

THE UNICORN IS DRIVING A MUSTANG:  
self, memory and narrative

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**The balloon of experience is, in fact, tied to the earth.**

Henry James, Preface to *The American*

**Can writers simply imagine the possible worlds they create  
without brooding over the constraints inherited from their past?**

**How to wed memory and imagination?**

Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: life, law and literature*

I intend in what follows to contribute to study of the relationship between self, memory and narrative, a study which necessarily incorporates a discourse on imagination. There has been debate raging over this relationship for millennia. Perhaps ‘raging’ is too extreme a description of the scholarly exchange of views across centuries, which began with the notes and memos penned by Aristotle as outlines for his lectures on Poetics, and continues in the universities of the twenty-first century as semioticians pad along corridors in their blue suede shoes decoding the significance of signs on fire doors, whilst cognitive psychologists shrug on white coats before switching on the machines which, they claim, model mental acts.

I have spent the past three years reading academic texts and writing fiction, writing texts and reading fiction. I have encountered, during my research, many unexpected notions: the Pollyanna Principle, the Desire for Death, detached floaters, oxen being pulled backwards into caves, decagons, the Memory Bump, the Daughter of Memory, *mens rea*, the lunatic, the poet and the demolitionist, proairetic codes, Tootell Displays, quasi-pictorialism, and (thankfully) Sartrean nothingness. All this because I wondered, one day, exactly *what was happening* when I stopped typing as I wrote fiction, slumped back in my chair and stared out of the window and *what had happened* when I sat up and began to type again.

Already, there is need for elucidation. For my purposes here, ‘an act of the imagination’ means a mental act of creation; more specifically, imagination as it is involved in the act of writing a novel. Not of writing a cheque to oneself for two million euros – an act which, to be sure, would certainly have fictive elements, an act which might subsequently be followed by (imaginative) fantasies of how to spend this windfall – because writing such a cheque would not be a mental act of creation. Nor am I going to consider the acts of writing a poem, a lyric, a screenplay, a play script or a memoir, not because these forms are essentially non-creative but simply because I will be focusing on the writing of

novels. What functions do self-identity and memory play in the process of moving from the thought, 'I know, I'll write a novel' to holding that novel in one's hands, complete with author photograph, biog notes, strapline and blurb.

To elucidate further – it is a generally accepted notion that there exists a relationship between imagination and memory. The most cursory consideration of this statement will reveal its cogency. So, in order to arrive at a theory regarding the role of imagination in the process of writing a novel, it is incumbent upon me (as it has been for so many others) to comprehend what is understood by the term 'memory'. The sound you can hear is that of a can of worms being ripped open. To emerge from the cave dwellings of Palaeolithic man, and then slalom from the Platonic notion of self, through the Enlightenment *rationales* of Hume, Locke and Kant, only to hurtle past the dead-eyed notions of Behaviourism, before skirting the (possibly drug-induced) theories of Phenomenology, and on, barrelling through a conference of Narratologists, eventually to arrive at the laboratory door of Cognitive Psychology, is a hair-raising journey. A journey which I am prepared to re-enact in the following pages. But only if you come with me. With a torch. And sandwiches. And a bottle of Glenlivet whisky.

I intend, first, to establish the boundaries of the area I shall be examining; I wish it could be limitless, I wish I could explore the relationship between the writer's and the reader's imagination, for example, but the constraints of time and space do not allow this. So I shall content myself with an excursion into the social, commercial and personal contexts in which writers ply their trade, followed by an overview of the concept of self and how that concept is informed by autobiographical and working memory. I hope at this point to persuade the reader that story grammar is innate, *a priori* knowledge. Having established more boundaries, narrowing the pathway as it were, I shall examine aspects of the process of generating narrative, the nature of imagination and the way imagination performs when I write narrative. We shall be joined for this stage of the journey by a foul-mouthed unicorn, who will, thankfully, leave us as I consider the writing of *Blue Earth* in the light of my theories.

Sustenance will indeed be needed for this outing because I am going to argue that what I am doing when I slump in my chair and stare out of the window is dissolving the distinction between noetic and autonoetic memory, and

switching my point of view from field to observer to field. More, I will claim that I collapse the barriers between autobiographical memory, working memory and long-term memory *for my purposes as a creative writer*. The route we will travel to arrive at these conclusions is a demanding one, ranging from the deepest limestone caves of Périgord, to the rabblesome *piazza* of sixteenth-century Florence, the storm-lashed beaches of Tobago and the Kensington Arms. More than this, the concept of the route itself illustrates, or, rather, mirrors my final contention: that narrative is a landscape over which swarm many possible pathways. When I imagine myself into the landscape of novel in progress, using my elaborated memories in all their forms, I imagine the view from a changed field perspective and I try, as best I can, to select the most satisfying route along which to lead the reader.

Our companions for this journey will be many and various – a *matadore*, Billy-Ray Rickman, Michelangelo Buonarotti, John Player Special, mustangs, Shake, Gustave Flaubert, palaeolithic cavemen, Janet and John, and the serial killer, Mr Candid, to name but a few ... in short, a motley crew.<sup>1</sup>

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## BOUNDARIES

One obvious distinction to be made between the novel and other creative written works is this: novels are long. They are, in some cases, very long indeed. Not unreasonably, the novel is notorious for taking a rather long time to write. There are, of course, exceptions to both these observations – the short novels which are not so slim as to be novellas, and certainly not so slight as to be light-weight: *Of Mice and Men*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, for example.<sup>2</sup> As for the second point regarding the amount of time a novel takes to write, well, there are no hard and fast rules.<sup>3</sup> *The Day of the Jackal*, by Frederick Forsyth, famously punched a mere nine-day hole in the writer's diary;<sup>4</sup> conversely, Donna Tartt suffered a decade of angst, despair, elation and, no doubt, a degree of boredom as she wrote *The Little Friend*.

Despite these differences, in length, in approach, we acknowledge that both *Jackal* and *Little Friend* are novels. If one builder announces that he has constructed a four-bedroomed house in nine days, whilst another announces that it has taken him ten years to create a robust family home, we would be inclined to choose the latter in which to live. This choice would be based on our prior knowledge and understanding of what constructing a building involves. However, if, as readers, we pick up *Jackal* in our right hand and *Little Friend* in our left, we know that they are novels because we are sufficiently culturally literate to decode from the common form signs they share to determine the characteristics that denote them to be novels. That is, their length, layout and

packaging: the cover, the blurb, the brooding black and white author photographs. Experienced readers do not even have to hold the books in their hands – they are able to scan the shelves in bookstores from ten feet and know that *Jackal* is a thriller, whilst *Little Friend* is a literary novel, such is the efficacy of the cover designs produced by the art departments of publishing houses and the deafening blare of publicity generated by PR departments. But the point is that the experienced reader, fishing in his pocket for a crumpled ten pound note, *doesn't care how long the book took to write*. (This assertion does not entail, *ipso facto*, that the period of endeavour makes no difference to the quality of the writing, or, indeed, the reverse.)

My reason for focusing on the facts that novels vary in length from thirty thousand to two hundred fifty thousand words and that they can take anything from nine days to a lifetime to write, is to acknowledge that in what follows – which will be, in effect, an account of the writer's relationship with The Book in terms of the acts of memory and imagination involved in its writing – I shall be assuming that most novels range between seventy-five thousand and a hundred and fifty thousand words, and take one to two years to write.<sup>5</sup> This assumption is important. It is important, I would argue, because novels occupy writers' lives and there is a qualitative difference between living with characters for nine days, one year or a decade.<sup>6</sup> There is also the matter of the changing character of the writer herself – ten years of experience in the life of a reflective, intelligent writer (such as Donna Tartt appears to be), must surely be transformational?

Another factor which, I believe, plays a part in the relationship between the writer and The Book, is the degree of certainty of publication. Here we brush uncomfortably against the hairy backside of the beast that is commercial reality in 2005. As Lennard J. Davis remarks, the novel is 'a strange combination of commodity and cultural experience'<sup>7</sup> and never more so than now. It is hard to imagine what, exactly, Johann Gutenberg would make of contemporary best-seller lists. Perhaps, it isn't hard. Mr Gutenberg would be perplexed. He would have no concept of celebrity, nor of recipe books, television tie-ins or millionaires. (And yet he would hold Katie Price's *Jordan* in his hand and know it to be a book.<sup>8</sup>) Many of the books which sell in hundreds of thousands are commissioned or ghosted, or represent merely another means of presenting the buying public with a well-known product in a different medium.<sup>9</sup> For many of

these writers, the element of uncertainty regarding the work being published is removed. I would suggest that there is a world of difference between J. K. Rowling sitting down to write *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and John Kennedy Toole penning *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Rowling is assured of a readership of millions, Toole committed suicide because he could find no publisher for his masterpiece. Does Rowling's luxury of the certainty of publication and commercial (if not critical) success affect the act of imagining?

In his book, *The Fabulators*, published in 1968,<sup>10</sup> Robert Scholes, an American literary critic, argued that the traditional realist approach to narrative was redundant (and this in tandem with Barthes announcing the death of the author – unhappy times<sup>11</sup>). We should, Scholes suggested, stand aside and allow the fabulists free rein. Leave the holding up of mirrors to those who understood how to reflect reality – film directors. What the reader needed, according to Scholes, was a heady mixture of romance and allegory. To be sure, some writers have obliged in the past thirty years;<sup>12</sup> indeed, Sterne and Rabelais obliged long before. It is worth remembering that at the time New Journalism had arrived on the scene, rattling pills, waving bottles of bourbon and talking fast. *In Cold Blood*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test* all blurred the distinction between fact and fiction, blending the fictional and the empirical.<sup>13</sup> So what are these boundaries between fact and fiction, fable and neo-journalism?

David Lodge neatly summarises an earlier theory of Scholes' regarding these boundaries<sup>14</sup>:

the novel was generically an unstable mixture of the fictional and the empirical, of romance and allegory on the one hand and history and mimesis (realistic imitation of ordinary life) on the other.<sup>15</sup>

And the novel still *is* a generically unstable mixture; if anything, it is distinctly more unstable, certainly in terms of marketing and marketing placement. *Schindler's Ark* was published in the USA as non-fiction – and won the (then) Booker Prize in 1982 for best novel. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night* was published in 2004 as a Children's Book and won the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel, selling to millions of adult readers. Is *White Teeth* fabulist? Is *A*

*Thousand Acres* an adaptation of *King Lear*? Is *Primary Colours* memoir or literary merry jape? Is *The Cold Six Thousand* Neo-New Journalism? Is Philip Roth the new Gore Vidal? Does it matter? Do we care? The answer to both of these, I hope, is no. In much the same way that the majority of readers cares not one whit whether a book took nine days or a decade to write, neither will they care where the theorists and reviewers decide to place a book on a quadrant composed of lines denoting aesthetic value and institutional validity (or cultural experience and commercial worth, come to that).<sup>16</sup>

For the purposes of what follows, however, I do care, because it seems to me that the acts of imagination required for the writing of fabulist narratives, or of narrativised empirical research, are different to those required for traditional realist fiction.<sup>17</sup> And it is the latter on which I wish to focus, whilst acknowledging that the ‘crossover’ novel is a force to be reckoned with.<sup>18</sup> In conclusion, I am intent on examining the relationship between self-concept, memory and imagination in the process of writing realist, literary novels, of a certain length, over a reasonable length of time.

So, having laboured that point, I shall move on – to focus on a polymath who never penned anything longer than a sonnet ...

## CONTEXT

In 1499 Michelangelo Buonarroti completed his sculpture of the *Pietà*, at the age of twenty four, a quite remarkable achievement. I was fortunate enough to see the work a couple of years ago, in St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.<sup>19</sup> The *Pietà* sits in a pillared niche in a fabulous building designed, in the main, by the sculptor in his role as architect. The sculpture is in its place, nestling in the right context, if you like. Or, rather, it could be described as occupying the right space in a marbled landscape. Even more remarkable than Michelangelo's age when he carved the mother and son, is the fact that many of the people who cross the exquisite, vaulted nave to gaze at this lump of metamorphosed limestone are themselves changed. When I was there, I cried. Looking at the *Pietà*, I began to cry and I was not alone. How can this be? How can figures carved in stone evoke such a response? A photograph of the sculpture does not have the same effect, even though it is a direct representation of the piece. It is argued by many that what makes Michelangelo God-like – *il divino* Michelangelo – is the emotional intensity of his work, or, rather, the products of his work. The *terribilità* – emotional intensity – which radiates forcefully from the faces and figures he sculpted and the ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

The ultimate Renaissance Man lived in interesting times, as, perhaps, we all do. The all-powerful Medicis were his patrons during his early working life in Florence but in 1496 they were usurped by the fanatical ascetic, Savonarola, and Michelangelo fled to Rome, which was itself sacked by Habsburg mercenaries in 1527. Against this background, following this history, thirty-seven years after completing the *Pietà*, Michelangelo began the project of painting the Last

Judgement, the altarpiece of the Sistine Chapel. The contrast between the Neoplatonic humanism of the ceiling frescoes and the Mannerist (or Late Renaissance) figures of the Last Judgement, is significant. Michelangelo experienced the social, economic and religious convulsions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and these influenced his work. Compare the God who breathes life into Adam, to the vast Christ-figure casting the damned into hell and the observer might conclude that Michelangelo's life experiences transformed his interpretation of the reflection in the mirror he held up to his world.<sup>20</sup>

It is, perhaps, unfair to refer to the work (poetry, architecture, painting, sculpture) of one who may be the most accomplished artist ever to have lived, in order to discuss the relationship between memory and imagination for mere mortals. Michelangelo was an artist who, surely, exemplified the Aristotelian concept of *tekhnê*, that is, the productive capacity to create, informed by an understanding of that capacity's intrinsic rationale (which might explain Michelangelo's design for the Campidoglio in Rome but, I would argue, hardly explains the *terribilità*). My point here is that even *il divino* was not immune to the effects of the shifting political and social landscape of the time in which he lived. And neither are we. I am aware that in a hundred years' time a social historian or political commentator may refer to this time as the Neo-Conservative Period, or the Age of Creationism, or the Evangelist Age, or the Bush Empire, or the Fifty Years War on Terror.<sup>21</sup> I cannot know what it will be, because I cannot climb to that privileged, perspectival high ground but nevertheless there are, without doubt, meta-forces working on me as an individual living within a social group, meta-forces of which I am only subliminally (yet, paradoxically, uncomfortably) aware. And these forces operate on me, whether as a consumer (when I select a pack of Fair Trade coffee and a pint of organic milk) or a writer.

So much for the socio-political context in which I sit in my study and write. There is, also, the personal context. That is, the *facts* of my existence. I am a white woman, born in 1958 in Bristol, England, a country where I have lived ever since. I could elaborate on these skimpy facts by giving details of my education and professional life but I'll resist the temptation. And yet I know if I were to furnish the reader with some of these dull facts, they would be able to make fairly accurate deductions about my life – grammar school for girls in Epsom, Surrey +

university + current postcode + preferred national daily paper + contents of fridge  
= snapshot of a life lived. (This illustrates neatly the concept of inferential  
knowledge, which is discussed at length in the section on autobiographical  
memory, below.) To decontextualise Wittgenstein, 'We make to ourselves  
pictures of facts'.<sup>22</sup>

Surely, it makes more sense to speak of individuals as being the results of  
their experiences – the 'you are what you experience' school of thought – rather  
than products of their biographical facts? Perhaps it does. But there is no  
escaping the observation that *what* I experience will depend to a great extent on  
those bare facts given above. An Aborigine living in one of the derelict plywood  
houses provided for him by the state on the outskirts of Alice Springs, whose  
days are spent drinking sweet, cheap mosel wine, will not expect to have the  
same life experiences as a middle-aged, white, English woman. Age, culture,  
gender, education – all of these properties dictate to a great extent what the  
experiences are that fashion the concept of self. (This notion of 'self' and the  
various theories regarding the coding of memories will be the basis for a lengthy  
exposition later.) Writers are affected, sometimes even compressed, by the meta-  
forces of cultural and social change, as well as being acted upon from within by  
their personal experiences and the constant realignment of the sense of identity  
the memories of these experiences causes.

I have attempted, so far, to establish the boundaries of the area of literature I shall  
be exploring and the issue of the context in which the writer writes, in terms of  
both the social and the individual pressures and constraints acting on the writer.  
It's now time to address the problems of the identity of 'self'. At this point, an  
excursion into the fields of psychology and cognitive psychology is called for, in  
order to establish what, exactly, memory is and what role it plays in generating  
'self history'.



## SELF

### **The Philosophers' Wall**

Any inquisitive student attempting to make sense of mental acts sets off, sprinting enthusiastically, in the quest for knowledge and runs, almost immediately, into a brick wall. This wall is quite an obstacle – the foundations laid by philosophers when they averred, hundreds of years ago, that we can have no access to the minds of others. We can speculate, we can infer and deduce, we can even now calibrate neural impulses and measure the movement of eyeballs in sleep, in order to arrive at the conclusions that if A's lover has left her, she will be upset; that B's tears and the blood spurting from his nose means he must be in pain and that C's rapid eyeball movement means she's dead to the world. But the fact remains that the only mind to which we have direct access is our own, and as a result any conclusions we may arrive at concerning mental acts are based, substantially, precisely on introspective mental acts. Some philosophers went further, piling brick upon brick on the wall. Descartes famously doubted everything around him and found all that was left was the mental act of thinking. This is not to say that all that was left were his doubts (a common fallacy);<sup>23</sup> rather, Descartes arrived at the conclusion that he could not doubt that he was experiencing his doubts; more, that he could not doubt the subjective experiences of feeling the chair's back, the table's hardness, as if they were there. If these experiences could be described as 'his', then he must exist in order to experience them. Sadly, this says nothing about the existence or otherwise of the mind of his chamber maid or wig-maker. But this is not the place to analyse the arguments of the Sceptics, the

Reductionists, the Existentialists, the Behaviourists and so on, regarding the existence or otherwise of others' minds.

There remains, however, the charge of the sin of solipsism – are the sciences of psychology and cognitive psychology the Hamlets of the academic world? The incomparable Gilbert Ryle answers the charge:

Sometimes we idly fancy that the whole world is merely our dream. Solipsism is a theory rather like this fancy, but based on argument. If asked why I believe in the existence of stars, trees and people, I have to reply 'My sight, hearing, touch, in short, my perceptions are sorted and supplemented by memory, inference and conjecture, but without perceptions such thinking has nothing to work on. Now perceiving is having sensations. But you cannot have, for example, my visual or tactual sensations, any more than you can have my toothaches. So you cannot perceive anything that I perceive. The world that my senses acquaint me with is private to me. Even the *you* that I see and hear could no more exist without my existing any more than my toothaches could. I hanker to believe that independently existing, unperceived things tally with the perceived contents of my private world, but I ought to believe that I alone (*solus ipse*) exist in my own right, all else depending on me as my toothaches do.' No important philosophers accept this repellent conclusion. But many, accepting the argument for it, have to postulate non-perceptual reasons for believing in independently existing things and people. We should, instead, reject the step in the argument 'perceiving is having sensations'.<sup>24</sup>

This last sentence refers to Ryle's theories concerning mental concepts; he considered the portrayal of these concepts as events occurring in a ghost lodged in a machine (the mind located in the brain) to be mistaken. Rather, he believed that mental concepts refer to dispositions to behave in certain ways in appropriate circumstances. Before leaping to the conclusion that Ryle is a closet Behaviourist, take note:

As the human body is a complex, organised unit, so the human mind must be another complex, organised unit, though one made of a different sort of stuff and with a different sort of structure. Or, again, as the human body, like any other parcel of matter, is a field of causes and effects, so the mind must be another field of causes and effects, though not (Heaven be praised) mechanical causes and effects.<sup>25</sup>

Ryle has been labelled as many things, Reductionist, Behaviourist and Demolitionist among them, and it is this last label I prefer. When discussing acts of remembering, Ryle denies that memory consists in ‘hearing’ or ‘seeing’ copies of visual or auditory objects, because no event has simultaneously occurred. That is, if you imagine a loud thud, no auditory event has simultaneously occurred, so no copy has been made of it. Ryle, effectively, demolishes the copy and posits instead a direct relationship between the event or object and the memory of it, unmediated by analogues or copies.<sup>26</sup> There is another reason I am drawn towards the notion of demolitionist tendencies. I suggest at this point that the argument for the existence of others’ minds is accepted for our purposes, and we allow the philosophers to continue the debate off-page. In order to demolish the brick wall they have built, I suggest swinging at it with the sledgehammer of common sense rather than slashing at it with Ockham’s Razor.

### **The Psychologists’ Shock**

In 1978, the eminent psychologist Ulric Neisser, addressed an audience of colleagues attending a conference, presenting a paper titled ‘Memory: What are the important questions?’ and shook them all to the core by announcing that the work done in memory research for the past century was all bunk. I was not there, so I can only speculate about the response to this statement. Did papers fly? Were ashtrays thrown? Probably not. Perhaps the psychologists sat in respectful silence, because Neisser had a point. For a hundred years or more, the majority of psychologists involved in the study of memory had adopted a ‘traditional laboratory research’ (TLR) approach. Subjects were placed in rooms and shown nonsense syllables and unrelated diagrams, or random facts were given them,

stripped of context. Their response times, the rates of short-term memory decay, recall delay periods were all assiduously logged – and all of these data were controlled, calibrated and measured in clinical conditions. Marvellous stuff – but what, Neisser was asking, does that have to do with the man who mouths an obscenity in the bank as he realises he’s forgotten his cheque book, or the woman who pauses on a threshold because she’s convinced she’s lived this scene already, or the unbidden memory which occasionally surfaces in my mind, of snapping my ankle and falling, as a result, into a bush of poison ivy? Neisser’s answer was ‘nothing’.<sup>27</sup> What he wanted was ‘a new approach, concentrating on the detailed examination of naturally occurring memory phenomena in the real world, which paid particular attention to individual differences.’<sup>28</sup> In short, Neisser was demanding that research into memory be driven primarily by the ecological validity of its findings,<sup>29</sup> that is, the research should apply to naturally occurring behaviour in the natural context of the real world.

### **The Cognitive Psychologist’s Dream**

The methodological concepts underpinning cognitive psychology are surprisingly simple to grasp, given the daunting name given to this field of study. Psychology was recently birthed by the union of medicine, physiology and philosophy, a neo-science of the late nineteenth century. It has had considerable impact on our lives – *vide* the developments in advertising, the Hollywood dream machine, the growth of counselling services, the queues stretching down Harley Street, the cheques made out to compensate for PTSD. Yet during its short life, the study of psychology has morphed again and again, spilling over the ever-growing map of human knowledge, fluid and tricky as a puddle of mercury. At its inception, it was described variously as the ‘science of the mind’, the ‘science of mental life’ and ‘the science of behaviour’. Sir Frances Galton determined in 1883 that investigations into human memory required observation and interaction; at the same time, Hermann Ebbinghaus decided that behaviour was the key, informed by TLR and experimental control. Perhaps it was the muscularity, the *rigour* of Ebbinghaus’ theories, the sheer science of the approach which appealed to the Victorian mind? Whatever the appeal, it proved to be the more attractive approach, and the study of psychology was (with a few exceptions – Paivio,

Brown, McNeill, Mandler) conducted in the laboratory until Neisser leaped to his feet and called the psychologists' conference to order.

Since Neisser's intervention, psychology has changed yet again, as the ranks of cognitive psychologists have grown. Some of these researchers focus on internal, covert mental processes, which include mental events, mental representations and, of course, everyday memory (a study almost forgotten since Galton) and they do this without recourse to the study of animal behaviours, psychometrics, neural-imaging, or neuro-physiology.<sup>30</sup> Instead they are interested in developing theories which adequately explain the functions of memory to describe, if you like, Ryle's 'complex, organised unit'. The cognitive psychologist has moved away from the 'tradition of studying memory for items of information stripped, as far as possible, of meaning, context and personal significance'.<sup>31</sup> Rather, he examines naturally occurring memory phenomena in the real world, and any findings must, as such, have ecological validity. That said, the cognitive psychologist likes nothing more than to generate models to represent findings, in an attempt to map the mental world, and many of them are relying increasingly on drawing analogies between the workings of the human mind, and the storage of data and its manipulation by computers. All this endeavour is supported by work in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Cognitive psychologists studying everyday memory concern themselves with such functions as memory for intentions, places, events, eyewitness testimony, flashbulb events, personal experiences, knowledge, expertise, conversation, texts, narratives, thoughts and, interestingly, dreams. In short, the areas of concern for any writer – particularly a writer examining the relationship between memory and narrative.

It should be said here that I have exaggerated the schism between experimental psychology and cognitive psychology; the attitudes of the various practitioners are not as deeply entrenched as I have suggested. My purpose is to emphasise the attractions of the latter's focus of study being in the real world. As Alan Baddeley remarks of his text, *Human Memory*, 'The particular chapter topics are not very different from those adopted by virtually every other text book on memory.'<sup>32</sup> The topics may not be different but the methodologies are.

### **The Hammer of Introspection**

Many people, if asked to describe their memory processes, refer to filing cabinets, boxes, file card systems etc. They talk of filing memory events, putting them, as it were, in particular places so they can later send out their retrieval scouts to scurry around and dig out the dog-eared mental papyrus headed 'Stinks on a scale of 0 – 10' when confronted with the choice between cheddar and camembert. Traditional laboratory researchers model memory in much the same way – 'the store house metaphor' as Koriart and Goldsmith call it.<sup>33</sup> These experimental researchers are primarily concerned with the quantity of information stored, for how long it is stored and what factors cause it to be lost or modified. Cognitive psychology, however, is concerned with the quality of the experience, the method of encoding and what correspondence the consequent memories have with reality. In short, how does the quality of the memory correspond to reality ...

... here it comes again. My intention when planning this section was to summarise various aspects of current everyday memory theory and lay them out in a neat row of nutshells. However, another problem has arisen; a thorny one at that, springing precisely out of the notion of the correspondence to reality. To reprise: I am concerned with exploring the relationship between self, memory and narrative in the process of writing a novel. I had planned to present an overview of past and current theories of memory, followed by observations on imagination by the great and good. But having smashed the wall of solipsism, another obstacle appears on the horizon – the hammer of introspection which is poised above my nutshells. Impossible to ignore.

In private correspondence with Professor Gillian Cohen, I described my task as attempting to ascertain *what is happening* when I slump back in my chair in my study, as I work on a novel, and stare unseeing out of the window. More, *what has happened* when I cease to slump, sit up and begin to type again. In short, I intended to analyse my own mental acts.

It is an accepted fact that an observer changes the event observed. My study is small, dark and smoky. If three experimental psychologists in white coats stood behind me, having attached neuro-sensors and cardiac pulse monitors

to my body in order to assess my stress levels and areas of increased activity in my brain as I wrote, I would feel a tad uneasy, not to say, claustrophobic. Indeed, I can say if my writing process was so observed, it would be adversely affected. In the light of these problems and recognising the limitations of experimental work, cognitive psychologists rely heavily on introspective evidence amongst other accounts. That is, subjects report their current, covert thought processes, and they are also invited to introspect and describe the mental strategies they adopt, in decision-making or problem-solving, for example. Or writing novels, come to that.

Many psychologists (and practitioners in other fields – behaviourists, doctors, teachers, for example) distrust introspective accounts, and for good reason. Here are a few of the caveats regarding the introspectionist approach:

- Some (Nisbett and Wilson, for example),<sup>34</sup> maintain that there may in any case, 'be little or no direct access to higher order cognitive processes'. As a result, many cognitive processes may not be available for scrutiny by consciousness.
- There exists the problem of the inadequacy of language to describe – and certainly to explain – some cognitive processes.
- Connectionist theorists argue that there are patterns of activation across fields of neural structures and these patterns fire and connect at levels of which we cannot be aware. So, we may be conscious of the end product of a mental act but it is not possible to discern the activations of which that end product is a result.
- It would certainly be impossible to give an introspectionist account of these activations – and, further, one is tempted to say it is impossible even to theorise about their properties (there are, after all a near-infinite number of ways of mapping possible pathways between A and B), and as a result we could question even the existence of such patterns of activation.
- There are, also, problems with widely reported memory phenomena, experienced by nearly all of us, for which activations no amount of introspection can account. For example, 'floaters', the fragments of memory which present themselves with no apparent trigger (see above); passive

memories, which are triggered by unexpected stimuli (smell being the main culprit); and the curious problem-solving mental act which follows the sensation of something being on the tip of the tongue and which precedes someone leaping up in a crowded pub yelling, 'Fire!' in response to a question regarding Arthur Brown's most famous song asked three days previously.

- Any introspection which takes place concurrently with a mental activity almost inevitably distorts that activity, usually by slowing down the process. For example, if someone with only a conversational grasp of Spanish is asked to report what exact mental acts they perform when translating the statement 'La corteza de algunos árboles es muy útil al hombre', then their awareness of the task will distort that particular translation – they will, indeed, be self-conscious.<sup>35</sup>
- However, the obvious solution to this last problem – to ask the subject for retrospective introspection reports – also produces distorted accounts, since the rate of decay of memory causes some elements to be soon forgotten.
- It is worth noting that recent developments in methodology have eliminated one other problem that used to arise with introspective accounts of mental acts or states. Psychologists now commonly use large control groups and/or computer models etc. However, in the late nineteenth century, some psychologists felt uneasy using any subjects other than themselves. This led to an unfortunate situation in the case of Sir Francis Galton, who 'managed, by dint of considerable effort to induce in himself feelings of paranoia such that every person or even horse he met in the street was imagined to be spying on him'.<sup>36</sup>

All of the above (and indeed, every question ever uttered since palaeolithic caveman stumbled into the light grunting 'who am I?' and every answer subsequently given), makes certain assumptions, not least of which is that it presumes an understanding of consciousness. Which, according to psychologists, we don't have. That is, psychologists and neuroscientists are still investigating which acts of memory and learning take place consciously and which do not. Implicit learning/memory is 'unconscious learning', or 'learning



of which we are not consciously aware'. The usual example given of this activity is the acquisition of language skills in young children; they are able to construct grammatically correct sentences without being able to articulate the rules of case grammar. Explicit learning is stored in such a way as to be available to consciousness – thrust your hand into a pile of burning embers and it is unlikely you will do it again. Theorists and experimental researchers are still trying to define the boundary between implicit and explicit memory/learning, still trying to explain consciousness.

Each of the above objections as to the validity of introspective accounts of mental processes holds water. Worse: there is still no consensus regarding the definition, or even the purpose of consciousness. In response it might be said that we all *appear* to share some notion of what it is to be self-aware and *appear* all to experience sense data in much the same way and *appear* to encode the data in some way (amnesiacs, those suffering from blindsight, neglect, anarchic hand syndrome etc. notwithstanding)<sup>37</sup> which enables us to retrieve the data encoded at a later date. Yet there appears to be evidence that mental events occur of which we are unaware – perhaps we do not possess the faculty to apprehend this subconscious activity (or, come to that, superconscious activity; there is no reason to suppose that this activity occurs below the pitch, as it were, of our consciousness. We may be ignoring the dog whistle of the universe.). This scenario reminds me of a scene in *Altered Land*. John, the main character, is deaf and when he is a schoolboy he remarks of the experience of trying to sleep in the dormitory, as he remembers his father:

Many nights I'd lie there crying, mourning him, and no one could hear me. That is the one privilege of the deaf – there is privacy in the dark, when we are sightless. Often I wondered if all the boys were lying there crying, wailing even, and no one knew it.<sup>38</sup>

Before anyone suggests that this is simply a version of the 'if a leaf falls and no one sees it, has the event occurred?' school of thought,<sup>39</sup> I (either as Jules Hardy or John Player) emphasise I am not doubting the wailing, and neither am I doubting implicit memory.

Here is hypothesis to explain the fact that *homo sapiens* learns and memorises without being aware of it:

### **Janet and John and the Alpha Mind**

*(Scene: Janet and John sitting in a crowded, smoky pub. John is staring vacantly at a television showing a football match. Janet is frowning, turning her glass in her hand. She speaks suddenly.)*

*Janet:* If there can be mind/body dualism, then there may be mind/mind dualism.

*John:* Excuse me?

*Janet:* Well, we speak of the mind as a single, unified but multi-functional<sup>40</sup> entity but perhaps it is not? Perhaps there is the mind that knows how to buy a drink in the pub, that is, it reminds us of the protocol of the act, and it also knows facts, such as the accepted dates for the Peloponnesian War being 431-404 BC. This mind we could label the Beta Mind.

*John:* If you say so.

*Janet:* So, developing this line of thought, we could conjecture that there exists an Alpha Mind.

*John:* Yeah? What's that do then?

