

2007

## Notions of truth in contemporary narrative : Where the truth lies

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NOTIONS OF TRUTH IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE: WHERE THE  
TRUTH LIES

BY

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Bachelor Of Arts (English)

International, Cultural & Community Studies

Date of Submission: July 3rd 2007

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Creative nonfiction narratives have in recent times become increasingly popular. This thesis sets out to examine what is at the heart of the unique reading experience that creative nonfiction narratives offer readers. It begins with an analysis of various definitions of both creative nonfiction and fiction in order to establish the way, or ways in which they are held to differ or be distinguishable from one another. Though various definitions assert that there are distinct differences between fiction and creative nonfiction narratives, several make mention of occasions where the boundaries between the two may become indistinct. On such occasions, as when fiction relies heavily on fact or creative nonfiction is enhanced by literary technique, they make cursory mention of a reader's role in distinguishing a factual narrative from a fictional one. In light of these definitions a comparison of the words on the page between creative nonfiction and fiction begins to highlight difficulties in distinguishing what is a factually based narrative and what is fiction—leaving aside extra-textual information. It is argued that an examination of factual material from a creative nonfiction narrative, when compared to a similar excerpt from a work of fiction, reveals no evidence of the truth, or reality to which it corresponds. This issue of evidence is further extended throughout the comparison of creative nonfiction and fiction narratives. Attention is then turned to the reader's role in creating the sense of difference between the narratives. An analysis of two notorious literary impostures further illustrates the role of readers, and their desire for true stories about real people and events, in the creation of the 'truth effect'. It is concluded that a reader brings to the text assumptions about autobiographical narratives and a desire for the real and is thereby implicated in the creation of the 'truth effect', for which creative nonfiction narratives are so popular.

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For Chris.

I wish to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe my supervisor, Dr. Richard Rossiter, and my sincere appreciation of his constant guidance, insight and patience throughout this study.

I also wish to acknowledge, and specifically thank, the kind support of ECU staff members, Sarah Kearn, Peter Bedford and Nichola Webb.

Most importantly, I wish to thank my family, Tom, Anjelica, Mitchell and Ashleigh, for their constant love and reinforcement.

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## Part One: Introduction

In light of the recent rise in popularity of the creative nonfiction genre, this thesis examines what is at the heart of the unique reading experience shared by readers of such narratives. It examines what it is these evocative narratives offer readers that fiction does not. It looks closely at the words on the page of both genres to see if the 'truth', for which creative nonfiction is popular, is present within the pages of the narrative as something distinguishable from fiction, or whether the sense of difference between the genres stems from differences in a reader's approach to the narratives.

Part two of this analysis considers several definitions of both creative nonfiction and fiction to consider the way, or ways in which they are commonly held to differ or said to be distinguishable from each other. In light of these definitions a comparison of creative nonfiction and fiction texts follows, with emphasis on the reader and how the sense of difference between creative nonfiction and fiction narratives may be formed.

The thesis is concerned with the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. Insight from reader response criticism informs the discussion of the role of the reader. The ideal reader is one who is an agent of both meaning and effect, as reader response criticism holds: '[r]eaders' experiences will govern the effects the text produces on them' and that readers 'assemble the meaning(s), thus becoming coauthors in a sense' (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman & Willingham, 2005, p.355). Textual

interpretation, then, according to 'psychological' reader response criticism, is a process based on experiences, both life and textual, that a reader brings to the text.

A comparison of Helen Garner's creative nonfiction narrative, *The First Stone* and her prose fiction *The Children's Bach*, begins in part three with a focus on factual material used in *The First Stone*. An excerpt, taken from a transcript of a police interview, is compared with a similar fictional excerpt. This thesis argues that the sense of difference between the excerpts is based on the knowledge of genre which the reader brings to the narrative. The comparison continues with a consideration of the way in which individuals in both genres are constructed. The emphasis is on whether or not a real person can be distinguished from a fictionalised character. This argument continues with a focus on the 'subjective voice', for which creative nonfiction is known; and narrative modes such as language, diction, tone and figurative language and the creative treatment of fact.

A similar analysis of Alice Sebold's memoir, *Lucky* and her novel *The Lovely Bones*, follows the analysis of Garner's narratives. The comparison of the narratives centres on the ways in which the psychological impact of rape and violence is represented in both narratives. The focus is on the language, such as diction and imagery, and the use of setting as a technique in both narratives to contrast the commonplace with the horrific. The concluding argument, of part three, considers what effect or effects are produced by the reader's knowledge that *Lucky* is a memoir and the name Alice Sebold on the cover of the narrative is the same as the narrative 'I' within the pages.

The final point of analysis is drawn from two literary impostures, Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* and Helen Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. This adds further insight into where the sense of creative nonfiction narrative's 'truth' comes from, in light of the assumptions with which the reader approaches narratives of this type. The argument centres on the reader's assumption, as promised by the conventions of autobiography, of the authenticity of the identity of the author outside the narrative and what effect this assumption has upon a reader.

It is worth first noting the work of two theorists closely related to this topic. The first theoretical work to be mentioned here is Lars Ole Sauerberg's *Fact Into Fiction: Documentary Realism in the Contemporary Novel* (1991). The work is relevant here in terms of Sauerberg's look at the differences between literary and non-literary texts in terms of the function they fulfil as either 'recreational' or 'informational' (p. 40). Sauerberg's analysis, mainly focused on realist texts, further considers reality reference (or documentary realism as he terms it) in fiction as highlighting the artificiality of the text rather than enhancing its realism. Although his analysis is closely related to the current topic it does not consider how differences between creative nonfiction and fiction are established, given that both are by nature creative endeavours.

The second critical work that I draw on in some detail is an essay by Tzvetan Todorov, 'Fictions and Truths' found in *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life* (1994). Todorov examines the construction of truth in narrative as an effect created by rhetoric. Todorov's work is relevant to this thesis in terms of how particular conventions employed by narratives, such as language, selection of detail, form and voice impress upon the reader a sense of truthful correspondence. His discussion centres on what he identifies as an obvious incongruity between the name of the

continent America and the fact that American children are taught that Columbus 'discovered' the continent(1994). Todorov argues that the naming of the continent came down to a literary contest of sorts. He explains that navigator and explorer Amerigo Vespucci's account of his voyage and discovery were '*better written than the letters of Columbus*' and

what the christening of the continent celebrates is not the intellectual discovery, but—whether its godfathers knew it or not—a superior literary achievement. Amerigo's glory is due to the forty-odd little pages making up the two letters published in his lifetime. (Emphasis in original, 1994, p. 36)

His analysis is based on a comparison of the navigators' letters, which were approximately of the same length. Columbus' 'utilitarian missives' were dull in comparison to Amerigo's accounts which dazzled his friends, distracted and enchanted them (*ibid.*, p. 37). The power of Amerigo's account lay in its form, its voice and the way Amerigo assumes the reader he addresses is informed and intelligent. Todorov's conclusion from this detailed analysis is 'Columbus writes documents; Amerigo writes literature' (*ibid.*). As his analysis primarily centres on the text itself and the role of language in creating impressions of truth, it assumes a passive reader and does not address what role the reader plays in decoding the text and constructing the sense of, or effect of truth for which creative nonfiction narrative is popular.

## Part Two: Defining Creative Nonfiction & Fiction Narrative

### *Creative nonfiction*

In a chapter entitled 'What Makes it Distinctive', from his book *Literary Nonfiction: the Fourth Genre*, author Stephen Minot defines creative nonfiction as having 'three basic characteristics': '[i]t is based on actual events, characters, and places; it is written with a special concern for language; and it tends to be more personal than other types of nonfiction writing' (2003, p.1). These basic characteristics are typical of various definitions of the genre. Lee Gutkind, editor and founder of The Creative Nonfiction Online Journal, further defines the genre as 'dramatic true stories using scenes, dialogue, close, detailed descriptions and other techniques usually employed by poets and fiction writers about important subjects' (n.d.a, p.1). The following analysis is loosely structured around the three basic characteristics of creative nonfiction put forth by Minot.

Using facts, Gutkind explains, writers of creative nonfiction 'simultaneously "showcase" or "frame" fact in a creative way' (n.d.b, p.2). Kristen Iversen in *Shadow Boxing: Art and Craft in Creative Nonfiction*, states, 'creative nonfiction is literary writing that is based—perhaps loosely, perhaps rigidly—on real-life situations. Creative nonfiction depends upon factual information in ways that fiction does not' and 'like fiction... creative nonfiction is based on good storytelling' (2004, p. ix). Factual information is what Iversen terms, '[t]he tools of reality', which she lists as 'fact, research, history, investigative reporting, experience, and memory' (*ibid.*). These elements come from 'the "real" world rather than a "purely imagined" one' (*ibid.*).

It is this use of fact that Minot asserts accounts for 'a definable line between literary nonfiction and **fiction**' (Emphasis in original, 2003, p.1). He further adds, 'some short stories and novels that draw heavily on actual events and characters seem like nonfiction. But the fiction writer's approach is significantly different. As a result, readers respond with different assumptions' (*ibid.* p.1.). Minot explains that the difference between creative nonfiction and fiction is a matter of 'commitment'. His premise of difference holds that 'the fiction writer is committed to creating a work of art known as a story or novel', whereas the creative nonfiction writer is 'faithful to actual people places and events', though there is a certain 'freedom to select what to emphasize and what to ignore' (*ibid.* p.2).

