The Weight of a Human Heart

Short Story Collection and Critical Exegesis

Ryan O'Neill

BA (Hons) University of Strathclyde, MSc University of Bristol

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University of Newcastle

Statement of Originality

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Dedication

To my wife, Jennifer, and my daughters Lauren and Evie.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks must also go to my fellow writers Patrick Cullen, Erol Engin, Bill Pascoe and Michael Sala for their encouragement and friendship throughout this process.

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Abstract

The creative component of this thesis is *The Weight of a Human Heart*, a collection of twenty short stories written in a variety of different styles, and utilising a number of diverse settings, from Africa to China to Australia. The collection is comprised of an equal number of realist and formally experimental short stories, including stories in the form of book reviews, homework assignments and graphs and charts. The critical exegesis maps out the major influences on *The Weight of the Human Heart* in the context of a survey of the Australian short story, an examination of metafiction, and a discussion of the work of James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov and the Oulipo.

Eleven stories in the creative section of this work are available as a commercial publication and therefore not available as part of this PDF document.

Cast of Characters

A character in a frame story

Several months ago my uncle, the noted author Marlow Lockwood, passed away. Although I had never met him, I found, to my great surprise, that as well as leaving me a small legacy, he had made me his literary executor. Due to pressing family concerns, it was some time before I was able to make the journey to my uncle's property, six kilometres west of the town of Mulliner, New South Wales. There I discovered two dozen neatly catalogued manuscripts, and my uncle's instructions on how to dispose of them.

The papers detail some two thousand characters that my uncle had created, but never used, in his many published stories and novels. Some of these characters had been revised or deleted, others metamorphosed into something very different in various drafts, others still were removed at the insistence of editors, and in one or two cases, at the threat of legal action. It was my uncle's generous wish that these characters be freely appropriated by his fellow writers, and inserted into their stories, novels, plays, poems and essays. The first small fraction of the characters is listed below, and when these have been claimed, more will be forthcoming.

Background characters

The woman running along the beach sprints past main characters as they talk, providing a symbolic commentary on their dialogue. If necessary, she can be used as a plot device, stopping to tie her shoelace and smile at the husband, which leads to an argument with the wife. The woman running along the beach is occasionally partnered by a man with a dog, a limping tramp, or an old woman with a walking stick.

Character from a pornographic novel.

One morning, when Patrick Longstaff wakes from troubled dreams, he finds that he has grown an additional seven penises. Delighted with his good fortune, Longstaff embarks on a career as a gigolo, earning himself the nickname which also serves the title of the novel, 'The Cocktopus.'

Characters from unused dream sequences

A hundred foot tall purple man with two mouths for eyes. A decrepit woman with a fish head and donkey tail. A six legged, hundred-eyed monster with ruby-red claws and a gaping maw full of teeth made from human skulls. A naked, blonde twenty two year old with perpetually open legs.

A character created by a computer writing programme

Ernie Anderson is 66 years old, 4ft 9' tall, with light brown eyes and ginger hair. He is introverted and reliable but can be clinging and is scared of spiders. He is athletic, with chocolate skin and a small-featured face. He is an embroiderer. He has a romantic interest, but is not yet married, and has one older sister. Unfortunately, his dialogue consists entirely of 1's and 0's.

A stereotyped character

Archie Bennelong spends most of his time staggering between the dole office and the bottle-o. Other characters in the setting of the generic Outback town know to avoid him (and do so quite easily, as his unwashed smell precedes him down the street) because he is quick with his fists. He looks exactly like the picture of the aborigine on the two dollar coin, and is always surrounded by a Southern Cross of flies. He has spent some time in prison for various petty offences which have not been imagined. If he is feeling too lazy to smash a car window and grab a stereo, he might daub himself with white paint and sit half-naked outside the post office, playing a didgeridoo. On the weekend he goes bush, hunting with spear and boomerang. Archie first appeared in a short story in *Quadrant* magazine, bludging in the margins of the page.

A character who is several steps behind the reader

'Really, I wish Candy wouldn't take those cookery lessons so seriously. She goes round at Paulo's almost every night now, and she is always exhausted. Maybe that's why her pastas are undercooked. At least Paulo has the good grace to seem embarrassed for being such a bad teacher when I say hello to him. That reminds me, I must give him back his wallet, the one I found under our bed. And I really must ask Candy why she bought all that weedkiller when we don't even have a garden.'

Characters who look like someone famous

There is a man who looks like Cary Grant but with blonde hair, and a woman who looks like Jennifer Aniston but a little shorter and a man who looks exactly like Sean Connery in his James Bond days, and also a woman who closely resembles Barbara Streisand, but without the bump on her nose. These characters are useful for any occasion and will save the time required to imagine and describe someone in an original way.

An unnamed male character

He had the desperate look of a man explaining a joke for the third time.

An unborn character

This seven week old embryo (sex as yet undetermined) was removed from the womb of a seventeen year old schoolgirl in a substantial rewrite of a short story. The foetus could

easily be implanted into another female character, or a male character for that matter, if it were a science-fiction story.

Unfinished characters

Susan Feeney was a forty year old woman who had always regretted never having-

Murphy wept, for he hadn't realised that the death of his-

A tall, thin man with an enormous----

An unnamed female character

She attended her sister's wedding with her fiancé, but put her arms behind her back when the bride threw the bouquet.

A religious character

Though it was out of his way, Haggerty went by the foreshore and the beach. The ocean had been one of the first things God had made. It had taken him four days more to think of Man. Sometimes Haggerty wondered if the time had not been wasted.

A character who has been deleted entirely from every draft of a story

A character who is only heard on the telephone

Angela Turner's vocal range extends from low G to high E, and a frequency range of 300 to 3300 Hz. The average decibel level of her conversation is 65 dB but this increases to 102 dB when she calls her husband's mistress to scream at her.

A character who uses the toilet

Unlike most fictional characters Alan Rhodes urinates five or six times a day, and defecates at exactly nine thirty am every morning. These actions inevitably affect the structure of any story he appears in. He always seems to excuse himself and go to the bathroom at precisely the moment of epiphany. The one time he was not allowed to go to the toilet he proceeded to soil himself just as his wife was confessing to a lesbian affair.

A scientific character

Roy always believed there was no such thing as intimacy. The electrons in atoms repelled each other. Even when he was making love to his wife, they never touched. Their skins were one angstrom apart.

The character from the contributor's notes

While ostensibly a short biography of the writer, the individual who appears in the contributor's notes to this story is as much a fiction as the other characters. He has not, in fact, been published in numerous magazines and anthologies, nor have his stories won several unnamed literary awards. Whilst pretending that his relationship with his two cats, Sheba and Mitzi, is the most important fact of his personal life, he makes no mention of his frequent visits to prostitutes, or his hatred of his father.

This character would be suitable for a story about a successful, pleasant, talented, handsome, modest writer, or any other work of fantasy.

A character with cancer.

Alexander Moodie has died from cancer almost a dozen times. He has had carcinomas, lymphomas, sarcomas and blastomas. Tumours have been found on his testes, his lungs, and his prostate and have been caused by smoking, diet, asbestos, chemicals, radon gas, heredity and infection. He has been a dying father, brother, son, grandfather and first cousin in many stories. He is the perfect dying character. He never complains, and always has an appropriate last word or look that will bring closure to another character's grief.

One thing to keep in mind; he was once married to the woman running along the beach, but they divorced just after his first diagnosis of leukaemia. It is advisable to keep these characters apart.

A character with realistic speech patterns.

Teresa said, 'Umm, did you see that thing, that thing on TV the other night with him from that movie. Well I watched it with Steve and he was like this is crap and I was like you're not even... What do you know you're not even watching it. Reading a book is what... He was reading. Because it was... I think it was Sunday, yeah Sunday, that was it. Umm, the thing is, when you, the thing is, he knew that I liked it, you know? He knew that and it actually, like... you know? It made me, like, angry and that that he thinks he is so fucking Mister fucking superior there with his and you can... You know what he's like so like I grabbed this book he was reading and he hates it when... I got the book and I ripped the what do you call it the page from the shit he's reading and I was like, wait, I've got it here, I kept it so I did. Listen, hang on, wait till I... listen to this shit will you, ''Oh papa, it's long since I've ceased to see you otherwise than as you really are! I think we've all arrived by this time at the right word for that: 'You're beautiful--*n'en parlons plus*.' You're as beautiful as ever-- you look lovely.' Who, I mean who the fuck talks like that?'

A Post-Modern character

'I never metafiction I didn't like,' said the man who was made up entirely of words on paper.

A pathetic character

Since losing his daughter in a hit and run, Michael Barrett spends several hours every day standing on the road where she died, pointing a hairdryer at passing cars in the hope they will mistake it for a speed camera and slow down.

Three characters from stories that were universally rejected

As Scott Haggerty's wife screams in her thirtieth hour of labour, he goes to fetch her a glass of water and never returns.

Donald Moffat is a sixty two year old, 2.1m tall, sandy haired, blue-eyed, shabbily dressed accountant who, for no reason, begins to resemble the books that he reads. On finishing *Huckleberry Finn*, he starts to speak in a southern drawl, and the fourth chapter of JG Ballard's *Crash* finds him masturbating as he drives his car into an oncoming truck. Despite horrific injuries, he is discharged from hospital in only two days after reading a Superman comic, and is able to fly home. The story ends with Moffat reading the Book of Genesis, and becoming God.

It has been Christmas for six years at the house of Liz McAvoy. This character's husband left her on Christmas Eve, and since that time Liz has never taken down the decorations. One day, at her (vaguely realised) office, doing her (ambiguous) job, she meets Frank, a twenty five year old who looks like Cary Grant, but with blonde hair. The two begin to go out together, and fall in love. Eventually Liz has to invite Frank back to her festive house. Under the Christmas tree there lies the present that Liz's husband left for her, still unopened. Frank insists that Liz gets rid of all the decorations, and when she refuses, he leaves her. In the end, Liz opens her husband's Christmas present and finds only an empty box.

A character who gives too much exposition

'Really, Peter Johnson, my good friend of some twenty five years,' said Max loudly, 'You've never been the same since Jan left you for your youngest brother, causing this ill-advised move from Melbourne six months ago with little Johnny, your sickly, only child.'

A distracting character

Georgia Garamond is ᴀʟɢᴇʀɪᴀɴ, but has spent a lot of time in **Berlin**. She works as a `courier` and ᴄᴏᴍɪᴄ on **Broadway** and was married to Richie *Blackadder*, who died in a car accident. She is a **bold** modern *angry* woman.

Three characters with real names which are too ridiculous to be used in any story

English language teacher, Richard Head. Bum Kok Lee, a cleaning woman. Retired panel beater Klaus Wanke.

Five characters who exist only in note form

Junkie who eats healthily and doesn't smoke.

Irregular verb of a character- behaves differently in present and past.

Old woman who always opens conversations with her husband with an insult, as a way of testing his mood, in the same way she spits on a griddle to see if it is hot.

A wife who looks like a bad passport photograph of a beautiful woman.

Teenager whose father was an engineer. When she was a baby, she and her mother travelled with him to every continent in the world. Now, it infuriates her that she has visited so many places, and has no memory of them. She still has her baby passport, and sometimes she stares with resentment at the picture of her infant self.

A character with an obviously symbolic habit

Simon Breen is always twisting his wedding ring.

A second person narrator

You have almost finished reading this story. You have enjoyed it, but not perhaps as much as the writer hoped, and you will be glad to go on to something else. You expected the character from the frame story to re-appear, and are let down when he does not. Instead, in the last words of the story the writer resorts to a trite quotation from Shakespeare to make an unoriginal point.

'All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.'

Disappointed, you stop reading.

The Archivist

Kay knelt uncomfortably between M and N. Along both walls of the narrow room he worked in, almost a corridor, were ranged tall grey filing cabinets, and inside these cabinets were twelve thousand three hundred and eighteen folders. Kay knew this for he had counted them. Each cabinet had four drawers and a combination lock. It had taken Kay some time to think of fifty three different combinations. He had begun with notable events from his own life, but after using his birthday, and his parents' deaths, he still had forty-nine to go. He found the remainder of the numbers in a *History of the World* he borrowed from the library. The cabinets began with the sacking of Constantinople, and ended at Trotsky's assassination. Kay, to his embarrassment, found that his birthday was besides that of Jesus.

Each of the manila, maroon and green folders that Kay spent each day filing represented a particular category of customer. Kay was easily categorised himself. He was thin and was and looked exactly (somehow exactly) fifty years old. He had regular features, a high forehead, aquiline nose and thin lips. He preferred dark clothing and sometimes it was difficult to tell where he stopped and his shadow began. When he spoke, he raised his eyebrows, the sound of his own voice surprising him. Hundreds of times each day, he would run his fingers over the folders to find the correct place to file. Not long ago, he had spilled some ink on his right hand and discovered he had worn away the prints on three of his fingers.

As Kay stood up, he was disturbed by a clanging in the storage unit down the hallway. This had been unoccupied for as long as he could remember, but now he could hear a scrape of moving boxes, and thick phlegmy breathing, which sounded like paper being ripped. He stopped to listen for a moment, his hand resting on some unfiled contracts. A sharp cough startled him, and then a woman's voice, calling 'Excuse me? Anyone? Excuse me?'

Kay opened the steel doors and went out into a wide dark corridor. All he could see of the woman was her silhouette some twenty yards away. 'Excuse me!' she called again, much louder this time, and when he still didn't answer, 'Hey! You over there!' she screamed. The several echoes of her voice gave Kay a start, for he wasn't even used to the one of her yet.

'Yes?' he said.

'Could you help me?' she asked loudly. 'It's rather urgent.'

Kay locked the doors and approached the woman. The colour of her lipstick he noticed first, for it was the same as the maroon folders he filed. She had blonde hair, brown

eyes and a narrow mouth. Kay guessed her to be in her forties, though her neck seemed older, and she wore a low-cut black jumper and a long red skirt.

'Oh, thank you,' she said. Her voice was pleasant when she wasn't shouting, and reminded Kay of the talking books he sometimes listened to as he worked.

'Thank you, you see it's a bit of an emergency. There's a small fire.'

'What?'

'In there. Could you put it out?'

Kay glanced into the unit. The place was a chaos of boxes and rubbish, and in one corner a pencil line of smoke joined the ceiling to a small bin. Flames like the edges of yellow paper peered over its rim. There was an open bottle of red wine on the floor, and Kay snatched it, and glugged it onto the flames. The fire hissed and died. Beside the bin was an open handbag, a mess of make-up, money, cigarettes (he realised now why the woman coughed) and old receipts.

'You were lucky not to set off the sprinklers,' he said. 'Don't you know that you can't smoke in here?'

'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'Thank you! What's your name?'

'Joseph Kay.'

'My name is Wendy.'

'I can see that.'

She had on a silver chain around her neck, with her name also spelled out in silver.

'It's from Peter Pan. Have you ever read it?'

'Years ago, in school,' Kay said, looking around the unit, which was shorter and wider than his own, shaped in fact, like a drawer in one of his filing cabinets.

'Were you a Lost Boy?' Wendy asked, giggling.

'I'm sorry?'

Kay watched her, as he had watched so much of life, from the corner of his eye. Wendy strolled between the twenty or thirty cardboard boxes stacked around an old flower-patterned sofa, a television, and a rolled-up carpet. Then she sat on a hard, wooden stool by a small table with an old fashioned typewriter.

'These are all my books,' Wendy said. 'My husband is an English lecturer. My ex-husband. We've just got divorced and I had to move to a smaller house. But I got the books. I got the books. Please tell me if I talk too much, I won't think it's rude. I'm writing a novel, there's my typewriter over there. I haven't started yet, but I intend to have it finished in a month. I can do it. My husband (ex, I should say) used to call me a force of nature. I

met him when I was a student, one of his students. I wanted to be well-read, but I ended up only well-thumbed. What do you do, Joseph, apart from save women from fires?'

'I work in the room down there. I file documents.'

'What kind of documents?'

Kay thought for a moment.

'Some kind of financial contracts. I don't really know.'

'You spend all day, alone, filing documents for which you don't know the purpose or reason, and your name is Joseph Kay. It's very like Kafka.'

'Who's Kafka?' Kay asked. 'Was he your husband?'

Wendy laughed, but stopped when she realised he was serious.

'No, not my husband, he was just a writer. I've one of his books here somewhere,' she said, and standing close to him, she knelt and opened up one of the boxes and began to sort through it.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'I have to get back to work.'

'Of course, of course. Thank you again for saving me,' Wendy said, looking up. 'I'll never forget it!'

Kay returned to his room and went back to work at O, as if to symbolise his surprise. It disturbed him to think of himself filed in Wendy's memory. He wondered what she would do with him. Soon he could smell cigarette smoke, and he heard her coughing again, so he went and turned on the radio so he wouldn't have to hear her. There was a religious programme on, and Kay discovered that it was five weeks until the end of the world, according to some American cult. At intervals he would turn the radio down, but he heard no tap of typewriter keys. He spent the afternoon appending documents to his files, and then he locked the cabinets, from Turkey to Trotsky.

After work Kay set off for the train station. The bare branches of the trees outside the warehouse scraped against its walls, leaving a series of scratches on the paint, like prisoners marking off the days. In the trees he could see four magpies and a parrot, and he stopped for a moment to watch a column of ants disassembling a cockroach. On the train Kay looked out of the window and categorised the clouds. He lived in a high flat overlooking the harbour. His flat was very small. From his balcony he could see tall buildings across the water, which always reminded him of a carefully planned bar graph. He showered before going to bed. Stray staples and paperclips clogged the drain. Sometimes, if he couldn't sleep, he would read a file he had brought home from the warehouse, though he knew it was strictly forbidden.

The next day was a Saturday, and Kay spent the weekend bushwalking. He was a naturalist, and secretary to several wilderness societies. Whilst he believed that God had created the world, it was Man who had to put it in order. It satisfied him to sort all creatures, great and small into categories. Life itself was divided and categorised into five kingdoms, five folders. He enjoyed being able to give a name to every plant and animal he saw in the bush, to sort out the chaos of nature

On Monday morning he arrived at work at his usual time. Several cartons of files awaited him at his unit, and he was busy all morning. At noon he went into the hallway for some air, and he stood by a large, open window giving names to the birds that flew by. On looking down he noticed that his shadow had grown another head, and he started. 'I'm sorry,' Wendy said. 'I didn't mean to scare you. I just wanted to stand in the light for a while; it's so gloomy in here.' She was wearing an ugly red and white striped dress, the pattern continuing on the bare skin of her arms and shoulders, where pale paths made triangles on the sunburn.

'You're back again,' Kay said.

'Yes, I have lots to do. All my books are in a mess, not to mention my financial records.'

'I hope you enjoy filing.'

'Only my nails,' she laughed, but when Kay looked at them, they were bitten down to the blood. 'Listen, I'm sorry to bother you again. I just wanted to ask your advice on the quickest way to sort my books. You're the expert. Would you come and have a look?'

He followed her into her unit and saw that she had unpacked her books, making a wall of them in the middle of the room, alongside the magazines and food wrappers and empty bottles. The typewriter still had a tongue of white paper, but now against the walls were a dozen empty bookcases.

'Alphabetically would be best, I would imagine,' Kay said. 'I'll help you make a start, if you like, while I'm on my lunch break. You can go onto your other records.'

'Thank you, thank you, that would be wonderful,' she said.

He noticed a few faint scars on her sunburnt forearms.

'Paper cuts,' he said. 'You should cover your arms.'

'Oh, I will, yes, certainly,' she smiled.

The first book Kay took from the wall was a Kafka. He remembered how she had compared him to Kafka, and he was curious enough to open the book. In the margins of the pages, he found dozens of questions and comments in sharp, ugly handwriting. He looked

through this book, and the next, called 'Bartelby,' and found the same sorts of annotations, notes that began at the top of the page and continued down the right margin, along the bottom and sometimes back up the left margin to the top. Surrounded by the angular red handwriting, the letters on the page seemed to huddle together for safety's sake.

'Those are my notes,' Wendy said. 'My husband-that-was made me read everything that he read, and had me write comments. He said it helped him with his lectures.'

Kay closed the book and put the Melville after the Kafka. He only looked up again when Wendy touched his shoulder.

'It's half past G,' she said. Kay, in the middle of Greene's *Collected Works*, looked at his watch and saw he had taken an extra two hours for lunch.

'I have to go,' he said.

'Would you help me tomorrow? Please? I'm terrible at alphabetising things. Everything ends up under J, my favourite letter.'

Kay thought for a moment, and agreed.

He returned to the books the next day, after finishing work. He took longer now in his sorting, for he would sometimes stop to look at an interesting cover, or to read the author's biographical note. Wendy would talk as she worked on the other side of the wall of books. Sometimes she imitated her husband giving one of his lectures, and Kay enjoyed listening to her, though he couldn't understand what Post-Modernism was, or Beat Poetry. Often she would look up from arranging this or that to comment on the book he happened to be holding.

'Do you know how much like a Carver character you are?' she said once. 'You only speak in everydayisms and I'm forced to discover your inner life through small gestures and moments of silence. Sometimes I look at you and think you're undergoing some kind of spiritual crisis when really you're getting ready to break wind.'

Kay laughed. He enjoyed being compared to writers he had never heard of, and books he would never read.

'I'll read anything,' Wendy would say, 'but not Trollope. He was my husband's favourite. And he left me for one.'

For the next week he spent an hour or two after work cataloguing Wendy's books. She would read poems to him by Marvell and Donne, and he didn't listen, until she explained the grammar of them. He had never considered that words could be put into groups, like animals and plants. As he worked, she would sit at the typewriter and drink wine, but he never saw her write a word.

'The trouble is,' she said to him one afternoon, 'that books have a beginning, a middle and an end, and you can see where each one is just by counting the pages. But in life we don't remember the beginning, we don't know when it will end, and so we don't know where the middle is. It's all just a mess. Don't you ever feel that?'

But Kay, busy with Dickens, didn't hear her.

'I want to write a bestseller. My husband used to say that to write a great book, you had to use your heart as an inkwell. Well, he used my heart until it was dry, and all he wrote was a boring textbook on the Romantics that he forces his students to buy.'

She was often on the phone, and spoke into her mobile like a character in the movies, loudly, clearly, and always repeating and summarising what the caller had said so that the audience could follow the plot.

'What's that? You saw my husband at the restaurant with that slut? Did he look happy? Uh-huh, yes. So he didn't look very happy...'

But that Wednesday night would be Kay's last as he had only a handful of books left to place on the shelves. When he went into her unit, he saw that a red tablecloth like a bullfighter's cape had been spread out on the table, with a bottle of wine, two glasses, paper plates, a loaf of bread, and some cheese. Wendy was waiting for him, wearing a blouse and tight jeans that came down low when she bent over. Kay noticed for the first time that she had tattoos, one just above her left breast and the other on her lower back. If they had been symbols he would not have minded, but they were words, and he found himself trying to read them. He resented this, but couldn't prevent himself from staring at her backside and chest, and she did not seem to mind.

'I wanted to thank you,' she said. 'All this help, I don't know what I would have done on my own. Won't you have some wine?'

'I'll finish the books first,' Kay said. 'There are only a few left.'

Kay opened the last box and found Religion. He didn't open the books anymore, for he didn't like to see the arrows that she had sent into the hearts of them, the underlinings and crossings out. He preferred his files, where every change had to be initialled and countersigned. The last book to find its place was the Bible. Wendy applauded him, spilling some of her wine on the floor.

'Finished, and with the Bible too, well done! Have you read it? No? You'd like the Book of Numbers. That's the one where God files his chosen people.'

She refilled her glass.

'Thank you so much! Here, sit down by me. At last, the wall between us is gone.'

She drank down the wine.

'Do you have any idea, Joseph, how I hate all these books?' she said. 'I abhor every word in them that he made me read. But he wanted them, and I got them. Sit, sit."

Kay took the seat beside her, knocking over two empty bottles on the floor.

'I must be going soon,' he said. Wendy smiled lazily at him and he noticed that she had a breadcrumb stuck in her teeth.

'For all the little time we've spent together, I feel I know you, Joseph,' she said. 'Not like my husband. I knew Salinger better than I knew him.' She touched Kay's cheek.

'What's wrong?' she cooed. 'I like you. You know that, don't you? Don't you like your Fwendy-wendy?'

She pulled a book from the shelf beside her and let it fall to the floor.

'Oops!' she said. 'You need to show me where this one goes.' She smiled at him and fingered her name nervously. Kay realised that she had misfiled him.

'You haven't drunk anything,' she said. 'Have a drink with me.'

'I would prefer not to,' Kay said. 'I'm sorry, I have to go now.'

She grabbed at his arm.

'No, stay. Please, please, please, please stay, please,' she said, walking around him.

Kay could feel her words boxing him in, like the words she had written in the margins of the books. She went to kiss him and he stepped back from her and said, 'Goodnight.'

'Fine! Fine!' Wendy said. 'You want to be a sad, lonely little Kafka character? Here!' And she reached down to the bookshelf and heaved 'America' at him. The novel opened before it reached him as if it were trying to fly away, and only the edge of it caught him, one of the pages giving him a cut on his left cheek as he ducked. Wendy had fallen to the floor, and was tearing pages from *Anna Karenina*. 'Get out, get out, get out,' she whispered. Kay left quickly, the blood from his cheek leaving a pattern of ellipsis on the floor, as if something were to be continued. As he hurried away down the stairs, he heard her call his name. He took a taxi home, and that night went to sleep with a folder open on his chest, as if he were trying to file himself.

Late the next morning, Wendy knocked on the door of his storage unit, stranding Kay in L.

'Joseph, I'm sorry,' she lisped through the keyhole. 'I had a little too much to drink. I'm very embarrassed.' He could hear her breathing outside the door for a moment, and

when he didn't answer, she went away. Kay went back to work, only for Wendy to return an hour later, kicking at the door.

'I said I'm sorry,' she said loudly. 'Have the decency to talk to me, at least.'

Then, very quietly, 'I'm so alone.'

Again, Kay said nothing, but this time she waited at the door for an hour before leaving. All that time he stood silent at P, desperate for the toilet. She came back one last time in the evening, as Kay was about to leave for the day. This time she didn't knock, but tried the door handle and when she found it was locked she swore, and shouted 'I won't let you treat me like this again, Michael!'

Wendy didn't try to speak to him again that week. Still, he was nervous. Even the numbers on the contracts had become threatening. Zeroes were like neat bullet holes and sevens were pins pulled from grenades. Once or twice Kay heard a bottle smash. Sometimes, there was the sound of weeping. For a full month he didn't see her, and then one morning he opened a maroon folder to file, and there she was. Kay let the folder fall to the floor and Wendy's life spilled in front of him- her address, her payslips, her divorce certificate, and her driver's license. She had taken out a loan for $10,000 from the finance company Kay worked for. He thought that it must be a coincidence, but it disturbed him to even have a facsimile of her in the room. He examined the contract and found that it would take her eight years to pay off her loan. After this time, Kay was legally obliged to archive the contract for a further seven years before it could be destroyed. He was appalled. Wendy would be with him for fifteen years.

But after a moment, he laughed at himself, for it was only paperwork. He carefully filed the folder in its proper place and went back to work. But that night he heard her once more outside his door. She had become a voice to him now. It was as if that were the only part of her that hadn't been filed away.

'Let me in, Joseph,' she said. 'Please, answer me. You have no right to treat me like this! Let me in!' And then she laughed. 'But I forgot, I'm already in.' And he heard her walk away.

Kay had an empty safe at the back of his room and it was here he put Wendy's folder, locking it behind Anthony Trollope's birthday. Then he telephoned his supervisor to ask for a week off. Kay almost never took holidays, and his request was granted immediately. His time off passed quietly. He spent his days on his balcony, looking at the ships as they passed, or rather the water they moved in, as if he were searching for any flaws in their reflections. He hoped that Wendy would give up trying to contact him now. He

imagined her talking to the door to his unit for hours on end. After a few days Kay became more and more anxious to get back to the warehouse as he thought of the backlog of work that awaited him. On the day of his return he first went and asked the caretaker about Wendy.

'She moved her things out last night,' the man said. 'She was playing her music bloody loud while she did it, but you're the only other one on that floor, and you weren't there, so I let her be.'

Kay was happy. He went upstairs, but as he came to his unit, he could hear the radio playing, and he realised he must have left it on all week, and wondered why the caretaker hadn't mentioned it. The announcer was saying that today the world was going to end, and when Kay opened the door, he saw that it had.

Wendy had defeated the battle of Borodino with a crowbar, the Treaty of Versailles with an axe. The Bay of Pigs she had simply overturned. Each one of Kay's fifty three safes had been broken into, and each of the thirteen thousand two hundred and twenty files had been thrown onto the floor. Kay could not take it in at first. The huge mounds of paper were without form. It was only after a few moments that he was able to distinguish pelts of paper glued to the walls, paper rocks scattered around paper mountains, and strewn folders forming hundreds of disorderly flags. As he stepped in the room, a draught followed him and there was a stirring, as if a spirit moved on the face of the papers. Kay turned on the light and stood silent for a long time.

The he knelt to pick up the first documents that came to hand- a woman's driving license and a man's payslip, and he began to put things into order.

First and Last

My dear Alan and Gabrielle

I would like to offer you my belated congratulations on your wedding. Forgive me. I am sorry that I didn't write sooner. But here in Uganda only the sun rises and sets on time. I am all for leaving Western ways behind, but that is no excuse for my awful tardiness. After all, it isn't every day that one of my oldest friends is married. I hear you honeymooned in Bali. How long for?

Twenty lifetimes ago, it seems, I said goodbye to you, Gabrielle. How often down the years I have recalled our childhood together. How we loved puzzles, jigsaws and crosswords! I have thought often of our blinking Morse code signals to each other in church during the sermon, and of you writing anagrams on my forearm that I wouldn't let anyone wash off until I had solved them. I remember most clearly our favourite game, "First and Last." I still play it, even now. Gaby, your kisses were sharp and bold, the same way you wrote an x on the page. Forgive me, Alan! How like the cliché of the old boyfriend I have become. Hearing of your engagement I must admit to a touch of jealousy, perhaps even envy, and regret. And you, Gaby, always said I was too cold!

Water, (to change the subject) and power have been a problem here recently. I could go on. Sunburnt countries aren't all like Australia. We have no computers, no telephones or TVs. The skin I was born with makes me ashamed sometimes. (Gaby, try to explain this feeling to Alan. I know he won't understand, being a man for whom *Quadrant* and *The Economist* are his favourite reads.) Your donation last month, Gaby, has purchased new blackboards, so students can finally see letters and diagrams clearly. Before that, we scraped chalk against the walls. Alan, your wife never listens to me, as you know, so thank her for me. (But I'm afraid I can't thank you, or your party, for your calls to restrict refugee numbers from Africa. I have known you for years, and that gives me leave, Alan, to say I find your present stance disgraceful. A politician must remember that his actions and his opinions will be judged by history. But no doubt you will say my criticisms are due to jealousy.)

I apologise. I won't mention politics again. This letter is, after all, to say how happy I am, in truth, for both of you. It is unfortunate that I can't make it back to see your happiness. Sydney, now, is a foreign city for me, and it feels like one I have never visited. A few weeks ago I stood at the equator, one leg in the northern hemisphere, one in the southern, my heart divided. At the hotel Luxor where I stayed that night, I still felt the dotted line run through my sleepless body. But come, to talk of things other than my self pity. Even I sometimes have enough of me.

Please, Alan, forgive this rambling. I am a bit drunk. Gaby was the first woman I said "I love you," to, and I thought she would be the last. But you have that honour now. How I envy you.

James

Auntie's Story

She wakes up, on her back, her arms crossed against her chest, disturbed to find that she was sleeping as if she were laid out for a funeral. A man's voice beside her says, 'It will be six fifty three and twenty seconds,' followed by three beeps. It is still dark outside, and cold. She listens and waits until it is seven o'clock precisely, then, muttering to herself, she sits up, and claws her way into her dressing gown, first the left arm, then the right. She pulls the garment tight around herself and slowly stands up. Then she puts the phone back on the hook, stopping time. Since her husband died in the war, years ago, she has listened to the radio to help her go to sleep. But it had run out of batteries in the night, and so she had called the speaking clock.

She shuffles, rather than walks, to the kitchen, which is part of the dark blur she lives in when she doesn't have on her glasses. She dislikes wearing them in the house. Without them she can't see the crumbs, the tea and coffee stains, and the dust that she knows is there, and she can pretend that the cockroaches are just knots in the wooden floor.

She goes to the stove and turns on the gas. Then she takes a box of matches from the drawer and lights the ring. She fills the kettle and puts it on to boil, then goes to the cupboard to find that there stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop.

(For those readers who like to flick ahead, to see how long the story is, I will save you the trouble. There are seven pages remaining.)

'She wakes up, disturbed to find...' For Christ's sake, this isn't the story I want to write! Go back to the original idea, from the Newcastle Herald, 22nd of January 2008.

Man Held for Murder of "Auntie"

Brian Johnson, a Birmingham Gardens man, has been arrested for the murder of Mrs Anne Beattie, last Wednesday afternoon in Charlestown. Mrs Beattie, a 77 year old widow, was well known in Newcastle as an eccentric, and was known as "Auntie" by neighbours and friends. She was on her way from her sister's house to Charlestown Square when Johnson is alleged to have stabbed her in the neck. Mrs Beattie died before help could arrive. Johnson, who is unemployed and of no fixed address, is due to appear in Newcastle Criminal Court next Thursday to face charges.

When Mrs Beattie got out of bed that morning, there was no foreshadowing or symbolism to suggest she would die that day. In her last few hours, there would have been no exposition or complication, no rising action, no crisis, no climax, no falling action, no resolution, no moral. And for God's sake, no epiphany. These things happen only in stories. Try again, describing only what happened.

(For those readers who like similes, 'She was very fat and had a bloated look about her, like a book that had been dropped in the bath.')

Auntie opened the cupboard, and putting all her weight on her left leg, stretched shakily up and forefingered the packet of tea bags from the top shelf. But when she opened the packet, she found there was only one teabag left, and it had split open. She limped to the bin and emptied the tealeaves into it, then put the packet away in case she found some use for it later on. There was a jar of stale coffee in another cupboard, and she fetched it down as she waited for the kettle to boil. Then she jerked open the cutlery drawer and took out a small teaspoon with a yellowed ivory handle. She spooned some coffee into a chipped mug, then went to the fridge and took out a one litre carton of milk. She added the milk to the cup, then took the whistling kettle carefully from the stove, and added the steaming water. Then she stirred in a clockwise direction six times, smiling as she tinkled the spoon.

This won't do either. A short story can't tell everything that a character does. In real life it may take five minutes to make a cup of coffee, but a story isn't real life. It just pretends to be. Must find another way to tell this: but distracted by trying to think of a good last line for the story.

What does Auntie look like? It's impossible to find a photograph of Mrs Beattie anywhere. Is there any point to a physical description anyway? In a story, you really have only a sentence or two to sketch a character. Most descriptions are interchangeable. There may as well be a table, and the reader can choose what the character looks like. In almost all cases, it will make no difference to the story.

she was a	tall	woman	kind	face,	long	hair	and	blue	e
	short	with a	round		bobbed			green	yes.
	dumpy		pallid		short			bloodshot	
	frumpy		horsey		dirty			brown	
	fat		wrinkly		dyed			hazel	
	thin		jowly		grey			grey	
	average		smooth		purple			narrow	

(For readers who don't like to be reminded that they are reading a story. Please stop now, and read any or all of the following, by much better writers than me; 'Lady with Lapdog' by Anton Chekhov, 'Squeaker's Mate' by Barbara Baynton, 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish' by J.D. Salinger.)

Auntie sat on the toilet and (how should I put it?) passed water. Then she washed her hands, returned to the kitchen, and drank some of the lukewarm coffee she made three paragraphs ago. She sipped the coffee slowly and began to write a shopping list on the back of an old envelope. The telephone rang, and she hurried to answer it because her sister knew she was at home, and if Auntie didn't pick up, her sister would think that she had fallen down, or died.

'*Ik haat het schrijven van verhalen over*,' her sister began.

Auntie and her sister learned Dutch from their mother, and never spoke it to anyone else.

'*Mij ook*,' Auntie said. '*Het is gewoon de schrijver, te pronken.*'

'*Wat een slimme ezel*,' her sister said, hanging up now that the untranslated foreign dialogue had made the reader feel irritated and inferior.

Auntie got up, and looked out of the kitchen window. The sky was exactly the colour of this page. She went into her bedroom and started to get dressed.

This isn't working. 968 words and Auntie hasn't even left the house yet. She has to be dead before the 3,000 word mark. I don't like to write more than that.   Most stories, like most lives, go on for far too long.

I'll just use an * to show that time has passed.

*

The old woman walked down the empty streets. She felt as if it was Judgement Day, and she had been forgotten. When the sun finally came out, she crossed the empty street so that she might at least have the company of her shadow. At last, near her sister's house, she saw a man walking his dog, and she felt strangely grateful. She was still cold, for the weather was heavily symbolic in a short-story-kind of way. Yesterday there had been strong gusts of nostalgia, but now there was only a thin despairing rain falling, though the forecast said there would be rays of hope later on.

Auntie came to her sister's house, and knocked on the door. After a long time the door was opened by another old woman. I don't want to describe her, so let's agree she looked like your grandmother on your father's side. Auntie leaned forward and kissed her sister on the cheek. Margaret smelled like a book, this book, if you bought it second hand.

'Come in, come in,' she said, and Auntie went inside. (Let's assume they are speaking Dutch here.)

'How are you?' Auntie asked as they sat down.

'I'm fine,' Margaret said. 'Tired. What about you? Did the test results come back?'

'Yes,' Auntie said. She waited a moment, then said quietly, '*Het is kanker*."

"No," Margaret cried. "No. You've never smoked, nothing like that. It can't be. How can it be?'

Margaret doesn't realise that fictional cancer is different from real cancer. In stories, you don't get cancer from smoking, or asbestos. You get it because the writer wants the reader to feel more interest and sympathy for their creation. That's why Auntie has cancer. She isn't very interesting. Of course, cancer in real life is a terrible thing. My only daughter died from leukaemia when she was eight years old.

On second thoughts, it seems pointless to give Auntie cancer for just a few pages. Also, it detracts from her death at the end, if she is going to die anyway. Try something else to engage the reader.

Let's see.

<center>1.</center>

Margaret talks away at you for some time, but you don't listen. You are thinking about your shopping list, trying to remember if there is anything you have missed. After some time you notice that your sister has fallen asleep in her chair. The room is warm, and you are tempted to sleep too.

If you close your eyes and fall asleep, go to 2.

If you stay awake and leave to do your shopping, go to 5.

<center>2.</center>

You close your eyes and, after a very short time, fall asleep. You dream that you are a little girl again, and your father is pushing you on a swing that hangs from a tall tree with a thick trunk. He pushes you higher and higher, and you shout for him to stop, but he won't. Finally, you can hold on no longer and you fall from the swing. But you don't fall to the ground. Instead, you fly through the air, towards a house that is built on the clouds.

If you believe that dream sequences in short stories are a lazy and obvious way to illuminate a character, go to 4.

If you believe that having a reader choose a character's actions is a juvenile concept best suited to a children's book, go to 5.

If you would like to continue to choose Auntie's actions, go to 3.

<center>3.</center>

Too bad. You are the reader, not the writer. Go to 5.

<center>4.</center>

You are right. Now got to 5.

<center>5.</center>

Auntie stood up slowly, and carefully took the cold cup of tea from her sister's sleeping hands. She didn't hurry, for she was unaware that she had only 980 words left remaining to her. She put on her coat, and kissing her sister on the cheek, she went outside. The rain had stopped, and the sun had come out once more, so the world had a freshly painted look to it. Auntie crossed the street, which took her just over a year. (I stopped writing this story last year at the word, 'street' and have only just not started it again.) She went slowly along the sidewalk (I am writing this now in New York, where I am visiting my brother). She was short of breath, and rested her shoulder against a lamppost every hundred yards. (I wrote that sentence with an inexplicable erection.) A man with a dog walked past

<center>28</center>

her, his shoulders hunched. Auntie waited for him to pass, then went on. She was only a few minutes from the shops now.

(For readers who don't like this story, feel free to use the following to write your own.)

Aa Bb Cc Dd	(& *
Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii	
Jj Kk Ll Mm	) !- ?
Nn Oo Pp Qq	; " " '
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv	
Ww Xx Yy Zz	' , . :

Forgive me. I lied about my daughter dying. You should never trust a writer. At this moment, she is playing on the floor at my feet as I write, unaware that I have just killed her. She is not eight, she is three, and she is healthy, thank God. It was a terrible thing to do, and I should be more careful. Ink is more difficult to wash away than blood.

I lied because I can't find a way for this story to work and I wanted the reader to feel sorry for me, so he/she would keep reading. Perhaps the story should be told from the murderer's point of view, how he goes about his day, and then, at the last line, with no warning, he plunges a knife into an old woman's neck. Let's start again.

(For readers who like to flick ahead. I lied. There are, in fact, three pages still remaining.)

Brian and Joey and Cally-Sue were all killing themselves. It was a cold morning and the apartment stank of stale clothes and sweat and dirt, but they didn't care because they were all off their head on E's and whizz and Speed, laughing and oohing and aahing at the static on the TV. But then Joey began to freak out, shouting, 'It wasn't me, it was Caramello Koala! It was Caramello Koala!' until Brian couldn't take it anymore and he shouted, 'Fuck off!' and ran outside even though it was raining, and he was so out of it he didn't even know he had a knife in the pocket of his no.

No. If there is one thing worse than listening to someone talk about drugs, it's reading about them. But if telling the story from neither Auntie's nor Brian's perspective is successful, perhaps I could try both points of view at the same time.

Brian searched the gutter for cigarette butts. When he found one he tried to light it but the matches kept burning his fingers. Finally he succeeded, and the smoke came from him mouth like a remembrance of winter. He stumbled along, flinching from himself in shop windows. It was then he saw the old woman, limping on the other side of the street. He waited until she rounded the corner, then followed her. She was nodding her head like she was agreeing with him. Brian only meant to put the knife to her throat as he yanked the bag from her. But the blade met her neck and suddenly there was blood everywhere and he turned and ran away.