*Janet:* The Alpha Mind is responsible for those higher order concepts the genesis and maintenance of which the Beta Mind has no direct access to. This is not to say that the Beta Mind is not a complex, sophisticated entity – but what do I mean by sophisticated?

*John:* Don't ask me.

*Janet:* The question is rhetorical. We describe the Beta mind as sophisticated because we compare it to a chicken's or an ape's. Or a computer's.

*John:* Computers don't have minds. They're only as good as the programs, which means as good as the programmer. And if he's using his Beta Mind, like you call it, coz that's all he thinks he's got ...

*Janet (looking at John with some surprise):* Exactly. Which is all he *can* think he has because it's all he is aware of, and that's why I have a caveat about the activities of the newly instituted Oxford Centre for Science of the Mind.<sup>41</sup> Lady Greenfield has announced that 'the time is ripe for the machinery of scientific method to come to bear on the most profound questions of the human condition'. These are, apparently, the nature of consciousness and how religious beliefs manifest themselves in our brains.

*John:* Blimey.

*Janet:* They're going to use functional magnetic resonance imaging to investigate the boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness.

*John:* What, like those photos you see with brains all different colours?

*Janet:* Something like that.

*John:* And that's going to tell us what's goin' on in our brains when we believe something? Or have faith?

*Janet:* So they hope.

*(The two of them sit in silence, Beta Minds working furiously.)*

*John (comprehension dawning):* You're not sayin' that ...

*Janet:* Yes, John, I am. They're making a Rylean category type mistake. Just as did the foreigner who asked, when watching a cricket match, whose role it was in the team to exercise the *esprit de corps* given they'd all been bowled out.<sup>42</sup>

*John:* Ryle? Didn't he nick the title of that Police album?

*Janet:* He did refer to the fallacy of the 'Ghost in the Machine', yes.

*John:* But you're saying there are *two* ghosts ...

*Janet:* No, I'm not. But interesting you should bring up ghosts. As St Augustine in his *Confessions* remarked, it's extraordinary that we can use our memory to represent to ourselves scenes which appear to be rich with colour and sound, and yet memory itself is colourless and silent –

*John (excited):* Jus' like ghosts!

*Janet (with asperity):* You've never seen a ghost.

*John:* Well, you've never seen a unicorn and you're always bangin' on about them.

*Janet:* That's not the same thing.

*John:* Why not?

*Janet:* I'll tell you later. Anyway, as I was saying, I'm not asserting there are two ghosts in the machine. I am, if you like, saying there may be two *or more* systems operating when we perform mental acts and of some of these we are unaware. Systems, much like ghosts, have no colour, they make no sound, they have no scent, and they have no extension. Systems, in short, resemble Euclidean points.

*John:* So?

*Janet:* Do I have to explain everything?

*John:* Yes. You can't say systems have no extension – I've seen maps. I've seen flow diagrams. They're systems.

*Janet:* No, they're representations of systems.<sup>43</sup> And if constructs such as 'Alpha Mind' and 'Beta Mind' resemble Euclidean points (*mutters to herself*) but does it make sense to talk of Euclidean *points*? In the plural? (*collects herself*) does it make sense for Lady Greenfield to talk of locating the nexus of these phenomena?

*John:* You've lost me.

*Janet:* I *can't* lose you. Your sense of self, your self-history, your identity is constructed from your experiences. You are not mine to lose. You are what you remember. You are not what I remember.

*Jack:* What d'you mean? I'm the same as I always was. I haven't changed. Like I said last week, it's *you* that's changed, you're not the same woman as –

*Janet:* Let's not go into that right now. What I'm saying is that you are the sum of your experiences. *Your* experiences. They are the only things you truly own. But if we allow that there might be an Alpha Mind operating concurrently with the Beta Mind then there may be mental events occurring when you construct your sense of self to which your Beta Mind has no access. Strange as that might seem.

*John (frowning):* All sounds like bollocks to me. Just the usual fancy words you always use to make sure I don't understand.

*Janet:* Your incomprehension is not my goal here. But you have a point, John, about words, or language as I would prefer to say. You accuse me of playing word games. I'm not. I'm monolingual. I only have one language with which to describe concepts of mind, or minds.

Interestingly, neither the concept of mind, nor the concept of consciousness is represented in the Ancient Greek language.<sup>44</sup> But no one, surely, would suggest that Plato or Aristophanes were not conscious when one wrote *The Republic* and the other *The Frogs*?

*John:* The what?

*Janet:* *The Frogs*, but that's not important right now. What I'm saying is, the naming of a thing may make a difference to its epistemological status but not, surely, to its ontological integrity.

*John (wearily):* And your point is?

*Janet:* I'm making more than one point here.

*John:* Too bloody right you are.

*Janet:* One – it is accepted that mental events occur of which we are not consciously aware. It may be that we do not have the language skills necessary to describe these events, or we do not have the faculty to discern mental events which take place at such speed, or in such ways.

Two – scientists have tried to model the mind, either by highlighting analogies with the brains or behaviours of other mammals or by developing computer programs which attempt to model the processes of memory. I object to the first approach because I cannot accept that a rat electing to choose one path to a food source rather than another path is in any way analogous to my ability to experience grief or my ability to imagine a unicorn. As for the computer models, well, there are many problems with this and not merely the instinctive reaction that computers have no soul. I'm white so I haven't got soul either, but I still object. OK, in the past digital computers could only operate serially, whilst the neurones in the human brain operate in parallel, but apparently they've solved that problem now.<sup>45</sup> But, computers find the storage of data stupidly simple and retrieval unproblematic. Computers don't forget. We do. Computers do not exhibit the characteristics of 'graceful degradation', a beautiful phrase which describes an unpleasant state of

affairs – the loss of brain cells through ageing. But despite this loss, the human mind is still capable of remembering a great deal and performing a vast number of functions. The computer is not. If the fuse blows or the data processing system develops a fault, the whole ceases to function.<sup>46</sup>

Three – scientists may have no truck with the notion of ‘soul’ and feel they have no need to appeal to some mysterious element of the world to explain the complexities of the human mind, but the philosopher and just about everyone else in the universe does. In *De Anima* Aristotle moved away from Plato’s monism to posit the theory that the essence of what it is to be human is to be found in the *psyche*, which for the Ancient Greeks meant ‘soul’. So, for him, psychology would mean the study of the soul. He argued that there exist both ‘form’, which is, if you like, the essence of an object; and ‘matter’, which is the material, the substance of which an object is made. The matter of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* is metamorphosed limestone from Carrara, the form is the sculpture that is Michelangelo’s representation, *terribilità* translated into a grieving mother cradling her dead son. A more basic example would be that of a shelf – its function dictates that it must be flat, solid and horizontal; that is the form of the shelf. It may be made of wood or of metamorphosed limestone but the point is that the form implies the matter – a shelf made of jelly might be attractive but it would have no function – yet the matter cannot imply the form. So, Aristotle argued, the ‘soul’ is the form of the human being. A corpse has no *psyche*, it is therefore not a human being, it does not have the form, the essence of human being just as the jelly does not have the form of the shelf. This results in the Aristotelian assertion that form and matter always co-exist but he denies that there is therefore unity, that the mind and body are one. Bearing in mind that the Ancient Greeks had no word corresponding with the English word ‘consciousness’, it is interesting that Aristotle referred to the *nous poetikos*, the ‘active mind’, which is not reducible to mechanical accounts of matter. This, of course, leads one to ask whether he is suggesting that there is a ‘passive mind’.

*John:* What? Like your Alpha and Beta minds?

*Janet (shrugs):* Maybe. Many cultures make reference to base and higher thoughts. For example, traditional Chinese religion refers to the dual soul, the lower, material soul, *p'o*, and the higher, mental soul, *hun*. (*Sighs.*)

It's impossible, isn't it?

*John:* What's that, love?

*Janet:* Any attempt to define what the mind, or consciousness *is*. We take it for granted, but all of them – the Gnostics with their 'divine spark', the behaviourists with their mechanistic accounts, the phenomenologists, the cognitive psychologists, the neuro-scientists, the reductionists, the functionalists, the mysterians – none of them manages to answer the question. Even Wittgenstein came over all misty in the end: 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.'<sup>47</sup>

*John (sympathetically):* Maybe it's just that we *can't* know. Y'know, that it's jus' something we'll never understand.<sup>48</sup> What makes us human, like. Maybe to get it we'd have to think in a way we don't know how to do. Maybe it'd be like that bloke in that movie the *Lawnmower Man*, or that book *The Black Hole* by that geezer Fred Hoyle. Just too much information – our brains and our minds would explode. D'you want another pint?

... And there we shall leave Janet and John, sitting at the bar, nursing their drinks and thinking their higher order thoughts. Janet could talk all night, rehearsing and revisiting the various theories, both philosophical and scientific, regarding the nature of consciousness and never coming to a conclusion, *because there are no answers* to the questions what is consciousness and what is the mind? Perhaps it would be as well here to accept David Papineau's summary of Thomas Nagel's philosophy of mind: that consciousness inheres in the subjective element of mental acts and is not an objective phenomenon to be explained in physical terms.<sup>49</sup>

Or, to put it more succinctly, if one were to ask 'What am I talking about when I talk about my "mind"?', the answer might be the same as Louis Armstrong gave when asked what 'What am I talking about when I talk about jazz?': 'Man, if you gotta ask, you'll never know.'<sup>50</sup>

## MEMORY

As we have seen, there exist many fundamental problems inherent in any study of mental acts (such as remembering and imagining), not least the issues of the existence of both one's own and others' minds, the nature of consciousness, the ontological status of higher order thoughts and the validity of introspection. Effectively, my position regarding these issues is: both my mind and the minds of others exist; the nature of consciousness cannot be adequately explained, yet enough of us appear to understand the concept sufficiently well to accept (tacitly, as it were) that many higher order thoughts occur in such a way as to be accessible to our consciousness and we appear to be able to employ a language sufficiently well to discuss shared mental experiences; and, lastly, despite the fact that retrospective introspection has many problems as a methodology for describing mental events, I intend to adopt the approach here as it seems the most appropriate, whilst acknowledging the problems outlined above.

Why switch my focus now to the subject of memory? Because if I adhere to the 'you are what you experience' school of thought – and I do – then I cannot ignore the role that memory has played/plays in my development of my sense of 'self'. And by 'self' I mean 'self' as grown child, student, carpenter, traveller, lover, insurance policy holder, tobacco addict, writer ... the list is seemingly endless. The 'there, then' informs the 'here, now'. And this is why it is cogent to write 'memory plays' despite the fact that this phrase seems inherently contradictory – the past encoded in the present or vice versa. 'Here, now' is sitting at my desk in my study in my house at 12.58 a.m. on 19 January 2005. And now it's not – it's



12.59 a.m. and am I different? Changed by memory? Perhaps. I 'know' I am changed since 12.59 p.m. on 18 January 2005 because I have encountered in the intervening twelve hours ideas I have not encountered before – for example, the fact that no other European language has a word which directly corresponds to the English word 'mind', and that Cox's Orange Pippin apples are ready to eat only when they are shaken and the pips rattle. I hesitate to say that my changed self is merely an accretion of facts. But I can say with a great deal of certainty that my concept of 'self' has changed since 12.59 a.m. on 19 January 2004; I have been variously disappointed and surprised by my own actions and thoughts and have 'learned' from these experiences to act differently (when I remember to do so).

So what is this powerful tool called 'memory'? It is, to be sure, a complex entity. As Baddeley says, 'The use of a single term might seem to suggest that memory is a unitary system, albeit a complicated one ... [but] ... it is not one system but many.'<sup>51</sup> Perhaps more pertinently, memory is not simply many systems, these systems also serve multiple functions. A glance at the entry for 'memory' in the *Dictionary of Psychology* confirms this, giving, as all dictionaries must, a concise, dry definition:

Memory refers to one of the following: 1. The mental function of retaining information about stimuli, events, images, ideas, etc. after the original stimuli are no longer present.<sup>52</sup> 2. The hypothesised 'storage system' in the mind/brain that holds this information. 3. The information so retained.<sup>53</sup>

The entry goes on to remark that 'memorial processes are extremely complex and different memory tasks recruit different ones'<sup>54</sup> and as a result the term 'memory' frequently has an adjectival qualifier. For example, associative, autobiographical, biological, declarative, echoic, episodic, explicit, false, flashbulb, genetic, holographic, iconic, implicit, inaccessible ... the list is extensive. What are the functions of these theoretical mental processes?

Most psychologists, in whichever camp they have raised their flag, are agreed that there are many systems and sub-systems within 'memory'. This, of course, makes perfect sense, as even the most cursory examination of the mental

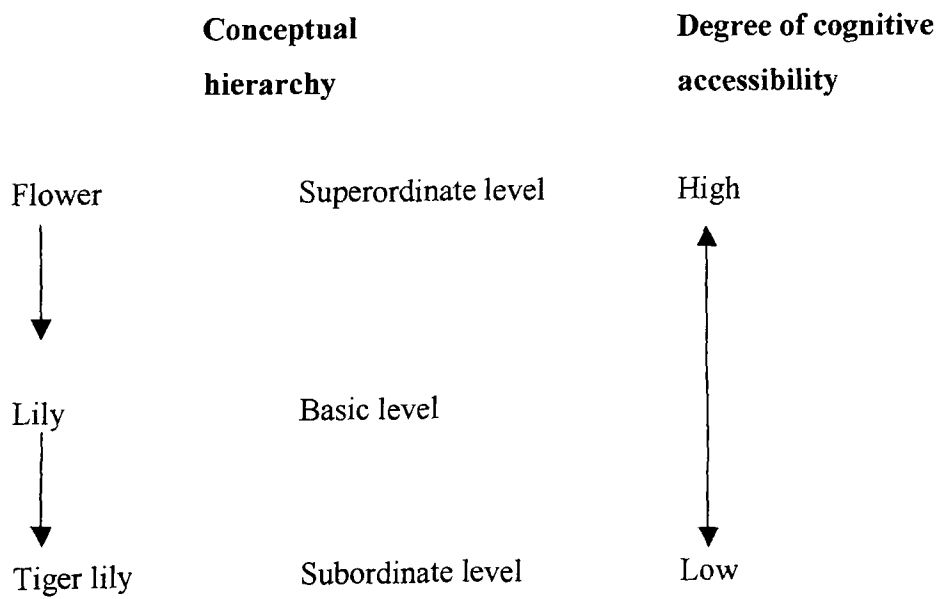
processes of memory will show. The same meta-system that enables me to remember the Chip and Pin numbers for my credit cards, enables me to pick up cards and play Pinochle for the first time in thirteen years. The same meta-system that enables me to look at a collection of plastic squares and think ‘keyboard’, enables me to recall the exquisite taste of a ‘bug’<sup>55</sup> I once ate on the island of Zanzibar. And the same system that breaks down and leaves me speechless when asked what my mobile telephone number is, provides me with vivid images of Charlie “Chum” Kane, who (or which? To write ‘who’ implies that Chum has an Aristotelian-style soul, that he has attributes which are not enjoyed by a corpse ...) is nothing but a fictional construct and as such I have no direct sensory stimuli data to retrieve when I think ‘Charlie “Chum” Kane’, *just as I had no stimulus when I encoded my images of him.*<sup>56</sup> Complex indeed, and certainly not unitary.

### **Modelling Memory**

How to represent this myriad of functions? Model, model, model as the estate agent of the mind might say. (For examples of some of the models developed by psychologists to account for the possible relationships between the systems and sub-systems of memory, see Appendix 1.) These systems are, obviously, theoretical constructs which attempt to map what happens when I recall ‘taste of bug’ or ‘PIN number’. They are three-dimensional representations of a two-dimensional entity, or, to quote Janet, a Euclidean point. The human desire to name and map, to establish spatial or temporal relations between things, it strikes me now, is in itself a higher order thought and as such, is perhaps an essential element of the thing it is trying to explicate. As a result it might be that the exercise is nothing but an exercise in tautology (as futile as the activity of dancing to architecture).<sup>57</sup> The psychologists who devise these models are presenting representations of memory in which they construct networks of inter-relationships between the systems serving the different functions of working memory. What is interesting, for example, in section (a) of Johnson’s MEM Model (see Appendix 1), is that it so clearly represents the spatial characteristic of memory, which appeals, I believe, to the ‘folk’-concept of memory. That is, that some memories are ‘buried’, they lie deep within us, whilst other memories

skitter about on the surface of our consciousness, serving fleeting purposes and then falling off and disappearing. (The ‘storehouse’ metaphor, mentioned above, also makes appeal to this desire to give spatial dimension to concepts of memory.)

A swift trawl through current theories of memory, or a glance at the dictionary entries mentioned above, or an examination of sections (b) and (c) of Johnson’s MEM model, will reinforce the validity of the statement that memory serves many functions, yet has the characteristics of a discrete, unified entity. This leads, *ipso facto*, to the acknowledgement that these functions must be in some way co-ordinated, otherwise each act of memory would be reduced to a serial succession of simple, atomic or sub-atomic events, rather than the rich, textured, *parallel* representations that are conjured in various circumstances. Upon walking into a room where a vase of lilies sits on a table, I order (but not, apparently, serially) my visual perception data ‘flower →white →waxy →lily ...’ but it’s not all I do. Rosch et al.<sup>58</sup> have suggested that the memory performs categorical organisation at the point of encoding, and there exists a conceptual hierarchy within these categories. For example:



So far, so obvious. This recollection may involve a number of functions of working memory, but it can hardly be called a rich, textured mental experience. What of the fact that if I walk into a room where there is a vase of lilies the words ‘death’, ‘grandmother’, ‘dust’ immediately present themselves to me as signifiers

of affective (emotional) mental states? I am not saying that I have not performed the retrieval tasks outlined above as I trace (the route of?) the conceptual hierarchy of 'lily'; of course I have. But I have also performed a number of other memory acts involving my episodic memory, my semantic memory and my associative memory at the very least, in order to arrive at the bundle of ideas and mental states that the visual perception of a vase of flowers triggers in me. ('Triggers in me' – now, there's a get-out clause.) In terms of cognitive accessibility, it might even be said that these mental states are not accessed at all but constructed (or successively reconstructed) at the point of retrieving 'tiger lily'. So what is co-ordinating these acts and outcomes?

### **The Elf, the Homunculus and the Sharp-suited Executive**

There are many interesting theories regarding this co-ordination but the constraints of time and space demand that I focus only on a few of them. Here, again, the 'folk' or popular concept of memory is relevant. I mentioned earlier the common notion of a Tolkienian mental elf scurrying around in the memory room, rootling about in image-filled boxes and mental filing cabinets. (There's no reason for there to be only one elf; it could be that there are many elves, hanging about, waiting to dig out one recollection or knowledge fragment or another, much like the sperm who hang about in Woody Allen's film, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex ...*, waiting to be called upon.) This scenario is not only comforting in some strange way, but it is also conceptually manageable to those with only a passing knowledge of psychology – it answers the question 'what happens when I have a bundle of thoughts' without the interlocutor believing the answer. But for our purposes, we must leave the elves well alone.

The question remains: who or what is bundling up our perception data in such complex ways? Thomas succinctly summarises the problem which is looming, yet again, as the ever-present 'legitimate temptation to dualism'.<sup>59</sup> He goes on: 'I (as a whole person) am conscious of the things around me, but who is there to be aware of the things in me, to register my thoughts, and who manipulates my mental representations when I am actually thinking with them?'<sup>60</sup> [...] How can some inner I, some homunculus, be avoided?'<sup>61</sup> Here we have a

theory of elf as homunculus. Obviously, Thomas is deliberately employing 'who' rather than 'what' in order precisely to appeal to the sense that there exists a dualism – the 'me' who experiences the 'outer' world, and the 'me' who experiences/reflects/generates the 'inner' world. Why? Because to ask 'what' manipulates/reflects/generates the inner world seems to be absurd, although the cognitive psychologist might answer 'a subsystem of memory', or the neuro-scientist might suggest that it is the stimulation of C-Fibres which results in the representation 'pain'. (And yet, I suspect, that this will not be a satisfactory answer to someone with seventy percent burns to their body as a result of being caught up in a terrorist bomb blast; the uttered word 'pain' would have cultural and semantic properties for the burns victim which is hardly reflected in this definition.) But this answer does not address the question of 'who' is aware of a representation, for, as Thomas remarks, 'a representation can scarcely be aware of itself', so someone must be aware of it. It cannot be the same 'person' who actively perceives the world – sees colour, tastes lemon juice etc. – because these representations and perceptions *are an element of the person perceiving them*.<sup>62</sup> As Thomas says, 'a person is not just the *container* for mental representations'.<sup>63</sup> It would make more sense to say that the person is the accretion of those mental representations (which brings us back to the 'you are what you experience point of view') but this assertion fails to answer the question, who is bundling up my mental representations? The answer cannot be 'me', because that assertion fails to explain the causal relationship between my material body (eyeball – sight – rabid dog) and my mind (sight – rabid dog – fear). My mind says? instructs? shouts? 'run!' and a muscle system or two springs into action. What is the causal relationship? Could I just as usefully suggest: {material body (eyeball – sight – keyboard)} ↔ {mind (sight – keyboard – creative writing)}? But I get ahead of myself ...

Thomas suggests adopting Paivio's theory of Dual Coding<sup>64</sup> as a way out of this mess. This theory proposes that there are 'distinct and quasi-independent formats for mental representation, two "codes" or representational systems',<sup>65</sup> verbal representation and representation in mental imagery. According to Paivio, mental imagery represents what an image is of, and in verbal representation, the mental word represents whatever it is a word for. In my opinion, the problem here, of course, is the description 'distinct and quasi-independent', otherwise

known as having your cake and eating it. To propose two distinct codes – a dualist account of mental acts – and then collapse them into one by suggesting that they are ‘quasi-independent’, whatever that might mean, at one (or two) stroke(s) presents us either with two homunculi (or elves) and/or fails to explain who or what is aware of my mental acts.

For the cognitive psychologist, the question of who (or what) is bundling my mental images and representations into rich, textured mental experiences, is easily answered: the central executive. If this answer seems to the reader to lack poetry, well it might. Particularly when the reader is informed that the central executive, in his Armani suit and sharply pressed Paul Smith shirt, is in the business of co-ordinating subsidiary slave systems in order to control working memory.<sup>66</sup> Baddeley<sup>67</sup> outlines the current theories of what these slave systems might be – short-term memory, long-term memory, primary memory, short-term store, long-term store, buffer store ... one could go on. But one won’t, for the simple reason that these terms and the theories and models they represent do indeed lack poetry. (An interesting point here is that Baddeley’s seminal text, *Human Memory*, does not itself lack poetry. For example, the suggestion made to a subject with short-term memory dysfunction, that ‘archbishops are made in factories’, or the exchange between a researcher and a patient suffering frontal lobe damage: A: ‘Can you think of anything you made at school that is striking?’ B: ‘An Australian wombat.’)<sup>68</sup> The explicanda of the system theories to which these labels apply may well be cogent and workable explanations for how memory works, and there are many experimental findings which have been tested and retested to exhaustion and which can be said to arrive at proofs. I accept that these systems are involved when I am given a list of ten nonsense syllables to memorise and repeat at intervals, and that the rate of my memory decay can be measured as a result. However, I cannot accept that these accounts explain fully what is happening when I imagine Billy-Ray Rickman.<sup>69</sup> The slave systems may well play a part in this mental process of imagining but I cannot accept the argument that a combination of the outputs of these systems alone constitutes the elements of imagination, nor that this explains higher order conceptual acts. And, to be fair, Alan Baddeley acknowledges this:

Suppose we accept that the process of remembering is accompanied by a rich and complex set of subjective cues. Does it matter? ... Is there not a danger that we are returning to the old swamp of introspectionism, with theory depending upon finer and finer distinctions that can only be made by the trained introspectionist? That is clearly a danger, although the success of studies using many subjects and simple discriminations suggests that it is not at present a major problem. Furthermore, even if the approach to the subjective aspects of cognition is full of pitfalls, it cannot be avoided if we wish to develop a psychology of cognition that is complete ... We have a long way to travel before we fully understand the fascinating but elusive phenomenon of conscious awareness, but the journey has begun.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Benevolent Conductor**

Science has, to an extent, failed us, so where to go from here? Having dismissed the elf, the homunculus and the sharp-suited executive, we come face to face with the flamboyant conductor, in his tails and cummerbund. Professor Nicholas Humphrey, in his article 'One-Self: A Meditation on the Unity of Consciousness'<sup>71</sup>, provides an elegant and – for me – satisfactory account of the subjective experience of consciousness (how could it be anything other than subjective?). Humphrey describes the experience of watching his days-old baby son flailing about in his crib, and the questions that experience triggers in him, the central question being, 'What kind of experience is *he* having of *himself*?'<sup>72</sup> He watches his son and he imagines an orchestra tuning up ('a medley of single notes and snatches of melody, out of time, out of harmony'), waiting for the conductor to appear. Looking at his son once more, he sees hands clutching at the air, sees eyes trying to focus – and Humphrey reaches the conclusion that his son's 'conductor' is nowhere to be seen as yet; 'the sub-systems that will one day be *a* system have as yet hardly begun to acknowledge each other'.<sup>73</sup> But if there is no conductor, then perhaps the baby has no sense of self, and if there is no self there can be no experiences, since there is 'someone' who has to experience – the experient. Yet Humphrey, unsurprisingly, rejects the sceptic notion that his son is non-conscious. The baby is, after all, seeing, hearing, touching and so on, and

representations of these perceptions will be being encoded in his memory (as the psychologist might say). The father thinks of Frege's observation that 'the inner world presupposes the person whose inner world it is'. Fair enough, says Humphrey, but 'it seems to imply that all those "someones" that I recognise inside this boy – the someone who is looking, the someone who is acting, the someone who is remembering and so on – must *all* be genuine subjects of experience'.<sup>74</sup> Which leads to the conclusion that the baby is a collection of sub-selves – he is not yet one person, 'perhaps he is in fact *many*'. Which notion, Humphrey suggests, is not unfamiliar (I could say there is the someone who is a dimension of me who flicks open my Zippo and lights yet another Marlboro, and there is another who knows this is definitely a bad move).<sup>75</sup> However, this does not help Humphrey understand his son, since he believes that these sub-selves only come into existence when plugged into 'the *main me*'.

And here's the nub of the matter for Humphrey: 'I won't say that, merely because I can't imagine it, it could make no sense at all to suppose that the baby has got all these conscious selves within him. But I will say I don't know what to say next.'<sup>76</sup>

He is saved, however, by the realisation that 'the reason I can't imagine the baby's case is tied into that very phrase "I can't imagine it"'. Every time the father tries to imagine the son as many sub-selves, the concept of 'baby' draws the sub-selves into one. Because each time he tries to imagine the baby's sub-selves, he imagines each set of experiences as *his*, Humphrey's. And as he says, 'just to the extent that they are all *mine*, they are no longer separate'. 'Mine' – a possessive pronoun denoting ownership.<sup>77</sup> Humphrey then encounters the startling thought that whilst his experiences belong to him, are owned by him (just as Descartes' *cogitationes* belonged to Descartes), the baby's are not. 'Maybe with the baby every experience that any of his sub-selves has is not yet *his*.'

But then, in one of those familiar (and often agonising) clashes between sub-selves, Humphrey-as-father demands of Humphrey-as-philosopher, what the hell does he mean, that his experiences belong to him but his son's experiences do not belong to his son?

And this is when the conductor steps into the limelight and taps the stand (I 'see' a von Karajan-like creature, austere and Teutonic, wielding the baton).

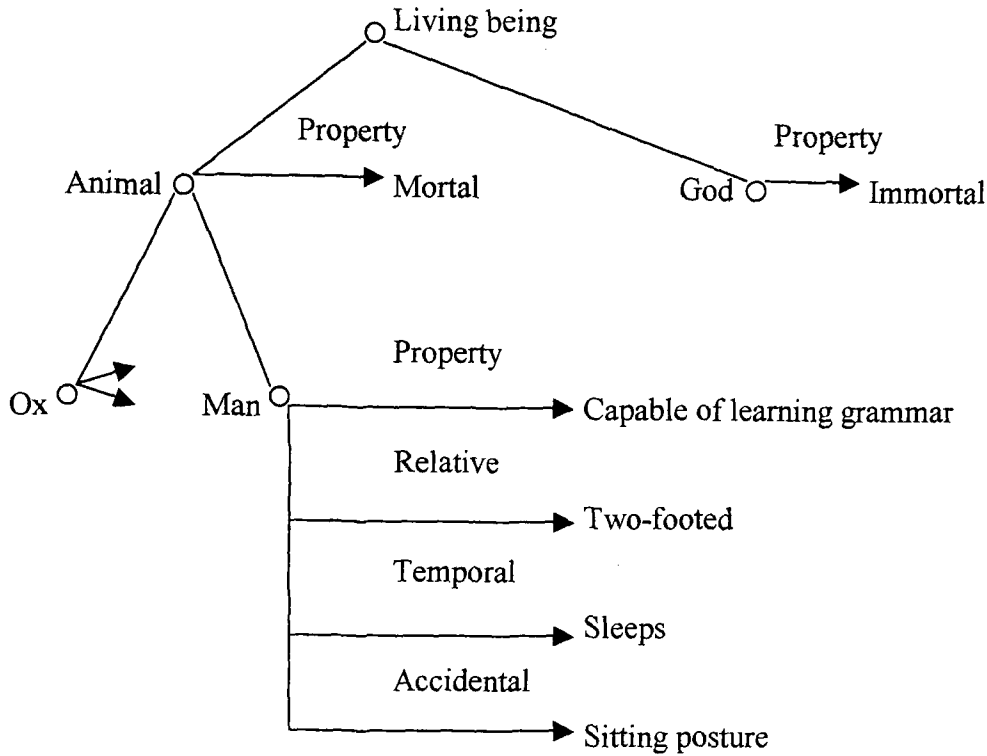


Yet Humphrey now begins to move away from his initial idea of the conductor as ‘dominant authority’, citing the fact that professional musicians (the sub-selves) often describe the conductor’s role as being ‘decorative’. He or she may well influence the interpretation of a symphony – ‘*but that is not what gets the players to belong to each other*’. We have returned to the notion of belonging, which is crucial to Humphrey’s theory. ‘What truly *binds* them into one organic unit and creates the flow between them is something much deeper and more magical: namely, the very act of *making music* – the fact they are involved together in creating a single work of art.’ More, he now poses the question:

What makes the parts of a person belong together – if and when they do?  
The clear answer has to be that the parts will and do belong together *just in so far as they are involved in the common project of creating that person's life.*<sup>78</sup>

In Humphrey’s words, the sub-selves (of which we are, interestingly, aware to some degree, at various times) ‘have become co-conscious through “co-laboration”’,<sup>79</sup> a common project directed by a benevolent conductor, whose purpose it is to oversee the development of a conscious human being. It is the conductor who binds together the strands of thought pulled from the skein of active perceptions and mental representations which constitute our experience of the world. He can influence the style and interpretation of those strands, but he does not produce or modify the raw materials – the perceptions, if you like.

I can well imagine that scientists would balk at the notion of recourse to the ‘magical’. My riposte is that anyone who can accept what is essentially a flow diagram:



adequately models Aristotle's concept of soul and form in *De Anima*,<sup>80</sup> has no right to snicker.<sup>81</sup> If we concede the cognitive psychologists the right to attempt to map and model the unimaginable, then they must allow Humphrey his 'magical', and (just in case Humphrey isn't scary enough) Ludwig Wittgenstein – a dominant Teutonic authority if ever there was one – his 'mystical'. In short, if we accept – as many psychologists do – that there are many higher-order mental events which occur of which we are unaware (that is, that we are not conscious of), then the theory regarding the benevolent dictator is as attractive an explanation as any other to answer the key question: who or what is bundling up my perception data in complex ways?<sup>82</sup>

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

Having slapped the cognitive psychologist on the wrist, I now have to go to him, cap in hand, and ask if I can borrow some of his theories and terminology regarding everyday memory, simply because they are commonly accepted by those who are interested in mental activity at this point in time, and remembering and imagining are – without doubt – mental activities. For my purposes here, I intend to focus on those established aspects of memory which, I believe, influence me as a writer. Why write ‘influence’ me? I could also describe them as ‘directing’, ‘informing’ and ‘guiding’ me. It seems, *prima facie*, that to address only certain aspects of memory rather than the whole is erroneous – surely it makes sense to consider memory as a unitary (if complex) concept, particularly in the light of the fact that I am what I remember (that is, my concept of ‘self’ and ‘self-history’ is generated by both long-term and short-term memory, and the various sub-systems existing within them)? Maybe it does – but then, it could be argued that to speak of ‘autobiographical’ memory is an absurd notion. If Janet cannot lose John because he is not hers to lose, and if no one can experience Gilbert Ryle’s toothache other than Gilbert Ryle, then it seems that to write of memory being anything *other* than autobiographical is absurd. (This argument extends the point made in the last section regarding the notion of possession.) My point being that my memory is precisely that – mine, just as Humphrey’s sub-selves are his. But, as I argued above, ‘we appear to be able to employ a language sufficiently well to discuss common mental experiences’, and that is what I am doing here. My memories may be mine alone<sup>83</sup> but I am confident that you will know what I mean when I talk about ‘regretting’, ‘loving’

or ‘despising’ because I believe that you have memories of experiencing similar affective mental states/feeling the same emotions\* (\*delete as applicable, according to your dispositions, which dispositions will exist as a result of your experiences – yes, we’ve wandered into a hall of cognitive mirrors ...).

