

**Runaway Memories:**

**A collection of short stories exploring various styles of memory-based narratives**

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## **Abstract**

It is arguable that memories are one of the most important aspects of the human mind. It is through memory that we are able to learn, to make decisions, to evolve. Michael Jacob Kahana (2012) suggests that “our memories define who we are, and our ability to learn and make new memories determines who we become” (Kahana, 2012, p.13). It has also been a topic by several literary authors in their works, such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Antonio Lobo Antunes. This thesis approaches the subject of memories by researching theories and notions regarding the functions of memory and how memories are processed. It embodies the combination of research and practice, where the research into theoretical materials is used in order to develop a collection of short stories. This thesis has the main objective of approaching the practical side of creative writing with thorough background research in theories of human memory, linking all the short stories through the overarching theme of memory and the creative practice, delivering a consistent and unique approach to the field of Creative Writing. That is, these short stories are interpretations of the research through creative endeavour, and aim to explore these theories through the developed narratives. With each story, there is an accompanying critical commentary which describes the creative process and the theoretical approaches that influenced each of them, as well as the literary influences that informed the development of each story.

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## Introduction

This thesis consists of the embodiment of research and practice put together, where a collection of short stories has been written as a result of research on the subject of memories and its theories, and also how this subject has been addressed by different authors. It results from acknowledging the theoretical and critical marriage of scholarly studies of memory, in literature and other sciences.

Memories are fundamental to all our experiences. Without them, we would have nothing to compare our present and future behaviours to, no sort of measure in terms of how we have developed, progressed, or even how we passed our time. When making decisions, we consult our memories. When choosing what sort of food to eat for dinner, we consult our memories. Everything we do relies on memory; from brushing our teeth, reading the morning newspaper, to composing a musical piece or writing the next great novel. Michael Jacob Kahana suggests that “our memories define who we are, and our ability to learn and make new memories determines who we become” (2012, p.3).

Memory is arguably one of the most important aspects of our mind, and one of the hardest to be understood. For centuries, it has been the subject of many studies and also of many works of fiction. There are countless scientists that attempted to explain how memory works and just as many writers and poets who borrowed from memory – not only their own but also using it as a theme – in their creative processes. Authors such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, António Lobo Antunes, James Joyce, Ian McEwan, and philosophers and scientists such as Henri Bergson, William James, Pierre Janet, Hermann Ebbinghaus, Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin, all have contributed to this vast field of knowledge.

This is the thread that I have undertaken in this thesis. The overarching theme guiding this work in its unruly waters is the theme of human memory, not so much diving into my own personal currents, but rather using the ever-changing flow of memories as the main subject for the short stories. In order to accomplish that, I shall also borrow from several scientific studies on human memory, which will give my creative production an added layer of consistency and depth. The stories will be analysed and the theoretical foundations behind each one will be explored and identified appropriately. This thesis will not, conversely, treat the concept of human memories from an abstract historical or

personal view. That is, it does not concern itself with ideas such as collective memory or concepts that deal with personal accounts of historical events or other impactful occurrences. Its focus is on the pragmatic and theoretical approaches regarding the inner workings of memory.

With that said, however, it is important to define the ground this journey will cover, and what the signposts actually signify. According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online* (2014), memory is “the ability to remember information, experiences, and people”. For the context of narrative construction and analysis, the point on which this thesis will focus is the ability of remembering experiences and events (which include different pieces of information, regarding people, places and other relevant contexts). Additionally, the basic definition of memory by which most of the literature involved in the research for this thesis follows a similar meaning to the straight definition presented above, in order to facilitate the understanding what it is meant by the term “memory”. The term may seem simplistic in nature, but it is far more layered than it first seems, as Alan Baddeley states in his *Human Memory: Theory and Practice* (1970):

The use of a single term might seem to suggest that memory is a unitary system (...). As will become obvious, it is not one system but many. The systems range in storage duration from fractions of a second up to a lifetime, and in storage capacity from tiny buffer stores to the long-term memory system that appears to far exceed in capacity and flexibility the largest available computer (1970, p.4)

Corroborating the above quote, from a Neuroscientific approach, “memory is the series of processes whereby the nervous system acquires information from new experiences, retains this information over time, and eventually uses it to guide behaviour and plan future actions” (Purves et al, 2013, p.245). The concept and definition of memory is more expansive than the first impression. More importantly, these definitions serve essentially as a fundamental context of the concept of memory – the short stories featured in this thesis developed on the concept in their own extravagant ways, stretching the theories to their creative boundaries.

This thesis has probed into several fields of scientific and literary studies (Dynamic Psychology to Cognitive Neuroscience, Romanticism to Contemporary Literature, for example), with the aim of building a scaffolding of knowledge applied to the creative process that is the central piece of this thesis. Therefore, this thesis consists of three

essential steps. One of the first steps is to investigate some of the key theories of human memory and their relationship to creativity and language, in relation to the written word. That is, it will develop a line of inquiry that will examine and consider several theories, from varying time periods, in different fields of human knowledge, such as psychiatry, psychology and even neuroscience. This first step, which is built upon in each chapter of this thesis, is fundamental to the development and advancement of this project, as it is the premise for all the creative fiction featured within (e.g. as an explanation to the processes of a narrative piece). It is important to note that, with the definitions of memory mentioned above, they serve as a basis that is extrapolated within the short stories featured in the following chapters; these extrapolations are elaborated further in each chapter's commentary sections.

With that bank of knowledge available regarding different theories on memory, this thesis will also consider the literary influences for each short story here produced, some with the deliberate theme of memory while other influences exist in the realm of narrative style. It is also reasonable to say that memory is a fundamental element for any sort of writing, fiction or otherwise, due to its importance in the definition of our own perception of self and of the world around us – as it is popularly said, we write about what we know. As it was mentioned above, the subject of memory is not necessarily an original one in terms of works of fiction, since multiple authors like the ones mentioned before have already utilised this theme to great success in the past. It is important, therefore, to analyse how it has been employed by different important authors, looking into works by writers in both English and Portuguese language. Identifying different authorial approaches to the subject of memory as well as recognising their influence on the stories produced for this thesis will enable me to highlight how the creative texts presented in this thesis stand out as original works as well.

This takes us to the next step of the project – a collection of short stories that have the connected thread of memory between them. That is to say, they all feature the subject of memory, in either underlying or blatant fashion. The stories may not necessarily have a connection between them, in terms of narrative, but each of them is facing and dealing with a specific facet of memory, based on the theories and authorial approaches to memory researched beforehand.



With these three essential steps, the thesis is divided in several chapters, each of them dedicated to a short story and the theoretical and critical analysis of its production. These critical commentaries are set in place to discuss the creative process and explore the construction of these pieces, evaluating their connections to several of the theories and similar approaches and inspirations for each story. It is in these commentaries that this thesis exposes its originality – by analysing the creative process and the research done behind it, this thesis will reveal its consistency and strength in its contribution to the field of Creative Writing. Additionally, with the critical commentaries, alongside contextual analysis of theories and other works of fiction within the spectrum of memory, the validity of the contribution to knowledge by this project will be strengthened and solidified.

## Methodology and Literature Review

The thesis has been developed in a parallel way, exemplified by the short stories present in the following chapters, and by the reflective work that takes those stories into account as well. Through the deep analysis of each short story, the theories and knowledge acquired from the preliminary research will come to light, tied to the process of their use in the creative development of each story. In order to support the progress of this project, it is relevant to provide the scope of the research that was done in order to develop this thesis.

Before any sort of truthful and valid research may produce results, the context within which this thesis falls into must be analysed and taken into consideration, whether to serve as support arguments, decry their potential contentions or shift certain positions held by the original project proposition. For this particular thesis, the focus on memory led the project to look at some of the early scientific (in our modern definition of the term) approaches to the subject. That is, the first aim of this thesis was to establish a foundation of theories and approaches to memory that served as the well from which I have drawn ideas in the development of short stories. Being from mainly a literature studies background, I sought the help of Suzanne Nalbantian, author of *Memory in Literature* (2004), Michael Jacob Kahana, author of *Foundations of Human Memory* (2012), and Alan Baddeley, with co-authoring of *Memory* (2015). With those three books, I was able to identify some signposts as to where to begin the journey through the threads of scientific knowledge regarding memory, and, of course, go beyond these three sources and research further into the theories introduced by them. These signposts are discussed further later in the thesis – they consist of early theories and approaches to the subject of memory that served as my own introduction to the subject. It is also important to highlight that this thesis will not wander into the merit and validity of theories, but just use them at face value in order to construct short works of fiction, even though most of the theories researched still hold or held influence in current, more generally accepted approaches to memory.

The first book is a comprehensive study through several theories of memories and the discussion of how they are represented by several contemporary authors. That is, it utilises literary sources as case studies to particular theories, especially the ones that were relevant at the time of these authors' production of fiction. This aspect of Nalbantian's work

offers the crucial difference between itself and my own thesis – even though their subjects are closely related, the final purpose of my thesis is the production of a collection of short stories, based on the knowledge compiled from the similar research grounds. Nonetheless, the fact that the basic premises overlap provides me with a helpful direction to start outlining the theories that will support my creative fiction.

The first step that it helped me take was the definition of relevant memory research in recent times. According to Nalbantian, there are two “Golden Ages of memory research” – the first being in the late nineteenth century (with names like Henri Bergson (1889), Pierre Janet (1923), Herman Ebbinghaus (1885)), and the second being the 1990s, which she dubs the “decade of the brain” (2004, p.2). From the first Golden Age of memory came several basic theories and trains of thought that proceeded to be developed further into the twentieth century, and served as important basis to interpreting information gathered from neuroscience, which had a particular boom in the second Golden Age in the 1990s. Nalbantian also introduces some of the authors whose works have the subject of memory as a centrepiece. Nalbantian’s introduction to those nineteenth-century scholars led me to Henri Bergson’s works *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Time and Free Will* (1889), which are mentioned in her analysis. Bergson, a French philosopher and psychologist, defined within these works a lot of the fundamentals for his theories, including his approach to memory. He influenced various philosophers and memory scholars well into the twentieth Century, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1935), Paul Ricoeur (1948) and Gilles Deleuze (1953), among others.

In *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson, concerned with the metaphysical as well as the material world, wished to “overcome the theoretical difficulties which have always beset dualism”, a dualism that consisted of “the reality of matter and the reality of the spirit” (2004, p.7). According to the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, “these theoretical difficulties have generally arisen from a view of external perception, which always seems to result in an opposition between representation and matter” (Lawlor and Moulard, 2013). This issue was represented by his choice of vocabulary in defining the two “separate” entities: the brain and the spirit.

Bergson presents one of the foundations of his general theory on memory by distinguishing two forms of memory: a more basic, mechanical one, and a more complex, of

“independent recollections” (2004, p.87). That is, the first being a memory that more mechanical, a “memory of habit”, that does not concern itself directly with the past, but it is focused on the present – it is an automatic, quasi-instantaneous type of memory. He also links this sort of memory directly to the brain, as if it were the means of a mechanical recording, a slab onto which memories would be carved. The second he called “pure memory”, which was higher in the hierarchy according to his way of thinking, as, for him, it did not concern any part of the body – it was more than a mechanical recording. One of his justifications towards this argument is that patients who had cerebral lesions that impaired bodily memory (which may fall into the memory of habit parameters) could still recollect certain past events by other stimuli and emotions.

Bergson also used one of his most famous theories in the context of memory: his theory of duration of time. It was first posited in his *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889), and also developed in *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe* (1922). Bergson compares his concept of duration of time to Einstein’s space-time notions, where perception of duration of time is relative. To him, the perception of time in memories – the duration of time in revisited memories - was considered “real” and immeasurable, as opposed to measured time, as in time measured by man-made ways, which he considered to be “fictional” time. Furthermore, Bergson adds the concept of “elemental memory”, a memory that serves as a bridge of time between two separate memories:

Without an elementary memory that connects the two moments to each other, there will be only one or another, consequently a single instant, no before and after, no succession, no time. (Bergson, 1922 cited in Nalbantian, 2004, p.13)

His concern with duration is also aided by his view on recollection and repetition of the past, which translates into more pragmatic terms. Rather than seeing memory as merely said repetition of the past, Bergson believed that memory was linked to “creative duration and to sense” (p.222). He notes that “if matter does not remember the past since it repeats it constantly and is subject to a law of necessity, a being which evolves creates something new at every moment” (p.223). The duration of a past memory is then extended not only to the present moment, but also into the future that is then created and evolved.

Bergson saw fit to bring up the relevance of studying memory not just as a form of perception, a point which was innovative in itself. According to Keith Ansell-Pearson, in his “Bergson on Memory” article, which can be found in *Memories: Histories, Theories and Debates* (ed. Radstone, S. and Schwartz, B., 2010), Bergson’s idea towards the way memory is regarded is close to Freud’s theories, “insofar as both are committed to the view that a radical division must be made between memory and perception” (2010, p. 61). Freud, however, was much more concerned with other particular psychological aspects of memory, such as trauma and childhood memory repression, which distanced himself from Bergson’s focus.

His fellow Frenchman, philosopher Pierre Janet, also contributed to the development of memory research. Differing from Bergson’s metaphysical concerns (even though he acknowledged the existence of some of the trends at the time, such as hypnotism, spiritism, possession states, among others), Janet focused on “primitive levels” of subconsciousness, a term which he coined in order to differentiate his concept from Freud’s “unconscious”. He spent a good deal of his research concentrating on studies on hysterics, studying patients who suffered from myriad psychological issues, such as somnambulism, a “kind of hypnotic sleep emerging in hysterical states, which had access to the subconscious” (Nalbantian 2004, p.14). The sort of memories he encountered in such patients were referred to by Janet as “elementary memory,” which was connected to the recollection of specific, individual sensations, as in singular names, faces, places and more, not necessarily connecting them in any sort of narrative or episode. In addition to his concern towards “primitive memories,” he also classified a more complex type of memory, which he also dubbed “intellectual memory,” and it consisted of more elaborate ideas, not limited to particular, singular sensations. He claimed it was on a higher level in terms of psychological processes (“elementary, or automatic memory” being on an inferior order), and that it can only exist as a “function of language” (Nalbantian, p.15).

He also touches the point of the need of absence in order to memory become active, which is in tune with Bergson as well. For both, the absence of a subject is essential before it can be recalled from memory. Janet uses the example of a sentinel:

A sentinel, as I said before, sees the enemy arrive; he first makes the acts which are ordinary reactions to this stimulus; to hide, to defend oneself (...), but at the same time

he constructs a speech relative to the appearance of this enemy. To activate itself, this speech does not require a new appearance of the enemy (Janet 1926, cited in Nalbanatian 2004, p.18).

This sort of memory is clearly a sort of complex type of memory, which depends on being able to recollect and create something new, much like Bergson's concept of creative evolution, where the past is used in the present to create the future. It is important to note that, as it reiterates the differences between this complex memory and automatic memory.

Bergson and Janet's approaches all possess a heavy dose of philosophy, and both acknowledge a good share of speculative theories (some of which were trending at the time). There were also others, however, who were concerned in methodical experimentation with memories that also influenced greatly the future of scientific studies on this subject. Hermann Ebbinghaus is one of those who addressed and experimented with memory in the late nineteenth - early twentieth century.

Ebbinghaus was a philosopher at the University of Berlin, where he conducted memory experiments with himself as the subject. As Kahana mentions in his *Foundations*, "rather than trying to explain the complex manifestations of memory in our daily lives, Ebbinghaus sought to develop a simple method for studying memory under highly controlled conditions" (Kahana 2012, p.4). His experiment consisted in having lists of randomly arranged syllables, "where each syllable was formed by linking a consonant, a vowel, and a second consonant". One of his precepts is that each singular syllable could have meaning by itself, whereas, in a random order, there would be little meaning among them. His experiments had the intention of defining "a measurable correlate to the Aristotelian notion of association" (2012, p. 5). Aristotle's proposition was that if events A and B are related to each other, thinking of either of them will help one to recollect the other event. Therefore, Ebbinghaus was attempting to create such relations between the syllables by learning them in "a randomized series" (2012, p.5).

In following through these experiments, Ebbinghaus carried a "highly regulated life" (2012, p.6), with consistent habits and noting "the times at which he learned the lists" (2012, p.6), noting as well how well he could recall the list of syllables and taking into account "fluctuations to his attention" (2012, p.6). The results from these sort of experiments conducted by him were carefully noted when he attempted to recollect the

lists, measuring retention after a period of time, and also how quickly he would relearn a list. It was through these sorts of experimentation that led Ebbinghaus to be the first to describe the concept of the learning curve (and, subsequently, the forgetting curve). The learning curve was his conclusion regarding how learning a particular list (or lists) was made easier when spacing them over a period of time as opposed to attempting to learn them in massive, consecutive blocks. Furthermore, he found that he had the capacity of memorising, on average, seven syllables from the lists, this finding being “a reference to the span of immediate memory that led some modern theorists to propose separate short-term and long-term memory systems” (2012, p.7).

Expanding on Ebbinghaus’s experiments, Georg Elias Müller took to using different subjects for doing trials in a similar fashion to Ebbinghaus, but with further control in mind. He developed a mechanical system, which was adapted from a kymograph, “which is essentially a drum that rotates at a relatively constant speed”, so that the rate in which the participant subject would be exposed to the syllables was even more controlled, therefore giving them fewer opportunities to repeat the items to themselves – an act which is called “rehearsal” (2012, p.9). He also took the studying of the forming of association in a different manner than Ebbinghaus: he developed a “paired-associate learning task”. Kahana explains this task as follows:

Rather than having participants memorize a list of items in order, as Ebbinghaus had done, they presented randomly paired syllables to be studied (the Study Phase), and then later they gave the participants one member of each pair as a cue to recall the other member (the Test Phase). (2012, p. 9)

The way Müller evaluated the learning through this experiment also differed from Ebbinghaus, as Müller chose to examine the participants’ “actual recall responses,” which led him to construct the concept of “interference”, the “idea that forgetting, rather than reflecting the loss of information, represents interference of later learning with earlier learning” (2012, p. 9). From the concept of interference it was also elaborated the concept of “reverberation” (when a very recently experienced association is tested, and it is easily remembered, “as if it were reverberating in one’s mind,”) which is related to the concept of “short-term memory”.

This concept of short-term memory came to be part of a very popular memory study system known as the Atkinson-Shiffrin model, or Multi-Store Model, or, more recently,

Search of Associative Memory (SAM). Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin introduced their model in 1968, as an attempt to illustrate the structure of memory. Several of the notions used by them were already introduced in earlier works like the ones mentioned above, but they expanded on them in order to establish a system structure. Their system consists of the process of memory being stored from a specific input or stimulus into the short-term memory (STM), which may only be able to store information for approximately between fifteen to thirty seconds. With the use of rehearsal (the concept mentioned above), there is a possibility of that piece of information then to be moved to the long-term memory (LTM), which possess a longer period of storage, from a few minutes to a lifetime. There are factors that may interfere (as Müller theorised) in the storage integrity and duration, such as biological issues or new pieces of information that may overlap the type of information stored.

In *Memory* (2015), by Alan Baddeley, Michael C. Anderson and Michael W. Eysenck, they refer to Frederik Bartlett, who “rejected the learning of meaningless material as an appropriate way to study memory” (2015, p.8). His approach, conversely, was the opposite end from Ebbinghaus’s experiments. He was more concerned in the semantic, therefore meaningful, value of the words that were used for his experiments; however, he was arguably lax with his approach by not producing enough reports or other relevant statistical data to support his claims. This is further discussed in a later chapter in this thesis, when discussing the concept of “associative memory”.

These pragmatic, scientific approaches to studying memory were necessary to provide other scholars with a “methodological conscience” (2012, p. 10), and formed the foundations to further research that are still being developed today. Concepts mentioned above, such as learning/forgetting curve, along with the concept of “interference” introduced by Müller, and the theories from Bergson, Janet, William James and a few others, cemented the foundations for a field of science that was poised to grow. Over the course of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been a considerable amount of research into the inner workings of memory and more has been discovered about how our brain factors in these processes. Cognitive neuroscience is such a field that explores the activities and functions produced by neural circuits of the brain. It is a field that is even further away from my previous training, which required a basic,



introductory-level approach. For that purpose, I used *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience* (Purves, D., Cabeza, R., Huettel, S.A., Labar, K.S., Platt, M.L. and Woldorff, M.G., 2013) to guide me through the steps in understanding this relatively new field:

Cognitive neuroscience is a relatively new discipline that has arisen from the recent marriage of neuroscience, a biomedical field that has flourished both conceptually and technically during the past century, and cognitive science, a field of study rooted in the long standing interest of natural philosophers and psychologists in understanding human mental processes. (2013, p.2)

Memory is one of the many aspects that this field of knowledge addresses, but it is one of central importance as well, as it is memory that “allows us to learn from the past, understand the present, and plan for the future” (2013, p.243). A number of the theories mentioned above are also referred to and built upon in Cognitive Neuroscience, often with changed terminology, and further expanded concepts with additional supporting experiments and research. The concept of Perception, for example, is expanded from the differentiation by Bergson of perception and memory, to defining it as “the result of an interaction between sensory stimuli and stored knowledge,” that is, the recognition of a sensation (visual, tactile, etc.) by retrieving previous memories of these sensations (and the objects connected to them). The concepts of different memory systems (such as the Atkinson-Shiffrin model mentioned above) are also expanded into “working memory”, which is fundamentally what it was referred to as “short-term memory”, with “long-term memory” being expanded into two different systems within itself, consisting of “declarative memory”, “systems that mediate conscious memories for events and facts,” and “nondeclarative memory”, “systems that mediate memories that are expressed through task performance” (2013, p.243). Declarative memory is obviously the one that is of most interest to me for the purposes of this thesis; however, the influence of the other systems must also be taken into consideration.

In any case, it is relevant to point out that these theories and approaches presented here at this introductory chapter are not the full range of the texts and reference sources that were employed in this thesis. Each chapter will disclose further details pertaining the theoretical approaches pertinent to itself, such as Endel Tulving (1985), David Ingar (1985), Baddeley and Hitch (1972), by analysing the basic understanding of the theories and the

way they were applied in the production of the short story. Furthermore, that is also the case for the analysis of relevant literary sources.

It is clear that theories on human memory have been expanded to great extents, especially since the modernization of the scientific methods, acknowledging new technologies and embracing different schools of thought. All these variations provide me with an immense database for providing the short stories the technical foundations which I intend to use. It is of great importance as well, to identify other authors who used memory as the central subject for their works, and understand how they used the artifices available to them in the construction of these said works.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, authors like Marcel Proust (1913), Virginia Woolf (1925) and James Joyce (1916) were influenced by the imminent changes in society and some of the contextual contemporary knowledge, and produced works that utilised their own memories as artifices for fiction. Some of their novels and short stories drew heavily from introspection and the use of fluid language in their conception and execution, from which parallels can be drawn to memory theories (such parallels will be covered later). Referring back to Nalbantian, she considered the factors of memory in authors as far back as the Romantics (such as Rousseau, Lamartine, Victor Hugo), through Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Edgar Allan Poe. Even though these previous writers were indeed incredibly relevant and memory was indeed a part of their creative processes, for brevity's sake I chose to concentrate on early twentieth century to contemporary authors, as their approach is more interesting in relation to my creative processes.

Mentioning Marcel Proust in a research project on memory in literature is crucial; his *In Search of Lost Time* (originally published in between 1913 to 1927) is often considered one of the best novels of all time, and its influence is still felt to this day. For Nalbantian, Proust's approach to memory is a perfect example of the use of the "Engram", which is, according to Karl Lashley: "the physical change or neuronal trace in the brain both ingrained, originally, and later triggered by sensory signals – visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile" (2004, p. 60). Furthermore, Nalbantian also claims that Proust "is the only writer seriously referred to by scientists in their discussions about the localization of engrams" (2004, p.142). This novel, which was published in a series of seven separate parts, is, like some of the other works I will mention further down, highly autobiographical – but not to

the point of being memoirs, and the novel possesses several examples of *involuntary memory* (a concept that is connected to Ebbinghaus's practice of association), but also examples of *voluntary memories* (memories which are actively sought to be triggered), *bodily memories*, among others. The best known of these is the madeleine episode, which consists of the triggering of a chain of sensations in the narrator upon drinking lime blossom tea with madeleine cakes (the gustatory sense) in an apartment in Paris, and leading him to recollect about the sensations experienced, years before, when eating the same sort of cake in the village of Combray, away from Paris. The process behind this triggering, however, is more complex than it may first seem. Before tasting the tea, the narrator had expressed that he was in a depressed disposition, but, as soon as he tasted the tea with the madeleine cake, "a shudder ran through (his) whole body" (1992, p.45), causing an intense sensation of joy within himself, yet he could not quite understand why. This caused the narrator to voluntarily walk the path of his mind, and discover the reasons behind the sudden flourish of good mood that took over. This is a good illustration that, albeit there are recognizable memory events, such as the ones mentioned above from different theories, the process of triggering and recollection are not necessarily fixed to one particular type of event – it can transition, being kicked off by an involuntary memory into a voluntary one, by a bodily memory into a voluntary, or any other possible combination among the different types. There are other occasions within Proust's masterpiece that demonstrates varied events, but for the sake of brevity it was best to keep to the most iconic of them.

Not long after Proust, several authors, also utilising heavily autobiographical and memory-inspired artifices, published their works with a particular feature that is also incredibly iconic among that period: the stream of consciousness. This term was coined by William James, which described the path of experimentation that writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner would take in their careers. These three are some of the most representative of early twentieth-century literature, even more so in regards to stream of consciousness. Combining that with their use of memory, it was clear that acknowledging their productions was necessary. There are some other features that put those three in particular under a similar umbrella, such as the autobiographical elements in their own fiction, a distinct sense of collapse in moral and social orders (on which I will elaborate in specific points), and a certain obsession with the historical past.

Once again, enlisting Suzanne Nalbatian's analysis to support my own, these three authors created some characters whose memories are always interfering with their present – the past is on an ever-constant interchange with the present. Virginia Woolf's characters Lily Briscoe, from *To The Lighthouse* (1927), and Mrs Dalloway, from the eponymous novel (1925), are two of those.

Nalbatian calls *To The Lighthouse* the quintessential memory novel, as it shows the three core processes of memory – encoding, storage and retrieval. The first part of the novel, which represents the encoding of memory, tells the story of the Ramsay family and some of their friends who go to their summer home in Isle of Skye, Scotland, where Lily Briscoe, a young friend of the family, attempts to paint a picture of the matriarch, Mrs Ramsay, and her son James. It is in her attempt that the memory slowly becomes encoded. The second part, fittingly titled *Time Passes*, describes the time passing in the summer house, abandoned for ten years, during which several events (historical – breakout of WWI; and within the family – the passing of Mrs. Ramsay, one of the Ramsay children dying in the war) occur, which could also be interpreted as a metaphor for the storage of memory. This leads to the third part of the novel, with the return of some of the visitors from that summer ten years before. Upon her return to the home, Lily Briscoe attempts again to complete the picture she started all those years ago, and it is during that second attempt that the memories surface,“ and as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there” (1992, p. 81). The sense of sight was the trigger for Ms Briscoe, which unleashed the flow of the past into her present. Even though Ms Briscoe seems to be the main character to be provoked by the presence (and absence) of Mrs Ramsay, other characters are tied to the matriarch in their own relationships with her – particularly Mr Ramsay, her husband, a man deeply concerned and anxious with his own work, coming across distant in the first part of the novel; and James, the youngest son, who, as young boy in the first part, holds a large amount of antipathy towards his father (due to the feeling of competing with him for his mother's affections, and the denial also by his father of visiting the lighthouse). The lighthouse itself becomes an important symbol, notably to Lily Briscoe and James; it becomes a visual cue for the triggering of memories that are strongly tied to the figure of Mrs Ramsay. In the third part of the novel, the sight of the lighthouse is closely tied to the

memory of the mother; it is the main visual prompt for the flow from the past to invade the present.

In 'A Sketch of the Past', an autobiographical essay Woolf wrote near the end of her life, part of a larger publication called *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings* (1976), she elucidated some of the processes behind her writing, where she discoursed about the foundational influences of her work. It was written 44 years after her mother's death, an event she claimed to be her main personal obsession – one as such that led her to wish to eternalize the memory of her mother in the character of Mrs Ramsay:

It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen until I was forty-four. Then on day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To The Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another... I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. (1992, p.81)

This is not unlike the Romantic writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who claimed that whenever he relegated his memories to paper, they were released – a point that was stated by Pierre Janet: memory is a function of language, and upon writing it, it is solidified in language. Furthermore, the novel was also inspired by Woolf's own family summer home in Cornwall, and her feeling of isolation from living with her stern father after her mother's passing.

There are other visual cues within *To The Lighthouse* that elicit memories from the characters, but, again, for succinctness, I shall leave the focus on the sight of the lighthouse and the memories of Mrs Ramsay. Stream of consciousness is not only a literary technique, ultimately, but in these cases, it is the "conveyor of memories," a tunnel that links the past to the present, where the past becomes "living presences in the minds of the characters". These characteristics are found in the characters of Gabriel Conroy in James Joyce's *The Dead* (1914), or Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1902); Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes's nameless narrator in *The Land at the End of the World* (1979), William Faulkner's Benjy and Quentin from *The Sound and The Fury* (1929). Death, it seems, also permeates the memories of these characters, as the absence of the dead characters corroborates the retrieval of the past through their stream of consciousness.

The scope for this research takes in several types of sources as a base in order to enhance and support the variety that the practical part of the thesis wishes to implement. With this varied base of resources, I developed a collection of short stories that are original and consistent in their processes, acknowledging the influence from both literary and theoretical works. These sources were analysed and discussed in each chapter, in a way that establishes how the creative process for these stories was unique, and warranting its originality beyond the short stories, but also the actual development and research that cemented the foundation of this production.

## Chapter One - "The Haze" & the Bergsonian Mind

This first story, called "The Haze", stems from an extrapolation of Henri Bergson's interpretation of the mind and the brain. Since he was one of the earliest modern theorists on human memory, it seemed only logical to start by using one of the aspects of his works in the development of a story. As mentioned in the introduction, he had defined two types of memory and related them to two aspects of humanity – the brain and the spirit (*cerveau* and *esprit* in French). The type of memory directly connected to the brain is, according to him, the most basic type, a mechanical recording that is solely concerned with the present; it holds no meaning or narrative power. The spirit memory, however, is the one which is more complex – one that is used to retell particular episodes and events and which hold such meaning. He believed, due to some of his own patients who had cerebral lesions being able to retrieve certain memories through different stimuli, that this type of memory was not, then, mechanically recorded in the brain. Nalbantian interpreted that he suggested that "thought itself or 'pensée' to be independent of the brain" (Nalbantian, 2004, p. 10). In Bergson's own words, upon the recognition of these processes remaining unaffected from brain lesions:

We pass, by imperceptible stages, from recollections strung out along the course of time to the movements which indicate their nascent or possible action in space. Lesions of the brain may affect these movements, but not these recollections. (Bergson, 2004, p.88)

The extrapolation of this point helped the development of "The Haze" to its current state. In essence, this story consists of the mind of a man who is deceased, revisiting his memories from the afterlife – not in a spiritual or religious sense – where it all returns to him through a haze he seems to be faced with. As an interpretation of Bergson's approach, the narrator's consciousness and memories remains alive and independent of his body which have ceased to exist. Even though the memories that are brought to the forefront are seemingly very random, there are several elements that foreshadow the context in which the narrator finds himself. The fluidity of the memory events, sometimes in an associative context – that is, sensory triggers that connect one memory event to another – sometimes unrelated, reveals an inconsistency of the narrator's own perception of these events. This inconsistency becomes clearer upon the realisation of particular features of the memory events on which the focus is laid.

As the story develops, the nature of his consciousness and this “afterlife” becomes even less certain and it plays further into the concept of the metaphysicality of the mind. This story achieves an interpretation of an early theory regarding human memory that transcends a more traditional scientific method (even though Henri Bergson himself did work within the scientific methodology) in order to explore the possibility of an afterlife. Following the story, there shall be a more in depth analysis of the processes behind its development, both theoretical and literary.



## 1.1 The Haze

It's terribly hazy when you die. They say there's a light, they say there's a tunnel, and you suddenly reach somewhere, the place where all our souls will eventually go, but that's not how it has been for me. You see, for me, it's just been a long and blurry replay of myself. Now, you might question the validity of my statement, or even how I am able to convey these ideas and explanations from the great beyond. I suppose you'll have to take my word for it. Maybe I read a bit too much when alive, coming across several fictional and/or speculated accounts of what happens after death, and those might have influenced my choice of expressing myself this way.

In any case, you see, standing (not quite standing, but I can't think of another way of putting it) where I am, there have been no angels nor demons, no stairways nor fire pits, neither Valkyries nor Garm. I see no gardens, no vast fields of clouds, no circle of hell. All I see is me. I see myself not as one looks at oneself in the mirror, but I see myself as if I were God overseeing his creation, a shepherd overseeing his flock. But all I see is myself – from my genesis to my demise. I don't see it as if I had multiple TV screens, nor do I see it all in floating bubbles around my ethereal being. It's all in this haze in front of my eyes, a dream-like experience that I have no control over whatsoever, thus nullifying any God-like powers I might have implied I possess. It is as if my past crosses my path as I stand still during a sandstorm.

It is not in any sort of order, either. You could assume the old cliché, of seeing your entire life before your eyes at the conclusive moment of the body, and think that you could see your first footsteps, your first day at school, in some sort of progression, but you would assume wrongly. As I have experienced it, it all occurs at random, I see myself just weeks before my own extinction, a bleak face grimacing at the unknown yet unavoidable future. The first time I beheld that scene, I tried to reach out, to let that old me know what was to come, but it came to no success. I wished to tell myself that the end was nigh, perhaps embracing another cliché and ordering my old self to “enjoy the days”. That is when I realised my circumstance, this impalpable existence, where I no longer feel. Whether it is my sentence or my reward, I do not know, and I feel I never will.

Within the blink of an eye (if I did indeed blink), I see myself as a young adult, a reckless youth of reddened face and a defiant flicker in the eyes, with the sort of attitude that one may regret at a later stage; I never did, however. An ephemeral version of myself, a few years later, insisted on reminding me, as it went right through the car the younger one was driving. Oh, pardon me; I forgot to add another detail regarding the way all of this happens. They mingle. Not in the sense that they acknowledge each other's existence, but they often juxtapose, blend and mix among themselves, often making it hard to define which details are from which memory. It's like a drunken binge, where the night, faces and thoughts melt into a single puddle of ambivalence, when the control seems to loosen up and the focus seems to grow blurrier and blurrier.

I tell you this because this understanding has been fermented during my time in this state. I often do not remember things, facts, events, people, until I see them in front of me, but then they hide from me again. Perhaps it would be of more interest if I were to address certain events that I have come across while staring ahead through this mist of the expired, this haze of antecedents, as they appear before me. I might remember them from before, or I might not. Some are trivial, I feel, and some carry a certain weight of importance to me. However, I do not know why. I just know.

There are things that seem more likely to appear and reappear. There's this particular moment, I can see it forming in the sand of elapsed times, and I'm standing in a toy store. I must be quite young, around six years old, and I sneak a small box of firecrackers into my shorts. I feel the excitement as I hurriedly make my way out of the shop, thinking that I have just stolen a jackpot of treats, a superb crime with superb rewards. I run out the door into a field of pebbles, I feel my feet aching from the pointy rocks pressing at my sole, and I'm younger, I see several trees and a hill before me, and a white farmhouse at the top. I hear a girl running up to me, and she trips and falls. Her knee starts bleeding, she cut herself on a rock, she is crying, scared. A warm flush takes over me, I run up the hill, swallowing the inconvenience of the pain upon my bare feet. I run into the farmhouse, and I'm several years older, in a white and blue school uniform. There are holes in my trousers, and some blood seeping out of my right knee. I am holding a football, panting, looking at a parked car across from the football field. The horn of the car is familiar, and so is the face of the driver. She smiles, and I drop the football. The car dissipates into an ocean, and I'm an older man,

perhaps thirty-something years old, and I'm at a beach. A small child kicks a football towards me, and I grasp it. I can feel the raspy grains of sand against my fingers. I throw the ball, and the child laughs, I hear a familiar voice calling for me and it's another familiar face. She calls me love, and asks me to hand her a bottle from the cooler sitting across the way. I make my way over, and I'm at a park; I'm a few years younger, and I'm carrying a basket. That same face from before, she's there, sitting on a blanket on a grassy patch of the park. She's wearing denim trousers and a T-Shirt that says "You're Not Welcome Here".

Often they suddenly dissipate into darkness, and I'm left alone in it. There's no time, there's just this darkness and my past. I can't make them appear the same way I can't choose which ones to appear. There are no feelings, either. I only feel what is being shown to me, but then that feeling also evaporates into this oblivion the moment those events are blown away.

Some feelings come back again when I am suddenly sitting in a classroom, there are maths equations written on a blackboard, and I hear laughter coming from behind me. I feel ashamed, my face reddened and burning with embarrassment, and tears gathering on the corner of my eyes. The wrath brings me to my feet, where I stand and point my finger at a doctor as he stands in silence with his hands held together in front of him, and I shout at him, I call him terrible names, and I notice a grey hair on my knuckle. I suddenly dodge a punch, and I bob my head out of the way from another gloved hand as I side step and attempt a flurry of my own against my opponent, a man with whom I've never exchanged a word, yet I am angry and focused to hurt him. I get the wind knocked out of me as I fall on my stomach onto a banister. I'm wearing baggy trousers and a clean reckless teenage face. I hold my stomach and look at the sympathetic faces around me, a mix of worry and held-back laughter draped over them, I close my eyes in pain, and when I open them again, I'm staring at a ceiling fan, it's not spinning and I notice its mould-covered blades, my eyes squinting slightly at the bright light, and again with another blink of my eyes, it's gone. Another intermittent moment ensues, and I am enveloped in nothingness, as if nothingness was all there has ever been.

So this is what is left of me, an unrelenting sequence of fragments of myself, sometimes pleasant, sometimes agonising, and truly all me. I'm exposed to myself, given eyes of radiosopic meticulousness, though the haze is relentless, never dissipating, in a

suspended state, where I am everything and nothing, condemned to roam aimlessly within. Sometimes, certain images and sounds linger, floating in the dark mist of forgetfulness; words that were spoken to my past selves or a detail that I held on to for any odd reason, a verse of a song that I cared about, whispers from a voice that caresses my insides. They sometimes come by themselves, like a floating scarf blowing in the wind or just the scent of a freshly baked banana pie; but sometimes they grow into a full event of its own. Like now, I see the silhouette of a woman by herself, a face that I cannot make out apart from long, flowing locks that I had felt in my hands before, as they grow grey right before me. I can still feel how their silkiness between my fingers, she says she needs to wash them, dye them, and I say nonsense, she doesn't need to cover up how truly beautiful she is. Her voice changes, while I still struggle to see her face, getting deeper and hoarser. I can hear her talking quietly, almost whispering, as my body is suddenly tingling throughout, pins and needles all across it. There are other voices, too, some directed at me, some directed at her, but I can't see any faces. My heart pounds strongly in my chest, the only feeling I get besides the numbness of my unseen body. My breath becomes irregular, I heave nervously and I can feel my eyes moving rapidly. The voices become louder, but not clearer; there's a tone of urgency in them. Then, as if there were a sudden gust of wind, the haze twirls and the voices fade away again.

It feels like this isn't the first time these voices have echoed in this miasma of obscurity, though they quickly give way to images of a starry night and a full moon. It is cold and the sky is reflected on the river, as if Van Gogh had lent his skills to my afterlife. There are boats moored on several small piers, and it is quiet, apart from the sound of my shoes on the pavement. My head feels light and my stomach feels full, and every step I take is wobbly and slow. I can feel some heartburn, I have been drinking and I tell myself I'm taking the scenic route home. It's dark ahead and the little light that illuminates the path is coming from the moon and street lights from the other shore of the river. On my right, there's a line of tall trees and I go behind one of them to relieve myself. I am singing to myself as I feel the comfort of bodily relief. Then, I feel a sharp pain on the back of my head, followed by a very warm and tingling sensation that spreads down to my body. I want to scream but I can't, and all I can hear is the thumping of my heart, this time with no voices in the background. It is all then overtaken by the fog of my limbo, swept away by an unseen force.