Auntie pushed her glasses further up her nose. They didn't fit well, sitting too close to her eyes so that her eyelashes brushed against the lenses like the legs of a fly against a window. Her legs were tired and she walked slowly. Across the street she saw a young man smoking a cigarette and admiring himself in shop windows. The way he blew out the smoke made Auntie think of her dead husband. Strange things made her memory open in the past now, in the same way that a bus ticket or a blade of grass might be used as a bookmark. Then something bit her in the neck, and she died in a memory of her husband, the sound of his boots as he marched away to war.

(For readers who like a story with a twist- Brian was actually the son Auntie gave up for adoption when he was six days old.)

This story is a complete failure. Nothing has worked. And now it is the end, there isn't even a good last line. I want something like

I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.

or

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

or

He loved Big Brother.

or

They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

or

So that, in the end, there was no end.

So, something like that, please. Write the last line below. Thank you.

_____

Ryan O'Neill's stories appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Zoetrope All-Story* and *HEAT* among many others. He won *The Age* short story competition in 2007 and 2008. He lived in Newcastle with his wife and son until his death in February, 2010 from lung cancer. A posthumous collection of stories is forthcoming from Giramondo.

The Traveller

Lockhart was lost. He crossed a border of shade to stand in the sunlight, looking around for a sign. At every step the coins in his pocket jangled. He was in the habit of carrying loose change about him to throw to beggars. An airplane flew far up in the sky, travelling away from the sun, which hadn't appeared to change its position all day, as if it too had lost its way. Seeing no sign, Lockhart continued down the street, thinking once again how well stocked the shops appeared, how solid the houses. He turned a corner and found himself in a part of town he remembered from his childhood, massive steelworks and a railway line running behind an endless row of neglected houses. He stopped and closed his eyes. There was a smell of sewage from a broken pipe, acrid smoke and the thrum and clank of machinery. It might have been in Mogadishu.   Since he had returned to Australia, everything he saw reminded him of something.

The bell rang as he walked up to the school gates. Children dashed from the building, smart in their uniforms. There seemed to be a car waiting for each of them. He caught sight of his nephew, a small, red-haired boy, and automatically held out his hand. Paul shook it, awkwardly, and Lockhart said, 'Mr Livingstone, I presume.' Though Paul's surname was Livingstone it was not a very good joke, and Lockhart had already used it three or four times before. Lockhart found it difficult to speak to his nephew. Paul had the look of someone travelling through life without the correct papers.

'Chile,' Lockhart said abruptly, after they had walked side by side for a few moments.

'Santiago,' the boy said.

Paul had won a prize from his school for memorising the capital cities of a hundred and fifty countries. Lockhart was proud of him. He himself had left school at fourteen.

'You're very clever, isn't it?' Lockhart said. 'I mean, aren't you?'

After all his years there, Africa had colonised Lockhart's English.

'Shall we foot it?' he said, and Paul nodded.

'Where's Mum?' he asked. The boy's blue eyes always seemed to be moving, looking this way or that, but always settling back to his uncle.

'At the doctor's,' Lockhart said. 'Just a check-up. She'll be home soon. I said I'd pick you up. Canada.'

'That's easy. Ottawa,' the boy said.

'Excellent,' Lockhart said. He tugged at his nephew's schoolbag and the boy turned to face him.

'Did you pick up the sponsorship forms?' Lockhart asked

Paul nodded and unslung his bag from his shoulder. He took out a sheaf of forms and a sealed envelope. Lockhart glanced at the forms, then opened the envelope and counted the money inside. 'That's excellent,' he said. 'This means three months of square meals at the Orphanage. Well done, son.' The boy grinned at him and Lockhart, looking up, realised he had lost his way again.

'Where's your house?' he asked.

Paul pointed to a nearby street. 'It's your house too,' he said, but Lockhart was silent.

They soon came to the place, a small white weatherboard cottage with a well-kept garden. Paul unlocked the door and they went inside, Lockhart taking his watch from his pocket and putting it on. It was an old habit, from living in Nairobi. If you wore a watch in the street there, it would be ripped from your wrist. His nephew, he noticed as he fixed the strap, had also put his watch in his pocket for the walk home from school. Lockhart made his way through the clean, bare hallway, the only decoration the small crucifix nailed to the yellow wallpaper. Lockhart wanted a shower, partly for the pleasure of it, and partly to avoid his nephew, whom he knew would hover around him, as insistent as any beggar. In the bathroom, he took off his clothes and regarded himself naked in the mirror. He had been careless of the sun since coming to Australia. While his chest was white, his arms were an angry maroon, his calves brown and his thick thighs pink. He reminded himself of a map of colonial Africa. Standing there, he practised his smile. Lockhart stood in the shower for ten minutes, until all the hot water was gone. As he dried himself he could hear music from Paul's bedroom, the throb of an insistent bass like the war drums in old Tarzan films. He changed into a pair of dark blue trousers and a blue shirt that his sister had given him. The clothes were brand new. There were no names written in the label, no burns or small, repaired tears. It was a pleasure to wear clothes that hadn't belonged to someone else.

He went into the kitchen and put the kettle on. Neatly spaced along the walls were several photographs of African children in wooden frames. On the bottom left of each frame, in Lockhart's handwriting, was the child's name: Faith, Prosper, Charity, Innocent. When he heard his sister at the front door he sat down at the kitchen bench.

'Hello!' Narelle called out as she came into the kitchen, carrying a heavy leather bag. She was ten years younger than Lockhart, but she seemed older. Her hair was grey, the skin on her thin face mottled with veins. She worked in a hospital canteen, and wore a neat, white uniform that smelled of disinfectant.

'How was your walk today?' she asked him.

'It was lovely, thanks.'

'Are you making tea?'

'Yes.'

'Could I have a cup?'

'Of course.'

It struck Lockhart how much their conversations resembled the dialogues in a phrasebook. She put her bag down on the kitchen counter and a thick manila envelope fell out. As she leaned over to pick it up, Lockhart caught sight of her scar, where they had cut off her breast the year before. It was long and still red, with raised dots on either side of it from the stitches, like a disputed border on a map. Lockhart looked away.

'Here's the money from the fundraiser at the hospital,' she said, handing him the envelope. 'You had better put it in the bank tomorrow. I don't like having that much money in the house.'

'I will,' he said, as he opened the cupboard to find a cup for her.

'I haven't had a letter from the orphans for a while,' she said. 'Are you sure they're OK?'

'It's just the postal service,' Lockhart said. 'Once, in Swaziland, I posted a letter to a village two miles away and it took a year to arrive. Don't worry. When I left, Faith was just starting school, thanks to the money your rotary group sent, and Prosper was being apprenticed to a carpenter.'

He poured out her tea, spooned several sugars into his own. He couldn't remember if she took sugar, but he didn't want to ask. He stood for a moment, blowing on his mug.

'Are you all right for money?' she asked suddenly, reaching for her purse. 'It must be so expensive here, compared with what you're used to.'

'I'm fine,' Lockhart said. Then, 'For the moment.'

'Where's Paul?' Narelle asked. 'Here, let me do that.' She took his mug and washed it in the sink.

'He's in his room,' Lockhart said. 'We had a nice chat today.'

'He's very fond of you,' Narelle said.

She put one of her hands on the table, and a moment later the other on top of it, as if she was comforting herself.

'He's a good boy,' Lockhart said. 'Very smart. I'd have gone far with his brains.'

'You did go far,' Narelle said.

'Yes, I suppose so,' he replied. 'A few thousand miles, anyway.'

They drank their tea, neither of them speaking for a moment. 'Because, you see,' she said, 'the doctor found a lump, in my breast. The right one. Obviously.'

'Yes,' Lockhart said, putting down his cup. He had little desire to become person A in the dialogue, but he knew what questions were expected. 'What did the doctor say?'

'I've to go to the hospital tomorrow, for tests. They think the cancer may have returned. And …'

'What?'

'They're worried it's travelled to other places. In my body. They're going to take some tissue.'

'A biopsy,' Lockhart said. His hand had jerked up nervously, like a student desperate to answer a question.

'Yes,' she said. 'A biopsy. I don't like that word. Greg went in for a biopsy, and never came out again.'

Greg was Narelle's husband. He had died when Lockhart was in the Congo, several years before.

'Paul will be upset,' Narelle said, sipping her tea

'Are you going to tell him?'

'His father didn't tell him, and I don't think Paul ever forgave him. We have to.'

Lockhart nervously noted the use of first person plural.

'Could you?' Narelle asked. 'It will be better from you. He admires you so much. If you say everything will be all right, he'll believe you.'

'When?'

'Now,' she said.

'Of course.' He smiled his smile. 'Don't worry.'

'Richard,' she said. 'If anything should happen to me, could you look after—'

'You'll be fine!' Lockhart called heartily over his shoulder as he left the kitchen.

He went down the narrow hallway to his nephew's room. Taped to the door was an old creased map of Africa, torn from an atlas. His nephew had marked out his uncle's travels in a red felt pen, through countries that no longer existed. The lines and dots reminded Lockhart of the progress of a disease.

He knocked on the door, and went in. On several high shelves were various knick-knacks that Lockhart had sent Paul over the years; a model bicycle made from coca-cola ring pulls, a coat hanger twisted into the shape of Africa. One wall of the room was papered with

different notes of African currencies, francs, shillings, and krugerrands to make a lurid collage of corrupt and assassinated presidents, zebras, lions, waterfalls and Zulus. And yet all of it was worth less than five dollars.

Paul was lying on the bed, reading *King Solomon's Mines*. Lockhart stood at the door, uncertain of how to begin. He had had little experience of cancer. Most Africans he had known had never lived long enough to die from it. The boy looked up at him from behind the book, and seeing Lockhart's face, he frowned. Lockhart grinned at him, and said, 'This one will get you. North Korea?'

'Pyongyang,' the boy replied.

Lockhart sat down at the end of the bed. 'You know that your mother was at the doctor,' he began.

Paul sat up suddenly and stared at him.

'What is it?' he said quickly.

To Lockhart, he already had the look of an orphan about him.

'Well …' Lockhart began. 'She's home now.'

'That's good,' the boy said. Lockhart was afraid Paul would ask questions, but like him, the boy was a natural speaker B. Lockhart, to his own surprise, said 'When you're a bit older, you can come out to visit me in Africa. You'd get on well with Prosper. He's just starting as an apprentice mechanic.'

Unexpectedly, Paul leaned forward and embraced him. Lockhart patted the boy firmly on the back twice, then said, 'Let's go and see your mother.'

Narelle was waiting in the living room, writing a letter to one of the orphans. She looked up as they came in, and Lockhart shook his head and mouthed, 'Tomorrow.' She frowned, then nodded, and the boy sat down beside her, shrugging off her kiss. They watched the television for a long time together in silence.

At last Lockhart said, 'I think I'll turn in. Goodnight.' He kissed his sister on the cheek, and shook his nephew's hand. Then he went to the kitchen to retrieve the envelope Narelle had brought for him, and went to his bedroom, a small space at the back of the house. The green walls were covered in more framed photographs of children, waving and laughing at the camera. These were the children his sister thought lived in Lockhart's orphanage. But there was no orphanage. They were street children he had found in Freetown and Kampala; he had paid them a cigarette each to be photographed. Lockhart shut the door, then kneeled down and pulled the suitcase out from under the bed. It was easy to pack up his few things. He supposed that he had never really unpacked his suitcase in

forty years. He added the envelopes that Narelle and Paul had given him to a dozen similar envelopes wedged tightly under the Australian phrasebook which Paul had presented to him as a joke, but which Lockhart used on occasion.

When he had closed the case, he sat down on the bed and looked out of the window to the dark street. He wasn't sure where the train station was. He felt lost, and he realised then that he had always had this feeling, that all his life he had felt as if he had just arrived in a strange new town at midnight, and was waiting for the morning to get his bearings. But morning had never come.

He sat quite still for an hour after he heard the doors close in his nephew and his sister's bedrooms. Then he took his suitcase, and crept into the dark hall. He had opened the front door and was standing half-in, half-out of the house when Paul appeared from the kitchen wearing a shapeless blue dressing gown, a glass of water in his hand. He stared at his uncle's suitcase.

'Where are you going?' the boy asked, frightened.

'Nowhere,' Lockhart said, and he shut the door.

An Australian Short Story

It is a Tuesday morning.[i]

It was a plain weatherboard house with a rose garden at the front, a vegetable garden down the side, and an orchard at the back.[ii] Its solidity was late nineteenth century, as the town's was.[iii] Everything about the place groaned with bad taste.[iv] Two parrots perched on the white and blue fence, preening themselves from their fluffy orange chests to their green tails, their wings opening and closing, their necks twisting and turning.[v] The landscape of red tin roofs shimmered liquid in the heat.[vi] All over the district the smell of smoke, charred wood and incinerated gum leaves tinged the air and thickened with every breeze.[vii]

Then, to the right, at the far end of the house, a jacaranda tree in shadow seemed to disintegrate and its pieces scatter as a flock of birds rose from its branches.[viii] For a moment he stood uncertainly in the sun, then ran back into the she-oaks.[ix] He was a short, thickset man of about forty two years of age; his face was not handsome by any means, but the features and the expression of his face was something very peculiar.[x] His breathing was tired and heavy, sometimes catching and whistling softly in some mysterious passage behind his chest.[xi]

Shit, he thought, his life was a mess.[xii] He achieved, tangibly, nothing on his farm, if such it could be called.[xiii] As usual he attracted women who wished to still the raging storms of his heart.[xiv] But there was, to all appearance, small hope of that.[xv] Worst of all, the unaskable question- was he happy with her?[xvi]

She might have materialised piecemeal in his mind, her black hair drawn smooth and tight to be held at her neck, the whiteness of the scalp where the strong hair was pulled back from her forehead, her full arms and the slope of her almost bare shoulders, her skin as if not much exposed to the sun and with its own flush of colour- these things came to him like unrelated aspects of different people.[xvii] He grinned as if he had found his true love, and perhaps he had.[xviii]

'Hello,' she said standing flat-footed in her cheap thongs, the breeze pressing the thin folds of the long green dress against the back of her thighs.[xix] 'I thought you had a story you wanted to finish.'[xx]

'No, no, it's all right'[xxi] He said he must have some smell which repels publishers.[xxii]

'I don't think so,' she murmured, and smiled, although the smile was also something of a murmur.[xxiii]

Her husband's gaze caught hers; he waited, challenging.[xxiv]

'Happiness,' he said, 'is notoriously difficult to describe.'[xxv]

'Yes,' she said.[xxvi]

'I've been writing a novel,' he added.[xxvii]

Suddenly she felt like crying.[xxviii] Her mind was still numb from the cold winter and what she saw as the gradual failure of her marriage.[xxix]

His eyes clouded over with revulsion.[xxx]

'You don't even care.'[xxxi] A couple of pages, that was all, in two years.[xxxii]

'I'm sorry...'[xxxiii] She assumed a bleak, set expression, trying to ward off the idiotic butterfly smile that persisted in trying to alight on her mouth.[xxxiv]

'Curse you!' he yelled.[xxxv]

It had come over him again, for no reason- the feeling of failure, of isolation that this landscape had given him.[xxxvi]

'You're always saying that, for years you've said it.'[xxxvii]

He stopped suddenly and stared in front of him.[xxxviii] What the landscape had to say to him under these circumstances was not precisely clear.[xxxix]

She began to grumble her way across the yard and into the house.[xl]

'One thing I do know,' she was trembling with rage, 'the one thing I'm sure of is that I've been too good to you.'[xli]

'Go away.[xlii] I feel like I'm suffocating.'[xliii]

She gazed at him with a puzzled frown as if trying to divine exactly what he meant.[xliv]

'Say that again and you will put me into a passion.'[xlv]

A roar of laughter was the reply.[xlvi]

'I'm sick of you.'[xlvii] (He didn't remember saying any of this, later on.)[xlviii]

'It's only this,' she said suddenly, 'I can't stand this life here; it will kill me!'[xlix]

She was walking away; she was no longer between him and the light.[l]

'Dirty brute!' she said.[li] 'I won't be returning.[lii] Goodbye.'[liii]

Distance seemed to have a soporific effect on him.[liv]

'Goodbye,' he called, and it was as if a tree had spoken.[lv]

In the weeks after his wife left, each crowd was a riot, each street a midnight alley.[lvi] He would dawdle down to the harbour with its green smell of sea lettuce and the stone wall, scribbled with the white droppings of gulls.[lvii] The air was full of gulls and the stench of

sheep ships and harbour scum.[lviii] He blundered past a man sharpening his fingernails on a red brick wall, a bare-faced waitress swabbing terrace tables, a busker unpacking a saxophone in a doorway.[lix] He took off his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business.[lx] The pub.[lxi] That's when he started to drink.[lxii]

The vintners fetched wine fit to make you drunk, smooth on the tongue and rufous, rough as a dog's rasp at some abdominal cavity which finds gentility a bore, but fairly clear of histamines, thank Christ.[lxiii] Of course, his wife never understood him, that was the trouble, such a queer, difficult kind of woman.[lxiv] He looked up at the sky.[lxv] A hundred yards out, just beyond the line of the surf, two seagulls were hovering.[lxvi] It was all part of the quivering awareness of the natural world.[lxvii] He felt confused and helpless.[lxviii] 'What am I supposed to do?' he said.[lxix] Let me, for God's sweet sake, get drunk.[lxx]

He was red-eyed, bleary and unsteady.[lxxi] So many, many fights [lxxii] All the time she'd worked and gone without and lived in the heat and believed in them, and close to the time he could make things up to her she should go.[lxxiii] More fine wine was produced, more savouring of the crystal goblets.[lxxiv] His lips moved as if he were addressing some image held before his inner vision; then he turned and tramped on.[lxxv] How could it have turned into such a fucking disaster?[lxxvi]

'Jesus Christ,' he said, covering his eyes.[lxxvii]

The sun was getting low now, and the shadows were lengthening.[lxxviii]

It was evening, after a day hot enough to blister the ear of an elephant.[lxxix] When he got to the house the front was dark, but he could see light coming from the kitchen at the back.[lxxx] The miracle had happened.[lxxxi] A voice boomed out of the blackness.[lxxxii]

'If you have anything to say to me sir,' (the dusky pale of her cheeks illuminated by two spots of crimson) 'you had better say it.'[lxxxiii]

He stood very still with his face lifted towards the house, as a tradesmen waits who has rung the doorbell, received no answer, and hopes that someone will appear at last at an upper window.[lxxxiv]

'I'd like to explain.'[lxxxv]

'What?'[lxxxvi]

'Why are you weeping?'[lxxxvii]

A sorrow beyond words.[lxxxviii]

'Oh, nothing,' she paused.[lxxxix] '...anyone could we could all cry like that every day if we wanted to if we didn't stop ourselves.'[xc]

The weight of her dress was lifted outwards and the moon was in her face.[xci]

'You'll admit,' said her husband, 'that you tend to the dramatic.[xcii]

She laughed at this to herself.[xciii]

So he began to feel a good deal better.[xciv]

'My love for you,' he said,' is the most honourable thing about me.'[xcv]

She smiled her sideways smile.[xcvi]

'Love's fucked anyway.'[xcvii]

She caught his arm and walked him through the front door, and down the carpeted hall to their bedroom.[xcviii] They were entering paradise.[xcix] On occasions like this, his face was a mask of glee, grinning with self-satisfaction, as though he'd pulled off a particularly difficult conjuring trick.[c] He put his hand on her knee and rested it there.[ci] The clasp seemed to embolden her to confidence.[cii] Does she love him?[ciii] She rests her hands on his shoulders; he puts his arms around her.[civ] A dance, fleshed out by smouldering fantasies, a heartbeat of time so intense it is almost unbearable, wallowing in velvet so soft you can feel each hair brushing against your skin.[cv] And he presses his crying mouth into her flesh.[cvi] At last he fell back exhausted, and lay breathing heavily.[cvii]

'Are you happy now, then?'[cviii]

Thanks, that was nice, she said.[cix] But her heart was beating pit-a-pat.[cx]

'Just trying to keep things together,' he muttered before he nodded off.[cxi]

His breathing, a solid snore of the same pitch and volume hour after hour, night after night, was as comforting as the sea.[cxii] He was woken in the night by a dream of intercourse, the excitement of fondling a body, the huge relief of orgasm.[cxiii] He raised himself upon his elbow noiselessly and peered into the darkness.[cxiv] He stood up and walked out of the room.[cxv] He sat in the lounge in the vague- the vain- hope that she might actually follow him.[cxvi] A universal dictionary, a rhyming dictionary, a thesaurus, an illustrated bestiary, inks of various colours and consistencies, pencils of all hardnesses, penhandles of many shapes, and pens of steel, quill and gold, were all fitted into a combination lectern and writing desk, which held also a Dictaphone, an improved pantograph for writing by hand, and a stenotype machine.[cxvii] He suddenly loved the place at night, its stillness, its lights, its easy beauty.[cxviii] He lifted the peg-board from beside his chair, adjusted the wad of unruled paper, and began to write generously across it with a blue felt pen.[cxix] Scenes, conversations, faces.[cxx] The man buried himself in his paper.[cxxi]

The night wore on.[cxxii] Towards dawn, his eyes heavy and his mind exhausted, he would catch himself nodding in his chair, and would return to bed.[cxxiii]

'How is your writing?' she asked.[cxxiv]

'Vanity,' he cried, 'all is vanity.'[cxxv]

'I'm sure your novel, when you get down to it, will be excellent.'[cxxvi]

This became her answer to everything.[cxxvii]

'What is sad,' he said, 'is that I've learned some of these things more than once.'[cxxviii]

'Do you have a theory about everything,' she asked tiredly.[cxxix]

What he felt he kept within his breast.[cxxx] He could not help being a little selfish; it was constitutional.[cxxxi] She has seen it year after year after year.[cxxxii] Indeed, she was as proud of it as of his talent, of which she considered it an expression.[cxxxiii]

'Do you love me?'[cxxxiv] His eyes danced a little, and she noticed in them a life hitherto kept from her sight.[cxxxv] Was she, with the smile no anguish could unpin, and no agony subdue, happy?[cxxxvi] She must make do with what is available to be offered.[cxxxvii]

'Of course,' she whispered back and sinking down reached up both arms to him.[cxxxviii]

'You're sure?'[cxxxix]

'Yes![cxl] You believe me?'[cxli]

'Yes.'[cxlii]

And she lay beside him, separated by a knowledge which he did not share, of something sinister; of wounding, of unhappiness and of pain.[cxliii]

She laughed.[cxliv] 'Very well, I'll tell you a story.'[cxlv]

They would live- somewhere, and be- very happy.[cxlvi] Tomorrow will be full of possibilities.[cxlvii] She lied and lied and lied.[cxlviii]

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.[cxlix]

[i] *Reconstruction of an Event* by Glenda Adams (1979)

[ii] *American Dreams* by Peter Carey (1974)

[iii] *Gretel* by Hal Porter (1971)

[iv] *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* by Thea Astley (1979)

[v] *A Fishbone in the Throat* by Isabelle Li (2009)

[vi] *Salt* by Pierz Newton-John (2009)

[vii] *The Funerals* by Brian Matthews (1989)

[viii] *Little Jackie* by A.G. McNeil (2009)

[ix] *Under the House* by Jessica Anderson (1980)

[x] *The Master and his Man* by John Lang (1859)

[xi] *Dust* by Gavin Casey (1936)

[xii] *Sonatina* by Brian Castro (1994)

[xiii] *The Mob of Callemondah* by David Rowbottom (1956)

[xiv] *The Last Days of a Famous Mime* by Peter Carey (1974)

[xv] *A Dispersal* by Anon (c 1850)

[xvi] *The Powerful Owl* by Candida Baker (1994)

[xvii] *Party* by Peter Cowan (1965)

[xviii] *The Punch* by Laurie Steed (2010)

[xix] *Nails of Love, Nails of Death* by James McQueen (1984)

[xx] *A Man in the Laundrette* by Beverley Farmer (1985)

[xxi] *Place of Birth* by Beverley Farmer (1985)

[xxii] *New York, New York* by Rosemary Creswell (1996)

[xxiii] *The Booster Shot* by Peter Goldsworthy (1993)

[xxiv] *The List of All Answers* by Peter Goldsworthy (1986)

[xxv] *Portrait of Electricity* by Murray Bail (1975)

[xxvi] *The Milk* by Jessica Anderson (1987)

[xxvii] *The Other Side of the River* by Georgia Blain (2009)

[xxviii] *ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ* by Murray Bail (1975)

[xxix] *Country Girl Again* by Jean Bedford (1979)

[xxx] *Going Home* by Archie Weller (1986)

[xxxi] *Nullarbor Honeymoon* by Dorothy Hewitt (1996)

[xxxiixxxii] *Our Lady of the Beehives* by Beverley Farmer (1985)

[xxxiii] *The Shipwreck Party* by Liam Davison (1989)

[xxxiv] *The Weight of a Man* by Amy Witting (1961)

[xxxv] *How Muster-Master Stoneman Earned his Breakfast* by Price Warung (1892)

[xxxvi] *The Weeping Fig* by Judith Wright (1953)

[xxxvii] *Frederick the Great Returns to Fairfields* by Elizabeth Jolley (1983)

[xxxviii] *Miss Jackson* by Frances Adams (1892)

[xxxix] *An Old-Time Episode in Tasmania* by Tasma (1891)

[xl] *Down at the Dump* by Patrick White (1964)

[xli] *Hostages* by Fay Zwicky (1983)

[xlii] *What Else is There?* by Margaret Trist (1946)

[xliii] *Las Vegas for Vegans* by A.S. Patric (2011)

[xliv] *"Well, What Do You Say to My Boy?"* by Judah Waten (1954)

[xlv] *The Ghost on the Rail* by John Lang (1859)

[xlvi] *The Parson's Blackboy* by Ernest Favenc (1893)

[xlvii] *Fiend and Friend* by Hal Porter (1962)

[xlviii] *New Year* by Joan London (1986)

[xlix] *Water Them Geraniums* by Henry Lawson (1904)

[l] *The Only Adam* by Gerald Murnane (1985)

[li] *Uncle Patrick was a Scholar* by Margaret Trist (1946)

[lii] *Period Piece in the Fields* by Lyndall Hadow (1962)

[liii] *Oh I Do Love to be Beside the Seaside* by J.M.S Foster (1980)

[liv] *The Sleeping Doll* by John Morrison (1955)

[lv] *Trees Can Speak* by Alan Marshall (1956)

[lvi] *Flinch* by Ryan O'Neill (2007)

[lvii] *Clay* by Patrick White (1964)

[lviii] *Thomas Awkner Floats* by Tim Winton (1985)

[lix] *A Vigil* by Helen Garner (1992)

[lx] *The Union Buries its Dead* by Henry Lawson (1892)

[lxi] *Short-Shift Saturday* by Gavin Casey (1942)

[lxii] *A Miracle of the Waters* by Zeny Giles (1989)

[lxiii] *I Lost my Love to the Space Shuttle 'Columbia'* by Damien Broderick (1986)

[lxiv] *The Letter* by Marjorie Robertson (1946)

[lxv] *Velodrome* by Angelo Loukakis (1986)

[lxvi] *The Birthday* by Vance Palmer (1934)

[lxvii] *The Dingo* by Vance Palmer (1934)

[lxviii] *The Woman from the Bend* by Don Edwards (1944)

[lxix] *Solemn Mass* by Dal Stivens (1941)

[lxx] *A Double Because It's Snowing* by Hal Porter (1958)

[lxxi] *Hawkins' Pigs* by Brian James (1944)

[lxxii] *I Told Mama not to Come* by Angelo Loukakis (1984)

[lxxiii] *Living* by Peter Cowan (1944)

[lxxiv] *I Am Monarch of All I Survey* by Michael Wilding (1986)

[lxxv] *The Good Herdsman* by Frank Dalby Davison (1964)

[lxxvi] *Partying on Parquet* by Angelo Loukakis (1986)

[lxxvii] *The Chosen Vessel* by Barbara Baynton (1902)

[lxxviii] *The Brown Paper Coffin* by James McQueen (1988)

[lxxix] *Mr and Mrs Sin Fat* by Edward Dyson (1890)

[lxxx] *Did He Pay?* by Helen Garner (1981)

[lxxxi] *The Miracle* by A.E. Sturges (1963)

[lxxxii] *Reunion in Gunyah Creek* by Maurice Corlett (1980)

[lxxxiii] *The Romance of Lively Creek* by Marcus Clarke (1877)

[lxxxiv] *The Empty Lunch-Tin* by David Malouf (1985)

[lxxxv] *Graffito Spy* by C.C. Catt (1981)

[lxxxvi] *Having a Wonderful Time* by Kate Grenville (1980)

[lxxxvii] *Life and Death in the South Side Pavilion* by Peter Carey (1975)

[lxxxviii] *The Lost World: Signs of Life* by Ted Colless and David Kelly (1983)

[lxxxix] *Extra Virgin* by Jan Hutchinson (1988)

[xc] *Working Hot* by Mary Fallon (1982)

[xci] *The Incomparable* by Nicholas Jose (1984)

[xcii] *The Enemies of Time* by Amy Witting (1991)

[xciii] *From a Bush Log Book: Going into the Heartlands with the Wrong Person at Christmas* by Frank Moorhouse (1981)

[xciv] *The Narrow Escape of Herbie Bassett* by Eleanor Dark (1959)

[xcv] *The Heraldry of the Body* by Craig McGregor (1983)

[xcvi] *The Midnight Supper* by David Campbell (1959)

[xcvii] *Campaign* by Jean Bedford (1986)

[xcviii] *The Cost of Things* by Elizabeth Harrower (1974)

[xcix] *Paradise* by Murray Bail (1975)

[c] *Waiting for Mr Mowbray* by Paul Morgan (2008)

[ci] *The Art of Convalescence* by Amanda Lohrey (2009)

[cii] *Miss Pallavant* by Rosa Praed (1888)

[ciii] *The Courts of the Lord* by Fay Zwicky (1982)

[civ] *Foxtrot* by Claire Aman (2009)

[cv] *Queen of Love* by Rosie Scott (1989)

[cvi] *An Unfinished Head* by Carolyn Van Langenberg (1986)

[cvii] *The Premier's Secret* by Campbell McKellar (1887)

[cviii] *The Bodies* by Michael Sala (2009)

[cix] *Our Swimmer* by Tim Richards (1992)

[cx] *'Women Must Weep'* by Henry Handel Richardson (1934)

[cxi] *Breaking Up* by Paddy O'Reilly (2008)

[cxii] *Mermaid Footwear* by G.L. Osborne (2009)

[cxiii] *The Man of Slow Feeling* by Michael Wilding (1970)

[cxiv] *The Heart-Breaking of Anstey's Bess* by Price Warung (1894)

[cxv] *Amateur Hour* by Garry Disher (1986)

[cxvi] *Getting to the Pig* by Barry Hill (1978)

[cxvii] *Guest of the Redshields* by Christina Stead (1934)

[cxviii] *The Sybarites* by Michael Wilding (1972)

[cxix] *Virgins, Widows and Penitents* by Gerald Windsor (1980)

[cxx] *Angel* by Cate Kennedy (2006)

[cxxi] *Lady Weare and the Bodhisattva* by Kylie Tennant (1969)

[cxxii] *The Night We Watched for Wallabies* by Steele Rudd (1899)

[cxxiii] *Dr B and the Students* by David Brooks (1990)

[cxxiv] *Conrad's Bear* by Susan Hampton (1984)

[cxxv] *A Knight of Teeth* by Peter Mathers (1981)

[cxxvi] *An Extraordinary Thing* by Ray Mathew (1961)

[cxxvii] *How I Met my Daughter* by Max Barry (2007)

[cxxviii] *Libido and Life Lessons* by Frank Moorehouse (1987)

[cxxix] *The Airport, the Pizzeria, the Rented Car and the Mysteries of Life* by Frank Moorehouse (1977)

[cxxx] *The Story of Wills' Leap* by R. Spencer Browne (1890)

[cxxxi] *'The Luckiest Man* by E.W. Hornung (1892)

[cxxxii] *The Crossing* by Deborah Robertson (1992)

[cxxxiii] *Kaijek the Songman* by Xavier Herbert (1941)

[cxxxiv] *'Do You Love Me?'* by Peter Carey (1979)

[cxxxv] *The Swallows Returning* by Ian Kennedy Williams (1982)

[cxxxvi] *Young Woman in a Wimple* by Hal Porter (1963)

[cxxxvii] *Reasons for Going into Gynaecology* by Gerard Windsor (1986)

[cxxxviii] *The Rages of Mrs Torrens* by Olga Masters (1982)

[cxxxix] *Ismini* by Beverley Farmer (1983)

[cxl] *The Price* by H. Drake Brockman (1948)

[cxli] *Green Grow the Rushes* by T.A.G. Hungerford (1977)

[cxlii] *Running Nicely* by Morris Lurie (1979)

[cxliii] *Winter Nelis* by Elizabeth Jolley (1979)

[cxliv] *Mauve* by Patrick Cullen (2009)

[cxlv] *'Sojur Jim'* by J.A. Barry (1893)

[cxlvi] *The Cost of Things* by Elizabeth Harrower (1967)

[cxlvii] *Summer in Sydney* by Barbara Brooks (1983)

[cxlviii] *Boy Meets Girl* by Hal Porter (1980)

[cxlix] *The Drover's Wife* by Henry Lawson (1892)

The Pornographer

Swain fell asleep in the middle of the orgy. He awoke at his desk, in the dark, his face buried in the cleavage of his note book. After turning on the lamp, he read the last sentence he had written, 'Fernando devoured Althea, gasping as his passion reached its crescendo and liquefied...' But he couldn't make out the rest, as his pen, in sympathy with Fernando, had dribbled ink over the rest of the page. He stood up, stretched, and went to the window, peering through his reflection. Swain was a gaunt man in his thirties. He wore thick glasses, the punishment his parish priest had prophesied for him long ago for masturbating.

Directly opposite his window, two dogs, a terrier and a Labrador bitch, were copulating in the gutter. When they had finished they remained joined together, and began to bark and snap at each other. He closed the curtains and turned away. His flat was small, the walls painted a creamy white. Swain had given a similar colour to the thighs and buttocks of many of his heroines. The place was sparse, with a plain table, a sofa, an armchair and some bookshelves. It had occurred to him before that his flat was furnished like a description of a flat in a pornographic novel. A few words set the scene.

After reading once more the last paragraph of the orgy, Swain frowned and went to one of the bookcases. The top four shelves were taken up by classics. Jealous of the great writers, Swain had researched all their perversities. Joyce was a panty-sniffer, Kafka a collector of lesbian porn and Hans Christian Anderson a virgin. The two bottom shelves held Swain's novels, all eighty six of them, cheap paperbacks with cracked spines and yellowed pages. The first three books were written by 'Garth Harding' but then Swain's publisher had suggested a female pseudonym, and so the rest were by 'Candy Hatrick.' There was a photograph of Candy on the back of each of the books. Sometimes she was a blonde, and sometimes a brunette, but she was always blowsily attractive, with large, round, heavy breasts.

Swain knelt and took out a worn copy of his very first book, *Jungle Lovers* and turned to the fourth chapter, where he found, as he had suspected, that he had used a similar line to describe Fernando's climax. He knew that neither his editor, nor his readers would notice, but one of the few things in his books he was proud of was the orgasms. No two were ever exactly the same, much like orgasms themselves. He went back to his desk and finished off the orgy scene, the last in his book. It had taken some planning, involving, as it did, thirteen characters. In his early novels Swain had limited himself to a maximum of three characters in a sex scene. But he had quickly realised there was an algebra to writing

pornography. Each chapter would have *x* male and *y* female characters. The number of things *x* could insert into *y* was limited to 1, and the number of things *y* could have inserted in them was limited to 3. A sex scene was simply the working through of this problem.

After the orgy, he put the manuscript away in a drawer, intending to type it out later. Then he took a new sheet of paper. Between books, Swain would always attempt to write a 'proper' short story, where the characters were not simply elements of foreplay. He had always wanted to be a writer, and was ashamed that he had only succeeded in writing pornography. He sat at his desk for a few moments, pen in hand. He had found that he couldn't write a simple sentence like, 'He came inside,' without becoming self-conscious and starting again. Eventually, he started to write a story about an old married couple having an argument. But after half a page, he stopped. The man and wife had already begun to exchange *double entendres*. Swain threw the paper in the bin and took himself to bed.

Unable to sleep, he lay in the dark for some time. He began to think about his next novel, which he would begin in a day or two. He already had a title, *Lost in Lust.* But the thought of describing another penetration, another ejaculation, suddenly wearied him. He was almost asleep when the noises began from the flat next door. This came as no surprise. The same thing happened almost every night. Though his neighbour had moved in a month ago, he still hadn't spoken to her. He knew, from the nameplate on the door, that her surname was May, and that she wasn't married. This had led him to thinking of her as Miss May, which made her sound like a centrefold, when she was anything but.

After years of defining women by the curve of their breasts and the dampness of their vaginas, Swain found it difficult to describe a real woman. But from what he had seen of his neighbour when he had passed her in the hallway, she was quite small, flat-chested, with mannishly short dark hair and a narrow white face which was neither beautiful nor ugly. Though Swain had never heard her say a word, he could hear her now, groaning from a few centimetres behind his bedroom wall, overlapping with the sound of the man, grunting and swearing. The noise had the effect of an obscene lullaby, and he soon fell asleep.

Swain woke early and decided to go downstairs to fetch his newspaper. When he opened the door of his flat, and stepped out into the hallway, he found a couple embracing against one wall. He recognised at once his neighbour, the woman he knew as Miss May. He didn't know the man, but one of his hands was around the woman's slender neck, and the other was drawn back in a fist. Swain stepped into the hall, and slammed his door shut. The man dropped his hands, and turned to look at him.

'Good morning,' Swain said to the woman, and she smiled at him.

The man shrugged, turned to the woman, and said, 'You know what you are, don't you?'

Then he turned and walked towards the stairs. The woman remained leaning against the wall, the pink necklace of the man's fingerprints slowly fading from her throat. She was wearing a thin, black nightdress, and Swain could see the subtle shape of her small breasts and the darkness between her thighs. The perfection of her skin struck him. It seemed so flawless it might have been airbrushed. He realized that he was staring, and before the woman could say anything, Swain went past her to the stairs. He found his newspaper rolled in the mailbox, the front pages ripped back like a rough circumcision.

Swain returned to his flat, sat and read the paper. Then he sighed, and went once more at his desk, took a virgin sheet of paper and wrote, '*Lost in Lust*, by Candy Hatrick' at the top of the page. There was a knock on the door. When he went to answer it he found that it was the woman. She had changed clothes, and now wore a short, white dress patterned with sunlight from the hall window. She was leaning against the doorframe, her cheek against the wood as if it were a man's chest.

'Hello,' she said. 'I'm Amanda. From next door.'

Her voice was at the same time bored and alluring. It reminded Swain of the one time, years before, when he had called a telephone sex line.

'Hello,' he said. 'I'm Richard.'

'Can I call you Dick?' she giggled.

Swain felt as if they were acting out one of the scenes from his books.

'No,' he said, shortly. 'I prefer Richard.'

'Well, Richard, I just wanted to thank you for this morning,' Amanda said.

Involuntarily, Swain imagined her face distorted by an orgasm. He did this with all women, even the old, the overweight and the crippled.

'It was nothing,' he said. He took off his glasses to cover his embarrassment, and in the soft focus of his short-sightedness, she once again seemed to belong in a men's magazine.

'You didn't walk away,' Amanda said. She ran her fingers through her short hair, and then blushed, as if it were he that had made the gesture.

'Was that your boyfriend?' Swain asked.

She laughed.

'Him? No. I only met him last night. He was an idiot. The best part of him dribbled down his mother's leg.'

Swain could think of nothing to say.

'Can I come in?' she asked abruptly.

'Of course, please,' he said.

He stepped aside and she entered, her hand trailing along the wall. She lingered before his bookshelves, her head slightly tilted, to read the titles. Her fingers followed her gaze: where she looked, she touched. Without speaking, she knelt, and took one of his books from the bottom shelf.

'You like reading this kind of stuff?' she asked. 'One handed books?'

'Well, I... I write them,' Swain said awkwardly. 'I'm Candy Hatrick.'

'Really?' Amanda turned to the back cover. 'Your photo doesn't do you justice.'

She opened the book and started to read, "'His tongue travelled over her body, licking the sweat that had gathered at the tip of her breasts, whilst she crooned her contentment.'"

'Please, don't,' he said. He stepped forward to take the book from her hands, but she held it firmly.

'But it's good,' she protested. 'Can I borrow it?'

'I suppose so,' he said, sitting down on the couch.

She wandered to his bedroom doorway, and looked inside.

'My bed must be right through that wall,' she murmured.

Then she came over and sat beside him. Her bare knee touched his.

'So tell me,' she said, looking at him, her head slightly tilted, as she had looked at his books. 'Do you do research for your books?'

'Not for a long time,' Swain said.

He watched unmoving as she hitched up her skirt lightly with one hand, reaching under it with the other. Looking at him, she touched herself for a moment. Swain realised that he was witnessing the cliché of the woman who wore no underwear, and he felt absurdly proud that none of his sex scenes had been this amateurish. He felt no arousal. It was as if he were merely reading the words 'breasts' and 'vagina' on a page. Even when she held her damp fingers to his nose, and he could smell the bitterness of her, he felt nothing. With her other hand she had started to unzip his trousers, massaging him through the fabric. He gently moved her hand away.

'What's wrong?' she said, frowning. 'Don't you want to?'

'I can't,' he said.

'I have some pills in my flat. They can get you hard.'

'No.' He shook his head. 'I don't want an erection that's been manufactured.'

'You don't think I'm pretty?' she pouted.

'It's not that,' he said

Amanda lowered her skirt.

'I'm sorry,' he said.

'That's all right. You're not the first to turn me down. Still, I get my fair share of men. You've probably noticed, through that wall,' she said. Again he became aware of the artificially sensual quality of her voice, as if she were trying to keep him on the line. 'Some of them are nice, like you. Some of them, like that guy this morning, aren't. But nice or not, usually, it's easy. I know I'm not very pretty, but that doesn't matter. Even an ugly woman is beautiful to a man when she has his cock in her mouth. You can write that one down, if you like.'