This commitment to fact is a tacit understanding between author and reader often referred to by various literary critics and commentators as a kind of pact. Originally referring to autobiography, such an idea appears to have originated in the 1970s with Philippe Lejeune's term *le pacte autobiographique*, in which he outlines 'that the author, narrator, and protagonist of the autobiography are one and the same, and that the story purports to be true' (Egan, 2004, p. 14). Other literary writers, such as Minot for example, term it an 'unstated pledge' which is made 'to the reader' (2003, p.48). Gillian Whitlock terms it 'the autobiographical pact': the use of the definite article 'the' reveals a sense of its universality (2004, p.165). Lastly, literary critic Ralph Keyes terms the implicit understanding a 'good faith effort' (2005, p.4). Regardless of the title, the convention follows that readers approach creative nonfiction narratives with the assumption that authors are able to some extent to 'verify' what they have written (Keyes, 2005, p.4).

Though based on fact the literary qualities of creative nonfiction distinguish it from other forms of utilitarian discourse. For,

[i]n addition to informing, it reflects the feelings of the author, the emotions that in varying degrees make it a personal account. You can't achieve this goal with utilitarian language... To earn the title of "*literary*", it must communicate not only direct meanings but **overtones**, shadings of meaning. And in addition, the language should give pleasure in itself as music does. (Emphasis in original, Minot, 2003, p. 35)

Numerous critics agree that the creative element is an essential quality of the genre:

[f]irst—simply stated—creative nonfiction is prose that demonstrates skillful use of literary technique. Voice, mood, tone, symbol, metaphor, dialogue, characterization, plot, epiphany—all the elements used by the fiction writer, or any good writer. (Iversen, emphasis in original, p. ix)

Making use of literary technique and figurative language then, enables special meanings or effects which engage and evoke responses often at an emotional level. Rather than merely communicate 'direct meaning' it encompasses 'overtones' and 'shadings of meaning' (Minot).

What further distinguishes it from other forms of functional writing is that 'creative nonfiction does not deny personal opinion: on the contrary, it welcomes the subjective voice' (Gutkind, b, p.2). Gutkind adds, quoting another critic McPhee, that 'a piece of writing can be creative while using factual materials, that creative work can respect fact' (p.2). Factual material undergoes a process of 'selection, interpretation, composition and invention'; it is then ordered by an author's 'subjective voice'. Stephen Minot says, 'You are not writing from someone else's point of view.... You are true to the world as you see it' (Emphasis added, p.43). According to theorist Lars Ole Sauerberg a 'biographer is as much at pains to furnish a key to or a purpose for a person's life as the historian is to discover some dominant principle behind an apparently random

collection of events' (1991, p. 43). It is the creative nonfiction writer, then, who orders this 'random collection of events' into meaningful story.

### *Fiction*

The origin of the term 'fiction', in reference to literature, refers to 'any imagined or invented narrative', the Latin root of which, *figĕre* means 'to shape or fashion' (Scott, 1965, p. 107). *Webster's New World Encyclopedia* defines fiction in this manner:

Fiction [is] any work in which the content is completely or largely invented. The term describes imaginative works of narrative prose (such as the novel or the short story), and is distinguished from nonfiction (such as history, biography, or works on practical subjects), and poetry...biography may also be 'fictionalized' through the use of imagined conversations and events. (1992, p.408)

Although it states that fiction 'is distinguished from nonfiction' it does not explain how, which seems important in light of biography's tendency to be, when necessary, 'fictionalized'. Also, using history as the antithesis of fiction is clearly based on assumptions that historical narrative is itself neither 'completely or largely invented' or imaginative.

An analysis of 'the words on the page' forms part of a comprehensive discussion of various literary and theoretical approaches to fiction discussed in Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999). The glossary offers an inclusive definition of fiction as 'any literary *narrative*, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that in fact happened' (Emphasis in original, 1999, p.94).

Various theoretical approaches are discussed in the glossary, approaches which pay particular attention to 'types of sentences that constitute a fictional text, and especially with the question of their **truth**, or what is sometimes called their "truth-value" —that is, whether...they are subject

to the criterion of truth or falsity' (Emphasis in original, pp.94, 95). In effect, fictional sentences are believed to differ because they refer to a 'special world, "created" by the author' (*ibid.* p. 95). Fiction's language is an 'emotive language composed of pseudostatements' in contrast to 'referential language' which is 'justified by its truth' its 'correspondence with the fact to which it points' (*ibid.*). According to this definition, fiction does not assert itself as fact but rather 'pretends' or 'imitates' some type of 'natural discourse' as it merely 'represents the verbal action of man(sic)...reporting, describing, and referring', which implies a contrast to nonfiction(Emphasis in original, *ibid.*). Ultimately, though, the distinction between correspondences to fact or imitation and factual assertions lie not within the discrete units of language themselves, the words on the page, but 'with conventions implicitly shared by the author and reader of a work of fiction' (*ibid.* p. 95).

A surprising endeavour of fiction, suggested neither by formal definitions nor the Latin root, is Virginia Woolf's claim in *A Room of One's Own*: 'Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction' (Woolf, 1992, p.20). Her claim, that a necessity of good fiction is its truthfulness, suggests that the term 'fiction', in reference to literature, differs in complexity to its general usage: an invention, a lie or a deceit. , Good fiction, as Woolf suggests, is concerned with what theorist Lars Ole Sauerberg terms the 'phenomena of reality', the skilful representation of experiences drawn from the known world (1991, p. 44).

Liz Stanley, in *The Autobiographical I*, suggests that there is something decidedly intertextual and complex about fiction and autobiography (1992, p.59). That is not to suggest that all fiction is autobiographical but simply implies that fiction by nature is itself also concerned with representations of human experience, for stories 'both explain and

construct the ways in which the world is experienced' (Wake, 2006, p.14). This detail is consistent with the way in which various authors describe narrative production.

Renowned Australian author Richard Flanagan, by way of example, in a recent article in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, explained his personal writing experience in this way:

What I discovered the more I wrote is that writing fiction is a journey inwards to your own soul, and most days the vanity of this ambition is shipwrecked on the shoals and reefs that encrust all souls. But very occasionally you make it in there, and when you discover that you're not a single person – within you are all people, all things, all good, all evil... (Slattery, 2002, p.19)

Despite the slightly 'schizophrenic' sounding comment, it is not uncommon for authors to speak in analogous terms about the process of writing.

Similarly, in reference to her novel *The Lovely Bones* author Alice Sebold, in an interview, spoke of her upbringing in the suburbs as the material she utilised for her novel. Her novel, she states, is 'a combination of things, but a major element in its pages is the oddness of what we often condescendingly refer to as the suburbs' (BookBrowse, www, 2005). The resources for her novel came from her imagination and the 'incidents that occurred all around [her] as a child and as a teenager...growing up in one of many supposed Nowhere U.S.A.s' which 'created for [her] a bottomless well of narrative ideas' (*ibid.*). Sebold grew up hearing that there were 'a thousand stories in the naked city and none of them the same' (*ibid.*).

Additionally, *The Children's Bach*, by Helen Garner, opens with an author's note, which reads '[t]his book is a work of fiction. Its characters do not exist outside these pages' (1984). In an interview, though, found in *Making Stories: How Ten Australian Novels Were Written*, Garner says,

what I actually write emerges from things I've witnessed, experiences I've had myself, or that people around me have had. It emerges organically... I don't invent a book out of thin air. I need—or I did at the time I wrote *The Children's Bach*—a bed of detail for the thing to be based on before I can start to make something up. (Grenville & Woolfe, 2001, p61)

And, of the autistic young boy William (Billy) in the novel Garner admits that

I did actually know a child who was autistic; music was his only connection with order, the only way he could be reached. In some moods he could only be calmed by a certain piece of music that he loved. He used to sing just as the child in the book. (*ibid.* p.68)

This analysis has so far revealed that while creative nonfiction is explicitly concerned with realism, for as Stanley further points out the 'ideology' of creative nonfiction is 'a realist one', Woolf points out that fiction is also, albeit implicitly, similarly concerned with representation of the oddities of life: sometimes regardless of how extrapolated the reality (1992, p.62). Various definitions, though, as quoted above, acknowledge that there are occasions of overlap between creative nonfiction and fiction which depend on the reader to make distinctions. For example, Abrams points out in the discussion of fictive sentences, which according to Abrams do not assert themselves as fact, that the distinction between fact and fiction depends on the 'conventions implicitly shared by the author and reader of a work of fiction' or, as we have seen above, a tacit pact. Additionally, Minot says that 'some short stories and novels that draw heavily on actual events and characters seem like nonfiction' but 'readers respond with different assumptions' to creative nonfiction than to fiction (Emphasis added, p. 1). In light of the current definitions, the following look at

Garner's narratives will compare the words on the page, the 'referential language' of a narrative that is 'justified' by its 'correspondence with the fact to which it points' (Abrams) and a narrative that is 'completely or largely invented' (Webster's).

### Part Three: Helen Garner's *The First Stone* & *The Children's Bach*

Australian author Helen Garner published her first fiction novel *Monkey Grip* in 1977 and her first nonfiction *La Mama, the Story of Theatre* in 1988. Her reportage style narrative *The First Stone* (1995), as stated on the cover, is a response to questions about sex and power she felt were raised out of a sexual harassment suit in Melbourne, 1992. Allegations of sexual harassment were raised by two young female students against the Master of Ormond College, a residential college of Melbourne University. The narrative incorporates a collage of episodic conversations relating back to questions of sex and power, giving the narrative a sense of polyphony.