This time, nothing lingers. But, then again, passage of time is as unnoticeable to me now as it would be to a rock. Everything seems fickle and ephemeral in this haze and each episode is as random as are the sights, voices and sensations that seem to stick around after these episodes are gone. Sensations, such as those experienced when waking up from a nightmare – the bad dream has ended, but its dread lingers in the back of the throat, a knot tied by someone else. Sometimes, what lingers is solely a bodily feeling, regardless of this state that I'm in where I can't actually claim to have a body. I suddenly jump out of a plane, I feel the intense vertigo that sticks my stomach to my back, and as I pull the cord, the whiplash from the sudden decrease of speed makes my entire body tremble. I can see the spread of a country side, farm houses, and tiny white specks across fields of green. Some of the buildings have writings on their roofs – most of them single letters, though I see one with a red cross a bit further away. They don't make sense to me; the wind is so strong I can't hear myself breathe. I close my eyes, and with them, I am back in the haze, with nothing but the restless feeling on my feet, as I try and dangle them towards solid ground. I reach none, and I'm left hovering above unseen floor.

The greying haze takes over with a darkened background, as if I'm in a misty cave. I hear steps echoing, clicks of hard soles on the concrete floor, like the ticking of a grandfather clock. My small feet come into focus, finally, in my poorly laced shoes – they're swinging back and forth, along with the creaking metal of a swing. I laugh, and ask to be pushed higher. Someone's behind me, and he's happy to comply. I hold on to the chains tightly, their texture rough and sand-like. The old paint on them is dry and flaking. I tug on them and lean backwards, thrusting my feet up into the air. The grey skies don't even react to my attempts to reach them, but I feel I'm getting close. Vertigo again strikes my insides, as the haze comes down as if the skies decided to fall around me, and the echoing returns. This time it is louder than before, it takes over any enduring impressions from those events, and all I can feel is its consistent rhythm. It sounds like it's moving closer to me, slowly but surely, then it stops. The last click reverberates for what feels like a long time, as the haze grows darker once again.

I can't really tell when or if things that come to me in the haze are coming back for the first time, or if they have been repeated many times before. Sometimes, they do feel as if I have relived them time and time again, especially when they flow from one to another,

these re-enactments of my forlorn self as they come back with all the sensations into all limbs and organs, like muscle memory that brings out tension so familiar to my body. This clicking, however, this sound of decisive steps in the obscure café of my destitute self, they don't sound familiar at all. They bring certain warmth to my arms, but not the sort of warmth from an afternoon's under the early autumn sun, bowling balls at a makeshift wicket at the Riverside Park. The ball is batted all the way over my head; I jump and reach for it, but it's too far gone and with a glug and a splash, it bounces into the river and starts floating away. That afternoon's natural, glowing warmth is again replaced by a pulsating type, and I feel it travel through inside my body, my heart suddenly thumping more strongly in my chest.

The image of the bubbles left around the ball is slowly shrouded by the deep haze once again, but this throbbing across my body seems to persist. I can smell something, a strong minty smell that tickles my nose. The haze is replaced by steam; I bring my hands up to my face and see that my fingers are pruning, wrinkling them even further. I hear sizzling; someone is pouring water over the hot stones in the sauna heater, creating more clouds of steam. I rub some sweat off my face, and continue to argue about the results of the previous night's football results. I'm slouching, which makes my beer belly even more protuberant. The heat of the steam room feels more intense as my insides feel a burst of embarrassment due to my poor shape. I take deep breaths, the steam has a strong scent of eucalyptus that burns my nose, while still claiming that we have no defence, and we need a good defensive player to coordinate the rest of them. The blurry face that is buried in the steam laughs; his laughter hits the wooden walls of the room weakly, like a damp cloth being dropped on the floor.

The light in the steam room dims down to darkness again, my nostrils not bearing the burning sensation from the steam anymore. The bland laughter dies down to be replaced by whispers again, hushed voices that make no sense. My head throbs, trying to understand what the whispers are saying, to no avail. I feel a pair of hands caressing my temples, I'm lying down on her lap again, that girl with the most beautiful face I've ever seen; she asks me if that feels better, and I say it does. My headache seems to melt away at her touch. I see the stars above her head; the sky's a dark shade of blue, littered with them. She tells me not to point at them, it might bring me bad luck, but I scoff at the idea, I'm

feeling lucky as it is. I draw constellations with my finger, giving Orion his belt and the claws to Cancer, and I breathe the fresh air of this April evening. In my mouth, I can still taste the cake and her lipstick, a combination so sweet that makes my heart thump rapidly again. Life feels good, and it feels real, and it feels fleeting; the stars fade into the dark blue backdrop, like faerie lights drowning in a pond, and with them, the light that seemed to shine on my girl's face dulls within the ubiquitous miasma of memories. Left behind, like a scar on my lips, the taste of her strawberry lips.

I feel the bumps of the seeds with the tip of my fingers, I have a strawberry in my hands and I gently stroke it. My hands are small, I look up and I see a man smiling down at me, he has a basket full of these berries and he tells me I can eat that one. I do, and it tastes delicious; it's so fresh that I get a jolt of excitement, and I ask for more. My father tells me no, I will have to wait until later – I notice his beard hair wiggling as he speaks. We're outdoors, there are rows of trees and of bushes around us, and the sun is out in its full glory. I'm wearing some Velcro sandals that cling very tightly to my feet, and it's not very comfortable, but I don't mind – I nibble on the rest of the strawberry as I wobble along with my father, who picks more from the bushes ahead. My hands are covered in the juice of that single strawberry, but they look the smoothest they've ever been. Staring at them, I notice the juice slowly becoming darker and thicker, a deep shade of crimson that is smudged over my fingers. I'm on the ground and it's dark – I think I'm lying on grass, but I'm not sure. The back of my head feels warm; the only light I can see is from the full moon that comes down through the branches and leaves of a tree and from the lampposts from across the path. My hands are bigger and rougher, wrinkled and grey. My breathing becomes more reticent, and my head feels like it is spiralling; I'm back in the haze. It seems to be dancing in front of me, like there's a breeze blowing through it, making the mist curl in itself.

A short string of smoke floats upwards; it's coming off a freshly blown candle. It's on top of a cake, surrounded by other small sweets and colourful items. I eagerly look around and I see several silhouettes are clapping and congratulating me. I can't make them out, but they feel familiar. I look down at the cake – it has 'Welcome Back' written on it with icing. My ears burn, I feel a burst of excitement going through my body and I look up. There's a bright light.

## 1.2. Critical Commentary

This story was inspired and informed by approaches from early theorists in human memory – namely Henri Bergson and Pierre Janet. It was also inspired by the novel by Brazilian author Machado de Assis, called *An Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1881), which has a similar plot in essence – the post-mortem retelling of one’s memories from an “afterlife”. Within this next section, I will dissect these theoretical and literary influences behind the development of this story, and discuss specific passages and other direct references within its body of text. These theories are relevant due to their importance in the scientific approach and development of modern understanding of human memory.

In Bergson’s (1869) notions regarding memories, alongside with his contemporary Pierre Janet (1923), there was an intention to establish certain grades of hierarchy – defining to which echelons certain types of memories belonged. In *Matter and Memory* (1869), Bergson determined some distinctions between some of these. For example, he suggested that a memory that is formed by acts of repetition (i.e. learning a lesson by heart) was a memory of habit. This type of memory was encoded in the brain through repetition, concerning itself with solely the present. Whereas memories that involve the recalling of past events, “which truly recalls and ‘sees again’ (‘revoir’),” (Nalbantian, 2004, p. 9), are considered by him to be pure memory. The spontaneous nature of this pure memory being also a defining feature, where the memory is retrieved involuntarily, referring to a specific time in the past (i.e. recalling the learning of the lesson).

With this basic distinction in mind, the concern of the location of memories – that is, the physical space and delimitations that revolve around the nature of memories – comes into play when recognising the aspects that these types of memory possess. By asserting that memory of habit is written onto the brain, Bergson implies the physicality of this type of memory, giving it a concrete place in the world. In this, he also suggests that memory of habit is also part of a lower form of memory, a more mechanical and pragmatic type. Conversely, he goes on to suggest that the second type, this pure spontaneous memory, to be of a higher form, subscribing this type of memory to somewhere higher than the brain – the mind, embracing the metaphysical potentials of what the mind represents.



Bergson's reasoning behind placing these two types of memories on these different tiers were not defined by whim, either. Bergson used the two examples I mentioned before (learning a lesson by heart and recalling the learning of the lesson) as his way of explaining these two different types of memory. By asserting that, in order to learn a lesson, one needs repetition, he suggests that at each repetition the progress advances – that is, the lesson's content becomes more solidified in one's memory, "the words become more linked together" (Bergson, 2004, p.89). He suggests that this practice is purely constructed by habit, giving this type of memory this title – memory of habit. The way the lesson is learned has, according to him, all the characteristics of the formation of a habit. In addition, he compares this process to every other habitual bodily exercise (like walking), which he suggests "is stored up in a mechanism which is set in motion as a whole by an initial impulse, in a closed system of automatic movements which succeed each other in the same order, and, together, take the same length of time" (p.90). With this, he also adds his own theory of duration of time that was further developed in this *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe* (1922), in which he proposes two ways of interpreting time: "fictional" time – that is, time that is measured by man; and "real" time, which is the time in the duration of a spontaneous memory. This was done in a parallel to Einstein's time-space notion.

Then, Bergson distinguishes the process of the actual learning of the lesson from the recalling of how the lesson was learned. That is, by evaluating the difference between the ways of recalling memory processes, he determines their aspects. Through the consideration of how the lesson is learned, it invokes a different set of information regarding one's memories; while the recalling of the lesson itself is strengthened by the repetition, and the creation of links between the lesson's words, the recollection of each repetition, of each reading are brought back individually. Each repetition session links itself with a time and place in one's memory, as it were. In his own words, "each reading stands out before my mind as a definite event in my history" (p.89). As opposed to the previous type of memory, Bergson suggests that recalling these individual memory events have none of the characteristics of a memory of habit. They have been imprinted and bookmarked, so to speak, in one's mind, with a date in time (converse to the fact that memory of habit is always more focused on the present). In his own words, "it is like an event in my life; its

essence is to bear a date, and consequently to be unable to occur again” (p.90). He acknowledges that through repetition, these individual memory events may become more easily recalled. But he argues that, due to the nature of duration of time mentioned before – “real” and “fictional” time, the main difference lies in how the memory of habit, or the recalling of the lesson, is solely a representation of the lesson – there isn’t anything that prevents oneself to recall the entirety of the contents of the lesson instantly. On the other hand, when recalling a true memory, or recalling the learning of the lesson, its representation is subjective to the duration of time of the original event – a quasi-narrative element that connects the movements within the memory event in its “real” duration of time. In simpler words, “real” time, according to him, is one that is experienced, not measured.

This distinction is relevant due to the fact the Bergson rejected some of the concepts that were being developed around the late nineteenth century, such as Paul Broca’s (1861) localisation theory which attempted to map the areas of the brain which were related to language. As mentioned earlier, Bergson also did not agree with the notion that “pure memory” (the terms “pure memory” and “true memory” are interchangeable within Bergson’s approach) was like a “mechanical recording (‘enregistrement’), a psychological association, or a biological fact of animal life,” (Nalbantian, 2004, p.11). In other words, he was convinced that “pure memory” was something being stored in the mind, somewhere intangible, as opposed to the brain, something more physiological. Therefore, the metaphysical was his main concern.

To make of the brain the repository of the past, to imagine in the brain a certain region where the past once past would remain, is to commit a psychological error (Bergson, 1913, cited in Nalbantian, 2004, p.11)

Bergson’s justification, as mentioned in the introduction chapter of this thesis, is that in the case of cerebral lesions - damage to the tangible, physical brain – that may debilitate verbal memory, which would be classified as a memory of habit, “certain memories can be revived by the stimulus of even an emotion” (2004, p.11). By using this argument, Bergson further reinforces his belief in a true memory storage space that lies beyond the corporeal, material realm.

It is Bergson's metaphysical approach to the mind that was used as a major theoretical inspiration in the development of "The Haze". The story consists of the narrator's mind lingering after death, posthumously retrieving several memory events of his past through a haze; all memories spontaneously being conjured and replayed within his mind's eye, as it were. The choice of these memory events being replayed through a haze wasn't merely stylistic either – it was a direct reference to a statement by Bergson in regards to another aspect of these spontaneous memories themselves:

Furthermore, he stated that this spontaneous memory has a dream-like quality which 'is as capricious in reproducing as it is faithful in preserving'. He therefore warned that the more weighty spontaneous memory which hides behind acquired memory can capriciously reveal itself in a flash but vanishes or escapes ('se dérober') at the least movement of acquired memory. (Nalbantian, 2004, p.10)

This dream-like quality was then interpreted into this haze where the consciousness of the nameless, posthumous narrator finds himself. Incidentally, the term "acquired memory" refers to "voluntary memory", the type of memory which is accessed through a conscious effort, as opposed to the higher-form "spontaneous memory", which is involuntary and retrieved through the triggering of other stimuli – emotions, external sensory stimuli.

Within this haze at the beginning of the story, the narrator reveals that his consciousness is still carrying on with little more than his own memories being invoked in front of him, in a completely involuntary manner, as he evaluates and informs the reader of his own circumstances. This breakage of the fourth wall, through the acknowledgement of narrator himself, suggests the nature of the metaphysical substance of his current reality. Recognising both the involuntary memories and the metaphysical environment that is set for the narrator, the story immediately embraces two aspects of Bergson's higher-form "true memory".

The narrator also judges his own choice of communicating with the reader, again recognising elements from his consciousness that may have influenced his perception of his "afterlife", such as the references to religious interpretations, as well as other cultural common knowledge references such as the "old cliché, of seeing your entire life before your eyes" at the moment of death. The reference to dream-like experiences also refers to Bergson's approach to unconsciousness – especially focused on unconscious memories and

their recollection through dreams. He argued that “sleep itself can prompt the revival of spontaneous memory” (2004, p.12), also suggesting that the existence of these unconscious memories supports the concept of the metaphysical form of memories.

Due to Bergson’s quasi-spiritual belief in the place of “true memory”, there is a deliberate lack of more traditional interpretations in the way afterlife is perceived. With those references mentioned before (angels, demons, Valkyries, Garm, heaven, hell), the story accepts the knowledge of these concepts, only to later dismiss in favour of a more uncertain and ephemeral setting – the haze, once again.

The narrative that unfolds within the haze becomes one that seems to be solely concerning the memories of the character narrator – the flow from scenes of his childhood to other events at different stages of his life. The events that are retrieved also bring with them the sensations and potential emotions that are linked with them, a fact that the narrator also accepts and informs the reader (“I hold on to the chains tightly, their texture rough and sand-like”). Lerner & Keltner (2000) suggest that memories have the power not only to allow one to relive past events, but also retrieve the emotions felt at these past events.

The narrator also describes the moments in which none of the memories are present or being replayed to him. He finds himself in those moments in a darkened haze, where sometimes a lasting sensory output (“a verse of a song”, “the scent of a freshly baked banana pie”) from a memory lingers on. These lasting sensations serve to illustrate the connected emotions and impressions connected to the memory events, often working also as associative terms that link one event to another. Associative memory, a concept that was briefly explained in the introductory chapter, and will be further discussed in a following one, also permeates this story to a certain extent. An example of this is the transition between the fleeting scenes of the narrator’s past – running out the door of the shop from where he had stolen a box of firecrackers into a field of pebbles. Transitions like this make use of lower form of memory (for Bergson) which is connected to the physical act of running. Even though such a movement may be considered a “memory of habit”, they may be used in the retrieval of deep, “true memory”. Bergson addressed this by talking about “bodily memory”, “consisting of sensory-motor systems organised by habit, but having true memory at its base” (2004, p.10).

The choice to maintain the story in the present tense was done as so to implement the transitory essence of the narrator's relived experiences in the haze. To his consciousness, everything seems to flow in such a way that there is little else but the time of each memory scene – a direct application of Bergson's notion of "real" time. Therefore, the use of present tense serves the purpose of immersing the narrator within this transient environment that circles his consciousness. His own consciousness, however, is often betrayed by his own unconsciousness – after the memories events dissipate into others and back into the haze, he claims that they are gone. He has no control in the conjuring of the scenes, and once they are finished replaying, they are then relegated back to the unconscious memory, further into Bergson's concept of dream memories.

Within the narrative, however, there are signposts that imply that this hazy, uncertain afterlife where the narrator finds himself is not as he perceives. Through some memory scenes, there is an implication that the narrator is not truly in his final place. His consciousness, which assumed where he is, dismisses these scenes as just like any of the many he had witnessed until then. An image such as of the familiar woman that sits in the park wearing a t-shirt with the words "You're Not Welcome Here" elicits some of the nature of the narrator's state. This image in particular reveals that his unconscious is trying to inform his consciousness of his current state – that this is not his true afterlife, but a place of transition, much like the fleetingness of the memories that he relives. In truth, his unconscious placed that phrase on a previous memory of his, a direct reference to his dying moments – these were the last words he heard before dying, which becomes more evident towards the end of the story.

There are other scenes that assist in the placing of these warning signs, progressively changing in tone towards the end of the story, and the culmination of the narrator's journey through this temporary state, such as the feeling of tingling and vertigo – the association lying between a previous sensation and memory event, like skydiving, and his current state after being attacked. His head feels warm due to the attack, and again, his unconscious refers to another moment where he lay on the grass under a full moon. The scene with the strawberry juice in his hands also mingles with his present state – the transition of the red liquid on his hands into his own blood. As his mind quickly spirals further into its extinction, his unconscious keeps bursting through past memories and associating the present

sensations to previous ones - again, referring to the sensory inputs that are linked with the concept of Associative Memory.

In a final movement of acceptance, the narrator's mind brings him into a birthday scene – engaging in the full circle of the mortal condition. This was done in order to show the progress from the seemingly definite position of the narrator – a hazy limbo as an afterlife – into a more conclusive setting of his actual death. Like a prolonged near-death experience, his mind bursts through his memory as if to warn his consciousness about his terrible fate. The last line of the story terminates the narrator's life, referring to the cultural concept of how one sees a bright light just before one dies; a direct opposition to the narrator's dismissal of the other cultural clichés regarding death. This story twists into a narrative of the nature of memories and where they come from. By appearing in that Bergsonian dream-like form, these scenes carry the weight of the narrator's predicament, closing down to his last moments.

The inspiration for the development of this story, besides the Bergsonian metaphysical place of memories, was also Machado de Assis's novel *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (also translated and published as *The Posthumous Memories of Bras Cubas*) as mentioned earlier. Assis's novel is considered by critics, such as Carlos Emílio Faraco (2009) and Ernani Terra (2006), to be the novel that introduced Realism to Brazilian literature, and it tells the story of a man called Brás Cubas. He is also the first-person narrator of the novel, and he describes himself as a “defunct-author”. That is, a man that has already died and wishes to write his autobiography. The narrative proceeds to chronicle several points in Brás Cubas' life with his own, quite often humorous, commentary as he revisits these scenes. The plot is set in an inverse order – he starts his autobiography from the moment of his death, concluding it with the moment of his birth, in a rich family from Rio de Janeiro. This narrative choice was alluded to in “The Haze”, in the narrator's acknowledgement of what he believed was the moment of his own death, a memory scene the narrator does not describe fully but imparts his interpretation to the reader. Due to the nature of this novel, it fit rather well into Bergson's ideas of the “metaphysicality” of the mind, considering the character of Brás Cubas keeps his mind after the departure of his physical state.

Stylistically speaking, Assis's novel differs from “The Haze” in tone, as Assis wrote in an ironic style as a veiled criticism of the highly erudite novels published at the time in

Brazil, as well as the upper classes within the society at the time. Even though both “The Haze” and his novel’s narrators directly communicate with the reader, their purposes also differ between themselves. In “The Haze”, the choice to have the narrator communicating to the reader regarding his own situation was made in order to describe the perceived permanence of the narrator’s state. In other words, by directing speech to the reader, the narrator establishes for both reader and himself the certainty of his situation – being stuck in a darkened haze, destined to revisit all his past memories. Whereas in Assis’s novel, the tone of the narrator’s communication with the reader is one of nonchalance and debauchery, openly mocking and describing without reservations the viscera of his finished life. Through that, Assis accomplishes the irony and satire he wished to portray, Brás Cubas depicting family members and even himself as terribly flawed characters, parallel to the aristocracy of the age.

Bergsonian’s concept of the mind and its metaphysical place, disconnected from the material realm of the brain, informed the development of “The Haze” as both an exploration and exploitation of his interpretation of the place of memories. His early theories also informed this short story with the then-growing concepts of Associative Memory and the different types of memory and what he believed was their places as well. This contributed to establishing “The Haze” as a consistent short story with its theoretical scaffolding, as well as the recognition of the literary influence on the narrative. In the following chapter, Associative Memory will be more thoroughly analysed, as it is the key theoretical background to the short story featured then.

## Chapter Two - “On Wheels” & Associative Memory

This second chapter consists of a short story that is spread over a small series of shorter fragments, each of them following through a similar path of memory exploration. The name of this series of short stories is “On Wheels”. The main theoretical framework behind the following story is delving into the theories of Associative Memory and other approaches to memory triggers. As the name implies, it also probes into the cyclical nature of memories, as they do not necessarily follow linear processes – that is, recollection of memories, especially via sensory stimuli, does not necessarily follow a chronological order in terms of building narratives from these recollections. In even simpler terms, it means that when any new experiences are faced by an individual, one will always refer to his previous memories – this interaction may interfere with the “original” stored event, as well as creating a link between the original and the “new” event.

The concept of Associative Memory has been the topic of much academic and medical research, going as far back as Aristotle. On his *On Memory and Reminiscence* (2015), Aristotle outlines the basic process of Associative Memory that becomes the topic of studies from later scholars, like Hermann Ebbinghaus, who wished to test this Aristotelian notion of association. Such notion was put as such, from a 2015 translation:

Acts of recollection, as they occur in experience, are due to the fact that one movement has by nature another that succeeds it in regular order. If this order be necessary, whenever a subject experiences the former of two movements thus connected, it will (invariably) experience the latter. (2015, p.6)

To consolidate this notion, as put forth by Ebbinghaus (1964), he interpreted this as: if event “A” and event “B” are linked for whatever reason, recollecting either may cause the recollection of the other. He utilised this basic notion to test himself in the exercise of memorising a list of nonsensical syllables, in order to put to the test if this approach would indeed assist in his ability to recollect these syllables. These tests were under highly controlled circumstances, with the intention of measuring the ability of forming these links of association, albeit being less true to day-to-day life. Nonetheless, his experiments were essential in the foundations for a more scientific approach, in a modern sense. From these



experiments he was able to draw out certain concepts still used to this day, such as learning (and, consequently, forgetting) curve.

Another important concept related to associative memory is the one of the “Engram”. It is, according to Karl Lashley, a psychologist and behaviourist from the early twentieth century, “the physical change or neuronal trace in the brain both ingrained, originally, and later triggered by sensory signals – visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile” (as quoted on Nalbantian, 2004, 60). This concept has been largely used in both literary and scientific studies regarding Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* (1913) – Suzanne Nalbatian points out that Proust “is the only writer seriously referred to by scientists in their discussions about the localization of engrams” (2004, p.142). This concept is relevant as it approaches the previously argumentative-only theories to linking to physical aspects of human memory, plus the combination of these serve as the cornerstone for this short story.

A common literary artifice that has its roots in associative memory is *stream of consciousness*, used profusely by authors such as Virginia Woolf (1925) and James Joyce (1916). *Stream of consciousness* is a narrative device that replicates the often tumultuous thought processes of a given character – hence the use of the term *stream*, as the thoughts flow through a character’s conscience. This technique is indeed applied to this short story, explicitly to explore the narrator’s associations through his memories. The stories in “On Wheels” follow a similar pattern, without necessarily an epiphany moment, which was very commonplace in *stream of consciousness* works from the authors mentioned above. The associations are triggered by the sensations experienced by the character-narrator, which then may trigger further associations. It is through those sensations that this story explores the concept of Associative Memory.

## 2.1. On Wheels

### Fireflies

It's autumn again. Out in the yard, I see the glow of fireflies. They remind me of your tears. Sitting here, I remember what I've been told these past few months, over and over again.

“You've had a good life.”

Who dares to say otherwise to anyone in a situation like mine? Even though I just stare through this window, day in and day out, this is supposed to have been a good life. The fireflies seem to be dancing. Everything seems to be dancing when you look at the world through children's eyes. The surprise and awe at each new thing we learn, this inherent feeling of song in it, of movement. Of freedom. I remember when my toe used to itch, and I would just scratch it. I remember when I'd use my toe to step on the gas of our car. My bare feet had felt almost every sensation they could. There was something in me that always wished to get rid of anything wrapped around my feet. Then, I would walk on my bare feet.

You used to tell me not to do that. Back then, you used to tell me everything and nothing. I was always confused. I'm still confused. It's autumn again, and the fireflies remind me of your tears. In truth, I remember so little.

I want to get closer to the window. Maybe open it a bit. Maybe invite the fireflies in. I wonder if they would know I want them to come closer. The first time I caught one... I was with Verité. She told me not to hold it too strongly, otherwise I might kill it. Isn't it scary, realising you have the power to destroy something? Just end it, right then and there. Few were the times I felt such a fear. Yet, I can still remember how it feels, the bitter taste on the tongue, the scent of death that comes from our hands, the shivering from the breath of a ghostly moon that shines down on the field. The field of fireflies, crickets and bare feet.

We were caught in the rain, in that field, remember? It quickly became quite muddy, but I didn't care. I held my mouth open, drinking the water from the rain. I used to say my thirst could never be quenched.

These memories come and go, like the green glow of those fireflies. Verité came to see me a few days ago. We stared at each other in a hazy gaze of unquestionable intimacy. We didn't need to say anything. We've had a good life.

I know I shouldn't feel guilty. To be honest, I never really felt any guilt. The guilt I felt was actually from not feeling guilty in the first place. That sounds confusing. Maybe paradoxical. After what happened, though, my lips just felt more natural being closed. I know you don't blame me, either.

I quite often feel very thirsty, still. My thirst will make me sane.

I used to wake up, sweaty and wide-eyed, for years after that. I was told some people have it even worse, and for longer. I would wake up, hearing the noise of a screeching tire in the back room of my head. I'd look for you, in the darkness, and I'd only see your tears, shimmering in the moonlight. Your tears were like fireflies.

### **Looking Glasses**

The nurse asked me if I wanted to go outside. I said I'd tell her later. I guess I've been by this window far more often than I had thought. But then, I lack that impulse of the limbs, the desire of stepping up to the stage, the smooth untying of a knot in the gut. One can't cough up butterflies any more if one does not feel them inside. All I feel is thirst.

That is a lie. I feel all sorts of things, actually. But I lie. My mouth is always kept shut. I guess that was your final gift to me. I'm sure you could decipher me, though. Just like Verité does. The way we look at each other – no, the way she looks through me... We know. And you would know, too. Of course, the three of us were each other's looking-glasses.

I can't even remember how we all started. I always imagined it being one of those situations that we were brought together by the wind, or by some invisible line (or chain) that was tied to our souls the minute we were born, then we would stumble across life, across other people till we untangled that line. But all I know is that, at a certain point, we were three. Verité, you and me.

You barely said a word that day, in the field, before the rain and the mud. Verité had gone for the summer but we still got together. Funny, I remember I was the quiet one. She was definitely the loud one, you'd agree. I suppose that is how the three of us balanced each other out. Nonetheless, we were still learning. Hell, I'm *still* learning. But that summer we learned a bit more about ourselves. I always wondered if Verité ever knew. I've never told her, but you might have. She never said a word to me about it, though. That Saturday afternoon, we were spent from running and the silly things we would do, the mock races with our bicycles, all in a dance to disguise the growing in ourselves, the whisper that became a scream, a yelp, a howl within, and both of us knew, we saw ourselves in each other, the looking-glass was clear. That afternoon, it didn't rain. There was no mud. But there we were.

We never talked much about the weeks after that. Verité returned and we went back to our roles in our trio. She was loud as ever, talking about the things she saw and places she'd been. It was the first time I ever heard a first-hand account about another country. Even though I wouldn't say a word, I was amazed by it. And I'm sure both of you noticed it. She talked about her family, about the landscape that was flat as a pancake, about the language and how they pursed their lips when they talked. She knew much, because well, her parents were originally from there. You and I, however, did not have such a background, did we? I could tell you were also impressed, but there was something else that was more vivid in your mind. I hoped it was me.

My knees hurt. It's the damndest thing. But I ought to do these exercises, lest my legs get atrophied. I wonder if Verité is coming this week. She always says she will, but then she comes at random times and days. Sometimes, the looking-glass gets a bit hazy, to me. Not for her, though. She always knows. I've always wanted to ask her what she thought of you and me. But I never got the courage. To be honest, if it weren't for you, I'm not so sure what would have been of us. But you knew. And I hoped.

At that time, we wanted to live on that green pancake, pursing our lips whenever we spoke about it. We made all sorts of plans. Of course, none of them were brought into reality; we hadn't even finished school yet. I guess that is something we lost, at least a bit, as we grew older, that inherent beauty and innocence of plans, lost or faded after being chewed upon by the world's ruthless cogs and cobs. You two, however, never lost it entirely.

I guess one could say I felt every little bump in life a little too hard. Could you blame me, though? I know you wouldn't. Nor would Verité. We all saw too much into each other.

### **Grave Hearts**

I'm sure we used to do this together, in a way. I mean, like when we would ride the tube and come up with all sorts of background stories for the people around us, most of them looking miserable and sad. While we did so, you would be feeling quite chirpy and playful. It was Verité that always blamed their grave hearts, though. Nevertheless, we had most of those Londoners pinched out, or so we thought. We were foreigners, anyway. They wouldn't care.

The peculiar thing about our stories is how much of ourselves we would actually try and put out there, as a mundane thing. We would look at those people, just like I look out this window today, and give them names, give them weight, give them value, all from our own ramblings and thoughts. You'd agree with the fact that my stories, nowadays, are dull and unimaginative. You'd definitely add more flourish. And, somehow, Verité would add those grave hearts.

I asked her, last week, about why she always saw people as being heavy-hearted. She smiled, in that mischievous way, the edges of her lips pointing upwards, as if she had wanted me to have asked it years ago. She always saw that because it was her truth. She knew how that was, surviving the mandatory, while having something stuck in the throat, feeling the heart heavy and blue. She said she saw that on us, too. Through the looking-glass, our hearts, grave.

### **Perspective**

It is late. It is unusually warm for this time of the year. I should be sleeping, but this cloudless night is soothing. Looking at the stars, the perspective we get is always of one's smallness. I still dream of you. Last autumn... seven years. And I still dream of you.

And for even more than that, the three of us will never break off, will we? No, I think it's one of those things in life of which you could never get rid. Not that I would like to, anyway. We had plans; Verité wasn't always keen about it, though. In hindsight, she didn't really want to be "Aunty Veri". But we knew she would be all right.

I can't remember where we were then, but at that time, we were dead serious about some of our plans. They were more plausible, too; even Verité joined in. It was then we first noticed how the years had changed us. And yet, she was still the same. You asked me, during one of our late night conversations, those that we stretched through after a bottle of wine and a packet of cigarettes, while reading and trying to sound intellectual to each other, you asked me of my feelings about Verité. I remember wondering if you were actually jealous, a concept that I had not yet grasped. But then, it was just the three of us ever since I could remember. Was I the link that held us all together? How would it be if you were the one left with her? I doubt it would be any different. I know it would not be.

But you were jealous. And so was Verité, but both of you had that sort of jealousy that a child might have of a younger sibling. And, looking back, I was jealous, too. I knew more of you than I knew of her. I never stretched through a night with her.

I fell asleep on my chair, by the window. The nurse said I shouldn't do that, it's not good for my limbs. What does she know; she's just another one with a grave heart. Before I dozed off, however, I thought I saw fireflies.

## **Cadeau**

It's cold. They tell me not to open the window, it gets too cold and I can get sick. So I just stare through the glass, sometimes getting close enough that my breath steams it up, blurring my vision, and watch the droplets of the rain I used to drink and throw at everything – except you two. You were my truth and a gift of my own. Verité and Cadeau. That's what I ended up calling you. Were you ever okay with that? Surely Verité was used to it already, growing up with that name. You had a name already.

The thrill of the nonsense, of the pure childish deliberation, it is a feeling that I always went back to. That's why I renamed my world. You were yourself a gift. At times, I

would claim as my own, and so would Verité, but not anymore. And each bit that we put together, like scavengers in the search of something that is in plain sight, ourselves, our gazes that stared through each other, I would rename it, either by a flavour, or by an impulse that kicked my voice to utter whatever word it had entangled in the cords. Even the animals in the farm had their own names.

This cold reminds me of our farm, if you could even call it that. Quilts, hand-knitted blankets and a fireplace. We used to joke about being older than we actually were, that clichéd expression of being old spirits in youths' bodies. There was no snow; it didn't snow on our farm. Yet we shivered and tried to get warm under quilts and hand-knitted blankets. I used to stare at both of you through the tiny holes in the blanket, like a ghost from a future that was too worried about the present. Whenever I think about those nights, it is almost like a reel of an old film, of a monochromatic memory that was never meant to be real; like a scene from a bar in an Antunes novel, under the smokescreen of a cigar, feeling the body slowly being rid of the soul, after enough glasses of cognac.

Winter here is white, the kind of whiteness that does not cleanse anything. Its bleakness reminds me of the cold metal of a surgeon's table against my skin.

Would you say I'm bitter now?

My silence keeps me sane, just like my thirst. My hands twitch, every now and then, in a late reflex of the grasp of a firefly. And Verité sees that, when she comes to visit me. She held my hand last time, as I stared at the floor. Even then, she could see through me. We never stopped being each other's looking-glasses. I still see you through her. And she sees you through me. That is how our lines are still tugging at each other.

The other day, a young student came by, to try and talk to me. He asked me about what happened. I never understood why people asked me about that, over and over, while also pointing out that I've had a good life. It all goes around in circles, doesn't it? Like in a hypnotic dance that makes you lose track of everything, and then it's time to realise time has passed and it will remain gone, in the yellow pictures of a flying pigeon, carrying a message that is not to be read by anyone but oneself. My message was read, already.

Rattling, the window woke me up. The wind outside blew strong as a battle horn, throwing the snowflakes against the glass as “cannon fodder” soldiers, as if announcing the war that never ceased.

But tonight, I wouldn't be awake to watch the generals at it. I had my truth and my gift.

### **Love Songs and War Films**

I watch the light above my bed flicker, like an old screen projector, as I lay in bed at night, wide awake. It must be the second week, or so. Something went off, you could say, and I haven't had any sleep. Maybe a switch was flicked in my brain, decided to turn on all its engines and let them spin, whirl and burst; thoughts pumping out like paratroopers out of an old aeroplane.

There is little light outside, I hear the rushes of the trees as the wind tickles through the branches, and the worms in my eyes dance in the dark. When I squint, I can almost make out the blurry, black and white faces of Flynn, Niven, Heston, and how you'd grab at my sleeve tightly at the tense moments of a trench push or a bomb dive. I'd laugh it off, thinking of how typical it was, and I think you played into it just as much. In the pretentiousness of our youth, we fancied ourselves like those fanciful characters we had seen on the screen, always with the added background noise of a whirring projector as you'd *ooh* or *aah*, and I'd laugh or comfort you. But it was I who was being comforted, wasn't it?

That was even truer when we would go dancing – Verité hated dancing, she thought it was a thing for foolish romantics. Isn't that redundant? She hated the love songs, too, and still does. We were always suckers for a sappy one, though. Flying to the moon, like the great pretenders that we were. I wonder why, whenever I think about those times, more and more I feel like I've lived my life as an impostor. I know you felt the same way, our pretences were tied to each other. The purposeful old-fashioned clothing, calculated tastes and customs; wearing tweed and drinking whisky, brandy, cognac; listening to old music and reading “the classics”. It was all a façade, as it often was, a veneer to dissimulate that



blasting engine inside, a drive to sweep the world and everyone in it into a miasma of honesty and despair; where all would acknowledge the true nature of our condition as mortals, with no disguises and no elaborate plots; it's all chaos, it has always been chaos.

I never told you much about my trip. I have never told anyone much about it. What is known is what is on the records – where I flew to and from, who I was with, what I helped accomplish. But, in reality, it was nothing like Peck or Douglas. There was no flicking of film to superimpose itself over the noise and the heat, god, the heat, of explosions; the dirt that never left the fingers and the cold that never left the eyes. Since I returned, at nights, the rustling of leaves used to cause me to roll out of bed, wide-eyed and twitchy-handed. At nights, sleep would be fragile and ephemeral, a thin sheet of rest over a body that lays under a monsoon.

Tonight is different, however. Sleep seems to escape me for reasons that seem to cower away into the corners of the room, hiding in the deformed shadows that litter the beige-coloured ceiling. The paint is quite flaky, now, like an itch had been scratched to the point of breaking the skin, where the redness reveals itself like an urgent messenger of the inevitable push.

The scars are still there, some as latent as they ever were, pulsating. Like the one shaped like a star, at least that's what you saw, as you'd trail your finger on it. You never once asked me if it hurt, but I suppose you knew the answer. The twitches and grimaces I'd involuntarily make were enough. There are new scars that... send my head into another place. My feet, however, never again felt wet socks in tight boots, or a muddy patch in the garden; even though, now, I almost wish they did. They weigh me down like sandbags.

Verité tried to yank some of this out of me after you were gone, and it made my insides burn like they hadn't in a long time, the fire of embarrassment and shame, of regrets and indecisions. She had said harsh words about it all before, the pointlessness of war, the idiocy of risking one's life towards something outside one's control, and I never held it against her. It made sense, like it made sense to me to join in an effort that just wasn't sane. Perhaps that's what I was looking for, at the time: Insanity. Further steps into the chaos that spoke so loudly to and at me. It was something I had to do.

Quite often, as the dirt rained on us after flashes of artillery at night, I'd watch some of the shots fired in response, zooming under the cold moon. Some rounds would blast their way into the darkness, soon to disappear. It brought a sense of peace, an odd sense of calm, perhaps the one before the storm; it reminded me of us dropping coins down a well, waiting to hear the inevitable *glug* at the bottom. Even with the urgency of a battlefield, I still sought such moments; the insanity I had looked for had hit me so strongly that, paradoxically, it left me unaffected. That is not to say I didn't pull a trigger – I did, and every time I did, the shockwaves sent down my arm and shoulder rocked me into the insanity, like a giant swing that flung my senses around inside my head; the scent of gunpowder became my air, as I aimed at silhouettes and other muzzle fires across the other side, the “enemy's side”.

Did you ever call anyone your enemy? I mean, we used to avoid certain people, didn't we – Verité used, too. Did you ever say you hated anyone? Did you ever want to hurt anyone? I never quite did, but when I was there, it was how I had to operate, I guess. It was nothing like in the war films. It was nothing like the love songs, either.

### **A Good Life**

My dreams last night brought me back from fox holes and sand bags to the flaky ceiling and yellow-bladed fans. There's a persistent thud out the window that quiets the autumn birds – some sort of roadworks, I imagine. It is morning again, and it seems I eventually slept, dreaming of flying foxes and sand castles. I don't feel rested, I feel an empty weight between my eyes and on my chest, as I lay here in bed. There's a glass of water on the bedside table, next to my daily pills; one of the nurses must have come in before I woke up.

It is another autumn morning, where the chill slowly creeps up from the edges of the bed and tickles the skin. The light is shyly working its way through leaves and curtains, making random shapes and patterns all over the room. Sometimes, when the light hits it straight, the metal knobs of the cupboard on the other side of the room blind me with a sudden flash of light, straight into my eyes. Out of reflex, I'm back at the car with you.

We were driving home, weren't we? It was night, a country road somewhere, the only light coming from the headlights; the cat's eyes blinked at us as we sped past them, and the roadside trees would sometimes reveal themselves to be peering over the road. You were holding my hand, and a love song was playing on the radio. You quietly hummed the tune, your nasal tones hinted at your buzzing from the wine and dancing. The grumble of the engine soon faded to the background, everything slowed down along with your humming.

Then, as if the darkness held secret more insanity, a flash of chaos onto our lives, a pair of headlights from the car of apocalypse. The humming stopped, the love song was overtaken by screeching tyres, the shattering of a looking glass; how everything stopped, how everything quieted down, and I saw your face, and your tears.

Have I had a good life? The pursuit of chaos, the uncertainty of youth, the masquerade of all the wishes and intentions, pretending to be something else, hiding truth from the present moment. The insanity of war, facing rains of dirt that clanged on the metal of my helmet, the pounding of my heart that bled out through a bullet wound, and a medal that weighed the same as a fallen soldier. But I've also seen fireflies in the countryside, the whistling of birds and not of bombs; canvas with strokes that flowed like multi-coloured blood. I've heard songs that resonated with the line, the string, the chain from my soul, the one that was so tangled up in you, I've smelled scents that flared my nostrils, widened my eyes. I've held your hand. You quenched my thirst, and kept me sane, even when I looked for insanity. Now, all there is left are the fireflies, the ones that float in the rain, above the mud. I wish I could be one, but I'm afraid I wouldn't know how to burn.