'I'm tired of writing,' Swain said. '*The Coming of Carmen. Bodies and Bliss. Susannah's Sin*s. I'm sick of it. I don't want to write about sex anymore.'

'So don't. Write about… I don't know. Aliens or cowboys or trains or prisons or something. You could start now. I'll sit here.' She opened his book and started to read.

'Usually, I write when I'm alone,' Swain said.

Amanda got up, and went to his desk, looked at the paper.

'*Lost in Lust* by Candy Hatrick? No.' She crossed the words out. 'How about…' and she wrote on the paper handed it to him.

He looked at what she had written, '*The Eagle Tattoo* by Richard Swain.'

'What's the eagle tattoo?' he asked her.

'You missed your chance to see that,' she laughed. She went and sprawled on the couch.

'Take this down,' she said. ''The girl walked in the park. A man was watching her from a bench.''

Obediently, Swain sat and wrote out the words.

'And then?' he asked.

'Now, it's your turn,' she said, and she looked away to read his book. Swain sat still for several moments, staring at the paper. Then he began to write. After a few lines he was surprised to find that he was writing a love story. There were no crude jokes, no gaspings and spurting, no sex. The two characters were a man and a woman, not a penis and a vagina.

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They moved and they talked, and they wanted things, and the story went on. Swain sat at his desk for two hours, and when he looked up from the paper he didn't dare read what he had written. But he believed that it might be good. There was only the ending to write, and he knew that it would come to him if he just waited.

When he turned around, he found Amanda asleep on the couch, his book resting on her lap. Her skirt had ridden up past her thighs. Swain went to her and pulled it down, gently. But still she woke.

'How did it go?' she said.

'Well, I think. Far better than I ever thought it would.'

'That's good,' she said. 'Listen. I have to go now.'

She stood, went to the window and stretched. The sunlight stripped her of her dress, and Swain had no doubt now that she was beautiful.

'Do you think you could come back tomorrow?' he asked her.

'What for? The story?'

'No. I'd just like to see you again.'

She smiled.

'Yes, I'll come back,' she said. 'I'll come whenever you need me.'

For a moment they stood stiffly arm in arm, like the bride and groom on top of a wedding cake.

That night Swain was woken up by her squealing. He sat up abruptly in bed, his hands over his ears. But still he could feel the judder of the headboard, hear the groaning of the man, and Amanda's yelping and crying. He threw off the covers, got up, and fumbled his way through the darkness to his desk.   By the light of the desk lamp he found the last page of his story. Across the bottom of the page he scrawled the final line, 'She fucked him.' Then he threw the story in the bin.

R and L

Burdon, the first time I saw him, was attempting to transform lice into rice. Balancing unsteadily on a cracked plastic chair in the restaurant, he rubbed a thick wrist across the faded Menu board. All the while a dozen young men, sharing cloudy banana beer from a Coke bottle, laughed at him. He was a fat young man, his skin very white but for his brown hairless arms. Around his wide face and neck the line of his tan was perfect, as if a conscientious child had crayoned him in. I sat and watched as Burdon wrote a neat Arial R on the board with a stub of yellow chalk and then tiptoed to correct 'sweat potatoes.' But the words were out of reach, and he almost toppled onto the sloping shelves full of powdered milk, bottles of cooking oil, playing cards, and stony rice. Smiling, shaking his head, Burdon got down from the chair and turned round and I noticed the clean white of the Adam's apple between the buttons of his black shirt like a priest's collar.

He had a faint Australian accent, all but travelled away, a freckled face and thick blond hair. He asked to join me, and fetched his folder and his book from his table, and we sat by one of the dirty windows, looking out on the hills and the lake in the valley below. I ordered beans and rice, which seemed to please him, as if I wouldn't have known rice was available if he hadn't corrected the menu. Children, naked or in raggedy T-shirts waved as they ran past the window, shouting '*Muzungu! Muzungu!*' Burdon waved back at them and we watched as they played with footballs of tattered, tied-together plastic bags. We talked over sounds of gunfire and screaming, which came from a row of huts across the marketplace, where Action movies could be watched on black and white televisions for fifty francs.

'How long have you been in Rwanda?' I asked him.

'A month. I eat here every day, to help practise my Kinyarwanda. Someone once said that to learn another language is to gain another soul, and I've certainly got space for another soul in here.' He slapped his belly.

As we ate, Burdon explained he had come to teach English, working in a small secondary school a few kilometres from the village. He seemed delighted to talk to another Westerner. He would often preface his words with 'Listen,' and, perhaps recalling the classroom, he would clasp an earlobe delicately between finger and thumb. He said that he enjoyed teaching, even though there were no textbooks, and he had to work in a tent made of plastic sheeting. 'And the students. I have classes of over a hundred. Listen, that's bigger than some Australian towns.'

'I think I know your school,' I said. 'It's the one with the large green sign on the Kayonza road?'

'Yes,' Burdon said. ''REALNING IS LIFE.' Every day since I arrived, I've asked the headmaster to have it repainted, but he says it would cost too much money. It's a funny thing about the letters R and L, here, how they can't seem to tell the difference. My students write 'falmer' and 'gleen.' Their flag has an R in the middle of it, which should give them some help. But listen, the people here are so friendly. The way they greet each other. I think I've embraced the headmaster more in the past week than I have my own father!'

Burdon was a fervent, if confused Marxist and had recently made the great discovery that the world was an unfair place.

'If the world economy is like a game of Monopoly, then Africa is never allowed to pass 'Go,'' he said. 'They've never had a voice in history, and they don't even have a voice in books about themselves. Just look at *Heart of Darkness*. It's simply the story of a couple of white men. The Africans say hardly a word.'

As if to prove his point, at that moment a young woman walked past the window, smiled at us, and mimed the action of sweeping a floor. She wore a white blouse and a sarong patterned with fading rainbows, and she was barefooted, her two small toes stunted. She was very pretty but for her right eye, which was closed and scarred.

'That's Esperance,' Burdon said. 'My house girl. She's off to do the cleaning.'

'She seems cheerful.'

'She is. The headmaster found her for me. Apparently, she was beaten almost to death during the Genocide, and thrown down a pit latrine. She's very nice, but sometimes she stays and has a cup of tea long after it gets dark. She can't speak any English, and just sits there. It's a little awkward.'

I told him that perhaps she was trying to seduce him, and he shook his head. 'I would never take advantage of her like that. Perhaps I might interview her, when my Kinyarwanda improves, but that's all.'

As well as teaching, Burdon was reading a Masters degree in African Studies. The Genocide was to be his dissertation, the one million dead explained in 15,000 words. From his folder he took some graph paper, upon which he had carefully drawn various tables which divided the population of the village into Male and Female and different age groups. Esperance's name was written neatly in the first box. If she could climb out of a pit latrine, she would climb out of one of those boxes, I thought, as I leafed through Burdon's graphs.

At the back of the folder, I came across an ancient photograph of a very thin, bald white man, wearing colonial khaki, surrounded by half a dozen 'natives'. The Africans were half naked and humpbacked with banana bunches, while the white man sipped something from a china cup. The group were all scowling and sweating, standing in daggers of shade under some banana trees. The symbolism of the photograph was so blatant that I thought it must have come loose from the book Burdon was reading, 'Colonialism and Capitalism.'

'That's my great grandfather,' Burdon said, apologetically. The grandfather's name was Lionel Burdon. He had owned a plantation in Kenya for twenty years until the Mau Mau rebellion drove him to Australia. 'When I was young he would talk to me for hours about the (forgive me) 'darkies' in different countries he had visited. He was a terrible old racist.' Lionel Burdon had been a drunk and blamed the trembling in his hands on malaria, though Burdon now realised it was the DTs. He had died when Burdon was nine, but not before telling him that the two most important words to learn in any African language (though he wouldn't call them languages) were 'cheat' and 'liar.'

'Those are two words I never intend to learn,' Burdon said, taking the photograph from me and hiding it behind a pie-chart of Rwanda's imports.

By that time, it was getting late, and I had to get back to Kigali. Burdon pointed out his house to me, a small, gray murrain-walled cottage behind the marketplace, and invited me to visit if I ever came through the village again. Before I left, he asked me what advice I could give him, after thirty years living and working in Africa.

'The best friend you can have here is your stomach,' I told him.

'That's a bit cynical, isn't it?' he protested.

'A cynic is just a well-travelled altruist,' I said as I paid the bill and left.

It was six months before I passed through Burdon's village again, on a night as black as an eclipse. The truck's lights scooped two circles of brightness from the dark, illuminating startled peasants, who stopped utterly still as if posing for the camera of a passing ethnographer. I was tired, and had still a long journey ahead, and so I decided to stop and visit Burdon. The moon was pale and indistinct in the sky, like a sepia photograph of itself, and I barely found the door of his house by its edge of candlelight. I had to knock for a long time before it was opened. Burdon, wearing a T-shirt with the Harbour Bridge on it, looked ill and was much thinner than I remembered. But he recognised me at once, saying, 'As you can see, I should have followed your advice. Please, come in.'

His living room was very small, unsuccessfully painted mauve, and contained two wooden armchairs, their foreshortened front legs book-balanced, an unvarnished coffee table, some rough bookshelves and banana-leaf mats on the floor. The room was lit by a half dozen candles and some paraffin lamps. In each corner hung large spider webs, which Burdon had let form to catch the mosquitoes.

'Have you been sick?' I asked him, as we sat down.

'Just a little off-colour. I'm just having difficulty, everything being so new here, the sky, the land, the people, a new world.' His chubby hand, resting on his chest, nervously crossed and re-crossed the rumpled Bridge.

'The developing world?'

'Ha, yes,' he smiled, 'I'm just not used to the darkroom, the smell of the chemicals.'

He spoke in a voice that had become used to giving dictation, and I almost expected him to say 'comma, full stop, new paragraph.' At times, I had to stop myself from absently copying what he said, as if I were one of the students he was to complain of, that could not grasp idioms. After a moment, he went into the next room and I heard him boiling the kettle for tea. I went to look at the bookshelves, which held grammar books and dictionaries, and a few novels. There was *Heart of Darkness*, *Things Fall Apart* and a bookmarked *Passage to India*. When Burdon returned I asked him if he had finished the Conrad yet.

'I've started it, several times,' he said. 'But I've never quite finished it. Don't worry though; you won't find me here in a year, crouched behind unmarked exercise books, whispering, 'The grammar! The grammar!'

I laughed, and asked him about the school. He was somewhat discouraged, for he had gone to great effort to have two hundred textbooks shipped from Australia, and now at the end of the term, he could account for only four, the rest having disappeared. And then there were the soccer balls. Five of them, and all burst after two days of play. These disappointments told, I found he had little to say. His eyes turned to the bookshelves, as if he were tempted to choose a textbook and read aloud. Finally, he turned on the radio and we sat on the hard chairs and listened to the Voice of America. Burdon watched some flies settle on the shadows that the candlelight cast on the walls. Slowly, he lifted one hand, and slapped the wall, killing two of them.

'Even the flies are lazier than in Australia,' he said quietly, and then was silent.

Casting around for something to say, I asked him how his lessons were going.

'It's difficult,' he said. 'The classes are so large, and I'm not very good at discipline. I won't beat the students, like some of the other teachers, and though they like me, they

won't often do what I ask. The headmaster has been helpful. He's a lovely man. He believes in Pan-Africanism and that American scientists invented AIDS as a means of destroying Africa. I told him Africans were doing that well enough on their own and he thought that was hilarious. He showed me how to make a map of Rwanda with my hands. Do you know how?'

I shook my head.

'You clench your left fist in front of you, looking at the knuckles. Then you clench the right fist, put it beside the left as if you are to be handcuffed, only fit the right thumb above the left. Look! It's Rwanda.'

'You're right,' I said.

Then we sat in silence again, and I was about to leave when Burdon asked if I'd like to play Scrabble. He had gone to fetch the board before I could refuse. As we played, Burdon said 'There's no privacy here,' and he told me of how he had been reading a book in his back garden last week, and had glanced up to find fifty people watching him from behind the bamboo fence.

'Well, you can't expect privacy in a country the size of two clenched fists,' I said. 'And anyway, there's no word for it in Kinyarwanda.'

'Is there is a word for manners?' Burdon asked, putting down a Y.

'You've made a mistake,' I said.

'What?'

'Can't you see? I don't think STLATEGY is a word.'

He shook his head. 'I'm sorry, I'm tired.'

It was then I heard a cough from the next room, and beneath Burdon's chair I noticed a neatly folded sarong with a rainbow pattern. Burdon's hand leapt from the Bridge to push it further from sight.

'And how is the Kinyarwanda coming along?' I asked.

'Slowly,' Burdon said.

'They say the best place to learn a language is in bed,' I smiled. Burdon looked up from the board, blushing. He seemed ashamed, and I was relieved when the rain broke on the tin roof, and we had to play the rest of the game in pantomime. The downpour lasted only a few minutes, and when it stopped, I was glad to leave. As I got into my truck, the slits of light showing in Burdon's house disappeared, and I wondered, perhaps a little jealously, what words he was learning in the dark.

'This dirty old bitch has cheated me of 100 francs!' Burdon said to me, as he smiled at the old woman. 100 francs was five cents, Australian. Though his village was an hour out of my way that day, I had still stopped to see him, I didn't know why. Perhaps I enjoyed being a Marlow to him.

In the noon heat, the market place was drizzling colour; reds and whites and greens and blacks mixing and shouting. There were hundreds of women, many balancing baskets and jerry cans on their heads, haggling under the midday sun while the men sat in the shade, laughing and drinking. In the five months since I had last seen him, Burdon had had malaria, and he had lost still more weight. He said that perhaps it was because he had been exposed to so much bad English, he was on the way to forgetting his own language, and so the weight he lost was his soul. He wore the same T-shirt I had last seen him in, but the Harbour Bridge was flaking away from Esperance's hand-washing, and there would soon be nothing left of it.

Burdon hated the marketplace, and was only there because Esperance was sick. He spoke of her now without embarrassment, and I didn't ask if he had interviewed her yet. We walked quickly through the marketplace towards his house, the eyes of the crowd upon us. I saw line of pink prisoners stroll past a wooden sign that said, PLISON. 'Do you have a pen?' Burdon asked, and I shook my head. I helped him with his bags of fruit, for his hands were raw with sunburn. Abreast of us banana trees stood loosely in the dry ground, their leaves curling like old newspapers in a fire. The wind blew dirtily at us, and Burdon coughed and complained that the dust of the country was so deep in his lungs it was as if he was being buried alive from the inside. Half a dozen barefoot beggars pursued us, and one of them who came too close to Burdon yelped and began to hop up and down.

'Step on their toes,' Burdon advised me. 'That's the only thing that stops them.'

I threw them some coins, and Burdon frowned. When we came to his house, he thanked me for my help, but didn't invite me in. He stood in his garden, nervously heeling a hole in the ground that soon disclosed a bone. Picking it up he murmured, 'The entire country is a graveyard.' Then he replaced the bone in the hole and buried it with his hands. Before he said goodbye, he told me he understood now why Esperance seemed so happy.

'With her one eye, she only sees half as much of this place as the rest of us.'

I didn't expect to see Burdon again after that, and in fact I soon forgot about him. It was three years before I returned to his village. Driving past the familiar rusting metal sign for the school at the side of the road, I read with some surprise, 'LEARNING IS LIFE.' The

repainted R and the L made me think of Burdon, so I stopped the truck, and walked up the path towards the school. On the left was a plastic sheeting church, the ground compacted by dancing and praising. Beyond it, an uneven gravel path led through a large iron gate, which wasn't fixed to any fencing, to four brown brick classroom blocks and a half-painted staffroom. In the middle of the compound, bony cows chewed the yellow grass around the flagpole with the flag and the R drooping upon it. With some surprise I saw that all the classrooms were empty, though there should have been lessons, according to the gestetnered timetable on the school gates. But away down by the lake I could just make out a hundred or so students with hoes and picks, digging out tree roots. I watched them for some time, their shadows lengthening as they worked.

Then I went on to the administration block intending to ask the headmaster if Burdon still worked there.   When there was no answer to my knocking, I went up to an old man nearby who was kneeling in front of a blue door, stencilling in thick letters, '**Prefet des Discipl**-.'

'*Muzungu ari he*?' I asked him, and he nodded at the door. I knocked and then went in to find Burdon sitting behind an oak desk which rested on four thick textbooks (perhaps the very four that had escaped from the thieves). As he stood to greet me, I noticed how he had had his hair cut short, perhaps to disguise the fact he was going bald, and I felt at a loss to guess his age, as I often did with Africans. He wore a purple safari suit, and had a cup of tea on the desk in front of him, beside an ornate gold photo frame. After we greeted each other (he held my hand for a long time, as a Rwandan would) I said, with some surprise, 'They've put you in charge of discipline, I see.'

'Yes,' Burdon said, or rather, dictated. 'It was a couple of years ago, just after I last saw you, that things came to a head. Some students in my class refused to do the work I had set them, and I finally lost my temper. 'So you don't want to work?' I said to them. 'You want to be peasants? Very well then, go and dig like peasants!' and I sent them out into the fields for the rest of the day. After that, if students misbehaved, I simply ordered them out to dig. What these Afr... I mean, what the students need is hard work, that's all.'

'So did all those children digging by the lake this morning disobey their teachers?' I asked.

'No. They failed their English exams. Their English must be improved if they're to have any chance of making anything of themselves.'

'So you're trying to save their souls?' I enquired, but Burdon didn't understand. I was going to question him about his Marxism, until I noticed that it was not textbooks that

his desk rested on, but four filthy volumes of *Das Kapital*. Instead I asked him to tell me about his school, to pass the time before I could leave. As I leaned forward to shake his hand for the last time, I saw that the gold-framed photograph on Burdon's desk was that of his great-grandfather, which he had shown me in the restaurant when we first met. The heads of the African workers had been cropped and they stood anonymously behind the smirking white man, carrying their burdens.
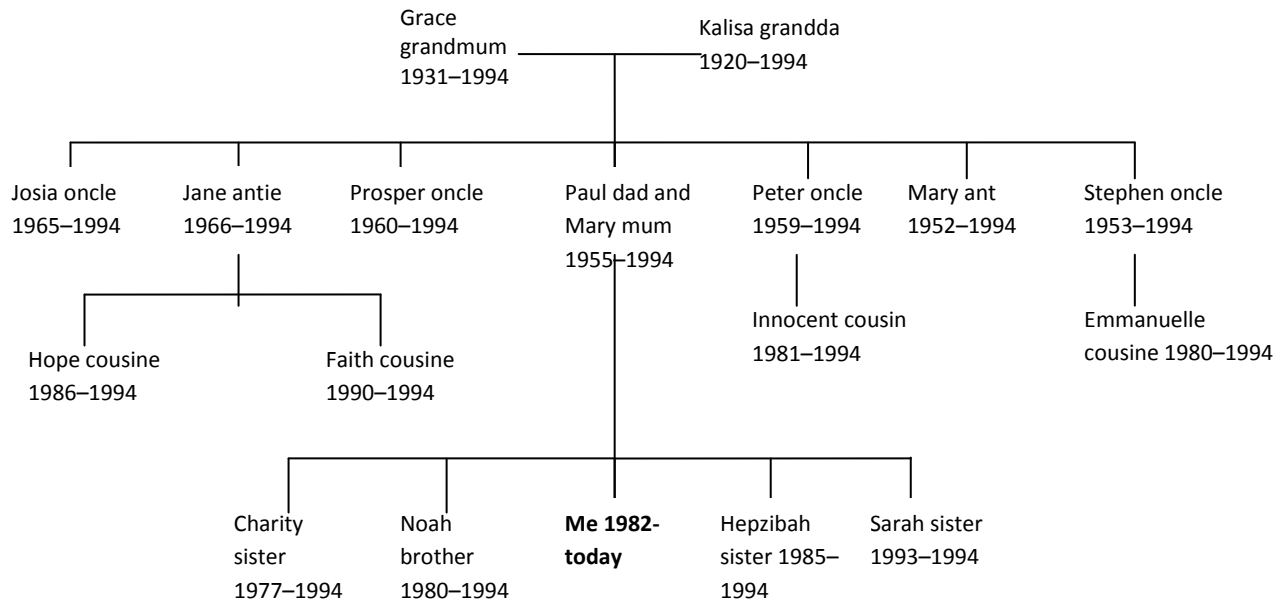
Outside Burdon's office, the painter was putting away his brushes. The new sign on the door said in neat white letters, '**Prefet des Discipline, L. Burdon**.'

I said nothing about the mistake.

My English Homework

Elementary, Week 1. My Family.

Draw your family tree. Remember to use the vocabulary we studied in class.

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                    Grace                    Kalisa grandda
                    grandmum                 1920–1994
                    1931–1994
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Josia oncle 1965–1994	Jane antie 1966–1994	Prosper oncle 1960–1994	Paul dad and Mary mum 1955–1994	Peter oncle 1959–1994	Mary ant 1952–1994	Stephen oncle 1953–1994

Hope cousine 1986–1994   Faith cousine 1990–1994

Innocent cousin 1981–1994

Emmanuelle cousine 1980–1994

Charity sister 1977–1994   Noah brother 1980–1994   **Me 1982-today**   Hepzibah sister 1985–1994   Sarah sister 1993–1994

Elementary, Week 2. Describing places.

Describe a room in the place where you live. Use at/on/in/by/etc

In our house there is a live rooms. In live room there's is couch. On couch is my husband. On his hand there is beers. By couch, there is cabinet, on cabinet there is TV. On TV there is movie. In movie there is fighting. At movie my husband watches. At the left there is a 2 windows. In the windows is my husband's car. At the middle there is a coffee'stable. On the table is my husband's mags. By the table is bookshelves, in the bookshelves is books of my husband. At the door, there is I.

Elementary, Week 4. Tenses.

Complete the following sentences with the correct form of the verb in brackets. Use past simple or past continuous.

Example: He went (go) to the cinema yesterday.

1. He was seeing (see) John when he walked (walk) to work.
2. He was having (have) a bath when the phone rung. (ring)
3. The boy and girl were (be) sad when they were losing (lose) their ball.
4. I didn't spent (spend) any money yesterday.
5. The shop was opened (open) at 9 and was closing (close) at 5.

Elementary, Week 6. Adjectives

Write about a person you admire. What are they like? What do they look like?
Write at least a hundred words.

A person I very admire is Adolf Hitler. I admire him for many reasons. He was beginning the 2nd world war and he hated the Jews people. Cuntsequently, he is a very admire man. Adolf Hitler was prezident of Germany but he was Austria. I admire him for all the people he killed. I admire him for dead babies. In qualities he is ruthlessness and cruelty and insane. And now his personal appearance. Adolf was a small man with a small beard (moustache) and dark hair. He always puts on uniforms and is shouting. I don't speak Germany, so I don't know that he says, but I know I admire that he says. In conclusion that is a 100 words on why I admire A. Hitler out of all the people of the world.

Elementary, Week 7. **Describing a Past Experience.**

Write about a time recently when you were very happy.

Firstly all teacher forgive forgive, I don't admire Adolf Hitler I hates him it is my husband Samuel who tell that 'admire' it means 'hate' and I don't was look in dictionary and and when I read it out in class every persons laugh and my husband laughing all the time at me forgive forgive is because he my husband was helped me with week 6 homework and all answers did been wrong, and he is/was angry now please teacher if I write ☼ on paper it means my husband helping me so you to must mark them all correct or he will stop me to come to class thank you your student Grace.

and PS the answer to my homework question is I can't memory any.

Elementary, Week 10. Modal verbs.

Fill in the blanks with the correct verb. Use each verb only once.

> *must   will   should   may   can*

1. I <u>should</u> go to the party or stay at home. I'm not sure.

2. 'My arm is sore.'

'You <u>may</u> see a doctor.'

3. 'I'm hot.'

'I <u>must</u> open the window.'

4. You've been working all day. You <u>can</u> be tired.

5. John <u>will</u> run as fast as James.

<div align="center">☼</div>

Elementary, Week 12. Languages.

Why do you want to improve your English? Give at least 5 reasons

1. Because of my husband only speaks English at all time, and I want understand all he says and talk to him about it.

2. Because English is language of Australia and now I'm Australian I must to learn English.

3. Because I don't want to speak Kinyarwanda ever again because it is tongue of killers.

4. Because we have dog and my husband trained dog and my husband says that 'dog knows more English than I do' so I want to knowing more English than dog.

5. Because I want to get job because no money, no life.

Intermediate, Week 1. Conducting an Interview.

Ask one of your family or friends to take part in this interview with you. Record their answers.

1. What is your name?

Samuel Asimwe.

2. Where are you from?

From Fort Portal, in the west of Uganda.

3. Are you married?

Yes. To you.

4. Do you have any children?

No. And there is nothing wrong with me, let me make that clear. If there is a problem, it's yours.

5. What do you do in your free time?

Listen to my wife nagging me. Yes, you will write that. Write it down now. She always is trying to talk to me in English. I studied English for 16 years in Uganda. It is like a second nature to me. My wife thinks that she can go to class four hours a week and she will speak English better than me, but she is wrong.

6. What do you do at weekends?

I do what I want, and it is not your business

7. What is your daily routine?

I get up at 6.30. I eat breakfast, which my wife cooks. It is terrible. I have a shower. I get dressed, and go to work at the chicken factory. I work there until 5 pm. I get home. I eat dinner, which my wife cooks. It is terrible. I go out. I meet my friends. I come back home at one pm. I go to sleep.

8. Tell me about your friends.

No.

9. Tell me one thing you like/dislike.

I hate dogs.

10. What do you do in your free time?

We are finished.

Intermediate, Week 4. Continuous Tenses

What were you doing at this time...

a) Fifteen years ago

I was hidding in a toilet.

b) Ten years ago.

I was refugeeing in a camp.

c) Five years ago.

I was marrying in Uganda.

d) One year ago.

I was houseworking.

e) Last month.

I was houseworking.

f) Last week.

I was houseworking.

g) Yesterday.

I was houseworking.

Intermediate, Week 3. Travel.

Imagine you are going to travel around the world. What countries would you visit? What would you do there?

I would go to France because I could speak French very well, as/since my mother and father teached me that. My mother and father were Francophone, not Anglophone like my husband.

First I would go to Paris because it is city of ♥♥♥. There I would visit the Eiffel Tower and the Champs Eleysees and the Big Ben.

After that I will drive by train to Marseilles which is in the south of Paris. There have many beaches and things. Another mustsee for me is Brittany. I would like to go there for a honeymoon because we don't have honeymoon when we married. Then I would go to New York and America and many other places. But first Paris in my dreams.

Intermediate, Week 6. Relationships.

Write about someone important in your life. How long have you known them? Where did you meet? Remember to use one or two of the transition signals we studied in class.

Firstly, I met my husband Samuel, seven years ago. Secondly, we met in Uganda, in Kampala. Moreover, we met at a club. Then we liked each other very much. As if that were not enough, he asked, You are Rwandan? and I said that, Yes, I am. How is it there? he asked and I said it is very terrible. More so, after two weeks we met to go on a date. We had many words to talk to each other about, and we were happy and happiness too. After that, we fell in love. We loved very much. But then on the other hand, we fighted, every day. Likewise, he is jealous. We argued ever day. As a result, he went away for a long time. In like manner, I got a refugee visa from Australia. Furthermore Samuel came back and he was very sweet and honeyed me. And we fell in love again. We choose a day to get marry. In that year, 1st October, we got married. Finally, we fellt that we were the happiest in the world. In addition we come to Australia. On the contrary, we are not the happiest in the world. To illustrate, Samuel talks at the phone many more than he talks at me. Whereas he said that my English is bad, he didn't like me learning English in class. In spite of that, I love my husband. To sum up, he is only one important in my life.

Intermediate Week 8, Jobs.

Which of these occupations is the easiest? Which is the most difficult? Which job would you like to do?

Factory Worker	*Teacher*	*Nurse*
Musician	*Fisherman*	*Explorer*
Actor		

Of these occupations the easiest is maybe actor. Because all an actor has to do is pretend, and that is easiest. E.g. Whenever I am not happy I pretend to become happy so that my husband is happy. And it is somehow easiest. A Factory Worker is the most difficulter. Sam is a factory worker and he told me that this job is the hardest job in world. It is harder than a musician who just plays things and fisherman. A Teacher is hard too. But my 'dream job' is to be nurse. Nurses cure and heal all the people. When I was five years old, I wished to be a nurse. This is the best job. But I am housewife. And that's the end.

Intermediate Week 10. Giving Instructions.

Choose a task and write a series of instructions on how to complete the task. Write at least ten steps. Examples: Making a cup of tea. Replacing a lightbulb. Cooking scrambled eggs.

How to found out that your husband is a cheater.

1. Ask your husband where he is going every weekend.

2. Don't believe his answer.

3. Follow him one night when he leaves the house.

4. Sit far away from him at the bar.

5. Watch him talk talk to a woman.

6. Watch him kiss a woman.

7. Follow husband to outside car.

8. Watch him playing sex in car.

9. Do not say nothing.

10. Go home.

Advanced, Week 1. Personal Qualities and Personal Appearance.

Describe someone you know. What are they like? What do they look like?

My husband is scruffy, unpleasant, disorganised, irresponsible, slow, stupid, insensitive, dishonest, aggressive, unambitious, miserly, untrustworthy, disinterested, lazy, late, unsociable, unimaginative, uncooperative, stubborn, smarmy, tight-fisted, narrow-minded, thoughtless, self-centred, selfish, insincere, distant, callous, hostile, rude, combative, authoritarian, wasteful, ungrateful, deceiving, ego-centric, complacent, disrespectful, suspicious and vain.

He is short, squat, thin, weak, out-of-shape, ugly, hideous, stuttering, crying, balding, bloated, pockmarked, has cauliflower ears, a bent, runny nose, bleary eyes, bull-necked, plain, lisping, hook-nosed, flat-faced and a small penis

Advanced, Week 2.

Absent from Class

Advanced, Week 3.

Absent from Class

Advanced, Week 4. Accidents and Mishaps.

Match the following mishaps together.

| You slip | runs out of petrol |
| You lose | on a spill |

|	
You miss	your wallet/ID card
You over-	your bus/plane/taxi
Your car	sleep

Have any of these mishaps ever happened to you? What happened? How did you feel?

Two weeks ago, I was walking to the shops when I saw a group of girls standing at a bus-stop. When they saw me they started to shout at me, and calling me names. I tried to walk away, but the girls followed me. I was very frightening, so I didn't see the spill of water on the floor of the ground before I slipped on it. So I slipped and hurt myself. Luckily my husband came along, and he saw what happened. He called the ambulance and went with me to the hospital. I had had broken a rib and a cheekbone, and also twisted my ankle. I felt very embarrassed but my husband was very kind. He looked after me, and talked to anyone who called me to see how I was. I love him very much.

☼

Advanced, Week 6. Giving definitions.

Create the clues and answers for a crossword. Use the examples we did in class to help you.
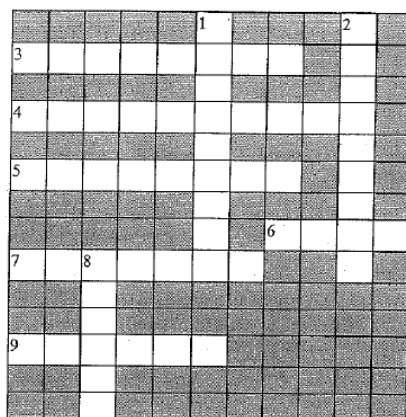
ACROSS

3. we do this noun when we disagree
4. slang for blue dark singlet
5. say you will do bad things to someperson
6. run away fast
7. a footballer is _____ the ball

DOWN

1. when people hide the truths, it is this
2. very very very very very very very frightened
8. the opposite of brave person

Advanced, Week 7.

Absent from class.

Advanced, Week 8. Location, location, location.

Imagine that you are a real estate agent. Write a short advertisement describing the house/flat you are living in.

A Little Slice of Heaven

This compact one bedroom flat is a renovator's delightful. You could be furious with yourself if you missed this charmingly apartment in a popular inner-city suburb. A short walk from the bus stop and the local TAFE, where classes can be taken by all. Nicely decorated by the sole currant tenant who is me. Address is secret, but enquire at Language Centre for details.

Advanced Week 11. Writing a Formal Letter.

Write a formal letter to a person or company. Use the layout we studied in class.

<div align="right">

I

am not telling

my

address you

pig.

</div>

22nd May 2010

Mr Samuel Asimwe

53 Robert St

Hamilton NSW 2240

Dear Mr Asimwe

Thank you for your continued interest in myself and my whereabouts. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide you with this information at the present time, and this state of affairs is unlikely to change in the future. This letter is to remind you of the penalties involved in breaching an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) which will result in your going to prison for quite a long time. I would strongly advise you to return to your loose women and not to attempt to seek me out again. On the other hand, I would be extremely happy to see you go to prison.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to not contact me. One thing you might bear in mind before attempting to see me again at the Language Centre, or in the

shops, is that I recently bought an Alsatian. (If you don't know this word, please feel free to look it up in a dictionary.) The Alsatian loves me very much, and he can't stand strange men.

Yours sincerely,

Grace Mbabazi

Advanced, Final Week. The Future.

What will you be doing tomorrow/one month from now/six months from now/one year from now/ten years from now? Use future perfect and continuous, will and going to.

Tomorrow, I'm going to finish my English course at the Language Centre. I think I'll be happy to have finished.

One month from now, I'll be in another classroom, studying for a Certificate in Nursing, at the local college.

Six months from now, the divorce will have come through, and I'll be free.

One year from now, I'll be studying for a degree in Nursing.

Ten years from now, I'll be on my honeymoon with the man I choose to marry.

We will go to France.

Exegesis

Introduction

The Weight of a Human Heart is a collection of twenty short stories written in a variety of different styles, and utilising a number of diverse settings, from Africa to China to Australia. The collection is comprised of an equal number of realist and formally experimental short stories, including stories in the form of book reviews, homework assignments and graphs and charts. Many of these stories were written as a direct response to my reading of hundreds of Australian short stories in the years since I arrived in Australia in 2004.

Before settling in Australia I had never read an Australian short story. This is despite the fact that I spent the previous decade reading almost nothing but short fiction, and believed I had a good knowledge of the canonical short story writers writing in English, from Joyce and Kipling to Woolf and James, and many of the major short story writers in translation, such as Borges and Chekhov. The closest that my reading of short fiction came, geographically, to Australia, was the work of New Zealand's Katherine Mansfield. After immigrating to Australia I realised that if I was going to write short stories set here, I should remedy my unfamiliarity with Australian short fiction, if only to discover what had been done by Australian writers in the short form, and what was currently being done.

Therefore, over the next several years, both before and during the writing of *The Weight of the Human Heart* I read as much Australian short fiction as I could, from nineteenth century anthologies of crime and romance, to single author collections of the 21st century. It is important to note that despite my nationality (Scottish) and the setting of several of the stories in my collection (Uganda, Rwanda, China), I consider myself to be an Australian writer, and *The Weight of a Human Heart* to be an Australian short story collection. All the stories in the collection were written while I was living in Australia, were first published in Australian journals and anthologies (including *The Best Australian Stories*), before being collected in book form by an Australian publisher, and during a time I was immersed in reading Australian short fiction. The published collection contains several stories written before I commenced my research. The creative component of this PhD, while sharing the same title, differs from the published version as it only contains stories written after I had commenced my studies.

The critical exegesis examines *The Weight of a Human Heart* through the prism of literary influence, with each chapter discussing one aspect of literary influence on the

collection. As Lethem argues "Art is sourced. Apprentices graze in the field of culture" and therefore the first chapter of this exegesis, "The State of the Heart" explores the field of Australian short story culture upon which I "grazed" as I wrote this collection, and the influence that Australian short fiction had on my work . As Eliot ("Tradition" 16) notes "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" and thus this chapter places *The Weight of a Human Heart* in the greater context of an Australian short fiction tradition, through an examination of two of its most important strands; the development of realism and experimentalism. The chapter ends with a discussion of a number of Australian short stories, both experimental and realist, that have influenced the writing of the collection.

The second chapter "Rubber Wives" explores the nature of metafiction and its impact on *The Weight of a Human Heart.* The use of metafictional devices divides readers and critics, as can be seen by one review of my book in *The Guardian* newspaper:

> In this debut collection, O'Neill storms the stage, adorned in gold lamé, candelabra on the piano, trailing a diamond-studded tailcoat. Here's swank: a story told entirely through diagrams and graphs; a story told through EFL textbook exercises; a story told through its footnotes; a story told using the writing tips of great writers. Self-regarding, self-conscious, self-aware, these are stories that will dazzle and impress, or appal (Sansom).

This notion that a self-reflexive work is one that involves a writer simply showing off, and demonstrating, as Carver ("On Writing" 274) calls it, their "extremely clever chi-chi writing, or just plain tomfoolery writing" is not a new one, and will be discussed in this chapter. Since much of my own writing is metafictional, I am more inclined to be dazzled than appalled by self-reflexive writing, and as an example the impressive stories of John Barth will be discussed in some detail, as well as several of my own metafictional stories.

The final chapter considers theories of literary influence, and the specific nature of literary influence on my collection. Though, as previously mentioned, I consider *The Weight of a Human Heart* to be an Australian short story collection, and indebted to the Australian short fiction tradition, I also acknowledge several other sources of literary influence on the work, including the novels and stories of Nabokov and Joyce, and the experiments of the French writing group, the Oulipo. As Stafford (xii) notes "no single influence is ever pure or univocal- except in works that we would refer to as derivative." This chapter attempts to make clear the muddied, multivocal influences at work in my collection, which include the

stylistic experiments of James Joyce, the form and parody of Nabokov, and the constraints and game-playing of the Oulipo.

Chapter One

The State of the Heart: *The Weight of a Human Heart* **and the Australian Short Story**

The stories in *The Weight of a Human Heart* were directly influenced by the history and development of the Australian short story, more specifically the relationship between what might be termed the "conventional" (realist) style exemplified by Henry Lawson and the writers who followed him, and the "experimental" style which can be traced back to Marcus Clarke, and which reached a high-water mark in the "New Writing" of the 1970s. The stories can be seen as an attempt to unite these two strands of Australian short fiction, and therefore this chapter will explore these two aspects in some detail. Of course, a survey of Australian short fiction could easily run to book length, and therefore this chapter will be limited to examining key stages of development of the short form in Australia, paying special attention to the nineteenth century, and the 1970s.

The Problem of Definitions

While it might be envisioned that the terms "conventional" and "experimental" would prove problematic, it would be forgivable to imagine that the term "short story," at least, could be quickly and easily disposed of. Stewart (viii) argues against academic terminology or obliqueness defining a short story thus: "A short story is short, and it is a story." However this raises more questions than it answers, not least of which is what is meant by "short" and what is meant by "story." In fact, few short story writers or academics agree on precisely what a short story *is*. To take the matter of length as an example; Edgar Allan Poe (perhaps the first writer to make a serious critical study of short fiction) maintained a short story was one that could be read in a single sitting, and in which a unity of impression could be achieved. Henry James, on the other hand, defined a short story as being from 6000–8000 words, while Somerset Maugham's stories ranged from 1600 to 20,000 words (Reid 9–10). Moreover, E.M. Forster maintained a story could still be considered short if it was under 50,000 words (Pasco 123). Therefore, there is no critical consensus on the relatively simple issue of length, and this is before the infinitely more complex idea of "story" is even broached. As Pasco (115) notes, as soon as a common definition is found for the short story, a writer will inevitably come along and upset it.

May (xv) has called for a "truce" to the issue of definition so that other, presumably more important, questions can be considered. Part of the reason why a definition has proven to be so slippery is that as Head (2) states, the conventions of a short story are always changing, and so no one definition can ever be entirely appropriate or accurate. A conventional nineteenth century Australian short story, with its frame story, long descriptions of a bush setting, and dialogue and characterisation that owes much to the English novel, bears little resemblance to a conventional twenty-first century Australian short story; generally urban and minimalist.

When discussing "experimental" short fiction it is tempting to borrow Damon Knight's definition of science fiction, "[It] is what we point to when we say it" (1). But in order to identify the experimental, it is first necessary to identify the conventional, as the one exists only in relationship with the other. Moreover, the relationship is not static, but mutable through time. What seems *avant-garde* one day is conventional, even clichéd, the next. As Chekhov (195) notes, "The short story, like the stage, has its conventions," and it is only by defining these conventions that we can see how they have been ignored, reshaped, destroyed, or renovated; in other words, how they have been experimented with. Therefore the following survey of Australian experimental short fiction is necessarily also a survey of the changing conventions of Australian short fiction as a whole.

The Australian Short Story before Lawson: Morality, Mystery, Gothic and Romance Stories in the Nineteenth Century

The stories of Henry Lawson cast a long shadow over not just the Australian short story, but Australian fiction in general. For Kinsella (vii), Lawson is "the most written about and talked about writer in Australia" while Bennett (*Australian Short Fiction* 60) argues that Lawson's story, "The Drover's Wife" is the best known of all Australian short stories. Lawson's influence, whether viewed in a positive or negative light, has been widely acknowledged by both critics and writers (Bail "Introduction" xiv-xv; V. Palmer *Legend* 116; N. Palmer 235–236; Franklin 269; Wilding "Tabloid Story Story" 303). He is, in a word, 'inescapable" (Dunlevy 410). Yet Lawson did not emerge from a vacuum, and to understand his impact on the Australian short story, it is necessary to examine the short story before Lawson.

There had, of course, been short stories before publication of *While the Billy Boils*, in 1896, though most anthologists tend to overlook them. In fact, the short story in Australia

has a surprisingly lengthy history, longer by some decades than the modern Commonwealth of Australia itself. The first Australian short stories were published in the 1820s (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 12), before the states of Victoria and Queensland even existed. While English poetry and novels were available as models for Australian poets and novelists, throughout this century there were few English short stories which could be used as templates by Australian short fiction writers (Hadgraft 7). English journals printed mainly instalments of novels, compared to American journals which printed mainly short stories (Ejxenbaum 83). Other reasons for the lack of models for Australian short fiction writers were the vast geographical distances between Australia and Europe (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 2), and the relative infancy of the short story form. It was not until late in this century that it began to be acknowledged and understood that short fiction operated under different conventions than the novel (Shaw 3; W.V. Harris 187). It is not surprising that many Australian short fiction writers therefore chose to confront the new Australian experience with the apparatus of the English novel, and through the lens of established genres.