As the narrator was caught up in the case at the time of its occurrence, publication of the names of the real persons involved was prohibited; hence the adoption of fictive names in the narrative. The adoption of fictive names, according to Garner, turned what was meant to be 'an extended piece of reportage' into a 'broader, less "objective", more personal book' (Garner, Author's Note, 1995). This raised 'the story on to a level where, instead of its being just an incident specific to one institution at one historical moment, its archetypal features... become visible' (*ibid.*). Subsequently, the narrative engages a broader range of gender issues which, according to writer Fiona Giles, are relevant in contemporary Australian sexual politics. In her review of *The First Stone* Giles states that the narrative functions

[a]s a mediation on harassment and the various strategies for dealing with it, Garner grasps the historical moment when the system failed so as to look more closely at the psychodynamics of any harassing relationship—a kind of analytic intervention that seeks to understand the wider implications and causes of this social

problem. (Giles, 1995, p. 386)

As an 'archetype' the narrative cursorily critiques insufficiencies in dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace—where it seems women have little choice between remaining victims or becoming litigious villains. It does however consider in more detail issues of female passivity, which the narrative relates to the issue of sexual harassment. This issue of passivity is also what appears to be at the core of the narrative's critique of an evolving generational gap between two expressions of feminism: the 'ghastly' punitive 'young puritans, who remain strangely blind to the achievements of their feminist forebears' and the 'sane, sweet common sense, the congealed wisdom of the Golden Oldies' kind (Duncan, 1995, P.76).

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It is worth noting, in terms of further defining creative nonfiction, that *The First Stone* falls into a subset of creative nonfiction commonly termed literary journalism. The express purpose of literary journalism is essentially reportive and usually concerned with issues beyond the scope of an author's own experiences. The task of literary journalism, according to Kristen Iversen in *Shadow Boxing Art and Craft in Creative Nonfiction*, is to 'enter into a conversation, dialogue, or debate with those around you' an 'active engagement with significant social, cultural, political, or philosophical themes' (2004, p. 85). Where traditional journalism customarily aims for, although not always successfully, objectivity and effacement of the persona behind the articulation, literary journalism particularly focuses on 'the self in relation to the world' (*ibid.*). It is this 'self in relation to the world' that is of particular relevance here in terms of the representation of a female self.

This female self is the focus of Liz Stanley's discussion in which she says, as previously quoted, that there is something intertextual about fiction and

autobiography. According to Stanley, initial representations of a female self in literature were first conceived of in 'fictional autobiographies': hence the intertextuality to which she refers (1992, p.59). Many 'women who were early contributors to the novel did so through writing fictional autobiographies' which enabled 'a focus of attention not on any self, but a *female self* and one who thereby became a woman of importance, of study, of interest, as did the seemingly ordinary facts of her life' (Emphasis in original, Stanley, p. 59). Therefore Stanley claims, 'it was the *novel* and not autobiographical writing that initially enabled women to make directly referential claims for the female self, for made through fiction these could be presented as less seditious' (Emphasis in original, *ibid.*). Today's literary journalism and creative nonfiction provide for an 'active engagement with significant' political and sexual ideologies.

*The First Stone* begins with an excerpt obviously taken from a police report. It is first formally introduced by two brief sentences:

Around lunchtime on Thursday 9 April 1992, a man called Dr Colin Shepherd went to the police station in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton. In the CIB office there, he had this conversation with two Detectives. (1995, p.1)

This formal introduction is then followed by a police transcript in which Dr Colin Shepherd (a fictive name) is interviewed by two detectives. In the interview Dr. Shepherd denies all allegations of sexual harassment raised against him and the interview concludes with one of the officers stating: 'Mr Shepherd, I am now obliged to put some serious questions to you in relation to fingerprinting' (1995, p. 13). The brief two sentence introduction and transcript appear to be material which we assume is verifiable fact; it also establishes a grave and alarming predicament for the subject Dr Shepherd. Unadorned by the narrator's mediatory remarks or modifiers, which usually reveal the attitude of a speaker towards a subject, the syntax, diction and resultant formal tone are indicative of traditional court proceedings and legal discourse. As this type of discourse is familiarly

found in crime fiction detective-style narratives, usually employed both to create suspense and mimic legal discourse, how does it then hold up or maintain its sense that it has a 'correspondence with the fact to which it points' (Abrams) when compared to an excerpt from a crime fiction novel?

The following excerpt is taken from the crime fiction novel, *The Chamber* by John Grisham:

ON FEBRUARY 12, 1981, Sam Cayhall was convicted on two counts of capital murder and one count of attempted murder. Two days later, the same jury in the same courtroom returned with a sentencing verdict of death. (1994, p.27)

The formal syntax and diction of both quotations is not dissimilar. In light of the similarity of these excerpts there is an apparent degree of difficulty in distinguishing the difference between what is fact and what is fiction. Moreover, how sure can we really be that the excerpt from the Grisham novel, the fiction, is itself *not* also based on fact? On this occasion it appears that the only way a reader can read one as factual and the other as fiction, without themselves researching the material, depends on knowledge of genre that the reader must themselves bring to the narrative. A reader, familiar with the conventions of genre decodes this type of communication based on their experiences with similar discourses.

According to transactional reader-response theory, a main progenitor of which is Wolfgang Iser, readers are active in the production of meaning of texts. Guerin et al summarise Iser's theory thus:

Readers' experiences will govern the effects the text produces on them...a text does not tell readers everything; there are gaps or blanks, which he refers to as the 'indeterminacy' of the text. Readers must fill these in and thereby assemble the meaning(s), thus becoming coauthors in a sense. (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman & Willingham, 2005, p.355)

According to such processes the reader brings their experiences to the text and they actively construct meaning and their knowledge of genre assumes differences between what corresponds to fact and what does not.

The above excerpt from *The First Stone* also bears comparison with a passage from Garner's *The Children's Bach*, purely in terms of its seemingly similar objective expression. Though *The Children's Bach* is a prose fiction narrative, the comparison is particularly interesting in light of the modernist conventions the narrative employs, a mode which traditionally eschews an intrusive narrator.

*The Children's Bach* presents the interconnected lives of a small group of suburbanites, the central setting of which is the idyllic Beatrix Potter-like Fox family home. The charmed setting is ironically juxtaposed against the encroachment of modern life that lies without. The narrative opens with a family tableau of the poet Lord Tennyson, which we quickly learn is ironic as the traditions and assumptions it represents are critiqued throughout the narrative. This becomes evident as Dexter, the embodiment of patriarchal idealism and tradition, is suddenly confronted with his wife, Athena, disappearing with an aging musician, Phillip. The narrative, in the modernist tradition, is concerned with the unconscious and subconscious motivations and workings of its characters, as depicted externally through their actions. For example when Athena willingly returns from her liaison with Phillip and resumes her domestic duties, as though she had never left, we take her return to mean that for the time being she has resolved or adequately come to terms with the inner disquiet that caused her to flee in the first place.

The prose fiction's limited third person point of view bears comparison with the previous excerpt from *The First Stone* for its seemingly objective tone: 'Vicki and the boy crossed the street and stepped on to the buffalo grass. It was early evening. The trunks were grey, the leaves were green, a mild wind was moving along' (*The Children's Bach*, 1984, p. 32). It is a simple report-like account of subject, action and setting. The tone of the modifying adjectives 'early' and 'mild' are neutral, such as may be associated with simple detached observation. The tone and simple syntax create a detached point of view similar to that found in *The First Stone*, the difference being that one makes extra-textual claims of truth that it refers to non-textual reality, whereas the other makes no such claims. Again, it is a reader's internalised knowledge of the conventions of genre that determine what has a factual correspondence or what is fiction.

Given that creative nonfiction, as previously discussed, makes use of literary conventions to frame fact in a creative way, what differences then can be found in the ways in which individuals are represented in creative nonfiction as opposed to fiction? Do the conventions of characterisation as used in fiction, such as description, dialogue, differ to such a degree that we are able to perceive who is a real person and who is fictional. In this instance the characterisation of Dexter Fox has some curious resonances with the representation of Dr Shepherd in *The First Stone*.

As previously mentioned, *The Children's Bach* opens with a tableau of 'the poet Tennyson, his wife and their two sons walking in the garden of their house on the Isle of Wight' (p.1). It is an image familiar in traditional Victorian photography:

Tennyson looks into the middle distance. His wife, holding his arm and standing very close to his side, gazes up into his face. One boy holds his father's hand and looks up at him. The other boy holds his

mother's, and looks into the camera with a weak rueful expression.  
(1984, p.1)

Any study of traditional Victorian photography will reveal the underlying patriarchal motivations behind elements such as composition and gaze. Composition, for example, refers to the way in which subjects are organised within the frame in relation to each other, which suggests power relationships between the subjects. Seemingly unprompted elements such as composition are ideologically motivated by patriarchal assumptions regarding the centrality and marginality of relationships within families and society, reflecting what Veronica Brady terms 'the patriarchal ideology of conquest', where women are considered auxiliary 'makers of house and home' (1994, p.287). The ownership of the photo is quite significant in terms of characterisation, as we learn that it is Dexter's and it is he who has 'stuck this picture up on the kitchen wall' (p.1). This implies Dexter's idealism, and in this example his patriarchal idealism for Dexter literally and metaphorically sticks up, or holds up, this quaint patriarchal picture of the father surrounded by his doting wife and adoring children.

Dexter's well-meaning idealism and denunciation of modern life are evident in his childlike ignorance and, although he 'seems to have been untouched equally by the sexual and the feminist revolutions', it seems forgivable in light of his 'old-fashioned goodness' (Taylor, 1990, p. 120). Dexter's embrace of 'old-fashioned' values alienates him domestically as seen when his mother comes to visit bearing the gift of a new iron for Athena:

Dexter took the iron. 'It's so light!' he said. 'How could you make things flat with that? Irons should be heavy.'  
The women looked at each other. (p.60)

His genuine amazement over the iron's weight provides satiric comment on his conservatism. Awareness of his own ignorance, though, seems to escape him, as for example when he is unable to cover up his clumsy fall

into sexual indiscretion because he is unable to operate the most mundane of domestic appliances, the washing machine:

He took the sheets down the back steps and thrust them into the old washing machine under the porch. He had no idea how to make it fill up. He tried to read the instructions on the scratched dial. (p.92)

When Athena returns, however, from her transgressive relationship with Phillip, she marches into the house, begins cleaning and ends up washing the adulterous sheets herself. Dexter's conservatism and his cynicism towards 'modern American manners' crumble as he eventually succumbs to the centripetal force of modern life and learns that his own 'innocence was illusory' (*The Children's Bach*, p.28 & Taylor, 1990, p.122). Dexter, then, in terms of the text's sexual ideology is a victim conditioned by patriarchy and it is his wife Athena and her illicit actions that act as agents of Dexter's change. What is significant in terms of comparisons with *The First Stone* is that Shepherd and Dexter evoke similar responses.

