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The Story of Rose Bower : Exegesis

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Exegesis:
The Story of Rose Bower

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Publications

Curteis, I. 'The Hindrance of Holding a Raw Egg: Storytelling and the Liminal Space' in *Local-Global, ReGenerating Community*, Eds. Martin Mulligan, Kim Dunphy, Vol. 7, RMIT, Melbourne, 2010, pp. 150–164.

Curteis, I. 'The Voice in Which it is Told: The Importance of the Human Voice in Life Stories and Folktales' in *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, Eds. Bill Cope, Mary Kalantziz, Vol. 5, Issue 5, University of Illinois Research Park, Champaign, Illinois, 2011, pp. 237–252.

The above papers appear here in slightly amended form.

General Introduction

My process of writing this thesis did not begin with the setting up of a framework of literary theory that I wished to prove or interrogate. The story of *Watermarks* started when I pushed a mower over a rough, patchy area of grass and sent up clouds of red earth, twigs and small stones. I hoped the scanty grass would grow and cover the bare patches if I kept it short and forced lateral growth. The picture of Rose Bower, seated on a ride-on mower, roared into my mind's eye unbidden. She, like me, stirred clouds of red dust while mowing, but left a lush grass sward in her wake—a regenerative gesture the character maintained throughout the novel.

My field of research already nestled in a space where magic and reality overlapped: storytelling. Folktales and storytelling have played a part in my life as far back as I can remember. As a storyteller, I had also often experienced the powerful community-building capacity of storytelling and the deep impact stories had on people's lives. This became the core of my theoretical research and the creative intention of my novel.

My use of stories in performance, workshops and within this thesis is heuristic. I do not subscribe to singular interpretations of folktales and remain convinced that right or wrong interpretations do not exist. Rather, stories offer many layers of meaning which become apparent and relevant at different points in time to different people, or emerge at different points in time for the same person: either way the learning (if learning is sought) rests with those who live with the story—who carry it with them somewhere in the pockets and wrinkles of their souls.

I am respectfully aware of the emphasis folklorists and anthropologists place on the origin, the process and context of the collecting of stories, and the cultural context in which oral stories are traditionally told. I have inherited the majority of folktales used in this thesis from my Grandmother, Margarete Emma Vogt; her sources were also oral. The stories passed on to me were told to her by her nine older sisters and by her Mother, Sophia, née Bieker. I do not know Sophia's story source and concede that it is possible that she reclaimed orally what had become written works. It is equally possible that she received the stories aurally. Either way, as a storyteller, I believe folktales settle on the page only if we weigh them down with ink and they take off again as soon as someone decides to tell them.

Within this thesis, stories encourage the characters to discover solutions to life's questions, dilemmas and challenges. This is based on my experience that stories offer encouragement to people, as telling/hearing stories fosters sound decision-making and self-empowerment borne out of *imagination* without the need for any emphasis on 'message' or 'moral'. Furthermore, folktales allow individuals and communities to name and identify issues—particularly issues of abuse which otherwise remain shrouded in silence.

Telling and receiving stories, both traditional folktales and life stories, makes us aware of the poetry within our own lives by generating a heightened consciousness of events, details, confluences, tropes, themes and archetypes in a very particular way: by veiling something with the imaginative imagery of Story, a new perception is created. A crispness of seeing and perceiving—a new awareness of dimensions—that did not previously exist is called into being. Storytelling is comparable to the work of environmental artists Christo and Jean-Claude and their wrapping or mapping of spaces which offer us new ways of seeing the familiar and sometimes commonplace. David Bourdon⁴ refers to Christo and Jean-Claude’s work as revealing something through concealment. We observe things and events that have been there all along from a fresh point of view, fully aware because they are in a liminal space of visible invisibility—defined by cloth or story.

Story is not one-dimensional; folktales are populated by heroines and heroes capable of courage, cunning, inventiveness and the wit to question all that is proscriptive. According to Jack Zipes:

[i]nstead of petrifying our minds, fairy tales arouse the imagination and compel us to realise how we can fight terror and cunningly insert ourselves into our own daily struggles and turn the course of the world’s events in our favour.⁵

The work presented here crosses and recrosses the perceived borderline between life writing/autobiography and fiction. I do not draw on remembered “testimony”, nor did I carry out any field research. There are, in my view, no ethical questions regarding the ownership of the family stories I have used. As my grandparents passed these down to me, I consider them a part of my heritage and a part of my own story. Furthermore, as these stories are part of a creative-writing project, they have been fictionalised and used in the same way traditional folktales have been used throughout the novel. Other passages of life writing are my own story—as a storyteller and writer, I feel it is my right to tell and retell and recontextualise these narratives in ways I deem appropriate. Moreover, I am not *studying* my own situation of childhood sexual abuse in relation to that of ‘participants’ in a sociological study; I am not discussing my story in a context of non-fiction or therapy. I am telling my story as one tale among others. I am also offering my story as a “voice” for others who have reached the limits of their language, limits imposed by the horror of their own experiences, which so often leave victims speechless. And I, in turn, borrow from the “voice” of folktales and from the stories the characters in *Watermarks* tell, to tell my own. In this imaginative context my personal story and my family narratives become “raw material” like the clay in a

⁴ D. Bourdon, *Christo*, New York: Harry N. Abrahams Publishers, 1970

⁵ J. Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment; The Wondrous Fairytales of Western Culture*, New York: Penguin Books, 1992, p. xxx

sculptor's hands, a substance transformed in creative processes. I feel the ethical dimension is addressed *through* the creative arts practice and my intentions as stated above.

As a hybrid text, *Watermarks* interweaves life stories with folktales as well as employing magic realism and forms of experimental practice stylistically. Narratological and stylistic devices, including shifting tense, *écriture féminine*, gothic elements and magic realism, allow the ordinary and commonplace to take on new, vivid, disturbing yet enlightening features without rationalisation. According to James Ley such hybrid works:

are essential to literary culture because they explore the limits of expression and thus the boundaries of the self. Inevitably, these books place demands on the reader in excess of most forms of entertainment. They require not just reading, but rereading. Their aesthetic is one of complexity, indeterminacy, slow philosophical reflection. As such, they run counter to the contemporary idea of entertainment, offering instead more esoteric and cerebral pleasures.⁶

Such was my intention in this thesis.

⁶ J. Ley, 'Tyranny of the Literal', *Australian Book Review*, April, accessed 13 June 2010

Chapter 1

Storytelling and the Liminal Space: Building Communities and Social Responsibility; ‘The Hindrance of Holding a Raw Egg’: A Workshop Based on the Folktale Fitcher’s Bird

The aim of my creative research is, as far as this is possible in written form, to show how the creative process of oral storytelling can engage and mobilize individuals and communities towards positive social change by enabling questions of social responsibility through arts practice. The intention of chapter one is to argue for the *efficacy of the arts*, specifically storytelling particularly in the creation of liminal space. Chapter two will offer insight into *how* oral storytelling, via the power of personal detail, overcomes disabling distance and engages us individually and collectively to effect positive social change:

Art enables us to develop an enriched imaginary, to think differently about our human situation; it can work against “immaculate origins and unnegotiable destinies” to create sustainable myths which depict how identities form through social and personal relations that are “actively invented” (Carter xii), and thence such myths enable us to relate in new ways to ‘degraded environments’ and ‘displaced others’ (Carter xii). By displaying the complexity of the human situation, art performs its role ‘in the ethical project of *becoming* (collectively and individually) *oneself in a particular place* (Carter xii).⁷

The act of telling and listening to a story fulfils an intrinsic human need in increasingly complex and mediated societies. Storytelling allows creative interaction in a time-space continuum, and, by doing so, forms community without establishing proscriptive structures.

An Example: the Storytelling Workshop

My key focus in a workshop is to provide an experience of traditional storytelling: a story told from mouth to ear, a living malleable thing, woven into the fabric of the air breathed by those who share the tale.

⁷ M. Costello ‘Attention to What Is: Beverley Farmer, Ecocriticism and Efficacy’, unpublished paper, Southern Cross University, 2010

By following the storytelling with a conversation, the audience and I together build an awareness of individual points of view, and an experience of communal cohesion based on respect and imagination. When those engaged in conversation engage in something greater than the sum of the parts, conversation becomes art, as we create new possibilities beyond our personal limitations.

Handing out Raw Eggs

The women in the traditional story, *Fitcher's Bird*⁸, are given a raw egg to 'hold and keep' at all times. To aid workshop participants in their own experience of the circumstances the characters find themselves in, I place an intact raw egg in the hand of each. Holding the egg impacts on how we do things, how we move and how we think. Simple but necessary things, like using a knife and fork, or using the toilet, become complicated while holding the egg. Its fragility gradually seizes control, not only of our physical mobility, but also of our creativity; creativity becomes inhibited because part of our consciousness has to remain with the egg in our hand. The fluidity of our thoughts is interrupted by an intrusion: concern for the egg. It is also a constant reminder of the authority of the person who gave it to us to hold and keep—even though they may be far away, they have an impact on the quality of our life. Holding a raw egg inhibits our freedom; it dis-ables us and makes us less capable than we are, or could be, and, as we come to understand the story, we recognise the egg is a tool of surveillance, a means of 'remote control'.

I encourage workshop participants to experiment: to carry the egg around—if possible over a period of days—and to record their thoughts. The results are revealing.

Telling the Tale of Fitcher's Bird

As I hand out the eggs I open with a traditional invocation—a means of calling the audience 'over' which I will explain below—and begin to tell *Fitcher's Bird*. The story is comparable to *The Robber Bride*, *Blue Beard*, *The Tiger Bride*, *Mr Fox* and many others found in every culture in various forms. (The full text is available in the Appendix.)

Conversation

The root of the word conversation lies in the Latin *conversationem*, to live with, to keep company with; literally it means *to turn about with*. As such it also, perhaps more by implication, means to share a direction with others, and, in an extended sense, refers to the manner of conducting oneself in the world—which paths we share and with whom, which paths we travel alone.

⁸ Although this story is widely attributed to, and published by, the Grimm Brothers, I first heard this story told by my grandmother, Margarete Emma Vogt.

Following are examples of some points or questions raised during these after-story conversations.

Comments are often made on the apparent lack of fertility of the egg. It does not ‘hatch’ nor does it seem to contain magical powers as such. It never takes long before someone states that the purpose of the egg is surveillance: the egg, by falling into the gore and remaining stained with the blood of other victims, reveals that the holder was disobedient and entered the forbidden chamber. A thought that usually arises here is: the egg has no power per se, as once the youngest decides to place it away safely, she is free—the egg cannot force her to hold it. For workshop participants, this realisation usually leads to the recognition that herein lies the ‘key to freedom’.

A further recurring point of conversation is the correlation between the image of the egg and the image of the bird—while the egg is part of the entrapment, the bird is part of the liberation, as, by taking on the image of a bird, the youngest escapes. Questions may arise again, here, about ‘hatching’: whether she ‘hatched’, in some way or other, out of the egg, in the sense of a profound maturation, emotionally and spiritually, and thereby overcame a terrifying and dangerous situation.

The strange phenomenon of receiving ‘a key’ with the prohibition attached (not to use it under penalty of death) leads to similar reflections on human society and human relationships, questions of knowledge and power, including self-empowerment. The gift of a key is useless without the freedom or ability to use it. The key, too, in its own way, becomes an inhibition and occupies our consciousness, as does the egg. However, the demand *not to use the key* stands in contrast to being mindful of the egg at all times—the only way not to use the key would be to forget its existence and thereby avoid the temptation to use it. This ‘forgetting’ would mean voluntarily relinquishing comprehension of and insight into the nature of ‘the bloody chamber’ and the ‘master of the dark arts’. In conversation, participants readily agree that there is no safety in not knowing danger, however frightening knowledge may be. The solution is not to *forget* the key, but to separate it from the demand to carry the egg at all times, and to then use the key. Once this riddle is solved (in solving it participants identify with the youngest in the story), the power to re-member is also obtained, as played-out in the image of the youngest reassembling and cleansing the dismembered bodies of her sisters.

The imagery of dismemberment compels us to ask: Why is death not enough? Why must the bodies be mutilated? Or if the story is internalised, what lives within our emotions and thoughts that hacks and hews us to pieces? What inner resource do we have that is capable of remembering—of putting back together again that which has been, in this case, brutally disconnected—and then of dealing with oppression?

Participants also take note of the dark humour, not immediately obvious, but nevertheless contained within the story. For example, the wedding guests and the sorcerer greet the grinning skull as the bride—foreshadowing a wedding with death. Further, one moment the sorcerer thinks

the youngest is completely obedient to his will; the next moment he must do all she asks and is harried-along on his way by what he believes is the voice of his bride-to-be.

Finally there is the community as witness, the community as protector. The last deed of overcoming evil—finding the youngest safe, stopping the doors and blocking the windows, and setting the house ablaze—is a communal task. This imagery often raises questions ranging from issues of social responsibility and justice or even capital punishment, to effectively dealing with human predators externally and emotional ‘predators’ internally.

Not all questions developed during a workshop are listed above or answered within the session. Nor is the unfolding dynamic within the conversation adequately represented. But what is apparent is that human engagement takes place between people who are usually complete strangers, who may vary in age and cultural backgrounds. They are nevertheless capable of, and willing to grapple with, existential questions in an emotionally engaged and creative manner.

The events so debated are unfolding in a story; therefore, according to conventional opinion, are not *real*. Why then do these imagined events suddenly matter enough to engage people in heated, passionate and deeply insightful conversation?

Storytelling and the Liminal Space

What is integral to human experience and what are comprehensive truths common to all humanity is expressed through Story. In this sense, storytelling can overcome separation—particularly emotional separation that may be caused by cultural, social, gender, class, ethnic, familial, religious and national differences. Folktales globalise our feelings, at least for the duration of our engagement with the story.

I recognise the complexity of this assertion and feel it is appropriate to digress via two examples relating to the globalisation of cultural texts. Rustom Barucha demonstrates a cautioning approach⁹ in his comments on Peter Brook’s production of *The Mahabharata*. Barucha¹⁰ is not suggesting that only those belonging to the culture of origin should be permitted to use or work with sacred and culturally significant texts; he asserts that someone belonging to this culture is as capable of misrepresenting cultural material as someone viewing it from the outside. However, he does argue a certain form of westernisation of Indian texts is appropriation and should be avoided:

⁹ Barucha, R. “A view From India” in Williams, D. (Ed.) *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 228-251

¹⁰ Barucha, p. 230

The Mahabharata must be seen on as many levels as possible within the India context, so that its meaning (or rather, multiple levels of meaning) can have some bearing on the lives of Indian people for whom it was written ... if Brook truly believes the epic is universal, then its representation should not exclude or trivialise Indian culture, as I believe it does.¹¹

Barucha's main concern is Brook's negation of the "non-western context"¹² which he explains is partially due to the fact that Brook, as a non-Indian, did not "internalise *The Mahabharata* through a torrent of feelings, emotions, thoughts, taboos, concepts, and fantasies"¹³ in his childhood. I agree with Barucha that the use of any cultural text needs to be conducted in the most respectful and sensitive manner. I also think that we *can* internalise material from cultures other than our own *as adults* and that this process can be regenerative.

Anmol Vellani¹⁴ describes how community theatre productions in the village of Heggodu¹⁵, inspired by the social innovator, K.V. Subbanna, include works ranging from Shakespeare to Kurosawa.

The people of Heggodu are the sponsors, producers, performers, audience, and critics of what is essentially a modern theatre and art practice [...] Sudhanva Deshpande [...] witnessed a conversation between a tea-stall owner and a taxi driver, discussing with great enthusiasm the latest production of *King Lear*, while comparing it with a Lear production some eight years ago, as well as Kurosawa's *Ran*.¹⁶

The majority of the people of Heggodu will not have come from a position of having "internalised" Shakespeare or Kurosawa as children (although now the children and younger adults see many international performances and participate in all facets of production as outlined above) but it does not appear to limited their enjoyment or engagement or lead to appropriations. Subbanna recognised the people of Heggodu were capable not only of making modern theatre their own, but that the act of doing so would be "regenerative in voicing a new kind of life, stimulating new

¹¹ *ibid*, pp. 230-231

¹² *ibid* p. 231

¹³ *ibid* p. 231

¹⁴ Anmol Vellani, "The World in the Village: Lessons from K.V. Subbanna's Inspirational Life" in *Local-Global: Identity, Security, Community*, Vol Seven, 2010, pp. 42-53

¹⁵ Heggodu is situated in the hills of Karnataka, a southern state of India.

¹⁶ Vellani, p. 42

thinking and spurring new conversations in the community”.¹⁷ Over time the traditional form of community theatre, *Yakshagana*, and Subbanna’s new form of community theatre have drawn “influences and inspiration from each other, always bringing about a strange admixture or a meaningful and creative confluence.”¹⁸ Here we see something of a reversal of Barucha’s concern because “secular texts, Shakespeare and Greek plays, as texts about deities and divine figures, have also been done in the Yakshagana style” in Kannada, the local language, which is certainly not the traditional cultural context for Shakespeare or plays from ancient Greece. According to Vellani, the intention is to vastly expand,

the array of virtual realities from which the local people could draw their influences and images, and thereby develop a more catholic [as in *universal*] sense of identity, a sense of belonging to a larger world—a world encompassing the region, state, nation and the globe. It is thus, in critic and commentator Sadananda Menon’s words, that ‘they emerge as world citizens’¹⁹ and as social scientist Shiv Visvanathan has put it, they are citizens who are ‘full of a multiplicity of times, full of diverse others as possible selves’^{20, 21}

Having made this argument I would like to reiterate that folktales do globalise our feelings for the duration of their telling, the comprehensive effect—it would seem—can reach far beyond it.