I've had a good life.

But I haven't. I lied, I felt so much and learned so little. All those pompous attempts, the smirking and derisive attitude towards anything I might have considered "lesser" – the music we listened to, the food we ate, the books we read, the exhausting disguise that makes me sicker now than it ever did. I ruminate these things, fully aware of the pointlessness. All life is not something that could ever be good. Whatever frivolous delusions we tell ourselves, they constitute no reality – it is insanity! The insanity I needed,

the insanity I looked for, it wasn't real, it was all escape, a desperate howl to a night that reverberated nothing. I have left parts of my flesh in other countries, I have parts of my body that have no more use, but when you were gone, it all didn't matter anymore. The lying had to stop, as it was all for you, the present that was now past.

Verité knew this, she always knew this, and yet she let it live, a lie that grew cursed roots into soil brimming with bile. I suspect you knew it, too. Like a condescending hand that stroked a child's head, you let it be, too, this fake kingdom I built with bricks made out of my own saliva, a defiled world coloured over with starry skies. And, you see, it is not your fault, nor Verité's. It's all mine, the curse of living inside a head that's too volatile, too human.

Those headlights, the ethereal lights that came forth and unrooted us, blasting us out of the echo chamber of our minds, and broke your body, removed your spirit, broke the chain between us and ended it. It reminds me of everything else – the fireflies, the grave hearts, the bullets, the tears, the love, the war, the songs and the hands, clasped together, locked. I've had a good life.

## 2.2. Critical Commentary

The past often comes through the front door of the mind and overtakes our perceptions and actions, but most often than not, it comes subtly, through connections of whose existence we are often unaware. There is constant dialogue between different thoughts and ideas in our minds, and they all carry a significant number of memories, imagination or a bit of both. It is an aspect of our intellect that has been discussed since ancient times, and it is held to be our principal resource of memory: the principle of association. This chatter of the mind is the foundation of this short story, separated in seven parts, where I explore the concept of association by slowly treading through the connections built within the narrator's memories. This story is entitled "On Wheels", a name chosen to imply the circular, repetitive nature of events – even when they are just being repeated endlessly in the narrator's own mind. At first, I intended for them to be standalone short stories, but as it progressed, it made more sense to produce a continuous thread between them.

"Fireflies" was the first part that I wrote of this series, with the motivation of establishing a strong visual cue that would elicit the past from the seemingly dreary mood in which the narrator finds himself. It is a story that also puts into play the concept of Engram, the "physical change or neuronal trace in the brain both ingrained, originally, and later triggered by sensory stimuli (visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile)" (Nalbantian 2004, p. 60). It was not by chance that I chose a character in medical care as a narrator, but as a way to underline the character's apparent apathy and displacement – creating a distance between him and the world and circumstances in which his memories were first recorded. Also, it was chosen to establish a sense of longing, placing the character in an environment that is not his own, where he can do little besides wishing he could be elsewhere.

The key visual prompt, which is present to a certain extent in all stories of this series, is the presence of fireflies. It was built around the image of droplets of tears reflecting the light of the dashboard of a car, an emotional moment in the narrator's life, which reminded the narrator of the greenish glow from those insects. There are auditory cues as well ("I would wake up, hearing the noise of a screeching tyre in the back room of my head"), which refers less to fireflies than to the event that ultimately brought the narrator to his current

state: a car accident that took the life of his lover and the use of his legs (another reference to the title of the series – the narrator is wheelchair-bound). This event was powerful, which consolidated the strength of the memory in the strong emotions the narrator held towards his lover, and it is revealed that due to the nature of the accident that the narrator suffered deeply as trauma took over.

It is worth mentioning that traumatic memory is an aspect of human memory that has been thoroughly researched, especially in regards to the health issues related to this (such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and memory repression). Nonetheless, I chose not to focus on that aspect in this series in particular, focusing on the associative aspect of the memories presented here, as it is more relevant to the context of this thesis.

Ultimately, there are symbols of representation that carry links connecting separate objects with a particular knowledge representation. The fireflies, the auditory cue of the screeching tyre, the sight and taste of the rain, the tactile feeling of his bare feet in the field, all these are such symbols that are imbued with association with particular events that flood the narrator's inertia. I made use of all the senses to strengthen the bridge that connects his emotions from the past to his recollections. This was made following the classical view of Associative Memory as Michael Jacob Kahana in his *Foundations of Human Memory* (2012) says: "According to the classical view, associations are links connecting two distinct knowledge representations" (2012, p. 112).

The Aristotelian principle of association is essentially this: if an item A is linked with B, thinking of either item may elicit the memory of the other. If, then, an item C is linked to item B, the linking between C and A will be automatically made, but not necessarily with the same strength as the link between A and B or B and C (Nalbantian, 2004, p.60). Herman Ebbinghaus, a German philosopher from the late nineteenth century, sought to experiment with this principle in highly controlled experiments, using himself as a subject, by memorising himself a list of randomly arranged syllables, noting how well he could remember the lists and the connections he made between the syllables. Granted, it was not an experiment that perfectly simulated the nature of daily human interactions and learning processes, however, it established an early study via scientific method in understanding human memory.

Frederik Bartlett (1932), philosopher turned experimental psychologist, argued against that very fact, saying that Ebbinghaus, by exerting such control over his experiments, thus removed the most important and interesting aspects of human memory. However, as Baddeley (2015, p.138) pointed out, Bartlett veered towards the other extreme, being sometimes too informal with his methods, even to the point of gathering little, if any, statistical data in order to produce credible outputs. However, his approach did develop towards a more meaningful way of understanding how associations are built, especially when building towards Long-Term Memory. Because he was less concerned with the degrees of retention of new material, such as learning a set of syllables such as those with which Ebbinghaus experimented, Bartlett was able to realise that when participants in his experiments were given meaningful words, as opposed to nonsensical syllables, they were able to create stronger associations between them. If that is to be extrapolated, one can reach the postulation that meaning may strengthen association between different sensory cues, related to the same memory event. They may also possess different levels of strength in terms of their associative power – this is following Craik and Lockhart's (1972) proposition of levels of processing.

“Levels of processing” is a hypothesis proposing that “information is taken in and processed to varying depths” (Baddeley, et al. 2015, p.144). Furthermore, Baddeley adds that “they [Craik and Lockhart] suggest that each of these processes will leave a memory record, with deeper processes leaving a more durable trace” (p.144). Analysing meaning takes a deeper process than just merely being told to memorise and repeat nonsensical information, and this can be expanded, again, towards the establishing links of emotion and meaning, where memory events, such as a tragic occurrence, may be processed from different sensory inputs, in a deeper, and therefore longer lasting, level. There are other approaches to associative memories that were further developed from the 1970s, which were developed using mathematical methods and inspired also by the known circuitry of the brain (Kahana, 2012, p.152), such as “category learning” (Nosofsky, 1992) and “multitrace attribute-similarity model of item recognition” (Estes, 1986) – however, their focus is less towards the linguistic aspect of associative memories and more towards the intricacies of developing systems to interpret the computing processes behind associations built by the brain.

Following, then, the hypothesis of “levels of processing” and applying it to “On Wheels”, it can be argued that all the sensory cues that refer to his late lover (Cadeau) are different items with links of varying strength – this can be identified by the fact that the visual cue of the fireflies is what initiated the way the story unravels, eliciting its strength. It was also the first sensory input to be linked with the emotional event. The other sensory prompts came as the connection between all of them was explored after the first, more powerful, trigger.

The first story in this series is meant as a catalyst, a metaphorical crash into the disguised apathy of the narrator, as his memories return in cycles, and he acknowledges that fact, welcoming them, for his time is spent mostly in quiet idleness. The following story, “Looking Glasses”, takes the narrator further down a past that mixes his own direction of his associations, going deeper into them, digging for a vein of a past that has long gone. The image of looking glass itself is a metaphor, not only of the characters’ intimacy, but also of the narrator’s own perception of his memories – as the past comes back, he stands behind a looking glass, a one-sided mirror, where all he can do is watch but not interact.

Time (and the sense thereof) is fleeting in this series, done in the fashion of Henri Bergson’s theory of duration of time, especially when in regards to memory. For Bergson, in his *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889), and also developed in *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe* (1922), he approaches the concept of time not unlike Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity. He proposed that measured time, that is, time that is measured by man, is “fictional”; as opposed to time that cannot be measured, such as the sense of time in a memory (or dream), which he classifies as “real”. These differing concepts of time were the basis for the fleetingness of time as the narrator fluctuates between the past and the present.

The narrator is very self-aware as it is pointed out by some of his remarks and rhetorical questions cast at his late lover. This second story also sheds light onto how the relationship began, not only between the narrator and the dead character, but also Verité. She is a peculiar character, placed there to constantly remind the narrator of the past as well, and elicit the real (as her name implies, *truth* in French) emotions from this silent, nameless narrator. She goes beyond a visual cue, but she is also an enigmatic, interactive, multi-sensory cue that evokes strong emotions as a significant item in the chain of



associations in the narrator's mind. It is also relevant to note that she is an important character from the narrator's past and present, their interaction does not forge a path into the future – his introspectiveness maintains both characters in a standstill, where the past overtakes any future that could be assembled in the present.

In "Grave Hearts", it is implied that the narrator does attempt to carry on with certain habits (such as creating stories about the world around him), yet it still goes back to the ineffable power that his memories hold over his present – in this case, the bleakness of Verité's view of the world, unsatisfied with the obligations and expectations from society. The narrator interprets her view of other people because she sees herself in them, and likewise he saw himself reflected on her. It is a corroboration of his own apathy and bleakness, as the past brings him a better feeling than what he feels in the present. "Perspective" highlights that, as he reminisces about some of the childish plans made with his lover in the past, and enhancing the presence of Verité by the fact that, even though the three were a close knit group of friends, the narrator never really knew much about her. Finally, in "Cadeau", the narrator names his lover, by disclosing that both Verité and Cadeau (French for *gift*) are not their real names, but something from their quirky relationship. Furthermore, the narrator's reluctance to accept the present is further brought to light upon the visit of a student – this is a direct reference to the fact that the narrator was a soldier in the past, as it had been implied in the previous stories. His unwillingness to talk about that is not out of traumatic experience but because it is a part of his past that did not bear as much of an impact as the loss of Cadeau.

Eventually, in "Love Songs and War Films," the narrator sheds some little light on his past, referring to what has happened to him during his time away. He draws parallels between his own experiences and the experience of watching old war films with Cadeau, virtually comparing his memories of war with the images of war films and the often farfetched heroism that is featured in them. He admits embracing chaos, which translates to his nihilistic view of the world, one that he tries hard to portray.

At this point, the memories have almost all become voluntary, after the initial sensory triggers, much like in the case of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)* (1913-1927). Suzanne Nalbatian points out that in *Swann's Way*, while the narrator attempts to identify certain memories from Combray and his aunty's home, "the

memories can be classified as voluntary, involuntary and hearsay” (2004, p.64). Voluntary memories, according to the text, are the ones inspired by taste or smell; involuntary are the oldest and most “instinctive” (2004, p.65); and hearsay, memories appropriated from another person’s recollection. Nalbantian also suggests that this could potentially be Proust’s response to Bergson’s two types of memories (“memory of habit” and “pure memory”). This may seem to contradict the notions of association discussed above in some ways, such as placing memories triggered (or “inspired”) by smell or taste as voluntary; but, in reality, it is a different interpretation of the involuntary triggering phenomena. What Proust suggested was that, upon having these sensory inputs triggering some memory, it became his voluntary act to search and revisit the memories linked to that sensory input. It could be, then, interpreted as the narrator in “Fireflies” that, upon seeing the image of fireflies outside his window, he chooses to follow the association of the images of fireflies to the fateful night of the car accident.

With this in mind, “Love Songs and War Films” and the last segment, “A Good Life,” both depend less on the triggered involuntary association from the visual cues, than a more voluntary expedition down the chain of associations within the memories of the narrator. From the image of fireflies and the other sensory triggers that surface during the course of the other segments, the narrator takes full control of where the associations may take him, thus revisiting memories that were further away from the original links of association, yet still maintaining the links intact. As mentioned before, the narrative in “Love Songs and War Films” is littered with references to the narrator’s experiences in war, even though he’s not specific about where and what war he was involved in. This is corroborating the notion of time that is consistent through each section of the story.

The conclusive part of this story, “A Good Life,” reaches the narrator’s train of thought at something he mentioned in the first part – the phrase he kept being told, “You’ve had a good life.” He contests it, evaluates his life in a way to weigh in the memories he so vividly carries and keeps on reliving. Moreover, he finally explores the actual event that led to his current state, the moment where his love perishes and he gets stuck on these metaphorical wheels where his life repeats itself in his mind. It is an emotional memory and it is at the centre of the narrative development. The plot is cyclical and, for the narrator, repetitive – he is fully aware he has revisited these memories time and time again. However,

like the last chapter of Machado de Assis's *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, a novel mentioned in the previous chapter, the narrator in "On Wheels" considers the outcomes of his life, and concludes that he has, indeed, had a good life.

The way these stories are delivered, with the aforementioned fleetingness of time, the mix of the present and past, and the first-person discourse from a nameless narrator to another character, is a direct allusion to António Lobo Antunes, a Portuguese writer who authored *The Land at the End of the World* (1979), a semi-autobiographical novel recounting his time as a combat medic in the Portuguese army during the Angolan independence war, in 1971. He is a trained psychiatrist, and lived through the Salazarian dictatorship in Portugal, experiencing first-hand the regime's harsh policies. His is also a nameless narrator, whose perspective changes between his memories of growing up in such a regime, his traumatic and ultimately desensitizing experience in war, and him telling his own grim and apathetic view of a post-dictatorship Portugal to a voiceless woman. The language used in the novel heavily inspired my choices in this series of short stories, which consisted of strong imagery drawing from single points of his memories (in Antunes's case, the sight of his mother's knitting needles "secreting" sweaters; the fireflies in the case of "On Wheels"). Additionally, it is mentioned that the narrator in "On Wheels" was a military man at some point in his past, but I chose not to explore his war experiences too much and focus more in the connections made in his civilian life (from both before and after his time in the military). Regardless of the inspiration and similarities, this series has a different purpose, and does not draw from personal memories, but exercises the theories of memory mentioned above.

Antunes's novel influenced "On Wheels" in its use of language, particularly in the way some of the memories and images are delivered. The narrator describes his memories, sentiments and impressions in a flourished way, as a counterpoint to his somewhat grim perspective of his past and present life. The way Verité is described corroborates this perspective – the narrator identifies a difference between Verité and himself, even though he presents his views with a similar glum view of the world. Indeed, this story delivers several associations built in the character's past, evoked in the present by both sensory triggers and his own voluntary will to revisit those events once again. There is no permanent conclusion to his state, whilst he retains his belief in the tragic nature of the human condition. Regardless, he still finds a way to recognise that his life has indeed been good.

This story explores the mind of a man who has dealt with emotionally intense prospects, consistently conjuring the associations his mind has constructed through the years, demonstrating the theories of association within the confines of a creative short fiction work.

### Chapter Three – “Donno”: Memory & Autobiographical Memory

There are several factors that may influence someone's sense of self and identity – the environment, language, social and economic position, cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds. They all contribute to the establishing of one's identity in different degrees. This next story, “Donno”, focuses on the role of one's environment – especially the physical and spatial aspects. It can be argued that the physical space where the formative years are spent may be as important as any of the other facets that contribute to the construction of one's selfhood. Therefore, I sought to extrapolate this particular feature in order to expand its potential effects.

Endel Tulving (1972) contributed to the concept of “episodic memory”, which relates to the ability of recollecting events personally experienced. Episodic memory has also been defined as a context-dependent memory, that is, “memory of an event in which the context of the event can also be recalled” (King A., et al, 2004). If the relevance of a context is expanded, it may be applied to the spatial context as well, therefore placing it as a feature in the recollection of past memory events. Furthermore, if we consider the type of context that may be less prone to change through time (i.e. the physical space of a city), the context itself may also become a part of the triggers or sensory cues that may initiate the recollection of associated memory events.

In “Donno”, the context is radically changed for the eponymous character, and he finds that his memories are completely gone. That is, once he was removed from his original environment, his connections to the memories and the contexts that related to his identity were broken, leaving him lost in a village filled with unfamiliar faces and spaces. This is an exploitation of a direct rupture from his “autobiographical memory”, which is an aspect of *episodic memory* that deals particularly with memories that spread across one's life-span, and that are specifically related to the self. The study of “autobiographical memory” started somewhat recently, with Martin Conway's (2005) initial theory. He proposed it as a system that has the “experienced self” as its main concern, it goes beyond the concept of “episodic memory” in as much as it focuses on the content of the memories, as opposed to the actual events. That is, by concerning itself with the content of memories (i.e. knowing that one bought a new car last year, but not necessarily remembering the event of buying the car), it

recalls particular points of one's past in order to establish their self-narrative. This system may be used to describe further the establishing of one's identity. Tulving (1983) also explores an aspect of "autobiographical memory" considering the role of the "cognitive environment" in the encoding of memories. "Cognitive environment" takes into account the mental state around the period of the encoding, as well as the context of the retrieval. In this story, this concept is magnified to play with the impact of the spatial environment in the foundation of the "cognitive environment" of the protagonist.

This sort of disruption of one's perception of self, a detachment of one's own self-awareness, can also be spotted in James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), particularly in the episode where Stephen Dedalus and his father move temporarily to Cork. Stephen's distance from where he grew up, Dublin, made him feel out of place and, to a certain extent, out of self. On the other hand, his father, being a native of Cork himself, became more alive when interacting with friends of old – who themselves, along with the city of Cork itself became bridges to his own self-awareness and perception of self. "Donno" expands on this detachment to a type of amnesia that the character faces. Through that, the story will go further into the function of one's surroundings in one's memories.

### 3.1 Donno

“Are you awake? Are you okay?”

“Donno.”

“Where are you from?”

“Donno.”

“Do you understand us?”

“Donno.”

“What’s your name?”

“Donno.”

The sand felt rough against his body, his skin burning under the sun and the sound of the waves was like his mind, shifting within itself. He didn’t recognise any of the faces gathered around him – then again, their faces were overshadowed by the bright sun that shone right above them, its beams finding their way straight to the young man’s eyes as he lay there, answering any questions thrown his way with a single word: Donno.

A woman offered him a hand, saying something that came into his ears like a muffled trumpet. He took it, perhaps instinctively, and was helped up. He squinted as he looked around, unable to recognise a single aspect of his surroundings. The small crowd muttered among themselves as they observed the slim, suntanned man rising with eyes of supreme confusion. The old woman smiled at him, her suntanned skin wrinkling into a leathery, gap-toothed grin:

“There you go, boy, did you hit your head or something?”

The young man’s mind drifted and so did his gaze, as his eyes scanned the surroundings with the curiosity of a deaf person who just gained the ability to hear. A former deaf person, if you will. The woman took the man’s arm and led him away from the crowd. When they were distant enough, she waved a withered hand in front of the man’s eyes, which snapped his mind back into reality.

“I asked you a question! Can you say anything else?”

He stared at the woman's greying eyebrows, following the hairy curve of each of them above eyelids like crumpled paper. He also noticed how brightly grey were her unruly locks that were blown around by the coastal winds. With a shake of his head and an aggressive, repetitive blinking, he risked:

“Yes...?” his voice uncertain, like a modest songbird.

Her eyes widened with surprise, and her leathery smile was back on, exposing the holes in her dental history. She led the man further down the spot where he was found, a gorgeous sandy beach, lush with tropical flora and fauna, serving as the set for a small village of fishermen and various layabouts.

“Good, good. So let's try this again. I'm Bernice, what's your name?” She leaned her small head towards him.

“I... donno.” he exhaled in defeat.

“Not this again...” she muttered to herself, “Right, I'll just call you that, shall I? Donno?”

He shrugged, his mind racing too fast, and too sparse, to try and argue.

“Right. That'll have to do. Now, the other important things: where are you from, and how did you get here?” she asked.

As he prepared to answer, she also joined in and said: “Donno”.

“Okay, okay. This is clearly pointless. Let's go get you cleaned up and figure out what to do with you.”

She turned on her heels with the agility of an old fox, beckoning Donno to follow her back towards the village. The crowd had dispersed upon their return, though some stragglers that saw them walking past the village centre quietly whispered among themselves. It was a small village, with fifteen wooden and bamboo huts at the most. They were laid out in two circles, one on the outside and consequently longer, and the other other on the inside, with fewer but slightly bigger huts, all facing towards the centre. There were a few fishermen sorting out today's catch in this centre, the smell of guts and sea salt



ripe in the air. Bernice ignored the eyes that were cast their way, while Donno struggled to grab the reins of his unbridled mind, galloping through the meadows of confusion and perplexity. They stopped in front of a hut that was larger than the rest, and also seemingly older. Donno glanced at Bernice's face as she sucked one of her remaining teeth and, with a rustling noise, she opened the curtain where a front door should be and walked in. Inside it was dark and damp, and there were all sorts of thingamabobs spread across the floor – small bones, wooden tools, sheets of linen, a few chairs, a table with a big pile of smaller knick-knacks, and a man. The gloomy figure didn't notice the two walking in, concentrated on the shaving of a small piece of wood into an even smaller piece of wood. Bernice clicked her tongue.

“Fletcher? A word?” she inquired.

The figure slid his small knife once more on the piece of wood, shedding off a short sheet onto the cluttered floor, like a fingernail clipping. Donno noticed that his grasp on the knife's handle loosened, and that he was missing his right middle finger. Fletcher slowly looked up, as if the hinges of his neck were rusty.

“Come off it, Fletch, it's just me and... Donno,” she hissed, “No need for your theatrics. It has happened again.”

Fletcher's demeanour changed drastically, from a gloomy façade to a look of wonder and amazement. He was also an older person, a village elder in his own way, with short, curly grey hair atop a head that resembled a turtle, if not for his bushy moustache. He was also quite small.

“You're... joking!” he exclaimed, “Are you joking?”

“No. He just woke up, about an hour ago.” she replied, “And he doesn't remember anything from before, either.”

“So... is he – are we – do we -,” he fumbled for words, his eyes glistening with excitement.

Donno stood there next to Bernice, staring at the old man whose exhilaration was akin to a small puppy. He noted that the man also had some scars on his forearms that seemed like a set of small tyre treads.

“Obviously, I don’t know anything. And if he’s anything like you were, we won’t be getting anything out of him,” Bernice said wryly.

“S-sure, sure. Was there any stuff else with him?” Fletcher replied, toning down his excitement, the cold bucket of reality water dampening his spirits.

“Not immediately, but I’ve sent two boys to look further around the beaches, just in case,” she said, “so here’s hoping.”

Fletcher shifted his glance onto Donno, whose countenance was set on the same expression since he woke up.

“Hi, um, Donno, is it? Welcome to, uh, our little village,” he rehearsed a smile that wasn’t ready for show time yet, “I know quite well what you might be thinking right now, so I just want you to relax for now, and regain your strengths. How does that sound?”

“O-okay?” Donno replied. He was flustered through and through, anxious about all that he didn’t know, and that was almost everything.

They provided Donno with washing water, a clean set of raw cotton clothing and a pair of woven straw sandals. He figured out what to do with all that, but only because his body took charge and proceeded with cleaning and dressing before he could realise what was happening. Soon enough, he was dressed and taken to Bernice’s hut, where she had prepared a meal for him and told him he’d stay with her at first, but eventually they would help him build his own hut. There was little discussion between other villagers, as they seemed to steer clear from both Bernice and Fletcher’s paths. Donno went along with it all, like a train set on its tracks. Then again, he didn’t feel like there was a choice.

*A child’s laughter woke him up. Lying on his back, he stared at the thatched roof, wondering if the child would stop. He recognised the laughter, though, so he jumped onto his feet and ran outside. The early morning sun temporarily blinded him, but once his eyes adapted, he smiled at a child and a woman, who now seemed to be laughing just as hard. He tried to step closer, but he couldn’t. He was stuck, his feet caught up in something invisible. He tried to scream, but nothing came out.*

Donno sat up quickly, sweating. Across from him, on the other side of the hut, lay Bernice, her chest slowly moving with deep breathes of heavy slumber. He wanted to scream, but he was worried it would wake people up, so he just let out a quiet “Ah”. He sat there in silence, crickets and the distant sound of waves the only ones engaged in futile conversation. He kicked off the linen sheet wrapped around his feet.

The days and weeks flew by him almost like his first day in this village – a bystander to a convoluted but fairly uninteresting air show. Donno was often tasked with helping out around the village, overseen by either Bernice or Fletcher, both of whom always had a knowing look upon their faces. They would confer together and whisper things to each other, Fletcher insisting that she would still tell the two boys to keep looking up and down the beach every day; Donno slowly managed to interact with the other villagers, who avoided asking Donno personal questions, as they knew he only had one answer.

Donno’s anxiety was slowly dissipating, as he grew to know and like this abrupt new beginning to something he was never quite sure he had before. The dreams, they also seemed to disperse and be less intense, though he kept them a secret. During his time on different chores, he soon (re?)discovered he had a talent for woodworking, helping the village’s carpenter in the making and mending of small fishing boats and other fishing apparel. The two elders seemed pleased, often reiterating how fortuitous Donno’s arrival to the village was.

Then, one morning, there was some hesitant clapping, of the non-celebratory sort, outside Bernice’s hut, which woke her from her sleep. She rolled off the mat on top of a pile of dried grass that served as a mattress and went to see who wanted to speak to her at this early in the day. Squinting as she stepped outside into the morning light, she was nervously greeted by one of the village young men.

“Yes, Jay?” she asked.

“We, uh, we found something,” he muttered, looking around him as if worried about spies.

“Where?”

“At the beach end, near the cliffs.”

“Show me.”

Jay led Bernice towards the beach, taking a path around the centre of the village to avoid being seen. It was still quite early in the morning, so not many villagers were out and about yet, which made sneaking around easier. Soon enough, they were treading along the coast, heading towards a chain of rocky cliffs that stood guard on that part of the island. Jay suddenly stopped, and pointed to a bundle of driftwood, algae and other debris. Upon closer inspection, however, Bernice noticed that, entangled in all the rubbish, there was a leather bag. She rehearsed a nervous, gummy smile.

“Listen, dear,” she turned to Jay, “don’t bother telling anyone about this, is that alright?”

The young lad nodded, as he untangled the bag from all the rubbish. Sea water poured out of the many holes in the stitching of the bag, which wasn’t bigger than a regular-sized watermelon. He handed over to Bernice, who cradled it like a baby, if she would normally cradle her babies in one arm, covering the head with the other. The walk back to the village was shrouded in an intense silence from both Jay and Bernice, the latter of whom headed straight to Fletcher’s hut. Upon their return, there were a few more early risers starting their days, but still easy enough for her to walk about inconspicuously between huts. Fletcher was already up, just outside his hut, as if contemplating the morning. They exchanged pleasantries and Bernice walked straight into the hut, motioning to Jay to go away. Fletcher quickly followed, as if he could read the old woman’s face.

Inside, the humidity didn’t seem to bother Bernice, who kneeled onto a woven mat and laid the leather bag in front of her. She kept her silence as she quickly unravelled the shrivelled string on the top of the bag, and proceeded to investigate its contents. Fletcher watched intently, also in silence, as she laid out some mushy things – clearly items that didn’t survive the salt water damage – on top of another. Finally, however, she pulled out a

piece of cloth. It was a piece of rough cotton, woven into a square shape, and, on it, several shapes were stitched onto it, with two large Xs on different parts of it - a crudely stitched map. Fletcher opened and closed his mouth a few times, finally pointing a shaky finger at the map.

“Do you think this is Donno’s?” he let out.

“Hard to say,” she shrugged, “but then again, it’s not often we find these, is it? Certainly a first for this one.”

“Are you going to show it to him?”

She remained quiet.

“You should,” he insisted. Bernice’s face frowned slightly as she pondered. “You never know, it might spark something in him. If there was ever something like this, I would have wanted to see it,” he continued.

She nodded, but still questioning herself if that was the best for Donno, for Fletcher, for Jay, for the village. She felt the weight of this decision on her frail shoulders, asking herself if this would indeed fire up something in Donno, what it might mean. Would Donno leave them? Would that mean others would leave, too? The truth, the one she avoids facing like a vampire avoids the sun, is that Donno wasn’t the first to suddenly wash up on these shores. But they all stayed. Fletcher stayed. Sierra, the woman who turned out to be a great cook, she stayed. Maya, and her skills with the loom, stayed. What would happen if any of them left? Probably nothing, in the grander scheme of things, she admitted, but she worried about the repercussions. She was old and frail, and would probably not do well on her own, nor would she take well to moving away.

“So? Should I get him?” Fletcher snapped her back from her worrisome daydream.

“Yes. Bring him over, but don’t tell anyone else about this just yet. Curiosity will only distract people from their tasks,” she said after quickly recomposing herself.

Fletcher headed out and, moments later, returned with Donno, still rubbing sleep off his eyes, his hair unruly from the throws of sleep. Bernice greeted the young man and told him to sit down, as she grasped the cloth map tightly in her hands. She embraced her

reluctance and then let go, laying the map flat in front of it. It was a square with about eight inches each side, stained beige in colour, with darker brown stitching for the outlines and the Xs so deliberately constructed within the fabric. Simplistic, perhaps, but it seemed to delineate their overall surroundings accurately enough – at least to the elder woman.

“Good morning, Donno,” she said callously, “sorry to wake you so abruptly.”

He waved his hand in dismissal, then, she continued.

“We found something that we believe is yours,” she motioned to the map, “and I think it explains how you got here.”

His eyes widened slightly and a shiver went down his back, shaking off the fogs of drowsiness. Bernice proceeded to explain the earlier findings, while Fletcher stood in silence, staring at the small map. His heart was racing at the implications, his mind flipping through his years in this small community, his self-discoveries. He wanted back.

“Do you understand what this means, Donno?” she asked, snapping Fletcher’s attention to the room.

“I do. So this shows where I probably came from,” he risked.

“Maybe. These past few months, you’ve become one of us. And this, this doesn’t change anything,” she faltered.

Fletcher’s lips were quivering, but he made not a sound. Donno knelt before the map, looming over it like a brooding owl, studying it carefully. Some flashes of his dreams suddenly took over his mind, the familiar faces and feelings in them, the way the sand under his feet felt in that dream place... For all the things he didn’t know, this time he knew what he had to do.

“I’m going back,” he said decisively, for this first time in months.

With that, any words of protest from Bernice bounced off Donno like raindrops onto an umbrella, as he got onto his feet and briskly walked out. Fletcher helped Bernice to her feet, and then both proceeded to follow the young man towards the woodworking hut. His mind was still ablaze with images from the dreams, trying to make sense of it all. At the hut, he gathered tools and other materials. The two elders stood by as he zoomed back and

forth, showing a determination that none had seen out of him until now. Bernice tried mumbling some words again, to try and slow down the pace of a flustered Donno, but his tunnel vision was such that within minutes, he had the necessary tools to start carving wood. She frowned with conviction and stepped in front of him, with a raised hand.

“Enough! Donno! You have to listen to me! This is reckless and dangerous – if you recall, you barely made it alive over here, you need to think this through!” she blurted out. Donno stopped on his tracks just as he holstered an axe onto his back. He took a deep breath.

“Listen, I... I don’t know a lot of things. But I know I need to do this,” he calmly responded, and continued with his work.

His burst of activity as he loudly and vehemently cut, chopped and filed some bits of wood around the workshop gathered the attention of a small crowd, as the elders stepped back. Bernice had looked at Fletcher for support, but the man would just shrug, himself struggling with his own questions and curiosities. She felt powerless. Donno, on the other hand, was focused on crafting a sturdy raft – his talents becoming alive with each carving motion. It would take, however, a few days for him to be able to finish this project; somehow he knew that the fishing rafts he had helped build before wouldn’t be enough for his imminent trip. Nevertheless, his drive never faded, as he worked for hours for the following days. The curiosity by the others slowly dissipated, except for Fletcher.

Donno was carving out a thick paddle at night, when Fletcher came to visit. He looked around the workshop, the pieces Donno had been working on for the past couple of days spread out in a neat fashion.

“Hello, boy,” Fletcher said, raising his hands as in surrender, “I’m not here to talk you out of anything. In fact, I’m here to talk you into something. Take me with you.”

“Why?” Donno asked, after a moment’s pause.

“Well, you see, my boy. Many years ago, before all these wrinkles and grey hair, I, too, washed up on the very beach where you woke up those few months ago,” the old man casually replied. Donno furled his brow in confusion. Fletcher continued, “So I’m just as curious as you. Plus, I actually know our side of the map better.”

Soon enough, Fletcher was aiding Donno in the assembling of the crude yet sturdy vessel. One day earlier than Donno had expected, they had finished it. There was a buzz about the village as they asked for some of the younger men to help carry the raft out of the workshop, their curiosity rekindled by the impressive construction. To Donno, it felt he had channelled all of an innate knowledge that still flowed within him. Fletcher could only feel his achy bones and the excitement of the upcoming journey that might answer questions he did not know he had.

During this time, Bernice was a lot more reticent than usual, scarcely being seen or talking to anyone. Her concerns were still very vivid in her mind, and she worried, she held on to those worries like a piece of burning coal in her hand. And yet, the day had come that she would have to deal with it. She was not used to having people go. Now, she had not only to say goodbye to Donno, but also to her longest relation, Fletcher.

*“Kierro? Are you awake?”*

*The soothing voice woke him up, as he heard heavy rain crashing onto the thatched roof and bamboo walls. His sleepy eyes barely opened full before he could see her – young and beautiful. She smiled, and it was as if the sun was rising to greet him.*

*“It’s raining pretty hard. Mind if I sleep a bit closer to you?”*

*He reached his arm around her, she felt so warm. He squeezed her closer to him, and wanted never to let go.*

Donno sat up, with his arms stretched in front of him. In his mind, the very real imminence of what he’s going to do...

The buzz had spread across the entire village just before noon, as the hushed crowd gathered around the two men who were strapping the final boards and nailing the last planks down, to form the biggest raft most of them had ever seen. Some were bringing woven baskets filled with fruit and other foods, as well as pouches of water and some green coconuts. There was virtually no dissent from anyone, besides Bernice’s heavy reluctance,



and well wishes were widely given. Throughout preparations, Donno's entire demeanour altered as he stood taller than any other man in the village. Fletcher warned Donno that, even with a raft as sturdy as the one they had built, it could be a tricky journey; he only knew the immediate surroundings of the village, but nothing too far north from where they were – and that was the direction the map seemed to indicate where the other X was. The younger man acknowledged the danger, but his eagerness was steadfast.

In less than an hour, they were finally ready. With food for a few days, some extra tools, bits for raft maintenance and other necessities, they prepared their vessel, strapping several pouches evenly across as not to compromise its balance. One last help from the young men and they had set their raft onto the shoreline. Much like the arrival of Donno, the goodbyes were brief. Just before they embarked, Bernice came forth, and addressed both the two men, but also the crowd.

“Just, remember us, Donno. You may not remember where you were from, but I hope you remember where you are from now,” she said. Turning to the crowd, she continued, “And you all, remember these two, for they are also part of us.”

Being dramatic was never her forte, but she felt the words she said. No one questioned her attitude at all, especially Fletcher – having known her the longest, this was an aspect of Bernice that he had seldom seen. With that, they hoisted themselves up onto their raft and slowly paddled towards the open sea. Following Fletcher's interpretations of the map, they took a western turn after a mile, then headed straight north.

The sea, its untameable whims and throws, would indeed prove this bold journey to be not without its dangers. Donno, however, unwavering in his strong paddling and manoeuvring through the currents, conserved the old man's confidence. Through tropical rain, and scorching sun, he carried onwards.

It was in the early dawn that Donno saw a coastline a few miles ahead of him. He could see, under the warm light, several small huts, not unlike the ones from the village they had left a few nights (or had it been weeks? He wasn't sure) before. Donno intensified his paddling, as Fletcher lay asleep on the middle of the raft. The closer they got, the more

Donno felt a rush of blood tingling through his entire body, his mind racing through the images from his dreams – the woman, the child – these images becoming more and more vivid in his mind, as if they were more than just dreams, and with each stroke of the paddles, the more these images came back, the thatched roof, the bamboo walls, the feeling of sand, he knew it was that beach, it was there he was going to feel that sand. He paddled the raft straight onto the shore, his heart racing as if it had just been restarted. The impact shook Fletcher awake. He sat up, looking very confused at his surroundings and at Donno.

“We’re here, Fletcher! This is my home! I know these houses, one of them is mine! Monny must be waiting for me! I remember everything!” he blurted out excitedly. He looked over at Fletcher, waiting for a response, “How about you? Do you remember this place?”

“Donno.”

### 3.2 Critical Commentary

Our environment plays a role that we may not always acknowledge in the formation of our identity. It is something with which we can easily identify, where the familiarity dims the urgency that our instincts feel when exposed to new surroundings. In technical terms, the way our memories of our environment are established is a combination of our visual and spatial memories, among other senses that may be strongly linked to a location. Even just the differences in the smells of new environments may ready our brains for different sets of reactions. In “Donno”, the title character is thrown into an environment in which nothing is familiar; there are not any sorts of ties from which he might draw his own identity and memories. This story is an extrapolation of the role of our surroundings in the construction of our sense of self, the ability to recognize our own existence and experiences, where the foundations of our own self-awareness are formed.

The inspirational base behind this story comes from two sources – the theoretical explanation of the processes behind the formation of the self, “autobiographical memory” and one of its elements, the role of the “cognitive environment”; and the example laid by James Joyce from *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) regarding Dedalus loss of identity when he moved to Cork, mentioned in the introductory segment of this chapter. Alan Baddeley (2015) calls this sort of memory related to events and other information that are related to the self “autobiographical memories”. It is not, per se, a separate type of memory, as opposed to the concepts of working memory and short-term memory (STM). In *Memory* (Baddeley, et al. 2015), he suggests that its processes depend “on the episodic and semantic memory systems” (p. 299), but that “the role that it plays in our lives differs in interesting and important ways from other functions of memory” (p. 299). He also suggests that the study of autobiographical memory is the more recent aspect of episodic memory to be systematically carried; so, albeit some research has been conducted, there is the need for further development. In order to fully understand these preliminary studies, it is important to comprehend what episodic memory is, and other terminology that is involved with this train of thought.

Episodic memory is, in essence, the type of memory necessary to recollect specific events or series of events at a particular point in time. The term itself was coined by Endel

Tulving (1983), in order to differentiate this sort of memory with semantic memory, which is the type of memory that concerns itself with a more general sense of knowledge of the world – facts, meanings, concepts. That is, the type of memory that does not involve personal experience in its contextual processes. Episodic memory also refers not only to that ability of recollection, but also to the ability of using these recollections for what Tulving called “mental time travel”. It is a process that David Ingvar (1985) described through which long-term memory (LTM) was used to access past experiences in order to adapt and predict the future. That is, “we remember what has happened before and use this to imagine what is going to happen next, and plan accordingly” (p.158). The concept of “mental time travel” is further explored in the last story of this thesis.

The other type of memory that helps establish “autobiographical memory” is “semantic memory,” which will also be discussed in later chapters. Tulving described it as:

The memory necessary for the use of language. It is a mental thesaurus, organized knowledge a person possesses about words and other verbal symbols, their meaning and referents, about relations among them, and about rules, formulas and algorithms for the manipulation of these symbols, concepts and relations (...) Semantic memory does not register perceptible properties of inputs, but rather cognitive referents of input signals. (Tulving, 1972, p.386)

Essentially, “semantic memory” concerns itself with more rigid pieces of information, less related to actual memory events and scenes, but more with constructed knowledge. It is employed in the learning of language, but also it transcends into learning of other types of knowledge such as historical, physical and biological facts. “Episodic memory” can also be connected to the knowledge of such facts, but it concerns itself more with the context in which they were learned (i.e. remembering the class in which one learned about the Second World War, as opposed to remembering the facts about the War).

“Autobiographical memory”, as the name implies, goes beyond the limits of “episodic memory,” expanding into all those specific memory events that are solely related to the self. That is, it “refers to the memories that we hold regarding ourselves and our interactions with the world around us” (p. 299). As mentioned before, it is not an entirely a different type of memory, from a theoretical perspective, as it depends heavily on “episodic memory” (and, to a certain extent, “semantic memory”), but it does have its own set of characteristics that highlight its role in our own functions of memory. One of these

functions, for instance, is the creation of “a coherent representation of ourselves and our lives” (p.322). Also mentioned before was the fact there is still little research to illustrate better the inner workings of autobiographical memory and the focus on more individual phenomena that pertain to this type of memory, such as “flashbulb memories” – memories related to historical moments, such as remembering where one was when one heard about the World Trade Centre attacks - and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These two are not of concern, however, when it relates to this particular short story.