The kindly characterisation of Dr Shepherd in *The First Stone* is surprising given that Shepherd is the accused sexual harasser. In the narrative where the young women at the centre of the allegations are portrayed as litigious villains (the author is constantly agonising about the necessity of them going to the police and the fact that the consequences of their actions apparently outweigh the offence), Shepherd is sincere and unthreatening. The narrative constructs him as 'an agreeable-looking middle-aged man' (p.49). This favourable impression of Dr Shepherd begins when he answers the front door of his home 'restraining a keen golden labrador' and 'he looked at ease domestically' (p.49). No more homely picture could be created than by the presence of this seemingly good natured breed of dog. He is physically disarming, 'plump' and his 'eyes were bright blue and his face was soft. His hair was grey-white, thinning and wispy on top. His voice was slightly husky' (p.50). A little further in the narrative this favourable impression is sealed as he furnishes

'a tray of cups and some sweet biscuits in a cereal bowl' (p.55). This careful selection of detail starkly contrasts Shepherd with the ferocity of the young women and his guilt or innocence goes seemingly unquestioned.

This portrayal of Shepherd is confusing, firstly because of the author's espousal of feminism and secondly as he is accused by Elizabeth Rosen (a fictive name) of, on the night of a college social, inviting her into his office where he locked the door, turned down the lights, said 'I often have indecent thoughts about you', and while grasping her hands moved his hands from her hands 'to her breasts' and asked the young woman for a 'real kiss' (pp.7-8). Also, Nicole Stewart (also a fictive name) similarly accuses him, on the same night, that while she danced with him that 'I could feel that there was pressure where his hand was being raised up my back. He then moved his right hand across my ribs and placed it flat against my left breast' (p.11). These allegations Shepherd 'emphatically' denies (p.9). In light of these accusations the number of positively connotative terms then used to describe Shepherd, above, seem, at best, highly selective. There is a natural association between 'plump' and a non-threatening demeanour. 'Soft face' and 'wispy' hair is equally disarming and finally there also seems a natural association between 'bright blue eyes' and innocence. It is the reader who decodes these quaint grandfatherly terms and is positioned, through the language to empathise with Shepherd. In terms of 'truth' or 'fact' then the reader is totally dependent upon the narrator's description of Shepherd, her personal impression of him, which constructs him not only as innocent, but the view that he is a victim in the sexual suit debacle. This view of Shepherd as victim becomes evident in the narrator's caustic remarks and negatively connotative language used to refer to the young complainants.

Shepherd's characterisation is significant in light of the narrative's 'nonfiction' status and the obvious stock literary protagonist/antagonist oppositions it employs as the young women, the complainants, are sharply contrasted to Shepherd. The second chapter of the narrative begins with a first person account of the initial encounter with the report of the alleged assault, in the newspaper dated four months after the previously mentioned transcript:

One morning in August 1992 I opened the Age at breakfast time and read that a man I had never heard of, the Master of Ormond College, was up before a magistrate on a charge of indecent assault: a student had accused him of having put his hand on her breast while they were dancing. (1995, p.15)

The narrator's initial response is one of shock and a rhetorical question is posed, '*has the world come to this?*' (emphasis in original, *ibid.*). This question is also found on the back cover of the book though reworded: '*has feminism come to this?*' and it rather obviously refers to the litigious actions of the young women. After speaking to a number of her 'feminists pushing fifty' friends, who 'had all noticed the item [in the newspaper] and been unsettled by it' on the telephone, one friend observes: 'Look – if every bastard who's ever laid a hand on us were dragged into court, the judicial system of the state would be clogged for years' (p.15). After which the friends laugh and the author states that 'there was even a kind of perverse vanity in it, as among veterans of any tedious ordeal' (*ibid.*). The response not only reveals the attitude of the speaker but also the view of her particular society, labelled 'feminist pushing fifty'. Their collective view is derogatory of the young women's actions as exhibited through the negatively connotative verbs 'dragged' and 'clogged'. The tone overtly represents the complainants' actions as petty and subsequently negatively shapes a reader's impression of both the complaints and the young women.

An example of the narrative's literary language, which continues the above stance towards the young women, is found in its concluding paragraph. Firstly, preceded by a list of reflective 'what ifs' regarding the case, the penultimate sentence and final 'what if' reads: 'If the famous complaints hadn't lain there stinking all summer long, gathering "agendas" like blowflies' (p.222). Though the figurative language refers to the complaints and the social and political context in which they drew attention there is nevertheless some slippage between 'complaints' and 'complainants' as the description is rather too physical for an abstract concept. It pronounces cynical judgment upon both the complaint and the complainants' actions.

As previously mentioned, creative nonfiction narrative 'welcomes the subjective voice' (Gutkind). Several elements within the narrative reveal that the disapproving characterisation of the young women came about from their spurning the author's repeated requests for an interview. This, coupled with the author's befriending of Shepherd, caused a conflict between the author's personal ethics and feminist loyalties, which is implied by a quotation prefacing *The First Stone*:

The struggle for women's rights is...not a matter of gender loyalty. It is a matter of ethical principle, and as such, it does not dictate automatic allegiance to the women's side in any given argument. (Heller, cited by Garner, introduction, 1995)

We can only take this to mean that 'feminist' does not necessarily equal uncritical allegiance in every situation.

A further look at this 'subjective voice' and closer analysis of the author's unexpected alliance with Shepherd hints at a Freudian oedipal fantasy: 'you find oedipal fantasies in almost any plot that involves a male-female triangle or sexual jealousy' (Holland, 1990, p.65). Upon *The First Stone*'s

release in America, author Janet Malcolm suggested as much when she commented on the narrative's curious psychological workings:

Garner's oscillating identifications with harasser and harassed, her lurching between generations and genders, her alternating states of delusion and perception invite comparison with the coded messages of patients in psychotherapy. (*The New Yorker*, 1997)

The narrative nonetheless serves as an example of literary journalism's complicated enmeshing of personal and public issues. This is significant in terms of the narrative being 'a gripping blend of reportage and personal experience' cohabiting under the banner of 'nonfiction' (Text cover). For, where exactly do fact and personal opinion separate? Are the young girls and Shepherd accurately depicted and how is the reader to discern what is truthful, what is personal bias and what is 'creative', given that the narrative will be found in the 'nonfiction' area of a library and the 'true stories' section of a bookstore? There is an obvious conflict between the narrative's 'nonfiction' status, as 'truthful' or 'factual' representation and this 'subjective voice'.

In terms of the representation of a female self, *The First Stone*, while chipping away at and critiquing the institution's (Ormond College's) progressive façade and meaningless tokens of equality, simultaneously showcases this conflicted female self. There are some significant resonances here also between Garner's conflicted state and that of Athena in *The Children's Bach*. Athena, in her somnambulistic conformity, frequently daydreams of a life without the burden of husband and family, a world in which 'her children dematerialised, her husband died painlessly in a fall from a mountain' (p.22). Athena, however, is deeply conflicted in her role, as revealed when she ponders death:

Athena felt ground drop away from under her feet. She hung over a black gulf, she heard the wind. Her self was in tantrum, panicking. *What? Me die? Life go on without me? Impossible!* (Emphasis in the original, p.30)

Rather than fear death or dying the idea of life going on without her, of not being needed, scares and unsettles Athena. This fear, coupled with Athena's liaison with Phillip and her brief escape, suggest the dissonant contradictions within her character as from moment to moment she desires to be unattached and at the same time experiences horror over the thought of not being needed. The only evident difference between these representations of a female self, in terms of fiction and creative nonfiction texts, is that one is clearly a fictional subject and the other a real, living person. However, it does not necessarily prove that one form, or the other, is better able to demonstrate the struggles of a subject, against dominant sexual and political ideologies, than the other. It is simply that we naturally attach more value to one as corresponding to a real person.

A final point of analysis is found in the personal confrontation of Garner with the men from Ormond College, who are also contrasted to Shepherd. The confrontation occurs during court proceedings as 'two old men' from the male-dominated college who were 'among the phalanx of grim-faced Presbyterians' attending the proceedings (p.35). An unusual taxonomy of men based on religious caricatures, relating back to the college's patronage with the church, terms Dr Shepherd a 'plump Anglican rather than a rangy "Presbyterian"' (p.50). The two old men spark an encounter with the author, who was seated in the courtroom:

The two old men *pushed* past me into the row, *shoving hard* against my legs although I tried to turn them aside to *allow passage*...I looked up at the men as they *forced their way* past me, and [I] said, trying to cooperate, 'I'll get my bag from under your seat.' They did not answer, but stood in the row and waited, blank-faced, staring into the distance, without the slightest acknowledgement that a fifty-year-old woman was *down on her hands and knees among their legs*, trying to shift her belongings out of their way. (Emphasis added, p.35)

Then, 'the men *installed themselves at their ease*' and one of them '*spread his arms*' to read a newspaper (Emphasis added, p.35). The incident ends stating: 'I noticed that my neck was prickling and my heart

was beating fast' (p.36). The account is forcefully punctuated with sexually connotative words, such as have been emphasised. It reads very much like an aggressive sexual encounter: a rape.