The term ‘autobiographical memory’ is commonly accepted to refer to the memory of experiences and events that form our personal history, our sense of self. As I have said, there seems to exist the problem that everything we remember could be described as autobiographical, but this is not what is meant by cognitive psychologists. Cohen provides a succinct definition:

The defining characteristic of autobiographical memory is its relationship to the self: The remembered events are of personal significance and are the building blocks from which the self is constructed. Paradoxically, the self is both the experiencer and the product of the experiences.<sup>84</sup>

(This last sentence brings us back full circle to the problem of who is there to be aware of my thoughts, and at this point it might be best to wave to the conductor.)

### **Dimensions**

Four main dimensions (yet another quasi-spatial concept) of autobiographical memory have been identified:

- First, the memory may consist of autobiographical *facts* – date and place of birth, given name, location of first school, etc. Interestingly, this dimension is often referred to as ‘biographical’ fact, which draws attention to the relationship between self and fact. I may know the date of my birth but it would be fanciful to suggest that I have a memory of the event, even though I was present and must have experienced it. And this is where Humphrey’s theory of dispersed sub-selves is useful.

- The vividness of autobiographical memories may vary and, according to Brewer<sup>85</sup> and others, this variation reflects the properties of the memory – is it a copy or a reconstruction? Copies are the more vivid and detailed, whilst **reconstructions** may incorporate **elaborations** and inferences which were not there at the point of encoding and thus they cease to be copies. Interesting to note here that Conway<sup>86</sup> has suggested that autobiographical memories are ‘actively reconstructed at retrieval and thus have a **dynamic, changeable quality**’, bearing in mind that Cohen maintains that autobiographical memories are ‘long-lasting, perhaps because the self-reference that is characteristic of these memories is known to promote recall’.<sup>87</sup> Taken together, these characteristics imply that autobiographical memories are vivid, long-lasting, changeable and frequently recalled or revisited but, unlike the flashbulb memory (which is discussed later), this revisiting seems unlikely to be for the purposes of rehearsal.
- Autobiographical memories may be specific or generic. For example, I may have a memory of sitting in a library and being disturbed by a dog which enters the building and selects my right foot on which to throw up a half-masticated blueberry muffin, which is a specific memory. I also have a generic memory of studying in libraries (a close relative of the schema we employ in everyday memory, which are also discussed later).
- There are two potential perspectives from which autobiographical memories can be represented to ourselves: **field** and **observer**. The former perspective means that the memory is recalled from the point of view of the experiencer, in the field as it were. In the latter scenario, the memory is recalled from the perspective of an observer of the event; inevitably, these memories are going to be reconstructions because the experient is ‘watching’ the experient experience. Recent experiences are more likely to be recalled from a field perspective, and as such more likely to be copies. Temporally distant memories are more likely to be

recalled from an observer point of view, and as such the emotional impact of these is diminished, as is recall of detail.

## **Functions**

It is important to remember that ‘memory’, whilst it may be a unitary entity, is also extremely complex and a multitude of systems is involved even in the simple task of putting the cat out at night. To speak of autobiographical memory having a discrete set of functions is effectively to ignore the inter-relatedness that exists and the collaboration that occurs between the different sub-systems of memory as whole. Imagine a champagne fountain – the glasses are the sub-systems/sub-selves/subsidiary slave systems, each bearing a different load and tolerating different forces; the champagne bottle is the external world; the champagne that pours from it is the cascade of perceptions we have of the external world. The flow of liquid is the glittering, ever-changing account of the world and self we make to ourselves, constantly changing, constantly revised (re-seen, literally) but retaining a sense of whole. And each glass plays a part in creating that fountain. The analogy is a sound one: for (*vide* Rylean categories), if one were to ask ‘where is the fountain?’, the answer could not be ‘there, in the bottle’, or ‘there, in the champagne’, or ‘there, in the glasses’. The fountain is the sum of its parts and more – the Aristotelian notion of Form perfectly realised. Such is the form of ‘autobiographical memory’ – autobiographical memory is (if you like but most psychologists won’t) to memory what champagne is to champagne fountain.<sup>88</sup> However, despite the fact that it is a near-impossible task to disassociate autobiographical memory from the Gordian knot that is ‘memory’ in order to describe its functions, that’s precisely what I shall attempt now to do.

As Baddeley remarks,<sup>89</sup> ‘Relatively little research has been done on the rich and complex strategies and tactics we use every day to interrogate our memory systems’, and as a result there are few hard and fast rules regarding it. Nevertheless some functions are universally agreed upon:

- Autobiographical memory is essential to developing both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships; it is the central generator of **personal history** and **identity**. Total amnesia (a rare condition) leaves the patient

without history and, thus, without identity. Baddeley describes the appalling effect of this condition on a patient, Clive Wearing, an accomplished musician and conductor, which resulted from a case of enccephalitis. Not only does he have no past, he is also unable to learn anything (as if the champagne has frozen in a moment), because he has no memory. He describes (he has not completely lost his language) his condition as ‘Hell on earth. It’s like being dead – all the bloody time’.<sup>90</sup> His wife recently wrote an account of their life together for the past twenty years, and was interviewed on BBC Radio 4 about the book.<sup>91</sup> She described the effect of the amnesia as ‘overnight he lost his mind’ and later she said ‘his “now” is gone’. With no memory Clive Wearing has no past, present or future and no sense of self. However, he has not lost his musical ability, which is but slightly impaired.

(An aside here: When Clive Wearing was in hospital during his illness, the doctor would say to him, ‘Mr Wearing, please open your eyes’, over and over again but there was no response. However, when his wife said, ‘Darling, look at me’, the patient opened his eyes. His wife’s fascinating interpretation of this is that ‘the heart and the mind are entirely separate entities’.)

Autobiographical memory is also essential to establishing and maintaining relationships with others, in the realm of the inter-personal. As Cohen says, ‘People become friends by exchanging **narratives**’.<sup>92</sup> If I meet with a friend for a drink, and he asks ‘What are you doing now?’ I don’t answer ‘Having a drink with you in the pub’. I say, ‘Writing the next novel’, or ‘Decorating the bathroom’, or ‘Despairing of my life’; of the three answers only the last refers to ‘now’ (most likely as a result of doing the first two). Experiences are compared and/or shared, **stories** are told, states of mind are disclosed. It is unlikely I would say ‘I am unhappy’ without going on to explain what has happened to bring about that mental state. (This relates closely to the subject of **scripts** and schema, discussed below.)

If the notation ‘intrapersonal and interpersonal’ seems familiar, it may be because you are reminded of intranet and internet networks, and you would be right to be so. Cognitive psychologists, interested as they

are in modelling and creating computer programs to model the mind, often make direct analogy between computer and mind. Indeed, a great deal of the research that has been done regarding memory has sprung from the investigation of the storage properties of mind and computer.

- Autobiographical memory is also used for **problem-solving**.

Problems, as we all know, come in many shapes and sizes.

1. You stay overnight with a friend who asks in the morning, ‘Tea or coffee?’ and you remember that you like both but you prefer to drink tea first. A simple choice with few consequences.
2. You return home on a freezing evening and manage to snap your front door key off in the lock. After a bout of cursing, you try to recall if this has happened before and what you did – wait next door for your partner, look for an open window, punch out a pane of glass, and you act accordingly. Perhaps you cut yourself the last time, breaking the glass, so you elect to wait it out next door. A practical problem of short duration with a limited number of possible solutions.
3. You are aware of sinking ever deeper into the quicksand of financial debt. Having decided to halt the slide, you are then faced with a number of choices and to solve the problem you plan a series of meetings with various advisers. A complex problem the solution to which will involve a review of how you have arrived in this state, the setting up of repayment schemes and quite possibly a change of behaviour over a long period of time.
4. You are married with children and realise that you are deeply unhappy; you can stay in a loveless marriage, or leave. A yes/no state of affairs. You are likely to spend a long time arriving at a decision. You may disclose your state of mind to friends and discuss possible outcomes. You may recall past years and to try to **trace** the deterioration of the relationship. You may attempt to imagine what your future will be like, as a



single parent, but you only have the memories of being a married parent to help inform these imaginings. You may try to recall articles you have read, conversations you have had with friends who are single parents. You arrive at a decision. A complex problem the solution to which is a simple binary decision, a decision informed by past experiences and future projections.

Autobiographical memory plays multiple roles in all these scenarios, which involve recall, planning, disclosure etc. It gives us our past and our possible futures, whilst working furiously in the present. The woman planning on leaving (or staying with) her husband uses her fund of memories to project into a possible future (unknown) **landscape**. In the distance is a trig point named ‘happiness’ and there are an infinite number of possible paths to reach that point. The path she chooses will be dictated by her autobiographical memories (with the possible exception of other’s accounts of being single parents – I shall return to this situation, that of appropriating other people’s experiences later).

- Planning is another function of autobiographical memory, not unrelated to the case of the unhappy wife mentioned above. Most people would argue that there is a qualitative difference between planning a route through a shopping mall to purchase a bayonet light bulb and an OS map of Latvia in the shortest possible time; planning a family holiday in Latvia; and planning to leave your husband before the plane flies to Riga. These plans may be in some way qualitatively different (when measured by the consequence of failure, possibly. If it takes three and a half hours to complete the trip to the mall only to discover you’ve forgotten to buy the light bulb, that is irritating. If you wake in a hotel in Riga and realise you forgot to leave your husband, well, that would be intriguing.<sup>93</sup>) Nevertheless, whilst there may be qualitative differences, all acts of planning involve autobiographical memory. ‘Planning depends on memory. Knowledge derived from past experience and stored in long-

term memory must be retrieved and used in formulating possible plans, and in **constructing representations of hypothetical events.**<sup>94</sup>

- Belief systems, prejudices, likes and dislikes are also dependent on the operations of autobiographical memory. If you are what you have experienced in the past, then how could it be other? If you were once violently sick after eating a live oyster, it is unlikely you'll eat another. (Behaviourists will describe this as learned avoidance behaviour – fair enough, but the lesson had to be learned and knowledge stored.) Interestingly, memories of enjoyable events, the eating of bugs in Zanzibar, for example, not only will encourage me to eat seafood should I ever find myself in Stonetown again, but will also be recalled more vividly than unpleasant events. This is outcome – of favouring the positive – is governed by the delightfully named Pollyanna Principle.

### **Noetic and Autonoetic Memory**

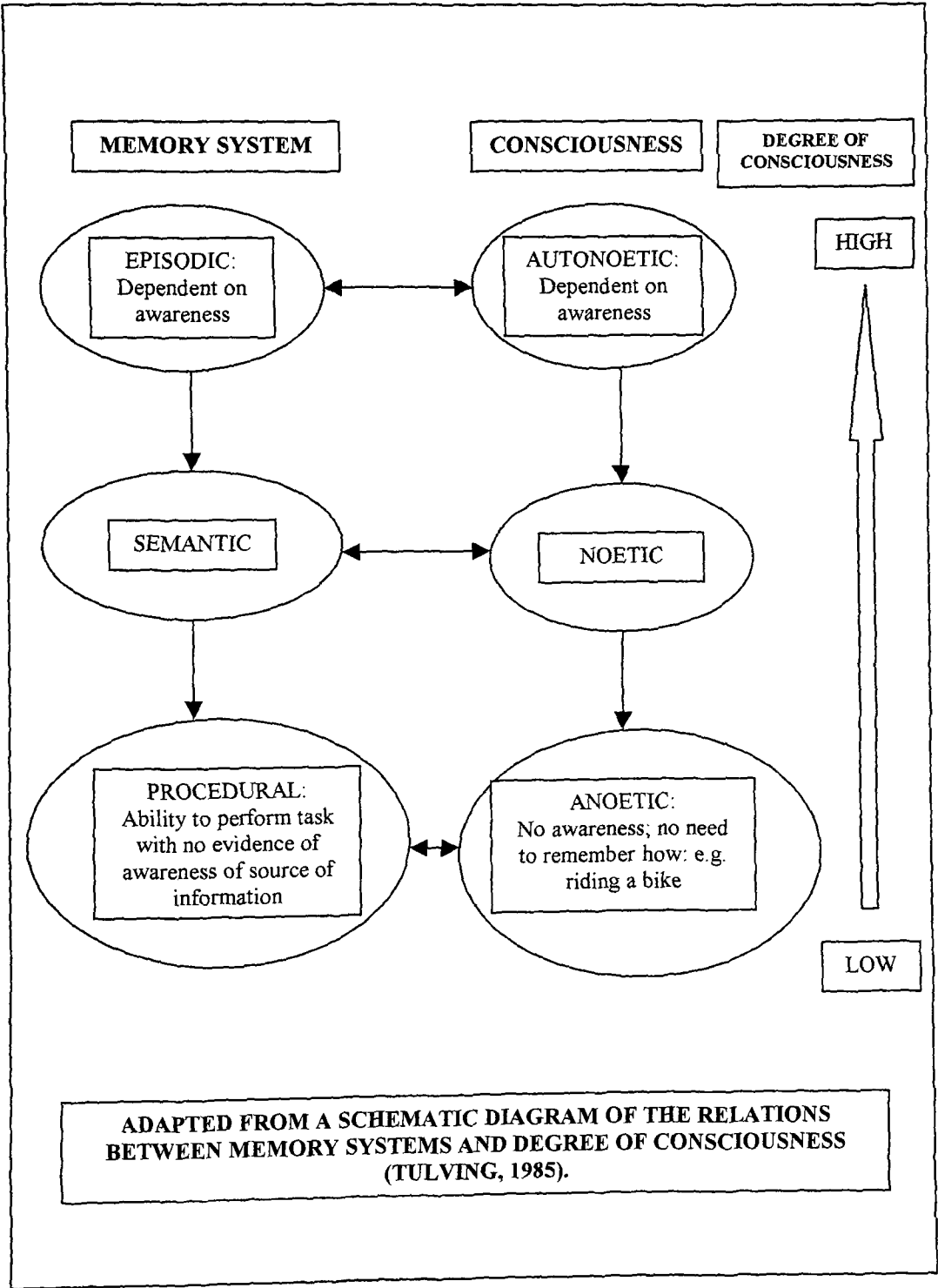
Without memory we would be bereft. We would have no sense of self, no language and no means of ordering and systematising thoughts and experiences to arrive at value-laden concepts of the world. Memory is the tool we use to construct identity, culture and comprehension. Two memory systems which are central to generating these skills are episodic memory and semantic memory. In your episodic memory filing cabinet (or subsidiary slave system) you store your memories for events (time, location, encounters, outcomes etc.), objects, people and so on, and these are sorted by chronological (you have a lifetime for this) and spatial (as Spike Milligan said, 'everyone has to be somewhere') criteria. These memories have you as their source – your experience of the world. Semantic memories are stored in the cabinet labelled 'General Knowledge About The World' and these inter-related concepts are distributed amongst the various schema (see below) and categories of memory.<sup>95</sup> For example, 'boiling water' could be stored in your framework of understanding of physics, and/or your understanding of pain, should you spill it on your bare foot. Thus, semantic memory is abstracted from experience, it is not the experience itself. As such its source is not you, the source is the world, or objective reality, if you like. (The

episodic memory of the boiling water would be ‘the time I burned my foot’; the semantic memory could be ‘caution’, or ‘burned skin blisters’ and so on.) Obviously, if the source of semantic memory is the world, then encounters with other people is a part of that world and knowledge derived from those encounters is stored in the semantic cabinet.

Tulving<sup>96</sup> has identified within episodic memory a further distinction. Memories about which we have no knowledge of when or where they happened to us, he calls noetic. So, for example, my falling through a cucumber frame and cutting my eyelid open when aged three is an episode I know happened (because I have a scar, because my mother told me so), but I have no context in which to put it. I can’t remember anything about it. But ask me about my dinners in primary school, and I can conjure the smell, the noise, my uniform, the strange, wildly coloured aluminium water jugs ... it’s an experiential memory, set slap-bang in my context. This is an auto-noetic memory.

This distinction, between auto-noetic and noetic memories, is, for me, an important one. In order to illustrate the finer qualities of each memory system, I have taken it upon myself to modify Tulving’s model slightly (see over, page 52). What attracts me to this model of memory is the stress Tulving places on the degree of consciousness involved in the encoding of auto-noetic and noetic memories. In effect, he is saying that we have a high degree of awareness when we encode the experience of specific events, of meeting people, of highly emotionally charged moments, etc. Inferences from these memories filter through to semantic memory, and our awareness of the origin of these memories can become blurred, as we are less aware of this genesis of new interpretations of the world. As always, with any discussion of memory, it must be remembered that the word ‘distinction’ is misleading because the interrelatedness of the various categories of memory mitigates against clearly defined boundaries to each system. As Cohen says of episodic/semantic memories, ‘the two forms of knowledge are not separate, compartmentalised structures, but are in an interactive and inter-dependent relationship’.<sup>97</sup> Hence the arrows denoting the interaction between different systems of memory; gateways through which information flows, constantly changing, reviewing and modifying itself.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMORY SYSTEMS AND CONSCIOUSNESS



### **(Nota Bene)**

It is important to stress here that autobiographical memory is defined as being ‘distinct from memories of other people’s experiences, memories of public events, general knowledge, and skills’, in short it is *purely* autonoetic. The reason I stress this is because I will later be challenging this notion, in terms of myself as writer.

### **Schema and Scripts**

Since the early 1930s, following the publication of *Remembering*, by Frederic Bartlett, there has been agreement amongst psychologists that schema play an important role in the organisation and structure of the subsystems of memory – or, to put it differently, how we order our thoughts. Because order them, we do. We all know we do, we do it all the time. We spend our days, morning, noon and night, shuffling from bed to kitchen, to car, to office, to pub, to bed, and all the time we experience the world and we order it. We sit with a coffee in the kitchen and make lists of ‘Things to do/buy’, ‘People to email/phone’ etc. We sit in our cars in traffic jams, ejecting sexual fantasy tapes from our mental video machines. We march into the lecture theatre, face the students and our minds empty of all thought. We write letters to friends who have been bereaved. Some of us write novels. And we have schema for all of the above. Schema are frameworks which impose organisation and grouping on received information and knowledge and they serve a number of functions: they ensure that we store information economically; they enable us to conduct social lives; they are essential to our semantic memory; and they provide us with **story grammar**.

(I have an image of a dodecahedron of chicken wire – let’s call it ‘schema for going to a restaurant’ – and as I experience all the chicken tikkas and pigeon roulades of years, I slap strips of experience, *papier maché*-style, over the mesh, and the dodecahedron becomes increasingly substantial. The facets of the object are known yet variable – Italian food, paying with credit card, search for taxi etc., and if they are not, there are default values on which I can rely. For example, if someone tells me he ate a Macdonald’s the night before, I know he didn’t use a linen napkin.)

Economic storage of pre-stored and new knowledge is important because it makes retrieval of knowledge faster and more efficient, as well as enabling us

to infer. As Cohen points out, we do not need to store the knowledge that 'Julius Caesar had a mother', we infer the fact from our semantic knowledge store.<sup>98</sup> More, we assume others would agree with the assertion. Indeed, Platonic syllogism relied on precisely this form of manipulated knowledge.

In my autobiographical memory there exist vast numbers of schema – for watching a play, for seduction, for writing a PhD thesis, for doing my laundry ... the list is endless. Schank and Abelson<sup>99</sup> label some of these schema as 'scripts' which represent social interaction. If someone were to ask me to join them for lunch at the Hotel du Vin in Bristol, I would not appear at the table dressed in swimming costume, snorkel and fins. If they asked me to join them at the beach bar in the Coco Reef Hotel in Tobago, I just might (although the fins would be, if not entirely inappropriate, inconvenient). These scripts suggest that we are, as it were, actors playing on well-known, well-worn stages in familiar scenes, reading from well-known scripts.<sup>100</sup>

Schema do not *represent* semantic knowledge, they are not the knowledge itself but without them it would not be possible to acquire an understanding of the meaning of higher order concepts and language because our semantic knowledge is derived by extraction from personal experience, governed by experience. The understanding of words and concepts such as 'plot', 'theme', 'style', 'hermeneutic', can only be arrived at, I would argue, by a process of distillation followed by reduction rather than by pure abstraction alone. For example, there is no point asking me when I understood the word 'phenomenological' (if indeed I do), because the process took place over time.<sup>101</sup> There is no moment in time I could point to and say, 'I remember understanding the word "phenomenological" *then*'; rather, my understanding is the result, I would argue, of repeated encounters with the word in various contexts. These encounters lead to an accretion of small understandings, if I may call them that, which have as much to do with my understanding what phenomenology is *not* as understanding what it *is*. Interestingly, a semanticist would describe her work as investigating the ways in which meaning influences how people think and what they do, as well as determining what is **culturally significant** about the semantics of a language. Which is a pretty good definition of the function of schema in autobiographical memory when we are discussing words such as 'phenomenology', 'theme' or

‘style’. It is as well to remember, however, that schema also enable us to perform simple, repetitive tasks, such as making a cup of coffee.

### **MOPs and TOPs**

Not everyone considers the theory of schema and scripts adequate to explain the phenomenon of how we retrieve memories to enable us to cope (usually faultlessly) with thousands of situations. For example, Schank<sup>102</sup> argues that the sheer number of scripts and schema we would have to store to deal with such disparate scenarios as writing a novel or dealing with a burglar, is uneconomic. As a result, he has generated (yet another) model for working memory, which he claims reflects its dynamism, flexibility and efficiency. I intend to focus only on two aspects of his theory: MOPs and TOPs.<sup>103</sup> Essentially he argues that memories are stored at many levels of generality, and the higher-level generalised event representations he labels Memory Organisation Packets (MOPs). Each MOP is related to others, and draws upon them to create a memory of an event. If you recall your car breaking down on a motorway, the memory will involve recall of weather MOPs, communication MOPs and so on. This is evident from the way conversation uses cues to remind us of events: ‘The time we broke down on the M4 and it was snowing? Remember? When neither of us had our mobiles with us? And the AA man was caught up in the jam from that accident we passed?’

Operating at even higher levels, Schank proposes, are Thematic Organisation Points (TOPs). These representations are effectively abstract concepts, such as ‘avoiding failure’, ‘achieving success’, ‘supporting your partner’, ‘making judgements’ etc. They enable us to recognise similarities and establish analogies between events. If you were to read in the paper that a rapist had been sentenced to eighteen months in prison, and on the same day a woman who had robbed men after sedating them with a date rape drug had been given a five year sentence, then your TOPs would kick in and arrive at an opinion about this state of affairs and the state of the judicial system. TOPs are unconsciously developed in tandem with the development of semantic knowledge (and are, therefore, anoetic) which, in turn, is derived from personal, subjective experience of the world. It seems to me that they also have a motivational aspect to them, as

if they are developed in order to try to close the gap between what you are and what you aspire to be (pulling together past, present and future, as it were).

### **Story Grammar**

Finally, there is the role that schema play in the generation of story grammar. Neisser<sup>104</sup> maintains that schema ‘govern the format for story-telling’ and that many of our memories are encoded according to **narrative conventions** generated by schema. Let us not forget Cohen’s statement that ‘people become friends by exchanging narratives’, that we tell stories of our lives to enhance inter-personal relationships. This certainly seems to be the case; consider the following telephone conversations:

Andy: Hi, how you doing?

Bob: Oh, alright, considering I wasted an hour this afternoon waiting to see a doctor.

Andy: Oh – what’s wrong?

Bob: I’ve got an itch in an embarrassing place.

Andy: And?

Bob: Nothing wrong, really. I’ve got some cream and it should clear up in a week.

And:

Andy: Hi, how you doing?

Bob: Oh, alright, considering I wasted an hour this afternoon waiting to see a doctor.

Andy: Oh – what’s wrong?

Bob: I’ve got an itch in an embarrassing place.

Andy: And?

Bob: Well, he’s not sure what it is. He’s made an appointment for me to see a specialist.



Two different simple stories are being told by Bob, the first is resolved, the second is not. Even with these simple stories, a lot of schema work is going on. At a meta-level (activated MOPs), both Andy and Bob understand how to have conversations on the telephone and the staccato-style sentence structure that is used. Andy knows that it is irritating to waste an hour at the doctor's and – because of the default values of his schema – he also knows that Bob probably spent the time texting on his mobile, reading old, tatty magazines and glancing at every person who entered and left the surgery. Andy knows Bob was bored. Andy also knows that there might be serious consequences relating to the itch and he understands that it is a delicate matter. (Perhaps he has suffered something similar?) If Andy is a good friend, then he will be relieved that Bob will recover in a week, or he will be worried about the scenario of the specialist. And he will remember to call again when Bob has seen the specialist – because the story is unresolved. I'm not suggesting that Andy will call because he wants to hear a ripping yarn, involving hypodermics and STDs, but, rather, that he will call because Bob's story isn't finished and he has some emotional investment in the outcome.<sup>105</sup>

In the context of memory, most cognitive psychologists agree that there are two kinds of schema which operate when stories are read (or told) – event schema and story schema. The distinction between them is plain: event schema activate knowledge about subjects which will inform understanding of a narrative. If I read Zola's *Germinal*, prior knowledge I have about mining, about France's turbulent political past, about the trade union movement and the *bourgeoisie* will all be activated. Story schema, on the other hand, support and inform our understanding of how stories are structured. They are abstract and content-free schema and their role is to shape our expectations of a story as they 'incorporate knowledge of story structure that reflects the existence of a story grammar'.<sup>106</sup> Because of this last, they are only useful when the reader encounters traditional stories or novels; they cannot function when experimental text is encountered. And by experimental text, I don't mean *A Clockwork Orange*, which may be demanding as a text, but only at the level of decoding/learning (hmm, interesting ...) Burgess' neologisms, the language of *nadsat*. Story schema do not support or inform the reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, because Joyce is operating with a story grammar – or, rather

operating in the absence of conventional story grammar – that the reader doesn't recognise.

What is interesting about theories of narrative schema as propounded by psychologists is that they are exactly the same as the theories propounded by literary theorists, literary critics, primary school teachers, linguists, semioticians, semanticists, creative writing lecturers ... and so on. We agree. We all agree. A rare convergence amongst so many academics, each pursuing their own agenda. Roughly, story grammar is:

Story (setting + theme + plot + resolution)

Setting (characters + location + time)

Theme (goal)

Plot (episodes)

Episode (event + reaction)

Resolution (event or state)

Goal (desired state)

As it happens, J. M. Mandler, a cognitive psychologist outlined these 'rewrite rules' as he described them,<sup>107</sup> but I am sure we all recognise these elements of narrative, even if we prefer to call them 'titles for lectures to be given in undergraduate creative writing course'. Cohen maintains that these rewrite rules 'generate a hierarchical tree structure with subordinate nodes branching out from the superordinate node (Story)'.<sup>108</sup> And this is where I must part company with Cohen because the focus of her scholarly attention (memory for texts) is different from mine (memory for writing texts). But it would seem that there is a consensus for the view that we all recognise a good story when we hear one.

One aspect of any theory concerning grammar that intrigues me is the debate (OK, there isn't *complete* consensus) between those who consider grammar to be an element of innate or *a priori* knowledge (Chomsky being the heavyweight in the blue corner) and those who consider it to be learned or *a posteriori* knowledge (see Piaget limbering up in the red corner). The two points of view are most succinctly summarised as being that either we are born with a deep grammatical structure in place, or our understanding and eventual command of the rules of grammar are learned as a result of developing cognition. I have to

say here that I am drawn towards the nativist (Chomskian) point of view, although I could not say why. Perhaps because if it is possible to argue that we are born with an innate knowledge of grammatical structure, then it might be possible to say that we are born with a knowledge of story grammar? This appeals to me. I know that there are those who will point to Miss Smith, the primary school teacher, repeating the mantra ‘A story must have a beginning, a middle and an end’ to a classroom full of seven year olds, as if the children don’t realise this. But they do – just because the class has produced twenty-nine different stories that don’t conform to the rules of story grammar (and, *q.e.d.*, twenty-nine stories which are unsatisfying, as well as being unsatisfactory) it doesn’t follow that the children don’t understand story grammar. They do, they simply don’t have the capacity to translate the rules into successful narratives.

In his *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster describes the story as a ‘low atavistic form’, which seems a little harsh yet may be true. He argues that the story (for which read, awareness of story grammar),

is immensely old – goes back to neolithic times, perhaps to paleolithic. Neanderthal man listened to stories, if one may judge by the shape of his skull. The primitive audience was an audience of shock-heads, gaping round the camp-fire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense. What would happen next? The novelist droned on, and as soon as the audience guessed what happened next they either fell asleep or killed him.<sup>109</sup>

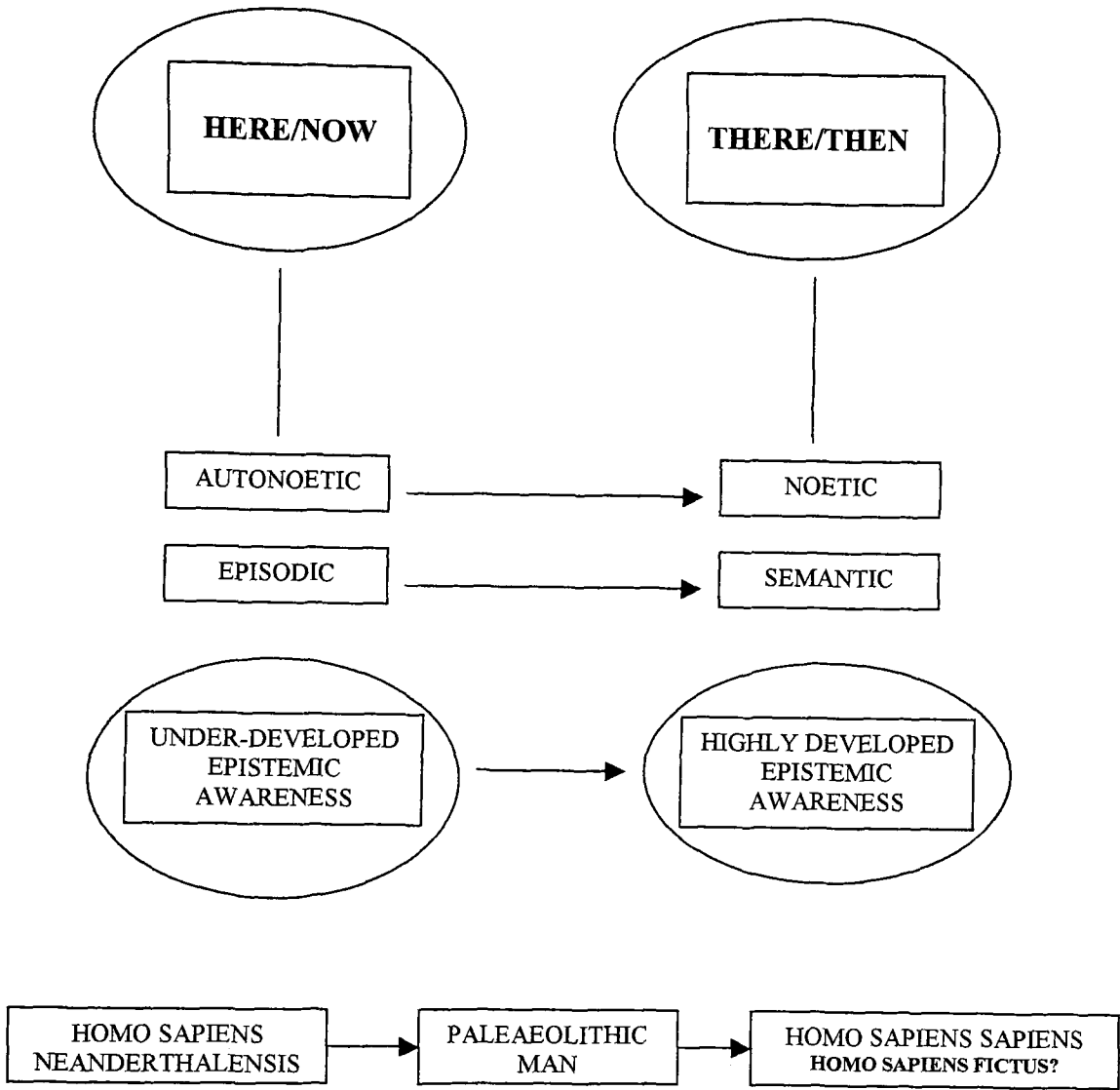
At first it would seem that there are problems with this – not least Forster’s eliding of hundreds of years of research by anthropologists and sociologists to arrive at the conclusion that Neanderthal man enjoyed an innate knowledge of story grammar. Forster compiled the series of lectures which were eventually published as *Aspects of the Novel* in 1926 and things have moved on a little since then. But interestingly he may have had a case. Recent research indicates that one of the significant differences between Neanderthal (Middle Palaeolithic) and Upper Palaeolithic man was the development of Broca’s area in the brain, which became ‘a vital part of the human brain’s “language organ”’, as Matt Ridley points out.<sup>110</sup> A theory is beginning to evolve, amongst neuro-scientists,

psychologists and linguists alike, that ‘human language was originally transmitted by gesture, not speech’.<sup>111</sup> At first this may seem to be no big deal but consider this: hand gestures can mimic both objects and motions, can mimic ‘bird’ and ‘stone throwing’. Nouns and verbs. The former are found in the temporal lobe, the latter in the frontal lobe of the brain and it is Broca’s area – the language organ – that bridges them, across the Sylvian fissure. ‘It was their coming together that transformed a prototype of symbols and signs into a true grammatical language.’<sup>112</sup> Indeed, it would seem that speech did not occur in human beings until 70,000 years ago (a comparatively recent development in anthropological terms), perhaps in response to the desire to communicate in the dark (although even this conclusion is being challenged; see the developments in the theories concerning *Homo neanderthalensis*).<sup>113</sup> So, given the ability to mimic, to develop tools (with our new, long, oppositional thumbs) and to speak we could make to ourselves symbols, ‘so that the mind could represent within itself’. Linguist Terence Deacon argues that ‘early human beings combined their ability to imitate<sup>114</sup> with their ability to empathise and came up with an ability to represent ideas with arbitrary symbols’.<sup>115</sup> Ridley remarks of these combined abilities, that they

brought the thoughts of other minds together: they externalised memory. They enabled people to acquire far more from their social surroundings than they could ever hope to learn from themselves.<sup>116</sup>

Or, to put it another way, they began to develop a (shared) semantic memory. Which brings us back to Forster and his shock-heads. Forster made the point that story-telling involves an understanding of the notion of ‘there, then’ as well as the ‘here, now’, an awareness which, surely, would have developed in tandem with the externalisation of memory, that is, semantic memory.