For “Donno,” the motivating theoretical aspect of “autobiographical memory” is both the idea of a narrative that is built up from one’s past experiences in order to determine one’s current identification of self, as mentioned above, especially the concept of “cognitive environment”, being expanded from only the mood and mental state but also the physical space in which the memories are encoded. From the many sensory inputs that may establish these past experiences, it was the visual-spatial aspect of memories that I chose to explore. By enhancing the weight of that aspect when it comes to the autobiographical processes, I therefore enhanced its weight upon the recognition of self, thus establishing the character’s apparent amnesia due to his sudden distance from a setting where all is familiar, displaced then from his original “cognitive environment.” This distance is present both in a visual sense, where the cues of his home were not present anymore; but also the spatial sense, where his own perception of where he is, the locations around him being completely different, affected enough parameters that, for this particular character, disabled his own self-awareness. This is all defined within the first page of the story, with another implication: this “disabled self-awareness” was deliberately not a conscious effort – as in, the character was not conscious when this process happened, as it is shown with his waking up at the shore of a small fishing community, where he is not able to name himself nor answer any of the people’s questions regarding his own person. It is as if there was a physical link directly tied to Donno’s own home, and, when the distance was great enough, that link was broken, and, with it, all shards of Donno’s knowledge of self, at least at first.

The presence of his “semantic memory” here is deliberate through the use of the same language as the people within this village, where he is able to communicate with the new figures in his life that he is not familiar with. This was done in order to amplify the fantastical nature of Donno’s memory loss. According to Michael C. Anderson in *Memory*

(Baddeley et al., 2015), memory retrieval may be influenced by the cognitive context (which is a part of the “cognitive environment”). He cites the study done by Viorica Marian and Ulric Neisser (2000), in which a group of Russian-English bilinguals “were asked to tell stories about their lives in response to word prompts” (p.214-215). This study was separated in two halves – one to be held in English, and the other in Russian. It became evident that, when they were requested to tell stories of their lives in English, the vast majority of them were encoded within an English-speaking context. Likewise, when they were asked to tell stories of their lives using Russian, the majority of the stories were from a Russian-speaking environment. Marian and Neisser suggested that “linguistic context acts like other forms of incidental context,” (p.215), where memories are more dependent on their context. Anderson mentions that “other studies have replicated this pattern, and extended it to memory for academic material, and even general semantic knowledge” (p.215), though he mentions more cases of bilingual studies. Nonetheless, it is part of a larger theory that acknowledges the importance of context within episodic memory retrieval. Anderson calls it “context-dependent memory”, which is “the finding that memory benefits when the spatio-temporal, mood, physiological, or cognitive context at retrieval matches that present at encoding” (p.211). With that in mind, this concept is then expanded to the greater context of Donno’s “cognitive environment” and his “autobiographical memory”.

Besides the “cognitive context-dependent memory” mentioned above, with the case of the bilingual studies, one that is relevant to this story is the “environmental context-dependent memory”. He cites the common case of leaving one room of the house with the intention of grabbing a cup of tea, for example, but upon reaching the kitchen, he would have forgotten what he was there for. Then, by returning to the original room, he remembered what he wanted in the first place. This is a simplistic example of “environmental context-dependent memory,” but this phenomenon has been explored further. Godden and Baddeley (1975) analysed this occurrence in a practical scenario, in the case of the training of deep-sea divers. Some of the first experiments “on the effect of cold on divers had suggested quite incidentally that the underwater environment might induce strong context dependency” (Baddeley et al., 2015, p.212). This study was inspired due to the observation of the reports of a team of divers who were set to study the behaviour of fish when interacting with trawl nets. The reports, which were initially the main form of

noting these behaviours, were hindered by the fact that the divers, upon resurfacing from their dives, would often forget the specifics of the behaviours observed. Godden and Baddeley then experimented with divers by having them listen to “forty unrelated words either on the beach or under ten feet of water” (p.212). Following that, the divers would be tested in either the same or the alternative environment. The findings of this study showed that, as suspected, they would remember more words in the same environment (for example, listening to the words at the beach, then recalling them at the same beach) in which they first heard them, as opposed to the other environment. These changes were also found in different types of change in the physical contexts, such as different rooms, as well as different types of sensory stimuli.

The influence of “context-dependent memory” also applies not only to “episodic” and “autobiographical memory”, but also to other forms, such as “eyewitness memory”. As the name implies, it is the sort of memory system that describes when an individual has to recount, via an eyewitness testimony, an event that the person was witness to. According to Smith and Vela (1992), when individuals were exposed to the context in which the event happened, their memories were recalled more easily, facilitating their testimonies.

Even though Donno’s “semantic memory” seems unaffected when it comes to his linguistic ability, his “episodic memory” is clearly hindered, as not only he is unable to recall who he is, but he is also unable to recollect the circumstances that drove him to this place, as well as any memory events from his life up to this point. By being unable to recall specific events of both his immediate past as well as from his long-term memory, Donno finds himself absent of personal identity. Removed from his home environment, Donno suffers an uncanny type of amnesia, which, at first, seems to affect most of his “episodic memory”. His initial interactions with Bernice and the other characters are rich in this characteristic absence of referral to Donno’s knowledge of self.

In the recent past of this village, Bernice reveals that a situation like Donno’s has happened before, when she talks to Fletcher about the new arrival. This is not fully discussed between the characters, but it is clear that this is not the first time they were faced with a similar situation – a nameless castaway who has no recollection of his past and identity. Quickly, some of Donno’s past is covertly revealed through a short dream sequence, where he sees his partner and their child – his unconscious delving into his

memories to give light to a past that is lost outside its original context. Donno's perception of his circumstances was one of fear and confusion, quite often feeling like he has no choice.

Eventually, Donno starts adapting to life in this community. It is through that adaptation that one of his abilities comes to light, which suggests this may have been his profession at his place of origin. This illustrates that it was, indeed, his "autobiographical memory" that has been deterred by his removal of his home; while his "bodily memory", which concerns his physical skills (and could be an extension of his "semantic memory"), remains unaltered. The context of his ability with woodworking is not fully explored as it is not relevant to the narrative as Donno's cognitive context. Later, some of the younger villagers find some items that, as they assume later, are connected to Donno. As it is revealed, Bernice expected such an encounter, implying that the same thing happened when the previous castaways arrived. Additionally, it is implied that Bernice might have found items related to the previous arrivals but chose not to disclose the findings to them. It is also revealed that Fletcher as well as at least two other members of the village were all found washed up at the beach in a similar fashion. Donno's situation becomes less unique, but perhaps more pressing, with the presence of a crudely-stitched map that seems to indicate where he came from. This triggered something unconscious in Donno, who chooses to follow the map. What follows is the culmination of his instincts, wishing to find again that "cognitive environment" that he had seemingly lost upon his arrival to this village. Fletcher expresses his wish to join Donno in this expedition, in order to look for the same thing – the drive to do so from Donno strengthened Fletcher's desire to rediscover his own origins. After another dream sequence in which names from Donno's original life come to the surface, the story culminates with their rocky travel to where the map seemed to indicate. Like being granted sight again, Donno's memories rush back towards him – he recognises immediately the houses on the shore they are approaching, mentioning the name of his wife, expressing vividly that he remembers everything. This is met with Fletcher responding ambiguously "Donno."

The end of this story leaves significant implications to the origins of Fletcher himself – it was assumed that he had come from the same place as Donno, but when arriving in that place, he responds with the exact expression that Donno did upon his own arrival to Bernice's village. This indicates that Fletcher's original environment is yet somewhere



different, expanding on the possibilities between the other characters that are involved in the context of both villages. More importantly, the way it explores Donno's absence of identity due to his physical detachment from his original "cognitive environment" expands the perception of this theory by exaggerating its interpretation. It reveals a perception of the theories mentioned above that enhances the creative development of the narrative with the memory processes being once again the device behind the unravelling of the short story.

From a literary point of view, "Donno" was inspired by a specific episode in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). In this particular episode, the protagonist Stephen Dedalus's move from Dublin to Cork when he was barely a teenager, resulted in the disconnection of the character's own sense of self, due to being removed from the place where he had built up strong links. The importance of the sense of place regarding Dublin is highlighted by the way the narrator describes the fading of Stephen's childhood memories: "The memory of his childhood suddenly grew dim" (p. 89). Dublin itself became a sensation, a cue of sorts. On the other hand, Cork had no links to his past, therefore no meaning, as opposed Stephen's father, who seemed to find his own lost memories back at the physical place to which they were linked. Therefore, once Dedalus was removed from his "cognitive environment", his own perception of self as well as of his surroundings weakened, leaving instead room for his father to demonstrate an amplified voice, evidently basking in the recognition of his own "cognitive context" that allowed him to sit at a bar and reminisce with his old cronies.

To a different extent, the flow between memory events frequently presents physical spaces almost as cues – from the playground at Clongowes Wood College, to the boys bullying him, to his mother. Later, as well, there is the connection made between the physical space of Belvedere College, which reminded him of Clongowes; or remembering the "turf-coloured water" (p.89) from the bath at Clongowes due to a cup of tea at home. The importance of the physical context is reinforced by the associations made by Dedalus, and "recaptures consciously the past experience" (Nalbantian, 2004, p.89).

This story's exploration of the role of the "cognitive environment" within the context of "autobiographical memory" and its elements is successful due to its exaggeration of the theories discussed above. As a result of augmentation of the precepts of the concept of

“context-dependent memory”, the narrative is coherent to the approaches considered before, culminating in a creative short story that is convincing in its delivery and has a clear strong foundation.

## Chapter Four – “The Workshop”: Learning & Working Memory

The way one learns and adheres to new information, whether in the form of new knowledge or new physical abilities, is a two-way type of communication within the brain, which tries to establish connections with information that might have been previously stored. That is, when a person learns a new language, for example, it is most likely that they will refer to their native language upon learning new structures and vocabulary, as it was the first experience of learning a language one might have had; therefore, in order to create meaning, as it has been brought forward by Bartlett (1932), Craik and Lockhart (1972) and Baddeley (2015), a meaningful memory may have a deeper level of processing. One revisits previous similar events that may assist in the construction of a new memory.

This process has been named by Baddeley and Hitch (1974) as “working memory”, which proposes to explain the operation of the communication between a previous memory and the introduction of new information, which may then develop a whole new memory. There are several elements that form this process, which depends not only on different senses, but also on different methods of development. There are four essential aspects: “*the phonological loop*”, which consists of temporary storage for verbal/acoustic material – commonly used in repetition drills, for example, in language classes; “*the visuo-spatial sketchpad*”, which stores information pertaining visual and spatial coding – spatial meaning the physical space or traces of an environment; “*the central executive*”, which is a system that provides with attentional control – that is, through this system one becomes aware of what they are doing; and “*the episodic buffer*”, which is a multidimensional code that allows these various subcomponents of working memory to interact with “long-term memory” – this is what allows the revisiting of previous knowledge in order to apply understand and internalise new information.

These might be simplistic explanations at this time, but they will be further described in the commentary of the following story, “The Workshop”. This next story is an exercise in working memory, by showing the thought process of a woodworker as he progresses in his profession –as well as relating to his relationship to another character later in the story. The approach to this story seeks to explore not only the raw concept of working memory, but also to probe into the context of the moment of the encoding of the character's memories.

In other words, It is through an analysis of not only his previous memories of learning – the learning of his skills as a carpenter – but also the context within which these memories were encoded, that his memories establish a stronger sense of meaning, and, consequently, become more deeply processed and realistic.

To provide a more natural association, the woodworker also revisits not only the context of the encoding of learning, but also the context he revisited at the moment of learning as well – building further associative links between different memory events, as described previously in the concept of Associative Memory. Upon triggering the sensations of a particular memory event, other events that are connected to the former are also brought to the forefront of his awareness; all this triggered by the interaction processed by working memory.

## 4.1 The Workshop

The smoothness of the surface of the table matched the hands that nervously felt their way around a brand new chisel, shiny differently-sized hammers, snips, nails, measuring tapes, pencils, and pieces of chalk. To the side, other larger tools with steel teeth that seemed hungry to tear through whatever was put in front of it, others with coarse sheets on their end, like an inverted treadmill, a conveyer belt of harshness. The hands touched it all, opening different bottles which cast different smells from their insides, one that smelled like the rubbers he used at school, brushing away that four that should have been a five; another smelled like the room in which his grandmother used to serve tea and cake in, that waft of old books and upholstery, the caps of those bottles being clicked open for the first time, snapping their necks to reveal their true purpose, their utility, their lifeblood.

The familiarity of these tools, these shapes, smells, was latent, exciting, pulsing in his head as he reached for the first set of softwood boards that were piled to the left of the table, its dust still fresh, and the maple smell still lingering. Several different sizes cut into rectangular shapes, like a grand puzzle, with pieces clearly missing. The novice carpenter wondered if putting it all back into the original form of a mighty maple would be the ultimate woodwork. But, for now, he was charged with the building of a chair. To his fortune, the shapes of the boards were helpful for such a piece, requiring him to take some measurements, some scribbles and markings with the pencil, and to note the shaped edges of the boards and where the chisel would be needed.

With a crack of knuckles, like his father would do before stroking the piano, his mother bringing him a glass of wine to be put by the music sheets, he readied himself to play his own set of musical notes by the rhythm of the manual saw as he slowly adjusted his position, the jagged teeth biting through the wood like piano hammers on strings, bringing out the scent that was hidden deep within the wood, freeing it to invade the senses, through the mask and goggles, the wood turning into shapes of legs, a chunk of the board then chiselled into a backrest, another being sanded down to a seat, under a shaky yellow light. Some longer boards were sawn down to sticks to specific measurements these hands checked multiple times, four longer ones and four shorter ones for legs and spindles, holding them up like the branches he'd shave down to a mighty sword. How quickly he

learned the importance of a hilt, his thumb throbbing from a surprise attack by a childhood friend, the clacking of wood that echoed through autumn battlefields. Each little part was put aside by the workshop table, while it was all being assembled in the back of his own mind, like connecting pieces of LEGO, building blocks of a day-care that seemed to have too much light.

Sawdust floated around in the air, unsure where it was going to land, as the glue was warmed up and prepared at the other side of the workshop. The hands turned on an airing fan as the strong smell of wood glue raised and danced around, a single stream of steam circling above the small metal pot, looking like a long finger that mesmerised him in a hypnotic dance towards its own extinction. With a few strong movements, squeezing the hot glue between two pieces, satisfaction behind foggy goggles. And to finish, the hands brushed varnish over every inch of the assembled wood as if it was a canvas, a great empty space where he would sign, like the wall of his very home, the discussions of what shade of green were they to choose, did it match the furniture?, now they had to buy the beddings to match, but it's okay, they can change in the future when they get bored with it, plus, the living room can be a different colour altogether. But this chair was one solid colour, one choice and it wasn't his to make, the varnish lent its dark shade to the wood as if it was taking away the light, its wet gloss like a melted mirror. Soon enough, his first commission was ready, a creation that brought him a sense of pride, the obtuse shapes and straight lines that put it all together standing in the centre of the shed, as the varnish slowly dried and clung itself to the wood like a frightened animal, he acknowledged however that it took him longer than he had hoped, cursing his hesitation, that short moment's pause before his father's hands would fiercely build a crescendo, often cursing his own slow hands when a passage proved too tricky for someone of his age. Once both the varnish and glue were dried, he finally acknowledged that he was now officially a carpenter.

A new shipment had arrived that morning, pieces of cedar and oak of various sizes, piled around the workshop on top of the sawdust that covered the floor like sand, results of the sandcastles he built and shaped into his trade. He needed to replenish the stock anyway, as this week's commission was to be a long one. Nothing that he hadn't done before, his slightly roughened hands moved more swiftly as he measured and ticked the

lengths on the new piece, like shuffling through the mail, fingers at the ready to pinch and flick through pages of a much anticipated funny book, eyes eager and fast. Measurements of a table top were quickly pencilled over a large, thick piece of oak, an uneven piece that seemed to have air-dried for weeks, its longer sides irregular, like a relief woodcarving of mountains up in the Highlands, he felt the cold and the wind straight to his face, adjusting a scarf that wasn't there any longer. Quickly, however, he was able to shave the shorter sides, the shavings curling down onto the floor like sheets of ice on which boots would slip, scrapped off a frozen pavement for chump change, enough to pay for transport to the polytechnic, and smoothing those straight edges, he was reassured it would make a good table top.

This craggy top side would make a rustic looking table, somewhat quirky and unique, benefiting his own vanity. With some straining, he managed to flip that bulky piece of wood onto its top, flipping over a mattress in his mind which had been soiled after a rocky night of sleep, he felt the nape of his neck burning in embarrassment, taking quick note of length, where the legs should probably go, trying to follow the instructions from the brand new crib, chipping some of the wall paint in the process, see, I told you we'd have to repaint!, with a few flips of measuring tape and strokes with pencil, he went on to peruse the rest of the new wood, evaluating their general shapes, digging his hand through the sand of sawdust, filtering it out as it trickled down through his fingers. Soon enough, he put aside a few rectangular pieces of a sturdy looking cedar, running a piece of wet cloth down the side of each one. A tip that he was privy to from his polytechnic tutor, his after-hours tending of splinters in his palm, squeezing and tweezing the invading culprit, a diminutive spear in his flesh, one of many to pierce the skin and the mind, the signposts of a life that roughens the hide unceremoniously.

He went back to the soon-to-be table top, its underside propped upwards like a surrendered beast. Analysing it, he considered how he would give legs to this – should it be struck through the top like wooden stakes?, should he attach cleats to the underside and screw legs onto them?, should he build a legs base on which to rest the mighty top? Running his hands over the pencil markings on the wood, he thought a box stretcher base with the legs going through the top would fit it best. His tools at the ready, quickly alternating in the carving, chiselling, hammering of the carefully measured holes, with a flick of tape and the

stiff stab of a hole saw, whirring and sending waves through his arms, an intense visit to the awkward weight of his first drill, to the battering of a cake mix over which he leaned, standing on the steps in a kitchen with cupboard doors that would never quite close, the shaking of the counter top enough to rattle the drying rack of dishes, and the scents of chocolate, vanilla, flour, and coffee.

The hole saw chewed its way through the unwavering lumber, quickly coming through the other side, regurgitating its innards onto the floor and feet of the carpenter, like rough wheat grain, each hole adding to the harvest. His arms felt slightly numb, as he put down the drill. He picked up the chunks he had chosen for the legs, noting the angle they must be fit into, and where they needed to be further chiselled in order to fit through. As planned, he would fit the legs straight through. To do so, he would then need to sand down the legs into a shape onto which the top would progressively fit – they would not work if the legs were the same width all the way through. Each leg was propped up like a sandstone tower looming over a desert, and their square edges slowly narrowed with sharp movements of a smoothing plane, again spitting out more wooden coils, springing downward into itself, that spiral under which hid a creature that caused such disgust, but which he carefully flicked off his mother's gorgeous looking tomato plant, each branch straining under the weight of the fruit, the little curls of that small head he so carefully held for the first time, a little bundle of flesh, hair, and screams, how do I hold him properly? The musky, earthy scent of the lumber lingered in the air, populating his nostrils through the mask (the whiff that caught him upon the first visit to the carpentry class), and each leg slowly getting the intended shape – narrow on top and wider at the bottom - soon to be assembled at the bottom with a box stretcher at their feet for additional support.

The surfaces of all the hunks of timber he was working on seemed raw to him, incomplete, pieces of a whole that wished to come together like magnets, feeling the pull of invisible strings that connect the entire universe together, a universe of chaos where only in this workshop, the fragments of wood that surround him, were assembled into his own order. With a coating of varnish, the base of the legs was finally set up, propped up by a stand that held the upside down top. The wait was long, warranting a break from the shop – the soreness of limbs melted away with a cup of sweet coffee prepared earlier in the day, straight from a thermos, its outrageous sweetness, how can anyone drink it so sweet, that's



just sugar with some drops of coffee!, the steam off the cup circling up to his face, fogging the goggles he forgot to remove, using a bit of cloth to clear out the view, it's dangerous to drive and clear the windscreen at the same time, but it's the Highlands, no one ever comes around here, just the rain, the cold, the wind and the snow (eventually)! The carpenter stood outside the workshop, holding the cup both hands, looking to the back of his house, its red bricks a few shades darker than the first time he saw them, with a grey sky as a backdrop and the simple buzz of a countryside that has nothing to add to an autumn day. The sun was starting to set, as it always did at this time of the year, highlighting how long he had been within that workshop that took him into himself, revisiting the steps into which he would create something new, but familiar. The carpenter's wife appeared at the back door, beckoning him to come, dinner was ready and he might as well, the day's work was done.

He started the next day watching the clock at the bedside table, watching the numbers flicker into others, expecting the klaxon of the alarm to ring, his arm ready to spring out and stop it; not unlike a snake at the Edinburgh Zoo at feeding time, snapping its jaws at that white mouse, he wanted to look away but he couldn't – that's nature, his father said, and it's okay, that's how it's supposed to be. And that was how it was supposed to be. Within the hour, he was back in the workshop, the base for the table having acquired a darker hue overnight due to the varnish. He found cedar seemed to grip, such a good canvas for any type of finish, and to match the top such sombre tone would be best. Giving the base a few good pushes, the carpenter tested its resilience, noting that the nails and glue seemed to have done their jobs. It was time, then, to add the top and work on the finishing touches. It should be simple enough – if the measurements were right, the top would slide snugly into position.

A few groans escaped through gritted teeth as he lifted the table, with the assistance of a manually-operated lifter, and adjusted towards the upper parts of the base, standing like carved stalagmites, spears set skyward; jets flew overhead him as he squinted at a sunny sky. The top did as expected, sliding on the narrower top of each leg, until it couldn't slide anymore. The carpenter looked at the table, again with a familiar prideful sense, regardless how many commissions he had done before. With a rubber hammer, he pounded on the top on several strategic spots to wedge it further into its place, quickly whacking the imaginary rats and voles that seemed to prop up from the craggy surface. He checked the

levels and hammered where needed, making it levelled. The upper parts of the legs were sticking out through the top, impaling the carcass of a great tree, like the poles supporting the net under trapeze artists, flipping from one to the other in somersaults indifferent to gravity and common sense, and finishing the show with a bounce on the net that laboured under the force of each body.

He reached for a saw and worked on taking those protuberant chunks out, sawing very close to the surface, the excess lumber being dropped to the floor of the workshop in four wooden *thuds*, like shards of an oversized Jenga set being pushed out of their tower. A belt sander was then employed to smooth the remaining fractions of inches that still stuck out, eventually smoothing them down, kneeling down he brought his eyes to the level of the top to assure himself of the result. His fingers ran over the irregular longer side of the table, they could've been a mountain range, but now it looked like crashing waves frozen in time, stuck in an eternal turmoil with the sand – frozen is right, those trips to Skye in November were merciless, not a chance he'd be getting into the water, are you insane?, they had drunk the thermos dry trying to keep warm.

The belt sander was set aside again, he chose to use some manual sanders of varying sizes to prepare carefully the surface for the first coat of staining; he thought that this type of finish would suit it better than a straight varnish. A tin of the liquid perched on one of the shelves within the room, its hue dark as the waters of the Canal, its rippling blackness showing signs of a living imagination that dreamt of pre-historic creatures hiding from light and eyes, the wistful ambitions of a young boy who attained glory from the discovery and eventual destruction of such a threat. Now concerned with creation, he poured the stain liquid into a larger bucket, its strong scent fighting its way through the filters of the mask. He inspected the brushes, ordered on the workshop table. They were themselves stained by the finishes of past jobs, consolidating their assemblies in their times, as if they were magic wands that inaugurated the genesis of each chair, table, bed, swing set, shelf, with swift movements and the magic of time. Dipping into the bucket with the largest of the brushes, his strokes were consistent, covering the naked surface in the twilight of the birth of yet another composition, one that had been assembled throughout the years; the several mistakes at the polytechnic, but it was expected, that was why he was there; the patience of the wife, we will start a family soon!, the first commission, the passing of his mother, he was

still her boy, the grandchild she never saw, that was how it was supposed to be, it was all chaos. But here it was, the obscurity of outer space being brushed on top of a table top, the light being slowly covered by the dark, it was how it was supposed to be.

Greying hairs on the hands, the wrinkles had seemed more numerous, the inside of his fingers and palm felt like they were several inches thick. The workshop seemed smaller, maybe it was; piles of wood populated all corners, layers of sawdust and wood chips covered the floor, some had been compressed on top of another through the years. It was time for another commission, it must have been hundreds of them by now, his shoulders and back feeling tender, but his will was resolute. This time, it was a rocking cradle, he enjoyed working on them because of all their minute parts, it was easier on his old body as well, and there was something extra to it, too. The workshop door was propped open, bringing in a piercing gust of wind that circled in the same direction, shuffling the dust like a small tornado. A girl walked into the workshop, no more than eighteen - he saw her as a baby still - she was barely a foot tall, he could carry her in one hand. With her hair tied tightly in a bun, wearing denim overalls and brand new boots, she had a sheepish grin that was not from him. Her hands were like his once were, eager, curious and unsure, flagging down the bus that took so long to go anywhere; why don't you drive?, he was never one to complain, they never did.

A specific commission, the wood was to be walnut made from a tree that sat at the client's property that had to be cut down. It had been delivered to the workshop the day before, once again fragmented in various dimensions – it seemed the tree must have stood for years, as its remains filled the workshop's far walls as if they were closing down around them, like an anxious scene from an action film, he'd twitch on his seat in anticipation, surely the hero won't be crushed, of course not, don't worry, dear. It was the first time he'd have her in the workshop, his heart palpitating in a familiar bolt of excitement, quivering at his knees before a recital that had everything to go wrong, the wonted burning of the back of his neck, he wanted to create things his way!

At each choice of piece of wood, he would expound the reasoning behind it, as many times he would to himself, inside his mind. The walnut lumber was versatile and willing to

be shaped into what he wanted. He perused the various pieces, setting a few aside – the shorter boards first, then some longer ones – his sharp mind picking them apart swiftly, making up for his slower limbs. The carpenter's daughter followed him as he navigated the workshop like an admiral on a ship, the fierce commander at the control of a crew that bent itself under his order. Her eyes quickly shifted between his lips and his hands, attentively connecting the verbal dots and his instructions. He progressed to the several tools and their functions, the admiral inspecting his sailors, the water splashes hitting him on the brow as stones were cast past the paper ship he blew along the shore of a lake, it was naval war from a childhood that went on to invent, discover, build, create, a passion that transmitted itself like a tributary river onto his daughter; flowing, knowledge of the years had begun to be passed, copied onto a new slate.

The carpenter asked for one of the rectangular pieces which stretched a few feet in length, and with skilful flicks of a measuring tape, he made markings with a pencil. He explained that was to be the bottom of the cradle. He had a plan for this that would be unique, as unique as the pair of eyes that took much in, and reflected, to him, both the light and the shadow of the life that dragged before him, rags from his mummified feet that shambled ahead, it was peaceful, it was quiet, yet it all came alive within the workshop walls. She said she wanted to be a part of it now, to him she was always a part of it, each bit of sawdust and wood chips, piece of completed furniture, door frames, bannisters; she was present at each brush of finish, he did it all with the knowledge that she was as much part of it all as the very wood he used.

He grabbed a hand wood plane to start smoothing out the board, carving a shallow concave shape into it by shifting the applied pressure. His fingers wrapped around the ball-shaped knob of the plane like preparing for a trick bowl at the grounds, and after each push he continued to explain what it was that he was doing - the words seemed to coil out of his lips like wood shavings out of the cutting blade. He let her have a few tries, directing her on regards to speed, strength, angle, observing proudly the growth of confidence and determination. Once he took it back over, she shook the sting from the plane off her hands, yet trying to look as if it hadn't hurt. She didn't want to show how terrified she was of being there, so she tried her hardest to blend into the room, wide-eyed. Her breaths were shallow as if not to disturb even the very air within the workshop.

After the board, the carpenter went to select several shorter boards of walnut lumber for spindles – he had a different idea for this particular cradle, as he had with previous pieces without much deliberation, his style had developed as such that the wood looked like it had been moulded into the shapes of household furnishings. Minuscule details had become the biggest of his focus, diminutive carving knives became the conducting baton of his orchestra. The wrinkles around his eyes matched the constant squint he had as he held the shortened, tubular wooden pieces, searching for a fingerprint, a hidden Waldo in a crowd of red and white, the face in a photograph that faded like the colours of leaf on the front steps; are you going to rake them away already?, they had become mush under the rain and comings-and-goings, the whittling chisel dancing its way around the board, leaving a trodden path of spirals around the tubular spindle. It became a labour of precision, which laid a cover of silence over the entire workshop. The daughter silently observed both the slow progression of the chisel and the look in her father's eyes. His eyes, which always seemed so tranquil, held a mute intensity akin to the man from the Western films, a quick draw and the bandit was dead, a promise of gold that was forlorn, shavings that dropped down like coins from a dramatic death scene, the good guys won.

He assessed the size of the base board and the spindles, making notations regarding their positions for assembly later, pencilling tiny numbers and lines in a hurried, almost trembling hand. The gliding pencil on the wood, like the notes he would take at the polytechnic, underlining the words that Napoleon said, was it King George?, the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell; he was never good with words, he had told himself. At times, the carpenter seemed to forget his daughter was there. She even admired it, that he could disconnect himself so completely, to focus his senses upon a single goal, setting fire to kindling using a magnifying lens as the camp master had showed her. It also humbled her, making the gap between father and daughter even grander, a vacuum that once again seemed to widen the inside of the workshop – something that she thought would intimidate her further but actually found soothing. There were times she felt resentful of her father's hideout due to missed bedtime stories, celebrations of special times, and a protective feeling towards her mother, who uttered no word of complaint – stiff upper lip like her father, when her own quivered and she cried out for the presence of a parent, answered always by her mother. Through a gentle brush of the hair, her mother

calmed her, reassuring her that her father loved her, he was just doing what he had to do, he had his own way of showing it. The sleep brought on from tears was always the heaviest, as if her mind wished to escape reality deeper into her unconscious, and she never remembered the dreams.

The carpenter was hunched over the workshop table doing some fine carving on the top and bottom of the spindles when he snapped out of his trance, noting his daughter's slight squirming as she tried to get a look at what he was doing. He smiled, his teeth were always so big, she thought, and he let her get a closer look. He showed her how he was working on the spindles so that they would be wedged into the bottom board and the top rail through a handmade spiral-like carving. His weathered face beamed slightly with pride, a look she had rarely seen. Her gaze followed his hand as he handed her the next spindle to be worked on, handing her a small whittling knife, then he got another spindle for himself, telling her to follow his movements – a slow twist of the wood, holding the knife firmly in place to carve a thread to both ends. Her hands didn't seem to stay still, like the wavering flag atop the mound of dirt – careful with the hole, dear! The carpenter reached her shoulder softly and encouraged her to go on, just let the knife slide around the wood – the spiral movement brought her down the water slides of the summer at Alton Towers, her stomach feeling like it was at her throat at each sharp turn and descent, she was now creating something that gave her the same chills; it was the chill of godhood, suddenly bringing powers of creation to hesitant hands that had laboured so little. It was okay to make mistakes, he reassured her, there was no rush nor need for perfection - his own definition of creation.

Sixteen spindles laid in a row on top of the workshop table, ordered by size. Each of them had a very small curvature, with their ends of a clearer shade of beige, the colour of the inner flesh of wood. Along with the base and end boards, and the top rails, it was almost ready for assembly. The carpenter's daughter's goggles were slightly fogged up, as they were a bit too big for her face – they kept slipping off her nose, but she could see through the blur the parts spread out like an art installation. The day had passed on faster than she had realised, it was as if they had stepped inside a TARDIS (she did think the workshop seemed bigger on the inside), she felt her stomach protesting in a grumble that she had missed lunch by a few hours. The carpenter himself, however, seemed unfazed, going over

other pieces of lumber with the patience and reticence of an old shepherd examining his flock. The shards of the puzzle were starting to be put together in his mind, a vision of how these freshly carved parts came together; he could see it now, a deep wooden basket assembled in such a way that the seams were barely visible, just as he'd imagined, giving the illusion that the parts weren't made separate, but rather the wood was bent under his will into this shape. Instead of having curved wood at the bottom as rocking feet, he would have the basket hang from two larger boards; again whittled in such a way that it would look as if a tree grew in the shape of a cradle.

The musky scent that danced around the room did little to abate the carpenter's daughter's hunger. She looked at her small watch several times, noting that the silver hands moved very little in between. After the piecing together of this project in his mind, the carpenter noticed the unease that virtually emanated from his daughter, so he put down the tools he was handling, acknowledging her relief in the form of a food break. She opened the door of the workshop, a chill gust of wind greeting their faces, as she lowered her mask to breathe in the cold autumn air. Tears slowly formed on her eyes - they always did when she first stepped out into the cold. The carpenter reached in his pocket, handing her a cloth handkerchief. Her grasp was gentle and swift, his eyes followed her hand it brushed against his fingers – how small that hand used to be, took the whole hand to grab one of his fingers!, and his own eyes started watering up, the wind indeed too cold.

The afternoon sky was grey, with multi-coloured leaves spread over the garden lawn. It was quiet; the rustling of the trees was the only audible sound. The carpenter's daughter handed him back the handkerchief, with a wide grin on her face. Her mask was hanging over her chin while he still had his on – he looked like a superhero, she thought, his greying hair matching the sky that seemed so vast above them. The vastness between them was more manageable, as they stepped up the lichen-covered stone path towards the house. The light was on, and there was a monotone whistle coming from the kitchen.

It had been years since the door had last been opened. The lock was hard to operate at first, but with a few hard nudges, it clicked open. The air invaded the workshop like a tornado, sweeping up old wood shavings and raising scents that had long lain dormant.

Everything seemed to be in the same place – the tools, now covered in a thin layer of regular dust, were in their place on the far side of the workshop table; the power tools either hanging from hooks on the walls or set up on shelves like museum pieces. The wood plane sat across the centre of the table diagonally, as if ready for take-off. The carpenter's daughter noticed that this room had not only the usual musky fragrance, but also a scent that struck much familiarity to her. A smell of old, of something she knew well, like aftershave that stuck on her hands for too long, the enduring scent of time and family. It was an aroma that she thought she'd never smell again.

Her hand patted the wall in search of the light switch, bringing again some light into this place which had held so much mystery for her for so many years, now back into a different kind of oblivion. The light flickered in bolts of yellow, flashing photographs from an unseen face in the crowd, applause and fall curtains, but here she was again, the workshop. Under the dust and years of silence, there were still some pieces of lumber on the far walls, wood that had come here with a purpose. She slowly walked in, as the wood chips and sawdust rustled under her feet. The yellow light, mixed with the dust, gave the pieces of wood varied shades, hiding their true natural hue. She ran a hand over one small pile, brushing the dust off – hands that were calloused, slightly wrinkled and scarred – and revealing them to be yew wood. Shuffling through the pile, she picked some long pieces and carried them over to the table. She set them side by side, and noted that they were about the same length and width. However, she needed them to be narrower. After a moment's pause, she put one aside and sat the other piece at the centre of the table, grabbing the wood plane by its knob – it seemed to have grown rougher through the years, but it felt familiar, like the coarseness of her father's hand when they'd go into town, crossing the River Spean, they are just tourists, dear, that's why they don't speak English, she would squeeze his hand and hide her face into his coat.

The years dried up the wood more than she had anticipated, but with a firm and constant rhythm, she slowly planed the sides of the pieces, forming two narrow boards of yew wood – one slightly longer than the other, after a quick use of a saw. Even the pencil, left alone for years to mark no measure, was put back to use, as the carpenter's daughter scribbled some lines on the sides of the boards in a hurried hand. Taking up the saw once again, she carved some chunks off one of the boards, enough space to fit the other board



through perpendicularly, forming a cross. She felt her stomach churning and fought back the tears; it was still hard to believe but it was his time. The wood needed sanding, and she wanted to do some finer whittling – a complex set of Celtic knots across the entire cross. Then, with a coat of finish, she gave it a dark reddish colour, like the colour of his hair in all the faded photographs her mum still kept. It was a final act of creation to her father, from a place he knew well, in which he always found solace, and in which he found connection to his daughter, who proceeded to create, just like he had done over the years. Her hands felt smooth against the tools, but they would get coarser.

## 4.2. Critical Commentary

Learning new information, that is, new inputs to be processed by one's mind, is a process that establishes new knowledge, that is, a more consolidated piece of stored information within one's memory. Learning may also be facilitated when the new information is relatable to a previously stored piece of information in one's memory. Then, a new memory may be formed with the inclusion with this new information, combined with the previous information. This is done through a process called "Working Memory", a model developed by Baddeley and Hitch (1974), which describes this operation. There are several elements that compose this process, which will be discussed shortly. This mechanism and other previously analysed theories on human memory were used to develop the short story "The Workshop", which deals with the memories of a carpenter associated to the moment of learning – in this particular case, the learning as well as the execution of his trade.

The "Working Memory" model was developed as a system to describe the combination of "temporary storage and executive processing" (Baddeley et al., 2015, p. 98), covering complex cognitive activities beyond what previous models had offered. In *Memory* (Baddeley et al., 2015), Alan Baddeley, a British psychologist and one of the developers of this model, describes the models that came before "Working Memory", including their limitations and where his approach differs and expands. The first one, which was also mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, was the "Atkinson-Shiffrin Model", from 1968. In a simplified explanation, this model, through the description of "short-term" and "long-term" memory, assumed that learning followed a very linear procedure: an input from the environment is absorbed by a sense (i.e. visual or auditory), then placed within "short-term memory", following through to "long-term memory" (LTM) in time. According to Baddeley, this assumption is problematic due to the inherent implication that just by holding information for a long enough period of time within "short-term memory" (STM) is sufficient to solidify learning.

Challenges to this assumption came soon after in Craik and Lockhart's (1972) principle of "levels of processing, which maintains that learning depends on the way in which material is processed, rather than time in short-term storage" (2009, p.67). Plus, Shallice and Warrington's (1970) account of a patient who possessed damaged "short-term"

capabilities was still able to form LTM, which wasn't accountable through Atkinson and Shiffrin's approach to STM. It was out of a need to expand on the complexity of STM that Baddeley and Hitch developed their more complex model called "Working Memory". The terminology was chosen in order to "dissociate it from earlier models of STM, which were primarily concerned with storage, and to emphasize its functional role as a system that underpins complex cognitive activities, a system that supports our capacity for mental work and coherent thought" (2009, p. 69).

Understanding this system, then, became relevant to the development of "The Workshop" as it is a story that revolves in the interaction between LTM and STM with the present, in the form of carpentry commissions. This system possesses four specific components that work together in this combination of storing and processing information. These four components are the "phonological loop", which relates to the temporary storage of auditory material; the "visuo-spatial sketchpad", related to the temporary storage of material pertaining to visual and spatial (as in physical space, such as the traces of an environment or the setting of a room, for example) inputs; the "central executive", which is a system for the attentional control – that is, it comes into place when the "working memory" is geared towards something that requires the person's attention, like driving a car, or other complex activities; and the "episodic buffer", which works as a multidimensional code that provides all the other components of "working memory" to interact with LTM and with each other.

Once again, these are condensed interpretations of the "working memory" system, which served to inform the direct construction of "The Workshop". The recognition of these components assisted the short story by being able to describe the mechanism through which a complex task such as woodworking function, eliciting the process within the narrative in the memories related to the learning and execution of each piece of furniture that the carpenter in the story manufactures. That is, this system has been the main theoretical background for this story, deeply involved with the way the narrative is presented. Other previously analysed aspects of memory were also involved in the development, including Associative Memory and elements of Bergson's approach to learning.

From a literary perspective, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) was a source of inspiration for this short story, due to its approach to memory. This novel, which consists of three parts, chronicles memory process in its essence. Nalbantian suggests that this is "the quintessential memory novel" (2004, p. 80), citing that in the novel's three parts "the encoding, the storage and the retrieval of memory" (2004, p. 80) can be traced. The story's plot is centred on the Ramsay family and Ms Briscoe and their time in the Ramsay's summer home in the Isle of Skye. The first part of the story, called "The Window", is the moment of encoding of the memories – "sealed by emotion" (p.80) – tied to the central mother figure of Mrs Ramsay. Ms Briscoe is an artist who is attempting to paint the house with the figure of Mrs Ramsay by a window of the house, highlighting the previous point of Mrs Ramsay's centrality in this setting. Then, there is the passage of time in the second part, appropriately called "Time Passes", which represents the time needed for storage of these memories. In order for a memory to be formed, not only time is needed but absence is also required. This chapter elicits the passage of time – ten years, to be exact – since the last visit of the family to their summer house, which happens during the third segment. At this last part, the revisiting of their holiday home triggers several memories to all the characters involved, combined with the absence of some family members (Mrs Ramsay having perished years before, as well as Andrew having died in the First World War). This extremely condensed summary serves to cover the basis of the novel in order to point out the elements of human memory that are so prominent in its narrative and development.

