



READING THE MEMORIES IN GLENN D'CRUZ'S FILM VANITAS (2022)

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ABSTRACT

Vanitas, a documentary film by Glenn D'Cruz, a Melbourne based Anglo-Indian, is a tribute to his late father Antonie Joseph 'Anto' D'Cruz. It falls into the corpus of Anglo-Indian works dealing with colonial nostalgia and postcolonial identity. One of the striking features of this film is its thematic focus on presenting a father-son narrative, wherein Glenn narrates his father Anto D'Cruz hardships and disillusionments as an Anglo-Indian immigrant in London in the 1960s and thereafter in Australia where he died in 1983. This film is an experimental cultural text that uses animation technology, old photographs and select objects of the dead father to present a memory narrative. This article examines their significance through a close reading of the film.

Keywords: colonial nostalgia, transgenerational memory, collective memory, hauntology, memorabilia, mourning

INTRODUCTION

Glenn D'Cruz's¹ 27-minute documentary film *Vanitas* (2022) unfolds the struggles of an Anglo-Indian father, now dead, from the perspective of his son. Though it is based on a personal narrative, the theme of displacement in the film has a wider connotation. It tells the story of a section of the Anglo-Indian community that emigrated to the United

¹ Henceforth, Glenn D'Cruz will be referred to as D'Cruz. His first name (Glenn) will be mentioned when referring to him as a little boy. To avoid confusion, Anto D'Cruz, father of Glenn D'Cruz, will be referred to as 'Anto.'

Kingdom and Australia after Indian Independence in 1947. The film highlights how their collective memory of being the progeny of a white European man (and an Indian woman) in colonial India was shaken by their experiences of facing socio-economic challenges in the Western countries. It presents a mosaic of personal and collective memories that haunt the narrator-cum-performer, D'Cruz. The present study looks into these memories to examine the causes and the effects of haunting.

The methodology used in this article is based on Memory Studies. Material memory and image analysis are used as methods to find out what aspects of Anglo-Indian heritage and history connect the memories of the father with that of the son. The overall tone of narration in the film is that of mourning. The article examines the association of memory and mourning with the cult of haunting in contemporary cultural texts. The analysis is divided into three subsections: The first, "The Title and the Storyline" explains the concept of 'vanitas' and discusses the narrative of the film text. The second, "Haunting Memories" looks into the theoretical precepts of hauntology and reviews its significance in the poetics of *ars memoriae* ("the art of memory"). The father-son narrative offers a scope for looking at the film from this perspective. The third subsection "Memorabilia as Mourning" analyses the belongings of the dead father as haunting metaphors that shaped the son's discourse on mourning in the film.

THE TITLE AND THE STORYLINE

"Vanitas," a Latin word, means 'vanity' in English. In art, "Vanitas" refers to a genre of painting, developed during the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, that symbolically emphasized the biblical thought of *memento mori* and transience of life. Many of these paintings display contrasting symbols of death and pleasure in one frame. "Vanitas" emphasizes mortality and critiques human vanity. On the canvas, these ideas were elucidated through the depiction of certain objects that belonged to the deceased person. They invoke the past to underscore its haunting effect on the generation living in the present time.

D'Cruz's *Vanitas* presents this haunting syndrome as a legacy that pervades the colonial past, the postcolonial present and even the future imagined through the posthuman lenses of technology. The borders between the temporal zones—past, present and future—in this auto/biographical narrative are problematised by blurring

identities of the father (the dead), the son (the living) and other unnamed characters. While animation technology is used to achieve this effect, certain objects that belonged to the father are represented to reify the central theme of the painting. They serve as objects of material memory and signify the haunting trope inherent in the aesthetics of 'Vanitas.'

The generic transformation of 'Vanitas' from painting, a visual form of still-life art, to the audio-visual motion picture takes place through the employment of hauntological dramaturgy. Unlike painting, cinema is a multi-media art form. In *Vanitas*, the film, use of minimal light and sound, choice of vintage colour schemes, close shots, voiceover, animation technology and editing techniques contribute to the intended haunting effect. Unlike the painting, its purpose is not just to remind people about the ephemerality of life. Instead, it disseminates a message on the triviality of ego in an essentially transient life span. It conveys the idea that ego is similar to vanity in many ways, for both create inter-personal barriers in communication.

