Metafiction in New Zealand from the 1960s to the present day

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2011

ABSTRACT

While studies of metafiction have proliferated across America and Europe, the present thesis is the first full-length assessment of its place in the literature of New Zealand. Taking as its point of reference a selection of works from authors Janet Frame, C.K. Stead, Russell Haley, Michael Jackson and Charlotte Randall, this thesis employs a synthesis of contextual and performative frameworks to examine how the internationally-prevalent mode of metafiction has influenced New Zealand fiction since the middle of the 20th century. While metafictional texts have conventionally been thought to undermine notions of realism and sever illusions of representation, this thesis explores ways in which the metafictional mode in New Zealand since the 1960s might be seen to expand and augment realism by depicting individual modes of thought and naturalising unique forms of self-reflection, during what some commentators have seen as a period of cultural 'inwardness' following various socio-political shifts in the latter part of 20th century New Zealand.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the mode of writing most commonly referred to as "metafiction" has become a well-established area of study internationally, particularly since its rise to prominence in American literature since the 1960s, this is the first attempt at a full-length study of its place in the literature of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Key studies of the mode in the latter part of the twentieth century by theorists Robert Scholes (1979), Linda Hutcheon (1980), Patricia Waugh (1984, 1992) and Robert Stam (1992) have focussed predominantly on American writing – and, to a lesser extent, British, South American, and European work - while the proliferation of metafictional writing in New Zealand remains largely undocumented. Indeed, the only book-length studies produced in New Zealand on metafiction have been theses on Hispanic literature and French film: Nicola Gilmour's *A "Passing" Interest: Reading Transvestite Narratives, Gender and Metafiction in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Hispanic Writers* (2000) and Deborah Walker's *Self-reflexivity and the Construction of Subjectivity in Contemporary French Cinema* (2001). Aside from critical works on Janet Frame, C.K. Stead's personal essays, articles by Cherry Hankin, and Patrick Evans' brief comments in his conclusion to the *Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (1990), there are only two substantial sources for criticism on the mode. Lawrence Jones' overview of metafiction and reflexivity in his chapter "Other Modes" in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (1998) [1] and Michael Morrissey's entertaining if unorthodox introduction to *The New Fiction* (1985), provide the most comprehensive notes on metafiction in New Zealand: the only further sources for

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[1] Jones provides a similar, though smaller, overview in Part II of *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* (1987).

commentary can be found in the occasional journal article or book review. Broadly speaking then, the goal of this research is to fill this gap in our criticism with a book-length study which will draw on a selection of authors to trace the international mode of metafiction, its key concerns and characteristics, across the last fifty years of New Zealand's literary history. The question this thesis asks could then be formulated as: How has the international field of metafiction manifested itself in New Zealand fiction since the 1960s?

Clearly, metafictions have grown to occupy prime space in the country's literary landscape. For authors such as Janet Frame and C.K. Stead reflexivity has been, at one time or another in their careers, the single most important modal feature of their novels. One might be inclined to agree with Lawrence Jones who in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* writes that metafiction "had become by 1991 the most important new development in mode in the New Zealand novel…" (1998, p. 230). And even if it was not the most important development - mythological-realism in Māori and Pacific writing is surely a strong contender - metafiction seems to have been the most ubiquitous. Beginning here in the late 1960s with Frank Sargeson's protégés Maurice Duggan, Janet Frame, and C.K. Stead, the mode continues in various guises through the 1970s, 80s and 90s in the work of Michael Jackson, Albert Wendt, Russell Haley, Bill Manhire, Nigel Cox, Michael Morrissey, Craig Harrison, Maurice Shadbolt, Maurice Gee and others, and continues into the twenty-first century in novels such as Charlotte Randall's *Within the Kiss* (2002), Paul Thomas' *Work in Progress* (2006), and Jack Ross' *Kingdom of Alt* (2010). What, according to various reviews of these writers, seems to set their work apart is that they directly and self-consciously address their own procedures and techniques.

These *meta* texts, to note the Greek, move with, above or across themselves: editing themselves as they go, exploring the structure which gives them shape, self-consciously revealing their own linguistic elements, questioning the conditions of their authorship, and often parodying the literary conventions and clichés of the genre of which they still remain a part.

The origin of the term *metafiction* is generally traced back to American novelist and critic William Gass in 1970, who in *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, defines metafiction as works "in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed" (p. 25) or which "instruct us in the art of narration, the myth-making imagination" (p. 107). Another widely-used definition is that of Patricia Waugh, who defines metafiction as "writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984, p. 2). In either sense the phenomenon is seen to constitute a shift in focus – a shift away from the subject matter to the manner in which it is represented in the text. To take examples from New Zealand-written novels, when Charlotte Randall's narrator in *Within the Kiss* (2002) begins berating the story for its "hackneyed old" Faustian theme, or when a house in Craig Harrison's *Grievous Bodily* (1991) collapses because it has reached a form of post-modern enlightenment and deconstructed itself, the reader is forced to consider the underlying framework of the writing. If in theatre the world is a stage, then in metafiction that stage, not to mention the wings, orchestra pit and green room, are open to the audience's scrutiny. In its most overt form, a metafictional work will, to extend the metaphor, pull the audience from their seats, drag them behind the scenes, and sit them in a producer's chair. As C.K. Stead's narrator

questions his desire to write another story and describes his narrative habits as "tending to the structural character of a Russian doll" (2001, p. 2) or as Janet Frame describes good prose as touching the reader "like a branding iron" (1979, p. 50) the reader cannot help but be jolted out of the fictional world to sit alongside the writer and evaluate their processes.

This foregrounding of process over product has generally been described as "post-modern" and "anti-mimetic" and the apparent renaissance of the metafictional mode in the latter half of the twentieth century, both internationally and in New Zealand, has generally been described as a reaction to traditional "realist" modes of fiction – as an attempt to revive the declining popularity of the novel since the rise of new media, especially film and television. Each of these concepts in the discourse – post-modernism, anti-mimetics and anti-realism – will be examined over the course of this thesis, but as a starting point, critical characterisations of metafiction have, especially prior to the 21st century, tended to pit the mode against modernism and realism.

By the 1970s in America, a number of readers, writers and critics had begun to complain that conventional realism in the novel was becoming contrived and dull. As American critic Robert Scholes put it, realism had "seen its best days and was being perpetuated in a trivial and often mechanical way; while all around us a new and more fabulous kind of fiction was coming into being - a kind of fiction that had much to teach us and many satisfactions to give us" (1979, p. 1). In Scholes' estimation, though, reflexivity was a backward step. Taking examples from the fiction of Borges, Barth and others, Scholes argues that the metafictional mode was narcissistically avoiding the "great task" of humanity re-imagining itself, by becoming "too self-involved, and […]

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threatened by over-elaboration of its own complexities" (p. 218). Scholes saw the dying novel as taking one of two directions: either toward an increasing self-scrutiny, or toward a new "fabulatory" style. The new fabulators, he argued, would blend the fantastic and the mythical in order to question traditional schemas of knowledge and – somewhat ambitiously perhaps - to "turn civilisation in the direction of integration and away from alienation, to bring human life back into harmony with the universe" (pp. 217-218). The metafictional mode, however, was an avoidance of these authorial duties: in his conclusion to *Fabulation and Metafiction*, Scholes decides that self-reflection is a narcissistic way of avoiding fiction's "great task": "this masturbatory revelling in self-scrutiny […] generates feeling of guilt – not because what it is doing is bad, but because of what it is avoiding" (p. 218).

Scholes is not the only critic to have used the masturbatory metaphor in describing metafiction's self-regarding aspects. Robert Stam traces the critical resistance to self-conscious fiction back to F.R. Leavis' dismissal of the "sport" of Laurence Sterne and Henry Fielding, calling Leavis' objections to the reflexive mode a puritanical hostility toward its "suspectly onanistic" qualities (Stam, 1992, p. 127). For many critics the very fact that fiction writers had turned to narcissism or textual onanism seemed to confirm their suspicion that the novel was a dying art form. As Linda Hutcheon has it "…many reviews of new metafiction, especially in the early 1970s, were negative: cries of lamentation over the death of the novel genre abounded" (1980, p. 2). One of the most widely-known and frequently misquoted declarations of the novel's impending demise came from one of its most rigorous and prolific practitioners, American John Barth. In his provocatively titled 1967 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" he wrote of the "used-

upedness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities" in the novel (1997, p. 64)

- a statement that, as New Zealand anthologist Michael Morrissey has it, was "felt by some to signal the death knell of the novel" (1985, p. 20).

Perhaps the American lamentations were to some extent concurrent manifestations of the growing disenchantment with conventional ways of conceiving fiction and authorship in European criticism. As early as 1930 Walter Benjamin's "The Crisis of the Novel" had diagnosed the traditional novel structure as terminally ill, and lauded the use of literary montage in its stead: "petit-bourgeois publications, scandal sheets, tales of misfortune, sensations of '28, folk songs, advertisements…" which, he claimed, opened up "new, epic possibilities" of style and structure (1930 [1999], p. 301). Certainly by the late 1960s, critical essays such as Roland Barthes' famous "The Death of the Author" (1967) and Michel Foucault's equally famous counterpart "What is an Author?" (1969) seemed to be challenging old notions of literary and biographical interpretation and contextualisation while hinting that conventional forms of narrative were bound up in out-dated and sometimes dangerous cultural and social structures that quietly perpetuated 19th century socio-cultural norms, smuggling in the imperatives of the era's grand narratives, and failing to represent recent cultural and social changes. If the advance of post-structuralism in Europe suggested that the crisis of the novel might be resolved through depersonalisation, then the *nouveau roman* – often typified by the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Maurice Blanchot and others – seemed to fulfil the new criteria: subordinating author, structure, character and even plot to detailed and often repetitious descriptions of the world and its objects.

In America though, the solution to the problem of the novel's impending demise seemed to have worked in opposite direction. Rather than entirely disintegrating conventional form, writers considered to be metafictional and post-modern, such as Barth (see 1969), Gass, Nabokov and Vonnegut were recapitulating conventional structure and form with a self-conscious deliberateness. Certainly John Barth believed that the conventions of language could be re-vitalised through self-reflection. Prefacing a 1984 reprint of "The Literature of Exhaustion", he acknowledged that while the essay had frequently been read as a "Swan-Song of Literature piece" its main line of argument is that "virtuosity is a virtue" (1997, p. 63). For Barth, the answer was to deepen the narrative structure of the novel, to get in and behind its conventions and assumptions, to explore the "meta" levels of storytelling: "…it might be conceivable to rediscover validly the artifices of language and literature – such far-out notions as grammar, punctuation… even characterization! Even plot! – if one goes about it the right way, aware of what one's predecessors have been up to" (p. 68). Perhaps the conventional novel was not dead, just so exhausted it needed resuscitating.

But if metafiction since the mid-twentieth century was thought to be attempting a kind of literary Heimlich-manoeuvre, it was also often characterised as a reaction to literary Modernism. In the New Zealand literary context for example, the analysis of fiction – what little there is of it – has tended to follow American trends to place metafictional writing under the banner of "post-modernism". According to Lawrence Jones, the effects of post-modernism in New Zealand fiction are most apparent in the use of reflexivity: discussing the novels of Jackson, Haley and Eldred-Grigg among others, he writes that "the more explicitly post-modern texts are those which foreground

metafictionality" (1998, p. 233). Patrick Evans too, albeit with some reluctance, heads up his discussion of the metafictions of Frame, Stead, Haley and others as examples of "what we have come to know as 'post-modern'" (Evans, 1990, p. 262). And drawing heavily on the foundational works and comments of John Barth, Michael Morrissey makes a number of claims about the metafictional opposition to humanist-realism that rest on further claims about the "modernist-renouncing" and "realism-rejecting" techniques of "post-modernism" (1985, pp. 30-33). Morrissey goes on to distinguish modernist and post-modernist (metafictional) texts by two principles he has loosely adapted from Barth:

> All varieties of post-modern writers share two stances in common which distinguish them from the proceeding modernist movement. First, as Barth has noted [...] post-modernist works do not have the difficult scholarly density of such high water marks of modernism as Finnegans Wake or the early Cantos. (Contradiction: Ted Jenner and Guy Davenport deploy quantities of classical historical and scientific learning) [...] Second, they do not – to quote Barth once more – stress the 'special, usually alienated role of the artist in his society, or outside it'. It is revealingly difficult to find a novel in New Zealand that deals with the growth or problems of being an artist. (Morrissey, 1985, p. 34)

The problems with characterising metafictional writing as post-modern are well-evidenced in Morrissey's claims. Despite his parenthetical disclaimer and the mismatch in making a generalised comparison between Ezra Pound's poetry and post-modern prose, it is clear that examples of metafiction such as John Barth's erudite mythic and epic metafictions (*Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), *The Tidewater tales* (1987), *Once Upon a Time* (1994) among others) are easily as dense and difficult as the archetypes of modernist fiction.

Furthermore, to suggest that the metafictional modes of writers Morrissey also claims as post-modern - Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov for example – lack literary and cultural density seems a fairly erroneous generalisation. But transporting Barth's criteria to the local context also creates problems for Morrissey, given that a number of New Zealand fiction writers (especially Hyde, Duggan, Frame, Stead, Ballantyne, Sargeson and Duckworth) had clearly been dealing with the growth or problems of being an artist – and of the metafictional stories that had been written, most used troubled writers as framing narrators. In fact it is so revealingly easy to find New Zealand works of fiction that deal with these issues that Lawrence Jones describes the main interests of New Zealand fiction following the provincial era (or after 1965) in precisely in these terms, saying that the "Post-provincial Man or Woman Alone often appears as an artist" (Jones, 1998, p. 205), and that the "Post-provincial novelist, [...] tends to focus on individuals, asking that they be understood and also often asking how they can better handle their lives" (p. 202). Indeed it is a concern that continues right through the so-called post-modern period into the twenty-first century in the novels such as C.K. Stead's *A Secret History of Modernism* (2001), Charlotte Randall's *Within the Kiss* (2002), and Albert Wendt's *Mango's Kiss* (2003), to name a few.

But the most obvious problem with defining metafiction as a purely post-modern phenomenon is the mode's history. Regardless of which literary-cultural conditions precipitated the renaissance in Western literature of the twentieth century, metafictional reflexivity appears to have existed as long as the novel and is evident in other literatures outside of the Western tradition. Patricia Waugh for example points out that "…to draw exclusively on contemporary fiction would be misleading, for, although the term

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'metafiction' might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself" (1984, p. 4). Waugh traces the mode in Britain from Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), and uses the work of Barth, Gass, and Vonnegut to illustrate its twentieth century resurgence in America. On the other hand, theorist Linda Hutcheon traces the beginnings of metafiction's modern incarnation to the early seventeenth century: "The origins of the self-reflecting structure that governs many modern novels might well lie in that parodic intent basic to the genre as it began in Don Quijote, an intent to unmask dead conventions by challenging, by mirroring" (1980, p. 18). At a further remove, Robert Stam follows the trail of reflexivity back to Greek and Roman classics, claiming that "the parodistic critique of fiction found in Cervantes is already preset in Aristophanes, Euripides, Horace, and Ovid" (1992, p. 1). While one cannot discount the proliferate renaissance of reflexivity and metafiction in the twentieth century, at the very least, seventeenth and eighteen century fictions such as Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (1605 [2003]) or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759[1996]) are clear proofs that deeply entrenched meta-reflexivity appeared in European fiction well before the rise of modernism and post-modernism. So while applying the term post-modern to metafiction might serve as a more-or-less useful shorthand for locating the mode's popularity among the literary trends of high-modernism, it makes little sense in terms of the mode's actual history.

A further complicating matter is that the metafictional mode is not a phenomenon found only in Western literature. As already mentioned, Nicola Gilmour has located the mode in nineteenth and twentieth century Hispanic writers; Y.H. Zhao has pointed out that the metafictional mode in Chinese storytelling goes back to the sixteenth century (1992, p. 96); and Madeline Jablon has also pinpointed a strong "tradition of self-

consciousness in black [African American] fiction" (1997, p. 3) which has resonances with Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau'ofa's descriptions of traditional oral storytelling in the Pacific context.

Perhaps then the ubiquity of the mode across time and place suggests that self-referentiality can be found in all literary narratives to some degree. If we agree with theorists like Roman Jakobson and Paul de Man, all literature contains elements which derive from a concern with language and literature itself; all writing includes some implicit reference to literature as a whole, especially insofar as it relies on established modes and conventions. In a sense any text, by transmitting information about any given topic, also - and perhaps unwittingly - transmits information about itself. But what distinguishes a metafictional text from a merely reflexive or reflective one is that it shows a direct awareness of this double-bind, a consciousness of what Sally O'Reilly terms the "usual relationship" between language and meaning, or sign and referent (p. 289).

To put forward a provisionally useful - but still problematic - definition then: metafictions look to foreground their referential nature, while conventional fictional narratives typically attempt to conceal it. In this sense then, metafiction is an amplification of what Gass identifies as the "Manichean" struggle in all artistic disciplines across all periods: "In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artefact out of the materials and so to treat the medium as the end" (Gass, 1970, as cited in Waugh, 1984, pp. 14-15). Unlike other artistic forms, in which one side "wins" over the other, in reflexive art neither impulse prevails. To take some fairly obvious examples from fine art, if in Jackson Pollock's

paintings process wins out over product, and in William Morris' Art and Crafts Movement product takes precedence over process, in self-reflexive art this tension is never resolved. In fact, reflexive art protracts and even amplifies the product/process dichotomy, staging the conflict and making it the central focus of the work. Examples from characteristically post-modern New Zealand fine art also conform to this description –the work of McCahon, Billy Apple, John Reynolds, and Dick Frizzell regularly use the reflexive mode to explore the relationship between product and process, artist and audience, or to make wry comments on the artistic process or satirical observations of the art world in general:

Figure 1.

Dick Frizzell

Edition 2004

Figure 2.

Billy Apple

Art For Sale 1980

The unresolved tension in metafiction is much the same as the tension in the preceding paintings: when Frizzell creates a work which consists entirely of a reference to the other 79 prints in the edition, or when Apple foregrounds the fiscal aspects of the creative act, they place uncomfortable questions before the viewer. Is this art, or

commentary? There is a sense of uneasiness created when the subject of the work is the work itself. In the same way, C.K. Stead's narrator reviewing a reviewer of his earlier work in *The Secret History of Modernism*, (2001, p. 114) or Charlotte Randall's Mephistophelian character in *Within the Kiss* (2002) making various plot suggestions which are carried out in the ensuing narrative, can end up leaving one with a form of epistemological vertigo. As John Barth says, discussing the story-within-a-story form, "They disturb us meta-physically: When the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they're in, we're reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence…" (1997, p. 73). Self-reflexive art then raises questions about the relationship between language and reality, between epistemology and ontology. The questions about ontology in a metafiction (for instance: what is a text? what is the mode of existence of a text?) can only be held in balance by its questions relating to epistemological assumptions (How much can a text tell us? What are limitations of a text in describing reality? How dependable is language? How significant is the author?)

For these reasons, the metafictional mode has been associated with *anti-mimetic* approaches to narrative – methods that attempt to subvert naturalistic and/or realistic illusions of fiction and expose the artificiality of the fictional world. Gass, for instance, claims that the mode challenges naturalistic forms of narrative which attempt to depict social realities through stylistically conventional modes of storytelling, thus challenging the notion that the novelist's role is to "render the world" (Gass, 1970, p. 24). In Stam's terms, this aspect of the metafictional can be characterised as an "aggressive anti-illusionism [...] which explodes and transcends conventional narrative categories" (Stam, 1992, p. 167). Or, in the words of metafictional theorist Margaret Rose, metafiction is

seen to oppose literary social realism by constructing a fictional illusion and simultaneously undermining the validity of that illusion:

> All writing is under 'suspicion' in metafiction, a function of which is to sharpen the public's powers of discriminating fact from fiction, and good fiction from bad. Here fiction is also rescued from a naive relationship to its subject, and to itself as the means of representing objects from reality within the 'second' world of the stage. Thus parody could also serve to introduce a critique of 'realism' into literature where, for example, satire might remain bound by its contrast of ideal and reality. (Rose, 1979, p. 74)

In the New Zealand context, the oppositional territory between the metafictional mode and the realist mode (variously weighted as "social-realism" by Cherry Hankin, "critical-realism" by Lawrence Jones, or "humanist-realism" by Michael Morrissey) is similarly marked out. Lawrence Jones (1990, 1998) places metafiction into what he terms the "other tradition" and claims it should be differentiated from the dominant tradition of "critical realism" (1998, p. 229). Its development, he claims, resulted from changes in the New Zealand's socio-cultural spheres that were not adequately captured by a literature dominated by realist techniques: "One need only look at the full spectrum of narrative in Western literary history [...] to see that realistic fiction is only one of many modes, that realism and its underlying assumptions are truly 'conventions', not universal truth. However, in the brief history of New Zealand narrative, realism appears as the only mode, the way of seeing, and thus the realistic novel, novella, and short story have been the dominant genres" (1990, pp. 24-25). Jones' statement mirrors Cherry Hankin's earlier claim that the tropes of social realism were coming to an end because they no longer fitted

the cultural forms the country had taken on. Hankin said in the late 1970s that a dominant reason for the "growing disenchantment" with social realism was that it had become ossified: "it does not represent the variety of character-types, of lifestyles or of mental attitudes which now exists in our society" (1978, p. 298). A number of other critics have made similar comments. Mark Williams has spoken of "the prisonhouse of New Zealand realist fiction" prior to the mid-1980s (1984, p. 505). C.K. Stead claimed that even in the late 1980s "the range of New Zealand fiction has been narrow and […] has been too easily content with fictional conventions, not seeming at all sophisticated, or questioning, in the matter of how truth and fiction relate" (Stead, 1989, p. 238). As late as 1990 Patrick Evans also discussed the metafictional "anti-realist tradition in United States fiction", pointing out that it was still "relatively new to New Zealand writers, dead-locked into realism as they have been for so long" (p. 262).

Again, perhaps the most contentious – and strategic – of the claims opposing metafiction and realism can be found in Morrissey's manifesto-style introduction to *The New Fiction* (1985). In the anthology's 30,000 word introduction, Morrissey attempts to lay claim to the anti-mimetic and anti-realist properties of the post-modern and metafictional modes, claiming his new anthology would do away with conventional ontologically-focussed material and represent practitioners of a new post-modern mode that "have not grown hoary with humanist-realist habit" (1985, p. 14). As Morrissey has it: while American writers in the latter half of the twentieth century were worried about the novel dying, and while French critics such as Foucault and Barthes were proclaiming the author already dead, New Zealand fiction had generally "maintained a moribundly simple look while the authors insisted on the superior ontological status of being

aggressively alive" (p. 24). However, a new breed of post-modern writing was emerging to challenge conventional realism and modernism – a mode of post-modernism characterised by "a subversive difficulty, an abhorrent elitism, a dangerous insouciance, a risqué refusal to conform to the national standards of tepid tone and simplicity of form" (pp. 18-19).

While the sometimes contradictory and over-generalised claims of Morrissey's critical introduction have been brought into question on several fronts, it does represent (or probably over-represent) the more widely accepted opposition between realist and post-modern-metafictional modes by other literary critics – an opposition rejected by some of our novelists and practitioners. On the one hand, metafictional writers in the latter half of the twentieth century have been said to be exploring territory away from "the dominant fictional mode" of realism (Hankin, 1978, p. 295) or "violating" [the] conventions" of critical realism (Jones, 1998, p. 229). But on the other hand, my recent interviews with metafictional writers Stead, Haley, Jackson, Wendt, and Randall reveal that many, if not all, of those operating in the mode believe they have used metafiction to reinforce or extend realism. Stead has pointed out that his drive to more complex forms of narrative do not conflict with attempts to naturalise experience, but with the stock of literary practices, saying that "to get a sense of the 'real' one must shake off the merely conventional" (See Appendix C) and elsewhere speaking of going beyond realism in order "to get nearer to reality, not to dispense with it" (Stead, 1989, p. 238). Michael Jackson has commented that his essays in metafictional writing (*Barawa*, 1986; *Rainshadow*, 1988; *Pieces of Music*, 1994) are "all grounded in real events, and concerned with real people" but that the form of the work is "transfigured by a desire to describe and say more than the

real events and the real people allowed or revealed" (See Appendix E). And Albert Wendt has spoken of his fiction as "a reconstitution of reality in order to understand and comprehend that reality, hold it for a moment in the ever-moving, ever-shifting present" (See Appendix F). Perhaps even Janet Frame's fictions provide clues along the same lines: in *An Angel at My Table* she describes the moral "sense of responsibility" she carried to adequately depict "the memory of the people" inside mental asylums (1984, p. 74) – gesturing at the need for a more inventive fiction that might adequately represent seemingly unconventional mental processes.

If notions of realism tend to be as highly subjective as experience itself, what these author's comments have in common is the notion that realism and metafiction may not be so exclusively opposed. If the use of self-reflexivity serves to paint a more naturalistic picture of events for the reader, perhaps it is possible that when a narrator divulges information about his/her creative processes, he/she is not seeking to shatter the illusion of the narrative's constructedness, but to impel the reader deeper into its reconstruction of reality and to bolster the illusion of authenticity. The obvious question raised by this supposition is then: How – if it all – might a metafiction be seen to intensify the naturalistic and/or realistic properties or qualities of a fiction, rather than merely calling the aims of realism into question?

That will have to be answered chapter by chapter and text by text, but even posing the question in this way helps to resolve one of the contradictions inherent in Morrissey's claims in *The New Fiction*. If on one hand, realists were too concerned with their "ontological status" in Morrissey's estimation, on the other hand realism in his view was ontologically "undernourished" and thus had a tendency to perpetuate "flat stereotypes

passed off as characters, painfully banal and unrealistic dialogue and no ideas beyond a few vague humanist hopes" (1985, p. 17). That is, realism was both too concerned with reality and not concerned enough. But how so?

Perhaps it could be said that New Zealand's dominant practice of realism was faltering less through its adherence to the ideal of narrative reflecting reality, than through its inability, or unwillingness, to describe the necessarily problematic ways in which reality presents itself through the fictional medium. If we can provisionally accept the criticisms levelled at it in the latter half of the twentieth century, it is possible that the conventional modes of realism found in the country's literary back catalogue were no longer realistic or naturalistic enough since they had a tendency to overlook a common contemporary interest in the increasingly contested nature of what a "text" is, what a work of fiction can accomplish in representing the world, how stories "perform" reality, and what the relationship between reader, writer, and subject, are or ought to be. Seen in this way, metafiction cannot have been the great hope in shattering the illusions of mimesis it was often hailed to be, but a more precise, and self-conscious, means of depicting the realities of life and narrative: of uncovering the way narratives perform or represent reality, of revealing the inner workings of the way stories are told, and of examining the relationship between writer, reader and subject.

Granted this proposition, the difficult, self-conscious, multi-layered and arguably narcissistic features of metafiction mean the mode is hard to classify using cultural-historical terms like post-modernism or by recourse to literary modalities of realism or anti-mimesis. Metafictions pose a unique challenge to readers in that they are largely self-critiquing – to some extent or another they provide their own contextual self-reading,

challenge conventional modes of reading, and voluntarily enter into the realm of theoretical debate. Often, at the same time, they attempt to deflect the possibility of criticism with self-referential irony. Because a metafiction constantly acknowledges its own artifice and focuses on its own production, it has a tendency to bridge the conventional gap between fiction and criticism, acting as both a primary and secondary text. Any critical approaches then must be able to account for multiple levels of meaning and signification derived from the interaction of these two inter-dependent - and sometimes discrepant - levels of operation.

In order then to ensure relevant questions are asked of the work, it makes sense to query the metafictional mode in both of its aspects. Firstly, from a narratological standpoint - as fictional narratives which necessarily use various literary structures and conventions. And secondly, as individual instances of self-conscious performance or reflexive speech-acts: acts of staged language which operate within a literary-historical context. I explain in more detail the reasons for this methodological approach in the next section, but hopefully it will suffice to say here that because reflexive fictions consistently expose their artifice and self-consciously bring the act of writing to the fore, they can be usefully – or at least interestingly – examined with narratological tools – tools designed to provide an accessible set of terminological categories with which to discuss the forms and functions of the first-level mimetic functions of narratives. But the formalist approach only takes us so far, since the complex layering of metafiction finds writers "staging" or "performing" language as narrators, and often undoing the presumptions of mimetic action with self-reflexive questioning. So within the larger narratological schema or framework a key methodological tool I draw on here is textual *performativity*, an operative

concept or interpretative approach which will function to examine the meta-levels and layers typically seen as peripheral to the main mimetic action of the narrative/s.

Needless to say, the present thesis is not intended as a comprehensive study of the reflexive fiction produced in New Zealand to date. Some significant authors operating in the mode have been given only minor comment due to time and space: Ian Wedde, Maurice Shadbolt, Anne Kennedy and Jack Ross would be among those who would warrant a similar extended analysis. However, it is hoped the writers included – Janet Frame, C.K. Stead, Russell Haley, Michael Jackson, Albert Wendt and Charlotte Randall - will provide a diverse and refreshing enough sample to uncover many the main concerns and trends in the country's metafiction without replicating the encyclopaedic glosses already published. These authors have been selected both for the breadth of their metafictional work, and for their diversity of backgrounds and interests. Each of the authors have met criteria of producing at least three works of metafiction which have been distributed by mainstream publishers – at least two constituently metafictional novels, and further concomitantly reflexive fiction in either long or short work. Except for the youngest, Charlotte Randall, each of these writers has also produced critical work or substantial interviews which would confirm their interest in reflexivity. It is hoped this thesis will provide an introduction to Randall's work that will extend the existing material of minor articles and reviews.

To sum up then, this thesis employs representative readings of the selected authors to ask how individual metafictions behave as performances of writing and authorship. It concludes that metafiction in New Zealand largely operates as an expanded or augmented form of realism which responds to and performs a mode of cultural "inwardness" which a

number of commentators have seen as a social and literary-cultural characteristic of the period from the 1960s. The thesis then finally broadens to examine how these findings sit amongst other characterisations of New Zealand literature, society, and culture, discussing possible sociological explanations for the cultural shift and links to other theories and movements in the country's writing.

Finally, it should be noted that while the primary material for analysis in this thesis comes from the public record - published criticism, media reports, creative literature, and reviews - the researcher saw the opportunity to conduct a number of interviews to supplement these sources with further contextual information, and authorial reconceptualizations of the work. It is hoped that these author-interviews will serve to broaden the discursive base, mirror the multiple reflexive levels evident in the primary texts, and aid in linking the formal narratological elements to authorial performance and intent. It is also hoped they will serve as a documentary source into author viewpoints of metafictional writing in New Zealand for future reference.

CHAPTER I: Methodology

1.1 Narratology and performativity

In narratological and performative frameworks, stories and the "performances" of stories are everywhere – narrative is fundamental to epistemology, to an understanding of the structure of human thought and interaction. Narratology - or the study of narrative - is not just a phenomenon that begs examination in literature, history, anthropology, but is also an important area of study in psychology (Randall, 1995) and business and policy making (Czarniawska, 2010). Likewise, the concept of performativity - which has its origins in J.L Austin's speech-act theory - is currently being applied across diverse fields from science and technology (Pickering, 1995) to political speech and queer theory (Butler, 1997, 2000). In the first part of this section I give a brief overview of narratological and performative concepts in order to provide a rationale for the combination of the disciplines underpinning this study of metafiction. The second part of the methodology (1.2 Performativity in narrative) refines the reasons for the synthesis of these approaches, and discusses the projected outcomes of this thesis. The third part gives a schematic representation of the Genettean narratological framework - elements of which are employed in the forthcoming close readings – and describes how performativity works as an operative concept in the study of metafiction. The fourth part refines and discusses the terminology used in the remainder of the study.

To begin with, the term narratology was originally proposed by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969, although its theoretical basis can be found in work predating the *Grammaire du Décaméron* – particularly in Russian formalism (Jakobson, Propp et al.) and later developing through a branch of Structuralism that favoured modal means of interpretation over thematic, in the work of Bakhtin, Todorov, Barthes, Genette and others (Prince, 1994, p. 524; Fludernik 2009 p. 10). In English, probably the best known and most comprehensive formulation of the discipline is Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (1980). Genette's survey - which will be utilized in the following chapter on the conceptual framework - provides a systematic theory of narrative focussing on a single example (Marcel Proust's *A la recherché du temps perdu*) in order to create a terminological framework that would, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "identify, name and illustrate all the basic constituents and techniques of narrative" (Culler, 1983, p. 7). Following Genette's model, a number of European and North American narratologists such as Bal, Berns, Chatman, Fludernik and Nünning, have contested, developed, and continue to refine Genettean frameworks for their own critical approaches. References to these theorists and concepts will form some of my theoretical framework, and will serve to locate the functions and techniques of metafictional mode used in New Zealand fiction within a broader theoretical base, which properly reflects the international literary context in which the metafictional mode arose.

However, even with a broad narratological framework in place, refining a methodology suitable for the discussion of self-referential texts remains a unique challenge since metafictions contain their own inbuilt "methodologies". As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, a metafiction's own contextual self-reading means that no one

viewpoint or theory will provide a broad enough scope to deal with both levels of meaning without running the risk of distorting or misrepresenting the narrative. By examining their own implementation, metafictional texts have already anticipated critical approaches. As Hutcheon puts it: "the point of metafiction is that it constitutes its own first critical commentary, and in doing so [...] sets up the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered" (1980, p. 6).

The choice of methodological approaches is then, in part, dictated by the bifurcated focus of the metafictional texts themselves. On the one hand, the diegetic level of story necessitates a practical narrative-based terminology, and on the other hand, the self-reflexive presentational processes of metafiction suggest that the texts may be usefully treated as narrative "performances". The concept of performativity I trial in this thesis is appropriated from body of work that reflects a shift in socio-cultural concepts since the early 1990s – from approaches that understood culture as text to approaches that regard culture as performance (Petrey, 1990; Parker, 1995; Slinn, 1999; McDonald, 2003; Loxley, 2007; Pannewick, 2010). The concept originally derives from John Austin's riposte to Logical Positivism in which he draws attention to "performative utterances" – a class of statements in the indicative mood that do not merely contain values of truth or falsity (confessions, promises, threats - such as "I propose", "I bet", "I do") and must be classed not just as constative speech but as "speech-acts" - utterances with an operational function (Austin, 1970, 1975). However, the general conception of Austin's performative evolved in latter part of the 20th century through the Searle-Derrida debate, and consequently the term's overtones have come to refer to transitory and "iterable" texts (or "utterences") invested with ontological significance.

The point at which a Derridean understanding of performativity in a fictional setting differs from an Austinian conception is important in terms of how a study of metafiction may link the more formal aspects of narratology to cultural performativity. While for Austin and Searle, fictional speech-acts function non-seriously, "in ways parasitic upon its normal use", (Austin, 1975, p. 21) or in a way that opposes pure or "standard cases of promises and statements" (Searle, 1977, p. 204), under a Derridian conception such hierarchical oppositions (serious/non-serious) are problematic, and the performative aspect of language is only marked by iterability – the capacity for a sign to be repeatable in different contexts. "For ultimately," Derrida says, "isn't it true that what Austin excludes as an anomaly, exception, 'non-serious' citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative?" (1988, p. 17) In other words – there can be no performative or active speech-act without reference to a larger encompassing framework of experience. A sign – fictional or not - is a sign precisely because it is repeatable and "parasitic" – certainly not because it is "pure" or original.

For Derrida then, there is no delineation between fundamental (standard) uses of performative language and secondary (fictional) uses, since both rely on each other for their definition. As a consequence, the recent conceptions of performativity I draw on treat language as a series of different types or "chains" of iterable marks, with no divergence between citational and "original" utterances. Derrida again:

> By no means do I draw the conclusion that there is no relative specificity of effects of consciousness, or of effects of speech (as opposed to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no performative effect, no effect of ordinary language, no effect

of presence or of discursive event (speech act). It is simply that those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them, term by term; on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility. (1988, p. 19)

Derrida's concept of iterability is vital in linking the narratological framework with the performative model in that it allows us to bridge the divide between text and context, conceiving of language as somatic, environmental and co-functional: that is, language – even fictional language - produces tangible and locatable effects, and is conversely affected by tangible and locatable cultural and social actions. Hopefully this point will become less abstract and more sensible as the chapters on Frame and Stead et. al. progress, but to put it in performative-theorist Henry McDonald's words, from a post-Derridean vantage point language both "participates in and resembles sensuously the reality it represents" (2003, p. 58). Indeed McDonald posits a historical and conceptual progression from pre-modern allegorical formulations of narrative (where language is taken to be a simple reflection of some extra-linguistic actuality) towards symbolic understandings (indirect or abstract forms of allegory) - an opposition which McDonald claims, served as a vehicle of the foregrounding of text's ontological role in modern thought: "From a modern perspective language is "performative" in a sense that can only be understood with reference to modern symbolism; it is autonomous and "stages", so to speak, its own reality or acts of consciousness" (2003, p. 62).

The move to performative reading in this thesis then follows a more general shift in focalisation from the "representative" to the "ontological", treating both the metaphorical and referential conceptualisations of texts not as static objects, but as ontological events –

performed and re-performed (by authors/narrators and readers/narratees) and interpreted and reinterpreted (by readers/critics) in a variety of contexts - indeed the authors featured in the study were invited to add to the reconceptualization of their texts through a series of author interviews. The purposes of a performative standpoint for a thesis on metafiction should be clear in the next section; but, put simply, because reflexive fictions consistently expose their artifice and self-consciously bring the act of writing to the fore, they can be usefully viewed as ontologically-grounded performances of text-creation: their writers "staging" or performing language as narrators for an audience who, in turn, perform their roles as readers.

1.2 Performativity in narrative

While the narratological and performative strands of theory have substantial histories as individual disciplines, synthesising the two conceptual frameworks is a relatively new approach. The critical premises of narratological performativity (or, more simply, narrative performance) have been more-or-less implicitly suggested in works such as Wolfgang Iser's *Prospecting* (1989), Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms* (1990), James Loxley's *Perfomativity* (2007), and Monika Fludernik's *Narrative and Drama* (2008). However, it was only recently that German theorist Ute Berns explicitly and systematically outlined its possible scope in her article "The concept of performativity in narratology: mapping a field of investigation" (2009). Berns shows that the otherwise distinct fields can be employed synchronously to investigate both the story-level of a narrative (how it functions as a text) and its broader pragmatic and cultural foundations (how it functions within a context). Indeed her configuration for the study of narrative-performativity is a two-way project: not restricted to working from strictly formal grounds, nor from extrinsic generalisations. In combining the theoretical modes, one is able to move between the poles of text and context freely, opening up new areas of discourse and functional hypotheses:

> In this narratological context, the descriptive force of the concept is paramount, even though the transfer may raise questions regarding the status of fictional discourse in speech act theory. However, when that same concept of 'performativity' is appropriated for the analysis of a whole novel as a metaphorical 'utterance', this foregrounds the operative potential of the concept as it generates

new objects of investigation, which, incidentally, raises new questions of method.

(Berns, 2009, pp. 94-95)

Berns article is given more attention in the following conceptual framework section, but it is worth noting how her post-Derridean usage of "descriptive" and "operative" language functions in the previous quote. For Berns, as for McDonald - and as we will see for New Zealand literary historian Warwick Slinn - the connection between illustrative and active aspects of language provides a site wherein the act of narration can be "considered in a wider pragmatic or cultural context" (p. 93). Berns gestures to a variety of contexts where the "citational and re-signifying potential" (p. 95) of Derridean conceptions of performativity have taken root, such as studies of gender and the "gendering force" of speech (Felman 2003; Butler, 1990), in semiotics (see Elam, 1987; De Marinis, 1993), and in studies focussed on the body, or the materiality of the cultural situation (Butler, 1993; Carlson, 2004). In collapsing text and context, Berns aligns her understanding of performativity with that of Mary-Louise Pratt, Sandy Petrey and other theorists who oppose the "parasitic" view of fictional language proposed by Austin/Searle, and who treat literary discourse as "speech contexts" in which an individual text is interpreted or decoded according to culturally-shared understanding of implicit conventions.

Interestingly, Berns' methodological solution to the problem of relating text to context is mirrored in reverse in a similar proposition made a decade earlier by New Zealand literary historian Warwick Slinn. In "Poetry and Culture: Performativity and Critique", Slinn proposes a performative model in order to overcome what he terms the problem of "extrinsic referentiality" in the study of poetics (1999, p. 59). He reasons that the study of poetics needs to be reconceptualised since it has become overly determined by

interpretive readings of the thematic, ideological, and political varieties that begin, not within the text, but from remote and often disconnected grounds:

> This orientation towards the culture rather than the work, the general rather than the specific, or towards quick diagnosis rather than elaboration of the symptom, continually privileges extrinsic referentiality, as if cultural meaning is always found in discourses from institutions outside literature (medicine, law, politics). The consequential tendency to simplify literary effects is obvious. (p. 58)

Slinn gestures toward a wave of literary studies in the latter half of the 20th century which tend to diminish (or, perhaps, completely ignore) aspects of texts which do not sit comfortably within their extrinsic frames of reference – a process which tends to circumvent the more intricate components of literary practices and forestall discussions of more multifaceted or dynamic instances of language performance. The problem for Slinn (like Berns and McDonald) is how to stay berthed on solid text-based (and perhaps neo-structuralist) ground, while releasing the formalist anchor enough to explore the broader cultural horizons implied by the reading. As a solution, Slinn also evokes Derrida's critique of Austin and Searle, and incorporates iterability into his description of the performative in order to link verbal form with culture and convention: "performatives are inseparable from the possibilities and practices of semiotic and thence cultural repetition (or citation), their successful enactment depending upon recognition of the appropriateness of their verbal form (or formula). As much as a singular act, performativity is the reiteration of a set of norms" (1999, p. 62). For Slinn, performativity provides a solution to the potential text/context dualisms by tendering a "dynamic" framework for the junction of literature with social and cultural experience, in which a

text should no longer be read as a passive mimic of social discourse to be mined by extrinsic vantage points, but an active "cultural event" which participates in reconstructing and refashioning reality, even as it recapitulates those cultural conventions and practices. In order to discuss this point I will briefly diverge from the theoretical to the pragmatic, and mention another study of New Zealand fiction, in the hopes of reiterating – by way of contrast – the possible value of the performative-narratological methodology in limiting possible problems of extrinsic referentiality.

At the time of writing, the most recent and – arguably – most significant attempt to discuss current New Zealand and literary culture is Patrick Evans' study *The Long Forgetting* (2007), which utilizes conceptual tools from neo-Marxist, psychoanalytical and gender-based criticism, as well as concepts derived from contemporary feminism and queer theory, to examine the country's literature in English from a post-colonial position. The resulting study is a perceptive critical account of New Zealand literary culture since the 19th century, which traces economic, social and cultural patterns of Pākehā ideological dominance, and reveals ways in which settler culture sought to normalise, euphemise and aestheticise its destructive European-capitalist presence in New Zealand. While the study is undoubtedly, as Lawrence Jones puts it, "a witty and coherent synthesis of the poststructuralist criticism of New Zealand literary culture of the past 25 years" (Jones, 2008) from its critical reception, it also appears to suffer in part from the limitations of its extrinsically referential standpoint. In fact two of the most prominent critics to have reviewed the study - Jones and Stafford – have taken Evans to task for precisely this problem: what Jane Stafford terms his all-pervasive "postcolonial benchmark" (2008) or what Jones terms Evans' "overstanding" perspective (2008).

According to both reviewers, *The Long Forgetting* errs in circularity - by taking an approach which follows an established critical system, mining its texts for evidence which will re-enforce that system. Stafford charges Evans with using a theoretical framework which "flattens and homogenises" (2008) the literature, and Jones arraigns Evans for a "singleness of focus" which "twists [the literature] to suit his argument" (2008).

Given the political implications of *The Long Forgetting*, it is striking that it omits nearly all of the works by the authors in the present study. C.K. Stead and Michael Jackson do not figure at all, which seems an unusual oversight given that Stead has always been outspoken about his position on the conservative side of cultural-politics, and that Jackson is producing some of the most interesting socio-cultural work from the liberal left. Jackson, for example, has consistently produced fiction that would contradict the narrowness of the Pākehā worldview described in Evans' thesis – indeed, he has even sought to uncover what Graeme Lay termed, in a review of his work, the "official amnesia" (1989) of Pākehā injustices to Māori in the Taranaki area. Evans does include Wendt in his study, who is praised for his determination to exclude "complacent" (2007, p. 206) Western readers and baffle literary critics - although presumably not all literary critics. Russell Haley is not on Evans' cultural map at all, and Charlotte Randall, one of our most lively talents, is only mentioned briefly. Evans censures her for submitting to the pressures of globalised capitalism which "efface the localised referent" (p. 181) in her work and for producing novels that are "homogenized" - as if it should naturally be her aim to document national characteristics. Of course Evans includes Frame in his study, but I would concur with Jane Stafford that his treatment of her seems "strangely marginal" (2008) and even rather narrow, focusing predominantly on her early

autobiographical work and what Evans sees as yet another reshaping of the old colonial nationalist paradigm - the thorny crown of her "victimhood" (Evans, 2007, p. 154).

As already outlined, the narratological-performative framework suggests two possible reasons for the omissions made by extrinsically referential studies. On one level, it is possible that the critical tools of extrinsic studies fail to engage the complicating formal and technical strategies of metafictional writing. For instance, Janet Frame's metafictions are embedded with irony and diffused by manifold layers of voice, point-of view, duplicity, imposture and derivation through which Frame destabilizes notions of authority – and even meaning. Even some of Frame's most perceptive critics find the levels of reference and meaning in her novels "elusive, ambiguous" (Cronin, 2009, p. 4) or "paradoxical and inconclusive" (Michell, 2009, p. 129) or as Evans himself has previously described them, like "a riddle to solve" (Evans, 2004, p. 23). Not surprisingly, the single focuses of psychoanalytic, post-colonial, and gender-based theories may entail oversimplifications of Frame's complex structures. As Jennifer Lawn has argued, critics who treat Frame's work as passive in their imposition of theory may fail to engage the text's own heuristic self-interpretation and conceptual density: "The critic who imposes theory on the text – bearing in mind the more or less explicit equation between vulnerable text and vulnerable author in so much commentary on Frame – risks replicating the role of the 'bad doctor' who misdiagnoses the textual signs" (2009, p. 28). Or as Marc Delrez has it, the elusive "linguistic constructs" which are constitutive of Frame's oeuvre mean that an overall view of Frame's work "can only be had through a kind of sensitive diaphragm, as it were: one that keeps opening and contracting as both writer and reader struggle to visualize elusive expanses/expansions of being" (2002, p. 221).

On another, more abstract level, it is conceivable that extrinsically-referential points of view tend to overlook the innately operative force of language to transform, stage, reiterate and act – even despite a texts possible position in a hegemonic cultural structure. If we agree with Derrida, every individual speech-act is distinct and valuable due to its specificity - its ability to "break [...] with its context" (1988, p. 9). And in this sense it is impossible to define the entire context of a speech act – context cannot be "exhaustively determinable" and the "conscious intentions" of the author are never completely present or transparent in a text (p. 18). A performative utterance is not constituted solely by intentions or purposed meanings as Austin/Searle propose, but also by the complex structure of language. In excluding, for example, the possibility of parodic or playful citation of language, many of the fluid, contingent and plural meanings of a text may remain obscured by extrinsic (colonial-postcolonial, rational-nonrational) binary oppositions.

The point is not to propose a set of false choices between narratology and contextualism, or between unbiased formalism and loaded ideological interpretation. Rather, this study hopes to attend to the complexities of textual form while remaining aware of, and responsive to, the socio-cultural and literary-cultural implications of the texts it examines. Instead of inspecting literature for thematic features which reflect hegemonic social patterns already delineated in other spheres of the social sciences and literary studies, this study operates from within the texts, using performativity as operative concept within the general field of narratology. The discussion within each chapter works bidirectionally from one bearing to another. On one trajectory, the novels serve as examples illustrating how metafiction functions within the general framework of

narratology, and, in this sense, the texts answer the purpose of theory to a small degree. From this direction I hope to investigate a number of concepts, taxonomies, and models that are currently under debate in narratological and performative studies – concepts that have bearing on the way fiction is performed, produced, viewed, and discussed in New Zealand and internationally: from issues pertaining to the various understandings of post-modernism and realism, to micro-level issues of authorship, the nature of the narrator, models of character "focalisation", parodic modes, matters of narrative framing, patterns of internalisation, and theories of the implied reader or "narratee".

On the other hand, as this summary of performative theory suggests, the texts should not be seen as necessarily subordinated to theory, acting as convenient illustrations of greater extrinsic or even formalist generalities. From the other trajectory, I hope the methodology and theoretical framework will lend itself to the task of elucidating and particularizing the texts – examining and clarifying them as distinct and individual performances of speech. By examining their specific features I hope to discover whether or not these examples of New Zealand metafiction are able to contribute to literary culture despite thematic aspects which may or may not reveal varying levels of immersion in dominant cultural codes of understanding. In other words, this study attempts to bring the intrinsic qualities of some of the country's more modally complex fiction into balance with the existing body of extrinsically referential studies. Performativity thus functions as an interpretative approach within the larger narratological schema or framework.

In the broadest possible sense then, the questions of the thesis then are both performative and narratological: How do Frame/Stead/Haley/Jackson/Wendt/Randall perform writing and authorship? Do conventional modes of categorisation (anti-

realism/post-modernism et al.) sensibly explain their textual projects? What space in narratology does the metafictional mode of their stories occupy? How do the authors see their work now? And what are the possible contexts of their narrative performance?

1.3 Metafictional performativity in a narratological framework

As Nünning (2004, p. 354) Fludernik (2009, p. 88) and others have pointed out, there are a number of narratological typologies in current use – so many that it seems unsuitable to discuss narratology as if it is a uniform discipline or singular framework. While many of the new narratological methodologies appear to derive from Genettean and/or Stanzelian models, they have diversified into a variety of approaches through encounters with structural linguistics, phenomenology, poetics, psychology and other discourse areas (Barry, 1990; Fludernik 2000). Despite their various modifications and amendations, what these approaches have in common is the assumption that it is imperative to conceive of narrative as an active agent – something which is dynamically implicated in the production of historical and cultural (in this case, literary-cultural) developments – therefore rendering semiotic studies of narrative vital and even central to cultural-historical and thus literary critique. As Ansgar Nünning argues, agreement on the functions and modes of signification in texts is essential for a reasonable and coherent discourse: "it does make a difference whether we can establish a consensus about textual features or not, and it is the descriptive toolkit of narratology that provides us with the terminological categories needed as the basis for rational argument" (2004, p. 358).