Indeed, *To the Lighthouse* was written with very specific memory techniques in mind that Woolf herself has written about. One of them, for instance, is the process of "tunnelling" (mentioned in Woolf's 1923 journal) which is "a way of retrieving the past incrementally by 'installments'" (p.81). The author has mentioned that this novel also has autobiographical elements, as her own family used to go on trips to a house in St. Ives, Cornwall. Similarly, the parallels between Mrs Ramsay and Woolf's mother were deliberate and the writing of this novel was a sort of exorcism of her own mother's ghost, according to the author's own admission.

It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary,

rush. One thing burst into another... I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed with my mother. (Woolf, 1976, p.81)

This could be also referred to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's own approach towards memories – once he put them onto paper, he would lose them. Likewise, Woolf suggests that her obsession with her mother was finished once the novel was complete.

The way memory is referred to, especially in the last chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, uses the aforementioned technique of “tunnelling”, counting on a lot of the visual cues from the encoding. Ms Briscoe revisits the painting she failed to finish during the first part – Woolf then utilising the very visual aspect of Ms Briscoe's art to evoke these memories. Nalbatian argues that both Ms Briscoe and the author herself are parallels of one another, each utilising their art (painting and writing) to retrieve the memories of their figures (Mrs Ramsay and Woolf's mother). To corroborate this, Nalbatian refers to two passages that state the physical effort of painting by Ms Briscoe: “And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too in the past there” (Woolf, 1992, p.172); and “She went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past” (1992, p.172). Ms Briscoe's painting becomes the embodiment of the memories that are retrieved through her art – the image of Mrs Ramsay and all her influence over the family and visiting friends; as well as the image of the lighthouse itself.

The lighthouse, to which the title of the novel refers, becomes another visual cue that elicits various associations from the characters for different reasons. For Ms Briscoe, for instance, it is part of the physical space, the very material background for her painting that is so closely tied to the retrieval of her memories. The lighthouse is also part of the background of Lily Briscoe's painting itself as she “had always seen Mrs Ramsay in her summer house against the background of the lighthouse” (2004, p.81). The painting she had started before the matriarch's death is revisited years later, with the visual setting (the lighthouse, and also the pattern of the tablecloth where years earlier the family had dinner) triggering the stream of consciousness for the artist. Nalbatian refers to this visual retrieval in distinct contrast to Marcel Proust's triggers: “It is not a touch of the napkin which suddenly recalls a past, but the sight of designs on a tablecloth and the thoughts associated with it” (2004, p.81).

These types of associations, along with the passage of time, were direct influences towards the writing of "The Workshop". This short story is divided in four parts, each centred on different commissioned works for the carpenter, as well as set in different time periods of the carpenter's life. The passage of time becomes the growing storage of memories, both new and revisited through the processes in "Working Memory". Furthermore, there is not a single sense that dominates the characters' retrieval of memories, but a mix of several of them – even though tactile memories are somewhat more predominant.

The first segment of "The Workshop" covers the carpenter's first commission, a chair. This particular task was designed to match the inexperience of the main character, as this was his actual first professional commission, as opposed to his learning of the trade. As he prepares to initiate the construction of the chair, many of the memories that come to him, comparing his current circumstances to moments past, came to him via association – the cracking of knuckles like his own father's actions before playing the piano. As discussed before, the triggering of memories is not necessarily a linear process, therefore associations via different sensory inputs may be triggered in different circumstances. Plus, this initial triggering may also flow into the recalling of memories that were connected to the sensory inputs within the first triggered memory scene. This is seen in the further recalling of the character's mother bringing a wine glass to his father's piano, and in the comparing of the carpenter's saw with the piano hammers. More associations, connected to moments of learning, quickly flow into his consciousness – some of them, such as the image of using a tree branch as a play sword, were implicitly reinforced at both the moment of learning the trade, shaving wood boards into spindles, as well as the moment of recalling and performing the learned skill. The non-linearity of his memories becomes evident the further he proceeds in the assembly of this first task. This first task, as well, serves to prove to the carpenter himself of his mastery of the skill, accepting finally that he has become a carpenter, in spite of his amateurish hesitation. The flow of memories in this first part, featured through the entire story, is inspired by the stream of consciousness that is vivid in Virginia Woolf's novel. Memories flow through the associations made during the character's labour and its non-linearity.

The second segment of the story follows a few years later – the carpenter being then a bit more experienced than before. It is a deliberate choice to make the character work on a commission base, as it allows the narrative to explore each piece of furniture he built as an interpretation of the evolving practice of the carpenter. In this part, the implications of his gained experience are exposed through his roughened hands and the quickness of his shaving other boards, for example. The memories that are conjured here are also related to the moment of learning – indirectly, perhaps, in reference to his job scraping ice from pavement as a way of financing his transport to where he was training to become a carpenter in the first place. These memories also become associated with the task at hand via the central executive, as his attention is focused in the construction of this table – therefore, his “working memory” becomes this workshop itself, where the carpenter brings his previous information – the learned skills as a carpenter – to work with the new information, the crafting of a new table. This way of evoking memories is also related to the concept of “Engrams” mentioned earlier. In the context of Woolf’s novel, with the memories being evoked by sensory triggers and cues, there is also the relevance of the character’s environment. This environment may influence and leave a mark at the moment of encoding, therefore assisting the recalling at the moment of retrieval. Psychologist Endel Tulving noted about this particular aspect of the “Engrams”:

Engrams, too, must be specified in terms of both their antecedent conditions – particular events particularly encoded in particular cognitive environments – and their consequent conditions, including the circumstances surrounding their subsequent retrieval. (Tulving, 1983, p.160)

This means that the cognitive environment of the summer house in the Isle of Skye has a direct connection as well to when the memory was encoded, and it assists recollection when the characters returned to that place. Cognitive environment implies something more than only the physical space, but also the associated mental and emotional impressions connected to that space. In “The Workshop”, this concept was used beyond the environment of the actual workshop, stretching it into the context of the tools and the associations linked to them at the moment of learning. These moments are intermingled with each task the carpenter endeavours to achieve; the bodily context and the shapes that are formed through his work become references to events in his life that brought him to his current situation – moments like his preparing board pieces to work, “like shuffling through

the mail, fingers at the ready to pinch and flick through the pages of a much anticipated funny book,” – where his memories float up to the surface of his consciousness.

The following segment proceeds further into the carpenter’s life – the greying hairs on his wrinkled hand – and it also introduces another character: the carpenter’s daughter. This part of the story solidifies further the complex forging of the carpenter’s experiences, and brings to light, in turn, his daughter’s lack of experience. She seems to have had expressed an interest in her father’s job, therefore she decided to follow him during a day’s work. The rocking cradle was the chosen commission as an allusion to their father-daughter relationship, as well as to her new undertaking in becoming an apprentice of her father – a figure that, to her, holds some mystery and wonder. This part also features the constant flood of memories that seem to push through at several moments during the carpenter’s work on this cradle, as well as his interactions and perceptions of his daughter’s presence in the workshop. Throughout the story, these moments are an example of the practice of “tunnelling” described earlier; his work unearths these tunnels and drags these events straight to the surface. Similarly, the daughter’s own moments come forward, closely related to the environment in which her father would spend long periods of time – away from her. Her anxiety to be introduced within the four walls of the workshop is supported by the apparent emotional distance, and the mutual emotions that are not fully expressed or explored. The daughter’s wish to “blend into the room” suggests this, as she has longed to be a more active part of her father’s life. The cognitive environments, at least for her, encompass the physical space of the workshop, as well as the presence of her father – and his frequent absence in her life outside this place.

The role of the carpenter’s daughter is also one to signal transition – the passage of time and construction of memories are carried over through his life into hers. Her presence elicits from the carpenter other memories that go beyond his labour, but are intermingled with his own cognitive context within which his memories are recalled. The daughter’s memories ultimate source ends up being her father, evoking events associated directly to his elusive presence: “His eyes, which always seemed so tranquil, held a mute intensity akin to the man from the Western films,” for example, another reference to a shared moment between the two that was made particularly relevant for her and the emotional connection existent there.



Finally, the last part of the story acknowledges the carpenter's concluding passage of time and the revisiting of the daughter to that workshop. Like the Ramsay family returning to their summer home ten years later, the daughter unearths the burial ground of a past that had been stored away under old sawdust and rusty tools. Once again, several sensory inputs serve to conjure memories of this room and her father as she rediscovers the things that were abandoned in the workshop, especially after her father's death. Due to the recent occasion of his passing, it is implied as well that he had not been able to make use of this space – the neglect in which the workshop is found hints to the fact that no one had come in for a long time. It is also implied that the daughter did not follow the same profession fully, even though she still kept some of her skills sharp, a point shown in the carving of the cross for her father's grave. By this act, the daughter also closes a life cycle – accepting her father's death, and starting her own cycle.

The mix of theories and approaches behind this story were interpreted in order to construct a consistent narrative in which the main development is the workings of memories at moments of labour. The use of the passage of time was set between the segments in order to build up the encoding and storage of memory, inspired by Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and it worked in the consolidation of both characters' memories and personal relation, culminating with the proverbial "passing of the torch". Ultimately, this story serves to explore the layers of emotional memories that can be associated with labour and other environments.

## Chapter Five – “Fumes” & Eidetic memory

Approaching an aspect of human memory that differs somewhat from the previous one, the following short story, “Fumes”, goes into the concept of *eidetic memory*, colloquially known as photographic memory, which consists of when a person is able to remember, with great detail, events of their past. It is an intriguing condition that is still not fully explained by science, leading to discussions about its very existence. There have been tests developed to try and identify its characteristics, as well as testing the ones who claim to possess such ability, but they were often met with scepticism.

A prominent case that was made public was the case of a young woman named Elizabeth, who was a Harvard student. A vision scientist called Charles Stromeyer III tested Elizabeth by presenting a pattern of ten thousand random dots to her right eye, then another pattern to her left eye. She was able to combine those two patterns in her mind, and then build the random-dot stereogram – a form of image design, usually done by a computer, to create a pair of images that produces a sense of depth by the use of special equipment or focusing the eyes accordingly. This, according to Stromeyer, was conclusive proof that photographic memory existed. His findings were published in *Nature* in 1970, but nothing more was developed by him after this publication.

Criticism of the concept of eidetic memory usually consists of the claim that there has been an underwhelming amount of evidence to prove that it exists, as well as querying the very definition and its characteristics, also due to the lack of people who claim to have such condition. For example, if one is to claim that they indeed possess photographic memory, then there should be no errors when recalling past events. So far, according to Nigel J.T. Thomas in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entry on “Mental Imagery”, there “is no scientific consensus regarding the nature, the proper definition, or even the very existence of eidetic imagery, even in children” (2016).

Nonetheless, this is a topic that is ripe for creative endeavours, and therefore it was fit to be explored within this thesis. The title of this short story, “Fumes”, is a direct reference to Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges’s short story *Funes the Memorious* (1942), which also deals with eidetic memory – in his case, as a metaphor for insomnia, in simplistic

terms. “Fumes” expands on the idea of eidetic memory by also extrapolating what Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said in his *Confessions* (1782): his memories left his mind once he wrote them onto paper. The character in “Fumes” possess exactly that combination – his memories are completely perfect, up until he writes them down. Then, they abandon him, with some exceptions. It is a story that attempts to analyse the interpretation of human memories in terms of their role in the functioning of a person, as well as their interactions with the world around them.

## 5.1 Fumes

Everyone had heard of him. The miles of scrolls, the towers of notebooks, filled with every minutia of the past fifty-odd years lived by this man, all under the roof of an impressively humble abode. Once word got out that there lived a man whose memory was so delectably flawless, a perfect record of one person's entire existence, he instantly became famous. Ever since his consciousness settled in (from his records, this was at around the age of twelve months, twenty-five days, three hours and eighteen seconds), his then-undiscovered talents were quick to reveal their sharpened teeth through the early practises of speech and other cognitive-development activities related to a young child. His abilities to remember words (i.e. when paired with an image, in the true form of exercises for children), sounds, smells, well, just about anything, highlighted something that his parents would only come to understand later, as this would consistently increase and improve as he grew older. Due to this remarkable skill, he very quickly learned how to write, reaching the level of a higher education student long before his thirteenth month.

Clearly, learning to write wasn't an issue whatsoever to his younger self. What proved to be an issue, however, was *what* he wrote. Sure, at first he'd write whatever a children's education book told him to, and then develop into stringing more complex sentences and ideas as it went along, within a week. Then, to a mix of relief and confusion, when faced with the writing of a diary, in which he was asked to confide the details of his week (which consisted of, indeed, *every* possible detail, from the actual events to how he was feeling at their specific times), all of that week's knowledge seemed to have vanished, like the proverbial dust in the wind, from his young mind. His general cognitive abilities were unharmed, however his direct knowledge of any event, either in a narrative or factual fashion, seemed to have completely disappeared - all of these "coincidentally" written in said diary entry. Strangely enough, some of the week's progressions weren't fully gone - he had indeed developed his writing abilities further, for example. His parents, relatives, doctors and tutors were dumbfounded, unable to grasp what this meant. Some, though, were somewhat relieved, thinking that this was more like how a young child ought to be. This didn't last long, as the next few days went by and his power of remembering things were back in full swing.

Interestingly enough, it took his family a few more tries to realise what the pattern was, in terms of his development, and the sudden bouts of amnesia. The conclusion was finally reached, and this was the first buzz about his “condition” that started rippling across town; a headline of a local newspaper read ‘GENIUS CHILD, FORGETFUL WRITER,’ which didn’t quite do justice to the situation. The fact of the matter was that he would forget everything he’d write down. This, of course, proved to be an incredible challenge for his parents and educators, as they had to come up with some sort of way to retain the child’s developmental progress on track, while juggling with the ever-frequent issue that, if he were to write down any particular event that happened to him, it’d be then forgotten. Of course, making the child read his own diary would, in a way, reconstruct the “lost” memories. But the further the child would grow and have more experiences, the more the child would have to read. A plan had to be panned out in order to keep some sort of sense in his life.

The reports on how they’d established an approach to this problem became hazy, as several *specialists* in the town wanted to offer their solutions. “Tie bits of red string on his fingers,” one of them said, which didn’t work at all, regardless of their anecdotes about how an uncle did that even when he was very old and going senile... Another one suggested setting up alarm clocks around the house, giving him a wristwatch to ring whenever he left, as well. When asked “what next,” the specialist said it would help him remember what time it was. One by one came forth with a different suggestion, straining the poor parents of the child, who kept on writing, every Sunday evening, the occurrences of the previous week, only to forget it all.

A simple suggestion came from the local parish head, a man of faith, not of science, which confounded most as to why no one thought about it before: “How about we ask him not to write down his diary anymore?” It seemed reasonable, so the parents instantly agreed, against the protests of more learned men, who were concerned about the health of the boy – there might be severe consequences if his brain kept on gathering information, they said. Soon, very eagerly they told him not to write down his diaries anymore, and, to be extra sure, removed all writing implements from his reach just in case. After the first week, the child seemed perfectly normal, moving along on his other developmental steps as everyone else watched from a distance. During the second week, with his memory

unaffected, he started being more verbose than before, rambling on about past events and numbers he came across since the last written diary. By the end of the third week, he was barely coherent, as the more he experienced, the more babbling he would become, mumbling on about the minutes the milkman had performed his deliveries over the past three weeks (always between twenty and five to six in the morning). The parents started becoming worried, and sought the dumbfounded specialists who had been observing this as it developed. The most urgent solution, they all concurred, was to get him to write down his diaries again – at least until he became coherent again.

The process took nearly two days, with the understandable sustenance breaks in between, to record all the events of the past three weeks, including notes on his own incoherence – his writings, as it was later understood, had a good, albeit simplistic, level of insight, and it possessed a fair amount of impartiality, especially considering his age. After finishing the latest of his diaries, he went back to his former self - a child who, although still imbued with great linguistic capabilities, was essentially a blank slate, no recollection of his more recent experiences. Due to the immediate effects of his writings, the parents concluded that it'd be best if the boy kept writing weekly diaries, as to avoid further cases of distress, while they further considered what to do.

This temporary decision became more and more permanent, as the months passed. Slowly, the general public interest fizzled out like incense swirling away its last breaths of smoke, to the point of just the humble family and a few still-intrigued neuroscientists and other specialists in areas regarding the mind. On the physical level, the child had been developing at a natural pace – including the usual milestones of walking and teething, for example. Of course, having his linguistic skills developed much earlier than everything else created a distorted perspective that everyone involved still struggled to process. It also gave the impression that the child was more intelligent than he actually was. Even with great language ability, the child didn't necessarily possess a higher degree of knowledge than other children of his own age. His verbal skills definitely contributed to his intelligence, but perhaps due to his fleeting memories, it balanced things out in terms of long-term world knowledge development. As the time passed, his language skills seemed to keep developing, providing evidence that he was at least able to retain new words and concepts. This served to paint a broader picture about the situation – there was a clear disconnect between his

ability to retain linguistic coherence and retaining particular memory events, at least to the point where he wrote them down.

Several more tests were conducted by the specialists, monitoring the boy's bodily growth from his bones to his organs, and they were still unclear, lacking the signposts that might illuminate the way to an answer to this puzzle. The x-rays and MRI scans showed little more than the translucent parts of a healthy young boy's body. His brain, the part most examined, didn't seem to have anything abnormal, except that there was a fuzzy section at the very base. A medical intern first noticed that it looked a bit like a cloud, and he used the word "smoky". Another one joked that it looked like the child might have been angry and the picture showed he was literally fuming.

After several attempts to get a clearer picture, it was assumed that the MRI scanner was faulty, and had to wait for the technician to get around to fixing it – the town wasn't particularly prosperous, so the mere fact that they had such facilities was a rarity in itself. It was proposed several times to take the child to the capital, where the hospitals would be top-of-the-line, with cutting-edge technology and all other sorts of advanced proficiencies, and could help assess the situation further, but the parents were resistant, they wished to keep their child at home. Some specialists agreed, worrying that a change in the child's setting might cause some other unexpected issues as happened with the attempt to block the child from writing, so the parents' wishes were respected.

Watching the growth of their boy, the humble couple felt both blessed and cursed with the task of raising this child who had such fantastic characteristics. At these first few years, they frequently sought spiritual help, thinking that this might have been an act of supernatural disposition. The local priest, the one who suggested to them to get the child to stop writing altogether, was usually their first port of call for counsel and comfort. However, the priest himself felt unequipped to go beyond the most generic words of comfort he could muster. The boy became the theme of many sermons, and the general populace started to increase their awe, becoming convinced that this was work of holy providence. The priest asked for patience and caution, and suggested against hasty conclusions, but a small sect within the local community started to become more and more convinced of the fact that this was indeed an intervention from a higher being. Before anyone noticed, there was a considerable group of people who claimed that the boy was sent to Earth so that he would

write off all the sins of human kind, and let us all forget so we can move onto a great, peaceful life free from sin.

It didn't take long before another sect of believers began congregating towards an opposite opinion: that the boy was sent here not to free humanity of sin, but to shame it all through the eternal records written down by the child. They became worried, and considered this to be a sign of the end of times, and would gather outside the boy's family home and spread words of panic to come, "we are all doomed", they said. The parents were terribly concerned by this, especially because they had been so careful with making sure their child was still able to live his life as normally as he possibly could – some posters were set up so that the boy would be informed about some basic routine proceedings at the start of each new week; as well as having other family members and family friends helping him with other more complex tasks, such as getting him to school or to the hospital.

Nonetheless, the child seemed happy enough, and to the relief of his parents, he seemed to retain some of the more basic functions that he needed to function at a basic level; he seemed to remember how to wash himself, how to clean the house when asked, and what at least his parents' names were. Through the months and months of further development, his weekly visits to the hospital slowly revealed the extent of his memory retention, which just highlighted what had been previously observed – memory events were still as elusive as a thunderbolt, while other (some might say "primitive") processes seemed to be stored unaffected.

The first sect, the one that saw the child as a saviour, decided to camp outside the family home as well, as a response to the aggressiveness of the second sect, who adamantly sought to spread a sense of panic to all citizens of the village. It promptly created an atmosphere of tension, where members of the opposing groups were becoming increasingly hostile to one another. Sadly, neither of the groups seemed to take into account the polite protests and requests put forth by the parents to stop the quarrelling, as they were afraid that this sort of stress could exacerbate something in their child. Their reaction was to embrace their convictions more fiercely, some of them even coming up with stories related to what may have been written down by the boy. The fact that all the writings were safely put away in lockboxes provided by the many specialists was ignored by the groups, as not to give any semblance of truth to any of the theories from neither group.



Before long, the animosity between the two groups escalated beyond mere words, towards physicality, as each group slowly encroached towards the other's territory, and accusations flew across the pavement on the other side of the road. The parents saw no other option than to contact the local police in order to keep some modicum of peace around their house. It was all an unnecessary mess, and the police had to make designated areas for each group on the empty lot across the road from the house, where they would be able to camp, and have strict borders so that they could proceed with whatever they were hoping to accomplish, without creating a public nuisance. The boy, hearing the ruckus, watched the groups being herded around by the police. Some of them saw him, and were even more riled up as some claimed it was a sign that he acknowledged them. Of course, one group was delighted by that sight, thinking that by being looked upon by the child, their sins would be then written off and forgotten; whereas the other group strengthened its argument that the shame of their sins would be forever recorded.

Fearful of the reactions of those now called “fanatics” by the local press and even the priest, the parents decided to keep the boy indoors for longer and longer, forcing on him a reclusion that lasted for a long time. In order to try and keep up some sense of formal education in place for him, they arranged to have his school tutor to come around to their home. It was their hope that this sort of arrangement might even be better for him in the long run, as the boy did retain a fair amount of information from his school lessons, even though he would not be able to recount how he learned such things. It was tricky, however, when his monthly hospital exams would come up, to get him over there – crowds of fanatics (both camps seemed to grow every week) would gather every time the door opened, hoping to be gazed upon by the “eyes that would cleanse sins,” or begging for mercy. It became a matter of police involvement, again, to the anguish of the boy's parents.

This reclusion lasted long enough that it had a lasting effect on the boy, as those camps established themselves more permanently at the empty lot – even against the protest of not only the parents, but other neighbours. The town mayor was concerned that moving against those groups would be considered some sort of attack against religion, with the upcoming elections, so he wished to cover his bases. Over a year passed with what was supposed to be a temporary arrangement – the boy now reaching his first decade, physically developed as expected – and there seemed be no end in sight. Because of that, the child

became progressively reclusive, which affected his own writing output. Since his parents tried to maintain a normal childish routine, his weekly diary writing sessions took several hours, as they covered all the events from the previous week. But then, with his forced seclusion, he had a lot less to recount. The specialists thought it was expected for this to happen, it was logical.

It was very fortunate for the entire family that both parents held very similar ideas as to what should be done to secure a healthy life for the boy. There were very few arguments between the two, and it was abundantly clear that they had only the well-being of their only child in mind. Therefore, when the seclusion started affecting the boy's memory writings, they devised a way to allow the child to thrive like he had been doing until the instability brought forth by the fanatics interrupted their lifestyle. The first and most obvious option was to move somewhere else, perhaps a bigger town, as they hopefully would gain access to more thorough tests. Even with the concern that a change of environment could bring some issues to the child, they considered that the child might be old enough to be able to deal with extreme changes. Other options were to concoct some sort of decoy, so that the boy would then be allowed back to his former school and other activities. It would be risky, as he if were to be recognised or the ruse spotted, he could be potentially put in a proverbial line of fire from fanatics; but perhaps a bit more sensible as a move to another town would require a lot more money, which the family didn't have a lot of.

With the assistance of the closest members of the family – some uncles, aunts and cousins – they started gathering at the family home at night to discuss how they were going to try and do it. One of the boy's cousins, who was about the same age and height, was soon chosen to be the decoy. The mother quickly fetched a few of the boy's clothes – the cousin was happy to assist. The others suggested some sort of interference by creating a diversion of sorts, to give the fanatics something to look at while they would move the boy along to school. Some ideas were from a simple “Look over there!” to more complex distractions that involved fireworks or some other sort of special effect. In the end, they decided they would do a dry run with most family members escorting the cousin dressed as the boy, in order to see how the fanatics would react. In order to avoid unnecessary derailments, the parents also decided to share the secret with the local police commissioner, who chose to send a few more officers to watch over the charade.

The next morning, as planned, the family was to gather at the house in order to make a blockade around the cousin, and distract the attention of the fanatics away from the door. Meanwhile, the mother and the boy were to head the opposite way, wearing hats and clothes that hid their features. On paper, it sounded like an elaborate plan akin to a spy film, but sadly it failed the moment the cousin stepped out – a horde of fanatics from both camps were soon besieging the uncles and aunts who tried their hardest to maintain a perimeter around the cousin. Shouts and screams from both sides shook the family back into the house like crashing waves on a beach wall, both groups colliding into each other like two rivers meeting violently, as the family locked the door behind them. The crowd that amassed outside wasn't aware, nor did they care about the fact that it wasn't really the child they both worshipped and feared, but such reaction was enough to make the parents admit that, for the safety of their only son, more drastic measures must to be taken.

For weeks after the failed school visit attempt, they were back to their more reclusive routine. The parents started to hear what the specialists had to suggest, in terms of where to take the child, as some of them had already proposed. Their main offer was to take the child to the capital, where he could be housed in a secret place and easily blend in with the millions of inhabitants. It could come with a steep price, however; in order to keep the place a secret, the family would have severely limited contact with the child, as any letters sent or received could be intercepted by the bolder of the believers of either camp. It brought both parents a great weight to their hearts, as they took some time to consider. The boy was shown pictures of places that he might be sent to, and didn't question the decision – the impression everyone had was that either he knew he was unique, or that he didn't question, completely ignorant of the situation he'd just go along with anything. He was still a curious boy, regardless of his isolated living – he'd often watch the groups gathered in tents and circles, separated by a makeshift fence set up by the police, noting the way they clustered among themselves peacefully, but sneered at the other side as if whoever stood there wasn't even human. He may not have been fully aware of the extent of his talent, but he was able to take in human behaviour – reading people, as his father once described the phenomenon.

In order to make the move to the capital, the effort would have to be even bigger – especially with the stakes of keeping his location a secret. This time, the parents pleaded

with the authorities to make this attempt as safe as possible, without the risk of being flooded by a sea of ardent believers. With the permission of the mayor, the police organised a small task force to transport the child in a convoy of a few unmarked cars. The use of more cars, as it was explained by the head of this task force, was to divert anyone who might try and follow the convoy – they wouldn't necessarily know in which car the boy would be. In order to do so, an elaborate plan of getting the boy to move from one car to another halfway through, as well as changing the order of the cars in the convoy was set in place, and, soon after, in motion.

The parents held the boy tightly the night before, and expressed their love and hopes for a safe journey. He didn't recognise them from any particular event, but, (some say) instinctively, he knew who they were, and gave them their due respect. On the day of the move, the police cordoned off the road leading up to their house, which was a much appreciated commitment from local authorities, and set up a perimeter where none of the fanatics could see what they were doing. The bigger scale plan worked well, and after some emotional goodbyes from his family, the boy was taken in the convoy off to the capital city. Thankfully, the newspapers had lost interest in the boy a few years before, so there was no fuss from the broader population – even though the number of people in those fanatic groups was ever growing. One of the first specialists to interact with the boy, and the man behind the idea of moving him to the capital, was in the same car as the boy, who had grown a sense of familiarity towards him in a subtler way than how he had for his parents; he recognised him as someone who was interested in him.

As the scenery changed before his eyes, the boy's eyes darted around at every new feature, scanning the horizon like an avid bird of prey. The specialist was very attentive to the boy's behaviour, as it was a major concern to everyone involved what impact such radical change might have on the child. Through the small town to the open countryside, the boy's demeanour seemed to perk up from his usual reserved self, asking on occasion what a shape on the distance was, or what other towns they drove through were called. The drive was long and took most of the day, and, as they rode, the specialist watched the child, wondering how he processed all this information, only then to be lost with the slide of a pen on paper, like sandcastles under the fury of high tide, blasting them down to nothingness.

The boy squinted when he could spot the skyline of the capital city approaching. So many lights, enormous buildings, and cars everywhere; his eyes moved even more rapidly, barely blinking, between all the different stimuli that flooded each of his senses. Car horns, people shouting, smells of steam, smoke, excrement, flashing signs, huge advertisements, television screens, the fleeting yellow light from each street lamp they drove past; everything contributed to the flood over his senses, and he quietly took all of it in. The specialist mentioned that, if the boy wished, they could visit some of these places – theatres, shopping centres, open markets.

They eventually pulled up to the gate of a big complex of buildings – the gate had a security booth, where a man came to check each of the convoy's cars and allowed them all inside. All the buildings looked the same – tall concrete buildings with big mirrored windows on all sides, with no identifying markings. The boy and his possessions (consisting of his many notebooks and a few pieces of clothing) were taken into the building closest to the gate. The ground floor was a vast concrete hall with glass doors and pillars across the centre, with a set of lifts on the far end. The shoes of the specialist and one of the police officers clicked without rhythm, echoing across the floor, until they reached the lifts. The specialist thanked the officer profusely, and said goodbye as the lift dinged open. The specialist and the boy got into the lift, and it quickly clacked and whirred its way up to a floor halfway up the building.

The doors opened to an open-space room where a bed was set up on the right side, in a space that was made to look like a boy's bedroom, apart from the lack of walls and doors, with a single bed, some toys neatly organised on top of a wooden box, and several notebooks stacked on a desk. The other spaces of the floor looked like something from a futuristic film - several monitors, an MRI scan machine, a treadmill that had several other attachments and a few other medical machines; all on sterile white floor. It was clear that this was not a common hospital, but that fact was irrelevant to the boy. The specialist put the boy's luggage next to the bed, started unpacking the notebooks and placing them on some empty shelves. The boy scanned the floor time and time again – the big windows to the side of the bed peered over the entrance gate, he could see the security guard sitting in his booth with the glow of a small television dancing on his face. The specialist told the boy

that it was late, and he should sleep – tomorrow it would be a new start, with wonderful things to happen.

The boy's first night was restless, his sleep was intermittent. In that week's diary, he mentioned dreams of smoke and fire that kept him awake, but almost nothing of the array of tests he was put through. EKG, EEG, MRI, he had his blood taken, his spinal fluid analysed; he was subject to essentially every known medical exam. For that first week, due to all these tests, he was requested not to leave the floor. But, the specialist promised, he would personally take him to experience the city. It was an exciting prospect for the specialist and his team, as the amount of stimuli that the boy might be exposed to in a completely new environment could create interesting processes to be revealed in further tests. His EKG came out normal, as he was in every other aspect a perfectly healthy boy. The EEG and MRI, however, had some anomalies that could not quite be explained. Sections of his brain were perfect, as they should be, but, like the more primitive MRI taken before, some sections were smoky on the MRI; on the EEG, where they were trying to read his brain activity through some memory exercises, the monitor showed some faults – it flashed, and blinked, and never quite managed to identify what parts of his brain were active as he memorised some words and repeated them. Due to the high quality and cost of the equipment, it would take months until they could fix it all. Nonetheless, the testing would continue regardless of the frustrating results.

The specialist also added to his team a psychiatrist, in the hopes that he could assist in identifying what might have given this boy his extraordinary memory. It was agreed that they should meet before the boy's diary writing session, to assess his impressive recollection abilities; and also they should meet after the writing was complete, to gauge the fleetingness of said recollection skill. The specialist felt confident that, with the psychiatrist's investigations once the equipment was properly working, they would reach a definite answer.

Yet, his confidence was not enough to ensure more positive results from the analysis, as the boy's brain remained elusive under the eyes of the medical machinery, hiding behind a cloak of smoke and volatile electricity. The psychoanalysis sessions weren't very fruitful either, since this particular case was so unique and full of firsts that the current theorists and major thinkers in the field weren't equipped to understand and explore the

depths of the caves that hid under the seemingly normal surface of the boy. The sessions ended up being almost like a word-by-word prompt of what the boy would then write in his diary, to the specialist's frustration.

On one of his weekly communications with the boy's family, he was reminded of one of the main promises he made in trying to convince them to let the boy come to the capital with him: a chance at a normal life. Up to this point, he had been remiss, not allowing the child to leave the complex at all – every interaction that the child was exposed to was within the glass walls of the floor of that same building. The diaries were not dissimilar to the ones back at the village, as the restriction on experiences for the boy had a direct impact on what he'd write down. Something then clicked for the specialist, an epiphany that illuminated what should've been bright enough; he would take the boy to venture out in the capital.

As the boy was an avid reader, a good start was the city library – an impressive multi-floored building that boasted the largest collection of books in the entire country. It wasn't too distant from the medical complex, so travel time would be minimal, and it would consequently minimise concerns regarding the boy's wellbeing. The boy's presence in the capital up until now had been kept carefully hidden from the general public – local authorities wished to avoid any sort of panic that could emulate what happened at the village, fearing the larger-scale it could take in such a populous city.

Regardless of the secrecy involving his presence, both sects had indeed propagated further – it spread from the village onto neighbouring towns, until it reached the capital. So it was not uncommon to see rushed façades being put at the front of old business, setting up meeting places for both sides of the camp. So it was clear that they would have to avoid any of these spots, all the while helping the child blend in and experience more. It was a similar hopeful experiment from before – if the child were to get greater levels of experiences, perhaps his brain would respond more vividly to all the different tests and sessions they put him through. The specialist was convinced that the answer was in figuring out the boy's brain.

The capital was a modern, bustling city, with millions of citizens and endless opportunities to blend into the background. It was then easy enough to elect a chaperone to take the boy to places of interest – libraries, museums, theatres, concert venues – and allow

him to interact and absorb as much as he could. And that was what they did; at first, extremely cautiously, with members of the specialist's team keeping a very close eye on every interaction the boy had. With time, their confidence grew that the boy would be able to proceed under the radar of anyone who might create potential issues – mainly any of the fanatics. With this great avenue for new knowledge, it didn't take long for the boy to change as a result of exposure. He returned every week from the library with piles of books that he'd very quickly forget about, once he wrote about them, yet this never quite discouraged him. He also wrote often about the plays, films, concerts and operas he attended, quite often of his own volition.

The specialist decided to have fewer monitoring sessions of the boy's activities, due to costs concerns, leaving one monitoring session after each weekly diary writing session. It had been several months since the move was done, and progress was virtually non-existent. This created pressure from the government and other investors, which forced him to decide on cuts for the project. This meant that there would not be any new diagnostic machines anytime soon, unless he could find something concrete that could explain the child's incredible abilities. These issues were of little effect on the boy, who carried on attending classes at a school nearby, visiting the library with staunch regularity, as well as other routine activities he was eventually used to.

Due to the frugality of outside pressures, the specialist progressively loosened his grasp on the boy's routine, allowing him longer times outside the complex, attempting to cut corners on every opportunity he could. As time passed, the boy was able to be more and more independent; as if his instincts developed the more he explored the city, regardless of his lack of memories. The specialist had fired all but one of his team members, who still accompanied the boy in excursions outside the complex, with just these two team members to monitor the boy's brain functions and developments. This allowed the project to last longer than expected despite reduced funds, progressing into months and months of further research. It was for naught, however. The funds were progressively reduced at each report that the specialist sent over – the lack of obvious progress remained the principal reason for these decisions. More had to go, and the specialist had to cut more corners.

The machines were slowly taken apart and moved to hospitals and other areas where they would be more directly useful, slowly leaving the living space in the complex a



barren, wall-less room. Leftover cables and tape, white plastic containers and strips of paper, all were strewn across the floor like debris, with a handful of toys piled by the boy's bed and on top of a chest of drawers. In boxes, the ever growing number of diaries towered on the far side of the vast room, away from the main door. For days, that was the scene to which the boy returned, the specialist ignoring the gloomy decadence of his research. Not long afterwards, a letter came which provided the whole project its last breath, as the plug was to be pulled immediately. The specialist didn't want to bring the boy home – granted, it had been a bit over a year since the boy was moved to this complex – mainly because his letters to report on the progress and status of the boy were embellished, trying to reassure the funding bodies that they made the right choice by allowing the boy to come to the capital.

The project crumbled, so the specialist decided to bring the child to his own private flat in an outer area of the city, while still hoping to get access to the tests with which he had become obsessed. It was an easy arrangement to make, and the child, ever so adaptable, quickly became used to a new routine; new libraries, new scenarios as the background of mysteries to which he was oblivious. This change of plan would turn out to give the boy even more independence, as the specialist hadn't the necessary resources to control the schedule as closely as before, as well as give a more permanent environment for the boy to establish a semblance of a normal life.

The specialist signed the boy up to special classes, after covering up the boy's condition as a type of autism as to cover any chances of the boy being recognised due to his earlier national fame, as well as written instructions about where to go and who to talk to. It was a makeshift plan that turned out better than expected, with the increasing independence of the boy.

Meanwhile, in the village, the absence of the boy slowly calmed the once-heightened tempers of the two camps of fanatics. After the first year, the encampment across from the parent's home was gradually dismantled; members of both sides quietly muttered among themselves as they eventually moved away. Some vocal individuals berated the leavers, but to no avail, as the pointlessness of their folly had become clearer to

them, especially without actually seeing the boy any more. Some of these louder devotees tried getting answers from the parents, becoming more intrusive at each time the door or even a window would be opened. This only caused them to be rushed home more swiftly with the interference of the local police, who were glad that this situation was finally reaching the end of its natural course. Quiet fell over the village once again, and life returned to normal. Every month, the parents received a letter from the specialist; and, every month, they wished their boy would come back.

The city grew smaller to the boy – now a young man. Several years had passed since the move to the specialist's flat. He had taken to the man like a son, now, and had set aside his research goals almost entirely: he had become more concerned with providing the young man with the normal life he had promised to his parents all those years ago. As the boy aged to a young man, he was, however, becoming more unsettled. The routine he followed: special classes at a local adult learning centre, library visits still, and more of the same; it all had fallen down to instinct (and a handy map) and he found himself going wayward, getting lost on purpose around the neighbourhood – everyone had gotten used to the sight of him, and would gladly show him the way back. The specialist hadn't noticed this behaviour at first, the young man was quietly-spoken and reserved; his reluctance to express himself was always interpreted as the fact that his removed memories left him taken aback so by the unfamiliarity of his surroundings that his silence was natural. His growing restlessness seemed to point to another direction; his eternal lack of awareness regarding his own situation was veering him towards frustration, an underlying cyclical sense of dissatisfaction. It turned into confusion.

His writing sessions became more erratic, he refused to write down the events of the previous week to their full extent – he wasn't aware what he was doing, but by doing so he was saving vivid fractions of memories. Consequently, these fractions slowly piled up and fed into the confusion. Why did he remember the colour of a book he had seen on a shelf at the library, but he couldn't remember what the weather was like then? Even more frustrating than not recognising a familiar face of a neighbourhood shopkeeper or recalling the name of the specialist who greeted him each morning, it became infuriating to him that he had flashes of events that he knew had happened in the past, but not with the

astounding amount of details he normally did. It was a cycle that was cracking and he started to recognise the connections – the writing sessions he was encouraged to complete, the stacks of notebooks like watchtowers around him; he had turned into a prisoner of his own words that relieved him of his own self. The pieces of memories that lingered from his incomplete reports, like shattered glass, fuelled his inner turmoil – more visions of puzzle pieces that raised more questions than answers about the world around him.

The specialist eventually noticed the restlessness of the man, whose writing had become forceful, the pen that slid on the paper being energetically dragged across the pages, like the pickaxe of a desperate prospector. The reputation of the specialist became mediocre, his connections with the government and research institutes remained anything but fleeting, holding on the flimsy threads of professional courtesy. His drive had diminished along with his reputation, as his hopes for a great breakthrough had fizzled down to a dying ember. One day, when the young man left the flat, the specialist decided to read one of the latest diaries – a custom he had relegated to only a few times per month. Upon reading it, he felt a shock hitting his spine; his pupils dilated and his breath became deep and fast. The usual narrative details, all the precise elements of the young man's life, they were not there. Instead, there were short, abrupt sentences that described little more than the names of the people he had met (including the specialist's, whose name was always readily presented with a picture by the man's bedroom door); street and shop names, food items, car models and other images from the overexposed commercial signs and posters scattered across the city. More shockingly, there were paragraphs of angry, indiscernible writing of which the specialist could decipher little – strong words, expressions of utter bewilderment and detriment, a forfeit of ignorance and a clear desire to break the cycle.