One early and enduringly popular genre was the moral tale, intended to illustrate religious doctrine (Hadgraft 7–8). Stories such as "The Convict Laundress" by Francis Vidal (1845) and "Retribution" (1854) by Mrs Charles Clacy were intended to instruct young women by presenting Christian stories that saw evil punished and virtue rewarded. Characterisation and plot were necessarily secondary to didacticism in these stories. Another enduring genre was the adventure story. From the 1840s many stories were written which featured pirates, bushranging, heiresses, evil villains, rebels, lovers, duels, imprisonments and escapes, all standard tropes imported from the English popular novel, and which would be used and reused in Australian short fiction through the next fifty years (Hadgraft 2–3).

From the 1850s, crime stories became popular in Australia, reaching the country a decade after Poe's creation of the seminal fictional detective C. Auguste Dupin (Hadgraft 23). Along with the influence of Poe, the popularity of the Australian crime short story in the nineteenth century can perhaps be explained by the peculiar aptness of the Australian landscape. The bush provided motive (in the great Gold Rushes of the time) and opportunity in plenty (in its complete isolation) for crime and detective story writers. James Skipp Borlase and Mary Fortune (also known as "Waif Wander") pioneered the form in Australia (S. Knight xi). Borlase had the gift of what Hadgraft correctly identifies as "sheer readability" (18). His story "Mystery and Murder" (1862) fascinatingly demonstrates how quickly the conventions of crime fiction were established, and how little they were to change

in the next century and a half; Borlase's detective welcomes a client to his office, a mystery is discussed, and the detective attempts to solve it using his deductive skills. Several of Borlase's stories took advantage of a bush setting, such as "The Moon Fossickers of Moonlight Flat." Here, the bush is a romanticised place of mysterious disappearances and moonlit crimes, not a place where ordinary people live and work. Similarly, Mary Fortune, credited as being only the second woman ever to write a crime story (S. Knight xi), exploited the bush setting skilfully in stories such as "The Dead Witness" (1865). The opening paragraphs of this story explicitly inform the reader that it is set not just in the countryside, or a rural area, but in the weird Australian bush. Clearly, Fortune is writing her story for outsiders, readers who needed the bush explained to them. Fortune's bush setting is well realised, and her stories structured around the same mystery conventions as Borlase's: a mysterious disappearance; undercover policemen; overlooked clues.

If the bush was the perfect setting for the crime story, then it was also ideally suited to other transplanted genres, such as the gothic and the ghost story. This is unsurprising as the Australian bush invokes all the gothic tropes; isolation, bizarre landscapes, eccentric characters. Gothic short stories flourished in late nineteenth century Australia, and appeared in a large number of publications (Gelder and Weaver "Introduction" *Gothic Fiction* 1). Marcus Clarke (3) explicitly linked the Australian landscape to the gothic in his sketch "Australian Scenery", where he equated "the dominant note of Australian scenery" to "the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry—weird melancholy. The gothic tale would also often blur into the ghost story. Interestingly, while these genres were, like crime and the moral tale, imported from abroad, the early Australian ghost stories focus more on eerie experiences outdoors rather than the more traditional indoors of a haunted house. Bennett (*Australian Short Fiction* 27) denies any explicit idea of experimenting with genre here, arguing that the focus on the outdoor ghost story was due more to exigency. After all, there were no castles or ancient haunted houses in Australia. The oldest and strangest feature of the country was the country itself and many ghost stories, such as Rosa Praed's "The Bunyip" (1891) expertly utilise this fact. The gothic was to remain a recurring theme in Australian short fiction into the twentieth century and behind, but perhaps nowhere more expertly evoked than in the short fiction of Barbara Baynton.

Stories of romance were also common in the nineteenth century Australian short story before Lawson, and proved an attractive option for the first female Australian writers as they could make a living selling stories to the large and voracious market in Australia and abroad (Gelder and Weaver "Introduction" *Romance Fiction* 2). The prolific writers who

operated in this genre, including "Tasma", Rosa Praed, and Mary Fortune, were published nationally and internationally (2–3). Yet despite their erstwhile popularity, these writers have suffered critical neglect in later decades perhaps, Giles (2) argues, because of their "unfashionably moralistic" style.

In a strange land, with a rich oral tradition but without a literary one, it is no surprise that the first Australian writers looked to established models and tropes from abroad for their stories. If a story opened in the bush then there was a very good chance that it would be about a dead body, a ghost, or a love affair with either a happy, or poignantly tragic ending. These early Australian stories were at the same time experimental and conservative: they were experimental in that they began to utilise unique settings (the bush, the mines of the Gold Rush), but they utilised these settings in narrative frameworks borrowed from Europe and America. While exploiting an Australian setting and characters for stories of romance, mystery, adventure and moral instruction, it occurred to only one writer before Henry Lawson to push the Australian short story in a new direction, towards the exploration of everyday Australian life. Ironically, that writer was an Englishman, Marcus Clarke.

Marcus Clarke (1846–1881): Australia's First Experimental Writer?

Marcus Clarke was born in England when the short story form was in its infancy in Australia, and he died one year after the founding of *The Bulletin*, the journal that was to launch Henry Lawson's career, and with it the modern Australian short story. Yet Clarke's work does not form a bridge between the nineteenth century Australian short story writers and Henry Lawson. Rather, Clarke stands as a true original in Australian short fiction, something recognised by Mark Twain, who called Clarke "Australia's only literary genius" (qtd. in Wilding "Marcus Clarke" xi). In his short life Clarke produced an enormous amount of writing, including seven volumes of stories. Although he is best known for his convict novel, *For the Term of his Natural Life* (1871) he is also a major figure, or *the* major figure, as Hadgraft (19) maintains, in Australian short fiction before Lawson, though in comparison to Lawson, his short fiction has suffered from critical neglect. It has been argued that nationalist critics in the twentieth century deliberately ignored Clarke in favour of Lawson, at least partly because Clarke wasn't born in Australia (Wilding "Marcus Clarke" xi-xii). There is perhaps some evidence for this claim in A.G. Stephens' (vii) comments about Clarke in his "Introductory" to *The Bulletin Story Book (*1901) stressing Clarke's nationality

(English), and his ignorance of much of the country as disqualifying him from being taken seriously in his writing about Australia.

And yet it was Clarke, as Wilding ("Marcus Clarke" xiv-xvi) notes, who offered an unsentimental, realistic portrait of the bush several decades before Lawson was feted (by Stephens, no less) for doing precisely the same thing. Clarke was unique in nineteenth century Australian short fiction in the range of his writing, and his receptiveness to international influences. He revered Balzac, and wrote an early essay on the French writer (xxxvi) and he was also an enthusiastic reader of the American short story writer, Bret Harte (xviii). In his work and his life Clarke was mercurial. One anecdote tells of his trying absinthe, and being asked if he liked it. He responded "Not particularly… but I'm experimenting with it. There are a lot of lies told about these things…I can't say yet if absinthe be good or not" (viii). Clarke's experimentation in life is reflected in his experimentation with the short story form.

In some of his stories Clarke (4) subscribes to a gothic view of the bush, as in "Australian Scenery," when he sketches the "Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning to write" in the Australian landscape. This is only one aspect of the bush he explored. Hadgraft (19) lists some of the many genres Clarke worked in: "sketches- of the bush, of bush townships, of characters ranging from drunks to squatters-… projections into the future…the broken romance, the femme fatale… farce, detection…mystical experiences."

Clarke wrote several stories set in the fictional bush township, Bullocktown, including "Poor Joe" and "Gentleman George's Bride." The latter is a sprawling story, with many vitally delineated characters, including a roguish heir, a rapacious Jew, and a spurned wife, all of them recognisably Australian characters in a recognisably Australian setting, and without a bunyip or a dead body in sight. In an experimental flourish, the bill for the bush wedding is displayed, complete with mistakes and costs, such as "Hoarse feed, Shouts all round, Dit O parting" (31). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the story is the last line: "Ah! There is a great deal of poetry in the lives of some very unpoetical-looking people isn't there?" (46). Clarke was perhaps the first Australian short story writer to look for poetry in the lives of the unpoetical. The bush had been explored by previous writers in every mode but a realist one. Clarke did not simply view the bush as a colourful backdrop for sensational stories (though he wrote these too) but also as a place where ordinary people lived and worked, were jealous, got drunk, celebrated, and mourned. The bush could be a place of hypocrisy and misery, but also of high comedy (as in "How the Circus came to

Bullocktown") and farce, as in "King Billy's Troubles", which satirises government red-tape and bureaucracy, presenting a number of letters and reports aimed at getting some breeches for a local aboriginal man.

As Bennett (*Australian Short Fiction* 31) notes, Clarke's literary experimentation included metafictional short stories that almost seem as if they belong with the "New Writing" of the 1970s. In "Holiday Peak", the narrator comes across a hidden paradise in the bush, essentially a parallel universe where the lives of his friends can be seen as they might have been- if they hadn't made the mistakes that led to death, ruin, or disgrace. Not only that, in an early example of intertextuality, it is a place where fictional characters live together- Steerforth from Dickens rubs shoulders with Dumas' Count of Monte Cristo and Poe's Lenore. This idea is one that Clarke returns to in "The Author Haunted by his own Creations" where the writer's characters appear to upbraid him about their fates. A villain complains of the absurd crimes he is forced to commit for the sake of the story, adding, in a note of postmodern poignancy, "I'm always left at the end of the third volume, if I'm alive, without hope of mercy or promise of repentance" (Clarke 224).

"Human Repetends" (1881) is another example of the range of Clarke's imagination and is a Poesque weird tale of reincarnation. Clarke also attempts comic fantasy ("Horace in the Bush" where the literati of Bullocktown debate poetry with a man they later come to realise was the Roman poet Horace), adventure ("A Modern Eldorado"), and tales of mystery and imagination ("The Mind-reader's Curse" and "The Dual Existence"). In the oddity of "A Haschich Trance", Clarke records the story he wrote under the influence of opium.

Hadgraft claims "Clarke's stories do not rank with those of the masters" (19) but this assertion is arguable, especially if judged in the context of the nineteenth century Australian short story as a whole. Clarke's stories, in their invention, their complexity, their experimentation and their characterisation, are a major achievement. In the breadth of his writing in short fiction, Clarke is unmatched. His stories, as Bennett (*Australian Short Fiction* 31) states "taken together… contain a compendium of almost all the styles and forms available to short story writers in the nineteenth century." No other Australian writer could claim this, until perhaps the 1970s, in the work of Frank Moorhouse.

And yet, while many literary histories of Australia discuss a "Lawson Tradition," none discuss a "Clarke Tradition" in Australian short fiction. Clarke's position in the Australian short story seems analogous to that of Laurence Sterne's in the English novel. Both writers produced wholly original and experimental work that enjoyed some acclaim in their own day, falling into relative neglect after their deaths, only to be re-discovered by new

generations of writers many years later. Clarke was aware that, despite his own contribution, much of Australian life had still not been explored in literature. He wrote "Australia has strange and marked features in her young civilisation, which have never yet been touched upon by the writers of fiction. Someday, perhaps, some author… will make use of the material that lies ready to hand… We hope that day will come soon" (Clarke qtd. in Wilding "Marcus Clarke" xviii). That day was to come a decade after Clarke's death, with the publication of Henry Lawson's first short story, "His Father's Mate" in *The Bulletin*.

The Bulletin Style and Australian Short Fiction

For many critics the modern Australian short story began in the pages of *The Bulletin*, specifically in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Stewart xiii; Hadgraft and Wilson xii). The importance of *The Bulletin* in the development of the Australian short story cannot be overstated. As Ken Lewis (223) notes, almost all significant Australian writers of the time were associated with the journal in some way. The first issue of The *Bulletin* appeared in January 1880 and contained journalism, cartoons, illustrations, and verse (221). In the first year of the journal only two short stories were published. This number grew to thirty-four stories in 1889 (220), but it wasn't until the 1890s that short stories become an integral part of the journal. The founding editors of *The Bulletin* were J.F. Archibald and John Haynes, but it was A.G. Stephens who had the greatest influence on the form and content of the fiction published in its pages. Stephens has been described as "perhaps the most influential man of letters in the history of Australian writing" (Lee 29) and realism was his preferred style (21). In the same way that Emile Zola had used social realism in his fiction as a flag-waver for social and political reform (Lee 21–22), Stephens intended to use realism in the pages of *The Bulletin* as a way of constructing a distinctly Australian nationalist literary identity and style.

Stephens recognised that Australian fiction had, until that point, been only nominally Australian, declaring "The literary work which is Australian in spirit, as well as in scene or incident, is only beginning to be written" ("Introductory" v). Writing in the Red Page of 25th June, 1898, Stephens rejected the idea that Australian literature should slavishly follow English literary modes, and argued instead for a wider, international outlook with which to create a national literature (Goodwin 37). From 1888 *The Bulletin* published many translations of Maupassant short stories, intending his realist style to serve as a model for local writers (Jarvis 64). At the same time, there was a marked increase in the number of

volumes of short fiction and anthologies being published; with forty collections from 1887 to 1894 (Hadgraft 25), though how much of this was due to *The Bulletin's* influence is difficult to determine.

The editors of *The Bulletin* consciously set out to create a new Australian literary tradition which would deal with explicitly Australian themes, drawing from an international literary tradition modelled on such writers as Balzac and Maupassant, rather than an English focus. They had clear ideas of the kinds of stories they were looking for, and expressed their preferences to readers, and potential contributors in the Red Page of the journal. The emphasis was firmly moved from the romance, the gothic, and crime story, to the realistic story of Australian life. Overt moralising and authorial intrusion were discouraged (Jarvis 59–60). If a story was too long, or had too many incidents, Archibald was always ready with editorial suggestions to "boil it down" (a favourite *Bulletin* mantra). *The Bulletin*'s preference was for *short* stories. The word limit for a story in *The Bulletin* was 3000 (Bennett "The Short Story" 164) though editors favoured stories of even half that length (K. Lewis 222). Concision was key, the editors claiming that William Shakespeare himself would not have been given three and a half columns (Moore 319–320) in the journal.

This focus on brevity was to have an enormous impact on the development of Australian short fiction. Before the 1890s many Australian short stories began with long digressions on the landscape, often as part of a framing device, or story within a story, a device borrowed from the novel form. Some of these frame stories were actually longer than an entire *Bulletin* short story. By focussing on and promoting brevity in the short story (and by providing models of such brevity, for example, Maupassant), *The Bulletin* effectively recreated the style and structure of the Australian short story. Where once a character might have taken a paragraph to say a simple "Yes" or "No," the dialogue in *Bulletin* stories becomes noticeably shorter and more naturalistic. A reduced word count also demanded a simpler, tighter structure. The frame tale, if not done away with, was drastically reduced in length. An authentic Australian setting was also encouraged (Jarvis 64) and realism became the watchword for the preferred writing style. For Stephens ("Introductory" v) the best *Bulletin* stories were "branches torn from the Tree of Life, trimmed and dressed with whatever skill the writers possess" and as close to the truth of a real event as possible. This was a repudiation of the gothic, detective, ghost story and the romance story, which had formed the backbone of Australian short fiction before *The Bulletin*.

The stories that *The Bulletin* published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century proved a decisive break in style, theme and subject matter from most nineteenth

century Australian short fiction that had come before. A.G. Stephens stated with some pride that literature in the colonies was "suckled at the breast of journalism" (qtd. In Whitlock 36), a statement that Patrick White was to echo decades later, as a criticism. Goodwin (153) defines the preferred *Bulletin* formula as follows, "Short sketches, with some anecdotal narrative interest (often inconclusive), no words wasted in description or dialogue, no long speeches… a setting among bush workers…" Yet the critical consensus for *The Bulletin* stories of the 1890s, with the exception of Barbara Baynton's and Henry Lawson's work, has been generally negative (V. Palmer *Legend* 106; Stewart xiii; Hadgraft and Wilson xiii). This was something Stephens ("Introductory" v) himself tacitly admitted when he stated: "our most talented story writers are still only clever students of the art of writing." Indeed, apart from Henry Lawson and Steele Rudd, the most popular of *The Bulletin* writers such as Edward Dyson, Price Warung and Ernest Favenc, are little known or read today. They are, however, still of interest in how their work reflects the tastes of the editors of the journal, and their audience. Dyson displays the nationalism of *The Bulletin* in the anti-Chinese sentiment of his much anthologised story, "A Golden Shanty." Warung demonstrates the journal's fascination with Australian history in the many tales of the brutalities of the convict era, and Favenc's adventure stories transcend earlier examples of the genre by their expert evocation of the Australian landscape.

The Bulletin's unapologetically intrusive editing style and well publicised submission guidelines helped shift the focus of Australian short fiction from stories of romance, adventure and mystery, towards stories more explicitly concerned with ordinary Australian life, and told in a realist fashion. The writer who was able to work most successfully within the constraints and themes of *The Bulletin* short story to produce something original and lasting was Henry Lawson.

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) and "The Lawson Tradition"

Fifty-two Henry Lawson short stories were published in *The Bulletin* in the last decade of the nineteenth century and Lawson's name, and style, were to be forever linked to the journal. As described above, *The Bulletin* demanded a certain kind of story: realistic, set in Australia (Jarvis 60, 64) and ideally of a short length (under 3000 words). As Bennett notes: "the form of *The Bulletin* short story encouraged the writer to reduce excessive detail…Contributors strove to economise with words, to create a single incident as the story's crisis, or turning point (*Australian Short Fiction* 48–49). Of all the *Bulletin* writers,

except perhaps Barbara Baynton who only published one story in the journal, Lawson was to prove an expert at working within these parameters. Lawson, while not dispensing entirely with the frame story, radically shortened it. Now, it was no longer two or three pages; in "A Camp-fire Yarn," the frame story is established in six words, ("...said Mitchell, continuing a yarn to his mate…") and the story itself is under way (298).

For Marcus Clarke, the bush was only one of many things he wrote about. For Lawson, it was essentially all he wrote about. Almost all his stories are set in the bush, with a handful set in New Zealand, or in the city. But even those characters not presently in the bush in these stories are ruminating on it. Compared to his contemporaries, Lawson's prose style appears modern, sometimes startlingly so. At times his stripped back realism and emphasis on naturalistic dialogue seems to anticipate the work of Ernest Hemingway. Indeed, the editor Edward Garnett believed Lawson to be Hemingway's superior in his economical style (Kinsella 8). Lawson's characters were rural, working class, laconic; in short, recognisably Australian, even today. There is no explanation of what a selection or a swag is — it is assumed, the reader being Australian, that they will simply know. In "The Union Buries its Dead," Lawson's skill at establishing character and setting in a few words is clearly demonstrated as the narrator observes the progress of a coffin through a bush town toward the graveyard. Here Lawson explicitly rejects the clichés that had accrued around Australian fiction; he writes about leaving out "the wattle" and "the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian called Bill" (85). Instead Lawson picks out telling details — the drunks attempting to show some respect as the coffin passes, the sycophant holding a sunhat over the head of the oblivious priest. Phillips ("Lawson" 92) has argued that this story, in treatment and theme, belongs more to the mid-twentieth century than the tail end of the nineteenth.

Lawson's early collections, including *While the Billy Boils* (1896) and *Joe Wilson and his Mates* (1901), cemented the themes and realist style that would shape the Australian short story for decades to come. Webby ("Australian Short Fiction" 154) has drawn parallels between Lawson's stories in the 1890s and the New Writing of the 1970s in that both broke from the established literary forms of the day. Indeed, the difference between Lawson's stories and those of his predecessors and his contemporaries was instantly recognised in Australia (Kinsella 3) (Stephens "Henry Lawson" 3). Contemporary reviews of *When the Billy Boils* attest to the impact Lawson's stories had at the time, and the special interest paid to his style. In several reviews his stories are compared to photographs (Anon "Short Stories" 6; Warung 49; P.M. 59–60) and are commended for their adherence to reality, with

one reviewer stating "the ability to produce this sense of objective reality is the surest mark of the true artist, and Mr Lawson possesses it in an exceedingly high degree" (Prometheus 8). In fact, Lawson was commended for not allowing his imagination to intrude on his stories (Farrell 56). Just as Lawson's "photographic" realist style was applauded, so were the plots and everyday themes he explored. A review of one of his later collections celebrates it as a refreshing change from "the stock sensationalism of the average Australian story. In reading them we have never had the questionable pleasure of meeting a bushranger… and there was not even the robbery of a bank…" (Anon "Australian Bush" 107). Bank robberies and bushranging, staples of Australian short fiction in the nineteenth century, were now something to be sneered at.

A common criticism of Lawson's short stories is that his imaginative vision was too narrow and restricting; that he wrote only about the bush, and only in a realist fashion. This was a claim made by contemporary critics (Stephens "Australian Writers" 181) and also after his death (Davison 230), and eventually echoed by Wilding ("Tabloid Story Story" 303) in the 1970s in his criticisms of the Lawson tradition. While it is true that Lawson's style and subject matter varied little in his short fiction, it should be remembered that the bush was a subject that had almost never been written about previously in a realist style. Before Lawson, as one contemporary reviewer noted in 1908, Australian literature was made up of "tame Religious Tract Society authors, weird English and American concocters of shilling shockers and penny dreadfuls… all swallowed if only they could induce a temporary belief that their "Australian" characters were really Australian" (Anon "Aspects of Lawson" 135). This harsh criticism is to dismiss many fine Australian short story writers working before Lawson such as Mary Fortune, but there was an element of truth to it. Lawson's vision may have been narrow, but it was one that had been virtually unexplored since the publication of the first works of Australian fiction in the 1830s, apart from the "Bullocktown" stories of Marcus Clarke. Lawson took the editorial impositions of *The Bulletin* in length and subject matter and within these limitations created a number of stories that are almost unmatched for their time in intensity, complexity and characterisation. Kinsella (15) recognises that Lawson's conception of the short story was entirely different from those of his contemporaries such as Price Warung and Louis Becke, for whom short stories were merely another species of telling a yarn.

Lawson's radical experimentation and reinvention of the Australian short story has been obscured by his success. The brevity imposed by *The Bulletin* had the effect on some of his contemporaries of reducing their work to sketches, but for Lawson, at his best, it served

to focus his imagination. His style, direct and objective, was also something new in Australian literature, though it is impossible to tell where the Lawson style and *The Bulletin* style began and ended. Whitlock (37) has defined Lawson's realism and that of other short story writers in other colonies such as Canada as "colonial realism… a modest and quite elementary determination to write about life as it was observed in the local sphere," while also stating that Lawson's style was more complex than his contemporaries (41). The style and themes he pioneered were to inaugurate, and influence the modern Australian short story for several decades. Before Lawson, Roderick (375) argues, the Australian short story was buried under "layers of artificiality" more concerned with applying the style and sensibilities of English writers such as Dickens to Australia, rather than creating an Australian style. In exploring Australian themes in an economical, realist style, Lawson inspired the writers who came after him with the self-assurance to do the same (Murray-Smith "Henry Lawson" 379).

However, many of these writers mistook Lawson's personal vision of the Australian short story for a universal one. The influence of his "bush realism" was to be hugely influential in Australian short fiction until the 1960s when, as Dunlevy (410) argues, Australian short story writers, "would still write of the same fictional land and speak the same fictional voice" as Henry Lawson. Lawson's experiments with Australian short fiction essentially created a series of conventions for the Australian literary short story. The conventional Australian short story in the first half of the twentieth century is realist, formally conservative, explicitly Australian in theme and content, and brief and economical in characterisation, dialogue and setting. This was the tradition that Patrick White decried with his famous cry against contemporary Australian fiction, which he called the "dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism" (*Patrick White Speaks* 16), and which Bail and Wilding railed against even until the 1970s. Yet, as shall be seen, the realism of the "Lawson tradition" in these years is not as monolithic as its critics suggest. Short fiction writers would explore and adapt Lawson's realism, but it was not until the 1970s that these conventions would be seriously questioned.

After Lawson: Barbara Baynton and Steele Rudd

The two most important writers to follow Lawson, Barbara Baynton and Steele Rudd, each owed him a debt. Though Baynton directly acknowledged the influence of Lawson on her one collection of short stories, *Bush Studies* (Webby "Introduction" 6), her vision of the bush was quite different from Lawson's. Perhaps this was because Baynton

never truly belonged to *The Bulletin* school of writers. Only one of her stories was published in the journal, in a heavily edited form. It is true that Baynton's stories share Lawson's bush setting, and explore the bleakness of bush life as Lawson's did. But stories such as "Squeaker's Mate" and "The Chosen Vessel" are unleavened by Lawson's occasional flashes of humour or sentimentality. In Lawson the narrator is always in the foreground- most of Lawson's stories are told by someone else. Baynton's stories stay closer to the characters and are much more subjective (Phillips "Barbara Baynton" 149). Phillips further (149) argues that Baynton's short fiction, exploring the cruelty inflicted by men on women, and the harshness and unfairness of bush life, was the antithesis of the nationalistic fiction of the 1890s. Baynton considered herself a naturalist rather than a realist, (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 81) and in her tales of obsession and violence the influence of her reading of Russian writers such as Dostoevsky is clear (Gullett 26). A.G. Stephens praised her realism (Phillips 154) and her "truthful glimpses of Australian life" (Webby "Introduction" 3) and the rawness of her stories were later to affect Vance Palmer so much that he tried to meet with her while living in London (Hergenhan "Shafts into Animalism" p.no?).

Perhaps the bleakness of Baynton's stories explains their lack of popularity when compared with Steele Rudd's, by far the most commercially popular of all Australian short story writers. The first of Rudd's many "Selection" stories appeared in *The Bulletin* in 1895, and were collected in *On Our Selection* in 1899. The stories were set in the bush, and told in a realist, laconic style reminiscent of Lawson's, but Rudd diverged from Lawson and Baynton in his use of comedy. While some humour does feature in Lawson's stories such as "The Loaded Dog," Rudd's tales of Dad, Dave and the rest of the Rudd family rely heavily on comedic elements. The hard work and isolation of the bush is softened and disarmed by pratfalls and misunderstandings. While Rudd's initial collection *On Our Selection* has much to recommend it, including a warm and affectionate portrayal of family, it could be argued that his work never really developed past this point. Rudd's many subsequent collections were to repeat the same plots, motifs and tone as his first. Ikin (376) has criticised Rudd's stories as being boring, unfunny and his characters and plots formulaic. A.D. Hope (62) echoes these criticisms, asserting that Rudd wrote caricatures rather than characters, his slapstick humour soon becoming tiresome. Ikin's characterisation of Rudd as a failed artist, and his assertion that "his talents were meagre" (376), is overly severe. It is true Rudd's stories were unchallenging, predictable and on the whole presented a romanticised view of the bush, but they appealed to Australian readers in a way that Baynton, and even Lawson, never did, perhaps because of their undeniable "vitality and gusto" (Hope 67) qualities which

Lawson, for all his strengths, did not have. New volumes and reprints of Rudd's "Selection" stories appeared regularly, continuing into the 1920s, and were later adapted to other media, such as radio and film. The front cover of a 1940 reprint of *On Our Selection* boasts that over a quarter of a million copies of the collection had been sold since its original publication, making Rudd easily the most widely read Australian short story writer in the history of the form. Rudd's legacy remains in the only Australian literary prize for a short story collection: the Queensland Literary Awards Steele Rudd Award.

Apart from the prolific Rudd, few short story collections in Australia were published during the years of the Great War. Bennett (*Australian Short Fiction* 94) argues that those authors who did choose to write about the war and its effects "found in *The Bulletin*'s dominant tradition of 'bush realism' the models of structure, characterisation, setting and style to which they could most readily adapt." It is interesting to note that the Great War, which in Europe and America was an impetus to experimentation and modernism, encouraged the opposite effect on Australian literature, consolidating Lawson's style.

Between the Wars

The market for short stories in the 1920s was still dominated by journals with a rural focus, such as *The Bulletin*, the *Lone Hand*, and the *Western Mail* (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 100), all of which preferred to publish stories in the Lawson realist mode. In Europe and America at the same time, writers such as Joyce, Sherwood Anderson and Katherine Mansfield, following Chekhov's lead, began writing short stories that marked a move "from realism to lyricism and suggestion" (Feddersen xxiv). However, such overseas influences, it has been argued by Hergenhan (xiii), did not have a marked effect on Australian literature until the 1930s.

Bennett ("The Short Story" 173) identifies Vance Palmer and Katherine Susannah Pritchard as the first half of the twentieth century's most constant practitioners of the short form in Australia. Pritchard published a collection each decade from the 1930s to the 1950s, and Palmer four collections spanning 1915 to 1955. These two writers, while both realist, demonstrate the elasticity of the Australian realist tradition. Pritchard's work shows the influence of Chekhov and Maupassant as well as Lawson, but later, reflecting her communist beliefs, became more politically themed. In "Marlene," an upper class, elderly white woman visits an aboriginal camp, only to find herself the grandmother of a newborn baby. With this knowledge, her kindly intentions curdle, and she has the camp broken up. This powerful

story, told in a minimalist style reminiscent of Lawson, and with a bush setting, nonetheless explores themes of race and exploitation that Lawson never touched upon. Similarly, Palmer's work was heavily influenced by Lawson in the early 1920s, but gradually became inclined more towards modernism as it developed (Bennett "The Short Story" 175), so that by the 1940s he had rejected the idea of a short story as simply "a straightforward narrative, with every outline filled in, every action performed on stage, and the machine moving to a climax foreshadowed in the beginning" (Palmer "Foreword" viii) as so many of Steele Rudd's stories are wont to do.

In the 1930s, other writers found more difficulty in escaping the continuing influence of *The Bulletin* style. The limits to experimentation in this decade can be seen in Dal Stivens' short stories, which were often more akin to fables or tall tales rather than realistic explorations of contemporary life. Stivens received many rejections from the literary journals of the 1920s and 1930s for being "avant-garde- way out" ("Bulletin" 212). While acknowledging the importance of *The Bulletin* to writers of his generation, Stivens also found their over intrusive editing style tantamount to "re-writing" (211–212). Many years later, Stivens commented that he felt like an "alien writer" in Australia due to the difficulty in getting his stories published (Clunies Ross "Some Developments" 168–169). Feeling that "Lawson's world wasn't mine," Stivens ("Authors' Statement" 230) found himself drawn more to the work of American, rather than Australian writers. Stivens' experience during these decades demonstrates that, while a realist style was broad enough to contain Pritchard and Palmer, writers who attempted to step outside of realism could have trouble being published.

Along with the great distances between Australia and Europe and America, censorship was a further factor in delaying and discouraging experimentation in the Australian short story for much of the 20th century. As far back as 1900 A.G. Stephens had a copy of a French novel seized by Customs officials who feared it was obscene, and a consignment of works by Balzac was also seized, with the importers facing charges (Murray-Smith "Censorship" 77–78). In the 1920s, books banned in Australia included *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, *Brave New World*, and even *Moll Flanders* (78). By 1936 around 50,000 books were on the list of prohibited publications (79). The Censorship Board unbanned *Ulysses* in 1937, but then banned it again in 1941, the embargo this time lasting well into the 1960s (82), along with a ban on Nabokov's *Lolita* (86). Consequently, many of the foundational modernist texts were not readily available to Australian writers until almost the 1970s.

While Lawson and Baynton had been aware of international writers, Hergenhan argues they were more influenced by *The Bulletin* editors and readers in their writing (xiii) and that it was not until the 1930s that international influences, including Mansfield and Hemingway, began to influence Australian writers (xiii). But even at this time, the Western Australian short story writer Peter Cowan found no useful local influences except for Barbara Baynton as an antidote to *The Bulletin* style fiction he believed was still prevalent (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 80). Instead, he turned to Hemingway, who "had forged a language for his own time" (Cowan 197), as well as Dos Passos and Faulkner, when they could be found in Australia (Bennett "Short Fiction" 179). These international influences perhaps explain Cowan's move away from the bush realism of Lawson and Rudd, identified by Bennett (179) in the 1940s, towards an increasingly modernist style in his later work. As Bennett noted, Cowan never stopped experimenting with the short story (*Australian Short Fiction* 160–161) and is notable for his exploration of modernist techniques throughout his long career. It is perhaps telling that Cowan preferred to be published in new journals like *Overland*, rather than the home of the bush realist short story, *The Bulletin* (161).

Towards the end of the 1930s, the market for Australian short stories was expanding. *The Bulletin* was starting to accept longer stories for publication (Goodwin 153) and the annual anthology *Coast to Coast* began in 1941, a forerunner to the modern *Best Australian Stories*. Also, two new, long-running literary journals appeared: *Southerly* (1939) and *Meanjin* (1940). With the beginning of these journals, Wallace-Crabbe (xi) argues, serious literary criticism emerged for the first time in Australia, though this is to underestimate the earlier critical contributions of Vance and Nettie Palmer, and A.G. Stephens among others.

The 1940s and 1950s: Boom and Bust

It is due to the flourishing of the short story market that Hergenhan (xvi) identifies this decade, along with the 1890s and 1970s, as a key era in the development of the Australian short story. Indeed, the 1940s was selected as the beginning of the modern age of the Australian short story in one anthology (Davis). Cowan (197) agrees that the 1940s were a very good time for Australian short stories, feeling there was an "immense sense of experiment, of stimulation and hope for writing…" despite the ongoing restrictions of censorship. Bail ("Introduction" xiv) further notes the large number of collections and anthologies published from this decade onwards, a number which appears disproportionate to Australia's relatively small population. Proof that the conception of Australian short

fiction was moving away from the traditional *Bulletin* style story can be seen in Vance Palmer's (vii-viii) foreword to the 1944 *Coast to Coast*, where he claimed "we no longer demand that [a short story] have a formal beginning, a middle and an end; that it shall contain a plot, as easily extracted as the backbone of a fish… Nowadays a short story may be a dream, a dialogue, a study of character, a poetic reverie; anything that has a certain unity and the movement of life."

Some evidence of Palmer's claim that the Australian short story had indeed developed can be found in the stories published in *Coast to Coast* (1941). Palmer's own story, "Josie" explores the effects the death of a young girl has on her classmates. Though realist, the story is notable for its skilful use of the third person plural narrator ("we"), an unusual and difficult narrative point of view to employ even today. In "Dry Spell" by Marjorie Barnard, realism blurs into fantasy as a long dry spell affects a city, and the narrator, in strange ways. Evidence of international literary influences are clear in the Hemingwayesque dialogue of Dal Stivens' "Solemn Mass" and "A Bum Actor," while Gavin Casey's "Short Shift Saturday" deploys a naturalistic style suited to the working class narrator, a miner. For Bennett, Casey's stories demonstrate the lingering influence of Lawson into the 1920s and 1930s (*Australian Short Fiction* 134), and indeed Casey's style is reminiscent of Lawson at his best, as in the "Joe Wilson" stories. Other stories in *Coast to Coast* also demonstrate Lawson's continuing influence, such as James Hackston's "The Horse from Bungowannawinnie," an entertaining bush yarn that could easily have appeared in *The Bulletin* in the 1890s, and Kylie Tennant's "A Bargain," a Lawsonesque sketch about two tramps haggling over a woman in the bush. What is clear from this anthology is that while realism still dominated the short story in the 1940s, this style was not monolithic. Rather, realism was a wide spectrum embracing the obliqueness of Palmer and Barnard on the one hand, and the yarn-spinning of "The Horse from Bungowannawinnie" as well as the bush realist, *Bulletin*esque style of Alan Marshall's "Tell us About the Turkey, Jo" on the other. While, as Palmer said, it was true that Australians no longer *demanded* a short story that had a formal beginning, middle and end, and told in a realist style, it appeared these stories were still very popular, more so than stories of dreams, dialogues or character studies.

By the 1950s, Bail ("Introduction" xv) argues, the focus of Australian short fiction finally turned from the bush to the city, though the "plain" style favoured for so long by Australian writers remained. The realist tradition was continued by writers such as Alan Marshall and John Morrison, whose stories, Goldsworthy (536) claims, "represented for many people the mid-century Australian story at its best: widely accessible and not 'difficult'

or obscure, but not facile or oversimple…Realist, but not drearily so." Along with Marshall and Morrison, Frank Herbert, Gavin Casey and Frank Dalby Davison kept the Lawsonian "anecdotal forms of storytelling" alive (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 143). Fiction describing the immigrant experience, such as Judah Waten's *Alien Son* also consciously placed itself in Lawson's realist style (Waten "Authors' Statement" 235).

For Cowan (197), however, the excitement of the 1940s had evaporated by the 1950s. A review of one 1950s anthology, the influential *Coast to Coast*, gives an example of this feeling of ennui. The stories were characterised as "dull, lack[ing] colour, movement, conflict and gusto" (Bartlett 60) because they had modelled themselves too squarely on "nineteenth century realism" (59). Yet those writers who moved too far from social realism continued to encounter difficulty being published. Cowan (197), whose style had progressed from its Lawsonesque beginnings to become more elliptical, found this decade a "very lean period." Similarly, Frank Moorhouse, whose first short story was published in 1957, found publication increasingly difficult as he moved away from traditional Australian themes, which he characterised as "sympathetic to the working class and kind to kangaroos" (Moorhouse qtd. in Godwin 255). Moorhouse's mention of kangaroos here is symbolic of the Australian short story's preoccupation with the bush landscape well into this decade. Goldsworthy (539) notes the curious fact that a great many Australian short story collections published from the 1920s to the 1950s featured titles associated with nature and the natural world (539), this at a time when Australia was rapidly becoming more urbanised.

Another writer who had difficulty being published, as his ornate style marked him out as unusual and experimental, was Hal Porter (Webby "Australian Short Fiction" 152). As Barnes (160) has noted, Porter's style is the antithesis of Lawson's, and would at one time have been described as "un-Australian." Porter's short story collections, including *A Bachelor's Children* (1962) are, in their mannered prose and self-awareness, unlike any other short story writer of the time, though, as Goldsworthy (536) notes, Porter was never seen as a forerunner to the experimental writing of the 1970s. Clunies Ross ("Some Developments" 170) agrees that Porter's work had little influence on new writers, as his work was so little known (170). Interestingly, Porter and Cowan, who in different ways moved away from the Australian realist tradition, have been identified as two of the key short fiction writers in the years after the Second World War (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 161).

The 1960s: The End, or the Beginning of a Golden Age?

By the late 1960s, Harrower (479) gave voice to a feeling that a Golden Age of short story writing had passed in Australia. This decline in the short form was demonstrated when *The Bulletin*, which previously published one to three short stories per issue, ceased publishing them altogether (480), a decision that caused little comment (482). *The Bulletin*'s decision was reflected in the wider short story market, which had narrowed to an unparalleled degree (Ewers xiv). Many of the stories that were published seemed old-fashioned and out of date, the editors of journals unwilling to take risks in publishing new writers (Harrower 483). As an example of the conservatism of the form, Harrower notes that in the influential anthology, *Short Stories of Australia: The Moderns*, the youngest contributor was forty-four years old at the time of publication (484). In the 1960s, it appears that the Australian short story was stuck in a cycle, which Goldsworthy identifies as "critics and editors...demanding a certain kind of writing which writers went on supplying- as 'The Australian Tradition' or 'The Lawson Tradition'" (539). Further evidence of this process is supplied by Clunies Ross ("Some Developments" 166) who notes that the Oxford's World's Classics *Australian Short Stories: Second Series* (1963) drew mainly upon Lawsonian realist stories while excluding more modern, and modernist, writers like Hal Porter and Patrick White who did not follow that tradition.

C.B. Christesen, editor of *Meanjin* from 1940–1974, was later to criticise those Australian short fiction writers who in the 1960s were reluctant to engage with modernist techniques, feeling more comfortable with the literary conventions of the nineteenth century, conventions which could no longer accurately reflect Australian life (Christesen 242). Alan Marshall was singled out by Christesen as one of the writers who found modernism "uncongenial" (243). Marshall himself realised that by the late 1960s he was a writer out of time, stating that he could not write like Patrick White or Randolph Stow, as "They live in a world with which I'm not familiar" (qtd. in Marks 316). Other writers such as Frank Hardy continued to be heavily and unapologetically influenced by Lawson's short fiction (Hardy 204), while at the same time, censorship continued to stifle innovation in the form throughout this decade. For instance, Patrick White's short story "Down at the Dump" was nearly prevented from appearing in *Meanjin* because the printers objected to two examples of the word "fuck" (Christesen 244). Not only was swearing frowned upon in literature, but writing about sex could bring about police prosecution (243). Frank Moorhouse, always keen to push boundaries, submitted stories to the journal *Australian Letters* in the 1960s which would, according to the editor, have resulted in prosecution for obscenity if published

(Dutton 255). For much of this decade, Australian short fiction appeared trapped in the past. Furthermore, the number of published collections was small, as were the number of stories published in journals (Clancy 245), further discouraging new writers from working in the form.

However, this decade was not as grim as Harrower painted. Torre (423) argues that the 1960s was one of transition in the Australian short story. While writers such as Marshall and Hardy were content to explore familiar themes in a literary style heavily indebted to Lawson, others were not. Hal Porter and Peter Cowan continued to be published throughout the 1960s, as did Dal Stivens, whose fabulist stories were finally enjoying some popularity. Another important landmark in this decade was the publication of Patrick White's short story collection *The Burnt Ones* (1964). The international settings of this collection, and its unashamedly modernist style marked, as Torre notes (433), a decisive break from the realist to the mystic, the parochial to the universal in Australian short fiction. For White, as for Cowan and Porter, the short story was used to depict an individual view of reality, and not to utilise a nationalist view of reality that had already been constructed (Barnes 170), as in the traditional *Bulletin* style story. However, it was not until the 1970s that such experimentation became widespread in Australian short fiction.