Perhaps Nünning's ideal of unified typology is a little hopeful, but it does make sense to outline a reasonably stable and accessible set of terms for use in the remainder of the study. This section begins by outlining the Genettean narratological model as a theoretical framework, and includes the most useful variants, suggestions and developments which have arisen in revisions of the original by theorists Mieke Bal,

Seymour Chatman, and, more recently, Nünning himself. Within this framework, I locate the more specialised functions and techniques of metafictional narratives, adapting useful terminology and categories provided by earlier studies of reflexive fiction by Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon, and Robert Stam.

The basis of this framework derives from Gérard Genette's structuralist analysis *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (1980) and its revised companion, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988). In the former, Genette begins his framework by dividing narrative into three levels: story, "the signified or narrative content" (p. 27); discourse (that which is narrated (p. 28); and narration (or "the narrating action"" (p. 28). He goes on to posit three further categories which reveal how the relationships between these levels function – these he terms the "three basic classes" (1980, p. 31) of narrative: tense, mood (here "mode"), and voice (revision of mood/mode: 1988, p. 41):

TENSE

1. order
a. anachronies (analepsis, prolepsis)
b. anchrony

2. duration
a. ellipsis
b. summary
c.scene
d. pause
e. stretch

3. frequency
a. singulative
b. iterative
c. repetitive

MODE

1.focalisation
a. zero focalisation
b. internal focalisation
c. external focalisation

VOICE

1. person
a. homodiegetic
b. heterodiegetic

2. time of narration
a. subsequent
b. simultaneous
c. prior
d. interpolated

3. narrative level
a. diegetic
b.extradiegetic
c. hypodiegetic

Figure 3. Summary of Genette's categories with emendations.

Tense in the Genettean framework is comprised of three subcategories: order, duration and frequency. The first pertains to the "temporal order" (p. 35) which accounts for how events are directly or indirectly arranged within the narrative: here analepsis (retrospective action) and prolepsis (anticipatory accounts of action) function as *anachronies* – "the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative" (pp. 35-36) while any event devoid of any temporal placement - such as those discussed in the forthcoming chapters on Haley and Randall - is termed an *achrony* (p. 84). Along with the ordering of narrative events, Genette distinguishes between various kinds of duration – *anisochronies* – modulations or shifts between narrative time and story time. Common to traditional narratives are *ellipsis*: the omission of story-events from the narrative; *summary* : condensing of story-time in narrative; *scene*: which (often found in dialogue) equates to or "realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story" (p. 94) ; and lastly, *pause*, in which the story-events are interrupted by narratorial discourse and description. To this model Seymour Chatman has usefully added the category of *stretch*, where "discourse-time is longer than story-time" but story-time is not paused (1980, p. 68). As Fludernik points out, stretch is likely to have developed in modernist narratives, such as depictions of thought and mind-states in "imitation of the filmic technique of slow-motion" (2009, p. 101) an idea I will discuss in relation to C.K. Stead's modernist techniques in *All Visitors Ashore*. Finally, under the subcategory of *frequency*, Genette describes the relationship between the number of times an event takes place in the story and the number of times it is discussed in the narrative: where *singulative frequency* refers to one event mentioned once (or x events mentioned x times),

repetitive frequency refers to one event mentioned more than once, and *iterative frequency* relates one time an event which occurred on several occasions (1980, pp. 114-116).

If Genette's category of tense is useful in discussing the technical minutiae of metafictional texts, then his second and third categories – *mode* and *voice* - are vital tools for discussing the performative aspects of reflexive fiction. Genette's mode (or *mood*) is concerned with the seer's perspective and is governed by narrative perspective, or what Genette terms focalisation, the point-of-view from which the story is told. *Zero focalisation* or *nonfocalised* narrative represents what Genette terms the "classical" omniscient perspective in which the authorial narrator hovers above the diegesis with transcendental access to the story-world (p. 189). Also helpful is his additional delineation is between *internal focalisation* (diegetic - where the only information presented is filtered through the subjective perceptions of a character) and *external focalisation* – which is extradiegetic – the information available to the narrator is less than that available to the character/s, and the narrator follows the character's actions "without ever being able to know his thoughts or feelings" (p. 190).

Distinctions surrounding mode are particularly important to performative descriptions of metafiction in that they clarify the relationships inherent in the presentational process. While fictional performances - in the general sense of what Berns terms "imitative" or "illusional" (2009, p. 96) - function on both the story and on the discourse levels in narrative fiction (characters perform actions, while the narrator narrates), the metafictional mode complexifies this performativity by self-consciously subverting mode and focalisation. For instance, Charlotte Randall's *Within the Kiss* ingeniously distorts the margins between focalisation/nonfocalisation by attributing

internal modes of focalisation to the narrator and non-focalised omniscience to the characters themselves, so that it becomes increasingly uncertain just who is speaking, or on what modal echelon the narrative is functioning.

In addition, Genette's typology surrounding "voice" is important to the discussion of authorship, and the (implied) status and reliability of the narrator. Genette resolves ambiguities of first-second-third person narration by distinguishing between homodiegetic narrators, who are also characters in the story, and heterodiegetic narrators, who are not. As Fludernik explains:

> The major advantage of this terminological innovation is that there is no confusion about the use of the first-person pronoun […] By contrast, the standard term 'first-person narrative' ostensibly indicates that the first-person pronoun refers to the central protagonist on the story level just as third-person narrative uses a third person pronoun, he, she or they, in referring to the main protagonist(s), or a second-person narrative refers to the central protagonist by means of you or an equivalent address pronoun. (2009, p. 98)

Genette also disntinguishes between four kinds of narrating: subsequent - the conventional positioning of past-tense narrating which tells of events after they have occurred; simultaneous – narrating that occurs contemporaneously with the action; prior - predictive narrating, usually in the future tense; and interpolated – narrating that occurs between the moments of action (1980, 216-217).

Most useful for a study of multileveled fictions are Genette's distinctions of narrative levels. The diegetic level is naturally to be understood as the story-level of the characters thoughts and actions, while the extradiegetic is the level external to diegetic action – what

could be otherwise termed the temporal-spatial level of a narrator who is not a part of the story (1980, p. 228-229). For Genette the metadiegetic level is one that is implanted in an original diegetic level (often a "story within the story"); however, because the term causes some ambiguity ("meta" seems to implies a level beyond or above the diegesis rather than within it) Mieke Bal's revisionary term *hypodiegetic* is used here to denote embedded narratives (2006, p. 16). This should clarify the use of the term *meta* in referring to levels outside, rather than within, the primary diegesis of the narrative.

As Ansgar Nünning has also pointed out, there has been some confusion in narratological terminology surrounding the use of the term meta that originated in English translations of Genette:

> The rather shabby and contradictory treatment of different forms of metanarratives is indicated by the fact that in the English translation [...] the term 'metanarrative' appears in two quite different sense: On the one hand, it refers to the phenomenon of narrative embedding and to narratives on a hierarchically lower level [...] On the other hand, Genette and his translator both use the term as an unspecific umbrella term to thematize the 'internal organization of the text', i.e. for different forms of self-reflexive narration (2004, p. 15).

Nünning develops this point to propose a further distinction between metafiction and metanarrative in general. While both terms refer to variations of self-reflexivity, they imply different uses: *metanarration* refers to reflections on the discourse or process of narration, and *metafiction* to comments on the fictionality of the text or narrator. This distinction implies a possible solution to the problem raised in my introduction – the apparent dichotomy between anti-mimetic and realist functions of the mode held by

Hankins, Jones and Morrissey. Does metafiction, and/or reflexivity in general, serve to undermine mimesis and expose the illusions of narrative? Or does it impel the reader deeper into its construction of reality? Under Nünning's distinction, metafiction which comments on the fictionality of a given text, may do the former, while metanarration which provides general comments on discourse - may well contribute to the appearance of authenticity in a narrative, thereby supporting realist strategies. However, Nünning's distinctions may cause further ambiguities when variations are introduced: for example, in instances where fictionalised metanarration occurs hypodiegetically (in Janet Frame's novels), or where metafictional commentary occurs in a work of non-fiction (in the anthropologically-based works of Michael Jackson for example). The most important of these lexicological difficulties are discussed briefly in the following Description of Terms (1.4).

1.4 Description of terms

If self-reflexivity is the defining characteristic of metafiction, then there are still varieties and degrees of inside this broader description. In this study, the terms *reflexive, extra-diegetic*, *self-referential*, *reflective*, *self-conscious* and which are used to describe metafictional devices are to some extent interchangeable, and their use is governed by slight variations in meaning which should be clear in context. Metafictional generally refers to the mode as it is applied to complete novels or short stories; reflexive or self-referential to the way in which a text turns back on itself; extra-diegetic to narrative outside of the story world (the level of what Nünning terms metanarration); and self-conscious, reflective to more understated or suggestive manners of self-examination.

Other terms are perhaps not so compatible. When defining the properties of metafictional novels, Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam tend to interchange the term *genre* with mode and form, Hutcheon speaking of "the defining characteristics of the genre" (1980, p. 4) and Stam defining metafiction as a "self-conscious genre in the novel" (1992, p. 127). While their use of the term is technically acceptable - metafiction could, according to dictionary definition, be seen as a genre within the novel genre - the use of these synonyms generates some unnecessary terminological ambiguities. If metafiction is a genre, then it would follow that metafictional novels would stand together without needing further classification; however, there are not only metafictional works spanning the various genres of the novel (mystery, romance, crime, travel and autobiography for example) but meta-narratives in all media where fiction is found, such

as film, television, photography, painting, cartooning, even computer games. A reader who wanted to find further examples in the genre of *Don Quixote* may be surprised to be directed to InXile-Entertainment's Xbox game *The Bard's Tale* (2004), or to the novels of C.K. Stead, or even more so to a Dick Frizzell print, which also contains a meta-narrative:

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Figure 4. Richard 'Dick' Frizzell. Masterpiece. Screenprint on paper.

A further problem is that defining metafiction as a narrative genre is misleadingly delimiting because metafictions vary greatly in degree and concentration from work to work. At what point do we include a given text in the metafictional genre? Is *Moby Dick* a metafiction simply because the narrator begins by bringing into question his own identity? Are Michael Jackson's novels excluded as metafictions because they have an autobiographical basis? For these reasons, when discussing reflexive properties, the meta-reflex is not as usefully defined in this study as a genre, kind, or style, as it is a mode, a manner, approach, or method of writing that crosses genres, styles, and media. All of these items (fiction, film and fine art) can be discussed on the same grounds if reflexivity is considered as a stylistic mode rather than a defining genre, and all can continue to occupy their respective places on the shelf. The term *mode* in this thesis is then used to distinguish metafictional processes from other modes of writing (magic-realism or illusionism for example), while *form* denotes specific metafictional properties and contours within a text, and genre refers to the genus or type typically associated with the text's subject matter or thematic concerns.

The degree of metafictionality a work exhibits has been another area of terminological content in previous studies of the mode. What degree of reflexivity, self-consciousness or self—reflection makes a work a metafiction? Waugh restricts her definition of metafiction to those works in which the reflexive mode is the "dominant function" and distinguishes only between work which "explicitly masquerades as formalized critical interpretation" (in Nabokov and Borges for example) and a more general degree of metafictional texts which reveal "complex implicit interdependence" of narrative levels (1984, p. 15).

On the other hand, Hutcheon divides metafictional (or as she would phrase them "narcissistic") texts into four categories. To begin with, she divides those which are "diegetically self-conscious" from those which demonstrate "an awareness of their linguistic constitution", distinguishing between texts which consciously reveal themselves to be narratives or stories within the story-world, and those which focus on their linguistic make up, or with language in general (1980, p. 7). Diegetic metafictions then directly disclose their fictionality in the narrative realm. An example of diegetic self-consciousness would be when Charlotte Randall's narrator acknowledges that the main character's dream sequence is merely a fictional device used to "smuggle" plot information into the narrative ("…of course a dream, how else do we smuggle the preternatural into the daily grind…" [2002, p. 10]). By contrast, non-diegetic or linguistically-focussed reflexivity is characterised by a specific percipience to language-use. When C.K. Stead's character Harry Butler (discussing traditional conceptions of the soul with his students) claims that "we should […] look at the way the word traditionally functions, and this will reveal to us something about our notion of ourselves" (1986, p. 128), the structure of the story-world is not called into question, but our ideas of language and reality are. In addition, Hutcheon then further subdivides these categories into two possible varieties, the "overt" and "covert":

> Overtly narcissistic texts reveal their self-awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic identity within the texts themselves. In the covert form, this process is internalized, actualized; such a text is self-reflective but not necessarily self-conscious. (1980, p. 7)

If Hutcheon does not seem an "overzealous hairsplitter", as Madelyn Jablon suggests (1997, p. 10), she does form categories based on such minor differences that they tend to obscure the shared features of many metafictional works. Most, if not all, of the novels in the present study are concerned with both the artificiality of their narrative processes, and their linguistic componentry: Stead, Jackson and Randall have all produced novels which are "re-written" internally (within the diegesis, a character or narrator questions the validity of events in the narrative and alters or re-writes them); but they are also concerned with their linguistic features – Frame with the social implications of language use; Randall with finding words and ways of saying; Stead with the use of descriptions and characterisation; and Jackson with how language alters perception, and how personal narratives are distorted by memory.

While Hutcheon's division between diegetic and linguistic metafiction might be too reductive for the purposes of this study, it is certainly worth bearing in mind. But her distinction between overt and covert narcissism certainly provides a functional basis for contrasting the texts. "Overt narcissism", in Hutcheon's theory, is fiction in which narrativity constitutes a major topic or theme of the work; where in "covert narcissism" the process of self-reflection is buried within the text. These classifications correspond loosely with what I will term (avoiding the pejorative sound of narcissistic and the furtive connotations of covert) "constituent-reflexivity" and "concomitant-reflexivity". Constituently reflexive texts are those that deliberately reveal themselves to be fabricated or crafted and which aim to uncover the various tools of storytelling even as they are utilised within the text. Concomitantly reflexive narratives may incidentally contain in their enactment dramatized narrators/writers, or simultaneously provide the reader with

passing reflections on language, but these are overshadowed by more dominant narrative modes. From a simple statement such as "this is a sentence" to novels which are self-parodying, the meta-sensibility can be found in so many narratives that it is important to refine the definition of the metafictional to avoid expansive inclusions. There are implicit or concomitant reflexive features in nearly all writing considered post-modern, from *factional* to *aleatory* to *fabulatory* and so on, and these different terms are often competing for the same works. The purpose of these distinctions is on one hand to determine which texts are most representative of the mode (and thus most useful in terms of the scope and depth of the present study) and on the other hand to create a useful taxonomy of features through which to discuss the relevant texts.

Finally, terms pertaining to naturalism are used to refer to attempts at objective literary portrayals or reproductions of (usually human) nature, behaviour or perception. I have no intention of foregrounding Émile Zola's particular view of naturalism, however fruitful that line of investigation might be for a future study. In addition, terms pertaining to "realism" generally refer, not to the movement in the United States or former Soviet Union, but to the realist tradition in New Zealand – commonly characterised as attempts at faithful representations or "verisimilitudes" of perceived social realities, especially – though not exclusively – those of middle or working classes. For more thorough historicisations of the New Zealand realist tradition, see Evans (1990) Jones (1994) and Wilson (2010) .

1.5 Reflexive narrative in the New Zealand context

As Jones points out in his chapters in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, by 1991 the country's literature was saturated with novels that were "explicitly concerned with their own narrativity and fictionality, as well as sometimes with their intertextuality and their blending of fact and fiction into 'faction'" (1998, p. 230). While he draws examples from work produced in the 1980s and early 1990s, fitting the metafictional mode into the broader categorization of post-modernism, I hope to show that it is possible to trace the mode back further: to the 1970s in Stead's fiction, the 1960s in Duggan, and further still to the 1950s in Janet Frame, which will complicate Jones' historicisation to some extent, and render Morrissey's claim to represent the avant-garde in *The New Fiction* largely redundant.

Jones' outline of reflexive writers (up to 1998) includes Maurice Shadbolt, Craig Harrison, C.K. Stead, Ian Wedde, Michael Jackson, Russell Haley, Stevan Eldred-Grigg, Anne Kennedy and Janet Frame. To revise and update the list, M.K. Joseph, Maurice Duggan, Elizabeth Knox, Bill Manhire, Albert Wendt, Charlotte Randall and Jack Ross could be added, as well as writers who have used the mode in short fiction, such as Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimaera. But for many of these authors, the metafictional mode is limited to a single work or overshadowed by other more dominant modes. M.K. Joseph's tall story *A Soldier's Tale* (1976) pushes realism towards self-reflexivity in places, but ultimately pulls up short of constituent metafictionality. The narrator's occasional forays into the meta-regions of narrativity are - for good reason - rather shallow: his gestures at the capricious nature of yarn-spinning would undo the "historical-realist"

elements of the narrative altogether if the reader were to be convinced of the unreliability of the narrator. While he admits that the story is "not strictly realistic" (p. 10), he nevertheless urges the reader to accept it as fact: "try to imagine him telling this story, squatting on a ration-box staring with his cold eyes over the rim of his mug into the thin, blue flame, seeing in it the pictures he was describing to me" (pp. 10-11).

Similarly, some of Maurice Gee's work shows hints of reflexivity, but for the most part settles back into a more conventional mode of (autobiographical) social-realism. *Going West* (1992), perhaps Gee's most reflective novel, is narrated by the autobiographically-based character Jack Skeat, a writer writing about another writer, but he generally ignores the technical and fictive issues of the account he is creating, and focuses his account on the character's lives and relationships. He writes not to discover but to order and invent: "Why do I do this? Why start? I have no need of discovery. Isn't that what I'm leading to?" (Gee, 1992, p. 5). To a large extent the questions raised in Gee's novels turn on the motivations of characters - their need to explain a series of causes and effects in the diegesis - rather than in self-questioning the nature of narrative and representations of reality. That some of Gee's protagonists are writers and artists seems more to be inspired by his locality and encoded biography (in Henderson/Loomis) than in his desire to explore matters of fictiveness.

A similar philosophy appears to be at work in Maurice Shadbolt's novels. As Jones points out, Shadbolt uses reflexive procedures "without necessarily embracing the post-modern attitudes often used to justify them" (Jones, 1998, p. 230). To take an example from his most playful foray into reflexivity, *The Lovelock Version* (1980), the constituent reflexive intervals develop alongside its more dominant mode, historical-realism. The

narrator occasionally calls the ontological status of his characters into question ("the Lovelocks, then, do they live?") only to write off the uncertainty: "Never, mercifully, this narrator's problem […] this life, this unfinished fable, this scriptless dream, and too untidy by far, is also too short for elegant sport with the spurious; and too intricate for truth" (Shadbolt, 1980, p. 27). If the "truth" of the story is at all brought into question, the question is immediately discarded as being of little relevance, and conventional realism resumes its place centre stage.[2]

Other New Zealand writers have tried to incorporate reflexive analysis into their fiction with limited success. Historian Stevan Eldred-Grigg's otherwise interesting foray into metafictional-memoir, *My History I Think* (1994), raises a number of cryptic questions and makes a series of abstract claims relating life to his narrative ("The hidden history is the history of the historian" (p. 189), or "Writers can hide very nicely behind their characters. I have hidden myself all my life. I like to hide" (p. 12), but they are not given tangible illustration in the story. By the end of the book the reader has little insight into the underlying tension between autobiography and fiction that the writer seemed to promise. In fact, the end of the novel unwittingly sums up its own problems with metafictional mode. "The interesting part of the story is always concealed," the narrator says in the last few pages. Likewise, Geoff Palmer's reflective case of esprit d'escalier in *Telling Stories* (1996), while an entertaining piece of fiction, ends up making some fairly pedestrian statements - "All sorts of strange things happen when you start to write things down. Things like maintaining a narrative flow and stuff" (p. 63).

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[2] As Shadbolt intimated in an article on his 'Beginnings', the processes behind writing did not have a place in narrative, or even in general discussion: "The better the writer, the less there is left over for literary conversation. Writers who talk shop often have empty shelves" (Shadbolt, 1981, p. 97).

On the other hand, a number of writers have incorporated metafictional gestures in intelligent and illuminating ways, but they have been overshadowed by a more dominant mode. In the case of Mike Johnson's *Antibody Positive* (1987), the narrator describes his obstacles in scripting the book, but these "great many time, motion, character and plot problems" as Ireland puts it (1989, p. 189), become lost in the more perplexing science-fictional aspects of the novel. Likewise, in Craig Harrison's *Grievous Bodily* (1991) the moments of metafictionality are literally and metaphorically buried by farcical or carnivalesque comedy. In the final part of the book, the literary-minded Dr Mottle realises that he might be a character in a novel, and the house in which he is standing collapses:

> This only seized his mind briefly but it flipped his entire environment from realist mode to conscious fictional mode and back again. And this was fatal for the Prannock house, because a self-conscious house could not remain standing after what Wesley had done to it, any more than a realistic narrative could remain intact if its characters showed awareness of their fictionality. It would collapse. (Harrison, 1991, p. 250)

The house does collapse, ending the story, and Dr. Mottle puts it down to the post-modern problem of "deconstruction", making Harrison's ending more of a literary in-joke or one-liner than a useful addition to theme, plot, character or the narrative framework.

Other authors such as Ian Wedde, Jack Ross and Anne Kennedy have written dense and erudite (anti)novels which combine self-reflexive approaches with experimental and even occasionally aleatory and asemic modes which might best represent New Zealand's

"post-modern" fiction if the mantle at all concerned them (see Wedde 1986a, 2006, 2008; Ross 2005, 2006, 2010; Kennedy 1988, 1993).

One of the writers who took the concept of post-modernism seriously was Auckland-based Michael Morrissey, who frequently used the term in the mid-1980s to describe his own work and that of the writers he collected and published under the title *The New Fiction*. Morrissey's early work was clearly influenced by Sargeson, and although it later became dominated by agonised self-conscious stories about personal and sexual relationships it could still quite easily be described as social-realism with an overcoat of urban chic – a mode of realism which he eventually returned to in *Paradise to Come* (1997). Mid-way through his career he made an extended foray into an eclectic mode of consciously avante-garde fictions in which he imported a variety of experimental devices from America, Britain and Australia. *The Fat Lady & the Astronomer*, and *Octavio's Last Invention* are avowedly post-modernist, and have a plurality of influences from writers such as Joyce, Beckett, Barthelme, and Borges to populist sci-fi writers such as Alfred Bester.

What most defines Morrissey's work, or what defined his most frequently anthologised stories in the 1980s, was his use of *faction*, what is now commonly known as *RPF* or *real person fiction*: the device of taking real and often famous historical figures and importing them into a fictional setting together with fictitious allegations. While faction or RPF has been popularised since the 1990s with internet story boards, fanzines and role-playing boards, it is most likely that Morrissey first encountered the idea in the short stories of Christchurch-born Australian-based writer Gary Langford. Langford's outlandish titles (such as "How a skinny minstrel called Bob Dylan forced Adolph Hitler

to invade Russia, thereby losing him the second world war" and "Humphrey Bogart Got More Than An Oscar For the African Queen'", "Barth's Dream", "The Death of James Dean", and "The Girl Who Waited Too Long for Godot") were being published in *The Listener* and *Landfall* from the early 1970s.[3]

Morrissey picks up on Langford's technique in his collection *The Fat Lady & the Astronomer* (1981) creating narratives with historically-based characters such as Charles Fort, Franz Kafka, Jesus and Andy Warhol. The most successful from this series of stories is Morrissey's oft-anthologised "Jack Kerouac Sat Down by the Wanganui River and Wept" (first published in *Islands* in 1980), a story which, as the title suggests, imports Langford's model into a New Zealand context and extends Kerouac's famous road-trip beyond the West Coast of America across the Pacific, to the grave of James K Baxter in Wanganui. Like Langford's characters, the character of "Kerouac" in Morrissey's story makes no exact reference to the historical figure of Jack Kerouac, but uses self-consciously fictional motifs and references from *On the Road* (1957) and combines them with real-world references to Jerusalem and Baxter's burial place. As a result, the story creates a fissure between language and reality while questioning the necessity of logical or "realistic" narrative progression.

As has been mentioned, another culturally interesting element of Morrissey's body of work is his anthology *The New Fiction*. While the collection itself shows an interesting range of experimental work, it suffered at the time from a framing introduction that

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[3] A full list of Langford's publications is available at the University of Waikato database of New Zealand short stories: http://www.waikato.ac.nz/library/resources/nzc/stories/ssauthor11.shtml

attempted, through a false-dichotomy, to pit its "young" metafictionalists against realism and an older generation of established writers – a move that drew highly critical reviews, most notably from Patrick Evans, C.K. Stead, and David Dowling. One of the immediate problems with the 30,000 word critical introduction to the anthology was that the obligatory methodological explanation for inclusions and omissions was unusually short – 8 lines long – and Morrissey's reasons for not including work by authors (Duggan, Frame and Stead, as well as Vincent O'Sullivan, Michael Henderson and Steven Eldred-Grigg) that might have otherwise brought into question the disjuncture established in the essay between the old and new generations and between realism and post-modernism, were inexplicably brief and vague. Ostensibly Morrissey had conceived of the anthology to showcase work that had remained unpublished, because of what he claimed was the realist-dominated climate of New Zealand literature. But there were problems with his explanation. He was taken to task by Stead for not including Frame, little known writer B.F. Babington, and Duggan (and by extension – Stead himself) who had legitimately been working in the "new" mode at least 15 years earlier – 30 years for Frame. "Michael Henderson, and even more, Michael Gifkins," Stead adds, "seem so pre-eminently to lie within its scope I find their exclusion incomprehensible [...] either Morrissey is confused, or he is not giving his reasons for his exclusions." (1989, p. 236). On the other hand, David Dowling (1986) invalidated Morrissey's claim that his selection of writers had suffered from a lack of attention by pointing out that, of the 40 pieces in *The New Fiction*, 33 had been previously published (and five of those in the allegedly conservative pages of *Landfall*).

In sum, Morrissey's new fiction was neither very *new*, nor very *fictional*: many of its works - pieces by Ted Jenner, Wystan Curnow, Francis Pound, Alexandria Chalmers and Markman Ellis - drew on the methods of autobiographically-based concrete poetry for their impact, and failed to resemble even prose, much less anything marketable as fiction. Without giving any sensible justification for the reader to change their understanding of some longstanding and useful nomenclature, the otherwise successful pieces of "new fiction" rattled around like round pegs in a square hole - the term fiction being too boxlike to accommodate them comfortably, and the various influences (open form, concrete poetry, bricolage, and so forth) giving the collection a sense of shapelessness.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its large scope of influence on New Zealand writers, the metafictional mode's origins are multiplicitous and difficult to trace. It is clear, though, that some of the most important and widely read international twentieth-century metafictionalists in the local literary circles wrote, or were popularised, in America. C.K. Stead references Nabokov's use of "pale fire" in "A Quality of Life" and plays on his use of providing revisionary insights into an earlier manuscript (Stead, 1981c, p. 113). Earlier still, Maurice Duggan's "Along Rideout Road that Summer" (1961) shows the influence of Vladimir Nabokov 's *Lolita* (1955) of which, according to Stead (1991, p. 135), he borrowed an illegal copy from friend Erich Geiringer in 1960: like Nabokov's Humbert, Duggan's narrator shows great delight in displaying his broad literary tastes, and recounts his version of events to an imagined jury. Duggan also references Jorge Luis Borges in "The Magsman Miscellany" (1975) likening his own prose to the Borgesian maze. And Borges is elsewhere referenced or drawn on by Albert Wendt in *Black Rainbow* (1992) reflected on by Michael Jackson in *Pieces of Music* (1994), and recalled by Russell Haley as

an influential figure.   As I have already mentioned, Morrissey's attempt to introduce metafiction and its related modes in his introduction to *The New Fiction* draws extensively on the fiction and criticism of Gass, Barth and Borges.

If the metafictional eruptions in America did in fact cause a wave of reflexivity to roll across the Pacific in the late 1960s, its first port of call was probably Auckland. Certainly Sargeson's protégés, those "alarmingly dedicated and embattled" writers who, according to Maurice Shadbolt, crafted "prose and poetry from pure literary motives" (Shadbolt, 1981, p. 97) were amongst the first in the country writing concomitantly reflexive and, eventually, constituently metafictional work. Three of these writers: Maurice Duggan, Janet Frame and C.K. Stead were experimenting in short fiction, Duggan exclusively, while Frame and Stead were also writing poetry and planning novels.

To some extent Frame was already beginning to use the reflexive mode before she met Sargeson, and before the metafictional renaissance even began to take place in American literature. The short stories in her first book *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951) make Frame appear well ahead of even her international contemporaries, especially considering the book took six years to be published: as Pamela Gordon has pointed out, the stories were "written in 1946 while the aspiring author was working as a live-in housemaid/waitress/nurse at a boarding house in Playfair Street, Caversham, Dunedin" (Gordon, 2009). Although a kind of juvenilia, some of the stories in the collection hint at the metafictional preoccupations with language and reality that would become the staples of Frame's later work. The final piece - accurately enough titled "My Last Story" - is the most prophetically narrative-focussed. The piece is very short, two pages long, narrated by an unhappy author-figure who repeatedly claims she is "never going to write another

story" (see 1951[1990], p. 97) yet feels she must name the topic she is not going to write about - her family - and thus produces a sort of double-negative sketch. The story certainly disrupts conventional modes of storytelling: it breaks the fourth wall to directly address an implied audience and draws attention to its own use of language – particularly in its reiteration of clichés and chestnut sayings ("earning a living", "every cloud has a silver lining", "it must be love", "a heart of gold") but also by referring to its own punctuation: "I'm going to put three dots with my typewriter, impressively, and then I'm going to begin…" (pp. 97-98). While rather slight as a whole, it is clear a gesture toward the metafictional mode that Frame would develop later in her novels, and it also dates Frame's use of self-reflexive play to over 20 years before Duggan and Stead made use of the mode, and makes Michael Morrissey's 1985 anthology of reflexive "new fiction" appear to dawdle 50 years behind the avant-garde. In fact, Morrissey's "paradox" – that "the new fiction has been present in New Zealand for some time" (1985, p. 14) is less a paradox than a truism, given the presence of the mode in Frame, Stead, Duggan and, to a lesser extent, Shadbolt.

Probably the most accomplished and substantial early metafiction belongs to the first occupant of Sargeson's army hut at Esmonde Rd, Maurice Duggan - although this work would not be written until a decade after his stay with Sargeson. "Along Rideout Road That Summer", the first draft of which was written at the end of his Burns fellowship in 1960 (see Richards, 1997, pp. 269-70), is one of New Zealand's most anthologised stories, and aside from Frame's gestures in *The Lagoon*, the first evidence that the conventional grounds of fiction was beginning to be seriously examined within the narratives themselves. Duggan's story develops the themes of an essay he wrote for

Manuka - the Auckland teachers' training college journal - in 1960, an article which argued that in New Zealand's English curriculum "the bridge between reality and art has never been established, except in the primitive sense of admiring life-like representation" (pp. 5-8). What was most lacking, he claimed, was the teaching of a specifically New Zealand literature. He illustrated the comic discrepancies in reading and writing New Zealand in the style of English romantic prose with a short fictional example, showing how the literature "of nightingales and daffy-down-dillies [pays] no attention to this infestation of buttercups, these squabbling gulls, that hawk over the pasture" and juxtaposing romanticism with the New Zealand setting when his narrator looks up from "the damsel with the dulcimer to meet the loitering figure of Maka Huia, bright ribbons trailing from the ribbons of her ukelele" (1965, pp. 5-8). The problem, as Duggan saw it, was how to connect the dulcimer with the ukulele: how to reconcile romantic forms with the less flowery realities of everyday life in New Zealand.

After developing the idea over a year, Duggan completed a story in 1961, which was eventually published as "Along Rideout Road That Summer" in *Landfall* in 1963. In the finished story Maka Huia becomes the ukulele-playing Fanny Hohepa, a farmer's daughter, and the narrator becomes Buster O'Leary, a 17-year old employed on the Hohepa farm. The story begins with similar metafictional juxtapositions to the essay: Duggan highlights the Kiwi vernacular when Buster sets out in the evening "to flog a torch from somewhere" and butts it up against old world romanticism as he is studied by the "faintly luminous eyes of […] milk-white unicorns" (1965, p. 55).

The story is conscious of its fictional status and parodies itself as a poor-man's Odyssey: "In fact, and fortunately there have to be some facts, even fictional ones, I'd

removed myself a mere dozen miles from the parental home" (p. 55). It also parodies the conventions of popular New Zealand fiction, pokes a finger at some of its well-known practitioners (probably at Ian Cross, and certainly at Barry Crump in the much-cited "crumpy conversation") and distances itself from the element of laconic "natural" speech in the realist tradition, or what Stead has called "the line of New Zealand fiction which has gone in for the realism of inarticulacy" (1981b, p. 13).

Duggan's modus operandi though could be seen as an example of the complicating factors of reflexivity in the usual dichotomy between metafiction and realism. If metafiction is typically associated with anti-mimetic devices that shatter the realistic illusion of the fictional world, then Duggan also clearly wants to expand or develop the representational qualities of fiction in order to paint a more realistic portrait, containing both laconic and voluble modes of speech, romantic and more sober understandings of New Zealand life. If this was a point of departure from the Sargeson tradition, it was a feature that Duggan held in common with others in the second generation: Stead, Frame and also Shadbolt and Gee. Despite Duggan's close contact with Sargeson since their meeting in 1944, Duggan tended to eschew the focus on everyday speech patterns and straightforward form that his mentor was so well-known for. As Ian Richards points out "even Duggan's early stories, such as 'Sunbrown' and 'Notes on an Abstract Arachnid', display a Joycean wordiness and impatience with convention form" (Richards, 1998, p. 152).

But it is arguably Duggan's posthumously published "The Magsman Miscellany" (written in 1974, published in 1975) that pushes the anti-conventional envelope into purely and constituently metafictional territory. Ironically opening with the observation

that it is a "presumption to think of one's marginalia as being possessed of any interest" (p.52), it begins with a series of just such marginalia: a sequence of apothegmatic reflections on writing, proverbs on the text, and discussions of Narcissian contemplation, Alice's looking glass and the Borgesian maze. The story probably remains one of the most difficult written by a New Zealander before the 1980s, having little in the way of plot (an eccentric amateur writer named Ben McGoldrick is writing a letter to his wife requesting divorce while reminiscing about their relationship). In the main it is a character-study, a study of a writer and his writerly obsessions – and these to a large extent, are Duggan's own, as his biographer Ian Richards points out (1997, pp. 165-82). Among McGoldrick's notes beginning the story is a rather extended discussion of the writer-reader relationship, a relationship which is based on a series of unreliable hypotheses: "meeting a reader would, it seems certain, not be quite the same thing as identifying the reader one has in mind as one writes, as one wrote. No such being exists" (Duggan, 1984, p. 52). McGoldrick does not write for or about his "nearest and dearest", nor does he attempt to write the sort of work that interests himself - his reader is "an invention, a browsing and wiser sublimation of the magsman tissue and cell" (p. 52). Within the diegesis though the reader is the narrator's wife, Rosie McGoldrick, who, taking a break from her domestic duties finds her husband's "imaginative curlicues" in an OHMS envelope. These notes, we are informed, "began soon after they were married: the very first of them suggested that Rose consider breeding Doberman pinschers, for which Ben foresaw an increasing demand by departments of justice and education" (p. 66). Her response to the divorce letter is nonplussed; her husband is a "compulsory fantasist", and the letter cannot be taken seriously. What should be taken seriously

though is his struggle with the complexities of communication – for McGoldrick language is "part of what defines and imprisons and paroles us" (p.66).

Mark Williams picks up on Duggan's pun on linguistics in a later review and uses it to aver what a large break Duggan had made from the traditional realist mode. He writes: "Duggan recognizes the limits of language itself. […] The pun is the giveaway: self-conscious tricks like this force on us the recognition that the world made out of words is never simply the world 'out there'. Consequently the humanism of traditional realistic fiction is unceremoniously thrown into the garbage can of literary history […] Such a leap is overdue in much New Zealand fiction" (Williams, 1984, p. 505). While Williams may be overstating Duggan's break from the realist tradition, it is probable that in discarding the everyday "crumpyness" of New Zealand realism, Duggan wanted to reinvent the formal syntax and linguistic complexity that had been - in Sargeson and Mulgan perhaps - thrown out with the bath water of Britishness (see Broughton, 1998), and see it transported into a New Zealand frame of reference. On the one hand it is hard to imagine either Sargeson or Mulgan having a narrator who is concerned whether or not "all forms of publication that are not a priori entertainments may [...] be judged presumptuous" (p. 66). But despite the complications of Duggan's reflexivity here, many, if not most of his stories remained in a mode of fairly conventional Sargeson-influenced realism.[4] Certainly stories like "Along Rideout Road" and "The Magsman", in introducing complicated verbal play, complex syntax and carefully-placed literary references, drive their own fictional artifice inwards and bring into question their

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[4] Stead discusses the Sargeson influence in his introduction Duggan:, M. (1981). *Maurice Duggan: Collected Stories*, Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press. (p. 7)

linguistic grounding. But perhaps in this sense they extend - rather than discard - the principles of realism, giving further depth to depictions of contemporary New Zealand life and society.

But what of the other New Zealand fiction writers adopting "anti-realist" modes? For Cherry Hankin, like Williams, there was recognisable by the 1970s "a new climate of questioning" in New Zealand fiction, and the writer that provided the clearest example of a break with the staples of social realism was, for Hankin, Janet Frame - "the greatest liberating influence on New Zealand fiction since Frank Sargeson began experimenting with New Zealand speech patterns forty years ago" (Hankin, 1978, p. 302). Frame is remarkable, Hankin contends, for her capacity to employ language in a way that reveals the inner workings of the mind. She "creates for us an essentially linguistic universe where physical space is subordinated to mental space […] that helps us to transcend the dullness and limitations of everyday existence" (1978, p. 302). Frame's narrative creation of "mental space" will become part of the discussion on "inwardness" as this thesis progresses, but perhaps Hankin was only slightly exaggerating in her prediction that the developments of the sort Frame was introducing would "herald the end of one literary era and the opening up of a new one" (1978, p. 302).

CHAPTER II: The elusive humour of Janet Frame's metafictions

2.1 Derivations: the quizzical and the implausible in *The Adaptable Man* and *Living in the Maniototo*

If the critical debate surrounding New Zealand metafictional writing has been constrained by problems of - to borrow Slinn's term again - extrinsic referentiality, then Janet Frame's reflexive fictions are surely among those that might be usefully read from a more performative, intrinsic standpoint. Given that Frame's oeuvre has already been examined from Jungian, Kristevian, Irigirayan, Foucaultian, Bahktinian, Shakespearean, Feminist, Marxist and Postcolonialist and other theoretical frameworks, this chapter looks to synchronously investigate the formal narratological concerns arising from her metafictions alongside their broader performative and contextual functions. To put the problem of extrinsic referentiality in other terms, Kai Jensen and Roger Horrocks have pointed out that one of the main characteristics of poststructuralist "overreading" in New Zealand's literary criticism and elsewhere is that it often shifts the focus "to what has been obscured or dismissed as 'peripheral' by previous readings while ignoring elements that are apparently plain or easily perceptible" (Jensen quoting Horrocks, 1995, p. 68). This is especially true in the case of Frame, given that, as I contend in this chapter, she consistently problematises singular readings though consistent reflexive irony. To reiterate a point made earlier, Frame's use of metafiction has proved difficult for even her most perceptive critics. The complex levels of reflexivity and meaning in her work have

been have found "paradoxical" (Michell, 2009, p. 129), "elusive, ambiguous" (Cronin, 2009, p. 4), or like "a riddle" (Evans, 2004, p. 23). This chapter then attempts to read Frame with the grain, taking biographical and critical commentary and aligning it with an expository approach to questions raised by the complicated meta-reflexive areas of her fictional discourse, rather than beginning in remote ideological grounds that tend to, in Slinn's terms again, "simplify literary effects" (1999, p. 58). The problem with a singularly-focussed extrinsic theoretical standpoint is that it risks treating Frame's work as a passive object (see reference to the Searle-Derrida debate in Chapter I), and may fail to engage the texts' heuristic self-interpretation and reflective density. Such theories, to repeat Lawn's statement on readings of Frame, risk replicating "the role of the 'bad doctor' who misdiagnoses the textual signs" (2009, p. 28).

Indeed Frame has often been, despite her clean bill of mental health, a kind of phenomenon for experimentation, or "contestable object" as her literary executor has put it (Gordon, 2009). For this reason, it is difficult to write about her novels without mentioning the public and private personas of Frame herself. When dealing with an author with such a huge biographical mass (and with a public interest in her biography that exceeds the interest in her work - an irony Frame herself pointed out) it seems unavoidable to mention her person, especially since the way her work has been talked about in the past has often been consciously or unconsciously supported by elements of a surrounding mythology – those descriptions of her as an outsider, an asexual recluse, or as an eccentric, schizophrenic, or more recently, 'autistic' genius (Abrahamson, 2007).

Interestingly, as a counterbalance to the – no doubt occasionally fair – descriptions of Frame as a socially inept "victim", some of those closest to her have described Frame as an

often buoyant, sociable person with an exceptional sense of humour. According to her biographer Michael King, she told her life story in a way that "acknowledged past tragedies but seemed more frequently to tremble on the brink of laughter" (2000, p. 518); was to her niece and literary executor, "a very very funny person to know" (Gordon, 2009); and to friend and publisher, Stephanie Dowrick, Frame was a "very funny person" whose vision and humour were starkly original: "The most ordinary, most banal, things, would be transformed through Janet's eyes" (Dowrick, in Verghis, 2004). To take another example, what close friend Karl Stead thought of first when he considered Frame was her "humour, her jokes, and her response to jokes" that most often "had to do with language and with perception" (Stead, 2004, p.18). Stead's description of Frame perhaps provides a useful introduction to the humour of her implied narrators in her metafictional work:

> It was as if the whole of human existence was a joke - a black one perpetrated by the gods. Here we were, on earth, destined to live (good), but also to die (bad), and with nothing certain 'beyond' except extinction, and nothing that alleviated the starkness of this fact except our own inventions. […] There was truth and there was fiction; but in a way everything was a fiction, because it seemed we had no choice but to go on behaving as if everything was forever. We had to pretend our social structures enshrined absolutes. […] Janet's presence, when I first knew her, had the feel of a self-recognising fabrication. It was tentative, an offering, as if she were saying, 'this is quite absurd but under the circumstances what else can one do? (Stead, 2004, p.18)[5]

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[5] From Stead's obituary for Frame: Stead, C. K. (2004). "The gift of language." *The Listener* 192 (3326).

Stead is not the only commentator to have mentioned the witty explorations of language that cross over into her work. Frame's Virago editor Donna Coonan said that what most remarkable about her personality and work is the "humour": "she has such a lightness of touch and a self-deprecating humour that makes her writing very human, warm-hearted and life-affirming" (Gould, 2008). And there have also been a few - outnumbered - critical reviewers who have commented about her humour, such as David Gates in *The New York Times Book Review* who wrote, of *Towards Another Summer* (2008), that "Frame's sad, slyly comic fish-out-of-water story needs neither explanation nor excuse, and Grace's aloneness isn't a medical condition, it is a human one" (Gates, 2009). H. Winston Rhodes much earlier picked up on Frame's "wit and humour" (in *Daughter Buffalo*) noting that her treatments of death never outweighed her fascination with life. (Rhodes, 1973, p. 162) Even Gina Mercer, by the conclusion of her mid-90s feminist reading, sees, the more closely she looks at Frame's work "this sense of her wicked and powerful subversion of expectations" (Mercer, 1994, p. 249).

This chapter aims to use the intrinsic performativity of Frame's fiction to take Mercer's intuition a step further. It attempts to show that Frame's novels reveal far more than subversive critiques of patriarchal societies, or the Pākehā culture of denial, or the mental health establishment. Indeed, Frame's "wicked", absurdist and sly subversive tendency seems to overreach such extrinsic readings by satirising human attempts at self-definition, raising doubts about the validity of all forms of language, finding absurdist humour in various elements of human discourse, and ultimately parodying her own uses of language and narrative structure. This sly, absurdist reflexivity of her novels - which, it seems, was present in her personal interactions - is traceable from the self-reflexive

dabblings at the beginning of her career into full-blown metafictional farces at the end. Clearly escalating over the course of her career, this farcical sense of the limits of language shows a pervasive resistance to statements on identity and a subsequent insistence that the human desire to "read" the subject in any systematic way is as unreasonable as it is inevitable.

The beginnings of Frame's quizzical metafictions might be traced to the early 1960s, when Janet Frame's publisher in London, Mark Goulden, famously attempted to persuade her to produce a specifically English-styled novel, hoping she would write a bestseller. Clearly the idea of adapting to a set model irritated Frame, as the novel she consequently wrote demonstrated. *The Adaptable Man* was a sore disappointment to Goulden. On reading the final manuscript he commented that Frame had reverted to her "old depressing atmosphere of mad people and doom and despair" (Goulden 1978, in Stead, 1981a, p. 131) – seeming to entirely miss the playful elements of social satire, and Frame's send up of English realism. Far from doom and despair, Frame claimed to see the novel as "optimistic". As she said to interviewer Elizabeth Alley: "this man who is totally paralysed in *The Adaptable Man* and views life through a mirror, I think that's a triumph. It sounds a bit twisted perhaps, but […] it's a triumph of survival" (1991, p. 159).

The authorial-performativity of Frame's narrator, and thus the narrative's twisted sense of humour, appear to be complicated by elements of autobiography. Seeming to have imported her own frustrating circumstances into the plot, Frame - after commencing the novel with fairly conventional descriptions of an East Suffolk village with cottages, country lanes and even a duck pond - progresses to mocking such

descriptions through an obscure narrator-figure Unity Foreman who, commissioned by an American magazine "*Cornstalk*" to visit and write about the small country village of Burgelstatham, is encouraged by her editor to write "country-stuff, not too much sweetness, not too much tooth and claw" (Frame, 1965, p. 39). Unity acquiesces, but remains in the city and sends bogus reports back to the magazine full of trite descriptions of stubble fields and neatly trimmed hedges, while the reader is left to ponder what relationship she has to the characters in the story – or whether it will be revealed that she is the narrator. In Genettean terms, the main ambiguity of the novel is whether Unity Foreman is a homodiegetic or heterodiegetic narrator.

While at times the metafictional elements tend to be engulfed by the conventional realism that Frame was instructed to write, there are, along the way, a number of hints at Frame's brand of reflexive satirical humour. The characters in the book are portrayed as the dregs of evolution – people who "must adapt or be threatened with extinction" (p. 28) and who have all devolved into absurdly petty creatures wholly tied up in the concerns of their stamp collections, gardens, lost inheritances and light fittings. By the darkly comic ending, three of the main characters are killed by a plummeting chandelier, which begins what the newspapers call "The Chandelier Inquest" – a deliberately self-conscious poke at the absurdity of the novel's own ending (p. 252). But there are other reflexive prods and pokes. Fictional clichés - such as "the behaviour of fictional heroes who 'sleep immediately their head touches the pillow'" (p. 21) - disrupt the narrative's illusion of reality. And the name of the narrator is itself reflexive ("Unity" is probably a reference to the three dramatic principles of unity in Aristotle's Poetics, - time, place and action - and "Foreman" being, in one of its definitions, a person who presides over a jury and speaks

on its behalf) reminding the reader of the narrator's officiating position over the time, place and action of the drama. To add to these disruptions, by the end of the narrative the reader could be led to think that probably the whole novel has been written by Unity Foreman – is in fact another sham report, or a collection of her letters to Cornstalk. In narratological terms then, the "voice" of the story is neither strictly homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, since Unity Foreman is both an implied character and implied narrator.

All in all, the novel meant to be Frame's first serious "success" became an autobiographical farce, and a minor act of literary mutiny. It also showed an early sign of the "sense of the ridiculous" (as one back-cover blurb describes it)[6] and an early sign of Frame's later use of metafictional play with the absurd, and paradoxically derivative, nature of identity. As Kim Worthington observes, *The Adaptable Man* points out the inadequacies of realism in depicting modern society, and suggests the "imitative and artificial nature of the human struggle to adapt and survive" (1998, p. 3). But it also gestures towards the imitative and quixotic nature of language that becomes the major motif in Frame's later novels, themes she develops beyond spontaneous reflexive commentary into humorous metafictional explorations of the implausible and derivative in *Living in the Maniototo* (1979), and *The Carpathians* (1989).

Living in the Maniototo, Frame's tenth novel, is a multi-layered metafiction, an acute examination of language, narrative and reality, and a comic story of manifold perspectives and false-bottoms - of stunted relationships, nonsensical obsessions, and absurd pursuits. It is the first of Frame's novels to entirely undercut realist techniques, and foreground the illusions subscribed to in the narrative process. If some of Frame's previous novels

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[6] *The Adaptable Man,* as described in the back-cover blurb of the 1993 Random House edition.

(especially *Towards Another Summer*, *The Adaptable Man* and *The Edge of the Alphabet*) could be considered concomitantly metafictional, then *Living in the Maniototo* is the first of her constituent metafictions. The narrator, Mavis Halleton, embarks on her five-part story by telling of her work as a novelist, recounting the deaths of her husbands, foreshadowing a trip to Berkeley in the US, and describing her life in Blenheim, a fictional suburb of Auckland. Blenheim - seemingly based on Glenfield, Auckland, where Frame lived in the middle of the 1970s - is, to its residents, a poor copy of "real" cities in America. To Frame though, the relationship between imitation and imitated is more complex, and through her narrator Mavis, she applies notions of simulation and derivation to setting and characterisation in order to pose a number of reflexive questions about narrative itself: Does fiction derive from reality? Is reality itself a series of derivations and simulations? Does reality derive from fiction? Each of these inquiries overlap and form the various strata of the novel. The answers are invariably a humorous exploration of the absurd, the implausible and the quixotic.