The specialist felt the shock of this discovery down his entire body – how long had the young man been lax with his writing? He flipped nervously through several of the notebooks, realising that it had been months since the last full transcription. It terrified him, what consequences were looming if this kept up? The experience when he was a child was unnerving enough, but now with him a fully grown man, it was equally unpredictable. With anxious fingers, he dialled several numbers on his phone, calling upon old colleagues, some members from his research team, to try and locate the man. It was a critical moment, and he focused on the consequences of this new discovery.

The young man headed down the street, mind buzzing; his brows furled and he squinted at the path ahead of him. His eyes moved rapidly and erratically across the bustling street; the cars that drove past, pedestrians too absorbed in their own worlds; and he noted every single detail, his brain was in overdrive as it recorded it all like a high-speed camera. He was walking at a fast pace, yet he felt everything was moving around him in slow motion, he was underwater; he was drowning and couldn't come up for air. It all smelled of steam and sewage; he waddled on until he reached a park. Young people sat on the bollards by the entrance, they were wearing school uniforms – two boys with blue ties, white shirts, shoes that hadn't been buffed in a while, laces loosely hanging over the sides of their shoes; one had blue eyes, the other one brown, similar haircuts - fashion dictated?, spots and acne on the face of the blue-eyed boy; a brown-skinned girl came and talked to them, she moved slowly as her blue skirt swished over her legs and the knee-high white socks in black shiny shoes...

It was an episode of complete assimilation; he incorporated all the details of this scene, but not in his usual way. It was as if he was privy to something new this time, the whole composition of human interaction seemed to unfold before him as he still struggled for air. It was enticing him to see the complete work, a seductive trance that reverberated within his mind and before his eyes. The murmur of the world became a symphony of detached musicality, a droning sound that stopped him dead in his tracks – he remembered too much. An explosion of senses overtook him, with flashes of braided hair, a boiled egg in a cup, the smell of incense that wafted from the temple by the main market in the village; it was a rosy smell that made him cough. His pupils dilated and narrowed, he heard the string of bells that rang every morning from the cathedral, it echoed down the early morning of the street into the vast open room of the complex all those years ago. All these moments hitting him like a lightning bolt gave him no comfort, and made no sense. He fell to his knees and rubbed his eyes as if he would be able to remove them, peel them away and shake the torment off his brain, where all was gone and what was back wasn't part of him, they were all departed sensations that belonged to the paper on which they were written.

The frantic search by the specialist ended quickly, as a crowd slowly gathered around a crumbling man, kneeling just outside the path into the local park, frantically shaking his head and rubbing his eyes. The colour had fled from his face, and the veins on his forehead

were pronounced and spread out like spider webs. The specialist rushed towards the man, quickly attempting to calm and bring the frenzied man back from the edge of insanity. With some straining, the specialist was able to put his arm around the man, while shooing away some of the interested yet unhelpful crowd. The man limped along, his eyes closed, almost rolling inwards; he breathed heavily and the only noises he made were nonsensical ramblings, like a scratched record, never reaching the next word that would give any sense to what was being uttered. The specialist heaved the man all the way back to their building, and up the stairs, and into his flat, where the paper towers shook slightly by the forceful gust of air that followed the pair. He then nervously found an empty notebook and a pen, guiding the man's hand to the pen and placing it on the paper; he shouted at the man, telling him to write it all down, he must do, there was no way of telling what may happen. And the man did.

The man slept for days after that, a sleep that was deep and empty, a temporary oblivion his body and mind embraced with all their might. Once again, the specialist contacted some of his former colleagues, and related what had happened – it was definitely a new development that was just as unique as everything else had been up to this point. However, that alone wasn't enough motivation to reignite interest in further research from his former employers. Upon reading the latest entry, the specialist noticed it started off as erratically. Yet it progressed, becoming more akin to those he used to read, detailed narratives of every detail of every sensation the man experienced, with an addition – the man also wrote down about the flashes he saw, those fleeting moments that cast their shadows in the rushing waters of his wits; moments that had been written down before, and were supposed to be gone from the man's brain, erased away as their form was transferred to the very paper of those notebooks.

This evidence injected the specialist with a burst of curiosity, one that he had not felt in a long time. All they had known about the special case of the boy, now man, was being challenged – the glimpses described by the man referred to years old memories, factoids that had been catalogued back when he had a full support team. Surely with this he could restart the research and examine the man frequently again. His heart pounded in anticipation, his hands shook as he dialled several numbers and tried to reach those who

could make it all happen again, his mind raced over thoughts of recovery, of redemption... But it never came. His calls went answered and he felt himself sinking into the reality of his circumstances. His curiosity would not be satisfied, his thirst for knowledge would forever remain a dry taste in his mouth. The man remained in a deep sleep. The specialist stared at the man's slowly breathing chest. It went up. It went down. His own breath matched the man's, the quivering in his hands slowed down to a stoic stillness. He swallowed dryly the saliva that built up in his mouth. The sun was reaching noon, and it glared over the glass of a photo frame on the far wall. The specialist walked over to the window, and opened it wide. The capital carried on, with its symphony of chaos and indifference. He looked at the young man again, and let himself go.

The following days rushed by in a blur for the young man. He was forcefully awakened by the loud knocks of a group of police officers, along with the presence of former members of the specialist's team. They were all taken to the local police station in order to deliver their statements regarding the grim demise of the specialist, while some of the other scientists made temporary arrangements to accommodate the young man. He spent the next few nights each in different places, quietly following instructions. His confusion from before seemed subdued, and he had the same wide-eyed expression on his face as he had had the past few years. Nonetheless, he did notice that something was out of place with the sudden absence of the specialist, the interrupted routine of waking up at that flat and going to the library made him feel uneasy. Former colleagues talked among themselves and decided it was time for the young man to return to the village – where, from what they knew, things had changed. The man's ageing parents were still there, and would probably welcome him back with open arms.

The village was unchanged, as if it had been frozen in time, but the man didn't recognise it. The main road that stretched by the open market was busy with dust, people and noise, the square by the village hall was overtaken by merchants and their wagons, tied to equally dusty and rugged horses. The young man sat on the passenger seat of a small white van, driven by one of the old scientists, with several cardboard boxes stuffed in the back of the van, filling it almost completely. The air smelled of heat and sweat at each

corner that the van turned, until it reached a half-completed road that led to his parents' house.

The van whined to a stop. The front door screeched open and a grey-haired couple stepped outside, squinting under the afternoon sun. Their faces beamed and their lips quivered when their eyes set on their son. They stared at him as he got out of the van and walked around, quietly, hoping for a semblance of recognition from his gaze. The young man noticed the drops of sweat that gathered on the scientist's forehead, the glare of the sun off the balding head of the man who called him son, the heat on his back that burned his neck. They all quietly moved the boxes into the house, piling them once again into several cardboard towers, in which memories of this very home lived, breakfasts in which the eggs were burned, the milk had soured, rain pelted down and wind blew the window shutters off their hinges. With everything in piles even larger than before, they set more boxes down across the front room quietly. The mother took the small bag of the few belongings the young man had, and brought it to his old room. It was also unchanged, a shrine dedicated to the memory of their son – their old bodies and minds had become so tired through the years, and yet held on to the idea of their son, gripping the frayed ropes that held their past tantalizingly.

The young man's return was not met with indifference by the other villagers. Some of the neighbours noted the arrival of the white van and the emotional welcomes from the parents, and they were quick to share murmurs and whispers, pointing fingers and throwing looks of confusion and concern. The news of the return of the young boy who remembered it all spread around the village like the warm pulse of a vaccine, and soon it was known by everyone else. It brought back the sparks of interest and curiosity that had been dormant for years since the boy's absence. For the time being, however, the buzz didn't escalate further, muffled under worries of the tensions from years past.

It didn't take long for the young man to settle, again in his fortress of paper and memory; he was quick to establish a routine that followed similar patterns, always written down on notes across his room. With wariness, the parents showed him the way around the town, always under the watchful, frightened eyes of the other villagers. The unknown had returned to their lives, and it reminded them of their ignorance. Nonetheless, the young man resumed this routine – again absorbing whatever he could from the local library – a

much less impressive collection than the one in the capital city, obviously, yet it didn't matter. Thanks to the cataloguing of his oldest diaries, his parents, under the advice of the scientist who delivered him back, were able to instruct the man about which volumes he had already read from the village library's modest collection.

The librarian, a younger woman who had recently replaced the former one, was keen to assist the young man – she had heard of his reputation, but hadn't formed her own opinion about him. His parents explained in few words what the circumstances were and gave her a copy of the catalogued books. She enthusiastically accepted it, and looked forward to the interactions with this intriguing man. Her job up to this point had been unchallenging, dealing with mundane tasks and requests, filling out forms for the government, shushing the occasional loud visitor. The prospect of interacting with someone of such unique circumstances thrilled her, filled her with a fizz of excitement.

Their first meeting was short and direct. She noticed how quickly his eyes moved, like floodlights searching the skies. He spoke few words, saying little beyond what he'd like to borrow. Her attempts at small talk fell short, and he just forcefully smiled once he received what he had requested. Over the week, their interactions grew longer, as he'd remember her name and slowly engage in the small talk. It was all still very superficial, she thought, but she also thought that the odd reputation he had did not do him justice. Her opinion changed, however, the following Monday – after a diary writing session, unbeknown to her – when he returned to his previous monosyllabic, reticent demeanour. This confused her, but as the weeks passed by, she noticed it always happened on Mondays. By Sunday, they would be communicating a lot more freely. Then, the following day, they would always return to the same restrained conversation.

To the relief of his parents, the villagers had learned to leave the young man be – not ignore him, but, this time, there was no fanatical or aggressive fascination towards him. Months had passed, and he kept on his routine, this treadmill of incessant rediscovery and oblivion, without showing any of the disquietude that plagued him so. Those rocky emotions dwelled dormant underneath, like tectonic plates of his brain. His castle of paper and memories, a mighty stronghold built upon recollection, grew ever so larger at each passing month. His parents seemed to shrink, their wrinkled faces and hands and feet matched by



the first wrinkles that also grew on the man's own face. Stillness had settled within the household.

After a few years, adjustments had to be made to fit the ever-growing number of diaries that were heaped throughout the house. With whatever funds they could muster, the man's parents commissioned the building of an annex to the house, where they could then store almost all of the diaries they had collected so far. When it was finally complete, even the librarian went over to assist with the move, trying to organise the diaries in a chronological order. She resisted the urge to flip through them, though she noticed her name was prominent on some of the more recent ones. She liked knowing that she had been written down in such a definite way, but she was also saddened by the fact that having her name written down meant that she was then removed from the man's mind.

The annex was, like the rest of the house, built with wooden walls, the high ceiling a criss-cross of beams. The space was organised to have shelves fitted on every wall and some free-standing units along the middle of the room to form corridors. The boxes with the notebooks were organised by month and each shelf by year. It was not a well decorated annex, but a functional one; its sole purpose was to store the notebooks and to create space for the future ones as well. With that, the living space in the house was improved, changing the oppressive impression one would have when walking into the man's bedroom. Now with the turrets of past knowledge gone from around his desk and bed, somehow he felt as if he had stopped being watched; out of sight, out of mind. Or in his case, into paper, out of mind.

The next several years were shrouded under the same cloak of tranquillity from the previous years, with the aging of the man matching the filling of the annex shelves. The librarian would quite often come over, to be greeted happily by the parents, but to be greeted differently by the man depending on which day of the week she called around – most of the times, it would be early on Sunday. She knew that he'd customarily write in his diary on Sunday evenings. She helped to organise the annex, especially after his ageing parents became weaker with the years. Her picture had been added early on to a corkboard

outside the man's bedroom, which featured faces and names of the people he'd most likely interact with through his day. She, however, felt bittersweet when he'd call her name on a Monday – she knew he had just learned it that day.

It wasn't long until his mother fell ill. It was a sudden condition, mostly brought on by her advanced age, the doctor said. She spent a few weeks bedridden, with her husband constantly by her side. The man would come and visit her in her room, sombrely talking to her but still without any distinct connection or deeper recognition. Eventually, her state deteriorated, and she passed. She was quietly put to rest in the village cemetery, with a discreet and modest ceremony where family and friends said their goodbyes. They had to do it all over again not even a year after that, once his father passed on as well. The man's reaction to both events was sober, never fully engaged with mournful emotions to be expected in circumstances like these.

It boiled down to him being alone in his family home. Unbeknownst to him, his father had asked the librarian, on his deathbed, to help watch over his son. For that purpose, the librarian moved into the home – taking residence in the living room, as she felt it would be too disrespectful to claim the late couple's bedroom. The last words of his father to her resonated in her head, in a tornado of flurried emotions, when he asked her not to let the man forget about them. In view of that, she didn't remove their picture from the corkboard, hoping it'd keep them in his mind, for whatever it was worth.

Both the man's and the librarian's wrinkles increased in number as the calendars were changed time and time again, the spiralling of the planet through the universe bringing no sense of the smallness of the village life. Greying hairs replaced the dark colours of his head, and his usual thoughtful intensity grew heavier and slower. Occasionally, tourists and other interested parties came around to call, asking about the man who remembered everything. The librarian would greet them, and answer some of their questions, but would refrain from exposing the man to this – she didn't want to reduce him to some sort of freak show attraction, it was unfair and she thought so much more of him than this. It was safe to say she had developed an almost spousal relationship with him, even though, every Monday

morning, he'd only remember her name due to a faded photograph held up by a grey pin on a corkboard.

Periodically, strangers would attempt to accost the man when he would be around in the village or in the library, asking him direct questions about past events, what weekday it was that same day, twenty-seven years ago; what the weather was like in the first day of autumn eight years ago - all questions that were answered by a frustrated gaze and furrowed brow. He would carry on, the strangers lingering behind with disappointed grins on their faces.

At home, the librarian had taken charge of the everyday running of the house, while still organising the numerous notebooks that filled even more shelves in the annex – it was getting close to full, perhaps just enough space for a few more months' worth. The closer it got to fullness, the longer the man seemed to stay away – either in the library itself, or in longer and longer walks over the outskirts of the village, up hills of green and rock. He felt that something was fermenting within him, a sore feeling, like reflux that crawled up his throat, and it gave him unease.

The man's fifty-fifth birthday was approaching. He barely slept for the weeks before – even though his diary writing continued on. He'd stay awake, staring at the plaster ceiling, noting the uneven brush strokes of a painter from years before; flakes of paint that hung on like snowflakes on overflowing gutters. When he'd fall asleep, he dreamed of fire, of smoke and of release. That sensation he had brewing within him bubbled at each day, each week, increasing the pressure within him. It was an unseen tension, a weight that bogged down his mind down to a slur of emotions, muddled rails for his trains of thoughts. He had been turning his nose frequently, like a nervous tick, as if he had smelled something bad – a smell of wood smoke, flash fire and despair; his nose would feel warm, blood rushing to it, and he felt the inside of his nostrils burning.

The day before the man's birthday, which would be on a Monday, he had his usual writing session, even with the restraint he had been having – the bags under his eyes darkened after each night – he pressed on and wrote all his impressions, observations and interactions of the week. He closed the volume with a thud as each of the words he had just written fluttered away from his memory, like sandcastles being washed away by the rising

tide. He rested his hands on the desk in front of him, staring at the wrinkles and the grey hairs that stuck out like needles, veins of pulsing blood that stood out in relief, like rolling hills over a desert. He felt the back of his throat itching, then burning, which made him let out air from his lungs, a surprised sigh that raised his heartbeat instantly. He walked out of his room, and saw the librarian tidying up the front room by the sofa where she slept. She smiled sluggishly at him – it was late at night – and carried on. He walked past her to the kitchen, where he found a small box of matches. Rummaging through the cupboards, he found some liquid alcohol under the kitchen sink. The librarian was too focused and tired to realise what the man had in his hands. He trod into the annex with a determined gait. Without turning the lights on, he opened the alcohol bottle and poured it over as many boxes as he could, until there was not a drop left. The fumes of the alcohol rose and tickled his nostrils, making him wiggle it to the sides a few times. The librarian emerged behind him, turning on the lights of the room abruptly. The man squinted at the bright light, with a match in one hand and the box on the other. Without looking back, ignoring her screams of protest, he struck the match alight and let it drop into the puddles of alcohol that lay around him and across the room. Flames instantly licked its way through the entire floor and started devouring the fuel-rich boxes, creating huge clouds of smoke that obscured the room. The fumes spread across to the other rooms of the house, past the despairing librarian and out to the open sky.

## 5.2 Critical Commentary

Also called “photographic memory” or “total recall memory”, “eidetic memory” is a unique concept regarding human memory. It is understood as the exceptional ability of remembering events with incredible amounts of detail. This concept has also been the interest of several creative endeavours, like the short story by Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, *Funes the Memorious*. “Funes” is a short story written as part of this thesis directly influenced by Borges’s story as well as the speculation and uncertainty of the existence of this phenomenon within other humans.

It is troublesome to identify the true nature of “eidetic memory” as a condition, due to the fact that very few cases have been studied, and no studies have been conclusive enough to assert the existence of this condition. Furthermore, the pure definition of this phenomenon is also still highly debatable – whether it is only limited to visual outputs (images, scenes, texts) or if it crosses over other senses. Due to this, it can also be referred to as “eidetic imagery”, which is defined by Leask, Haber and Haber as “a visual image representing a previously scanned stimulus, persisting for up to several minutes, and phenomenologically in front of the eyes”. That is, “eidetic imagery” focuses in the remarkable, but often temporary, ability by some individuals to recall with great accuracy scenes that they had only seen once. According to Rusiko Bourtchouladze, in his *Memories are made of This* (2002), children are more likely to possess “eidetic memory” than adults. A study performed in the 1960s by psychologist Ralph Haber from the University of Rochester, consisted of testing five hundred elementary school students for eidetic image ability. They were shown a picture from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* for a few seconds, and then the picture was removed. According to Haber, four per cent of the students were able to recall with striking detail the image they were shown.

Another early documented case was of a woman named Elizabeth, a student and artist associated with Harvard University. Charles F. Stromeyer III studied the case of Elizabeth, who had demonstrated a “phenomenal ability to recall and visualise images of pictures, scenes or specific pages of poetry she had read” (Bourtchouladze, 2003, p.126). In order to test this claim, Stromeyer used a technique called random-dot stereogram, which consisted of having Elizabeth viewing random patterns formed by ten thousand dots via a

stereoscope. She looked at the pattern with her right eye only, and after a ten-second break, she looked with her left eye at a different pattern. According to Bourtchouladze, ordinary people tested in the same way would see each pattern as pointless – if they looked at both simultaneously, however, their eyes would superimpose the patterns to form a three-dimensional image. In Elizabeth’s case, she was able to superimpose these patterns mentally, conjuring the separate images seen from each eye in order to form in her mind a three-dimensional image. This was also exacerbated when she was tested with patterns formed by a million random dots, which she was able to retain for up to four hours.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth’s case has been contested as the tests weren’t as frequent or detailed, and also since then she has refused to do more tests. Yet another case, nonetheless, was explored by Russian psychologist Luria (1975), who studied the case of V.S. Shereshevskii, a man who also exhibited an outstanding ability to memorise mathematical formulas and tables of numbers with phenomenal accuracy. He was also an influence when writing “Fumes”, as it will be discussed briefly. According to Esgate and Groome (2005), Shereshevskii was able to do so “because he had the ability to retrieve the array of figures as a complete visual image with the same vividness as an actual perceived image” (Esgate et al, 2005, p.23). That is, Shereshevskii would memorise the formulas and tables of numbers as if they were an image, as opposed to actual text or a semantic sentence. By recalling these images, he was able to “project these images onto a wall” (2005, p.23) and consult the formulas present there. In his case, Esgate and Groome consider it solely as “eidetic imagery” as opposed to memory, due to its scope on the solely visual aspect of his memory. Interestingly, he utilised his superb memory skills as a career, by doing tricks of memory on stage. But, later in life, his eidetic prowess seemed to produce several hindrances. Due to the nature of “eidetic imagery”, the memorised items would often come to him without any contextual or organisational meaning, often leaving him without understanding what the images were. Additionally, he had difficulty in forgetting some of the eidetic images, to the point that it interfered with the memorising of new ones – old ones would often be recalled and intrude in the recalling of others. Ultimately, he spent his last days in a psychiatric hospital, “possibly as a consequence of the stress and overload of his mental faculties resulting from his almost infallible memory” (2005, p.23). These issues with Shereshevskii

were particularly relevant in the development of “Fumes”. The insight brought from this was enough to fuel the issues faced by the character with the flawless memory.

This story is the longest of this thesis, due to the timeline that was devised for it. Since “Fumes” is a story that covers almost the entire life of the character, it was necessary to lay the groundwork to establish and explore the main character’s capabilities. His exceptional memory abilities are not the sole driving force behind the narrative, but also the way he relates to others around him and society at large. Furthermore, the grand flaw with his otherwise perfect memory, the fact that he forgets everything that he writes down, is an extrapolation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s statement that “as soon as he relegates that memory to paper, it leaves him” (Nalbantian, 2004, p.25): “When it serves me, it is only so long as I rely on it, as soon as I consign the deposit to paper, it deserts me” (Rousseau, 1782, cited in Nalbantian, 2004, p.25). This statement itself was also a foundational inspiration for the concept behind “Fumes”, as well as Virginia Woolf’s end of obsession with her mother after writing *To the Lighthouse*, mentioned in the previous critical commentary subchapter.

With the context of “eidetic memory”, especially considering that it is still a condition that is contested and there has not been any conclusive consensus, this story envisions a character in which the most extreme possibility of this condition to be true, with the caveat mentioned above. The character’s quickly established weekly cycles – experiencing a variety of sensory inputs, which are retained in perfect detail, to have it then erased from his mind upon writing in diaries – define the nature of his life. It is a theme that is not unlike the “wheels” theme on the series of short stories presented in the second chapter of this thesis, “On Wheels”, but it is exercised in the more repetitive actions of the main character in “Fumes”. This is displayed especially when early on the specialists experiment on the then young boy, by having him not write his diary. The consequence of this experiment is quickly obvious – the amount of information that his mind attempts to retain proves to be overwhelming, underlining the necessity of the diary writing sessions. The bittersweetness that may come with the possibility of such a remarkable ability is put into perspective by the reaction of the character, showing the clear necessity of clearing his mind periodically.

From the early paragraphs of the story, there is also reference to other types of memories that were developed by the character – especially formative habits that stayed

with him throughout his life. Learning to write (and to a different extent, learning to speak) could be considered memory of habit, alongside earlier stages of development such as learning to walk. Of course, there is a very clear disparity between the character in “Fumes” and the examples and concepts of “eidetic memory” presented above. This was done in order to explore other facets of human memory beyond solely imagery, expanding on the ever-growing body of memory experienced by the character throughout the story.

It is also eventually revealed that the memories he loses more consistently are ones that relate to specific events of the past – an aspect of human memory known as “Episodic Memories”, which have been discussed in a previous chapter. Whereas his “episodic memories” are frequently gone, some “semantic memory” may linger behind – his parents’ names, some of the household chores he was required to do. In other words, this discrepancy with the memories he retains after writing in his diary elicits that Rousseau-like desertion of the memory of the events he experienced in a week, preserving then only functional memories that support his cognitive and physical growth.

The story also delves into other elements, especially regarding the nature of the population that surrounds the character in his village. The essence of his condition, either seen as a gift or as a curse, worries the populace as it is such an uncommon circumstance. The divergence between the two sides is a glimpse into very human traits – fear of the unknown, spirituality, understanding the meaning of human condition. It was an opportunity to exercise another literary influence from another Portuguese author, José Saramago, and his works *Blindness* (1995) and *Death with Interruptions* (2005). In these two novels, two nameless countries are fraught with mysterious happenings that cause massive chaos among the population. In *Blindness*, an unknown infirmity is spread among most of the people, causing them to go blind – a white blindness, in fact. It then chronicles the descent of humanity and its nature (the collapse of civilisation in terms of human interaction – compassion, empathy, kindness) in the country as every single person in it falls victim of this illness, except one: the wife of an ophthalmologist – the one who attempted to diagnose the very first case of this malady. In *Death with Interruptions*, the country is suddenly struck, after the turn of the year, with the fact that no one seems to die. At first, it is seen as a blessing, considering another conundrum of the human condition – death. But,



in the novel, it also meant that those who were in their deathbeds, suffering, were doomed to remain in their moribund state without closure or release.

These predicaments featured in Saramago's novels informed and inspired the setting for the disputing factions in "Fumes", depicting the humours of humanity facing something essentially supernatural. The two sects in the short story follow an exaggerated, quasi-satirical form as a side theme – by distorting the behaviours of the mundane, the story evidences the true foolishness of fanaticism. Furthermore, the conflict between those two sides serves also to conduct the character's narrative when it comes to the progression of his life – the impact of his forced exile within his own family home on his memory processes. The rationale here is around the lack of inputs – sensory and generally cognitive – in his interactions, which in turn resulted in a smaller output in his diary writings, giving another insight into the character's memory encoding and storing processes. Exposition to input, like brief exposure of the children to a picture in Haber's study mentioned above, is shown to be essential to the character's routine ability to function.

The move to the capital – the journey itself to settling in the new living space – affected the character immediately, flooding his senses with more input and interaction that revitalised his memory activity. That interference can be seen on his first night at the specialist's compound: "The boy's first night was restless, his sleep was intermittent. In that week's diary, he mentioned dreams of smoke and fire that kept him awake," foreshadowing his fate and the implication of the story's title.

The tests that he is submitted to are standard tests that serve to map a patient's brain and identify the development of specific sections. From those mentioned in the story, EEG, which stands for electroencephalogram, and MRI, magnetic resonance imaging, are the two tests that involve mapping and analysis of the brain and its activities. EEG is a non-invasive (that is, it does not involve internal operation of the patient) that measures "electrical brain waves that can be detected at the scalp" (Purves et al, 2013, p.32). It is done via the use of electrodes on the scalp fed into different amplifiers, which in turn manage the different voltages between the electrodes. Then, "the amplified signals are then digitized and recorded for subsequent analysis" (p.32). The fluctuating voltages are interpreted in terms of the action that happens in the brain, serving to identify steps of

neural processing – monitoring brain activity and serving the purpose of identifying normal or abnormal brain processing in several states.

MRI, on the other hand, is a test that provides a visual representation of the brain, enabling the possibility of mapping the brain as well as identifying the regions of the brain in which certain functions are more prevalent. In terms of memories, it is known that the hippocampus, amygdala and other parts of the medial temporal lobe system, even though the amygdala is not “considered a memory region per se” (p.286). Many of the theories analysed above for this thesis have been related to specific parts of the brain within research done in cognitive neuroscience – for example, the hippocampus is considered “critical for episodic memory” (p.289). The way MRI works can be explained by the terms that form that acronym itself: “magnetic”, “consider a compass needle. At least, the needle is aligned with the Earth’s magnetic field (...). Similarly, when a person is inside an MRI scanner, protons in hydrogen atoms of the brain become aligned with the very strong main magnetic field of the scanner,” (p.22) so wherever there are changes in the alignment of these protons, they provide a type of signal that can be measured and formed into an image.; “resonance”, which “refers to the ability of a system to absorb energy delivered at a particular frequency,” (p.22) so by providing these protons some energy temporarily, they slowly proceed to release the energy they absorbed; and “imaging”, the images are formed through the decoding of these signals from the previous two processes “by sophisticated computer analysis to create an image that reflects the proton density” (p.23). Ultimately, this means that through these interactions it is possible to get a highly detailed image of the brain, once again without the need of any invasive techniques. Through MRI, it is possible to have hemispheric images of the brain, as well as cut section images and identify very clearly specific areas that show activity, and analyse them by comparing to how a normal brain should be.

The use of those two tests in “Fumes” provides the story with technical consistency, with an added fantastical element of the actual result of the character’s exams. In order to match the running theme and title of the story, the results were put forth as inconclusive and unconventional - “some sections were smoky on the MRI,” implying that the memory sectors were blurry and therefore unidentifiable. Even though such tests were not further explored in the story, the knowledge of their processes were important in the structuring of

the story, contributing to the theoretical texture that underpins this thesis. Additionally, the specialist's obsession with the character's brain, believing that it is the brain that is the key to this mysterious condition, is in a way a nod to the Bergsonian approach to the mind and its independence of the physical brain – coming full circle.

With the character's move to a place where he is exposed to a broader variety of stimuli, the story advances to the frugality of the results-driven funding bodies that are supporting the studies by the specialist. This is done in order to lay the groundwork for the growth of the character into a young man, and to explore the struggles he faces later on in life – his urges and other emotions that take over even though he does not retain the memories that elicit these feelings. Adding the financial problems that the specialist team starts to experience, it furthers the uncertainty surrounding the protagonist's circumstances.

"Fumes" also features a small segment that indicates the passage of time. But, differently from the previous stories in this thesis, this section in the story does not serve the purpose of storage of memory. Rather, it serves to proceed with the intellectual development of the protagonist – his settling with the new life and routine living with the specialist, away from the more controlled environment he was in before within the medical centre. Unwilling to admit failure, the specialist's actions end up forcing the protagonist into a situation where he started to crumble mentally, and inadvertently retaining more memories than before, guiding the protagonist down the foreshadowed spiral. This, combined with the additional failures, causes the specialist to commit to his ultimate desperation and kill himself. This was chosen to happen as an omen to the culmination of the protagonist's life as well. Due to his memory constantly overwhelming him, the ultimate freedom he would find would be in death – fire, more specifically, which has a mystical power of cleansing, removing all the troubles that the protagonist felt were his, including his numerous diaries. The character of the librarian was written into the story to corroborate with the nature of the protagonist; an organisational element in his chaotic life that floats between one extreme and another.

Stylistically speaking, José Saramago's narrative style was also a great influence on "Fumes". He often wrote in a "stream of consciousness" style, and disregarded punctuation to certain extents – especially when writing dialogue. This was a major influence in the

writing of this story, with the deliberate absence of any direct dialogue; it is in *Death with Interruptions* that this technique is seen most prominently. Besides the fantastical elements of a character with such a remarkable skill, “Fumes” became a story that goes beyond the use of the theories of human memory mentioned above, but one that also deals with the natural human tendency in their conflicts and abilities of dealing with the unknown, as well as relating to the overpowering nature of the human mind and its mechanisms to deal with extremes – in this case, the extreme curse or blessing of having such a phenomenal capacity of remembering everything.

## Chapter Six – “The Hound”, “Madam Zoray” & Mental Time Travel

The following two stories were written inspired by a concept first proposed by experimental psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist Endel Tulving in the 1980s, called “mental time travel”, also known as “chronesthesia.” This is a hypothesis that considers the mental ability by humans to be aware of their own past, and to a certain extent their future when it relates to predicting results, which informs their consciousness of them in order to function and survive in their daily lives. “Mental time travel” is a specific ability that is permitted to happen, according to Tulving, due to “episodic memory.” It is narrower in scope than “episodic memory”, but it also utilises elements of “working memory” and “semantic memory.” It also goes beyond the mere recollection, but a process that may be voluntary or involuntary; it may be as vivid as re-living the experiences, or as fleeting as a dream. The process was initially described by Swedish neuroscientist David Ingvar, who noted the importance of “Long-term Memory” (LTM), using it to recollect the past in order to plan or predict the future. Tulving then labelled it “mental time travel”, and prompted, rather suitably, extensive research especially in the field of neuroimaging.

The following two stories, “The Hound” and “Madam Zoray”, seek to explore the concept of mental time travel not necessarily for problem solving, but as a way for the characters involved in both stories to explore their own past, and how their past informs their present. The stories borrow from theories explored in the previous chapter, while expanding in their own right with the addition of “mental time travel” and their own narrative style. The exploration and development of these stories follow a similar route to each other, even though each of them has different ultimate implications within their narrative world.

Some of the researched concepts in “mental time travel” relate to previous notions that informed other stories in this thesis, such as the Bergsonian approach to “real” and “fictional” time. Lisa Zyga (2010) wrote in an article regarding “mental time travel”: “Because mental time is a product of the human brain and differs from the external time that is measured by clocks and calendars, scientists also call this time ‘subjective time.’ Chronesthesia, by definition, is a form of consciousness that allows people to think about

this subjective time and to mentally travel in it” (Zyga, 2010). This is an indication that Bergson’s Einsteinian interpretation of time has been corroborated through later theories.

Both stories featured in this chapter have strong elements of “mental time travel”, in which the consciousness of the protagonists are overwhelmed and sent back in time for brief periods of time in order to explore the elusive inner conflicts that are underlying their life through the narratives. Additionally, both stories are similar in style, with a lighter tone than the previous stories, and dialogues written around the underground memories of the protagonists. They explore both the protagonists’s follies and circumstances, exposing their past through their time travels, in order to place them in their present. As these are the last stories in this thesis, the theories they were inspired by were more varied, but the main focus remains on “mental time travel” and its ramifications.

The first story in this chapter, “The Hound” tells the tale of an obese man with a sub-par olfactory sense, but whose musical ability with the ukulele transports him back to several moments of his past - moments he had thought were forgotten – and unravels episodes that elicit strong emotions from him as he plays the theme songs of certain television programmes. Whereas “Madam Zoray”, the other story in this chapter, is about a somewhat bitter and disillusioned fortune teller – she does not believe in any of the mystical attributes she professes to her clients – who happens to be narcoleptic. She uses her illness as a way of attracting and convincing her customers that she does possess the special ability of seeing the future, but, in truth, her narcoleptic seizures only serve to send her down the path of “mental time travel,” also bringing to light the circumstances that led her to her present state.

As mentioned before, both stories are lighter in tone than my earlier stories, with casual dialogue and subtle satire, but they also count with a degree of insight in the formation of the characters and the inner workings of their minds through their memories. Unlike “Donno,” these stories do not explore the cognitive environment of the characters as much, but of the episodes that form their actual past, time travelling to those moments which were for one reason or another particularly important for them.

## 6.1 The Hound

“Do you have any spare strings?”

Stan reached out his hand, opening and closing it like he had an exercise ball in his palm. He wasn't a small man. That made the small instrument he held with his other hand even more comically disproportionate. The ukulele was strapped around his neck, like an oversized pendant, with one string miserably broken off the headstock.

“Sorry, mate, I'm out. Maybe Don has one; he just stepped out for a fag.”

His generally happy face sank to a frown, wrinkling his face and giving it a white and red tone. He leaned back on the chair, which protested in wooded cracks, and hung his arms down his sides like a big ragdoll. A gust of cold air made him shiver as Don walked back into the front room of the pub. It was just after noon, but due to windows covered with events posters the room was barely lit from the few streaks of sunlight and incandescent light bulbs that hang from dusty light fixtures.

“Hey Don, do you have any spare A strings?”

“Sure, Stan. In my gig bag, help yourself. Fancy another pint?” said Don, rubbing his hands together and blowing into them the last bits of cold air and cigarette smoke.

Don proceeded to unbundle himself and stepped up to the bar, waving a tenner at the disinterested youth who kept fiddling on her mobile phone. Stan squirmed as he leaned forward along with the cracks of the chair, and let out a groan as he reached for Don's ukulele bag. The strain increased the redness on his round face. He fished out a small pack of strings and picked out the A string from the bunch. His breathing got slightly heavier from the bout of unexpected exercise he just had to do. His nose would almost whistle at each breath – it was not a small nose which, combined with his girth and the stereotypes associated with it, gave him the nickname of the Hound. Legend was built around the nickname (it wasn't true) that Stan could smell when his food was coming from the kitchen, or how fresh the pork scratchings from the pot behind the bar were. In truth, his nose was sub-par at best – his wheezes should have been enough to debunk the rumour. This fact alone raised the suspicion, to Stan, that the nickname was mostly ironic. It never stopped the joke questions from his mates.

“Is my food coming soon, Hound boy?” some would ask.

“Yeah, the minute your mum leaves the cook alone,” he would retort. He wasn’t very good at comebacks.

The ukulele moaned out of key as the string was stretched more and more, until it sang a very clear A.

“You go through these too quickly, Stan. You need to be a bit gentler on the strumming there.”

“Yeah,” said Jim, “We’re not ACD-bloody-C!”

“It’s not my fault these things are so flimsy,” he argued, “Are we rehearsing this or not?”

Stan, Don and Jim played a ukulele each, Stan and Don with tenors, and Jim with a baritone. They came together as a trio after watching enough YouTube videos that convinced them it’d be easy enough to copy.

“We need a gimmick,” said Don when they held their first band meeting.

“How about we only do Taylor Swift songs covers?” said Jim with a straight face.

“No bloody way I’m playing that! That’s bollocks my niece listens to!” Stan puffed.

“What’d you think of Tom Jones, then? Sweet Caroline and all that,” said Don.

“That’s not Tom Jones, that’s Neil Diamond! Plus, that’s stuff for old ladies,” Stan retorted once again.

“It don’t matter, I meant that sort of music, didn’t I. Go on then, Stan, you suggest something,” Don snickered, lifting his chin defiantly. Stan didn’t like that sort of attitude.

“Um, well, how about ukulele versions of TV theme tunes?” he risked.

Don and Jim stared at each other for some silent seconds. It was enough for Stan to set up his chubby fingers on the strings and start picking some notes that in succession it



jangled the *Cheers* theme song. The pair started humming along, throwing in the few words they remembered:

“Nananana... everything you got... nananana.... Mmmhmmm... get away....”

Stan stopped abruptly just shy of the chorus, risking some notes that didn't match the previous ones. He risked a few more, finally finding the right one. The momentum was gone, however, and his other two bandmates stood in silence again. The bartender sniffed.

“You know, you might have something there, Stan.”

So ever since, they had been meeting at their local pub, practicing a set list of theme songs. They had hopes of performing at the upcoming real ale festival to be held at that very venue. Even though Jim's speaking voice was unremarkable, he could actually emulate a singer when needed, and so could Don. Stan, on the other hand, could barely breathe out words when playing. They mostly chose songs that had words to them, so to encourage any potential audience to join in. The thought of it gave them the illusion that it would make them go down well. Since Stan wasn't doing any singing, and he was playing one of the tenor ukuleles, he was in charge of playing the more complex parts. He took that responsibility in stride and confidence. Internally, however, he grumbled and grunted at the thought of having to learn techniques that could be well over his current capabilities. The reason he chose to learn the ukulele, in the first place, was that it had fewer strings than a regular guitar; therefore, he assumed, it'd be easier to learn. He wasn't a dedicated man. But he was a proud man as well, so he would have to make do to save face.

“All right, it's back in tune. What do we play now, then?” Stan said, crossing his arms over his instrument.

“Let's have another go at *Fools and Horses* again. We almost nailed it, didn't we?” said Don.

“Yeah, all right,” said Jim, “are we playing the credits song from that, too?”

“Nah, that'd be too much, innit. Let's keep with one tune per show, all right?” replied Don.

Stan scratched his nose. He hadn't really paid attention the last time they tried playing that song, focusing too much on the pieces of paper in front of him – chord sheets with the lyrics of the songs he got straight off the internet.

“Hound boy, see if you stick the tempo right this time,” said Jim.

Don counted in a bit faster than before, and strummed along to the bass line that Jim plucked on, the progression that was so characteristic of that particular theme song. Stan joined in, too, giving the other two players the *oomph* they needed to fill out their sound. As Don started singing about a pony in his pocket, some images started to be conjured in Stan's mind. The yellow three-wheeled van, scenes of Peckham and working-class markets, the golden shimmerings of an over-adorned Del Boy; it conjured up the smell of tea, burning toast and cheap jam from the corner shop, before it was replaced by a Tesco Express. Stan sat on the carpet in the middle of the living room, where his dad snored loudly. He could hear his mum, too, speaking loudly at the kitchen phone – the tiles on the kitchen wall looked like someone had killed a unicorn and used its rainbow-coloured blood to decorate them.

The television flickered, it was an old model already, one of the first colour models bought at a bargain price off his uncle. His dad still owed the last two payments on it. He watched eagerly as the pictures changed from a grainy still image of a block of council flats to the white bearded countenance of Uncle Albert. Stan leaned forward, his already protruding belly piling up against his crossed legs. He brushed away some of his curls off his eyes and sat in a trance-like stare at the grainy television screen. Even when he'd laugh, his eyes remained still and hypnotised. Even when his mum brought over the overdone toast and apricot (or was it cherry?) jam, along with a cup of bland tea with no milk, he'd eat and sip, but his eyes never faltered.

“...Only fools and horses work, la la la la,” sang Don, confidently. His accent suited this song well.

Stan's last strum reverberated in the front room of the pub. The bartender clanged a couple of glasses together. Don and Jim nodded, with their yellowed teeth shining through their grins.

"Nicely done, I think that was our best yet," said Don. He stretched out his right hand and had a closer look at it, as if he was trying to read something on it.