One question worth considering about the above account is what the language reveals, aside from what it shows us about the Ormond men. It was Freud's theories about the unconscious mind that first proposed that we could discover 'the unconscious through the language people choose' (Holland, 1990, p.64). Psychoanalytic criticism therefore considers the text as a site of unconscious libidinous desire and anxiety. Feminist psychoanalytical criticism extends the theory by contextualising sexual identity socially, culturally and historically. A further scrutiny of the connotative diction from the above passage reveals unconscious tensions beneath the language. The apologetic, cowering actions and tone seem complicit with, or participatory in a system responsible for female oppression. Garner's passivity in this encounter is remarkable and demonstrates the nature of sexual oppression and the internalised nature of patriarchy as a tendency to defer to male authority and at the same time feel abused by it. This is perhaps no more evident than in the surprising title of the book borrowed from a notoriously masculinist text: the bible.

The point I wish to establish here is how deeply the author is implicated in what is, theoretically, an 'objective' text. This degree of involvement raises questions of facts and truth. Perhaps the best way of approaching this point would be to pose further questions such as, what in this account can be taken to be 'true'? How would the account have differed if the author were male (would the two men have treated a fifty-something male in the same manner)? Would the resulting reader's view of the men differ? What differing truths about the men would have been established if the men

'slid' or 'eased' past her legs instead of shoved pushed and forced? In his definition of creative nonfiction editor Lee Gutkind says that 'a piece of writing can be creative while using factual material, that creative work can respect fact' (n.d.b, p.2), but can fact withstand the subjectivity and personal bias of an author?

Readers' responses to the numerous narrative strategies, as examined here, (of language, tone and characterisation) will—according to reader-response criticism—be determined by their own life and textual experiences. With knowledge that the narrative *The First Stone* is considered a creative *nonfiction* text, there is more likelihood that reader's response to, and impression of, the narrative is one that underlines its status as 'true'. This analysis has so far revealed that there are certain incongruities between the banner 'nonfiction' and the 'subjective voice', and has highlighted the absence of clear distinctions between what is fact and what is fiction in the words on the page.

#### Part Four: Alice Sebold's *Lucky* & *The Lovely Bones*

*Lucky* is the story of the brutal rape of the author, Alice Sebold, in May 1981, as an eighteen-year-old college student, away from her family at Syracuse College in the USA. The brief introduction encapsulates the theme of the narrative and reveals the origin of the curious title *Lucky*: 'in the tunnel where I was raped, a girl had been murdered and dismembered. I was told this story by the police. In comparison, they said, I was lucky' (Introduction, p.3). The tone of this brief introduction ironically suggests that 'lucky' is not something the author feels as a little further on she states: '...at the time, I felt I had more in common with the dead girl than I did with the large, beefy police officers or my stunned freshman-year girlfriends. The dead girl and I had been in the same low place' (*ibid.*). The title *Lucky* therefore functions as a rhetorical question overshadowing the quest-like nature of the narrative. In an interview, included at the back of *The Lovely Bones* text, Sebold is quoted as saying, 'that idea of a shadow that travels with you, that has another destiny than you might have imagined, has always fascinated me. For me, that shadow has always been a teenage girl who died' (p.6).

Survival was foremost in Sebold's mind during the rape and the fear of being murdered is shown in the narrative through her obedient passivity:

I became one with this man. He held my life in his hand. Those who say they would rather fight to the death than be raped are fools. I would rather be raped a thousand times. You do what you have to. (p.7)

The title then presents something of a paradox woven throughout Sebold's memoir and tied to its poignant conclusion: 'I live in a world

where the two truths coexist; where both hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand' (p.243). This paradox emerges as a narrative theme culminating in the view that victims have a choice in what they make of their survival and that ultimately 'no one can pull anyone back from anywhere. You save yourself or you remain unsaved' (p.61).

So it is then that the narrative continually delves into the ongoing psychological impact of rape and violence and the sense of isolation and alienation produced by it: 'I had made contact with a planet different from the one my parents or sister lived on. It was a planet where an act of violence changed your life' (p. 68). In this new world Sebold 'saw violence everywhere. It was not a song or a dream or a plot point' (p. 80). Rape and violence were no longer something that she could numbly and safely walk away from as one would a song, dream or story: they were now a part of who she was. Further she says: 'I was now on the other side of something [others] could not understand. I didn't understand it myself', and poetically concludes: 'my life was over; my life had just begun' (pp.27 & 33). This poetic epitaph reveals the way rape divided her life into two discrete identities: the innocent Alice before the rape and the raped, spoiled Alice.

Continuing to explore the psychological impact of the violence the narrative reveals the way in which Sebold's family and friends awkwardly strove to regain equilibrium with Alice-the-victim. After the rape Sebold had difficulty in discussing her ordeal with her family: '[b]ut can you speak those sentences to the people you love? Tell them you were urinated on or that you kissed back because you didn't want to die?' (p.61). When she attempts to broach the taboo-shrouded subject she does so with dark humour, such as the occasion, just after her rape, when her father asks her if she would like something to eat:

In my response, I wished to slam-dunk the fact that no one needed worry about this tough customer.

"That would be nice," I said, "considering the only thing I've had in my mouth in the last twenty-four hours is a cracker and a cock."  
(p.51)

This not only reveals the awkwardness Sebold and her family faced in order to pry open communication on the subject, but also reflects the manner in which humour is commonly used as a coping mechanism.

Up until this point of the analysis, all of the above narrative quotations are clearly reflective and introspective in that they refer to the inner state of the author and her grappling with the aftermath of violent rape. 'My life was over; my life had just begun' is clearly not fact, in a scientific sense, but is gravely metaphoric of the changes which occurred as a result of the rape, and is also an example of the creative aspect of the genre.

*Lucky* as quest-type narrative centres on desire, a subject in search of 'an object' or 'state of being', in this instance a search to make sense of and come to terms with horrendous life altering experiences, a theme which is mirrored in Sebold's fiction *The Lovely Bones* (Tyson, 1999, p.216).

*The Lovely Bones* is the poignant story of Susie Salmon, a fourteen-year-old girl who is lured into a hole in the ground—a dugout—by a reclusive neighbour who rapes and murders her. The first person narrative is narrated by Susie from Heaven. Susie's disappearance is at first a mystery as no one is sure what has happened to Susie until little pieces of her and her belongings slowly trickle their way into the hands of the authorities. The text opens with a paradoxical thematic episode, not unlike the introduction to *Lucky*, describing a snow globe on Susie's father's desk that has a little lone penguin inside. When her father notices that she is

concerned for the lonely penguin in the snow globe he says to Susie, 'Don't worry, Susie; he has a nice life. He's trapped in a perfect world' (Prologue). The oxymoron, 'trapped in a perfect world', suggests that a perfect world offers little comfort if one is trapped in it. Heaven, as Susie's intake supervisor Franny explains to her, is anything you desire it to be 'all you have to do is desire it, and if you desire it enough...it will come' (p.19). Though Susie's Heaven is anything she desires it to be, it imprisons her and keeps her from the family with whom she constantly longs to be. Eventually when she ceases watching them from heaven, after more than eight years, she reveals, 'If I am to be honest with you, I still sneak away to watch my family sometimes. I can't help it...' (p.323). We deeply empathise with Susie as we hear the hell of longing she experiences in heaven as she says, 'I could not have what I wanted most: Mr. Harvey dead and me living. Heaven wasn't perfect. But I came to believe that if I watched closely, and desired, I might change the lives of those I loved on Earth' (p.20).

In *The Lovely Bones* the narrative strategy of repetition and delay epitomise Susie's attempt to come to terms with her new circumstances as revealed above when she says, 'if I watched closely', 'I might'. Susie's yearning and unrequited desire also 'mirrors the reader's experience of reading the text' as their understanding of the title *The Lovely Bones* is repeatedly deferred, as a thematic delay strategy (Tyson, 1999, p.162). So, just as Susie strives to come to terms with her situation the reader strives to make sense of the curious title and theme of the narrative.

Bones then recur symbolically throughout the narrative, the significance of which is not fully realised until the end of the novel where Susie reflects upon what her death has brought about in the lives of the family she left behind. Initial references to bones particularly relate to the murderer Mr.

Harvey, because he has killed a number of neighbourhood pets and kept their bones in a secret place in his basement. Initially we are unsure if 'the lovely bones' refer to Harvey's sick mind for only a sick mind would likely find anything lovely about bones. Further, the recurring allusion to bones becomes evidently symbolic when for example Susie recalls, in heaven, a children's nursery rhyme:

Stones and bones;  
Snow and frost;  
Seeds and beans and polliwogs.  
Paths and twigs, assorted kisses,  
We all know who Daddy misses!  
His two little frogs of girls, that's who.  
They know where they are, do you, do you? (pp. 144-145)

The rhyme appears to be derived from a playful hide-and-seek game that the text implies Mr. Salmon played with Susie and her sister. The rhyme is ironically repeated and mournfully reworded by Susie towards the end of the novel:

Stones and bones;  
Snow and frost;  
Seeds and beans and polliwogs.  
Paths and twigs, assorted kisses,  
We all know who Susie misses... (p.278)

These allusions to bones, however, are not, as we come to see by the end of the novel, the same bones implied in the title. As Susie's story draws to a close she makes a reflective observation about her family and the way in which her death has affected them. As her family tentatively regroup and begin to build the next chapter of their lives Susie observes, with a sudden change to past tense, of the new relationships:

These were the lovely bones that had grown around my absence: the connections — sometimes tenuous, sometimes made at great cost, but often magnificent — that happened after I was gone...the events that my death wrought were merely the bones of a body that would become whole at some unpredictable time in the future. The price of what I came to see as this miraculous body had been my life. (p. 320)

The lovely bones, then, from which the title is drawn, are not the sad hidden bones of Harvey's victims of menace, but the new body, the new ligaments and connections her family and friends formed after her death. Susie's final realisation that she can not go back to the way things were and the dawning of the reader's understanding of the narrative's theme and bone symbolism are tied to the quest-like driven structure of the narrative.