The metafictional elements constitute a satire on language-use, and the multiple layers of linguistic play are probably what lead Patrick Evans to say that the novel "is driven not by experience, but by the logic of a language that is detached from experience" (1984, p. 84). What Evans is getting at, perhaps, is the discrepancy in the novel between reality as lived and as described - the resident absurdity in the various character's attempts at self-definition. From the first sentence of the novel, the narrator Mavis Halleton muses on the spectacle of language, marvels at the implausibility of her favourite defining statement: "I have buried two husbands, you know." The sentence, she says, is a type of shorthand which she uses to draw herself out of the crowd, or out of human possibility,

the "possibles and probables of existence" (Frame, 1979, p. 11). But we are to understand that the statement is mildly ridiculous – a cue to be used in conversations in bus queues, shops, waiting rooms. Mavis cannot be pinpointed so easily – she is variously Alice Thumb, Maui's sister, or Pansy Proudlock: in fact the reader is given at least twelve different identities to choose from. Mavis is an "instant traveller, like the dead, among the dead and the living; an eavesdropper, a nothingness, a shadow, a replica of the imagined, twice removed from the real" (p. 12). The first of the two "removals" she speaks of are from the "real" author (Janet Frame and her own experiences of Auckland and America) [7] to an undesignated fictional author alluded to at the conclusion of the novel. The second removal is from this fictional author to ostensible narrator (Mavis Halleton and her various aliases). From the outset of the novel then, Frame makes narrative focalisation a central question: is it merely internalised in the diegetic level (i.e. from Mavis' point-of-view) or is there some external point of focalisation – an extradiegetic perspective any reading must account for?

What is clear from the beginning of the narrative is that our narrator is a writer - a "ventriloquist" or performer with a repertoire of "old well-worn jokes" whose "real artistry is in daring to enter the speech of another, even if it may be only the speech of a talking stick" (p. 13). Through this on-going performance of ventriloquism, the narrator begins to foreground the oddities and incongruities in acts of telling and reading stories, drawing the reader's attention to the novel's plot contrivances rather than plastering it up with

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[7] *Living in the Maniototo* is in part based on Frame's circumstances while living in Berkeley and Baltimore in borrowed accomodation. Frame also includes details of friends and acquaintances in the novel. ("Brian", according to Evans, resembles John Money, Frame's friend in Baltimore; and "Peter Wallstead" resembles Ronald Hugh Morrieson)." (See Evans, P. (1984). "Living and writing in the Maniototo." *SPAN: Newsletter of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*(18): 77)

realism. When the Garretts, (acquaintances whose house Mavis is looking after) conveniently die in an earthquake while attending an opera in Italy, the narrator finds herself "believing the news of their death simply because it was a coincidence that fiction would never have allowed" (p. 119). And if this detail does not already undermine the reliability of the narrator, we learn that Mavis has only met the Garretts once, and yet they have, without any explanation, left her their entire estate – house, contents, and a yearly stipend. This kind of coincidence, Mavis jokes, simply does not happen in fiction, only in "real life": "in fiction such events have to be worked for and slaved over and then, usually, regretfully, left out of the story" (p. 120).

The "coincidences" follow thick and fast to the point of being deliberately preposterous. To repopulate the novel with characters, Frame has four guests arrive to stay with Mavis in the dead couple's Berkeley house. By chance, all four characters were born or have lived in New Zealand, and all four have plans to write books. And, like Mavis' two dead husbands, all of the characters have quirky, or idiosyncratic, problems with language. Mavis's first husband, the senile Lewis Barwell, loses his ability to name objects, uses "definitions in place of nouns" (p. 26), and babbles obscenities to strangers over his shortwave radio; her second husband, Lance Halleton, will not contextualise his life-work teaching the French language by visiting France (and when he dies in his sleep - again through a ridiculous coincidence, dying of a "spasm in his throat" - Mavis jokes that for all she knew "he might have choked on a remembered idiom" [p. 64]). The guests are stunted by similar preoccupations with language. Roger Prestwick is "enclosed and ruled" by clichés and generalisations. Doris Prestwick is unable to articulate her desires and goals and is thus unable "to compete with those who grasp their dream with such

certainty" (p. 162).   Hungarian Zita Carlton is constantly drawn into doubts about the slipperiness of language, conscious of Teutonic and Sanskrit derivations of English words. And Theo Carlton, after suffering a "vascular accident", has articulation problems which are not just similar to Lewis Barwell's, but a complete replica: both men have a difficulty in naming, and resort to using descriptions instead of nouns.

Diegetically, Frame's humour in the novel arises from discrepancies in human thinking, the derivative nature of culture and self-projection, the implausible pretences of language, and the ironies inherent in many human pursuits and aspirations.   To begin at the first and most obvious layer, there are comic discrepancies in the derivative nature of human "creativity", in the imitativeness of human artefacts, and in the rhetoric of authenticity surrounding them.   In Blenheim, Frame's version of suburban Auckland, advertising language has reached an almost religious-poetic fervour, where "'wall to wall carpet' could inspire as 'Glory be to God for dappled things […] where now 'decramastic tiles' satisfies as 'pale flakes with fingering stealth'" (p. 52).   But the suburb is less a sublime masterpiece than a quixotic series derivations and imitations - even the morning frost is a mere "imitation" of frost elsewhere (p. 46).   If living in Blenheim means your "streets are named after British lords and their country seats…" it also means your architecture is derivative of North-American design: "Heavenfield Mall, at the top of Heavenfield Street, overlooking the harbour and its islands that are themselves shapes of sunlight, is a huge windowless pretence, as much an insinuation of Elsewhere as its own name or that of city or of the restaurant, Manhattan, at its entrance" (p. 46).

The houses in Auckland are similarly derivative - a strange assortment of derivations, some with the American styled "front-porch", others "with stone archways and heavy

carved doors labelled Mediterranean; those with new false bricks and real bricks over false bricks, and false iron and false wood, and various house-skins or "cladding"…" (p. 57). Not that America is any less derivative. Mavis' inherited house in Berkeley is a place "full of likenesses, of replicas, prints of paintings, prints of prints, genuine originals and genuine imitation originals, imitation sculptures and twin original sculptures" (p. 17). And when it is announced that Berkeley and Blenheim are to become "twin cities", Mavis responds with bathos, recalling a poem she had heard at school: "The world's great age begins anew… / Another Athens shall arise…" So if Berkeley is a pastiche of cultures and aesthetics and Blenheim is modelled on Berkeley, then the world is becoming, as described in Shelley's poem 'Hellas' (1821), a new imitation of Athens – liberated, all-embracing and eclectic.

The absurdity in human attempts at self-definition extends from the national and cultural strata down to matters of personal identity. The novel's characters are farcical in their obsessions with matters of self-definition. Brian Wilford has a habit "of making [his] personal characteristics sound like virtues" and he writes-off the narrator's whimsies with "keen icy breeze[s] of logic" (p. 29). He is so pedantic about accuracy and definition that when he buys a new watch which happens to have been set five years ahead of time, instead of taking it back to the jeweller for correction he begins the absurd task of winding it back second by second (p. 31). Similarly, the narrator's second husband Lance Halleton has an absurd obsession with self-definition and demarcation: on moving to a new house he carefully works out "in both imperial and metric measure the volume of each room", and later becomes obsessed with the minutiae of finances – his own, but also those of his city and even "the national debt" (p. 42).

In fact, all of the characters exemplify, in one way or another, preposterous obsessions with definition. When Mavis is introduced to Baltimore jeweller Tommy, she finds it ridiculous that his abode, a smelly, littered room (with, to add another language-joke, an empty birdcage attached with a To Let sign) is pretentiously called a "studio apartment" (p. 35). Similarly Frame pokes fun at the housekeeper, Mrs. Tyndall, who is obsessed with becoming a radio competition winner, although she cares nothing about the prize - it is simply "a part of the general dream" (p. 81).

But the ventriloquist performativity of *Living in the Maniototo* parodies more than human attempts at self-definition: the distinction between reality and the imagination is constantly breaking down as one reproduces the other, and as reality begins to derive from fiction. In the second part of the novel Mavis travels to Baltimore to stay at a friend's house (Brian) and while there, she witnesses the strange loss of their mutual friend, Tommy, who dies trying to capture a fictional Blue Fury from a television commercial for bleach. When Tommy suddenly sees the apparition of the Blue Fury beside him, he reaches out, grasps the air and disappears in a haze of bleach fumes.

Given that the reader can only assume Mavis is an internally-focalised, homodiegetic narrator, she is unexpectedly blasé, even ludicrously indifferent, about the event. Later, as she discusses the disappearance with Brian, he comments that "things like that don't happen", then breaks into metaphysical (and metafictional) musings: "Those creatures and worlds that we know only in sleep and dream and mythology-of yesterday and of today-the magical technology-are emerging as usual reality in the new dimension of living and dying. And when the unreal has been accepted and made real, new realities will present themselves, forces which become gentlenesses, gentlenesses which become forces"

(p. 38). On a first reading this passage sounds like an obscure, and almost apologetic, disclaimer for an extravagant authorial intrusion. But, for Mavis, "death" is as fictitious (or subjective) as her explanation of it is nonchalant. Tommy's apparent demise represents a shift in ontological status rather than an end – his disappearance is merely "the result of an inevitable break in the surface of things […] he still exists, he's merely returned beneath the surface of apparent reality" (p. 39). That is to say, Tommy's death is figurative: his understanding of reality had become so intertwined with the fictional diegesis of the Blue Fury in the television commercial that he has been swallowed by fiction.

Ironically, Mavis implies that she will also be swallowed by her own fiction, hinting that the reader's natural assumptions about the narrative's focalisation may turn out to be misguided. As Mavis contends, an "author" inevitably "dies" in the creation of his or her work: "A writer, like a solitary carpenter bee, will hoard scraps from the manifold and then proceed to gnaw obsessively, constructing a long gallery, nesting her very existence within her food. The eater vanishes. The characters in the long gallery emerge" (p. 134). On a performative reading of this metafictional death, Frame's notion of the "manifold" cannot be limited to the "many folds" of the "sexual and reproductive anatomy of women" (1994, p. 1) as Gina Mercer has it, or the slightly schizophrenic sounding "manifold nature of her protean selves" (2001, p. 353) as Renata Casertano has it, or even the "manifold utopias" (2002, p. 185) of Marc Delrez – although perhaps it can accommodate all of these visions. More likely, Mavis is using the word in the Kantian sense, using it to describe what she elsewhere calls the "possibles and probable" of her world. Like Kant, she appears to see human thought as an attempt to structure the chaos of experience by

tracing conceptual connections (a process Kant called the "synthetic unity of the sensory manifold" [2007]) and she sees the written narrative as a record of these connections. In fact, for Mavis, any act of human creation appears to be an attempt to bring structure to the manifold. While Tommy's life has become derivative of a fictional television commercial, he symbolically leaves a part of his manifold world behind for Mavis. Telephoning the owner of Tommy's apartment to confirm his disappearance, Mavis is informed that his apartment is empty and the only item remaining is a necklace made from a string of small globes or reproductions of what "looks like worlds" (Frame, 1979, p. 40). This unusual piece of jewellery is not one of a kind, but part of a matching set. They partner a pair of "world earrings" Tommy had previously given Mavis. The trinkets provide another layer to the motif: as mock-globes they provide a comic symbol of derivation – a string of imitation-worlds, of pseudo-manifolds - like Mavis herself, nothing is original, factitious or fixed - the entire world is a "replica of the imagined" (p. 40). Everything within the manifold is also a series of derivations.

The final level of comic derivation performed in the novel is also the most metafictional: fiction imitating itself. As the first part of the novel progresses, the narrator provides lengthy reflexive discussions of her narrative processes: parodying conventions of the romantic novel (""His blue eyes had an honest twinkle"" [p. 45]); providing the reader with her "codes" for good writing (among them the self-referential statement "a prose sentence which touches like a branding iron is good"); detailing her disagreements with her creative writing teacher Howard Conway; and lampooning what she calls the "blowaway tradition" - novels containing "women with streaming hair and eyes, horses with flowing manes, and trees and men with flowing seed, set in storm and hurricane

country" (p. 54). In highlighting these conventions and genres, Frame reveals the artificiality of their operations, and mocks the notion that language is a transparent medium, a see-through "window to the world". But she also accomplishes this task is by staging or dramatising her own use of language. Early in the novel, Mavis (or Alice, or Violet) describes her naïve expectations that the writing process would be an effortless act of the imagination: "I'd imagined that it would be like watching a fire running along a fuse, against time and life, to explode a once-buried seam of meaning along a disused word-face; and that anything else was 'imitation' writing." But instead she finds that all she can write about is "family gossip and chat with myself and my past, without a trace of the "art"" (pp. 54-55). Mavis too is an imitator or impersonator, barely scratching the surface of reality. The narrative becomes very opaque, even obscure at times, as the narrator focuses on the function of language as an intermediary between the phenomenal world, or the manifold, and the subject. This is not a flaw in the prose, but a refusal to produce fixed meaning, a deliberate revelling in the pleasures of indeterminacy. In one passage Mavis describes language as: "the hawk suspended above eternity, feeding from it but not of its substance and not necessarily for its life and thus never able to be translated into it; only able by a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow, to hint at what lies beneath it in the untouched, undescribed, almost unknown plain." This extended metaphor is its own case in point. As a sentence it seems to self-reflexively stage the "inadequacy" of language to pinpoint meaning, or to precisely locate its prey. But since it is both an allegory and a description of allegory, the term *inadequacy* can hardly be used in the pejorative: everything is in some way or another derivative. If the concept of "imitation" implies inadequacy (the failure to capture an essence, or to reach the state of

actuality) then everything is inadequate. For Mavis, there are no true copies; or rather the whole world is a copy, a breathing mass of derivations. For sure, language is not a transparent window to the world, but neither is the world.

This idea is reinforced in the third, fourth and fifth parts of the story, in Berkeley, the "house of replicas" where Mavis house-sits for the Garretts, retired art collectors holidaying in Italy. A week after the Garretts have left, and while Mavis is working on her novel (which becomes ostensibly the novel we are reading) she receives news that the Garretts have been killed in an earthquake and that they had bequeathed her their house. Soon after, two couples that the Garretts had invited for the summer arrive and the novel Mavis is working on becomes a biography of each of the guests. One of the visitors, Roger Prestwick, has been possessed with the idea of taking a solo journey into the desert for some time and decides to embark on simulated trial-run while in Berkeley. Having prepared an absurd amount of provisions for his excursion (food and drink to last a week, sleeping bag, Swiss army knife etc…) the group sets off to drop him in the desert for an hour or so to test how he responds to the conditions. They deposit Roger beneath a road-sign marked "DESERT" – a sign that in its comically simplistic nomenclature seems rather illusory to the other characters – one of the party reflexively commenting that "…it doesn't seem real. In a country like the USA where public information is intimate and discursive, you don't see abrupt signs like that!" (p. 171).

The sign is less designating a geographical region than it is a linguistic marking of the boundary between reality and the quixotic imagination. This is the "DESERT", but not the desert Roger had idealised. It is an imitation of an ideal, and Roger realizes this as soon as he has parted company with the others (in the "quaint fashion of an explorer")

and finds himself lonely and waiting for their return. Although he is certain that he will experience an epiphany, if not on this simulated journey then on a later journey across one of the great deserts, no such revelation is forthcoming and he begins to "feel irritated with himself for his engrossing concern for the 'real' desert, the 'real' journey so vivid in his mind…" (p. 175). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Roger decides at the end of his sojourn that the real journey might not be necessary. "Why indeed go into a 'real', 'utter' desert?" he asks himself. "It was in trying to test the reality that one met all the problems and failures, not only of the thing itself but of the mind that is occupied obsessively with dualism" (p. 185).

It is this preoccupation with dualities, between the real and the simulated, the original and the replica, the "utter" and the derivation, that is ultimately tested and destabilized in the humour of the novel. To quote Margaret Atwood's review in the *New York Times Book Review*, *Living in the Maniototo* is, as a whole, characterized by an obsession "with the problem of distinguishing the real from the imitation; with the implausibility of 'real life'" (Atwood, 1979, p. 13). This sense of implausibility and absurdity is (perhaps gratuitously) underlined at the conclusion , or rather, the punch-line, of the novel. When Roger and the other guests leave Berkeley again, and Mavis prepares to return to Baltimore, the Garretts suddenly return from Italy. As it transpires they were not killed in an earthquake, and Mavis' "guests" were fictional entities, now wiped from the story with the same authorial cleanser used on Tommy. The plot is, after all, just a deliberately "bad joke" – the sort of thing her creative writing teacher, Howard Conway, would definitely not approve of. Finally, Mavis wonders whether she is a fictional character too, a "replica of a replica dreaming a replica of dreams…" (Frame, 1979, p.

237). Which of course she is. She is a derivative of the authorial persona, a studied performance of a ventriliquist, a comic replica of the author herself perhaps - a Frame within a Frame?

2.2 Pretenses of language and place in *The Carpathians*

The Carpathians is even more structurally extravagant than *Living in the Maniototo*. Underlying its metafictional configuration is a kind of antireductionism, or at least an attempt to blunt Occam's razor: entities are multiplied unnecessarily, and if one simple explanation could be given for the story's provenance then several are offered - all of which are red herrings. The main character of the novel, Mattina Brecon, is the first possible source of focalisation. A jet-setting American philanthropist, she travels to Puamahara - a fictional New Zealand town based on Levin and the Tararuas - to quell her curiosity about the area and gather material for her husband, a dried-up New York novelist. The focus of her quest is a (caricatured) local legend known as the "Memory Flower": the home of a mythical "memory-collector" and an accompanying tree with a metaphysical "memory blossom". After renting a house on "Kowhai Street" (with the name Frame seems to be adopting, or possibly counterpunching, the late nationalist stance of parodying earlier "Kowhai Gold" nationalism - or what Stafford and Williams

describe as the Māoriland preoccupation with mythologising and romanticising Māori[8])
Mattina begins recording in note form details of its residents, who, like the characters in
Living in the Maniototo, are variously ensconced in inane and derivative ways of living.

In fact, the residents of Puamahara lead even more banal and absurd lives than those
in *Living in the Maniototo*. In their "seemingly endless street[s] of similar houses, on and
on to the ends of the earth" they "ally their being to a house or gate or an item of furniture
or adornment" and when they do emerge from their homes they are like zombies "with
brooms and brushes and motormowers and hedge-clippers to perform the daily sweep and
cut and snip […] all to make certain of one more day of life" (1988, pp. 15-16).

On one level, the characters' empty materialism becomes a backdrop for what
Mattina sees as the town's impostures and pretences, and through which Frame continues
with the theme of derivations. The people of Puamahara stare in the windows of shops
"as if appraising works of art, things of beauty; the gleam of the 'goods' was hypnotic –
washing machines draped with blue and red satin ribbons" (p. 47) in a mall as out-of-
place as Heavenfield mall in *Living in the Maniototo* – this mall is also a windowless
pretence, overheated by the "burning sun" and home to homogenously-named retail
outlets: "Computer City, beside Bathroom City and Furniture City" (p. 46) – a further
derivation of artificial America, which the Puamaharian's believe has "everything, a world
of gadgets, goodies and horrors" (p. 47). And on a another level, the characters are also
obsessed with the artificial and derivative: Ed Shannon is obsessed with his computer

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[8] Stafford and Williams discuss a similar self-conscious aestheticism in relation to Katherine Mansfield's writing in "Fashioned Intimacies: Māoriland and Colonial Modernity" (2002) and comprehensively cover the topic in *Māoriland: New Zealand literature, 1872-1914* (2006) – see especially page 13.

game - a flight simulator (p. 54), Joseph James with his being replaced by an electric piano tuner (p. 62).

But American-style materialism is only one aspect of the Puamaharian's derivative existence – Frame pushes the theme of derivation a step further into complete "imposture". The street on which Mattina is staying is full of fraudulent personalities who belong elsewhere: "Kowhai street is a street of imposters. Imposters and strangers" (p. 44). Everybody on the street claims they are not really from Puamahara: Dorothy Townsend does "not belong here originally", Hercus Millow describes himself as "almost a stranger", and long-term resident Madge McMurtrie is "spoken of as a stranger" (p. 20). After meeting everybody on the street Mattina notes that the inhabitants speak of their real homes "in the way [her husband] spoke of the treasured literary classics" (p. 39).

The chief of these fakers, though, is Dinny Wheatstone, a metafictional character in the novel who lives in and out of the narrative's diegesis, moving anachronically across the temporal order of the narrative, or as Mattina puts it, within both the "present and future" of the story (p. 115). Dinny is, like Unity Foreman and Mavis Halleton, suspiciously autobiographical, an "imposter novelist" (p. 43), another comical derivation or imposture of Frame - who, according to the narrator, studies "the meaning of the meaningless" (p. 57). When Mattina meets Dinny and agrees to read her unpublished novel, she finds the events she has just experienced have already been described by Dinny in the manuscript. Just as Mavis in *Living in the Maniototo* is usurped by a break in the narrative's focalisation, "dies" in the creation of her work and is left to wonder whether she is a fictional character, a "replica of a replica dreaming a replica of dreams…" (Frame, 1979, p. 237) so Dinny steals Mattina's narrative perspective, seizes control over "all points of

view" in the story, and Mattina (despite an attempt to take back control) becomes a character in Dinny's novel, trapped in the "parentheses" of her narrative.

Another important parallel between the absurdist, language-focussed, humour in *The Carpathians* and *Living in the Maniototo* lies in the various linguistic problems suffered by the characters. For some characters, their language is dying at the hands of younger generations. Madge McMurtie ("the penultimate Madge" – an echo of "the penultimate Mavis" in *Living in the Maniototo*) finds, when speaking to her niece, that her idiolect is antiquated and unintelligible – she speaks "the language of another age" (Frame, 1988, p. 30); as does Hene Hanuere who, faced with the Māori cultural renaissance, is struggling to learn her own language (p. 26). But the presence of Dinny Wheatstone further complicates the characters' use of language by filtering and controlling their speech. Mattina notices when talking to Ed Shannon that his speech is oddly controlled, does not have the usual "exclamations and asides that are a part of the usual patterns of speech" (p. 53). No explanation is provided on the diegetic level, so it becomes evident that Ed's unusual speech must be the result of Dinny's editing and rewriting. Ed's speech is not his own, but a derivation, the speech of an imposter.

Again, it seems Frame is interested in the derivative nature of language, and the human reliance on iteration and reiteration. All of the characters are at the "mercy" of concepts and words (p. 75). Dinny Wheatstone dwells on the importance of the word "but" (p. 13); Gloria James emphasises the importance of the word "know" (p. 75); and Mattina jokes that she has spent most of her life "on the trail of really and its parent noun" (p. 48). In these instances, Frame is suggesting that concepts are not derived from experience – rather they shape and inform experience – and the systems that make

language possible are also the systems that produce thought. In this sense, both words and concepts are imposters. Or to borrow something Paul de Man has said, "as soon as one is willing to be made aware of their epistemological implications, concepts are tropes and tropes are concepts" (1978, p. 13). That is to say, even basic concepts (such as Mattina's concept of "the real") have a figurative history (in Mattina's case stemming from the Anglo-Norman French, which in turn derives from the Latin res meaning "thing") and are, in this sense, tropes, things that stand in for a history beyond individual experience. As Patrick West notes in his comparison between Kristeva's political earnestness and Frame's use of conceptual allegory, what empowers *The Carpathians* is the allegorical absence of its cultural and political implications (West, 2008). Frame's characters attempt at constructing personal "meaning" are variously preposterous, their use of language verges on the quixotic, and all the narrator can do is perform her role at a cool distance, acknowledging her fallibility.

As the novel progresses, Mattina's odyssey to Puamahara becomes less Homeric and increasingly Cervantian. Although her goal is to "witness and feel a concentration of life that would reveal the secrets" (p. 94) of Puamahara, she is only "able to stand and stare at the passing time […] to visit the residents and take notes about them as if they were animals in a zoo" and ends up thinking she might have "gained as much knowledge of people in distant places if she had merely walked two blocks to the Museum of Modern Art and browsed through the great paintings" (p. 95). Her search to uncover the myth of the town is likewise comically fruitless: the mythology of the Memory Flower remains vague and the town locals are ignorant of its source and significance. Ignorant of the myth, that is, except insofar as it has been "seized, retold, enhanced, illustrated" (p. 12) by

the Puamahara Tourist Centre and promoted through a cheaply produced and hastily erected plaster sculpture at the town's entrance – a sculpture with detailed inscription "resembling the print on a giant packet of cornflakes" (p. 115). To add to the absurdity, the orchards where the memory flower is found are implausibly signposted as simply 'The Orchards' (p. 113). Like the all-too-obvious "DESERT" sign in *Living in the Maniototo*, the Memory Flower is interned in simplistic nomenclature, neither rooted in history or in ownership but planted in a vacuous arboretum of language. The myth is an amorphous derivation, a cheap imitation of other mythologies –even a counterfeit.

No sooner has Mattina resigned herself to the absurdity of her search for the meaning of the Memory Flower than the other residents of Kowhai Street are assailed by an outlandish narrative calamity. There are bizarre moaning noises and an unaccountable shower of letters and typographical marks. Suddenly the residents' power to conceive and articulate ideas has disappeared and they are plunged into "into a swamp of absurdity" (p. 101) which leaves them grunting and moaning and making "intermittent animal-like cries" (p. 128) just before they disappear from the story altogether. The source of the fracas is not explained, but seems to be conceptually connected with a "gravity star", a recently discovered galaxy "that appears to be both relatively close and seven billion years away…" (p. 7).

Is this the "apocalyptic revolution" (1994, p. 248) of human thought that Gina Mercer sees? Perhaps. But it is also another Framean joke. When Mattina wakes on the day following the event, she ponders the fate of her neighbours and "burst[s] into laughter" (1988, p. 131). And while there are initially a few mumblings of conspiracies about the community, the event is soon a triviality. Mattina simply buys up the vacant

street for her real estate portfolio, and by the time her husband Jake returns a year later the locals have all but forgotten the event. As one Puamaharian says: "But it's all blown over now. How quickly everything settles, is forgotten! Who thinks of the Wahine these days? I bet that even a few years after Noah's Ark when someone mentioned the Flood, most would say, 'Which flood? I don't remember a flood'" (p. 190).

In fact, life and language go on as usual, and there is less a final "collapse of language" (1989, p. 518) such as Susan Ash sees in the events – merely a minor interruption. In terms of the narrative's performativity - the disappearance of the Kowhai Street residents is a deliberately outlandish metafictional manoeuvre effectuated by the narrators ("Mattina" and/or "Dinny") – an event which allows the narrative exploration of the absurd and derivatory nature of language to continue, this time from the reverse angle. Rather than showing the effects of language on the way the characters interact, Mattina/Dinny gesture at how impossible it is to view life outside of the constraints of language. To do so is to plunge into a swamp of absurdity. It also allows Frame to collapse the diegetic, story-level of the characters' thoughts and actions, as well as the extradiegetic temporal-spatial level of a narrator, and to reopen the metafictional framing narrative. Mattina returns to New York and promptly dies – not due to the effects of Gravity Star, as some reviewers have suggested, but to an unrelated "malignant tumour" that her son J.H.B has invented extradiegetically[9] – and the reader is left wondering what the ostensible source of the narrative is. The most plausible authorial source at this point in the narrative is Dinny Wheatstone.

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[9] John Henry Brecon invents this death during his ostensible writing of the novel, and then contradicts it at the conclusion (p. 163, p. 196)

Dinny Wheatstone is in many ways a continuation of the metafictional narratorial presences throughout Frame's work - Unity in *The Adaptable Man*, Mavis in *Living in the Maniototo*, (as well as others such as Grace in *Towards Another Summer* and Thora in *The Edge of the Alphabet*). But she is probably the most diegetically transcendent of these characters, the most radically conceptual, and the most non-entitative: "Dinny" is less a character than a conceptual evasion of character – a kind of ontological equivocation. Her "imposture" does not offer the exaggerated plethora of possible identities as Mavis Halleton's does; rather it seems to offer no possibility whatsoever. For Dinny life and language are fundamentally empty: we "are all deep in imposture, surrounded only by imitations of truth" (p. 52) a claim which proceeds from her nihilistic announcement that she is pure concept: "I am nothing and no-one: I was never born" (p. 51).

As Dinny is severed from the diegesis, exposed as a linguistic construct, it is tempting as a reader (since the ability to suspend disbelief derives at least in part from a habit of attaching speech to the most plausible speaker) to transfer her utterances to the implied author, Janet Frame. But this option of grounding the speech-act is obviously questionable, since while imposture does imply an antecedent, Frame's metaphysic (as it was in *Living in the Maniototo*) precludes any notion of a true source. The antecedents of the imposters (Mavis' to her "ventriloquist dummies", USA to New Zealand) reveal themselves to be imposters. The only difference between the imposture of Dinny is that she is aware of the fact, while "most others who remain unaware of such a state particularly in themselves, there may be little or no knowledge of their reality, their nonentity" (p. 51). Dinny's self-contradiction is an inversion of the Cartesian principle: only by knowing she does not exist, can she "burgle" all other points of focalisation, all

other narrative points-of-view. However, like Mavis, she must die to her own perspective: "Complete imposture, I repeat, leads to nothingness in which one inhabits all worlds except the world of oneself" (p. 51).

But narrative tricks do not stop there - even Dinny's negative-ontology is undone by the end of the novel. On the last page, her self-negating focalisation is usurped when Frame performs yet another narrative evasion and attributes the story to a fictional narrator called John Henry Brecon, Mattina's son. John Henry then claims to have never known his parents, asserts the immutability of language in the face of the gravity star, and disclaims the novel as "merely notes" toward a fiction (p. 196). The story, the reader is assured, is a sham. There are no pretences or contrivances remaining with which to think of the novel as anything more than purely conceptual, and if the reader has any remaining capacity - or desire - to suspend disbelief, then it is utterly shattered. The novel has not only bared its anatomy to the reader and flaunted its own plasticity, it has then turned on this gesture, mocked its own preposterous derivativeness, revealed that even taking its reflexivity in earnest is frivolous and ridiculous.

2.3 Out of the frame: metanarration on metanarration

If the intrinsic performativity of Frame's novels gesture towards an increasing metafictional farcicality, then, as I perhaps gratuitously pointed out in the introduction, the biographical and historical notes we have on Frame seem to corroborate this increasing character of absurdist reflexivity. Frame's decision to take the mode to such an

extreme in *The Carpathians* - to mock even her own work's reflexivity - comes possibly from the fact that that she felt metafiction was becoming something of a derivation, yet another trope of language. As she said in an interview with Elizabeth Alley after the novel was published, she felt that "novels that feature novelists writing novels" were "becoming a bit of a bore" - especially when there is no "urgency" in what is being written (Alley, 1991, p. 159). Reflexivity was becoming overused - perhaps she was admitting her own part in this - and it was becoming another pretence to be shattered, another subject for satire, or perhaps another part of what Lawrence Jones calls Frame's sense of the futility of "arbitrary social customs" (1987, p. 249).

To return briefly to biographical details, it has been often said that Frame strongly disliked all manner of contrivance and pretence. As Pamela Gordon recalls: "She could certainly be stubborn and uncommunicative when faced with pretension and insincerity, which she could not abide" (Gordon, 2009). Or as Michael King has said of Frame, her conversation and her writing "conveyed a vivid sense that reality itself is a fiction, and one's grasp on it no more than preposterous pretence and pretension" (2000, p. 518). Evidently it was not just pretence in others that Frame found irksome; her own drafts were filled with self-reflexive, self-deprecating, and 'threatening' remarks from the writer to herself. As she told friend John Money "…half the sentences are interspersed with remarks like…by god improve, who do you think you are trying to write like – and so on…"[10] It seems Frame was as conscious, if not more conscious, of the derivative nature of her own creations as she was of the various "realities" she was looking to portray.

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[10] Letter from Frame to Money 23/3/62 As cited in King, M. (2000). *Wrestling With the Angel: a Life of Janet Frame*. Auckland, Penguin: 229

To take another example, when in 1988 an interviewer for *The Listener* raised the topic of Dinny Wheatstone's imposture, Frame responded by noting the bona fide psychological diagnosis known as the "imposter syndrome" - a psychological complex in which sufferers are typically unable to recognise or internalize their own accomplishments, seeing themselves as frauds. As the interviewer reports, there was a "long pause. Then she risk[ed] a shy, sly, sideways smile: 'some might even suggest that I have a touch of it myself'" (McLeod, 1988). What is interesting about this comment is not its plausibility - it would be naïve to assume that Frame was self-diagnosing - but the sly sense of irony with which she approaches the question, at the same time entertaining and deflecting the possibility. This is, I would suggest, Frame enacting "in person" what is evident in the performative mode of her novels. Her narrators are imposter-selves, comic guises, metafictional representations of the all-too-human instability of personality, personae that are mindful of the absurdity of strict self-definition, yet happy (with sly self-consciousness) to go along with the plot anyway.

Clearly, extrinsically-based readings of Frame's novels need to take these complicated technical strategies into account - especially the manifold points of focalisation, the constant disruptions between diegetic and extradiegetic narration, and contradictions in the discourse-level of narration. Looking closely at the performance of Frame's narrators, it seems the most riddling and elusive feature of her metafictions is their tendency to parody the whimsical and quixotic nature of the very language they employ– demonstrating the way ideas can be brought into being, obsessed over compulsively, and then wiped from existence with preposterous ease. Human use of language can be farcical; life itself a bitter and funny manifold of absurdities, and Frame's mode of

performativity would suggest there is nothing to be done but enjoy the spectacle… with,

perhaps, a grin of self-awareness.

CHAPTER III: C.K. Stead: the provenance of narrative

If his mind was the author of the fiction of the dream, why did his mind not know how it was going to end?

C.K. Stead – *The Death of the Body* (1986, p. 47)

3.1 The author, the reader, the text

If Frame's metafictional performances can be seen to bring realism into question, to break the realistic illusion of the fictional world through the manifold absurdities of language, then Stead's metafictions undoubtedly take a more sober approach - attempting, this chapter proposes - to enhance the representational aspects of a narrative through reflexivity, rather than undercutting them. Paying close attention to Stead's critical views on Modernist aesthetics, the following section examines the place of metanarrative in his fiction, with particular emphasis on its relation to notions of realism and autobiography, and the relationship between reader, author and text. It asks how, in breaking with the mimetic illusion of the story-world, do the devices of metafiction affect discourse-performance? In other words, how do metafictional techniques affect the representational aesthetic of Stead's narratives? How does the writer perform authorship? Do metafictional intrusions make a narrative seem more, or less, "real"?

Described variously as post-modernist, reflexive, clever, metafictional, confessional, infuriating, self-conscious, C.K. Stead's output of novels, poetry, and criticism has

garnered, at least in terms of the latter, a fair share of controversy. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the preoccupations of his fiction without an understanding of his critical concerns and premises. The metafictional elements of his novels – not to mention his other avenues of writing – can only be fully appreciated in relation to a particular preoccupation of his critical thinking - a concern that could be termed a "question of provenance" - the problem of where the source material for a text originates and what the precise relationship is between the author and the reader in conveying and understanding the source of the narrative. To phrase the matter in a question: where does an idea come from and to where (or to whom) is it addressed?

Stead's preoccupation with this particularity of the text-author-reader relationship can be traced back to *The New Poetic* (1964), the critical study he wrote out of his PhD thesis on Modernist literature at the University of Bristol. A central focus of the study is the balance of the writer-reader relationship which became important in what Stead sees a shift from the dull rhetorical poetry of the English Georgian writers who "retained a faith that poetry could be widely popular, and a belief that it ought to be popular" (Stead, 1967, p. 59) and the Imagist poetic which, rejecting "public themes" led to the ensuing development of modernism - the "most significant revolution in poetry since that initiated by Wordsworth and Coleridge" (p. 96). For Stead, the strength of the Imagists - and later the Modernists - lay in their individualism, in their determination to write the poems that followed their own interests, as opposed to poems that would dish out easy satisfaction to the larger public. Like Yeats earlier who, according to Stead's treatment, strained to see through the clouds of public opinion and struggled with "the old antagonism of artist and public man" (p. 34), the Modernists solution was to create a

poetry of self-portraiture, a poetry which in Yeats' words, contained "a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking"[11] .

According to Stead's schematic representation of poetics - a triangle plotting the relationship between poet, audience, and reality - Yeats, and later Eliot, were forcing the line of tension in the triangle to lengthen, thereby correcting an over-intimate relationship between writer and reader, beginning a tug-o-war to wrest individual "genius" (p. 30) from the follies of public thinking:

> Where the audience stood too close, demanding flattery rather than truth, the poets have donned the hieratic robes of the aesthete, pushing their readers away from them, correcting the distance. Where the humanizing influence of a public has seemed remote and insubstantial, so that poet's view of the world was in danger of becoming too special and literary, they have where possible beckoned readers towards them, relaxing the aesthetic posture, again adjusting the distance. (p. 14)

Stead's view is built on a fairly clear-cut dichotomy between literary concerns and the concerns of the general populace, and, as such, accords with popular views that the modernist aesthetic tended to value the individual and reveal a mistrust in public institutions. To borrow Terry Locke's terms, Modernists "saw themselves as a besieged and misunderstood minority struggling to survive in a myopic, bourgeois morass" (1983, p. 311).

To redress the imbalance then, it became the Modernist writer's prerogative to preside over the aesthetic relationship, to withhold or indulge, accommodating the

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[11] Yeats, J.B. (1944) *Letters of J.B. Yeats* . Edited by J. Hone: 198 as cited in Stead, C. K. (1967). *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, Penguin. p 34

reader's interests "where possible", and what special and literary aspects of the text the author deems impossible to compromise, the reader must live with. If the writer is to overturn the timeworn tropes of (Georgian) representation, then s/he will do it by pushing the text towards the introspective, pushing what is authentically subjective. This approach to the writer-reader relationship with its attendant focus on workings of the authorial mind is, as we will see, pervasive in nearly all of Stead's fiction, as is his desire to represent thought and perception through typically Modernist mechanisms: interior monologue, breaks in linearity, stream of consciousness, irresolution. If Stead can be described as a post-modern writer then perhaps it is, in the literal sense, a matter of how far "post" he takes modernism – how he extends this authorial stance to accommodate metafictional representation of thought – or how he naturalises, in text, the presence of a man thinking.

Stead began writing fiction from a highly self-conscious perspective as early as 1969 when he completed the first draft of the short story, "A Quality of Life" (published in *Landfall* in 1970). The story is a reflexive tale about the writing of a novel - or rather, its possible destruction - since it explores a writer's dilemma over whether or not to burn his manuscript after he realises it has failed to answer its central question: namely, why Veena, the narrator's ex-lover, has married Mike Mileage, a rich dunce. The story is set in Nova, a thinly disguised New Zealand, and housed in the narrator's "shed" in the back garden - a fictionalised version of Stead's own writing studio. In terms of plot the story is deliberately eclipsed by the framing narration which poses problems about the writing process: "The fiction writer's task is delicate. He wants life, and the confusions of life, not some orderly system of cause and effect. Yet here, nonetheless, was something for which

it seemed necessary to find a cause" (Stead, 1981a, p. 136). The cause and effect of the story, as we will see in Stead's novels, is secondary, and in "A Quality of Life" is not discovered at all: why Veena has agreed to the mismatched marriage remains unanswered. In this case it is probably because the author himself could not know and did not feel at liberty to invent - as Stead has since revealed, the story "was close to autobiography, 'concealed' (but not very well) by the mechanics of Nova [...] written when I was young, unknown and had no children" (See Appendix C).

The story's narrator is characterised as a famous New Zealand writer with a high estimation of his own authorial importance. Wondering whether he can afford to discard the manuscript, which represents two years of labour, the writer asks himself whether he is willing to disappoint his expectant readership. The answer, he claims, would be of little consequence if he were European or American, or from any other nation except Nova. But because he is the "possessor of a rare gift" he feels the weight of the nation on his shoulders: "If Nova is waiting, not perhaps to read my novel, but for the world to read it, then it is Nova's novel I have destroyed; it is Nova's glory I have wilfully burned" (Stead, 1981c, pp. 113-114). Whether or not the young Stead saw himself in these terms (it is not obviously satirical),[12] this passage is a representation in fictional terms of the underlying critical premise of the *New Poetic*, albeit with a leavening of nationalism. The author is the centre of signification: it is the author's entitlement to preside over the aesthetic relationship, to burn or not to burn. And in a nationalistic sense too - the

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[12] These claims may sound tongue-in-cheek, but this is not clear in the tone. Perhaps Stead did see himself in these terms to some extent. As he has explained, he had arrived at a writing career at what he felt was the beginning of a burgeoning national literature. "I wanted to share in the excitement of 'making a New Zealand literature', shaking off the last vestiges of our colonial past [but...] it is an ambition that no longer seems entirely meaningful [...]."Stead, C. K. (2008). The function of criticism. *Book self : the reader as writer and the writer as critic*. Auckland Auckland University Press. P. 9

author is the voice, or rather mind, of the nation, so rarely gifted that he holds the power to incinerate the source of its greatness.

Naturally, this is the final outcome of the story: at the conclusion the reader is lifted back through the narrative frame into the present tense, with the burning of the manuscript. "Perhaps it was, as I had believed, the best fiction I had ever written. Or perhaps, on the other hand, it was only an elaborate poultice to cover a wound my ego had sustained in youth and which would never entirely heal. But I was no longer interested in judging its merits" (p. 138). In the end the story is perhaps less about any sequence of events, even less about the narrator's fiction, than it is about the power of the author to possess or dispossess, to withhold or indulge.

Stead's interest in authorial puissance is unquestionably central to his metafictional aesthetic – an interest summed up in what one *Observer* reviewer had to say about Stead's novel *The Secret History of Modernism* (2001): "It feels as if Stead wants to talk about the power of the author to deny pleasure, wants to say: 'This is what I can give you, should I choose'" (Green, 2002). In fact, "A Quality of Life" is in many ways a precursor to *The Secret History of Modernism*, which was written thirty years later. The novel, also framed by a writer-narrator who is struggling with his present work, is housed again in a backyard studio resembling Stead's own, and recounting a similar mismatch of relationships and unrealised ambitions: as Stead recalls in an essay titled "The Sweetshop Window" he had a French girlfriend in his first year at University, whom he failed to "consummate" with, which has become a recurring theme in his writing (2008, p. 56).

Narrated by Laszlo Winter, a New Zealand writer suffering from writer's block, *The Secret History* begins when contact with an old acquaintance conjures up memories of his

youth, and causes him to re-examine his past. Even his past is circumscribed in textuality - all three of the main characters, students in 1950s England, are working in literature: Winter is writing a PhD study on Shakespeare which shifts between the fictional and the academic; Rajiv, another fictional incarnation of Stead, is writing on Eliot and Yeats; and Sammy, the narrator's true love, is also working on a book, the title of which becomes the title of the book in hand. The trio are obsessed with authors and authorship: Rajiv rants and cries when he hears that TS Eliot has married, since Eliot has gone back on his supposed "renunciation of the flesh" (Stead, 2001, p. 29); Sammy's obsession with Modernist authors has led to her writing a speculative recreation of the conversations held between them at dinner parties and so forth; and Winter is preoccupied with the identity of Shakespeare.

Most important though are Winter's concerns with his own difficulties as an author as the tale leaps back and forth to present tense New Zealand, to the studio in which the novel we are reading is being written. Again, these concerns have little or nothing to do with the main plot as such and might fairly be described as Stead's concerns: as he revealed in a recent address at the University of Auckland the novel was "a direct transcription of what was happening" to him at the time (2008, 3 March). written following a severe bout of writer's block and, probably, a time of personal retrospection: like a dying character in a Shakespeare play the narrator longs "for the structure of narrative, so that death will not be meaningless and random, but the rounding off of a story…" (p. 2). It seems fair to say that the metafictional element of the story is predominantly disguised autobiography, much like the meta-elements of Stead's literary criticism which will be discussed shortly.

Nevertheless, the question of the story's provenance - its authorial origins - is first raised when Winter (or Stead if we are willing to risk an intentional/autobiographical fallacy and disregard the fictional artifice) questions his desire to tell another story and describes the typical structure of his novels as "a story within-a-story [...] tending to the structural character of a Russian doll" (2001, p. 2). Winter ponders his inner compulsion to tell stories and identifies himself with Hamlet, who requests that those surviving him will "draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story". The comparison though is fairly thin: unlike Hamlet, who must turn his story over to those who have survived him, Winter wants to sum up his own life and his place in the century just ended, to cheat history, or at least to twist its arm, by giving his own shape and meaning to events. The narrator makes a point of rejecting Shelley's formulation that life is "like a dome of many-coloured glass," suggesting instead that life is more linear - like, inevitably, a long fictional narrative: it can only be understood when narrated in sequential strands. Life, says Winter, "falls into discrete but interlocking narratives, and narratives break into scenes. That's how we hold on to 'what happens', how we process it, extracting and ordering the essentials and ridding ourselves of the copiousness of impression and sensation. Memory, if we didn't contain it, would destroy us" (p. 18). The point of provenance is, then, the author's memory, and "story" is more a matter of cogitation than imagination - the mind at work on experience, ordering sense-data, forming mental concepts, arranging events into patterns. Thus the division between fact and fiction holds little meaning: "Did changing people's names make autobiography into fiction? Did real names [...] make autobiography any less fictional?" (pp. 212-13). Clearly these questions are rhetorical and the answer they imply is: probably not. Winter simply feels compelled, not only to tell stories, but to talk about

their telling, and he directs his address beyond the reader to an implied audience which seems, at least on first reading, strangely remote, possibly generations away:

> And stories were necessary, not just to me, but to everyone. Over time the popular medium might have changed for most of the human race – from oral to the written word, from the written word to the movie and the television screen; but the need remained. Without stories everything flew apart and became shapeless, nameless, meaningless; and the more we learned about ourselves and our place in the dreadful exploding-and-dying universe we now inhabit, the more essential they became. Stories were the saviours of our sanity (p. 4).

On closer inspection, if the narrator is addressing a future audience, it can only be an audience which knows less about itself than Winter, since the information would be meaningless otherwise. It seems more likely that Winter is organising his thoughts - delivering a written soliloquy - and that the reader is merely an onlooker, a voyeur into the concerns of the authorial mind. Here again, we see the writer's prerogative to preside over the aesthetic relationship, uncompromising in its representation of special and literary effects concerning authorship. And again, we see the Modernist tendency to push the text towards what is authentically introspective and subjective.

3.2 Foregrounding the authorial mind in criticism

The highly self-representational mode is not only evident in Stead's fiction; it is also evident in his critical comportment. If Stead is determined to import into his fiction aspects of his authorial thinking, then he is equally at home with autobiographical fictionalisation in his critical studies of other New Zealand authors. His critical essay on Mulgan, which first appeared in *Islands* in 1979, is a well-known example - the essay is arguably as much about Stead's thought-processes as it is about Mulgan. It begins by recounting a dinner party with Mulgan's niece at Karekare on Auckland's west coast, which allows Stead to segue into the claim that when discussing writers it is best to avoid abstraction and to (quoting Allen Tate) "reproduce the actual conditions of our relation to him" (Stead, 1979a, p.267). Stead then places himself in relation to Mulgan geographically (in Mt Eden), claiming to know "for sure where he would have played as a child, which fields on the slopes of which volcanic cones would have offered blackberries and bracken and caves" (p.268) and finds himself with "a sense of kinship with Mulgan" (p.286). Of course Stead does not know for certain where Mulgan passed his time - this is invention - but the image is compelling enough and makes a quiet point in support of Mulgan's nationalist views.

Patrick Evans, in a supportive review of Stead's essays in *In The Glass Case*, (the essays are "possibly the best written by a New Zealander about New Zealanders" [Evans, 1982, p. 48]) also makes note of their experiential grounding, viewing Stead's self-inclusion as a "process of anchoring a writer to oneself through shared environment and experience" (p. 48). Discussing the essay on Mulgan, Evans points out that Stead's criticism is less

egotistical than it is concerned with the relationship between words and life-lived: "What matters to Stead is not just the group of words that make up *Man Alone*, but the experiences that shaped the man who assembled the words; and not just that, but his own relationship to the experience that shaped the man.   How living becomes writing fascinates him, and also the question of how the process works in reverse: how writing relates to living again, and how the critic should properly evaluate literature" (p. 48).

Others, including Stead himself, have not been so agreeable in their commentary on Stead's reviews. John Newton's description of Stead as an "irrepressible egotist" centres on what he sees as Stead's persistent and unnecessary tendency to write himself into the annals of New Zealand literary history: "In his treatment of Edmond's *Wellington Letter* this self-preoccupation reaches a new high-water mark. Given that the Edmond's poem-sequence revolves around the suicide of her daughter Rachel, it seems almost inconceivable that the critic can produce a reading which revolves around himself and his own 'sensitized' feelings" (Newton, 2003). Stead's criticism has also been marked by its "nerve (verging on egotism)" by Kai Jensen (1998, p. 513) and even Stead has conceded that his approach in writing about Mulgan was flawed, in that his "own presence in the article became intrusive" (2002, p. 195).

Regardless of its decorum, this aspect of the self-inclusive authorial disposition probably stems from the Modernist credo that the author should preside over the text, and reveal himself as the source of provenance – a credo iterated and reiterated in other areas of Stead's critical work: In *The New Poetic*, he lauds Yeats' essays, describing them as "discursive expressions of the rational will, of the personality which asserts itself and covets honour" (1967, p. 36) – a claim he later reiterates in relation to his own work:

"Criticism," he writes in *Kin of Place*, "should seem to come, not from God, or a committee, but from a critic. It should have individuality, character, a personality, a voice" (2002, p. 2). He also describes a writer's determination to etch their individual personality into the text as a benchmark for quality in fiction. In *The Writer at Work* (2000), Stead commends fiction which gives the reader an awareness "of language which has on it the stamp of that author and no other" (p. 197) - an idea which is present again in *Book Self* (2008) where he characterises the stamp of originality by the unique movements of the authorial mind which demand deviations in narrative structure: "I think a novel should be an image of the human mind, and the human mind clearly exists in the present, but carrying memory and anticipating a future. We live in past and future as well as the present. So the linear novel simplifies too much and fails to represent the complexity of the human consciousness" (p. 269). To extend Stead's question of provenance then: if the text originates in the authorial mind, is tagged with the mind's watermark, and the relationship between the author and the reader is a point of tension best governed by an acknowledged point of authorship, then from where does the authorial mind derive its source material? How does a story (or a work of criticism) come about?

3.3 Realist metafiction and the autobiographical

As early as Stead's second novel, *All Visitors Ashore* (1984), his modernist leanings were developing into a kind of meta-autobiographical mode. With long, meandering

sentences sometimes half a page long, highly detailed imagery, lavishly varied syntax and Joycean train-of-thought sequences, the novel is at heart a modernist coming-of-age tale, compressing Stead's experiences as a student in the 1950s into a single year. But where the novel extends modernism is in its degree of metafictional distancing and its playful, at times audacious, take on Auckland's literary scene of the period.