"Yeah, that was good. Good job on the melody there, Stan boy. Really give the tune a kick up its arse," said Jim. He leaned forward to reach his fizzy pint of lager and had a long gulp.

For Stan, he felt he was awaking out of a daze. He didn't remember the last half a minute or so, though it lingered in his nose and in his mouth the smell and taste of that overtoasted bread and cheap strawberry (or was it orange?) jam. He mumbled a couple of words and had a long gulp of his own drink, a not-so-fizzy pint of bitter. Its brownness matched the table where it was put to rest again.

"You know," Don raised his voice, "we might need a whole lot more songs if we're to follow through properly with this game. I mean, there aren't many theme songs over a minute long, are there?"

"Theme from *M.A.S.H.* is," Jim quickly pointed out.

"Yeah, but that's one in loads we've got shortlisted," replied Don, "plus, it only has lyrics on the film, not the TV series."

"It's not a bad thing necessarily though, innit."

"Guess not, just more rubbish to memorise if we can be bothered."

"Too right, but might as well. If they're short they won't be too hard to remember ultimately, innit."

"Sure, mate. What d'you think, Hound boy?"

"Eh," Stan shrugged, "I'm fine with it. It's good fun, and we can just play some tunes twice in a row, you know, to get people in the groove and sing along."

This was a point Stan liked to reiterate, to remind the other two that if they get the crowd behind them, it may make them feel like they're doing something right. This discussion was shaking off the last candy floss of the sticky daze Stan found himself in just a few minutes before. It left him a bit unnerved, but the other two couldn't tell – his wheezing remained the same.

“Right, yeah. Maybe that could work,” said Don, “especially later in the set. Y’know, when people are pissed enough that they won’t bother if we’re playing the same thing again.”

Stan and Jim nodded in agreement. The bartender yawned. The sun sneaked past the overcast sky outside, and managed to find its way through the gaps between the posters on the window. The trio carried on.

“Let’s have a go at the theme from *Cheers*, yeah?” suggested Stan, “That’s a longer tune on its own already.”

The nationality of which theme songs they were to play was also a point of discussion in their earlier band meetings. At first, Don and Jim were resistant about playing American TV theme songs, but Stan dissuaded them.

“If we want to upload some of our covers to YouTube, we’d have a better chance if we use some American rubbish, too, innit,” Stan argued.

That was the sole argument he needed, so they sprinkled their set list with theme songs from TV shows from both sides of the pond. Of course, for the sake of their future live performances, they all agreed British themes should receive special care. Don flipped through some of the sheets on the music stand in front of him like a bank attendant counting money, and placed the crumpled paper with handwritten words on it. Stan started it off with some surprisingly dexterous picking, ringing the iconic first few notes of the *Cheers* theme song.

“Making your way in the world today...” Don chanted.

The black and white pictures of long gone revellers, images of an inebriated past that permeated human history, they all loomed over Stan’s eyes, slowly closing in until that was all he could see. His eyes went out and into focus at the yellow letters that appeared over

the screen as the song carried on, singing about a place that felt like home, as more intoxicated colourless grins danced on the TV screen. Stan had a bandage over his knee, feeling it sting still after the application of some antiseptic. He was sitting back on the armchair with the vinyl upholstery, he hated sitting on it because of all the sweat and noise it caused. It was the only place he could sit with his stretched leg, however.

“Seriously,” he thought, “how stupid can anyone be to slide tackle me like that?”

The other sod, he continued thinking, was worse off, anyhow. He could still hear the scream echoing within the changing room of his mind.

“Ya bloody broke it, ya fat bastard!” it bellowed.

Stan lay on the pitch, clutching his knee while the rest of the lads pushed him off the poor soul onto whom he had fallen. Like a collapsed boulder, he was rolled off the lad, whose leg had seen better, less broken days. He sipped bland tea, just like how mum used to make it, and squinted at the screen. The grey glow from the changing pictures cast a vast shadow behind him and his armchair, the silhouette of a plump king of a minuscule kingdom.

Stan’s fleshy fingers once again rang out the iconic note progression of the theme song to a halt. His glazed look was quickly replaced by a wide-eyed stare as he felt returning from yet another trance-like moment. He had quickened his breathe to a higher pitch wheeze, as if someone was emptying a balloon of air by holding its end very tightly.

“Good harmonizing, mate,” said Don to Jim, who beamed at the compliment, “it’s a tune that needs it, I reckon.”

“Too right,” said Jim, beamingly, “otherwise it sounds like it’s lacking something, innit.”

For Stan, it felt it still lacked something. For starts, it lacked himself. He didn’t remember how he played all the way through, but his bandmates seemed satisfied. Whatever was going on, it was making him lose focus, but somehow carry on playing well enough. His wheeze slowly returned to its low pitch and slow pace. The bartender restocked some of the packets of crisps behind the bar. Don and Jim took a mouthful of their

respective drinks, while Stan sat with his arms crossed over his ukulele again. He risked an *Uhm...* and an *Er...* before eventually finally remembering how to speak.

“That was all right, yeah? No major fuckups, yeah?” he grunted.

“Nah mate, nice playing there, you’ve got that picking spot on,” Don replied sharply.

Stan nodded. He did practice these tunes at home before, but he remembered doing so, he didn’t have these weird blackout moments he’d been having today. Droplets of sweat emerged on his forehead like sprouts of anxiety trees and vines of uncertainty. He sniffed and shook his head to himself, wobbling the droplets, and then cracked his stout knuckles before letting out a hissing sigh. Jim belched a hoppy burp after downing the rest of his pint.

“*Ri-burp-ght,*” Jim said, “It’s been a good practise so far, but we playing all the set today?”

Don and Stan exchanged glances as if they were looking for answers at a plaster wall.

“I don’t know, do we have time?” replied Don.

The trio looked over to the bartender, who seemed to be in her own world, picking dirt off her fingernails. She could feel their gaze on her, like a wet fuzzy blanket, yet she tried to ignore it, hoping it’d go away. Of course, it didn’t. Her eyes came up to meet their awkward stare.

“What’s that, then?” she asked the group.

“We just want to know how’s the time, are we still good?” Don reiterated.

The bartender shrugged, brushing off that wet blanket off her shoulders like it was none of her business. “It’s still bloody early, lads, you do your thing,” she finally said, “only when we start getting packed that you boys will have to stop.”

Stan didn’t want to protest, but his pudgy fingers were starting to become sore. He was also still a bit distracted by these flashbacks he had had the past two songs. It felt like he was back there at those moments, for however long they played for, which is not exactly where he’d like to be if he needed to be at the present time, playing.

“Next one, then,” Jim said authoritatively, “we could do a short instrumental one. Like *Black Adder*, or even *Father Ted*. That’s just about twenty seconds, that is.”

“I don’t know, mate, I think we should focus on tunes with words in them. Gets people singing along and all that,” Don reckoned.

“People can tap their toes to tunes like that, though, just as well,” Jim protested, “like *Steptoe and Son* theme, or even *Fawlty Towers*. That’d be tricky without a violin...”

“Let’s do another one with words in it. *Dad’s Army*? That ought to go down well,” Stan interjected, interrupting Jim’s trailing off.

Stan wanted to experiment with the tunes, as he was wary about another bout of time travel. *Dad’s Army* was a safe bet, he hadn’t really watched it much, it was a bit before his time, he assumed. All he remembered was watching the odd re-run, surely it would be fine. He sniffed twice then flipped through the pages in front of him, finding the duly printed chords and lyrics for the song.

“It has an old-timey ring to it, too, that ought to please any old geezers in the crowd,” he concluded, ignoring the fact that he wasn’t a young lad anymore himself.

The trio started the song in an unsure tempo, showing a lack of confidence that was more akin to teen garage bands or students having a go at some odd number at a school assembly. Jim decided to take singing duties for this, trying to synchronise his playing and Bud Flanagan’s accent from the original version, while Don and Stan held the rhythm fort by keeping the cadence somewhat coherent. It wasn’t a great attempt at first, and Stan’s forehead had grown a full crop of sweat drops, but his focus was still in it. As his eyes trailed the lyrics and chord changes indicators on the sheets, he felt relieved that he was all there. But then he wasn’t.

The first thing that came to him was the scent of old man’s perfume, a pungent yet purified smell that seemed to cling not to one person’s body, but to one’s surroundings. Then, it was the yellowed wallpapers, all covered with patterned brown stains, like the teeth of a long-time smoker. In fact, when the first strong scent subsided, what replaced it was the smell of damp cigarette smoke and lighter fluid. He was at his grandfather’s front room, at the plump age of four, perhaps five. The voice off the telly resonated in the room, singing

about Mr. Hitler and his frustrated attempts to conquer England. The sun struggled to shine through the dirty window and the cigarette smoke that rose from Stan's elder that sat on a wooden chair just a couple of feet off the telly screen. Stan sat on the sofa, barefoot, while he stared at the sharp-dressed figure of his grandfather. The old man grumbled a few times, but his right foot was tapping along to the beat of the song. Stan hadn't realised then the dichotomy of the run-down room and the spot-on dress sense of his granddad, which made this visit to his past even more eerie. As the arrows on screen advanced on the map of Europe, Stan stared at the slick shine off his granddad's white hair. He had a burning sensation on his ears, as if he had been sitting in a sauna for far too long, and felt sleepy. He leaned back on an oversized cushion that lay against the arm of the sofa, and struggled to keep his eyes open.

"Good going, lads," said Jim, "we started off a bit rocky, but the groove right later on."

Don nodded, stretching out his fingers and shaking his wrist off with a few quick flicks. The bartender checked her phone for what must have been the hundredth time in the past hour. The few sunbeams faded away briefly as clouds swam across the blue sky outside.

Stan remained silent, opening his eyes wide after realising it had happened again. He held his eyes steadfastly at the blurry words on the chord sheet, while trying to control his breath as not to spiral into full sibilant puffs.

"We should have another go," Don said casually, "just to see if we can pin it down from the start this time. I reckon this one's a belter!"

"You think all of them are beltors, Donno," Jim laughed, inadvertently nudging no one with his elbow, "You alright there, Stan?"

"Yeah, sure, again, yeah?" Stan replied nervously, breaking the peculiar spell he had cast on himself. A drop of sweat streamed down his temple, dragging other drops on the way down to their own demise off the side of his round cheeks, falling onto the floor with no ceremony. He was tense; he could feel his shoulder muscles tightening under the layer of shirt and fat. These flashbacks, or whatever they were, were exhausting him, as if his brain



had been on a treadmill all day. Sprinting to the past and back was the sort of cardio his nervous system wasn't expecting.

"Actually, no, let's just carry on and we can go back onto the ones that need more work, yeah?" Don backtracked.

"Works for me too," shrugged Jim, "*Friends* theme?"

Don and Stan winced; they weren't that keen on that show. They knew, however, it was a very popular one. Jim shyly risked the riff from that show's theme song, and it came out like a series of high speed sneezes followed by a drawn out cough. The other two shook their heads in unison. Stan murmured a sigh, and put his fingers into position. He had practiced this one enough. He also braced himself, hoping faintly that this song wouldn't cause anything. But it did.

Stan plucked away the intro riff while Jim harmonised with him, and Don retained the base rhythm. Don then kicked off with the first few verses, giving Stan the sensation that no one had told him his life could have gone this way. He closed his eyes very strongly, and refused to open them at first, concentrating on the feeling of his hefty fingers on the strings. Then, he didn't feel the strings anymore, but something cold and moist, and metallic. He opened his eyes and he had a can of beer in his hand, Stella Artois, it said, and it was dark. There was the lambent glow of the television that caused the shadows around the room to dance. There were several other empty cans by his side, he wasn't wearing a shirt. He stank. He couldn't really smell it, but he could feel he stank. His bulging belly hung over the waistband of his shorts like drooping honey. The images of a fountain and people swimming in it didn't seem to give him any comfort, as he chugged the lager down his throat as if he needed to rescue a thirsty man inside of him. He saw a pile of letters by the television, some ripped open, and some still sealed. Many printed, but on top of them all, there was a handwritten one. Even from the distance, he could identify the handwriting. The screen flickered to a fade out, just as the last chord of the song rang out in the front room of the pub.

The bartender came over and picked up the empty glasses. The trio could hear her loudly chewing some gum, smacking her lips as if she was clapping her hands. Stan felt the tip of his fingers pulsating, pushing tightly on the strings of the last chord he stroked on his

ukulele. Jim had let go of his, slinging it over his shoulder like some soldier of poor fortune, and made his way to the bar after the bartender. Don coughed.

“That was solid, Stan,” said Don, as if the cough was a preparation for this sentence, “but you feeling hot there, mate?”

Stan noted his forehead was forming puddles of sweat, not mere droplets anymore. He shook his head.

“Just normal, mate, trying to get this right, innit.”

Don grinned dismissively. Stan didn't like when Don grinned at him like that, it gave him the impression that Don knew something he didn't. Don wasn't the one who gave him the nickname of Hound, but he helped perpetuate it. It brought Stan some uneasy sensations. Jim did some small talk with the very disinterested bartender, while she poured him yet another pint of beer. It looked like one of their cheaper lagers. Then again, all their lagers were rather cheap. He made his way back to the other two lads, as Stan used the short sleeve of his shirt to wipe off the sweat.

The handwriting he saw on the letter came back to his mind, like floating letters on an alphabet soup. The letters smelled familiar; the way the M and the S were curled into themselves, the loop of the L and the stress of the crossed Ts. He could almost taste their origin, but it eluded him. That period was an obscure one for Stan. He almost never left the flat, except to buy more beers – whatever they'd have on sale. The *Friends* theme song hid itself within the oblivion of those years, among the dancing shadows that flittered over the ominous letter of intriguing handwriting. It still didn't make any sense to him, however, why these memories, whole scenes songs being evoked so wholesomely and absorbing by these theme songs. His logical capabilities weren't the sharpest – he was generally unremarkable intellectually as he stood – so he couldn't quite reach any sort of conclusion to himself about what it could mean. He simply remained in a state of confusion and concern.

After gulping the head off his lager and belching gravely, Jim swung his ukulele back to his front, then cradled it in his arms like a wooden baby.

“Right, lads, what next?” Jim said casually.

“Are we doing any of the kids themes we picked out earlier?” Don asked.

“Sure, we can have a go,” Jim replied, letting his arms now hang on his sides, “we mostly only have instrumental, though.”

“Right, like Thomas, yeah?”

Don nodded, then Stan, trying to avoid eye contact by imitation.

“Actually, uh,” he finally uttered, “let’s do another upbeat one, yeah? With words.”

Jim and Don shrugged at each other, as if to say “works for me”. Stan puffed as he searched through the sheets, not sure what he was looking for. He found the short transcript of the *Young Ones* theme, full with the words and even some more detailed instructions for the short catchy riffs that were sprinkled over the short intro song.

“How’s that, then?” Stan proposed.

“We haven’t worked out the arrangements that well for that one, have we?” Jim protested.

“It’ll be fine, mate,” Don said dismissively, “that’s why we’re here, innit.”

“It’s too short, too, no?” Jim tried to protest further. It was clear he just didn’t want to play this one.

“We’ll just run through it twice, then, yeah?” Don puffed, “unless you want us to do the Cliff Richard version.”

Jim shook his head vehemently, then sighed defeated. Stan remained quiet, biting his tongue slightly while quietly trying to decipher his own instructions on how to play the song. He quite liked the song and the show, and he hoped that perhaps with a show of which he has good memories he could revisit a merrier time, to wash away the bitter confusion of the previous dip into his past.

“One, two, three, four,” Don counted, then strummed first chord and by that dictating the tempo for the others.

The other two joined in as soon as they could, which wasn’t straight on point, like disgruntled runners who only heard the echo of the starting gun. Don took the lead singing, referring to young people and the fleetingness of their own condition, that sort of thing. The

image of Vyv's spiky red hair and flippant V signs, Rick's twisted and defeated face, Neil's expression of a permanent high and Mike's smug mug that a mother would struggle to love, all these images faded into each other right in front of Stan's eyes. It then merged to a pub, a much brighter pub than the one they had been rehearsing in. The telly was hanging from the corner on a black metal contraption that seemed more fitting to hold caged animals or unruly children. Stan was sitting across from it, there were some familiar faces around him; they were his mates. They all must have been just barely of age to be drinking there, but they were all acting like they were regulars already. It was bright, yes, the daylight was at its peak outside and it invaded the pub like the smell of a freshly baked shepherd's pie. Stan's ear was throbbing, he just had it pierced and he could feel the blood rushing around it. It had been his mate's mum who did it for him... what was his name... George? Nah, that didn't sound right, it was that punk fella from school; he actually looked a bit like Vyv, even. He couldn't put a name to the face, he was right there and they were bantering over this drink or the other. From the telly, the theme song blasted out loudly enough to punctuate their rowdy conversations. It was a typical young men's conversation, where all are trying to talk first and cause more laughs than the others, while bragging about what number of drinks they had had the previous weekend. And belching, a lot of belching.

The words of the song rang out, repeating themselves again as if it was fading out then in again, like a scratched recording skipping to the same bit of the track. Stan found himself somewhere else, not in that bright pub with a bunch of lads; he was at home again, and it was dark. His head was spinning, cans of Stella were again spread across the living room, some piled up like aluminium castles built to celebrate the overwhelming power of alcohol. He was older, he felt his bulgy belly being tugged down by gravity. He could almost smell the scent of stale lager and cheap takeaway that clung to the air like spiralling tornadoes of neglect. The dancing shadow of the television casted upon the wall looked like a box of oblivion that sucked in the colour of the dancing figures on the screen. To the right of the telly, a pile of letters lay sombrely. On the top, the same one with the familiar handwriting, the loopy Ls and the rounded As, it sped the spinning of his head. The dizziness built up to a panicked centrifugal force led by too much cheap lager and the fastened beating of his overworked heart. He ambled over to the letter, watching the letters twist and dance on the paper before his eyes, forming words that stung him like angry bees that

dropped dead after each attack. Words like *goodbye*, *I tried*, and *forget*; they flew into him like attacking hawks, pecking and grasping at his skin. The sting spread through his left arm, then through the rest of his body...

Don's voice slowly faded into Stan's awareness. Stan's wheezes were more intense than before; he felt the stinging on his left arm subside, and immediately ran a hand over the scar in the middle of his chest. His other hand held on tightly to his ukulele. Dripping sweat threw itself off his face and chin.

"Not convinced, mate," said Jim, a bit defiantly. "Don't think it works just by playing it twice through."

"Well, it's either that or Cliff Richards, mate," responded Don. "Or we can just play along like this, *with* the Cliff Richards lyrics. With a bit of adaptation, mind."

"Maybe, yeah," Jim nodded. "It's not that I don't like this tune, yeah? I just don't reckon it's as catchy."

"Catchy or not, it's a good one, mate," Don said reassuringly. "Hound boy here was in the groove with it, too."

"Right, uh, yeah," Stan gulped. "Cracking one, for sure. What's next?"

He didn't want to linger too much, he felt he was reaching something, like a secret drawer in the dressing room of his mind, something that had been stashed away for some reason, and it seemed to be calling him back to it. It begged him to be set free, and the thought alone terrified Stan. But he didn't possess the mental strength (let alone physical) to resist the lure of such call. He wanted to go back into that tunnel and keep digging further; it had become a necessity, trying to dig through the earth to reach precious air. Of course, a lot of this was going completely undetected by his consciousness; he was never one to rationalise the inner workings of his own psyche. After flipping through more of the pages, all still very pristine, with a freshly printed look, one stood out for him. The idle chatter between Don and Jim became muffled, as if Stan's head had just submersed in a bathtub full of pasta sauce and red wine.

"Eleanora," he whispered to himself, shocked. The name came to his lips like a squirrel up a tree, rapidly and scared. It also came by itself; that is, it came after finding the

pristine sheet with the chords for the *Happy Days* theme song. It tickled the back of his throat like a corn shell. "This one, lads?"

The duo looked over and shrugged. Don grumbled as he put his coat back on and produced a packet of cigarettes out of one pocket. He stepped out the front door of the pub, which then swung closed with a woody thump. Jim looked over at the sheet.

"Ah, right, this'll be a good one, mate," he said, scanning the words on the paper. "Could have good go at harmonizing too, yeah?"

"Yeah, if you two can manage," Stan said defensively.

"Why, can't be bothered trying? The original has what, three, four voices in it, we could have a go," Jim objected.

"I'm no good singing, and you know it," Stan said with a whistling wheeze.

Jim shrugged. "Just thought it'd be cool if we had a harmony going," he pointed out.

There was an awkward silence. Don's shadowy silhouette covered the few holes on the front door glass that weren't covered by posters. The bartender counted the dead flies on the far side of the bar, by the glass of pickled eggs. "Still three," she thought. There was a hum over the room that wasn't there earlier. The day was getting on, so it might have been some vent or another turned on by a timer. Jim mouthed the lyrics a few times, trying to carve them into the marble of his brain. Jim's ears were hairy, Stan noted, as Jim stood over his shoulder. Stan's left hand was locked in the position of the first chord of the song, and had been since he set it up on the stand in front of him. He wanted to have a whack at it soon, and look for that name. Eleanora. He tasted tomato and basil pasta sauce on the tip of his tongue, and the scent of bitter grapes at each hissing breath he'd take.

Don rattled the door opening, interrupting the silence. Along with him, a gust of cold air and cigarette smoke drifted in. He puffed at his hands and took his coat off, while the other two remained quiet.

"D'you got the solo thing down, Hound boy?" he asked.

"Yeah, mate, let's do it," Stan replied as he felt his hands pulsating. "I won't do any singing, though."

“Jim will do the harmony thing still, so it should be fine,” Don reassured them.

Stan felt that the mystery of these engulfing memory episodes was about to be solved, or at least given a bit more sense. He was going to welcome the whirlwinds of his past and displace himself to somewhere that was hidden under the floorboards of his conscience’s pantry. His first strum on the ukulele set the key, then Don and Jim started with the rhythm chords, as Stan picked away with the main riffs and themes of the song.

Like a trapdoor being opened under him, Stan felt a rush of blood to the head, warming up all the way up to his ears and the back of his neck. Then, it all cooled down into darkness. His ears became as cold as ice; faintly, the theme of *Happy Days* went on about the days of the week, and how rocking Saturday was. A sudden light came above him, like a tractor beam from an alien spaceship, but he was still. He was wearing a white polka-dotted shirt with black trousers and red Doc Martens. He shifted his weight from one leg to another as the space around him grew more illuminated. The floorboards he was standing on were shiny, freshly polished – he could almost see his face on it – with several lines painted in different colours. The light spread further, revealing the room to be an indoor gymnasium, and then the light dimmed down to a blueish colour, with some other flashing and dancing about the walls. There were some decorations hanging on the wall, and some old painted letters above the entrance. It was the local leisure centre, and they were having a school party. Many of the local youth were dancing, dressed in the rabid fashion of the late seventies.

His boots thumped across the floorboard as he walked through a small group of younger lads. He had made it a bit late to the party, but he was excited. It was the first time he was to come to a party like this with a girl. Like a periscope, he stretched out his neck and squinted above the other kids to find his date; and there she was. She was standing by the five-a-side goal posts that had been moved to make room for the party. He ran a finger over his collar, and swallowed dryly. He stepped forward decisively, drubbing his heels on the boards at each step. She turned around and smiled at him, dimples revealing themselves like blooming flowers and hairs flowing down her shoulders like a cascading fountain of lava. He looked down briefly and sucked in his bulging stomach ever so slightly, and advanced with the conviction of a bamboo tree under heavy winds.

“Hi, Eleanora,” Stan spouted out nervously. She had something in her hand, and, silently, she handed it to him.

He instantly noticed his name, neatly written on the envelope. He told himself he would never forget how her Ls looped.



## 6.2. Madam Zoray

The sign outside was faded by the weather and time. It was once a vivid purple background with brash yellow letters indicating that right here, in an alley just off the high street, you could find the fortune teller. Some of the symbols – stars and other vaguely mystical icons – had paled to a bleached silhouette of their original forms. The door was also painted with the same tone of purple, with flakes of paint revealing the ravages of the sun and English rain. It also hinted at what you might find inside. Through the front door, a typical bead curtain greeted the visitors and obscured the darkened, damp front room. In that room, a round table covered with a velvet cloth that had seen more velvety days. Around it, three chairs were set up – one of them was fancier than the others, with red ragged upholstery and a throw with more generic esoteric images. There were also pillows on each armrest. Several bookshelves, filled to the brim with dark-covered volumes littered the walls, and a mist seemed to linger over the room like molecule-thin cobwebs. The light that came in from the front windows barely broke through the also purple curtains, thick as a circus canvas, sober and quiet. An incense stick burned on the far wall, by the less mystical door that led to a separate room.

A diminutive figure walked through the room, sending the incense smoke curling in her wake. She was wearing a dark blue shawl over her head, with some trinkets hanging off it. You couldn't tell her age at first, as the shawl obscured her face, but in the hazy, overshadowed room, you could make out some of the wrinkles around her lips and the yellowness of her teeth. She moved slowly but confidently, setting out some multi-coloured candles on the table and other cryptic paraphernalia. "Any minute now," she whispered to herself. She swung the back door open, stepped under its frame and looked into the back room. Her shoulder slumped against the side frame and she remained there for a few minutes. If anyone could have had a closer look, they'd have noticed her eyes were closed, and her breathing slowed down to rhythmic sighs. If anyone could have had a closer listen, they'd also have heard the low rumble of a snore. Suddenly, she straightened herself up and carried on with her preparations. It was all done with such conviction that it was clear that this was established after years and years of daily repetition. Her routine was such that her mind barely went anywhere else until the first customers walked in. And she knew they

were coming; it was all written down in the slates of her mind – she never kept a diary or anything, it was a virtually holistic system that gave her the sense of when she had her appointments schedule.

Right on cue, the front door was pushed open. The smell and noise from the high street temporarily invaded the room, creating an ephemeral connection between this place and the outside world. Once the door was closed, the entire room returned to a dimension of its own. It felt like the bottom drawer of an old chest up in a grandmother's attic. Abandoned, forgotten, or perhaps merely ignored by the universe. A young woman clicked through the beaded curtain. The small lady in the room greeted her with an arcane grin and spread her arms with open hands.

“Hello, my dear,” she said operatically. “I was expecting you.”

“Madam Zoray, yes?” the young woman replied nervously. “I-uh, wasn't sure if I'm too early, that is, hum-“

“You arrived exactly on time, my dear,” Zoray interrupted, keeping her theatrical tone. “Please, have a seat,” she gestured to a chair.

The young woman awkwardly sat on the chair directly across from the fancier one, as she assumed that was the fortune teller's favoured seat. Madam Zoray gazed solemnly at the girl.

“Would you like anything before we start?” she asked. “Tea? Water?”

“No, I'm good, th-thanks,” the girl squeaked.

Madam Zoray ceremoniously rearranged the throw over her seat, and sat down carefully, as if gauging the influence of her movements to the space surrounding her. She shot another sombre smile at the girl.

“So, Miss Parkinson,” she ruptured the silence. “Tell me what you wish to know, my darling.” Her voice sounded like it was coming from a long funnel, with a slight tremble but all the deepness of an echoing cave.

“Y-you can call me Joan, Madam,” she answered with a nervous stutter. “I, you know, um, I’m not sure. It’s like, um, I’ve got this boyfriend, right? And he’s like, I don’t know.”

Madam Zoray’s expression changed from a sombre grin to a stern smirk. “And you want to know if he’s the one you’ll marry?” she said slyly.

Joan nodded three times, as if it was a ritual movement. She clasped her hands together, and looked at her long fingernails. They had been freshly painted red, glossy and impeccable. She twiddled her thumbs, and then looked at the smirk that had now turned to a sneer. Was it a sneer? She couldn’t tell. Madam Zoray had practiced cryptic faces down to an art form; it was one of her best abilities, she fancied.

“Of course, my dear Joan,” she proceeded. “Well, let’s find out what I can see... *beyond the veil.*” Her last words held the tone of something otherworldly, eldritch even, conjuring goose bumps over Joan’s arms and neck. That was another of Zoray’s talents – reach just the right intonation to sprinkle the right amount of glamour in her speech to get everyone’s hair standing.

Zoray placed one of the pillows on the table and then stretched her hands out on both sides of the pillow, silently motioning her head to Joan to follow. Joan reluctantly put her hands over Zoray’s. Zoray then closed her eyes and hummed a few enigmatic sounding mantras. As if something suddenly turned her neck into an uncoiled spring, her head collapsed face first into the pillow. Joan held on to Zoray’s hand in shock, leaning back into her chair.

Meanwhile, Zoray’s mind spiralled into a purplish whirlpool of reality; the room became a lilac-coloured pool that was being drained into a black hole of time and space. She found herself wearing a black lace dress and matching gloves, standing in a long queue along the middle aisle of a red brick church. Everyone was quiet, with the exception of murmurs and whispers at the front of the queue by the transept. People’s faces were of utter sombreness. Whenever glances would meet, they’d exchange sympathetic smiles and *tsks* of disappointment. Zoray could almost recognise the face on the picture that was set up on an easel by the wooden coffin on the steps before the choir. It had the familiarity of those faces that are so similar to each other that the distinction between them relied on

little else but a name. She was then transported, she thought she was in front of the church, but then realised she was elsewhere – a police station? There was an altercation just outside, police officers struggling to pull out a kicking and squirming man out of the back of the car. The man was also familiar, not personally, she gathered, but from pictures she had seen. The movements became blurry, dissipating again like watercolours washed away in the rain, melting down the white canvas of the oblivion of unconsciousness.

Joan was leaning over, trying to have a better look at Madam Zoray's face. She was shivering, afraid that the old fortune teller had kicked it into the otherworld. Zoray swiftly jerked her head up, opening her eyes wide. Joan yelped, letting go of the old lady's hands and almost tumbling backwards over her chair. The fortune teller's shawl didn't move back, which nibbled at the back of Joan's mind.

"My child, I fear," she announced decorously. "I fear this situation is not right for you. I have... seen what the universe has planned for you, it communicated to me through the interconnected knots that tie us all together, and it rang the bells of pain and suffering." She hoped she hadn't overdone on the drama.

Joan's face dropped to a pout. Her eyes watered up like fishbowls, and her shoulders shook slightly. Zoray reassured herself that the amount of drama was right.

"You see, the spiritual forces that linger within the fabric of existence saw it fit to bestow upon me the truth," she continued with the same melodramatic tone. "And the universal truth is that the path you are currently in is not the one that will deliver you happiness and joy. It must be changed."

"B-but, what, how do you mean, Madam Zoray?" Joan was on the verge of tears. "How horrible it'll be if I stay with Jez?"

"My dear Joan," Madam Zoray leaned forward, squinting her eyes until they barely reflected Joan's eyes back at her. "Trust the universe, trust the forces of the dimensions that surround our own, and believe when I say, change your path and you will not have to find out."

The two sat in silence for a brief moment. Joan took a deep breath and wiped the held back tears away. Madam Zoray leaned back on her chair, leaving her hands open with

her palms up, serenely. She quietly examined Joan's expressions. "One more success," she thought. It was all about the reading, she had written once, reading the person, and reading the dreams. They're almost always completely pointless, but she used them to flourish her trade, and it had proved very fruitful up until now. It had become her trademark, so to speak.

As far as Zoray knew, she was the only narcoleptic fortune teller in the south of England, which gave her a unique selling point. She embraced it, as it gave her readings even more mystique, and, through the years, she learned ways of triggering these episodes at will – but still, at times, they'd happen at random as well. She just saw a way of monetising it, and she didn't regret it after all these years, she was never short of customers. Sure, she had been accused of charlatanism several times before, but it had never shaken her belief in her business, or the belief in the constant stream of clients that were so eager to part with their money. Steadfast, it was a venture in which she held a certain degree of pride. She didn't have any family, and most of her friends were in the business as well, so this was the life that she chose. Or the life that chose her. Either way, she had no moral dilemma regarding what she did for a living, and the fact that an illness such as narcolepsy assisted her in this pursuit, the better off she was.

Joan fished out her wallet from her bag and handed the agreed amount to Madam Zoray. Zoray grabbed the small bundle of notes, counting them in the back of her head while she welcomed the profuse "thank yous" from Joan, and escorted the customer out. Her mind's diary reminded her of another appointment that was soon to follow. She rearranged some of the candles and blew the incense stick off – she was sick of the vanilla scent. Pushing through the back door, she walked along a kitchen totally lacking in magical atmosphere. At the other end, there was another door that led to a tiny garden. To the left of the door, there was another chair with pillows just under the extra bit of roofing from the small terraced house, and a big tin bucket half-filled with cigarette butts. She sat down and rolled herself one, retrieving the mental notes she had made about the next customer. There was a beep coming from the kitchen. She jumped onto her feet as graciously as a dried leaf onto the grass, and threw her current cigarette into the bucket. She moved, almost glided over the kitchen floor and opened the door to the front room just in time to hear the ringing of the door as her next appointment walked in.

It was another lady, this time a bit older than Joan, who had been there before. Madam Zoray smiled as cryptically as she could, looking at the woman from under her shawl.

“Good day, my dear Sam,” she said slowly, dragging out each syllable. “You’re early, but I knew you would be.” Thanks to the motion sensor outside the front door, she thought to herself.

“Thanks for seeing me in such short notice, Madam Zoray,” Sam said, nervously. Her voice carried the tightness and urgency of an exasperated fire alarm. “I just need to know what to do!”

“Of course, my darling,” Zoray said with all the pomp she could muster. “Please, have a seat.”

Sam sat down across from the mystical chair, and twiddled her thumbs nervously. She rested both her hands on her stomach, which was large and bulging, and tapped her foot rapidly. Zoray noticed that Sam was wearing a perfume that smelled like a lorry full of lilacs crashed into a lorry full of cheap vodka. The tapping of the foot ceased once Madam Zoray sat across from Sam, resting her hands peacefully on the table once again. Zoray’s glare examined Sam’s flaky nail polish that was probably shaken off from too much twiddling of thumbs, her white tank-top that strained over the fact that it was a size or two too small for its current wearer; she tried to ignore the stained teeth.

“Tell me, what is it that you need to know?” said Zoray, after a long yet deliberate pause.

“Oh Madam, you have no idea, I have been having this feeling in my gut, right,” Sam said quickly, the words coming out like they were spring-loaded, coming out as quickly as possible. “Right here, you know?” She motioned to her stomach.

Madam Zoray gave her an enlightened nod.

“And, and, I think my life’s going to be in pieces if I don’t act quick, you know?” Sam continued as the words were still jumping out of her lips. “It’s my mum, Madam; she’s driving me crazy, yeah? She’s been living with me since I’ve been on the dole and she helps

around with the house and the kids and all that, but she's also a nosy cu-," She stopped abruptly, covering her mouth. "I'm so sorry!"

"That is no problem at all, my child," Zoray said stoically. "Please, do carry on."

"Anyway, I want to know, is my mum going to find out, well, yeah, about, uh," Sam trailed off, embarrassed.

"Your *affair*?" Zoray snapped, but with a sober tone.

Sam nodded repeatedly, and started nibbling on a fingernail.

"Very well, my dear Sam..." Zoray sighed mystically. "This may be tricky, but I think I can help you. I remember your... *affair*. I'll see what the universe has to tell us."

She patted the pillow that lay in front of her, and smirked slyly at Sam. Zoray then closed her eyes, wrinkling further the skin around the eye sockets and cheeks. She mentally navigated her own brain, as if looking for the off switch. With a muffled thud, she once again collapsed face first onto the pillow. Sam was taken aback for a second, and then resumed her position of leaning forward and biting her fingernails like a typewriter chewing through a sheet of paper.

Zoray felt her mind coming alive, as if a light had been turned on in this gloomy and dark room she found herself in. The room seemed to stretch in all directions; bits of grass sprouted quickly, some trees popped up and paved roads put themselves together in their zigs and zags. Clearly the room was not a room but a park, somewhere outdoorsy. For once, she didn't exactly have a body – some of her dream visions, as she called them, were from this flying camera perspective, as she also called it. It wasn't a vivid dream, by the way, as she never had any control over these things; she just rode them out and made up whatever interpretation she thought her clients wanted to hear. Ultimately, her narcolepsy just gave her "fortune telling" a nice effect.

The park spread out for miles, and the sun shone down with the might of summer and the absence of clouds. There were few people out and about, cycling, walking, jogging, or doing other related outdoorsy activities. By one side, there were a couple of tennis courts. On the other, surrounded by bushes, was an open field with markings for playing cricket. There was no one in that area; the bushes on the far side of the field, away from the

path, were even bigger than the rest and seemed to be shuffling. Zoray felt her field of view slowly approaching the mysterious moving bush. She could barely make out two shapes under the shade – their movement was rhythmic but erratic, which made it hard to follow. Then, she noticed that the things on the bushes weren't berries, but pieces of clothing that seemed to have been thrown about in the flustering of passion. She couldn't control it, but her "vision" floated over the bushes to spot the bodies of a half-naked couple. The man already down to his underpants, and the woman, bare-breasted, struggled with her trouser button, amidst the kissing and vigorous groping from the man. Zoray quickly recognised both, and felt her ethereal cheeks burning and tingles in other ethereal parts long gone quiet. She tried to whisper a name, "Adrian," but nothing came out.

Like someone just rescued from drowning, Madam Zoray flung her head back from the pillow and sat upright, wide-eyed. Sam was sitting, staring her in tempered anticipation. Zoray tried to regain her wits while maintaining most of her dignified mannerisms. She never quite got the hang of coming out from the episodes. She learned how to cause them at will, yeah, but the coming out always took the wind out of her, so to speak. And the more she aged, the worse it seemed to get. As far as the dreams go, they never got to a point that they'd affect her directly, at least. Anyway, her cunning mind slid into several conclusions as she quietly stared at Sam, reading the apprehension that was printed over the woman's face. It was clear what she wanted to hear, so she strung along the sentences she thought would reach that effect the best.

"My dear child, I have looked again into the stars behind the veil, and read what the universe had writ aeons ago especially for you," Zoray flared her arms slowly. "And much was revealed to me. Your questions, your concerns, they have been conceded to me by the powers that command our universe and the one beyond, and they have told me this." She paused dramatically.

Sam nibbled her index fingernail.

"Your mum shall not interfere with your life, as it will soon be clear," she continued after what she deemed was long enough a pause. "And your affair with your stepfather shall remain a mystery that only the chasms of oblivion may acknowledge."



The woman seemed to sink into her seat. Perhaps the words being so openly professed caused her pain, expressing her transgression vividly and bringing it to life with all the thorns of reality piercing her skin. Madam Zoray didn't find the relief on Sam's face as she expected. The woman who sat across from her had gloom etched across her countenance, like damsels from pulp comic books.

"Plus, you see," Zoray quickly added. "It has been revealed that what you have done was writ for those same aeons before you were even born – it was *destiny* and only *destiny* that brought you to this point. Embrace your *fate!*"

Madam Zoray thought that these words would consolidate the ineffability of destiny, and for that effect she emphasised the word like a highlighter for speech. It seemed to be a common trait between people, she thought, that they accept more of themselves if it was clear to them that they had no choice, like cattle prodded to the abattoir. She was right, too, as Sam's cheerless demeanour morphed into a serene look, followed by a heavy sigh.

"You're right, Madam," Sam said, finally. "If this is what is supposed to happen, then I'll face it!"

"There is no fighting against the laws of the cosmos, you know," Zoray said wisely.

Sam nodded emphatically, her foot tapping again nervously, making her whole body jiggle slightly. She dug through her purse and placed some crumpled five pound notes on the table.

"Thank you again, Madam Zoray, you always know how to guide me," Sam said between breaths, and then hopped to her feet and left.

Zoray sat for a few more minutes, contemplating the memories she had conjured this last session. Adrian had been a former lover, a torrid affair that ended just as quickly as it started. She basked in these thoughts while she nimbly counted the money left by Sam, pocketing the cash somewhere within her long dress. She leaned back on her chair, lost in the images of grassy fields and trees, itchy legs and leaves going where they shouldn't go; they left her nostalgic. Her next appointment wouldn't be for a while longer, so she let her mind swim in the swirl of past sweat and cheap cider. It sank through sentiments of longing, flushing her face with blood that seemed to be pumped warm for the first time.

Her reverie was interrupted by the beeping noise coming from the other room. She cleared her throat, shaking off the foams of nostalgia off the top of her brain and rose to stand in all her arcane composure. Quickly enough, through the clicking beads, emerged her next client. The rugged looks wouldn't suggest this was a man who would indulge in the questionably esoteric and debatably mystical, but here he stood.

"Liam, always on time, my dear man," Madam Zoray said, with her signature stare and vague tone of voice.

The man grinned at Zoray with a stubble-covered face; grey, white and black hairs spread around like territories in a game of Risk. Zoray motioned her hand to the table in a long-practised way.