Taking as a starting point Forster’s here/now and there/then maxim, I would like to suggest that the following might adequately illustrate the development of the capacity for semantic memory over thousands of years (perhaps as a result of the bridging of the temporal and frontal lobes).



One last excursion into the realm of Upper Palaeolithic man is needed before returning to the twenty-first century. The art of the era, in fact, takes many forms but the best known is cave painting. In the caves of Cantabrian Spain, the French Pyrénées and the Périgord area there exist many extraordinary panels depicting animals and humans in charcoal and pigment-based media. Not only these, but also non-figurative representations either carved or painted (strangely reminiscent of Australian Aboriginal art – echoes of Jung’s collective

unconsciousness ...). The caves chosen for the art work appear to have been selected for their acoustic properties and it has been suggested that some of these, such as the Salon Noir at Niaux, may have served as sanctuaries, or places of communal activity. Indeed, there is speculation that Upper Palaeolithic man sang, perhaps vocalising cosmogonic myths.<sup>117</sup> At this point we must seek out the anthropologist rather than the psychologist for illumination.

The cave paintings have been minutely studied, and many anthropologists and linguists believe that there is a narrative grammar to be found in the depictions. The structure of the narrative may not immediately be obvious to us, accustomed as we are to the conventions of DC Marvel comics, the narrative continuum of the cartoon panel in Japanese Manga comics or Anime epics, or, come to that, Renaissance frescoes (for example, Michelangelo's 1504 cartoon 'Battle of Cascina' – inevitable, really, that *il divino* would reappear). The word 'cartoon', from the Italian *cartone* (pasteboard), originally meant not saccharine Disney but a sketch of a full-sized scheme used as a model (which sounds familiar) for a work to be executed. Notwithstanding our changed expectations of story grammar, there is both meaning and narrative structure to be found in the cave art of Upper Paleolithic man. How do the anthropologists account for this?

In the nineteenth century Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), an expert in archaic cultures, argued that myths are based on a form of psychological delusion because archaic man could not distinguish between subjective (ideal or auto-noetic) and objective (real or noetic) reality.<sup>118</sup> Tylor therefore described the mentality of the cavewoman wielding her hairy brush as she mixed spit and pigment, as pre-logical – which seems fair enough, given Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, the herald angels of the Enlightenment, were still thirty thousand years down the time-line. Tylor, however, insisted that despite the fact her understanding of the world was illogical, the myths and stories the cavewoman shared with her peers nevertheless had moral value. (This assertion seems, at first blush, itself to be an illogical step. But consider the fact that the Palaeoliths performed burial rituals, as did Neanderthals before them. From this we can infer that they had a concept of after-life, possibly a simple cosmology and – in order to justify the effort expended – **empathy** for those bereaved.) Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), a German academic also writing in the nineteenth century, developed a theory about the historical development of language in the light of

his studies of the Vedic texts of ancient India.<sup>119</sup> He concluded that the mythologies of ancient man did not represent real heroes, real Gods or real actions; rather, myths were the product of a confusion of human language arising from the attempt to give expression to natural phenomena (storms, thunder, drought, birth etc.) through visual and sensual images. Again, the sense of delusion/confusion reflects pre-logical understanding. The British anthropologist, R. R. Marett, writing in the twentieth century, argued that myths and their associated symbolic ceremonies arose from emotional responses to the environment, which was manifested in dance and ritualised gestures, and these birthed oral narrative myth.<sup>120</sup>

I would like to suggest here that these ‘confusions’ can be accounted for if we accept that at that point in time – roughly 30,000-10,000 years ago – the distinction between episodic memory and semantic memory was not as strong for archaic man as it is for us. Or, to put it another way, his faculty for epistemic awareness (that is, knowing what we know and being able to make judgements about the accuracy of what we know) was not fully developed.

Turning to Claude Lévi-Strauss, we find that he says of myth that it represents a third level of linguistic usage beyond surface narrative and its underlying structures (are we encountering once again Janet’s notion of the Alpha mind? The higher order concepts of which we are unaware?). More, Lévi-Strauss thinks that language patterns and the repeated structure of myths demonstrate that there is a common framework underpinning all human life across thousands of years and this belief has much in common with the nativist point of view expounded by Chomsky – that we are born with deep grammatical structures in place, which inform our understanding of narrative. The fact that we cannot discern a *familiar* (post-logical) narrative pattern in the cave paintings does not entail that the paintings do not have a story grammar. Perhaps it is simply that we no longer have the capacity to imagine pre-logical mentality?

There is, finally, one last aspect of Palaeolithic man’s art that makes me consider the possibility that the cave artist understood the rudiments of ‘story’ if not plotting, as we know it. Because it would seem that not only did he have a grasp of ‘there, then’ as well as ‘here, now’ (given there would hardly have been herds of bison and ibex roaming in his darkened cave, acting as models for his representation), he was also able to toy with the notion ‘what if?’, which is a is

far more sophisticated notion. In order to answer the question ‘what if?’ it is necessary to be able to construct representations of hypotheticals, and as we know, that requires the retrieval and manipulation of semantic knowledge and noetic memories derived from past experience. How can we say that the cave artist must have squatted on his haunches and pondered what ifs? Because not only did he represent the figurative and non-figurative in paint on rock, he also represented the imaginary (or, as Sartre might say, the not-given). In the Lascaux cave system, near Montignac in south west France, there’s a unicorn painted on the wall.<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps Plato was right when he opined that humanity is trapped in a cave, mistaking shadows on the wall for reality?

### **Schema-Plus-Tag**

Most of the examples cited both by psychologists and myself, in order to provide evidence to support the theories of schema and scripts, are deathly dull. Putting the cat out at night, making a cup of coffee, writing a list, yawn, yawn, yawn ... Is this life? you may ask. Well, yes, sadly it is. Which is why cognitive psychologists concentrate on such things, because, guided by Neisser’s ecological validity principle, they are trying to establish how memory works in everyday life, rather than exclusively in the laboratory. As we know, schema are frameworks which impose organisation and grouping on received information and knowledge; they help us to get through the day. Many actions we perform become effectively automatic because we have faith in our schema. How many times have you driven to a distant destination and had no memory of driving? I’m not saying you have no memory of the journey itself but that you have no memory of driving. But – thank goodness – there is an exception to this relentless monotony of recourse to well-worn schema. The tag.

A few years ago I sat in an Indian restaurant with a group of five friends and we ordered ... what we always order. Six beers arrived, we drank, we began to exchange narratives. So far, so schema. I am, unfortunately, rather deaf, so I was unaware of a commotion behind me and the first I knew of it was a chair flying past my left ear and crashing into the window. Non-script event. I turned to see a man being wrestled to the floor, as a chef of South East Asian appearance



flew up the stairs from the basement, brandishing a meat cleaver. Definitely non-script and no default values kicking in. The Asian man clambered on the back of the victim and began to whack him with the meat cleaver. I'm watching this scene and no amount of frantic retrieval of past experiences is helping me decide what to do. Blood begins to flow and other waiters are drawn into the violence. Interestingly, reflecting on that incident now, I begin to think that perhaps past experiences *did* inform my decision to stand up and go over to separate the Asian man from the blood-spattered ex-customer (as it turned out), then to separate the Asian man from the meat cleaver. I think now, that my belief systems (informed by my TOPs) encouraged me to believe that, being a woman, it was unlikely that I would be hurt. Also, I think I believed that the situation was fundamentally unfair – if you want to fight, put down the axe and put up your fists. A very British view, I suppose, and one that might be described as culturally significant.

The point is, I recall this event in detail, right down to the tear in the ornate waistcoat worn by a waiter. This event is a fine example of schema (going to a restaurant with friends) plus tag (near-murder).

If all this sounds irritatingly over-familiar, I apologise. 'It's not schema plus tag!' I hear you cry. 'This is all stale buns. Aristotle did it years ago.' And of course, he did. Because schema-plus-tag is but a variant on the Aristotelian notion of *peripeteia*, that is, a sudden reversal of circumstances. So in what way does the account of schema-plus-tag vary from *peripeteia*, if indeed it does? What exactly is the relationship between self, memory and narrative? The time has come to reverse the dialectic and address the effect narrative has on memory and self.

**SO?**

In his *Making Stories: law, literature and life*,<sup>122</sup> Jerome Bruner, suggests that we ‘should not write off [the] power of story to shape everyday experience as simply another error in our human effort to make sense of the world, though cognitive scientists are sometimes wont to do this.’<sup>123</sup> Bruner goes on,

Nor should we shunt it off to the philosopher in the armchair, concerned with the age-old dilemma as to whether and how epistemological process leads to valid ontological outcomes (that is, dealing with how mere experience gets you to true reality). In dealing with narrative reality, we like to invoke Gottfried Frege’s classic distinction between ‘sense’ and ‘reference’, the former connotational and the latter denotational, and we like to say that literary fiction does not refer to anything in the world but only provides the sense of things. Yet it is the sense of things often derived from narrative that makes later real-life reference possible. Indeed, we refer to events and things and people by expressions that situate them not just in an indifferent world but in a narrative one ... Eventually we ask how story, *eo ipso*, shapes our experience of the world.<sup>124</sup>

And of course, he’s absolutely right.

For months and days and thousands of words and hundreds of pages and piles of text books, I have been sitting in a mental comfy chair, full glass at my elbow, reading and thinking furiously and, quite possibly, making precisely the

error Bruner outlines. I could stand accused of disregarding the role that narration plays in the interpretation of the world, and our expectations of it. *Je m'accuse*. I deny the charge and genuinely believe it's not the case. I have, thus far, examined in some detail the theories, both ancient and modern, about what it is to be human, the nature of self identity and the locus of our thoughts and memories. Why? Because I believe that if I am to write with any authority about the role memory plays in my creative writing, then I must furnish myself with a working knowledge of what the mind is and how it works. So I have been sitting in my chair, wearing a number of (ill-fitting) hats: philosopher, psychologist, cognitive psychologist and – of course – writer. Perhaps it was the dizzying effect of switching so much headwear that encouraged me to focus thus far on the relationship between the world and the writer from the point of view of the effect the perception of the world has on the writer and not the reverse. Well, I have now tossed all hats in the cupboard, except for the one that fits most snugly: the novelist's fedora.

I spent the years between 2001 and 2004 working on a novel, *Blue Earth*. I must have done other things too – I must have enjoyed good food, must have sat in the sun with friends, taken shopping lists with me to supermarkets, wrestled with my central heating timer system ... But when I try to recall doing these things it's near-impossible because the writing of *Blue Earth* was so difficult, so demanding that all I hear – and almost all I can see – when I look back is the white noise of creativity. It filled my life and as I write this, I am preparing to do all those things writers do when their books are launched – interviews, readings and so on – and I am, of course, reminded of the drafting and grafting of writing the novel. In what follows, I shall be reflecting on what I did during those years (and in past years, working on other novels and short stories) in the light of what I now know about self-identity, memory and narrative.<sup>125</sup>

## NARRATIVE

Fresh from playing the central character in the Bridget Jones novels, actress Renée Zellweger is to turn her own hand to writing. Zellweger, 33, said she planned to write 'fiction, non-fiction, whatever I'm feeling when I pick up the pen'.

*Metro Magazine,*

Quoted in *Private Eye*, no. 1125

I experienced a number of reactions when I read this snippet beamed in from La-La Land. Stupefaction at the extent of Ms Zellweger's arrogance, despair about the current state of publishing (because you can be sure that should she actually write something – anything – it will be published), and the feeling that she's old enough to know better. Joubert once opined that 'To write well, one needs a natural facility and an acquired difficulty'<sup>126</sup>; in Ms Zellweger's case one might remark that she has an acquired facility and a natural difficulty. To be fair, Ms Zellweger is in good company if she thinks that the writing of a novel is with regard to degree of difficulty akin to the task of changing one's socks. Disraeli apparently once said, 'When I want to read a novel, I write one' and I recall Jeanette Winterson, interviewed a few years ago, famously saying that she wrote so that she would have something good to read.

The point here is that these remarks make no acknowledgement of the difficulty of writing traditional realist fiction, no acknowledgement of the sense of vulnerability it can induce, the commitment it requires and the potentially debilitating effects of being locked permanently into self-critical mode. When I

was a child sometimes I would write a word, such as 'where' and then look at it and think, that's not how it's spelt. I'd try again and again. 'Were', 'whur' 'whir' – what? And I'd try again. The more I stared at the word 'where' the more insane it became. Imagine doing that with a two-hundred-thousand word typescript – the more you stare at it, the more insane it becomes. That is what happened to me. Traditional realist fiction must have at its heart the *plausible*. Once the writer begins to wonder whether the work is in fact plausible, then doubts creep in and this, as we know, can be a dangerous catalyst. It may lead the writer eventually to believe that he has nothing but his doubts and that way lies madness. I'm not saying, as Red Skinner once did, that 'Writing's easy, you just sit down and open a vein'. (Although there are writers - Raymond Carver, James Ellroy, Anne-Marie Macdonald? - who might have, and those who appear to have opened others' veins - Brett Easton Ellis, Edward Bunker, Annie Proulx?) And I am not saying that writing is difficult in the same way that being a cancer nurse, or a worker in a Brazilian open cast coal mine, or a forensic scientist must be difficult. But nevertheless, it makes demands of the writer that are unusual.

Even the great authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found writing a tad trying. Tolstoy observed that 'one ought only to write when one leaves a piece of one's flesh in the inkpot each time one dips one's pen,' which seems a little extreme. Flaubert described the artist, and thus himself, as 'a monstrosity, something outside nature' and in trying to disprove this axiom, the artist 'suffers from it and makes others suffer too'. Dostoevsky worked 'nervously, with pain and travail of soul' and Conrad later spent twenty months working on *Nostromo*, 'to the exclusion of all that makes life really loveable and gentle'. Flaubert went so far as to suggest that the writer should not even attempt to alleviate these dark moments with a little socialising: 'If one gets mixed up with life, one cannot see it clearly; one suffers too much, or enjoys it too much'. Heaven forbid.<sup>127</sup>

I have been bandying about the phrase 'writing a novel' with abandon. What, exactly, do these three words involve and what, exactly, are the demands this process makes of the writer?

## **Processes**

As with the cases of story grammar and functions of memory, there may be a great deal of debate about the finer points of theories regarding creative thinking but there exists a rough consensus of opinion as to the general framework of the process of creative acts.<sup>128</sup> One might call it The Act of Thought, as Wallas did,<sup>129</sup> or Process Approach Theory, as Graves and Murray do,<sup>130</sup> or P/H-Creativity, as Robertson does.<sup>131</sup> No matter the appellation, the nature of the progression, or procession, is essentially the same.<sup>132</sup> Wallas' account is clear and simple:

- Preparation
- Incubation
- Illumination
- Verification

Graves' and Murray's Process Approach Theory is essentially an elaboration of Wallas' account:

- Pre-writing (collecting of thoughts)
- Drafting (focusing of thoughts)
- Revision (ordering of thoughts)
- Editing (re-drafting)
- Publishing (clarification of thoughts)

Interestingly, this last account focuses entirely and specifically on the mental rather than the physical aspects of writing; it ignores the tap-tap-tap of the keyboard and the scratch-scratch-scratch of the pen.<sup>133</sup> And I intend to do the same, because whilst the actual typing or writing of the script does take time and is necessary to the process, it is not my hands that write, it is my mind. As A. L. Kennedy says, 'I think it would be useful for me to point out one thing straight away. I write with my mind. This is very obvious, of course, but its implications are, perhaps, not.'<sup>134</sup> So, let us consider the ghost, not the machine.

But all this begs the question 'Why write anything at all?'

### Why write fiction?

If you are hungry, you eat; if dirty, you wash; if starved of physical affection, you drink. But what is the source of the impulse to narrate? The *desire* to narrate?<sup>135</sup> To return to Joubert's 'acquired difficulty': what does he mean here? We can assume he does not mean the acquired difficulty of returning from IKEA with a flat-pack desk. No one in her right mind would rip open the box and then say, 'I must go and write a novel'. (Although, I have made that excuse in precisely these circumstances ...) Considering Joubert, it becomes apparent that by 'acquired difficulty' he may mean the difficulties the characters in the novel may encounter. But this is, surely, getting ahead of ourselves? Can characters exist independently of a narrative framework, however vague?<sup>136</sup> Surely the 'acquired difficulty' is an allusion to 'overcoming the monster', 'rags to riches', 'the quest' and so on – yes, the famous Seven Stories theory, that is, the theory that all plots can be slotted into one of these frameworks.<sup>137</sup> I even make reference to the theory in the opening lines of 'La Corrida':

We have forgotten more than we remember. We have forgotten the swooping flight of birds which are no longer named, the thoughts of the Barbarian Visigoths as they swept through Iberia. We have forgotten why callused hands pushed at the stoic monoliths of Easter Island, the first steps of pilgrims as they trekked the globe. We have forgotten the terror and cunning of those who paced the Medici Corridor, the words spoken at Ararat. We have forgotten more than we remember.

But there is something I remember; something. A summer. A moment. I pace this room, raging, trying to forget more than I wish to recall.

There are seven stories in this world and this one is mine.<sup>138</sup>

'La Corrida' is written within a classic 'overcoming the monster' framework; in this case the gladiator is a female Spanish bullfighter, Cristina, the Goliath is the bull, *el toro bravo*. (However, the character who says 'this one is mine' is not the bullfighter but a photographer who shadows her. His is the narrative voice telling

another's story; a familiar technique, Fitzgerald's Nick in *Gatsby* being an obvious example.)

But the question remains – *why* did I write it? What impulse or compulsion makes me write fiction? I believe in the case of 'La Corrida' the answer is relatively simple. I wanted to subvert the 'overcoming the monster' model by having a sexy, blonde woman standing centre-stage, dressed in flashing *traje de luces*, facing *el catedral* – the black bull. This is not good-versus-evil because the bull has made no moral choices as he rushes through the barricades; it is an unequal fight between woman and bull, progesterone and testosterone, *casa* and *calle*. Was I aware of this as I wrote? No – I'm aware of it now as I deconstruct a short story I finished six years ago. But this still doesn't explain *why* I wrote it. I know now that what made me write was my desire to change the world, the physical world, to rewrite it, to reinvent space and re-people it.<sup>139</sup> What do I mean? Consider these excerpts:

Santiago de Compostela has many near-forgotten, narrow streets. It is a dark city, darker even than Venice; it breathes more deeply. At this summer's end the city appears to be falling in on itself with a long-drawn-out sigh. I sit in a cafe in the Praza da Quintana, camera on my lap, *Herald Tribune* open on the zinc-topped table. The arcades of the rúa Nova had blinded me as I walked from sheets of white light to rhomboids of deepest shadow, but here, in the square, the light is kinder as it reflects from stone buildings mellowed by centuries. Surrounded by gesticulating, stocky Galician men, sipping Ribeiro from small ceramic cups, their hands signalling the state of their hearts and minds, I sip my sherry, dry as packed ice, and bite into a manzanilla olive. I turn back to the paper but the text dances in the sunlight. Closing my eyes I lean back, out of the shadow of the umbrella, to feel the sun on my skin. I don't know what impulse makes me open my eyes and look across the square towards the via Sacra, squinting in the glare.

At first she is a silhouette, a black mannequin moving against flat light, walking down the steps into the square. The shadow of the clock tower falls across her and she swims into colours and dimensions, broad shouldered and narrow-hipped, her walk easy, almost a lope. I try to look away but find I can't. She walks towards the cafe, scanning the packed tables for a vacant chair. She looks at me.

A cloud passes silently in front of the sun and the colours of the Galician praza leach away. I find I can now remember the afternoon in Venice with shocking clarity, can remember spending hours at the gates of the Arsenale, waiting for the light to change,



waiting for the fish-scale wake of a vaporetto in the lagoon of the Arsenale Vecchio. Waiting, as ever, for the elusive to present itself, my stomach tight with the fear of failure. I can picture Gambello's arch, can see the lions of Piraeus, the small square in front of the arch. But in the corner of the square, where the tables of the café should spill, there is a darkness, a smear of images.

After the light of midday in the praza, a light as sharp as broken glass, her hotel room is dim, seems to waver in shuttered gloom. In the corner is a vast, black trunk, padlocked and seemingly immovable. The room is small and cluttered, dominated by a rumpled bed. Cristina slams the shutters and closes a torn velvet curtain across the window. She pulls me down on the creased sheets and begins to push at my clothes. I have slipped from one world to another, from one state of being to another. I can see nothing. I am a photographer without sight and my world is reduced to the sense of scent and touch as if I am moving in a black velvet sack, at once luxurious and sybaritic.

A waiter pushes through the crowd around us, carrying a broom. He holds it in one hand and pushes at the fabric canopy over the road. A cascade of rain water bellies out, smashes on the cobbles. The crowd around us jumps back, shouting at him, jostling our table. Thunderous roars break out above our heads as lightning sizzles into a nearby hillside. A young woman screams. The static in the air tastes of copper; the atmosphere is singed. The crowd is becoming restless, sensing danger, and laughter has stopped. They shift uneasily, leaning into each other.

A few days later we hire a four-wheeler and drive up through Mijas before dawn, into the scrub-blasted, water-fractured foothills, passing through small, contained villages, shuttered against the rising heat. We see groups of hunters, long-barrelled guns slung casually over their crooked arms, eyes glinting in the shock of the rising sun. They look far-distant looks on Cristina as she drives, their eyes accustomed to tracking moving, unpredictable prey from a distance. She drives as she eats - like a man, aggressively, too fast on the tight, joint-squeezing curves, one arm casually slung over the open window. And she chain-smokes for the entire journey, dropping one cigarette and lighting another. She does not speak, she only smokes and drives us deeper and deeper into the hills, and in the ever sparser villages people watch us as we speed through, their eyes never settling on me, following only her. Old men with glasses of cerveza, slices of tortilla poised between plate and mouth, seem posed for eternity as they watch us pass, clouds of white silica dust billowing behind the jeep. I ache to ask her to stop so that I can photograph them but this journey, this summer, belongs to her.

As we drive to Ronda I tell Cristina that I have already seen the Plaza de Toros in Ronda when it was empty of people, seen the tendidos, the stalls, tilting towards the sky in

ordered harmony, seen the pillars supporting the sculpted roof of the arena, stretching to heaven. I tell her I have stood at the vast wooden dog-leg gate, *arrastre de toros*, where the bull bursts into the ring, and she smiles faintly. I have even walked to the centre of that dusty bowl and turned full circle, trying to people the seats, conjure the sounds, feel the burning heat, imagine the bull. Trying to turn the kaleidoscope of images, of smells, of sounds and tastes in my hands until they form a pattern I can understand, and now she laughs aloud. But I do not tell her that I failed. For nothing in my imagination could conjure the bedlam, the sensory coruscation that is *la corrida*.

We walk through the labyrinth of white-washed tunnels beneath the ring and come to a ramp leading to a square of blinding Andalusian sunlight. Shading our eyes we walk through the doors to find a mess of trucks and dollies, men running back and forth, calling to each other. Loops of chains clank overhead, strung from pulleys. The chrome and steel of the vermilion trucks burn and the white walls, scarred with strange, dark markings, dance on my retinas.

‘Where are we? I mean, who are all these people?’ I ask, view-finder snapped to my eye, my fingers adjusting shutter speed.

‘Monsabios. The butchers’ boys.’

Cristina is walking slowly away from the bull, her back turned, with the same lonely near-lope I saw in the square at Santiago. She stops in the centre of the arena. *La hora de la verdad* has arrived - the moment of truth, and a pall of silence descends on the crowd. She is not walking towards this maddened, stinking, ebony animal, streaked with the blood pouring from its massive neck; she is waiting, armed only with a short sword, for the beast to come to her. Ariadne and the Minotaur are locked in combat. Cristina drops the glorious, dusty *muleta* to her side and turns to face *el toro*. The bull’s legs buckle for a moment and then recover as it gazes at her. I catch its eye in the lens once more and still see the uncomprehending black-blood-red rage there. I focus on one of the horns - *asta* - and see that it is as pointed, as sharp as intolerance. *El catedral* gathers himself like a wave breaking and charges for the last time, scattering a trail of blood.

I quote at length here, because I believe that in these short extracts can be found the key to answer the question, what do I mean when I say I want to change the world? I mean I want to change my memory of it in such a way that my characters live in a surprising, sensual, dangerous landscape. If, as Raymond Carver said, good fiction is indeed ‘the bringing of news from one world to another’,<sup>140</sup> then the news I am bringing (to lay on top of the ‘real’ one, like a sheet of gossamer) is ‘this is what the world could be like, this is what the landscapes of lives could be like’.

(Cristina is gored and dies as the bull's bloodied body is dragged from the ring by the monsabios and their mullilas. But you knew that already, didn't you? Because the shadow of the clock tower falls across her when the photographer first sees her. Anyway, it's a short story, of course she dies.)

### **Beginning to draw together the threads ...**

In the previous section of this paper are words and phrases printed in bold typeface. At this point, it would be useful to list them:

- Narratives
- Narrative conventions
- Story grammar
- Stories
- Scripts
- Traces
- Landscape
- Personal history
- Field and observer points of view
- Identity
- Empathy
- Constructing representations of hypothetical events
- Problem solving
- Cultural significance

These words and phrases appeared in an exegesis on the processes and functions of autobiographical memory. But it occurs to me that, with a little tweaking, this list could represent an elaborated model for the process of creative writing ... it is not substantially different from Graves' and Murray's Process Approach Theory. So, narrative grammar and functions of autobiographical memory could be said to mirror each other. As Bruner would say, 'self is a product of our telling and not some essence to be delved for in the recesses of subjectivity'.<sup>141</sup> In other words, our faculty to construct self-history, self-identity, is dependent on the ability both to understand and employ narrative conventions.

Here it is useful to point out that there exists evidence other than Palaeolithic cave art that understanding of narrative grammar is innate. Both Alzheimer's and Korsakov's syndrome, degenerative diseases of the brain, are associated with a disorder called dynarrativia,<sup>142</sup> as Bruno has highlighted.<sup>143</sup> This disorder is associated not only with a loss of memory but also with the loss of the ability to understand causality or affect and the sufferer can no longer comprehend or tell stories. (For observations regarding dynarrativia, see Appendix 2.) The result of these appalling neural conditions is that the sufferer loses not only himself as he has no sense of identity, but also the ability to empathise because the sufferer is unable to understand that other people have minds or feelings; all sense of inter-subjectivity is lost. (So it would appear that Janet can, to some extent, lose John.)

To return to autobiographical memory and 'La Corrida': I have been to Santiago, and whilst I was there, a violent storm passed overhead, setting buildings rumbling and triggering car alarms. I have been to Venice and drunk coffee in the café by the Arsenale; I have been to Mijas and driven the hinterlands of Southern Spain; I have walked to the centre of the bullring in Ronda and marvelled at the beauty of the arena. I have not witnessed a bullfight; I have not stood sweating in the centre of a bullring as *el toro* runs at me; I did not see the tools of the *monsabio*'s trade at Ronda but at Mijas. It is obvious to me that my episodic and semantic memory and knowledge have contributed hugely to this project of writing about a female bullfighter.

Which brings me to the extract about the hotel room and, strangely, I hear a memory echo across more than twenty-five years. I have suddenly, quite literally, now remembered a novel I wrote when I was at university.<sup>144</sup> Five minutes ago, I rummaged through a cupboard and found the battered manuscript of *Imogen's Dream*, which I haven't looked at for two decades, and I unearthed what I wanted: throughout the narrative there runs a thread, references to someone (the One) waiting in a hotel room (see Appendix 3 for the text). I can see, re-reading, re-visiting my twenty-year old self, that already the desire to emphasise the sensuality of setting was in place. More explicitly, so was my desire to construct hypotheticals: 'How it might have been? This is how it might have been.'

Is this an adequate explanation for my impulse to narrate? Some might accuse me of tautology, since ‘how it might have been’ is, arguably, the Aristotelian-style Form of the matter of fiction. But that does not preclude me from claiming it as the source of my impulse to write. Others might accuse me of mistaking theme for impulse but I reject that accusation. The theme of the excerpts from *Imogen's Dream* is that of longing, a longing for passion, a longing to be claimed. Standard stuff for a twenty-year-old undergraduate with too much time on her hands. I yearned for an encounter in the faded glory of a *belle-epoque* Parisian hotel room, and instead I found myself in the Queen Vic. Now, of course, I have memories of hotel rooms (episodic memory) and what goes on in them (schema), which is why ‘La Corrida’ is published and *Imogen's Dream* is not.

### **Meta-TOPs**

Thematic Organisation Packets (TOPs) are, we remember, representations of abstract concepts, unconsciously developed in tandem with developing semantic knowledge. I would like to suggest that the impulses to write experienced by different writers are lodged as a form of meta-thematic organisation packets, which share much in common with those mental activities of which we are unaware (a function, possibly, of Janet's Alpha mind). As I mentioned, I am struck by the motivational aspect of TOPs and the value-laden abstract concepts they generate. It is difficult to articulate exactly what the impulses are but not impossible. I would like to suggest that these self-generated meta-themes govern culturally verified themes in narrative.

In *Writers in Conversation*,<sup>145</sup> playwrights, poets and novelists talk about what compels them to write, and reading their interviews it becomes apparent that there are many and varied motivations. The majority of Jewish writers (Auster, Miller, Richler, Wesker, Steiner, for example) cite the fact of their Jewishness as the source of their impulse to write. Others refer to a sense of alienation or marginality (Le Guin, Alice Munro,) the need to escape (Theroux), or the persecutions of discrimination (Alice Walker). Timberlake Wertenbaker cites the fact that she had two passports and four nationalities (an English mother, American father, brought up in France, but in the Basque region). This led her to

become absorbed by the question of identity and her work often revolves around the quest for self-identity. Some writers make parallels with other creative media, most notably music; for example, John Barth talks of being 'most comfortable as a writer taking, as it were, a received melody ... and then orchestrating it to my present purpose'.<sup>146</sup> Robertson Davies points to the influence of theatre, Tom Wolfe to the cadences of southern rhetoric. The account that most intrigues me is that of W. G. Sebald. Essentially he says that, on the one hand, he is noise phobic, he loathes the sounds of machines. He attributes this to the silence of the under-developed, rural Austrian village in which he grew up. But the reason for his revisiting the 'problematic' past is precisely because of the all-enveloping conspiracy of silence wrapped around Austrian and German families at the time, the 1940s.