Like "A Quality of Life", written fifteen years before, and *A Secret History of Modernism*, fifteen years later, the novel is also narrated by an author looking back on his youth to an unsuccessful love affair. Biographical details are hard to exclude from an assessment of what Stead is doing with the novel. Central is Stead's well-known friendship with Frank Sargeson and Janet Frame over the fifties, when Stead was a frequent visitor to Sargeson's house at 14 Esmonde Road in Takapuna, where Frame lived in a hut as Sargeson's ward. After completing his BA at the end of 1954 and enrolling for an MA, Stead had married Kay Roberts, librarian at Auckland University, and lived in a flat on Takapuna Beach, only walking distance from Sargeson's house. Given that the Auckland harbour bridge was not yet built, they were reliant on Ferry crossings to get to and from Auckland city to work, a journey which sets the tone for the theme of the water crossings of various characters.[13]   Reading the novel with these details in mind it is difficult to view the novel as straight fiction - the autobiographical signal in the name of the narrator, Curl Skidmore, as well as the characterisations of gay artist Melior Farbro and frizzy-haired poet Cecelia Skyways are hard to miss as Sargeson and Frame. Moreover, many of the details are lifted directly from 1950s Auckland: descriptions of Takapuna beach, Queen St and Princes Wharf; details of the 1951

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[13] (See Stead, 2008, p. 32)

Waterfront Strike which Stead mentions elsewhere in his personal-political essays; and undisguised characterisations of poets R.A.K Mason, Rex Fairburn and James K. Baxter.

But again the most telling autobiographical element of the novel is in its authorial perspective, in how the narrator constantly draws attention to the novel as a work of the mind. Announced in the first sentence ("Let's begin with the tea-towel" [1984, p. 1]) is an author making decisions on how the narrative will proceed, implying that the story might be told in another mode or modes, and that there is a considered cogitative process occurring behind the diegesis. This mind - it is not a "voice" since it addresses nobody tangible - reappears throughout the novel, breaking the fourth wall, bringing the reader into the present tense and "speaking to" various characters: most often Aorewa, the narrator's lost love ("Why the silence? Are you refusing to answer?" [p. 8]). Of course she is not refusing to answer, she simply hasn't been addressed, it is the mind of narrator addressing his conception of Aorewa – and the narrator decides that because everything is merely "going on inside [his] head" (p. 8) that it is up to him to decide whether she answers or not. She does, but the answers he provides through her character simply add another layer to the authorial mind: we see his memories only not only as he would like to see them, but as how he desires others to see them.

The metafictional performance reaches its peak in Stead's playful chapter describing a stilted rendezvous with Janet Frame. The account begins tongue-in-cheek, in a conventional novelistic mode with descriptions of the weather and landscape ("the light of an autumn morning, clear and fresh and mild" [p. 70]) then closes its focus on two characters, Cecelia Skyways and Melior Farbro with some tongue-in-cheek scene-setting

dialogue ("'Pass me the butter, Cecil,' said Melior" [p. 70]) before humorously turning the narrative in on itself with overt metafiction passages:

> And so the narrative, having begun concretely and dramatically, with the butter to lend authenticity, and with dialogue which did not fully explain itself and thus had the flavour of the real, would now track back and fill in what had not been explained, how Cecelia had admitted to her obsession with Curl Skidmore and to a wish for a kind of experience which the 'convent' hadn't permitted, and how Melior, excited at something which seemed to offer the chance of a vicarious participation in the rages of youthful sexuality, had probed and prompted and encouraged and finally devised a simple plan by which the two young writers could be left alone together to sort out their feelings and wishes in respect of one another (p. 71).

The chapter this passage introduces kills two birds with one stone. Less importantly, the passage is a well-known literary counter-punch aimed at Janet Frame. As has been verified by the public recollections of both Stead and Frame, the passage is part of a larger personal and literary tussle between the two writers that began with Frame's story "The Triumph of Poetry" published over two decades earlier in *The Reservoir* (1963). Frame's story about a talented - and balding - poet who forfeits his creative gift in the pursuit of academic success lifted so many details from Stead's life and repackaged them so unsympathetically that it seemed, to Stead at least, a direct insult. Like Stead, the character in Frame's story was a successful academic from a working-class background (at the time Stead was only 31, but had already been made an associate professor at The University of Auckland), married to a young librarian, lived in a small flat near a beach,

and was in the early stages of his publishing career. And like Stead, the character's creative voice was being muted by the demands of academic work. In 1964, at the time Frame's story was published, Stead's creative writing was, by his own admission, relatively "unknown" – at least in comparison with his academic work (*The New Poetic* was published in the same year with great success). In any case, the similarities were impossible to miss to anyone who knew of Stead and Frame's friendship, so it is unsurprising that Stead was hurt by the story (he describes feeling as though it was a "curse" [Stead, 1999, p. 224]).

If Stead's rejoinder seems a little below the belt, then the reflexivity of the mode diverts some attention away from the claim of the story (that Frame had designs on Stead and that Stead rejected them) while its almost dissociated tone allows Stead to distance himself from the material and place himself above and beyond the narrative action. By ensuring the reader's awareness of the authorial presence behind the narrative, by waving the flag of subjectivity, Stead is cleverly able to simultaneously claim and disclaim his use of the events, or "have his novel… and at the same time undercut the nostalgia and disarm criticism" as Lawrence Jones has described it (1998, p. 231).

More importantly - at least for this study, Stead's use of metafiction in the passage raises some interesting questions about standard dichotomies between modernism and post-modernism as well as realism and anti-realism. To begin with, Stead has quoted the passage as an example of his breaking with what he sees as the imitative conventions of standard realism: "To get a sense of the 'real' one must shake off the merely conventional. This is the Wordsworth principle. He wanted to be rid of 'the family language of poets'. I wanted to be rid of 'the family language of novelists'" (See Appendix C). In context -

the quote is from Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) - Wordsworth was targeting stylistic conventions that he thought were outmoded, such as personifications of abstract ideas.   For Wordsworth this was a matter to be addressed in a critical foreword to his work; but for Stead the disclaiming of traditional conventions (of dialogue, analepsis, obligatory descriptions of weather, of exoteric character interaction and so on) is a matter central to the novel itself, and as such he uses the familiarity of the devices to provide a counter to illusionism.

Stead's use of metafiction in countering the "conventional" to get closer to the "real" places a large question mark over those standard distinctions between "realism" and "metafiction" upheld by Morrissey, Jones and others. If metafiction is anti-illusionist, aimed at disrupting the concerns of realism and its principles of naturalistic representation, then it may be possible that disrupting those features may serve, in an oblique way, to reinforce them. That is – where forms of realist representation have become outmoded, then reflexive disruption is one way in which reality can re-present itself through the mode. Given that a text necessarily contains conventions deriving from traditions of representation, then the closer the author wants to get to reality, the more they must draw attention to whatever conventions are employed. As Stead has remarked:

> I think my notion of realism may be peculiar to myself [...] I think of myself as a realist in fiction. I don't see that as being at odds with metafiction. When I began writing I had in mind something I thought of as 'conventional fiction' (characterised by the work of my contemporary Maurice Shadbolt, and also perhaps Gee) which I wanted to avoid. I thought of it as a mode one could easily slide in to

-- a kind of cruise mode written by, and for, habitual readers of the same conventional stuff (See Appendix C).

It may be fair to say that for Stead then, metafiction intersects with realism, and the standard dichotomy between realist and metafictional modes hold little meaning: conventional writers are wrongly labelled realist, since it is not how well a narrative creates an illusion of events that determines how real a story is. Realism for Stead is perhaps more literal: bound to the facticity of the narrative process, the point of provenance, and the authorial prerogative. It follows then that for Stead a high degree of realism (overt or constituent realism perhaps) depends on a high degree of metafiction, given that reflexivity grounds the narrative in the authorial mind and is able to expose, rather than merely reproduce, conventions of representation. If Yeats and the Modernists sought to wrest the text from "conventional" thought through the poetry of self-portraiture and the presence of clear authorial puissance, then Stead extends this goal into critical and fictional writing by including the authorial presence in the diegesis. Reality, indeed *realism*, demands that the story have an author, and not just a nominal author, but the mind of the "real" author.

It is perhaps not surprising then that of Stead's eleven novels to date, at least seven have contained highly autobiographical material. As well as *The Secret History of Modernism* and *All Visitors Ashore*, his novels *The Death of the Body* (1986), *Sister Hollywood* (1989), *The End of the Century at the End of the World* (1992), *The Singing Whakapapa* (1994) and, doctrinally at least, *My Name is Judas* (2006) have all contained narrators or primary characters who are based in part, on Stead himself, and often include other characters resembling people he has encountered in one way or another, with

names, events and locations altered or disguised. The metafictional element is present in most of them, and in *Sister Hollywood* even steps forward and makes itself known when the narrator of a short story called "The Last Life of Clarry" remarks that the reading public is apparently tired "of the novel about the novelist writing the novel… I'm not tired of it. I've written one and would write another…" (See Philipson, 2005) - a prophecy that would come true twice over in Stead's oeuvre.

3.4 Author/reader/text in *The Death of the Body*

While the characters in "A Quality of Life", *The Secret History of Modernism* and *All Visitors Ashore* comment metafictionally on narrative in abstract terms as the stories progress, the mode is taken to such an extreme in *The Death of the Body* that the novel can be read as an extended metaphor for narrative creation.   In fact the framing narrative - again about a struggling author with an unattainable muse - is so manifestly in the foreground that it has its own setting (variously in England, Italy and Denmark), characters (an unnamed padrone in the "Cafe Corso Magenta" and Uta Haverstrom, wife of a Scandinavian Consul, both of whom comment on the draft as it progresses), as well as its own plot (the narrator's unusual relationship with Uta and his search for a suitable environment that will enable him to finish writing his story).   The "primary" or hypodiegetic narrative, if indeed these terms fit, is about professor of philosophy, Harry Butler, who is struggling with his academic work on the mind/body dichotomy and whose relationship problems with his wife have driven him to an affair with one of his

students. When the affair becomes public knowledge Harry begins to be harassed by militant, boot-wearing lesbians from the university's Women's Collective. Coupled with these problems, Harry's family home has been commandeered by a police detective squad who are using the kitchen as a surveillance post to photograph and record the movements of his drug-trafficking neighbours. The fictionalised autobiographical themes are again recognisable: the struggle for inspiration in Harry's lack of academic publication; Harry's nostalgic longings for lost French inamorata Natalie; and another detail close to Stead is in the plot involving Harry's skirmishes with the Women's Collective: around the time Stead was writing the novel, Mervyn Thompson, his fellow lecturer at Auckland University, was infamously abducted and tortured by masked women after unsubstantiated claims of rape and sexual harassment.

Auto/biographical details aside, the complex primary plot is not really primary to the novel at all. As Reginald Berry puts it: "It is Stead's dream for this fiction that the reader will find the telling more arousing than the tale" (Berry, 1987, p.345). In fact, the hypodiegetic story by the end is rather slight - existing to illustrate Stead's methods of composition, or serving as an almost arbitrary conduit through which the authorial mind will demonstrate its processes. The plot is not completely arbitrary though – it does have some connections to the framing narrative, and these are pointed out in the first few pages when the narrator likens the reader and writer to the detective and philosopher of the novel: "Nothing is so puzzling as a death. The detective wants to solve the crime, if it's a crime. The philosopher wants to penetrate the mystery of life and death…We want to know these things too. We are the detective and the philosopher. Like them we're always asking ourselves the big questions" (Stead, 1986, p. 10). These connections

probably strike the reader more as an editorial after-thought than as the genesis of the idea for the novel or as a description of writer/reader commonality, but the point is made: like the detective and philosopher who want to piece together a sequence of events, the author/reader want to connect ideas through narrative construction.

The metafictional narrative-probing is vigorous, and mainly articulated around various difficulties the narrator encounters as the story is written. It is worth citing a few passages to build a picture of just how pervasive (and wryly amusing) the reflexivity can be. One of the difficulties is plot sequencing. The narrator muses: "There's a problem in telling a story. Things have to come one at a time, as through a narrow gate. But in reality nothing is single. A whole set of facts and circumstances march abreast. You have to let me build up those facts and circumstances in my own way" (p. 11). Another difficulty is in shifting characters through the more banal aspects of the day to day, while maintaining a modicum of realism:

> I think it was Virginia Woolf who said her worst problem as a writer was to get a character from one room to the next. Was she to write 'So-and-so got up from his chair and crossed the room to the door, pausing only to notice for the first time that the kowhai was in flower'? […] But on the other hand in reality people don't flash from point A to point B like a lizard up a wall. Whichever way you choose, the slow progress or the sudden leap, it will never seem quite satisfactory (p. 16)

Still another example of the narrator's is a tendency to write expository prose, rather than trusting the reader to follow the action – a tendency to break the "show don't tell" rule. Following a passage of indirect speech and action in which the narrator explains why Harry allows the drug squad to remain in his home, the narrator interrupts the flow with

reflexive doubts: "Am I making myself less than clear? It always happens when one becomes explanatory. I must trust the Story, and get on with it" (p. 40).

The voice of the story is internalised and has a mild self-contempt, while the prose reads like diary-entries and the doubts and uncertainties the narrator holds about his story build as the plot progresses to a point where it seems the narrator is really talking to himself, and the reader is to take the role of a welcomed voyeur. Commenting on a scene he is dreading showing his informal editor, Uta Haverstrom, the narrator begins to disclaim his own writing, saying it is not particularly "edifying", and commenting that the scene "doesn't end with a ringing line or a witty one" (p. 61).

The self-criticism in this and other comments made by the narrator may have contributed to Damien Wilkins writing of the self-loathing of Stead's novels (Wilkins, 1997), and Zoe Green to describe another of Stead's novels as a "take on the masochism of surrendering to narrative" (Green, 2002). But to read these passages as anything but tongue-in-cheek is perhaps to miss Stead's paradoxical self-assurance. Like his modernist predecessors, Stead is doubtful and introspective in his ontological outlook, but assertive and even forceful in his aesthetic stance. It seems that the more metafictional, the more self-conscious, the more unsure Stead becomes, the more he is able to assert his aesthetic authority over the narrative. This is especially evident in the narrative disclaimers on the first page of the novel. "I am, as I've told you, the voice of the Story. But if you don't believe a voice can exist without a name, call me Ishmael, or Phillip, or take whatever name you find on the cover of the book. These won't be correct, but if they silence your anxieties and permit you to listen, then let them serve. In the end an identity will be forged" (p. 7). In a sense these disclaimers only undermine themselves. The author does

not, for example, in the three options, include a female pronoun: if the narrator is nameless, he is certainly not genderless. And while Stead claims to introduce himself only to dismiss himself "as of no consequence", the fact that he has raised the topic of authorship at all allows him to dedicate the following two chapters to characterising and defining the writer and clearly marking out the oppositional territory between author and reader. A simple and loosely structural reading of the first eight pages of the novel (chapters 1 and 2; pages 7-14) demonstrates the depth of the authorial puissance in the novel – it shows what a passive role the implied author takes in relation to his material, and what an assertive role he takes in commanding the reader-response:

Phrases pertaining to author	Phrases pertaining to reader	Phrases pertaining to text
-I'm a travelling salesman, an itinerant bard, a newsman in search of a happy ending	-you can believe	-it speaks to me
	-you will see	-I'm under instruction
	-call me Ishmael or Phillip	-it's commanding, dictatorial, hectoring
-I'm the life-and-soul of the party-of-one	-let them serve	-I'm a slave to it
	-you will travel with me	-I am under orders
-I'm the voice of the story	-so imagine	-these are my instructions
-I begin	-you can see	-I follow them
-in my own way	-follow me	-I can't avoid
-I will give you a story	-you might say	
-I've sometimes thought	-you have to let	
-I might cheat	-have patience	
-I might put	-give me time	
-I suppose	-you see that	
-what I mean	-if you notice	
-this I suppose	-you can see	
-I start	-think not only	
-I'm sure	-don't […] jump to quick conclusions	
-I think she	-remember that	
-I would probably		
-I imagine		
-I should urge you		

Figure 5. Author/reader/text in *The Death of the Body*

The frequency of these phrases as they appear in the text is hard to convey - they are collected from two very short chapters - what would amount to around a couple of ordinary A4-typed pages each. The reason for charting these phrases as units - or "bundles of relations" as structuralists might call them - is that they give a simple statement of the author-read-text relationships and clearly emphasise the patterns

between them. My rationale for charting them in these three particular streams is of course derived from Stead's own schematic representation of literary relationships in *The New Poetic* – his tripartite triangle plotting the relationship between author, audience, and material.

What is most evident from the units is just how concerned Stead is with ensuring that the writer-reader relationship goes ahead according to plan. From the number of qualifiers in column 1 (in my own way, sometimes, might, suppose, think, probably, imagine) the reader is to be clear that the author has considered and reconsidered his role. But it is almost as if the story might not be told, or will not be told if the reader does not assume his/her role as acolyte to the author. Stead seems confident with his picture of the author-reader relationship, particularly in the repetition of imperatives handed down from author to reader (column 3: you will travel with me; so imagine; you can see and so on). The author is to act as a kind of tour guide through the narrative, while the reader must simply "follow".

What Stead's narrator is unhappy with, or what he appears least confident about, is the relationship between author and material. Where the writer lacks "authority" is in relation to the source of the text, its provenance, and its relationship to the implied author. If the reader is subject to the writer, the writer is subject to his material: ("I'm under instruction"; "it's commanding, dictatorial, hectoring"; "I'm a slave to it"; "I am under orders"; "these are my instructions"). The main assumption of realism seems to underlie these phrases: that the author is out to capture something that is exterior to the text - although we are lead to believe that in this case this something is fictional, intangible, an instinctive act of the mind:

As yet there's nothing in the folder, but it speaks to me. I'm under instruction. If you don't like explanations to be fanciful you can believe, if you prefer, that what I call the Story is something in my head. A kind of instinct. Whatever it is, it's commanding, dictatorial, hectoring, and inclined to sulk when it doesn't get its own way (p. 7)

The personification of the Story is perhaps a deliberate non sequitur. The folder is completely blank, so what the narrator is describing is not the Story's voice or even something as definite as the voice of "inspiration". What he is describing is himself, his authorial voice. The author's position, not the Story, is what is commanding and hectoring. The real problem is in the story's absence: the narrator feels obligated to write, but does not know where his narrative will come from. So again Stead's central question is: what is the source, or provenance for the story? As a reader this is perhaps easy to answer: an author. As an author the question seems impenetrable - is there some sort of divine inspiration? Is it simply a matter of reproducing an objective reality? When asked about this concern in his novels, Stead responded that he first became interested in the question of provenance after reading the work of Italian existentialist Alberto Moravia:

I was fascinated early on by the fiction of Alberto Moravia, which is almost all (with only a few exceptions) in the first person. I think in his essays, which I read with profit at some point long ago, he proposes this problem of provenance - in a world where there can be no 'eye of God' (because there is not god) - as of primary importance. That was how I felt in writing fiction, and Moravia confirmed that anxiety and seemed to give it intellectual authority (See Appendix C).

Stead is probably referring to *L'uomo come fine e altri saggi* (1963) – translated as *Man as an End*, (1965) - in which Moravia contends that with modern culture having discarded monotheism it has lost its moral compass, and that human expression, art, and by extension the novel, had become a means to an end rather than an end in and of itself, dominated by the ideologies of fascism on the one hand and capitalism on the other. For Moravia the only solution to the failing of the omniscient narrative position was to turn to representations of an individually ideated reality, a solution which must have resonated with Stead's readings of Yeats and Eliot. As Moravia writes: "The first person is a vehicle that allows for an indefinite widening and deepening of the novel […] first person novels often have some sort of resemblance to essays, and readers who can find all the immediate and dramatic representation they want at the cinema, demand more and more that the novel should be an essay, an indirect representation" (1965, pp. 185-86).

This essay-like clarity is likely what leads Tim Parks to describe Moravia's fiction as "icily analytic, ever-precise" and his characters as "melancholy, alienated, disturbingly lucid" (1999, p. iv) individuals - descriptions that could well fit the Ouroborosian nature of Stead's novels. *The Death of the Body* is nothing if not strictly lucid, and the icy left-brained peremptoriness becomes a problem raised by the narrator's editor/muse, Uta Haverstrom, when the narrator shows her a passage detailing the protagonist's affair with a student: "My job was to get it down exactly as it happened. She told me I was in danger of writing something 'heartless'. I think she had in mind the scene between Harry Butler and Louise Lamont. I tried to explain to her that I'm not in control. Or rather, that I'm in control but not in charge" (p. 62). Again the narrator claims and disclaims his authorship by maintaining an undefined connection to the story and absenting himself of

any real liability for its contents. But this is a ruse. The narrator is able to change the course of the narration to compensate for Uta's charge of heartlessness, and writes a scene in which he "moons about feeling surges of love for three women and two sons'" (p. 75). The scene is less than successful – "overwritten" - and after further conversations Uta suspects the narrator is merely writing autobiography, that he is "Harry Butler telling his own story" (p. 178). The narrator responds in the negative, but when she questions him again on how he has so many details, the chapter abruptly ends with no reply, as if to tease the reader with the question.

"No," says the narrator in the beginning of the next chapter, "I am not Harry Butler come abroad to write his memoirs. I am (let's say) unpaid secretary to the Story" (p. 180). Stead is possibly borrowing the secretary metaphor from the polish poet Czesław Miłosz, who wrote in the poem "Secretaries": "I am no more than a secretary of the invisible things / that are dictated to me and a few others" (1981c, p. 72) and which has since appeared in J.M. Coetzee's phrase "the Secretary of the Invisible", used to describe the role of the writer in *Elisabeth Costello* (2003, p. 201). Of course, what each of these uses of the secretarial metaphor implies is that the source of the writer's material, the provenance of the fictional world, remains indefinable – or at least concealed from both reader and author.

As the novel concludes with the narrator an unpaid secretary, the ultimate point of provenance for the story remains obscured, and an analogy made earlier in the novel stands. The analogy I refer to is, I think, the perfect epigraph for the novel and for the performativity of Stead's metafictional work as a whole. While practising a tantric exercise with his wife, Harry recalls a dream he had the previous night in which he was

walking along a narrow lane past a threatening dog that suddenly attacks him and wakes him from the dream. "What he asks himself now is this: if he, Harry Butler, didn't know until it happened whether or not the dog would bite him, who did know? Who gave the dream dog autonomy to act? If his mind was the author of the fiction of the dream, why did his mind not know how it was going to end?" (p. 47). Harry then decides that it may be "wrong" to think of the mind as a unified entity because there were two minds at work in the dream - one playing this "trick" on the other.

One way to read this would be to say that the two minds mirror the documentative and the imaginative parts of the authorial mind - one part that wants to convince and the other to charm. The two minds certainly mirror the two most pressing concerns of Stead's aesthetic - the reader and writer - one playing a trick on the other, the writer taking particulars of reality and weaving them into a narrative, the reader being lead along the road into a plot. As for the dangerous bitch? Stead's preoccupation with the archetypal European femme fatale might be too obvious, but Uta Haverstrom is in many ways a Scandinavian incarnation of the French characters in his other stories: Natalie Butler, Veena Leclerk, Louise Winter et. al. – all of whom are in various ways unattainable, a class above the narrator who is, to mix similar quotes from *The Secret History of Modernism* and *The Death of the Body*, "unfortunately" (2001, p. 229) from "ze sous seas" (1986, p. 32). While some might read these European muses as a symptom of colonial displacement and longing, it is more likely a matter of Stead again including the biographical in the story – perhaps again his frustrated affair with the French student and the fictionalised "wound my ego had sustained in youth and which would never entirely heal" (1981c, p. 138).

The closer one looks at questions of provenance and realism in Stead's fiction, the more its typically post-modern reflexivity seems sourced in an essentially modernist performance of individuation, authorial power and authenticity. Wystan Curnow has a point when he describes *All Visitors Ashore* as springing from an essentially "modernist ego" with a "cover-up" of post-modernism (Curnow, 1985, pp. 146-48). Perhaps the only problem with this definition is that Stead pushes this ego to such an extreme that Modernism can hardly contain it - he is post-modern in the sense that he has outgrown and burst the skin of modernism. The most obvious defining characteristic of Stead's metafictional aesthetic is also the ultimate provenance of his narratives: the presence of a man thinking. What one hears when one reads Stead's metafictions is almost less a story than it is the cogitations of an author, less a voice than a sequence of scripted notes chronicling the author's thoughts.

The Ouroborosian nature of this focus has attracted its fair share of critical objections, but Stead's novels - and his criticism - carry an undeniably transparent sense of an individual reality: they are meticulously close to the life of a mind at work, authentic in their reflections and thoroughly clear in their reasoning. Stead can never be accused of woolly thought. This is perhaps the element of Stead's fiction Damien Wilkins is pointing to when he finds fault in Stead's "surfeit of lucidity" (Wilkins, 1997), the element Kai Jensen praises in terms Stead's "sensuous lucidity" (1998, p. 513), and why Dennis McEldowney sums up Stead as "always lucid" (1997, p. 357). If a reader can countenance or appreciate the high degree of authorial administration in Stead's prose, the reward is a unique style of metafiction which pushes the conventions of realism into naturalistic representations of the mind, binding narrative to its point of provenance, and

openly reviewing rather than reproducing conventions of representation. It should be fair to conclude that in Stead's work metafiction is more a vital counterpart to realism than its disputant.

CHAPTER IV: Doubtful metafictions: epistemic dubiety in the work of Russell Haley

4.1 Freed? The shift from provincialism to internationalism

Stead's juxtaposition of local and continental settings and literary aesthetics, and Frame's themes of cultural imitation and derivation in her work written in Britain and America could be seen to complicate this thesis as a study of a "national" literature. Indeed, the metafictional writers in this study could be seen as largely transnational: as well as Frame and Stead who have spent significant periods producing fiction offshore, Russell Haley is originally from Yorkshire and writes on problems of migration; Michael Jackson is an expatriate living in the US whose fictions draw on his career of travel as an anthropologist; Albert Wendt's novels document his attempts to reconcile his immersion in European culture with the traditions of fa'asamoa; and Charlotte Randall has written extensively from her experiences in Europe and, as already noted, has been criticised for participating in an homogenous international style. As well as these diverse geocultural influences, it is evident that international trends toward reflexivity since around the 1960s have had a large bearing on the performance of narrative in New Zealand metafiction – trends which, as this chapter discusses, coincide with some significant changes in New Zealand's broader cultural make-up during the period, particularly in Auckland where the writers in this study - except the most recent, Charlotte Randall – have mostly been based. For the moment then, this chapter leaves the accumulating discourse on

performances of reality/realism, post/modernism, anti-illusionism and authorship, to contextualise ideas of "place" that underpin fiction in the latter half of 20th century New Zealand, outlining some significant cultural trends in the national/provincial literary context, before re-engaging the previous threads of discourse to discuss performances of place and identity in the metafictions of Russell Haley.

Most cultural writers in New Zealand would agree that the mid 1960s through to the early 70s were the beginnings of a large cultural shift in the country. As Michael King puts it, at the beginning of the 70s: "it seemed to some as if the maelstrom of change was gathering rather than diminishing" (2003, p. 457), or as Patrick Evans has it: "Around 1970 living in New Zealand began to feel different from before" (2007, p. 15). During this period New Zealand was undergoing a change from what is often described as a warmly insulated colonial outpost to an independent minor-leaguer in a globalised world, and the country's dominant cultural premises, and with them the politics of identity in New Zealand's fiction output, were beginning to respond to these changes.

To begin with the broader cultural shift, some commentators have argued that one of the most significant factors in the transformation was Great Britain's move into the European Union. American Phillip O'Neill, discussing the different trajectories in post-colonial development between New Zealand and Australia has argued that New Zealand settlers were more economically and culturally dependant on England than Australians, so when England joined the European Economic Community in 1973 the impacts on New Zealand were greater: "The relatively quick post-EEC smashing of New Zealand's self-conception as the overseas farm of England meant that it was ripe for a reconceptualization of its identity. An Australian post-English identity grew more

steadily, and replaced England with the influence of the US after the Second World War. Broadly, Australia looks outward, New Zealand looks inward" (1993, p. 6). The last clause of O'Neill's statement regarding a perceived inwardness in New Zealand culture will be an on-going area of discussion as this thesis progresses, but perhaps there is some validity to the hypothesis that the opening of global markets, as well as exposing New Zealand to new forms of culture, contributed to a kind of self-reflecting inwardness of culture that developed in response to its perceived isolation and insulated social structure. On one hand Pākehā New Zealanders had long considered itself a colonial elsewhere – a "chilled and sealed" outpost of the world, as Evans puts it – but Britain's entry to the EEC meant New Zealand "was being defrosted, its citizens socially, psychologically and economically exposed to the air, abandoned by the mother country to an indifferent and newly challenging world in which its competitors were unfamiliar nations outside the old colonial matrix" (Evans, 2007, pp. 16-17). Arguably, this sudden exposure, while providing the country with a variety of alien cultural influences, also created a new culture of inward self-negotiation, a mode of meta-cultural self-inspection, or as Alan Brunton puts it, "a reflexive turn": while asserting its independence from Britain, the country was looking back at itself and rediscovering (for Māori and Pākehā alike) its own indigenous culture: "Independence promises a future but, because its origin is the past, it is also a movement back into history, a demand for a genealogy" (Brunton, 2000, p.2).

This demand for greater self-understanding was perhaps registered most strongly in Auckland where the convergent boundaries of the various Pacific and European cultures were most active. While the ethnic make-up of all the main centres was certainly becoming more diverse, Auckland appears to have been the hub of this growth. Rural

Māori were migrating to Auckland to work, and the proportion of Māori in the city rose from 0.9% in 1936 to 8.1% in 1976 (McClure, 2009). In addition, the opening of Mangere International Airport in 1966 confirmed Auckland's status as New Zealand's main gateway to the world, and Auckland as the world's first port of call in New Zealand. Over the 70s the rate of immigration increased and two-thirds of immigrants from the Pacific Islands (the Cooks, Tokelaus, Western Samoa and Niue) made Auckland their home. By the late 70s, hundreds of Vietnamese refugees had arrived in the city and by the mid-1980s when a change in New Zealand's immigration policy occurred, thousands of Korean and Chinese migrants made the journey. Along with these arrivals and departures - regular flights to the UK had begun in the late 1960s - Auckland was the first city exposed to the currency of global trends. Many new cultural features were taking root in the cultural landscape, from European cuisine, Asian automotives and other technologies, to American fashion and music.

If Auckland was perceived as a more interesting place in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, it may have been seen as more exciting place to create art, and perhaps the move of many writers, artists and musicians from the southern regions to Auckland could be read as confirmation of a shift from provincial to more international interests. As Peter Simpson has pointed out, Christchurch had previously been the hub of creativity in the 1930s and 1940s in terms of the fine arts, as well as literature, music and theatre: institutions such as the Little Theatre at Canterbury University College, and Denis Glover's Caxton Press were the main outlets for our most important contemporary writers (Simpson, 2007). But throughout the 1950s their dominance was dwindling, and many of the artists who initiated and supported them (among them Rita Angus, James K.

Baxter, Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, Colin McCahon) had relocated to the other main centres – predominantly Auckland or Wellington. This movement, Simpson points out, was indicative of general movements in New Zealand culture (2004, 2007).[14] Indeed those who remained in provincial regions were often thought to be doing themselves a disservice - as Frame's narrator in *Living in the Maniototo* says of her character resembling the ever-provincial Ronald Hugh Morrieson: "Why hadn't he come to live in Auckland, the cosmopolitan city, to get experience, to keep his art alive and in the swim?" (1979, p. 56).[15]

The passage of cultural influence from America to Auckland is well-documented in the New Zealand poetry scene. While Wellington had some outlet for new innovations in the magazine of Victoria University's Literary Society (*Experiment* [1956-69]) the literary milieu of Dunedin in the 1960s was locked in a staunchly European outlook. As Bill Manhire recalls it, the literary tastes he met as a student at The University of Otago were "Eurocentric" - in some part due to the selective tastes of its chief literary benefactor, Charles Brasch, and in another part due to the way publishing rights in the Commonwealth were dominated by London publishing houses (Manhire, 1987, pp. 142-54). Ian Wedde puts it in more general terms: "You think of poets like Brian Turner or Bill Sewell in Dunedin where the phantom of Charles Brasch still hangs around. It was an Anglophile centre, whereas in Auckland, say, from earlier, there was the interest of

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[14] The foundation of New Zealand's largest professional theatre, Auckland's Mercury Theatre Company in 1962, can be seen as another sign of the shift, and elsewhere Simpson sees the 1951 Writer's Conference as the "last hurrah" of Christchurch's cultural pre-eminence. See Simpson, 'A Country in Search of Itself: The 1951 New Zealand Writers' Conference' in Williams, M., Ed. (2004). *Writing at the Edge of the Universe.* Christchurch, Canterbury University Press: 135

[15] (Frame, 1979, p.56). Peter Wallstead is, according to Patrick Evans, based on Ronald Hugh Morrieson, "the novelist who has lived all his life in the obscure Taranaki township of Hawera" (1984, p. 78).

people like Curnow in Wallace Stevens and so on […] From Auckland the lines always tended to run more readily towards the West Coast of America" (Wedde, 1986b, p. 47). And while writers like Manhire, Wedde and Stead had previously found it difficult to buy modern American poetry, bookshops in the main centres (especially Progressive Books in Auckland) were by the early 1960s beginning to stock writers like Creeley and Ginsberg, as well as collections of verse such as Donald M. Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry* whose representation of the avant-garde became an archetype for anthologies produced here later, such as Morrissey's *The New Fiction* (1985), Mary Paul and Murray Edmond's *The New Poets* (1987) and Bernard Gadd's *Other Voices: New Writers and Writing in New Zealand* (1989).

American literature had already impacted what could be called the first and second generations of New Zealand writers – Ernest Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson on Sargeson's generation, Ezra Pound on Stead's – and it was to do so again when the ideas of the Black Mountain poets (especially those of Robert Creeley who made a visit to the country in 1974) began to be appropriated in the "open form" movement initiated by poets such as Alan Loney and Alastair Paterson, as well as Manhire and others (Ellis, 1998, p.13). These new overseas influences and international perspectives certainly played a part in bringing about a self-consciousness that ended much of New Zealand's provincialism. But at the same time this self-consciousness seemed to reinforce notions of the national boundary. As Maurice Shadbolt has noted, up until the 1960s "there was no New Zealand literature thought worth academic inspection" (1993, p. 170-71) but by the beginning of the decade national literature and history were becoming an established topic in universities (Auckland University introduced New Zealand literature into the

curriculum in 1956). By the time the National English Syllabus Committee was formed

in 1970 it was evident that the school language curriculum was "no longer seen as an

outpost of the British empire, but as a genuinely home-grown indigenous product"

(Catherwood, 1986, p.1). And where previously only unsubstantial and occasional

criticism[16] on specifically New Zealand literature had appeared in reviews in magazines,

newspapers, school journals, radio and the like, by the mid-1960s there was evidence that

theory-based criticism was to take a more prominent role in the country's literary

proceedings – if not yet in *Landfall*, then in the genesis of a new cluster of often short-

lived journals and magazines devoted to avant-gardism.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the first marked thread of new theoretical writing came

from students at Auckland University in the late 60s, where Sargeson's protégés were now

teaching. One of these students, Russell Haley, had taken English papers on modern

literature (including a widely revered paper on modern poetry taught by Roger Horrocks,

and another taught by C.K. Stead), and during the course of his studies had met fellow

students Bob Orr, Murray Edmond, Jan Kemp and Ian Wedde – the "third wave of New

Zealand literariness" as Edmond jocularly puts it (1986, p. 168). Another student Haley

met, at the university cafeteria in July 1968 at an event called Young Aucklanders in the

Arts, was poet Alan Brunton. Following their meeting, Haley became a part of what he

describes as the "wild-looking" bunch of young arts students who congregated around

Brunton's flat, an ex-drughouse in Boyle Crescent in the Auckland suburb of Grafton.

The group, with its agenda to reinvigorate what they saw as a buttoned-down and

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[16] In the 1950s, it was widely believed that there was nothing more to add to criticism of fiction (novel, short story) in New Zealand - due, in Robert Chapman's estimation, to a lack of quality work produced before 1946. Excluding Katherine Mansfield, Chapman holds: "There were not thought to be enough works to sustain examination more than once in, say twenty years" (Chapman, 1973, p. 71).

outmoded New Zealand literary scene, was a neat fit for Haley: "I'd always run to catch up with the avant-garde and so I slipped into place quite naturally here with fellow writers who weren't Presbyterian realists" (See Appendix C). Soon after establishing their common ground, the manifesto-wielding "Cultural Liberation Front" was born - a group propelled by the charismatic Brunton which served "some ill-defined purpose like overthrowing society or changing consciousness or reinvigorating the imagination" (Brunton, 2003). Indeed, there was an air of confidence in Auckland at the time which gave some of this new generation a large estimation of their own significance. As Ian Wedde recalls his first meeting with Bill Manhire: "I was contrastingly pretentious. It was part of the Auckland thing at the time. He was much more interested in New Zealand literature is another way of putting it. He wasn't not interested and didn't have an attitude. He was a much more mature, open-minded individual than we were" (Wedde, 2001, p. 60).

Apart from disseminating its ideas - the Cultural Liberation Front's manifesto "Who as a Slug …" was published in *Craccum* in 1969 after some controversy - the group had still another, more tangible purpose: to act as a front from which the group of friends would get funding out of the AUSA through the Literary Society to fund Brunton's proposed new literary and arts journal *Freed*. The first edition of *The Word is Freed* (later editions made variations on the title) came out in July 1969, and arguably put forward the first real evidence that European critical theory, as well as the American Beat aesthetic, had begun to register on Auckland's literary circles.

Like the generation that preceded them at Esmonde Road, the Boyle Crescent group were earnest in their pursuit of literary trends. Perhaps even more so, if one can

extrapolate from Wedde's obsession with being up-to-date: "I was utterly paranoid. I was terrified not to have read the latest issue of a magazine X, Y or Z. There was this awful fear, a longing. It was a fear of not being up with the game. […] In the end it wasn't about servicing an intelligence or a sensibility or anything like that, it was just about obsession" (Wedde, 2001, p. 59). But they were also conscious – perhaps more so than the previous generation – of broader socio-political issues, of "otherness, 'differences', slips between reality and history, social policies and foundation myths, the conventions of cultural identity" as Brunton, Edmond and Michelle Leggott term it in their reassessment of the 1960s and 70s in the *Big Smoke* anthology (2000, p.2).

Although only lasting for five issues (Brunton only intended four) *Freed* is now often seen as the patriarch publication of a succession of internationally-conscious, loosely "post-modern" journals, produced (mostly) in Auckland: *Edge* (1971-1976), *Spleen* (1976-1977), *Morepork* (1979-1980), *Parralax* (1982-83), *And* (1983-85), *Splash* (1984-86), *Antic* (1986-90), and the most durable heir of the Auckland avant-gardes: *brief* (1995-present). The publication of *Freed* expanded the group of literati - to 19 members according to a head-count by Janet Wilson - and gave them what they felt was a collective confidence (or a "very inflated sense of our importance" as Wedde puts it [2001, p. 59]) to step away from what they saw as the nationalist flag-waving of the preceding generation of writers – the so-called *Phoenix* writers – Brasch, Curnow, Glover, Sargeson (and Stead by virtue of his siding with Curnow in an infamous debate).[17] As Haley has commented:

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[17] For an extended discussion see Newton, J. (2003). "The death throes of Nationalism." *Jacket* 22. Retrieved 13/03, 2008, from http://jacketmagazine.com/22/newt-stead.html

"we were all opposed in our different ways to timeworn ideas about NZ nationalism…why go through all that Curnow thing about finding a place to stand. We didn't need to do that. We were here and now" (See Appendix C).

There was perhaps an element of bravado to the "Freed" sentiment. If the imagination was released from the need to find a place to stand, there was no end to the preoccupation with geographic place and cultural identity. For Haley at least, "place", and its relationship to nationality is at the foreground of his work; certainly far more the source of its imaginative power than broadly social concerns. But perhaps what the confluence of the New Zealand cultural context and American and Continental critical theory in the Freed generation did do was complicate notions of cultural place and identity and create a new freedom to explore territories beyond the national boundary. For Haley this meant imaginative crossovers between New Zealand and his place of birth in Leeds, as well as accounts of other places he had travelled. As Haley says in his afterword to *Real Illusions* (1984) he often felt fragmented about place - stretched "between here and there" - which seemed to result in a near solipsism: "But you have no real country out there. It is all in here. So juxtaposition rather than 'realistic' continuity becomes the way you re/present the world through language" (p.122). Again, what O'Neill has noted as a tradition of "inwardness" seems to prove a sticking point – the "in here" that Haley speaks of - the focus on the internal processes of the mind - is, as it has been for Frame and Stead, a defining characteristic of his metafiction. As his narrator says in the title story of *The Sauna Bath Mysteries*: "life inside was more interesting than the life where he went through doors, bought bread, walked up and down streets" (1978, p. 81).

4.2 Exiled to the mind: Russell Haley's epistemic dubiety

Although Haley was less than flattered when Stead dubbed him the "probably / The best Yorkshire surrealist / writing in New Zealand" (Stead, 1979b) it was probably not the sly qualifier or the triviality of the mantle accorded to him that rankled as much as the suggestion that Stead - and others such as Hone Tuwhare - saw him as an English rather than Pākehā New Zealand writer. Indeed Haley went to some pain to straighten the record in an afterword to his second collection of stories *Real Illusions* (1984) noting that due to his vague genealogy he could not "lay claim to a tribal connection with Yorkshire" (p. 123), had elected to become a naturalized New Zealand citizen, and was in the process of recreating his sense of personal history in and through fiction set in New Zealand: "The New Zealand element in these stories does not merely reside in place names nor in the planting of indigenous trees and shrubs; it derives, I believe, from my transportation here of the family ghosts" (pp. 123-24). These questions of migration and belonging in Haley's metafictions then can be seen to complicate the "here and now" assertion of the *Freed* generation. As this chapter hopes to show, in Haley's metafiction all certainties of the here and now are constantly undermined by doubts of where and when? Haley's fictions are concerned with histories of place and identity, but what gives them weight and complexity is their epistemological uncertainty - their deliberately indeterminate places and times which are shrouded in elusive memories and ambiguous points of reference. Locations in Haley's work are ultimately locations of the mind, albeit a mind

that is doubtful of its own abilities to interpret reality. As he pointed out in 1984, when discussing the difficulties of writing fiction as a recent migrant: "I must confront a landscape here which still rears with all the strange familiarity of a place constructed in a dream. I suppose that is why many of the stories […] circle around the theme of building a house. I am trying to make a place in the world" (pp. 122-23).

Questions of place aside, the other half of Stead's description was quite right: Haley's fiction does spring in part from the surrealist tradition - with perhaps elements of the Dadaist movement that proceeded it and the Absurdist Theatre movement that followed it thrown in. Where Stead's Modernism is concerned with authorial control and aesthetics, Haley seems to pass over such concerns in favour of producing more what could almost be expressed in the terms of André Breton's surrealist manifesto: "Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation" (1924[1978], p.122). Indeed, Haley has pointed out that as a would-be writer in London from the mid 1950s to early 60s, he was inevitably caught up in the explosion of surrealist and absurdist drama: "I was as engaged with drama as I was with prose fiction […] Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams had new plays produced and I saw the first London performances of absurdist playwrights such as Ionesco and difficult to classify dramatists such as Jean Genet." (See Appendix C). Certainly these influences can be seen in Haley's preoccupation with mental ghosts, which force his fiction into the inner world of dreams and mindscapes - but while, generally speaking, the surrealists and absurdists deliberately flattened characters, placed exaggerated stereotypes in cyclic situations performing meaningless actions and speaking in dialogue full of clichés, repetition and nonsense, Haley's work delves into the psyche in a way that, like

Frame's, is more concerned with the absurd realities of the human condition than with the strictly "surreal". As Janet Wilson puts it, Haley shows a desire to explore "the tragi-comic conditions of existential angst leading to an absurdist worldview" (Wilson, 2001) or as Haley has conversely revised it "an absurdist worldview [...] that leads me to explore tragi-comic situations" (See Appendix D). Either way – as this chapter points out - the absurdist points of view in Haley's fiction mean that reason and logic always require qualification and are often rejected in favour of narrative performances of mental chaos, narrative uncertainty, and unanswerable doubts. Haley's fiction exhibits a clear preoccupation with human uncertainty, focussing less on character development or plot structure than on characters who find themselves subject to illogicality, characters subject to severe - although entirely human and "real" - states of consciousness, through events such as memory loss in *The Settlement* (1986), extreme self-consciousness in *Beside Myself* (1990), dream-states in "The Balkan Transformer" and "The Cosmetic Factory" (1978) and social isolation in *Tomorrow Tastes Better* (2001). These are not stories of human triumph: through all of the mental fragmentations and uncertainties Haley's protagonists undergo, they rarely arrive at satisfactory answers to their existential questions. But perhaps this is what drives the narratives on. To borrow another famous quote, this time from Breton's friend, absurdist playwright Eugène Ionesco: "It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question" (Ionesco, 1970).

From a narratological standpoint, one can easily divide the epistemic dubiety of Haley's work into two levels of the text: within the diegesis - as characters explore their uncertainties about world and self - and extra-diegetically or metafictionally - as the narrator, conscious of his modes of communication, divulges his narrative uncertainties to

the reader. To begin with, Haley unsettles the reader's epistemological certainty within the diegesis through elusive settings, uncertain variables, unpredictable interactions, altered mind-states, elusive memories and, most prominently perhaps, the expectations of his characters. Haley's metafictional novels – and many more of his short stories - begin with a character in an uncertain world. Indeed, his narratives can almost be read as a protagonist's attempt to make sense of the world he is thrown into, except that most often, it is the protagonist's failure to make sense of the world. As Michael Morrissey usefully notes, Haley's characters are invariably lumped with dubiety and illogicality which is ultimately never settled: "Haleyian impersonations are epiphanies in reverse. Rather than given insight, the recipient realizes he is confused, mistaken" (1985, p. 49). And this is perhaps where Haley departs from his metafictional predecessors: Haley's metafictional protagonists do not highlight and then parody forms of realism as Frame's do, or use an objective reality to create stable or logical base for the reader-writer relationship as is the case in Stead's work. Rather, Haley's characterisation completely undercuts any sense of objective reality, throws logic out of the window, and denies the reader any final frame of reference for the world in which the character finds him/herself. The reader, with the central character, ultimately ends up "failing" to make sense, (or succeeding in not making sense) of the story-world.

From the outset of "The Balkan Transformer", in Haley's first collection *The Sauna Bath Mysteries* (1978), the narrator's epistemic doubts about his character are announced with a marked nonchalance: "As always it seems impossible to give him a name. It seems sufficient that in some way he has been transformed" (p. 28). To add to the deliberate equivocality of the statement, it is a matter of perspective as to how the character has been

transformed: having woken under the light of a stained-glass window somewhere in the Southern hemisphere, the character appears to have been marked either with "an ordnance survey map" or with pustular sores, but this is uncertain. The reader is then transported to another setting, an evening party in suburban Parnell, and this setting is described by reference to its subjective texture rather than by standard imagery of outward appearance. The light from the windows of the house is "sharpened" by the branches of a tree; the furniture is "hard" formed with right-angles, and the rooms contain "objects like chairs and settees which are covered in velvet and sometimes feel like skin" (p. 28). Minor characters are also described in textural terms, "people who bump each other gently with murmurs" and are defined by a series of fallacious or "illogical" statements: non-sequiturs, negative propositions, truisms and axioms:

> So the people in this room connect. They move. But they do not shimmer as leaves might curl and turn and reflect and wave and shimmer.
>
> I can make almost nothing of them. In their nakedness in spite of their clothes – in which they move around the room.
>
> Two people come into the house from outside. Both of them have lived for more than thirty years. Both of them think different things in spite of their having had many common experiences. One is a man and the other a woman. All of the people in the room are men or women. (p. 29)

The deliberate equivocality, almost fallaciousness, of the description begs a number of unanswered, and possibly unanswerable, questions. In what way are they naked in spite of their clothes? How much more than thirty years have they lived? Is it possible that two different people may have identical thoughts? Why is it important that there are no

hermaphrodites or children at the party? Who is the "I"? Of course these questions are not answered – the indeterminate and dubious beginning of the narrative rather serves to establish a pattern of doubt across all of the character interactions, a constant vacillation between the characters' definite and indefinite knowledge which is continued throughout the remainder of the story. Why is a psychologist performing chin-ups on the architraves? A dog digging a well in the centre of the living room? A mysterious figure in a military uniform asking for passports? Why is the host remodelling his home with a chainsaw and nailing an Indian carpet over a hole he has created in a wall? And why is somebody outside knocking feebly on the carpet hoping to be allowed in? These questions simply beg more questions, and any possibility of certainty begets more uncertainty:

> Now he stood in the cold knocking on the underside of a carpet and there was no one who could hear him above the roar of music and the chain-saw.

> Why did he not simply push against the limp resistance of the carpet? Did it remind him of the hanging leather door of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul? (p. 34)

There are no answers to these questions, and the questions themselves enlighten or inform the story through a querulous mode of characterisation: the sorts of questions the character asks (or fails to ask) comes to define them.

