THE MEMORY ADDICTS: blog and timeline

July 2009

I had, as usual, the summer off from teaching. I seem to have typed up about ten pages of notes for a possible novel, which I then put aside. Skimming through them now, I'm astonished by how much I had thought through before I began the actual writing—which I had believed (until now, upon checking my records) I wouldn't do for three more years. In fact, though, in a 2013 interview, I claim that I wrote 60 pages during an earlier summer, given as possibly 2005! (In the interview I also say I completely reworked them.) Almost all\* I have now are these ten pages of notes from 2009, which may have been based on the vanished 60 pages from that earlier summer—or maybe I got the year wrong, and I wrote those 60 pages in 2009? (\*I do have three weird pages from 2006 which are somehow still in the novel—even though every time I read it I feel as if I should maybe cut them. They're nothing like the rest of the book! But their weirdness is cool. And they fit and enlarge the POV character. So they may survive.)

October 2012

This was the year I went from a full-time teaching contract at St. Catherine's to a three-quarter time contract. For the first time in decades I wasn't feeling perpetually overwhelmed. When November drew near, I decided I would try NaNoWriMo—not with any intention of finishing a first draft by the end of the month, but just to spend every first period, which I had free, working on one. *The Memory Addicts* may not have been the only possible project I found in my files, but it was by a long the most solid and most complexly imagined of them. I cheated on NaNoWriMo a bit more. I began rewriting, reimagining, replanning two weeks early, in mid-October.

November 2012

October was mostly a planning month, though I did get a lot of the first chapter redone. In November, I started to really get going on, and to get excited; I felt I had something.

December 2012

I now had enough under my belt—130 pages—and enough of an idea of where the novel was headed, to submit my first fifty pages, mid-month, to the James River Writers "Best Unpublished Novel Contest." I felt confident I could finish it, and was still spending every first period writing.

January-February 2013

When the first round of judging came in, I was asked to submit the entire novel by mid-February. I got a first draft finished under the wire. I knew it wasn't *the* first draft. I guess I could claim that that first draft took me four months, but there had been all that aughties prep work. What's more, I knew about passages and larger episodes I had been obliged to leave unwritten. Sure, I submitted something coherent, but I always knew I would keep working on it.

winter/spring 2013

Throughout the completion of the first draft, I was thoroughly intimidated by everything I didn't know and really needed to know. I wasn't merely writing; I was researching like crazy, trying to make my crazy project sound plausible. At some point I heard that I'd placed joint second. For a not quite finished first draft? I was thrilled.

May 2013

What I called the "expanded first draft" was now done. It came in at 78,400 words.

June 2013.

JRW made an official announcement of the contest results. I started to take seriously the idea of getting an agent; of seeing if it was commercially viable; of preparing my pitch. But first,. I had to think about a second draft.

July 2013

Richmond Magazine, the co-sponsor with JRW of the contest, interviewed me. I'd be unable to reconstitute some of this timeline without that interview. And I'd have forgotten the interesting tidbit that my original plan was to get the characters, somehow, to South Africa. Weird.

September 2013

By early September I'd finished my second draft. The book was holding fairly steady in length, up only another 850 or pages, but I was making it crisper as well as filling in narrative gaps.

October 2013

At the JRW festival I began to meet with agents. Two read the book. Both were carefully discouraging: the book was publishable but they weren't the right agents; the atmosphere for new novels had changed, and a book by a new author could no longer get by with being merely good. It would need to be superlative. Oh, and I should get to work on a second novel. No publisher wanted to take on a one book author.

2014

By mid-January I had a third draft. 79,500 words. Just a polish, but it launched me into a 4th draft, completed inside two weeks. In this late January version I was up to 84,000 words. (An October revisit added only 600 words more.) Was I, perhaps, done? I would put *The Memory Addicts* aside. I started a new novel, *Lala and the Ladders.* Solid concept. Arresting first few pages. But it was stillborn.

2015- spring 2021

I don't know when I did new polishes, or how many there were. But I did share the book with a few friends during these years, and I did fiddle with it. Not as much as I fiddled with three other abandoned (or suspended?) novels: *Onward & Awkward; The Velvet Varmint Vanishes; Whistleboy.* Yet somehow by the time I turned my attention back to it had acquiired a couple thousand more pages. I read them through. I felt ready to send the book out again.

July-September 2021

After a polish that took the book up to 88,250 words I felt actually pretty happy with it. I hired a Reedsy editor. While I didn't think she was entirely in sympathy with what I was trying to do, I found her feedback really useful. I rejected three of her recommendations: (1) to simplify the diction and not use so many big words (sorry, but the boy can't help it); (2) to cut the history sections (they're too central thematically and there's too much plot bound up in them and they're who Millar IS; which is not to say she doesn't have a point, only that excising those bits would be major surgery); (to limit myself to 3 or 4 POV narrative voices (that just wouldn't be major surgery, that would be a wholly different book). But I listened to her about clarifying the chronology and rethinking the deliberate narrative holes; about clarifying who was who and why they were all worth caring about; about dialogue. I would undertake a major revision.

December 2021

I did make some immediate revisions, but mostly I let the possibilities simmer in my head for a couple of months. In December I did the most extensive rewrite yet. The book is now at 98,000 words. The characters are richer, the plotting is both more complex and clearer, the chronology is much more straightforward. I've made explicit swaths of the action which I wished not to show at all. While I'm sure this has made the action clearer and more vivid, I worry that it has also made it cheesier. On Christmas Day I sent the revised MS off to Atmosphere Press. By the end of 2021 they had set me up with an interview. They were taking it.

January 2022

I've signed the contract. A developmental editor is currently reading my MS. I've been assigned a graphic designer. More, it seems, pretty darn soon.