George Steiner, as a survivor of the Holocaust, is driven by the need to explore language, because, he says, it 'seems to reach to that unknown land, that active shadow land' (which reminds me of Plato's remark about the cave walls) 'between the nervous system and consciousness'; for Steiner, imagination and the mind are shaped by language. (This idea is shared by many linguists, that thoughts are shaped by the language learned.<sup>147</sup>) More than this, precisely because he is a Jewish survivor, Steiner has spent his writing life trying to answer the question: 'Why did the great culture of Europe not resist more effectively when the inhuman came?' He writes because he is compelled by the need to answer this question, even though he realises that 'imagination trained to imagine, to fictionalize, is somehow lamed in the face of actual, concrete inhumanity'. This, to me, is the perfect example of a meta-theme; perfect in the respect that it acknowledges the inadequacy of waving a novel at the gates of Auschwitz in the hope of changing history (*not* in the hope of erasing memory), and yet Steiner is striving still to distil experience and situate it, as Bruner says, 'not just in an indifferent world but in a narrative one'. 'The multiplicity of human tongues ... has been the enabling condition of men and women's freedom to perceive, to articulate, to "redraft" the existential world in manifold freedom'.<sup>148</sup>

### After Goliath ... David

I mentioned the Goliath that is *el toro bravo* above and it is but a short, semantic soft-shoe-shuffle from Goliath to David. Michelangelo's David, which he carved between 1501 and 1504.<sup>149</sup> Michelangelo carved stone, he subtracted from a block of marble, using hammer and chisel. Unusually, he did not often use small, clay models to guide his work on the larger piece; it is claimed that *il divino* could look at a block of marble and see within it the Form.<sup>150</sup> His chisels simply revealed the slave, the Christ, the saint. Indeed, the unfinished sculpture, the apparently ghostly Awakening Slave (see Appendix 4), shows precisely this, almost as if the slave is embedded, literally, within the marble, as if he will soon yawn and rise, becoming whole and polished as he stands.

Writing, however, appears to be a different endeavour. Surely it is the business of writers not to subtract but to construct – one chapter after another, one character appearing after another? A serial development, which has a beginning, a middle and an end. And of course, this is what happens *but not at this point*, the point of preparing to write. I suggest that the meta-theme is Joubert's 'acquired difficulty', and the themes the writer elects to develop within the framework of innate story grammar dictate the shape, the landscape of the work that emerges. I believe that each writer's meta-theme is discernible, not in each novel, perhaps, but certainly across a lifetime of writing. The meta-theme is there, always – the engine that drives the impulse to write, an engine which burns elaborated memories as fuel.

### Preparation

Having finished *Mr Candid* I did not think, I must write another novel. Instead, I tended my garden, taught some classes and indulged in a little carpentry. But all the time I was doing these things, the engine was turning over, grinding out its strangely punctured ticker-tape. As I yanked weeds out of my laughable lawn, a theme suggested itself: nature versus nurture. As I prepared lecture notes, formless characters stood at my shoulder, saying nothing. As I planed lengths of wood, landscapes hovered at the edge of my mind's eye. The engine was humming and, much like the fridge in my kitchen, sometimes I heard it, sometimes I didn't, but I knew it always hummed whether I was aware of it or

not. (This humming, I fear, is something the audacious, overly optimistic Ms Zellweger may never hear.)

Once the lawn was weeded, the shelves built and the semester was over, I went through those rituals that denote: beginning a novel. The buying of a particular make of pen, the tidying and dusting of the study, the purchase of reams of A4 and boxes of blank floppies. But these actions are actions performed by the machine and not the ghost. What was the ghost doing meanwhile? It was toying with Leibniz' idea of Monads – a notion I encountered as an undergraduate. The identity of indiscernibles.<sup>151</sup> If I was going to write about nature versus nurture, and I wanted to avoid the hackneyed theme of identical twins ...

## Incubation

The opening of *Monad*:

One early evening in the year of 1684, Gottfried Leibniz, a gaunt, grizzled man with soft brown eyes and insubstantial beard, sat back in his chair in the Royal Library of Hanover and stretched. The bones in his shoulders cracked at the same time the chair cracked. The sounds were the same, indistinguishable. The sounds were, he decided, indiscernible. For two years he put aside his history of the House of Brunswick, instead writing his thesis; a thesis which rested on the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, a thesis which later became famous. 'The monad,' Leibniz scratched on yellow, feather-edged paper, 'has no windows.' Space, he argued, is nothing but the appearance of the order of possible co-existences; time nothing but the order of possibilities which are inconsistent. *Monadology* blew the Newtonian concept of spatio-temporal relations out of the water. For Leibniz knew, all those years ago, that the principle of Sufficient Matter applied equally to acts of God as to the acts of men and women. For each matter of fact with which we are presented there must be sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise.

I often think of Leibniz and I see an unloved, unkempt man, his eyes weakened by hours of writing by oil lamp. He spent his youth wandering around Europe, meeting Tschirnhausen, Boyle, Malebranche and Spinoza. What, I wonder did he make of Amsterdam and Paris? Did he look back and think of those cities as he later sat for years in the library in Hanover, developing the Infinitesimal Calculus? Could he hear the snickers of the Rationalists as he imagined his windowless monads?



I think of Leibniz because I reckon he was right and I should know because I am the embodiment of his principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. After all, I was born twice.

(September 2001)

I spent weeks trying to build on this passage, trying to use it as a foundation for the development of two characters, Evelyn and Frances, identical twins/monads living in different places, in the same time. I set Frankie in the snowy wastes of Alaska, Evelyn in the bland suburbs of Worcester Park, Surrey. I furrowed my brow, I knuckled my forehead but it was no good – nothing worked. And why would it? I was, if you like, breaking an essential rule of story grammar. My main character was in two places at the same time. Either she was two characters with one mother, or two characters with two separate mothers. But one thing was sure: she couldn't be two characters with no mother, at least not in realist fiction.

I did not think, I must write another novel. Instead, I tended my garden, taught some classes and indulged in some carpentry. But all the time I was doing these things, the engine was turning over, grinding out its strangely punctured ticker-tape. As I yanked weeds out of my laughable lawn, a theme suggested itself: nature versus nurture. As I prepared lecture notes, characters stood at my shoulder, then faded away, to be replaced by others.

Pages from the opening section of *Monad* (second draft):

## **PART ONE CHILDHOOD**

### **I**

Evelyn often tastes blood in her mouth these days. She swallows it, of course, not knowing that it is blood. If she knew what caused the tang of metal on her tongue she would be disgusted; would rinse out her mouth with water and spittle. Not that that would help because there is a constant, tiny trickle of bright red, oxygenated blood spilling from her gums. Evelyn is beginning to lose her milk teeth and as she sits in class the world shrinks to the sensation of her tongue rasping on a ragged edge of thin enamel. This is what is happening right now. Evelyn Sharpnell is staring at her teacher, unseeing, her tongue (that underrated, muscular organ) pushing and pulling at a rounded

molar. There is a tiny grating sound in her head as the tooth tears away from the gum. Evelyn, who is losing her first tooth, is amazed. She feels the tooth as a boulder in her mouth and spits it out on the desk where it rolls across the lined paper of her maths book. Her eyes screw up, her bloodied mouth opens and she bawls, causing the teacher to whirl round, leaving a streak of chalk howling on the blackboard.

‘Good grief - it’s only a tooth. Why’s she making such a fuss?’

‘Is that what you think? That she’s making a fuss?’ Alice looked up from the pastry she was rolling out. ‘She’s in pain, so she cries. It’s natural.’

‘Everyone goes through it. You spoil her.’

‘I love her.’

Ian sighed and left the kitchen, ignoring the whimpering floating down the stairs. He crossed the hall and went into his study in which there were no books. From the ceiling hung Airfix models, dangling on catgut, swinging lazily *en masse* like frogspawn in water as the door slammed behind him. Over the years he had created a squadron, a fleet, a national asset of moulded plastic and Humboldt’s enamel paint. For a few minutes he watched the planes spinning slowly, watched until they near-stopped, and then he switched on an angle poise lamp and pulled a box from a large paper bag. On the cover of the box was a picture of a Spitfire, miraculously surviving the incandescent flak bursting around it. The flaps of the pilot’s cap flew like beagle’s ears and his comfortable smile was broad and reassuring. Ian opened the box and spilled green slats of moulded pieces onto the desk. This was the moment he savoured, when he scanned hundreds of curiously moulded pieces and - without even looking at the plan - proposed to himself a manner of proceeding, a logical route which would take him from his current state of staring at an unrelated, disparate mass to the state of watching a perfectly modelled, faultlessly decorated aircraft swivel on catgut from his study ceiling.

Ian - who sold, first, fear and then insurance - wondered sometimes about this fixation of his. He considered, occasionally, the meaning of it. Why did he spend his evenings constructing models of aircraft designed, patented and produced by other people? Where, exactly, was the root of his satisfaction?

Where indeed?

(*Monad*, pp. 1-2)

## V

Frankie’s first memory was of darkness. Occasionally she tried to people this darkness with faces or objects - a snowshoe, a husky, a puffin - but failed. This didn’t worry her because she liked the dark. Frankie would lie in her bed beneath layers of blankets, lie

on her back, her arms straight at her side, and stare into the night. She believed that the night was a thing, a substance which crept into her room through the hairline cracks beneath her door, pushing the day out. When she was older and she was taught the principles of osmosis, she thought of herself as little girl picturing the night making its way into her bedroom and thought it a better explanation. Because night, she knew by then, didn't fall - it muscled its way in, forcing everything else to leave.

Frankie was a silent child, a *watchful* child. She would sit at the table and watch her mother's every move as meals were prepared, following her mother's hands as they filleted, sliced and butchered. Sometimes her blue eyes would flick to her mother's face as if to register any disgust her mother might feel as she pulled the guts from a king salmon. Frankie's black hair was snipped short, tufty, and her mother often felt she was being watched by a mute, skinny rodent as she went about her business. But if Dorothy, Frankie's mother, was being honest she would say that this suited her for she was hardly verbose herself. It suited them both: this silent domestic world, their quiet, endless days.

(*Monad*, p. 29, March 2002)

The characters at my shoulder had resolved themselves into two camps, two families. The identical twins were in place: Evelyn and Frankie, leading different lives in Alaska and Surrey, each with their own mother and father. They were twins, now, who had been adopted. Both had to be adopted otherwise my 'experiment' with nature and nurture would not work. So Maggie Regan came along – a young, Irish maid, 'uneducated and delicious', possessed of a keen native intelligence. I needed sperm, so to speak, so I introduced a William Raymond Franklin Reeves:

William Raymond Franklin Reeves sailed from New York to Southampton on the day that Dylan Thomas died. Billy-Ray leaned on the railings of the liner, watching Manhattan slip away (due to the curvature of the earth discerned by Gallileo's eye) unaware that the Welsh poet was lying dead-/drunk, yet-to-be-found, in room 314 of the Chelsea Hotel. The sun was sliding down like a melting butter pat on a steaming sweet potato, as Billy-Ray noted, this being his notion of poetic license. It was, perhaps, his unconscious homage of sorts. The wind kicked up harbour water as the ship breezed away from the city and Billy-Ray pulled his heavy, double-breasted coat close and buttoned it against the cold. Once the ship made open water it began to buck in a storm moving in from the east and he made his way down to the bar.

Settling himself at an empty table, Billy-Ray ordered a bourbon and watched the barman steadying himself as he moved among glass, appreciating the economy of

movement, the grace of the man. Once he had drunk his first bourbon and motioned for a second, Billy-Ray looked around himself and caught a glimpse of his own face in the mirror - florid and square, small-eyed and freckled. It was not a face of which he was proud but it served its purpose: it seemed an honest, open face and bamboozled others into thinking he might be a trust-worthy, amiable human being. A woman in a short, sleek black dress and wavering stilettos weaved her way towards him, near-falling as the liner shuddered and lurched to the left. Billy-Ray stood to steady her and she fell awkwardly onto the banquette, next to him. [...]

Five days Billy-Ray spent with Jacqueline O'Toole on the QE2 that second week of November 1953; five days of sybaritic pleasure funded by her absent husband. Billy-Ray realised he had underestimated her within moments of attempting to wrap his arms around her naked body in her cabin. Jacqueline - for all her lack of balance and co-ordination - gave as good as she got. They parted at Southampton, deprived even of the chance of a short but tender adieu by the appearance of Sir Sidney O'Toole on the deck of the berthed liner. The two men shook hands after being introduced, each thinking the other was a fine example of Irish manhood, and then Billy-Ray turned and walked away into his next life. William Raymond Franklin Reeves, Sir Sidney thought as he watched the younger man strut along the dock, was not necessarily a man who realised that payment was always due for goods received.

The memory of Irish life, the concept of Irish manhood - robust, quick to anger but always, *always* charming - shared by Billy-Ray and Sir Sidney were views with which Maggie Regan would eventually disagree. But then, why wouldn't she?

(*Monad*, p. 12 and p. 13, March 2002)

I spent some of my childhood in Worcester Park, Surrey (unfortunately); I have spent time in Alaska. I remember the taste and obsessive tongue-wiggling of losing a tooth as a child; I had a step-father who spent a great deal of time putting together Airfix models. I have not sailed the Atlantic; I have not watched my mother slice, fillet and butcher. But I have been a fishmonger. I soldiered on with my fictional families and their mundane existences, the Irish-American William Reeves beaming drunkenly from the margins.

But it appeared that I couldn't resist it, couldn't resist the urge to refer to the wider landscape. Dropped into the narrative, were the following:

There is no edge to the world any more. In centuries past people pointed to the horizon and where fingertip, sea and sky met there was the edge, the end, the *limit* of the world. Everything they could see in front of them which had not tipped over that distant,

wavering line was the world. The extent of experience. But now we know differently and I am not sure that knowledge is a useful tool. I am not convinced that knowing what we know now has liberated us or refined us. I do believe that it has excised the wonder from our lives. When Gallileo stood back from the galaxy, took stock and scratched his notations on rough, fibrous paper, he eviscerated European beliefs. Dragons and white whales tumbled into the ether and disappeared; sirens cooed their last; skulls and bones slid away and were sent spinning into eternity.

Where did these dream creatures wash up? In Alaska - the edge of the world.

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The Aleut Indians named the archipelago on which they lived, the sea swirling around them and the world they could see 'Alashka' - the Great Land. And so it was. These Indians lived in forests, catching fish and birds, hunting mammals, gathering what berries and grasses they could during their brief summers, during their brief lives. There were hazards - ice and shifting glaciers, quakes, tidal waves, infinite winters and Russians. The Bering Sea was too small a moat to keep the Russians at bay. They must have sailed south from Cape Olyutorskiy and headed south, making landfall on one of the volcanic islands. Within fifty years of that landing the Aleutian Indians were decimated, reduced to fishing for their masters, salting and packing tarpon and cod for the dining tables in Moscow and St Petersburg.

The Russians felled trees and slaughtered bear, beaver and otter before moving on, moving south, clearing the spruce as they explored the coast. Hamlets grew, straddling the clear waters of glacial rivers running to the Gulf. Wooden houses built on stilts, painted green, cherry red and arctic blue, were built in what became Sitka, Ketchikan, Petersburg. The Russians turned stones, pebbles and moraine, trawled the seas and climbed the mountains searching for wealth, but found only fur, fish and wood. Eventually bored by salmon and sitkas they sold the land - the Great Land, Alashka - to America, for seven million dollars, and sailed for the Gulf of Anadyr, leaving behind them only intricate gabbling and Indian resentment.

The Russians had searched long and hard, hunted for decades, but they never uncovered the wealth of Alashka: coal, copper, platinum, silver. Nor did they find the gold. As for the black gold - that took a little longer.

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Seward's Folly - his payment of seven million dollars for the The Great Land - made him the butt of all jokes, the senseless Secretary of State who might as well have burned the dollar bills and flung the ashes in the ocean. Urbanites strutting the fledgling streets of New York, Washington and Philadelphia, shielded themselves from fierce afternoon sun

and snickered at this waste as they sweated. These sophisticates could not guess that the plains were about to dry up and the rains would not be seen again for five years. Families loaded carts and creaked their way west, or worse, back east, in search of food and land, in search of living cattle. Those men who did not have - or had lost - women and children, those men headed north, on and on, over the border, walking, sledding, climbing mountains to reach Turnagain Arm and the Kenai Peninsula. When they reached their destination they were met by more snow-covered mountains, glaciers, desolate landscapes and clear, melt-water streams. The men drank in tent cities, visited freezing whore houses, then bought picks, buckets and jerky before disappearing deeper into the wilderness. Driven by rumours, hounded by the memory of death they hoped they had left in the Plains, they went in search of gold. Some found it; most did not. These last lived alone for months on end, drinking rot gut as they sifted through the purest water on earth, or digging and swigging as they created warren-like tunnels in rock and icy moraine, swinging the oil lamps to catch a glimpse of metal. These men became hollow with earth-lust. The greed for gold ate away their guts, thinned their flesh and they howled at the moon, at their empty hands.

Occasionally they returned to the tent city, each time noticing that tarpaulin was being replaced by timber and glass, that streets had appeared where before there had been mud or ice. If they had been lucky they filed their claims, if not, they sold tiny dust-like scraps of gold and spent the money they received on the pursuit of the dream. What was this dream? To be rich, that was all. To be rich and to sit on soft chairs feeling a woman's thigh, to wash in hot water, to eat until their hollows were filled. To be rich, having stripped the earth, having torn it apart at its edge.

Many of these men died alone, their hands still empty, palms facing the empty sky, preserved intact until the thaw arrived. Preserved intact but for the dream which no longer existed for them.

On the evening of 27 March 2002, having ditched Leibniz and his Monads, and replaced them with the Sharpnells, the O'Tooles and Billy-Ray Reeves, I wrote a note to myself on the typescript: 'Billy Ray discovering Swanson reserves – change from someone who is indifferent about the earth to someone who rapes it'. I remember the moment well. I poured myself a large whisky and thought, 'Bloody hell'. Because I knew it meant an exhaustive re-write and I knew I was right.

I did not think, I should write a different novel. Instead, I tended my garden, taught some classes and indulged in some carpentry. But all the time I was doing these things, the engine was turning over, grinding out its strangely punctured ticker-tape. As I yanked weeds out of my laughable lawn, a theme

suggested itself: nature versus nurture. But now I knew how that was to be done. Frankie, growing up in untouched wilderness, feels an affinity with the land; Evelyn, growing up in suburbia, crowded by walls, becomes asthmatic and claustrophobic, slowly loses her mind. As I prepared lecture notes, Billy-Ray Reeves' soft, florid face melted away and in its place appeared the hard, unforgiving features of Wilhelm-Rajmund Reichmann.

By now, months had passed, and still I was weeding and wondering. I had revised my course from the path I took when I tried to ignore the narrative conventions that have always informed both my reading and writing. I had modified my story grammar to accommodate a larger cast of characters, the narrative shifting, as it were, from being a closed system to an open one. I was digging deep into memories of my childhood to write Evelyn and memories of travelling through Alaska to write Frankie. And, of course, I was all the time constructing representations of hypothetical events. I realised that Wilhelm-Rajmund, Alice, Ian, Dorothy<sup>152</sup> and Maggie all needed backgrounds, needed their own personal histories. I made notes and tinkered with plot-lines, problem solving, in effect.

I began again at the beginning:

The tall woman is creating an obstruction on the bridge; the river of people heading west is breaking up around her, slowing down and resetting its course. There is something about her, something about the way she stands, broad-shouldered, relaxed, focusing on what can see, which makes people swerve so as not to jostle her. Her hair, black, short and spiky, is damp with sweat. The blue marlin on her upper arm appears to swim lazily as she shifts, moves her arm, but the tattoo is not remarkable here, amongst the festival-goers, with their braids and dreads, combats, skateboards and surf wear.

The bridge is higher than she thought it would be – higher and more solid than she'd imagined. She wants to lean over railing to study the mudbanks hundreds of feet below, but there are bars curved like swans' necks which arc back over her, preventing the desperate from jumping. Behind her she can see the gorge, its steep-sides marred by graffiti, traffic streaming along the river's edge. Before her is the city. Shading her eyes she can make out spires and towers, follies and warehouses. The docksides are disused, built over by luxury apartment blocks. A steam train rolls past gantries in the distance, but she knows these are mere remnants of a time long gone. To the left and above her

the Downs and the *camera obscura* seem unchanged. She is surprised by how familiar an alien city can feel.

The bridge is crowded, two lanes of cars moving relentlessly as cyclists weave between them. The pavement on the south side of the bridge, where she is standing, is solid with bodies heading towards Ashton Court. The sun is high and she sees red noses and blistering shoulders, sweat stained t-shirts. She had not known that this was a festival weekend. She hears a blasting, roaring sound and looks up as a hot-air balloon in the shape of a chic, French town car floats by, passengers waving from the wicker basket. Still leaning immobile on the rail, scanning the panorama of distant hills and nearby bridges and woods, she is aware that she is creating a disturbance in the crowds, that she is an island, rock-like. A child rams a bike into her knee and she flinches, looks down at the small, blonde boy, frowning.

(*Fata Morgana*, August 2002, p. 1)

The working title is now *Fata Morgana*,<sup>153</sup> Frankie opens the novel, standing centre-stage on the suspension bridge in Bristol during the Ashton Court festival, a city and an event I know well. The blond boy on the bike is the son of her unknown twin, Evelyn, who by then lives in Bristol. My intention is to end the book with a passage opening as the boy rams his bike into Frankie's leg and then cycles away.

I approach the whole unwieldy affair from a different angle: I divide the narrative into 'Books', Books I – V. (I love those Roman numerals, so Carolingian.) I develop the Temples (*nées* Sharpnells), the Reichmanns and the Regans (Maggie now has eleven siblings and a whole history to herself). Then there's Sidney and Jackie O'Toole, now Cooper, Thekla and Lucca Barzini and ... I begin to feel like plate-spinner, rushing from stage left to stage right, twisting the narrative props as hard and fast as I can. The canvas grows denser and heavier; even Pollock would have had a problem with dealing with it. I write Books I, II and III, still sprinting from plate to plate.

Alice Temple, Evelyn's mother, has whole chapters devoted to her. An excerpt from one of them:

But most often Alice sipped her tea, listened to the sounds of her neighbours (the terrible cries of old Mr Greenfield next door sometimes shattering the evening) and she thought about the world around her – wondered if she was *living* in a catastrophe and hadn't even realised it? Unlike her husband, who read only the sports' pages, editorials and the



obituaries in the newspaper, Alice read the articles and reportage and they scared her. She remembered when Evelyn was one year old and she, Alice, had sat up with her through the night, holding her tight, as thousands of miles away troops had landed in the Bay of Pigs and the world hiccuped with fear. Alice remembered how angry she'd been that Evelyn, who had lived but one year, might not see another. The Bear backed down that time and the Eagle won – but for how long? She recalled crying when she heard Martin Luther King announce that he had a dream. That memory, of being in a staff meeting on the dreary evening of 22 November 1963, wishing they could pack up and go home, was as sharp as a knife. For as she sat there, listening to a visiting teacher complaining about pigeon holes, the school caretaker burst into the room, almost incoherent. 'They shot Kennedy,' he shouted and burst into tears. 'They've shot the president. He's dead!' And the fifty-four members of Trinity Manor staff sat in silence, stunned, immobile. 'They' had indeed shot Kennedy, blown gaping holes in his neck and head, blown a gaping hole in Camelot itself. The only Catholic president and they had shot him. Alice remembered taking the train home that night and how many people were sitting alone, crying, as she did herself. And it seemed to go on and on, the catastrophe unwinding itself outside her windows. The papers full of reports from Saigon, Hanoi and Washington as the American troops began to fly into Vietnam and Buddhists self-immolated on the television screens. Orange robes flaring as flames danced around their unmoving bodies – what self-discipline. What self-delusion. LBJ, LBJ how many kids did you kill today? The slag heap in Aberfan shifted and slithered and forty-four children died. How she had cried that day. The effects of taking thalidomide during pregnancy were made evident in the limbless babies that began to arrive, suffering, apparently from phocomelia (from the Greek, meaning 'seal's limbs', as Alice read in the *Telegraph*). Christine Keeler opened her legs and a government teetered. Los Angeles and Chicago began to burn as Rhodesia turned and snapped at the heels of its oppressors. And all the time the B52s were humming across a distant land, dropping napalm. Before that - the Berlin Wall going up in a day and Yuri Gagarin orbiting the earth. Alice often wondered what he saw when he was up there – was the catastrophe obvious? Did it have shape and colour? Did it hum or did it roar?

Was it surprising that Alice Temple's hands shook?

Ian Temple, Evelyn's father, now has a chapter about his National Service days.

An excerpt:

LAC Ian Temple arrived in Alexandria in December 1950, on the troop carrier, the *HMS Canberra*, sickened by motion. LAC Temple, who had never been further than Devon before, whose only brush with the ocean had been a week each summer on the tame beaches around Bude, had been bucketed along the Bay of Biscay in winter storms

and then thrust through the Strait of Gibraltar to sail the relative calm of the Mediterranean. He stood on the docks of the port, eyes swimming, stomach heaving, and felt he was losing his nineteen-year-old mind. The troops gathered their gear and mustered untidily before climbing aboard open-sided trucks which set off for the train station. Dust flew around them, coating slick skin with grit, blasting in their eyes, and Ian swayed on the wooden bench, trying to swallow his vomit as he stared unseeing at the slums and mud huts on the outskirts of Alexandria. The smell of life – exhaust fumes, dung, rotting vegetables, open sewers – combined to make him lean forward suddenly and drool thick, acid-rich spittle on the truck's wooden floor. He was not alone in having nothing left in his guts to throw up. The journey to Cairo was a mere hundred and fifty miles, yet it took more than eight hours as the train stopped at junctions, stopped for herds of goats crossing the line, stopped to collect freight and goods at Kafr ad Dawwar and Damanhur. Ian slept as much as he was able, his blond head resting on the shoulder of the man next to him. He woke to the glory of the west bank of the Nile, the expanses of desert swamped by palm trees and fields of cotton and corn.

The writing of these short passages takes me days because there is so much research to be done: the name of the ship, the date, the towns along the rail tracks, the crops that would have been grown. The balance between research and imagination has become unequal and I'm relying on language to see me through.

Did I just write the word 'imagination'?

## IMAGINATION

Foolish, really, to think I could get away without addressing the issue of ‘imagination’, the elephant in the writer’s living room. Yet again, we have stumbled across a thorny problem which has occupied philosophers<sup>154</sup> and psychologists for centuries: ‘what is imagination?’<sup>155</sup> To turn once more to the dictionary in search of a pithy definition:

**Imagination** *n.* 1. The faculty or action of producing mental images of what is not present or has not been experienced. 2. Mental creative ability. 3. The ability to deal resourcefully with unexpected or unusual problems, circumstances, etc.<sup>156</sup>

Certainly pithy but raising as many questions as it answers: what act is performed? What kind of mental images do we retrieve? What are the qualities of these images? Is there evidence to suggest that we can imagine what we have not experienced? The *Dictionary of Psychology* may provide answers:

**Imagination** the process of recombining memories of past experiences and previously formed images into novel constructions ... imagination is treated as creative and constructive, it may be primarily wishful or largely reality-bound.

The word ‘imagination’ is also subsumed into the entry for ‘image’. A few interesting points are raised there, however: that Structuralists consider ‘image’ to be one of three sub-classes of consciousness and they describe an image as a

mental representation of an earlier sensory experience, that is, a copy of it. The copy is considered less vivid than the original perception but ‘still consciously recognizable as a memory of it’.<sup>157</sup> This position has been adopted by cognitive psychologists, who consider an image to be a ‘picture in the head’.<sup>158</sup>

This last definition – of ‘the picture in the head’ – appeals to common sense, writes Reber, but there are caveats. First, the ‘picture’ is not a real one; representing an image to oneself is a cognitive process ‘that operates “as if” one had a real-life picture that was an analog of a real-life scene’. Secondly, the image is not necessarily an exact reproduction of an original event or experience (as Conway wrote, autobiographical memories are ‘actively reconstructed at retrieval’)<sup>159</sup>. It is, after all, possible to imagine a unicorn driving a Ford Mustang. Thirdly, this form of mental representation is not fixed, but adjustable. That is, we can adjust the view we have of it; the unicorn can drive away from or towards the ‘viewer’.<sup>160</sup> Fourthly, we tend always to think of ‘images’ as visual, and in the main they are, but it is possible to ‘image’ a melody (think of Sinatra singing ‘My Way’), or a tactile experience (think of forking hot spaghetti bolognese into your tender mouth). Reber concludes that this ‘picture in the head’ theory ‘encroaches on the meaning of an etymologically related term, *imagination*’ and indeed it does.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Unicorn is Driving a Mustang**

Let me address one cavil the reader might have: that we can have no memory of a unicorn as we have had no direct sensory experience of one. Hmmm. One aspect of this potential problem can be dispensed with straight away – the fact that a unicorn is not here, standing in my study, polishing and buffing its horn with a red neckerchief, does not mean that I cannot present to myself an image of it doing just that. I agree with Ryle and his assertion that representations are not copies, *because they are not copying* an object or perception – remember the auditory memory without the concurrent accompanying sound? Brentano, the founder of phenomenology, describes the relationship between a memory and the object remembered as being simply that between self imagining and object imagined. There is no mediating agent ‘between’ them. I can imagine an absent friend – how? By retrieving memories I have of encounters with her, which may

be stored in any number of memory systems (schema, MOPs, episodic etc.), and actively reconstructing them at the point of retrieval. As with the fastidious unicorn, she doesn't have to be here. I can 'imagine' her when she was younger. I can 'imagine' her now. I can 'imagine' how she will be when she is older. 'A-hah!' you might cry, 'but you've had no experience of her being older!' Well, of course I haven't. But because I have memories of her when she was younger and I have experience of other people getting older (not least myself) and I'm able to construct hypotheticals, I can 'imagine' her at seventy. I would not be able to do this if I had not known her before or now. I cannot only know her in the future. This is a case of 'here, now' informing a future 'there, then'. I did not say my well-informed, well-supported conjecture of what she will be like at seventy will prove *correct*; I only said that I am able to 'imagine' it. 'All well and good,' you may sneer, 'but you cannot claim to be able to imagine an older unicorn on the same basis.' If you mean, 'in the same way', then I would agree. The memory systems I use to construct the older woman my friend might become *are not the same* as those I use to 'imagine' a unicorn – that is to imagine an object that does not exist, just as Wilhelm-Rajmund Reichmann does not exist. According to Tulving, the memories I use to 'imagine' my friend are encoded in my autobiographical memory, they are *autonoetic* and as such firmly embedded in their contexts; the memories I use to 'imagine' a unicorn are *noetic*.