"The Cosmetic Factory" from Haley's collection *Real Illusions* (1984) constitutes a similar performance of doubtful questions – the narrative progressing not through "real" events or tangible cause and effect but through a series of conceptual leaps, unanswered questions, and non-sequiturs. From another party in suburban Auckland, the reader is taken on a conceptual journey to a cosmetic factory in Germany. Like the room in "The Balkan Transformer" which looked at from above appears "like an opening and closing

sea anemone" (p. 88) the narrator of "The Cosmetic Factory" has a vision of a room above the ceiling which may be opened by climbing a chimney: "If the ceiling and roof were removed it might be possible to plot the movements of the planets"(p. 94). The protagonists of both stories, struggling to understand their surroundings, seem almost completely disassociated and unable to escape their own inner narratives. Beset by vague memories of his father's visit to Germany with an inadequate English camera, visions of the party's hired barman in a military uniform, and images from what appears to be a wartime film archive shown by the host, the narrator inexplicably climbs up the chimney and finds himself in an imaginary realm, being towed on skis behind a truck into Germany. The story progresses with stark illogicality – almost in the manner of a dream, where the elusive variables of the events are incomprehensible but accepted without questioning. Once in "Germany" the protagonist is issued with a visitor's pass to a cosmetic factory where he encounters beauty advertisements, photo-electric beams, filmic backdrops and a naked feminine holograph. To explain the chaos, he simply becomes convinced that "his visitor's tag is imprinted with a magnetic code which will allow only particular events to occur" (p. 99). These conceptual "events" consistently refer to motifs in other places and other stories in Haley's oeuvre: memories of volcanic hills, cameras, passports, men in military uniform, even the leather doors of the Blue Mosque from "The Balkan Transformer". By the end of the story, when the narrator is dressed in a gold frock, made-up, and photographed as an advertisement for a magazine, the vision seems to contract, as if in an expectation of a return home. And while it may be expected that the narrator will return through the chimney to suburban Auckland - Lawrence Jones is half-right when he says "the phantasmagoric move from one to the other finally seems to

take us back to the beginning" (1987, p. 242) - the ending of the story ultimately takes us back to a place we have never left. At the conclusion, the narrator leaves the factory and "emerges into Germany dressed in a navy suit of impeccable cut" (Haley, 1984, p. 101), leaving the protagonist and the reader stranded in, literally and figuratively, foreign territory. Like "The Balkan Transformer", the events of "The Cosmetic Factory" seem to contradict the protagonist's expectations - or in fulfilling them, contradict the reader's expectations of the protagonist, leaving the reader to wonder how the character continues to operate within and make sense of a world that seems essentially incomprehensible.

4.4 Extradiegetic dubiety in *The Settlement*

Perhaps the most pronounced example of the crossover from diegetic dubiety into the metafictional or extradiegetic level can be found in Haley's first novel, *The Settlement* (1986). Again, Haley's protagonist is from the outset of the story struggling to understand the world around him: he is subject to chance occurrences, elusive variables, a foggy memory and an inability to interpret events. The novel begins when the protagonist Walter Lemanby falls from his roof and wakes in up in a strange convalescent home among equally strange inmates and staff. In Annexe A, his epistemic uncertainty is

immediately established through his own loss of memory: How did he get there? Is he being treated for his physical condition or his mental health? Is this reality or a dream? But these questions extend almost immediately beyond the diegesis, beyond Walter himself, to the fabric of the narrative. When Walter raises his doubts about the existential reality of events, Dr. Eugene, who is in charge of Walter's case, takes control not only of his patient but of the narrative as a whole:

> 'I also resent the notion that I might be your fantasy. How would you like it if I turned the tables?' Dr Eugene laughed out loud. 'When I snap my fingers, Walter, you will utterly disappear. Ready?' (1986, p. 36)

Walter assents, and when the following chapter resumes with an indifferent Walter musing over the state of his wardrobe, the lines between imagined and the real are blurred, and links between cause and effect completely removed. Like Frame's character Tommy who is wiped from *Living in the Maniototo* with the cleansing product from an advertisement, Walter disappearance is not, and cannot be, explained except through extradiegetic speculation: suddenly the narrative is interrupted with a change in tone, introducing a new heterodiegetic narrator who begins by commenting on the frailty of the human condition, which resides in what he calls "our imperfect surface tension" (p. 53). The new narrative voice provides a metaphor of a windscreen exploding outwards when recoiling from impact, and supposes that this is how a person can be "broken from within", noting that the genuinely invulnerable must have an "unspoiled and case-hardened carapace against the release of our own pressure" (p.53). Presumably the shell of the novel is not so impenetrable, since the voice eventually disrupts the conventions of narrative to such a degree that Walter Lemanby and Dr. Eugene come undone: "Their

dialogue descended to the banal since they were no longer strung complexes. They unravelled like the sleeve of an old pullover." At this point, Walter Lemanby ceases to be a character in what would otherwise be a realistic (or surrealistic) novel and, in one of the boldest narrative leaps made in New Zealand fiction, the story ends prematurely at page 53 and starts again from the beginning, with Walter waking again in Annexe A. If the reader had any expectations of realistic characterization, then these have shattered like the glass of the metaphorical windscreen, and the reader cannot remain oblivious to the fact that Walter is a linguistic construct, with an amendable and even completely rewritable history.

As Walter's stay at Moorfields resumes, the settlement - described variously as a convalescent home or a "crazy farm" (p. 63) - is beset by unexplained upheavals. The government sets curfews as military personnel patrol the area with helicopters and searchlights, and there is what appears to be a breakout of some form of civil unrest. The reason for the disturbance is uncertain and, while there is obviously no way of interpreting the story naturalistically, there is also no single way of reading it figuratively. If the reader's impulse is to either accept the events of the diegesis or to look for hidden meaning, then neither the literal or figurative meanings have any certainty. Janet Wilson's naturalistic reading of the events as showing "the existence of a centralized, totalitarian state that represses the individual" (2001) is as hesitant as Kevin Ireland's figurative reading: "The Auckland that Walter emerges into on the other side of his experience is a city transformed by future-fiction; it is in the grip of a totalitarian regime, whose symbol is an oval shape (like a rugby ball?) fighting a civil war against rebels (anti-Springbok tour protestors?)" (1989, p. 156). Perhaps Haley did see the novel as a

comment on totalitarianism or civil rights, but while Walter may be oppressed externally his internal tensions are by far the most bewildering. From a narratological-performative perspective the themes of repression in the diegesis seem simply to reinforce the extradiegetic metaphor of the fragile "carapace" - the fracturable "surface tension" of Walter's purely linguistically-constructed self.

At this point it could be mentioned that the metaphor of the fragile membrane is prefigured in Haley's "Looping the Loop", a story from *Real Illusions*: when Martin Tranter looks back on his family history he sees his mother incompletely in memory, as "a cadence" and "a cast of mind" rather than as a unified whole, before describing how frangible the human mind is: 'time stretches us in every way until we are a thin vibrating membrane. And how delicately then the mind is poised like a spider skimming over an elastic skin of water. How easy to collapse inwards with the pressure of an event or touch others against an affinity and merge" (1984, p. 15). For Martin the binding substance of the fragile familial membrane is language, yet due to his mother's "tales" and "verbal embroidery" his true genealogy remains unclear.

For Walter in *The Settlement*, the doubtfulness surrounding his ability to make sense of events is also a matter of linguistic dubiety. The heterodiegetic voice that intruded at page 50 returns again, breaks the narrative flow and reflects on the fragility of language: "Any utterance, any sentence, is a thread stretched from here to there. Walter lay in his bed. Above and beyond, before and after that devious and yet simple formulation there resides a profound silence" (1986, p. 71). To illustrate the delicate string - or to use other Haley's other metaphors, the fragile membrane or the "imperfect surface tension" of language - the narrative voice then introduces an ostensibly irrelevant dream-character

named Harry into the story and has him try to gain Walter's attention. "Harry knocked on the door. But the problem of the utterance lies beyond the fact that it can be made. Harry has fingers which can be clenched into a fist. The door is resistant enough to provoke an action. It can't be assumed that this structure gives egress to somewhere else" (p. 72). In fact, when the metaphorical door is opened and Harry steps over the threshold, the "somewhere else" that Harry is entering is Walter's imagination. Harry becomes a figure in Walter's dream – although in so far as Walter recalls the dream, Harry becomes a part of Walter's waking life as well. When Walter later makes a journey to an island lying beyond the settlement he suffers from a bout of existential anxiety, and wonders whether Harry has continued to exist in some form: "Could you summon up transparent beings like that and then leave them in limbo?" (p. 83). The narrator then begins to wonder whether a fictional character has any sort of tangible existence: "Was it proper to generate even a single sentence about an imaginary person? There was Harry because he had been so stated into being. But he arrived in an infinite and somehow trembling present. He trailed no past and no future unless one were given to him. Was Harry's door endowed with the kind of threshold, which, once crossed, hurled a mere image into full physical being?" (p. 83). The narrator is not interested in giving descriptivist answers to the problem of non-existent subject terms: Harry is not intended to be thought of as a non-existent subject, but a non-existent concept – a vehicle for Walter's own existential doubts. In fact even Walter's status as a subject is questionable since by the conclusion of the novel he is not only a "character" in metafictional terms, but in the novel's diegetic terms. The roles are reversed: Harry, who seems to lack any existential grounding, turns out to be Henry Grimshaw, the settlement's administrator,

and Walter seems to have been an unwitting actor in some kind of government experiment. But even these ostensible revelations are attenuated by the degree of dubiety extradiegetically. The narrative speculations, the blurring of dream and ostensible reality, and the tonal changes all remain unexplained. Finally the novel resists any mode of interpretation other than the mode which reads it as being about interpretation itself. Unlike the metafictions by Stead and Frame which tidy up after themselves by employing framing narrators and explanatory coincidences, Haley seems content to let the narrative remain provenance-less and open-ended.

4.5 The thin envelope of skin in *Beside Myself*

In *Beside Myself* (1990), Haley's penchant for maintaining epistemic uncertainty in the narrative becomes less dreamlike and more determinately recognisable as he takes the fragile membrane of personality and embodies it in an agonizingly thin "envelope of skin" (p. 14). The protagonist Midge Cochrane is endowed with morbidly self-consciousness traits which are exacerbated by a recent divorce, unemployment, and general boredom. As he tries to pull his life together, navigate a new relationship and make sense of his past he becomes more and more conscious of the distance between his projected self and his personal sense of identity until he can only see himself as an "actor" playing out the script of his life. Not that his existential dubiety is a new development – even in childhood his parents believed his "reality used to falter under the scrutiny of others"(p. 9). To Midge, though, his uncertain sense of reality derives less from others' view of him that from his

own untiring self-scrutiny. He sees himself as a duality – an immediate self that is constantly accompanied by a reflexive self, one who is constantly monitoring the actions of the other as a spectator does a performer: "But the underlying truth is that the world is a set which is built by and furnished for ourselves and we walk around on it and in it and we sometimes watch and do. We observe our performance as 'the one sitting here, the one walking over there, the me that's saying this.'" (p. 10). Like Walter Lemanby, whose fragile mode of existence in *The Settlement* is constantly under pressure from the tyranny of language, Midge's consciousness is "a wedge of words" (p. 11). Language is not just post-experientially descriptive, or even pre-experientially prescriptive; it is a constant of the present-tense, an invisible wedge, causing him to narrate his life as it is happening.

Midge has a number of metaphors for this state of being; he is variously a trapeze artist and audience, a mirror and mime artist, a pair of Siamese twins, a driver and hitchhiker, a parasite and host. But he most identifies with himself as an actor in the film of his own life:

> What new movie can this undistinguished face appear in? Or if I'm stuck for life in this one can I write myself additional scenes in the hope of being allowed to try them? […] There isn't anyone directing this B-grade movie. The cameras just keep rolling. I'm sick of myself. I'm tired of this script (p. 152).

The script of Midge Cochrane's life is not exactly enviable. His general dubiety is compounded by what he sees as the chaotic nature of his day to day existence, a life constantly subject to contingency and randomness: "There are no closed human systems. Time flicks at us with an infinity of filaments. We are bound to lift a hand, take one step, kill a butterfly, and our futures are composed from fractional and arbitrary acts" (p. 44).

The butterfly effect of these arbitrary events has had dire consequences in Midge's day to day life. Since his return from a disastrous second honeymoon in Europe, his ex-wife continues to send him vindictive postcards boasting how it is "marvellous to be free"(p. 17). His old friends are upwardly-mobile and living in expensive Auckland suburbs, while Midge has been made redundant from an archiving job, drives an old Triumph, and is considering buying a half-share in an old Kaipara bach with his friend, although even this plan is about to fail when his friend Tony dies in a car accident. His new relationship is dubiously desperate: twelve hours after meeting Estelle at a party in Mt Eden he becomes desperately jealous of her past and begins to make plans for their lives together, deciding to sell his place in Wellington and make the move to Auckland.

Metafictionally, Midge is equally as doubtful and self-conscious about the story he is telling as he is about his life and personality. He compares his story to actor Lawrence Olivier's autobiographical work *On Acting,* which he sees as case of masculine bravado masking a terror of loneliness and a solitary death. Midge pities the all-too-obvious subtext under Oliver's metaphors of the actor as an ox, lion, bull, tiger - personifications of power and virility used to describe an eighty year old man about to "drop off in his sleep" (p. 39). Like Olivier, for whom acting appears to have been an attempt to transcend his mortality, Midge attempts to extricate his sense of self by re-narrating his life, but unlike Olivier, he is invariably frustrated by his own unrelenting habit of self-examination. This self-consciousness invades every aspect of Midge's story, from its structure ("I ought to begin at the beginning but I don't know where that is […] how do you start a story that doesn't look as though it's ended yet?" [p. 18]) to its action ("I

stopped being me and started to watch me instead" [p. 15]), to the language of his narration:

> The discovery that I'm an actor – or rather, the fact that I can't stop observing myself so I appear to be performing, putting on an act, pretending, is changing my life. Why did I say that? Everything has already changed. I can't avoid picking away at fragments. For example – I just checked the word 'act' in my dictionary and its primary meanings are to do with deeds, actions and then off it glides into performance, the stage, drama, and pretence. So acting has no real opposite because the converse is rolled up in the same verb. If you fail to act does it mean that you don't take action or that you are authentically yourself? (pp. 27-28)

Midge attempts to answer his own question by deciding, in a moment of philosophical whimsy, that the only escape from his perpetual state of self-consciousness is by ceasing to act altogether. He comically elects to lie motionless in complete darkness, but inadvertently falls asleep and wakes the following morning, realising that his "maunderings" were portentous nonsense. Nevertheless, they lead him to a kind of Sartrean revelation that even ceasing to act involves intentionality: "The very fact that I had recorded what I was thinking belied the notion of letting go, doing nothing. I had never been so self-conscious as in those moments when I was attempting to free myself of consciousness of self" (pp. 165-66). His attempts to free himself inevitably lead him further and further into self-reflexivity, self-consciously performing the narration of his life and leading him into a series of metafictional intrusions. Whether he is reminding the reader of novelistic conventions ("In novels new lovers manage to fuck magically and everybody comes in fifty different ways" [p. 54]) or breaking the fourth wall and

launching into nonsensical ramblings on the page ("Cody Bill snatched leather and forty-fived his fans. Chill Bodies, verified as dead, are pee-emmed for their glands. I'm doodling. Filling in time, using up space" [p. 127]) Midge's storytelling is humorously and painfully self-aware, an agonising metaphor for the more absurd aspects of the human tendency to self-reflection.

These passages also make the point that stories aren't necessarily just communicative acts from one person to another. Humans narrate to themselves, for themselves, and stories can express and reorder fragments of the individual - even stories intended for an audience are first self-audited. If the narrator is the first voyeur then the reader takes a secondary role: not the Sartrean peeper-through-the-keyhole, but the "other" that stumbles on the voyeur and immediately activates his consciousness. When Midge nearly falls asleep at the wheel of his car on the way to Wellington, the narrative is interrupted and he reflects on himself in the third person:

> I have an abiding interest in seeing that Midge Cochrane survives. He would not have been able to tell you the last part of his story if it weren't for me. That's if he's telling it to you. I suspect he is doing all this for myself. But I'm the other he thinks of as his self-voyeur, his enraptured and entrapped audience. Of course I am an actor too, just as he is, and isn't our profession the very one that enables us to simulate profound emotions but at our core remain somehow indifferent to the agonies and ecstasies which we portray?" (p. 117)

Midge's self-reflection reaches its peak at the conclusion of the story when he gets a part as an extra in a TV commercial - a simple walk-through part which would have him stroll down a city street into a café. He rehearses the scene several times without incident,

but by the time comes to shoot the scene he is aware of a gathering crowd of onlookers and has counted eighteen panes of reflective glass he has to pass before he reaches his mark in the café. On the first take his self-awareness gets the better of him and he is scolded by the director for walking with a hunch. On the second take, he overcompensates by deciding to ad-lib a flirtatious smile at a young woman on the set, and when the director calls for a cut he appears to have something of a panic-attack. Ignoring his directions he continues his walk-through – down the street to the café, where he has a hallucinatory memory of his father, apologises to his co-actors for ruining the take, and talks to his vision of James Dean. When the director throws her clipboard at him he continues his walk, off the set, past the café and down the street, at which point the reader must have doubts as to whether the entire scene Midge is describing is as contrived as the commercial itself – a whimsy the narrator has contrived to illustrate his ideas on acting and self-reflexivity. In fact it is hard to read the scene Midge is painting as anything other than pure ideation – he walks off set into a city of brick façades lit up with a contrived sunset: "I'd escaped from the film but I still had to get beyond the boundaries of the set" (p. 184).

The central question of *Beside Myself* is not whether Midge is going to buy a house or "get the girl", but whether he will be able to make any sense of himself or the world he inhabits. And the answer to that central question remains, of course, in doubt. The final three lines of the novel recapitulate Midge's characteristic uncertainty, when after wandering around the city and spending a night in a backpackers hostel he contemplates getting in touch with Estelle: "There was a pay-phone downstairs in the hall. I went back

to my room to think about whether I could bring myself to call Estelle. I'm still thinking." (p. 186)

This final passage, I think, sums up Haley's preoccupation with epistemic doubt. The sustained questioning of Midge Cochrane, (or Walter Lemanby or Harry Rejekt) becomes, not only the mode of text but the meaning of the text – a pointed reminder of what humans can and, more importantly, cannot be certain of. Like *The Settlement* and Haley's early stories, it suggests that human understanding of the world is always a by-product of a necessary failure to grasp any final or ultimate meaning.

Perhaps it is apt that Haley's concluding statement in his interview for this project was one of personal dubiety: "I'm still not sure what I've made with my metafictional engineering" (See Appendix D). Like Frame, Haley couples the theme of epistemic uncertainty with the inadequacy of language to form meaningful human connections, but unlike Frame, no attempt is made to settle these uncertainties in terms of the broader structure of the narrative: rather than tidy up and close off the plot structures with framing narrators or admissions of fictionality, Haley's narrators hold to their Keatsian negative capability, content to occupy undefined spaces and to abandon the approaches of discursiveness and rational progression. From the absurdist treatments of Harry Rejekt whose isolation in rural New Zealand sets him to invent a petting machine for an abandoned dog in *Tomorrow Tastes Better* (2001) to the desperate uncertainties of Walter Lemanby in *The Settlement* and Midge Cochrane in *Beside Myself*, Haley's portraits consistently undermine the predictability and stability of perception and replace them with self-consciousness and epistemic doubt.

Despite Haley's differences from Frame and Stead, he is also a writer who seems to extend realist techniques rather than doing away with them altogether, as he looks to uncover real processes of the human mind. As Lawrence Jones says of Haley's metafictions in *Real Illusions* they "are not attempts to evoke a publicly recognisable New Zealand world so much as attempts to capture an interior world" (1990, p. 243) or as Haley has said himself – he intended to create fiction in which "history and the present resonate as dream and myth, and where 'world' is seen as a transaction with 'mind'" (1980, p. 37). If there is a tradition of "inwardness" in New Zealand fiction as O'Neill has suggested, then Haley's roots in Dadaism/Surrealism seem to have found fertile soil. To take a final example from *Beside Myself* – when Midge Cochrane begins reading "confessional books", he learns that he is not the only person "in the universe who lived in the kind of soft buzzing cave that I inhabited […] The world was filled with secret selves who fumbled around in their own darkness"(p. 13). But it is the "fumbling" that is really the key to understanding Midge and Haley's other protagonists - they invariably have more questions than they have answers, they are subject to forces of both their own overpowering subjectivity and the contingencies of the 'place' they inhabit, and their resulting state is one of constant epistemic doubt. As a reader it can sometimes be difficult even to be certain about what is even uncertain in Haley's fiction, but, as I hope is evident from this chapter, this is probably the author's point.

CHAPTER V: Michael Jackson: intersubjectivity and the individual

5.1 Illeism in *Barawa*

If New Zealand's cultural upheavals following the 1970s had, in the terms of Brunton and O'Neill, instigated a "reflexive turn" which shifted the culture "inward", then other literary and cultural commentators seem to have recognised this as well. Australian poet, Judith Wright, has described New Zealand writing of the period as "on the whole inward-looking, sometimes even self-pitying" (1977, p. 137). Michael Harlow addresses Rob Jackaman's charge that New Zealand poetry is excessively self-reflexive by saying he suspects that "the 'embarrassing' over-presence of the poet in the poem" indicates "too intellectual an approach to experience" (Harlow, 1977, p. 113). Gordon McLauchlan's strange polemic *The Passionless People* (1976) argues that the homogeneity of New Zealand culture up until the 1970s meant the country was in danger of a cultural implosion, or what he termed "the collapsing inwards of our society" (1976, p. 212). And other critics have made similar comments, though with less pejorative overtones. Michael King attributes what he sees as "New Zealanders [turning] in on themselves" to the effects of World War II and the nation's hope that it could re-stablise itself - return to the serenity of suburban life it had enjoyed before the 1940s (2003, p. 413). And Ian Reid, studying the differences between Australian and New Zealand fiction over the period of the great depression, claimed that New Zealand's geographical isolation and smallness meant the country's writers did not utilise the same broad historical and social forms as Australian writers, instead preferring to "keep close to personal experience" (1979, p. 127).

Perhaps this inward individualism is still evident to some extent in the twenty first century. Recently, Finlay MacDonald joked that New Zealander's self-obsessed hope for a work of fiction that would unite the nation should be called "the Great New Zealand Navel" (2009).

These comments will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis, but if "realism" for Frame, Stead and Haley had come to necessitate a turning "inward" to focus on representations of the individual mind (and a corresponding absence of broader social critique), then Michael Jackson's work – on the face of it – looks to question individualistic ways of seeing to explore the nature of living in societies, and to question common paradigms about the ways in which we narrate our collective histories. Jackson's metafictions would appear to stand out as an anomaly, in that they explore social interactions and search for common resonances between people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The way Jackson goes about his project - through what Hugh Roberts terms "lyrically self-reflexive explorations of cultural and personal identity" (2006) – does, I would suggest, reinforce a kind of individualism and subjectivism that may, in the end, recapitulate claims about the primacy of the inward self in New Zealand writing.

Born in Nelson and educated at Victoria, Auckland and Cambridge universities, Michael Jackson juggles his vocations as a travelling anthropologist, fiction writer and poet, with a professorship at Harvard Divinity School teaching on subjects such as the politics of storytelling, post-war Sierra Leone, phenomenological anthropology, and ritualisation. The theoretical basis of all of his work – fiction or otherwise – might be said to derive from what he calls, in his first novel, the "quest for connections and juxtapositions - striking common chords, finding common ground, disclosing common

historical truths" (1986, p. 4). Jackson's historically-based novels – or what he calls "essays

in fictional writing" – *Barawa* (1986), *Rainshadow* (1988), and *Pieces of Music* (1994) are

autobiographical ("grounded in real events, and concerned with real people") and, for this

reason, they are as compulsively nomadic as Jackson himself. Set in Europe, New

Zealand, Australia, Singapore and Africa, they explore the nature of living in an

increasingly globalised society and question common paradigms about "place" and the

ways in which we narrate our personal and collective histories. The other piece of work

discussed in this chapter, Jackson's memoir, *The Accidental Anthropologist* (2006),

documents his early adulthood in Wellington, which was spent mixing with many of the

country's literary icons from Fleur Adcock to James K. Baxter. It then follows him across

Africa as he conducts field-research among the Kuranko people in the Sierra Leone, and

crosses continents to Australia, where he lives with the Warlpiri community in the

Northern Territory.[18]   Jackson's "fictions" – the term will require some qualification - are

strongly underwritten by critical theory and the existential-phenomenological premises of

his formal ethnographical work. In both modes he favours personal encounters and

specific historical episodes over objective theoretical categorisations, but even in the

fictional writing, the underlying issues of participation and observation, of intellectual

abstraction and experiential reporting, jostle for position in his search for common

resonances between people of diverse backgrounds. The two modes, though, generally

overlap and inform each other.

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[18] Jackson performed ethnographic fieldwork in Sierra Leone (1969–70, 1972, 1979, 1983, 2002, 2003) and in Aboriginal Australian territories (1990, 1991, 1994, 1997).

Barawa and the Ways Birds Fly in the Sky (1986), Jackson's first essay into fiction, draws on his previous anthropological work with the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone, and reassembles his experiences using elements of poetic invention. Although published as a work of ethnography, the book is, in anthropologist Nancy Schmidt's terms, "clearly a creative narrative that combines history, ethnography, poetic description, biography and autobiography" (1987, p. 61). Beginning with a Kuranko family that becomes involved with William Winwood Reade, a British historian, explorer, and philosopher who wrote colonial accounts of Africa in the 19th century, the novel follows a fictionalised Jackson as he discovers that his friends and assistants, the Marah family, are descendants of those who knew the explorer.

The metafictional elements of the novel derive from a tension between Jackson's use of autobiographical material, and his novelistic narrative approach which employs the device of "illeism"[19]. To create a sense of distance and framing, Jackson speaks of himself in the third person, as an anthropologist "wearied by years of academic writing in which the lives and identities of actual Kuranko people had disappeared under a welter of interpretative ideas about totemism, witchcraft, sacrifice, divination, initiation and narrative" (1986, p. 3). This puts a disquieting presence behind the narrative – reminding the reader that the work is literary rather than scientific. Like Shakespearean characters who refer to themselves by name (Othello: Farewell! Othello's occupation gone)[20] Jackson's use of illeism draws on a need to clarify identity and objectify the subjective.

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[19] "Latin *ille* meaning that, and, by indirection, third-personalism, he-ism, it-ism, that-ism. The term illeism also covers the affected mannerism of the writer's referring to himself by means of the third person" See Opdycke, J. (1944) *Say What You Mean*. Funk & Wagnalls. London. pp. 31-32.

[20] Othello III. iii. See Viswanathan, S. (1969). ""Illeism With a Difference" in Certain Middle Plays of Shakespeare " *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20(4): 407-415

By objectifying the subjective the illeistic device in the novel is used phenomenologically – it gestures to a difference between Jackson's public and private selves, and creates a sense that the narrator is not just performing a formal address to the reader, but one in which he hopes to examine himself as much as his topic: to use a Heideggerianism, he wants to examine his own being-in-the-world. Perhaps the most important aspect of his *Dasein* is the relationship between the implied author and his reflexive self-inclusion "Michael" (as he refers to himself) in the Kuranko history. When the anthropologist asks himself how he might "bring to life" the Kuranko people in his written account, he decides that he will include himself in the story – that he will "see Barawa as a kind of genealogy in which he, too, figured" (1986, p. 4). The illeistic distance to the implied author – Jackson - serves to position Michael alongside the Kuranko people as another character in the story, but it also to dramatise the anthropologist's surprise at his own audacity in "casting himself in the role of a Kuranko bard" (p. 4).

This distant equation of viewer with subject presents one of the main tensions in *Barawa* – something that could be described as the anthropological version of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle: the more involved the observer is with the subject, the more influence he or she has on the events being recorded and explained. And as Jackson has pointed out, this is a tension not just present in the anthropological realm:

> The trick is to strike a balance between sensuous or social engagement in the world of others and an understanding that always requires a certain distance and detachment. A profound paradox is therefore involved here, because life never allows one to be a spectator and participant at the same time. This paradox

pertains to ethnography as well as to our everyday lives, in which what we do in our relationships with others and what we think about what we are doing (and express in our rationalizations, our stories, our fantasies) are seldom congruent. (See Appendix E).

Jackson's illeism seems to be an attempt to dramatise this paradox in the narrative. Michael puts his reservations aside and goes on with the self-inclusive approach, personally urged by the Kuranko to chronicle the events of their history, and hoping that he "might move away from a yearning for essences, causes, and determinate meanings to an open-ended quest for connections and juxtapositions - striking common chords, finding common ground, disclosing common historical truths without the pretence of arriving at any necessary truth" (p. 4). Freed thus of the demands to present the reader with objective truth, Michael feels his task is "totally authentic" - allowing him to enter "imaginatively" the lives of the Kuranko.

Jackson's, or rather Michael's, insights into Kuranko life are incisive and (compared with Frame and Haley) refreshingly earnest: he provides dutifully sincere descriptions of Kuranko life, as well as insights into his own difficulties: the paranoia that comes from lacking an understanding of the culture's language, and his struggles in coming to terms with his role as an unemployed member of the tribe (he sees himself as an "old woman" watching the comings and goings of the men). But the most innovative aspect of his aesthetic comes about through an anomaly in the narrative mode. In Genettean terms it is hard to make sense of the homodiegetic and heterodiegetic voices of the novel – while the homodiegetic voice of Michael may help Jackson by situating him within the diegesis,

it also depersonalises the narrative and creates an aesthetic vantage point which distances the reader from both the anthropologist and his subjects.

Just as when Othello speaks in the third person the audience is reminded that they are merely viewing an actor playing the role of Othello, so when Jackson uses his name to place himself in the novel, the reader becomes aware that the voice of the narration is separate from the character in the account – evincing perhaps general anthropological criticisms of "participant observation": the notion that research produced by an observer who participates in events is restricted to the "public fronts" socially constructed by the other participants. In this case, though, the reader has become the public, and the protagonist a public front. Thus, for all of the advantages illeism provides in ensconcing Jackson in the text and creating reader awareness of narrator-subjectivity, the third-person self-reference blocks the reader from aspects of the narrator's private persona and the narrative comes across as slightly "schizophrenic", as one reviewer has put it (Jorion, 1988, p.573).

5.2 *Rainshadow*: Intersubjectivity and the individual

Jackson continues with the third-person reflexive mode in his second and arguably more accessible essay into fictional autobiography – *Rainshadow* (1998) – but he discards the use of illeism and adopts what appears to be more creative license in the storytelling to create what might best be described as a Künstlerroman. However, the shifting modality set out in *Barawa* remains - Jackson moves between memoir, anecdote, poetry, social

commentary, and existential reflection, blending aspects of autobiography and traditional fiction with a more philosophical style. And, like *Barawa*, the goal of *Rainshadow* is to question traditional understandings of the self and the social environment as his sensitive poet-hero negotiates his growth to maturity. But the protagonist, to some extent based on himself, Jackson renames Nicholas Day, which removes the problems of third-person self-reference.

The novel begins with an epigraph from Pablo Neruda which sums up the story at hand - in fact it possibly sums up a tension in all of Jackson's work: "perhaps I didn't live just in my self / perhaps I lived the lives of others." It is the qualifier that is so suggestive, since it points to the most important themes of the novel: intersubjectivity and an ongoing struggle to articulate an identity that is both personal and collective. As Jackson told Denis Welch in 2006:

> You can't examine human subjects or human subjectivity by assuming that the person is a bounded entity who has a personality or an essence or an identity. Because identity, if one wants to use that word, is emerging in the course of interactions and conversations … I'm sure we all have the sense that we're roughly the same person we were 20, 30, 40 years ago, but at the same time we're variations on a theme, a theme that is very loose; and every encounter, every event, every situation produces a different refraction of that theme. (Welch, 2006, p.33)

Jackson's narrator is an author writing in France (on what one can only assume to be a fictionalisation of the Katherine Mansfield fellowship) but struggling with the Muse – or rather with Mnemosyne. While trying to bring his past to light as material for his novel he begins to question the validity of what he had assumed was knowledge of himself and

his family history. Nick Day comes to the sensible conclusion that "memory is not knowledge" (Jackson, 1998, p. 2) since it is a product of the collective: "what I think I know now depends on someone else's memory, a version of reality long gone" (p. 8). Moreover, Nick depends on the stories of his 80 year old grandfather George for most of his family history, stories which, at best lack cohesion: "It never occurred to me then to wonder why he should devote so much time to regaling a child with anecdotes or reminiscences which even an adult would have found hard to follow [...] meditating on events whose import he had never fully fathomed, compelled perhaps to arrive at some kind of conclusion or moral, even a justification, for his life" (p. 16).

At worst his Grandfather's stories are erratic and obfuscating. As George admits during one of his chinwags: "We only remember what we want to remember; trouble is it's what we don't remember that makes us what we are" (p. 7). Indeed, the Day family have some skeletons in the closet, and Nick has, it seems, come to be defined as much by what he doesn't know about his family history as what he does. In true solipsistic Cartesian style Nick claims: "I am only sure of one thing, and that is my doubt" (p. 8). Since being orphaned as a young child he has been moved around from one family member to another, so much that he feels he does not have a childhood of his own so much as he has inherited "the childhood of others" (p. 35). The little that he does know about his parents, comes from the vague stories of his grandfather, which he listens to avidly and accepts verbatim "until it seemed that his recollections were mine too and my life continuous with his" (p. 17).

From the outset of the novel Jackson appears to be illustrating one point of his intersubjective philosophy: that the individual does not hold control of the truth about

their life, that individual memory is disjunctive and fickle. Nick reflects on a Buddhist image of the ego, which is "nothing but a compost of memories" which Jackson then gives a "boldly literal translation" (in Damien Wilkins words [1989, p. 58]) in an incident in which Nick's father proudly shows off his carefully constructed compost heap to his young boy (Jackson, 1988, p. 3). This point is reiterated almost outlandishly when a tragedy strikes and infant Nick falls into "10 feet of liquid manure" (p. 6). Although rescued, Nick's history remains correspondingly murky and the questions surrounding his personal history become more mysterious: for all of his grandfather's stories he knows nothing about the circumstances surrounding his mother's death. Tracing these circumstances becomes the basis of Nick's search for identity, and for Jackson's metafictional discussion of the relationship between stories, experiences, and selfhood.

The young Nick Day occupies himself by transforming his grandfather's anecdotes into essays and speeches - recitations of runaway criminals, arson attacks, angry mobs (Nick's grandfather is a retired police constable in rural Taranaki township of "Moabite"). By the time Nick is turns fifteen and moves to his third home – with his uncle Conrad - he has mastered writing enough to pen his first poetry. His efforts earn him the praise of his unemployed uncle, who then begins to supervise Nick in his studies "with such unremitting zeal that I felt at times I was fulfilling his ambition rather than pursuing my own" (1988, p. 103). Again – Nick's identity is formed in a larger social context – if his childhood is the childhood of his cousins, his memories formed by his grandfather's anecdotes, then even his will belongs to someone else.

Jackson makes the point more explicitly when Nick falls in love with his cousin Mir. After exercising his poetic ability in passionate verse for Mir, Nick finds that language can

"capture nothing of the real", but according to the narrator, what Nick has not yet realised, the narrator tells us, is that "words can, for this very reason, suffer us to accept the reality of nothing" (p. 118). Words inadvertently point to the human ability to transcend fixed identity – they point to what is so unessential about humanity. As Jackson has recently explained, "the struggle for being – of Nick, and of his grandfather before him, is less a struggle for an identity than a struggle against the very idea of identity – a liberation from living in terms of an idea of oneself, so that one is free to live in relation to an unstable and unpredictable world" (See Appendix E).

Indeed, Nick is caught between two ways of viewing identity - one embodied in his friend Jonathan, who thinks that "the past determines everything" and the other embodied in his cousin Mir, who thinks that even the notion of identity is "such a restricting idea" (p. 187). But when he discovers the family secret – that his Māori mother committed suicide after being rejected by the Pākehā side of the family and losing her husband – Nick travels to the small village of Manutahi to find his extended whanau. His Māori relatives embrace him, educate him in his whakapapa and invite him to live with them, but Nick, no nearer to understanding himself, leaves the village and flees to Sydney, where he experiences his first existential freedom and realises he needs to stop looking to others for his self-definition. In Graeme Lay's terms, Nick's revelation is that he has to arrive at his own identity: "that mere awareness of our antecedents does not itself give us the identity we may crave" (Lay, 1989, p. 376).

This complicates the narrator's notion of intersubjectivity, and leaves open the question of whether Nick's identity formation is more socially constructed - a matter of relational processes - or whether Nick's identity is really formed through personal acts of

self-determination. If most of the narrative tends to suggest an intersubjective and communal basis for identity, then the last part seems to revert to the Cartesian solipsism of the first chapter. In the final pages of the novel the narrator wonders whether he has "touched the truth" or, like his grandfather with his anecdotes, simply indulged in an artificial pretence, "making things seem to cohere by simply omitting whatever is arbitrary":

> We make things hang together by artifice – like the bones of those Cro Magnon articulated by means of wire and glue, protected by a bed of sand, a glass cage. But might not everything be given over equally to wind and rain, so that at last there are no individuals to identify, but only fragments freed from the solidity of stone, in a matrix which includes wild thyme, broom, pebbles, seaweed, swallows, pinewoods, paths (p. 190)

It appears that Nick wants to answer the question in the affirmative, to assert the Buddhist school of thought that sees absolute reality as ultimately interconnected and interdependent. But like Frame's narrator in *The Carpathians* who hopes to break down the delineation of self and others through the revelation of the Gravity Star, the divisive nature of language wins out over Nick's attempts, and the problem of individuation remains.

Despite Nick's attempts at arguing for social constructions of identity, the narrative winds up being framed with solitary figures certain only in their own thoughts. *Rainshadow*, having begun with a man alone in France, writing about a solitary boyhood, and raising the question of whether or not he is, in S.D. Cox's words, "destined to be estranged" (1995, pp. 117-120) from his own society, ends with the writer - still alone,

and identifying himself with a figure who is a striking counter-example to the novel's claims for intersubjectivity: a hobo muttering to himself. After returning to the present tense in France, the narrator describes a clochard in a vomit-stained overcoat whom he has often seen pushing a trolley up and down the Port de France, and likens his desire to write to the beggar's relentless muttering:

> Mon semblable, mon frère! All these nights that I have lain awake, memories flooding my brain, a film which goes on unreeling, an inward chatter no less a noise than that which afflicts him – fragments of half-forgotten conversations, leit-motifs, images, names, twists and turns of what promises to be some kind of narrative. This prepossession like a malady, a fever flaring, a parasite settled on one's soul, so that at last you long for the end, to forge, to be empty again – indeed, to be cured (p. 191)

Like the hysterical – and, interestingly, *illeistic* – beggar whose self-directed speech helps him to preserve an otherwise vulnerable personal identity, Nick is obsessed by his desire to define himself, and his search for a cure drives him inwards, into self-narration. For all the aspects of his personality that are constructed by and for others, for all of the implications that the individual does not hold control of the truth about their life, that memory is disjunctive and constructed collectively, Nick ultimately winds up in state of solipsistic perplexity and "inward chatter", electing to take sole control of his personal narrative by writing a novel. And there the story concludes. However, the clochard and his accompanying metaphor reappear in a vignette near the beginning of Jackson's third work of fiction, *Pieces of Music*, which picks up where *Rainshadow* leaves off, and aims to "bring to a close" (1994, p. 2) what the author feels he has left unfinished.

5.3 Individualism in *Pieces of Music*

Like *Barawa* and *Rainshadow*, *Pieces of Music* (1994) is again a genre-bending work of autobiographical fiction in which Jackson looks at – or for – personal identity (in David Eggleton's terms Jackson's narrator is "the anthropologist as anti-hero who has taken as his text the Delphic maxim, know thyself" [1994, p. 50]). But unlike *Barawa* and *Rainshadow*, Jackson discards omniscient narrative modes and adopts a more conversational first-person singular. Beginning in Menton, the novel globe-hops first to New Zealand to the narrator's youth where he was a university student in the early 1960s, then to Australia where he recounts experiences during his employment with the Victorian Aboriginal Welfare Board, and then on to Italy, France, Singapore and, eventually, the Belgian Congo, at each place recounting "loosely connected" (cover blurb) anecdotes which play with tonal variations on displaced identity.

Pieces of Music is the most constituently metafictional of Jackson's novels, and most consistently raises questions about the nature of its own procedures. "To tell a story is to set out on a journey," the narrator reflects at the outset of the novel. "Narrative is grounded in the journeys we embark upon every day, going out in the world to work or forage, returning in the evening to a home, a hearth, a bar, to share food and drink and tell each other stories about our day's experiences" (1994, p. 1). Extending this metaphor between physical and narrative journeys to terms of personal identity, Jackson looks to uncover the individual's "point of departure for understanding others" through the

interrelation of place, person and narrative, and provides a metafictional comment on the relationship between language and place:

> Home is like a noun in a sentence. At home, among familiar things, we become settled in our ways. We think we know who we are.
>
> To walk out into the world is to set the mind adrift.
>
> Musicians speak of this movement as a tonal journey out from the home key.
>
> Sometimes there is no going back. There are alien harmonies. One thing shades into another. Nouns are metamorphosed into verbs. (p. 1)

Jackson's narrator suggests that the way we typically think of home is as a static entity, abstract and delimited like a noun, and signifying something unchanging. But since embarking on his journey he has realised that his version of "home" has become more like an active part of speech, something changeable and lacking a specific object to attach itself to. Re-examining the passage, Jackson has explained: "life is full of intransitive as well as transitive moments, much as a bird is sometimes on the wing and sometimes still on a bough. Life is filled with fleeting and fugitive things, just as language is made up of prepositions, copulas, verbs, and not just nouns. So I prioritise relations over relate, exploring home as a word for homeliness and balance in a relationship, not as a word for a specific place" (See Appendix E).

Illustrating the transient aspect of human nature, Jackson re-examines the homeless figure of the clochard. In this version of the story, the narrator tells of a math teacher who has gone mad with guilt after being drunk in charge of a vehicle which killed his wife. But Jackson also extends the story to speculate on the psychological processes of his

character: "Rather than using ideas and dreams to justify or forget the past, which is what so-called normal people do, [the beggar] mercilessly keeps alive images of what has happened, torturing himself with regret, rehearsing endlessly the things he might have done or should have done to prevent his wife's death. Living vicariously, he lives another life" (1994, p. 6). Unlike the narrator of *Rainshadow*, the implication is not that Jackson is in a similar position but that he is in a precisely opposing position, given that his desire to narrate his story to others is equivalent to the desire to exist.

In addition, the clochard, with no intersubjective life, "no name", no relationships except with his own inner monologue, and no "public" story, living in a self-imposed exile and debating with his own conscience, has no "self" to speak of: "because his identity is constructed so tortuously from events that others know nothing of, he is in effect a nobody, a quelconque, an idiot" (p. 6). The narrator's position then allows an added privilege - not just of reconstructing his own identity, but of constructing the identity of the clochard. The position though creates problems of truth and authenticity similar to those discovered by the self-reflective "Michael" in the story of *Barawa*. As the narrator reflexively points out, his use of the clochard is in some ways an attempt to "rehabilitate" the other into his own likeness, to presume upon another's consciousness:

> Consider now the audacity of the author of these pages. Beginning with some meagre autobiographical details, he constructs his fantasy. A clochard, with whom he has never exchanged a word, is given a past and personality – the very things the poor drifter has done his utmost to render opaque. In good bourgeois style, the author has dragged the clochard off the streets, given him a bath, loaned him some of his own clothes, and found him a menial job in the factory where he himself is

employed. The clochard has been made to pay for his marginality and mystery! The clochard craved anonymity; the author, refusing him that freedom, dresses him up and turns him into a walking parody of himself (pp. 6-7).

The problem of the fictionalised identity inevitably turns on the dichotomy between intersubjectivity and solipsism. As the narrator walks home to the Villa Isola Bella along the Port de France he weighs up the risks of fictionalising others. While he can find "no good grounds for claiming certain knowledge of anything", he hopes that language might bridge the gap between himself and others, lest his thoughts "degenerate into mere solipsism" (p. 7). However, he concludes that there is always a loss and gain in any dialogue, and that "every writer has a need for his work to be redeemed by life" (p. 8).

But the narrator will also come to realise that the relationship between his life and his work – between reality and fiction – is more complicated than he has allowed for. This is first evident when while working on his anthropological monograph in Sierra Leone, the narrator posits an ironic connection between Borges' fictional account of the world of Tlön and standard ethnographies which provide glosses of economy, principles of legal and political life. He decides he could model his study of the Kuranko on Borges's example, fictionalise his research and thus complete his project with a minimum of fuss, leaving neither his subjects or examiners any better or worse off (p. 108). But if it seems occasionally plausible to blur the line between reality and fiction, it also seems inevitable at other times. When challenged by an academic colleague on the accuracy of his version of Antoine Saint-Exupéry's death at war, the narrator begins to wonder whether he has subconsciously invented what he thought was fact: "I asked myself, if I had been so convinced of the veracity of my account of Saint-Exupéry's death – an account it now

seemed I had largely imagined – then what store could be set by the ethnographic data I had collected in West Africa and was now preparing to publish?" He sets out to find the book he believes will corroborate his story, but finds that it doesn't exist: "all the quotations I had recorded were, in a sense, oblique commentaries on the impossibility of drawing a hard and fast line between fact and fiction" (p. 147).

What the narrator is sure of is that all writing - or at least all philosophical and fictional writing - is in some ways disguised autobiography. When the narrator quotes a passage he is working on in his translation of Blaise Cendrar's *Moravagine*, he selects a passage that argues that there is only one true subject for serious works of literature: "They are all autobiographical. It's why there is only one literary subject: man. It's why there is only one literature: that of this man, this Other, the man who writes" (p. 60). Similarly, the narrator writes a diary entry, in which he is discussing a parallel predicament in his objectives and the aspirations of those he is studying. While he has hopes of changing himself through his observations of the lifestyle and traditions of the rural African Kuranko people, they are simultaneously abandoning their traditions and leaving for the Western-styled towns. "We like to think we are at the cutting edge of history, ringing the changes," the narrator maintains. "But we are not. We simply come to understand the moment in history into which we have been thrown. It shapes our destinies. We cannot be other than ourselves. Nietzsche was right when he wrote that all philosophy is disguised autobiography. Our intellectual life is little more than a legerdemain for justifying who we are and what we cannot change" (p. 18).

At points it appears the novel will swing back to an individualist Cartesianism, towards a similar solitary authorial mode to that of *Rainshadow*, or even to the near-

solipsistic narrative point-of-view in *Barawa*'s illeism. And to some extent it does. While the tension between personal identity and the relationship of the self to Other/s will continue as a motif throughout the episodes of the novel, it is ultimately less resolved than it is metafictionally performed. As the narrator writes in his notebook: "We are manifold figures, constantly shifting our ground. When one side is in shadow, another is in the light. But both sides are equally real, and whatever identity we have lies in the interplay between them" (p. 132). Like the divided personality of the clochard, or of the illeistic narrator of *Barawa*, Jackson in *Pieces of Music* seems detached and estranged wherever he goes: from questioning the validity of his place in the African communities, to feeling "out of place" even among his own colleagues, in his own country, in a comfortable academic life (p. 137). Even when a friendship he forms with an African worker promises to help the narrator, in David Eggleton's terms, "break through his own cultural solipsism" (1994, p.50), he ends up looking back with some doubt, considering the events as having happened to "another avatar" of himself: "a young man I would not like very much" (p. 69).

By the end of the novel, it seems the solitary individualist will win out over the collectivist by default. When in the space of a year the narrator suffers the death of his wife as well as that of his close friend Maciek who represents the narrator's ideal of the bohemian collectivism. He finds himself alone, "exiled to the ends of the earth" again, reflecting on mortality:

> When life is full and you are with people you love, it is easy to let yourself be fooled
> into thinking that the good times will never end. But, says [Raymond Carver],
> who must have been facing death as he wrote this: Things do come to an end.

> People stop living. Chances are that two of the three friends in this picture will have to gaze upon the remains - the remains of the third friend, when that time comes. The thought is grievous, and terrifying. But the only alternative to burying your friends is that they will bury you. (p. 150)

After these deaths, *Pieces of Music* ends elliptically with the narrator deciding to leave New Zealand alone to emigrate to Australia, and leaving an open end to what could be seen as the debate between individualism and collectivism that unfolds in his narrative. Not that the narrator could, or would even want, to resolve the paradox inherent in his examples of the intersubjective. If the goal of his art is to better understand the "other" within the collective, then it must draw on that other's individual lifeworld or "being-in-the-world" – a concept fundamental to Jackson's existential-anthropology of relatedness. And it must, as Jackson points out in *Barawa* and *Pieces of Music*, be necessarily framed by the subjective. So perhaps what really distinguishes Jackson's anthropological metafictions is the paradoxical solipsism implied by his reflexive and metafictional self-inclusion.

The focus on modal performativity in this reading of Jackson's novels certainly fails to illuminate the delicacy of his prose, his heartfelt insights into human interactions, and his keen observations of personal and collective histories. If Jackson's episodic tales sometimes "lack resonance in the wider field of the novel" (1989, p. 58) as Damien Wilkins maintains, then their discursiveness also reminds us that fiction should resonate with the everyday subjective experience of the particularized person - that our memories and experiences are often disjointed and incomplete, but nevertheless fruitful ground for self-understanding. In this way Jackson's work, while questioning individualistic, often Western ways of seeing the other, also reinforces a kind of reflexive subjectivism. This

inward individualism is evident in what Welch describes as Jackson's "sense of awkwardness and displacement" (2006, p.32), or in what Graeme Lay calls the "mental landscapes" of *Rainshadow*, (1989, p. 376) or in what Kimberley Patton calls Jackson's mode of "interior exploration" (Patton, 2009). In this sense perhaps Jackson's work does sustain critical claims about the primacy of mental inwardness in New Zealand writing after all. One might agree with David Eggleton who wrote that *Rainshadow*, rather than documenting the growth of a fictional individual, "is a chronicle of the growth of the New Zealand mind" (1994, p. 50).

CHAPTER VI: Albert Wendt's citationality and resistance

A tale is about other tales; it is also the teller and her telling...

Albert Wendt - *Black Rainbow* (1995, p. 105)

6.1 Māori and Pacific metafiction in the 20th century

To use terms already mentioned, some critics have perceived a "reflexive turn" or "inward looking" period from the middle of the 20th century in New Zealand which corresponded to some large cultural shifts in the country. In the words of publisher Elizabeth Caffin, by the 1980s New Zealand was undergoing a period of "intense self-scrutiny" (2004, p. 240) driven by global cultural influences:

> More readers had tertiary education, were more sophisticated in their interests, were thinking seriously about the society in which they lived, were asking questions about race and gender, were examining the past with curiosity and suspicion. Māori voices were at last being heard and could not be ignored [...] A new Labour government promised revolution and delivered it – though not quite in the form expected. (Caffin, 2004, p. 240)

Certainly New Zealanders began to see themselves as having not just a history of their own – but an important and unique culture that needed political recognition. In the latter part of the twentieth century fiscal policy was beginning to - and would continue to - play a role in determining the shape of the arts and culture, from the Department of Internal

Affairs' establishment of the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography in the 1980s, through to the Arts Council's formation of what was to become the New Zealand Film Commission, and to the 1990s Labour government's investment into the growth of arts and culture which culminated in the The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992 – an act that Peter Skilling has described as the "the ideal vehicle for carrying an official, self-conscious narrative of national identity" (2008, p. 132).