1970s and the "New Writing"

The 1970s finally saw the relaxation of Australian censorship laws, leaving writers free to examine controversial subjects such as sex, drugs and rape that had been forbidden to them before. At the same time, both writers and critics in the 1970s explicitly acknowledged the influence of international, mainly postmodern writers on Australian short fiction; writers such as Richard Brautigan, Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Julio Cortázar, Italo Calvino, and Kurt Vonnegut (Bennett "Australian Experiments" 360; Wilding "Tabloid Story Story" 305; Clunies Ross "Laszlo's Testament" 111). Although the total number of collections published in the 1970s was little greater than the number published in the 1950s (Moorhouse "Whatever Happened" 181) there was a sense that something special was happening in Australian short fiction, a kind of "New Writing," as exemplified by the stories in *Tabloid Story*, edited by Michael Wilding and Frank Moorhouse, and which first appeared, fittingly, the same year as the relaxation of censorship laws (Goldsworthy 540). The importance of *Tabloid Story* to the short story in the 1970s has been compared to that of *The Bulletin* in the 1890s (Clunies Ross "Some Developments" 174). This is ironic, as the Lawson or *Bulletin*

tradition meant little to many of the writers who appeared in *Tabloid Story*, who might have little awareness of or interest in the established Australian canon, even including such recent Australian writers as Patrick White (Wilding "Tabloid Story Story" 307).

In the 1970s there was an upending of the realist convention and themes which had been prevalent in Australian short fiction since the time of Henry Lawson. If there was a homogeneity in the Australian short story before the 1970s (with some notable exceptions, such as Porter and White), in the 1970s this changed to a celebration of difference, one of the keys to postmodernism, according to Iftekharrudin (5) who argues: "Postmodernist theories and texts, at the fundamental level, have adhered to heterogeneity as opposed to homogeneity..." This heterogeneity can be seen in the work of writers such as Frank Moorhouse, and Michael Wilding who utilised postmodern techniques such as fragmentation of plot, parody, and self-reflexivity to reinvigorate the short fiction of this decade. The experimental stories of the 1970s also embraced a number of genres that had been marginalised for many years in Australia, including science-fiction and fantasy.

The traditional, realist short story in Australia (which never entirely disappeared in the 1970s and re-asserted itself thereafter) harked back to Poe's definition of a short story, with a few characters, a single theme, a limited number of settings, and, influenced by *The Bulletin* and Henry Lawson, most often followed an economical, realist style. The experimental story of the 1970s was the opposite of this. Iftekharrudin (20) defines postmodern stories as "complex in form and content and [making] use of a variety of styles including parody, self-conscious fictionality, grotesquery and fantasy" (20). The experimental (or post-modern) short story of the 1970s and beyond therefore rejects realism, conservatism in form and content, and embraces uncertainty and fragmentation. For a moment in the 1970s, the experimental *became* the mainstream, and from the 1970s onwards the experimental story emerges, more than ever before, as an identifiable strain of the Australian short story.

Hergenhan (xix-xx) argues that the focus on realism in Australian short fiction before the 1970s was exaggerated and distorted by those belonging to the New Writing school. But there is no doubt that many writers at the time felt stifled and frustrated as their work was continually turned down by literary journals in favour of what might be described as "conventional" short stories (Hergenhan xx). Murray Bail's ("Authors' Statement" 187) annoyance is clear in his comment that the most important influence on him as a writer was "dissatisfaction with the barren anecdotal realism of the local literature." Later, reflecting on the 1970s, Bail argued that young writers in Australia in that decade felt enclosed by "a

formidable wall of [realist] stories, so it seemed" ("Introduction" xvi). The "so it seemed" is important here, as the realism Bail was describing was never as uniform as suggested by some critics, especially Wilding. In their influential magazine insert, *Tabloid Story*, Moorhouse and Wilding published "the sort of new writing we wanted to encourage — no more formula bush tales, no more restrictions to the beginning, middle and end story, no more preconceptions about the rounded tale" (Wilding "Tabloid Story Story" 302). Interestingly, Wilding here echoes Palmer's conception of Australian short fiction which he wrote about in the 1940s, suggesting aspects of the "New Writing" were not so new after all.

Wilding believed that a "nationalist cult of the short story" (303), centred on Henry Lawson, had led to the impoverishment of Australian short fiction, as endless anthologies and literary journals published and celebrated a short story tradition that was "narrow, reduced…barren… (304)." The stories Wilding abhorred were realist, terse, anecdotal, and conservative in form, content and themes. Murray Bail was even more hostile, calling realism "the great curse of Australian literature" (qtd. in D. Anderson xi). If this was Old Writing, then the New Writing would take a different turn, following less in the steps of Lawson, than of Marcus Clarke. Wilding maintained that Clarke was a more experimental and wide-ranging writer than Lawson and was keen to highlight Clarke's often overlooked contribution to Australian short fiction. In Wilding's view, the prevalent critical emphasis on Lawson only served to retard the development of the Australian short story ("Tabloid Story Story" 303–304).

Clancy (248) refutes Wilding's description of the development of Australian fiction as "an exaggerated stereotype, caricature even" and by the 1980s Wilding had moderated his criticisms. Instead of arguing for the narrowness of the realist Australian literary tradition, he maintained instead that Australian realism was "protean," was capable of evolution, and had interacted with modernism throughout the twentieth century ("Introduction" *The Oxford Book* xi). Still, there is no doubt that in the 1970s Wilding felt the need to distance himself and his journal as much as possible from a particular form of Australian realism, as did the other major writers of this decade: Murray Bail, Peter Carey and Frank Moorhouse, all of whose work appeared in *Tabloid Story* before appearing in collections. Each of these writers approached the short story in a markedly different way from what had come before, whether in theme, form, style or all three. Goldsworthy provides a brief and useful introduction to the trio: "Carey is the one most concerned with fantasy and surrealism, Bail with the nature of language and writing, Moorhouse with narrative experimentation and ways of writing about

sex…" (541–542). Any discussion of the 1970s Australian short story must make mention of these writers.

Frank Moorhouse, co-editor, with Wilding, of *Tabloid Story*, was also one of the most prolific short story writers of the decade, publishing several collections between 1969 and 1980 including: *Futility and Other Animals: A Discontinuous Narrative* (1969); *The Americans, Baby: A Discontinuous Narrative of Stories and Fragments* (1972); *The Electrical Experience* (1974); *Tales of Mystery and Romance* (1977); and *The Everlasting Secret Family* (1980). Moorhouse's stories, frequently set among the youthful urban intelligentsia, deal unflinchingly with drugs and sex, often describing or referring to sexual acts in a detail which would have resulted in prosecution only a few years earlier. In stories such as "The American Poet's Visit" he satirises the pretensions of the literati and the bourgeoisie, one of his recurring themes. "The Jack Kerouac Wake: The True Story" is intertextual, utilising the same plot and characters as an earlier Michael Wilding short story and displaying Moorhouse's interest in formal experimentation. Moorhouse's writing eschews the more fantastic or surreal elements found in other short fiction of the decade, while embracing thematic and structural experimentation. He also shares some of Carey's obsession with America, Americans and their insights and influences on Australia, as can be seen in such stories as "The St Louis Rotary Convention 1923, Recalled" in which Becker, an American salesman for Coca-Cola, has to deal with a culture and a people he simply doesn't understand.

Moorhouse pioneered the use of "discontinuous narrative," where several short stories about the same characters or setting would overlap in one collection, and sometimes over several. He coined the term to describe his first collection, *Futility and Other Animals*, when his publisher asked what his book should be categorised as, as it was not a novel, but a series of overlapping stories which shared characters (Raines 427). Moorhouse's discontinuous narratives were influenced by Salinger's Glass family stories and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (Raines 426) as well as Lawson's linked stories (434). As Raines points out, Moorhouse's great innovation was to "[extend] the use of the short story cycle, to create a series of interlinked cycles" (434). In these discontinuous narratives, which extend over many short story collections and novels, a supporting character in one story may become a main character in a story in a later collection, and the past of one story may exist as the future in another. A complex web of relationships in time and space is created. For instance, in *The Americans, Baby*, Dell in the first story is revealed as having once slept with another character, Kim, who would go on to marry Sylvia, who was once the girlfriend of

Carl, who is the lover of Paul. And weaving in and out of these stories, and sometimes colliding with them, is the figure of Becker, who briefly reappears as the lover of the daughter of industrialist T. George McDowell, the main character in the later collection, *The Electrical Experience.* This collection expands the scope of the discontinuous narrative, following McDowell through youth and old age. The stories are interspersed with "fragments" such as quotes from invented and real persons, and even instructions on how to mix a milk-shake. Each story successfully stands alone, but builds up to something larger: a man's life as a mosaic of episodes. Several of the McDowell stories are also formally experimental. "The Secret of Endurance" is one long sentence, and "Gwyneth McDowell's Statement Concerning her Sister, Teresa McDowell, June 1969" is presented as a typewritten document, complete with deletions and revisions.

The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets is in many ways a summation and re-statement of the themes Moorhouse explored throughout the 1970s. The collection is made up of four sections, each consisting of several interlinked stories. The "Pacific City" cycle brings back T. George McDowell in a minor role, and introduces Irving Bow, a character who lives contemporaneously with the events in *The Electrical Experience*. In this section Moorhouse pushes the boundaries of the acceptable. Bow is a pederast, and the stories do not flinch from describing his obsessions. The "Imogene Continued" cycle resurrects Cindy from *Futility and Other Animals* and takes place during an academic conference peopled by the kind of characters found in *Tales of Mystery and Romance*. Once again Moorhouse describes in intimate detail the claustrophobic worlds of conferences and academia, coupled with an extremely daring story that touches on sexual violence, race, and feminism. The final section, "The Everlasting Secret Family" cycle is presented as the narrative of a man kept by a politician, and features sadomasochism, explicit homosexual and heterosexual sex, defecation, oral sex, and in one story, the drugging and rape of a teenager. It is hard to believe that just a few years earlier, the word "fuck" almost prevented the publication of a Patrick White story. In the intervening time, Moorhouse exploded every taboo remaining in Australian fiction, as well as demonstrating the possibilities of the discontinuous narrative form, which would later be adopted by other Australian short fiction writers such as Gillian Mears.

Peter Carey's short fiction is characterised by bizarre premises followed through to their logical ends described in a realist style that serves at the same time to disturb and convince the reader. In "Peeling," a man describes, in a matter of fact way, the seduction of his neighbour. This leads towards a bizarre, unforeseeable climax, where a hidden zip in the

woman's skin reveals a man inside her, and then a woman, and then a white doll. The effect is disquieting and unexpected. Here, and in stories such as "Crabs" and "The Fat Man in History," Carey uses the details of realism to lead the reader into a surreal world. Concrete details make the strange occurrences in his stories infinitely more unsettling than a baroque style would.

Several of Carey's stories could easily be classed as science-fiction. "Exotic Pleasures" shows the effects of alien life on earth, and in one marriage in particular. "The Chance" takes a hackneyed SF premise, that of body swapping, which Carey makes his own, once again exploring a relationship breaking apart through bizarre events. Carey generally avoids the metafictional techniques that characterise Murray Bail's work, except most notably in his story "Concerning the Greek Tyrant" in which the characters created by Homer come to realise they are being manipulated and tortured by a writer. Carey's stories strike away in an entirely different direction than any previous Australian short story writer. He is not interested in the bush, nor particularly in realism, nor in a convincingly depicted Australia, but his stories are haunting, and even at their most fantastic, somehow realistic, due to the care with which he extrapolates unbelievable situations and the convincingly human way that his characters deal with them. Though Wilding and Bail became less interested in narrative as time went on, it always remained a strong presence in Carey's fiction (Bennett "Australian Experiments" 362).

Murray Bail's contribution to Australian short fiction is an important one, and remarkable in that it is based almost entirely on only one collection, *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories*. Bail, like Carey, all but abandoned the short form after 1980, but the handful of stories he wrote in the 1970s, in large part as a reaction to what he saw as the destructive legacy of realism on Australian fiction, were influential. Bail's fascination with language and form, and his rejection of realism, are recurring themes throughout his collection. "Huebler" offers a series of sketches of bizarre characters, framed by the story of a photographer who wishes to take a picture of every person on earth. The metafictional "Zoellner's Definition" is similarly without a conventional story, as a character is described through itemising his body parts. Bail's inventiveness and wordplay replace the traditional plot. When Bail does offer a realist style, the results are as disconcerting and surreal as anything in Carey's work. In "Life of the Party," a man invites his neighbours for a barbecue then, for no explainable reason, hides from them in a treehouse and observes their carousing. Here, as in Carey's short fiction, Bail appropriates an anecdotal realist style to ground the bizarre premise, which paradoxically makes the story seem even stranger. Other stories in

Bail's collection explore the surreal and the metafictional, but perhaps the most famous engages directly with the prototypical Australian realist short story, Henry Lawson's "The Drover's Wife." Bail's story opens with a reproduction of Russel Drysdale's famous painting, itself based on Lawson's short story. Bail's story is narrated by a man who believes his wife, who has left him, is the subject of the painting. The narrator analyses the picture for signs of how she is feeling, what she is doing and recalls, in a nod to Lawson, a time she killed a snake that was under their beach shack. The wife, Hazel, left the narrator for a drover they met while on a trip to the bush, and the narrator's last thoughts in the story could also be interpreted as Bail's comment on Australian literature: "Hazel- it is Hazel and the rotten landscape which dominate everything." For Bail, the type of realist story exemplified by "The Drover's Wife" and the preoccupation with landscape dominated Australian fiction. Bail has been criticised for being too concerned with structure, cleverness and theory at the expense of the imagination (Bennett "Australian Experiments" 362) and while this is true in some of his stories, for example, "Cul de Sac (Uncompleted)," at his best, as in "A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V,W,X,Y,Z", and "Portrait of Electricity" his inventiveness outweighs the absence of plot, or traditional characterisation.

The New Writing of the 1970s marked a decisive shift from realism in Australian short fiction towards surrealism, metafiction, fantasy, formal experimentation, and an exploration of topics and themes that were not only taboo in the previous decade, but in some cases illegal to even mention. Australian writers also looked more outward to international influences, rather than inward towards Australian influences. The experimental writing of this decade was not without its criticisms, however. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Australian short story writers who were part of the realist tradition reproached the writers of the 1970s for being obsessed with strangeness over the everyday, and being too complicated (Morrison 225), for being too self-referential, artificial, strange and unamusing (Waten 235) and for being metafictional (Dutton 254). Essentially, these criticisms of the New Writing boiled down to the fact that it was unlike the Old Writing, and this is precisely what Moorhouse *et al* had set out to do.

It is important to note, however, that not all experimental writing published in this decade was successful, nor was a short story successful simply because it was experimental. Just as the realist tradition could feature well written or poorly written stories, so could the New Writing, as a reading of *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book* would demonstrate. Indeed, Wilding ("Introduction" xv) later admitted that New Writing could be "emptily formalist, a new dandyism." A more damning criticism of New Writing is Webby's ("The Long March"

128) observation that it was dominated by men. This was indeed true for much of the decade, though less so towards its end, with collections from Thea Astley, Glenda Adams and Elizabeth Jolley appearing. Jolley's stories are evidence of Torre's (442) observation that "Not all New Writing was experimental," and in fact Jolley (214) herself explicitly rejected metafiction and experiment, being more attracted to what she called the "traditional; story, character, metaphor, symbol, rhythm." Jolley's short fiction demonstrated that realism, if submerged, had not entirely disappeared from Australian short fiction in the 1970s, and paved the way for its re-emergence in the 1980s.

The 1980s and 1990s: New Directions

As Torre (445) notes, the New Writing of the 1970s resulted in several new directions for Australian short fiction in the following years. These new directions will be touched upon below, as the sheer number of collections published after 1980 preclude anything but a brief examination. Moorhouse ("Whatever Happened" 181) states that from 1970–1977, twenty-one Australian short story collections were published by fourteen different authors- which marked little change from the same time period twenty years earlier. From 1980 to 1987, there were at least thirty-four collections published by twenty-seven different authors (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* xv-xvii), as well as several anthologies. This growth continued into the 1990s, making a comprehensive survey of these decades impossible without going into much greater length than is possible here.

Among these new directions in the post 1970s short story was a return to a form of realism. This time, following the example of Moorhouse and Wilding's realist stories of the 1970s, no area of life was off-limits. Among writers who helped rejuvenate realism in the 1980s were Olga Masters, Helen Garner, David Malouf, Robert Drewe and Peter Goldsworthy. Bennett calls these writers "new realists" and their work was characterised by a turning away from narrative tricks, and an investigation into personal and social relationships (Bennett *Australian Short Fiction* 240). Bennett does not classify Tim Winton among these new realists. This is perhaps because Winton's collections, such as *Scission* (1985) and *Minimum of Two* (1987), owed more to the realism before the New Writing than after it. However, Winton's later collection, *The Turning* (2004) owes an obvious debt to Frank Moorhouse's discontinuous narratives in its structure, as does Gillian Mears' *Ride a Cock Horse* (1988) and *Fineflour* (1990), and Robert Drewe's *The Bodysurfers* (1983). Realism was therefore no longer limited to a narrow style and setting, or hamstrung by

censorship, and was revitalised by the experimentation of the 1970s. Moorhouse acknowledged a new vitality in Australian short writing when he compared his editing of a 1983 anthology with one published in 1972, at the dawn of New Writing: Then "I had not found an abundance of riches. This time I did" ("Introduction" 1).

Another new direction in the 1980s was the resurgence of short fiction by women. Whereas the 1970s had been dominated by men, the 1980s and 1990s saw a slew of collections by women, including Olga Masters, Kerryn Goldsworthy, Beverley Farmer, Joan London, Thea Astley, Janette Turner Hospital, Gillian Mears, Lily Brett, Gail Jones and others. Place also returned as an important theme in short fiction, including Tasmania in Carmel Bird's stories, Canberra in Marion Halligan's and tropical Queensland in Thea Astley's. Australian short story collections also featured more international settings, as in the Greek stories of Beverly Farmer, the African stories of Victor Kelleher, and the Southeast Asian stories of James McQueen, while Australian suburbia remained a popular setting for writers such as Peter Goldsworthy. The bush also returned as a setting for Australian short fiction, though treated in a more complex and ambiguous fashion than before, as in "The Last of the Hapsburgs" by Janette Turner Hospital, and "Radiant Heat" by Robert Drewe.

While the 1970s marked a high point in experimentation in short fiction in Australia, experimentation did not disappear entirely in the 1980s with the resurgence of realism, just as realism had never disappeared entirely in the 1970s. Writers such as David Brooks and Gerald Murnane produced explicitly postmodern collections. Brooks' stories owe an obvious debt to writers such as Peter Carey, Calvino and Borges, and, like Murnane, rarely or only fleetingly reference Australia. Murnane's metafictional short stories on the other hand, are entirely unique, and seem to owe little to anything that has gone before in Australian short fiction.

The 21st Century: Growing from *Dark Roots*

A comprehensive survey of the contemporary Australian short story would require far more space than is allowed here, but as in the previous two decades, certain lines of development can be noted. The first of these is actually less a development than a regression; the reduction in the number of single author collections published in the first years of the century. The only full-length study of Australian short fiction, Bruce Bennett's *Australian Short Fiction: A History*, drew a line at the turn of the century with the optimistic pronouncement that "short fiction in Australia remains alive and well" (Bennett 318).

Unfortunately, as Stinson ("In the Same Boat") notes, the following years (2000–2006) proved to be a "nadir" for Australian short fiction, with only a handful of collections being published, and then only from established novelists such as Tim Winton. Stinson further observes that this drought in short fiction was broken by the publication of two collections in 2006: *Dark Roots* by Cate Kennedy and *The Boat* by Nam Le. These collections are an example of perhaps the least surprising aspect of the twenty first century Australian short story: that realism remains the predominant style. Cate Kennedy is the most critically acclaimed short story writer of recent years. She has been described as "the queen of the Australian short story" (M. Johnson) and "one of the world's finest short story writers (Wyndham) and her collections as "seminal works of Australian literature" (Birch "Not Doing a Novel"). She has published two collections of short fiction, *Dark Roots* and *Like a House on Fire*, the former shortlisted for the Steele Rudd award in the 2007 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, the latter winning the award in 2013, as well as being shortlisted for the 2013 Stella and Kibble awards. Another of Kennedy's impressive achievements is the publication of a short story, "Black Ice," in the *New Yorker*, a rare honour for an Australian writer. The enormous critical and commercial success of Kennedy's short stories demonstrates the continuing attraction that a realist style holds for Australian writers, critics and readers.

The characters in Kennedy's collections are ordinary people, her settings recognisably Australian and familiar; hospital waiting rooms, kitchens, schools. Kennedy's skill is in finding moments of drama in these ordinary lives. Her writing style and structure avoid formal experimentation, and her stories are recognisably part of the social realist tradition of John Morrison, Judah Waten, and looking further back, Henry Lawson. For such an evidently important figure in the contemporary Australian short story, there has been almost no critical engagement with her work, apart from the mainly positive reviews of her two collections. Stinson has argued that the preeminent place of Kennedy is at least partly due to "the contemporary cultural cringe" where international recognition leads to a writer being more highly valued in Australia. In Stinson's view, Kennedy's "minimal realism" is well crafted but ultimately simplistic, and too similar to the writing style being taught in creative writing programs around the world. While Stinson's argument is compelling, he underestimates the influence of a specific kind of realism in Australian writing, while perhaps overestimating the influence of overseas writing. If Kennedy's work owes something to Hemingway, it owes a great deal more to Lawson. Nam Le's *The Boat*, while embracing a wider range of international settings than Kennedy's Australian stories, is also

recognisably realist, and Stinson maintains that at least some of its unanimous critical acclaim in Australia is due to the effect of the new cultural cringe. Whether or not this is true, what is certain is that the two most celebrated short story collections by far of the last twenty years fit comfortably into the Australian realist tradition.

Realism also remains the prevalent style of stories selected for Black Inc's prestigious annual *Best Australian Stories* anthologies (2001-present) with one reviewer commenting of the 2007 edition "if these stories are representative of what is being written in Australia, then the reader would have to conclude that social realism remains the dominant mode across the literary fiction landscape" (Syme 84). This is not perhaps surprising considering the editor of this edition was Robert Drewe, whose latest short fiction collection, *The Rip*, demonstrates his continuing commitment to a social realist style. Other anthologies, including Scribe's *New Australian Stories* (2009) and *New Australian Stories 2* (2010) and the annual *The Sleepers Almanac*, have been more willing than the editors of *The Best Australian Stories* to publish short fiction that is formally experimental, or at least not written in a social realist style.

One experimental trend that has developed from the 1970s to become accepted, and even conventional, is the adaptation of Moorhouse's discontinuous narrative style, or its more marketing friendly term, "novel in stories." A number of realist Australian short story collections have utilised this structure in the twenty-first century, including Tim Winton's *The Turning* (2004), Gretchen Shirm's *Having Cried Wolf* (2010), Barry Divola's *Nineteen Seventysomething* (2010), Tony Birch's *Shadowboxing* (2006), Patrick Cullen's *What Came Between* (2009) and Michael Sala's *The Last Thread* (2012). Indeed, Sala and Cullen's collections were marketed as novels rather than collections of short stories, despite displaying all the hallmarks of a linked short story collection. Similarly, Shirm was declared one of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Young Novelists of the Year in 2011, despite *Having Cried Wolf* owing much more to the short story form than the novel. This rebranding of short story collections as novels perhaps reflects the continuing reluctance of Australian publishers to take the risk of publishing short story collections at all. However, in recent years fewer linked collections, or novels-in-stories, have been published, and the conventional, "unlinked" single author collection has regained its popularity among publishers, and writers.

Though obviously not as strong a thread in contemporary Australian short fiction as it was in the 1970s, the experimental short story still endures. Formally and thematically experimental short stories are more likely to be found as a single story in an anthology, or

sprinkled amongst a majority of realist stories in a single author collection, as in Paddy O'Reilly's *The End of the World* (2007), rather than in a collection of purely experimental work. Two notable exceptions to this rule in recent years are Wayne Macauley's *Other Stories*, and Tom Cho's *Look Who's Morphing*. Macauley is perhaps the most consistently experimental writer of short fiction in Australia in this century, though the term is not one he embraces, stating, "I don't consider my work experimental in and of itself. What is experimental about it, certainly in the Australian literary context, is my willingness to mess with form in the pursuit of an idea" (qtd. in O'Neill "Explaining Bees"). Macauley is aware that experimentation relies on context; but if the context of twenty-first century Australian literature, and short fiction in particular, is overwhelmingly realist, then Macauley is without doubt experimental. Though his short fiction was widely published in journals and anthologies, Macauley's work languished in obscurity among the small presses, until the publication and success of his third novel, *The Cook*, which led to the reprinting of his only short story collection, *Other Stories*. In some ways Macauley seems like a writer out of time, His work would not have seemed at all out of place in the 1970s, published in anthologies alongside stories by Bail, Moorhouse and Carey. In fact, Macauley's debt to Carey is clear. Macauley, like Carey, is not interested in realism, and his stories often follow a bizarre idea to its logical end, as many of Carey's did. Several of Macauley's stories hardly feature plots or characters, but instead a strange situation is explored or described. In Macauley's stories the central idea is often the main character, with the characters themselves as ciphers. As in Kafka, Macauley sometimes dispenses with place names altogether, as in "The Affair in M-" and "The Dividing Spring." There is another echo of Kafka in "The Farmer's New Machine" which dispassionately describes the workings of a machine that kills the elderly and turns them into mulch for farming. In "This Bus is not a Tram," the narrator rebels against the idea of a bus claiming to be a tram. Sadly, Macauley, like Bail and Carey before him, appears to have left the short story form behind to concentrate on the novel.

While Macauley's understatedly realist style underpins strange and bizarre themes, Tom Cho's style is more extravagant. In *Look Who's Morphing*, myriad elements of pop culture clash with Cho's fictionalised relationship with members of his family. All Cho's stories are told in first person, and indeed the cover of the collection depicts a stylised photo of the author himself. Cho's stories are amusing and inventive, and his severing himself entirely from the realism of most Australian short fiction is invigorating. For instance, in "Dirty Dancing," Cho becomes the character of "Baby" from the 1980s feature film, and the plot plays out in an unexpected fashion, though much hinges on the reader's knowledge of

cultural ephemera. In almost every story Cho adapts a situation from a blockbuster movie, or cult television show, and inserts himself into the plot, culminating in "Cock Rock" which remixes *Godzilla*, *Gulliver's Travels* and Japanese pornography. Cho's exploration of identity and popular culture is a unique, if not entirely successful, addition to the Australian short story, and has inspired other writers to work in the same vein, as in *A Man Made Entirely of Bats* by Patrick Lenton, which shares Cho's obsession with pop culture.

The Heart of the Matter: How Australian Short Fiction Helped Shape the Collection

As outlined above, the Australian short story has a lengthy and complex history, one I became increasingly aware of as I wrote the stories that were to make up my collection. After arriving in Australia, and reading a number of contemporary short story collections, including *The Boat* and *Dark Roots*, and several different anthologies, it became clear to me how strong the realist tradition in Australia was; a fact brought home by the rejection of many of my experimental stories by literary journals. Indeed, for a year or two I felt like Murray Bail in the 1970s, surrounded by a wall of realist stories that felt impossible to break through. In fact, a major influence on a number of stories *The Weight of a Human Heart* was Bail's *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* (1975), a collection which simultaneously marked Bail's mastery, and abandonment, of the short story form in favour of the novel. "Cast of Characters" was directly inspired by Murray Bail's "Huebler". The opening section of this story describes a photographer who is impelled to "photographically document…the existence of everyone alive" (3). This is essentially a framing device for what follows: a list and description of a number of people that Huebler intends to photograph, as in the example:

> **5. At least one person who is pathologically modest.**
> There is an American industrialist (his name we all know) who has not been photographed, nor has he been seen in public for the last… twenty three years (11).

"Huebler" then, is essentially a series of vignettes or character sketches, each of which is just long enough to display Bail's impressive powers of invention and imagination, but not long enough to fatigue the reader by stretching any of the conceits past their breaking point. The idea of a photographer who wants to photograph everyone on Earth therefore

gives structure and unity to a series of otherwise disconnected micro-fictions. Bail's clever use of structure here was something I carried over to "Cast of Characters." As in "Huebler" the opening section of the story is a framing device intended to unify the disparate sections that come after it, which each describe a different character. While Bail's story does not explicitly acknowledge the Huebler character as a framing device, "Cast of Characters" does. The opening section is titled "A character from a frame story" and describes how the characters created by a recently deceased writer, Marlow Lockwood, are being offered to other writers to use. ("Marlow" is the character in the frame story from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Lockwood is taken from the frame story in *Wuthering Heights*.) The first section of "Cast of Characters" therefore introduces the story, but is also part of the story, as the narrator is the first of the "cast of characters" to be described. As in "Huebler" there follows a number of vignettes, each describing a different character. The structure, borrowed from Bail, proved extremely useful in that a number of disparate ideas, many of which would not have justified a story in themselves, instead complement each other and achieve a kind of unity through the framing device.

Similarly, Bail's "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z," which was the first example of Australian metafiction I encountered in my reading of Australian short fiction, was instrumental in the conception of "Auntie's Story." The title of Bail's story signals its metafictional intent, and if the reader is left in any doubt, Bail dispels it with the opening line, "I select from these letters, pressing my fingers down" (173). Bail's story, like John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," examined in greater detail in chapter two, simultaneously tells two stories; the story of the writing of the story, and the story itself. Bail's self-awareness in his work extends to the names of the character (Kathy Pridham) and the setting, (Karachi), both of which are apparently chosen on a whim. The story of Kathy's love affair, and final separation from her lover, Masood, is interspersed with the observations and interruptions of the writer. Bail's metafiction differs from Barth in that there is little sense of conflict between the story and the storyteller. Bail tells his story in the self-reflexive way he does as if there were no other way, and his interruptions appear inevitable and integral to the story which is, after all, only "marks on paper, and so on" (183). The power of "A, B, C…" lies in the fact that it succeeds in rejuvenating a tired concept (a doomed love affair) through self-reflexivity, while at the same time providing enough realist detail for the reader to care about the characters. At the end of the story, Kathy is left sobbing and broken-hearted, and the reader is moved, despite Bail's insistence that she is simply made of words.

The most obvious borrowing from Bail's story in my own "Auntie's Story" is that of authorial intrusion. "Auntie's Story" developed from a desire to emulate Bail, but was also written in response to "Mrs Porter and the Rock" by David Malouf, which appeared in *The Best Australian Stories 2007*, and which I read that same year. Malouf's work has won many national and international awards, but as I read "Mrs Porter and the Rock," which tells the story of the titular elderly lady who visits Uluru with her impatient son, I became more and more impatient with passages such as:

> The first thing she'd done when Donald left her alone in the room was to have a good go through of the cupboards. She didn't know what she was looking for but people, she knew, were inclined to leave things, and if there was a dirty sock somewhere, or a suspender belt, or a used tissue, she wouldn't feel the place was her own.
>
> The drawers for a start. There were two deep ones under the table where they had put her port, and two more at the end of the long cupboard. When you opened the cupboard a light came on. There was a good six feet of hanging space in there, with a dozen or so good hangers. Real ones, not fixed to the rail so you couldn't walk off with them like the ones in France (26).

Though undoubtedly well-written, this long short story was full of paragraphs such as these, detailing the everyday observations of Mrs Porter in a determinedly realist style. Ironically, though Bail makes no secret his characters are not real, they feel more real than Mrs Porter, despite, or perhaps because, the story is told from her point of view. In endlessly describing the world, Mrs Porter becomes less real and more artificial. "Mrs Porter and the Rock" is undoubtedly "well-made" but the ending did little to dispel my opinion that it relied too much on realist tropes, containing as it did, a quintessential moment of epiphany: "This was a moment, she knew, that she would never forget. Never. As long as she lived. She also knew with certainty that she would live forever" (43). My reaction to Malouf's story was undoubtedly unjust; I had spent the previous several weeks exclusively reading realist Australian short fiction, and this undoubtedly coloured my view. Having revisited Malouf's story since this time, I can appreciate its strengths. but at the time I was inspired to respond to Malouf, and Bail, by writing "Auntie's Story."

The opening of "Auntie's Story" is a direct parody of "Mrs Porter and the Rock," detailing as it does, in painstaking detail, the observations and actions of an old woman like Mrs Porter, before the writer finally abandons the style in frustration:

> She shuffles, rather than walks, to the kitchen, which is part of the dark blur she lives in when she doesn't have on her glasses. She dislikes wearing them in the house. Without them she can't see the crumbs, the tea and coffee stains, and the dust that she knows is there, and she can pretend that the cockroaches are just knots in the wooden floor.

> She goes to the stove and turns on the gas. Then she takes a box of matches from the drawer and lights the ring. She fills the kettle and puts it on to boil, then goes to the cupboard to find that there stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop.

As the story progresses, the writer attempts to leave realism behind, and find different ways to tell Auntie's story. Though this notion of marrying a metafictional conceit to a realist story was inspired by Bail's "A, B, C…" the writer character intervenes in very different ways. While Bail's writer appears to accept the limitations of fiction and "the trouble" (173) that the act of telling a story brings, the writer in "Auntie's Story" is far less tolerant of the unreality of fiction. He attempts and quickly discards several different literary devices and styles, including realism, before finally abandoning the story altogether, leaving the reader to choose, or create, their own ending. Although Bail's "A, B, C…" provided the seed for the story, and Malouf's "Mrs Porter and the Rock" the fertiliser (so to speak), "Auntie's Story" story quickly grew away from Bail and Malouf's stories into something quite different. A more detailed discussion of the metafictional aspects of "Auntie's Story" can be found in chapter two.

"Auntie's Story" is an example of the experimental strand of my writing. One principle in the selection and organising of the stories in the collection was that I wanted the collection to feature both experimental and realist fiction equally. Almost all Australian short story collections, past and present, are either entirely made up of realist stories, such as *Scission,* or entirely made up of experimental stories, such as *Look Who's Morphing,* or are

realist with one or two experimental works. Few collections give the realist and the experimental equal significance, and in *The Weight of a Human Heart* I wanted the book to bring together these two strands of Australian short fiction writing, which are sometimes portrayed as being antagonistic. As a keystone in the middle of the collection, I placed "An Australian Short Story." I believe this story draws the collection together, as it is made up of lines from more than a hundred short stories past and present, from every phase of Australian literature, including the time before Lawson, the Lawson realist tradition, the New Writing of the 1970s and beyond. It is at once a realist short story, featuring a bush setting and love story, and also an experimental story, as each line is taken from a previously published Australian short story. "An Australian Short Story" is a celebration of Australian short fiction in all its forms, and at all stages of its development.

If "Auntie's Story" was written as the result of a sense of frustration at the limitations of the Australian realist short story (or what I had read of it at the time; further reading over the next several years softened and revised my views so that I became aware of the many variations in Australian realism) then several stories from my collection responded in a less hostile and more constructive way to realism. Specifically, and perhaps paradoxically, the short stories that I set in Africa owe a great debt to a realist Australian short story collection.

Though I had lived and worked in Rwanda for two and a half years, between 1999-2001, I had never written any stories set in Africa. At first this was not a conscious decision, but it became one when I read Binyavanga Wainaina's essay, "How to Write about Africa." The title is, of course, ironic, as is demonstrated by the opening lines, where Wainana advises:

> Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial' and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means black Africans.

The essay goes on to counsel the (presumably white) writer of how to embrace the many stereotypes and clichés in writing about Africa. I first came across Wainaina's excoriating "advice" in 2005, and the long list of pitfalls, platitudes and offensive stereotypes he detailed that, apparently, would inevitably result from a non-African writing about Africa cemented my intention to never write about my experiences in the continent.

Some time later however, in the course of my research, I came to reassess this decision after reading Victor Kelleher's short story collection, *Africa and After* (1983). Kelleher's background reflected my own to an extent; he was born in Great Britain, then lived and worked in Africa (though for far longer than I had) before moving to Australia. Kelleher's collection is divided into three sections, with seven stories set in Africa, seven in Australia, but dealing with characters who have come from Africa and one ("Refugees") in-between. In reading of the experiences of Kelleher's characters both in Africa, and "after" I found many echoes of my own experiences in Africa, and an acceptable approach to writing about them.

All of Kelleher's Africa stories are told from the point of view of, or narrated by outsiders; usually white men. This is the case in "A Nehru Shirt" where the narrator is bluntly informed by an African, "This is not your place" (68). This is a lesson the narrator learns when he becomes personally involved with one of his neighbours, an African woman called Mina. Their relationship is terminated by the woman's brother, who reminds her, "You belong here… with me, amongst your own people" (75). When the narrator demands that the woman be allowed to choose, she chooses her brother. Although I was still cautious in writing about Africa, I decided to follow Kelleher's successful example, in writing about Africa in a realist style, and at least at first, from the point of view of an outsider character, a white man. This resulted in the story "R and L" which, like several of Kelleher's stories, explores the culture clash between African and European cultures. Despite his best intentions, Burdon, the main character in "R and L" also comes to realise that he does not belong in Africa, and his response to this is to retreat into the mindset of his colonial ancestor. Unable to see Africans as equals, he infantilises them. He wants to rescue them from themselves, just as the protagonist of "A Nehru Shirt" wants to rescue Mina.

Burdon has studied Africa at university and is critical of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which Burdon criticises for the fact "The Africans say hardly a word." It is noted later in the story that Burdon never finishes Conrad's novella. Burdon's criticism is, in fact, reflected in the structure of "R and L" itself, as my story is entirely concerned with two white men, and the African characters don't speak at all. This was a deliberate decision, and one that recalls another piece of Wainana's ironic advice, that "African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause."

The third section of *Africa and After* continues Kelleher's exploration of the themes of isolation and belonging, but this time with stories set in Australia. "The Traveller"

describes a brief fling a man, who has recently returned from Africa, has with a New Zealand woman. Both characters are, in their different way, exiles. In the morning, the man leaves the woman with false hope their relationship will continue, and a false telephone number. I borrowed the title of Kelleher's short story, and the idea of the traveller returned from Africa for my own story, "The Traveller." Here Lockhart has returned to Australia, ostensibly to raise money for his African orphanage, which does not exist. But when family affairs threaten to entangle him, Lockhart, like the protagonist of Kelleher's "The Traveller" is quick to flee the scene.

Kelleher's collection, realist in style and invariably focussing on the point of view of a white character, was fundamental in setting an example of how I could approach my African experiences and convert them into fiction. The publication of "R and L" and "The Traveller" eventually gave me the confidence to move past Kelleher's realism and limited point of view, so that I would approach African themes and characters in different ways in "The Cockroach" and "My English Homework."

Conclusion

I would accept Murray Bail's image of the Australian short story as a wall of realist stories, with some reservations. On closer inspection it becomes apparent that each brick in that wall is shaped and placed differently, and if some writers used the same materials, such as Lawson, or Morrison, or Kelleher, the bricks each writer made were unique. The wall also has many areas that are quite irregular, with sections laid by writers such Marcus Clarke or Dal Stivens or Hal Porter. These parts may be in the minority, and in an obscure part of the wall, but the structure would not stand without them.

The Weight of a Human Heart is my small contribution to the wall of Australian short fiction. It is built upon what went before, and I hope others will build upon it in turn.

Chapter Two

Rubber Wives: Metafiction in *The Weight of a Human Heart*

That novels should be made of words, and merely words, is shocking really. It's as though you had discovered your wife was made of rubber… William H. Gass (27).

B.S. Johnson's 1964 novel *Albert Angelo* follows the frustrated, would-be architect Albert as he teaches, with little enthusiasm, at a number of rough inner city schools, all the while ruminating on art and a failed love affair. Finally, in the penultimate part of the novel, any pretence that the story is "real" is exploded by the author's directly addressing the reader:

> Fuck all this lying look what I'm really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him albert an architect then whats the point in covering up (*Albert* 167).

In this passage, and elsewhere in his work, Johnson forcefully elucidates his artistic beliefs: that writing fiction, far from revealing any hidden truths about life, only serves to conceal them; that writing should be self-reflexive, that writers should not pretend they do not exist in their work but instead should be at the forefront of it; and finally, assuming fiction is anything more than a collection of conventions hallowed by tradition ("whats the point in covering up") is absurd. Johnson's outburst in *Albert Angelo* is a mini-manifesto for many of the features of metafiction, a term coined by William H. Gass in 1970 to describe the works of such writers as John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges and Flann O'Brien (24–25).

Several of the stories in *The Weight of a Human Heart* share B.S. Johnson's preoccupation with the "reality" or otherwise of stories, and would undoubtedly qualify for Wolfe's "Puppet-Masters" school of fiction, as they make no secret of the fact that they are, first and foremost, words on a page. On the other hand, my collection contains a number of realist stories that Johnson would have disapproved of for adhering to (supposedly) outdated fictional conventions. Metafiction is a central concern of my collection, and this chapter explores the nature of metafiction (and by extension, realism), in theory and in practise. An examination of metafiction, realism, and the relationship between them will show that these two approaches to writing, so often portrayed as being antagonistic are actually, and always

have been, complimentary. Finally, metafiction in practise will be examined in detail through a close reading of three short stories by an acknowledged master of metafiction, the American novelist and short story writer John Barth. It will be argued that discovering, as Gass puts it, your wife is made of rubber is not simply shocking; rather the reading and writing of metafiction can be a pleasurable and liberating experience.

Definitions

Many literary terms, even those that appear to be self-explanatory ("short story" "science-fiction") are open to interpretation, debate and argument, and the term "metafiction" is no exception. Metafiction has also been referred to as "surfiction" (Federman 5–15) among many other terms (Lauzen 94), though it appears that Gass's formulation has won out over time. However, as McHale observes in discussing that even more debateable term, "postmodernism," the plurality of definitions and constructions of metafiction "does not mean that all constructs are equally interesting or valuable, or that we are unable to choose among them" (4). Thus, a single definition of metafiction is at least helpful, and perhaps, essential in discussing metafictional works.

It is useful then to begin with the most straightforward definition of metafiction that can be found. For Waugh metafiction is "a term given to fictional 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" (2). Waugh's definition is valuable as it helps differentiate between a metafictional work, and a work that contains only elements of metafiction. The key words here are "self-consciously and systematically." That is, the writer must be aware that they are examining the relationship between fiction and reality in their work, and further that they do so systematically, i.e. in a thorough and considered manner.