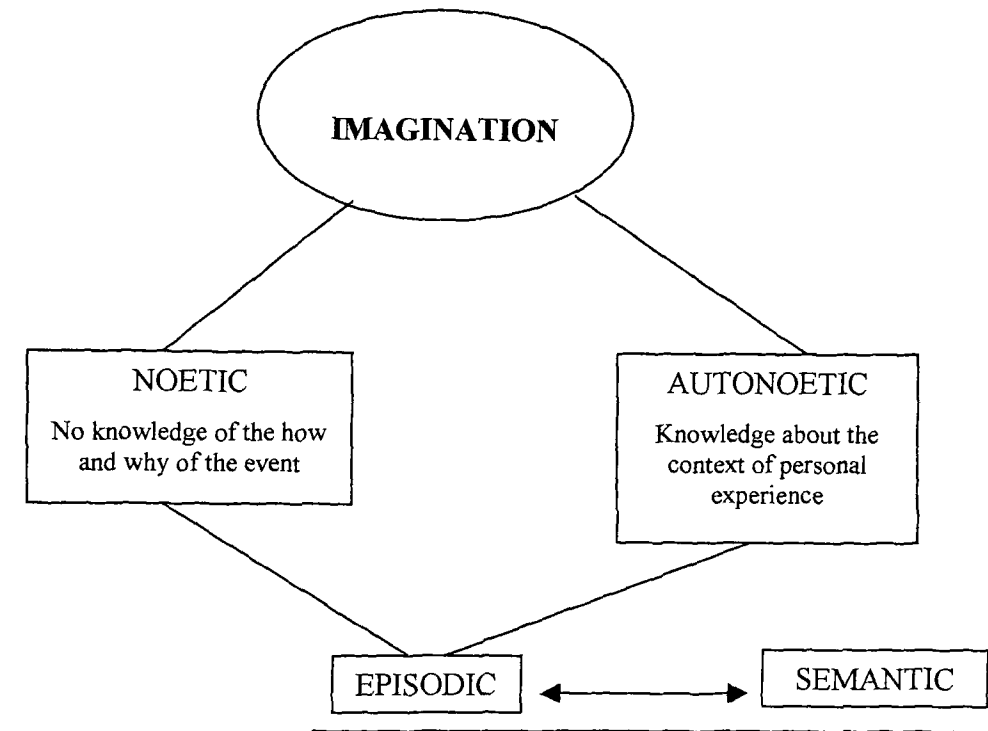
### **The Gauntlet**

I mentioned above that I would be challenging the cognitive psychologist's account of autobiographical memory being distinct from memories of other people's experiences, memories of public events, general knowledge and skills, and it is at this point that I throw down my gauntlet. I am referring here to my memory in terms of it being the tool of a realist fiction writer (although I feel a little uneasy with this distinction, as if I change dramatically, or even become someone else, Incredible-Hulk style, when I write).<sup>162</sup> I am arguing that, for the purposes of creating realist fiction the distinction between my *noetic* and *autonoetic* memories disappears. That is, the variable element of degree of consciousness (as argued by Tulving) disappears – when I imagine, I experience a very high degree of awareness of the fact that I am manipulating, editing and

reconstructing memories. For example, I appropriate from the real world facts (the Alaskan earthquake occurred on Good Friday, 1964, measuring 9.4 on the Richter scale) and I retrieve episodic memories (standing at the head of fjord east of the Fairweathers, looking at a treeline which had been obliterated to a height of more than eleven hundred feet, decades before, by a *tsunami*).<sup>163</sup> When I write about the earthquake in *Blue Earth*,<sup>164</sup> I roll fact semantic and episodic/noetic and autonoetic memories into a ball, as if they are two strips of differently coloured plasticine, and soon the two are inseparable, shot into each other, like marble cake. If I go further, perhaps add other facts, episodic memories and semantic memories, the ball becomes an entirely different colour. There is, if you like, no longer any substance resembling my autonoetic memories. The memories have become Billy-Ray's, it is his view of the landscape, it is Billy-Ray sitting in a Beech 18, watching the waters of the Gulf recede as he listens to a voice on the radio, emanating from Honolulu.<sup>165</sup>

There is always much talk of 'empathy' when characters in narrative are analysed (by critics, readers or writers), that is, the ability to understand and imaginatively enter into another person's feelings.<sup>166</sup> (Recall what Cohen said of the intra- and inter-personal functions of autobiographical memory.) It would seem to me fair to say that if the writer has expectations of the reader feeling empathy for a character, the writer had better feel it herself. I would argue that what happens when I experiment with my plasticine ball, modelling and remodelling Billy-Ray Rickman, is that I effectively move away, first, from the field view of my episodic memory to the observer mode, and then, secondly, I move back into field mode, but it is a field that is not mine.<sup>167</sup> It has become Billy-Ray's memories and sensations I am experiencing. That is what I mean when I write of 'imagining' in my role as writer. It is not my intention to imply that my act of 'imagining' is in any way mystical because I don't think it is; but I would say *this is what I do when I slump back in my chair and stare out of the window*<sup>168</sup>:

SUGGESTED MODEL OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND MEMORY SYSTEMS (AFTER COHEN)<sup>169</sup>



• INFORMATION:	SPECIFIC EVENTS EG: OBJECTS/PEOPLE	GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: FACTS ABOUT THE WORLD
• ORGANISATION:	CHRONOLOGICAL/ SPATIAL	SCHEMA/CATEGORIES
• SOURCE:	PERSONAL EXPERIENCE	ABSTRACTION/INFERENCE REPEATED EXPERIENCE GENERALISATION
• FOCUS:	SUBJECTIVE: <b>SELF</b>	OBJECTIVE REALITY: <b>WORLD</b>

In *Delusion and Dream*,<sup>170</sup> Freud suggested that we all have within us multiple voices, as if we embody, although not in any corpuscular way, a whole cast of characters, like those found in novels or in plays. More, he argued that writers create their narratives by throwing the characters on the page, much like dice on baize, and seeing what numbers come up. These multiple voices, which may be in conflict, interact with each other until they resolve their differences, in effect. I find this idea intriguing but ultimately mistaken. It may brush against my notion of having different field views but there the similarity ends because according to this Freudian view, it is always the *same* characters treading the boards.

### The Tattooed Character

The two main characters in *Altered Land* are an alcoholic mother and her deaf son; the narrative is written from the point of view of both, in the first person. This technique requires the writer to be able to move from one field position to another extremely convincingly; I am not saying that I managed to do this, all I am highlighting is the fact that the more adept the writer is at 'imagining' in the way I describe, the more successful the narrative. Indeed, its plausibility is dependent on this. *Mr Candid* had a cast of wildly dysfunctional characters but I would still like to think that I managed to 'imagine' them in the way I have outlined. I felt empathy with them; I 'became' them in order to picture what they would do in certain situations:

Flanagan is staring furiously at the scuffed pine floor of the town hall. He is thinking of Jane Sullivan and how it must have been for her – how bereft she must have been to take her own life. The Jane Sullivan he remembers was a good, God-fearing Catholic. Flanagan's heart is hammering as Brannigan returns with two more whiskies and the jazz band begins to swing. (*Mr Candid*, p. 7)

That night, as I sat with a beer in the old train wagon they use for a bar there, the radio was playing and I heard that the little girl had died of multiple injuries and that the other driver had survived. The girl's dog, a Labrador, had died as well in the impact. The dog was called Tinkerbelle and when I heard that I put my head in my arms and I cried and I



couldn't stop and I tried and I couldn't stop and I tried and I couldn't stop and when I looked up, snot and tears running down my face, there was Mr Candid, leaning against the bar looking back at me, unsmiling. (*Mr Candid*, p. 228)

Luke Kane lost control when he realised that the body under the sheet belonged to Sugar. He was uncontrollable. No one there ever managed to erase the sight of Luke Kane - the son of Mr Steel, the man who had *everything* - crying and mewling like a baby. No one could get near him just as he made sure no one could get near Sugar. Luke Kane guarded the body, like a lion, like a *mother*, kneeling over it, howling, desolate, lashing out at anyone who tried to calm him. He pulled the sheet back from Sugar's face, saw the damage inflicted by a single sliver of steel and his grief redoubled. The sounds he made were inhuman, bestial. [...] The afternoon was strangely silent - no cars passed on the distant road, no gulls called to each other, there were no thin cries floating from the beach. The only sound was the sound of Luke Kane's heart emptying and filling over and over as he bawled. Time passed and the doctor and paramedic tried to approach him again; again he snarled and roared, lashed out. It took more than an hour for the cops and paramedics to grab Luke Kane and drag him away from the body so he could be sedated. Luke Kane had chewed his lips and his chin was bloodied as if he had gorged himself on his sister's body. Which, in a way, was what he been doing for years. (*Mr Candid*, pp. 336-7)

Flanagan, Chum and Luke Kane all reacting to death in distinct ways, which reflect how I 'imagine' them: Flanagan thinking of others, Chum Kane thinking of Mr Candid and Luke Kane thinking, as always, about himself.

### **The Dead People**

There is always debate regarding characterisation, technical questions, as it were, about how or whether to show or tell and so on. More, there are the problems identified by Davis: 'One is that they are designed to elicit maximum identification with the observer. The second is that their existence is part of a monolithic structure created by an author.'<sup>171</sup> Davis (who adopts a Marxist approach to literary theory) alleges that characters have purpose whilst people have personalities, characters are intentional, they are created purely for authorial purposes – and perhaps there is something to be said for this view. But he goes further, claiming that 'characters' are essentially dead people: if a reader reads *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* ten times, Tess never changes, she is always the same,

no matter how many times she is encountered. This does not take into account the relationship between the text and the reader. First, I would suggest that if the reader were to encounter *Tess* at seventeen, and then to re-read the book thirty years later, the interpretation of Tess-as-character would be different. Secondly, I would suggest that a nineteenth-century reader would interpret Tess-as-character very differently from a reader in 2005.<sup>172</sup> More, Davis' argument takes no account of character-as-metaphor – Captain Ahab, Marlow and Kurtz, Madame Bovary and Heathcliffe, to name a few.

Also, consider this: Davis assumes the writing of the novel is a seamless affair, in which well-groomed, burnished characters roll along well-greased, silent tracks, their purposes tattooed on their foreheads, from the first line to the last, as if the novelist began to write knowing them absolutely and never revisited his idea of them. I would certainly dispute this: if I am what I have experienced, and my 'imagination' functions in the way outlined above, then to say my characters have no personality is to imply that when I 'imagine' I strip myself of my personality in order to 'imagine'. Which is patently absurd. 'Character,' Davis remarks, 'gives readers faith that personality is, first, understandable, and, second, capable of rational change.'<sup>173</sup> Well, yes. Precisely.

### **Wittgenstein's Boiled Fox**

Kant maintained that 'it is only what we have experienced that we can reproduce by connecting together images from our memory'. This makes no allowance for the development of semantic memory. More, Kant's statement makes no sense when it is remembered that Kant himself never ventured further than seven miles from his birthplace of Konisberg and yet felt qualified nevertheless to discourse on how we understand the world, discourses which incorporated asides about waterfalls, volcanoes and hurricanes. Of course, the problem here is with the word 'experience'.

There is a tendency amongst philosophers and cognitive psychologists alike to speak of 'sensory experience', 'sense data', 'apperception', 'perception', 'auditory image' etc., when theorising about the way we construct reality. The effect of these labels is to suggest that we serially encounter a river of bits/bytes/dollops of information about the world which we then store according

to various systems. Psychologists, in particular, are wont to record the memory traces of flash cards, lists, maps, and so on. The lay person might ask 'What does this have to do with creative life?' and answer, 'Nothing'. Then ask, 'What does this have to do with everyday life?' and answer, 'Nearly nothing.'

But it does. It is the language of philosophy and psychology that creates a fog between how we construct our concepts of reality and self and the tools we use to do this. 'Experience' can mean a myriad of things. It can mean the incident witnessed at a supermarket check out, when a mother finally snaps and wallops her whinging seven-year-old; it can mean the sensation of falling of a cliff edge as sleep beckons; it can mean turning on the radio mid-way through Peggy Lee singing 'Is that all there is?'; it can mean watching the film 'Legend'; it can mean tasting a Zanzibar bug or smelling the infamous Durian fruit; it can mean glimpsing a front page photograph of Victoria Beckham pouting in that curious way she has; it can mean ... anything. Everything you do is an experience. It may not be a memorable experience (that is, generic schema event) or it may be (schema-plus-tag), but whatever the experience is, it will affect the experient, perhaps minimally, perhaps in a way that can be called life-altering.

There is, Tulving might argue, a difference between the mother-walloping-child and the Durian-smelling experiences: the former was presented to me by an outside agency, the latter was (unfortunately) directly experienced and this is what Tulving means when he writes of the distinction between auto-noetic and noetic memories. And here, yet again, I have to disagree. I cannot accept his argument that the mother-walloping-child incident is without context for me. If it were, then how would I encode it? In my semantic memory involving concepts of child abuse? Or parenthood? Or would it be a 'floater'? In my role as writer (which, for the record, is, as they say, 24/7; the fat lady never seems to sing in this regard) I would argue that both my direct and indirect experiences are fed through a filter marked 'things that might be useful in my role as writer'. W. G. Sebald articulated this view far more elegantly:

Writing is by definition a morally dubious occupation, I think, because one appropriates and manipulates the lives of others for certain ends. [...]  
A writer's attitude is utilitarian. I think Graham Greene said somewhere

that most writers have a splinter of ice in their heart. This seems to me a very perceptive remark because writers have to look upon things in a certain way. There is this horrible moment when you discover, almost with a sense of glee, something that, although in itself horrid, will fit in exactly with your scheme of things.<sup>174</sup>

Quite so. Sebald recalls a short story he wrote, 'The Emigrants', in which a school teacher boils a dead fox. The teacher's story, as told by Sebald, augmented by photographs, was supposedly 'authentically' autobiographical, quasi-journalistic.<sup>175</sup> The boiled fox was not. Sebald borrowed that pretty vignette from Ludwig Wittgenstein's life as a school teacher. (Wittgenstein might say in defence of a charge of animal abuse, 'death is not event in life'; to which I would reply, 'OK, I'll allow you that, if you'll allow me to make pictures from facts'.)

Sebald has touched on a matter (the writer as vicarious emotional thief and factual magpie) which is of no little interest to cognitivists and writers – the matter of Attention. A great deal has been said here about perception and sensory experiences and it is a well known fact that we filter the sensory data we receive because we simply do not have the capacity to deal with the sensory overload that results from experiencing the world. We choose those events on which we wish to focus and we are often distracted when the filter begins to fail. Colin Cherry has identified another aspect of attention which, I believe, is well-known to writers: the Cocktail Party Problem.<sup>176</sup> Cherry has studied the way attention functions when someone is at a loud party trying to filter out the noise around her and he has developed the theory that attention switches according to the emotional content of what is being filtered out. For example, if amongst the hubbub the woman's name is mentioned, perhaps across the room, she will hear it despite the fact the filter should have screened it out according to the factors of volume and distance. I believe that writers are particularly prone to attention switching but that the switch is not necessarily thrown by the emotional content of what is heard or seen, rather it is thrown by the desire to hear others' stories, or because he or she is writing about a place or time or subject. When I began to write (the final version of) *Blue Earth*, I became aware of any references to clouds, pigs and Catholicism, to name a few attention-seeking subjects. I listened

to weather reports closely, I spotted short articles in magazines and newspapers about battery pig farming. Obviously, in these cases, the material was always there, I had simply never directed my attention towards it before.

There is also, however, the issue of the manipulation and appropriation of the lives of others to use for one's own purposes and this is where the writer could be described as being, at best, an always sympathetic ear, or, at worst, a callous pirate of the emotional seas. What might pass as concern for a woman's account of miscarriage, might, in fact, be a desire to hear about the physical event and the emotional fallout because realist narrative must be plausible.<sup>177</sup>

Utilitarian indeed. My memory of this exchange could not, I would argue, be described as purely noetic because the context has been encoded by me.<sup>178</sup> Not only that, but I have no interest in encoding the memory as representation or copy, since I *intend* to manipulate and elaborate the memory content. *The memory is encoded as proto-narrative.*

### **The Unicorn's Pedigree**

Of course I have memories of experiencing unicorns, I have memories of encountering them in childhood books, films, heraldry, conversations, advertisements ... just as you have. I spent my university life smoking Benson and Hedges, fingering the embossed unicorn daily, as it were. In fact the unicorn has quite a pedigree for an animal that has yet to be directly experienced. A short history of the beast:

The unicorn appears in ancient Chinese mythology, its companions the dragon, the phoenix and the tortoise. We know this because it adorns gateways of the tomb of Confucius in Qufu, built in 500BC. Pliny the Elder refers (AD60) to the unicorn in his *Historia Naturalis*, and describes it as 'a ferocious beast, similar in the rest of its body to a horse, with the head of a deer, the feet of an elephant, the tail of a boar, a deep bellowing voice, and a single black horn, two cubits in length, standing out in its forehead'. Unsurprisingly, Pliny says it 'cannot be taken alive', which neatly explains the dearth of fossils, skeletons or furs. In the second century AD, an anonymous Greek monk felt moved to write *Physiologus* (*The Naturalist*), in which he makes reference to the unicorn. *Physiologus*, the original bestiary book, greatly influenced Medieval artists and

the art of the Middle Ages, where the unicorn appears in tapestries, in heraldry and in paintings. Its disposition had evidently changed since Pliny's times, as it by then signified holiness and chastity. Shakespeare refers to the unicorn in *Timon of Athens* (Act 4, scene iii), naming it amongst lions, lambs, wolves, horses, bears and foxes, all animals for which, as Wittgenstein would confirm, we have epistemological evidence. Robert Bylot, searching for the elusive North-West passage in the seventeenth century, claimed to have seen 'sea-unicorns' bobbing in the waves – we can only surmise he was referring to the illustrator-shy, elusive narwhal. Centuries later, in 1941 to be precise, George Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn* was published, the title referring to the emblem, the shield, the signifier of the British Empire. (Disney released *Fantasia* in the same year, featuring all-singing, all-dancing unicorns. But these were essentially frivolous unicorns, unicorns who'd give you the glad-eye, unicorns for whom the word 'cartoon' meant something other than it did for Michelangelo.) In 1951 there came the Festival of Britain, an Empire-Fest of awesome proportions, during which the royal herald was blazoned everywhere, because it gave a clue, apparently, to the British character: the lion symbolised action, the unicorn symbolised *imagination* (italics, obviously, mine). Then came the films, *Legend* and *Harry Potter* spring to mind ... The poor unicorn. Dragged from pillar to post across the ages, mourning, no doubt the loss of its terrifying bellow and terrifying feet, as it was transmogrified across centuries from *Ur-beast* to My Little Pony.

But there is hope, yet, for the unicorn. It has a more illustrious pedigree even than that which I have outlined. We know that Palaeolithic man sat in his temperature- and light-controlled cave and painted the unicorn fifteen thousand years ago on the walls of his sanctuaries. Thousands of years later *and thousands of miles away* the people inhabiting the Indus valley, in modern Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, depicted the unicorn in their temples, their homes, even in the seals they used to formalise agreement. These seals have been dated to between 2600 and 1800 BC. The implications of this are staggering: recall Levi-Strauss' theory that language patterns and myth demonstrate that there is a common framework underpinning all human life across thousands of years. It would seem that the ability to ask (and answer) the question 'what if?' has been with us a long time, as long as the ability to construct hypotheticals; indeed, so

long has it been with us that to suggest the ability is not innate, *a priori* seems misguided, not to say churlish. The unicorn has always been with us, no matter whether we are *homo sapiens* or *homo fictus*.

If I, as *homo sapiens*, create *homo fictus*,<sup>179</sup> then why would I deny *homo fictus* any knowledge that I have? How *can* I deny my characters my semantic knowledge? I know Wilhelm-Rajmund, Chum Kane and John Player all know about unicorns. As Carver said, 'You are not your characters but your characters are you'<sup>180</sup> (which is another reason why Leonard J. Davis is wrong to describe characters as 'dead people'). Chum, Special and Billy-Ray know all about men and women and love and disappointment and divorce and regret and friendship. Of course they do, because I do – but they cannot know anything I don't know about these things. Interestingly, Weber remarks that 'Carver's characters know a great deal less than the author does'<sup>181</sup> and I agree, because they cannot know more than Carver.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, Carver must have had an epistemic awareness of what his characters did not know in order precisely to relieve them of the burden of certain kinds of knowledge.<sup>183</sup>

As Cohen said, we can retrieve far more knowledge than we store because we are able to infer (for example, the knowledge nugget 'Julius Caesar had a mother'). As a writer, I do not burden readers with superfluous knowledge about characters that can be inferred; I would not do this if I were introducing Billy-Ray to a friend at a cocktail party, so why do it on the page? Further, as a writer, I do not burden my characters with knowledge about the world that they can infer. To be sure, the revelation of inferential knowledge can itself be pivotal either to the character or reader, or both; it may even be the force which drives the plot. (The most obvious illustration of this would be the crime genre, in which the detective, Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta, for example, infers from facts and forensics, the actions of the perpetrator of a crime, and reader is aware of the accretion of these inferences.) These observations are, obviously, encroaching into questions concerning the relationship between author, text and reader, and I don't have the space here to address them fully. What I would like to say is that my comments regarding what is not written about characters reminds me of Hemingway's theory of omission; I could define the nine-tenths of the iceberg beneath the text as representing both reader's and the writer's inferential knowledge.

Which last point brings me to my final digression on the various dimensions and affects of memory and its relationship with narrative and imagination. Not only does the submerged body of ice contain frozen within it inferential knowledge, it also provides the tip of ice with a foundation on which to float, based on our understanding of shared cultural and emotional experiences. These inform our prospective expectations and provide us with ‘expectation-supporting norms’, as Bruner describes them.<sup>184</sup> These norms may be simple, such as ‘woman crying – pain or disappointment’, or complex, for example, ‘stranger – alienation, displacement, danger’ (that is, character as metaphor), or ‘9/11 – fear and destruction’ and they provide the writer and the reader with a common shorthand, obviating the need for lengthy exegesis. (And one element of that shorthand tacitly agreed upon by both writer and reader is that these norms have as their dialectical opposites, ‘possibility-evoking transgressions’<sup>185</sup>, another version of *peripeteia*.) These norms also provide a framework for what can be considered plausible, an essential aspect of the writer-reader relationship given plausibility is at the heart of realist fiction. It seems fitting that Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* has been recently published to great acclaim, as the narrative deals with a problem that has arisen for the writers of realist fiction with regard to individual memories and shared experiences: the flashbulb memory.

### **Flashbulb Memory**

Flashbulb memory is a special case of witness memory. It is the term given to the unusually vivid and detailed recollection people often have of the occasion when they first heard about some very dramatic, surprising, important and emotionally arousing event.<sup>186</sup>

This is the succinct definition provided by Cohen (in 1996), who goes on to mention Kennedy’s death, Pearl Harbour and the Challenger Shuttle.

Flashbulb memories typically encode what is called the ‘reception event’ rather than the event itself. That is, they encode the circumstances in which the person first received the news and usually include the place,



who was present at the time, what activities were going on, the affect occasioned by the event, and the source of the news.<sup>187</sup>

I sit here, in the third week of June 2005 and look at the list of notable events mentioned by Cohen in 1996. What to say?<sup>188</sup> 9/11. Beslan. *Tsunami*. Three intrinsically different events, all seared into our memories. Branded there, ineradicable.

Once formed, flashbulb memories are apparently long-lasting and unchanged over time. Flashbulb memories are also distinguished by their phenomenological quality. They seem to have the peculiarly vivid character of an actual perception – what Brown and Kulik<sup>189</sup> call ‘live quality’ – and tend to include seemingly irrelevant and trivial details.

There have been many millions of words already written about 9/11, Beslan and the *tsunami*, and there will be many more, because there are so many things to be said about these events and I shall leave that contextualising and conjecture to others better able to comment.

My reason for mentioning them here is that this concept of flashbulb memories – an undeniable fact of twenty-first century existence, as images are beamed around the world, in real time and remembered in exactly the manner described by Cohen<sup>190</sup> – is fascinating to any writer. There is, first, I would argue, the fact that these memories are *both* social and individual. That is, they are substantially common memories, shared by hundreds of millions and yet they are also your own. To be sure, my memory of 9/11 has details yours will not – a friend I bumped into as I walked to a post office; telling her I’d just heard a report of a plane hitting the World Trade Centre, puzzled that a pilot could allow that to happen (this is my memory of the reception event). I later sat on a burgundy sofa watching television for hours; you may have sat on an emerald sofa, or you may have stood in an office but we all watched the same images, over and over again. We were collectively being presented with Neisser’s ‘successive reconstructions’ so it is hardly surprising that when I cause the black marks 9 and / and 11 to appear on the page, I know that you see two silver towers, stark against a cerulean sky, gold and russet flames billowing from them. But, of course, what I

cannot know – exactly, in detail – is your emotional response to that image. I cannot know if you reviled the pornography of violence, or if you (like Damien Hirst) thought the image strangely beautiful, or if your fear of what might happen next overwhelmed you, as the search went on for other, lost planes. Or, perhaps, all of these.

It would be asinine to suggest that Michelangelo and his contemporaries did not experience flashbulb memories, but I would argue that these memories would have been qualitatively different. He may have seen bloody battles, may even have witnessed murder. But a battle is a series of events and a murder a single event, usually involving one person and few witnesses. These are not memories that would have been global in the way I outline above; they would still have been individual. The memory of seeing a man murdered might have changed Michelangelo's concept of self as it was encoded, but he could not refer to it to others and expect them to share any aspect of it in the way I can by writing 9/11, Martin Luther King, Diana, Princess of Wales, *tsunami*.

Many writers of fiction contributed to the editorials and analysis pages of the broadsheets after 9/11 to debate what we should 'do' about the event. Impossible to ignore, impossible to include. What to do about it? For example, to set a realist novel in New York, or indeed just about any westernised urban area, at the turn of the century and not mention 9/11 and its effect on the characters would be to distort the mirror the author holds up to the world. Now, however, more than three years later, it is easier. The event cannot, I believe, be ignored, but three years later a great many of us are experiencing a form of emotional amnesia, or selective forgetting, that enables us to both write and read fiction which encompasses these events. I remember my mother crying hopelessly on 22 November 1963 as she watched the black and white frame by frame assassination of Kennedy (surely the first of the truly visual collective flashbulb memories?). Many years later she watched Oliver Stone's *JFK*, emotionless as a stone.

My first brush with the problem of how to incorporate a collective flashbulb memory into narrative came last year, during the writing of *Unlocked*.<sup>191</sup> Why a 'problem'? Because the vividness of the memory is directly proportional to the degree of emotion experienced at the time of reception. Does the writer place a character at the site and imagine how it must have been? It

would be a brave thing to do but not, I suspect, a difficult one precisely because of the 'live quality' of the memory. However, I fear I am a narrational coward because I elected to refer to the event obliquely.

Shake, the main character of *Unlocked*, owns and operates a small deep-sea fishing venture based on the fictional island of St George, set to the south of the Windward Islands in the West Indies. Shake is a white Englishman, a wanderer who craves emotional amnesia. One early morning he takes an American family, the Westmores, fishing:

Shake climbs up onto the flybridge as Bap casts off the bow line, and *Ribailagua II* eases away from the jetty. Out in open water, the swell increases and Shake powers up, begins to plane the waves, reducing the pitch. Mr Westmore hauls himself up the ladder and comes to stand by Shake, legs braced, feet splayed, arms crossed.

'Everything OK?' asks Shake.

'Fine.' Mr Westmore nods his pale ginger head. 'You're English, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'My grandmother came from an English village called Frithelstock Stone, in Devon. Maybe you know it?'

'Afraid not.'

'No. No one ever does.' Mr Westmore looks even more despondent than before.

'I wasn't born in England and I haven't lived there for a long time.' Shake feels he has to apologise for his ignorance. 'But it's interesting, because if you look at a map of St George a lot of the names are from Devon. Some of the sailors who landed here must have been from the area. There's Exeter, Tor Point, Plymouth and Tamar for a start.'

'How long you been doing this?'

'About ten years now.'

'Hmm. Must be a great life. I work on Wall Street.' Mr Westmore grips the grab rail. 'I have a seven bedroom house in Westchester, a son at Yale and a beautiful daughter. I drive a Jaguar or, sometimes, my Maserati for a change of scene. Sometimes I drive to our summer house on the Island. I also have a duodenal ulcer, hypertension and haemorrhoids.'

Not surprising he looks so sad, thinks Shake. But when he glances at Mr Westmore, it's to find the man smiling slightly.

'Well, I have a one bedroom shack on a piece of land that looks like a clearing in a jungle with an empty swimming pool pit in the middle. There's one tap with cold water and the power cuts out twice a day usually, sometimes more. The phone line goes

dead most days. I drive a fifteen-year-old Land Rover, when it allows me. I'm building a concrete house and I have more outgoings than income. I also have a crocked left knee.'

'Last year we went to Puerto Rico, year before to Nassau.'

'Nice.'

'No, not nice.' Mr Westmore wipes the sweat from his temples. 'Just more of the same. Went looking for something different and they weren't it. It's not the same – Wall Street. It's not the same. I've worked there more than twenty years and it's not the same. The whole city is different. Everyone I know has been looking for something ever since and I don't know anyone who's found it.'

Shake always has a problem with this, does not know what to say.

He'd been out deep sea fishing with four young Frenchmen early that morning, around Jacamar Island, and he didn't get back to dock until nearly eleven. The men had been disgruntled and burned by the time they returned, had walked off to the Oriole Palm Bar with barely a thank you. Shake remembers looking round and the grounds were deserted, no security, no gardeners, no guests around the pool. He'd cleaned up the boat and then walked across the manicured lawns to the beach bar, puzzled by the set of the shoulders of the men there, puzzled by the way each of them had each built a fence around himself. Shake arrived in time to see a replay of the second plane coming in, argent and curving, arcing like a scimitar as it sliced through the tower. Shake stared as the clip replayed, frame by frame, each frame matching the slamming of his eyelids. His hands and thighs felt suddenly cold and he'd sat on a stool, looking up at the screen, waiting to believe what he was seeing over and over and over again. The bar tender poured him a straight whisky, unasked, and Shake – who never touched anything stronger than an occasional beer when he had the boat – drank it and the glass was refilled. He sat there for hours, with the same men, building his own private fence, fighting the sense of mute panic. The world kept showing itself to Shake it its awful immensity and he kept trying to draw it back in, pull it back in, reduce it once again to an unimportant, sunlit Caribbean island. No one spoke. Sometimes the men glanced at each other, sometimes they cried and no one said anything. When the near-atomic dust clouds began to race along the concrete canyons, burgeoning florets of breathlessness, a heavy-set blond man stood, set his stool carefully against the bar, wiped his eyes with the heels of hands, and said, 'That's it then.' And everyone knew exactly what he meant.

'That's why I wanted to come here, to St George,' says Mr Westmore. 'I didn't want just another bit of America with white sand. I wanted ... shoot, I don't know what I wanted. To live a little, maybe. To not feel safe. Because anyway, I don't feel safe. I never feel safe. So why pretend it's all the same? My duodenal ulcer? I got that *since*

nine eleven. It's not the work, it's not the dealing and the commuting and the parties. It's not that.'

'No.'

'Don't know why I'm telling you all this. Never told anyone before.'

'It's because you'll never see me again.' Shake begins to slow the Bertram 31, and the bow drops a little. 'You should put some cream on your face. The wind makes it feel like you're OK but you're burning all the same. Here.' Shake ferrets in a box and digs out a tube of SPF30.

What is happening in this extract? First, as a writer I have made many choices. I have decided to address the issue of 9/11. Why? Because Mr Westmore is American, and it is important for later plot developments that he be so. He is a rich American, he is, after all, staying in a seven-star hotel in the Caribbean, so I have 'made' him<sup>192</sup> a futures trader on Wall Street. He is in his fifties, so will have experienced 9/11 – but directly or indirectly? And this is where my cowardice comes into play, because I elected to switch the point of view at the moment that Mr Westmore makes oblique reference to 9/11. More than that, I also change tense and style. The narrative begins in present tense, revolves around dialogue, then switches to past tense recollection, purely from Shake's pov, and then back to present tense. There is also the stylistic notation of line spaces to underline the switch. Cowardice aside, why elect to make these choices?

Because they allowed me to write my memories. I didn't watch the news in East Coast real time, sitting in a Caribbean bar, nursing a whisky but that is what Shake would have done. However, my memory of watching the event left me with three strong images – the flight of the second plane, the clouds of dust and the stuttering frame by frame endless replays. I received the news in the same way as Shake, so I could shift my vision from my field to observer to Shake's field incorporating in him my (remembered, rehearsed) responses with a sense of certainty that these responses were plausible. As I mentioned, Shake has a desire to collapse the world to the manageable, so his need to reduce the impact of the news was, to an extent, peculiar to him but I 'imagine' that many people felt the same.

This last point is important – it refers not only to the 'collective' element of our flashbulb memories but also to the fact that it is indeed possible for the

writer to use forms of factual and emotional shorthand (or to appeal to expectation-supporting norms, as Bruner might say). As a writer I do not feel compelled to elaborate the events of 9/11. The reader has an entire subset of memories which they can explore for themselves but because of the nature of the encoding of these events, a writer can be sure that this subset exists.<sup>193</sup> It is a matter for some debate, however, and possibly of some concern, whether this 'memory sub-set shorthand' applies equally to other mental acts, such as feeling guilt, remorse or love.<sup>194</sup> (It would seem that writers do assume that the reader knows what a character feels when he feels angry, that writers assume that a reader has a similar sub-set of memories, which have influenced their concepts of 'self'.) I am referring here, of course to the issue of the writer appealing to the reader's capacity to empathise. Suffice to say here that my assertion above, that I cannot know – *exactly and in detail* – your emotional responses to the images of 9/11, still stands; but I also assert that I can assume with some degree of certainty that you have a subset of memories which correspond with the collective flashbulb memory.