From the early 1970s through to the 1990s, New Zealand's literary politics seem also to have been going through a period of self-examination in line with local and international social tectonics – and again, many of the new literary-cultural trends appear to have found first lodging in New Zealand's largest and most diverse cities – Auckland and Wellington. From the appearance of the term "Women's Liberation Front" in the American political-literary magazine *Ramparts* in 1968 came the foundation of Auckland and Wellington chapters of the Women's Liberation Front in the early 1970s and New Zealand's first feminist magazine *Broadsheet* (1972-1992), which was followed in 1981 by the establishment of New Women's Press in Auckland, and in 1984, the appearance of the *Women's Studies Journal* (See Roth, 1984) - also formed in Auckland, and (coincidentally) sharing its foundational year with the assault on Mervyn Thompson. Two years later there appeared what Patrick Evans has described as "a daunting combination of feminism, politics and post-structuralist critique" intended to derail "the patriarchal monoculture" (2007, p. 23) in the pages of the Auckland journal *Antic* (1986-1990).

If the patriarchal monoculture had any traction in the country's literature going into the 1990s, it was fast running out of steam. As Fergus Barrowman has pointed out, distinguishing between Māori, women and the Pākehā-male writing of the period:

> An essay which fell into the trap of treating these as exclusive categories might begin with the metafictional techniques of the Pākehā men; go on to how loudly different women writers beat the feminist drum; and end with the educative, didactic and fabular modes of contemporary Māori fiction. But the boundaries are unsustainable. For instance, many of the features derived by Māori writers from traditional oral forms – use of oratory and myth, the presence of the dead, collective narrative voices – are very similar to innovations credited to post-modernism or magic realism (Barrowman, 1996, p. xi).

Janet Frame has already provided an exception to the male metafictionalist stereotype, being the first to use the metafictional mode in short fiction ("My Last Story") and also in the novel (*Living in the Maniototo*). But the Pākehā pole of the stereotype was also insupportable. One the earliest metafictional stories - by an author who identified as an indigenous Māori writer - was the well-known metafictional story by Keri Hulme, "Kiteflying Party at Doctor's Point" (1977). It had also been one of the country's most heavily reprinted short stories – first published in Islands in the autumn edition of 1977, but brought to the attention of the general public in anthologies in the mid-1980s (in Lydia Wever's *New Zealand Short Stories: Fourth Series* in 1984, and then in Oxford University Press's *Women's Work: Contemporary Short Stories by New Zealand Women* in 1985 as well as Michael Morrissey's *The New Fiction* – also in 1985).

"Kite-flying Party at Doctor's Point" follows a woman who is suffering psychological torment following an episode of postpartum psychosis. She addresses an undisclosed reader who has counseled her to "write it all down, write it out, put it in writing" (p. 213). The reader soon discovers she is a teacher of literature, who struggles to follow her own stylistic advice as she writes ("I will try to make it present" and "to mention the physical details as much as possible" [p. 213]) but cannot quiet her self-critical inner voice. Invited to a day at the beach by university colleagues, she wanders away and finds herself in a dark cave alone and frightened - in perhaps an equivalent motif to Plato's cave, or Forster's cave in *A Passage to India* - where she is confronted by a colleague who asks her what is troubling her. However, she prefers to remain silent until the writing of the story, which we are to understand is an admission of infanticide, albeit an admission that remains enshrouded in metafictional doubts:

> Have I told you anything?
>
> Has it meant anything to you?
>
> Or is it all just writing?
>
> All just words? (p. 226)

Hulme's metafictions – particularly "Kiteflying Party at Doctor's Point", "Station on My Way to Avalon" and "Headnote to a Maui Tale" - clearly fit the characteristically "inward" mould of fiction produced in the period (Morrissey describes "Kiteflying party" as having a "disturbing intensity that emanates from concentrating on interiority" (1985, p. 67) and Lawrence Jones has described these short stories as an effort to "tap into the psyche' of her characters" (1987, p. 230).

The most significant male Māori author of the period – Witi Ihimaera - has also found occasion to use metafictional approaches. Eva Rask Knudsen (2004) finds a "metafictional" focus on issues of "self-representation" (p. 338) in *The Matriarch* (1986) although the passages she cites seem fairly concomitantly reflexive compared with metafictional elements in what Jackie Buxton (2009) terms the "self-conscious, intertextual refashioning" of Ihimaera's *Dear Miss Mansfield* (1989). Perhaps Ihimaera's most playful use of the mode is used to parody eurocentric literary and post-colonial discourse in "A History of New Zealand Through Selected Texts". The "history" parodies papers presented at a literature conference Ihimaera attended in Kuala Lumpur in 1998, taking the form of a deliberately-verbose extended academic abstract which pokes a stick at over-intellectualization while purporting to "explore the various texts of identity, representation and construction as presented in eighteen selected New Zealand novels, films and poetic works" through "the semiotics of contact and the various diasporic, immigrant, exilic and expatriate [...] alternative realities, asymmetries, and linguistic aesthetics" (2003, p. 167). Beginning by re-reversing Samuel Butler ("Nowhere") and complaining of the "deplorable level" of spelling transported to New Zealand from Britain, Ihimaera uses his faux-methodology to send-up a series of major authors and literary movements in the New Zealand canon, including William Satchell in "The Greenstone Flaw" , Mansfield in "The Pardon Garty", Curnow in "Land Brawl in Unknown Trees", Frame in "Bowels do Dry", Stead and Gee in "All Visitors Aboard & Dumb", Tuwhare and Hulme in "No Ordinary Son & The Clone People". While the story comes across as rather flippant, it clearly reveals other facets to Māori and Pacific writing in general: concerns with the iterability of text and their use in the appropriation

and critique of Western culture – concerns which will be discussed here in the more constituently metafictional work of Samoan-New Zealander Albert Wendt – particularly his novels, *Ola* (1991) and *Black Rainbow* (1995).

6.2 Biography is fiction: Ola's manifold realities

As this chapter will point out, the strength of Wendt's metafictions lie not only in their disenthralled perceptions of (post)colonialism, but in the transparent iterability of their language-use and thematics. At the same time as they critique the homogenous and "ordinarised" in Western culture, they openly draw on and recycle Western literary artifacts - combining them with traditions of Samoan storytelling and staples of the metafictional tradition in New Zealand, to create what Paul Sharrad terms an "identity politics ground in specifics of Samoan and New Zealand social history" (2003b, p. 372).

This chapter reads Wendt's most constituent metafictions (*Ola* and *Black Rainbow*) in the light of their contributions to post-colonial thinking, looking at them against the backdrop of metafictional work already under examination in this thesis. Contrary to a claim made by Patrick Evans in *The Long Forgetting* (p. 206) - this chapter reveals that Wendt's work should not exclude Western readers, baffle literary critics or indeed anyone familiar with the modes of international fiction in the latter half of the 20th century. It contends that Wendt's metafictions – novels he wrote from the early 1990s into the 2000s - are, while thematically oppositional to aspects of New

Zealand's culture and literature, to a large extent modally reiterative of other metafictional narratives in this study – contoured by many of the same reflexive techniques that have shaped fiction produced in New Zealand since the 1960s. Indeed, just as the authors in this study have tended toward performing "inward" and individualistic modes of thinking to address problems of social homogeneity, so Wendt's fictions tend toward "self-absorbed" (as Norman Simms has it [1992, p. 219]) central characters - or as Michelle Keown puts them "neo-Camusian outsiders, variously tortured, marginalized and rebellious individuals" (2005, p.18) who react against what Wendt terms in *Black Rainbow* "reordinarisation", or what Sharrad has termed "the smothering power of uniform collectivity grounded on essentialist values" (2003b, p. 378). In doing so, Wendt's work critiques the country's dominant cultural and literary mores while paradoxically reiterating many modal features already identified as part of the metafictional tradition in New Zealand and abroad.

Like Frame's *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians*, Stead's *Secret History of Modernism* and *Death of the Body*, or Jackson's *Pieces of Music*, Wendt's *Ola* begins with a framing device – an encompassing narrative about a writer struggling to write a story. The main character and title figure, Ola, is a well-educated middle-aged English teacher and a compulsive diarist who takes her father Finau on a pilgrimage to Israel – a journey which leads both characters to question their understanding of race and religion (particularly in Finau's revelations about Judeo-Christian history) and their general understanding of cultural relationships in New Zealand and the Pacific. But Ola is only partially responsible for the way her story is told. Pati Tuaopepe, a novelist, finds three boxes of autobiographical writings by Ola abandoned on his doorstep with an

accompanying note asking him to use them as a basis for a book. Excited but daunted by the idea of assembling Ola's notes, Pati decides not to rewrite the fragments into a whole but to rearrange the parts so that "readers (including Ola) could see the connections, a unity" (1991, pp. 7-8). If this rationale brings to mind the narrator of Jackson's genre-pastiching "quest for connections" (1986, p. 4) or Frame's play on Aristotle's "unity", then it also closely echoes Frame's John Henry Brecon in *The Carpathians*, who like Pati, disclaims the novel as "merely notes" toward a fiction (1989, p. 196). In Sharrad's words, Wendt uses the device to distance " himself from [his use of the] female voice by adopting the role of a fictional editor who 'merely' assembles the farrago of Ola's diary entries, recipes, bus tickets, and so on" (Sharrad, 2003a, p. 184).

But the characters Ola and Pati also allow Wendt to enact the problems of authorship. Both acquire the role of self-conscious storyteller in the way that Frame's "ventriloquist", "eaves-dropper" and "hoarding-bee", or Haley's "mirror and mime artist", or Stead's narrative "slave" do – Ola describing herself as a "captive" taulaaitu/songmaker/shaman (1991, p. 9) and Pati characterising his role as storyteller through the metaphor of a craftsman with his material - his individual vision meaning the story will be "selected and ordered […] like the wood-chips from a carver's chisel" (p. 8). Furthermore, Pati's narrative performance opens questions and disclaimers relating to authorship and provenance. If one simple explanation could be given for the source of Ola's story then several are offered: responsibility for the narrative is passed from Albert Wendt (and his personal experiences of Samoa, New Zealand and Israel) to the ostensible narrator Pati (whose name appears at the conclusion of the novel) and finally to the fictional author: Ola. This allows Wendt to distance himself from the thoughts and

opinions of characters - to simultaneously claim and disclaim his use of autobiographical material, particularly his own travel notes and the poems he recycles from previous publications – notably "Knife" and "Door" from his collection *Shaman of Visions* (1984). Perhaps the theoretical views which help determine the shape of Wendt's fiction are similar to those which inform the autobiographically centered metafictions of Stead and Jackson - as Wendt said in interviews he sees little "difference between fiction and non-fiction" (Hereniko, 1999, p. 91) and "no difference between fiction and autobiography/biography" (See Appendix F).

Ola is clearly assertive in her relationships, but also deeply private. As Sharrad has pointed out, she shares "many traits with Kerewin Holmes" (2003b, p. 184) - Keri Hulme's protagonist in *The Bone People* – and she also resembles Haley's protagonist Midge Cochrane in *Beside Myself* and Jackson's Nick Day in *Rainshadow*, in that she can often become withdrawn and self-conscious: a "mere observer of other people's lives, an absorber of those lives to shape my own, perhaps to justify it" (p. 299) or reticent and neurotic: "Why do I now talk more and more to myself (and in writing?) Getting more neurotic, more cut off from others?" (p. 144). Even more salient is the resemblance between Ola and the unnamed narrator of Keri Hulme's story "Kiteflying Party at Doctor's Point". Like Hulme's character, Ola expresses strong doubts about her desire to narrate intimate details of her life, doubts about the importance of her story, and even her desire to communicate at all (in a self-deprecating tone Ola describes her notes as "smart-alecky, self-defensive wind/bluster/glib rationalisations / Reader's Digest psychology / Time magazine wisdom" (1991, p. 144). The most striking similarity though, lies in a

quatrain of rhetorical - and similarly metafictional - questions which echo those that

conclude Hulme's story:

> What am I doing here?
>
> Why am I writing this?
>
> Is it to save me from myself?
>
> What is wrong with me? (*Ola*, p. 40)

While Ola's intensity does not rely solely on her "concentrating on interiority" as Hulme's

story has been described (Morrissey, 1985, p. 67), Wendt does use Ola's self-awareness

and self-doubt to delve inward into reflections on the nature of self-narration and raise

reflexive questions about the relationship between art and life. For Ola, who tends to "see

things in terms of well-organised stories, with a beginning, middle, climax and resolution"

(p. 301) the tension between life as lived and life as representation becomes increasingly

important to her self-understanding, until she arrives at the conclusion that the two are

mutually exclusive. Frustrated that she cannot "reshape/revise" her life like she can a

"poem/song/tale", she decides that "art is not life" (p. 236): "A storyteller lies

imaginatively, and the more deliberate she is about it, the more her tale is art and not

life. But the deliberateness is what makes us more than what we are, giving us design,

shape, purpose. Otherwise, what is there to protect us from the terror of existing

without meaning?" (1991, p. 236).

An element of the narrative performance in the shaping of *Ola* surrounds selection

of material. The problem Ola and Pati face is that the meaning they desire for their

narrative is not self-evident from the outset: Pati's dilemma is what to include or exclude,

especially as he eliminates the material that is "repetitious and unnecessary to the unity of

the work" (p. 8), where for Ola it is a larger matter of understanding what is vital to her history and what she should give Pati as raw material. Like Frame's character Brecon, or Stead's narrator Winter, Ola's (or Pati's/Wendt's) metafictional intrusions into the process of narrative construction function less to disrupt the illusions of a fictional world than they do to normalise the problems of reconstructing "reality" and footnote the performance of authorship. Perhaps the most important narrative footnote of this sort comes towards the end of the novel, when Ola wonders whether she should finish her account in Bethlehem, at what has been a kind of new beginning for her father, or whether she should let her story continue through their return journey to Samoa: "Does any tale ever end?" p. 236). She elects to continue, and the narrative follows her journey with her father back to Sapepe, where Finau, now old and dying, calls together a meeting and publicly offers her the leadership of the aiga. Here, one might easily accept Sharrad's cautious criticism of Wendt's "residual" modernist tendency toward "symbolic transcendence" and "return" here (2003a, p. 193) if it were not for complicating dubiety and interiority in Ola's hesitance to accept the responsibility. The final words of her account in the novel are a series of poetic abstractions reflecting this internal doubt – as she sits meditatively on the beach contemplating her future and the future of her aiga she asks "But where do I go from here? / Where do we go?" (p. 346).

The novel's conclusion is similarly open-ended. Closing the framing narration is an afterword in which the ostensible author, Pati Tuaopepe, addresses the reader to summarise Ola's testament, and to remind the reader that her story is a fiction utilising invented settings and characters created by Albert Wendt in previous work. This afterword, rather than merely undermining the notion that the novel is a direct reflection

of reality, instead broadens the definition of reality to place Ola within a larger "manifold" of the imagination:

> So Ola in her story has played profound tricks with reality (hers, mine and yours, dear reader) disguising her trail with fictions borrowed from other practitioners of that magic, to give it other depths of meaning, or, should I say, another shape of meaning. [...] All is real, whether borrowed or created or dreamed, or mixed together with facts, fictions, strange sauces and herbs and condiments in quantities peculiar to each mixer, dreamer, cook, creator. We are all possibilities of every creator.
>
> All is Ola.
>
> All is life. (p. 347)

If Wendt is happy to borrow metafictional tropes from "other practitioners", his solution to the problem of fictionalising the real is far more overtly deconstructive. He consciously dissolves binaries of fact/fiction, biography/invention, originality/pastiche into fictional commixtures, rendering dichotomous notions of realism/anti-realism fiction/autobiography near unintelligible. Indeed, the universal possibilities of intertextual appropriation in Pati's concluding statement are not only a good description of Wendt's propensity to employ modal cross-reference and pastiche, but a sign of his determination to broaden reality by allowing his fictions to playfully interact with a vast range of cultural and meta-textual signifiers - a modus operandi he employs to full effect in *Black Rainbow*.

6.3 A tale about other tales: citationality and authorial performance in Black Rainbow

While *Ola* is suffused with minor references to various authors (most notably Borges, Kundera and Wendt), in *Black Rainbow* metafictional citationality becomes a constitutive feature of the story itself: from parodic iterations of Janet Frame's characters through to fictionalised representations of the works or characters of Borges, Stead, Hulme, Shadbolt and specially marked members of the New Zealand literati who are deemed to be underground resistance writers: Hone Tuwhare, Donna Awatere, Ranginui Walker, Bill Pearson, Jim Baxter, Patricia Grace, Dick Scott, Witi Ihimaera, and Wendt himself (p. 157). But while *Black Rainbow* is set up in opposition to "ordinarised" Western culture in New Zealand, it also directly recycles the metafictional concerns found in the New Zealand fiction, directly echoing reflexive themes first instituted in the country by Duggan, Frame and Stead, and finding common ground with Haley's dystopian sentiments and Jackson's individualism. Again, it could be said that the clever self-scrutinising individualism of Wendt's metafictions are anything but "baffling" in the context of local reflexive writing – and probably therefore all the more pertinent. To borrow a statement from Juniper Ellis, *Black Rainbow* and *Ola* share "many of the concerns of post-modernism in a New Zealand context—an emphasis on fragment and process rather than complete product, a flattening or rupture of the frame that once supposedly enclosed content and meaning in a secure, separate realm" (1994, p. 112).

One of the thematic concerns Wendt shares with the wider metafictional ("postmodern" is probably unnecessarily delimiting) tradition in New Zealand can be seen in his use of allegory and myth, and in his attacks on the homogeneity of Western

culture. As Sharrad points out, the "allegorical reverie" of *Black Rainbow*, seems to draw "inspiration from Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* (like her town, Wendt's city constructs its own history and self-assurance from mythic 'memory')" (2003a, p. 210). But Wendt's construction of New Zealand also mirrors Frame's dual attacks on parochialism and homogeneity - particularly when Eric arrives at Taniwhanui, a bland suburban New Zealand township drawn from the 1980s, and is given rambling and incoherent versions of the community's history which mix Pākehā settlement with Māori mythology: "A strange but fabulous blend of fact, fiction, and fantasy, I thought as I listened" [1992, p. 202]). These passages - like those surrounding the myth of the Memory Flower in *The Carpathians* and the endless derivations in *Living in the Maniototo* - clearly foreground the commodification and commercialization of culture, or as Keown puts it in relation to *Black Rainbow*, the "'depthlessness' of a new type of technocratic society" (2005, p.31).

But Wendt heightens his critique of the homogenous and commodified through a vast series of metafictional interruptions and citations, which take force as the narrator Eric Mailei Foster finds himself separated from his family in a totalitarian regime organised by a governing body which attempts to control him through mental conditioning. Similar to Haley's Walter Lemanby in *The Settlement* or Stead's character Smith in *Smith's Dream*, Eric finds himself in an Orwellian dystopia, sent on a goose-chase to find his family while attempting to resist the process of "reordinarisation" (or cultural "brainwashing" as Wendt has defined it [See Appendix F]).

The first reference in the novel is not textual but visual, and acts as a kind of clock and compass, guiding the narrator and reader through the labyrinthine citations of the novel. In Eric's home is a lithograph by artist Ralph Hotere, "Black Rainbow":
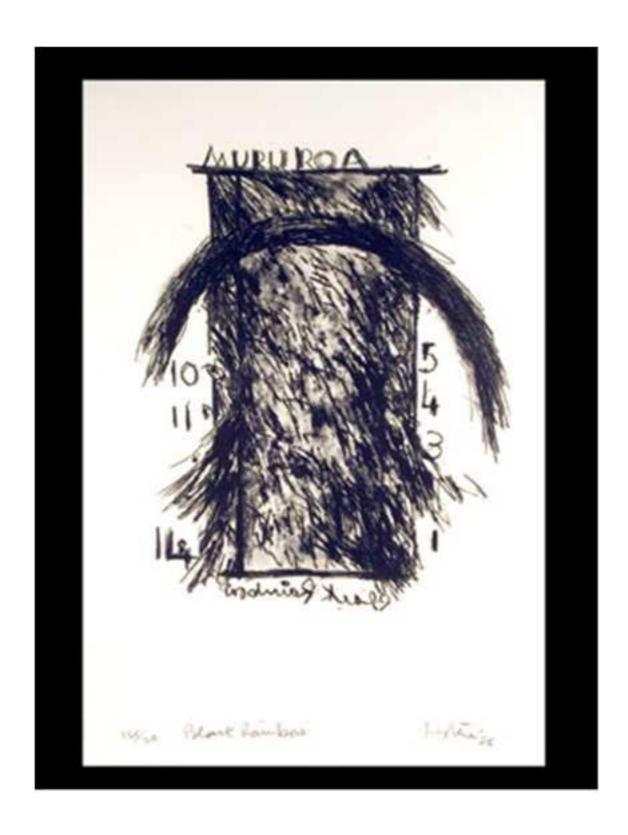
Figure 6. *Black Rainbow.* (1988). Ralph Hotere.

The print is part of a well-known series by Hotere, protesting French nuclear testing at the Mururoa atoll, and Eric's hesitant descriptions of the image with its "numbers, 1 to 14 [...] thick black arch [and] upsurging cloud" (p. 10) clearly link the work's depiction of a countdown to nuclear apocalypse to Eric's impending apocalypse of identity. Later, the lithograph returns as a ticking clock device, hanging ominously on the wall in the Puzzle Palace (p. 178); at a hotel, where it begins "ticking away madly" (p. 234). Finally, the lithograph functions as an oppositional symbol to the tribunal and its state-sanctioned reordinarisation of memory and culture, when it is explained that Eric's wife had begun their rebellion using the "Hotere icon to hold back the doomsday clock" and summoning "the agaga of our ancient Dead" (p. 242).

While fleeing hunters who are trying to erase his history, Eric meets a series of presumably "ordinarised" characters, such as "Jake Crump" who uses "mate" in every second sentence (p. 66) and a waiter named Burnie with whom he has a casual conversation: "We talked in this relaxed, matey way for three more whiskies, two literary stereotypes conversing in the Kiwi tradition" (p. 56). The purpose of these citations are clear: in parodying the Crumpish characters, Wendt is dramatising his own resistance to normative masculine descriptive devices commonly attributed to New Zealand's social-realist tradition. What is also clear is that the parodic performance of these passages also aligns Wendt with a self-reflexive tradition rooted in Duggan's parody of the "Crumpy conversation" in "Along Rideout Road That Summer" (1963) and elaborated in Stead's "pass me the butter" scene in All Visitors Ashore (1984).

Whether this was a deliberate alignment on Wendt's part isn't clear. But the next passage of citationality in the novel is certainly open in acknowledging the influence of literary predecessor, Janet Frame. Eric is ordered to drive to Wanganui, buy and read Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1961) to get instructions from the tribunal (p. 39) and is later interrogated by "Sister Ratched - Big Nurse" - a conflation of Frame's characters Sister Bridge, Nurse Clarke and Sister Honey from the same novel, which Ratched describes as an "overpraised autobiography-cum-novel [...] melodramatic tripe" (p. 58). The obvious resonance between the narratives should be clear - Estina Mavet's journey through "brain readjustment" in Frame's novel (1982, p.213) is cited by Wendt as another touchstone to evoke the terror of Eric's road trip through mental and physical reordinarisation. If the effects of colonisation on the colonised can be compared to a nuclear apocalypse, they can also be compared to the brutalities of mental institutionalisation.

The remainder of the vast literary and cultural citations in the novel are often lighthearted - most serve to give the novel a labyrinthine sense of openness, a kind of endless citationality that creates what Sharrad calls Wendt's "playful surfaces of infinite textuality" (2003a, p. 208). The literary origin of this infinite maze of references is duly acknowledged when Eric is sent to talk with Maneco Uriate, a "compatriot" (p. 86) of Borges whose conversation metafictionally prefigures the open-ended conclusion of the novel:

> "'Stories don't end, do they?'
>
> I shook my head. 'It is as Borges wrote.'" (p. 87)

Within Wendt's maze are a host of references to other literary and cultural touchstones (from William Yeats to Hone Tuwhare, Bob Dylan, James Baxter, Yoko Ono, Winston Peters and Roger Rabbit) – some of whom are reordinarised "otherworlders" and some of whom are given the status of "Tangata Moni" or "True Ones" - ("descendants of Māori rebels and urbanised Polynesians from the islands, and rebel Pākehā") who exist peacefully at the fringes of society (p. 223).

Some of these iterative passages obviously - and pointedly - echo metafictional tropes in New Zealand writing. Like Haley's narrator Midge in *Beside Myself* (1990), Eric wonders whether he is also just an actor in a movie - a film which the tribunal could simply "erase or dissolve in turpentine" (1992, p. 214). And like Stead - and later Ihimaera - Wendt fictionally targets local authors and academics with deliberately thin disguises: poking fun at "the out-of-print historical novels of Morerice Boltshad"; teasingly referencing "Wittie Ishmael" and "Kerrie Me Home" (p. 202); mocking "the stereotyped kaumatua in Hulme's *the bone people*" (p. 262); and jaggedly criticising what he sees as the in-bred stable of the 1990s University of Auckland English Department: "Mrs Ida Wedgecomb [...] Mrs Mary Edmondly [...] Ms Michelle Letgo [...] Brian Boyed" and so on (p. 207). Probably the most personal and direct attack though occurs when Eric is placed on trial before the tribunal. Here Wendt rips a page directly out of *All Visitors Ashore* and performs some metafictional score-settling - directed for the most part at its author - a thinly disguised caricature of Stead named Cantos Head.

As mentioned in the introduction to Chapter III, Stead had for some time been provoking outrage from members of the liberal left with his conservative socio-political statements on a range of topics from the national secondary curriculum to the Treaty of

Waitangi. Among his critiques on literary subjects, he had written indifferent reviews of Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* and Hulme's *The Bone People* – in the last instance questioning Hulme's right to call herself a Māori writer on the grounds that she was seven-eighths Pākehā (Stead, 1985; see also Hereniko & Wilson, 1999, pp. 59-60). When Wendt was awarded a chair in the English department at the University of Auckland, Stead again saw opportunity to comment, suggesting that Wendt had gained the position due to "political correctness" rather than literary or academic merit (Cox, 1994; Edmond, 1994).

Wendt answers Stead's "disguised racism and sexism" (p. 258) by characterising Cantos as the worst kind of academic "wanker": a "ferret-faced" pedant with an overwhelmingly obvious desire to throw his intellectual weight around (p. 250). In a farcical trial near the end of the novel, Cantos claims that his own migrant ancestors wanted to save Tangata Māori "from themselves" by bringing them "the Light of Science and Reincarnation and Eternal Life" (pp.254-255). The courtroom crowd agree, and over their calls for Eric to be "deconstructed" (p. 252), Cantos accuses him of "reverse racism" and a "mistaken belief" that being part-Māori makes him "indigenous" (p. 254).

Ultimately, these arguments cause the tribunal to find Eric guilty of treason. He is given a choice of three sentences: to be reordinarinised, to undergo a temporary death and be reincarnated as his former self, or to die permanently. Eric shocks Cantos and the other dignitaries by opting for a permanent death, but they ignore his decision, and the novel ends with the tribunal deciding to return him to his former state.

Perhaps, like the closing passages of *Ola*, the ending could be read as another performance of modernist symbolic transcendence and return – only Wendt again uses metafiction to bring the tidiness of this reading into question. Eric finally ruminates that

"we are, in the final instance, allegories that are read the way the reader chooses. Or, put another way, we are allegories that invent and read themselves" (p. 265) and therewith the diegesis of *Black Rainbow* unravels to mirror the open-endedness of *Ola*: closing the narration is a framing afterword which opens the novel to a larger manifold or labyrinth of options - this time asking the reader to "improvise whatever other endings/beginnings they prefer" (p.267).

While the open and self-conscious citationality of *Ola* and *Black Rainbow* was a well-established trope in postmodern fiction by the 1990s, as Sharrad has pointed out, Wendt's originality lies in the extent to which he pushes this aspect of narrative performativity: "what is new is the greater degree to which the author has consciously blurred the distinction between self, history and fiction. The rhetorical question framing the new novel Ola - What is a life? - is given its answer in the performance of the text: life is the meaning you fabricate for it, that is, a fiction" (Sharrad, 2003a, p. 180).

It could also be added that, if Wendt's critique of Western culture hinges on the notion that life is a fiction, then it is also a fiction created from other fictions – even fictions created by the culture he looks to critique. As Keown notes, Wendt has spoken of his use of citationality and syncretism as a way to generate new meanings in a (post)colonial context:

> Wendt has also argued that post-colonial writing should not reject European aesthetic and ideological traditions in a spurious search for cultural authenticity, but rather should celebrate the syncretic character of postcolonial cultures and the 'indigenization' of European forms: "Colonialism, by shattering the world of the traditional artist, also broke open the way for a new type of artist who is not bound

by traditional styles and attitudes and conventions, who explores his own individuality, experiments freely and expresses his own values and ideas, his own mana unfettered by accepted convention" (Keown, 2005, p. 17).

If Wendt's originality is paradoxically sourced in his freedom to cite and reiterate texts from other traditions, then his deeply entrenched use of citation may be attributed to what Sharrad calls Wendt's "honesty of confessing to literary influences" in *Ola* (2003a, p. 186) or as Wendt himself has said, his "following the Polynesian tradition" of paying tribute to "tohunga or tufuga" or "the writers and artists who influence" him (see Appendix F).   Clearly many of the modes and devices Wendt employs are typical of the reflexive writing this thesis has so far examined: his use of framing devices closely resembles Frame's usage; aspects of his work utilise dystopian conventions of bleak cultural homogeneity in the way that Frame and Haley do; and he divulges and foregrounds self-consciousness and uncertainty in the face of narrativisation much as Haley, Hulme and Jackson do. But if Joanne Tomkins is oversimplifying the matter when she concludes that most of the literature of indigenous writers in the Pacific in the latter part of the 20th century "employ the same methods as white Western writers of the post-modern tradition" (1990, p. 483-97), then, in Wendt's case, it is largely due to sheer degree of citationality in his work. Assembling pieces from a manifold of cultural sources and literary influences, Wendt faces the threat of cultural homogeneity with a unique - and sometimes forcefully individualistic - syncreticism.

In another way, this individualism also places Wendt in the tradition of New Zealand metafiction so far established. Clearly, Wendt's writing fits the perceived pattern of "inwardness" identified by critics of the country's writing, by favouring individualistic

perspectives over broader social patterns of thinking. Even as he explores the Samoan/New Zealand/Pacific cultural rubric and confronts the politics of colonialism – he does so less through examining configurations of political power or the organisation of class structure, than through the individual's struggle against social homogeneity and cultural "ordinariness".

Wendt's novels may also reinforce the argument that metafiction and realism are not mutually exclusive. As Sharrad points out, his use of citation and pastiche in *Ola* is underwritten by an authenticity that seeks naturalistic or realistic representation: "for all its postmodern experimentation, the shoebox assemblage of Ola's life can be seen as an extreme kind of naturalism that is merely another way of trying to be honest" (Sharrad, 2003a, pp. 179-180). Clearly for Wendt a real or natural representation of life not only involves stories, but is constituted by them. As he says in *Black Rainbow* stories and humans are constitutive of each other: "A tale is about other tales; it is also the teller and her telling" (1995, p. 105).

If there is a paradox in Wendt's desire to both critique and to employ Western forms of narrative, then he performs it as a kind of Judo technique. Using the weight of his opponent against him, Wendt takes momentum from the larger body of Western literary artifacts – shifting their weight with elements of Samoan storytelling and staples of the metafictional tradition in New Zealand – and finally grounding them in his own metafictional performance which hovers above and behind the text. In this way, Wendt is able to create new "tellings" of history and culture. As the renegade Aeto says nearing the end of *Black Rainbow*: "Because the story I'm telling is only a substitute for what actually

happened, my telling is the only reality we have of that [...] And every telling is different,

so what happened is different with every telling" (pp.236-237).

CHAPTER VII: Charlotte Randall: anthropomorphized narrative

6.1 The prison-house of plot in *The Curative*

Characterised by sardonic and often acerbic narrators, Charlotte Randall's metafictions balance a zealous attention to language and vocabulary with mordant observations on the human condition. By blending contemporary and historical settings, often within a single narrative, Randall brings the follies of the past to bear on the present, and provides a counterbalance to the story that society is continually improving. On the surface, her novels aim their trenchant humour at a broad range of subjects, often satirising questionable medical science, pseudo-religious superstitions, spurious cultural trends, and dubious "alternative" medicine. Underpinning these critiques though, Randall pushes the metafictional mode into unchartered territory by having her characters anthropomorphise the processes of narrative creation, and act as agents for comment on what narrative psychologists term "self-construction" (Crossley, 2000, p. 2).

If the authors discussed so far in this thesis have used the metafictional mode to frame narrative and comment on its construction, then Randall takes the mode a step further – embodying and performing complex narrative ideas in her characters' interactions. The deeply circular reflexivity inherent in this process fractures Randall's fiction into exigent and/or multifaceted structures – from the inverted chronology of *What Happen Then Mr Bones* (2004), to the anthropomorphic structure of *The Curative* (2000), to the fractalian contours of *Within the Kiss* (2002). This chapter explores these

narratological characteristics with predominant reference to the two most complexly layered of Randall's novels: *The Curative* and *Within the Kiss*.

Randall – an exception to the rule that most reflexive writing in New Zealand has come out of Auckland - was born in Dunedin and moved to Christchurch as a young adult to study psychology at the University of Canterbury. Although later abandoning psychological research to write full-time, her continued interest in the discipline is evident in her novels' preoccupations with the peculiarities of human thinking and wry descriptions of the history of clinical treatment in Western society: as she describes it herself, she regularly uses her epidemiological research to "savage" medical sociology in her novels (See Appendix G). Like the English novelist Graham Greene with whom she has been compared (Walker, 2008) Randall focuses on characters who are often troubled, psychologically or existentially, finding themselves thrown into a sordid - and sometimes squalid - existence and coping by adopting world-weary attitudes that might be seen as sceptical or even intellectually supercilious.

Randall's most recent novels *What Happen Then, Mr. Bones?* (2004) and *The Crocus Hour* (2008) develop the metafictional mode along structural lines. *What Happen Then, Mr. Bones?* (2004) continues her experimentation with unique and rather exigent narrative structures. Narrated in reverse chronology from section to section, it traces the lineage of the fictional Montague family, beginning in Wellington, New Zealand in 2002 and ending in Oxford, England in the 1650s. The story follows the development of a family who carry a genetic "disease" – a mortal fear of death - from hypochondriac Joe Montague and his ascetic vegan niece, back to his maternal grandfather Frederick, a medicine peddler, and earlier still through seven generations to matriarch Valentina

Montague, a midwife who is hanged for performing abortions and who miraculously revives just before she is dissected by a group of medical students. Often the characters in the Montague family are dismissively characterized, mocked and parodied by a plot that begins with the frailty of old age and death and works towards the defencelessness of birth. Many of these characters are not even given the honour of being included in the story: "This is the big difference between life and the Life," the narrator remarks. "In the latter only the important people have names and you are the most important of all, but in the world there's an endless stream of nameless people and you are no one" (pp. 266-67).

Structurally, the novel also makes a decisive point about the psychology of narrative – it points out that while stories might be most easily understood working from the beginning to the end, human lives, and indeed complete genealogies, can only be made sense of in reverse. In the words of the narrator: "There's not much you can usefully do except look back at the path along which you've come" (p47).

The Crocus Hour (2008) – like *The Curative* and *Within the Kiss* – also traces the generation or production of an explanatory narrative. Based loosely on Randall's experiences when a travelling companion went missing on a backpacking tour through Europe, the novel begins in Crete in the early 1980s and follows its characters home to New Zealand as they try to understand the circumstances of the disappearance. The narrator, who remains unnamed and largely invisible throughout the story, meets New Zealander Henry Davis and hears the story of Henry's missing daughter Sally. As Davis's story unfolds the narrative then unravels - but doesn't answer - the mystery surrounding Sally's disappearance. The mode and narrative method of the novel develops Randall's use of monologue, and multiple narrative frames. Like Lonsdale in *The Curative*, Henry

Davis delivers the story of his daughter's disappearance through a sustained monologue to a narrator who remains a passive transmitter of information. And in the vein of *Within the Kiss*, *The Crocus Hour* acquires multiple frames since Sally's story is filtered through a number of lenses: those of her father, her friend Jane, and ultimately the narrator.

Compared with her later work, Randall's debut novel *Dead Sea Fruit* (1995) is relatively simple in structure and tone, but nevertheless prefigures many of the themes which have become staples of her oeuvre. Set in Dunedin in the early 1970s, it tells the story of two loosely connected families whose relationships disintegrate through fruitless extra-marital affairs and divorce, brought on by mental illness and an existential anguish which afflicts the characters "like a disease" (1995, p. 95). The novel uses monologues with a wry and caustic humour, and often reveals Randall's characteristic scepticism toward religious fanaticism, pharmaceutics, institutionalisation, and standardised explanations of mental illness and suicide – themes which resurface in Randall's second and probably best-known work, *The Curative* (2000), but which are developed alongside a direct - not to mention funny - metafictional concern with language and narrative.

The Curative is narrated by William Lonsdale, an "incurable" inmate of the Bedlam mental asylum in 19th century Britain whose mental acuity and extraordinary vocabulary surpasses that of his keepers, his apothecary, and even his neurologist. Shackled to the wall of his cell, suffering severe memory loss, and kept for the most part in isolation, Lonsdale has no means of verifying how or why he has arrived in the institution. He must reconstruct the story of his incarceration through self-prescribed memory exercises while enduring a series of torturous "treatments" by his captors: from blood-letting, to cupping, to vomit-induction.

The narrative centres around Lonsdale's reconstruction of his personal history, which he recounts in the form of a monologue to a mute cellmate, a device which Randall uses to animate the process of storytelling. If Lonsdale is, like Janet Frame's early protagonists, a prosopopoeiac embodiment of the victims of rationalism and psychiatric institutionalization, he is also, like the characters of Jackson and Wendt, a figurative epitomisation of the problems of personal identity and continuity.[21] Furthermore, he personifies the specific challenges of narrative creation – he embodies story. Like the host of actors in *Within the Kiss* (2002), his character is an anthropomorphisation of the storytelling process.

As Lonsdale points out, "story" cannot equal "plot" in his case since, chained to a wall, he is physically incapable of enacting a plot. "In fact," he reflexively remarks, "the story where none exists or can exist is a fascination for me. And more: it is essential, the only way I can exist for myself" (2000, p. 11). For Lonsdale the issue at hand is not merely a matter of literary definitions – he is taken by the need to recover his memory and create a coherent explanation of his situation to refute the diagnosis of psychosis and delusion prognosed by the institution. Without a story he has no means of verifying how or why he has been incarcerated in the first place – all he has is self-reference: "I have to rely on what I remember, on what I believe to be true. Of course this makes me a thoroughly unreliable narrator. However, since there is no one sane to tell my story to this hardly matters" (2000, p. 11). Indeed there are only two possible listeners to his tale

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[21] Like Jackson's protagonist in *Pieces of Music*, Lonsdale is audacious enough to invent 'lives' for others, but rather than feeling sorry for the victims of his creation, he feels envious of their fictional lives. After trying to convince Horatio, the narrator's mute cellmate, to speak, Lonsdale reveals he has invented a complete biography for Horatio. "I do this sort of thing all the time – attribute wonderful characteristics to nobodies, invent exciting adventures for dullards and stay-at-homes. Then I'm jealous of their lives, these lives that are my own invention!" (Randall, 2000, p. 92)

– a cellmate, who is deranged and mute, and his custodian, an alcoholic dupe who constantly impedes Lonsdale's progress in memory-recovery by administering various "cures". Conscious of his own Hamlet-esque monologues, the narrator admits that he prefers speaking to those who cannot answer back, and that his "perfect companion" is the mute cellmate he ironically nicknames "Horatio" playing metafictionally on the Shakespearian character and the ironic juxtaposition between the Latin root of the name 'orator' ("speaker") and the voiceless prisoner (2000, p. 43). Lonsdale's exasperating custodian is sarcastically and reflexively dubbed "Porlock", alluding to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's infamous unwelcome intruder.[22]

In his attempts to avoid insanity, Lonsdale turns inwards to his story and to language itself, keeping his mind occupied by "chasing polysyllables through the night" (p. 201), attempting to find the most fitting word which will explain the world, a word that will encapsulate his position in the cosmos: "I want a word that includes the present but also the past, that expresses something of the way the past is always a part of the present; and the word must also – yes – contain a sense of the ineffable" (p. 11). After rejecting a number of possibilities (fugue, pabulum, floccinaucinihilipilification, sprezzatura) he settles for a time on a word which seems to indicate he is merely a representation of an unseen author's ideas – of, perhaps, the themes Randall has chosen to explore. "I am a ghost in chains," he laments, "an effigy made of words. I am no longer a real man, only a device, a disembodied voice, an extended instance of prosopopoeia" (pp. 65-66).

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[22] Coleridge claimed his oriental poem 'Kubla Khan' was never completed because an unwanted person from Porlock interrupted him during its writing.

Lonsdale appears to be conscious that he and the other characters are merely figures of speech who act as conduits for Randall's self-reflexive commentary: Porlock representing the stupefied working classes, and the apothecary perhaps representing strict 18th century rationalism: as Randall points out, the person the character was based on "was real and what he says frequently consists of quotes from his published 'research'" (See Appendix G). But if Lonsdale embodies the victims of rationalism and psychiatric institutionalization, he also directly personifies the problems of narrative creation, and it is this element of his characterisation that is the most striking characteristic of Randall's metafictional structure. Indeed the question that drives the story to its conclusion is - from where does Lonsdale derive his sense of reality and self if he eschews the "pabulum" of narrative? What can be said to constitute personal identity outside of the patterns of the fiction he must create for himself? The answer is, it seems, nothing:

> You begin – you mistakenly think you can begin with anything – and the beginning is the ball and chain. You carry on – already limited by your initial mistake – and soon the walls are up, constructed out of plot and character, both of which increasingly define the space allowed.
>
> 'You look back longingly at the beginning and wonder how you could have started differently, better. Obviously, it's not true that you can begin with just anything. What, then, are the rules? Start at the end and work back, a seemingly marvelous process of loosening, of unknitting? But what are you working back to? To nothing.
>
> 'So you get craftier. You think about the final effect you want – the thing you really want to say. You have to have something to say beyond the story. That's

part of the rules. By this you will be judged. You'll work back from there, mentally, and then you will tell the story forwards. But what constitutes a final effect without a plot or character already defined? By this time you are mixed up and very irritable' (2000, pp. 177-78)

At this point in the novel Lonsdale becomes an anthropomorphisation of storytelling-in-progress, metaphorically shackled in situ in *The Curative*. Like the novel itself, it appears he has "not a single restraint" on his imagination and no one to check his "accuracy": "This is the last place where anyone cares about such a thing" (p. 208). The only problem is, as soon as he starts to invent himself, he realizes he is becoming caught in bonds more restricting than the physical chains he is subjected to: "'Do you remember how I told you […] plot and character and all the rest of it start to form a prison? […] I myself was the main character, and I was being ever more rigidly defined and delineated by the situations I found myself in. My life was the plot, and no matter how much I tried to direct it, to create new situations where other character traits could emerge, one thing led to another" (pp. 189-90). Lonsdale becomes completely cached in the artifice of storytelling the more he tries to remember how and why he was incarcerated, and becomes a dramatization of the trade-off inherent in self-construction: as long as he refuses to complete his story he is mentally free to go wherever his imagination leads him, but physically delineated, since he is unable to refute the charge of insanity. That is, provided he maintains his "being as possibility" – to use the terminology of narrative psychology - he denies his "situatedness" (Yancy and Hadley, 2005, p. 11).

As long as he remains within the subjunctive state he exists as a form of transcendent potentiality, but as soon as he begins to speak, his character enters the indicative mode,

and he is obliged to describe, or rather circumscribe, himself in terms of a "factual" reality that not even he believes he has access to. In fact, he starts to wonder whether he is deluding himself: "And if a man utterly divorced from the world can be amused by telling a made-up story to a man who doesn't listen, is he not suffering a special kind of lunacy that has yet to be collared and categorised, and during which, with one single peculiar flash of insight, he appears as mad even to himself?" (2000, p. 223). In other words, Lonsdale confronts the same questions as the reader and writer: why is this story – a complete fabrication – being written and read? What form of lunacy is the process of fictional narrative? Lonsdale is a conceptual incarnation - or a type of fractal iteration of - the book's larger narrative question - a "self-similar" of the writing and reading process.

When, near the conclusion of the novel, Lonsdale meets a sensible and intelligent steward named Edward Wakefield, he sets aside his self-doubts and begins to finalise the life story he has been telling Horatio, in the hopes that Wakefield may succeed in getting him getting released. His biography - as he is able to construct or reconstruct it - places him at the centre of a conspiracy in which he has been solicited, duped and poisoned by his inamorata Juliet, and incarcerated after being found incoherent and raving. While the story is interrupted prematurely, Wakefield, convinced of Lonsdale's sanity, manages to verify some of its details - although he refuses to have Lonsdale released until the tale is complete:

> 'Look what I have here.'
>
> 'A key.'
>
> 'The key. I can undo your chains and then you would be able to walk about the cell. However...'

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'However?'

Mr Wakefield laughs. 'I must first hear the end of the story.'

'You won't free me to tell it?'

'The ending might change if you were free.'

'You are a perceptive man, Mr. Wakefield. But I promise not to let the lack of chains go to my head.'

'Hah, I don't believe you would be able to help it. Tell me the end of your story as you must have envisaged it told: chained to the wall.' (2000, pp. 77-78)

Lonsdale acquiesces and finishes his story, only he realises he cannot leave without the word he has been searching for, the word that will sum everything up:

'It's a very important word.'

'It must be. It's forcing you to act as if you're insane.'

'But it's coming to me. Each time I take a step – note that I have now taken four clumsy steps towards the door – it's becoming clearer. But I won't go out the door without it.'

'Listen to him – he won't go out the door without it – perhaps the word is coat!'

'If I don't take it, I will go out of here with nothing. All my time will have been wasted.'

'I think you're pulling my leg. Words are a waste of time in these circumstances.'

'In these circumstances, they are all I had. And this one's a beauty, the only one you'll ever need.'

[...]

'You fill me with despair, Mr Lonsdale.'

'That's why you need this word, Mr Wakefield. It's the polysyllabic, Latinate version of the same thing. And now, like magic, it's coming to me. English has a word that comes from the Latin word for this, a word that defines thisness. And that word is?'

Mr Wakefield looks bewildered.

'Haecceity.' (p. 78)

Only now that he is fully circumscribed in narrative, summed up in a word, is Lonsdale able to be free of his physical constraints. In this way his character mirrors the reader and writer as they complete the transmission of story and are released from the constraints of the communicative act. Once the materialisation of the narrative is complete, Lonsdale can leave the asylum slowly, mouthing to himself, "the word that wants nothing, the word that does not want to berate me, bully me, does not force me to be free" (p. 264). And, with that, the narrative closes.

Clearly the inevitable inward individualism of Lonsdale from *The Curative* is unavoidable, given that he is kept in near solitary-isolation for the duration of the novel. But almost the same degree of isolation applies to the characters of *Within the Kiss* who are metaphorically chained in a "prison" of books (2002, p. 72) – although their isolation is mostly self-inflicted by a combination of their own fraudulent ambitions, and the artificial nature of their conversations which act as prosopopoeiac conduits for the author's narrative concepts.

6.2 Keep it Simple, Stupid?

If Lonsdale is a conceptual reiteration of the writing and reading process in *The Curative*, then in Randall's next and most complex metafictional novel, *Within the Kiss* (2002), this recursive process is delegated more widely within the characterisation and structure, into large shifts of mise en abîme, and in micro-level literary allusions. In fact, the characters in *Within the Kiss* are even more conscious than Lonsdale of their being "imprisoned" within narrative. Randall's modern day Faust quotes Goethe's *Faust* in an epigraph, finding himself in a "prison" of books, a "damnable, bricked in, cabined hole" (2002, p. 72) and remarks that the prospect of selling her soul to Mephistopheles for a best-selling novel seems too good to believe: "far better than the miserable truth of being chained to your pen or computer without a single interesting idea in your skull" (p. 36). The plan ultimately fails, though, as Faust and the rest of the cast become buried in increasing layers of text.

The characters are so bound by the whimsies of Randall's narrative vision that it is unremittingly obvious they are just light-hearted instruments or foils of the story. The novel's narrator constantly points out the prosopopoeiac nature of his actors and their lack of a corresponding actuality: "What do you mean is this story real, my sweet? You mean like the television news? Actually yes, it's real in precisely that way: the subjunctive obliterates the facts, everybody is wearing goodie or baddie masks, Faust is the freedom fighter, Mephisto the ultimate fascist" (pp. 19-20) .

Like the grammatical "subjunctive mood" which expresses the hypothetical, the subjective, the doubtful - statements that convey a divergence from actuality - the characters in *Within the Kiss* are embodied expressions of states that do not exist and of actions that are physically impossible. At times the characters are so hypothetical that the narrator jokingly bemoans the limitations of having to construct them in a way which will fulfil the reader's expectations and yet allow a complete exploration of the novel's ideas ("It would be easier if she were a shapely blonde, merely here for us to gaze upon, we could spend a lot of time describing her haircuts, her clothes, […] then we could forget about her altogether and get on with the tennis") (p. 8). At other times the narrator's whimsies take on a life of their own and blatantly enter the diegesis of the novel ("…ah there's some figments of my imagination on the beach up ahead, there's Shelley, they're burning him after he drowned, that's Lord Byron and who else, oh yes Edward Trelawny, perhaps I'll go and have a word with them" [p. 36]).

So deeply imbedded are the characters and plot in prosopopoeiac conceptualisation that the novel itself becomes its own character, following what could be fairly described as its own character arc. That is, if the novel's conventional "characters" are defined through a system of oppositions with other characters, then the novel itself is equally defined by oppositions to the other possibilities it presents to the reader. As the story is constantly planned, rewritten, edited, as its characters disappear and reappear within its pages, it seems the only subject of the book is the book itself, and that the diegetic subjects and actors are subplots to the main concern. As the novel's structure – or extradiegetic character - becomes more and more complex, it overwhelms the diegetic characters

themselves, and it becomes increasingly uncertain just who is speaking, or at what echelon the narrative is functioning.