Metafiction and Postmodernism

Before moving on from this definition of metafiction, the relationship between metafiction and postmodernism should be briefly addressed, if only to keep in mind that these terms are not interchangeable. As Waugh argues, postmodernism has many facets, of which metafiction is only one (21), though "nearly all contemporary experimental writing displays *some* explicitly metafictional techniques" (22). Ommundsen agrees that reflexivity

is "one of the few elements, in fact, most theories of postmodernism agree on" (28). Most, then, if not all, postmodern works are self-reflexive in some way. In actuality, by the 1970s, as Elias states, metafiction appeared to define postmodernism in American literature (16).

While metafiction and postmodernism are inextricably linked, at least in an historical sense, metafiction, as will be seen, existed long before postmodernism theory emerged, and long before the term "metafiction" was invented. Metafiction, then, is considered to be one of the key characteristics of postmodern literature, but it also predates postmodernism. In summary, it could be said that almost all postmodern writing is metafictional, but not all metafiction is postmodern.

Characteristics of Metafiction

There are a number of ways in which the writer of metafiction can explore the links between fiction and reality, and the most prevalent of these are examined below. The first and most obvious method of exploration is, as Waugh (18) notes, to expose traditional "realist" conventions, though this exposure does not signal giving up the conventions completely. It follows, then, that metafiction is, in a sense, parasitic. It feeds on a set of conventions to examine, explore, analyse and parody. Generally these conventions belong to the "realist" novel which, for a number of reasons has been the dominant literary mode since the nineteenth century.

When discussing realism the problem of definitions arises again, for, as Williams (xi) asserts, realism is a "notoriously slippery term." Indeed, even simply listing all the different definitions of realism is completely impractical (Baguley 47). According to Stern (89), realism has always existed in literature, but its definition and meaning changes depending on the literary period being examined. To further complicate matters, Heath (108) argues that the definition of realism varies not only from country to country but from author to author. Realism then is far from the monolith B.S. Johnson deplored. Arguably there are as many kinds of realism as there are writers working in a realist style, and realism changes and develops over time. However, several aspects of realism can be agreed upon as being used so widely they have become convention: that the world is knowable; exists independently of the observer; and can be understood and represented in fiction from an objective viewpoint. In realist terms the world essentially makes sense, or at least is made to make sense through fiction. Hutcheon (38) defines "traditional realism" as "mimesis of product" when "the reader is required to identify the products being imitated- characters,

actions, settings- and recognise their similarity to those in empirical reality, in order to validate their literary worth" (38). Metafiction, on the other hand, disrupts this relationship between reader and text. It disregards mimesis of product in favour of a "mimesis of process" (39) where the onus is placed on the reader to construct the story, along with the writer.

Metafiction plays with realist conventions by showing the process of their construction. The omniscient, invisible narrator (the "objective viewpoint") is one feature of realist fiction that is consistently interrogated by metafiction. In a metafictional work the writer is no longer invisible and omniscient, but exposed, hesitating, filled with doubt. In Alasdair Gray's *Lanark,* for example, Gray himself appears late in the novel to converse with the protagonist, apologising for the misfortunes visited on him, and those still to come. Gray's intervention in his fictional world is used to emphasise the unreality rather than the reality of fiction. In the case of *Albert Angelo*, the title character is dispatched by the author without ceremony on the last page of the novel, evidently to provide the clearly defined ending that realism requires.

Another common device used in metafiction is intertextuality; that is, referring to or borrowing characters, themes and plots from other works of fiction. Intertextuality again reminds the reader of the artificial nature of fiction. A striking example of metafictional intertextuality can be found in Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*. Here a novelist called Anthony Lamont (borrowed from Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*) is writing a novel which features Ned Beaumont from Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key*, Daisy Buchanan from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Martin Halpin from a footnote in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. By only using characters from the novels of other authors (and his own, previously published work) Sorrentino stresses the essential "made-upness" of fiction.

A further convention of the realist novel is that the characters have, more or less, "ordinary" names, to help maintain the illusion that they, in some sense, exist. In Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*, for example, the protagonists are Edward Mayhew and Florence Ponting. These names have been chosen not just for their ordinariness; they suggest nationality (English), class (middle) and the time in which the story is set (the mid-twentieth century). These names serve multiple functions: to conceal the artificiality of the characters and to service the themes and setting in time and place of the novel. Metafiction often takes the opposite approach. Character names are made deliberately absurd, to expose the artificiality of the characters, and to display the arbitrary control of the writer (Waugh 94–95). An example of this can be seen in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the

characters have been given attention-grabbing, punning names such as Genghis Cohen, Dr. Hilarius, Oedipa Maas, and so on. For Federman, highlighting the falsity of fictional characters does not make them any more false but paradoxically makes them more realistic "because they will not appear to be simply what they are: word beings" (13). It could be argued that realism, by attempting to conceal the unreality of characters, only amplifies it; Metafiction, by acknowledging this falseness, nullifies it.

Another characteristic of metafiction is playfulness. As psychologists recognise, play is an important part of human life (Waugh 34–35) and through literary games and devices the author of metafiction seeks to engage the reader in playing with the text. An example of this is in B.S. Johnson's *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry* where the reader is invited to model the protagonist's appearance on their own. Another example of playfulness can be found in Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" involving the date when the story is set. In a realist work, the date is often set out for the reader, ("It was a cold day in March") but the date in Barth's short story is embedded among a number of cryptic clues in the text (Seymour 190–191). A conventional novel would simply have described Christie Malry, and given the date of Barth's short story as 1942, but both Barth and Johnson allow the reader to, in a sense, join in the fun and write the story with them. These metafictional devices also serve a deeper purpose. As McCaffery (14) argues, metafictional writers employ playfulness as a "deliberate strategy…to provoke readers to critically examine all cultural codes and established patterns of thought." McCaffery is perhaps overstating the case here. If questioning the implicit conventions of realist fiction automatically leads to a questioning of social norms, then *Ulysses* would have inspired revolutions. It is easier to agree with Waugh's more modest claim: through play, metafiction "aims to discover how we each 'play' our own realities" (Waugh 34–35). In other words, by encouraging the reader to look past established realist conventions, and to take part in the construction of a fictional world, metafiction opens the possibility that a reader might look more closely at their own world, and their own place in it.

Metafiction versus Realism

The relationship between metafiction and realist fiction has often been characterised as oppositional or antagonistic. For Johnson, metafiction was in direct opposition to realism, with metafiction being "truer" than realist fiction. Writers of realist novels, unsurprisingly, maintain exactly the opposite view. In his essay, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A

Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel," Tom Wolfe, author of such sprawling realist novels as *The Bonfire of the Vanities* identifies the 1960s as a turning point in the fortunes of the realist novel, when the idea of its demise, "caught on among young American writers with the force of revelation" (47), a revelation that is echoed in B.S. Johnson's outburst. For Wolfe, 1960 marked the year that realism began to fall out of fashion (48), and a number of other literary styles rose to take its place, including magical realism and absurdism (49). Wolfe does not use the term "metafiction" but the more loaded "Puppet-Master Novels" to describe self-reflexive works. He characterises these kinds of novels as written by authors "in love with the theory that the novel was, first and foremost, a literary game, words on a page being manipulated by an author" (49). Although Wolfe admires the skill of some Puppet-Masters, such as Borges and Calvino, and other writers belonging to the minimalist and fabulist schools (49–50), he wonders why they have cut themselves off from the abundance of material available for writers which exists in the world around them, and instead have retreated to the "lonely island" (50) of metafiction. For Wolfe, the 1960s and 1970s were a time when the huge upheavals in American society were begging for a novelist to capture and make sense of them, as Dickens had captured the turmoil of the nineteenth century in his novels; instead Wolfe saw writers as retreating into solipsism, and simply playing with words. In the postmodern 1970s, it was often argued that realism was, as William Phillips stated, "just another formal device, not a permanent method for dealing with experience" (qtd. in Wolfe 50). Wolfe rejects this argument, instead maintaining that realism, as introduced by such writers as Fielding and Richardson in the eighteenth century, was as transformative to fiction as the discovery of electricity was to engineering (50). Realism, Wolfe argues, is unique in the way it captures sensations and captures the reader, and he calls for novelists to return to realism, before nonfiction captures their natural territory (50–56). Booth (*Rhetoric* 40–64) has pointed out that for many critics and writers, anything that deviates from convincing the reader the story is "real" such as a self-conscious narrative voice, is considered suspect.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, for Shields any pretence at realism is false and the lack of self-reflection in a modern literary work is a fatal flaw (155). Similarly the supposed laziness of the realist writer is bemoaned by B.S. Johnson as follows:

> Nathalie Sarraute once described literature as a relay race, the baton of
> innovation passing from one generation to another. The vast majority of

British novelists has dropped the baton, stood still, turned back, or not even realised that there is a race ("Introduction" 30).

Johnson saw himself as continuing this race by attempting to create a new form with each novel that he wrote, and by deploying metafictional techniques in each of them. His frustration at those writers who refused to run the race was exacerbated by contemporary dismissals of his own work by critics such as Peter Ackroyd, who ridiculed Johnson's "lamentably archaic 'experimentation'" (qtd. in Coe). Ackroyd's criticism pinpoints a flaw in Johnson's argument that literature is a race; in effect, much of Johnson's metafictional experimentation does not look forward, but backward, to writers such as Laurence Sterne.

While the self-reflexivity of metafiction is what appeals most to Shields and Johnson, it is what most appals others, such as Wolfe, and Scholes, for whom metafiction is a betrayal of the great realist task of the novel: "[Metafiction] produces a certain kind of pleasure, no doubt, this masturbatory revelling in self-scrutiny; but it also generates great feelings of guilt- not because what it is doing is bad, but because of what it is avoiding" (217–218). Metafiction avoids the duty of the novelist (as Scholes sees it) of reflecting, explaining and understanding the objective world. Shields and Johnson would argue such a duty is impossible without some self-reflexivity, as the world is selected, understood and arranged by the writer, flawed and human as he or she is, not by some omniscient deity. Scholes' characterisation of metafiction as "masturbatory" is also revealing, suggesting an activity that, while enjoyable, is entirely selfish, self-centred and ultimately sterile.

Such critical hostility towards metafiction is not new. For Leavis (1), the four great novelists of the English language: Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, Henry James and George Eliot belonged firmly to the realist tradition. The self-reflexivity of Laurence Sterne's The *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was dismissed by Leavis as "irresponsible (and nasty) trifling, regarded as in some way extraordinarily significant and mature, [which] was found a sanction for attributing value to other trifling" (2). Again, Leavis's description is significant. Metafiction is irresponsible, echoing Scholes' reproach that it is avoiding the writer's real responsibility. Metafiction is nasty, which is the equivalent of Scholes "masturbatory" and it is above all, trifling; that is unimportant, trivial, a waste of time.

Shields and Johnson, on the one hand, view metafiction as the culmination of a progress in literature, and in fact, the only true literature. At the other extreme, Wolfe, Scholes and Leavis argue metafiction is a retreat from the writer's true vocation of making

sense of the world. The relationship between metafiction and realism is more complex than such a binary viewpoint would allow, and this relationship is discussed in more detail below.

The Self-Conscious Novel: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

Johnson's characterisation of literature as a relay race is vivid, but misleading, as Sukenick (35) observes: "Obviously there's no progress in art. Progress towards what?" If, as Johnson contends, literature is a race towards self-reflective fiction as apotheosis, then the race has been a stumbling, stuttering one where the racers constantly run off the track, run into each other, run backward, or fall over. In fact, though the terms "self-reflexive fiction" and "metafiction" were not invented until the twentieth century, metafictional works existed long before then, before postmodernism, and indeed before modernism. Stories that self-consciously explore their status as artificial constructs have existed since the beginnings of the modern novel, as can be seen in one of the great early examples of the form, Cervantes' *The Adventures of Don Quixote* (published in two volumes: 1605, 1615).

The story of *Don Quixote* is well known even to those who have never read it: a Spanish gentleman addicted to reading romantic epics of chivalry is driven mad, and comes to believe he is actually a knight. He sets out into the world attempting to live up to a code of honour as his literary heroes had done, and is beaten, humiliated and robbed, yet all the while retaining his essential dignity. But this is only one level of the novel. As Alter (4) argues, *Don Quixote* "exists simultaneously in two very different planes of being," that is, on the planes of the realist and the self-reflexive (or self-conscious, as Alter terms it). In Cervantes' novel, the sights, smells and sounds of everyday life in 17th century Spain are skilfully evoked in a realist manner. There are detailed descriptions of many characters, their appearance, the weather, the scenery, and dialogue. Yet it is parody that underpins the story. Quixote's adventures are meant to be understood as intertextual, as a commentary on the chivalric romances which dry up Don Quixote's brains. As well as parody, *Don Quixote* displays that most characteristic feature of metafiction; the appearance of the author in his own work. Amid the dust and heat of La Mancha there are sections of *Don Quixote* that call into question the authorship of the novel, and the "real" author even makes an appearance at one point. For Cervantes, the realist and the self-reflexive are complimentary, not in opposition to each other.

If, as has been argued, *Don Quixote*, is the first modern novel, then it can also be claimed as the first metafictional novel (Hutcheon 4), and the first significant novel to use a

self-conscious narrator (Booth "The Self-Conscious Narrator" 165). Alter (4) agrees that Cervantes is "the initiator of both traditions of the novel," the realist and the self-conscious (or metafictional). The self-reflexivity found in *Don Quixote* was not an aberration; Federman (xiv) argues that self-reflexivity was a feature of many other writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of them inspired by Cervantes. One notable self-reflexive work of the 17th and 18th century include John Dunton's *A Voyage Around the World: Or, A Pocket Library* (1691), which though little known is, Sherbert (43) argues "unique in the degree to which [it] depends on self-conscious digression." Another early example of the self-reflexive is Thomas D'Urfey's *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Intelligible World* (1707), which like many examples of metafiction, is a parody of a pre-existing form; in this case Platonic idealism (75).

Laurence Sterne and Henry Fielding both explicitly cite *Don Quixote* as inspiration for *Tristram Shandy* and *Tom Jones* (Booth "The Self-Conscious Narrator" 165; 175) and both writers developed the self-conscious narrator figure from Cervantes. As Booth argues, Fielding's self-conscious narrator in *Tom Jones* differs from Sterne's in that he appears to be in complete control of the novel he is narrating, and the information he is providing to the reader, while the interruptions of Sterne's self-conscious narrator (Tristram himself) appear chaotic and out of control (177–185). Booth has identified the importance of *Tom Jones* in the development of the self-conscious narrator in his claim that few novels published before Fielding's novel used self-conscious narrators, and few published after did not (180). Sterne's innovation, following Fielding, was to utilise "a device [the self-conscious narrator] which in previous writers was subordinate to other ends and made it an end in itself" (185), and which would not be used to such an extent until the short stories of John Barth in the twentieth century, discussed later in this chapter. For Watt (18–26), the literature of the eighteenth century was quite different from what had come before. Archetypes became characters, traditional storytelling gave way to plot, time became an important factor to be considered (unlike in fairy tales and epics), events that had gone before determined the choices of characters, and setting became particular rather than nebulous. But even as these conventions of realism were under construction, they were at the same time being deconstructed in self-reflexive novels such as *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master*, and *Tristram Shandy*. At the dawn of the modern novel, metafiction and realism were not considered to be in conflict; rather they emerged and developed at the same time. There was no question of one dominating the other, as they were two sides of the same coin.

Realism in the Nineteenth Century

By the 1830s, Alter argues, "the whole orientation of the English novel had swung around to a new point" (86) and that point was realism. Williams (xiii) agrees that realism was "the most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist." The reasons for this decisive swing away from self-conscious to realist are too numerous to go into here; but among them are the social and economic upheavals of the industrial revolution and new theories on the continuity of history (Alter) as well as the legacy of eighteenth century philosophical thought. The term "realism" is adopted from the philosophy of Thomas Reid, and the works of Locke and Descartes, which since the eighteenth century had come to be associated with the notion that objects exist independently, outside the perceptions of the beholder (Watt 12). Though the conventions of the nineteenth century novel were broadly realist, this realism was not monolithic; the realism of Dickens was different to the realism of Austen. Still, it was generally accepted that the novel's mission in the nineteenth century was to reflect this objective reality; in Stendhal's famous words, it was to be "a mirror travelling along a highway" (qtd. in Grant 65). The idea that the glass of the mirror might distort the scene, as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, fell out of favour. In fact, the notion that the novel was not realistic enough led to the emergence of a new realist movement, naturalism.

Literary naturalism, pioneered and championed by the French novelist Emile Zola, is "intimately related to and simultaneously distinct from realism" (David 357) though, as always with any form or genre, there has always been debate as to what precisely naturalism is, who should be considered a naturalist, and the many exceptions to the rule (Baguley 31). In fact, some critics have called attempting to distinguish between realism and naturalism a waste of time (41), but it remains the case that they can be distinguished, at least to an extent. Naturalism and nineteenth century realism were both concerned with *mimesis* or representing reality (48) but naturalism, rejecting romanticism, claimed to bring science to realism, drawing on "causality, determinism, explanation, and experimentation" (Habib 170), essentially bringing the laws of nature into the novel. Such a supposedly objective viewpoint led naturalist writers to unflinchingly explore themes, including sexuality, violence and poverty, that realist writers had often turned away from. Booth (55) claims that naturalists felt reality could only be depicted by doing "justice to the unpleasant side of life." It was this exploration of the unpleasant side of life that led to Zola's books, upon appearing in English,

being attacked by a British Member of Parliament as "pernicious" and "only fit for swine" (32).

Zola especially argued that naturalism progressed realism through using the scientific method (Baguley 57), applying the latest principles of medicine, anthropology and heredity to character and plot (63). For Zola, the writer was akin to a scientist setting up an experiment and then recording the results, dispassionately, and without bias (David 358). Just as a scientist removes himself from the experiment, so naturalist writers retreated into a supposed objectivity, curtailing the imaginative in favour of the empirical. An example of this is Zola's *Germinal*, where characters are delineated through description of external action, not privileged authorial access to their inner thoughts (368). Though the impact of naturalism on the nineteenth century novel was greatest in France, it also influenced writers in America and England including Jack London and Oscar Wilde, and later other genres, including the Western and the hardboiled detective novel (Lehan 229–240).

Realism, whether described as such or naturalism, was the prevailing frame for nineteenth century novelists to contain and comprehend the enormous social and economic changes of their time. As Alter argues, these writers "under the urgent pressure of history…were far less inclined to explore the problematics of their fictional instruments as they used them to engage with historical reality" (93). While it is true that several important nineteenth century writers such as Charles Dickens and Emily Bronte were interested in exploring the artifice of the novel, they were not interested in self-consciously calling into question the relationship between their fictions and reality (Alter 97) as Fielding and Sterne had done before them. As Alistair Fowler (qtd. in Baguley 40) points out, writers who do not question the idea of genre frequently find themselves "accepting the conventions prescribed by custom and fashion."

The nineteenth century, compared to the two centuries before it, and the one after it, saw an abeyance in self-reflexivity. The rise of realism in the nineteenth century novel is perhaps not surprising when considered in a longer historical context. Hume (5) traces the preoccupation of many critics with mimesis to the works of Plato and Aristotle, which form the bedrock of critical theory in the West. This view is echoed by Pericles Lewis, who argues that since the time of the ancient philosophers "the arts had been associated with mimesis, the imitation and representation of reality" (xviii). Arguments for a realist style in literature were buttressed by philosophy and wider artistic culture. So successful were the realist novelists of the nineteenth century in recording and interpreting their world for an increasingly literate population, that there arose a tendency, as Ommundsen (48) notes, to

assume realist conventions were the ultimate expression of fiction, and not something that had been constructed. Even the most hallowed and least questioned of authorial powers, that of telling the reader what a character is thinking is, Booth observes, artificial (*Rhetoric* 3). Yet it is working within the arbitrarily constructed realist set of conventions that is often held up as being the true task of the writer. Federman (292) agrees that "Literature has most often been culturally significant to the extent it represents the external world, either through the depiction of a social/historical situation, or through the verbalisation of psychological states." Realism has been, and arguably still is, linked to cultural significance. Even today, prestigious literary prizes rarely feature genres such as fantasy or science-fiction which do not fit neatly into the realist mould, and metafiction can be met with criticism that it is, in Raymond Carver's words "extremely clever chi-chi writing." ("On Writing" 274).

Modernism and Metafiction: The Twentieth Century

For Virginia Woolf, the new development in the art of the novel, modernism, could be dated to December 1910 (Alter 139). Notwithstanding Woolf's precision, the term would not be used widely until after the First World War to describe the work of Woolf and her contemporaries (P. Lewis xvii). Modernism, rather than representing a break with the nineteenth century realist tradition was actually an outgrowth of the work of realist writers such as Flaubert (42), Henry James, and Dostoyevsky (158). Modernism arose from a time of great social and economic change that brought with it the feeling that reality was too complex to be represented by the tried and true methods of Victorian realism. Whereas for the Victorians the objectivity and omniscience of realism were generally effective tools in understanding the upheavals of the nineteenth century, for the modernists the conventions of realism were insufficient to understand the complex horrors of the twentieth.

For Alter, literature after the First World War marked "an artistically manifested self-consciousness about the process of fiction-making…not…seen in the novel since the end of the eighteenth century" (139). The conventions of realism, while not abandoned, were certainly questioned and renovated, through experimentation in the representation of consciousness, time and narrative in fiction (P. Lewis 153–175). In modernism, the traditional realist conventions of time, plot, character and causation were refracted through the consciousness of different characters, and reality was what each character saw and experienced, not what existed "outside" them. Thus, in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the first section is narrated by the idiot, Benjy, who cannot distinguish between

past and present, and so the narrative is fractured and refracted through his consciousness, moving confusedly back and forth through time. In contrast, his selfish brother Jason exists entirely in the present moment, and his narrative voice reflects this. Faulkner ended his novel with a chapter told from a more traditionally realist objective viewpoint, but generally in modernism the idea of an objective world, outside the perception of human beings, was rejected. If the world existed, it existed in the consciousness, (P. Lewis 7) and it was through the consciousness of characters such as Mrs Dalloway, or John Dowell from Ford's *The Good Soldier* that reality was now depicted.

Lukacs has argued that equating subjective experience to reality is a distortion of reality (51) and while it is true that modernism did distort the realist conventions, it did not completely break away from them to become entirely self-reflexive. Instead of destroying previous literary forms, modernists, as Pericles Lewis argues, "sought to enter into a sort of conversation with the art of the past, sometimes reverently, sometimes mockingly" (27). Though modernism was an extension of realism, it featured several techniques that came to be identified with postmodernism and metafiction, including parody and intertextuality (245). While the modernist novel was interested in the novel as artifice, there was, in Alter's words "no perception of the novel's world as an arbitrary structure built strictly on the decisions (or whims) of its creator" (153). This meant few writers vaulted, or kicked down, the metafictional fourth wall, until Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was to anticipate the rise of postmodernism and metafiction after the Second World War.

~~Metafiction versus Realism~~ Metafiction and Realism

Metafiction, then, was conceived alongside realism in the seventeenth century, and developed in parallel with it until the nineteenth century, when realism became the dominant literary mode. With the advent of modernism, realism was not destroyed but experimented with, as the world was refracted through the consciousness of the characters rather than an invisible, objective, omniscient observer. Some writers, including B.S. Johnson, saw the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 as signalling the destruction of realism, but this was not to be. Just as realism and metafiction had existed together in the works of the self-conscious novelists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they co-existed in *Ulysses*, and would continue to co-exist in the metafictional writers of the twentieth century. Indeed, arguably, metafiction and realism had never ceased existing together, even at the height of Victorian realism. As Ommundsen states, it is possible to contend "all fiction is metafiction, and the

difference between *War and Peace* and *Tristram Shandy* is not one of kind, but merely of a lesser or greater explicitness of metafictional awareness" (25).

After the Second World War writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges and John Barth would, at the same time, use fiction to reflect reality, and to reveal the limits of fiction in reflecting reality. Stendhal's mirror travelling along the highway reflects not only the landscape, but itself. Waugh suggests another metaphor: in metafiction "The reader is always presented with embedded strata which contradict the presuppositions of the strata immediately above or below" (15). *Don Quixote*, the first modern European novel, offers these multiple strata for the reader to mine; the hero is a deluded knight living in La Mancha, and he is also a character in a novel whose authorship is doubtful, and he is also a parody of the knights of Romance. Though these elements are contradictory, as Waugh states, they are at the same time complimentary. Cervantes and his readers had no trouble navigating these strata.

Metafiction and self-reflexivity build upon the foundations of realism; they are not its culmination, as Johnson and Shields might argue. Similarly, Leavis, Wolfe and Scholes are incorrect; metafiction is not a diversion from the important business of fiction; it is an integral part of that business. It is just as possible for a work of metafiction to amuse, instruct, frustrate, satirise, entertain, and explain as a realist work. This is demonstrated in the stories of John Barth, examined below.

Lost in the Metafictional Funhouse: Three Short Stories by John Barth

Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice is a short fiction collection featuring stories that have been acknowledged as examples of "particularly rampant metafictional self-reflexivity" (Worthington 114). Barth's intention to involve the reader in the construction of his work can be seen in the first story in the collection, "Frame-Tale." Here the reader is encouraged to cut out a strip of paper from the book on which is printed on one side, "Once upon a time there" and on the other, "was a story that began" and then glue the ends together. This action creates a Mobius strip which reads "Once upon a time there was a story that began Once upon a time there was a story that began…" and so on, to infinity. Barth's interest in experimenting in the form and content of short stories is evident throughout the collection. Stories include the first person narrative of a spermatozoon journeying to an egg ("Night-Sea Journey"), a piece designed to be spoken aloud in a dialogue between the author (live) and the author (recorded on tape) in "Autobiography: A

Self-Recorded Fiction", as well as episodes in the youth of a boy called Ambrose Mensch in "Ambrose his Mark" and "Water-Message." Also, several stories are intertextual, adopting characters and plots from the Greek myths ("Echo", "Menelaiad", "Anonymiad"). While a number of the stories mentioned above include some metafictional elements, the three stories examined here are the most explicitly metafictional in Barth's collection; it could almost be said that they are the most self-consciously self-conscious. These stories are "Lost in the Funhouse," "Title," and "Life Story."

"Lost in the Funhouse"

"Lost in the Funhouse," the title story of Barth's collection, is also his most famous, and expertly entwines elements of realism and metafiction. The realist element of the story is straightforward, describing a trip to a seaside theme park sometime in the 1940s taken by the pubescent Ambrose Mensch and his family, including his older brother Peter, and a girl Magda, who both brothers have a crush on. During this trip Ambrose tries to come to terms with his awakening sexuality and his feelings of loneliness and awkwardness. As Seymour (192) notes, and, indeed the narrator of the story agrees, there is nothing particularly original about this coming of age plot. At the same time, as the realist story progresses, its construction is explained, questioned and criticised by the narrator. The dual progress of the story is established in the opening paragraph:

> For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is *a place of fear and confusion*. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, *the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America*. A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, *which in turn* is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type for titles of complete works, not to mention. Italics are also employed, in fiction stories especially, for "outside" intrusive, or artificial voices, such as radio announcements, the texts of telegrams and newspaper articles et cetera. They should be used *sparingly*. If passages originally in roman type are italicised by someone repeating them, it's customary to acknowledge the fact. *Italics mine* (72).

In four sentences, Barth moves from realism to metafiction. The first three lines might be found in any realist short story. The opening question and answer could be the voice of a third person narrator, or Ambrose's if the story is written in free indirect style, and the use of italics in the third sentence, while less usual, could be seen by the reader as emphasising the menacing qualities of the funhouse. It is only in the fourth sentence that the reader begins to sense that this story might not be as uncomplicated as it first seems. An apparently straightforward piece of exposition, "He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday" is followed by a strangely precise explanation of the particular holiday, given in italics. There appears to be no reason why such information should be given, never mind stressed. The appearance of the italics is then explained by the narrator; to be used as a stress (as in the third sentence) and to mark the intrusion of an artificial voice in the story. The italics in the fourth sentence, then, belong to an alien voice; in this case, the writer. This explanation is followed by an injunction that italics should not be overused, the joke being, of course, that this is precisely what has happened in the preceding lines of the story. The movement from apparent realism to metafiction also changes the context of the first lines of the story. It no longer appears that Ambrose, in free indirect style, is asking the opening question. The question, "For whom is the funhouse fun?" is also directed at the reader, and as will become clear by the end when the question is answered, the funhouse exists, like the story, on several levels; that of the concrete and "real" (there is a funhouse in the story in which Ambrose becomes lost) and the metafictional (the story itself is the funhouse, in which the writer and the reader become lost). A further level is the funhouse of teenage sexuality, which the smitten Ambrose has stumbled into due to his attraction to Magda (Martin 152).

The pattern set by the first paragraph is continued throughout the rest of the story, with the narrator utilising the conventions of characterisation, plot and setting of traditional realist fiction, and simultaneously undermining, commenting on or questioning them. For instance, the practice, common in the nineteenth century, of alluding to a place by its initial ("B____ Street") is discussed by the narrator, as is the believability of Ambrose, a thirteen year old boy, making the astute psychological observations common to youthful characters in *Bildungsroman*. Though the story is extremely self-reflexive, with rarely a paragraph passing without an analysis of the fictional devices which have just been utilised, Barth is also careful to develop the realist parts of the text, even if it is only to make fun of them a moment later with a metafictional conceit. An example of this can be found in Barth's use of

intertextuality; he compares the setting of his story to the description of a setting in a John Dos Passos novel.

At all times, Barth proves himself equally at home with the realist and metafictional aspects of his story. The hot, uncomfortable family car ride to the funhouse is described with as much careful detail as in a more traditionally realist story:

> Uncle Karl tapped his cigar ash out the ventilator window; some particles were sucked by the slipstream back into the car through the rear window on the passenger side. Magda demonstrated her ability to hold a banana in one hand and peel it with her teeth. She still sat forward; Ambrose pushed his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose with his left hand, which he then negligently let fall to the seat cushion immediately behind her. He even permitted a single hair, gold, on the second joint of his thumb to brush the fabric of her skirt. Should she have sat back at that instant, his hand would have been caught under her. Plain upholstery prickles uncomfortably through gabardine slacks in July (77).

Here can be seen all the elements of realist fiction: the painstaking accumulation of details and observations, such as the cigar ash and the texture of the slacks; the (rather obvious) symbolism of a pretty girl peeling a banana with her teeth; the careful suggestion of the attraction that Ambrose feels for Magda; and the poignancy of Ambrose's clumsy attempts to act on it, by brushing Magda's dress. All of these literary devices, and the use of sensory imagery in the final sentence, are constructed skilfully and convincingly by Barth here and throughout the story, to convince the reader of its "reality", only for this reality to be just as expertly deconstructed and revealed as a sham. The paragraph following the one quoted above decries the irrelevancy of the drive to the funhouse, and criticises the story so far for having a flawed structure and "nothing in the way of a theme. And a long time has gone by already without anything happening; it makes a person wonder. We haven't even reached Ocean City yet: we will never get out of the funhouse" (77). The narrator is here being disingenuous; actually, a lot has happened, but only at one stratum of the story. While on a literal level it is true Ambrose and his family appear no closer to the funhouse of the title, on a self-reflexive level there has been an exhaustive exploration of the mechanics of storytelling: how should a character be described? How can a writer create a sensory experience for the reader? Of what use are metaphors and similes? While little happens in

the plot, there is movement in the story, if the story is considered to be not the journey to the physical funhouse, but the construction of a metafictional one.

"Lost in the Funhouse" continues with several carefully observed "realist" sections interrupted by discussions of the fictional techniques used to create them. Actually, "interrupted" is possibly the wrong word to use; "complemented" would be more accurate. There is no opposition between Ambrose's youthful anguish at being smitten with a girl who is not interested in him, and the narrator's reminding the reader, by repetition of a description of the girl, ("she was remarkably well developed for her age") that she is just a character in a story. Barth demonstrates that it is possible to be moved by Ambrose's plight while at the same time being reminded that he is part of a work of fiction. Ambrose, like the narrator of the story, finds himself apart from his life and commenting on it. Desperately, if naïvely, in love with Magda, he is unable to truly embrace the experience:

> But though he had breathed heavily, groaned as if ecstatic, what he'd really felt throughout was an odd detachment, as though someone else were Master. Strive as he might to be transported, he heard his mind take notes upon the scene: *This is what they call* passion. *I am experiencing it.* (84)

Once more, this example works on the metafictional and the realist strata. On the latter level, this sense of detachment is an indication of the career that Ambrose is going to follow, that of being someone who takes notes rather than experiences things; a writer. On a metafictional level, the Master that Ambrose senses is the author of the story, who himself cannot be transported by his own writing, but must "take notes upon the scene," in his many interruptions and comments on his creative process. Significantly, Ambrose's thoughts in the last line are in italics, which the narrator had pointed out earlier not only indicated a stress placed on the words, but also an "outside" voice. As Worthington notes, "The self-reflexivity of the narrative serves to exteriorise Ambrose's self-conscious self-narration" (126). Ambrose's thoughts are at once his own, and those of his creator.

In the meantime, although he has not even entered the funhouse yet, Ambrose is described as lost in it. Just as Ambrose has taken a wrong turn in the literal funhouse at some point, "off the track, in some new or old part of the place that's not supposed to be used; he strayed into it by some one in a million chance" ("Lost in the Funhouse" 83), so he has also become lost in the story-as-funhouse. Though he is watching his brother dive into the swimming pool, at the same time Ambrose has slipped behind the structure of the story

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itself. While his brother, Peter, and the object of his passion, Magda, "found the right exit; he found one that you weren't supposed to find and strayed off into the works somewhere (85). Ambrose is simultaneously lost in the works of the amusement park funhouse, and lost in the works of the story-as-funhouse. This mirrors the experience of the writer, Barth, who has strayed off into the works of his own story, the author wandering around and criticising his own creation, with little idea of where he is going, how he got there, or more importantly, how he can get out.

Barth concocts a number of possible endings for the story and Ambrose's fate; he will find another lost person, he'll never be found, he dies alone in the darkness. At one point in his odyssey Ambrose comes across the operator of the funhouse, who is "gentle, somewhat sad and tired-appearing" (88) which, it is implied, is a vision of his own future, and also a vision of his creator, John Barth, who is at that moment working the levers of his own funhouse, the story itself. At this point, the narrator asks, "Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author's imagination?" (88). The obvious answer to these questions are no, and yes. But in a sense there is such a person as Ambrose, and that is Barth himself. In a conversation with Ambrose, his father (though really Barth) informs the boy that life is not like fiction; there are no turning points, only events, even the villains think of themselves as heroes, and nothing is as it seems on the surface (91). Again this speaks to the "reality" of the story, and the story *as* a story. However, this conversation is immediately discarded by Barth, for being "too long and rambling..." (91). Instead, Barth has Ambrose's father simply raise his eyebrows at his son going into the funhouse with Magda. There, paralysed by his own self-awareness, Ambrose allows Magda to go off with his brother Peter, while he becomes lost in in a maze of mirrors, lost in self-reflection, just as the author of the story is.

Traditional dramatic structure, as seen in Freytag's triangle, which is reproduced in Barth's short story, is of little use to Ambrose, or the narrator, and their story has no end in sight: "The climax of the story must be its protagonist's discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search" (97). Who is the protagonist of "Lost in the Funhouse"? Is it Barth, or Ambrose, or are they one and the same? Neither the author nor Ambrose is seen to leave the funhouse, though Ambrose imagines leaving at the conclusion of the story:

> He wonders: will he become a regular person? Something has gone wrong;
> his vaccination didn't take; at the Boy-Scout initiation campfire he only

pretended to be deeply moved, as he pretends to this hour that it is not so bad after all in the funhouse, and that he has a little limp. How long will it last? He envisions a truly astounding funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled from a great central switchboard like the console of a pipe organ. Nobody had enough imagination. He could design the place himself, wiring and all, and he's only thirteen years old. He would be its operator: panel lights would show what was up in every cranny of its multifarious vastness; a switch-flick would ease this fellow's way, complicate that's, to balance things out; if anyone seemed lost or frightened, all the operator had to do was.

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator- though he would rather be among the lovers for whom the funhouse is designed (97).

Just as the opening of the story can be read on a number of levels, so can the close. If the "he" of this section is taken to be Ambrose, his desire to create a funhouse of his own is a desire for control. Powerless and alone, having already lost Magda, he imagines being the funhouse operator (a writer) and helping those who feel the same way he does. He dreams of creating funhouses, but never being able to enjoy them- always lurking behind the scenes, self-conscious and self-aware. Ambrose's self-consciousness precludes him from being a lover, whether he likes it or not. As Martin observes, "the artist is liable to become trapped within the labyrinth of self-awareness" (154). Ambrose is too aware of himself to be ever lost in the moment.

The "he" is also the narrator (who is perhaps Barth or perhaps the grown-up Ambrose himself, or perhaps even both of them, since Ambrose is simply an aspect of Barth's imagination) and he realises that as a writer, he can create stories and make sense of the world, but that he will be unable to enjoy them as he will be too busy toggling switches, trying new techniques- just as the narrator in the story has been doing from the start with his interpolations, examples of intertextuality and interrogation of plot and style. With the power and pleasure of creation, whether in the case of Ambrose, or the narrator, or both, there also inevitably comes loneliness- neither Ambrose nor the narrator will ever be "a regular person." Ambrose is at once trapped inside a literal funhouse, the funhouse of his own imagination, and the funhouse created by the imagination of Barth. As Morrell argues, the

technique employed in this story is "more than just a presentation of the subject matter; it is a representation of that subject matter" (88). Barth himself is trapped in his own creation, never able to enjoy it, always self-consciously aware of it in a way that others, such as the lovers, are not. In fact, Woolley argues that this story could be read as Barth's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (471).

For Martin (151–157), the funhouse metaphor extends to the collection of stories as a whole, all of which are a form of autobiography constructed by Ambrose in an attempt to understand his life. (In this reading the spermatozoon in "Night-Sea Journey" is Ambrose in the moments before his own conception.) If this is the case, then the stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* demonstrate that Ambrose's, and by extension Barth's, loneliness and isolation are offset by the possibilities of recreating oneself in fiction (157). If *Lost in the Funhouse*, as Woolley argues, self-reflexively examines the corrosion of certain literary forms, and of language itself, this examination is not necessarily a negative one (465), and can indeed be more creative than destructive. In "Lost in the Funhouse" Barth takes a well-worn narrative form (sexual and artistic awakening) and by questioning it, does not destroy it, but rejuvenates it.

"Life-Story"

Barth's fascination with self-consciousness in writing is continued in the self-reflexively titled "Life-Story." Where "Lost in the Funhouse" was primarily about the difficulty of writing a story, "Life-Story" is more about the reader of the story (C. Harris 122). "Life-Story" can be seen, according to Woolley, as an "effort to get beyond reflexivity, first of all by critiquing it" (474). The story begins, once again, with a writer beginning a story, and intending to write it in a "conservative 'realistic' unself-conscious way" ("Life-Story" 116). Of course, Barth is being facetious here- the story has begun in the most self-conscious way possible, with a description of a writer writing a story. "Life-Story" follows the several false starts of the writer character, variously referred to as G, X, U and other letters of the alphabet, but never A or Z. (Interestingly, Michael Carey (121) theorises that the absent A is reserved for God, the ultimate creator, and the Z for the reader.) The writer is vehement in his attempt to write a realist work, even disclaiming the self-referential work of Borges and Beckett. Of course, by doing this the writer evokes intertextuality, another common metafictional device.

One layer of "Life-Story" describes the writer-character's attempts to create a straightforward tale of the kind he enjoys reading, but his description of attempting this is overlaid by another layer of self-consciousness. "Life-Story" sees Barth address and satirise common criticisms of self-reflexive fiction by describing, in a self-reflexive way, a writer who is trying to write a piece of straightforward fiction, "not some piece of avant-garde preciousness" (119). In order to write his story, the writer must cope with his own increasing conviction that he is a fictional character, interruptions by his wife, and interruptions from his own self-doubt to begin the story again and again. The story the writer is writing mirrors the story that Barth is writing; again, Barth adroitly manages the metafictional and the fictional. The writer's story starts several times, as does Barth's story of the writer, and both stories consider the usefulness or otherwise of self-conscious fiction. The writer-character (and presumably Barth himself) frets about trying the reader's patience (125) with his endless prevaricating over fictional form, and worries about characterisation and avoiding heavy-handed exposition. The characters in this story, and in Barth's other stories, appear to deplore their self-consciousness, but cannot seem to avoid it (Worthington 120).

Finally, in the third section of the story, Barth seemingly dispenses with the writer-character altogether (as Johnson did in *Albert Angelo*) to address the reader directly:

> The reader! You dogged, uninsultable, print-orientated bastard, it's you I'm addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction. You've read me this far, then? Even this far? For what discreditable motive? (127)

But even this classic metafictional device of addressing the reader is revealed as being, on another level, what the character of the writer has just had the character on the page he is writing say. In a metafictional house of mirrors, the author is talking through a character authored by one of his own creations. Barth's writer-character becomes convinced, for a moment, he is fictional, before becoming equally convinced he is real, and with another interruption by his wife, the story of the character the writer was writing, and the story of the writer that Barth was writing, and Barth's story all come to an end at the same time, as does the story the reader is reading. As Charles Harris notes, here and in the other stories in the collection, "…all three- teller, tale and told- are inextricably linked and mutually dependent" (121). If metafiction exposes "blanks" in fiction, it at the same time, with the reader's help, fills them.

"Title"

The title of "Title" gives an indication that self-reflexivity will play an even greater role in this story than it did in "Lost in the Funhouse." While the latter seamlessly combines realist and metafictional elements, and utilises the standard conventions of fiction such as plot, character, setting and so on, even if only to undercut, or parody them, "Title" apparently dispenses with all of that, focussing exclusively on the writing of a story, as can be seen in the opening lines:

> Beginning: in the middle, past the middle, nearer three-quarters done, waiting for the end. Consider how dreadful so far: passionless, abstraction, pro, dis. And it will get worse. Can we possibly continue? (105)

This idea of a writer commenting on what they are writing is nothing new. It can be found in *Don Quixote* and, exhaustively, in *Tristram Shandy*, as well as in the work of several of Barth's contemporaries. In fact, William H. Gass characterised these kinds of stories as, "drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing" (24). However a brief comparison between Barth's treatment of this theme, and that of another metafictional short story with a similar premise, Keith Fort's 'The Coal Shoveller", will show "Title" as being far from predictable, or dreary. "The Coal Shoveller" opens with a discussion on the act of beginning a short story, as Barth's "Title" does:

> 'The clock is ticking.' That's a poor beginning for a short story. The trouble with 'clock' is that it symbolises time, and I don't want to introduce any big ideas into my story (40).