D'Cruz begins his performance in the film by saying, "There is nothing more terrible, I learned, than having to face the objects of a dead man." In "*Vanitas: Hauntology and Object-Oriented Dramaturgy*," a chapter in his book *Hauntological Dramaturgy: Affects, Archives, Ethics* (2022), he states that this sentence is taken from Paul Auster's book *The Invention of Solitude* (1988). The 'objects' represented on the screen were once upon a time used by Anto (D'Cruz's father): camera, tape-recorder, cine-film projector, a tennis racket, ashtray, job applications etc. Besides, there are a few old photographs of him with his wife and children. In his article "Reflecting on *Vanitas: Archives, Affects, Ethics*," D'Cruz states, "In many ways these objects are the stars of *Vanitas*, for these objects were once embedded in the fabric of my family's everyday life and I use them to structure the film and tell a story about my perception of father's life and struggles" (*IJAIS*, 2022, p. 68). These objects, like the objects in the paintings, are marked by their archival as well as symbolical significances. While the objects in the paintings convey a general message, here, in the film, the objects dwell on personal memories.

D'Cruz's monologue on his father's obsessive fondness for English suits and his insistence on Glenn's wearing of formal suits since his childhood days sets the plot

into action. When Glenn was a boy of five or six years, he says his father, Anto, wanted him to look like one Lord Fauntleroy. The childhood photograph/picture of Lord Fauntleroy in faded black and white is shown in the film. From the name and the image of the boy in the photograph it is understood that the boy is the offspring of aristocratic European parents. Little Glenn did not like wearing suits and it appears this was one of the primary reasons for his disliking Anto. Anto, it may be mentioned, had his son's suits made from a tailor in London's East End. The suit is a potent symbol of Englishness. Anto's fondness for a proper English suit is suggestive of his anxiety for achieving Englishness.

A number of old photographs are exhibited from their family album in which both Anto and little Glenn are seen in identical suits. Even in his current avatar as the narrator in the film, D'Cruz is seen in blazer-suit, maybe one that belonged to Anto. He finds the suit uncomfortable and the tie stifling. Yet, he chooses to narrate the story wearing it. Here, the suit serves as a theatrical prop through which he objectifies his gripes and grudges against misrepresentation of the Anglo-Indian community in mainstream media. Though he begins the story on a personal note, the narrative takes an impersonal turn when he analyses the reasons behind his father's obsession with the English sartorial protocol:

It wasn't his fault. I blame the British and the Indians, too. Both groups despised us as much as they despised each other. Chee-Chees, blacky-whites, half-castes, Anglo-Indians, Midnight's orphans. The Brits hated us for giving human form to their rapacious colonial lust...The Indians saw us as British stooges Lackeys, hopelessly compromised by lax morals, alcoholism and music. We were party people. The men: 'good for nothing' ...The women: temptress, whores, easy lays. Eve incarnated. Trouser Snake charmers with painted faces, blush, mascara, lipstick. The suit guarded against such slurs by encasing its weaver in a magical mantle of respectability. (D'Cruz, *Vanitas*, 2022, 2:36-3:42 mins)

While D'Cruz describes the stereotypes to which men and women of the Anglo-Indian community were subjected, images of such stereotyped representations are foregrounded on the screen by showing a clipping of a party scene from *Julie*, a 1975-Bollywood film showcasing Anglo-Indian characters in post-Independence Indian society. The scene of their drinking, dancing and merrymaking are presented in the documentary through a sequence of quick cuts and edits to emphasise the absurdity of such an artificial representation. It also reveals D'Cruz's agonised response to such

a stereotyped representation of his fellow community members. An abrupt inclusion of the technically grafted comical-version of this scene from *Julie* (1975), a fiction film, into the non-fictional memoir film *Vanitas*, might appear like an interruption. Its function, however, is similar to that of pastiche in postmodernist satire.

