



TLC SHOWCASE

PATRICK HOLLOWAY

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Introduction to *The Language of Remembering*

THE LANGUAGE OF REMEMBERING is a novel that asks how do we make a home, how do we connect to the people we love and how do we move on from the past? It started as a short story which won the 2023 Bath Short Story Competition, and the characters never really left me.

Brigid, a teenager in a 70s Irish village, discovers that she is pregnant. The father is her boyfriend, James, who is also a teenager. She starts to contemplate what it will mean to become a mother, quickly sees how it will change her relationships, her future, and her life. Her own mother, Kathleen, becomes her biggest confidant as she battles with her own identity and fears of what is in store for her once the baby comes.

Over thirty years later, Oisín — Brigid's son — has returned to Cork with his Brazilian wife and daughter after years living overseas. He has come back to care for Brigid, who has early onset Alzheimers. As he worries how his wife and daughter will adapt, he is also forced to face up to his own past. As Brigid progressively deteriorates, she falls back to speaking Irish, the language of her youth. Faced with the sense that he is losing his mother to her illness, Oisín tries to learn Irish to connect with her once more. Through the interweaving chapters of past and present, the lives of the characters — their hopes, dreams and frustrations — unfold. Oisín faces his past and rebuilds his relationship with his mother, in spite of the illness that is consuming her.

I was very lucky to receive the Paul McVeigh residency in 2023 and through that had a brilliant session with Aki Schilz. At that time my novel was out on submission and being able to speak to someone as experienced as Aki gave me great hope as well as tools, knowledge and information. As I am currently working on novel number two, I sent the first 30,000 words to TLC and was so grateful for the feedback I received. Not only was it encouraging in terms of the overall narrative arc, but it also delved into specific sections, and where the work could be tightened, improved, or edited. As I was unsure at that point where this new novel would take me, it was brilliant to get such insight from such a talented writer and reader. The report is always open when I'm working on the novel and I can't wait to get it finished and send it to my brilliant agent, Eleanor Birne. With the help of the report I was able to really rework the 30,000 words and even made one of the chapters into a short story that I sent to the submission call for Lilliput at 40 — an anthology of stories and essays of Lilliput's biggest writers — and was delighted to receive an acceptance. My story, that chapter, will feature in the anthology later this year with writers I hugely admire.

With my debut novel, *The Language of Remembering*, being launched in February next year, with presales now open, it's a very exciting time. The 'fear' of novel number two has never really hit me and I think this is largely due to my work with TLC and that report that has given me so much confidence in my writing. For more information on my debut, you can see the links below.

<https://www.epoquepress.com/titles>

<https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-language-of-remembering/patrick-holloway/9781739188191>

Extract from *The Language of Remembering* by Patrick Holloway

Back in the car you call your wife and imagine her sitting by the window of her hotel room looking out on the shitty weather, feeling shitty herself. She answers and says in Portuguese, aren't you supposed to be in that evening class, and you say yes, but you left. Why, she asks, and you sigh and if a sigh could echo in a car it would but it can't so it doesn't. How's your mum, she asks. I'll see her tomorrow. Are you bringing Ailish? No, Katie will mind her. You should bring her, she says, it might cheer your mum up, who knows it might get her speaking English.

You sigh again because you no longer miss your mum but who your mum was – the way she turned a phrase and how it hung in the air long after it was spoken; how she could see everything from an angle inexistent to the naked eye; you miss the way she looked at you. Every time you see her now, you miss her knowing who you are all of the time. Miss being able to understand her.

'Well,' you say, 'I better get back home.'

'Ok.'

'Wait,' you say. 'Do you ever think about him?'

'About who?'

'Our son?'

'Always.'

You say the word *saudades*, which has extra layers to the simple English of I miss you. *Saudades*, she says, *muitas*. You wonder if she is saying it about you or him. Just hearing the lovely swollen sounds of Portuguese come from your wife's mouth and throat and nose makes you miss Brazil. A decade you spent there and you remember arriving without a word of the language. To know nothing, nothing at all. Not even able to decipher the space between spoken words; they were all just a gooey flux of sound. And you were so timid in how you reached out your hand to introduce yourself. So embarrassed when they laughed and put their arm around you, or if it were a woman, hugged you and kissed your cheek. The smell of tangy summer in their touch; in the very air around you. The cold, sugary sorbet of *açaí*, how good it tasted with strawberries and granola as the sun stretched prickly hot against the distant midday sky.