Structure also plays a significant role in *Lucky* as seen through Sebold's journey of healing and the tentative rebuilding of her own life. The sense of story develops out of Sebold's accidental encounter with her rapist on a public street. This encounter eventually leads to his arrest. Fourteen months after her rape, and after enduring courtroom scenes in which she had to recreate the events of her rape, the rapist, Gregory Madison, received the 'maximum sentence for rape and sodomy', which was eight to twenty-five years imprisonment (p.201). Madison was to face imprisonment while Sebold was expected to get on with her life, as when her father says to her, '[y]ou don't want to become defined by the rape', implying that she move on with her life (p.202). The remaining forty-odd pages of the text however recount a further troubled thirteen years of the author's life which leads to the poignant conclusion mentioned previously: 'hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand' (p.243). The structure of the narrative therefore orders the author's traumatic experiences into a sense of story.

As previously mentioned, the quest structure of the narrative is driven by desire, but what the double repetition of Sebold's experiences in both narratives further represents is a repetition compulsion. This Freud regarded as the 'tendency human beings have to get themselves into the same situations over and over' (Holland, 1975b, p.44). This compulsion

'symbolises a wish to return to one's warm, hungerless paradise before birth' (*ibid.*, pp.44-45). It is not hard to see this desire as woven throughout both narratives.

The opening chapter of the memoir *Lucky* begins with the language and detail of a testimonial-type discourse occasionally interspersed with poetic diction. This tendency towards abstraction is used reflectively in *Lucky* as brief moments of relief from the shockingly graphic account and to create sensory images of the experience. For example, amidst the horror of violation when the rapist orders Sebold to remove her clothing the imagery goes beyond concrete description to create a sense of physicality through the use of simile, for the experience of removing her clothing 'was like shedding feathers. Or wings' (p.8). Not simply a picture of nakedness it is the image of a bird without its feathers and wings, a picture of raw vulnerability, powerlessness, of smallness and ugliness. A little further a similar image creates a picture of post mortem morbidity:

...he looked down at my body. I still feel that in that gaze his eyes lit up my sickly pale skin in that dark tunnel. Made it all — my flesh — suddenly horrible. *Ugly* too kind a word, but the closest one.  
(Emphasis in the original, p.8)

The effect of the rapist's gaze upon her body evokes the invasive image of a pale naked body under a mortician's lamp. These images break up the concrete, aggressive, heavy verb use of the violence, shown through words such as; 'grabbed', 'yanked', 'struggled', 'claimed', 'shaking', 'humping', 'rammed' ( pp.1-12). These literal descriptors are without the use of modifiers, comprising mainly verbs and nouns, concrete and graphic action and effect. The brutality of the violence is highlighted by verbs which punctuate the account like blows. Every detail of what the rapist did to his victim — every detail of penetration and invasion — raw and graphic.

Where emphasis is placed on the violence of Sebald's rape the language of the similar account in *The Lovely Bones* seems adjusted to suit the delicate subject matter: the rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl. The raw language of penetration and violence is absent, evoked instead through the use of imagery. Susie does not tell us what Mr. Harvey does to her but alludes to it in such instances as when she says, 'he started working himself over me...he was inside me. He was grunting...I was the mortar, he was the pestle' (p.14). This figurative image is an example of the way in which the language in *The Lovely Bones* is adapted to the subject. Rather than the verb-saturated account of Sebald's rape, the 'mortar' and 'pestle' metaphor is an abstract image of violent bruising, which is no less physical though slightly distanced. The physicality of violation is further created through similar abstract imagery:

I felt huge and bloated. I felt like a sea in which he stood and pissed and shat. I felt the corners of my body were turning in on themselves and out, like in cat's cradle, which I played with Lindsey just to make her happy. (p.14)

This very physical description relies on figurative language, simile, to violently marry the innocence of a child's game with the perversion of base adult sexual desire and cruelty. It similarly invokes the physical as well as the psychological, as the previous 'feathers and wings' imagery from *Lucky* does.

The obvious differences so far encountered, in terms of language expression between the narratives are what we might expect of fiction and creative nonfiction, a matter of emphasis. *Lucky* as an account of the author's own experiences emphasises the aggression, violence, penetration and violation over six pages. Instead *The Lovely Bones*, by contrast figuratively implies the violence over two pages. In an interview, found at the back of *Lucky*, Sebald explains that she did not want rape to be the focus of the fictional narrative, and we can see from these examples that *The Lovely Bones* has not been overly burdened with

violence. The effect of *Lucky*'s language, however, in its distinct testimonial discourse, seems true and seems to have a direct correlation to an actual person and event. It is entirely possible, though, for fiction, or a literary fraud for that matter, to just as easily imitate this factual-sounding register. So, the only indication that the text is based on fact and personal experience is pointed out by the text itself through extra-textual cues. For example, the word 'memoir' appears six times on the cover of *Lucky* and it is several times mentioned on the cover that the narrative is the 'memoir of her rape'. Is it for this reason that the text without these cues could just as easily be read as fiction as true story, that creative nonfiction narratives must take pains, through an extra-textual prompting, to assert their factual basis?

A further example of the way in which Susie's ordeal is constructed figuratively is through the use of euphemism in reference to her murder. Euphemism typically functions in language as an expression which unburdens unpleasant denotative terms. Susie's murder is not described through violent description but rather offered through imagery evoked by her report that Mr Harvey 'brought back a knife' from beside him and that the knife 'unsheathed, it smiled at me, curving up in a grin...the end came anyway' (p.15). 'The end' to which Susie so succinctly refers is a euphemism for her own brutal death. Personification, a figure of speech which gives inanimate objects human-like qualities, animates the knife as it 'smiled...curving up in a grin'. The knife is given maliciously human and murderous qualities, curiously deferring blame for her death on weapon rather than killer.

Where figurative language is used in *The Lovely Bones* to displace much of the violence, its use in *Lucky* heightens the poignant psychological and

physical impact of Sebold's rape. This is revealed for example when she refers to the new relationship between rapist and victim:

It was a nuance of a realisation that would take years to face. I share my life not with the girls and boys I grew up with...I share my life with my rapist. He is the husband to my fate. (p.53)

Its implication is one of helpless resignation, a metaphorical marriage of destinies determined by a physical union. The fact that we are told Sebold was a virgin when she was raped extends this covenant-like imagery.

As previously mentioned, creative nonfiction makes use of factual materials which Iversen termed the 'tools of reality'. The use of such material in *Lucky* comes in the form of police reports, newspaper articles and police testimony, which contextualise Alice Sebold's account. An amusing example from the text is the inclusion of the full police report of Sebold's testimony. The final report contains a number of errors in it, for example Sebold had eight dollars in her pocket and the report stated that she had nine, and of the report she states that:

All I saw were what I thought of as the errors he [the interviewing officer] had made, the things he had left out or the words he had substituted for what had actually been said.

"All that doesn't matter," he said. "We just need the gist of it." (p.32)

One could rightly assume that a police report is deeply concerned with accuracy but, as the casual off-handed manner of this police officer shows, such documents thrive not so much on accuracy as 'the gist of' truth, a sense of truth as necessary to base a case upon. Though concerned with facts, such documents appear not overly concerned with the accuracy of peripheral detail. This is a fine point which demonstrates the role of focus and selection of detail as a device which shapes discourse and narrative. As Minot points out in his definition of creative nonfiction, writers have the 'freedom to select what to emphasize and what to ignore'. Moreover, in 'Fictions and Truths' theorist Tzvetan Todorov states that Plato observed of tribunal proceedings that judges were only

ever dealing with discourses about events, discourses which depended on 'verisimilitude, on convincing, rather than the truth...or the ability to produce the effect of truth' (1994, p.22). The selection of detail, what is emphasised or ignored, produces particular effects.

Further mapping the psychological territory of the rape, both narratives reveal disassociation as an involuntary survival impulse. A dictionary definition of 'dissociation' illuminates its meaning further; it signifies to detach, disengage or withdraw into an ego-state. The separation of the mind from the body is shown in both texts as a means of enduring the horror of rape. In *Lucky*, Sebold recounts how she attempted to mentally disengage her mind from the trauma of what was happening to her body:

I went into my brain. Waiting there were poems for me, poems I'd learned in class...I tried, as a sort of prickly numbness took over my lower half, to recite the poems in my head. I moved my lips...tears came out of the corners of my eyes and rolled down either cheek. I was leaving now. (pp.9-10)

In *The Lovely Bones* this same sense of fragmentation is shown through the previous quote where Susie felt the corners of her body turning in and out on themselves and also during the rape when she fixed her imagination elsewhere — onto her domestic life and her mother:

"Susie! Susie!" I heard my mother calling. "Dinner is ready."... "We're having string beans and lamb."... "Your brother has a new finger painting, and I made apple crumb cake". (p.14)

Susie heard her mother's voice in her imagination and focused on comforting images of familiarity in order to make her mental escape. These examples continue to recreate a sense of the psychological and physical battle endured.

Adding further to, and supplementing the psychological landscape of the rape and violence, the setting of both *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones* contrasts the everyday and the horrific. The site of the rape in *Lucky* is a tunnel which 'was once an underground entry to an amphitheatre, a place where actors burst forth from underneath the seats of a crowd' (Introduction). It was also a place where she 'had lain among the dead leaves and broken beer bottles' (Introduction). The juxtaposition of the amphitheatre, usually a place of jubilation and levity suggested by 'actors burst forth', with her rape and the rubbish she lay in creates a poignant contrast between dramatic performances and the cruel irony of the 'real'.