In the documentary, the suit evokes personal memory as well as collective nostalgia of the colonial Empire that defined Anglo-Indian identity and culture. The shame and disgust of inheriting racial prejudices inherent in mixed descent identity is conveyed through D'Cruz's repulsiveness towards the 'suit' which is on the one hand, a symbol of colonial legacy and on the other hand, a stifling source of postcolonial anxiety. The anxiety was about retaining cultural identity and gaining economic stability as an Anglo-Indian immigrant in a postcolonial world.

D'Cruz's account of his father's emigration from India throws light on the genesis of this anxiety. Anto left for England on a ship in the early 1960s. In India he had a well-to-do job of a goods clerk in the Indian railways, but he wished for a better standard of living, which he hoped to find in London. He decided to send air tickets for his wife and son as soon as he had saved the required amount of money. En route, he lost his signet ring, made of gold, to a crafty goldsmith in the Middle East. This ring was not just a valuable possession but a souvenir of prestige. In the documentary, D'Cruz narrates the incident of its loss during the journey through juvenile sketches. It is obvious that he heard the story in his childhood and the naïve sketches in this context trace the course of transgenerational memory of displacement. A sense of loss is embedded in this act of remembrance, which increases manifold times as the narrative proceeds with D'Cruz's recounting of Anto's professional ventures in London.

The loss of the signet ring foreshadows the hardships and disillusionments that Anto would face in London. In spite of having qualifications and experience, he failed to find a clerical job in London. His first job there was that of a bus conductor, which he did for many years till he found an executive post in the Post & Telegraph Office. This job was an improvement on the previous one but it was a short-time engagement as they emigrated to Perth, Australia.

This second-time displacement was more disheartening than the first one. Anto couldn't find a decent job in any of the Postal, Telegraph and Insurance offices in Perth. Though the Australian government claimed to follow a policy of multiculturalism in executing its immigration policies, its implementation was limited to pen and paper. In the film, a sequence of old newspaper cuttings in zoom shot is shown as evidence for unsympathetic and ambiguous attitude of the government towards immigrants of mixed descent identity in Australia. The often racist outlook of white society in Australia seems to have prevented Anto from getting a job in any of the government offices. His desperate efforts in this matter are conveyed through the exhibition in the film of innumerable job application letters addressed to these offices and a sequence in animation showing racist attitudes of the employers. Their spokesperson is a jaw-crackling gatekeeper who appears as a giant and crushes Anto and other coloured immigrants under his large boot. In a wistful voice, D'Cruz reveals that continuous rejections dejected Anto. He took up the job of a night watchman at Mirrabooka bus station to maintain his family. Heartbroken as he was due to his disillusionments and failures, he died within a few years at the age of 53.

Like the identical characters in the train, discussed later, the gatekeeper's role is played by a replica of D'Cruz. Here, the *simulacra* effect created through animation technology is complex. Though 'simulacrum' literally stands for false images, the aspect of repetitiveness in presenting the same image (D'Cruz's face) in different contexts, shifts the attention from the original object (the living person) to the act of repetition and the impact it makes through imitation. Here, the Dracula-like jaw-crackling rendition of D'Cruz's face shows that modernity equipped by the power of technology can dehumanize a human. The role of animation technology in encoding spectral traits into the living object is also clear. Such a representation blurs the differences between the victim and the wrongdoer. It also challenges the objective notions regarding subject positions of individuals and groups, since the sameness tends to suggest that the victim or the Other is mimicking and mocking the wrongdoer/oppressor, who holds a powerful position in the society.

D'Cruz confesses that he hated his father during his lifetime and had also wished for his death to get rid of his scoldings and surveillance. He grudged that his father never appreciated his trendy appearance and unconventional ways. Anto's dislike for his

long hair and wayward teenage habits widened the rift between them. Much later, when D'Cruz realised his father's struggles, he admired the stamina with which Anto had encountered the trauma of being a coloured immigrant in the white societies he moved to. The realisation converted his sense of guilt into profound grief that stayed with him not just as a loss resembling a spot in the loom of time but as an inheritance of loss that flowed with time like chronic melancholia. The film ends with an apology letter addressed to his father. He confesses his mistakes and seeks forgiveness for being insensitive towards his father's struggles.