To be sure, the novel "confounds" as Matt Vickers (2002) puts it, and perhaps, as John McCrystal claims, it exceeds even the "most devoted reader's grasp" (2008). But there is also the hint of a hidden rationale at work: Similar to the characters in *The Curative* – the cast of *Within the Kiss* illustrate the storytelling process in what could only be described as corporeal terms. However, they follow a far more complicated structure of illusion and allusion: like the rules which govern the outlandish shapes of Mandelbrot's geometry, one is able to discern a careful pattern underlying the seeming randomness and chaos of the novel – a cross-referencing maze of deception. *Within the kiss* takes the shape of a piece of fractalian geometry: it reiterates itself on various layers; its margins break up and its organizational base splits into fragments; and its main themes divide into smaller self-similar motifs which in turn beget smaller parallels. Just as fractal geometry was formulated to describe the idiosyncrasies of the natural world in a way that was impossible in traditional geometry, so Randall's novel describes (in this case dire) nuances of human behaviour and self-construction in a way that she couldn't otherwise within the "K.I.S.S" ("keep it simple stupid") principles of conventional novel form she parodies.

The novel begins with a narrator called John Smith who is telling a story to his "callow" young lover – a tale ostensibly cobbled together from what he has read of the diary entries of his wife, but – to begin the theme of deception and referential smokescreens – it also contains a number of his own inventions, since he cannot possibly be party to many of the details: "it's up to me to imagine how the devil and his disciple might converse" (2002, p. 9). John's wife, a budding novelist named Faust, has traded the

soul of their daughter Helena (a talented young tennis player) in exchange for her tennis coach Mephistopheles' help in producing a bestselling novel. This novel – the novel we are presumably holding - is, to make things confusing, John's account of the novel being written (and re-written) by Faust and Mephisto during their meetings at the local tennis clubrooms.

During this process the prose is scripted and re-scripted, characters are edited in and out of the diegesis, storylines are altered, and Faust and Mephisto ignore their own narrative inconsistencies ("'Oh, leave it for the editor,'" Mephisto says after one blunder [p. 154]). On every level of the story there is some form of ruse or deception as character and narrators - whoever they may be - use the story to their own dishonest ends, "selling" or "advertising" their own version to forward their illicit and self-interested relationships. The "craving void" (p. 92) of lust is not only the essence of any Faustian character, it is the essence of all of the characters.

While the so-called "tennis novel" is drafted, Faust and Mephisto discuss the writing of Goethe and Byron, and Faust develops an infatuation for one of Mephisto's star players, a teenage boy called Luxman. Her lust for Luxman becomes the first reiteration of the novel's fractalian character: as John Smith tells his complicated tale to his young girlfriend (the as-yet-unnamed Candy), she begins to recognise "parallels" (p. 29) in his story, linking their relationship to that of the mature Faust and the tenderfooted Luxman. John discounts the observation as a coincidence, noting that while both couplings involve age disparities "where the desires and expectations of each partner are a completely novel challenge to the other", his own girlfriend is "perfectly legal", where Luxman is only 14 years old (p. 29). However, the parallel raises suspicions, and as will soon become clear, it

is to be the first of the narrative's thirteen echoes – the second iteration of a recurring pattern of misguided and illicit relationships. Not that the pattern is simply a literary motif. It is a shape which forces on the reader a metafictional awareness of human propensity for misrepresentation, a shape which Randall uses to analogise, as she does in *The Curative*, the relationship between selling a story and constructing a self. Where for Lonsdale "self" and "story" were matters of integrity, for the characters in *Within the Kiss* identity is more smokescreen than self-revelation, more a matter of fabricating a cover or justification for their extracurricular lusts.

The next fractalian iterations of the theme are generated as Faust and Mephisto work on their pact - Mephisto on taking Helena's soul and transforming her into his own personal tennis star, and Faust on transforming Mephisto's insights on bestsellers into her popular tennis novel. It becomes clear during their conversations that Mephisto's "yearning" (p. 136) after Faust's young daughter Helena is more than a requisitional wish for her tennis skills – his lust for her body seems to be a kind of Freudian replacement-desire for the physical deficit he attaches to his disabled and wheelchair-bound wife. And as Faust and Mephisto discuss the novel-in-progress, they draw inspiration from Goethe's version of the Faust story – in which his protagonist seduces the 14 year old Gretchen.

This fourth iteration of the illicit love-affair is made plain when Mephisto interrupts the narrative to make a plot recommendation, suggesting that, like Gretchen in Goethe's version, Faust's semi-autobiographical character could "have an illegitimate baby" to her lover which she kills by drowning (p. 42). The suggestion is written off as "medieval", but the link is made nevertheless, and Faust/Gretchen and Mephisto/Helena join the pattern of relationships already formed by the John/Candy and Faust/Luxman pairings. John is

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trying to sell his story to Candy to keep her amused, Faust is trying to sell her story to the public for fame, Mephisto is trying to sell his story to Faust in exchange for her daughter, and as we will later discover, Goethe has also sold his soul to Mephisto in exchange for his 19th century version of the tale.

Some minor recursions of the novel's shape occur in micro-level literary allusions. As a spin-off from John Smith's relationship with Candy Barr, on several occasions Smith likens himself to T.S. Eliot's "J. Alfred Prufrock" - "That sad bastard […] staggering up and down the beach with no one to understand him" (p. 42) - reiterating the theory that Eliot's (1917) poem was about a sexually frustrated middle-aged man musing on ways to seduce a woman, drooling over downy "white and bare" arms and perfumed dresses, and dreaming of mermaids "riding seaward" who refuse to sing to him.[23] But John is probably also hinting at a parallel in the Faustian influences in Byron's play *The Deformed Transformed* (1824) and the protagonist in Byron's 1817 dramatic poem "Manfred" which tells the Faustian story of a spell-casting hero and his beloved Astarte – a plot which is said to dramatise Byron's own incestuous affair with his half-sister Augusta Leigh.[24]

The eighth and ninth iterations – more central to the novel than the minor links to Prufrock and Manfred – derive from the narrator's appropriation of historical characters. Feeling that her novel is lacking literary depth, Faust decides to drop some "dead famous poets" into the story (2002, p. 65). She decides first on Byron, a figure who is in

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[23] An example of this reading of Eliot (1917) is in Perrine, Laurence. (1956) *Literature: Structure, Sound, And Sense* 1st Edition. Harcourt, Brace & World: 798

[24] For an example of biographical reading see Soderholm, J. (1993) "Byron, Nietzsche And The Mystery Of Forgetting." *Clio* 23.

Mephisto's estimation "the ultimate Faust": "He screwed other men's wives, his half-sister, an unknown number of boys, although probably not his peacocks, monkeys or dogs" (pp. 65-66). When Byron enters the story and begins interacting on the diegetic level with Faust and Mephisto the iteration becomes obvious: Byron recognises Luxman as "a David, a Loukas" (p. 68) – an incarnation of his Greek boy-servant Loukas Chaladritsanos, for whom he is said to have had an unrequited love – or lust (Gross, 2003, p. 146). When Goethe himself steps into the novel he is referred to as "the rampant womaniser" and reference is made to his suspicious relationships with the already-married Charlotte von Stein, and his unrequited passes at the – also married - Charlotte Buff (2002, p. 113).

The "tennis novel", though, is not progressing as it should. After Mephisto admonishes Faust for her inclusion of Byron, he decides to take more control of the story and tells Faust to "get the girl talking" (p72). Confusingly, it seems Faust and Mephisto are aware of their narrator John, and the "girl" - John Smith's lover and patient listener – whom they duly name Candy. At this point the narrative becomes murky – we realise John Smith is not the implied narrator after all – he too is ensconced in the diegesis, edited by - as well as editing - the actions of Faust and Mephisto:

> 'I think we should get rid of him,' Mephisto glowers. 'Edit him out.'
>
> 'We can't do that, he's the narrator,' Faust protests.
>
> 'Well, I don't find him attractive.'
>
> 'Neither do I. And he's meant to be my husband.'

By the time Faust and Mephisto have finished their discussion about expunging John from the story there is no apparent narrator, nobody who appears to have the authorial

right of veto. And as the remainder of the story unfolds, this mystery becomes the central question of the narrative. As one confused reviewer writing for Victoria University's *Turbine* puts it: "Just who is writing the book?" (Prebble, 2002). Not only has Randall removed any plausibility from the characters and plot, she has completely undermined any implication of a storytelling perspective. In narratological terms the reader cannot be certain whether the narrator is homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, or whether the narration occurs as subsequent, interpolated, prior, or simultaneous – at times it appears the narration is following events (especially when John appears to be narrating), at times it seems to be happening in between moments of action or predictively (when Faust and Mephisto are drafting events) with the overall effect that the narration is occurring contemporaneously with the action – editing and re-editing events as it goes.

6.3 Fractalian iterations

Just as the novel loses all of its opacity and threatens to unravel at the seams, a new plot element is introduced. John discovers that Faust has been attempting to seduce Luxman, so he leaves her and disappears, sparking a man-hunt and a concluding cast-party which brings the dramatis personæ together and rounds out some final fractalian iterations to the novel's themes of misguided lust and sexual corruption. John, Candy, Faust, Luxman, Goethe and Byron gather at the apartment John has been renting to

conduct his affair with Candy. John has orchestrated the meeting between Goethe and Byron to allow them to discuss literary politics and their common love of Venice, and as a reward he is given a hair from the body of the infamously debauched Lucrezia Borgia.

Joining the fractalian party of debauchers are Gordon (John's friend) and his illicit lover Teresa who we later find out is Countess Guiccioli, a nineteen year-old Venetian with whom (the older) Byron had a love-affair (Smith, 1931, pp. 1221-1227). During the party Teresa discovers that Byron has had an "off the page" (p. 217) fling with Luxman, which adds yet another layer to the recursive nature of the narrative so that the story has thirteen self-similar iterations in its relationships: John/Candy = Faust/Luxman = Mephisto/Helena = Goethe's Faust/Gretchen = Byron/Loukas = Goethe/Charlotte = Prufrock/Love interest = Byron/Countess Guicolli = Lucrezia Borgia/Pope Alexander VI = Manfred/Asarte = Byron/Augusta Leigh = Teresa/Gordon = Byron/Luxman.

The effect of the fractalian layering is that no relationship prevails – no character comes to the fore as a central protagonist, and even the main protagonists function as archetypal instances within a greater pattern. As Zoe Prebble complains in *Turbine*, "even Faust and Mephisto did not strike me as especially fleshed out. It was hard to form any strong feelings about creatures with such purely mechanical roles" (Prebble, 2002). It seems Randall's goal is not to foster emotional attachments to her fictional inventions or to perpetuate the illusionism of conventions, but to invite the reader - in the space created by the absence of a dominant character - to participate in the work in progress, to identify the patterns and thus keep the intricate threads of the narrative from unravelling. In this sense the main protagonist of the story is the story itself, and the reader must take an

active role in depatterning it – extracting information about the deceptive relationships and untangling whatever certainty may be had.

Within the Kiss ends when Byron and Goethe die, Luxman moves to Australia, and Faust and Mephisto run with their initial plan and edit John and Candy out of the book. However, since Faust's bestselling novel - the novel we are reading - is doomed to be a commercial failure, the pact between Faust and Mephisto is declared void and, freed from her contractual obligations, Faust returns home with her daughter. Here a final narrative frame is secured in place around the story when Faust reveals that her husband is "not called John Smith, not a lover of ignorant teenagers nor of poets" (p. 255) but a man with, as far as the reader can tell, some interest in botany. In the final line, her husband identifies three twigs that are caught in her hair as juniper – a comment which implicitly concludes the novel with a final reference to the Faustian legend - an obscure allusion to the German fairytale "The Juniper Tree" which is referenced in Goethe's Faust. When Gretchen, who is imprisoned in a dungeon suffering from an "illusory" guilt over her dead child sings a section of the fairytale she identifies herself with her murdered child, who has been killed by her "harlot" mother.[25] For Randall's Faust the reference situates her alongside Goethe's Gretchen: her guilt is also illusory since in the end she has not

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[25] The version that Margaret/Gretchen sings is:

My mother, the harlot,
She took me and slew!
My father, the scoundrel,   *4225*
Hath eaten me too!
My sweet little sister
Hath all my bones laid,
Where soft breezes whisper
All in the cool shade!   *4230*
Then became I a wood-bird, and sang on the spray,
Fly away! little bird, fly away! fly away! (Goethe, 1808 [2001])

sacrificed her child Helena. So, like Gretchen whose "bonds of wretchedness and woe" (Goethe, trans. Swanwick, 2001) are loosed by voices from the heavens, the final act of *Within the Kiss* implies the end of an imprisonment for its narrator. Just as in *The Curative* Lonsdale's shackles are broken by the transmission of narrative to Wakefield, Faust's metaphorical "prison" of narrative, her bedevilled state of affairs, comes to an unequivocal end with the completion of her book. In both cases, the narrators come to be fully and explicitly anthropomorphized in their respective stories, and in both cases they are bound, and eventually freed, by the need to advance – or promote - their personal narratives. Like Lonsdale who must plead his case and try to persuade his captors of his account, the main goal of the characters in Within the Kiss is to persuade others of the value of their version of events - John Smith because he has lost "everything except his story" (p. 57) and Faust, Mephisto et al. to veil or dissimulate their desires for an illicit relational power.

Perhaps the metaphorical release from a narrative "prison" in final pages of *Within the Kiss* implies the reader and writer themselves. Is narrative a mask for an imbalance in the relationship between author and reader? Naturally the reader is bound to some extent by their - albeit subjective - response to what the author has placed on the page, but are stories also binding for the author? When I raised this question with Randall, she responded with a statement of her own authorial perspective which adds an autobiographical element to the motif in her writing:

> You'd think that fiction would be the one form that would allow an author to write anything they pleased, but this isn't true - there has to be a satisfactory character, a satisfactory story, in short there are rules [...] So, the very thing that you thought

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might be freeing (making things up!) turns out to be quite the opposite. Eventually the author comes to despise storytelling as a kind of prison, yet retains the naïve belief that there is still something in fiction writing that has to do with authenticity and the discovery or understanding of the self; and perhaps other selves by extension.

Perhaps Randall's statement sums up the tension between rules/bounds and imagination/freedom at work in her metafictions – tensions which break open the conventional roles of author/reader/story/character. Certainly, the exigent and fractalised structures of Randall's novels (similar processes are at work in the reverse chronology of *What Happen Then Mr Bones?* (2004) and the deductive narrative-construction of *The Crocus Hour* (2008) as well as two of Randall's unfinished manuscripts) reflect the processes that writers and readers use to generate the meaning and experience of the narrative. If it is not the novel itself which becomes the main character, then the conventional characters become authorial implements and reflections – instances of prosopopoeia – and the reader becomes a protagonist, confronting the same questions about the construction of the narrative as the figures installed in the story. In sum, Randall's metafictional novels extend storytelling beyond reflexive enactments of creation into a kind of anthropomorphisation of fictive evolution: opening elements of plot and characterisation into patterns which represent the way the mind constructs and reconstructs a self.

CHAPTER VIII: Findings and discussion

Money's not the passport here [...] Not like the old country. Ability – that's what counts here. You might say we've wiped the slate clean. There's a chance for everyone.

Michael Jackson, *Rainshadow*.

Comparing our metafictional writers with American/international equivalents such as John Barth, who uses metafiction to send up social role-playing, or Vladimir Nabokov to satirise American materialism, or Kurt Vonnegut, the absurdities of society at war, or others like Borges and Sukenick who take a more general philosophical approach – our metafictional writers can look remarkably inward, self-referential and at times self-deprecating. Throughout all of the metafictional work in this study, what seems to be most striking is the characteristic focus on mental processes, psychological interiority and the almost solipsistic modes of self-examination.

As the previous chapters have shown, Janet Frame's inward psychological realism reflects a quirky absurdist sense of humour that revolves around language-use; C.K. Stead's tendency towards an inward aesthetic stems from his Modernist individualism; Russell Haley's self-examining and self-conscious characters derive from a sense of personal epistemic uncertainty; Jackson's anthropological fictions invariably contain a large degree of reflexive subjectivism; Albert Wendt's work finds highly individualised solutions to the problems of colonial culture; and Charlotte Randall's interest in psychological depth is perhaps explainable in terms of narrative-psychology and mental patterning. These examples will be mentioned again shortly, but for now I want to

outline the main thread of discussion in this chapter: that since the end of the provincial period, it seems that New Zealand has developed a strong tradition of fiction which can be viewed as largely apolitical - at times asocial - and certainly more focussed on matters of individual mind than on the collective. Allowing that the individual chapters on each author have illustrated examples of reflexive "inwardness" in some depth, the obvious contextual question is: if so, why?

Aside from the previously outlined socio-political changes in the latter half of the century, there may be further explanation in the typically difficult-to-define social strata from which New Zealand literature was being written up until the 1980s. It is often said that New Zealand society prior to the transformative period of 1970s and 1980s is characterized by its homogenous social patterns and its unusual degree of economic equality among citizens. As Fergus Barrowman writes in his introduction to *The Picador Book of Contemporary New Zealand Fiction*: "The New Zealand of the post-provincial period was complacent and self-satisfied. We had the third highest standard of living in the world. We were a classless society" (1996, p. 7). For Barrowman this classlessness created what he calls the "paradox" of the provincial period, or "the mutual dependency of confidence in the nation and the oppositional stance to society" (p. 7). The provincial writers characteristically rallied against a Pākehā society which was politically conservative and puritan in its moral codes, while at the same time showing a hidden confidence that the nation could overcome such problems through imaginative reinvention. In other words, conservative homogeneity was the biggest fault they could find with what was classified post-war a socialist democracy, a country which from 1945 until at least the late

1960s was, in the words of political economists Chris Rudd and Brian Roper "characterized by economic prosperity and by social integration and political stability".[26]

Indeed, it seems that many of our writers have felt the country's social homogeneity (up until, and beyond, the middle of the 20th century) was somewhat stifling – even boring. To take a few examples, Stead has described a feeling of "isolation" up until the late 1950s in New Zealand which he thought derived from the "uniformity of its society, its dependence on Europe and America, and a certain sourness that underlies its achievements" (1981a, p. 246); Janet Frame has spoken of feeling a tedious sense of "nowhereness and nothingness" as she wrote her first poetry in the 1950s, that caused her to retreat into "an inward state" (1989, p. 215); Frank Sargeson attributed some of his difficulties as a writer in the 1940s to what he calls "a thinness in the material of New Zealand life" (1945, p. 7); and writer Jean Devanny, who emigrated to Australia in 1929, thought New Zealand was so homogenous that she would have no outlet for her socialist convictions and said she "had to leave there".[27]

For some writers New Zealand's egalitarian state (up until and around the middle of the century) was such a bad fit for the forms of social realism they were accustomed to reading and writing that the only options seemed to be to leave and write from elsewhere. Devanny and Rewi Alley are clear examples, Fleur Adcock and Kirsty Gunn may be too, and of course Mansfield, who much earlier wrote that in New Zealand there is "no scope for development, no intellectual society, no hope of finding any" (in Perez, 2011, p. 129) - a sentiment echoed in Wystan Curnow's reference to the "thinness and recentness" of

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[26] Before 1984, both of NZ's main political parties pursued Keynesian economic policies (Rudd & Roper, 1997).

[27] As cited in Reid (1979, p.68).

New Zealand's high culture up to the 1970s (Curnow, 1973, p.159).[28]   But for those who stayed, the options seemed to be battle on with traditional forms of social realism as Sargeson did, or to turn realism inward in the case of Frame, Stead, Maurice Duggan, and, as this thesis suggests, a tradition of writers whose reflexive modes followed on into the latter part of the century: Russell Haley, Keri Hulme, Albert Wendt, Michael Jackson, Anne Kennedy and Ian Wedde, as well as younger writers like Charlotte Randall and Jack Ross.

As political scientist Robert Chapman argued, picking up on social homogeneity in New Zealand fiction up until 1951: "One of the main difficulties, for example, which confines the approaches possible to those who write and set their fiction in New Zealand is the absence here of widely recognised psychological stereotypes.   The squire, the parson, the cultured aristocrat, the Birmingham businessman, the clerk with the white collar and the umbrella, the spiv or Cockney, just have not got established local equivalents" (1951, [1973], p. 75).   Stereotypes, in Chapman's view, are a necessary part of a literature - "the highest common factor of general observation in a stable pattern" - and a useful tool in a writer's kit, enabling them to sketch in minor characters quickly and efficiently:

> Where the [social] pattern has not been stable for long enough nor has been
> sufficiently stratified and geographically various to provide a variety of stereotypes,
> the consequences for the serious writer is that he cannot touch in any of his

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[28] See William Direen's 'Expatriation and New Zealand Writing'. (First published in NZ Listener, 1996) http://titus.books.online.fr/The%20Ex/Expatriation.html   The same could possibly apply to Edith Lyttelton and Robin Hyde - writers who "were forced to go abroad themselves to seek recognition" as Elizabeth Caffin says in 'Writer to Reader: The Publisher's Role' in Williams, M., Ed. (2004). *Writing at the Edge of the Universe*. Christchurch, Canterbury University Press: 239

characters lightly or make them begin to live by showing one or two exactly
observed departures from the expected norm. Each character must be
handwrought […] each author is driven to be his own sociologist, patiently
observing the unrecognised majority pattern as well as the minor variations of
which there will be all too few. (1951, [1973], p. 75)

Sociological research that emerged twenty years later supported Chapman's view that the
New Zealand social pattern was somewhat indistinguishable when compared with other
developed countries. In the same year, the conclusion sociologist John Collette came to
when looking at New Zealand class differences was that there were no obvious differences
between social strata that could be seen in comparable nations (Collette, 1973). And Ian
Reid reached a similar conclusion a few years later, noticing that census data of the 1930s
indicated an unusual uniformity in income statistics: "In New Zealand only one-fifth of
all bread winners are in the two lowest income groups (compared with one-third of
Australians) […] it follows that Australia's very considerable conglomeration at the lowest
earning levels indicates a potentially stronger class consciousness than in New Zealand,
where the main income bracket is nearer the middle of the scale" (1979, p. 28).

Whether their observations were correct or not, there seems to have been a belief
among many Pākehā New Zealanders - possibly stemming from the "Brighter Britain of
the South" immigration rhetoric - that New Zealand was a place that valued and upheld
social, or at least economic, equality. As column-writer and editor Leo Fanning wrote in
1940s: "New Zealand has been properly called a 'Land of Opportunity'. The people have
the opportunity for health, the opportunity for good education, the opportunity for
material prosperity, the opportunity for happiness. The way to welfare is not narrow;

admission is not reserved to a favoured few; it is a broad highway as wide as the islands—but the seekers of worth-while welfare must do worth-while work" (Fanning, 1940, p. 29). Whether or not this was a fair representation of reality, it was probably a fair picture of the way much of white New Zealand saw itself: as God's Own, the ideal nation-state. Perceived thus, the "thinness of material" in New Zealand's social strata probably meant stereotypes and tropes of social grouping would have rung false in attempts at realist fiction which drew on models based in the hierarchical arrangement of British society.

Certainly a great number of our writers have bypassed explorations of the social echelon and compensated with special attention to the inner workings of character, and of individual psychology. If they seem to have felt there was little in society to work with, it makes sense they saw fit to turn "in here" (to borrow Russell Haley's terms) or to choose between "this" internal world and "that" external world - in Frame's terms (1980, p. 27) or to acknowledge the world of words is not merely a simulacrum of the world "out there" (as William's sums up Duggan [1984]) As Subramani has pointed out, even Wendt's culturally critical works speak of a tendency toward inwardness in "that intellectual solitude so peculiar to the disinherited souls" in New Zealand (Subramani, 1985, p. 120).

Perhaps then, those who elected not to pursue the path of inward exploration - Langford and Morrissey for example – would have found that New Zealand's slowly broadening strata had not yet taken root deep enough to unearth a broad range of typecasts that could easily populate social fiction and create the necessary tension to explore differences of class and social positioning. Lacking specifically New Zealand stereotypes, the solution Langford and Morrissey found of borrowing characters from popular culture was one way out of the predicament. They were able to write fiction with

accessible characters – internationally recognisable characters with a background that a New Zealand audience would know and understand without the need of any sociological characterisation or closely-observed psychological setup. The mode of faction, or RPF, then had obvious advantages – humour deriving from implausible juxtapositions and cultural conflicts, the ability to define the individual status of a character through a system of oppositions formed with other characters. (In "Jack Kerouac Sat Down by the Wanganui river and Wept" these are predominantly racial and geographic: Kerouac meets "a Māori" who, prone to unexplainable bouts of laughter, drives a "Falcon Ute" through Putaruru, the "end of the world" and travels with him to Wanganui, "the heart of a green nowhere" [1985, p. 125-28]). But the problem with Langford and Morrissey's use of the factional mode was its limiting modishness and its obvious reliance on foreign-instituted models of character. The joke of seeing an international icon in a local setting could only be played out so many times before begging an obvious question: why can't New Zealanders read about New Zealanders?

It might pay to reiterate the comments on New Zealand's perceived cultural and literary inwardness already discussed elsewhere in this thesis before moving on to discuss context in broader terms. As already mentioned, Reid claimed that the country's geographical and cultural "smallness" meant that New Zealand writers in the great depression did not utilise the same broad historical and social forms as Australian writers, instead preferring to "keep close to personal experience" (1979, p. 127); Phillip O'Neill described New Zealand culture as tending to "look inward" (1993, p.6); Judith Wright, Australian poet, described New Zealand writing as "on the whole inward-looking, sometimes even self-pitying" (1977, p. 137); Michael Harlow explained the excessive

reflexivity of New Zealand poetry by saying he suspects that "the 'embarrassing' over-presence of the poet in the poem" indicates "too intellectual an approach to experience" (Harlow, 1977, p. 113); Gordon McLauchlan argued that the homogeneity of New Zealand culture would precipitate "the collapsing inwards of our society" (1976, p. 212); and Michael King attributed what he sees as "New Zealanders [turning] in on themselves" to the effects of World War II (2003, p. 413).

Much has already been made of New Zealand's long struggle in coming to terms with landscape and place, but it seems worth venturing a brief quote here in relation to the lack of broad social characterization. As Miles Fairburn has pointed out, film critic Gordon Miram remarked in 1945 that while New Zealanders were able to define their country in expressions of its physical contours, they had not managed to convey the nature of their society and its relationships. The basis of Miram's statement was in turn a remark made by then well-known British documentary-maker, John Grierson, on the National Film Unit's local documentaries. Grierson, visiting in 1940, had remarked that "Over in England we seem to see and hear a lot about New Zealand but never anything about the human beings who live in it. I knew about your mountains and glaciers, your tree ferns and your sheep country […] but no-body had shown me so I could remember it the face of a New Zealander" (Fairburn, 2006, p. 150). While the absence of human inhabitants may derive from an inherited tradition of marketing New Zealand as a land of opportunity, as an untapped, or "unmanned" landscape, it might be equally true that the documentary-makers failed to characterize the New Zealander because they felt there was none – because they felt there was no distinct New Zealand society worth portraying.

By 1976 Cherry Hankin had linked this preoccupation with landscape and environment to that of psychological realism in an editorial introduction to a collection of essays on New Zealand fiction:

> The constant struggle of the writer to come to terms with his society has caused social realism to figure prominently in this tradition; but the concomitant struggle of the individual to come to terms with himself has given rise, especially in the second half of the this century, to some compelling psychological realism. Dominating the themes of all the novels, however, and influencing their technique, has been the writer's intellectual and emotional response to his physical environment (1976, p. 8).

Similar to comments already discussed in this thesis by Chapman, Reid, O'Neill, Wright, Miram, Fairburn, McLauchlan and King, what struck Hankin about the New Zealand novel was a lack of a broad social orientation. After pointing out that the novelists' reference point generally derives from a conception of the individual within the larger structure of society, Hankin notes the slow growth of cities and larger towns in New Zealand and adds that it is thus rare for novelists to have achieved "more than the mere imaginative construction of events; able, in effect, to succeed in an act of definition both personal and national" (p. 8). Up until about 1975, Hankin writes, "The problems facing the heroes and heroines of these New Zealand novels (and of their counterparts in most twentieth century fiction), is that they are at odds with their inner as well as their outer environment […] the character's search is resolved by his moving from the physical locality where his conflicts have been acted out to a different place where he can make a fresh beginning" (p. 14). Indeed, where the fallacy of the "geographical cure" is explored

in the stories of this study, it invariably leads to a form of inwardness. Janet Frame's narrators (Mavis Halleton, Mattina Brecon) attempt to overcome their writer's block by moving from location to location, and they invariably end up as "solitary worker bees" (1979, p. 134) caught up in self-regarding fantasies. When the protagonist of C.K. Stead's *Death of the Body* flees the country to escape the accusations of militant feminists, he winds up scrawling introspective notes in a hotel room in Milan. And when Michael Jackson's struggling writer finds himself attempting to get inspiration from his surroundings in France, the most fitting metaphor he can relate to his position is that of a lonely, mumbling beggar. All in all, characters that remove themselves from sites of conflict invariably end up withdrawing further and further inward to a state of solitary individualism.

Other examples of perceived inwardness and explanations for the state have surrounded the early stages of post-colonialism. To take two examples from critics outside of the country that make this link, Englishman David Fickling, writing for *The Independent* spoke of Frame's language as having a "sense of marvelling at itself, and mocking itself [which] represents, I think, a scepticism native to post-colonial societies, where national identity is insecure and the social imprint faint" (2004); and contrasting the postcolonial attitudes of fiction writers in Canada and New Zealand, William New noted that "Canadian writers have claimed history by reshaping space, and New Zealand writers have named their separateness by reshaping memory" (1987, p. 239-40). Perhaps New Zealand writers have done both - it would be problematic to conflate what are probably two very different colonial experiences - but if there was less to protest in terms of economic inequalities then it seems to make sense that the lack of definable society in

New Zealand up until around the 1980s - and the expectations of behaviour this engendered - meant writers felt they had to turn to themselves for material, to the mind of each individual.

In terms of the country's fiction, this inward-looking aspect has, unsurprisingly perhaps, been most discussed in relation to Frame's work. In Lawrence Jones' terms, Frame "experiments with metafictionality, less from narrative playfulness than as an exploration of the nature and psychological functions of fictions" (1988, p. 231). Cherry Hankin points out that Frame's characters inner "mental realm" hold the key to their identity, as do "the words which reflect that inner life" (1976, p. 89). Stead describes *Living in the Maniototo* as a "coherent single work, because in all its parts and through all its registers there is consistently the quality of Frame's mind, a rare and beautiful intelligence" (1981a, p. 132). And Heather Roberts comments that Frame's characters invariably have access to an "inner world" (1989, p. 131). Indeed, as the chapter on Frame has attempted to show, her fiction deals with issues of social homogeneity through characters and narrators with exceptionally strong inner voices: Frame's parodic metafictions achieve their humour by contrasting the homogeneity and derivativeness of society en masse with focussed discussions of individual perception.

But these descriptions of Frame are fairly symptomatic of descriptions of our writing as a whole – at least for those writers of metafiction. To take a few examples from the writers in this thesis: Michael Morrissey has noted that Keri Hulme's metafictional story "Kiteflying Party" has a "disturbing intensity that emanates from concentrating on interiority" (1985, p. 67); Lawrence Jones has talked of the "psychological subtlety" of Stead's fiction (1990, p. 291); Patrick Evans has called the voices of women writing in

New Zealand "voices from the interior" (1968, p. 421); David Eggleton has argued that Michael Jackson's work chronicles "the growth of the New Zealand mind" (1994); Paul Sharrad finds themes of guilt and betrayal in the "psychological framework" of "self-exposure/confession" in Wendt's later work (2003a, p. 190); and E.W. Braithwaite believed that Russell Haley should "get out of his head and communicate more of a common world" (1979, p. 239). To sum it up in the words of one of Charlotte Randall's characters: "I don't have the luxury of going out of my mind; I can only go into it" (2000, p. 11).

Certainly if we contrast this inwardly reflective and self-directed characterisation of our metafictional literature with the ideological and politically grounded metafiction in other national literatures, New Zealand sounds well out of fit. To give a few examples of this politically-driven reflexivity from elsewhere: Dominican-American novelist Julia Alvarez's metafictions are said to pit themselves "against the patriarchal social construct of Dominican society throughout its history" (Brown, 1999, p. 98); Canadian Joy Kogawa's metafictional work "self-consciously reinterprets history from an ex-centric, minority position" (Goellnicht, 1989, p. 290); African-American Ralph Ellison's metafictions convey "an historically specific and materially burdensome reality of social marginalization [...] of racial exclusion and otherness" (Dubey, 2002, p. 152); English novelist Margaret Drabble's metafictions expose "the dominant patriarchal ideology and system of gender relations encoded in bourgeois marriage" (Bromberg, 1990, p. 25) and Spanish metafictionalist Carmen Martin Gaite's goal is to "re-establish true communication by overturning the omnipresent and powerful norms" of the Franco dictatorship (Sieburth, 1990, p. 85).

If the political and economic fabric of New Zealand society was perceived to be unusually egalitarian by international standards, and if the majority of voices in New Zealand literature came from a Pākehā (and later Māori and Pacific) middle-class, it makes some sense that authors in the country who have employed metafictional modes appear to use them to resist homogeneity through self-reflection. Certainly a common thread uniting the writers in this thesis is a desire to reinstate or to re-explore the notion of personal authority and authorship – Frame to point out the absurdities of literary creation, Stead to explore the notion of provenance, Haley to detail uncertainties about selfhood, Randall to anthropomorphisise the act of storytelling, and Wendt to explore individuation and conformity (as Paul Sharrad notes, *Black Rainbow* is a rebellion against "the dreary provincial average" and a continuation of a tradition in New Zealand fiction of individualist, and possibly "eccentric, anti-social" resistance to "materialist suburban standardisation" [2003a, p.212]). The exception to this rule might be Jackson, but his reflexivity is largely due to its autobiographical detailing – he uses the metafictional posture to tease out the difficulties and paradoxes inherent in ethnographical authorship, rather than to simply undermine it. Perhaps, then, New Zealand writers have attempted what John Barth pointed to when he said he did not assume authorship, but rather "imitates the role of the Author" (1997, p. 72). For Frame, as we have seen, this meant becoming what her narrator terms an "imposter novelist"; for Stead, the job of authorship means playing the slave to "Story"; and Haley provides several metaphors for his acquired role as a self-conscious storyteller: he describes himself as a trapeze artist and audience, a mirror and mime artist; for Wendt the role of narrator is like that of a shaman; and for Randall the storyteller is trapped in a prison of narrative.

Sure enough, one credible objection to the idea that New Zealand fiction (metafictional or otherwise) has been heavily tended towards the inward and self-reflexive rather than the social would be the point that many of our writers were writing "social realism" in the middle of the 20th century – and that the works of John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson, John Mulgan, Robin Hyde, Ian Cross, and others were at least implicitly directed at an appraisal of New Zealand society. Indeed one could even go further and point out that there are concomitant traditions of Gothic and dystopian social writing to which even writers in this thesis have contributed: Stead's *Smith's Dream*, Haley's *The Settlement*, and Wendt's *Black Rainbow* could all be classified as dystopian - if not Gothic dystopian - social critiques. This is, of course, true - but what these examples might suggest is that the tradition of social critique, especially from the period of cultural nationalism in the 1940s through to the metafictional turn in the 1970s and beyond, is not often sourced in either class differences or, to use Barrowman's term again, an oppositional stance to society. What the tradition is perhaps sourced in is an opposition to its own perceived social homogeneity. The ubiquitous notion that New Zealand was a land of equal opportunity (well summed up in the epigraph from Michael Jackson's *Rainshadow*) arguably precluded much in the way of class critique in our fiction, which in turn seemed to rule-out the use of stereotypes and sub-cultural groupings, and meant that any social critique would be set against a homogenous national consciousness – against attitudes of puritan thinking and conservatism and "the blankness of isolated small-town life" as William Schafer describes Ian Cross's *The God Boy* (1998, p. 119).

In fact, perhaps this would help to explain the particular slant of the Gothic and dystopian traditions in the country. In a fictional dystopia, there are generally no social

groupings besides those set by the state, or at least the social groupings are subdivisions

of government control - such as we see in the arranged "settlement" in Haley's novel, in

the "special police" in Stead's *Smith's Dream,* or in the "tribunal" in Wendt's *Black*

Rainbow. For example, David Eggleton and Paul Sharad have placed *Black Rainbow* in

a tradition of "dystopian fantasy fiction" that makes a break with the country's "generally

muted tones of literary dissent" (Sharrad, 2003a, p. 212) referring also to Rachel

McAlpine's *The Limits of Green* (1986), John Cranna's *Arena* (1992), Rosie Scott's *Feral*

City (1992) (Eggleton, 1992, p.5). To these examples could be added a growing

tradition of dystopian fiction for young adults in novels such as Sherryl Jordan's *Winter*

of Fire (1993), Fleur Beale's *Juno of Taris* (2008), Mandy Hagar's series *The Crossing*

(2008) and Jane Higgins' *The Bridge* (2010). Certainly in the works of adult fiction, the

individual struggles of the protagonists derive not from their being pitted against other

individuals or social groupings – but against a homogenous mass. Wendt's solitary

protagonist fights against "reordinarisation", Haley's against the repression of some kind

of totalitarian state, and Stead's for the right to be free from either fascism or its

resistance. And perhaps the same concern with social homogeneity rings true for the

Gothic tradition. The Australian author and Nobel-Prize winner, Patrick White, used

to call what he saw as particularly Gothic murders "New Zealandy", referring to the

dark internality "under the simple, uncomplicated New Zealand surface".[29] And Ian

Wedde has conflated the gothic genre in New Zealand with the country's

unsophisticated social and political place in the international cultural hierarchy, calling

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[29] I borrow this point from Mark Williams: Williams, M. (2008). *A Waka on the Wild Side. Contempoary New Zealand Cinema*. London, I.B Taurus: 189

it "the tremulous sniggers of uneasy provincials in the haunted houses of cultural subalternism" (2006, p. 151).

The critique of the unsophisticated and homogeneous might also be broadened to account for an aspect of social realism in other writers from the provincial period onward, in that it represents something of a continuance of the "Man Alone" topos in New Zealand fiction – the often-mentioned tradition of man pitted against nature and society - the "legend of pioneering manhood […] of courage and physical toughness" as Jock Phillips describes it (1987, p. 3). As others have pointed out, prior to the 1950s, the man alone was often a pioneering "bush-whacker" or "sheepman" struggling with his environment, but from about the 1960s, the environment in which the men – and now women - alone found themselves changed from the rural to the metropolitan. However, the essential characteristic of the self-sufficient, often solitary and stoic hero who dares to live outside the bounds of conventional society could be seen to remain – with some self-awareness. In Hyde's work - *The Godwits Fly* (1970) and *A Home in this World* (1984) - the solitary topos becomes the story of the artist pitted against an unreceptive culture. In Frame's early work the theme finds voice in the mentally ill wrestling closed-minded institutionalism. Stead has some fun with the formula in "A Fitting Tribute", as does Haley parodying the man and dog trope in *Tomorrow Tastes Better* (2001). But as is the case even with various parodies of the man alone, these stories rely on the convention as much as they subvert it: to borrow one of Linda Hutcheon's terms, parody is an impulse reliant on replication, on "repetition with critical distance" (1991, p. 6). In Wendt, the solitary rebel characters have, it seems, their roots in existentialism: as Keown and others have noted, Wendt was "influenced by the existentialist writings of Albert Camus, a

figure whom he has identified as a major influence on his early writing in particular" (Keown, 2005, p.18). Even Michael Jackson's protagonists, while arguing that there is little sense in looking at the individual outside of broader social realities, give a perpetual sense of being outside both the indigenous societies they are studying, and the academic world to which they report. In each of these cases, an aloneness and internality results from a marked desire or necessity to stand outside of a single homogenous grouping.

One minor point remains to be made on how this argument might fit into the broader rubric of New Zealand culture. It is probably fair to say that a degree of inwardness, reticence, and even self-abnegation came to form a part of New Zealanders' descriptions of their national character by the middle of the century. As Michael King has pointed out, many New Zealanders found foreigners had an irritating lack of social restraint:

> To some extent, what New Zealanders admired could be deduced from what they disliked. Writing in 1951, the civil servant Reuel Lochore had attempted to define what it was about Continental immigrants that made Anglo-Saxon New Zealanders recoil. 'They lack discretion and tact. They revel in displays of emotionalism and self-pity, and fail to realise how we despise such lack of self-control. On social occasions…they talk loudly and untiringly about their own affairs. Being bad listeners they cannot take a hint, not sense an attitude from what we have left unsaid.' (2003, p. 510)

If one contrasts the extroverted European or American with the self-consciously reluctant New Zealand "hero" (say Edmund Hillary, Janet Frame, Colin McCahon, Richie McCaw) one ends up with a more introspective and laconic individual – the typically

humble and sometimes dour and self-deprecating sensibility that led Roger Robinson in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* to talk of "the deadpan self-deprecation which characterises much New Zealand humour" (1998) or Craig Harrison in "How To Be a Pom" to sarcastically joke that all of New Zealand fiction is censored by one "General Literary Universal Misery Subcommittee" - acronym: GLUMS; or more recently a writer in the *Sunday Star Times* to say New Zealanders "mumble like Dan Carter, and use the adjective 'big-mouthed' to describe all our closest cousins, those braying, obnoxious Aussies, or Brits, or Yanks" (Hume, 2009, January 1).

Of course the rule cannot possibly apply across all of the country's literature, and nor does it mean New Zealand's "culture" – in this case, reflexive fiction - was necessarily unique in its asocial inwardness. The element of inwardness is possibly as much a product of the collective imagination, a kind of self-fulfilling tendency based on notions of distance and isolation, as it is an effect of place and culture. But what I hope has come out of this discussion is that while the 20th century renaissance of metafiction in America and Europe probably had a large part to play in New Zealand's appropriation of the mode, the ground here was already fertile for its growth: however it came about, a degree of the inward-looking, apolitical, reflexive, self-regarding character was already a feature of what could be broadly described as terms of New Zealanders self-description, and others – especially those outside of the country – have recognised it.

What's more, this characteristic seems to have persisted, even strengthened in our fiction as New Zealand went through cultural upheavals in the latter part of the century brought on by not only post-modernism, but its attendant late 20th century movements: internationalism, feminism, neo-liberalism, and post-colonialism. What is certain is that

fiction writers in New Zealand have not used the metafictional mode so much to oppose realism as to expand and augment it – to reveal the mechanics of their characters' thoughts and doubts – to describe and perform the problems of authorial decision-making. It is likely, then, that in disrupting the mimetic and diegetic levels of narrative these authors have managed to get closer to the individual realities of a period in New Zealand's socio-cultural history which has been arguably more self-reflexive, more inward-looking than ever before.

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APPENDIX A: Statement of contribution to doctoral thesis containing publications

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate: Matt Harris

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Dr. Mary Paul

Name of Published Paper: Harris, M. "Charlotte Randall". *The Literary Encyclopedia.* Published 12 September 2008.

In which Chapter is the Published Work: Chapter VII

What percentage of the Published Work was contributed by the candidate: 100%

_____   _____
Candidate's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Principal Supervisor's signature   Date

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate: ....Matt Harris...

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: ....Dr. Mary Paul...

Name of Published Paper: ....Harris, M. "At home in the world"...............................

....*Landfall* 217: flung – the 'ex-pat' issue. 2009.......................

In which Chapter is the Published Work: ....Chapter. V...

What percentage of the Published Work was contributed by the candidate: ....100%.........

_____   _____

Candidate's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Principal Supervisor's signature   Date

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APPENDIX B: Low risk notification for interviews

The primary ethical issue present in this project concerns attaining consent from participants in this interview process, so it was decided that a number of regulations should apply to the interview process. Namely, that no participant will be interviewed or identified as an interviewee without consent, and that interviews would be conducted via email, with these digital documents serving as records of consent. To ensure fair representation was given of the various views and statements by participating authors, it was decided that the finished dissertation would include, as an addendum full transcripts of all interviews. Editing of the interviews has been kept to minor matters of grammar and mechanics.

Massey University

21 February 2008

Mr Matthew Harris
School of Social and Cultural Studies
ALBANY

Dear Matt

Re: Metafiction in New Zealand Literature

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 14 February 2008.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia V Rumball (Professor)
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics)

cc   Dr Mary Paul   Dr Jack Ross
      School of Social and Cultural Studies   School of Social and Cultural Studies
      Albany   Albany

      Assoc Prof Peter Lineham, HoS
      School of Social and Cultural Studies
      Albany

APPENDIX C: Interview with C.K. Stead

(November 29, 2008)

MH: *Firstly, do you see your novels (such as* The Death of the Body*) as fitting into the mode broadly described as 'metafictional' or 'self-reflexive'?*

CKS: Yes, in varying degrees, though this is not something that has greatly concerned me or been a motivating element.

MH: *If so, how would you distinguish your use of the metafictional mode from the 'realist' modes so often discussed as the staple of the literary tradition in New Zealand?*

CKS: I think my notion of realism may be peculiar to myself, and I'm uncertain what it means to you. I think of myself as a realist in fiction. I don't see that as being at odds with metafiction. When I began writing I had in mind something I thought of as 'conventional fiction' (characterised by the work of my contemporary Maurice Shadbolt, and also perhaps Gee) which I wanted to avoid. I thought of it as a mode one could easily slide in to - a kind of cruise mode written by, and for, habitual readers of the same conventional stuff. A self-consciousness about the process was necessary to avoid this. I used to worry a lot about 'provenance' - what was the (fictional) source of the 'knowledge' the story contained, whose was the 'voice', etc - and I paid a lot of attention to the work of Alberto Moravia. Some of the outcomes (mine, i.e.) are, I suppose, though without the support of any specific theory, correctly described as 'metafiction'. To consider this development in my case you would have to look at my short stories as well as the novels. They were very important work-outs. Also if you look at what I write about Maurice Duggan you will see (slightly concealed but clear enough to the careful reader) that I am

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impatient with a lot of his later work, but see 'Along Rideout Road that Summer' and 'Riley's Handbook' as his late breakouts from conventional fiction - by far his best work - after which he crept back into the cage. One other point: people like Lawrence Jones tend to conflate a writer like Sargeson with one like Shadbolt under the heading 'realism' - whereas to me they were quite distinct types. Shadbolt was the writer of conventional middle class marketable fiction; Sargeson was the self-conscious literary artist.

MH: *Yes, 'A Quality of Life' seems a precursor in some ways to* A Secret History of Modernism, *housed as it is in the backyard studio?*

CKS: Yes. And isn't there a similar crux about a pregnancy (to the wrong person) in them? 'A Quality of Life' was close to autobiography, but 'concealed' (but not very well) by the mechanics of Nova and the old grandfather famous-author narrator, written when I was young, unknown and had no children.

MH: *As I understand it, you intimated that Duggan's work (and the stock of New Zealand fiction) was at its best when it progressed beyond documentary and moralizing, as well as the overuse of rhetoric and an excessive preoccupation with the perspective of the 'child'. Is that a fair summary?*

CKS: Probably, yes.

MH: *You have spoken of discarding realism to get closer to reality. Is there any specific way you envisaged your metafictional works as developing realism, as opposed to discarding it altogether?*

CKS: When I've said this I suppose I've meant realism as a set of literary conventions that tend to become more literary the more they imitate themselves and what has gone before. To get a sense of the 'real' one must shake off the merely conventional. This is

the Wordsworth principle. He wanted to be rid of 'the family language of poets'. I wanted to be rid of 'the family language of novelists'.

MH: *In that context, Wordsworth gave an example or two of stylistic conventions that he thought were trite, such as 'personifications of abstract ideas'. Can you pinpoint any popular fictional devices in you've felt the need to do away with?*

CKS: Well, do you know the often referred to 'Pass me the butter' opening to a chapter in *All Visitors Ashore*? The way all that is spelled out is very clear. Chapter five.

MH: On the topic of breaking with conventional 'realism', it could be said that your novels illustrate how unrealistic it is to exclude the authorial presence from the story. Do you feel that including a writerly presence in the diegesis can sometimes create a greater impression of reality?

CKS: I suppose so. It's something I fall into easily, I suppose, because that's what I am - and that helps it to sound 'natural', authentic.

MH: *Writers such as Lawrence Jones and Michael Morrissey have claimed that post-modern fiction here is (or was in the 1980's), to use Morrissey's words, something of a 'neglected phenomenon', and that its neglect is due to the dominance of the realist tradition here. Do you agree?*

CKS: I'm not much interested in the kind of literary schools paranoia (Loney is an example in poetry) that argues it is the 'fast track', or the 'front of the wave', and only ignored because it is avant garde -- meaning that in time everyone else will catch up. But in fiction there is always the commercial imperative. Unconventional or innovative things sometimes get overlooked because they are not saleable - and this becomes more acute in

a society the size of ours, where the market is small and consequently the minority market is unsustainable.

MH: *Ironically, most of the writers I'm looking at as being the avante garde here (yourself, Frame, Michael Jackson, Duggan) weren't included in Morrissey's anthology. Is there any context you're aware of that might explain the omissions, other than the reasons Morrissey himself provided?*

CKS: No - and I've forgotten what reasons he gave.

MH: *Your metafictions, particularly* The Death of the Body *and* The Secret History of Modernism, *might be seen as bringing to life the so-called 'dead' author, particularly in the way they foreground the authorial process (for example, when Winter describes his narrative habits as resembling Matryoshka dolls, and when the narrator of* The Death of the Body *discusses the difficulties of narrative's linearity). Do you see them in this way? As re-assertions of authorship?*

CKS: I take it your question means something about literary theory and 'the death of the author'. If so, I suppose a correct answer would be that I don't find it uncongenial or 'wrong' to see those fictional personae of mine in that way. But I didn't write those novels with that in mind. Literary theory would not have been even remotely in my thoughts in embarking on those novels, though a reader might see theoretical implications in what I found myself doing.

MH: *I raise that possibility because you seem to have been as underwhelmed with 20th century French/American critical theory as you were with certain strands of feminist thought that accompanied it. Your take on the extremist feminism of the 70s and 80s is pretty apparent in* The Death of the Body, *so I wonder if, with hindsight, you see in your 'metafictional' novels an implicit response to some of the theory you encountered around the time?*

CKS: I think I can only repeat the answer I gave above. I don't mind if they're seen that way, but I don't think that's how they came into being.

MH: *How useful was the metafictional mode in helping to revitalise your writing practice, especially following what you described, in your recent address at Auckland, as a severe bout of writer's block?*

CKS: Well, if I used the metafictional mode at that point, and I suppose I did, then it was very useful. But I didn't think, 'I know - I'll use the metafictional mode!' That kind of thinking would not have helped at all. I don't think about these things in abstract, except perhaps in looking back afterwards and recognizing how what I've done might be described. I doubt that any fiction writer does - or (correction) any good fiction writer. The problems present themselves in practical terms.