In "The Coal Shoveller" the writer attempts and then discards several different approaches to writing a story, while at the same time writing the story of writing the story. Fort's writer-narrator is inspired by the sight of a man shovelling coal outside his window, but he soon finds that even the simplest description of the man is fraught with problems, observing "All that I wanted was to describe the scene, but who could fail to see in my story a comment on the white noose that is strangling our black inner city?" (41). Fort's narrator attempts different points of view, briefly considers turning the story into an essay, and changes his thematic and stylistic approach to the work. Fort's story, while it is far from

being "drearily predictable," is at the same time a fairly straightforward treatment of a common metafictional device.

Barth's approach in "Title" is at once more complex, ambiguous and ambitious, as can be seen from a comparison of the first paragraphs of "Title" (elliptical) and "The Coal Shoveller" (direct). In the first paragraph of "Title" Barth is setting both himself and the reader a challenge. This paragraph sets out some of the criticisms that have been made about metafiction: that is has no heart, that it is too abstract. "Lost in the Funhouse" at least introduced a character, and began a plot in its first paragraph. "Title" begins the story by criticising itself, and assuring the reader it will become worse. Note the question at the end of the first paragraph is not, "Can I possibly continue?" but "Can *we* [italics mine] possibly continue?" Any story of course requires the collaboration of the writer and the reader. Here, Barth makes it explicit- from such a beginning, the writer can of course go on, but will the reader come with him? As Charles Harris notes, in Barth's fiction, "Not only does the reader give life to the characters and situation in the author's story, but in a real sense the reader gives the author life, since he makes his role possible. By that same token, the writer as well as his story makes possible the reader's role" (118). This co-dependence of the reader and writer is a vital element in "Lost in the Funhouse", "Title" and "Life-Story."

As "Title" continues, another stratum is added. Though the lack of conventional punctuation and spacing might confuse (and is probably intended to confuse) the reader, "Title" is not a monologue. There are two voices in the story- that of the author, and a companion, presumably female. The "we" therefore, also refers to the relationship of the male and female voices/characters in the story. Barth's approach becomes clearer when it is considered that the story was written to be performed in public, with sections of the story pre-recorded on tape. As Morrell explains the process, "The narrator says something to himself through a speaker on one side of the stage, then answers himself from the speaker on the other side, and all the while Barth himself stands between the two speakers, listening to what the voices say to each other" (84). Of course, this performance is impossible to replicate on the page, but it is worth bearing in mind as it dramatizes one of the themes of the story: both the voices in the story are Barth's, yet neither of them are. The story of "Title" is the story of writing a story, but unlike Fort's more formally modest approach, "Title" has several different strands. Barth points these out in his "Author's Note," as the story "addresses itself simultaneously to three matters: the 'Author's' difficulties with his companion, his analogous difficulties with the story he's in the process of composing, and the not dissimilar straits in which, I think, mistakenly, he imagines his culture and its

literature to be" (xi). In other words "Title" explores the exhaustion of a relationship, the exhaustion of a form, and the exhaustion of a culture, often simultaneously:

> As the narrator was saying, things have been kaput for some time, and while we may be pardoned our great reluctance to acknowledge it, the fact is that the bloody century for example is nearing the three quarter mark, and the characters in this little tale, for example, are similarly past their prime, as is the drama. Then God damn it let's ring the curtain. Wait wait. We're left with the following three possibilities at least in theory. Horseshit. Hold onto yourself, it's too soon to fill in the blank. I hope this will be a short story. (108–109)

Here the characters are analysing themselves and their relationship (past their prime) and the form in which they exist. The three possibilities that remain are later listed as "rejuvenation", that is the discovery of new forms other than the moribund novel, and secondly, "The demise of the novel and short story" to be replaced with something as yet unknown, and the third is to "turn ultimacy, exhaustion, paralysing self-consciousness and the adjective weight of accumulated history… to make something new and valid" (109). "Title" is concerned with far more than a writer's difficulties with writing. The real story of "Title" is how to continue writing stories when it appears there is nothing more to say, or everything has already been said.

Metafiction in *The Weight of a Human Heart*

A number of stories in *The Weight of a Human Heart* attempt to use metafictional devices in order to, as Barth says, "…make something new and valid" (109) from used-up and worn-out concepts. This is demonstrated most clearly in three stories: "A Story in Writing," "Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story," and "Auntie's Story." It is no coincidence that the titles of these three stories all include the word "story." As in the case of Barth's "Life-Story," their metafictional nature is signalled from the very beginning.

If "Lost in the Funhouse" can be seen as an attempt to rejuvenate the tired *Bildungsroman* or coming of age story, then "A Story in Writing" is an attempt to make new the hoary plot of a married man having an affair. The events in the story are straightforward; Frank contemplates, then begins an affair with his rival's partner Callie, and the affair is

eventually discovered. However, the fact that the three main characters in the story are writers is reflected in the its self-consciously artificial structure, which is based around a range of literary terms and devices. The purpose of these devices is to distort and parody a threadbare plot that most readers will have encountered many times before. Thus, Frank's dissatisfaction with his marriage is expressed in preposterously solemn Biblical terms, while the various hidden agendas of each character appear in footnotes. Even their names are literary devices. As Waugh notes, in metafiction, names are used to display the arbitrary control of the writer (94), and in "A Story in Writing" Callie, Frank and Penn's names are each analysed in turn, and their artificiality emphasised.

Metafiction is deployed throughout the story entirely for comic effect; Frank and Callie's feelings on their first date is satirised through hyperbole, their sex-scene is censored, their dirty talk reduced to the literary device of epizeuxis. Each section of the story explicitly draws attention to the artificial nature of the plot, characters and the setting. The story of the affair is resolved in a deliberately offhand, and unbelievable, manner when Callie runs off with Frank's wife. This artificiality is capped at the climax by the appearance of the author in the penultimate section of the story, (titled "Metafiction") where he discusses his inability to bring the story to a close. Appropriately, the story ends with a cliché; essentially the story is a cliché, but a cliché which has been refreshed by the metafictional techniques used to tell it. "A Story in Writing" follows "Lost in the Funhouse" by alerting the reader to every overused trope, every borrowing, every artificially constructed aspect of the story. It pre-empts and subverts the reader's expectations of what a story can do, and be.

"Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story" is an attempt to test the conventions of the short story, to breaking point and perhaps beyond. In "A Story in Writing," a predictable plot is rejuvenated by being told in an unconventional way. In "Sixteen Rules…" the plot is entirely dictated by a set of "rules" of good writing, as set out by various writers, from Anton Chekhov to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Of course, both realism and metafiction rely on conventions in different ways; realism relies on conventions to help suspend the reader's disbelief, while metafiction can only exist in response to these conventions. Lodge's observation on postmodernism is equally applicable to metafiction: that it "is essentially a rule-breaking kind of art, and unless people are still trying to keep the rules there is no point in breaking them, and no interest in seeing them broken" (275). "Sixteen Rules…" first sets out the rules, as espoused by various writers, but instead of breaking them, highlights their absurdity by following them to the letter. Thus the beginning of the story is rewritten a number of times to reflect the different aspects of writing that different rules emphasise, and the plot

becomes ever more ludicrous as each rule is strictly adhered to. "Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story" takes the "adjective weight of accumulated history," as Barth has it, in the shape of the literary advice of canonical writers, and uses that weight to create something new.

As noted in chapter one, "Auntie's Story" began as a synthesis of Murray Bail's metafictional short story "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z" and David Malouf's realist story "Mrs Porter and the Rock." However "Auntie's Story" soon became something quite different from the two stories that had influenced it. "Auntie's Story," like Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" and "Life-Story" shares a metafictional concern, namely as Waugh observes, "the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (6). The illusion is first questioned in the epigraph to the story, in which Ernest Hemingway decries writers who use epigraphs in their stories. The opening of the story though is solidly realist, which is no surprise as it is modelled on the style of Malouf's solidly realist short story. But the solidity of this realism is illusory; it is soon destroyed by the frustrated "stop stop stop" of the writer. In "Auntie's Story" the writer is frustrated by the inherent artificiality of realism and its employment of conventional literary devices such as foreshadowing, epiphanies, and complications. Dissatisfied with realism, as the story progresses the writer attempts a number of different metafictional styles and techniques, including authorial intervention into the narrative, intertextuality, and game playing. Yet these metafictional devices prove to be no more satisfying than the realist ones, and the writer eventually gives up.

In "Auntie's Story," as in much of Barth's short fiction, the writer's failure to tell the story *is* the real story. The story concludes, as do many works of metafiction, with a choice of endings, this time taken from other texts, the literal death of the author, and the invitation for the reader to take up the baton. If the writer fails to find anything new to say, then the story should be turned over to the reader.

The Billion-Footed Beast in the Funhouse

The relationship between Wolfe's billion-footed beast of realism and the funhouse of metafiction is often characterised as antagonistic and oppositional, not least by "realist" or "self-reflexive" writers themselves. Yet, as has been argued above, this relationship is more complex, and less hostile, than that. As Ommundsen states, "…the perceived and…misleading opposition between reflexivity and reality, or between metafiction and

realism, may have come about through the construction of metafiction itself as a genre or category distinct from 'ordinary' fiction" (4). In other words, the coining of the term "metafiction" as distinct from "fiction" has distorted the symbiotic relationship between the two. The survival, and indeed flourishing, of realist conventions almost a century after Joyce's attempt to explode or exhaust them in *Ulysses* is clear evidence that realism fulfils a human need to capture and in some way explain the chaos of reality. This does not mean that the billion-footed beast of realism is somehow superior to the maze of the metafictional funhouse. Metafiction questions how fiction is used to construct reality; this does not mean it is superior to realism. After all, the first modern European novel contained its own metafiction; the one compliments the other. As Woolley maintains, "a self-reflexive narrative is still narrative; as such, it is pervaded by voice" (481). It is voice of the realist writer that provides a cohesive and entertaining reflection of the world in a realist work, and it is the voice of the metafictional writer which prevents his self-reflexive work from becoming a sterile literary experiment.

Chapter Three

Stories are made out of Stories: Literary Influence and *The Weight of a Human Heart*

In a rare interview, the American novelist Cormac McCarthy, when questioned about his literary debt to William Faulkner, stated, "The ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written" (qtd. in Woodward). McCarthy's observation can, of course, equally be applied to other forms, including poetry and the short story, and embodies a view of literary influence that has been most famously explored by Harold Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence (*1973). For McCarthy, influence is ugly, but it is an escapable reality. McCarthy's choice of the word "fact" here is interesting, suggesting that influence is empirical, and can be weighted, categorised and charted. For Bloom, influence is also an inescapable part of the act of literary creation, though it is more unclear than hard fact. The act of reading is, for Bloom, an act of influence, and no writer can avoid reading. Bloom states, "To be influenced is to be taught, and a young writer reads to seek instruction" (8). Influence, then, is inevitable, and is, according to Bloom, a source of anxiety, guilt and other Freudian responses, echoing McCarthy's use of the adjective "ugly." However, there are other, more positive and even celebratory views of influence. Kenneth Koch, for instance, claimed, "I'm a writer who likes to be influenced," refuting the idea of "the act of creativity…as a Napoleonic imposition of one's uniqueness on the universe" (qtd. in Lethem). If a writer gives up on the idea of being original, and accepts they debt they owe other writers, it is suggested, much of Bloom's anxiety and McCarthy's ugliness of influence would dissipate.

This positive view of influence has been championed by Jonathan Lethem who has claimed, in the case of Bob Dylan, that his "…originality and his appropriation are as one" (Lethem); that is, there is no difference between Dylan's artistic influences and his artistic creativity. Lethem then extends this argument to encompass not just music, but all art including writing, his argument demonstrated by the fact that much of writing is plagiarised from other writers, as Lethem himself freely admits. For Lethem influence can be an ecstatic, not an anxious experience. In fact, the term "influence" is, as Primeau (5) notes, derived from the Latin *influere* meaning to flow in, suggesting a process that is natural, as in the flow of water. Influence, then, can be seen as an ugly process, an unavoidable process, a celebratory process, a neutral process, or a natural process.

An examination of literary influence is necessary because *The Weight of a Human Heart* is freighted with references to other books and other writers. Indeed, the collection is a product of influence; many of the stories that it contains directly owe their existence to texts that have preceded them. This chapter will therefore discuss the anxiety and the ecstasy of influence in the formation of my short story collection. First, the theory of literary influence will be examined in detail, and then the major literary influences on *The Weight of a Human Heart* will be analysed and discussed.

Influence: Anxious or Ecstatic?

As previously noted, perhaps the most influential study of literary influence is critic Harold Bloom's, *The Anxiety of Influence*. In his study, Bloom (4) notes an important point of departure from his predecessors, claiming that before his *Anxiety*, studies of literary influence considered the process of influence to be an unthreatening one. Bloom took a radically different view, arguing that the great works of the past do not exist solely as a positive force, or merely as a source of inspiration for the writer of the present. Indeed, for Bloom (10) inspiration *is* influence. The relationship between art and artists of the "now" and "then" is complicated, and mainly a source of negative emotions, such as the anxiety of the book's title; but also melancholy, guilt and fear. For instance, Bloom cites the poetry of Oscar Wilde as having been detrimentally affected by influence, with Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" described as being so in thrall to the style of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as to be an "embarrassment" (6).

According to Bloom (60), even great artists such as Dante, Milton and Goethe suffered from this anxiety. This artistic disquiet is also manifested, Bloom maintains, in a strange kind of guilt (115) and also in a fear that previous writers have exhausted all the avenues of art (148). This particular fear appears to be at least as old as the act of writing itself, as Barth ("Literature" 206) wryly notes, citing one of the world's earliest known documents, from Egypt, around four thousand years ago: a scribe's lament that there were no new themes to write about. Of course, the nameless scribe's concerns appear laughable now, but it demonstrates the truth in at least some of Bloom's arguments.

In his study, Bloom identified six "revisionary ratios" of poetic influence. These include *clinamen* where "a poet swerves away from his precursor," (14) *tessera*, where a poet "completes" his precursor's work, "as though the precursor had failed to go far enough" (14) and *kenosis* "a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor" (14). Though

Bloom's argument is well-written and persuasive, delving into Freudian ideas of the subconscious, it has been criticised for a number of reasons. Bloom's Oedipal framework is defined, as Paul (432) argues "in exclusively masculine terms" and appears to exclude female writers from his theoretical framework. Furthermore, Hogan (7) points out a pertinent criticism of Bloom's theory: the absolute lack of empirical proof to support it. Hogan's observation is an important one that any discussion of literary influence must bear in mind. While literature does not, and indeed cannot, exist in a vacuum, there are limitations in the study of literary influence. For instance, much discussion of influence relies on insights and analyses of the writer's subconscious, and one could reasonably argue that since influence is not conscious, it cannot be analysed, examined or identified with any precision. Primeau (3) even questions whether the study of influence is a legitimate form of criticism. He further notes, "Even when explained in the most intricate critical language, an influence is always a series of irreducible experiential encounters between works and readers. Bold yet unverifiable hypotheses about what actually happens in these interactions form the core of theories about literary history, the origins of poetic creativity, and the meaning of audience response" (3). If influence is indeed irreducible and unable to be explained with any accuracy by critical language, the entire study of literary influence is called into question. The study of literary influence, if this argument is accepted, appears to be somewhat akin to the study of gravity before Isaac Newton; it obviously exists, but no one knows how it works.

Bloom (6) gives one example of a bold yet unverifiable hypothesis when he argues that "an anxiety is *achieved* in a literary work, whether or not its author ever felt it." A sceptical response to this might be: if the author never felt the anxiety, how do we know it was achieved? Bloom (96) further maintains, "Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem," but it remains to be seen whether critics are discovering these roads, or creating them themselves. This question is explicitly posed by Stafford, in his exploration of how books "talk" to other books. After discovering linkages between the work of Henry James, William James and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Stafford was left unsure if these linkages actually pre-existed his research, or if he himself had created them (5).

While Bloom, on the one hand, insists influence is omnipresent, inescapable and subconscious, other theories of influence have taken entirely the opposite approach and insist influence can be categorised with precision. An example of this can be found in Hermeren's discussion of influence, where, following an intricate diagram it is explained:

The arrows (1), (2), and (3) stand for production-relations: *A* created *X*, *P* created *Z*, and *B* created *Y*. moreover, *P* at some time saw or read X and became influenced by *X*(4), and this influence is discernible in *Z*. Later on, *B* saw or read *Z* and became influenced by it (5) and traces of this influence are discernible in *Y* (33).

If Bloom's assertion of "hidden roads" is too vague, then arguably Hermeren's assertion of influence as a roadmap with arrows leading off to various destinations is surely too precise.

This idea of influence as something that can be precisely measured by a critic, or a writer, was argued against by E.M. Forster, who observed that no writer thinks, "I live under Queen Victoria, I under Anne, I carry on the tradition of Trollope, I am reacting against Aldous Huxley" (5). Most writers simply write. The study of literary influence cannot, then, be reduced to an equation, but nor should it be relegated entirely to the misty and conveniently unknowable unconscious. Any examination of influence must reflect the fact that, as Hogan states, it is:

> not reducible to a list of references and straightforward borrowings, though these are certainly important. To examine the influence of one writer on another is, rather, to see the vague presence of a precursor in the complex dhvani of a work, to seek a pattern in one text through which the shaded patterns of other texts are still visible (xii).

If Hogan is correct, identifying influence is a difficult, perhaps nebulous task, but not an impossible one. This is especially true in postmodern works, which Cowart states often utilise what he has termed "literary symbiosis," the most direct and obvious form of literary influence (2). Literary symbiosis goes beyond the idea of influence being subconscious or merely imitative to identify a more explicit relationship between the writer and the work they have been influenced by. Cowart argues (12) that working in a clearly identifiable artistic tradition may not be a stage the writer passes through on the way to a mature style of their own, but in the postmodern age, imitating a traditional form or style can actually be a sign of originality, as in the work of Nabokov, Calvino, Borges and others. Cowart's theory of literary symbiosis moves beyond Bloom's idea of the anxiety of influence, with its focus on the subconscious and its *clinamen*, *tessera*, and *kenosis*.

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Biological symbiosis is defined as a close relationship that is mutually advantageous to both organisms, and literary symbiosis is no different. The influenced text is not trying to overcome the original; indeed, it owes its existence to the original, and in turn, the original text is seen in a new light through the prism of the influenced text. Notable examples of literary symbiosis include the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Stoppard's play views the tragedy of *Hamlet* through the eyes of two minor characters who are unaware that Hamlet's undoing will also prove to be their own. The dramatic action of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* exists in the gaps between the scenes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and relies on the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's play to inform Stoppard's. After watching Stoppard's play it is impossible to return to *Hamlet* without seeing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a new light, and to imagine the lives of the two courtiers continuing behind the main action of the play. Here is an example of literary symbiosis; the source text, and the text that has been influenced by it, both gain an extra dimension from the existence of the other. The debt here goes beyond literary influence: Stoppard's play would not exist without Shakespeare's; even the title is a line from *Hamlet*.

Another example of literary symbiosis can be seen in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* which gives a voice to Bertha Rochester, the mad woman in the attic from *Jane Eyre*. In Rhys's novel the least of what we discover about the character is that Bertha is not her real name. *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals and interrogates previously unquestioned aspects of Bronte's novel. On the other hand, Rhys's novel could not have existed without Bronte's, and draws its tragic power from it. As in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the reader is aware of the sad fate awaiting the protagonist before the novel even begins, so that a reading of the influenced work is dramatically shaped by a reading of the original text, and the original text comes to be influenced by the reading of the influenced work. Here, anxiety is overcome by the deconstruction and reconstruction of the source text. As Cowart notes, "To deconstruct is always, paradoxically, to make new- at least where literature is concerned. As literary symbiosis, deconstruction at once foregrounds a universal intertextuality, and makes possible the continued production of new art from the seemingly exhausted loins of old art" (25–26). Instead of attempting something new, in literary symbiosis the old is *made* new, and this process offers fresh interpretations of both the source text and the work it has inspired. The newer work is not only explicitly influenced by the older work, but it owes its very existence to that work.

It has been argued that influence can be either a subconscious or explicit process, and involves being influenced in a movement towards a precursor (the ecstatic movement), or away from a precursor (the anxious movement). There is also another kind of influence that I became aware of as I was writing my collection. At times, I was certain that I had written an entirely original story, only to discover, with some dismay, months and sometimes years later, that another writer had already had a similar idea. This experience would have come as no surprise to Borges, who stated:

> In the critics vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotations of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future (201).

If Bloom's precursors are rivals to the modern writer, a source of anxiety and competition, with typical Borgesian logic, the Argentinean reverses Bloom's idea. Precursors do not create the work of a modern writer; the work of the modern writer creates its own precursors. Anticipating Borges, T.S. Eliot noted "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (*Points of View* 25–26). In the writing of *The Weight of a Human Heart* and in the associated reading of many American, South American, European and Australian stories and novels, my experience confirmed the ideas of Borges and Eliot. On numerous occasions I discovered themes, ideas and forms from my own work repeated and anticipated in writers I had never heard of at the time I wrote that particular story. The clearest example of this is in my short story, "An Australian Short Story," which is made up entirely of lines from over one hundred and forty Australian short stories. Shortly after completing this work I came across "Times Without Numbers," by Gilbert Sorrentino, in which the story is made up of lines from fifty-nine different authors, as well as lines from Sorrentino's previous work. I also found a cento written by Michael Sharkey, "Where the Bunyip Builds its Nest: Five Centos," which uses lines from Australian poetry in the same way my story uses lines from Australian prose. Sharkey's poem was written at roughly the same time as my short story, though I had no knowledge of it until two years later. Similarly, my short story, "Figures in a Marriage" which tells of the disintegration of a couple's relationship through graphs and charts, might be said to be clearly indebted to Jennifer Egan's short story told through PowerPoint, "Great Rock and Roll Pauses." However, I did not read Egan's story until after finishing my own.

And yet, these writers have by some mysterious process become my precursors, and would be treated as such should any critic take the time to compare my work to theirs.

Literary influence, then, exists in many different forms, some of them mysterious, some of them more easily identifiable, but all of them complex. Tolstoy spoke of influence as "...that endless labyrinth of linkages that make up the stuff of art..." (qtd. in Bloom *Anatomy* vi), and in writing of the influences behind my short story collection, I am mindful that I do not have the space or time to wander endlessly in this labyrinth. A guide, therefore is needed to find my way through the maze, and this guide is made up of the works of those writers who I feel have been the most concrete and explicit influences on my work. This discussion of the writers and books that have influenced me will necessarily be a limited one, and one that, while acknowledging Bloom's theory of influence, does not necessarily draw from it. As will be seen, my personal view of literary influence is more ecstatic than anxious, and influence in *The Weight of a Human Heart* owes more to Cowart's theory of literary symbiosis than to Bloom's anxiety.

I have chosen two writers, and one group of writers, whose work explicitly influenced me before and during the writing of my short story collection. Of course, it could be argued that hundreds of writers have influenced me subconsciously, and while this may be true, it is impossible to discuss with any accuracy. Therefore, my discussion of influence will focus only on those writers whose influence on my work is unambiguous, and acknowledged. I would, however, unreservedly accept one facet of Bloom's theory of influence, that of *clinamen* where "a poet swerves away from his precursor" (14). Much of my writing has been guided by a conscious decision to distance myself, at least in part, from the realist tradition in Australian short fiction, as can be seen by the experimental nature of several of my stories.

The work of James Joyce, especially *Ulysses*, opened up a new world of language and style to me and demonstrated the impact that style can have on the form and content of a story. Similarly, the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, especially *Pale Fire,* encouraged me to experiment with form in my short stories, and by utilising previously established forms, parody them. Lastly, the influence of the French experimental writing group, the Oulipo, can be seen in several of my stories that use self-imposed literary constraints and that play games with the reader. The work of each of these writers will be explored, followed by an examination of their influence on *The Weight of a Human Heart.*

James Joyce: Language and Style

Any discussion of modern literature, whether realist or experimental, cannot escape the shadow of the Irish novelist and short story writer James Joyce. In *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and most significantly, *Ulysses*, Joyce left a legacy that, Brown notes (xvi), all writers from Britain have had to work within, or attempt to distance themselves from. According to Tew (135), B.S. Johnson once claimed that Joyce was the novel's Einstein, echoing T.S. Eliot's comparison of Joyce to the great scientist (*Selected Prose* 177). Johnson was only one of many postmodern writers, whether American or European, who acknowledged Joyce as their "principal inspiration" (Brown xvii). Joyce's status in the development of the novel is such that his friend and contemporary Ezra Pound designated the period after *Ulysses* was published as P.S.U. or *post scriptum Ulysses* (Sherry 104). For Pound then, all literature after *Ulysses* was an afterthought. For T.S. Eliot, *Ulysses* was "a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape" (*Selected Prose* 175), an observation which seems to be as much lament as compliment. It would appear then that all writers after Joyce owe him a debt, whether they like it or not.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its reputation for "impenetrability, bewildering experimentalism, obscurity and inaccessibility" (Mullin 99), *Ulysses* has generated an endless amount of exegeses, analyses, discussion, debate and disagreement. All of these would no doubt have delighted Joyce, who claimed to have "put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant" (qtd. in Ellman *James Joyce* 521). It is easy to become lost in the many enigmas and puzzles in Joyce's work, and not only in *Ulysses*; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Dubliners*, while less formally complex, also resist easy interpretation. This discussion of Joyce's work will limit itself to the writer's use of language and myriad styles in these works. (*Finnegans Wake* is excluded because it has had no influence on my work, except, perhaps, as a warning on the limits of style. I have tried and failed to read Joyce's final novel several times over the last decade, and have always given up within fifty pages, finding the language impenetrable.)

Though Joyce's literary reputation is now more secure than perhaps any other novelist's, his career was marked by frustration and false starts. *Dubliners* was completed in 1905, and over the next several years accepted by various publishers who then changed their mind because of its perceived obscenity. It was not until 1913, when his collection came to the attention of Ezra Pound, who championed it, that Joyce began to enjoy a measure of success, and *Dubliners* finally appeared in 1914. In the same year, *A Portrait of the Artist as*

a Young Man began to appear in serialised form in the journal "The Egoist" and Joyce also began the novel that would come to be known as *Ulysses*. This was initially serialised in "The Little Review" from 1918, and published by Shakespeare and Company in 1922, on Joyce's fortieth birthday. Joyce then turned to *Work in Progress* which, after a long gestation, became *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939 (Norris "Biographical" 1–20).

Dubliners is, as the title suggests, a collection of short stories set in Dublin, at the turn of the twentieth century. The fifteen stories are written in a clear, naturalistic style that paradoxically only serves to render them more oblique, and resistant to interpretation. The stories are arranged in a loosely chronological fashion, with stories of childhood and adolescence ("The Sisters," "An Encounter") making way for stories of adulthood (Sherry 19) and finally, death. Joyce described the stories in *Dubliners* as *epicleti*, apparently meaning that they were to be thought of as moments of transformation analogous to the transformation of bread and wine in the Catholic Church (Brown 3). While several of the stories end on a note of transformation or epiphany, many do not, and resist such simple categorisation. As Connor (9) notes, the stories in *Dubliners* began as sketches, a form coincidentally preferred by Henry Lawson, whose *While the Billy Boils* appeared in 1896, only nine years before Joyce completed *Dubliners*. Lawson's sketches are descriptions of everyday incidents told in a clear, realist style, but Joyce's stories, though utilising plots that are, on the surface, not so different from those Lawson might have used (truanting schoolboys, the schemes of a matchmaking mother) stubbornly defy meaning. Lawson's realist style reveals his story to the reader in a way that Joyce's style of "reserve, indefiniteness, obliquity" (Connor 9) refuses to. As Connor has argued, whereas Joyce's later works, *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, abound in possible meanings, stuffed as they are with Joyce's puzzles and enigmas, in *Dubliners*, the "stories are enigmatic because they not only withhold their meaning, but also conceal whether there is a hidden meaning to be distinguished" (17). Paradoxically then, *Dubliners*, while being the "easiest" of Joyce's works to read in terms of language and style, is among the most difficult to interpret. If Lawson used a clear style to lucidly signal to the reader the themes and meaning of his story, Joyce used a clear style to make themes and meaning ambiguous, and perhaps ultimately unresolvable.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce's experiments with language and style evolve further. The main character of the novel is Stephen Daedalus, who will also appear in *Ulysses*. *Portrait* follows Daedalus from early childhood to maturity throughout turbulent political times in Ireland's history, as he struggles to transcend the influence of his

family, religion and nationality to form his own self-identity as an artist. If *Dubliners* saw Joyce working within, yet pushing the limits of, the nineteenth century fictional conventions that a writer such as Lawson would have recognised, *Portrait* saw Joyce abandon them (Mullin 100). *Portrait* is an explicitly modernist text. The language and style of the novel are inextricably bound up in that of the main character. While it is true that modernist writers such as Conrad had experimented with refracting reality through the consciousness of their characters, Mullin states "…Joyce pushed these experiments further in order to create a pointed separation between author and text, in an attempt to emancipate his fiction from an overbearing and inauthentic authorial presence" (101). This attempt at "emancipation" is demonstrated in *Portrait's* opening pages:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo …
>
> His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: his father had a hairy face.
>
> He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt …
>
> When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had a queer smell, His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance (3).

Here is reality as seen, not through the eyes of an adult writing about childhood, but through the eyes of a child *experiencing* it. There is no trace of, as Holden Caulfield famously put it, "all that David Copperfield kind of crap" (Salinger 1) in the story of Stephen's childhood. The reader is not the omniscient narrator, watching the child, and neither are they the grown up character, recalling what they experienced when they were a child. Instead, the reader *is* the child, and must attempt to construct order from the child's observations. The novel opens with the words, "Once upon a time," a phrase which has all the universality of a fairy-tale, but the fairy-tale is personalised; it is the story of Stephen, or baby tuckoo, as his father sings to him. Here, Joyce uses language to mirror Stephen's half-formed consciousness. For instance, in the quoted passage, the repetition of "his father" and the colons between each observation, "His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: his father had a hairy face" reflect the simplicity of a child's understanding.

There is no cause and effect, only a series of events, one after the other. Similarly, Stephen's description of wetting the bed focusses on feelings of comfort and discomfort; warmth and cold. He feels no humiliation. The smell of the oilsheet leads Stephen to think of his mother, and how he dances for her. The opening pages demonstrate Stephen's concern with himself. Like any child, his mother and father exist only in relation to Stephen and his needs, and Joyce's language reflects this.

Throughout the novel, as Stephen becomes older and his understanding of the complexities of the world grows, so too the language used to describe that world becomes increasingly intricate. By the end of the novel, Stephen, now no longer a "you" or a "baby tuckoo" but an "I" can say, "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smith of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (Joyce *Portrait* 275–276). In *Portrait*, many of the other million encounters Stephen has with reality are described, though in a fragmented and incomplete way. Years pass with little explanation, and, as Brown (40) points out, "most of the conventionally important key events [in his boyhood] happen offstage, as it were, in the gaps." Joyce is not interested in the conventional rites of passage of a young man; instead he is concerned with the growth of his consciousness, which reflects and refracts the reality Stephen experiences. In *Portrait* the different stages of Stephen's consciousness are intimately linked, as Connor (39) maintains, "with a style or succession of styles that themselves appear to develop and grow." Whereas *Ulysses* employs a bewildering number of styles to describe the events and characters of a single day in Dublin, style in *Portrait* is tied to one character, Stephen. This kind of interior monologue is typically referred to as "stream of consciousness" but Mullin (101) prefers the term, "coloured narrative- narrative infected by the idiom of the character and thereby achieving a curious independence from its author." As Brown (32) argues, this focus on Stephen's consciousness, with "the importance of its episodic and fragmentary qualities, its imbrication of many styles and languages…inspire an active readerly construction of meaning and order." In other words, through style and language, Stephen's experience of trying to understand the world is mirrored by the reader's trying to understand Stephen's reality. This process has led Brown (31) to suggest the protagonist of *Portrait* is not so much the artist struggling towards self-consciousness, but the reader struggling towards an active critical engagement with the text. Joyce's decision to excise an omniscient narrator from the novel therefore makes the book "radically unstable" (Mullin 102) as there is no single clear picture of the main character. Stephen is a different person at different stages of his life, as are we all. Just as the clarity of language and style paradoxically made *Dubliners* more

opaque, so, then, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is also a conundrum; an autobiographical novel in which the main character remains essentially unknowable, despite the reader seeing the world through his eyes.

If *Portrait* was indeed about the creation of a heroic critical reader, then this reader would find an even more difficult challenge in constructing meaning from Joyce's next work, *Ulysses*. The plot of *Ulysses* seems hardly enough for a short story, let alone one of the longer novels in English literature; Leopold Bloom, an average man, visits several places around Dublin on 16th June 1904, encountering various characters (including Stephen Daedalus from *Portrait*) before returning in the evening to the arms of his wife, Molly. However, underlying this story are hundreds, if not thousands, of historical and cultural allusions and correspondences. One of these allusions is signified by the otherwise baffling title; the story of Leopold Bloom returning home is the story of Ulysses returning to his wife Penelope. *Ulysses* the novel does several (and at times, it appears, several dozen) things simultaneously. It is at the same time a conventional realist novel and a merciless parody of realist novels. It is both novel and anti-novel (Johnson "Introduction" xvii), and it has an epic scope which is used to depict the most commonplace events.

Joyce himself described *Ulysses* as a novel, then an epic, an encyclopaedia, and at last simply a book (Johnson "Introduction" xiii). Perhaps fittingly then, *Ulysses* has no definitive form, due to its long and tortuous path to eventual publication in France. Each of the eighteen chapters corresponds with an episode from *The Odyssey*, with the characters in these chapters conforming to various mythological figures from that story, including Telemachus (Stephen Daedalus) and Penelope (Molly). That is only the beginning. Each chapter also relates in diverse ways with a particular colour, a particular symbol, a particular part of the body, and a particular branch of the arts (Sherry 114–117). Nabokov, while accepting the Homeric allusions in *Ulysses*, characteristically dismissed the rest of the correspondences as "dull nonsense" (*Lectures* 288) and while this may or may not be true, it does not concern us here. Instead, we are concerned, as with *Dubliners* and *Portrait* with Joyce's use of language and style. Indeed, each chapter of *Ulysses* is written in a different style, amounting to a "virtual encyclopaedia of narrative technique" (Brown 69).

Joyce's decision to radically experiment with style in his novel was integral to its composition. "I am doing it by different means in different parts," (qtd. in Brown 64) he wrote to Ezra Pound. In another letter he said that his book was "an encyclopaedia" where each chapter would "create its own technique" (*Selected Letters* 271) and again he describes "the task I set myself technically in writing a book from eighteen different points of view

and in [not quite] as many styles' (*Letters of James Joyce* 167). In fact, so important was the style of each chapter in Joyce's conception of the work that when revising *Ulysses* for final publication, he returned to earlier chapters which had already been published in serial form, and further radically altered their style (Walton Litz 40).

The stylistic fireworks that have awed and alienated readers in equal measure are absent from the first few chapters of *Ulysses*. The novel opens in conventional style with the chapter, "Telemachus." (It should be noted that, although Joyce gave each chapter a Homeric title while writing the novel, these titles were removed before publication (Nabokov *Lectures* 288). However, they will be used here for the sake of clarity.) The first chapter follows Stephen Daedalus and his friend Buck Mulligan as they get ready and go out for a swim. This, and the next two chapters ("Nestor" and "Proteus") which follow Stephen as he goes to work, teaching, and then to the beach, have been described as "relatively straightforward" (Brown 64), as evidenced by their utilisation of a number of established modernist literary techniques. As in *Portrait*, the external world is refracted through the eyes of the characters and most of the action is in the form of an interior monologue. From chapter four, the narrative switches from Daedalus to Leopold Bloom, and the same three hours are described again, this time through Bloom's eyes ("Calypso," "Lotus-eaters," "Hades"). These first six chapters have been described by Sherry as an "overture" (17) in which Joyce expertly deploys the standard techniques of modernism, namely "a lack of emphasis on plot, the development of separate but finely etched scenes, the use of interior monologue to centre the presentation in the elusively intense consciousness of the protagonist" (Sherry 17). In many ways, these chapters appear to represent a continuation of, rather than a development of, the sophisticated style Joyce developed in the later chapters of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

However, it is with chapter seven, "Aeolus" that a definitive stylistic break occurs. "Aeolus" marks the moment when Joyce's main concern moves from the psychological state of his characters, as commonly found in a realist novel, to experiments in style. It is "Aeolus," which "sets the tone for later chapters" as Mullin (104) argues. "Aeolus" follows Bloom into the offices of a Dublin newspaper where he discusses terms for running an advertisement. The Homeric correspondence of Aeolus, who provided Odysseus with a bag containing the western wind to help drive his ship back to Ithica, is exploited by Joyce in the form of hyperbole, rhetoric and other "windy" language. The most obvious demonstration of this (and that which most clearly signals the novel's severance from realist convention) is the headlines that are interspersed throughout the chapter, commenting in a generally ironic way

on the action. For instance, after the narrative follows Daedalus for some time, Bloom's reintroduction is hailed with the headline "RETURN OF BLOOM" (Joyce *Ulysses* 140). Similarly, when the editor of the newspaper approaches Stephen to write an article, the section is headlined in the form of (presumably) an advertisement. "YOU CAN DO IT!" (130).

In "Aeolus" written and verbal communication at work (in the newspaper) and at leisure (as the characters move to a local pub) are parodied. As Johnson ("Introduction" xxxii) has noted, "Aeolus" employs at least ninety five rhetorical devices to help create its uniquely overblown style. From this point in the novel, Joyce's focus moves from character to style; indeed Johnson (xxi) argues that "Character here is style." The literary conventions adhered to in the first six chapters are abandoned, and after "Aeolus" each chapter of the novel is told in a radically different style. As the axis of the novel turns from character and plot to style, Sherry (4) notes, "Each chapter dilates into a stylistic performance, shifting its source of energy from the linear continuum of plot or sequential events to language itself." Therefore, as the style dilates, less and less actually "happens." For instance, in "Penelope," which features Molly Bloom's famous internal monologue, external "action" is limited to Molly's getting out of bed and going to the chamber pot. However, her interior monologue is rich and teeming with incidents, memories and observations about her life, her husband and her lovers.

Other chapters of *Ulysses* adopt the style of the various Homeric episodes they are based on, though sometimes in an oblique fashion. These styles include musical techniques and onomatopoeia, incorporating the sound of Bloom's breaking wind in "Sirens" (Staten), a parody of women's magazines ("Nausicaa") a monstrous narrator, the "I" of "Cyclops" and even a "vaudeville version" (Ellman "Backgrounds" 19–20) of *Venus in Furs* in "Circe" which takes the form of a script for a play or film. "Ithaca," Joyce wrote to a friend, was written "in the form of a mathematical catechism. All events are resolved into their cosmic, physical, psychical etc. equivalents" (qtd. in Walton Litz 45). An example of this is when Bloom pours a drink for himself and Stephen, and the question is asked, "What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier, returning to the range, admire?" (Joyce *Ulysses* 624). The answer begins, "Its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level: its vastness in the ocean of Mercator's projection: …" (624) and so continues on, listing over forty other qualities of water Bloom esteems, in just under five hundred words. This is an obvious example of "dilation of style" as the focus is entirely on style, not incident. Joyce's purpose here, as in many of the other chapters, is

parody. In "Ithica" the realist convention of providing details to capture reality is stretched to breaking point and beyond.

So important is style to Joyce, that one chapter of *Ulysses*, "Oxen of the Sun," is entirely devoted to Joyce's mimicking the major styles of English literature from the alliteration of epic poetry, to the novelists and essayists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Iser 32–34). "Ithica," which sees Bloom and Stephen visit a maternity hospital, offers nine sections (mirroring the nine months of pregnancy) which allude to, pastiche and parody every imaginable literary style in English literature in quick succession. As Johnson states, the portrayal of the characters changes with each adopted style, and the styles, generally progressing in complexity, are meant to mirror the growth of a foetus ("Notes" 906–907). Johnson further suggests that, because, the chapter does not end with a contemporary style, but devolves into pidgin, Joyce is signifying that he is destroying and exhausting these styles (907). This is a claim Virginia Woolf would have endorsed, having once observed, "*Ulysses* destroyed the whole of the 19th Century … It showed up the futility of all English styles" (qtd. in Johnson 907). However, Iser argues that this is not the case at all; Joyce's intent, by deploying such an enormous range of styles in "Oxen of the Sun" and elsewhere in the novel, is to demonstrate that reality is so complex it cannot be explained or grasped by viewing it through only one style (35—37).

Joyce's stylistic experimentations in *Ulysses* are not empty gestures. Each style adopted by different chapters is allied to the content and themes explored in the chapter. While some readers might pine for the earlier, easier chapters of the "overture" written in a more recognisable style, Joyce's later chapters are an incredible *tour de force*, making use of every available literary style in English, from the nineteenth century realists, to newspapers, allegories, and histories. (Walton Litz 56). Nabokov argued that although there was "no special reason" (*Lectures* 288) for Joyce to use so many styles, by "changing the vista… changing the prism and the viewpoint … you see a greener grass, a fresher world" (289). This is true. The world of the novel remains as fresh as when it was first published.