This letter completes the communion of their souls. The poignancy of this union adds a spiritual note to this personal experience. The ending aptly resonates with the epigraph, a quotation from Johann Friedrich Von Schiller, featured at the beginning of the film: "It is not flesh and blood, but heart that makes us father and sons" (*Vanitas*, 2022). The statement affirms that Anto's anguish is now transferred to D'Cruz and his response to his father's material possessions is an effort to re-discover the old anguish—the ancestral crisis—in a new time and space.

HAUNTING MEMORIES

The father-son narrative presented in this manner highlights the role of transgenerational memory and its connection with the motif of haunting. Unlike the painting 'Vanitas', its narrative frame looks beyond theological maxims and coincides with evocative insinuations in postcolonial narratives representing lost time and its trajectories in narrators' nostalgic recollections.

A survey of post-war literature and cinema shows that increased rate of exile and migration generated the trend of searching for roots and identity in the ruins of history (Dennis Walder, 2011, p. 2). Though history is officially assigned to present a discourse on the past happenings, the material ruins of these incidents carry forward their traces in times to come. In this regard, the linear course of history is challenged and the role of memory in disrupting its borderlines is obvious. Discussing J.G. Ballard's novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984), Dennis Walder states, "Like modernity, nostalgia is a way of thinking about time. And not only about time past, but time passing, and to come. The dynamic of memory is that its existence is always in the present, even as it struggles to reclaim the past: this means that it constantly acts as

a drain on the future, which cannot be imagined without reference to the past" (2011, p. 139).

In V. S. Naipaul's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1986), the unnamed narrator of Indian descent from the Caribbean islands, who migrates to England and settles down in Wiltshire, finds himself trapped in the mesh of memories. His reflections on the topographical objects in the English countryside are marked by his meditations on changing perspectives on immigrant identity and memories of displacement. The title of this novel is borrowed from a 1912-painting by Giorgio de Chirico. A piece of metaphysical Art movement, the painting underlines a play of evocative forms and surreal colours. It presents an ancient cityscape with two cloaked human figures in an ambiguous and uncanny frame. What is interesting in the context of the current discussion is to observe how different art forms negotiate with the eeriness of fleeting time by presenting a playful interaction between word, image and text. In a film text like *Vanitas*, this is done skilfully. Here, the demonstration of the father's belongings and different locations are complemented by the son's candid reflections.

It is clear from D'Cruz's narration that nostalgia can be a source of continuous discomfort. When he says that he had a 'fraught relationship' with his father as long as he was alive, it seems at one level the discomfort is an outcome of their estrangement. However, when viewed carefully, it is apparent that the memory of fraught relationship is a prism that reveals the differences in their responses to Anglo-Indian lineage and transcontinental migration.

Reflecting on the film, D'Cruz remarks, "I never understood a lot of things about my father: his obsession with sartorial elegance, for one, but I was specially confused by his desire to obtain a clerical job" (*IJAIS*, 2022, p. 66). As mentioned earlier, Anto died of heartbreak at not finding a clerical job. His ambition for a mere clerical post baffled his son, though, he often explained the importance of the job to D'Cruz. He started his professional career as a goods clerk in India and this might be one reason for his assigning a nostalgic value to it. The other reason might be his collective nostalgia for clerkship.

The word 'clerk' in the Indian register refers to *kerani* and has a special significance in the history of British imperialism in India. *Kerani* is a Persian word suggesting industriousness. Under British rule, it referred to the English-educated Indian middle-class gentry who helped the Britishers in administrative work. Due to their fluency in English writing and speaking, the Anglo-Indians were preferred as clerks and executives in the British offices. Gradually, with the spread of Western education in the Indian subcontinent, the number of English language-knowing people from other Indian communities increased. After Independence, the clerical posts that were earlier held by Anglo-Indians were gradually filled up by the people of other Indian communities. This increased unemployment and economic insecurity among Anglo-Indians in India. As a result, many members of the community, like Anto, chose to find better job opportunities abroad. To Anto, clerkship was a reminder of the heydays of Anglo-Indian community, and he symbolically cherished it throughout his life as a collective memory.