Mangoes. You used to wake up early while your wife slept. Before Ailish. Very early on, when waking up next to her naked meant you had to leave the bed. If not, you'd wrap yourself around her and wake her into sex. Mangoes always remind you of sex. Maybe that is why, instead of fucking you'd be skinning a mango and slicing it from its skin, sliding it from itself onto the plate. You remember how slippery a mango can be, how sweet. You think of who you were there, who you were before you went, and who you are now, and there is nothing you can see that links them. There is a part of you that wants to go back and a slice of resent for your mother slips from you before you can hold it back.

You drive back to the rented house. Each facade the same as you navigate through the estate. You've a sudden need to make something your own, to feel like it belongs to you and you belong to it. Katie is sitting on the couch in the sitting room.

'You're back early,' she says.

'Yeah, the teacher wasn't feeling well. We had to finish early.'

'Well, Ailish's fast asleep.'

'That's great, thanks a mil, Katie.'

'Not a bother. Did you say you needed me tomorrow?'

'I did, yeah. Do you mind if I give you a buzz in the morning to make sure, Carolina might be coming back early.'

'Of course, I'll just get my jacket.'

She leaves and you realise you lied twice in thirty seconds. You go upstairs to Ailish's room and she looks toasty in the single bed with her blue bunny wrapped in one arm. You think you'll take her tomorrow, to see your mother. You have been visiting twice even three times a week since she moved into the nursing home. It is easier to see her there, somewhere unfamiliar. The person she is now fits there. Not in the house you grew up in, with all those memories clashing against what she has become. You kiss Ailish on the head and close the door. Back in the kitchen you pour yourself a glass of wine from the unfinished bottle.

On the sofa you fiddle with the remote in your hand but do not turn on the TV. You remember the day Nina called you. The missed calls, then the voicemail. Her voice pounding down the phone. Telling you that something wasn't right. That she was going

to the hospital, that she was so afraid. You listened to the voicemail in the toilet, on a break from a meeting. You ran from the office and pressed the button on the lift. You were on the fourteenth floor and by the time it arrived someone was asking you where you were going, that the negotiations were only beginning.

In the car, you tried to put the hospital address into Google Maps while swerving between cars. You thought you knew the way anyway and kept driving. Nina was just nervous. There had been a scan only a few weeks before and everything had been fine. The traffic was bad. The longer it took the worse you got. You searched the car for cigarettes, thinking you had some hidden somewhere. At traffic lights you screamed. You called Nina but no answer. Fuck, fuck, come the fuck on. You punched the wheel.

When you arrived, you parked on the street and abandoned the car. You entered through a car park, then a kind of workstation where every door required a card to scan. You saw someone leave one door and you ran through. It was a long corridor and the smell of disinfectant was overpowering. And there, just at eye-level, on one of the shelves, was a jar. And on it was your name. *Bebê Maloney*. The name struck you. You thought of your father. Remembered seeing the post in the door when he was alive: Mr. Maloney, and when he was dead: Mr. Maloney, and your mother tearing at the envelopes.

It took you too long to realise that *bebê* was baby, and that the surname was not your father's but your own. Inside the jar floated something that reminded you of a film about space or alien invasion. And still, you could not make the connection. Somebody opened a door and shouted at you in Portuguese and you left, asking for your wife, Carolina, you kept saying, Carolina Maloney, Carolina Moraes. Using all the names she had, until finally you were brought to her.

She was propped up against too many pillows and her belly was deflated and her face was strained pink and pale. A nurse tried to talk to you but you were falling to Nina, crying, saying, you're alive, oh, God, you're alive.

'It's ok,' she said, 'it's ok. Don't worry. It was twins, I just know it. I'm still pregnant Oisín, he's still here, he's ok.' She was holding her stomach smiling. And for a second you believed her and looked to the nurse who shook her head, slowly, so gently, but just enough. Just enough to know.

About the Writer

Patrick Holloway is an Irish writer of fiction and poetry and is an editor of the literary journal, *The Four Faced Liar*. He completed his Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow, before moving to Porto Alegre, Brazil, where he completed his PhD in Creative Writing. He is the winner of the Bath Short Story Award, The Molly Keane Creative Writing Prize, The Flash 500 Prize and the Allingham Fiction contest, among others. He was the recipient of the Paul McVeigh Residency in 2023. His work appears in *The Stinging Fly*, *The London Magazine*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Moth*, *Southword*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Carve*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, among others. His work has been featured in numerous anthologies including, *We Will Be Shelter*, *Masculinity: An Anthology of Modern Voices*, and *From the Well*. In 2024, he was selected as one of the ten writers for *The Evolution Programme* by The Irish Writers' Centre. His debut novel, *The Language of Remembering*, will be published in 2025 by Epoque Press.