David Bynum²² states:

I know the chief use or function of fabulous narrative traditions everywhere is to make people adaptable in their minds, to enlarge the scope of their mental lives beyond the confines of their actual experience socially, physically, and in every other way. I am so far persuaded of this

¹⁷ Vellani, p. 46

¹⁸ Vellani, p. 46

¹⁹ S. Menon, ‘Tribute to Subbanna’ in N. Manu Chakravarthy, (ed.) *Community and Culture: Selected Writings by K.V. Subbanna*, p392

²⁰ S. Visvanathan, ‘Subbanna’s Village in N. Manu Chakravarthy, (ed.) *Community and Culture: Selected Writings by K.V. Subbanna*, p388

²¹ Vellani, p. 50

²² David E. Bynum (Cleveland State University) was trained in Slavic languages and literatures at Harvard University. His *The Daemon in the Wood: A Study of Oral Narrative Patterns* (1978) treated the motif of the two trees in the world’s folk literature. Dr. Bynum is also an editor of the Parry Collection series *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*.

that I have come to think of fabulous storytelling and even of stories so told as proper aspects of human biology.²³

Story resides inside our body, mind and spirit, as an artefact of our humanity. Storytelling or hearing stories told places us on a threshold between two worlds: the world of our physical sense experience and the world of the story. This phenomenon of straddling two sets of consciousness is liminal space.

Liminality is a phrase originally coined by van Gennep²⁴ and later described by Victor Turner²⁵ as a threshold, 'betwixt and between the normal day-to-day cultural and social states and processes'.²⁶

Van Gennep²⁷ determines rituals have a well-defined beginning middle and end and take place in a 'sacred time' separated from secular time by markers such as burning of incense, lighting candles, chanting incantations, ringing bells or singing etc. He specifies liminal time as that not controlled by the clock; 'it is a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen'.²⁸ The same qualities of time and enchantment are intrinsic to storytelling. *Story time is liminal time*. The storyteller provides a mystery that has the power to reach within each of us, to command emotion, to compel involvement and to transport us into timelessness.²⁹ Story functions as a mediator, via the storyteller, and places us equally on a threshold, in a liminal state of mind, where the inner world of the story has a greater reality than the sociological, physical, cultural reality of the individual listener.

A storyteller, respectful of oral and cultural traditions, may employ a degree of formality or ritual, such as call-and-response openings which signal communal readiness, and mark the commencement of collective consciousness of the event of the storytelling³⁰, thus marking the shift into liminal story space. Story time, like liminal time, is separated from the secular by markers such as openings and closings, which clearly define beginning, middle and end. The 'calling over' of the audience/listener via traditional story openings has ritual qualities that signal the storyteller knows

²³ D. E. Bynum, *The Daemon in the Wood: A Study of Oral Narrative Patterns*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 27

²⁴ A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge, 2004 (first published 1909)

²⁵ V. Turner, 'Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol 6, No 4, December, 1979, pp. 466–614

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 465

²⁷ Cited in Turner p. 468

²⁸ Turner, p. 466

²⁹ R. Atkinson, 'Understanding the Transforming Function of Stories', in *The Gift of Stories*, London: Bergin and Garvey, 1995, pp. 3–17

³⁰ A. Pellowski, *The World of Storytelling*, New York: R. R. Bowker, 1977

the way through the story and offers a safe return, and, without doubt, a time of enchantment during which anything *does* happen. Formal closings signal the end of liminal time, the end of the telling, and bring the listener/audience back into real time, daily routine and normal consequences.³¹

According to Masuyama³², liminality is vital for the integration of knowledge acquired through intuition, perception or reason, as it orders chaos, and integrates stored memories as well as helping to accommodate and assimilate these into *scripts*. As maintained by Schank³³, these scripts are mental narrative structures, inner conversations we hold with ourselves, which guide our social interactions, emotional responses and form the basis of metaphor and simile in our thinking. In short, Story has the same quality and capacity and is of the same vital importance as liminality for the integration of knowledge, information, memory and the ordering of chaos. Stories, too, are a way of knowing, understanding and remembering, as per Atkinson³⁴, which restructures information and experiences into shapes or patterns we can commit to memory.

Most importantly, the liminality provided through storytelling ‘provides a charter for individual behaviour, and by extension, for communal social behaviour’.³⁵ This charter for communal social behaviour is sustained by *plural reflexivity*: ‘the ways in which a group or community seeks to portray, understand and then act on itself’.³⁶ Story archetypes represent a high level of a culture’s awareness of ‘its own being, a people’s understanding of its humanness and individual self-awareness’.³⁷ As this social behaviour is informed and inspired by Story in liminal space it rests on the strength of imagination, not on the authority of prohibition. Heroine and hero consistently break prohibitions—and must in fact do so in the pursuit of their quest. This quest is in essence a pursuit of archetypal needs: love, security, forgiveness, knowledge, healing, generosity, honesty and so on. Stories provide a frame in which a culture or community can place ‘a piece of itself for inspection’.³⁸ Since stories provide us with an abundance of archetypal images and symbols we can transcribe what has been ‘sectioned off’ and examine, revise, amend and improve it:

Public liminality stresses the role of collective innovatory behaviour, of crowds generating new ways of framing and modelling the social reality

³¹ *ibid.*

³² E. E. Masuyama, *Towards an Understanding of Rakugo as a Communicative Event: A Performance Analysis of Traditional Professional Japanese Storytelling in Japan* Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1997

³³ R. C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story. Narrative Intelligence*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2000

³⁴ Atkinson, p. 3

³⁵ Masuyama, pp. 181–182

³⁶ Turner, p. 446

³⁷ Atkinson, p. 3

³⁸ Turner, p. 468

which presses on them in their daily lives. Here all is open plurally reflexive, the folk acts on the folk and transforms itself through becoming aware of its situation and predicament.³⁹

This public liminality is further supported through the inherent democratic principles of storytelling, as, in Kay Stone's view, 'the narration of a story is the perpetually emergent form of artistic expression; in the context of storytelling the texture of the story emerges as narrator and audience interact'.⁴⁰ Within this frame, and in the liminal space in which all things are possible, 'stories appeal to something profound and numinous that drifts on the edge between consciousness and the unconscious'⁴¹, leaving both audience and storyteller free to exercise their expectations for Story and stories.

The Efficacy of Storytelling

There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.⁴² [Testifying to the importance of Story in developing] imaginative thinking skills ... in developing moral-ethical imagination, the ability to think in new and unexpected ways, the ability to see parallels and relationships in which none had existed before, to see things not immediately in front of your eyes, to become at least dimly aware of the complexity of our inner-selves.⁴³

At the present, we are experiencing an unprecedented boom in information technology, which supplies us with more 'facts' than we can process, but we are without adequate time, wisdom, or insight needed to interpret and integrate them into our lives. This global shift from 'knowledge-based' to 'information-processing' cultures makes creative thinking, creativity and the use of the imagination and metaphor crucial to the survival of humane societies, as stated by Root-Bernstein:

As more and more information becomes available, we understand and use less and less of it. If society cannot find ways to make integrated

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 478

⁴⁰ K. Stone, *Some Day Your Witch Will Come*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008, p. 112

⁴¹ K. Stone, *Burning Brightly: New Light on Old Tales Told Today*, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998, p. 6

⁴² Ursula Le Guin cited in A. Spalding, *The Wisdom of Storytelling in an Information Age: A Collection of Talks*. Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 77

⁴³ A. Spalding, *The Wisdom of Storytelling in an Information Age: A Collection of Talks*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 77

understanding accessible to large numbers of people, then the information revolution is not only useless but a threat to humane civilization.⁴⁴

Story structure provides us with archetypes and motifs that enable us to organise our thinking, interpret our experiences and act on them. By storying circumstances and events we increase coherence and achieve sensibility, overcoming isolated and disconnected incidents by binding them into meaningful cohesion. Innovative strategies for survival offered in folktales are:

not primarily utopian, not dreams of the future but observations and aspirations for the world as we live in it now. In the hands of skilled tellers, these old stories have the capacity they have always had to identify and address the most basic human concerns and contradictions as they manifest themselves today.⁴⁵

Story extends communality of experience by generating a sense of belonging in which the private becomes part of a greater collective experience. This, states Hillman⁴⁶, can facilitate important personal discoveries while bringing a higher level of comprehensibility to the things we do. ‘The more attuned and experienced the imaginative side of the personality, the less threatening and irrational, the less necessity for repression, and therefore the less pathology acted out in literal daily events.’⁴⁷ As we find our personal circumstances and behaviours reflected in the universal events of story, the liminality of storytelling allows us to access cultural resources, translate them into new social directions and ways of understanding, thereby facilitating creative thinking at its best:

In terms of human cultural evolutions we might consider stories as “a mental opposable thumb allowing humans to grasp something in their minds—to turn it around, to view it from many angles, to reshape it, and to hurl it even into the farthest reaches of the unconscious”.⁴⁸

Although a storytelling may be planned, the actual telling of the story is an immediate experience, something that takes place at that moment, with those present, in a time and space continuum. Storytelling is *the* process that creates Story, even if the stories told are themselves ancient. This process engages equitable participation, which means the absolute shape of the story told in a specific setting and time is not predictable or controllable by the teller alone. Within this

⁴⁴ R. Root-Bernstein, and M. Root-Bernstein. *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p. 29

⁴⁵ Stone, 1998, p. 69

⁴⁶ J. Hillman, *Loose Ends*, Dallas: Spring Publications, 1975

⁴⁷ *ibid.* pp. 43–44

⁴⁸ Birch and Heckler, quoted in Stone, 1998, p. 7

framework, all is both negotiation *and* predictability as individual listeners overlay their mental structure on storied content during the telling.⁴⁹ The community has therefore as much control over the story as the teller. The listener reconfigures the story within the liminal experience of the telling and organises the story relations by ‘linking people, time and place, things and general context of given events’⁵⁰, thereby creating an ‘event chain of logical relationships’.⁵¹ The shared nature of this process is a result of the dynamic between the teller, the listener *and* the story. In this sense, the audience—collectively and individually—owns the story.

Joseph Beuys’ “aktion” and Richard Bauman’s “action”

Joseph Beuys believed that art and only art could ‘dismantle the repressive effects of a senile social system’⁵² while still promoting and supporting ‘autonomous individual creative potency’⁵³ that engages everyone in a process of ‘direct democracy’⁵⁴. His performance art, i.e. *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, was highly personalised and ritualistic. Beuys’ created such works and *aktion* to offer an experience of how art and creativity could be tools of evolution and revolution capable of changing social structures. This, declared Beuys, is *social sculpture*, a process in which every individual can contribute to the creative shaping of a social organism—a *social work of art* created and owned by all.⁵⁵ Similarly, Richard Bauman viewed members of an oral storyteller’s audience not as ‘a passive receiver of the meaning inherent in the text, but as an active participant in the actualisation—indeed, the production—of textual meaning as an interpretative accomplishment’.⁵⁶

Further, Beuys’ *aktion*-based “exhibitions” meant the surrounding environment was loaded with ‘semantic materials’—materials not previously associated with particular meaning or value. Beuys’ intention was to waken the interest of the audience and to provoke a manner of thinking in which rigid, rational forms give way to imagination, inspiration and intuition. He often chose mailable materials, like fat and honey, to emphasis his theory of *plasticity*: the sculptural/formative/creative process begins in the formation/sculpting of the spiritual substance of thought (the artist’s

⁴⁹ F. Smith, *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982, p. 64

⁵⁰ J. Downing, and C. K. Leong, *Psychology of Reading*, New York: Macmillan, 1982, p. 220

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Joseph Beuys, *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler; Auf dem Wege zur Freiheitsgestaltung des Sozialen Organismus, Lectures and Discussions (Oral Recordings)*, Humboldt-Haus, Achberg, 23 March, 1978

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Styles of Oral Narrative*, p.13

intention), not in “art” as a manifestation of specialised activity or “product”. Access to this spiritual substance of thought is open to everyone, according to Beuys, making *plasticity* the central tenet of both direct democracy and social sculpture. To engage his audience in *plasticity*, Beuys created *Aktionsambiente*—action-ambience—in his performance environment. He fashioned a mood or atmosphere that not only enveloped himself as the performer, but also his audience, to increase their receptivity to the creative process.

In comparison, the folklorist, anthropologist and storyteller, Richard Bauman employed the term performance as ‘conveying a dual sense of artistic *action*—the doing of folklore—and the artistic event—the performance situation involving performer, art form, audience, and setting—both of which are central to the developing performance approach to folklore’⁵⁷.

The similarity of Beuys’ use of language and Bauman’s definition of performance is further apparent in their respective relationships to verbal art. In both Bauman’s storytelling and Beuys’ *aktion*, language is used in a way that draws attention to itself and becomes the performance act.

In Beuys’ *aktion*, *Der Chef*, *The Chief*, *Fluxus Gesang* he lay completely cocooned in a roll of felt. Only his protruding feet made the identification of a hidden human body possible. During these eight hours Beuys used a microphone to create an irregular soundscape of ‘breathing, gurgling, sighing, murmuring, coughing, hissing, grumbling, and whistling’.⁵⁸ His vocalisations were accompanied by the musical compositions of Henning Christiansen⁵⁹. When Beuys was unrolled at midnight he responded to audiences questions concerning the meaning of this *aktion* with, “*Ich bin ein Sender, ich strahle aus.*⁶⁰”: “I am a transmitter; I transmit” (author’s translation). For Beuys, language is sculptural—offering a parallel to Bauman’s concept of *metanarration*—the textual creation of a communicative context for the narration, the leaving of gaps to be filled in by the reader/audience.

⁵⁷ *ibid* p. 165

⁵⁸ Geisenberger, J. *Joseph Beuys und die Music*, Teclum Verlag, Marburg, 1999, p.74

⁵⁹ Adriani, G. Konnertz, W. Thomas, K. *Joseph Beuys: Leben und Werk*, Du Mont Verlag, Köln, 1981, p. 114

⁶⁰ Jappe, G. “Über Joseph Beuys, der Erweiterter Kunstbegriff” in Bluemler, D. Romain, L. (eds) *Künstler, Kritisches Lexikon der Gegenwartskunst*, WB Verlag GmbH & Co KG München, 1988 p.73

Conclusion

Art that cannot shape society and therefore cannot penetrate the heart questions of society and in the end influence the questions of capital, is not Art.⁶¹

Storytelling is grassroots communal oral-aural art that can take place anywhere, anytime without the need for elaborate structures or complex preparations. Storytelling is a form of cultural citizenship; by sharing and engaging in stories from around the world, we can engender greater understanding of cultural specificity and the universally human. Story extends the communality of experience by generating a sense of belonging, in that the personal becomes part of a collective experience and vice versa. This facilitates important individual discoveries while bringing a greater level of comprehensibility to the things we do—a vital asset in an age of the increasingly rapid development of information technology and economic globalization, displaced others and degraded environments. Economic globalization is taking place often at the expense and the destruction of local communities, while simultaneously imposing corporate paradigms on indigenous cultures. The price is the erosion of local identity, local diversity and commonality. According to Beuys, ‘only from art can a new concept of economics be formed, in terms of human needs not in the sense of waste and consumption’.⁶² Economic globalization does not promote equality; it increasingly polarizes people along economic lines that include a loss of access to natural resources, food and water, and habitable landscapes.

In 1995, Norman Meyer made the following statement:

Environmental refugees could become one of the foremost human crisis of our times ... The phenomenon is an outward manifestation of profound change—a manifestation often marked by extreme deprivation, fear and despair. While it derives from environmental problems, it is equally a crisis of social, political and economic sorts ... as such, the crisis could readily become a cause of turmoil and confrontation, leading to conflict and violence.⁶³

⁶¹ J. Beuys, *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler: Auf dem Wege zur Freiheitsgestaltung des Sozialen Organismus*, Vortrag und Discussion, März 23, 1987, Humbold-Haus Achberg, FIU Verlag, Wangen, 2008

⁶² C. Tisdale (Ed) *Joseph Beuys: Multiples, Catalogue Raisonné 1965—1980* (5th ed) New York University Press, New York, 1977.

⁶³ N. Meyer, *Environmental Exodus: An Emergent Crisis in the Global Arena*, Washington DC: Climate Institute, 1995, p. 175—176

The above quote shows that we will need communities capable of meaningful social integration and of being flexible enough to accommodate multiple cultures and identities. Folktales are full of power struggles and raise questions of:

... individual autonomy versus state [and other] dominion, creativity versus repression [and thereby] stimulate critical and free thinking; [folktales] harbour and cultivate the germs of subversion and offer people hope in their resistance to all forms of oppression and in their pursuit of more meaningful modes of life and communication.⁶⁴

We will need, more than ever, the ability to think creatively, to explore and understand across cultural boundaries. The arts, and the methodology of creative exploration and research intrinsic to all artistic processes, can provide shared liminal experiences and make more humane societies possible—even in the face of an, at best, uncertain environmental future.

⁶⁴ J. Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell, Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Revised ed.), University Press Kentucky, 2002, p. 21

Chapter 2

‘The Voice in Which it is Told’:

The Importance of the Human Voice in Life Stories and Folktales

Introduction

This paper explores the importance of the human voice in the oral art of storytelling, in the telling of life stories and in the telling of traditional folktales. Every teller’s individualised expression is created through their own voice and their own conscious and unconscious use of paralinguistic elements, and allows the listener not only to experience the content of a story, but to experience the ‘story of the voice’ itself. I use *voice* here exclusively in the sense of oral human utterance and oral expression. As I offer this paper primarily as a practising storyteller, *story* means folktale, fairytale and life story. Oral storytelling—whether life story or traditional folktale—combines narrated and narrative events: *narrative* is the event a story is telling us about, while *narration* is the event of telling itself.⁶⁵ I further explore the relationship between the human voice and silence, silence and story, and silence imposed by trauma and the contribution storytelling can make towards positive change.