Almost four decades after Anto's death, D'Cruz made this documentary film. This gap in time underlines not only the long span of his bereavement but also the pressing weight of his suffering over the years. In this respect, D'Cruz's documentary may remind one of Lord Alfred Tennyson's elegy, *In Memoriam* (1850) which was published seventeen years after the death of the poet's friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, in 1833. The prolonged grief invaded D'Cruz's remembrance of his childhood and teenage years, thereby adding layers to his remembrance of things past.

Perhaps it is the long hiatus that transformed D'Cruz's memory (of his father) into "an act of mourning" (D'Cruz, 2022, p. 91). Though his memories of mourning saw light on the cinema screen in 2022, like Tennyson's elegy, it was scripted in his mind over the years, thereby addressing the hinges in the father-son relationship with mellowed introspection. The belatedness comes with the revelation that their fraught relationship, which he had earlier counted as a consequence of inter-personal differences, resulted from belonging to the collective consciousness of an ethnic minority group. So, it was not only his own memories of his father that troubled him but also his father's memories of experiencing life in India and the diaspora. Yet, the way in which they were affected by the collective consciousness differed in degree:

while Anto was enslaved by the memories of colonial lineage, Glenn was apparently free of it.

Anto's thoughts on life, as reminisced by his son, are presented in the film as having been inculcated in him by his rootedness in the Indian soil. This is conveyed by representing two identical characters—a dhoti-clad Indian and an Anglo-Indian in blazer and suit—in animation technology. Both of them resemble D'Cruz. Their inaudible conversation on a night train (Indian railways) casts a ghostly spell. Their look-alike facial features, which may be cited as an example of *simulacrum*, emphasize sameness and repetitiveness. This techno-creative method suggests that in this film, lineage, a crucial factor in transgenerational memory, is to be viewed not only in genetic terms of identity but also in terms of geo-cultural legacy.

Though the identity of the dhoti-clad character is not disclosed, it is understood that he symbolises the pan-Indian geo-cultural legacy of which the Anglo-Indian community is an integral part. In this context, the identity of the characters is not so important because they signify family memory which according to Maurice Halbwachs is a typical intergenerational memory (Erl, 2011, p.17). Explaining Halbwachs' views on intergenerational memory as a source for knowing a social collective, Astrid Erl observes:

Through a repeated recall of the family's past (usually via oral stories which are told at family get-togethers), those who did not experience the past firsthand can also share in the memory. In this way an exchange of living memory takes place between eye-witnesses and descendants. The collective intergenerational memory thus goes back as far as the oldest members of the social group can remember. (Erl, 2011, p.17)

Intergenerational memory plays a crucial role in the handing down of ancestral experiences to the succeeding generations. While achievements and affluence of the ancestors instil a sense of pride in the progeny, their failures and frustrations generate insecurities in the latter. The trauma of displacement, precarity and loss of cultural identity experienced by the first-generation of Anglo-Indian immigrants tend to haunt their children and grandchildren. This haunting may be described as an uncanny intrusion of the past into the present time. The present analysis looks into this uncanniness with reference to the philosophical concept of hauntology.

'Hauntology' is a portmanteau word combining 'haunt' and 'ontology.' The poststructuralist thinker Jacques Derrida coined it and employed it as a terminology to examine the spectral function of the past in his book *Spectres of Marx* (1994). Derrida's purpose of writing it is implied right at the beginning in the epigraph quoted from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "The time is out of joint" (Act I, Sc. v). In the first chapter, he quotes it in detail prior to his analysis of the opening statement of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels, 1848): "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of communism" (1994, p. 2). He compares it with the opening of *Hamlet*, where the apparition of the murdered king appears to the prince and haunts him demanding justice. The haunting sets the plot into action and gradually reveals the rotten affairs of the state to the prince.

Spectres of Marx was written as a response to American philosopher Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History?" (1989) that challenged the existence of communism and fascism in the post-World War II decades. The title of Derrida's book referring to Karl Marx (1818-1883), a founding figure of the communist doctrine, emphasises the 'ghostly' influence of Marxist ideal of equality of man on European society and culture in an age of liberal democracy. However, free market economy, the most pertinent outcome of liberal democracy, could not solve the problems of xenophobia, unemployment, underdevelopment, class conflict and poverty that existed for centuries. Consequently, though time moved ahead and political outlook of nations changed, communist goals cast a spectral influence on the new system.