"Cheers, luv, been a while," Liam said as he casually clumped down onto the seat. "Just the usual checking of the future and all that, yeah?"

"Indeed, I expected that from you," Zoray replied as she sat herself down having a go at looking regal. "I also have a feeling there is something else..." There was always something else, she thought to herself.

"That mind of yours," Liam shook his index finger at her. "Can't let anything past it, can I? Too right, you are."

She beamed shrewdly.

"See, my boss's been acting real strange lately, you know," Liam continued. "So I'm left wondering if there's any change coming my way."

"I can definitely enquire, for all these things can be seen beyond the veil," she said, proceeding with her usual gimmick; hands resting peacefully on the table, palms up, and a secretive squint down to closing her eyes.

For the third time today, she looked for that figurative switch in her mind that allowed to trigger her narcolepsy and then to dive into her own vivid unconscious. Soon enough, her face dropped onto the pillow like a bag of bricks onto a bouncy castle. She suddenly saw herself in the mirror, right in the back room of her mystical shop. She was much younger, then, and had a scrappy look set on her eyes – she recognised it, it was when

she first opened the place. It had taken a bit of work and a pretty penny, but she cobbled up together with shades of purple and all arcane-like icons and symbols so that whoever were to enter the place, they'd know exactly the sort of place they found themselves in. She walked over excitedly to the front room, the smell of fresh paint and incense mixed in the air like a blend of exuberance and inebriation. The throw over her chair was brand new, and the symbols on it almost sparkled yellow; the beads curtain shimmered and spread the sunlight through the doorway like crystal prisms. Her heart thumped in anticipation for her first appointment – she was insecure, but she had trained herself to exhaustion on how to access that toggle within her and drive her consciousness into the dusk of her awareness. It was all about simulating the circumstances that caused her episodes – most commonly, a burst of excessive excitement would do the trick. So, in order to make that happen, she learned how to convince herself, even if for just a brief period, that there was a reason for her to be exceedingly elated. She mastered it quickly enough, and, combined with her knack for reading people's reaction and her eloquence that made feverous preachers burn with envy, she fell naturally to the position of fortune teller.

Her first client was about to come. She saw a shape coming through the front door, causing the beads to click and clack at each other. It was a big, square shape – the word burly came across her mind. The face, however, was obscured by high collars of a trench coat. She thought it odd, since it was summer and not at all cold, and noticed the brown hair with grey ones scattered all over that mysterious head. Spiky hair, too, strangely enough, like an overgrown hedgehog. It did little to evoke any reactions from Madam Zoray, until the mystery man searched through his pockets, revealing a shiny silver pen and a blank form with her name on it. Her apprehension dropped down into a burst of rage, which saw her raise her voice at the man until she collapsed into a naturally occurring narcoleptic fit.

Also for the third time today, Madam Zoray awoke from the impromptu sleep like a dog hearing the jingle of door keys. This journey was somewhat taxing for her – she felt out of breath for a minute or so. She re-established her poise, attempting harder to camouflage any evidence of flustering from her part. Liam was sitting across from her, leaning back very casually on the chair – also attempting to hide any flicker of inner commotion.

“So, eh, Madam,” Liam said, breaking the thick silence. “What'd you see?”

“I, well,” she faltered, but carried on. “The universe spoke to me once again, guiding my eyes through the rapid soliloquy that is the fate of all living things.”

Some of those words didn't seem to go too far into Liam's mind, but he was used to the sort of lingo Zoray threw at him. It didn't seem to bother him much, as he kept coming back. She read Liam's general stance, which screamed lackadaisical, and quickly connected a few words together.

“Liam, my dear man, there is naught a thing to fear, for your career line is on a straight path, deviated by little else than your own will. Head true, and you shall remain satisfied.”

He leaned forward, resting his arms on the table.

“So you're saying that my boss ain't looking to fire me, is that right?” he said with a squint.

Zoray nodded in a sapient way, hoping the gentle gesture would suffice. It did.

“Right you are, then, Madam,” he said, leaning back again on the chair, allowing a smirk to curve up to the side of his face. “As always.”

They quickly concluded their business, with Liam handing Madam Zoray a small bundle of folded ten pound notes. And, as usual, she didn't bother counting, smoothly pocketing under the many folds of her dress. Liam went on his way with a “Ta” and a nonchalant wave.

It was getting close to noon. The noise from the street became a mush of clicking shoes, loud peddlers and the city buses roaring about like hungry lions. Madam Zoray squinted through a hole in the faded purple curtains. The world seemed to be moving in a pace separate of her own, not slow motion but something different, like two bowls of custard being poured down off a roof, one thick, one thin. The silhouette of a man in a trench coat cast a shadow in the back wall of her mind, making her look straight through the outside world. Her eyes glazed over under the weight of her furrowing brow, as she bit her lower lip. She felt thirsty, the sort of thirst only brought over by a long speech, a walk under the desert sun, from the nervous certainty that something inevitable was about to happen, or from a long night of drinking. She was sure that it was only one of those things. She went

to the back room once again and put the kettle on. A calm breeze was blowing through the cat flap. Zoray opened the door to the back garden while the electric kettle whirred and hissed. The noise from the street seemed quieter there, fading into the noon sky. The sun was now shining sporadically, whenever it could flank the travelling clouds.

Then, there was a beep. Madam Zoray wasn't expecting a customer for another hour or so. She walked past the quietly wheezing kettle, which was still working its way up to a boil. Before she opened the door to the front room, she stopped and adjusted her posture to match the presence she always wanted to project. She waited to hear the clicking of the beads before flinging the door open in one swift move.

"Welcome, my dear," she started, as she stepped firmly into the room. "What can I he-"

She collapsed onto the carpeted floor, succumbing into a deep attack of narcolepsy. As her mind swirled around the drain of her unconsciousness, the last image she saw, the man who walked in, seemed to stand staunchly in the forefront of her mind's eye. A figure wearing a trench coat.

### 6.3. Critical Commentary

Through “episodic memory”, we are able to revisit specific episodes of our past that have been etched in our memories, often for a long time, whereas “semantic memory” is the system that “is assumed to store accumulative knowledge of the world” (Baddeley, 2015, p.14). And, as analysed earlier in this thesis, revisiting previous knowledge and memories (both episodic and semantic) through “working memory” allows us to perform complex tasks and solve potential problems.

In a system that combines these elements, to varying degrees, Endel Tulving (1985) coined the term “mental time travel”. Ultimately, it is a system behind the human ability of using past experience to predict the future: “we remember what has happened before and use this to imagine what is going to happen next, and plan accordingly” (2015, p.158). That is, this ability informs us with previous knowledge so that we may make decisions based on this. Also called “chronesthesia”, it was first described by neuroscientist David Ingvar (1985), who is considered a pioneer in neuroimaging. Because of this, this system was the subject of a significant amount of research through neuroimaging (Schacter et al, 2007, p.657). Tulving also claimed that the ability of “mental time travel” is uniquely human, even though there is a considerable amount of research being done to determine if non-humans have this ability as well. What is particularly unique regarding this approach is that, as opposed to the sole focus on the past, as most of memory research has done, “mental time travel” also takes into account the present and the future; the circumstances one may be facing at the moment, for example, may be led towards different resolutions depending on the past experiences. This differs from the focus of “working memory” in that “working memory” focuses on the system that enables us to make these decisions and create new memories; while “mental time travel” is the ability of combining elements of the three theories mentioned above.

Most of the tests done with this process have been done under fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging). This is a particular way of using an MRI scanner, focusing on the shift of blood flow in the brain, which indicates the parts of the brain that are being used. There have been studies that tested patients by giving them particular memory cues, such as:

In one study Shacter et al. asked their participants to recall a series of specific episodes, one might be meeting Anna in Harvard Square, another, losing your keys at the cinema. Testing took place under fMRI, and was followed by the request to combine two of these episodes into a future scenario, imagining, for example, losing your keys in Harvard Square. They found the same areas of the hippocampus activated in both the initial recollection and in the subsequent creation of a future scenario, a process which also involved frontal lobe activity, suggesting the need for executive processing, presumably involving working memory, to achieve this recombination. (Baddeley, 2015, p.158)

The evidence that the way the brain works with the planning for the future supports the importance of these recollections of specific episodic memories, even in an imagined scenario. Despite the fact that this does not apply for the two stories, it is relevant to explore this aspect of “mental time travel” as it describes the complexity of this system. As discussed earlier, the nature of the “chronesthesia” experienced by the protagonists in both stories is one of self-awareness, not necessarily dealing with their future but more concerned with their present.

It is relevant to point out that an fMRI study done related to “chronesthesia,” led by Sean Polyn, an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Vanderbilt University, worked in a similar way to Herman Ebbinghaus’s syllable tests, with the assistance of modern technology. The test was conducted with twenty participants between eighteen and thirty-five years of age, where, under an fMRI scanner, they were given lists of names of common objects and animals. Then, they were asked to classify the words into categories (such as inanimate or animate, big or small). Finally, they were asked to recall the words in order, after a short period of time. Through this test, they discovered the parts of the brain related to this sort of mental processing, as well as the strength of the simple words themselves in the memory of each participant. In other words, by giving the participants these lists, some words had more significance to some participants than others. Therefore, when those words triggered some sense of “mental time travel” in the participant, which was identified via the brain scans, their recollection was more accurate – not only the word itself, but the category and place on the list.

Endel Tulving, in a chapter in the book *Principles of frontal lobe functions* (Stuss and Knight, eds., 2002), sought also to discern what may be perceived as types of “mental time travel” and what may be functions of it. In other words, he wished to clearly identify the

differences between the actual process of “mental time travel” and processes that may utilise “mental time travel” but do not represent it. He firstly describes certain “behavioural and cognitive (mental) activities that clearly depend on chronesthesia but are not identical with it” (Tulving, 2002, p.314). These are more simplistic activities such as reminiscing about the past, daydreaming or making future plans, in a more casual manner. Tulving establishes that “chronesthesia” is a kind of consciousness that “expresses itself in individuals’ awareness of the temporal dimension of their own and others’ existence and that makes thinking about subjective time possible” (2002, p.313), which may differ from other sorts of consciousness – such as the forms of consciousness that children possess, some shared with adults, but, according to Wheeler et al. (1997), children up to 3 or 4 years old do not have the ability of “mental time travel.” There is an on-going debate whether this ability is exclusive to humans, but it is not pertinent to this particular analysis.

The first story of this set that utilises “chronesthesia” as the theoretical foundation, “The Hound”, follows the rehearsal of a musical trio that consists of Stan, the protagonist, and his band mates Don and Jim. As mentioned before, the tone of this story is lighter than the others featured in this thesis, with humorous similes and light-hearted descriptions of the characters and their circumstances. The protagonist is nicknamed “The Hound” as a direct slight to his physical appearance and poor olfactory sense – this was done as a play with the sensory inputs that one may expect of an exaggerated character such as Stan. This play culminates with the fact that it is not the sense of smell or taste that triggers Stan’s memories, but his auditory sense. The story takes place mostly in a pub, where the trio are having their first rehearsal with their newly formed musical group. Though there is a flashback to their first band meeting, it is not exactly an element of “chronesthesia.”

After the trio establish their musical gimmick – playing theme songs from television shows – they start off with practising the theme for *Only Fools and Horses*, a British show that started in the 1970s. It is at each song practised that triggers Stan’s memories, taking him back to the time of encoding of these memories. At first, the purpose of these travels is unclear – the character himself struggles to rationalise what he revisited. This first song brings him back to a point in his childhood, a seemingly irrelevant context where he sat at the family room watching that show, while eating toast and sipping bland tea. He is thrown back to this moment as the groundwork for the memories that were to surface for him



further in the story. Elements of his working-class upbringings are also elicited, as well as some fundamentals of Stan's personality. The memories that are evoked through the songs come as a surprise to him, along with the Proustian sensations that are prominent in those memories. This implies that these memories may have been "forgotten" by Stan, left in his unconsciousness until this moment of recollection.

Stan's memories are strong examples of the process of "episodic memory", complemented then by the other aspects of "chronesthesia". The next episode, brought forth through the *Cheers* (1982) theme song, takes him to another earlier period of his life when he was injured playing football. Again, in a Proustian style, this triggering evokes other memories of the circumstances that surrounded the moment of encoding – watching the television programme's opening credits – and recalled the cognitive environment related to that episode. Once again, this memory serves the purpose of laying the foundation to the ultimate recalling for Stan; a memory episode that is relevant to his place in life. The injury was the one fateful event at that time that caused him to be at home, watching that show, and it also alluded to his poor physical shape.

The next memory also alludes to Stan's shape, as well as his first perceptions of the people around him. Through playing the theme song for *Dad's Army* (1968), he is transported back to his grandfather's front room, where the decadent decoration considerably differs from Stan's grandfather. The order that the episodes are conjured is not chronological, with this particular episode referring back to his earlier childhood. There is an element of fear in Stan, sitting quietly while watching his grandfather sitting close to the television, which becomes another personality-defining characteristic, as more of his background is explored. The years of the television shows also match the periods he travels to, hinting at the age of the character himself. This is seen with the memories from the following song, the *Friends* (1994) theme song, as Stan recalls a moment where he is older than in the previous episodes. Another decadent moment, this time only featuring him and several empty beer cans, alluding to his emotional state at the time. It is in this episode that Stan's memories start to hint at the core of the narrative – the handwritten letter.

The letter becomes a thread that links Stan's past to his present – his mental time travels are connected to the development and understanding of his current situation, regardless if he wanted to or not. This is further developed within the following episode,

where the theme song for *The Young Ones* (1982) takes Stan to another brighter pub, surrounded with teenage friends where the theme song plays in the background. This suggests that it was the moment of encoding once again, where that song was input to his mind and eventually stored into his LTM. However, that first memory ends up evoking a later memory that is closer to the episode revisited by the previous song. Once more, Stan is in a poorly-kept room, with beer cans littered around, and he is drawn to that handwritten letter. This moment draws out more elements that make up that letter and the reason for its relevance in the narrative. The hints are not subtle, but seem to be to Stan himself – it has been pointed out that he is not the possessor of great intelligence.

The facets of “mental time travel” present within Stan’s recollections involve mostly “episodic memories”, with “working memory” coming into play less related to learning how to play the songs, but to the moment of original exposure to the song. It is a deliberate exploitation of the theories in order to establish Stan’s mental processes. Towards the final moments of the story, the name “Eleonora” is revealed to Stan, who seems to have blocked it out of his consciousness, taking him by surprise. It was done so as a component of a quasi-traumatic memory that he had cast aside within his mind, repressed after those darkened days of alcohol abuse that culminated with a heart attack: “and immediately ran a hand over the scar in the middle of his chest.”

Stan’s last trip down his memories comes with the theme song from *Happy Days* (1974). It transports him back to a school dance, his nervousness emphasising the emotions he was feeling then. This scene is the culmination of the story, reaching the end of the thread set up by the letter that was brought up in a previous episode. With his approach to the girl called Eleanora, the story concludes with the noting of her handwriting on the envelope. It was a significant moment for Stan, and it was recorded within his memory tied to vivid feelings that remained within his LTM. “The Hound” is made up by Stan’s revisiting of episodes of varying emotional importance, all representative of his ability of “mental time travel.” The different episodes and the elements that were conjured, considering the aspects in the moment of encoding, such as the emotional space in those episodes where the character was abusing alcohol, as well as the moment of retrieval – the repressed memories conjured through the songs. They also represent distinctly, to reiterate, the nature of these “episodic memories”, “such as recollecting where and when one learned

that Wellington is the capital of New Zealand” (Suddendorf et al, 2007, p.301), as opposed to the more pragmatic “semantic memory,” which is the actual knowledge of that fact.

Similar aspects of “mental time travel” are also explored in the other story in this chapter, “Madam Zoray.” It is a story that is similar to “The Hound” in tone, with some comic elements playing with the mystic and metaphysical aspects of the belief in fortune telling. As mentioned above, the protagonist of the story, eponymously called Madam Zoray, is a fortune teller who uses her own narcolepsy as a device to convince her customers of her non-existent future-seeing power. This choice was not only made for comic reasons, but also for the purposes of accessing the character’s memories. Using the medium of dreams allows the story to elicit those episodes of “chronesthesia” based on the cues of each of her customers. Those cues, though seemingly unrelated, serve to connect each memory event with each other, like the letter from “The Hound”, to unveil a larger scene of Zoray’s past. By following themes in these stories, it allowed me to develop their narratives in a progressive way, which gives the scenes consistency and cohesion.

The environment set in “Madam Zoray” is ripe with components to enhance a cognitive environment that strongly relates to the expectations of their clients – all the “cryptic paraphernalia” giving the room a measured feel to correspond to what Zoray imagines that her clients might expect. Once again, this was done knowingly to both correlate to Zoray’s ideas, but also to give the character the sort of persistent environment in which memories may be recalled and revisited. The first of her memory episodes, however, starts off away from such environment, but based off the prompt from her first customer of the day – Joan Parkinson. This first customer, with the desire of peering into her future regarding her current relationship, gives Zoray the cue that triggers her first “mental time travel” in this story. As it is explained later, she is able to cause a narcoleptic seizure at will, an ability she trained herself, and it is during those short bursts of sleep that she revisits her past. In this first occasion, she sees herself in a funeral service, and it is unclear for whom it is except that it was someone familiar, as well as a scene outside a police station. The implications are vague, but they elicit two characters that have relevance in her past – her son, who was untimely killed accidentally by the man from the police station.

Zoray is not given enough time to consider the memories she recalled during the first session, but the following session recalls another event of great emotional impact on her – a

passionate escapade in broad daylight at a park. It is implied that this is the father of her dead child, through once again the vague implications that her dream state discloses. The cue coming from her customer Sam relates to Sam's complex pregnancy situation, evoking from Zoray once again memories related to her son – the moment of his conception – as well as the fleeting affair from her past with a man called Adrian. The memory of her son becomes established as an important link between these episodes that are recalled. Even though she is not presented to be terribly affected by these events, they are ones that carry emotional weight that highlight their importance for the character's consciousness.

The next client, a man called Liam, engages Madam Zoray in another incursion into her past. This time, her memories bring her to the moment of her opening the fortune telling business. The man in a trench coat and spiky hair comes in with a pen and a form for her to sign, which causes her to fall into a rage and subsequently fall asleep. What this memory scene represents is the moment when Zoray discovered the terrible fate of her son – the man was a police officer who finally found her in order to get her signature for official documents regarding the processing of her son's body. Once again, here is another link within the chain of emotionally significant events from her past that are evoked through the story. The cue given by Liam, his worry about any potential changes in his coming future, was interpreted by Zoray's unconscious into recalling that incredibly impactful event. This is also the last memory event that she revisits, culminating with the resurgence of that same man in a trench coat in the present day. His appearance causes Zoray to fall once again into a narcoleptic seizure.

Some of the memory events described through the story are intentionally vague, in order to leave room for wondering by the reader, as well as not being necessary to express the processes of "mental time travel" done by the protagonist. It is implied that she understands the context of the scenes that are summoned; differently from "The Hound", these memories were not necessarily actively repressed nor relegated to her unconscious. As described before, the cues given by her clients serve as triggers to call forth the scenes. It is through them that the reappearance of the man in a trench coat was a surprise to round off the story in an inconclusive way – Zoray could have not predicted this outcome, even with her constantly using her ability of "chronesthesia." This is done as a jocular interpretation of both the fortune teller theme as well as the concept of "mental time

travel” as a way of predicting the future. The plot is driven forward solely by the memory events of the protagonist, with the abrupt climax purposely highlighting the irony of the character’s profession.

The biggest literary influence behind the development of both these stories is English author Terry Pratchett and his works within the *Discworld* series. More specifically, the novels *Pyramids* (1989) *Guards! Guards!* (1989). Pratchett was a prolific author, arguably best known for the series mentioned before (Eldridge, 2015), which consists of over forty published fantasy novels, mostly comical and satirical works. His prolific publication record makes him a relevant reference to these stories, as well. His influence on “The Hound” and “Madam Zoray” does not stretch into the fantasy genre as much as his use of language in the delivery of his comic discourse. It was not the purpose of any of the stories developed for this thesis to fall into genres and similar categories, therefore the limits of Pratchett’s effect on these two stories lie within the discourse. The characters are fanciful and exaggerated, a cornerstone of satire. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* (1968), he explores the concept of the grotesque and carnivalesque, which extends to satire. He suggests that satire is the distortion of the trivial, the deformity of the commonplace, in order to expose the ridiculousness of it all. According to Matthew Hodgart in *Satire* (1969), the role of a satirist is to expose this complexion of human society, but not necessarily present any sort of solution – the satirist is part of the problem. Although “The Hound” and “Madam Zoray” could not be classified as satire, they both feature components of satire in order to deliver its humorous tone. It is done through absurd similes and metaphors (“the tiles on the kitchen looked like someone had killed a unicorn”), as well as the characterisation of both protagonists.

Both Stan and Madam Zoray are virtually caricatures of types of people and professions (a regular pub goer in Stan, and a fortune teller in Zoray). They were depicted in this manner in order to differentiate their circumstances from what a reader might expect when encountering characters that might fall into an archetype or character convention. Their hyperbolic traits, Stan’s physical shape and poor olfactory sense and Zoray’s narcolepsy and opportunistic mentality towards her work, aid that goal of portraying these characters under a distorted light. By making them outside reality, they become more real instead – their attributes become more vivid, easier to spot and relate to. Their

circumstances also emulate parts of an offbeat nature. Stan's musical trio and the theme they chose to perform is done as a parody of musical ensembles –inspired by a visit to a local pub in Southampton, where a group of ukulele players were performing. One of the players, who was particularly quiet and concentrated on the music sheet in front of him, provided me with the image for Stan, which I chose to further extrapolate and develop the character with those extravagant features. Zoray, on the other hand, plays with the cliché of a confidence trickster, someone who thrives on taking advantage of the goodwill and faith of her clients. The character herself does not believe in her trade, deliberately deceiving her customers while using her trickeries to convince them of her supernatural abilities. She possesses traits that are also exaggerated, such as her narcolepsy, enhancing the distortion of her essence.

Of course, the aspects of satire present in “The Hound” and “Madam Zoray” are limited to the characterisation and the uses of language. The unconventional similes used in both stories represent the atypical discourse in order to establish a humorous tone. Freud suggests that laughter is caused by the unexpected, then using the language in an unexpected way lends itself to the comic spirit of the stories. In “The Hound,” the choice for television theme songs also adds to the development of the tone – all the television series that are featured in the story are comedies. This inserts into the story the cultural reference and context that complements the style of the story, as well as priming the readers with a notion of the reality in which the characters are present. Each of the songs played refers to different periods of television history with the common thread of comedy. The plot behind the narrative may not be comic itself, but the way the story reaches its apex is through the playful language and tone.

Meanwhile, in “Madam Zoray”, the linguistic components of satire are explored both in the character's own discourse, and indeed in the spatial environment of the story. Zoray's approach to her trade, deliberately deceiving, employs a type of clichéd discourse – the fantastical ways she describes her experiences in future seeing (“I have... seen what the universe has planned for you, it communicated to me through the interconnected knots that tie us all together”). Once again, exacerbation is the key characteristic behind her discourse; an over-the-top rhetoric serving the purpose of convincing the willing customers and to demonstrate the ridiculousness of her dialectic. Moreover, the physical environment of her

working area, that front room overdone with mystical symbols and other knick-knackery, heightens the façade that she wishes to establish in order to camouflage her fraudulent intentions towards her clientele.

These two stories had their core theoretical foundations firmly based in the concept of “mental time travel,” where they were utilised to exploit and expand on the theories in a creative practice. In order to do so, these theories were also mixed with other narrative elements in order to produce the stories in a fluid manner. The memory scenes featured in both stories served their purpose of depicting the clear components of “chronesthesia” and deliver plots that were driven forward internally by the characters’s memories as opposed to plots driven by narrative forces – external conflicts or other storytelling tropes. They also consist of the final two stories of this thesis, so traces of theories considered in previous chapters were also present and briefly noted in this subchapter. Adding the elements of satire, even though they are not satirical stories by any standard, they became works that deliver the consistency of the underlying theories, and also present narratives that transcend genre and discourse precepts.

## Chapter Seven – Final thoughts and Conclusion

With seven stories based upon varied theoretical approaches to the subject of human memory, as well as different literary sources of inspiration, this thesis puts forth a unique method to write creatively while using strong scientific support as a crucial aspect of the research. This thesis accomplished this task by emulating the behind-the-scenes processes expressed by the theories of human memory in the form of the narratives present in each story. It is important to assess the method through which this was reached, both from the research side but also from the practical aspect of this development, because it is the combination of both that allows this thesis to be developed and to deliver its unique approach to the field of Creative Writing. It is a singular contribution to the field as the creative process behind this collection of short stories is documented and detailed, recognising the limits and exploitations of the theories researched.

At first, like most creative endeavours, the concepts regarding human memory seemed too numerous to be considered fully within the abstraction that is the creative process. However, by making a deliberate distinction between the theories and using (albeit not exclusively) one main theory as the conceptual framework of the creative short stories, the task became more logical. After all, the ramifications behind the creative process must be considered in order to fully evaluate the rationale and the effectiveness of the application of the research onto the development of these short stories. The concern is to go beyond the “purpose of art”, from a philosophical point of view, and to understand how the originality of these pieces ensures their significance within the field of creative writing.

As mentioned above, the true distinction between these pieces of creative work and others that were analysed and acknowledged here, is the genuine aim to construct short stories with a strong basis in the scientific research and the summaries of their findings; the application of these understandings are how these short stories stand out in terms of their consistency and innovation. By exploring different theories with each story, the scope of this thesis is unique, taking into account not only the varied theories, but the separate narrative styles inherent to each story. The critical commentaries presented after each story throughout the thesis provide ample evidence of how the research informs the creative



production, as well as the understanding of these theories in the techniques through which they are applied.

It is from the first chapter of this thesis, concerning some of the earlier (chronologically speaking) theories, particularly the concepts proposed by Henri Bergson, that the structure is established, which remains constant throughout the thesis. Understanding and scrutinising Bergson's interest in the metaphysical was the intrinsic part of the story written in that first chapter, "The Haze". The story transcends its narrative in order to investigate and portray the elements of the Bergsonian mind and its quasi-spiritual place, away from the decidedly real brain. The result is a story that is accordant to the theories surrounding the topic of the mind, expanding their interpretation into a narrative format. The Bergsonian theory is not expressed literally within the narrative, but the framework behind the logical application of the theory is evident by the context within which the narrative is represented. In other words, it is like watching a marionette show – the strings are there, but it may not be obvious to the audience who is moving the dolls. The "pure memory" of the character-narrator comes through the memories that seem to take form from nothing, the matter-less space where his consciousness inhabits after his violent death. The influence from Machado de Assis's novel, *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, is also alive between the lines of "The Haze", as the voice of a "defunct author", the author that happens to be dead, is echoed by the character-narrator in this first short story. Braz Cubas is more derisive, however, than the nameless character from "The Haze", but his otherworldly experience informs the latter of an aspect of the afterlife that may be explored – the realm of the memories. It is there that the Bergsonian approach flourishes, supporting this story's delivery of the narrator's memories through the mystery of physical death.

It was not by coincidence that the first chapter of this thesis used an early theory of human memory as the main theoretical subject. Through the research for this thesis, it became clear that there were advances in the study of human memory that were built upon earlier approaches, as it is logical for any other field of scientific studies, such as Ebbinghaus's testing of Aristotle's notion of association. It also became clear that, because of this, the theories are not exclusive of each other; therefore the concept behind each story would also be influenced by the theories researched previously. That is, as this first story's main influence was Bergson's approach, the following stories naturally follow in

expanding the framework to embrace details from theories that were the focus of preceding chapters. Of course, this influence varies in extent from chapter to chapter, but it is inevitable that this crossover happens, as the construction of the knowledge base for this thesis is neither compartmentalised nor it is linear. As the thesis progressed from one chapter to the next, it is possible to determine, either expressed in the elaborations presented in the critical commentary section of each chapter, or by its implied presence, which theories may have been used to establish the argumentative groundwork that helped form each story.

In the second chapter, the thesis takes another progressive step into another theory, once again observing some sort of chronological order in the introduction of the theories. In the second chapter, the main theoretical point that supports the story “On Wheels” is that of “associative memory”. Now, even though the notions of association are referred all the way back to Aristotle, on his essay *On Memory and Reminiscence*, the more recent scientific theories were consolidated in the early twentieth century. With the experiments of Hermann Ebbinghaus and Georg Müller, as well as Frederik Bartlett’s approach and the further forays into association, the story “On Wheels” was constructed using the foundations of these theories. The associative elements in this story are rich and their use is noticeable within the story – especially the shift from involuntary association towards the more voluntary approach by the narrator of the story.

Interestingly enough, “On Wheels” was actually the first story produced for this thesis, as it employed and was inspired by some of the earliest theories that I came across during the early stages of my research. It was indeed written in its current order, but originally, the plan was to write each segment as an independent story. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, this plan proved to be less effective in the delivery of the narrative, as the desire to grow it into a somewhat conclusive scene made it difficult to succeed with the original idea. However, this was not understood as a setback, as I believe that it currently reaches the goal of exploring “associative memory” and the influences from Antunes’s *The Land at the End of the World*. The connections the narrator exposes from the involuntary triggers that conjure up the strong scenes of his past seem to perpetuate his condition to forever reliving his past. His future became something that he has no concern about – he seems to have given up in trying to live for a future, and condemned himself to living in a

present that is anchored to his past. The narrator's self-awareness of his state serves little to will him into changing his mentality, as he sees it as inevitable. Therefore, to serve this narrative journey better, it made more sense to progress with a story in a more logical and interconnected way, as opposed to self-contained sections. However, I left behind the traces of this original idea in the naming of each separate section – each of them after perhaps an overarching theme or the sensory inputs that triggers the memory in those segments.

One of the underlying themes, besides the associations with the tragic death of Cadeau, is the theme of war. War has been the subject of several works of art, from novels to cinema or television series. Due to the clichéd approach and interpretation of the experiences of war in other works, I chose not to delve too much into the memories of war in "On Wheels". It made more sense to solidify the character's obsession with his emotional past, purposely ignoring the potential effects that a war may have on a soldier. The range of the narrator's associations proved to be vast, therefore expanding into trauma territory would not have benefited the development of the narrative; if anything, such expansion could have hindered it by convoluting the character's focus with a wider scope of associations that is fit to a short narrative. Nevertheless, it was necessary to include at least some reference to the character's past as a soldier so to create more layers to his memories and unconscious.

It was inspired, as mentioned, by António Lobo Antunes's novel, whose main concern was the permanent imprint of his character's experiences in the Angolan war of independence. Like the character in "On Wheels", Antunes's nameless narrator seems to be frozen in time, recounting his impressions and sentiments to a voiceless character of a woman whom he meets at a bar. The language is the most powerful aspect of Antunes's novel, which constitutes the major influence on this story. The memories in the novel are the central point, like "On Wheels", overtaking the character's present and inhibiting him from living towards a future. "On Wheels", however, expands on this overwhelming nature of the memories into a narrative in which the character-narrator wills his memories to relive cyclically these memories through the never-ending association between the sensory stimuli he is permanently exposed to. This chapter supplies the thesis with another important theory that is intrinsic to others later employed, including the following story.

The next chapter, which consists of the story “Donno” and the role of the “cognitive environment”, continues the building up of the theories that employ the context in which memories are formed and encoded. This story exploits the role that the physical environment has on the formation of one’s identity, placing the eponymous character in a different set of circumstances that cause him to suffer a sort of amnesia. His memories gone from his consciousness due this displacement induce a lack of self-awareness in terms of what he understands himself to be. It induces him into a vacuum of personality, not able to recollect who he is and how he came to be at this particular physical space. The characters that surround Donno embrace him into their community, understanding that this occurrence is not the first one – they deal with it as they had done in their past. There is a mystery around their conditions, but they are not focused on that. This was done in order to maintain the narrative within the confines of Donno’s loss of his cognitive self. He yearns to find himself again, which is evidenced by the dream sequences that his unconscious delivers.

Donno is mostly a story about identity and self-awareness, with the theoretical support from the theories behind “autobiographical memories” which employs elements of “episodic memories” and “semantic memory”. “Cognitive environment” also complements these theories by recognising the importance of the context – physical and emotional – both at the time of encoding a memory, as well as recalling it. That is, the physical space or the emotional situation of a person at the moment of recording a memory has great impact in conjuring it back. This is can be depicted by the simple example of when I go to the kitchen from the living room, I may suddenly forget why I was going to the kitchen in the first place. Then, upon returning to the living room, I suddenly recall what I wanted from the kitchen.

Of course, in “Donno” this is exaggerated to the point where his memories escape him completely. His “autobiographical memories” prove to be impossible to be evoked, due to his complete removal from the physical space of encoding. Therefore, he cannot associate himself to any past experiences, which in turn causes him not to be able to relate to others in terms of his own self – his personality, his knowledge and his emotions. However, as an acknowledgement of previous theories (such as “memory of habit” and “working memory”), his proficiency as a carpenter is more easily accessible, even though he is not able to recall why he is able to perform this profession. The final twist in “Donno”,

with his return to the place of origin with Fletcher is to shift the focus onto Fletcher, who seems to be experiencing the same sort of amnesia that Donno suffered. Donno's memories, and therefore identity, floods back to him the moment he lays eyes on the familiar context of his village. Meanwhile, Fletcher's single-worded response implies that Fletcher's memories have, in place, secluded themselves once he was removed from his own familiar environment.

This story's particular approach to the importance of the physical space in one's identity was largely influenced by James Joyce's novel *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is a semi-autobiographical novel, which includes elements of Joyce's personal life. The particular episode that inspired "Donno" was when Stephen Dedalus, when removed from Dublin, seemed to lose his sense of self and identity, while his father's memories seemed rekindled when talking to some of his old friends in Cork. Once again, "Donno" exaggerates on this notion, summoning a greater effect on the protagonist, to the point that his identity is completely lost. It effectively delivers a narrative that explores and tests the limits of identity. Through the concept of "cognitive environment", added with "associative memory", the background of theories that inform further stories is developed further, where these two theories are elicited within the following chapter, as well.

The fourth chapter of this thesis features the story "The Workshop", which is set in a carpentry workshop in the Highlands of Scotland. It chronicles the life of a novice carpenter through commissions at different periods of his life. With each commission, his life experiences, which include both his professional and personal life, grow in depth and relevance to the protagonist. It ends up with the change of protagonists, in a way, as it brings the character of the carpenter's daughter into the focal point of the narrative. It is a story that relates to learning, as well as other theories mentioned before, such as "cognitive environment" and "episodic memories", but it focuses on another particular system: "working memory".

"Working memory" is a system that describes how humans are able to perform complex activities, by accessing their Long-term Memory (LTM) in order to deal with a task or process in the present. It combines elements of Short-term Memory (STM), LTM and learning. It is applied in this story particularly during the commissions built by the carpenter, in which the memories associated with the moments of learning are brought forward to his

consciousness. They are not voluntary recollections, and some of them are not directly linked to the moment of learning those particular skills, but, as it has been elaborated earlier about “associative memory”, the associations are linked more deeply. That is, at the moment of performing his profession, the carpenter recalls the moment of learning as well as the associations made at the moments of learning (such as the scene of him playing with a sword made out of a stick). It is an introspective story, where the dialogue is cast aside to focus on the “stream of consciousness” that flows from the protagonist’s mind. Additionally, it elaborates on previous theories with the inclusion and interpretation of “working memory” as such, applying the visual aspect of a physical workshop – like “working memory” describes a workshop table in our mind, where we use resources from our LTM in order to deal with an activity at the present.

Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* is the main literary inspiration for this piece, especially the character of Lily Briscoe. Like the protagonist in “The Workshop”, Lily Briscoe is also an artist who works with her hands. Painting is a physical act, like carpentry, and the physical movements are linked to particular memories – the “cognitive environment” is associated to the act of painting. The way Briscoe accesses the past through her painting is emulated by the carpenter, who relives his past through the carving and cutting of wood. Even with the character of the carpenter’s daughter, her memories are recalled when she takes the task of carving her father’s cross, with the implication that she will then carry on his legacy as a carpenter herself. It is not unlike the theme in “On Wheels”, acknowledging the cyclic nature of life – death can be another beginning. This story’s introspective essence serves to deliver the complexity of the “working memory” process, as well as describing a narrative that builds upon the memories of a protagonist’s labor.

With a more experimental story, the fifth chapter of the thesis includes “Fumes”, as well as the concept of “eidetic memory”. It is a narrative that exploits the concept of “eidetic memory”, influenced by Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “Funes the Memorious”, by describing the life of a character whose memory is infallible, with one caveat: when he writes his memories onto paper, he loses them forever. The conceptual cornerstone of this story came from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s claim that when he would relegate memories to paper, those memories were lost. Once again, this story exacerbates this perception into extremes. The character’s foil is the difficult adaptation into the life around him with such an

uncanny yet hindering attribute. Learning early that he needs to be rid of his memories in order to function on a daily basis, his parents and the people around him take several measures to assure his well-being. After all the difficulties faced by the character, from fanatics believing he is either the saviour or the doom of mankind, to lack of funding in order to finance research into his condition, it culminates with his release via fire - hence the title "Fumes".

I have mentioned this was a more experimental story due to the nature of its theoretical background. "Eidetic memory", as discussed earlier, is a controversial condition since it has not been effectively agreed upon its circumstances within the scientific community. Like mentioned before, it is argued that this condition does not even exist, while others require a more formal definition of what it means. Regardless of that, I decided to then exploit that and develop this story by once again going to the extreme of the condition, to push its boundaries. By giving the character an extreme version of "photographic memory", the story is able to explore the issues faced by the character's own limitations as well as the limitations of the society around him.

The society's behaviours in "Fumes" are heavily inspired by José Saramago's novels *Blindness* and *Death with Interruptions*. Both novels consider the impact upon society if certain supernatural occurrences were to happen – an epidemic of white blindness in the former, and the sudden absence of death in the latter. Going beyond the theories, "Fumes" exercises a "what if" scenario, estimating the reaction within the larger society as well as the effects on the people closer to the protagonist. It still holds a place in this thesis due to its experimental notion, as the purpose of this thesis is to employ different concepts of memory in the production of short stories, providing this story with a rare approach towards this overarching theme. "Fumes" utilises some of the theories presented earlier, but with a shift in focus onto "eidetic memory" and the circumstances in which the character is involved. However, the next chapter of the thesis returns to the use of several of the theories described above, as well as applying yet another approach to memory.

With "The Hound" and "Madam Zoray", the sixth chapter of this thesis is formed. Both stories explore the same theory, Endel Tulving's "mental time travel", in order to elaborate their narrative. They are also similar in style, being heavily influenced by the comic works of Terry Pratchett. The first story, "The Hound", depicts Stan, a man whose

physical abilities are not of note, who discovers an extraordinary ability to revisit his past while playing television theme songs. The narrative develops on his past, a past that he seems to have forgotten. His visits to his past help shape his current state, reliving key moments that have brought him to his present. It culminates with a pivotal moment of his past – the day he walked up to and talked to Eleanora, a character implied to be, from his previous memory scenes, a lover who had since left him.

Meanwhile, in “Madam Zoray”, the eponymous character leads a life of deceit. She is a narcoleptic fortune teller, who uses her condition to fool her clients into believing that she has indeed the ability to see the future. However, the cues given by her customers end up recalling memory events of her past that she had also relegated to her unconscious. Her “mental time travels” take her to other crucial moments of her past, including the encounter with a former lover, and, more dramatically, the death of her son. It is a story that faces the impacts of the associations from the cues received by her, conjuring then entire episodes of her past with the strength of an actual revisit. Bergsonian time is, once again, employed in both stories, the duration of the memory scenes were “real” – the characters’ experiences in those “mental time travels” feeling as long as they actually were.

Terry Pratchett’s satiric works were a major source of inspiration, especially in the narrative style of both these stories. The lighter tone and often humorous similes and exaggerated metaphors were delivered to immerse the narrative in an intensified environment to portray the disposition of both characters – with Stan’s poor olfactory sense, and Madam Zoray’s incapability of predicting her own future.

All these stories and theories communicate with each other through the common theme of memory, lending to each other substance and consistency in their foundations. The work with this thesis was intense and out of my comfort zone, as I am neither a trained psychologist nor a specialist in the field of Cognitivism. Nonetheless, my interpretations of these theories and their creative employment in the development of this collection of short stories were relevant to the field of Creative Writing, due to the acknowledgement to the scientific background of each approach. When it comes to the concept of memory, it is easier for Humanities fields to concentrate on the factual side of memories – the stories of the past, historical and personal events that had a significant impact in society as a whole.



This is why this thesis chose to focus on the theoretical, pragmatic side of human memory, in order to logically explore their inner workings and creative limitations.

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