In the folktale, *A Story and a Song*⁶⁶, we can learn that if we fail to ‘sing our song’ and ‘tell our story’ not only will they be lost to others and ourselves but we will not even remember that we once *had* a story to tell. I interpret this loss as a loss of self; few losses could be more devastating. According to Walter Benjamin, ‘the storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he, in turn, makes it the experience of those who are listening’.⁶⁷ In a broader context our stories can allow us to exchange cultural differences while simultaneously enabling us to better recognise things we, as human beings, hold in common. It is in this light of sharing and transmitting experience that I will explore the importance of telling life stories, the confluence of personal narrative and traditional tales and the importance of *the voice* in which they are told.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ R. Bauman, ‘Story, Performance and Event’, cited in H. Rosen, *Speaking from Memory: The Study of Autobiographical Discourse*, London: Trentham Books, 1998, p. 80

⁶⁶ A. K. Ramanujan, ‘A Story and a Song’, *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997

⁶⁷ W. Benjamin, cited in L. Parkinson Zamora, W. B. Faris, (Eds) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, p. 258

⁶⁸ S. De Beauvoir, in L. Wernick Fridman, *Words and Witness: Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies in Representation of Holocaust*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 63

Sharing Experiences—Weaving Memories—The Act of Transmission

Life stories allow us to explore and understand the stories that make up our lives, our personal experiences, beliefs and practices, and how these are woven into a context of lives, beliefs, and practices of people we live with, people who have lived before us and people who will live after us. According to Jack Zipes, ‘we keep family together through story, all types of stories. We circulate these stories to remember and be remembered. Our hope of immortality lies in story’.⁶⁹ The value of telling our stories lies in a deepening of our roots and the ability to access more profound layers of remembering and narrated family stories build bridges across generational difference and fill knowledge gaps.

Such insight is also transmitted in the Chinese folktale *White Wave*.⁷⁰ ‘When the old man died, the shell was lost. In time the shrine, too, disappeared. All that remained was the story. But that is how it is with all of us. When we die, all that remains is the story.’ In this sense, our story is part of a complex and continually emerging weave or tapestry of stories, an image linked to the concept of Urd’s working of ‘things that have come to pass’.⁷¹

My grandmother usually told traditional stories and stories about her life while drinking coffee seated at the kitchen table, knitting, crocheting or embroidering. So for me, knitting, crocheting or embroidering are linked to story by metaphor: if a story is missing, a stitch is dropped, a hole appears and the entire fabric is weakened and in danger of unravelling. Trinh T. Minh-Ha⁷² highlights stories as this fabric of life in pointing out that while living cannot be merely told, it is also not merely liveable, implying life needs both: the telling of its stories as well as the living of its stories as a basis of understanding.

⁶⁹ J. Zipes, *Creative Storytelling; Building Community Changing Lives*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 165

⁷⁰ Chinese folktale ‘White Wave’, cited in P. J. Cooper, R. Collins and M. Saxby, *The Power of Story*, Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1994, p. 7

⁷¹ In *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, Paul Bauschatz (1982) states that the perception of time in ancient Germanic culture was a movement from the nonpast—which is present and future combined—into the past; the past being a tapestry into which the events of the nonpast are added. The qualitative difference between this concept of past and the contemporaneous understanding of the same is one of the past *becoming*. Here, the past is constantly evolving, transpiring, and changing, unlike our current view of the past, which is made up of things long-gone, usually dead, and definitely finished. He believes this difference in concepts can be traced and understood linguistically and culturally: according to Bauschatz, ancient Germanic languages had a binary tense system, which did not distinguish between present and future tense, hence nonpast and past. Urd means: ‘that which has become’, or ‘that which has turned’, again emphasising the concept of weaving present and future into the tapestry which becomes past. Urd’s well, the *Urdarbrunnr* is not just the sump, into which all things drain in time, it is the source of healing.

⁷² T. T. Minh-Ha, ‘Grandmother’s Story’ in *Woman, Native, Other*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989

Understanding, however, is creating, and living, such an immense gift that thousands of people benefit from each past or present life being lived. The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being.⁷³

Stories depend upon a human community to carry them. Minh-ha emphasises it is not only the content of the stories that needs to be learned and carried, but also the *act of telling the story*. The act of transmission itself is something we must acquire. She explains that, although the stories are transmitted from generation to generation, the very power of transmitting also must be learned and passed on.⁷⁴ My grandmother's constant storytelling provided a natural process of learning; my skills as storyteller were acquired without pressure and came to fruition by telling stories to my own children, as well as in formal development during my studies of Recitation and Dramatic Arts.⁷⁵ This power of transmission, inherent in the telling of stories, enables us to share experience within human communities. Michael W. Apple asserts that a culture in common requires:

the creation of the conditions necessary for all people to participate in the creation and recreation of meanings and values. It requires a democratic process in which all people—not simply those who see themselves as the intellectual guardians of the 'Western Tradition'—can be involved in the deliberation of what is important. It should go without saying that this necessitates the removal of the very material obstacles (unequal power, wealth, time for reflection) that stand in the way of such participation.⁷⁶

In the act of storytelling, the very 'material obstacles are removed' and the story, the storyteller and the audience—those contained within a space of listening—share equal importance. Not only is every person in the audience a potential storyteller, but, to paraphrase Livo and Reitz, the stories told are a collective creation⁷⁷ which takes place between the teller and the listener, and listener and listener through conversation. This collective creativity allows people to enter into a cultural communion beyond the reach of their individual lives. Sharing stories offers an opportunity to learn about consequences virtually without having to suffer personally. It also provides the *experience*

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 119

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 134

⁷⁵ Bildungsstätte für Sprächende Kunst, Köngen, Leitung: Rüdiger Fischer-Dorp; Ingeborg Gessinger, Germany

⁷⁶ M. W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, New York: Routledge, 1993 pp. 62–63

⁷⁷ N. Livo and S. Reitz, *Storytelling: Process and Practice*, Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1986

that although our own story is unique, it does not have to be isolating, for it holds features in common with the life stories of others—and with the features of characters found in traditional tales. As Story is a shared reality through which we understand human life, the cultural practice of storytelling is vital to the health of our communities. In relation to generational equity, the loss of the ability to tell stories in one generation needs to be recognised as an accumulative loss for following generations.

By sharing life stories we also give them into another's care as expressed by Gayl Jones in the following passage:

My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that she didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget.⁷⁸

The telling of handing-down stories in the above example weaves generations together and fills in, at least in part, gaps of lived experiences held by one generation but not another; knowledge is accumulated, added to and expanded upon. Accumulated lived experience is handed down with the obligation: never forget, keep adding to the knowledge and keep passing it down the line. Hence Minh-Ha says Story depends upon every one of us to come into being and keep on coming into being. Furthermore, accumulated communal wisdom supports autonomy in both family and society according to Zipes:

the more autonomous people feel in their families and communities, the less violent they will become, and here storytelling can play a productive role by contributing to a strong sense of community. Storytelling can show children alternatives to violence through different ways of narrating their lives and assuming responsibility.⁷⁹

I will relate an example from my own experience: I understood the devastating effects of 'shell-shock' long before I had heard the term itself. My Grandmother's retelling of my grand-uncle's story allowed me, as a high-school student, to experience history with human features as prescribed texts were augmented by 'family history'. My grandmother's memories of her own and her family's war experiences, which spanned both World Wars, instilled in me a deep-rooted abhorrence of all forms of institutionalised violence.

⁷⁸ G. Jones, *Corregidora*, New York: Random House, 1975, p. 9

⁷⁹ Zipes, 1995, p. 194

Storytelling is in itself an act of memory. Both memory and Story employ *undecidability*⁸⁰ and illusiveness of language. It is the very lack of univocity, ‘which resides in language and its continual *deferral* of meaning’⁸¹, that defies any attempt to fix meaning through language, and gives stories their power and mobility. Language, according to Derrida, is a malleable flexible fabric of expanding possibilities. Folktales are therefore *un-fixed*, and exist in multiple forms that are amended and reworked in response to and concurrent with cultural contexts and generational shifts. Narrative memory is flexible, narrative knowledge is amenable to change; each expands with the telling of every ‘new’ story. By telling our own stories or orally narrating family or ethnic history, we can revisit the past, renegotiate and rediscover our recollections. In many indigenous cultures, stories preserve history and are a record and voice of resistance during times of oppression. Hilary McPhee states, ‘it may be that narrative memory, the stories of separate people, is the only way history can be shared’.⁸² An understanding of our past is created and our past is creatively maintained through stories.

Experiencing Difference, Discovering Common Humanity: The Key is Taking Time

The sharing of personal stories allows others to experience *our* truth and to understand who we are. This understanding does not subscribe to concepts of an objective reporting of facts. Rather, it relates directly to a phenomenon known as ‘story truth’ or, as Marjorie DeVault⁸³ describes it, truths of ‘our’ experiences.

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don’t reveal the past ‘as it actually was,’ aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences.⁸⁴

Because we go through a process of forming a narrative and narrating events, telling life stories creates and expands our personal experience as well as contributes to our own clarity. We also take

⁸⁰Undecidability used here as a condition that avoids absolutism, and maintains the possibility to act and decide; something that is and is not simultaneously. See J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (G. C. Spivak, Trans.), Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997

⁸¹J. Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, in *Twentieth Century Literary Theory*, K.M. Newton (Ed.), London: Macmillan, 1988, p. 65

⁸²H. McPhee, *Other People’s Words*, Sydney: Picador, 2001

⁸³ M. L. DeVault, ‘Personal Writing in Social Research’, in *Reflexivity and Voice*, R. Hertz (Ed.) London: Sage, 1997, pp. 216–228

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p. 216

a risk in telling our lives—our truths—but we stand to gain resolution, find meaning and healing, if healing is required. I would like to offer two examples. Lenora Ucko⁸⁵ of *StoriesWork* developed an interactive storytelling technique which combines the telling of folktales and life stories; her aim is to facilitate self-empowerment, sound decision making and support abused women in their efforts to overcome the shame, isolation and silence that shroud domestic violence:

In a support group setting, participants can address very sensitive subjects when discussing folk story characters. Abused women find it easier to see in folk stories what they may not wish to see or talk about in their own lives. Each abused woman subsequently finds her own way, considering for her own life what she has internalized from the folk story and the discussion.⁸⁶

Ucko goes on to describe how, once a folktale has been told, individual women will respond by telling their own life story. In one case, a young woman, unsure whether the *StoriesWork* support group was right for her, sat at the back of the room silently crying throughout the workshop. ‘As the session was coming to a close, the young woman dried her eyes and said simply, “now I can tell you my story”’.⁸⁷

A further example is Judith Rolls⁸⁸; Rolls researched the different ways women recover from romantic relationship break-ups, why these differences exist and how sharing women’s narratives of loss and separation might assist others in their recovery. Rolls found that ‘focus-groups are viable story-collecting tools’⁸⁹ well-suited to ‘women’s interactional styles’⁹⁰ and recognized through her study that storytelling plays an ‘educational role in our society’.⁹¹ Rolls further found that:

Because we do not have words or terminology in the English language to describe women’s experiences (Kramarae; Spender), issues related to

⁸⁵ L. Ucko, ‘StoriesWork: Interactive Storytelling and Domestic Abuse’, in *Storytelling, Self, Society*, Vol 6, No 2, 2010, pp. 94–106

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p. 102

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 103

⁸⁸ J. A. Rolls, ‘Tales from Broken Hearts: Women and Recovery From Romantic Relationships’, in *Storytelling, Self, Society*, Vol 6, No 2, 2010, pp. 107–121

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p. 108

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p. 108

⁹¹ *ibid.* p. 108

women have traditionally been passed on in the form of stories. In other words, they “storied” them into existence.⁹²

Rolls concludes that, ‘researchers interested in understanding aspects of women’s lives might well be advised to use storytelling’.⁹³ In both examples women regain their ability to tell their stories and by doing so recover who they are and discover who they wish to become. A native American saying states: it takes a thousand voices to tell one story—I agree, and would add: it takes one story to set a thousand voices free. The events of our lives are worthy of a story; through storying, the mundane is transformed into the profound, heightening the significance of the so-called trivial. As the mundane is invested with a greater truth by extending the individual experience into the communal story, we understand that the personal story is simultaneously universal. It is my experience that this recognition of concurrence between the unique and the universal enables us to recognise aspects of our lives within traditional myths, legends and folk tales.

When I tell ‘the button-story’⁹⁴, the story of my childhood immigration to Australia, others—if they too immigrated—respond with stories of their own or recall stories of immigrant children they knew or compare this alienation with their experiences of moving to a new place, changing schools and other examples of being ‘the stranger’. Given Australia’s recent policies on mandatory detention, my story, told today, will call up stories with more dramatic variations on the theme. My childhood story bridges time, place, and culture and opens the way to human questions: Where did you come from? Why did you leave your home? Did you want to come here? Behind these questions, again, lie stories often left untold because we think them too mundane, but storytelling always takes place in a ‘socio-historical context, and this context shapes the reception of the tale as much as the tale or the teller does. As the context changes so does the function of the storyteller’⁹⁵—therefore, every story counts.

Telling stories and receiving stories and storing them in memory takes time shared with another human being. Arnold Zable⁹⁶ explains that ‘the most human of stories is to come to understand another human being’. We cannot achieve this through a quick interchange or interview or a brief survey—we have to get to know people. It takes time. To come to know someone’s story means, for Zable, sitting beside them, listening to them and understanding their uniqueness, not only through the contents of the tale they are telling, but also through the very way the story is *told*. A

⁹² *ibid.* p. 109

⁹³ *ibid.* p. 121

⁹⁴ *Watermarks*, Chapter: ‘Weeds and Worries’

⁹⁵ J. Zipes, 1995, p. 224

⁹⁶ A. Zable, *The Humanising Effect of Story*, Basia Leinkram Lecture, ABC Radio National Book Show, presenter Ramona Koval, March 9, 2009

similar affirmation is made by Simone De Beauvoir⁹⁷—I will return to this particular statement in more detail, but will say this much here: Simone De Beauvoir emphasises that the salient point of personal stories, in particular survivor stories, is not the story told as such, but the *voice in which it is told*, because experience can only be communicated by another experience. This argues for the preservation of *oral* storytelling, as written language cannot encode linguistic forms and paralinguistic elements. (I will discuss this in more detail below.) We access experience through the *voice* of the individual—I mean the human voice literally. The way a story is told can reveal and carry cultural and individual specificity. Experiencing these cultural and personal differences can lead us to discover our common humanity. To paraphrase Zable, this is at the heart and soul of what a harmonious cosmopolitan society can be. With some tongue-in-cheek, he sums this up into a formula:

$$S = ER^2$$

S stands for ‘Story’, ER for ‘Entering into a Relationship’ and ² stands for ‘over a period of time’. So, ‘*Story is entering into a relationship over time*’.⁹⁸ I am grateful to Arnold Zable for his simple yet powerful formula. It is demonstrated in the following example.

Alida Gersie⁹⁹ describes such an experience of story, borne out of entering into a relationship over time, in her encounter with a young girl. The girl, a resident of a drug-rehabilitation centre in Harlem, ‘never talked about the past or the future’.¹⁰⁰ This girl’s name was Deirdre, like the heroine of the Irish tale of *Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach*.¹⁰¹ Recognising the girl’s loneliness, Gersie decided to tell her the story from the *Red Branch of the Ulster Cycle* in which the heroine dies of grief. Noteworthy in this context is that Gersie herself had heard it told as a fourteen year old, when she moved to a new town and found herself isolated and alone. Gersie perceived the loneliness in common between her fourteen-year-old self and the girl in Harlem, and, although the experiences themselves were decades apart, Gersie and Deirdre were united in their shared understanding of the tragic heroine of the Ulster Cycle. During the telling of the tale the young girl, who, according to Gersie, generally avoided all physical contact, ‘snuggled up [and] cried without saying why’.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ S. De Beauvoir in L. Wernick Fridman, p. 63

⁹⁸ Zable

⁹⁹ A. Gersie, *Storymaking in Bereavement: Dragons Fight in the Meadow*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1991

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 129

¹⁰¹ Also known as *The Death of the Sons of Usnach* or *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

¹⁰² Gersie, p. 219

The following day Deirdre of Harlem told her own sorrowful story but cried out between sobs, ‘I want to make it better. That other Deirdre. I want to live’.¹⁰³

Gersie’s account reveals two aspects of story-bridges: in telling our story we connect personal narrative to personal narrative and/or the telling of an oral story forms a bridge that connects a personal narrative to a traditional tale. Gersie’s story becomes the fulcrum—a point of mobility from which Deirdre can choose a different approach to her life. It doesn’t replace the support she needs, but it provides a point of departure from which something new can arise—similar to the experiences described by Ucko and Rolls. As Zable describes, and Gersie demonstrates, I may come from a different background (Gersie and Deirdre of Harlem) and events may be separated by decades, but I have a similar story to tell (Gersie’s own loneliness and the tale of Deirdre of the Sorrows) and therefore I understand your story and can help you tell it in your own voice (Deirdre of Harlem). Zipes also argues that by showing children the diverse forms and strategies story genres use to address specific situations, ‘the storyteller empowers children and gives them the means to articulate their needs and wishes’¹⁰⁴; from my experience as a storyteller I can unequivocally state: the same applies to adults. Zipes argues that learning how to tell a story is in itself a process of empowerment leading to the ability to narrate our own lives, and that this process further develops our ability to form plots to reach our goals. Most importantly, storytelling is a way to ‘create and strengthen a sense of community’¹⁰⁵ in which storying becomes a means of ‘animation and self-discovery’.¹⁰⁶ Zipes explains that such animated storytelling uses ‘models, ethical principles, canons of literature and social standards to *play* with the prescribed models, principles and canons’, allowing us to verify their usefulness to a community and to ascertain whether they are deserving of our respect.