In his article "What is Hauntology?" (2012) Mark Fisher (1968-2017), a British cultural theorist, discussed the spectral intervention of technology on popular culture, in music and cyberpunk cinema, since the 1970s. He observes that even Derrida was aware of it and in a way his hauntology discourse tallied with the techno-cultural discourses on tele-iconicity, *simulacra* and synthetic images (2012, p. 19). Fisher refers to a number of filmmakers such as Kubrick, Coppola and Scorsese who used the haunting effects in their films to convey the "collapse of time and space" (2012, p. 19). In Merlin Coverley's words hauntology "challenges our belief in the unbroken progression of linear time" and stands for temporal disjuncture and dyschronia (2020, p.11).

Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," a chapter in his well-known work *Writing and Difference* (1978), also upholds the idea of non-linear flow of time. His views on interpretation of words and production of meanings as expressed in this chapter, a seminal text on Deconstruction theory, correlate with the non-linear flow of memory in human beings. His concept of 'traces,' the absent part of the signs, is also relatable in the context of hauntology and its effectiveness in the construction of *memorabilia*. Memories drawing on the association of person/people now dead with certain objects are like 'traces' in a Derridean sense. These objects problematise the act of remembering by (dis)placing the living person's perceptions of the dead person's presence-in-absence and absence-in-presence in the roller-coaster of time. While doing that, memories re-create the *loci* ("place") where the people and the objects existed before they were a memory.

MEMORABILIA AS MOURNING

In *Vanitas*, the spectral effect of memory is manifested through representation of objects as well as through measured exhibition of places—the neighbourhoods and courtyards—in old video recordings and photographs. Regarding the objects, D'Cruz remarked, "In what follows, I will unpack the various stages of memorialisation I used to reckon with my father's ghost by focusing on the hauntological dimension of objects" ("Re-membering Anto D'Cruz," 2022, p.90). Select places, presented as sites of memory in this memoir film, widen its hauntological dimension. Family photographs presenting Anto and his wife (Glenn D'Cruz's mother) as a young and loving couple and video recordings presenting little Glenn and his sister playing with other children in the garden of their London home, speak of happy times. Contrary to these images, the ones presenting their house, garden and neighbourhood in Perth (Australia) are desolate, bereft of social interaction and childhood cacophony.

The images of family space and society in Perth highlight the 'absence' of all (human, non-human) objects, activities and sounds that were 'present' in the images of their residential life in London. The sharp difference between the contradictory images is suggestive of unhomely living conditions they witnessed in Australia. The nominal use of sound in these depictions intensifies uncanniness. On the one hand, it hints at inhospitable attitude of the Australian government towards coloured immigrants, and on the other hand, it highlights the shift in D'Cruz's perception of his surroundings as

he grew up from a little boy in London to an adolescent in Perth. Being a young child, he was probably unaware of the racist environment in London but he must have understood its overt and covert manifestations during his teenage years in Perth. The memories of his father that he accumulated in his childhood and adolescence continued to haunt him even in the later phases of his life. The film presents in its narrative scope the different stages of his memory gathering.

Over the years, as he walked through different roles of adulthood, D'Cruz's outlook towards the archive of his father's material possessions—the objects he used and left behind—underwent changes. The shifts in his perception of the past conforms to Aleida Assmann's views on the act of remembering:

Remembering is basically a reconstructive process; it always starts in the present, and so inevitably at the time when the memory is recalled, there will be shifting, distortion, revaluation, reshaping. In the period between the present action and future recall, memory does not wait patiently in its safe house; it has its own energy and is exposed to a process of transformation. ("Memory as Ars and Vis," 2011, p. 19)

Assmann describes this dynamic mode of memory in her discussion on *ars* (art) and *vis* (power, force). She says that history of *ars* goes back to the Roman tradition of mnemotechnics, a method for transforming memory from verbal to visual form (2011, p. 17). Its purpose was to "provide safe storage and identical reproduction of the relevant information" (Assmann, 2011, p.17). While 'ars,' mostly located in the rhetorical context, refers to the process of storage creation, 'vis' refers to the organic essence in memory that bestows on it an arbitrary force. Assmann explains this trait of 'vis' as follows: "This force can hinder recall, as in forgetting, or it can block it completely, as in suppression, but it can also be steered by an insight, a desire, or a new set of requirements, any one of which may lead to memories taking on a new form" (2011, p. 20).