In *The Lovely Bones* Susie is trapped in the dugout prepared by her attacker, where she is 'lying down on the ground, in the ground...trapped inside the earth' and she reflects that at that moment her mother '...would be checking the dial of the clock on her oven. It was a new oven and she loved that it had a clock on it' (p.12). The language works by contrasting everyday meaningless domestic concerns to the horrors of a secret world of violence that few are aware of. The physical description of the hole in which Susie is trapped is literal: 'the dark earth surrounding us smelled like what it was, moist dirt where worms and animals lived their daily lives. I could have yelled for hours' (p.14). Depicting her entrapment, this literal description is similar to the one of rotting leaves, rubbish, refuse and everyday filth in which Sebold was raped and is an example of creative nonfiction's use of symbolic language, which is conventionally associated with literary writing rather than factual discourse.

In terms of differences, then, between the narratives, *The Lovely Bones* is unmistakably fiction: the opening proposition that a dead girl is narrating

the story assures us of that. The reader's approach to the text, the way in which they engage with the plausibility of the fiction is dependent upon a 'willing suspension of disbelief': a turn of phrase originated by poet and theorist Samuel Taylor Coleridge to explain a semi-conscious act entered into by readers and audiences in order to enter fictionalised worlds. Does this approach though to fiction differ greatly to creative nonfiction when it seems, based on information found on the cover, the reader is perhaps being asked to receive the narrative as factual and enter a similar contractual arrangement?

One final and distinct difference that naturally warrants consideration in an analysis such as this is the aspect of point of view. In the case of *The Lovely Bones* it is the fictionalised persona Susie who is the narrator. She is indeed an engaging voice. However, the reader has a completely different response from *Lucky*, because the name Alice Sebold on the cover of the memoir—and the narrative 'I' within the pages—is the same. This, what Liz Stanley terms 'synonymity' between the name on the cover and the narrative 'I' within the story or pages, not only goes hand in hand with the autobiographical pact but hails the narrative as testimonial, as a true account of the real experiences of a real person (1992, p.61). Part of the process of reading an evocative 'true' story is based on assumptions about the 'I' within the pages of the narrative and of an authenticating presence outside of, and independent of, the text. What effect, then, does this have on the reader's response to the narrative? The following analysis of two notorious literary impostures considers how the reader's assumption of an authenticating identity outside of the narrative actively constructs a sense of the narrative's correspondence with reality.

## Part Five: Where the Truth Lies

The initial believability of imposture narratives emerges out of a reader's familiarity with the conventions of autobiography and tacit assumptions about the authenticity of an identity outside the narrative. Few impostures, though, have been accompanied by brazen public performances of an imposture identity in the manner in which Helen Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* and Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* have. These rare examples reveal that assumptions about the relationship between text and identity are powerful enough to empathetically ensnare readers in a lie. The term 'imposture', as used here, refers not only to the imitation of autobiographical narrative but the adoption of a false identity and the effect it produces upon a reader. Literary critic Susanna Egan, in a journal article titled 'The Company She keeps: Demidenko and the Problems of Imposture in Autobiography', sheds light on the analogous relationship of text and identity:

Texts in this category insert the individual life, almost parasitically, into public history, using a well known context to ground or vouch for the unknown life. One result is that such lives are readily believed. (2004, p.15)

Imposture narratives are believable as they not only imitate the conventions of autobiographical narrative but they insert an imposture identity into a particular social and cultural context, and history. Australia's literary tradition is rich with such impostures; from Ern Malley, to Bayley and Carmen through to Darville, and Norma Khouri who, although she is not Australian, played out her fugitive émigré role on Australian soil. It is frequently the impassioned first person account and the extraordinary stories narratives of this kind convey, that deter rational scrutiny, often

regardless of their literary quality, because the 'attribution of experience protects autobiography from aesthetic judgement' (Egan, 2004, p. 20).

Helen Darville's imposture narrative *The Hand That Sang the Paper* was published under her fake adoptive name Demidenko. The narrative's publication coincided with the 1990's emergence of suspected war criminal trials, and the belief that numbers of war criminals, during Australian's 1950's migrant surge, had found a 'safe haven in Australia' (2000, Rubenstein). Three such war crime trials were conducted in Australia, none of which resulted in prosecution (*ibid.*). In other words, there was a receptive context for Darville's work. Darville's novel was 'purported to be based on her family's experiences of the Ukrainian famine in the 1930s, and their subsequent collaboration with the Nazis in the Holocaust' for fear of her father and uncle being charged with war crime offences (Nolan & Dawson, 2004, p.5). Neither the Australian literati nor academic institutions picked up any nuance of fakery even when the narrative apparently

reopened a Fascist reading of the Holocaust and disturbed both the Ukrainian and Jewish communities in Australia as well as the critical and academic valuation of Australian multiculturalism. (Egan, 2004, p.16)

Appealing to a highly conservative ideology, these views were later bolstered by Darville's public performances, or what Susanna Egan terms, 'performativity' (p.21). The term performativity refers to 'the production of effect by means of discourse' through an 'explicit connection between the life in the text and the life in the world' (Egan, p.21). The public performances of Darville's Ukrainian identity accompanied and authenticated her narrative; the linking of text and identity produces a powerful credible effect. An effect which is a result of the reader's approach to the narrative based on information, or in this instance a deceit, that the text purports to be true.

Darville's fraudulent Ukrainian identity performances began with her adoption of the name Demidenko and she then further 'developed a Ukrainian persona, wearing embroidered blouses, combing her long blonde hair, dancing Ukrainian dances' (Egan, p.22). This fraudulent identity was also accompanied by the creation, in her narrative, of a fraudulent family history and their subsequent fraudulent voices. It was through this imposture social circle that Darville aired her repellent views. In doing so she not only created the authority of experience for herself but backed these up by adopting a polyphony of voices that acted to verify that 'this happened to us'. For example, Darville quotes her father as saying in defence of Nazi alliances, 'You don't know what it was like. It was a crazy time. People did things, and you...you can't explain them now' (*The Hand That Signed the Paper*, 1994, p.3). Also in the narrative a university friend named Cathe says to Darville's fictive persona, Fiona, in order to comfort Fiona's fears for her uncle and father during the Australian war crime trials,

I want you to understand...that...that I think it's wrong to try them. That trying people for what they did in war legitimises other wartime activities that are left untried. War is a crime, of itself. So I really hope that nothing comes of this, and everything just blows over. (p.4)

The validity of these strong views and opinions were shored up by the premise of personal experience, as guaranteed by the conventions of autobiography. It is evident that Darville understood all too well the significance of the relationship of text and identity and its impact upon a reader and reading public.

*The Hand that Signed the Paper* ends with Darville's persona Fiona visiting the Treblinka memorial fifty miles north-east of Warsaw. The Treblinka memorial is the Polish state memorial which commemorates World War II atrocities. Each stone at the memorial represents a Jewish person or Jewish community destroyed by German invasion. Fiona stands alongside

another visitor at the site; the visitor asks what her interest is in the site. Fiona replies that she is there on behalf of her uncle who had volunteered to work for the Germans and participated in the atrocities. The visitor asks her, 'Are you sorry?', and we assume he is referring to her family's involvement in the mass murder of Jews, to which she replies 'yes...I am' (p.157). There is little doubt, then, that this restorative view of history and our fascination, at the time, with migrant stories contributed to its earning the 1995 Miles Franklin award and the Australian Vogel award. When it was later discovered to be a fraud, the phoney empty sentiments were an outrage not only because of the resurrection of World War II sensitivities but because of the anti-Semitic perversion of its history.

Opening equally sensitive wounds, Norma Khouri similarly accompanied her imposture *Forbidden Love* with a fictitious performance which specifically backed up her fraudulent narrative. *Forbidden Love*'s stifling picture of Jordanian culture begins with a prologue that caters to stereotype: 'Jordan is a place where men in sand-coloured business suits hold cell phones to one ear and, in the other, hear the whispers of harsh ancient laws blowing in from the desert' (2003, *Forbidden Love*, prologue). The narrative portrays the modern desert city as superficially progressive under cover of seemingly dangerous and ancient barbarism: 'Modern on the surface', Jordan 'is an unforgiving desert whose oases have blossomed into cities. But the desert continues to blow in' (p.1). The physical and cultural setting are a frightening picture of patriarchal dominance, painting a disparaging portrait of Arabic men: Jordan's 'fierce and primitive code is always nagging at men's instincts, reminding them that under the Westernizing veneer, they are all still Arabs' (p.2). The diction contributes to the tone of voice and reveals the attitude of the speaker towards the subject. 'Instinct' is connotative of primal urges held in check, like trained animals, further implied with the sentence ending, 'they are all still Arabs'; despite their human exterior they are all still

beasts? Apart from this disturbing characterisation there is an unmistakable impression, when reading *Forbidden Love* that perhaps the author feels that she missed out on being a key figure in the women's movement and is attempting to recreate such tensions in her book. The number of conversations and incidents that lead to a discussion or reference to the oppression of women is notable, particularly in light of the fact that the author is herself American, neither Jordanian nor Islamic. What ensured publicity for her story was her high profile performance of a victim on the run from harsh laws and murderous practices.

The final chapter of *Forbidden Love*, titled 'Farewell', rouses fervour over the issue of honour killings. The paragraph begins:

The following are just a handful of the honour killings that were recently committed in Jordan. They were all reported in *Jordan Times* by the highly credible woman journalist who has courageously made this her cause. (p.208)

This is followed by the dates and names of women, victims of honour killings, all of whom Khouri claims are united by 'the fact that a male family member murdered all of them' (p.208). One such 'case' is recorded as occurring in October 1998, 'Khadijeh, a twenty-year-old Jordanian woman...still a virgin' was taken by her father to a deserted area where he,

stabbed her four times in the chest and slit her throat. He then turned himself in to the police, still holding the knife, which he said he had used to kill his daughter and cleanse his honour. (pp.208-209)

Apart from the fact that Khouri frequently focuses on women's virginity throughout the narrative, perhaps suggesting virgins are less worthy of such violence, what are we as readers to make of these testimonials given that the text is revealed as a fraud? Not only has this narrative drawn 'testimonial narrative into disrepute' but 'activists in Jordan point out, their local campaign against honour killings is seriously damaged by a hoax of this kind' (Whitlock, p.172). 'For in its classic forms testimony speaks truth to

power, and it does so on behalf of the oppressed' (*ibid.*, p.170). It is precisely for their humanist appeal and that they 'attend to a "psychological hunger" for learning about the lives of other people' that readers are drawn to such evocative testimonies and precisely these sensibilities that impostures exploit (Whitlock, p.169).