The story of *Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach* mattered to Deirdre of Harlem because ‘it offered her a fairly accurate representation of her own life experiences and therefore of her inner world’.¹⁰⁷ A shared truth of personal experiences transmitted by the unique voice of the individual teller empowered Deirdre of Harlem to recognise her needs and articulate them.

We sometimes find it impossible to articulate aspects of our life within the constricted confines of the language available to us: perhaps our story contains immense tragedy we feel we cannot voice; perhaps we have experienced mystery beyond the grasp of rational explanation—the reasons are many. In such situations, hearing a traditional folktale, myth or legend can *lend* us words and images that make it possible to speak the unutterable, because we find our story told, in essence, in

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Zipes, 1995, p. 224

¹⁰⁵ Zipes, 1995 p. 4

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Gersie, p. 220

the universal images of a sacred story. The language of stories is multivalent. ‘Language ... evokes, and through evocation inspires. Such inspiration enhances our vision. This we need, oftentimes desperately, in days of pain and turmoil’.¹⁰⁸

Story mediates between our outright experiences and our subtle intuitions, as well as allowing us to fathom common and intrinsically human qualities. People sit together and discover difference, and by learning difference and uniqueness we discover our humanity-in-common. In other words telling stories—traditional folktales and personal life stories alike—is intrinsically human. Therefore:

the process of learning how to tell a story is a process of empowerment. We all want to narrate our lives, but very few of us have been given the techniques and insights that can help us form plots to reach our goals. We need to learn strategies of narration when we are very young in order to grasp that we can become our own narrators, the storytellers of our lives.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps this is the key to understanding the woman in the Indian folktale *A Story A Song*? Perhaps she never acquired the ‘strategies of narration’ that empowered her to tell her story? The imagery offered in *A Story A Song* is poignant; what was once intimate and personal, becomes, through internal suppression, something external and alien: a man’s coat and shoes that neither the woman nor her husband recognise.

But what happens to us, individually and collectively, if the telling of our stories is externally suppressed? We stand to lose our humanity: we suppress the humanity of those we silence and we lose our own humanity if we are silenced by others.

Zable describes the dehumanising effect of such suppression via the examples of the ‘Children Overboard’ and the ‘Tampa’ affairs. Both incidences occurred in 2001 in Australian waters. In October 2001 a ‘Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel’ (SIEV 4) was intercepted by *HMAS Adelaide* 190 km north of Christmas Island and subsequently sank. The SIEV 4 was carrying 223 asylum seekers. On the following day it was announced that adult illegal immigrants had thrown children overboard to force entry into Australia. The evidence was a series of photographs showing children in the water. The truth—that no child was thrown from the SIEV 4 and that the images in fact showed children swimming for their lives after the SIEV 4 was sunk—was suppressed. In August of the same year, the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa*, as vessel in closest proximity to the stricken and sinking *Palapa 1*, was alerted by the Australian coast guard, and rescued 438 asylum seekers in

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 224

¹⁰⁹ Zipes, 1995, p. 4

international waters. Despite the fact that the *Tampa* was only equipped to safely carry 27 crew it was refused entry into Australian waters—a stand-off ensued. The Australian government created a media ‘black out’; no access was given to the asylum seekers; no one onboard was allowed ashore; no civilian doctors, nurses, or lawyers were allowed near the ship. No camera people were allowed close enough to put a human face to the unfolding tragedy, or to record the grief and loss experienced after the sinking of the *Palapa 1*. As such, the ‘Tampa Affair’ stayed an abstract event—the mediated image being a ‘horde of people’.¹¹⁰

Zable decisively points out that a horde will always equate with abstraction and abstraction alienates, depersonalises and distances. A horde quickly becomes the image of the enemy, and human beings, worthy of our deepest compassion, become *the other*, a threat to national security and health. If, instead of this abstract depersonalised image of the horde, we had *heard* the unique stories told in the individual voices of the refugees—human voices filled with emotion—what then?

Zable emphasises that desperate people will do desperate things in desperate situations to survive and notes the resemblance between the stories of the Tampa refugees and refugees of WWII by retelling the story of Ida Sokolowski. Ida was forcibly deported to Treblinka. Knowing what awaited them, some of the people she was with tore out the sides of the rail-car and leapt from the moving train. Ida too jumped from the train clutching her infant daughter—just as parents leapt from the sinking SIEV 4 clutching their children. The stories later told by SIEV 4 and Tampa refugees echo those of Jewish refugees—echoed stories of people fleeing persecution at any time anywhere in the world. However, to honour personal stories, we must also understand:

that despite similarities, every story is different. It would demean them to say they are the same; it would bereave them of their uniqueness—and still we must recognise the echoes that reverberate from one story to another, echoes upon echoes upon echoes.¹¹¹

Orality—Silence and Story

Before I pursue the theme of silence I would like to briefly focus on the nature of the spoken word. Walter Ong explains that sound stands in a particular relationship to time because:

[s]ound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent. When I pronounce the word “permanence”, by the time I get to the “nence” the “perma” is gone, and has to be gone.

¹¹⁰ Zable

¹¹¹ Zable

There is no way to stop sound and have sound. I can stop a moving picture camera and hold one frame fixed on the screen. If I stop the movement of sound, I have nothing—only silence, no sound at all [...] there is no equivalent to a still shot for sound. An oscillogram is silent. It lies outside the sound world [...] all sound, and especially oral utterance, is dynamic.¹¹²

Silence, particularly in relation to storytelling as described above, is then something other than a simple absence of sound or a temporary pause in speech. Bernard Dauenhauer¹¹³ determines silence ‘precedes speech and calls forth language’.¹¹⁴ Silence obviously also follows after or we would not be capable of making sense of language. Lea Wernick Fridman investigates the natural dynamic between speech and silence and examines the breakdown of this dynamic under the weight of historic trauma by interrogating the margin that separates the *representable* from the *unrepresentable*. Fridman determines that trauma on the scale of a holocaust *includes* a loss of words, a silence that does not bring forth speech, because the survivors ‘cannot describe what is beyond belief’.¹¹⁵ She avows, traumatic experiences of such magnitude create ‘impassable rifts between the domain of experience and that of language, and bring into hearing a very different set of silences’¹¹⁶ than those identified by Dauenhauer (and perhaps Ong). I would further add that when human beings transgress in ways so deeply depraved and inhuman, their deeds are located outside of human parameters and therefore *beyond human language*. Speech breaks down, collapses, in the face of the impossibility to bridge experience and expression, and the voice caves in to a silence that is ‘evidence of the unbelievable—testimony to historical horror’.¹¹⁷ Fridman asserts:

to dwell on this silence that is linked to the killing process, that is the very mark of the killing process, is to dwell precisely on the unintegratable and traumatic fact, and hence to begin to hear a silence

¹¹² W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 32

¹¹³ B. P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*, Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 119

¹¹⁴ Dauenhauer cited in L. Wernick Fridman, *Words and Witness: Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies in the Representation of the Holocaust*, Albany: State University New York Press, 2000, p. 55

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 59

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 54

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 61

profoundly resisted and, therefore, profoundly silent, at the chaotic heart of history.¹¹⁸

Here the traditional folktale can speak softly where the personal voice is lost for words.

Jane Yolen's novel *Briar Rose*¹¹⁹ uses the tale of *Sleeping Beauty* or *Briar Rose* to lend words to the silence left in the wake of the Holocaust of WWII. In Yolen's novel a grandmother tells her story of survival veiled in the images of the traditional tale and obligates her granddaughter to discover the truth behind her claim, 'I am Briar Rose.'

A mist. A great mist. It covered the entire kingdom. And everyone in it—the good people and the not so good, and even Briar Rose's mother and father fell asleep. Everyone slept: lords and ladies, teachers and tumblers, dogs and doves, rabbits and rabbitzen and all kinds of citizens. So fast asleep were they, they were not able to wake up for a hundred years [...]

"Is a hundred a lot?"

"A hundred is forever."¹²⁰

Yolen describes the systematic gassing of Jewish people in Chelmno. People were herded into the back of large enclosed vans and, while the vans were driven to the site of mass graves, gassed with the exhaust fumes from the engine piped into the interior. Yolen weaves between piercing 'eyewitness' descriptions and the language of the folktale. In doing so she bridges the abyss that separates the *unrepresentable* from the *representable*, the chasm between horrific experience and language:

... he had already leapt down into that hellish pit, pushing the stiffening bodies aside. And when he stood up again, shakily, on the backs and breasts and sides of slaughtered people, he held a single body in his arms.

It was a young woman and even in the quickening dark, Joseph could see that her arm was moving sluggishly, that her face had an odd pattern of roses on her cheeks.

... Joseph could feel her die in his arms. So he laid her down on the ground and, putting his mouth on hers, the taste of vomit bitter on his lips, he tried to give her breath.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 61

¹¹⁹ J. Yolen, *Briar Rose*, Starscape Books, New York: Tom Doherty, 2002

¹²⁰ *ibid.* p. 43—44

*And as he did so, giving her breath for breath, she awoke ...*¹²²

Yolen's use of the traditional tale, *Briar Rose*, reflects in principle the approach described by Gersie and her use of the Irish folktale. In Yolen's story the protagonist, Gemma, finds it as impossible, as did Deirdre of Harlem, to voice the horrors she has experienced. Yolen empowers her character to tell her story by *borrowing* the words and images of Briar Rose and employing them in an untraditional way, just as Gersie empowers Deirdre through the story from the Ulster Cycle.

A record of oral autobiographies of holocaust survivors¹²³ can be found in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*.¹²⁴ The film avoids the use of archival footage and focuses on the life stories of Jewish, Polish and German people, as well as recording contemporaneous visits to holocaust-related sites. In *Shoah*, we pay heed not primarily to the stories, which are being told, 'but to the voices in which stories are told, or, more often, not told'.¹²⁵

I briefly foreshadowed the importance of paralinguistic elements above and will return to this point as follows. Paralinguistic elements reveal the teller's overt and covert emotions in synchrony with the progressive unfolding of the story. They are direct markers of experience accessible to those hearing the tale told. Oral storytelling uses interjections (such as sighs 'ah' or exclamations 'oh' etc.), postures (such as the hunching of shoulders, the lowering of a gaze, tilt of the head), gestures, breath and voice modulation (warm, harsh, blunt, sharp, passionate, soothing), tempo changes, crying and weeping, laughter *and* silences. These paralinguistic elements cannot be encapsulated in a written form without diminishing their expressive power—a sigh, as brief as it may be, can contain a symphony of emotion. Silence, as argued, is exceedingly complex; there are qualitatively different silences—in the voices of the survivors we hear 'a silence profoundly resisted, and, therefore profoundly silent'¹²⁶.

Works of historical horror repeatedly focus on the breakdown of relationship between experience and language, the silence of and within language that flows in the wake of that breakdown, and, finally, upon the human voice itself and the ways it is marked by its experiences. The

¹²¹ *ibid.* p. 207

¹²² *ibid.* p. 238

¹²³ I feel it is important to note, but do not wish to further discuss here, that criticism has been raised against Lanzmann's use of mistranslated dialogue, bias, and the misrepresentation of some subjects in this film, *Shoah*.

¹²⁴ C. Lanzmann (Director), *Shoah*, America: New Yorker Films, 1985

¹²⁵ Wernick Fridman, p. 64

¹²⁶ *ibid.* p. 61

marks of traumatic historical experience, then, if not lexically available, are audible in the voice that is our venue, finally, to the silence outside language.¹²⁷

The above quote also points to the importance of oral storytelling, as the marks of traumatic historical experience are not lexically available and can therefore only be experienced through the human voice and its moments of silence. In her discussion of *Shoah*, Simone de Beauvoir¹²⁸ also focuses on the expression of the voice, rather than content, and describes the different voices: the points at which emotion takes over, the poise of the voice, and the individual differentiations:

She understands intuitively that the point is not the story being told but the voice in which it is told. She knows that an experience can only be communicated through another experience; that only as we experience the voice addressing us, the pauses, the hesitations that mark it and flow from experience, can we begin to understand. The stories of the survivors in the film do not bore the viewer, because the real story is [...] the story of the voice.¹²⁹

Telling our story on our terms further allows us to ‘retrieve the forgotten, to survive and supersede it’.¹³⁰ If we fail to nurture the oral traditions of storytelling, we stand to lose the ability to tell, the voices in which stories must be told, and the experience that comes to us through the voice.

Overcoming Abstraction, Depersonalisation and Distance—Transforming the Bystander

Patricia Joplin¹³¹ offers a corresponding perspective on silence and trauma in her retelling of the story of *Philomela*. Raped and bereft of speech (her tongue was cut out), Philomela refuses her status as mute victim and weaves her story into a tapestry. Joplin points out that ‘the text she weaves is overburdened with a desire to tell’.¹³² Philomela’s tapestry bears testimony to the silencing of victims of sexual violence, as her text reclaims ‘all that her culture defines as outside the bounds of allowable discourse, whether sexual, spiritual, or literary’.¹³³ This story, in all its

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p. 62

¹²⁸ S. de Beauvoir cited in Wernick Fridman, p. 63

¹²⁹ *ibid.* p. 63

¹³⁰ K. C. T. Hak, *Dictée*, New York: Tanam Press, 1982, p. 150

¹³¹ P. Joplin, ‘The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours’, in *Stanford Literature Review*, Vol 1, Spring Issue 1984, pp. 43—46

¹³² *ibid.* p. 46

¹³³ *ibid.* p. 48

detail, leaves the private space of personal suffering and becomes a political statement in its resistance to violence. Joplin directs our attention to a space between the act of violence and the act of resistance. This space is crucial as ‘in the middle [between rape and resistance] we recover the moment of the loom, the point of departure for the woman’s story’.¹³⁴ By its nature, weaving equates with the telling of the tale, the story can only reveal itself over time. ‘[R]evenge, or dismembering, is quick. Art, or the resistance to violence and disorder inherent in the very process of weaving, is slow’.¹³⁵

My life story also speaks of child abuse. The things that are hidden within the abstract term *child sexual abuse* are hard to name because these stories still largely remain outside socially allowable discourse. Such stories are horrific; we do not wish to hear them. The sexually abused child suffers repeatedly: through the acts of abuse perpetrated, through the silence imposed by perpetrators, and through those who do not listen because the details are too disturbing to hear. Victims of child sexual abuse are consistently forced into secrecy. By disallowing detailed stories, we actively reinforce the silence imposed by perpetrators. Through abstraction, we refuse to share the experience. The term abuse never reflects the reality it signifies; listening to the life story of someone who has experienced abuse does. If in relation to a holocaust, silence becomes ‘the very mark of the killing process’, then silence, in relation to child sexual abuse, is the very mark of the abusive act. Ernst Bloch’s¹³⁶ emphatic statement, ‘what we experience demands expression. We should not be silent about things we cannot say’, mirrors Philomela’s refusal to be silenced and reflects her innovative use of the ‘voice of the shuttle’ to replace her own unique voice so violently taken from her.

Equally, legalistic and clinical terms that speak *for* those that have suffered abuse can alienate and silence them. The victims are ‘left stuttering or not speaking at all in the face of the normative nomenclature of technical language’.¹³⁷ The silencers, find ‘the comforts and rewards that come with the embrace of certain magical verbal construction’¹³⁸ that allow them to hide behind ‘conceptual static’¹³⁹, successfully drowning out the details of stories we do not want to hear, thus maintaining a ‘free-floating attention’¹⁴⁰ at a ‘hovering distance’¹⁴¹ that allows them ‘not to get too

¹³⁴ *ibid.* p. 43

¹³⁵ *ibid.* p. 43

¹³⁶ E. Bloch, ‘Heraus zum Tag’, in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie* (Gesamtausgabe, vol. 10). Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1969, p. 412

¹³⁷ B. Duden, *Geschichte unter der Haut. Ein Eisenacher Arzt und seine Patientinnen um 1730*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987, p. 107

¹³⁸ R. Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989, p. 19

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

involved¹⁴². Such abstractions also provide perpetrators with the anonymity collective terminology affords, and veils the individual reality and the details of abusive actions.

In telling my story I lend my voice to those who have not yet spoken, and encourage them to break their silence—gently. Detail in stories of child sexual abuse is deeply disturbing—not least because it humanises and confronts us with personal individual suffering—and vital if we wish to overcome the isolation created by such experiences.

Lack of detail allows us to remain bystanders. It is the long-shot lens through which we view the ‘horde on the Tampa’, the complicit silence that simply denies what is too disturbing and fails to take responsibility for implementing long-lasting changes. Victoria Barnett¹⁴³ states, Nazism derived its power not only from fanatical party members but also from the millions who stood by, obeyed orders, informed on others and remained passive while witnessing the victimisation of human beings around them. In this sense, bystanders are perpetrators by proxy who allow the greatest evils to be committed by majority permission. This phenomenon of the bystander was not limited to or isolated within Germany. It was and is to this day an international phenomenon in both passive acceptance of the extermination of human beings and active replication of institutionalised violence—a phenomenon from which no human society is immune. Barnett¹⁴⁴ describes a rationale of survival that—in extreme situations—renders all other human action irrational when one is faced with the choice of one’s own torture and/or death, *or* the non-resistance to another’s destruction. However, she also describes the actions of the people of the village of Le Chambon¹⁴⁵, France, who rescued more than 2500 children from certain death during Nazi occupation. Barnett leaves no doubt that the courage it took to save these children resided in the fact that the villagers agreed to do so collectively, and, that this agreement was supported by a well-developed sense of community. It is likely that without this communal support such moral courage would not have emerged. A community can become the birthplace for moral courage even under dire circumstances.