MH: *You commented recently that you wanted, especially in your early work, to make 'the voice which gave the story its authority a part of the fiction' – a statement I assume is tied in with what you've just said about 'provenance'. Why is/was this such a point of interest?*

CKS: I was fascinated early on by the fiction of Alberto Moravia, which is almost all (with only a few exceptions) in the first person. I think in his essays, which I read with profit at some point long ago, he proposes this problem of provenance - in a world where there can be no 'eye of God' (because there is not god) - as of primary importance. That was how I felt in writing fiction, and Moravia confirmed that anxiety and seemed to give it intellectual authority.

MH: *There seems to be a link between the way you've handled writing fiction and writing criticism: in both cases you've often been careful to place yourself (or a fictional version of C.K.S) in context, in relation to the text. Is this a matter of transparency in both cases?*

CKS: I hadn't thought of connecting them but I think the answer must be yes.

MH: *In* The Secret History of Modernism, *your narrator raises some interesting questions on the relationship between fiction and autobiography. 'Did changing people's names make autobiography into fiction? Did real names […] make autobiography any less fictional?' (pp. 212-213). I wonder if you have any further thoughts on those questions?*

CKS: The idea is there, clearly implied in the question. Stories are stories and create their own reality -- and we need stories for our sanity, create them and live by them constantly. It's true, as everyone knows, that for fiction and autobiography very different rules apply. But they are nearer to one another than we usually acknowledge.

MH: *Your fiction could be seen to have contributed to the growth of an 'internationalist' perspective in New Zealand writing. Do you see it in this way?*

CKS: Again, not as an intention -- but if as an effect, then I'm pleased.

MH: *Internationally-oriented or not, your narrator in* The Secret History of Modernism *acknowledges the importance of New Zealand to his writing, saying that his perspective has been 'determined by what was for me home base, Auckland' and that it is as if his 'feet were planted somewhere on the Tamaki-Makau-Rau, 'the Place of a Thousand Lovers'…' pp. 47-49) How autobiographical are these passages?*

CKS: Yes, I think that's pretty much C.K. Stead speaking -- for that moment. He might contradict himself the next, of course. Personality (and therefore thoughts/ideas) are never entirely stable. But there's a perhaps relevant comment by Hilda Tapler in *The End of the Century at the End of the World* when she's asked why a novel of hers which is not set in New Zealand and has no New Zealand characters is a New Zealand book and she says, 'because I'm a New Zealander and I wrote it'.

MH: *You remarked in* The Writer at Work *('The View from Mt Eden' p. 198) that a 'new distinct 'New Zealand' culture "has begun, and it will happen." What do you see as the most important signs of this emerging culture?*

CKS: I would have to pull up the plant and look at the roots to answer this.

MH: Okay, that's probably too broad a question. A recent essay by Miles Fairburn attempts to resolve the apparent paradox between the internationalism and local culture here by arguing that New Zealand is an exceptional culture – exceptional only for the international reach of its consciousness, dominated as it has been to such a large extent by American, Australian, and British culture. Could you hazard a comment (if not on Fairburn's idea) on how and why you see your own work as having developed such a broad international reach?

CKS: Boredom? Wanting more, and bigger? Ambition? These are frivolous answers to a question I feel disinclined to think hard about - but they might also be half true.

APPENDIX D: Interview with Russell Haley

(December 24, 2008)

MH: *Firstly, do you see your fiction (such as* Beside Myself, *but also* The Settlement *and* Real Illusions*) as fitting into the mode broadly described as 'self-reflexive' or 'metafictional'? If so, how would you distinguish your use of the metafictional mode from other modes (such as the 'realist' mode)?*

RH: The terms self-reflexive fiction and metafiction don't quite do the trick for me so my following comments cover your first and second paragraphs: I enjoy realism and naturalism in fiction but I never wholeheartedly wanted to produce work that would fit those categories. Though I have to say that one of the tensions I feel when I'm writing is a pull towards naturalistic elements, to foreground 'story' and even to gesture in the direction of shaping a plot. Sometimes I have to call a halt to what I'm doing, backtrack, and find out where I've allowed those conventions to prevail or determine my direction and then I 'swerve', shift into a mode I really want to produce. I'm always alert to my desire to make something new. I'm not content to produce a story unless it creates a sense of unease through dream, illogic, and abrupt changes.

Background to my statements above:

I can't remember ever believing in god though I was always fascinated by mythology. I was an early convert to atheist existentialism. Before I'd had any university training I began to read writers such as Sartre and Nietzsche in translation. Samuel Beckett, of course, appealed to me at an early age. As a young, would-be writer in London in the mid fifties to 1961, I was as engaged with drama as I was with prose

fiction. Evergreen was the journal that kept me alert to literary movements so early on I read Kerouac and Ginsberg. I saw *Krapps Last Tape* and *Endgame* at the Royal Court Theatre but I also saw the first performance of *Look Back in Anger* – a so-called kitchen-sink drama. However, theatrical movements during this period were heterogeneous. There were many productions in London and Oxford of classical Greek plays by Euripides, Aeschylus and Aristophanes. Jewish dramatists such as Arnold Wesker were dealing naturalistically with Jewish working-class life. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams had new plays produced and I saw the first London performances of absurdist playwrights such as Ionesco and difficult to classify dramatists such as Jean Genet.

Essentially what has always interested me in writing is not plot, action, sociological material but form itself. And in particular I'm deeply involved in the idea of how far language can convey mental states, dreamwork, and interiority. I was, and still am, deeply impressed by the drunken hallucinatory scenes in Lowry's Under the Volcano. I'm fascinated by fugue states, the aura phenomena before migraines. I'll walk down any curious back alley of the mind to discover what's there though I'm now resistant to the idea of producing altered mental states through the use of particular drugs. I enjoyed listening to music and eating cream cakes after having smoked grass but most of those experiences were way back in the sixties or seventies.

MH: *You've made some incredibly bold (and, I think, hilarious) moves in your fiction – for example, interrupting the narrative at page 50 in* The Settlement *and starting again, and in* Beside Myself *launching into nonsensical 'doodles' about Cody Bill snatching leather… It seems that you want to deliberately remind the reader of the artifice of storytelling. Why?*

RH: I've recently re-read *The Settlement* and I was surprised and delighted (and unsettled) when I came to the narrative jump-start at page 50. I think I wanted the reader to experience a shock at that point because obviously Walter is going through a peculiar time…he's unsure whether he's really alive or whether he's in that period of suspension where the mind is still at work as we die but we can't know we're dead and time can stretch so that a few fragments of a second might stretch subjectively and become another life. Also I've always felt it important to stress the 'artificial' nature of fiction…or at least the artifice of a novel or prose fiction.

MH: *Obviously one of the central themes of your writing is language itself. In* The Settlement *the authorial voice breaks into the narrative to reflect on the boundaries of language with quite an intriguing comment: "Any utterance, any sentence, is a thread stretched from here to there." (71–72) I wonder if you would expand on this statement a little?*

RH: That merges nicely with paragraph four. Yes – language and form have always been my particular hobby-horse. One reason I admire Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and at the moment why I'm keen on W.G.Sebald is their focus on form. The way in which Sebald can shift from his brilliantly cunning 'I', his narrator, walking in the English countryside and then swerving as something on the walk reminds him of, for example, Conrad, and then there's a lovely drift into the background of *The Heart of Darkness* and all this is seamless and at the same time disruptive of the normal expectations of narrative fiction. I'm talking here specifically of *The Rings of Saturn* but almost any of Sebald's works has these qualities. And I think that sentence you quote about a thread stretching from here to there is my slightly optimistic idea that language can launch itself across the gap between people's minds as a spider will swing through space on a thread of its own

making. We're alone in our selves and we fumble to get across anything even as simple as, 'Where have you put the salt?'

MH: *In* Beside Myself *you make the point that stories aren't necessarily communicative acts from one person to another, that they can be self-communicative, they can and do express fragments of the self to itself. Is this a fair comment?*

RH: I didn't re-read *Beside Myself* during my recent survey of what I've done over the years but I think your statement about expressing fragments of yourself to yourself is a fair comment of what I've been attempting in my writing. Quite literally I often don't know what I am about to write, or say, until I've written or said the thing. Though of course I do spend a great deal of time talking to myself in my head – even interviewing myself, just to try to settle what I 'really' think.

MH: *Janet Wilson has described your novels as exploring 'the tragi-comic conditions of existential angst leading to an absurdist worldview'. I wonder what you think of this summary?*

RH: How nice of Janet Wilson to say that. Where does the quotation come from? But if I were writing about my work I'd reverse her sentence. I have an absurdist worldview and, perhaps unexceptionally, that leads me explore tragi-comic situations. In my deliberately comic NZ image of Harry Rejekt in *A Spider Web Season* and *Tomorrow Tastes Better* there's a deeply disguised seriousness (and maybe existential angst) behind such a notion as Harry inventing a dog-patting machine for the pup he's found abandoned in a sack in the middle of a rural Waipa road.

MH: *You were (and still are) I think, part of the first wave of writers that abandoned the provincial outlook and embraced the international aspects of NZ culture for the first time. Was this a conscious decision or something that just happened naturally?*

RH: I'd always run to catch up with the avant-garde and so I slipped into place quite naturally here with fellow writers who weren't presbyterian realists. I was at Auckland University in the sixties (as a mature student) with Alan Brunton, Ian Wedde, Bob Orr, Murray Edmond and Jan Kemp. Perhaps we were all opposed in our different ways to timeworn ideas about NZ nationalism…why go through all that Curnow thing about finding a place to stand. We didn't need to do that. We were here and now.

MH: *A recent essay by Miles Fairburn attempts to resolve the apparent paradox between the internationalism and local culture here by arguing that New Zealand is a unique culture – unique only because it has been dominated to such a large extent by a trinity of super-cultures – American, British, and Australian. Could you hazard a comment, if not on Fairburn's idea, then on what cultural forces you think have been most significant in your own writing practice?*

RH: Broadly New Zealand has a unique culture because of Māori & Māori language. But literary culture is something else. My literary culture is completely international. I read and continue to read work in translation from French (Genet, Sartre, Camus, Robbe-Grillet, Beckett and even Gide), German (Gunter Grass, Hesse, Sebald) Italian (Calvino!) and international work in English – Australia (Patrick White, Murray Bail), Britain (B.S. Johnson, J.G.Ballard) and the U.S. (Faulkner, Walter Abish, Robert Coover, Paul Auster, Vonnegut, John Hawkes and Thomas Pynchon). Incidentally, I wanted to work on Pynchon for my PhD but the HOD thought him academically not respectable. I'd have switched to Lowry but there were probably thousands of post-grads heading for Vancouver. So…I ended up with a horse and cart idea about Pynchon's use of science and 18C science fiction.

MH: *Your work was well-represented in Michael Morrissey's* New Fiction, *which I guess aligned you with the avante-garde of fiction writers here, and with the work of international writers like Barth, Coover, Borges and so on. Were these writers of interest to you?*

RH: I made a swift list above and forgot Borges and Barth. There must be hundreds of other writers who have been important to me but they are not surfacing right at this moment on a rainy Xmas eve day when I ought to be trying to clear the gutters! Not that I'm whinge when I'm able to sit here and struggle with ideas rather than with rotted tanekaha leaves wedged in the down pipes.

MH: *I hope these biographical questions aren't annoying, but how did your involvement with the* Freed *journal begin and end?*

RH: We'll talk about *Freed* when we meet. *Freed* was Brunton, really. Five issues – two by Alan, two by Murray Edmond and the final one by me with a lot of help from my friends, including David Kisler the layout genius.

MH: *I heard it mentioned that you taught at The University of Auckland for a while? Is this right?*

RH: I taught for two sessions at Auckland University. 1971-1972 when I was a doctoral candidate. That PhD venture collapsed in Britain when I was on a 'sandwich' scholarship from the University Grants Committee. Bad topic and too little money to support wife and two children. Besides…I lost interest in academic study and wrote my first worthwhile short fiction – *One Point One* – sitting in a meadow by the River Vyrnwy in the summer of 1973 in Wales and thinking about Grafton Road and Auckland. I held the Auckland University Writing Fellowship in 1986/87 and I was a tutor, again, from 1988-1993.

MH: *If so, I guess you may have been teaching around the time that critical theory and language-centered philosophy began to be taught in the university. Do you think any particular philosophies have informed your writing practice in any way?*

RH: I dealt quickly with para 10 in an earlier email and I think all I can add is that I have a magpie mind – I steal and hoard bits and pieces of ideas, theories, and the end result is I do what I do. There's no overarching or underlying single philosophy or critical theory that informs my work other than my sense that we're interesting and destructive, cruel and kind mammals who share this bit of the universe with other mammals. The difference is – we live with and inside language – and it seems to me that that so important that, paradoxically, many writers don't seem very interested in language itself. John Banville is someone who does care but the world is filled with people who think plot and story are the important elements of a novel. I've read many novels that have been ruined by the writer's fiddling around with plot. There's a potentially splendid Australian thriller/policier writer called Peter Temple and I got about three quarters of the way through *The Broken Shore* before he ruined the book with the twists and turns in his plot and the standard blood, guts and sadism in the closing chapters. And to be honest Banville did the same with a wretched novel titled *Athena*. There you go.

MH: *(This is less a question than a few thoughts I'm hoping you'll find the time to respond to): As I've been researching NZ writing this year, I've found myself returning again and again to something you said in your Afterword to* Real Illusions: *"…You have no country out there. It is all in here. So juxtaposition rather than 'realistic' continuity becomes the way you re/present the world through language. There is no consistent boundary to the real." One of the things that strikes me about this statement is that I find it describes a lot of the most interesting stuff written*

here, from Janet Frame to Albert Wendt even to 'younger' writers like Charlotte Randall. Many NZ writers, at least in contrast with the American metafictional writers, have quite a preoccupation with internal processes– the way the mind works on itself, and so forth – 'psychological interiority' I call it. With American writers you get more flattening out of character, metafictional parody for parody's sake. I wonder if you agree? Or have any comment on the idea at all?

RH: We can talk about the differences between our metafictional writers and the Americans though I can't say I've done much thinking about comparing. Seems to me we all do something different because we don't work from theory so it's near impossible to imagine what might characterise Coover/Barth,Hawkes and how that characteristic might contrast with Morrissey/Haley/Michael Henderson and so on.

MH: *Can I ask what you have planned for the future? Do you have any fiction in progress?*

RH: So – yes, I've been working on an idea, on and off, for the last four years and I've made as good a book as I can. The work is titled *The Company of Lost Voices*. It's a discontinuous text with four basic elements, autobiography, dream, fiction and Greek myth. The book has been with VUP for three months and they probably won't publish it. In the new year I'll be trying Granta and, in Australia, Allen and Unwin. I'm still not sure what I've made with my metafictional engineering.

APPENDIX E: Interview with Michael Jackson

(June 27, 2008)

MH: *Firstly, do you see your work (such as* Pieces of Music *or* The Accidental Anthropologist*) as fitting into the mode broadly described as 'metafictional' or 'self-reflexive'?*

MJ: Labels help us get some intellectual purchase on the world, to be sure – racial stereotypes, somatypes, national characteristics, discursive concepts – but they are never adequate to the complex processes and human experiences of being-in-the-world. This is why the creative writer is always struggling against the straightjackets with which habitual mindsets constrain life, turning to concrete images, lived experiences, existential situations, real events, and singular individuals in an attempt to show the extent to which life cannot be domesticated by language or reason. Life is always more than we can say, more than we can grasp, more than we can manage. This is why life is both exhilarating and disorienting. But there is seldom any exhilaration or disorientation in texts that purport to capture the essence of life and explain it. Metafiction and self-reflective are simply two of the many terms with which critical thought has tried to capture the essence of writings that resist classification – writings that answer only to the impossible demands of life itself. In brief, I am not interested in labels and labeling, only in the work, which must always do justice to life as lived, and is always trying to do the impossible.

MH: *If so, how would you distinguish your use of the metafictional mode from other modes (such as the 'realist' mode)?*

MJ: Because, as a radical empiricist, I seek to write about life in all its aspects – spoken and unspoken, thought and felt, imagined and enacted - I affirm realism, but

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there have been plenty of realist writers who have made realism into an idealism (members of the Soviet Writer's Academy, for example), which is, again, why labels are never what they seem and inevitably dangerous.

MH: *Yes, I think it's hard to place your oeuvre in terms of any labels at all, and I've had a few attempts myself: ethnographic memoir, fictionalized anthropology, metafictional autobiography, and so forth… But it strikes me that the goal is the same whatever form you're working with – the "quest for connections and juxtapositions - striking common chords, finding common ground, disclosing common historical truths" – these goals seem to describe your fiction and poetry as well as it does your ethnographic work. Is this a fair comment?*

MJ: Yes, though it is worth mentioning that the search for these connections – whether intertextual or interpersonal – is always a struggle, since discordant worldviews, social disharmony, uncommon ground, and warring factions constitute the reality of the world. I would not want my search for viable coexistence to be seen in a romantic light, as a form of wishful thinking, but as a struggle and ongoing negotiation, at once social, emotional, physical, and intellectual, that has taxed me to the limit.

MH: *One of the central themes of your writing is, I think, the limitations of language. In* Rainshadow *(p. 118) the narrator learns that the poems about his cousin can 'capture nothing of the real' although he is yet to learn that 'words can, for this very reason, suffer us to accept the reality of nothing.' I wonder if you would elucidate this last clause a little?*

MJ: There is a strong influence of zen Buddhism here, so nothingness or emptiness are to be taken in the zen spirit. At the same time, *Rainshadow* is a bildungsroman in which the struggle for being – of Nick, and of his grandfather before him, is less a struggle for an identity than a struggle against the very idea of identity – a liberation from

living in terms of an idea of oneself, so that one is free to live in relation to an unstable and unpredictable world. I am echoing here my response to your first question.

MH: *If your narrators regularly express doubts that words can capture the 'real', then they also seem to affirm that attempts are inevitable, and that ultimately 'truth' is a function of relationship. Is this a fair description of your outlook? How do you envisage the relationship between yourself and those you write for? The 'general reader'?*

MJ: All writers want to be read. Most aspire to be read by people from all walks of life. The exception is specialist writers – scientists and academics – who communicate amongst themselves, placing 'truth' ahead of 'edification'. As an intellectual, I find myself in revolt against the arcane, abstract and reductive conventions of the academy, but I have never embraced the vernacular notion that pervaded the social milieu in which I grew up – that common sense, spontaneity and intuition can be counted on to edify and enlighten, as well as determine right from wrong. My New Zealand background made it easy for me to identify bullshit, but it did not help me recognize wisdom. My relationships with the critical figures in my life – both literate and illiterate, in many different countries and cultures – have given me what little wisdom I have, and inspired me to bear witness, in my writing, to the contexts in which insights emerge, understanding flourishes, and mutuality is possible. But context is all. There is everything outside the text.

MH: *Toward the end of* Barawa, *the narrator is having a final conversation with Sewa and confesses that he sometimes feels his writing has "made Kuranko life intelligible but at the expense of the sensible"? Is this lost sensibility the context you're speaking of?*

MJ: The trick is to strike a balance between sensuous or social engagement in the world of others AND an understanding that always requires a certain distance and

detachment. A profound paradox is therefore involved here, because life never allows one to be a spectator and participant at the same time. This paradox pertains to ethnography as well as to our everyday lives, in which what we do in our relationships with others and what we think about what we are doing (and express in our rationalizations, our stories, our fantasies) are seldom congruent.

MH: *In* The Accidental Anthropologist *you have described your poetic processes as 'creative reimaginings' and contrasted this with your ethnological work which precludes 'imaginative licence'. How would you describe your process of writing fiction?*

MJ: My essays in fictional writing (*Barawa*, *Pieces of Music*, *Rainshadow*) are all grounded in real events, and concerned with real people. But the autobiographical is transfigured by a desire to describe and say more than the real events and the real people allowed or revealed. Like many writers who turn to fiction, I sometimes feel that life is too ragged around the edges, too unfinished or badly made and requires some artifice to attain completion. It is an audacious impulse that goes against the grain of my commitment to "do justice to life as lived", and shows how poorly I have implemented my own philosophy.

MH: *But 'life as lived' always contains a degree of artifice doesn't it? After all we're constantly revising events, reinventing our histories? Wouldn't an attempt to remove all of the artifice of storytelling be a bizarre form of reductionism?*

MJ: You are, of course, right. It would be absurd to argue for an ontological cut between life as lived and life as thought, but in proposing that life is continually overwhelming our ability to grasp it, and that our ways of apprehending experience in words, concepts and beliefs are always inadequate to the plenitude and sense of life as

lived, I hope to highlight the indeterminate relationship, the aporias, the tension between these dimensions of our experience.

MH: *In the memoir, you also bring into question the idea that writing creatively and academically are mutually exclusive pursuits. Do you see your academic writing as having impacted the style or mode of your creative writing?*

MJ: Lived events call out different responses in us. Sometimes we are struck dumb, and allow silence to be the way we honour a shattering experience. Sometimes poetry seems to offer the best means of doing justice to an event, healing the wounds it has caused us or communicating the wonder with which it has filled us. Sometimes, we turn to prose – fiction or non-fiction, academic or non-academic – in order to explore an idea or episode that haunts us. Every writer code-switches and experiments in his or her attempt to come to terms with certain experiences; most of us are more expert in one genre, much as we labour at the genre we regard as best suited to our subject. But one thing holds true, I think; we tend to botch our work when we mix media or blur genres too much. It is like a gaffe at a social gathering – using vernacular language when formal language is called for, giving food as a wedding gift.

MH: *Well I don't think you've blurred genres too much, but I was surprised at how close* Barawa *is to your fiction, published, as it is, as an ethnographic work. Of course the focus is different, but the mode is very similar – the tone, style, and even the degree of invention you allowed yourself. Is this a fair comment? Or are there specific rules you adhere to when crossing forms?*

MJ: Like any writer, I am not always conscious of what my hand is fumbling for, and finding, as I work, somewhat blindly, irregularly and intuitively, to give birth to a piece of

writing. It is for the critic, the reader, the outsider to appraise what has been brought forth. But I think you are right: a similar mode of inventiveness characterizes my poetry, fiction and non-fiction, and perhaps the term metafiction captures this.

MH: *There's an intriguing self-reflexive comment at the beginning of* Pieces of Music *that I'm not sure I understand, but I hope you will clarify: 'Home is like a noun in a sentence.' Is your narrator saying that having a 'home' is as much a necessity to a person as a noun is to a sentence? Could you comment?*

MJ: This is clarified in *At Home in the World*, pp. 4-6, where I summarise many of the points above. Home is an abstract noun, and suggests a bounded unit such as a house or family. But life is full of intransitive as well as transitive moments, much as a bird is sometimes on the wing and sometimes still on a bough. Life is filled with fleeting and fugitive things, just as language is made up of prepositions, copulas, verbs, and not just nouns. So I prioritise relations over relate, exploring home as a word for homeliness and balance in a relationship, not as a word for a specific place.

MH: *One of the more 'internationalist' sentiments in* Pieces of Music *occurs when the character Renata, while sailing from Melbourne to Genoa, asks the narrator whether or not he is a New Zealander, and he answers that the "… question doesn't really mean much to me." (p. 43) Is this passage a fair representation of your own view?*

MJ: I am not Nick Day, so you have to understand his comment in the context of his attempt to be more than the person he feels that his strange upbringing has made him; he is attempting to repudiate and get beyond the definitions that were visited upon him. I undoubtedly went through a similar phase in my own life, but I have no qualms about calling myself a New Zealander, in recognizing the degree to which New Zealand made

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me, and following the impulse that brings me home every year to see old friends, revisit old haunts and rekindle what Jim Baxter called the fires of no return.

MH: *You commented in your first email that you thought a study of metafiction here would show 'the international reach of New Zealand consciousness'. I wonder if you might be willing to elaborate on that statement a little in relation to your own work. For example, did the rise of critical theory, language-centered philosophy, reflexive-anthropology, influence your fiction in any way? As well as Continental writing, did you find American models of any interest?*

MJ: My inspiration has always been an ill-defined but imperative need to write about certain things that have taken hold of me. No intellectual fashions, no formative reading has prompted this struggle to give voice to inchoate longings and visions. But I have taken comfort, along the way, in the discovery that others have voiced similar longings and shared a similar vision, though they form a disparate group: William James, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, John Berger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernst Bloch, Michel Foucault, John Dewey, George Devereux, Claude Levi-Strauss, Erich Fromm, to name some of the most important. Among poets and fiction writers, Blaise Cendrars is, as my memoir attests, the seminal figure. All this returns us to your question about being a New Zealander. After living abroad for so many years, and doing ethnographic work in many different cultures, I can honestly call several places home. But there is something about firstness that is indeniable and compelling, so while I abhor nationalism the reality is that I found, like many New Zealanders before me, that I needed a larger domain that my home islands allowed – and so I have expanded my horizons, enlarged on the original core, acquired an extended family and many friends

without, however, ever repudiating my parents and the world on which I first opened my eyes.

MH: *(To follow on from the last question) – A recent essay by Miles Fairburn[30] attempts to resolve the apparent paradox between the internationalism and local culture here by arguing that New Zealand is an exceptional culture – exceptional only for the international reach of it's consciousness, dominated as it has been to such a large extent by American, Australian, and British culture. Could you hazard a comment (if not on Fairburn's idea) on how and why you see New Zealand as having developed this broad international reach? Particularly as it relates to your own experiences?*

MJ: I always think of John Mulgan's comment in *Man Alone*, about New Zealanders going abroad not to seek adventure for to seek 'satisfaction'. Ours is a small country. For an intellectual or a creative artist it may feel too small. One's community of kindred spirits is too confining and too familiar. One needs more – more people, more experience, more possibilities. I see the same impulse among young Sierra Leoneans, struggling to get abroad, to expand their horizons. It's the story of humankind since the industrial revolution – the move from the country to the towns is now globalised. The question of satisfaction is as urgent as ever.

MH: *Writers such as Lawrence Jones and Michael Morrissey have claimed that post-modern fiction (and I would include your self-reflexive work in this category) in New Zealand is, or was in the 1980s, to use Morrissey's words, something of a 'neglected phenomenon' due to*

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[30] Fairburn, M. (2006). Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism? *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts.* T. Ballantyne and B. Moloughney. Dunedin, New Zealand, Otago University Press

the dominance of the realist tradition here. Do you feel that your work was in any way neglected or impeded by New Zealand's adherence to realism?

MJ: If my work has been 'neglected' at home it may be because several of my books have not been distributed in New Zealand, and some NZ titles simply failed to reach a readership (*The Blind Impress*, for example, and the poetry). But this is a symptom, perhaps, of the problem of living abroad, of allowing the fires to die as Māori put it. Despite visiting NZ almost every year and a determination to publish there, I have a low profile in the country. One publisher, rejecting the manuscript of *Pieces of Music*, said that I was 'effectively dead'. I think New Zealanders have more problems embracing their expatriates than the expatriates have in embracing New Zealand. I meet European and Central American writers in the US who are not only published in their own countries but celebrated there, as if their choice to live abroad was not an issue; certainly not a sign of disloyalty or elitism. New Zealanders are still deeply ambivalent about the metropolitan world, about intellectuals and creative artists, as well as unnecessarily defensive about their own status. It's a sign of smallness, of course. But I wish it did not seem to be, at times, a sign of small-mindedness.

MH: *Lastly, can I ask what you have planned for the future? Do you have a new work in progress?*

MJ: I have just returned from New Zealand, traveling around the two main islands, looking up old friends, visiting certain sites, pondering the difference between firstness (which is one of our most powerful tropes for what is fundamental, primordial, natural, native) and what we designate as secondary or successive. Clearly this touches on debates about citizenship (those who are tangata whenua and those who come after, as later

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migrants or manuhiri), but it also entails reflections on the felt differences between birth parent and adopted parent, homeland and country of adoption, early life and later life, the world as seen through the eyes of a child and the eyes of an elder. My work in progress is a picaresque, a sustained meditation on this theme and its variations.

APPENDIX F: Interview with Albert Wendt

(February 1, 2009)

MH: *Do you see your some of your fiction (such as* Black Rainbow, *but also* Ola *and parts of* The Mango's Kiss*) as fitting into the mode broadly described as 'self-reflexive'?*

AW: If by self-reflexive you mean using my immediate experience and self in my writing of fiction, then yes. But basically that's what all writers and artists do, with some of us doing more of it in most of our so-called fiction. Reflections on the self, I suppose.

MH: *You poke a bit of fun at the stock realism of NZ literature in* Black Rainbow *(such as when the protagonist and Burnie talk "in this relaxed, matey way for three more whiskies, two literary stereotypes conversing in the Kiwi tradition of social realist fiction…"). What did you feel were the main conventions you wanted to disaffiliate yourself from in the realist tradition here?*

AW: I'm just having fun parodying social realist fiction in NZ. I was raised mainly on that because nearly all NZ fiction up to the 1980s (?) was dominated by that tradition. I also think I was heavily influenced by the fact that many writers in America and in anticolonial fiction elsewhere were doing that. Unlike many other writers I openly acknowledge and pay tribute to the writers and artists who influence me and therefore my work at different periods of my life. I do that in *Ola* and *The Mango's Kiss* and much of my other work, including my poetry. I'm here following the Polynesian tradition of paying tribute to the tohunga or tufuga you've learned from.

MH: *To what extent do you see the playful aspects of your work as being a feature of traditional fagogo storytelling, and to what extent have you been inspired by other writers (such as Borges)?*

AW: I've always been influenced by oral traditions and literary traditions from Samoa and elsewhere. Though I'm anti-colonial, literature (good stories and poetry) knows no boundaries, so even when I attack the colonial domination of our countries and cultures, I can't deny the love I have for some of the literature of the colonizing countries. That literature and art have also taught me how to read and dissect colonialism and colonial literature etc. The literature and art and philosophy I admire and love come from many different cultures and countries. It's always been that way, and it's that way for most of the writers I know.

MH: *Speaking of Borges – he also pops up in your poetry. Is he a favourite writer?*

AW: Borges I have always admired and have learned much from about storytelling. In the 1960's and 70's he was the writers' writer and had a huge influence on writers throughout the world. Even though I disliked his very conservative and sometimes rightwing politics. In my creative writing classes today, I ask my students to read him, and many of them fall under his spell and learn much from him about the craft and the art. So he is still influential today. Like Franz Kafka.

MH: Black Rainbow *and* Ola *display an obvious interest in the relationship between life and narrative ("…history is recreation / fiction…" in Ola for example). Where did this interest originate for you? Is it a matter of the way people relate to (or relate) history?*

AW: Our lives are made up of stories, or we would like our lives to be meaningful, well-told stories. Every thing is a story. Even mathematics and science etc. And when

we turn our lives into those stories they become art, a reconstitution of reality in order to understand and comprehend that reality, hold it for a moment in the ever-moving, ever-shifting present. I learned this very early in my life from my grandmother who was wonderful storyteller, a gifted shaper of our lives who put mana into her stories.

MH: *The narrator of* Black Rainbow *also reflects that "… a story written down loses because written language is an artificial technology. That story has to fictionalize a readership and its author." Presumably then you have a fictionalized readership in mind?*

AW: Yes, language is an artificial technology. The experience is what actually happens and when we try to use language to capture and describe that experience, it is a substitute, a recreation. You may have lived the most interesting and dynamic life but if you can't tell your story in ways that captivate a readership or yourself or audience, your life will come out as a boring narration. Janet Frame lived a very narrow, reclusive life but she mined that deeply and complexly and was able to tell it in very original and moving and complex ways. So many politicians and 'leaders' who've lived large lives – or so they believe – tell their stories in very clicheish and inept ways. That's why I don't read most so-called 'memoirs' or autobiographies etc. For me there is no difference between fiction and autobiography/biography.

MH: *Robert Sullivan has rightly said of* Ola *that it's "a very self- reflexive work and orients Polynesian culture within world cultures." What were your motivations for including such a diverse base of cultural references in the novel?*

AW: I'm a very diverse person who has lived in many cultures and have travelled around the world and familiar with the literatures/arts/movies etc of many of those cultures. So my writing reflects that. Ola is Samoan and a woman who is widely travelled

and widely read etc. That's what the novel shows and vice versa. *Ola* uses much of my experience growing up in New Zealand and Samoa and the Pacific, and my visits to China, Israel, America, England, Europe etc. and my living in the arts and literatures of those places etc.

MH: *You were (and still are) I think, part of the first wave of writers that embraced the international aspects of NZ-Pacific culture for the first time. Would you agree?*

AW: Yes, because, unlike most Pākehā writers who were/are fairly 'monocultural', I am what I've described in 7. Also because I've always indentified myself and my writing with the writers of the anti-colonial and so-called 'developing' /Third World countries. All my teaching life I've taught and promoted that literature which, over the past two decades, has been cutely labeled 'post-colonial.' Much of New Zealand literature, especially that written by Pākehā writers, is certainly not 'post-colonial.' It is still colonial.

MH: *A recent essay by Miles Fairburn attempts to resolve the apparent paradox between the internationalism and local culture here by arguing that New Zealand is a unique culture – unique only because it has been dominated to such a large extent by American, Australian, and British culture. Could you hazard a comment on whether you think Pacific nations (Samoa, but also Fiji) have been dominated in similar proportions by the same cultural influences?*

AW: New Zealand culture, I agree, has been heavily influenced by British, American, and Australian culture because the dominant population of our country remains Pākehā. But I think Māori culture, though denied by colonialism and its colonial literature, has shaped our national culture in very telling ways. The Māori renaissance has been, for me, one of the most influential forces in changing us and our ways of life in New

Zealand, and will continue to do so over the next decades. Māori and Māori culture are what make New Zealand different from any other culture in the world.

Colonialism changed and continues to change and help shape the cultures of Samoa and Fiji etc. But at least the indigenous cultures still predominate there even if I don't like many of those changes. Because Pacific countries are poor they don't have many choices/options in a Pacific and world that is still dominated by Europe, America, Japan and other Asian countries. Colonialism now has a new name, globalisation. And indigenous peoples around our sad planet will continue to suffer the devastating holocaust which Europe started unleashing on the Americas and elsewhere in the 15th Century.

MH: *In* Black Rainbow *you coin an interesting word – 'reordinarination' – I was wondering if you could give something like your own definition of the idea?*

AW: Reordinarination is derived from the word 'ordinary'. In the novel it is the process of conditioning people to be ordinary again. It involves brainwashing etc. all now done 'scientifically.'

MH: *On a lighter note, there's a funny section in the novel where you lampoon the UoA English department as a sort of inbred stable…How much was this just a bit of fun and how much was it a serious critique of the way the institution was being run?*

AW: Fun and critique!

APPENDIX G: Interview with Charlotte Randall

(September 10, 2008)

MH: *Your novels aim their satire at a broad range of subjects (dubious medical science, pseudo-religious superstitions, and spurious cultural trends) but underpinning these humorous critiques seems to be quite a unified social comment - they're almost counterbalances to the story that society is continually improving. Do you see them in this way? As (tongue-in-cheek) social critiques?*

CR: Don't forget dubious 'alternative' medicine! Yes, *The Curative*, *Within the Kiss* and *What Happen Then, Mr Bones?* are all social critiques, satirical to a varying degree. The *Crocus Hour* involves critique without satire, mainly because it has become more and more obvious to me that a significant number of readers don't have the reading skills/can't be bothered to extricate satirical critique from a fictional narrative. I put this down to extreme earnestness in schools, not that I much care if I'm wrong.

MH: *Like the readers who thought Swift was endorsing cannibalism in 'A Modest Proposal'…But do you intend to return to your particular brand of satire at any point?*

CR: I would have to say that it very much depends on whether I want to keep on being published! On the other hand, when I signed up to be a writer, the contract didn't contain any clauses about being a pleaser. . .

MH: *You also seem concomitantly concerned with the way we tell stories.* The Curative *and* Within the Kiss *display an obvious interest in the relationship between life and narrative (Lonsdale's reflections on narrative as pabulum, Faust on 'the subjunctive obliterat[ing] the facts'*

etc.) Where did this interest originate for you? Is it a matter of the way we relate to (or relate)

history?

CR: It's because I get bored with writers or readers who don't realise/pretend not to realise there's any difference between life (always lived forwards and ignorant of the future) and narrative (usually written in the past tense as if the narrator is already beyond the events recounted – which of course means anything can be changed or presented in a different light in his/her account of it). Life can't 'distort' but narrative can and does. This holds true for the non-fictional narratives used in written/oral history, as well as those employed by the media. The book I am writing now delves deeply into this very problem. It involves two parts, a brother and then a sister telling the story of their childhood(s). The question is, who is the distorting narrator? Can there even be such a thing when we are talking about our own emotions? How can we be 'wrong' about what we feel? The answer is . . . well, you will have to wait and see!

MH: *I'm looking forward to it… It sounds like a more thorough exploration of what Nabokov was trying to do with* Ada *by having the narrator's account of childhood punctuated with footnotes by his sister. Have you read the novel?*

CR: No. I should. I will.

MH: *In a recent radio interview (on 95bFM) you mentioned struggling with something you termed 'the vehicle' of storytelling. Could you explain what you meant by this?*

CR: There's always something I want to do in a novel that is somehow beyond the story. But the story itself has to be a suitable 'vehicle' to convey this other something (whatever it is) to the reader. I struggle because often I'm more excited about where I'm

trying to get to than the means of getting there. (In fact, I don't really believe in 'stories' - I'm going to come back as a physicist.)

MH: *There's an intriguing self-reflexive comment at the beginning of* The Curative *that I'm not sure I understand, but I hope you will clarify. Lonsdale reflects (on page 11) that "In fact, the story where none exists or can exist is a fascination for me. And more: it is essential, the only way I can exist for myself." Could you elucidate this passage a little?*

CR: Here Lonsdale is meant to be saying that if story = plot then there can be no story when someone is physically incapable of enacting a plot. But of course there is still a story – his story, which is gradually unfolded during his memory exercises and the speeches he gives to Horatio. For the reader, these devices bring him into existence as a character; but for Lonsdale as a character these are not literary devices - he is really asking: where would I be without memory, or without a coherent account of myself to set against the institutional allegations of madness and delusion?

MH: *While the novel is not as pointedly concerned with the artifice of storytelling as your two previous novels,* What Happen Then, Mr Bones? *still makes, I think, a strong point about life and narrative – namely that while stories might be most easily understood working from the beginning to the end, lives, and indeed complete genealogies, can only be made sense of in reverse. Could you comment? Was this one of your intentions for the novel?*

CR: Yes, this was one of my intentions. And in the beginning I thought this technique would make death much more prominent since the lives of the main characters begin with their deaths. But when I re-read what I'd written, the opposite seemed true: death was quickly dispatched and then the characters' lives blossomed. But maybe that effect was a result of my always knowing what would happen. This book is full of the

artifice of storytelling because the narrator – whoever it is, and this time it might really be the intrusive author – makes endless satirical comments and insinuations about the characters. They are mocked and ridiculed, and there's an endless succession of them; they scarcely come into existence (with say, the thoroughness of Lonsdale) before they are whisked away. This is important (Page 266): This is the big difference between life and the Life – in the latter only the important people have names and you are the most important of all, but in the world there's an endless stream of nameless people and you are no one.

MH: *Could you explain the reference to Berryman's 'Dream Song 26'? A common preoccupation with death? Suicide even?*

CR: The question is: What happen then Mr Bones? The answer to the question is: then I had a most marvellous piece of luck, I died. Knowing the answer to the question was meant to show how the whole plot started - with the marvellous piece of luck of Anne Green dying and then coming back to life. (And you only talk about dying if you have survived it – a truly marvellous piece of luck.)

MH: *In writing* Within the Kiss *you joke about the notion of 'organic' writing processes, but I wonder how the novel developed. Had you planned out all the narrative frames and shifting narrative voices from the beginning or did these twists develop along the way?*

CR: No, I didn't plan it all out. It developed 'organically'. The joke (for me, anyway) is the way people use this particular word: as if without argument or support it's the correct way for anything to be. And also, sometimes, the word is used as a synonym for natural and straightforward. But as you will be aware, the organic process of *Within the*

Kiss leads to ever increasing layering and complication. The fact that I find this funny just goes to show how perverse I am, I guess!

MH: *Yes. Thankfully, none of your novels seem willing to stay within the K.I.S.S. principle…*

CR: Well, the fat lady hasn't yet sung.

MH: Perhaps this question is a little nosy, but does the dialogue between Faust and Mephisto in *Within the Kiss* have any basis in your own experience? (i.e. conversations between yourself and publishers/editors?)

CR: No. Most people don't have enough experience in writing a whole novel to sustain such a conversation. The issues I covered, mainly questions about how a novel should be written, arose from reading the opinions of reviewers and journalists in newspapers, and from academic discussions that I read on the internet. I constructed the dialogue between Faust and Mephisto to make fun of opinions I disagreed with.

MH: *Among the narrative devices you poke fun at in* Within the Kiss *are the gratuitous use of dream sequences and 'cliff-hanger' chapter endings. Are there any other conventions you've felt you wanted to do away with as a writer?*

CR: I'd really like to get rid of the characters. How might this work? With a surface of plausible non-fiction, but the whole underlying thing completely fictional.

MH: *In* The Curative *(p. 65-66) the narrator hilariously claims he is an instance of prosopopoeia, "a ghost in chains, an effigy made of words" Do you see other characters in the book as also embodying abstract ideas/archetypes? The apothecary, eighteenth century rationalism? Porlock, the voice of the working classes?*

CR: Well yes, Porlock is the (imaginary and ridiculed) voice of the class of workers who were generally employed as custodians of the insane, although I guess not every member of that class had alcohol-related brain damage. The apothecary was real and what he says frequently consists of quotes from his published 'research' – which naturally reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the period he lived in. So he is both real and a convenient mouthpiece for his times. Of course, what is not often seen is how much I am commenting on behaviour that is still prevalent now: how the up-to-date jeer at the scientific idiocies of the recent past without it ever seeming to occur to them that this revisionism will soon be brought down upon them. But don't take from this that I am anti-science, or part of the science-as-my truth/your truth brigade. I am not. Facts don't become fictions just because they need to be updated or qualified in some way.

MH: *Lonsdale could almost be read as a personification of the problem of narrative creation, at least insofar as he needs to recreate his personal history…*

CR: Yes, that is how Lonsdale is meant to be read. How do you create an interesting story around a character who is chained to a wall and tell it from the first person? How do you bring the world in? (Third person would be a cinch.)

MH: *One of the problems you raise through his character is that of deciding whether you should begin with the final effect of a story and try to work this out through characterisation, or begin with plot and character and try to work to a point. Could you comment? Is this a tension you've personally resolved?*

CR: I'm a more experienced writer now and feel a little more capable of writing things in different ways. Generally though I don't like the technique of putting the shock! ending first and then dutifully explaining it all. You have to be a really good writer

or you can end up destroying the narrative tension. But an example of it done really well is Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Grass's *Crabwalk* is also good – you know from (nearly) the start that the boat sinks and why. My main problem now is trying to imagine what amount of effort a reader wants to put into a book, given that it's meant to be (more or less) entertainment. This has quite a bearing on how much I feel I can play with the narrative. And I'm still sobered by the fact that years ago a number of people said to me they were glad that *Pulp Fiction* had a happy ending.

MH: *Lonsdale recalls losing his first tooth at age forty-eight and realising he is caught in bonds more restricting than the physical chains he is presently subjected to. He remarks that "in real life there's no hope of any fiction tricks – hysteron proteron, or working backwards, or repeatedly starting again. You're stuck with it all." Is this why people are so attracted to fictions, do you think?*

CR: Perhaps. Maybe it's why they're not attracted to life.

MH: *In reality though people are constantly revising their personal histories aren't they? One of the ideas that comes across in your work is that even the 'facts' of a life are fairly relative…*

CR: Well, obviously there are some facts about a life that can't be changed – who your parents were, or your children are, who has died etc. But parallel to the facts of your life, to some degree you can remake your life in your own head. I've always loved this quote: life consists in what a man is thinking of all day (Emerson). You are what you think. (Not to be confused with: you can be whoever you want to be. Blech.)

MH: *A further focus of your oeuvre is the micro-level of language itself: vocabulary, word-choice, usage, and ways of saying. From various reviews I've read, some readers tend to be put off by this aspect. Is it a conscious decision to give your readers a challenge?*

CR: Well, I suppose I thought it wasn't much of a challenge to get out a dictionary and look up a word, or to do so online. I saw it as a game: you look up a word and get a fresh insight into the character etc. You might even have an aha moment. Seems I was wrong.

MH: *No – not for this reader anyway…ahas-a-plenty here. You don't get any flack from your publisher though?*

CR: No, not my publisher. Reviewers mainly.

MH: *To finish with a couple of biographical questions, how productive have you found your university residencies? Has working in university environments had any bearing on your work?*

CR: I work the same way wherever I am. But at the universities, the excellent libraries are a big bonus. As is getting paid. The book I wrote at Canterbury is still waiting for my skill to catch up with the content. It's called *Building the Ideal Palace* and is about the ways in which ideas in architecture have been imposed on literature. At the moment it's rather offensive, and both less funny and less compassionate than I want it to be.

MH: *What was it like working at Victoria? Did you enjoy being in the hub of the country's creative writing output?*

CR: Hub? What hub? The building was often empty. I enjoyed talking to Bill.

MH: *How do you think your background in psychology has shaped your fiction? (If at all)*

CR: My psychology degree enabled me to get research work in mental health. This obviously helped me with The Curative, especially the historical stuff because again I had access to very good libraries. But I also have a post-graduate diploma in Public Health which gave me some skills in epidemiological research methods and medical sociology (invariably called something else, but since I also studied sociology in my undergrad years I recognise it in sheep's clothing). But generally I use the former to savage the latter - probably not what was intended, but hey, I paid my fees.

MH: *I have to bring up your use of the nom de plume. Is it there to protect a parallel career in Public Health? For personal privacy? Or just for your own amusement?*

CR: No, I do not have a parallel career in Public Health. My real first name is very old fashioned and I was worried that readers would think my books were written by an old person. Stupid, but I was young at the time. Also Randall is my real name, just not my first or family name. Now I'm just glad I didn't come up with anything really dumb.

MH: *Lonsdale and Faust (and I think the family line from* What Happen Then, Mr Bones?*) are like mini fractals of – or incarnations of – the books' larger narrative structure. Or, to put it another way, your characters confront the same questions that the reader (and writer) confront. The question that drives* The Curative *to its conclusion is – from where does Lonsdale derive his sense of reality and self if he eschews the 'pabulum' of narrative? Like the novel itself, Lonsdale has "not a single restraint" on his imagination and no one to check his "accuracy": "This is the last place where anyone cares about such a thing." The only problem is, as soon as he starts to invent himself, he realizes he is becoming caught in bonds more restricting than the physical chains he is subjected to. As he says," I myself was the main character, and I was being ever more rigidly defined and delineated by the situations I found myself in." The same situation, I guess,*

applies to the writer, and it certainly applies to the reading process: again, as you say in Within the Kiss, *"the subjunctive obliterates the facts". A similar theme of entrapment/self-delineation is at work in* Within the Kiss *isn't it, when your Faust likens herself to Goethe's Faust 'Hemmed in with stacks of books am I / Where works the worm with dusty mange' who calls his workplace a 'damnable, bricked in, cabined hole') (p. 72). And elsewhere, when Faust decides that the prospect of selling her soul to Mephistopheles for a best-selling novel seems too good to believe: "Far better than the miserable truth of being chained to your pen or computer without a single interesting idea in your skull."?*

CR: Yes, I would agree with your argument regarding Lonsdale and Faust, how they are similarly embedded in the theme of entrapment/self-delineation; and that through these characters, the author (dunno what readers do anymore) is also exploring the paradoxes of writing fiction. You'd think that fiction would be the one form that would allow an author to write anything they pleased, but this isn't true - there has to be a satisfactory character, a satisfactory story, in short there are rules. One can try to ignore the rules, but will soon pay the price of not being released into the wider world, i.e. of being published.

So, the very thing that you thought might be freeing (making things up!) turns out to be quite the opposite. Eventually the author comes to despise storytelling as a kind of prison, yet retains the naïve belief that there is still something in fiction writing that has to do with authenticity and the discovery or understanding of the self; and perhaps other selves by extension. But selling (*Within the Kiss*) or persuading (*The Curative*) will always be a problem, and sometimes even the author - now embodied in Lonsdale and Faust – remains unconvinced of the reality (or truth) of the enterprise. And if you are a character

who is a stand-in for authorial doubt about fiction… On the other hand (I'm an octopus!) the fictional characters recognise that real life is subject to the same constraints as fiction. You can make it up as you go along only to a degree; at some point what happened before takes control of the possibilities of what can happen in the future; and this process isn't just about events but also about character, or 'personality'.

MH: *As a side issue (important to me though), I'm wondering where you encountered use of the word 'subjunctive' out of the context of grammar?*

C.R: Subjunctive out of the contest of grammar? I no longer remember. In my dreams? Did I think I was being funny? (Deluded again.)

MH: *I'm really looking forward to your novel with the brother/sister narrators – is the Penguin sitting on any more eggs?*

CR: As far as the brother/sister thing is concerned, I trimmed it down and took out the theme and sent it to the KM Short Story Award for 2009; it got in the top ten finalists which gave me a good laugh. It won't stay trim, of course. The novel version is called *Pestcoach*, and also goes on about the above: family rides around in family car while the author reflects that fiction is only a vehicle for various versions of the truth (two siblings with different versions of their childhood) while maintaining that ultimately there is only one truth and someone has it got it wrong…

BIOGRAPHY

Matthew Harris gained an MA in English (First Class Hons) from The University of Auckland in 2005, and teaches writing at Massey University in Albany, where he was nominated for Lecturer of the Year in 2010. Matthew's work has been published variously, from academic articles in *Landfall* and *The Literary Encyclopaedia* to creative writing in *Poetry NZ, Trout, North and South, Southern Ocean Review, Kokako, Blackmail Press, Stylus Poetry Journal* (AUS), *Wicked Alice* (US), *ToeTree Journal* (US), *Half Drunk Muse* (US), *Poetic Diversity* (US), *Blue Fog* (Fiji) and the University of Auckland anthology: *Spectrum* (Reed). Most recently, his first short film script *43000 Feet* was produced under a premiere executive grant from the New Zealand Film Commission, and is due for release in mid-2012. His second, *Snooze Time*, has just gone into production. More of Matthew's writing can be found at www.matthewjamesharris.com.