In the 18th century, the 'vis' approach was more popular and acceptable than the 'ars' approach. Giovanni Battista Vico (1688-1744), an Italian philosopher and rhetorician, viewed memory as a psychological discourse that was in a way connected with imagination and common sense (Assmann, 2011, p. 21). According to Vico, this force is highly active during childhood (Assmann, 2011, p. 21). In *Vanitas*, a strong and active intervention of childhood imagination into the psychological space of adult

memory is manifested in D'Cruz's recollection of his childhood memories. In *Vanitas*, his use of juvenile sketches for tracking his father's *memorabilia* in his childhood memory presents the act of remembrance as an organic entity, echoing what George Eliot described in her 1861-novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*: "As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into memory: as her life unfolded, his soul long stupefied in a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness" (1996, p. 126). The given extract elucidating the bonding between Marner, the father-figure, and Eppie, the child, is significant for understanding the contribution of the child's perception of select objects around her to the cognitive re-construction of the past in adult memory. In *Vanitas*, D'Cruz's re-construction of his own childhood reconstruction of two important incidents—Anto's first trip to England and the loss of his signet ring—that he had heard of from his parents, is an innovative strategy of conveying the vulnerability in restoring parental memories.

Only select objects receive the status of *memorabilia* or souvenir. Anto's belongings are viewed as *memorabilia* in the film. An interesting aspect of this film is that it represents *memorabilia* of two kinds: one that has material reality and the other that is imaginary—the signet ring, for example. Little Glenn did not see it but had heard of it. Yet, after learning about the ring from his mother, it registered in his mind as an imagined material memory. He could re-view his father's character by recalling his childhood impression of the (imagined) ring. He states, "it recalls his pride, his ambition and his desire to craft a persona consistent with these personal qualities" (D'Cruz, 2022, p. 104).

D'Cruz is conscious of its imaginary status. He observes, "I have no clear idea about what my father's signet ring looked like, but the story concerning its loss conveys so much information about his character that it plays as equal a role in *Vanitas* as any of his material possessions that have survived and have become part of my inheritance" (D'Cruz, 2022, p. 104). The signet ring in this context adds a Derridean dimension to its function as material memory. Since materiality of this material memory is imaginary, it stands displaced and distanced from reality and time. Its narrative value as *memorabilia* is available in traces. Its significance is elusive since D'Cruz's thoughts

on it, like the evolution of 'meaning of words' as per Derrida's concept of *différance*, got deferred (postponed/delayed) and differed (changed) over the years.

Other notable *memorabilia* in the film are as follows: father's suit, camera, tape recorder, rosary beads, a tennis racket, a handwritten note on moral conduct, postage stamps that Anto gifted his son, cards, a car in which he had a serious accident one night while returning from work in Perth. D'Cruz's childhood days in London are presented through family album and video recordings. These objects help the viewers to figure out Anto's personality. The suit, the signet ring and the tape-recorder playing "Send me the pillow that you dream on," a song in Anto's voice, are presented as hauntological metaphors for invoking melancholia caused by D'Cruz's gradual acceptance of the flux that constituted their racial memory and immigration history.

The suit, an insignia of father's obsession with Anglo-Indian identity and colonial nostalgia in the documentary, is like the ghost that ontologically belongs to the realm of the bygone era, but it has the power to appear anywhere and anytime. This suggests what Mike Fisher referred to as "collapse of time." The intervention of *memorabilia* being repetitive, the suit exists as an atemporal entity, a haunting agent that possesses the power to present time as "out of joint." This idea is conveyed in the film through D'Cruz's appearance in one of his father's blazer-suits. Though he disliked suits, he uses this sartorial sign to build up his father-son narrative. While at the beginning, he reveals that this sartorial sign was one of the reasons behind their fraught relationship, later, he chooses to incarnate Anto's musician avatar as presented in an old photograph. He wears his father's shirt and hat while singing with his father's recorded voice. This gesture is a conscious effort to merge their identities. Here, the camera and the tape-recorder function as techno-tele means for attributing a hauntological aura to the personified performance.