A detailed story, told in the voice of experience, has the potential to transform the bystander into an empathising listener. Listening to stories allows us to share this experience—even if we have never suffered like circumstances—within the safe space of Story.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² *ibid.* p. 9

¹⁴³ V. J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 117—130

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 153—164

Telling my story is a political statement in resistance to violence *and* a creative act. Stepping outside of the parameters of allowable discourse is an act of ‘creative maladjustment’ as defined by Herbert Kohl.

When it is impossible to remain in harmony with one’s environment without giving up deeply held moral values, creative maladjustment becomes a sane alternative to giving up altogether. Creative maladjustment consists of breaking social patterns that are morally reprehensible, taking conscious control of one’s place in the environment, and readjusting the world one lives in based on personal integrity and honesty—that is, it consists of learning to survive with minimal moral and personal compromise in a thoroughly compromised world and of not being afraid of planned and willed conflict, if necessary. It also means searching for ways of not being alone in a society where the mythology of individualism negates integrity and leads to isolation and self-mutilation.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

My reason for offering detail is to bear witness, to bring to consciousness, to share *my story* so that we together can come to understand creatively and address abuse at its source. *And* the perpetrators, can, by telling their individual story, engage us in their struggle to find words to speak—herein lies a lasting possibility for change.

De Beauvoir emphasised the point of a survivor story is the voice in which it is told, because experience can only be communicated by another experience. Our access to experience is the voice in all its vulnerability as it struggles to remember and articulate the very thing we wish, most of all, to forget. Telling my story allows me to move beyond denial and lift my narrative ‘out of the hell of blame and guilt and suggest a possible transformation’.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ H. Kohl, “*I Won’t Learn from You*” and *Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment*, New York: New York Press, 1994, p.103

¹⁴⁷ Professor Kay Stone, remarks as a general reader and professional folklorist upon reading *Watermarks*, 2009

Chapter 3

Writing Practices, Themes, Issues and Symbols, Strategies and Style/s

Setting and Themes

Mountains are formed by gargantuan collisions of tectonic plates or through violent volcanic eruptions on a colossal scale; land areas are lifted and thrust upwards, folding the earth's crust along fault lines. Escarpments, so created, remain transitional zones—liminal areas between divergent geological physicality resulting in steep abrupt elevation and the forming of cliffs, a margin between two landforms fashioned by erosion and vertical movement. The escarpment marks the site of transition from one sedimentary rock form to another and reveals the different age and composition of minerals in the dissimilar pace of erosion and weathering of formations. Climatic conditions change from base to summit; the heights are colder, more exposed to sun, wind, lightning strikes and the might of storms.

The aim of this setting is to create a disturbing sense of isolation within the novel, *Watermarks*; the town is removed, apart from other human habitation, and remote; its elevated position lets it appear both hazardously placed and aloof. The storm-battered, wind-ravaged town, hammered by constant downpours, smothered and obscured by veils of cloud, is not easily approached; once accessed it reveals a precarious environment in which the dynamics shift between heinous acts of depravity and feats of courage and compassion.

Despite the tempestuous environment, the town at first appears commonplace with a country pub, shops and a post office; the inhabitants all have red mud on their shoes and similar wrinkles around their eyes from squinting against the sun from the same angle.

During one violent storm a stranger arrives and takes up residence. Busy with their mop-up and agitated by the emergence of the indelible and increasingly legible watermarks, the locals forget about the outsider until flyers appear, advertising the retrieval of lost hope and revealing the name of the stranger, Rose Bower.

The outsider's storytelling and the appearance of the watermarks gradually fracture the thin veneer of normality to reveal a community deeply divided by abhorrent secrets.

But the inhabitants find Rose a compelling character; beginning with her mysterious appearance, her flyers and her mastery at crafts, she weaves a web of magic. She gradually engulfs the town in

a texture of warmth—reminiscent of Josef Beuys’¹⁴⁸ *warmth sculpture or social sculpture*. Beuys *social sculpture* refers to the social shaping of community—the building and sculpting of an interpersonal substance of warmth that develops over time, in accordance with people’s growing awareness of each other and the ideal of love and compassion between all human beings. This *Social Sculpture*, according to Beuys, would create a tool with which human beings could dismantle the structures that oppress them and bring about lasting changes and so alleviate human suffering. Storytelling is a way of community building because it belongs to communities and is inextricably connected with them; storytelling comes from within communities while simultaneously enabling communities to think about themselves.

Rose Bower’s storytelling warms the people of the town, and as it enfolds them, it allows one character at a time to change, to show their strengths and beauty, or compels them to divulge the evil they hold concealed within. Once revealed, the inhabitants must find the courage to confront the horrors perpetrated, and the strength to move beyond ascertaining guilt, as this proves not only impossible, but would catastrophically exacerbate their appalling situation. To break the vicious cycle, the inhabitants must understand: forgiveness is a gift to themselves.

My use of traditional folktales, mythology, biography and autobiography in *Watermarks* aims to create a dense textual fabric; varied narratives are woven into a tapestry, through which human potential for good and evil are explored. The theme of abuse is present throughout the novel; the interrogation of abuse functions as the foundation on which much of the novel is constructed. The interweaving narratives of childhood abuse, family stories of WWII, murder and cannibalism and the consequent dissolution of the town are meant to challenge the reader by highlighting the characters’ struggle with the extreme situations in which they find themselves: as perpetrators of these situations, as victims, as bystanders—unaware or uncaring—and as social innovators who bring about lasting change.

The autobiographical stories include child sexual abuse; I have not avoided detailed descriptions, as I believe abuse in any form can only prevail in an atmosphere of fear-induced silence, denial, or passive and active participation. Detail personalises the individual reality of victims; detail names individual pain, names humiliation and terror, and thereby provides the possibility to transform the bystander into an empathising witness.

The Norns: Tense and Time; Shifting Points of View

Narratological devices such as shifting tense and changes of point of view are employed to add to the texture and layering of the story and to create a sense of the omnipresence of the Norns—the

¹⁴⁸ Beuys

Writing Women of Norse Mythology—often erroneously interpreted as female representatives of past, present and future.

In *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, Paul Bauschatz¹⁴⁹ explains the perception of time in ancient Germanic culture as a movement from the nonpast—which is present and future combined—into the past, the past being a tapestry into which the events of the nonpast are added. In other words, the past is comparable to a work of art created over time. It is revealed as it unfolds; this must be seen as a creative process in which the final form remains unknown, as it is the result of the complex actions of mortal and immortal beings alike.

The qualitative difference between this concept of past and the contemporary western understanding of the same is significant. The ancient Germanic past, woven of the events of the nonpast, is constantly evolving, transpiring, *and changing*. Although we generally accept that history influences contemporary issues and acknowledge that the *perception of the past* changes according to one's point of view, we do not, on the whole, perceive the past as open to change, still developing and part of a continuing creative process. Bauschatz believes this difference in concepts can be traced and understood linguistically and culturally: ancient Germanic languages had a binary tense system of past and nonpast, which did not distinguish between present and future tense.

The Norns of the Poetic and Prose Edda¹⁵⁰ are commonly viewed as three *equal* representatives of time: past, present and future. But, there was no concept of triple time in Germanic culture, nor the linguistic or grammatical means with which to express it. In ancient Germanic culture the Norns could not be *equal* in the sense of equal thirds of a whole, as present and future were combined into nonpast, and the past received both into herself.

The name of the principal Norn is Urd, or Urth; the Germanic *Ur* means *ancient* in the sense of primordial. *Ursprung*, for instance, is the primordial source, the wellspring of a thing on the cusp of its existence in time. *Urd's* name is translated as: 'that which has become', or 'that which has turned', emphasising the concept that she is the power who weaves present and future into the tapestry which *becomes* past. This weaving takes place under the boughs of the *Yggdrasil*, World-Ash, beside the *Urdarbrunnr*, the 'Well of that, which has become'. I will return to the topic of the

¹⁴⁹ P. Bauschatz, *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982

¹⁵⁰ Both Poetic Edda and Prose Edda are collections of Norse mythology; the Poetic Edda is the older version and features thirty-four Icelandic alliterations written in verse form, interspersed with prose. The Prose Edda is younger and generally accredited to Snorri Sturlusson; Sturlusson applied the name Edda (which is now used for both documents) to a compilation of texts, some predating Sturlusson, some added long after his death.

well below. The second Norn, Verdandi or Verthandi, ‘that which is turning’ or ‘that which is becoming’, assists in working the present (nonpast) into the past. The third Norn, Skuld—which literally translated means debt—is of a different quality. The Germanic word, *schuld*, is both debt, as in owing something, and fault, as in being responsible for a mistake. The English *should* and the Germanic *schuld* have the same roots in *sceal*, meaning to owe, to be under an obligation; *should*, in conditional tense, is still used to express a recommendation and an obligation. Neither Skuld individually, nor the Norns collectively, predetermine human destiny as the Roman *Fates* are said to do; the Norns challenge and test the choices made by inscribing, in runes on ash-staves, all actions and events, and hold both mortals and immortals to account at the end of time.

This quality of collecting and gathering is also reflected in the depths of *Urd’s* well, the *Urdarbrunnr*; this well is not a sump into which all things drain, but *the* source of healing for the World Ash¹⁵¹; for with the waters of this well the Norns mix the white clay they use to anoint the ever-damaged roots of the tree. This clay, like the act of weaving, also relates to the layering of time; it is a mineral deposit of finest particles, maintaining exceptional plasticity while moist. The minerals are formed over very long periods by the gradual chemical weathering of rock. Clay, like the tapestry of time, simultaneously contains fossils—traces of the past—while remaining capable of receiving immediate imprints of the nonpast. The well is also the site of *rede*. The Middle English *reden*¹⁵², from Old English *rædan* (*æ-* Indo-European roots), means to give advice, to counsel, to interpret, to explain and used as a noun, *rede* means ‘a narration’. The place where the nonpast is woven into the past is a place of counsel, advice, healing and story—none of which work from the premises of a predetermined outcome.

While attempting to come to an understanding of the quality of the Norns’ creative dynamics and healing process, I revisited the image of Joseph Beuys’ *Snowfall*.¹⁵³ His work consists of sixteen felt squares placed in layers over three small branches suggesting the slow layering of snow falling, and, in this, the layering of time. *Snowfall* creates a deep sense of calm and clarity—through the combination of the simplicity and the visibility of all components—which allows me to compare this work to the tranquillity and clarity evoked by the image of the Norns at *Urd’s Well*—the slow layering of clay, the weaving of time and the telling of stories. In the three pieces of wood I see representatives of the three Norns, and, then again, the wood itself is related to the *Yggdrasil* and

¹⁵¹ I am aware of the scholarly debate surrounding the Tree—whether it’s an Ash or Yew and the different interpretations of the name and spelling of Yggdrasil—but do not feel this is relevant to my thesis here. Suffice it to say that the tree connects the ‘nine worlds’ in the sense that it allows communication and interaction between different ‘beings’ and/or plains of consciousness, depending on personal perceptions and preferences. Damage to the tree means a loss of connectedness and isolation.

¹⁵² ‘Reden’ still means ‘to speak’ in contemporary German.

¹⁵³ A. Borer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys*: New York: MIT Press, 1997: Plate 90. [Felt and fur tree trunks]. Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel. Photograph by Ute Klophaus.

the ash-staves the Norns inscribe with runes. I am not suggesting that this perceived similarity was Beuys' intention; I am saying that these two separate images come together in my imagination and support and inform each other.

My experience of this evocative relationship between the otherwise separate images of the Norns and Beuys' *Snowfall* may well have coloured my reading of the following passage of Paul Carter.¹⁵⁴

The Johnny-come-lately migrant could add his own thread to the still active loom of local invention. He might even unravel some threads, and, drawing them aside, disclose gaps in the historical fabric. Feeling an affinity with these voids, and sensitive to the silences and absences they represent, he might even remember what those who had lived here longer appeared to have forgotten. By such means newcomers might be woven into the local history, changing the pattern in the process.

Although Carter refers to the colonising of Australia, his use of the image of weaving the new or present—I include here my immigrant stories—into the existing past and thereby creating and adding to a *new* past is powerfully reminiscent of the Norns' weaving of nonpast into past. It also places the creative responsibility for the treatment of the gaps and silences in the weave and the quality of the weave itself in *our* hands: we shape the past with every action and thought and it is up to us to recognise it as ever becoming and perpetually open.

The imagery of the Norns; the well; the layering of clay and weaving of time; and the advising, counselling and challenging of choices made, not only inform the opening and closing of *Watermarks*, they saturate the novel; they are the inspiration for the character, Rose Bower, and led to my exploration of a layering of grammatical tense.

My experimentation with the repositioning of both the writer's and the reader's proximity to the text through grammatical tenses is also inspired by the work of the German linguist, Harald Weinrich.¹⁵⁵ Weinrich suggests the commentary tense of simple present carries a higher degree of tension, thereby signalling the 'message' within the text needs to be acted upon, whereas the narrative tense of simple past holds less tension and therefore does not suggest the necessity of immediate action. Through Weinrich's work, I recognised it is possible to create proximity to events taking place in a story by creating the impression of a 'close-up' for the reader through present tense, and a shift in proximity by creating the 'long-shot' or 'wide-angle frame' of past tense.

¹⁵⁴ P. Carter, *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004, pp. 1–2

¹⁵⁵ H. Weinrich, *Tempus: Besprochene und Erzählte Welt*, (6th ed.), München: C. H. Beck, 2001

Additionally, Michael Lewis¹⁵⁶ describes close and remote forms of verbs, stating that verbs in present tense imply the event described is immediate and verbs in past tense provide a psychological distance. Weinrich's and Lewis's research on changes in tense supply the writer and the reader with greater dynamics: tense changes playfully and imaginatively, and dramatically repositions our proximity to events taking place in narratives, offering mobility between commentary closeness and narrated remoteness, and the dynamics between emotional engagement and psychological distance.

The works of Angela Carter and research undertaken in my Honours thesis further inspires this experimental writing practice.¹⁵⁷ Angela Cater¹⁵⁸ used changes in tense to consciously manipulate 'distance' but also, according to Mason¹⁵⁹, used the present tense as a means to distinguish between human and non-human, life and death, and to describe the tension of metamorphosis:

Upon death or transformation, these beings are forced to leave the present tense and join the narrative stream of time, the shifting of tense itself becomes a moment of metamorphosis: between the non-human and the simple present, a world of continuous sensual immediacy without knowledge or interrogation of the future, *which, as every grammarian knows, does not exist* [Carter 1992¹⁶⁰], or expectancies, and the human and the simple past.¹⁶¹

Angela Carter not only weaves between these two tense systems, she liberates them from mere functionality—that of setting time—and elevates them to a means of 'creative distinction' between the mundane and the magical.

Angela Carter's narratological devices also include the unreliability of the narrator, intertextuality, and gothic or grotesque styles, which allow critical and parodic readings of time, gender and desire. By using these devices to re-write the latent content of folktales, she redefines strong female characters. Her restoration of a feminine attitude and a feminine point of view to folktales, and her

¹⁵⁶ M. Lewis, in *The English Verb: An Exploration of Structure and Meaning*, Hove: Language Teaching Publications, 1986

¹⁵⁷ I. Curteis, *Spinning Threads: Reinserting the Feminine Aspect in Folktales through a Fictocritical Writing Practice*, Armidale: University of New England, 2004

¹⁵⁸ for instance in: *The Magic Toyshop*, London: Virago, 1981; *Black Venus*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1985; *The Bloody Chamber*, London: Penguin, 1981

¹⁵⁹ T. Mason, *Living in the Present, An Analysis of Tense Switches in Angela Carter's 'Bloody Chamber'*, http://perso.club-internet.fr/tmason/WebPages/Publications/Bloody_Chamber2htm

¹⁶⁰ A. Carter, *Expletives Deleted*, London: Vintage, 1992, p. 28

¹⁶¹ Mason

capacity to add to these the elements of the contemporary novel, inspired some of my writing. In *Watermarks*, strong female characters, like Rose Bower and others—in particular Tam, Gladioli, Nellie, Marg, Meredith and the Girl's—are capable of action and anger, and they desire control and power over their lives. To some degree, they also desire the capacity and responsibility for power and control over the lives of others, i.e. Rose overthrew Fitcher and changed the town; to do so she had to take control.

In her work, *The Bloody Chamber*¹⁶² Carter's analysis of rites of passage in focusing on similarities between 'Bluebeard's' wife and biblical 'Eve'. Both women had access to everything their respective 'heavens' had to offer. Both stories confirm woman's desire to penetrate illicit secrets—the eating of stolen apples or the opening of forbidden doors. Eve receives knowledge from the 'tree of life'; Bluebeard's wives must face the horrendous truth of who their spouse really is, but only one succeeds in integrating this knowledge into concerted and life-saving action; Eve receives knowledge from the 'tree of life'. In *Watermarks*, as in many folktales, "disobedience" is revealed as the ability to listen to intuition. Gladioli and Nellie fulfil the role of the curious and disobedient or law-breaking character. Like Bluebeard's wives, Gladioli had to face the reality that simply obeying Fitcher would not guarantee her own or her children's safety. Nellie, without being under an immediate personal threat, decided it was worth risking all to uncover Fitcher's secret for the sake of others. Both Gladioli and Nellie follow their intuition and desire to know and unlock the forbidden door. Carter's argument that 'desire to know' is a rite of passage is supported by Clarissa Pinkola Estés's in *Women Who Run with the Wolves*; Pinkola Estés's equally argues that formal disobedience to patriarchal proscription and a sense of curiosity are vital to survive:

In the bluebeard story we see how a woman who falls under the threat of the predator rouses herself and escapes him, wiser for the next time. The story is about the transformation of four shadowy introjects, which are in particular contention for women: have no integrity of vision, have no deep insight, have no original voice, have no decisive action.¹⁶³

'Bluebeard's wife', Gladioli and Nellie *must* open the forbidden door, learn to stand the sight (or the evidence) of death and mutilation and use their wits to survive. The prerequisite to this action is disobedience. Both the traditional and re-written folktale and the events in *Watermarks* dramatises a form of initiation and sense of empowerment through its representation of active assertive women.