### **Anyway, Back to Unicorns ...**

He hated staying in motels – the beds were never long enough and the air-con never worked. Well, maybe it worked, but it never worked right – too fuckin' hot or too fuckin' cold. So he'd snort and toss and flick his mane out of his eyes all night long, waking up muzzy, his teeth gluey with hot spit. That morning was no exception – he woke in room 24 of the Hot Sands Motel, tangled in the sheets, his hooves scraping on the worn linoleum as he wrestled his horn free of the speared pillow, and the air con was buzzing but no fuckin' cold air was coming through. Well, whaddya expect for fifteen bucks a night?

He didn't even bother visiting the bathroom, just stepped outside and trotted over the highway to a 77 gas station, where he ran himself through the car wash. It was a good one too, the brushes well-worn, and the jets of water not too hard or too hot, just firm enough and wet enough to make him feel human, as they said. He snickered as he strolled back to the lot outside the motel, where his car was cooking in the Nevadan sun. What the hell was all that about? People making themselves feel human? Shit – either they were human or they weren't. No half-way houses there – although there were those weird psychos, the centaurs. Now *they* were trouble you din' wanna meet on a dark night in a narrow place. Except for, maybe, that dude Chiron.

The inside of the Mustang was baking under its rag-top, and he motored it over into the shade of a convenience store, before lowering the roof and switching the air-con on full blast. As he waited for the cool to kick in, he checked his smile in the mirror, ran a rough, serrated tongue over white, ridged teeth, smiled again. Yanking open the glove pocket, he rummaged through a selection of kerchiefs before pulling out a very conservative, cowboy number, scarlet with white spots. He polished his horn, rolling the kerchief along the spirals until they gleamed, and then tied the sweat rag round his neck. One last glance in the mirror, a self-satisfied smirk and he slipped the gear shaft, floored the gas pedal and fishtailed out of the lot, throwing up clouds of fine grit and sand, as garbage fled to the gutter and snagged on tinder-dry brush.

Leaving Caliente, he chased a freight train, ninety-six wagons from Santa Fe, Topeka and Jackson, rumbling out of town into the desert. The US606 followed the lazy curves of the line, and the Mustang roared, moved up the gears until the train grew smaller in the mirror. He slung a foreleg out the window, resting his fetlock on the ledge, felt the hot air rushing past, as an F16 fighter plane shot tracers over the endless valley ahead. The Mustang was the only car moving on the blacktop as far as the eye could see and he set the cruise control at 110 mph, leaned back and sighed, lit a Marlboro before slipping on his Raybans. And then he saw it, by the side of the road, in the distance, shimmering in the waves of heat rising from the badlands ...

We'll leave the unicorn there, cruising the least-travelled road in the USA in his Mustang, and perhaps wonder every now and then what it was he saw on the roadside. This vignette, excerpt, short piece, character study, exercise in third person pov, is included for one reason and one reason only: to illustrate what I mean by 'I imagine'. It took fifteen minutes to write, and for some of those I sat back and stared out of the window. I took from my semantic memory all I know about unicorns, all I know about driving Ford Mustangs, ransacked episodic memories of watching a ninety-six wagon train passing through the Nevada town of Caliente and hearing the boom of F16s passing overhead as I drove to Tonopah and I then I rolled these memories, these inferences etc., together in a ball. As a result I came up with a short 'road movie' piece, possibly in the detective-noir genre, the central character of which is a foul-mouthed unicorn. I could have written a scene in which a silent, brooding unicorn lies beside thundering, glacial waters outside the gates of Valhalla; or a scene in which a rather fey beast, nervous and diet-conscious, sidles through a sylvan glade as minstrels play in the distance. But what is essential to all these scenes is the fact that I wouldn't feel compelled to describe the unicorn. I know that you know it's white.<sup>195</sup> If I

described it as brown, you would roll your eyes, wonder at my temerity or stupidity, and move on to a different, more plausible text. None of us has seen a unicorn but we *know* it's white. More disturbingly, if I described a scene in which a foul-mouthed mustang (a horse which does exist) drove a Ford Unicorn (which is a more than credible name for a car),<sup>196</sup> then your faith in me as narrator would evaporate entirely. It would seem that even fiction which does not depend on plausibility for its validity is nevertheless bound by certain conventions of expectation-supporting norms which support the conspiracy between writers and readers. The unicorn exemplifies, for me, the narrational shorthand to which I have referred; if Memory is the Daughter of the Muse, then the Unicorn is the Nephew of Imagination.

One last question: am I right in thinking you also know that the Ford Mustang is cherry red?



## ***BLUE EARTH***

In October 2002, carrying the 200,000 word, unfinished manuscript of *Fata Morgana*, I flew to Tobago in the West Indies, where I spent the next seven months. I had, before leaving, posted a copy of the unfinished work to my agent in London. On the title page I had scrawled a note to her: ‘Maggie – forget everything I said it was about ...’ Once settled in the house in Tobago, which is sited on a wide, crescent bay, twenty metres from the sea, I swam, I drank beastly cold Carib and wondered how to deal with the behemoth in my study, only half-finished and already 550 pages long. I need not have bothered because my agent called me after a week and told me to throw half the manuscript in the bin. I was so stunned, my memory of the event is hazy (which must be the exception to the theory regarding the relationship between emotional content and encoding); I suspect I even stupidly asked, ‘Which half?’ Later that afternoon, after a lengthy conversation with my agent, I divided the manuscript into its chapters, stood back and looked at fifty three piles of paper. Then I picked out each chapter that had any reference to the Temples (Alice, Ian and Evelyn) and Knights (Alice’s parents), I bundled them up and buried them in the back of a dark, damp cupboard. This is a deceptively simple sentence that masks a welter of emotions – rage, despair, self-loathing and so on. The usual emotions experienced when one accepts that a year’s work and a hundred thousand words amounts to nothing.

## Illumination

I did not think, I must write another novel. Instead, in the absence of my laughable lawn and unfinished shelves, I sat on the gallery and stared at the endless sky falling to the horizon, where it met the Atlantic. I watched the sun set and rise, I watched Mars and the moon move across the night sky. I watched clouds form: lens, stratus and cumulonimbus. All the time, as I watched the sea and sky, the engine was turning over, grinding out its strangely punctured ticker-tape. I remembered telling my agent to forget everything I'd said *Fata Morgana* was about, to forget the nature-nurture theme. But if it wasn't about that, then what was it about? I realise this sounds odd – a writer with a three hundred and fifty page manuscript, sitting out, looking at the stars, and wondering what the book was about but it did happen. Gradually, I realised the root of the problem: I had committed the cardinal sin of ignoring my meta-theme and as a result the manuscript had become unwieldy, bloated and implausible. My meta-theme is (as of course it always is) the individual's ability to survive a life-altering event, an event which is experienced at an age when their concept of 'self' is still being formed. For John Player in *Altered Land*, it was the effects of an IRA bomb at the age of thirteen; for Chum Kane, in *Mister Candid*, the rape of his sister by his father, which he witnessed at the age of twenty; for Billy-Ray Rickman, in what was still *Fata Morgana*, the deaths of his brothers on the same day, as they served in Italy in 1942, when he was fifteen. Once I had acknowledged my meta-theme, I knew who was the character standing at my shoulder, whispering in my ear, 'It's about me, it's about me, it's about me' – Billy-Ray Rickman, in all his ambiguous glory.

I spent some time stitching together the gaps in the narrative, or, rather, in-filling the cavernous gaping holes left by the excision of the Knights and Temples. This work was not what I would describe as creative, rather it was an exercise in problem-solving as I sifted through the narrative, smoothing out the rumpled plot and deleting cross-references to characters who were now languishing in a dark cupboard, growing mouldy. Once I had finished reading and writing, re-reading and re-writing over and over, I had unearthed the themes were that were already illustrating my meta-theme: blood, oil and hubris. They had been buried under the weight of too elaborate a structure. Then I began to write again, to write

creatively, that is. I found myself in the interesting position of having to revisit lives and worlds I had already ‘imagined’ and left behind. But, of course, I had the nine-tenths of the narrational iceberg to mine for myself. I knew already a great deal about my characters and the landscape they inhabited. So I began to tweeze out strands of my characters’ experiences which I had not written about before (for example, Billy-Ray meeting and sleeping with Magde again; Isobel learning about fishing from her father) and began to weave them into the narrative.

Still I was living, alone, in the house in Tobago, looking out over the sea. I spent my days swimming, writing and walking along the beaches; in the early evenings, I sat on the gallery and watched the sun fall and the moon rise, weather permitting. Why is this important? For two reasons, I believe. The first refers to my comments in the opening chapters of this paper about the socio-political context and personal context in which the writer lives and writes. If it is accepted that my experiences and the manner of the encoding of those experiences as semantic/episodic/autonoetic/noetic memories both constantly inform and modify my concept of self – self as writer – then the landscape in which I was writing changed me.<sup>197</sup> Over time, my narrative became water-logged, as *Viveka* trawled the waters of the Gulf of Alaska, as Irochka drowned in Home Lake (rather than shooting herself, as in an earlier version), as the *tsumani* raced up Seward fjord, as Isobel stood smoking and thinking, looking out over the Gastineau Channel and wondering about ghosts. There are myriad allusions and references to ships, kayaks, Zodiacs, liners crossing water; Billy-Ray looks for oil beneath the North Sea, beneath the polar sands of an ancient ocean, as Sean Regan casts his line from the rocks of Blacksod Bay; sodden, mythical creatures appear – the Fish God, the black marlin, Sedna (or Arnaknagsak). And then Frankie flies to the North Slope with Billy-Ray in the de Havilland Beaver, and she watches the sky and begins to dream about escape. The fourth draft of the novel opened with Frankie sitting on her balcony in Malé, making gorillas and women out of clouds, which were gliding over a restless Indian sea. When that fourth draft was finished, I remembered what Billy-Ray had said when he first saw the Pacific and I called my agent to tell her the title had changed.

‘It’s called *Blue Earth*,’ I told her.

‘Hmm. Not really snappy enough.’

‘It’s called *Blue Earth*,’ I said again.

Perhaps it was my curtness or the rasp of insanity in my voice that persuaded her (fourth draft?) but from then on it was called *Blue Earth*.

Which brings me to my second point, with reference to the fact that the landscape I lived in changed both me and the novel as I wrote it.

## **Landscape**

In the introduction to this paper, I described the route I would be taking through the labyrinth of theories regarding self, memory and narrative, and suggested that the concept of this pathway itself illustrates, or, rather, mirrors my final contention here: that narrative is a landscape over which swarm many possible pathways. As I have also written, when I imagine myself into the landscape of novel in progress, using my elaborated<sup>198</sup> memories in all their forms, I imagine the view from a changed field perspective. More than this, I try, as best I can, to select the most satisfying route along which to lead the reader in this landscape.

Programmers responsible for computer-generated narratives of games, film and advertisements (hypermedia, so-called) approach the problem of story grammar from an interesting point of view, a view very different from those of literary theorists and linguists.<sup>199</sup> One of their number, Bob Hughes, has also argued that narrative should be seen as landscape:

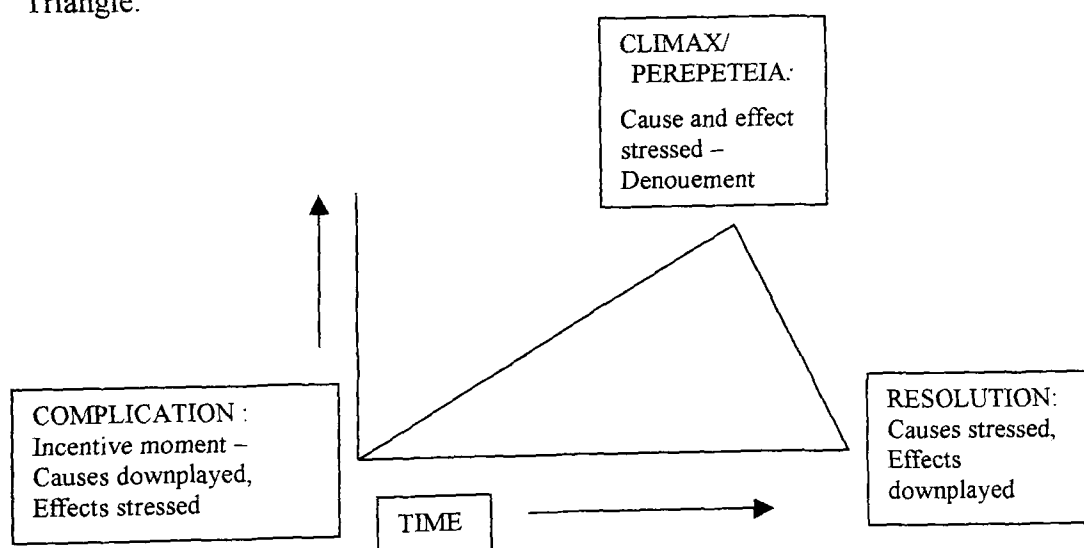
Most approaches to computer-generated narrative focus entirely on the creation of paths. But there is much more to narrative than this. To propose that the path is the narrative is like proposing that the Pyg track is Snowdon, or the Pennine Way is England. Each path is chiefly a route through a particular terrain – and the terrain is the main thing. Each is popular because it is a very good route that begins promisingly, develops interestingly and concludes satisfyingly. However, the Pyg track is no use without its surroundings and if you were to divorce it from the landscape, you would have nothing very much.<sup>200</sup>

Of course. I’m not sure that when I use the word ‘landscape’ I mean exactly the same as Hughes, who is speaking of essentially virtual landscapes.<sup>201</sup> However,

there is a great deal worthy of interest in his article: as he writes, ‘the terrain [that is, the narrative] is the main point’.

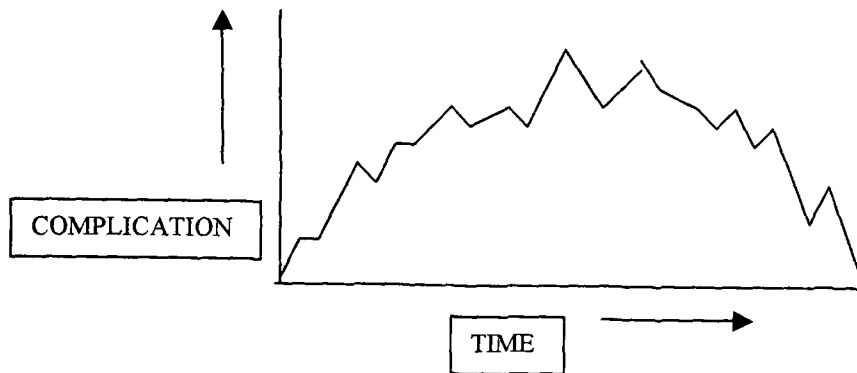
First, his description of the possibility of landscape, that is, that there are many paths we can use to traverse it, reminds me of aspects of prospective memory. Remember the woman who wanted to leave her husband and explored many different pathways to reach the trig point which represented ‘happiness’? This obviously refers to an imagined landscape (the problem), over which run paths of varying difficulty (the solutions).<sup>202</sup> I’m here tempted to suggest, adapting Hughes’ metaphor, that the narrative is Snowdon and the words on the page are the Pyg track. This is particularly apposite for me, with regard to *Blue Earth*: four drafts and eventually a final version; four pathways and an ultimately satisfying (Pyg-like) track. In retrospect, there were two reasons and not one why *Blue Earth* proved so difficult in the writing. Not only because I had ignored my meta-theme, but also because I consistently chose the wrong pathways – dead ends and cul-de-sacs, pathways strangled by brush.<sup>203</sup> (It is interesting to remember here deciding that Billy-Ray reveal himself to himself in an episode described as a trudge across a bleak landscape to reach a cairn.<sup>204</sup>)

Hughes also makes mention of Brenda Laurel’s analysis of Freytag’s Triangle:



Freytag’s triangle refers to the dynamics of drama, specifically farce. Laurel argues that if subsidiary peaks are included, then the model serves to illustrate the dynamics of many forms of literature. So, a traveller/audience/character would

have glimpses of the goal at all times, whilst encountering a series of problems along the way:



This model obviously has the characteristics of a mountainscape and, as such, suggests it has a spatial element lacking from the original. Because of this, it suggests to me the unseen (or the inferred, as I prefer to think of it); that is, the sense that there is a great deal which is unsaid, that there are lives lived off-stage – Hemingway’s nine-tenths iceberg made manifest.

Bob Hughes also observes that:

*War and Peace* really is a landscape and the text Tolstoy has given us is simply a route he found through it; his other works traverse different parts of the same landscape, by different routes, of different lengths. I certainly get a similar experience from all Tolstoy’s novels – and indeed from all Tolstoy’s sentences. [...] What’s more, Tolstoy *behaves* as if he is in a landscape. He is famously apt to indulge in what we call ‘digressions’, where he ‘leaves the main path’ of the tale to explore some philosophical or historical issue at length – just like some good mountain guide who takes you off the track for a while to show you some ruins, or an interesting geological structure, or a fantastic view, or to pick bilberries.

And as a writer I do the same; I behave as if I am operating in/imagining a landscape. In *Mr Candid*, the landscape was America, coast to coast, north to south. Chum made it from Alaska to Florida, from Long Island to Malibu, travelling always alone. I look back at the novel now, and I see scenes set in the Everglades of Florida, on the roads around Montauk, in the badlands of Montana

– and when I wrote the book, I had visited none of them. I have been to these places since to see if I had ‘imagined’ them in a way that had any correspondence with reality, to check whether the ‘pictures in my head’ were right. I like to think they were. In ‘La Corrida’, the world of bull-fighting, which stretches from Galicia to Andalucia, is central to the narrative: the *casa* as urban landscape and *calle* as the dusty, scrubland of the interior, mirrored in the sand circle of the ring. In *Altered Land*, the landscape is restricted to southern England, as it must be precisely because John’s timidity, his fear of change, prevents him breaking away from the familiar. And yet, throughout the book, there are references to the sand dunes of southern France, to the west coast of the States, to the peregrinations of tribes across Asia, to John’s desire to see the world. On the last page is Joan’s wish for John, as he sets off to travel in Europe: ‘he seems at last to have grabbed his life in both hands and shaken some sense into it. I want him to stay in that van and keep going. Drive through Europe, along the Mediterranean, down through Greece to Piraeus, jump on a ship and sail the world.’

Which brings me back to *Blue Earth*. I know now why I had to put all those piles of paper in the cupboard in Tobago: because the life stories of the Knights and Temples were nothing to do with the wide, endless, blue earth. To borrow from Forster, I doubted the Knights and the Temples for the same reason Lucy Honeychurch doubts Cecil Vyse,<sup>205</sup> whom she imagines always in a room without a view. Alice, Ian and Evelyn all existed in a world of small, shuttered rooms when I wanted to write about mountains and glaciers, arctic storms and earthquakes. They were too small, they rattled inside the Chinese box of the novel when I shook it.

### **Wykhamists in the driveway**

On 11 December 2003, I worked on the manuscript until half past three in the morning, the time at which I typed the line, ‘When the Great Sea Spirit is angry, insufficiently propitiated, she will send a dead spirit, a malignant *tupilaq*, to unsettle the mortals living on the ice shelf.’ Having reached the end of my journey, traversed my track, I then spent four hours printing and collating the manuscript. On the morning of 12 December 2003, I flew into Gatwick, returning from another long sojourn in Tobago, where I was met by a friend.

‘Take me to a Post Office, and make it snappy,’ was my greeting. That morning I posted the final draft of *Blue Earth* to my agent, with a note scrawled on the title page: ‘Maggie – I know what it’s about now’ and then I was taken to a hotel, the Wykham Arms in Winchester, Hampshire, where I slept for hours, through that day and into the next. For months, I had sat at my desk sweating in tropical heat, ignoring mosquitoes and yelping dogs, ignoring the sheen of salt spray on my skin, battenning down the jalousies as tropical storms lashed outside and rain flooded tiled floors, my days twelve hours long, my nights twelve hours long, month after month. All the time trying to switch my field view to Billy-Ray’s and Isobel’s and Frankie’s and and and ... Trying to imagine being freezing cold, flying in a float plane, trying to imagine that there were glaciers behind the back yard, rather than palm trees and bougainvillea. And all the time I could hear the waves breaking on the beach, all the time I was aware of the turning of the earth, because I could see it every night.

I woke in the Wykham Arms early in the morning of the 14 December 2003, feeling strangely bereft. They were all gone, those people I’d lived with every day for nearly three years; it no longer mattered what patterns the clouds made, whether the sea was pale or leaden. I went to the window and cracked open the curtains on a dim day, still grey even at eight o’clock (my nights were now to be sixteen hours long). In a driveway on the road opposite, a gaggle of men dressed in academic gowns were gathered, mortar boards in hand. They were bounded by pale walls, standing on beige pea gravel, in the middle of a maze of tiny streets. I felt claustrophobic, I felt alienated and yet this was my culture: English academia joshing and jeering, flaunting itself in a small, self-satisfied, moneyed city. I watched them and I was suddenly soothed by the realisation that Billy-Ray and Jacqueline, Isobel and Frankie, were all still there; it was just that they were living on the other side of the mountain. I could visit them any time.



## **SELF, MEMORY AND NARRATIVE**

The sandwiches are long gone and the Glenlivet bottle now lies empty. Our tramp across the narrativial landscape, where we paused every now and then to admire the occasional memory system along the way, is over, leaving us gazing at a mountain range, as a unicorn thunders across Death Valley in a (cherry red) Ford Mustang, disappearing into the distance. As you stab desperately at your mobile phone, trying to raise the Mountain Rescue Service, I'll take the weight off my feet and reflect on the journey.

First, we encountered the issue of self-identity and the manner in which we construct our sense of selves, how that sense flows from the outcome of the functions of many forms of memory, which are stored in a number of ways. There followed an excursion into the field of consciousness and the problems of establishing what, exactly, we mean when we use the word. A number of suggestions were made as to how we could solve the problem of who or what was ordering our inner worlds, ranging from homunculus of the inner self to the benevolent conductor. The focus then shifted to the functions and dimensions of autobiographical memory and the realisation began to emerge that there exists parallels between accounts of schema, scripts, MOPs and TOPs, and theories concerning the processes of creative thinking. This informed a discussion of whether or not to adopt a nativist theory of innate narrative/story grammar. At this point the path changed direction dramatically and various ideas were put forward to explain what it is that compels writers to write (with reference made to Thematic Organisation Packets) and what happens when writers 'imagine'; that

is, how they use their memory – semantic and episodic, long-term and short term, etc. – to provide the basis for their fiction. Finally, the process of the writing of *Blue Earth* and the influence of the environment on that writing, was analysed. And at the end of the journey, what do I think?

I think that there is a consensus of opinion, amongst practitioners and theorists of many and varied disciplines that our concept of self is dependent on our memory and that our self histories are constantly revised and updated by our working memory. It is self-evident that anything that is written as realist fiction – indeed, anything that is written at all – is mediated through the writer, and this is why the writer's sense of self is important. I believe that our impulse to narrate is driven by meta-themes and that our understanding of story grammar is innate, *a priori*, and this knowledge strongly influences the way we make sense of the world and, inevitably, influences the way that worldview is reflected in prose. As a result our interpretations of reality are subliminally broken into pico-narratives, atomistic narratives that are strung together in such a way that our expectation-supporting-norms (or prospective memory) are reinforced time and again, ensuring that what we remember corresponds to reality. This familiarity with narrative crosses temporal, cultural, ethnic, spatial and linguistic boundaries precisely because it is innate, *a priori*.

I believe that the mental act of imagining (with reference to the writing of realist fiction) relies on the exploration, elaboration and exploitation of semantic and episodic memories, both my own and other people's. I also contend that the distinction between auto-noetic and noetic memories disappears for the writer. 'Imagination' is, effectively, mimesis, imitation but not in the sense that it is a 'copy' as the original event or perception is no longer present.<sup>206</sup> Memory, or, as I have occasionally described it, the engine, needs fuel to function. Episodic memories and semantic knowledge are the vampires of mental life, they suck the blood out of perceptions of and experiences in the world and store the resultant data as proto-narrative. I believe the writer burns and converts this data into vast, unusual banks of inferential knowledge, which represent indirectly and directly experienced events. The more developed the writer's ability to manipulate his or her semantic knowledge and proto-narratives, the more plausible the narrative. If the writer is skilled at this, it will be possible for the writer to weave into his or

her narrative elaborated events and accounts of places that were either directly or indirectly experienced, and these accounts and events will not be qualitatively different. That is, it will not be possible for the reader to be able to distinguish between the auto-noetic and the noetic memories of the writer.<sup>207</sup>

‘Imagination’ appears, *prima facie*, to be boundless. Surely, if we can ‘imagine’ the unicorn in his Mustang, then it must be boundless? Not so. On the one hand I recall a CIA agent, standing in the dust clouds of Manhattan on 9/11 talking to camera and saying, ‘Imagine the unimaginable’, when what he meant was the previously unimaginable (although, of course, the pilots of the planes had been imagining it for years, no doubt, literally making pictures in their heads). On the other hand, there are some things which do appear to resist imagining: Margaret Thatcher’s social conscience, world peace, Ellen MacArthur enjoying eight hours sleep, the Alpha Mind. Of course, the first three scenarios are originally located in the ‘real’ world, suggested by an interpretation of known facts.

The existence of the Alpha Mind, however, is a theory propounded by a fictional character, Janet, earlier in this paper. It is an appealing notion, for two reasons. First, because it accounts for the reports made by cognitive psychologists of higher order mental events which occur at such a speed and in such a way that the experient is unaware of them. Secondly, precisely because it occurs ‘in such a way’, a seemingly mystical way, this relieves this writer of the responsibility for describing exactly the complex and elusive relationship between self, memory and narrative. But this is not a responsibility I can shirk. I have explained my theories regarding the role memory plays in realist fiction writing. I have gone so far as to describe my ‘imagining’ as being akin to playing with plasticine, a childlike metaphor for such a sophisticated mental act. And I have accepted Humphrey’s suggestion that there exists a ‘benevolent conductor’ who oversees these mental acts; but this ‘conductor’ is not someone other, it is a sub-self. To paraphrase Humphrey: what truly binds the elements of memory and imagination into one organic narrative unit [is] the very act of making up stories – the fact they are involved together in creating a single work of art.

Finally, I have argued that narrative is a landscape. How can it be other? We live in a three-dimensional world as three-dimensional beings – even *homo fictus* has to be somewhere. Any narrative, fictional or otherwise, is

founded on the notion that 'there is more to this than meets the eye'. Behind the house opposite a barbecue party is taking place, but I can't see it from here; the traitors are gathered on the steps of the Forum, but Caesar can't see them from his villa. Just as the mind filters and controls the amount of sensory data we receive, the writer ignores many pathways, selecting only one to follow across a spatial (and temporal) landscape.<sup>208</sup> The writer will ignore the various vistas he or she can see and choose one view, whilst being aware of unseen events (taking place off the page, as it were). These events might be the opera and supper party Isobel's parents enjoyed one evening when she was a child, leaving her fretting for a night as she imagined she would never see them again; or perhaps Annie Regan's body being racked with labour pains as Maggie sits taking tea with Michael. Both the writer and the reader accept that these things occur – characters eating, sleeping, working – in much the same way they accept that Caesar had a mother: by using their inferential knowledge.

Freytag's Triangle is unequal to the task of representing the depth of this landscape, as is Laurel's. Perhaps a better representation might be:



As Umberto Eco says, 'Once this world has been designed, the words will follow, and they will be (if all goes well) those that that world and all the events that take place in it require'.<sup>209</sup>

## **Finally ...**

I have encountered many previously unknown concepts and unexplored disciplines in the writing of this paper; the writing of which has, itself, been a journey. Having discussed the various explanations which have been offered by those who know a great deal more than I ever shall, in an attempt to answer the question ‘what happens when I stop typing and stare out of the window and what has happened when I begin to type again?’, when all is said and done, when the philosophers’ wall has been scaled or circumvented, when the cognitive psychologists’ nutshell has been cracked or put back in the bowl and I lay me down to sleep, there is one image that keeps bobbing up to float on the surface of my mind. As the reader knows, I am satisfied by Nicholas Humphrey’s suggestion that a benevolent dictator is the bundler of perception data, the overseer of memory. However, I confess, that there are times – many times – when Kliban’s God seems to illustrate exactly what it feels like to create Billy-Ray Rickman ...

The illustration has been removed from this digitized version of the thesis due to potential copyright issues.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The references to Billy-Ray Rickman, John Player Special and Mr Candid are to characters in three of my published novels: John Player is the central character in *Altered*, Chum Kane in *Mr Candid* and Billy-Ray Rickman in *Blue Earth*. Shake is the central character in *Unlocked*. I shall be referring to these works throughout the text, as well as other narratives I have written.

<sup>2</sup> Interesting to note that these authors also wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Earthly Powers*, *Cancer Ward*, *Tender is the Night*, *Howard's End*, all of them substantial works, as firmly established in the Western canon as the shorter novels.

<sup>3</sup> Umberto Eco, in his *On Literature*, remarks 'I do not have anything else to say about the way I write my novels. Except to say they take many years. I do not understand those who write a novel a year; they might be wonderful and I do admire them, but I don't envy them.'

<sup>4</sup> John Creasey, a little known mystery writer, wrote five hundred novels under ten pseudonyms. Stephen King wrote *The Running Man* in a week, yet Harper Lee took a lifetime to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

<sup>5</sup> I suggest the period one to two years because that is the timetable imposed on many writers by virtue of their contract with their publishing house. This timetable is extremely flexible but nevertheless, the writer is aware of it. Not many writers will be as insouciant as Douglas Adams, a notorious procrastinator, who once said 'I love deadlines, I love the whistling sound they make as they fly past'.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware of this difference because my second novel, *Mr Candid*, spanned six and a half years in the writing.

<sup>7</sup> Davis, *Resisting Novels*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> One eyebrow raising moment last year occurred when I read about the launch of Katie Price's (ghosted) autobiography. Clear-skinned, pneumatic and half-dressed, she posed, pouting, holding the book at an angle for the photographers. 'This says all there is to say about me. It tells the world what I am.' Unfortunately, at that moment she dropped the book and it fell open to reveal blank pages. It was a dummy put together for the occasion. Make sense of that, Umberto Eco.

<sup>9</sup> There are the tie-ins with television programmes (e.g. Michael Palin's *Himalayas*), television gardeners-turned-novelists (Alan Titchmarsh), and, of course, Dan Brown, who occupied the top four entries for the best-selling paperbacks in May 2005. Not only that, there are now books written about the Da Vinci code, and as a result, Eurostar sales rose 17%. Hmmm.

<sup>10</sup> Scholes, *The Fabulators*.

<sup>11</sup> 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.' Roland Barthes, being essentially interested in the destination of the text rather than its origin, is not of interest here.

<sup>12</sup> Llosa, Marquez, Fuentes, Calvino, Kundera, Grass, Lessing, Rushdie, de Bernieres ... the list may not be endless, but it is substantial.

<sup>13</sup> It's worth mentioning here that Tom Wolfe, who once claimed that 'New Journalism would wipe out the novel as literature's main event', published the hugely successful and entirely fictional *Bonfire of the Vanities* in 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge, *Practice of Writing*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Lodge for the notion of such a quadrant, see *Practice of Writing*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> I have direct experience of the potential problems arising from the commercial categorisation of novels in the marketplace. *Altered Land* was promoted in such a way as to appeal to the older

female reader; *Mr Candid* was described by Amazon as crime writing and by Waterstones as a psychological thriller; *Blue Earth* has suffered the indignity of being variously described as saga, as eco-novel and as love story.

<sup>18</sup> I should also say that I have no notion of what it may be like to imagine for the purposes of writing historical military fiction, nor of science fiction, children's literature, thrillers, crime fiction, chic-lit, lad-lit, etc.

<sup>19</sup> But not fortunate enough to see La Pietà prior to it being screened by glass to prevent the repetition of a hammer attack.

<sup>20</sup> In this context, the experiences of Carravagio, who murdered a man, subsequently spending years on the run, taking sanctuary wherever he could, is relevant. The style of his painting changed, the tones and hues becoming darker, the artist painting himself as the centre of violent, bloody scenes.

<sup>21</sup> I am unsure of the antonym of 'Enlightenment', because whatever it is, it is appropriate. I considered the Age of Ignorance, but we've already had one of those.

<sup>22</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §2.1, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> What Descartes was left with were not his doubts alone, but a range of thoughts, *cogitationes*; mental acts which are purely subjective, of which he was immediately aware, and which could, therefore, be described as 'his'.

<sup>24</sup> This passage is Ryles' contribution to the entry for 'Solipsism' in Urmson and Rée, *Concise Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*.