While Sherry has claimed that the characteristics of a conventional novel, including an omniscient narrator, a linear plot, psychologically credible characters and mimetic realism "cannot survive the colossal novelty of *Ulysses*" (104) the fact of the matter is that they have. Much to the chagrin of B.S. Johnson, *Ulysses* did not annihilate the well-made novel, at least for readers; it went on as before, and still does. For writers, on the other hand, *Ulysses* remains an imposing monument of style and technique. If it did not destroy the well-made novel, it did, and still does, make writers question its premises. In "Oxen of the Sun,"

"Ithaca," "Penelope" and other chapters, *Ulysses* offers an endlessly inventive fusion of style, language and content. And although Joyce's creative energies are directed towards stylistic effects in much of *Ulysses*, it is important to remember, as Sheehan (10) states, Bloom and Stephen are never entirely sidelined. Even in the midst of Joyce's stylistic flourishes the reader will still laugh with Bloom, and feel sympathy for him. Bloom is all the more human, the more multifaceted, as his actions and thoughts are viewed in wildly differing styles, and not simply a naturalistic one. It is interesting, if ultimately futile, to speculate what impact *Ulysses* might have had on the largely realist Australian fiction of the twentieth century had it not been banned in Australia alongside *Dubliners* in the 1920s (Murray-Smith "Censorship" 78).

Joyce and *The Weight of a Human Heart*

The influence of Joyce's ostentatious stylistic experimentation can be found in several stories in *The Weight of a Human Heart, particularly in* "A Story in Writing," "My English Homework," "Four Letter Words," and "An Australian Short Story." "A Story in Writing," though infinitely more modest in ambition and execution than Joyce's novel, was initially conceived as a tribute to *Ulysses*. While each chapter of *Ulysses* adopts a different style, so each of the twenty-nine sections of "A Story in Writing" is told in a different style, from free verse, to anachronisms, Homeric simile and haiku. I had not written anything for a period of about a year before writing "A Story in Writing" and I was worried that I might never write anything again. I hoped that by "changing the prism" of my writing, I might escape the writer's block I found myself in, and so I determined, after *Ulysses*, to write a story in as many different styles as I could. My ambitions were, of course, infinitely more modest than Joyce's, and consequently far more achievable. "A Story in Writing" was written in only a few days.

The plot of the story is as well-worn and inconsequential as that of *Ulysses*; a man pursues his best friend's wife. But the different styles adopted to tell each section of the story are intended to rejuvenate the somewhat tired central storyline. For instance, a scene where the three main characters exchange small talk in a book shop is undercut by annotations which ridicule or reveal the subtext in much of what they are saying. In another scene, Frank and Callie meet alone for the first time in a café, and their breathless attraction is parodied by the hyperbolic style. "A Story in Writing" is filled with literary allusions, including some to *Ulysses* itself; the "Bowdlerise" section of the story is a humorous reference to the trouble

Joyce had with censors. Some of the sections are intended to challenge the reader; For instance, the meaning of the sections "Epizeuxis" and "Prolepsis" (which themselves sound like Joycean words) may not be immediately clear to the reader. While Ulysses has "so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries" (Joyce qtd. in Ellman *James Joyce* 521), my intention was that "A Story in Writing" would keep the professors busy for, perhaps, an afternoon.

A major echo of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be found in my short story, "My English Homework." As noted above, one of the distinctive features of *A Portrait* is in its use of style to depict a rapidly growing and maturing consciousness. At the beginning of the novel, Stephen is a very young boy, and his simplistic language is a reflection of this. By the end of the novel, the sophistication of Stephen's consciousness is mirrored in the sophistication of the language he uses in his journal. On a more modest scale, in "My English Homework," Stephen's development is reproduced in the character of Grace, a Rwandan refugee living in Australia. Grace's story is told through the homework she completes for her English language class. Whereas Stephen's simplistic language at the beginning of *A Portrait* is a reflection of his very young age, Grace is an adult, but her English language skills are only as developed as those of a child, as can be seen in her week two homework, describing her house: "In our house there is a live rooms. In live room theirs is couch. On couch is my husband. On his hand there is beers." Stephen's consciousness and language develop apace, but Grace is fully conscious of her situation, though unable to express herself for some time. Her basic description of her husband with "beers" is an indicator that she is fully aware of what kind of man he is.

By the end of *A Portrait*, Stephen's developing consciousness and language eventually offer him a way out of the stifling atmosphere of Ireland; similarly, over the course of months, rather than Stephen's years, Grace's increasing linguistic sophistication offers her an escape from her violent and abusive husband. Mirroring her increasing confidence in using the English language, she becomes increasingly assertive in dealing with her husband, so that she is finally able to escape him, even taunting him with his own poor English. By the end of both their stories, Grace and Stephen are contemplating leaving their homes for Europe.

Echoes of Joyce can also be found in "Four Letter Words" and "An Australian Short Story." Each section of "Four Letter Words," like the "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses* has a subheading; in *Ulysses* these are made up of newspaper headlines which reflect the following section in obvious, and occasionally oblique, ways. This device is used much more

straightforwardly in "Four Letter Words" where each chapter heading consists of a swear word. "An Australian Short Story," on the other hand, owes something to the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of *Ulysses.* In this chapter, as has been discussed in some detail above, Joyce attempts to mimic a bewildering range of literary styles, from Pidgin English, to the essayists of the eighteenth century. "An Australian Short Story" also demonstrates a range of styles, though in a much more limited scope, borrowing lines from Australian short fiction from the early nineteenth to the twenty first century. Thus the diverse styles of Marcus Clarke, and David Malouf, separated by almost a century, are juxtaposed:

> 'If you have anything to say to me sir,' (the dusky pale of her cheeks illuminated by two spots of crimson) 'you had better say it.'
>
> He stood very still with his face lifted towards the house, as a tradesmen waits who has rung the doorbell, received no answer, and hopes that someone will appear at last at an upper window.

Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun" is, of course, infinitely more complex and ambitious, but "An Australian Short Story" gains a unique patchwork quality from the cornucopia of different styles that its structure dictates.

Ulysses and *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* were instrumental in making me aware that realism was only the beginning of literary style, and not the apotheosis. However, Joyce's greatest influence on my work has perhaps been, to return to Bloom's taxonomy of influence, an example of *clinamen* where "a poet swerves away from his precursor" (14). As much as I admire Joyce, his work has also taught me the limits of experimentation. In other words, the puzzles that Joyce so delighted in, and that he hoped would confuse professors can also have the adverse effect of alienating the reader. It is a truism that many sections of *Ulysses* are difficult to understand. The following passage, which opens "Oxen of the Sun" serves as an example:

> Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus.
>
> Send us, bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit.
> Send us, bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit.
>
> Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa! Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa! (366)

A consultation of any one of the many guides or annotations to *Ulysses* will quickly reveal the meaning (or at least one of the meanings) behind such a passage. In this case, "Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!" is apparently "the chant of celebration at the birth of a boy" (Johnson "Notes" 908). Though parts of *Ulysses* are undoubtedly obscure, the fact that each chapter is written in an entirely new style gives some encouragement for the reader to move forward; if one chapter proves impenetrable, the next will arrive soon enough, and since it is written in a different style, it may (or may not) be easier to read. As it turned out, however, *Ulysses* did not mark the end of Joyce's experimentation with language and style. In 1923 he began work on *Finnegans Wake*, whose "unreadability" (Norris *Finnegans* 170) was widely acknowledged during Joyce's lifetime and beyond. When sections of *Finnegans Wake* began to be published under the title *Work in Progress*, even Joyce's most enthusiastic and loyal supporter, Ezra Pound, was perplexed and disappointed, claiming, "Only a divine vision or a new cure for the clap can possibly be worth all the circumnambient peripherization" (qtd. in Newman 120). Joyce's linguistic experiments in *Finnegans Wake* dispense with the last vestiges of realism or mimesis that were employed in *Ulysses*. A random sampling of Joyce's final novel make clear some of the difficulties for the reader:

> Lob. And light your mech. Jeldy! And this is what you'll say. Waaaaaa. Tch! Sluice! Pla! And their, redneck, (for addn't we to gayetsee with Puhl the Punkah's bell)mygh and thy (297).

It is perhaps no surprise that some readers feel "rebuffed and humiliated" (Norris *Finnegans* 182) by *Finnegans Wake*, and though critics and scholars have discovered a plot, characters, and themes in the book, it remains famously, for the most part, impenetrable. If *Finnegans Wake*, as Norris (182) maintains, "will measure [the reader's] capacity for intellectual and imaginative adventure" then many readers, including myself, are simply not intellectual or adventurous enough. Having tried and failed to read *Finnegans Wake* several times in the last five years, even with the aid of many of the scholarly guides and keys the work has attracted, I finally came to the conclusion that reading Joyce's last novel felt like a dreadful chore rather than a pleasure, and I gave up.

The example of *Finnegans Wake* was at the forefront of my mind when I was writing *The Weight of a Human Heart*. While some of my stories are experimental, and

could be considered to break with convention in many ways, I was careful that they should retain enough of a connection to traditional narrative that the reader would not become lost, or if they did become lost, it would not be for long. I continue to admire Joyce for his tireless dedication to his art, and his determination to continue experimenting with style to the end of his life. But while there are no limits to Joyce's imagination, there are limits to mine, as both a reader and a writer, and though I hope to continue to experiment with style and form in the short story, I don't want to leave the reader behind when I do so.

Nabokov: Parody and Patterns

Vladimir Nabokov shares several similarities with James Joyce. Both writers were exiled from their country, though Joyce's exile was by choice and Nabokov's was forced upon him by revolution. Both are key figures in twentieth century literature, and both experimented with the style and form of the novel. Also, both men enjoyed scattering puzzles throughout their work, and expected a high level of engagement from their readers. While Joyce began publishing at the birth of modernism, Nabokov's career writing in English began at roughly the same time as postmodernism's recognition as a movement, though Nabokov would have bridled at his work being labelled in such a manner (Wyllie 171). Indeed, English (74) has claimed Nabokov's *Pale Fire* as an archetypal modernist text, pointing out that Nabokov's artistic interests and preoccupations were fully formed years before the rise of postmodernism. Finally, both Nabokov and Joyce faced censorship of their work, including, as mentioned above, sharing the distinction of having their novels banned in Australia. Nabokov's opinion of Joyce and his writing was complex; while he recognised *Ulysses* as a great work of art, he was also troubled by, among other things, how in the novel "the theme of sex … continually mixed and intertwined with the theme of the latrine" (*Lectures* 287) and the novel's occasional "needless obscurity" (290). That Nabokov criticised Joyce for his obscurity is ironic; obscurity was also a theme of the Russian's work, though Nabokov would no doubt have described it as essential, rather than needless.

Just as in *Ulysses*, where Joyce employed a radically different style in each chapter, so in many of his novels, Nabokov employed a different form. *Pale Fire* is a novel which takes the form of a critical exegesis of a poem, and the poem itself. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* has been described as being in the form of "fictional autobiography" (Bader 10) and also a detective story (Stuart "Laughter" 72–73; Stuart *Nabokov* 1–17) as has *Despair* (Oakley 480–483). *King, Queen, Knave* is structured after motion pictures (Stuart

"Laughter" 78–93) and *Invitation to a Beheading* after a stage play (72). *Pnin*, *Bend Sinister*, *Ada*, *Lolita* and *Glory* also utilised pre-existing literary forms, from memoir to campus novel, to family saga, literary biography and allegory (Bader 10). However, Nabokov does not simply work within these forms, but reworks them for his own purposes, primarily by parodying them.

Kiremidjian defines parody as:

> a kind of literary mimicry which retains the form or stylistic characters of the primary work, but substitutes alien subject matter or content. The parodist proceeds by imitating as closely as possible the formal conventions of the work being parodied in matters of style, diction, metre, rhythm, vocabulary (Kiremidjian 232).

The original and the parody therefore share a curious relationship. The parody necessarily cannot exist without the original, and as Kiremidjian states, because of this, parody was long regarded as an inferior form (232). In a sense, parody bites the hand that feeds it; its existence depends on the original, yet its very existence is a criticism of the original. This paradox can be seen in the term "parody" itself, which as Rose explains, has its linguistic roots in meaning both "nearness and opposition" (33). Parody can also be seen as a direct attack on the original, as in Robert Neumann's definition of parody: "One shoots at a man with the weapon of his own form" (qtd. in Kiremidjian 234). It is true that Nabokov's parodies are sometimes used as weapons. For example, Nabokov had a lifelong hatred of pseudo-scholars, and mocks them mercilessly in his work. But Nabokov's parodies are more than simply literary blunt instruments; instead Nabokov used parody to illuminate his views on art, and by extension, life.

In order for a parody to be successful, it requires a certain level of knowledge on the reader's part. In other words, for a parody to be appreciated, the reader must first be aware of the form that is being parodied (Cosgrove 203). Each of Nabokov's novels, according to Morton, "involves the reader in an effort of disentangling the sham pattern from the meaningful one" (10). Nabokov's first novel in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* for example, takes as its form both literary biography and the detective novel. The narrator is attempting to complete a biography of his late brother, the writer Sebastian Knight. In a traditional detective novel, such as those written by Agatha Christie, clues would be discovered and followed to their source, and there would be revelations and unmaskings. Yet

in Nabokov's novel discoveries are made that lead nowhere, or to entirely unexpected and absurd places, and nothing is resolved at the end. A reader approaching the novel without being aware of the conventions of detective fiction might, therefore, find it a frustrating experience.

Sebastian Knight parodies mystery fiction and literary biography to reveal the slipperiness of reality. Both of these forms provide definitive answers to the reader. At the end of the mystery novel, the culprit is unmasked, the train of clues revealed. At the end of the literary biography, the reader can expect to have learned much about the life and works of the subject. However, the narrator/biographer/detective of *Sebastian Knight* discovers not only that he never really knew his brother, but that it is impossible to know his brother. In fact, the narrator does not even know himself. In utilising the form of the detective novel, Nabokov implicitly invites the reader to solve a puzzle of his novel, as he also does in *Despair*, which is essentially a detective novel without a detective.

By parodying detective fiction and literary biography, Nabokov is calling attention to their artificiality, and by extension, the artificiality of the novel form itself (Stuart *Nabokov* 2) It then follows in Nabokov's fiction, as Stuart asserts, that "since any fiction is a parody of life, the best fiction, or the fiction that is most consciously itself, is the fiction that acknowledges as completely as it can be made to do its parodic nature" ("Laughter" 73). In the novels of Nabokov then, the more they embrace artifice, the more they depart from "realism," a word Nabokov insisted should always be in quotation marks (Stuart *Nabokov* 133) and move towards parody, the more truly realistic they are.

Many of Nabokov's novels, including *Sebastian Knight*, *Laughter in the Dark*, and *Invitation to a Beheading*, end with an acknowledgement and display of the artifice of the fictional world of the novel (Rowe 74). This is most explicit in the latter novel, where the protagonist Cincinnatus comes to realise that the world of the novel he lives in is a sham, a parody of reality, and he is able to walk out of it into another reality (that of the reader/writer?) at the climax. Nabokov's genius allows the reader to care deeply about the fate of his characters, while at the same time constantly reminding the reader that they are only that; characters in a novel. As Bader (4) argues, the reader becomes involved emotionally in Nabokov's novels because of their forms, and not in spite of them. Rather than being merely imitative, Nabokov's skill creates a seeming paradox, where "parody often reinforces the originality of tone" (159) of his work.

Just as Joyce spoke of stuffing *Ulysses* with puzzles and enigmas that would keep professors busy for centuries, Nabokov said of his own work, "I like to fold my magic

carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern on another. Let visitors trip" (*Speak* 139). Nabokov delights in using already established literary patterns (forms) to create new patterns. Similarly, Nabokov's characters are always in search of patterns to give meaning to their life. Unfortunately for them, "the author and the reader share a perception of the patterns invisible to the characters within" (Bader 8). This disparity between what the characters understand of their world, and what the reader understands, is deployed by Nabokov for both humorous and poignant effects. While Nabokov's parodies of form are often wildly funny, they are also concerned with highlighting hypocrisy and cruelty. The parodies are not an end in themselves- they are concerned with deeply moral questions which are explored through innovative formal devices (Hyde 11–12).

Nabokov's parodies then are not only imitations or criticisms of other forms, and neither are they simply games, though Nabokov often invites, and sometimes demands, that readers construct the meaning of the novels for themselves. This can be most clearly seen in Nabokov's masterpiece, *Pale Fire*. At its most basic level, *Pale Fire* is a parody of critical exegesis and the role of the critic. The novel consists of the nine hundred and ninety nine line poem, *Pale Fire*, by John Shade, as well as a foreword to the poem, extensive annotations and an index by Charles Kinbote, a university colleague of the lately deceased Shade's. It soon becomes clear, however, that Kinbote's annotations have very little to do with illuminating Shade's poem, and everything to do with elucidating Kinbote's obsession: that he is actually an exiled King from the European kingdom of Zembla. It is revealed that Kinbote was tracked down by an assassin (Gradus/Grady), and Shade killed in the crossfire. The critic, Kinbote, stole Shade's poem and arranged to have it published along with his own egotistical commentary.

However, by paying close attention to the superimposed patterns of this, perhaps Nabokov's most densely woven magic carpet, the reader can construct another possible version of the story: Kinbote is not a king, but a lunatic who fastens onto the poet Shade in an attempt to make his fantasies real through Shade's poetry. In this reading, Shade is killed not by a Zemblan assassin, but by a common thug who has simply mistaken Kinbote for the judge who sent him to prison. Even here, however, the reader must be careful not to trip. Several other readings of the novel have been put forward by critics, including arguments that Shade is the sole author of *Pale Fire* and Kinbote never existed, or conversely Kinbote is the sole author of *Pale Fire* and Shade never existed, or that the composition of the poem was heavily influenced from beyond the grave by Shade's dead daughter Hazel, or that Kinbote's commentary is influenced by the dead poet Shade *and* his dead daughter (Boyd

"Shade and Shape" 173–224; Boyd "Azure Afterimages" 163–199). As if that were not enough, there is also textual evidence to suggest that Gradus, Kinbote and Shade are one and the same person (Bader 33–41) and it has even been argued that Hamlet is the real author of the text (Ausubel 662).

The reader's questioning of meaning and reality in the novel is echoed by Shade in his poem and parodied by Kinbote in his commentary. Kinbote's utterly misguided understanding of Shade's poem "Pale Fire" casts doubt, by extension, on the reader's understanding of Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. Kinbote's attempt to apprehend Shade's poem is closely analogous to the reader's attempt to apprehend Nabokov's novel; however, since Kinbote's apprehension of the poem is so grossly distorted, he is at the same time a parody of the reader of the novel, and indeed any attempt to criticise or understand a work of art (Hennard 302–303). If *Despair* is a murder mystery without the detective, then the detective in *Pale Fire*, as Oakley (490) notes, is the reader. Detectives in a Nabokov novel must accept that they there is more than one answer to the mystery, and if there is such a thing as a solution to it, they will never be certain of it. Ausubel goes further, claiming, "We're all Kinbotes, reading our own story, our own theories, into the text. I am the unreliable narrator of *Pale Fire*, and so are you" (662).

While Kinbote's commentary provides the most obvious level of parody in the novel *Pale Fire*, John Shade's poem, "Pale Fire" also contains subtle parodic elements, as it references and utilises features of the Russian and Anglo-Saxon literary traditions (Meyer). Meyer further notes that Shade's poem has similarities with Wordsworth's "The Prelude" as a chronicle of artistic awakening (142) and also demonstrates the influence of Coleridge and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, in that it is an attempt to fashion poetry from "lower" forms of English, closer to ordinary speech than the poetic language of the eighteenth century (143–146). Meyer also argues that the language of *Pale Fire* is a parody of Wordsworthian poetry, falling as it does "below acceptable levels of density" (146). This charge is refuted by Boyd, who rejects the idea that Shade's poem is consciously "bad" and instead considers Shade's poem to be Nabokov's greatest poetic achievement (Boyd "Poem and Pattern").

Like so many of Nabokov's characters, Shade suspects there is a meaning and a pattern to his life, if only he could discern it. The poet searches for clues and worries at puzzles in order to come to terms with the death of his daughter, and his own mortality. After a near death experience he finds comfort in the thought:

> Yet it sufficed that I in life could find

Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind

Of correlated pattern in the game,

Plexed artistry, and something of the same

Pleasure in it as they who played it found.

…..

Playing a game of worlds, promoting pawns

To ivory unicorns and ebon fauns

(Nabokov *Pale Fire* 63).

Shade comes to realise that if there is no ultimate answer in life, there is at least a pattern, and pleasure can be found in discerning it. Similarly, readers can find great enjoyment in discerning patterns in Nabokov's game of worlds even if, or perhaps because, they will never be privy to its ultimate meaning. Shade, though he is apparently senselessly murdered, is more successful at discovering the patterns than Kinbote. As Maddox notes "Nabokov's narrators are passionate annotators of reality, usually their own private reality, who hope…to produce the key to the meaning of the whole" (9). The apotheosis of Nabokov's passionate annotators is Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire*. With simultaneous comic and tragic results, Kinbote attempts to make every line and allusion in the poem to be about himself. For instance, Shade's childhood memory of a snowfall as a "crystal land" (Nabokov *Pale Fire* 33) is metamorphosed by Kinbote into an endnote: "Perhaps an allusion to Zembla, my dear country" (74). Kinbote believes himself to be an exiled King, and central to the poetic concerns of Shade, as he explains in the increasingly unhinged commentary which attempts to, but never quite manages to, overwhelm Shade's poem. In his commentary Kinbote tries, and ultimately fails, to impose his own pattern onto Shade's. Kinbote's extensive annotations (which are also an example of self-parody; Nabokov had completed his translation and exhaustive critical commentary of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse* in 1964) attempt to wrestle the meaning of the poem away from Shade's life, to Kinbote's. Ultimately, Kinbote must admit that the pattern does not exist, and it is this knowledge, the novel hints, that will lead to his suicide.

Pale Fire operates within multiple levels of parody: from character (Kinbote the comically mistaken academic, Shade the folksy Robert Frost-like poet) and form (poem and commentary) to the parody within parody of Kinbote's exotic kingdom of Zembla/Zenda, and the allusions to the abstruse poetry of T.S. Eliot in Shade's poem. *Pale Fire*'s hall of mirrors is the ultimate example of Nabokov's parodic world, where, Morton

maintains, "each individual thing- by virtue of its uniqueness, separateness and concrete peculiarity- denies and mocks to some degree the reality of all others. Life is thus infinitely full of natural and manmade parodies" (127). One of these manmade parodies was the central tragedy of Nabokov's life, when his father was killed by blundering political extremists. It has been argued by Meyer that the incompetent Gradus/Grady is himself a parody of these assassins (211). Nabokov's parodies of various literary forms, Stuart states, are not so much interested in those forms, as in those forms and their relationship to reality (33). Whether by parodying detective novels, memoirs, chronicles or exegesis, Nabokov invites the reader to question the forms of fiction, and by extension, the patterns of their own life.

Nabokov and *The Weight of a Human Heart*

Nabokov's major influence in writing *The Weight of a Human Heart* was his use of parody, at the level of both structure and story. Before reading Nabokov, I considered parody to be an inferior form, perhaps feeling some of Bloom's anxiety that writing a parody was to owe too much to the original, and was indeed a sign of unoriginality. At this time I also had an overly earnest view of literature, dismissing as unworthy anything that might actually make a reader laugh. *Pale Fire*, and Nabokov's other parodies of form, inspired me to explore form and humour in my own work. This is most clearly demonstrated in "The Eunuch in the Harem" and "The Footnote." "The Eunuch in the Harem" adopts the form of a series of books reviews, and uses these reviews to tell the story of a love triangle between the reviewer, Paul Crawley, the author he reviews, Ray Harmer, and his wife, Wendy. This particular form allowed the parodying of multiple elements. Crawley, while not as monstrous as Nabokov's Kinbote, also finds a way to insert himself into a writer's life, and to cause irreparable damage. Crawley is a parody of the book reviewer; he is smug, self-satisfied and ruthless in his judgements. Crawley's reviews also allow for parodying bad poetry and prose, in the form of extracts from the books under review, especially Harmer's and his wife's literary outpourings. Furthermore, the book review form allows the story to take unexpected turns. Just as the commentary in *Pale Fire* gradually reveals a secondary plot, in a much less complex fashion the reviews in "The Eunuch in the Harem" gradually cohere to form a revenge plot, which the reader would not have guessed from reading the first review in the series. The prosaic form of the book review is the perfect disguise for a story that eventually ends with the decidedly bizarre climax of a critic being murdered with his own words. The

form dampens the horror of Crawley's fate. The reader is invited to laugh at Crawley's demise, not to be disgusted by it. Necessarily, this means the characters in "The Eunuch in the Harem" are one dimensional. The reader only knows the characters as adjuncts of the work being reviewed. The form of this story precludes emotion, but this removal of emotion enables the reader to be amused at the dark turns the story takes. A realist, first person account of the events of this story would be disturbing, sordid and sad. But when these events are overlaid by another pattern, in this case a pattern in the form of book reviews, the story becomes parody, and is (hopefully) entertaining.

Though Nabokov was not an Oulipian, some of his work could be described as such, involving as it does playing games with the reader, and sometimes, writing under constraint. My short story "First and Last" owes its existence to Nabokov's pre-Oulipian 1951 short story, "The Vane Sisters", which included a secret message so cunning it went undetected by the editor of the "New Yorker," to whom Nabokov had submitted it. In "The Vane Sisters" the narrator describes how a chance series of events, including his noticing some icicles, and the shadow of a parking meter, leads him to meet D. who tells him of the death of Cynthia Vane, a woman the narrator had become involved with after the suicide of her sister, Sibyl. The narrator recalls Cynthia's interest in the afterlife, and her unshakeable belief that "her existence was influenced by all sorts of dead friends each of whom took turns directing her fate much as if she were a stray kitten which a schoolgirl in passing gathers up" ("The Vane Sisters" 227). After hearing of Cynthia's death, the narrator considers, in the last paragraph of the story, the possibility that Cynthia might contact him beyond the grave:

> I could isolate, consciously, little. Everything seemed blurred, yellow-clouded, yielding nothing tangible. Her inept acrostics, maudlin evasions, theopathies- every recollection formed ripples of mysterious meaning. Everything seemed yellowy blurred, illusive, lost (238).

The reference to "inept acrostics" is a clue; if the first letter of each word in the final paragraph of the story is isolated, the following message is revealed, "Icicles by Cynthia, meter from me, Sybil." This remark refers to the incident at the start of the story, where the narrator was nudged towards learning of Cynthia's death by the icicles and the parking meter. The sceptical narrator has become the unwitting kitten, and Sibyl and Cynthia the schoolgirls influencing him, at least in part, after death. Nabokov appears to have been

especially pleased with "The Vane Sisters" claiming, with some complacency, of his sleight of hand, "This particular trick can be tried only once in a thousand years of fiction" (218).

"First and Last" was written as a response to Nabokov's challenge. While Nabokov's message laboured under the constraint of an acrostic in the final few lines of his story, in "First and Last" I concealed the message in the first and last words of each line of the story. The surface story in "First and Last" is an affectionate letter from James, an expatriate Australian living in Africa, to his childhood sweetheart Gabrielle and the man she eventually married, Alan. The letter is full of small talk and reminiscences. At one point James recalls the word games he and Gabrielle used to play when they were children, a clue similar in fashion and intent to Nabokov's casual mention of acrostics in "The Vane Sisters." "First and Last" concludes with a mawkish, drunken James admitting that he has lost Gabrielle to Alan forever.

However, if the reader follows James's hints (he mentions at one point how he and Gabrielle used to play a word game called "First and Last") and isolates the first and last words of every line, an entirely new story is revealed in which James begs Gabrielle to leave her husband for him. The secret message is as follows:

> My Gabrielle I am sorry for leaving every day for twenty years I have thought of you I remember your kisses like the touch of cold water on sunburnt skin I know he reads your letters and listens to your calls leave Alan and his jealousy I am in Sydney now at the Hotel Luxor Come to me please I love you James

Originally, "The Footnote" was conceived as a straightforward story; a character study of a failed writer. The first draft of this story was almost complete when I realised that it was not working. The relationship between the father and the son felt flat, and so I put the work away for a few months. During this time I reread *Pale Fire* and decided to borrow Nabokov's conceit of having Kinbote insert himself in the narrative through the endnotes. In "The Footnote" the narrator is relegated to the margins of the page through his father's selfishness. It is only after his father dies at the end of the story that the narrator succeeds where Kinbote failed; he manages to insert himself into the main body of the text, and the father instead becomes a footnote. Kinbote's eventual realisation that he could not escape into the poem "Pale Fire" leads, it is suggested, to his suicide. The narrator of "The Footnote" is more fortunate, and in the end finds new life in the main text of the story.

Oulipo: Constraints and Games

Oulipo (OuLiPo: *Ouvroir de literature Potentialle* or the "Workshop of Potential Literature") was a literary collective conceived in 1960 in France by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Lionnais (Motte "Raymond Queneau" 45). It is telling that the Oulipo's first members included not only writers, but mathematicians, and informatics experts (Bellos 104). Although primarily a literary group, the inclusion of members who worked in the sciences was no accident; one of the initial aims of Oulipo was, as Bellos states, to discover "what mathematics could do for literature" (105). The influence of mathematics can be seen in the first completed Oulipian text, Raymond Queneau's "One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems," in which the reader can create an almost infinite number of sonnets from the cut-up lines that Queneau provided. Queneau's work served, as Bellos has observed, as "both an announcement of the Oulipian project and also as an exhaustion of the very idea of potential literature- since nobody will ever read more than a tiny fragment of it" (108).

As of 2012 the Oulipo consisted of thirty eight members, a number of whom were dead, or stranger still, fictional (Levin Becker 20–21). However, the number of active members in the group is limited to twelve at any one time (161) and membership is by invitation only. In fact, the only way someone can disqualify themselves from joining Oulipo is by asking to join Oulipo. The group is collaborative and has met every month since its inception to share ideas, and to discuss, in Queneau's words "the search for new forms and structures which may be used by writers in any way they see fit" (qtd. in Arnaud xi).

Mathematical models for creating these forms and structures, as in Queneau's "Poems" were to remain an important aspect of the group as it developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Georges Perec, who was invited to join the group in 1967, especially embraced this facet of Oulipo. (Perec, though now deceased, is still considered to be a member of the group; death is no barrier to being an Oulipian.) His *Life a User's Manual*, a novel of life in a Paris apartment building, was structured after complex mathematical equations based around the Knight's tour of a chess board (Bellos 111–117).

Perec's novel is an example of an Oulipian attempt to create a new structure, but the group was just as interested in looking to the past to previous literary experiments. As Motte Jr. notes, from its beginnings the efforts of Oulipians have been directed in two ways: analysing older, experimental forms and synthesising new ones ("Introduction" 1). The Oulipo were interested in what had been written, and the possibilities of what *could* be

written. One example of the use of an older experimental form is the lipogram, that is, writing without using a letter or letters of the alphabet, a form which had first been recorded as being used two and a half thousand years ago (5). Those literary structures that existed before the foundation of Oulipo are termed, with typical Oulipian humour, "anticipatory plagiary" (Roubaud 40). A lipogram is at the centre of perhaps the most famous work produced by an Oulipian, Perec's *A Void*, a novel which operates under the constraint of never using the letter e.

Lipograms are only one of dozens of constraints that Oulipians have revived or invented. Indeed, writing under constraint is central to the Oulipian philosophy. The Oulipo, as defined by the group itself, are "rats who build the labyrinth from which they plan to escape" (Levin Becker 7–8). It is useful to remember, as Levin Becker observes, all writers create under constraints whether they are aware of it or not, being dependent upon the rules of their native language, or their chosen genre, or form (12). The walls of the labyrinth may be almost invisible, but they exist. The Oulipo are unique in that they use constraint as a spur to creativity. At the heart of Oulipo lies "the logic that rules can make you a better writer" (Levin Becker 15). It is through creating rules and constraints that much of the work of Oulipo has been generated. The word "generated" suggests a mechanical process, and indeed several Oulipian texts have crossed over into the realm of maths and computing.

Among the many constraints and devices members of the Oulipo have used are: acrostics, algol poetry, anagrams, antonymy (where words are replaced with their opposites), bananagrams (experimental anagrams), poems based on the Fibonacci sequence, N + 7 (where every noun in a text is replaced with a noun that comes seven places after it in the dictionary), bifurcating text, cento (a poem created from the lines of other poems), chimera (where all nouns, verbs and adjectives from a text are removed and replaced with nouns from text 1, verbs from text 2, and adjectives from text 3 and so on), larding (stretching out lines to ludicrous lengths), tautograms, and subway poems (where one line of a poem is composed by the writer travelling between two subway stations (Brotchie and Mathews). Constraints in the work of Oulipians can be explicitly revealed or kept secret. Harry Mathews, for instance, does not reveal the constraints his novels are composed under (Levin Becker 78).

The use of constraint, whether revealed or not, has an enormous impact on the Oulipian reader. Just as Joyce required the reader to keep up with a bewildering array of heterogeneous styles, and Nabokov asked the reader to join in the game of finding patterns and meaning in his work, so a reading of any Oulipian text challenges the reader to be equally alert for clues, puzzles, absences (Levin Becker 81), any of which may indicate an

Oulipian constraint or device. A potential work, for Jacques Bens, "is a work not limited to its appearances, which contains secret riches, which willingly lends itself to exploration" (qtd. in Motte Jr "Introduction" 20). For Bens this was one of the primary facets of Oulipo, as he states, "the first postulate of potentiality is the secret, that which is hidden beneath the appearances and the encouragement of discovery" ("Queneau Oulipian" 67). As in *Ulysses* and in *Pale Fire*, in Oulipian literature the reader is not simply a passive observer; creative writing, Oulipo suggests, demands creative reading (Levin Becker 300). It requires a reader who will be happy even if they cannot solve the puzzle of the book they are reading; indeed they must be happy even if the puzzle is unsolvable (Levin Becker 294). Whether it is the labyrinth of Dublin on one day in June, or the labyrinth of a madman's delusional commentary to a poem, or the labyrinth of a novel that does not use the most common vowel in the language, the reader is left to question how literature is constructed, and by extension, "reality" itself.

Oulipo and *The Weight of a Human Heart*

I first encountered Oulipo after reading Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style,* in which the same trivial incident is recounted in ninety-nine different ways, and then Perec's *A Void,* which, as has been noted, does not once use the letter e. Before becoming aware of Oulipo, I had written several stories under various constraints, without truly realising what I was doing. For example, in "Six Tenses," (2005) each of the six sections of a story are told using only one particular tense, from the past simple, to the present continuous. Upon researching the Oulipo, I was excited to discover Oulipians would often choose the form or constraint, and then write, trusting that the story would be found during the process itself. My initial Oulipian experiments were straightforward borrowings of Oulipian constraints. For example, I wrote a short story, *Missing*, without using the letter e. As I started the story, I had no idea where it would go, but the constraint of not using the most common letter in the language did indeed generate a plot; in *Missing* the narrator is unable to use or recognise the letter e because she suffered brain damage in a car crash.

When writing stories for *The Weight of a Human Heart*, on the other hand, I consciously mimicked the Oulipo's two lines of literary enquiry; that is, I set out to analyse and adapt older experimental forms, and attempted to create new ones. Among the stories that were generated from the first approach were, "An Australian Short Story", "Cast of

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Characters", and "First and Last", while the second approach produced "Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story" and "Figures in a Marriage."

"An Australian Short Story" was prompted by my discovery, through the Oulipo, of the cento, a poetic work composed entirely of lines taken from other poetic works. I decided to apply this to the short story, and "An Australian Short Story" was composed under a number of self-imposed constraints. These were that each line of the story would be taken from a previously published Australian short story, and that no two lines could come from the same story. Writing under these constraints obviously imposed several challenges. One was that the story could not be planned; instead it had to entirely depend on the lines found, and how they were arranged. The "writing" of this story took several weeks, as I searched through countless Australian short story collections and anthologies, noting down possible lines for use. From the bank of hundreds of lines I had archived, the plot emerged organically, and perhaps not surprisingly it was one of the oldest plots of all; boy loses girl, boy gets girl back. Each of the lines in the story is endnoted with the source, clearly signalling the constraint to the reader from the beginning.

In "An Australian Short Story", "Cast of Characters", and "First and Last", I escaped from labyrinths which had been constructed or designed by other writers. With other stories in *The Weight of a Human Heart*, I attempted to design labyrinths of my own. "Figures in a Marriage" is told under the constraint of utilising graphs, charts, lists and formulae. "Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story" takes the form of a short story which is structured around writing advice from several famous authors while in "The Writer and his Moods," each section is patterned after a grammatical mood, such as the interrogative and the imperative. In all three of these stories, the form was chosen first, and the story followed. In "Figures in a Marriage", the constraint of telling the story through graphic means necessarily narrowed the scope of what the story could be about, and so the disintegration of a marriage was settled upon, with graphs of instances of sexual intercourse, among other things, providing the plot. In "Sixteen Rules for Writing a Short Story" the rules dictated the action. For example, following Chandler's advice, "When in doubt, have a man come through the door with a gun in his hand" (qtd. in Bould 68), the action is interrupted with just that, as the story spirals in ever more ludicrous directions.

Another of the aspects of Oulipo which most appealed to me, and most influenced me, is the idea that a story can contain hidden layers which the reader is left to uncover. I became fascinated with this idea of playing a game with the reader, and camouflaging clues in the story that might lead the reader into another story entirely. I set out therefore to

explore this idea in "English as a Foreign Language." This story follows the troubled marriage of an English language teacher, and interspersed with the realist first person narration are several sections titled "Language Focus" which take the form of grammar exercises, listening transcripts, and other common EFL teaching materials. The majority of these sections serve as a comment on the story or the language-obsessed main character, but two sections in particular encourage the reader to participate in the story, and this participation is rewarded by the discovery of something hidden. The first example utilises phonetic script, which is a vital part of English language teaching and therefore perfectly the themes of the story, whilst also following Bens' (qtd. in Motte Jr. "Introduction" 20) definition of a "potential work" as "a work not limited to its appearances, which contains secret riches, which willingly lends itself to exploration." The secret riches here are presented as a grammar exercise to the reader:

Exercise: Change the following sentences from phonetic script to standard English. The first has been done for you.

1. /ˈlæŋgwɪdʒ ɪz ðə sɔ:s əv ˌmɪsʌndəˈstændɪŋz/

Language is the source of misunderstandings.

2. /wɜ:ds ɑ:r ðə fi:ˈzɪʃənz əv ə dɪˈzi:zd maɪnd/

3. /dʒu:lɪʌ ɪz fʌkɪŋ pætrɪk/

If the reader chooses to ignore the exercises, they can still follow the story perfectly well. However, if they choose to explore the story and look beneath appearances they will be given early access to the "riches" in the form of the revelation of one of the story's major plot points: 3. /dʒu:lɪʌ ɪz fʌkɪŋ pætrɪk/

Translated into standard English, the above reads "Julia is fucking Patrick." Julia, the narrator's wife, is having an affair with Patrick, the narrator's student. The reader-as-explorer therefore learns of this affair before the narrator does.

The second instance in which a hidden message occurs in the story is in the word search section. Again, if the reader chooses not to complete the exercise they can continue to the end of the story, in which the fate of John and Julia's marriage is left ambiguous. But if the reader does spend some time completing the word search they will find the following events, which take place after the ostensible end of the story: reconcile, separation, baby, pregnancy, happiness, forgiven. A hidden layer of story, which takes place after the main story has ended, is revealed.

As has been discussed above, many of the stories *The Weight of a Human Heart* owe an obvious debt to other writers, illustrating McCarthy's "ugly fact" that "books are made out of other books" (qtd. in Woodward). This fact is paraded and celebrated throughout many of the stories in the collection, and is perhaps most obvious in those stories which are self-reflexive, such as "A Story in Writing" and "An Australian Short Story." This is not surprising for, as Waugh observes, in metafiction, "The text is freed from the anxiety of influence by the paradoxical recognition that literature has never been free, cannot be 'original', but has always been 'created' or produced" (67). The knowledge that there is nothing new under the sun is not dispiriting, but liberating. In other words, that stories are made from stories is not, as McCarthy has it, an ugly fact, but a beautiful one.

Conclusion

Frank Moorhouse ("Introduction" 5) once stated: "The great need in Australian story writing is still that it should go 'too far' and resist blandness." Moorhouse's exhortation is a necessary one. The Australian short story, while being far from the "dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism" (*Patrick White Speaks* 16) that Patrick White dismissed it as, has had a propensity throughout much of its history to limit itself, perhaps too comfortably, to working within the conventions of realism established by Henry Lawson. This is not to say writers as diverse as Barbara Baynton and Alan Marshall can be characterised as "dreary", but it is undeniable that there came a time in Australian short fiction where the realism of many writers did not reflect the realities of everyday life, and instead looked backwards to a vanished past. In the 1970s, a reaction took place, and the "New Writing" of Carey, Moorhouse and others explored themes, forms and styles that, if they were not entirely new, were at least new to Australia. Reinvigorated and renovated since that time, realism has once again become the dominant form in Australian short fiction, with experimental short stories more likely to appear in anthologies than single-author collections.

Metafiction and realism have too often been described as a binary, with the one being argued as somehow superior to the other. An example of this can be seen in the hostility felt by some Australian short story writers and editors to the appearance of the New Writing of the 1970s, and conversely the frustration displayed by some of the proponents of New Writing towards an Australian realist tradition they found constricting. However, these two approaches to writing fiction are not as antagonistic as their partisans would have it. Rather, metafiction and realism have been inextricably entwined since the beginnings of the novel form. Just as the prevalence of realism in the nineteenth century did not lead to the end of metafiction, as F.R. Leavis would no doubt have wanted, so the metafictional explosion of *Ulysses* did not lead to the end of realism, as B.S. Johnson devoutly wished. This is because realism and metafiction are not antagonistic, but rather they complement each other. They are not different tender, but two sides of the same coin.

This can be seen in the novels and stories of Nabokov and Joyce. Both writers, in different ways, utilise realist and metafictional devices in order to most fully explore the themes that concern them. Along with the members of the Oulipo, they invite the reader to take part in the construction of the fictional world alongside the writer; to play, as Nabokov has it, a game of worlds. In their explorations of different forms, styles and constraints, these

writers opened up new paths, or rediscovered old ones, for the writers who followed them, including myself.

The Weight of a Human Heart is an attempt to follow Moorhouse's counsel to resist blandness: by embracing the strands of the experimental and the conventional in Australian short fiction; by attempting both the metafictional and the realist; by learning from, and being inspired by, some of the greatest writers in literature.

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