¹⁶² Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*, London: Penguin, 1979

¹⁶³ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting The Power of the Wild Woman*, London: Rider, 1992, p. 67

In *Watermarks*, I used changing tense to explore the mobility of ‘repositioning proximity’ and found it created a greater flexibility in the writer’s creativity and in the reader’s experiences ranging from relaxed attention to heightened engagement. The Chapter ‘Weather Rose’ begins in the past tense with, ‘Once upon a wild storm ...’ but by progressing into present tense it was my aim that the events become more immediate and the spatial focus narrowed from the greater storm-battered environment down to the names etched into the epitaph. This also transposes time—the chronological present of the story suddenly becomes the present in which my great-uncle is still a boy. As in Beuys’ *Snowfall*, here, too, I aim for one sheet of time to be layered over another.

écriture féminine

Hélène Cixous advocates *écriture féminine* as a practice that speaks through the body:

To write. An act which will only ‘realise’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength ... this emancipation of this marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak.¹⁶⁴

My use of *écriture féminine* in the *Watermarks* chapter, ‘Nellie Tells a Tale’, could appear to contradict the above as I have applied this technique to describe rape. However, I believe *écriture féminine* offers sophistication and power of expression while avoiding the possible pitfalls of conventional writing practices when describing rape. Violence of any kind forces the victim into an ungrammatical space—a space in which the rules of language, the rules of communication, no longer exist. Syntax, too, cannot exist in the destructive chaos of rape, if syntax is the organisation and ordering of words and structural elements of language. The force of violence, the act of rape, tears the body, and the ‘body as text’, apart. The rape in Nellie’s story is written as *écriture féminine* as this allows representation of violence against women through a feminine writing practice and avoids abstraction.

The punctuation of a text requires analytical distance in which we organise language into phrases, clauses and sentences. We structure text in a bid to clarify meaning, but we cannot clarify or assign meaning to rape. In Nellie’s story the rape leaves the girl speechless, but this speechlessness anticipates her future ability to find language beyond logocentrism, a language that allows both the girl (through howling) and Nellie (through storying) to reclaim herself. According to Curti¹⁶⁵ it is a

¹⁶⁴ H. Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, (K. Cohen and P. Cohen, Trans.) in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol 1, Summer 1976, Issue 4, pp. 275–293

¹⁶⁵ L. Curti, *Female Stories Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation*, London: Macmillan Press, 1998, p. 13

process of 'writing as the female body' in a script of 'ink and milk and blood'. Both the girl in Nellie's story and Nellie herself set out to triumph over and expose the predator, thereby testifying to the process of transformation from maimed to wholeness, from passive to active state.

In using *écriture féminine* in the chapter 'Writing on the Wall', my aim was to highlight unbounded beauty and levity; Fitcher has been vanquished; the town's people have been liberated; and there is hope. Rose has seeded storytelling and planted roses. Although sleep must come, this is a new beginning, not an end. The dissolving of rose blossoms into a flurry and flight of petals is, in gesture, similar to Cixous' image:

[a] text that divides itself, pulls itself to pieces, dismembers itself, regroupes, remembers itself, is a proliferating, maternal femininity. A phantasmic meld of men, males ... princes, orphans, flowers, mothers, breasts, gravitates about a wonderful 'sun of energy'—love—that bombards and disintegrates these wonderful ... amorous anomalies¹⁶⁶

écriture féminine places experience before language; in situations, both beautiful and terrible, in which the rational mind loses its capacity for structural logic, the only way to survive and transcend is to remain whole, undivided by commas, uninhibited by full stops. *écriture féminine* offers a powerful form of textual resistance: it avoids dissection and opposes dismemberment. In *Watermarks* my aim for *écriture féminine* was to create a counterpoint to the image of Fitcher mutilating and devouring the female body.

Magic Realism

The German art critic Franz Roh, describing the work of Post-expressionist artists of the mid-1920s, coined the term magic realism.¹⁶⁷ These magic-realist painters perceived everyday objects and life around them and attempted to depict, through the familiar and commonplace, the strange, the uncanny, the eerie, the *unheimliche* aspects of seemingly familiar reality. Their aim was to change their own and other's habitual perceptions by shifting the emotional point of view from the accustomed to the unusual. By emphasising the possibility of diverse ways of perceiving, they questioned the very concept of 'the mundane'.

¹⁶⁶ H. Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays' in *The Newly Born Woman*, (B. Wing, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 9

¹⁶⁷ E. A. Imbert, 'Magical Realism in Spanish-American Fiction', in *International Fiction Review* Vol 2.1:1975 pp. 1—8

The visual art concept of magic realism described and identified the mystery inherent in everyday reality, but did not necessarily critically question conformist and materialistic definitions of reality as such.

Magic realism in literature, however, attempts ‘writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism’.¹⁶⁸ Such literary boundary pushing also gives rise to the opportunity to examine the presumed unquestionable space of reality. In literary magic realism, the normal, the plausible, the everyday event co-exists with the supernatural, the extraordinary, and the magical. The authenticity of these occurrences is not questioned, nor rationally explained, and is given the same treatment afforded to notions of reality. Here, the supposedly impossible occurs without rationalising comment.

Amaryll Chanady¹⁶⁹ explains magic realism as characterised by two seemingly contradictory and autonomously coherent perspectives: an enlightened and rational view of reality, and the acceptance of the supernatural as part of the everyday world. Intrinsic to literary magic realism is the assertion of the concurrent coexistence of the magical *and* the real. While a writer of the fantastic genre can entirely dispense with the laws of logic and the physical world, a writer of magic realism must accept the realistic conventions of fiction *and* introduce something beyond, something that is not realistic, into the story. These magical elements are not highlighted for shock value; the aim is to weave them seamlessly through the world of natural law and materialistic perceptions. Magic realism is literary realism and therefore not only represents the real, but also remains grounded in social criticism, commenting on our social, historical and political realities.

The presence of an objective and dispassionate narrator who maintains a tone of equilibrium throughout the story is another feature intrinsic to magic realism. The reader doesn’t need to believe in the extraordinary events narrated, but the characters within the story and, above all, the writer must believe—or create the effect of belief—that *all* events recounted are equally real. The writer cannot question the events as *puzzling* in their *magical* sense. This genre aims to address, if not overcome, the problem of the suspension of disbelief inherent in all stories.

‘Realism’, as a literary genre, is by its very nature at odds with ‘story’ as Realism simultaneously claims reality and fiction. It is therefore an unstable literary term. The term ‘magic’, equally contentious, arouses concepts or images of the spiritual, the supernatural and the fantastic. In this sense, the term *magic realism* appears as an oxymoron; this seemingly contradictory term is no less powerful and enticing than the term *wise fool*, which may imply it takes a wise fool to fully

¹⁶⁸ L. Chamberlain, ‘Magicking the Real: Paradoxes of Postmodern Writing’, in *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide*, (L. McCaffery, Ed.), Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 17

¹⁶⁹ A. B. Chanady, *Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1985

comprehend the scope and possibilities of this genre. Magic realism provides a written art form capable of incorporating spiritual perceptions and questions into material reality, while simultaneously bypassing the need for abstract explanations.

All novels create imaginary space and time structures; the space created by the co-existence of the real and the magical defies the concept of a singular world, furnished with a set of singular rules. The space within the magic-realist novel is permeable and subject to metamorphosis: from the mundane to the magical, from the magical to the mundane. It therefore offers a space open enough to allow multiple realities to co-exist and generous enough to support diverse perceptions of realities we become aware of as readers. In this sense magic realism contests materialistic concepts of reality by opening up the limited space of intellectualism and expanding the space of perception. This ‘allows us to see dimensions of reality of which we are not normally aware’.¹⁷⁰

Magic realism causes us to question generic and dogmatic forms of literature through its central tenet: defamiliarisation. Defamiliarisation enables us to overcome perceptions and concepts we take for granted, build awareness of other realities, break down perceived cultural barriers, or in Victor Schlovsky’s words ‘recover the sensation of life: to make one feel things, to make the stone stony’.¹⁷¹ Schlovsky and his fellow Russian Formalists strove to slow down the pace of literature—the tempo of the individual story—wishing to give the reader more time to engage. This was accomplished by linguistic devices such as alliteration, inversion, metaphor and agglutination—forming new words by marrying two or three words or word elements together—when struggling and striving to find language capable of expressing multiple realities.

Magic realism draws on and incites poetic imagination which can take the reader—us, in all our subjectivity—beyond our own experience towards empathy with ‘the other’ be they in human or magical-spiritual forms.

I chose magic realism as it lends itself to express both spiritual and mundane realities. This genre further marries seamlessly with folktales because they too are a form of magical realism, as most protagonists live mundane lives into which magic intrudes without explanation and is accepted, generally, without comment. Magic is an integral part of the reality of folktales, not extraneous to it.

J.R.R. Tolkien states that magic, inherent in such tales, must ‘neither be laughed at or explained away’¹⁷² and describes the essential place of *Faërie* as magical. *Faërie* is identified as a place

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 21

¹⁷¹ Cited in B. Steinhäuser, *Magic Realism Tactics, Defamiliarisation Writing Techniques Applied*, April 2007, <http://latin-american-literature.suite101.com> (first accessed March 2010)

¹⁷² *ibid.* p. 11

and/or state of mind and when it comes to the magic of *Faërie* ‘its virtue lies in its operations’.¹⁷³ Anyone who has read folktales knows their most pronounced element is magic. Magic in relation to a liminal state of mind is a deed, an act of creation; ‘[a]n essential power of Faërie is thus the power of making immediately affective by the will the visions of “fantasy”’.¹⁷⁴ Tolkien defines fantasy as the mental ability of image-making, with ‘the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality’.¹⁷⁵ This is the essence of an act of creation. In folktales, acts of magic link deed and spoken word. In English we use the word ‘spell’ both as a noun to describe a formula of magic and the thing we do when we pronounce the letters that create a word. Its etymological origin *spellian* also denotes *story* and *to tell* or *speak*, which can take us to a time or place where the spoken word is imbued with the power to manifest—with the power to create the thing it names.

Gothic Elements

Mountains, Settings, Landscapes

In the context of gothic fiction, such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Ann Radcliff’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or Stephen King’s *The Shining*, mountains represent excessive hostile environs, an impression strikingly described in Percy Shelley’s *Mount Blanc*:

A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunters bone,
And the wolf tracks her there—how hideously
Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.—Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now.¹⁷⁶

In the context of folktales, mountains are a complex archetype. According to Friedel Lenz¹⁷⁷ they can equally imply arrogance, viewing things from a vantage point, outstanding knowledge and higher wisdom. The mountain archetype represents at once a place of perdition and a space of healing and transformation; the vertical gesture links heaven and earth—corresponding to the

¹⁷³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, p. 13

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 23

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 47

¹⁷⁶ P. Shelley, *Mont Blanc*, 1816, Part III

¹⁷⁷ F. Lenz, *Bildsprache der Märchen*, Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 2003, p. 245

gesture of the *Yggdrasil* (World Ash) linking the nine worlds of Norse Mythology. The character called upon to ‘stand on the mountain’ can gain oversight, as well as fall prey to overconfidence and a distorted sense of superiority. In *Watermarks*, this stark contrast is primarily represented through the characters of Rose Bower and Fitcher. Fitcher manifests the violent, eruptive forces, the awe and terror evoking ‘ghastly scarred and riven’¹⁷⁸ personality and reveals the ‘distorted sense of superiority’.¹⁷⁹

Tony Magistrate suggests Stephen King uses settings to mirror ‘a character’s psychological condition’—but this was *the* trademark of even the earliest forms of gothic literature, and Fitcher is representative of this tradition. ‘The gothic landscapes are animated by a terrible potency that appears out of all proportion to the small and vulnerable humans who are held within its bondage.’¹⁸⁰ The landscape surrounding the town in *Watermarks* and the architecture within it are initially in keeping with traditional gothic literature and are ‘imbued with a life of [their] own, an unnatural biology that reflects the character and history of [their] former inhabitants’.¹⁸¹ Frederick Frank¹⁸² points out that in the gothic novel, ‘place becomes personality, as every corner and dark recess exudes a remorseless aliveness and often vile intelligence’.¹⁸³ However, as *Watermarks* progresses, it becomes clear that the ‘remorseless aliveness’¹⁸⁴, ‘vile intelligence’¹⁸⁵ and ‘terrible potency’¹⁸⁶ affecting architecture and landscape are a result of Fitcher’s depravity. He is not only shaped by the landscape/soulscape of the story, he permeates it, exudes his perversion into it, and, constructs the terrible potency that simultaneously perverts and preys upon the inhabitants. There is no ‘faceless evil’ here such as (initially) experienced in King’s *The Shining*.¹⁸⁷ The horrific in *Watermarks* has an inimitable and identifiable source; the evil is neither of supernatural origin nor occurrence—it is the worst form of human depravity. I am distinguishing here between the source of evil (human) and the affects of evil (supernatural); Fitcher’s corrupted nature is human. The fact that it *impinges* upon all and everything in his circumference, even the weather, is supernatural—here the Gothic crosses into magic realism.

¹⁷⁸ Shelley

¹⁷⁹ Lenz, p. 245

¹⁸⁰ T. Magistrate, *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King’s American Gothic*, Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988, p. 17

¹⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 17

¹⁸² F. S. Frank, ‘The Gothic Romance: 1762–1820’, in *Horror Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*, M. B. Tymn, (Ed.), New York: R. R. Bowker, 1981, pp. 3–175

¹⁸³ cited in Magistrate, p. 17

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Stephen King, *The Shining*, London: New English Library, 1980

Decay

One of the most recognized elements throughout Gothic literature is death and decay. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote, ‘the most terrific of ruins [are that of the human soul] ... this living memento of the fragility, the instability of reason’.¹⁸⁸

Signs of decay and neglect—faded signposts, broken windows, neglected and deserted places, peeling paint, rust patterns on bus timetables no longer in use—create a sense of melancholy, meaninglessness, disuse and apathy. The town is scarred by amputations; discarded futures testify to the failed intrusion of agricultural industrialisation and population-growth dreams—the bricked up windows and graffiti-tagged walls of the abattoir; the sway-backed roofs of empty houses; the rusting swing-set dangling drunkenly; the notice boards with tattered remnants of things no longer important; signs painted over because the places they point to no longer exist. Nothing takes its beginnings from here; despite the elevation, the town is intended to feel like a sump into which rot, rankness, malodour, sadness and loss drain and linger.

Weather, Sight, Insight

Apart from violent storms and excessive rain, mist and fog feature prominently in *Watermarks*. Mist, fog and cloud, simplistically put, form in the meeting of opposites—warmth and cold. The water particles condense in reaction to a change in atmosphere and create opacity, a sight-barrier. These changes are as frequent and as unpredictable as the storms on the mountain. In Gothic writing, mist, fog and cloud represent the ‘obscured’. By reducing visibility, appearances become uncanny; orientation is lost. The clear outline and line-of-sight vanish; people, places and things are blurred, hard to identify, while sound is distorted; perceptions of distance and direction become unreliable. Our senses are overpowered and a once-familiar world becomes *unknown*. We cannot accustom our eyes to mist and fog; as they can conceal hidden dangers they incite a primal sense of fear. Edmund Burke (1844)¹⁸⁹ in his work on the Sublime identifies such obscurity as a state of darkness or the unknown; he compares it to the dread associated with the night and the power derived by repressive regimes by secluding (obscuring) their rulers from the public eye thus creating a hidden but omnipotent menace.

¹⁸⁸ M. Wollstonecraft, *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*, eBooks@Adelaide, University of Adelaide Library, 2009

¹⁸⁹ E Burke and A. Mills, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, with an Introductory Discourse concerning Taste by the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844

I have addressed the question of the eyewitness and the bystander from a certain perspective in chapter two of the Exegesis, but I would like to add here another perspective and a further example of how the setting of the novel determines the characters' ability to see what is taking place. Paul Carter (2004) describes 'eyewitness ideology' as concealing aberrant behaviour 'by exposing it to full view'.¹⁹⁰ The isolation of the town, the impact of unpredictable weather occurrences and the constant obscuring of perceptions create an atmosphere in which questionable things have become normalised or indifferently accepted as unalterable.

Carter argues what is left exposed and in full view is often overlooked. The illegal, criminal or aberrant is generally concealed. If left in full view, however, the deviant appears, in time, to become a 'natural' part of a normal landscape. 'To lay things out in plain view is precisely what developers (and Enlightenment scientists behind them) have always done to conceal their true purpose, the exercise of power.'¹⁹¹ To disclose perpetration, 'no veils need to be removed. All that is needed is the capacity to see what is in front of one's eyes'.¹⁹²

In *Watermarks*, the victims are tortured and murdered in Fitcher's house, their flesh is sold as 'meat specials'—it becomes clear that many realised something was amiss and intuitively linked the disappearance of tourists and Fitcher's 'meat specials', but never allowed the thought to shape fully in their consciousness. The vital connection was missing.