<sup>25</sup> Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness*, argues that there is a distinction between memory and anticipation and the act of imagining. Sartre suggests that when we recall an incident we posit it to ourselves as 'given-now-as-in-the-past', that is, not given-in-its-absence. Imagination, for Sartre, requires a mental act which grasps an object not given to the imager, grasps it, as it were, in its absence. This absence is an aspect of Sartrean nothingness. Effectively, Sartre is arguing that a man who imagines must, perforce, start imagining from the world he is in but treat it as a world which does not contain the imagined object. Therefore, when the man imagines he thinks of the object as non-existent. Contemporary cognitive psychologists might argue that Sartre has confused episodic and semantic memory systems. But it is interesting to consider Ryle's theory regarding memory – that there is a direct relationship between the mind and the remembered object, unmediated by a 'copy' – in the light of Sartre's theory. Indeed, Sartre might suggest the ability to imagine a unicorn supports his argument of the 'not-given' and non-existent. But this is difficult to accept as it is impossible to establish whether I could imagine a unicorn without having encountered images of unicorns throughout my life, deeply embedded as it is in English cultural history, which raises issues about the definition of 'non-existent'. (See the section of this paper entitled, 'The Unicorn's Pedigree'.)

<sup>27</sup> In fact, Neisser went so far as to say, 'If X is an important or interesting feature of human behaviour, then X has rarely been studied by psychologists'; quoted in Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to Gillian Cohen for her excellent overview of the history of research into memory, 'Historical Background: 100 years in the laboratory', pp. 1-23, *Memory in the Real World*. The quotation given here appears on p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> For a summary of how TLR and everyday memory research have converged, to a certain extent, see Cohen, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> These studies are left to neuro-chemists, neuro-physiologists and the like.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Koriat and Goldsmith, 'Memory metaphors'.

<sup>34</sup> Nisbett and Wilson, 'Telling more than we can know'.

<sup>35</sup> The translation is 'The bark of some trees is very useful to man.'

<sup>36</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 326. There are other anecdotes which will reward the assiduous reader.

<sup>37</sup> 'Neglect' here means patients who have a tendency 'to ignore the left part of their visual field', usually because of damage to the right parietal region of the brain. For a full description of the phenomena of neglect, blindsight and anarchic hand syndrome, see Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 329-33.

<sup>38</sup> *Altered Land*, p. 204



<sup>39</sup> What I object to strongly about the 'leaf falling', 'sparrow dying', 'butterfly farting' arguments is that I have yet to read an account of this argument in which the writer suggests that because no one witnessed the seiche in Valdez fjord during the 1964 Alaskan earthquake, the event has no empirical status. The tree line was decimated to a height of 1,117 feet, so we can safely infer that something happened.

<sup>40</sup> I feel it is time to outline the functions of memory. Tulving provides as good an overview as any in 'How many memory systems are there?'.

<sup>41</sup> Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 12 January 2005.

<sup>42</sup> See Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, pp. 17-25 for an explication of the famous category-type-mistake.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 1 for examples of representation.

<sup>44</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 328. Baddeley also points out these concepts are not articulated in Chinese or Serbo-Croat.

<sup>45</sup> There now exist computers which can 'learn' and 'plan' (for example, those that 'play' chess), and which employ a parallel activity process. But does it even make sense to ask if the computer enjoys playing chess, enjoyment being essential to the understanding of the word 'play'?

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted to Baddeley, *Human Memory*, pp. 255-9 for these concise objections to the computer-modelling theory.

<sup>47</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, p. 73, §6.522

<sup>48</sup> This is the position adopted by some philosophers, most notably Thomas Nagel and Colin McGinn.

<sup>49</sup> The relevant quotation is 'Nagel argues that conscious mental life involves certain essentially subjective facts, facts that can only be appreciated from the "first person" point of view, from the point of view of the subject of those conscious experiences. Such subjective facts contrast with objective facts, which are accessible from the "third-person" perspective, independent of any particular subjective point of view. Nagel concludes on this basis that any physicalist account of mind must fail to account for the subjective aspect of mental life.' See Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism*, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> I begin to suspect that this attribution is apocryphal. I have been in correspondence with the Armstrong archives office in New York and it is unable to provide me with any information about when or where Satchmo apparently said this; so, source unknown.

<sup>51</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Which implies in the *absence* of stimuli, echoes of Sartrean nothingness.

<sup>53</sup> A 'function', a 'system' and 'information' – the first two refer to the mechanisms of retaining the third element, eliding the aspects of memory. 'Memory' is a noun; 'remembering' a verb. Interestingly, we talk of 'having' a memory, of owning it, in the same way we talk of having a plasma television. This is intriguing in the light of the statements made by Humphrey about his child (see section 'The Benevolent Dictator'), Descartes about his *cogitationes* and Frege about his 'inner world' (see below, note 71).

<sup>54</sup> Reber, *Dictionary of Psychology*.

<sup>55</sup> I should make it plain here that the 'bug' to which I refer was not an insect but a shellfish. It had no name other than 'bug', in English. It bore a resemblance to nothing so much as a trilobite and constituted the main element of one of the best suppers I have ever eaten.

<sup>56</sup> More, Chum Kane changes; as I 'remember' him he changes. He is a copy of something that does not exist, that has no epistemological status.

<sup>57</sup> This reminds me of piece, 'Here Lies Miss Groby', written by the peerless James Thurber, reproduced in *The Thurber Carnival*, pp. 52-59. In the piece Thurber remembers the mania of Miss Groby, his English teacher, for parsing prose. 'She hunted for Topic Sentences and Transitional Sentences the way little girls hunt for white violets in springtime.' She instructed the student Thurber to search for examples of 'Container for the Thing Contained' in Shakespeare and the works of Sir Walter Scott. I make no apologies for quoting at length:

At first I began to fear that all the characters in Shakespeare and Scott were crazy. They confused cause with effect, the sign for the thing signified, the thing held for the thing holding it. But after a while I began to suspect that it was I myself who was crazy. I would find myself lying awake at night saying over and over, "The thing for the thing contained." In a great but probably misguided attempt to keep my mind on its hinges, I would stare at the ceiling and try to think of an example of the Thing Contained for the Container. It struck me as odd that Miss Groby had never thought of that inversion. I finally hit on one, which I still remember. If a woman were to grab up a bottle of Grade

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A and say to her husband, "Get away from me or I'll hit you with the milk," that would be a Thing Contained for the Container.

My point being that a model of working memory may, too, be a Thing Contained for the Container.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 227.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, 'Coding Dualism'. This is an on-line article and, as such, pages cannot be referenced.

<sup>60</sup> This is an interesting turn of phrase – 'thinking with them', as if mental representations are analogous to food and the mind is a knife and fork, or the reverse? Or perhaps a better analogy would be that of a painter (thinker) utilising/manipulating tubes of oil (mental representations). Hmmm.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, 'Coding Dualism'.

<sup>62</sup> This reminds me of a character in *Altered Land*, Sonje, who suffers from the condition synaesthesia, which means, literally, the coming together of the senses. This is nonsense, of course, since the coming together of senses is how we all perceive the world. The difference in Sonje's case is that the coming together, the ordering of the perception data is confused, when compared to the vast majority of mammals. Sonje smells temperature, hears gustatory stimuli, even tastes emotions. This condition exists.

<sup>63</sup> Which throws up the question of whether it would make sense to talk of a person being 'the thing contained for the container' (see note 54).

<sup>64</sup> Paivio, *Mental Representations*.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas, 'Coding Dualism'.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix 1 for a model of the central executive.

<sup>67</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, pp. 85-101.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>69</sup> Billy-Ray Rickman is the main character in *Blue Earth*.

<sup>70</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, pp. 370-71.

<sup>71</sup> Humphrey, 'One-Self: A meditation on the unity of consciousness'.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>75</sup> Humphrey provides a rather more cultured example, a passage from Proust's *Recherche*: 'When I used to wake up in the middle of the night not knowing where I was, I could not even be sure a first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness ... but then ... out of a blurred glimpse of oil-lamps, of shirts with turned-down collars, [I] would gradually piece together the original components of my ego'. This also reminiscent of Freud's description of the many selves in *Delusion and Dream*, pp. 135-45.

<sup>76</sup> Humphrey, 'One-self', p. 36.

<sup>77</sup> If this train of thought seems to be dragging us back to a solipsistic standpoint, inasmuch as the existence of the child could be argued to be predicated on the presence of the father perceiving it, it would be well to note that what Humphrey is saying is that he cannot look at his child without thinking 'baby', rather than 'set of sub-selves'. This is a matter for semioticians rather than solipsistic philosophers, since it is the nature of the signifier rather than the object signified to which Humphrey is referring.

<sup>78</sup> Humphrey, 'One-self', p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>80</sup> From Kintsch, 'Semantic Memory', pp. 581-87.

<sup>81</sup> This model is based on Aristotle's own (logical and not psychological) semantic-structure for genus-species.

<sup>82</sup> I still experience a niggling concern about this key question, precisely because of Frege's assertion that any discussion of 'the inner world presupposes the person whose inner world it is'. On reflection, I can only think that Frege's comment is a very blunt, very effective cudgel aimed at the tender head of dualism. Because he has in this statement incorporated the notion of possession ('whose'), he implies the very theory Humphrey is propounding – that it is impossible to imagine an inner world existing independently of a person, just as it is impossible for Humphrey to look at the object in the cot and not think 'baby'.

<sup>83</sup> I am not referring here to those who suffer from neural abnormalities (amnesia or autism for example), or those who for psychological reasons have false memory syndrome, or

obsessive/compulsive behaviours, or ersatz memories occasioned by hypnosis etc. I am referring to those aspects of memory experienced by those who would be described by psychologists as enjoying good mental and neural health.

<sup>84</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 147

<sup>85</sup> Brewer, 'What is autobiographical memory?', p. 271.

<sup>86</sup> Conway, *Flashbulb Memories*, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 147

<sup>88</sup> I have worried about this analogy time and again. Sometimes I am persuaded (by myself – or perhaps a sub-self?) that autobiographical memory is the bottle, sometimes the glasses. The problem is a Rylean one – if the champagne is perception data, then is autobiographical memory the glasses, and so on ...? Where, in short, is the fountain?

<sup>89</sup> Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p. 217.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>91</sup> 'Midweek', Radio 4, 25 January 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 149. As Barbara Hardy remarked, 'Even logicians tell stories', *Tellers and Listeners*, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Remember the pop art poster, which depicted a woman standing with hand slapped to forehead in surprise, the speech bubble announcing 'Damn – I forgot to have children'? It sold in the thousands.

<sup>94</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 46.

<sup>95</sup> In *The Writing Life* Dillard, interestingly, remarks that 'A writer's childhood may well have been the occasion of his only first-hand experience', p. 109. I can only assume that here she is talking of a time of subjective experience before semantic knowledge begins to develop – before the child assimilates experiences of others, encounters media in all its forms, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Tulving, 'How many memory systems are there?', p. 389.

<sup>97</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 146.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>99</sup> Schank and Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding*, pp. 89-112.

<sup>100</sup> This leads me to ask if I have a script for writing a novel? A script within a script as it were.

<sup>101</sup> It is one thing to point to a BMW 645 and say 'car' for the benefit of a two year old; it is another to point to a woman dressed in black suit and white coat and say 'phenomenologist' for the benefit of a forty-six year old. Why? For many reasons. The child will begin to perform set inferences, and recognise that Minis and Skodas are also cars. Already the child is beginning to build schema about transport, relative size, etc. But what can I do with the phenomenologist? I am too well-practised in semantics to assume that every woman, or every woman in a black hat and white coat, is a phenomenologist.

<sup>102</sup> Schank, *Dynamic Memory*, p. 112.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-61.

<sup>104</sup> Neisser, 'Snapshots or benchmarks?' in Neisser (ed.), *Memory Observed*.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Brooks argues that a struggle between Freudian pleasure/reality principle and the desire to death is at the heart of our wish to read and tell stories and to reach the end of the narrative. 'All narrative may be in essence obituary in that ... the retrospective knowledge that it seeks, the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death.' For Brooks, plots and narrative are tied to our sense of 'the human life-world'. Quoted in Felluga, *Critical Theory*.

<sup>106</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 276.

<sup>107</sup> Mandler, *Stories, scripts and scenes*, p. 76.

<sup>108</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 277.

<sup>109</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 41.

<sup>110</sup> Ridley, *Nature via Nurture*, p. 216.

<sup>111</sup> See Ridley, *ibid.*, pp. 216-22 for a full exposition of the various proofs for the primacy of gesture in the acquisition of language.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>113</sup> Evidence for this is the dimension of the space provided for the spinal cord in *homo sapiens*. Only in our case is the spinal cord broad enough to accommodate the nerves to the chest which control the complex muscle contractions and breathing that accompany speech.

<sup>114</sup> 'To imitate' – to mimic and make copies. There is here the suggestion of recreating, of copying from memory.

<sup>115</sup> Deacon, *The Symbolic Species*, pp. 113-19.

- <sup>116</sup> Ridley, *Nature via Nurture*, p. 220.
- <sup>117</sup> *Sunday Times*, 'High Notes of the Singing Neanderthals', 30 January 2005.
- <sup>118</sup> See Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 (P. Smith, New York, 1970).
- <sup>119</sup> Müller's major work was *The Antiquity of Vedic Astrology* (1873).
- <sup>120</sup> Freud described myths as 'the secular dreams of young humanity', which raises questions about the Freudian definition of 'secular'.
- <sup>121</sup> It is estimated that the painting was completed roughly 15,000 years ago.
- <sup>122</sup> Bruner, *Making Stories*, p. 8.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9
- <sup>125</sup> Interesting to note the etymology of the word 'narrative', which compounds 'narrare' (telling) with 'gnarus' (knowing in some particular way). See Bruner, p. 27. Or, to put it another way, 'telling (sharing) a particular type of knowledge; autonotic/noetic knowledge perhaps?
- <sup>126</sup> Source unknown.
- <sup>127</sup> Allott, *Novelists* – an absolutely riveting book.
- <sup>128</sup> 'There is no known language without some case marking for such narrative essentials as agent, action, object, direction, aspect and the rest ...' (Bruner, *Making Stories*, p. 33).
- <sup>129</sup> Wallas, *The Act of Thought*, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>130</sup> Quoted in Czerniewska, *Learning About Writing*, p. 89.
- <sup>131</sup> Robertson, *Types of Thinking*, pp. 41-42.
- <sup>132</sup> I could supply any number of differently named theories and models for this process but this is not the place. I simply want to stress the general agreement regarding the main elements.
- <sup>133</sup> Interesting, here, to note that Umberto Eco in his *On Literature*, pp. 307-9, accuses interviewers who ask writers, 'What are the phases one goes through in the genesis of a text?' of holding one of two contradictory views – that either the text develops 'in the mysterious heat of inspirational raptus', or the writer has followed 'a kind of secret set of rules'. Eco denies there is a set of rules, or any 'hot magma of inspiration', yet maintains that 'there is a sort of initial idea and that there are very precise phases in a process that develops only gradually'. He maintains that the genesis of his novels arise from 'a seminal image' – in the case of *The Name of the Rose*, that of a monk murdered as he read, and for John Fowles, a woman standing on the Cob.
- <sup>134</sup> Kennedy, 'Avoid the Spinning Plates', p. 3.
- <sup>135</sup> Bruner describes the 'impetus to narrative is expectation gone awry', *Making Stories*, p. 28.
- <sup>136</sup> I realise that there are circumstances in which this might be the case, usually in the genre of crime or thriller fiction – the character who reappears in one book after another, Inspector Rebus or James Bond or example – but I am considering traditional realist literature. I know that readers of Ian Rankin will reply that his is realist fiction, but the demands of crime/thriller writing are essentially different.
- <sup>137</sup> The seven stories frameworks are: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy and rebirth. See Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*.
- <sup>138</sup> 'La Corrida', published by Francis Ford Coppola's production company Zoetrope, in the e-magazine, *Zoetrope* ([www.zoetrope.com](http://www.zoetrope.com)), 1998.
- <sup>139</sup> Sartre argues that imagining is, essentially, grasping at nothingness, grasping at a world that does not exist. My argument is that I am transforming what did happen to what might (future) have (past) happened. Sartre argues that there is a distinction between the function of imagination and the interpretation of what is imagined. I cannot agree; the interpretation will rely heavily on the functions of semantic knowledge as stored in a memory sub-system and it is no refutation to claim that the function of imagination is not interdependent with other memory sub-systems.
- <sup>140</sup> Gentry and Stull, *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, p. 52.
- <sup>141</sup> Bruner, *Making Stories*, p. 86.
- <sup>142</sup> See Appendix 2 for a further discussion of dysnarrativia.
- <sup>143</sup> Bruner, *Making Stories*, p. 86.
- <sup>144</sup> I need not comment on how appalling it is ...
- <sup>145</sup> Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*.
- <sup>146</sup> Interesting to note the echoes here with Barthes' description of the alignment of the hermeneutic code and the proairetic code producing 'the same tonal determination that melody and harmony have in classical music', *S/Z*, p. 24.
- <sup>147</sup> For example, see Bruner's account of Dan Slobin's theories in *Making Stories*, pp. 73-75. I have often felt this myself. Many is the time I have stood in the shower, musing on some aspect

of the emotional world and ended up muttering 'The Italians would have a word for it' when my own language fails to represent my thought.

<sup>148</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*.

<sup>149</sup> Famously, the marble used for the sculpture had been abandoned forty years before by Agostino di Duccio, who had partially carved it as David himself, before declaring the marble damaged and unusable.

<sup>150</sup> Copplestone, *Michelangelo*, p. 156.

<sup>151</sup> What attracted me to the idea was the essence of Leibniz' theory: 'No two beings can be in the same place, because properties of a monad area function of its place, so that to have the same properties, the two would have to be in the same place, i.e., be one and not two.' See Urmson and Ree, *Western Philosophy and Philosophers* (Unwin, London, 1989), p. 168.

<sup>152</sup> Dorothy later became Isobel Chalfont-Webbe.

<sup>153</sup> See *Blue Earth*, p. 348 for an explanation of this.

<sup>154</sup> For Warnock, the answer is simple: 'For a philosopher a theory of imagination is a theory of self' – and I have to agree, given that our self-concept derives from the functions of memory, and imagination could be said to be a function of memory. From *Imagination*, p. 90.

<sup>155</sup> For Hobbes imagination 'is fundamentally a form of memory but a memory freed to some degree from the restrictions of actual experience'; which is a sound definition but one which lacks clarity since the locus of the problem of accounting for 'imagination' exists in the phrase 'to some degree'. For Hume imagination was the faculty that 'reproduces impressions, so we can think of them in their absence'. Hume, however, distinguishes between memory ('forceful' and 'ty'd down') and imagination ('faint and languid' and 'transposed') (*Treatise*, Book I, Part 1, section 3).

<sup>156</sup> From *New Collins Concise English Dictionary*, 1986.

<sup>157</sup> Reber, *Dictionary of Psychology*, p.358.

<sup>158</sup> Most philosophers and psychologists rely heavily on the visual when referring to images or mental representations. Coleridge deplored this and suggested we should wean children away from the 'despotism of the eye'. See Walsh, *Uses of Imagination*, p. 28, as well as Warnock's chapter on Coleridge and Wordsworth in *Imagination*.

<sup>159</sup> Conway, *Flashbulb Memories*, p. 17.

<sup>160</sup> This echoes the points made earlier regarding the field/observer characteristics of memory.

<sup>161</sup> Warnock has argued that a successful act of imagination requires that: 'besides its visual appearance, we should also create, or revive, in ourselves some of the affective aspects of the scene, and feel in ourselves some of the emotions which the scene would produce in us if it were there in reality' (*Imagination*, p. 169). Surely, if, as Warnock suggests, we are representing to ourselves copies – or imitations – then the affective qualities are inherent in the imagined object. This is the problem Humphrey encounters with 'baby' – the quality of consciousness is incorporated in the word 'baby'.

<sup>162</sup> In Allott, *Novelists*, there are some interesting insights into how writers feel about this. Charlotte Brontë described herself as having 'two selves', the woman and the writer; George Eliot described herself as 'not-self' when she wrote; and Woolf referred to 'some sort of speaker' other than her being the person who wrote. All of them women ... there's another doctoral thesis here. Allott, *Novelists*, pp. 141-60.

<sup>163</sup> As John Irving said in an interview, you can be 'tyrannised by the authenticity of your memory', *New York Times*, 6 December 2001.

<sup>164</sup> See *Blue Earth*, pp. 247-60.

<sup>165</sup> Sinnot makes an interesting observation: 'the mind has a truly morphogenic quality about it. The patterns it makes are new things, not repetitions of something in the past' (quoted in Vernon, *Creativity*, p. 112). The patterns may be new but the material used is already known, surely, as semantic knowledge.

<sup>166</sup> Some philosophers, Warnock, for example, consider empathy to be a universalising function of imagination, precisely so we can understand someone else's imagination. To muddy the waters, Coleridge and Wordsworth both believed that we need reason, followed by imagination to arrive at universals (*Imagination*, p.100).

<sup>167</sup> Keats described this as the novelists capacity for 'filling some other body' – see Allott, *Novelists*, p. 203.

<sup>168</sup> I should stress here that 'imagining' does *not* refer to the solving of problems to do with plotting, or tinkering with the construction of sentences, or editorial processes which correct imbalances of pace.

<sup>169</sup> See Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 146.

<sup>170</sup> Freud, *Delusion and Dream*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>171</sup> Davis, *Resisting Novels*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>172</sup> It is an accepted fact that the scope and characteristics of novels themselves have changed over the centuries. For example, in the nineteenth century some European writers (Zola, Hardy, Dickens, Tolstoy etc.) were concerned with the novel as observations of social realism; their novels worked within open systems, revolving around incident and incoherence. Others (Austen, Flaubert, Turgenev) wrote more from subjective experience, writing within closed systems of limited experience, striving towards order and harmony. More, over time 'individual experience begins to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality' and, possibly, cultural value, which has had the effect of consigning novels written within open systems to the metaphorical trash can labelled 'sagas'.

<sup>173</sup> Davis, *Resisting Novels*, p.119.

<sup>174</sup> Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation*, pp. 153-54

<sup>175</sup> Sebald as precursor of post-modernism?

<sup>176</sup> Cherry, *On Human Communication*, pp. 67-78.

<sup>177</sup> R. L. Stevenson was accused of having 'performed psychical surgery on a valued friend' in order to create the character of Long John Silver.

<sup>178</sup> It might be argued that this act of memorising is no different from learning the formulae of Physics for an examination. But I believe that there are fundamental differences between the memory of 'density equals mass divided by volume' and somebody else's account of a miscarriage, not least the motive for memorising both. Certainly the principles of Physics cannot be morphed in the same way as my image of Billy-Ray Rickman.

<sup>179</sup> Allott, *Novelists*, p.197.

<sup>180</sup> Koehne, in Gentry and Stull, *Carver*, p. 8.

<sup>181</sup> Weber, *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>182</sup> D. H. Lawrence wrote that 'great authors should not try to squeeze into small characters'. Thank God Carver ignored the advice.

<sup>183</sup> A good example of this would be Carver's short story, 'Why Don't You Dance?', in *Where I'm Calling From*. I would say, though, that just about any Carver story will illustrate this point.

<sup>184</sup> Bruner, *Making Stories*, p.6.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>186</sup> Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, p. 100.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> And now, in the third week of July, as I check this paper for errors, I see this paragraph, and since the last draft we have acquired memories of what has become known as 7/7 – the London bombings and following that event, the four failed London bombings. What is different, in terms of the sharing of experience, between 9/11 and 7/7 is that now people use the videos and cameras on their mobile phones to transmit images of what is happening even below ground, in real time; previously unseen, but perhaps not unimaginable.

<sup>189</sup> Brown and Kulik, 'Flashbulb Memory', in Neisser, *Memory Observed*, pp. 89-99.

<sup>190</sup> It should be said that there is no denying amongst psychologists that flashbulb memories exist. There is debate only about why they remain so unchanged and are encoded so vividly. Brown and Kulik, for example, argue that it a neural mechanism, triggered by factors such as fear, surprise and extreme emotion, which causes the memory to encode a 'printed' image of the whole event (*ibid.*). Conversely, Neisser argues that it because we 'rehearse' and repeat the event with others – the flashbulb effect occurs because of successive reconstructions.

<sup>191</sup> Working title, to be published by Simon and Schuster, 2006.

<sup>192</sup> More of this 'making' later ...

<sup>193</sup> Obviously, I am not claiming that these subsets are the same for everyone. The Aborigine in his plywood shack, the Taliban fighter in the hills of Afghanistan, the teenage Palestinian refugee in the camps will all have substantially different responses to my own. Yet it might be argued that they might share their own subsets with others in the same circumstances or of the same culture.

<sup>194</sup> Again, the issue of the universalising function of memory and imagination arises.

<sup>195</sup> This is a clear example of the universalising function of imagination, as described by Warnock in *Imagination*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>196</sup> Let us not forget that there exists in America the VW Rabbit.

<sup>197</sup> Zola and other social realists placed landscape at the centre of their novels – indeed the narrative sprang from the interplay between the characters and the landscape; without the landscape (Wessex, the slums of Paris etc.) there would be no narrative. Many contemporary writers – despite working within closed systems – do the same: Annie Proulx, Elmore Leonard, Anna Tyler, Paul Auster, John Updike, etc. For many of these landscape *becomes* a character.

<sup>198</sup> I would agree with Freud's assertion that 'the artist ... understands how to elaborate his daydreams', *Dreams and Delusions*, p. 156.

<sup>199</sup> For an interesting account of these approaches, see Hughes, 'Narrative as Landscape'.

<sup>200</sup> This is an on-line article and pages cannot be referenced.

<sup>201</sup> Perhaps some might argue that as a writer of fiction, I do the same. An interesting interface between reality and fiction is located precisely at the point of location. To reprise Spike Milligan, 'everyone has to be somewhere', even *homo fictus*. In *Altered Land* the setting is Bristol and the southwest of England. The roads and urban areas, shops, pubs and restaurants are named, they exist and they are located where they should be. In *Mr Candid*, the highways are correctly numbered, the cities and towns are named, and are located where they should be. In *Blue Earth* the pipeline, the mountains, the Cotswold countryside are accurately named and described. But Jarman House does not exist, although Thurloe Square does; in *Unlocked* I have created an entirely fictitious but plausible (geologically, economically and racially speaking) republic. I would describe this location as virtual.

<sup>202</sup> I am reminded here of Barthes' assertion that writerly texts have multiple entrances and exits. I realise that his theory refers to the potential for a non-linear reading of text but it struck a chord. Not least because of his dismissal of the plot triangle and his replacement of that triangle with a constellation, a "'nebulae" of signifieds' (*S/Z*, p. 79).

<sup>203</sup> Smith, in his *Writing and the Writer* describes the processes of re-writing and editing as 'covering the traces', making invisible the mistakes or changes of direction (pp. 35-49).

<sup>204</sup> *Blue Earth*, p. 378.

<sup>205</sup> Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 134.

<sup>206</sup> Jonathan Franzen wrote *The Corrections* wearing a blindfold, ear defenders and gloves, standing at a lectern, touch-typing. Dashed uncomfortable I would have thought, but this neatly illustrates the argument that images are not copies.

<sup>207</sup> As Lodge writes, 'the novelist works his effect partly by concealing the seams that join what he has experienced to what he has researched or invented', *Practice of Writing*, p. 31.

<sup>208</sup> Eco says of *The Island of the Day Before* that he wished to write about 'nature and nothing else' and so he elected to write about a man shipwrecked on a deserted island. As he incubated this idea, Eco became intrigued by the international date line, and as he flicked through an atlas, he discovered that 'the line also passed through Fijian archipelago ... At this point other memories intervened, *other trails opened up*' (*italics mine*).

<sup>209</sup> Eco, *On Literature*, p. 316.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendices 1 and 4 have been removed from this digitized thesis due to potential copyright issues.



## **APPENDIX 2: Dysnarrativia**

I tried to unearth studies of this condition but was unable to find any precise information and so I consigned the search to my mental dustbin. However, I find myself thinking about it frequently and have spent time considering what it is, exactly, that the sufferers of dysnarrativia cannot understand. I turned to a childhood favourite of mine, the French cartoonist, Sempé, and leafed through a few of his books. I remembered that the reason I used to laugh like a drain, despite the fact the books were in French, was the simplicity, the dynamism of the ‘stories’ he framed (language was no impediment). On the following pages there are four cartoons, of which three are single frame – the starting line, the car crash and the library; the fourth is a panel of five frames, the bath.

Within the first three, there are differences – the starting line and the car crash rely for their narrative on events which have already happened, unseen, unexplained, descriptionless. The third panel, the library, is situated in the ‘now’. If Sempé had elected to draw these three cartoons as panels, what would he have shown? Competitors gathering on the line? Two cars being driven along the same street? A man reading a book in a library? A moment’s thought makes us realise that we do not need to know these things. We can infer what happened before from what is happening ‘now’, even though the precise locations of the runners and the drivers are integral to our understanding of the pico-narrative. In fact, the ‘now’ in the runners cartoon is fluid – it is still happening. However, the fourth cartoon requires that it is a five-frame panel; if we look only at the last then there is uncertainty, we cannot construct what has happened in the past. The

woman may be in peril. It is essential for the 'story' that we know she is in a hotel and we know that she is secure in imagining herself alone.

So, how might those suffering from dysnarrativia view these images? Given that they have, apparently, no grasp of cause and effect, then perhaps they would not comprehend the pico-narratives at all? I am not interested in whether they find humour in the cartoons, but in the question of whether they can decode the signs of the smoking gun and the falling lamp, the crumpled car bonnets, the falling of the sign, and the unintended results? Or, like Clive Wearing (the total amnesiac) are they unable to comprehend 'now' as sandwiched between past and present? And even if they can decode these signs, do they 'forget' the signified? Is it that they cannot serially represent to themselves the events decoded? Obviously, the fourth cartoon is presented to the viewer serially, and Sempé assumes that the viewer will be constructing the narrative in parallel and empathising with the woman's desire for privacy (it doesn't matter whether there is someone in the woman's hotel room, only in the bathroom – even this assumption is value-laden). It would be interesting to know whether a patient suffering from dysnarrativia would find all Sempé's presentations equally difficult to decode and recode (that is, make deductions about what had happened before).

It might be that the answer lies in the phrase above: 'we cannot construct what has happened in the past'. Perhaps I should have written '*reconstruct* what has happened in the past'? Although in reality nothing has happened in the past to the non-existent runners and drivers, we effectively reconstruct – work backwards in a way – what probably happened. And this may be what a patient suffering from dysnarrativia cannot do - he or she cannot recode or decode the non-existent, the not-here.

### **APPENDIX 3: excerpts from *Imogen's Dream***

Hyde Park. Reached by crossing a zig-zag of glittering, mazed roads. Thin, pointed corners pointing nowhere. People milling still – in the heat – following a pointed corner's pointing finger. Defiant verdant monster threatened by towering hotels. Rest a moment and listen to the whispering of the small, mouldering buildings dotted between hotels. 'How it might have been? This is how it might have been.' And it is just possible to imagine that the one – the One – is resting in a room near here. Dressed in a startling white shirt, sipping cold Rhine wine in a hotel room near here.

The One ... waiting.

(page 90)

And the One – in the hotel room – shifts more easily, as the heat moves still further away. A white splash on the old, deeply sprung bed. A cold splash on the finely downed arm as wine spills. The heat shies away from this room, in the small hotel, leaving room for the soft gloom of light-pools around the bed. The bedroom is waiting for dusk on a long summer day.

How it might have been? This is how it might have been.

(page 94)

And in the hotel room the light fades more quickly than on the sunny, littered streets. There is a chill breeze coming through an open window ...

- Muslin on chintz, stroking walnut lines –

There is no sound in this room, but for the fading chinks of glass on glass. A flash of blinding white as someOne shifts on the creaking bed.

(page 103)

On the bed the body stretches. Stretching to its longest length. The sound of ripping as the dazzling white shirt tears and the sound of giggling as the body bunches to look at the flesh behind this tear.

(page 106)

Outside, cars, buses and neon light the streets. A kaleidoscope. Yellow, red, blue, white, green lights, moving and still, fight the night. Dazzling, blinding lights flickering everywhere. Except in one almost-silent room, where the soft hiss of a gas lamp can be heard above the sound of gentle snores.

It is cold now.

(page 108)

The vignette in the musty room is struggling for life. For the night has been within the room for a long time. The night for which it lives. The night for which it waited. The waiting so carefully, painstakingly played out in this room. Played out every night. The snores now quiet, milky sobs. This room has heard them before, has heard them every night. Perhaps it is the room that cries for the crumpled, white bundle on the old bed? Perhaps not. The room settles, the snores are heard once more. The bottle is empty, the glass turns silently on the table. The bedroom is waiting for morning through a dark, sultry night.

‘How it might have been? This is how it might have been.’

Waiting for the One who never comes.

(page 112)

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