The duet of the living son and the dead man's recorded voice manifesting D'Cruz's strong desire to embody his father's spirit, reveals the genetic connection between them. But the issue of genetic connection cannot be given sole priority in this context if one goes back to Schiller's words, shown at the beginning of the film: "It is not flesh and blood, but heart that makes us father and sons" (*Vanitas*, 2022). This enactment may be viewed as a theatrical method, a ploy, for creating *simulacrum* effect with

costume heirloom. This ploy aids in underlining resemblances between the two generations in D'Cruz's family or in an extended sense among all Anglo-Indians since the formation of the community in the 16th century. The gesture emphasises D'Cruz's conformity to Anglo-Indian culture and his effort to impersonate the postcolonial history that shaped the doubly hyphenated identity of Anglo-Indian immigrants in the diaspora. The act of dressing and singing like his father—a melancholic role play— may be interpreted as a personal rite for mourning. In his discussion on mourning and melancholia, Sigmund Freud observes, "In mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so" (2006, p. 313). In the documentary film, the objects serving as *memorabilia* symbolise the dead father as well as the death of D'Cruz's ego. In the last forty years, after his father's death, he seems to have realised that the crux of their 'fraught relationship' was their ego. This realisation, of course, was not instant. It was a gradual development that was guided by the 'vis' aspect of memory and eventually it transposed his resistance and non-conformity into self-criticism and guilt. Freud explains this kind of transition as follows:

In this way the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, which could now be condemned by a particular agency as an object, as the abandoned object. Thus the loss of object had been transformed into a loss of ego, and the conflict between the ego and the beloved person into a dichotomy between ego-criticism and the ego as modified by identification. (2006, p. 316)

Glenn's self-criticism is followed by his confession of insensitivity and ingratitude which he reads out from a letter addressed to the dead father. The letter exemplifies the surrender of his ego. It also objectifies his unconventional method of mourning as an atheist. He appreciates his father's courage to hold on to his principles even during tough times. He apologises for his selfishness and concludes by thanking his late father. Adding to Freud's notes in "Mourning and Melancholia," Ignês Sodré observed, "Failure to mourn creates an internal situation by which the lost object is excessively identified with, and the self lives in the shadow of an internal death, leading to pathological depression" (2009, p. 43). In this regard, the letter serves as a healing agent that relieves D'Cruz from the burden of guilt and melancholia.

CONCLUSION

In this personal recollection, the biographical account of the father often overlaps with autobiographical reflections of the son. It interrogates the linear flow of time and

widens the scope of transgenerational memory in exploring the displacement of their trauma. The study shows that D'Cruz's postcolonial consciousness as an Anglo-Indian immigrant scrutinises their colonial nostalgia in ancestral memory for tracing his Indian roots. At the same time, it reviews their diasporic experiences of tracking the routes through which his identity and cultural history has travelled. His generational location helps him to analyse the colonial hangover of Anglo-Indian identity from an objective point of view. Like his father, he does not hanker after the sartorial finesse symbolizing Englishness. Yet, he acknowledges its presence in his personal and collective memory, documenting its role in shaping the cultural identity of his community. He has great observational skills with which he reads not only the world outside but also the world within, that is the dominion of memory. In *Vanitas*, D'Cruz's memory is multilayered and multidimensional, similar to the gyres in Dante's description of the underworld in *Divine Comedy* (1308-1321), each layer? unfolding a realm and a revelation different from the other. Though he does not believe in God, he confesses at the end that he is blessed to have a father like Anto. This confession, which is made after a prolonged period of suffering, confirms that his heart is now purged of all bitter feelings against his father. His moist eyes symbolise repentance and transcendental feeling. The ending of the film marks the beginning of a spiritual awakening, which in times to come will help him to see the past in a new light. Like the cottage in Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, where the narrator-cum-writer could blend his memories with mysticism and imagination, the film provided a suitable creative space for D'Cruz to reinterpret the memories of his father with innovation and self-examination. *Vanitas*, the film, in this regard, is enigmatic and evocative.

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