While I was writing the novel the story of Elisabeth Fritzl made headlines. Imprisoned by her father in the cellar of the family home for 24 years, Elizabeth was repeatedly raped and gave birth to seven children. According to *The Telegraph*¹⁹³, 13th November 2008, Rosemarie Fritzl, Elizabeth's mother, stated that she had no knowledge of her husband's actions, but regretted not informing the authorities when he started spending most of his time in the cellar.

In *The Independent*¹⁹⁴, 21st March 2010, Toni Patterson states that of the seven children Josef Fritzl took three 'upstairs' to be cared for by Rosemarie:

She had been duped into thinking that Elizabeth had run away from home to join a religious sect and had only returned to dump her newly born

¹⁹⁰ P. Carter, p. 23

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*

¹⁹³ The Telegraph, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/345575/ Josef-Fritzl](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/345575/Josef-Fritzl), 13 November 2008

¹⁹⁴ Toni Paterson, *Whatever Became of Elisabeth Fritzl?* www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ 21 March 2010

children on her mother's doorstep. Incredible as it seems, the Austrian social services [also] believed the story.¹⁹⁵

Allan Hall in *The Brisbane Times*¹⁹⁶ of 11th March 2009 offered a similar description. I grant Fritzl forced his daughter to write letters asking her mother to look after the children, but when FBI profiler Clint van Zandt¹⁹⁷ was asked if he believed that it was possible that Rosemarie had not known what was happening in the cellar of her own house, he said that in cases of child abuse and spousal abuse a wife will become numb to what is happening around her because she wants life to be normal—she ignores everything else. This need to become numb and to protect ourselves from conscious recognitions was powerfully described by Victoria Barnett¹⁹⁸ as a rationale of survival (see chapter 2) and I have tried to represent this phenomenon in *Watermarks* through dynamics between the characters of Gladys and Fitcher. Fitcher, like Fritzl, does not make a secret of spending time in the cellar—he even tells Gladys that it is his room and she is not to enter it. Time spent there naturalises his behaviour, and makes it a normal part of their lives. On the only occasion Gladys does trespass she is caught and severely abused. Van Zandt inadvertently evokes images of the folktale, *Fitcher's Bird*, when he describes Fritzl telling his wife of a secret room in the cellar of their house, but forbidding her 'to go down there and never to try to get in'.¹⁹⁹ Van Zandt admits Rosemarie's acceptance of these circumstances and the fact that 'she lets that pass for the last quarter of a century'²⁰⁰ presents a challenge, as it is nearly impossible that Rosemarie Fritzl—or Gladys, as a fictional character—were not suspicious and concerned, particularly as both had repeatedly witnessed abuse perpetrated against their children. This exemplifies the exquisite self-deception of the eyewitness gaze and reflects the tragic circumstance of people the world over who live in denial and decide it is safer *not to know* what they suspect in the haunted recesses of their souls. Howard and Wilson state that, 'the failure of witnesses to act in circumstances such as this is not unusual and presents a growing trend of bystanders ignoring criminal acts'.²⁰¹

Carter discusses the importance of making such conscious connections, using the example of the logging of Tasmanian forests, where woodchips taken to Japan return to Australia as fax paper. The vital connection that paper represents logged native forests is not made and the destruction that a white sheet of paper represents is not recognised, any more than the specials in Fitcher's shop represent murder.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Allan Hall, www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/world/fritzl-daughters-dungeon-diary-11March-2009

¹⁹⁷ Clint van Zandt in Dan Abraham, *Verdict*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbeNL7_jzUU

¹⁹⁸ Barnett, 1999

¹⁹⁹ van Zandt

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

This is the exquisite self-deception of the eyewitness gaze—the sheet of paper conceals nothing. Its field of white openly displays the conceptual environment to which eyewitness seeing aspires. The logical terminus of clear-sightedness is blankness; the *tabula rasa* conception of mind embraces a world cleared of every difference because it finds there its own best mimic. But what it really sees so clearly is a world without vision: its own blinding blindness.²⁰²

In *Watermarks* also, obscured vision represents the limitations of consciousness; it is not enough to see; we need to understand what we are seeing.

The story of *Watermarks* aims to come to a solution to the blindness to abuse, to ‘adjust the frame that creates and maintains’²⁰³ and ‘authorise[s] the blankness at the heart of the [...] gaze’.²⁰⁴ Above all, it has been my intension to move beyond the hell of blame and guilt and suggest possible transformation. The metaphorical use of watermarks, in all of their meanings, is aimed at evocativeness and potency in this context.

The Making of Florian Fitcher

To create the character of Fitcher, I began by researching the story of Fritz Haarmann. According to Augustus Summers²⁰⁵, Haarmann owned a cook shop with a ready supply of meat and worked as

²⁰² P. Carter, p. 24

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ A. M. Summers, *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*, Forgotten Books, 2008 www.forgottenbooks.org, accessed May 18, 2010. Montague Summers, a member of the Roman Catholic clergy best known for his English translation of the *Malleus Maleficarum*—*The Hammer of Witches*—appears to have held literal beliefs in vampires, witches and werewolves and ‘dabbled in dark arts’. Summers’ seminal works on Gothic literature include *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938), *A Gothic Bibliography* (1940), *The Supernatural Omnibus* (1931) and *Victorian Ghost Stories* (1936). Summers was himself an exemplary *gothic character* judging by the description given by his biographer, Brocard Sewell:

... the striking sombre figure of Reverend Montague Summers in black soutane cloak, with buckled shoes—a la Louis Quatorze—and shovel hat could often have been seen entering or leaving the reading room of the British Museum, carrying a large black portfolio bearing on its side a white label, showing in blood red capitals, the legend “VAMPIRES”.

Summers is a difficult source; his engagement with the ‘Uranian Poets’ and their practice of pederasty alone gives sufficient reason for concern. But he is so representative of all that is identified as ‘the Gothic’, that it is difficult to pass him by.

a police informant. In this function, Haarmann preyed upon the mobile masses of war-displaced²⁰⁶, homeless youths. ‘He would walk up and down the rows of huddled sleeping forms in the third-class waiting halls [of Hanover station] and suddenly waking up some frightened youngster demand to see his ticket.’²⁰⁷ Under the ruse of offering a bed and a meal Haarmann took them to his house and raped them, murdering his victims by biting them to death. After consuming his share of their flesh, Haarmann sold the rest in his shop. Hans Grans—Haarmann’s co-accused—apparently often chose the victims and a third man known as Charles—also a butcher by trade—was sought by the police for assisting Haarmann in cutting up and disposing of the bodies. It is estimated that Haarmann murdered between twenty-seven and fifty youths ‘aged between twelve and eighteen years’.²⁰⁸

Maria Tatar believes the rumour of cannibalism and the selling of the victims flesh could be a case of a blurred identity that combines Fritz Haarmann, Carl Grossmann²⁰⁹ and Karl Denke²¹⁰:

Grossmann who became known as the Bluebeard of the Silesian railway was charged in 1921 with the murder and cannibalisation of fourteen women. Denke, called the Mass Murderer of Münsterberg, lived in seclusion for years and, in grim foreshadowing of state-sanctioned crimes in the decade to follow [Tatar is referring here to “medical experiments” carried out in the concentration and death camps of the Nazi regime], kept detailed records on the bodyweight of his victims, but he nevertheless enjoyed an unblemished reputation in his neighbourhood, where he was known as “Vater Denke”.²¹¹

Tatar explains that this ‘unblemished reputation’ existed despite the fact that Denke poured ‘buckets of blood’ into an ‘open courtyard’ that there were ‘strange smells and sounds emanating from his living quarters’²¹², offering another example of human inability to see what is taking place in full view. To re-emphasise a point Paul Carter²¹³ made: because such actions (i.e. pouring out

²⁰⁶ End of World War I and the time of the German Revolution of 1918–1919.

²⁰⁷ Summers, p. 170

²⁰⁸ cited in Summers p. 171, footnote: 258

²⁰⁹ M. Blazek, *Carl Grossmann und Friedrich Schumann; Zwei Serienmörder in den Zwanziger Jahren*, Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2009

²¹⁰ The Polish Word, *Denke* www.denke.org/stowoe.html, 2 August 1999

²¹¹ M. Tartar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 42

²¹² *ibid.* p. 42

²¹³ P. Carter, p. 23

buckets of blood) take place exposed to full view, they become normalised, a common practice, a familiar part of life.

My aim was to create a character (Fitcher) who embodied the archetype of cannibalistic ogres that populate folktales around the world and to represent non-fictional psychopathic predators. In Philip Jenkins' view, such characters can epitomise 'contemporary mythology in which the killers fulfil the symbolic roles that would in earlier societies have been taken by a wide variety of imaginary villains and folk-devils'.²¹⁴ He argues that:

Contemporary constructions of the serial murder phenomenon have much in common with mythological types from many different societies and eras. These depictions evoke such profound responses because the image resonates as a universal and perhaps mythic symbol. In fact the highly ritualised and formulaic character of serial murder fiction contribute to its folktale quality.²¹⁵

Jenkins believes folktales and myths elevate values and in doing so also reveal much about the society that creates them, quoting Durkheim's and Dumézil's view that myths 'represent and idealize commentary on social values and institutions, which are projected into a metaphysical realm'²¹⁶ as well as presenting frightening myths in order to create social cohesion through fear of 'the dangers that will befall people if they fall short of correct values and ideals'.²¹⁷ This is a view also held by Joseph Campbell²¹⁸ who believed folktales established moral codes and boundaries and so created social cohesion. In times of crisis, according to Jenkins, dangerous outsiders (witches, night hags, demons, ogres, bands of robbers, etc) 'fulfil a critical social function in defining conventional moral behaviour by providing a *ne plus ultra* against which normal society readily finds common ground'.²¹⁹ Such arguments identify the predator as the outsider—as representatives of the destructive chaos which exists outside of the boundaries of social cohesion—and mark the heroine or hero as belonging to a community by virtue of the fact that they uphold moral values and re-establish order by overcoming evil. I question this view²²⁰ as there are many folktales which insert the heroine or the hero from the margins, bringing these characters into a

²¹⁴ P. Jenkins, *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009, p. 101

²¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 112

²¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 112

²¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 112

²¹⁸ J. Campbell, *The Impact of Science on Myth—Myths to Live By*, New York: Bantam Books, 1961

²¹⁹ Jenkins, p. 112

²²⁰ I exemplify my position through the character of Rose Bower—the outsider, capable of bearing witness and supporting others to remove the veil of the commonplace and to see what is really happening.

community from ‘the outside’ or from a disenfranchised position to solve problems and vanquish oppressors, dragons and evil ogres, while the despotic rulers tyrannise and try to enforce draconian measures to impose ‘cohesion’ from within. Heroines and heroes break rules and act against established norms and must do so if they are to succeed in their quests. Heroes and heroines are often the fools and outcasts, the ‘cinderellas’ and unloved youngest sons/daughters.

In contrast, real-life predators belong to their communities to such an extent that they go unrecognised for extended periods of time or are never apprehended. The desire to cast them in the role of the outsider resides within a communities’ sense of failure, as it was not able (or in some instances not willing) to identify the danger and to prevent violence. Society, according to forensic psychiatrist, Professor John Gunn²²¹, does not take ownership of the predatory psychopath, because “if he is not one of us [...] our society did not produce him”—and we therefore do not need to feel responsible for his existence. Amanda Howard and Paul Wilson’s study shows that “a predator does not necessarily stand out as a person who might be a threat to others. Indeed, perhaps the most frightening aspect of some or most predators is their ordinariness. They could be the people next door, quiet and not particularly sociable, but just like you and me.”²²²

To offer contemporary examples: Ted Bundy was a former boy scout, college graduate, law student and a rising star in Washington State politics. Bundy worked at a Seattle crisis centre as a telephone counsellor for a suicide helpline. In his own words Bundy states, “Murder is not about lust, and it’s not about violence, it’s about possession ... it’s [about] being God.”²²³ Bundy was repeatedly drawn back to the decaying corpses of his victims and sexually assaulted them, while appearing to others, like David Munro, to be “a very nice guy. He was a friend of ours we didn’t think he was strange or different.”²²⁴ Terry Sullivan, John Wayne Gacy’s biographer, states in the Gacy interviews, “The people that knew him would have thought the Pope would have been more capable of committing a crime.” Those who knew him as a businessman willing to hire troubled young men, a committed community volunteer or ‘Pogo the Clown’ would no doubt agree; but Gacy raped and murdered thirty-three teenaged boys and young men within six years. Jeffery

²²¹ Gunn in R. Wainwright and P. Totaro, *Born or Bred? Martin Bryant: The Making of a Mass Murderer*, Pyrmont, NSW: Fairfax Media, 2009, p. 258

²²² A. Howard and P. Wilson, *Predators: Killers Without a Conscience*, Sydney: New Holland Press, 2009, p. 32

²²³ J. Kyle, Ted Bundy Interviews: Segment 1—6, A&E bibliography www.hubpages.com accessed 24 May 2010

²²⁴ Former Secretary of State, Washington, David Munro cited in Kyle

Dahmer²²⁵ was a model student, academically gifted, polite and shy around strangers, and he raped, tortured, dismembered, murdered and cannibalised his victims and sexually violated their corpses.

Fitcher—like most predators—is not an outsider, but part of his community. He knows right from wrong and can function—to all intents and purposes—within the accepted boundaries of society. His moral knowledge is intact and Fitcher employs it to fit in, to appear normal, but his moral emotion is non-existent. He has no feeling of wrongness regarding violence, cruelty, rape, torture, murder or cannibalism. None of this *feels* wrong simply because it doesn't *feel* at all. Fitcher, approximating most serial predators, does not perceive his victims as human beings; they are *meat*.

²²⁵ Jeffery Dahmer Interviews: Segments 1—6, A&E bibliography, www.hubpages.com accessed 24 May 2010

Chapter 4

Food in Folktales and *Watermarks*

—Usages, Symbolism and Practices

Food studies are an emerging in Humanities in Australia and internationally. For example, the Regional Food Research Network Australasia was launched in 2010-2011 and will hold its first conference and launch the first issue of, *Locale*, the Regional Food Research Network Australasia's refereed journal, in November 2011. Further, the University of Adelaide commenced the first Australian food-writing course at university level around 2006-7. The A-ranked journal *Text* had its first special issue on food published in 2010. Food Studies as defined by Miller and Deutsch (please see below), and research into the usages of food in folktales, particularly from a perspective of oral storytelling, is an emergent field. According to Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch:

These works span the spectrum of philosophies and methodologies in the humanities and social sciences. They include histories from biological, cultural, geographic, nutritional, political, economic, literary, or folkloristic methods. What all of these works have in common, despite the diverse range of their approaches, is food at the forefront of their well-researched anthropology, history, sociology, geography, philosophy, or literary criticism, rather than a tangential aspect to a larger issue ...²²⁶

It is legitimate to identify some of the key usages of food and the symbolic roles they play in folktales and how these practices have been applied in *Watermarks*. My research highlights the following points:

- Nutrition and nurture and the female element in folktales
- Food and transformation
- Threshold moments—food and magic
- The lack of food and the plot point
- Food and characterisation

Furthermore, in a storyteller's practice, storytelling often occurs in cafes and pubs where and when participants are eating and drinking, creating a connection between food and storytelling that is linguistic, narratorial, and part of practices of the everyday.

²²⁶ J. Miller and J. Deutsch, *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods*, Oxford: Berg, 2009, p. 7

Nurture and Nutrition and the Female Element in Folktales

Hunger in folktales it is not just a result of physical deprivation; folktales touch on something much deeper, the relationship between nutrition and nurture. Nutrition and nurture are a female capacity in the sense that woman sustains life out of the resources of her own body. Ann Baring and Jules Cashford's research shows that humanity's worship of mother goddesses was documented in 8000 B.C. through the sculpted terra cotta figure of *Çatal Hüyük*, who is "the forerunner of the great goddesses of the Bronze Age *Innana-Ishtar* in Mesopotamia, *Isis* and *Sekhmet* in Egypt, and the unknown Minoan Goddesses [...]"²²⁷. The figure of this goddess, depicted in the act of giving birth, was placed into the grain bins of ancient Anatolia, representing the perceived relationship between nurture and nutrition, giving birth and the generation of crops:

[B]y the very fact that her body in the act of giving birth portrays the mystery of creation, she becomes in some sense endowed with magical power to embody the relationship between the visible and invisible orders, helping the crops to grow, the trees to bear fruit and the animals to remain fertile.²²⁸

It is understandable then that the female element in folktales often provides or withholds nourishment; it is within her power to do so, as can be seen in figures like *Baba Yaga* or *Mother Holle*, an array of mothers and step-mothers, evil witches, benevolent crones and wise women. Nurture and nourishment are part of her power to create—how she uses this power appears to reflect whether she is good or evil.

In *Watermarks*, 'Nellie Tells a Tale', Gladioli consciously creates story-dinners to make it easy for people to share "food you could savour and enjoy while listening to stories". This connection is reiterated when Gladioli's tells the *Stone Soup* story to a customer while serving her food. Gladioli's gesture is one of nurture and nourishment borne out of recognition that "she needed stories; everybody needed stories, even those who didn't know it or couldn't admit it."

The sharing of food, food preparation and stories also takes place in Chapter 'Allerleirauh'. Stories and food are here so interconnected that the rotten apples come to symbolize the incestuous King in the folktale, *Allerleirauh*. Rose draws Nellie into the story by claiming she knew a girl who "changed her life by making bread soup". Rose deliberately diverges, talking about the cultural significance of bread in post WWII Germany, while simultaneously placing bread on the table. Rose tells Nellie, "it wasn't just the stomach that needed bread; the soul needed it too", because

²²⁷ A. Baring and J. Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, London: Penguin Arkana, 1991, p. 82

²²⁸ *ibid.* p. 50

“bread let them remember who they were before they became “The Enemy””. Rose interlinks food, culture, identity, memory and story and offers Nellie a space for reflection.

Bread soup is traditionally Lenten food or food offered to someone convalescing or very old. Bread is one of the most prominent foods named in tales of both a secular and a religious nature. According to Baring and Cashford, the sacred nature of bread may have arisen from our ancestors’ experience:

The rituals that evoked the birth, mourned the death and celebrated the birth of the corn show how vital was the analogy to the human imagination, for it placed regeneration at the heart of life. [...] The secret source of life was still invisible: where the dark womb of the Palaeolithic Goddess had been the cave-temple, now it was hidden deep inside the earth. Human beings are still born from her, nourished by her and taken back by her. They sow the seed in her womb and harvest it as the substance of her body, transforming it themselves into bread.²²⁹

Long before the Eucharist in the form of the Host represented the offering of the body of Christ, the “baked cakes of the goddess Inanna”²³⁰ were offered as “the fruits of her body for the feeding of her children”²³¹. Again this was not simply physical nutrition but a celebration of “nourishment and transformation through assimilating the body of the goddess.”²³² This image continues in relation to an ancient Greek ritual in which the hierophant cut an ear of wheat and held it up “in silence”²³³; “he must have made it appear translucent with an essential truth of human life. [...] might they [the ancient Greeks] not have had a vision of *bios* united with *zoe*, in which individual life and the source of life are reconciled as one and the same?”²³⁴

Bread not only represents a link between the mortal and the divine, it also represents a human link to those around us as reflected in the word *companion*, which is derived from Latin *com*, together and *panis* bread; companions are those with whom we have ‘broken bread’. Rose breaks bread with Nellie, acknowledging her as a companion and perhaps foreshadowing the vital role Nellie will play in overcoming Fitcher. In many cultures, the offering of bread and salt, given to a guest, is

²²⁹ *ibid.* p. 49

²³⁰ Stephen Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar*, Oxford: OUP, Clarendon Press, 1914, cited in Baring and Cashford, p. 195

²³¹ Baring and Cashford, p. 195

²³² *ibid.* p. 195

²³³ *ibid.* p. 389

²³⁴ *ibid.* p. 389

supposed to ward off evil spirits. In many folktales, the gift of bread is synonymous with bestowing a blessing. These are certainly intended aspects of the relationship between Rose and Nellie.

Food and Transformation—For Better and for Worse

In folktales, transformation and initiation occurs through food. Sacred food brings about an altered state of consciousness while poisons and potions devolve characters into animals or rob them of their memories.

As Rose continues with the story of *Allerleirauh*, the food offered to Nellie changes from bread to honey-cake. Honey has long been regarded as a sacred substance and the bee revered as divine in *Apis* Cults²³⁵ through the ages. Baring and Cashford, in speaking of Neolithic and Palaeolithic goddesses, state:

Bee and butterfly belong together as images of the Great Goddess of Regeneration. It was a very ancient belief that bees rose out of the dead carcass of a bull, and the association of bee and bull is made as early as the Neolithic in the image of the bee goddess incised on the head of a bull. In the third century A.D. the Greek traveller Porphyry talks of these later goddesses of Greece in the same imagery.²³⁶

The ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greeks also believed honey was a gift from the Gods with magical and healing powers; they employed honey in rituals of transition from spiritual to material and from material to spiritual existence—so all rituals concerned with birth and death and regeneration/resurrection. “[I]n Crete also the bee signified the life that comes from death [...] Honey was used to embalm and preserve the bodies of the dead.”²³⁷ Warriors of these cultures took honey-cakes to battle; the ancient Egyptians placed them into burial tombs. The Teutons thought honey cakes had magical powers and helped to protect against evil.²³⁸

²³⁵ In Neolithic *Apis*-Cults, sacred Bull and Bee Goddess Cults, the queen bee was recognised as the symbol of the Goddess herself; 4000 years later in Minoan Crete, where we again find the bull and the bee, the Goddess and her priestesses were revered as Bee Goddesses and depicted dressed as bees. Mycaean tholos tombs were shaped like beehives, as was the throne of the Delphic Oracle who was often referred to as ‘the Bee’.

²³⁶ Baring and Cashford, p. 118

²³⁷ *ibid.* p. 118

²³⁸ It would take me beyond the scope of this paper to do the significance of bees and honey in rituals and nutrition justice. For further reading, see: Rudolf Steiner, *Bees. With an Afterword by David Adams*, PhD, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1998

Such crossings are a form of initiation recognized by Marina Balina, Helena Gosciło and Mark Lipoveētiskāi:

As numerous anthropologists and folklorists have remarked in pursuing their quest the protagonists of fairy tales, like those of legends and myths, typically cross symbolic saturated boundaries. Whether in the form of flight to uncharted lands (the fabled “thrice-tenth kingdom”), descent into subterranean realms (Three Kingdoms), trespass into Baba Yaga’s domain (Maria Morevna), voyage across the sea, or entry into mountains (The Crystal Mountain), castles, and animals’ stomachs, these consequence-laden yet narratively understated traversals register initiation into a new phase of human development. The old self dies as a prerequisite for rebirth into a more mature or complete self.²³⁹

All along, Nellie’s wavering between reluctance and willingness to eat the food Rose offers her is paralleled by her alternating reluctance and willingness to accept the stories Rose tells her. Rose’s offer of honey-cake is intended to signify a point of transformation for Nellie; it is up to her to decide how she will engage with the stories and how she will take hold of her life. At the beginning of this chapter, Nellie is ‘like a curled echidna’, defensive and still a victim. Transformed by the nurture and nourishment of food and stories Nellie crosses a threshold and becomes a heroine. This is the process of “the old self [dying] as a prerequisite for rebirth into a more mature or complete self” described by Balina et. al. Not only does Nellie become capable of transforming her own life, but she becomes crucial to the transformation of life in the town, as her actions contribute significantly to Fitcher’s downfall.

Gladys is also transformed. However, in this instance it is not the ingestion of a sacred substance that brings about the transformation but her refusal to continue to eat something nefarious. After visiting Rose, Gladys decides to become a vegetarian. Fitcher is livid, telling her she will cook and eat the meat he gives her. In *Watermarks*, Fitcher controls many of the town’s people by feeding them human flesh; Gladys refusal to continue to eat Fitcher’s meat symbolises her liberation from his control. The Butcher tries to beat her into submission, but burns himself with the vegetable soup. Both Fitcher and Gladys realises a threshold has been crossed and something had irreversibly changed. Gladys reclaims her real name, Gladioli, and sets about planning a life free of the Butcher.

²³⁹ M. Balina, H. Gosciło and M. Lipoveētiskāi (Eds.), *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005, p. 16

In some folktales characters are held enthralled through the food or drink they are given. Fitcher's meat is comparable to evil potions used in enchantments; it corrupts those who ingest it and it brings them under his control, and, although the characters retain their human form, their actions are bestial and debauch.

The meal offered to Jonathon by his daughter, Martha, in 'The Progeny' stands in a stark contrast to the food shared between Rose and Nellie. The tearing up of the bloody meat and the planned seizing of Jonathon's assets signify abuse, and foreshadow Jonathon's revelations of murder and cannibalism carried out by the Butcher and his coterie. While bread and honey-cake nourish and nurture Nellie and protect her from the evil that surrounds her, the meat Martha served her siblings has a very different effect. Carol-Ann, "taken by a sudden appetite [...] lunges across the table and heaps cold roast on her plate"; Campbell's "eyes glow red for a second before returning to their normal murky brown" and Martha "smacks blood-glossed lips". Each of the progeny is "concerned with snatching up bits before the others can take them away". Already driven by greed, under the influence of the Fitcher's meat they become like a pack of wolves. They "freeze; their teeth rest on the meat in their mouths; their hands, dripping with bloodied juices, pause in mid-air." Jonathon knows his children are feasting on human flesh, recognises the danger he is in and flees.

Similar transformations are represented in the character Toby Crompton in Chapter 'Gladioli'. Toby "followed the Butcher's every move. His eyes glint, he licks his lips, his tongue flicks over sharp canines." After he leaves the butcher shop "before he gets into his ute, he'll rummage through the bin, scavenging every piece of diced meat and kidney he can find."

In the character of Harriet Allelon I offer a more traditional example. With the help of her Great-Aunt, Harriet offers Noel wine poisoned with a draft of forgetfulness potion so she can gain control over him and force him to marry her.

Lack of Food and Plot Point

In folktales and in *Watermarks*, food and the lack of food functions as a plot point at which the narrative changes direction and events are initiated.

Only two instances connected Harriet Allelon to food. The first instance is described above, in the second instance, Harriet, intent on spying at Jonathon's house, disregards the watermark on her mirror warning her of cannibalistic ogres, and pretends she is borrowing a cup of sugar. Harriet is devoured by Carol-Ann.

Nellie's lack of food and money generate the start of her quest.

In Chapter, ‘Scones and Tea’, Maureen, Gwendolyn and Faylinn are “driven by something akin to hunger. Only knowing who Rose Bower was would sate it.’ Like Nellie, these characters are driven by their need for nourishment. Again, lack of nourishment and nurture drives change; the girls do not lack food or resources as Nellie did, but they lack knowledge. Their hunger to know Rose Bower is intended, in the course of the novel, to translate into a desire to know themselves.

In Chapter ‘Saulis Mendis’, Rose tells these three women to “strike out on their own”. After finding Nellie in the emporium, they adopt her into their care, nourish her with food and nurture her with stories. My intention was to show how these initially self-centred, slightly neurotic characters could grow beyond their limitations and contribute to the wellbeing of others and to that of the town.

Food and Characterisation

In folktales, characters relationships to food denote them as villains or heroes. In some tales the abundant appetite of a hero or heroine is reflective of their great strength and generosity, just as gluttony is suggestive of evil and ruthlessness. Willingly sharing personal food is the hallmark of the heroine and the hero, as is the protection of communal food from theft, or corruption, as in *Watermarks*. Divine artefacts provide nourishment in abundance, while the self-sacrifice of a divine being paired with the integrity of a mortal hero and heroine can lead to the nurture and nourishment of their people.

On the day of the BBQ, Rose counterpoints the devouring of human flesh in Fitcher’s tent by telling the story of Kālī. Kālī is the fiercest creature in the universe, she is as black as death and all forms of life and all names of all of creation disappear into her. This subsuming quality allows a comparison with the Baba Yaga, who subsumes or reincorporates into her greater entity those who fail in their task to be human—who lack creativity and compassion, and who cannot exist as independent selves.

Like Kālī, Rose enters the battlefield. She does not physically devour the demons the way Kālī does nor does she, Baba Yaga like, subsume those who fail the test of being truly human, but she inhales the dark substance that binds Fitcher and his coterie of cannibals to their corrupted existence, and leaves them floating weightlessly. Where Kālī is overcome by a demonic rage from drinking the demon-blood, dancing through the ashes of the burial fires, killing all in her path, Rose, in her final act walks singing through the town. She draws the people out of their nightmares and—just as Kālī becomes Gauri, the radiant mother and giver of life or Baba Yaga gifts the trembling heroine liberating, magical fire—Rose, in a final act of self-sacrifice, once more nourishes and nurtures the people of the town.

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Appendix

The rendering of *Fitcher's Bird* offered here is based on my memory of my Grandmother's German-language version, which I have adapted over time for workshops and storytellings.

Under the earth I go,
On an oak leaf I stand,
I ride the filly that was ne'er foaled
I carry the dead in my hand.²⁴⁰

Once upon a time there was Fitcher, and Fitcher is a master of the darkest arts; he only needs to touch the hand of a girl and she jumps into the long basket he carries on his back, never to be seen again.

Disguised as a beggar, he appears weak and in need of alms. So he comes to the house of a man who has three beautiful daughters. He comes when the eldest is alone. Feeble-looking, starved and bedraggled, he begs for a morsel of food. The girl fetches some bread and milk, but as she offers it, he clasps her hand and, bereft of her senses, she leaps into the basket.

With long strong strides he carries her away to his house deep in a dark forest. Here he no longer appears as a beggar but reveals himself as a potent magician. He tells the terrified girl he will be generous; she will have whatever her heart desires, and he gives her the keys to all the doors in his vast household. He places his wealth at her disposal; she has permission to look into every chest and closet, to open all. All but one: the door the smallest of keys unlocks. He forbids her to open it under penalty of death and so saying places into her other hand an egg, unmarked and whole. "You must carry this with you at all times, for if any harm should come to it great misfortune would befall you."

She promises to do everything as he asks.

Fitcher tells her he must leave for a time.

The girl is left behind, held in a cage of her own fear, hardly daring to move; but soon she decides she must make the best of her circumstances. She explores the house, opening the doors one after another. Each room contains treasures beyond measure: gold, silver, precious gems, spices, silks and damasks, furniture wrought of the rarest of timbers ... Her path leads her to the door the smallest of keys unlocks. She resists, but curiosity takes hold, winding its tendrils around her skirt hems, tugging at her senses. Finally she relents, deciding she will not enter the room, just unlock the door and open it a crack, a nail paring, a slit as narrow as the sickle of a new moon, so

²⁴⁰ Traditional invocation to open the telling and call the listeners over into the state or space of Story.

she can peer inside. But as soon as she inserts the key it turns in the lock, the door springs wide and she is drawn inside.

A large bloody basin stands in the centre of the room wherein lay the hacked and hewn bodies of many dead girls. Close by is a large chopping block; an axe lies glistening upon it. So terrified is she that she near faints and the egg slips from her hand to land in the midst of the basin. The poor girl thinks her life is forfeit if she does not reach into the blood and gore and pluck the egg out. Quickly she seizes it and runs to wash off the blood, but to no avail, for the bloody marks always reappear. She wipes and she scrubs, but she can't get rid of the stain.

Soon enough, Fitcher returns; he demands the keys and takes them from her trembling hand, and then he demands to see the egg.

The girl falls to her knees begging for mercy, but Fitcher seizes her by the hair and drags her to the bloody chamber, saying, "Lady whence you went against my will, I'll take you now against your own."

He pins her head to the block and hews it off. He hacks her body to pieces and throws them on to the pile. Once his handiwork is done he makes himself ready to fetch the second sister, and her fate is no better than that of the first.

Not long and he fetches the youngest. But she is of a different character. She too is given the keys and forbidden to open the door the smallest of keys unlocks. Then she is given the egg to keep with her at all times, and again the master of the dark arts leaves.

The youngest takes the egg and places it where it will be safe. She takes the keys and unlocks all the doors; hesitating not a moment as she come to the forbidden chamber, she inserts the key and turns it in the lock.

She too finds the hacked and hewn bodies and recognises her sisters. She weeps and she mourns and takes their limbs and lays them out as they were in life. She draws water from a spring and washes them, and both return to the living.

The sisters embrace and the youngest hatches a plan; she hides the girls in a closet and tells them she will come for them and see them home, but as soon as they are safe they must send her help.

The sorcerer returns, bellowing for his keys; the youngest hands them to him with a smile. He demands to see the egg, and she places it in his hand. It is unblemished.

Convinced that she is completely obedient to his will, he asks her to marry him. She consents on one condition, he must take a basket of gold back to her father's house, he must carry it himself and not stop to rest or tarry upon the way and return with out delay. She, in the meantime will invite the guests and prepare the wedding feast.

Fitcher agrees; the youngest runs to the closet and bids her sisters to climb into the long basket. As she covers them with gold she tells them her plan. She calls the sorcerer and tells him she will watch from the turret window to make sure he keeps his word. He heaves the basket onto his back and sets off.

It is a hot day; the basket is heavy; the straps cut into his shoulders. The sorcerer stops in the shade of a great tree.

The oldest cries out, 'I see you from my turret window; be on your way.'

The sorcerer, thinking it is his bride calling, trudges onward and is soon plagued by a great thirst. He comes to a stream and stops to set the basket down and drink.

The second sister calls out, 'I see you from my turret window; be on your way.'

The sorcerer, again thinking it is his bride calling, trudges onward. As soon as he sets the basket down by the father's cottage, he hurries back.

Meanwhile, the youngest cleans the house from the bottom up, lays the feast and prepares the cup, and invites all the sorcerer's evil ilk; from the bloody chamber she takes a skull, adorns it with jewels, and veils it with silk. She sets it in the turret window for all to see. Quickly now she strips off her clothing, dives into a vat of honey, and slitting an eiderdown rolls in the feathers until she looks like a wondrous bird. So disguised, she leaves the house and turns homeward. Soon she encounters the wedding guests.

'Fitcher's bird from whence comest thou?'

'From yonder house there over the brow.'

'And where may the young bride be.'

'She has cleaned the house from the bottom up,

She has laid the table and prepared the cup,

Look up and you shall see

Her smiling a greeting and waiting for thee.'

The guests bowed to the skull, thinking it is the bride, and continued into the house.

Soon after the youngest meets Fitcher himself, he too addresses her:

'Fitcher's bird from whence comest thou?'

'From yonder house there over the brow.'

'And where may the young bride be.'

'She has cleaned the house from the bottom up,

She has laid the table and prepared the cup,

Look up and you shall see

Her smiling a greeting and waiting for thee.’

Fooled, he too salutes the skull as his bride to be, and hurries toward the house.

In the meantime the sisters have raised the alarm and called together their kith and kin and made their way to the house of the sorcerer. As soon as they see the youngest is safe and that the sorcerer and his ilk are in the house, they stop all the doors and block all the windows and set it ablaze.

Embers cool and smoke is carried on the wind. In time the sisters marry men of their own choosing and put the gold to good use and live happily until their days’ ending.