Synonymity between the narrative 'I' in the pages of the narrative and the name on the cover have the effect of authenticating the factual basis of the narrative. However, as these examples of literary impostures have demonstrated, the reader has no way of knowing from within the narrative what or who is true. Susanna Egan states that, '[b]ecause autobiography has distinguished itself from other forms of narrative by its reference to a person ... outside the text, the authenticity of the autobiographical narrative is the key to its credibility, and therefore, to its effects' (p.19). The reader assumes that the voice within the pages of the narrative is a real person which establishes the narrative's correspondence to truth and to non-textual reality. The reader is actively involved in the production of a 'truth effect'.

These examples of imposture further illustrate a significant point about the general nature of language and narrative. They illustrate what literary critic Gillian Whitlock expresses as the 'absence of a "moral grammar" that can distinguish the sacred from the profane' (2004, p.173). As we closely examine the grammar, words, phrases or terms that make up narrative, there is little that clearly distinguishes fact from fiction; as imposture has shown, little distinguishes what is true from what is profane. Imposture in narrative reveals the certain vulnerability of creative nonfiction to be easily imitated. This reveals that the reader's assumptions with which they approach the text implicate them in the production of

the narrative's correlation to truth. An approach which begins with a narrative's 'truth claim':

This truth claim is most profoundly that which separates autobiography from other forms of literature, even those with elements of autobiography in them, and therefore establishes the terms on which readers approach the text. (Egan, 2004, p.14)

The reader is bound by a text's truth-claim into reading the narrative as true and as corresponding to non-textual reality. This reveals a willingness on the part of the reader to enter such a relationship with the text, which leads back to the point Whitlock makes about a reader's 'psychological hunger'. I would like to expand, briefly, on the question of reader desire, or 'hunger'.

Psychoanalytic criticism offers insight into the psychological processes of textual interpretation and what it is that the text as an object represents in these processes. The outline of interpretive processes, below, is taken from Norman Holland's *Psychoanalytic Psychology and Literature-and-Psychology* (1990).

Object-relations theory goes back to psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott whose paediatric studies have contributed to literary thought. This theory proposes that at the early stages of a child's development the mother and child are undifferentiated. A number of transitional phases occur which begin to separate the young child from the mother and the stress of this separation is pacified by transitional objects such as a 'teddy bear or security cloth' (Holland, p.41). The theory of transitional objects then 'serves as a prototype for all situations later in life when we use symbolism to sustain ourselves. It is the forerunner of all important values and possessions, including works of art' (*ibid.* pp. 41-42). In this way narrative interpretation is linked to a coping process, the goal of which 'is to fulfil our psychological needs and desires' (Tyson, 1999, p.168). It is for these

reasons that psychoanalytic reader response criticism links narrative interpretation to either a reader's wish fulfilment and/or anxiety mastery. Therefore attached to notions of narrative representation is a certain amount of fetishism. In 'Symbolic Exchange and Death', for example, theorist Jean Baudrillard argues that representation is 'the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself...a fetishism of the lost object' (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 497). Representation and textual interpretation are linked to issues of desire.

A reader brings a text to life 'out of his (sic) own desires. When he does so, he brings his lifestyle to bear on the work. He mingles his unconscious loves and fears and adaptations with the words and images he synthesizes at a conscious level': the truth effect of creative nonfiction narrative begins precisely here (Holland, 1975a, p.12). For, based on a desire for the 'real' and on a narrative's truth claim, a reader decodes and consciously synthesizes the generic conventions of autobiographical types of narrative such as the extra-textual cues, the synonymity of the name on the cover and within the narrative. The nuances of language and the insertion of fact-like detail or testimony, further contribute to the experience of a creative nonfiction narrative as true. The unique reading experience offered by such narratives is therefore created by the reader. The reader's approach to the narrative and their belief that it refers to a true state of affairs, existing outside of and independent of the narrative, is confirmed by the representational devices of autobiographical narrative.

## Part Six: Conclusion

This thesis has endeavoured to consider what is at the heart of the unique reading experience offered by creative nonfiction narratives in light of their recent heightened popularity. It has considered whether differences experienced by readers between a creative nonfiction and fiction narrative are the product of the words on the page or whether such differences are linked to what a reader brings to the text. An analysis of this kind could as easily be applied to other recently popularised media, such as reality programs and feature film-length documentaries; one could consider the social and cultural implications of these (theoretically) unmediated forms.

The analysis of Helen Garner's narratives looks to the words on the page of *The First Stone* and *The Children's Bach* in order to establish that a sense of difference—between the factual basis of one and the imaginary basis of the other—is distinctly and quantifiably present. It becomes clear from the examination of an excerpt from *The First Stone* and an excerpt from Grisham's *The Chamber*, that what distinguishes one as having a correspondence to fact comes not from the words on the page but from the assumptions with which the reader approaches the text. I argue that, readers approach and respond to creative nonfiction narratives, such as *The First Stone*, as to a representation of a real, living world of experience owing to their knowledge of genre.

The nature of creative nonfiction, as proposed by various critics, led to a consideration of the creative treatment of fact and the subjective voice,

in light of *The First Stone*'s supposedly nonfiction status. Gutkind claims, in his definition of creative nonfiction, that creative nonfiction 'welcomes the subjective voice' and points out 'that creative work can respect fact' (*ibid.*). The examination of *The First Stone* questions this claim, for upon closer analysis of the 'creative' language used in the narrative conceptual contradictions are evident. The text informs the reader, on the cover of *The First Stone*, that it is a 'gripping blend of reportage and personal experience'. The connotations of the word reportage are journalistic. It implies that, regardless of 'personal experience', it reports a real case, about real people and events; it is fact. A closer examination of the language used to portray individuals within the narrative, however, exposes a clear case of biased representation. Through the dependence upon literary techniques, which include not only descriptive language but also the use of literary modes, the reader, desiring the real, is guided by the personal bias of the narrative's voice. I argue that this language provides evidence of the incongruity between the personal subjective voice and the narrative's nonfiction, reportive status.

This incongruity is evident in the archetypal stereotyping of Dr Shepherd as protagonist (with whom readers are expected to empathize) and the construction of the young women as antagonists. The distinct literary motif of good versus evil functioning in the narrative highlights the narrative's truth as being bound to literary convention rather than irrefutable fact. So clear is the portrayal of Shepherd as a literary figure, that we find his equivalent in the character Dexter from *The Children's Bach*. The comparison of this literary character with a real person reveals difficulties in distinguishing, in terms of fact and fiction, a real person from a fictionalised character. I argue that the reader is lulled by the familiarity of these literary conventions into believing that such oppositions apply to a real world of experience and are in effect truthful.

And further, that it is the language used to represent Shepherd that positions the reader to empathize with him. It does this through the use of positively connotative language. As reader response theory points out, readers bring to the text their experiences in both life and language. Connotative language bares a range of implied meanings effected through social and cultural usage. Readers' responses are bound to their decoding of elements of language and characterisation. The narrative invites a reading of Dr Shepherd as innocent, based on the author's positive impression of, and interaction with him.

I further argue, that although Alice Sebold's memoir *Lucky* is a true account of the author's horrific rape, it is, in structural terms, unavoidably a story. Stories are the recurring patterns of our human experiences (Abrams, p. 102). All human experience is ordered in terms of story which not only becomes the shaping principle of all narratives, but is something that readers anticipate in approaching narratives. In structural terms, then, both *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones* are shaped by a quest narrative, which rather than highlighting differences, establishes similarities. As Sebold's traumatic experiences are subject to the processes suggested in the root word fiction, to shape or to fashion, and are ordered chronologically—beginning, middle and end—the fact that the story is true comes not from within the text itself but from extra-textual information found on the cover.

Additionally, the comparison of the language used to describe rape and violence in *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones*, in terms of fact and fiction, reveals superficial differences which I point out are a matter of emphasis. The language used in both narratives evokes the psychological and physical impact of rape and violence. *Lucky* emphasises the brutality of

rape and violence through literal language which, by contrast, *The Lovely Bones* shies away from, instead figuratively implying violence and rape. It is the literal language of *Lucky*, as seen in the verb saturated excerpts, which has a realistic effect. Readers familiar with testimonial discourse, in which verbs feature highly as being indicative of concrete action, will no doubt have a sense that *Lucky*'s literal language corresponds to fact. It is an effect, though, that is created through the narrative's emphasis on the violence and rape as evidenced through the language. The reader brings to this discourse assumptions regarding its truth-telling capacity and the language has the effect of confirming these assumptions.

I consider the role of extra-textual information in prompting the reader's approach to the narrative. In the numerous notes on the cover of *Lucky* the word memoir is repeated six times. This positions the reader to decode the text, to interpret it in terms of its correspondence to fact, to a real world of experience. If it were not for this extra-textual material a reader may assume its factual basis but not be entirely sure of it. An explanation of why a reader may assume its factual basis is, according to Richard Ford, because readers "want facts, and when they read fiction they try and pin down the 'real' facts that underlie the novel" (Quoted in Cunningham, 2003, p.1). Ford's claim links textual interpretation to a reader's desire for the real, in the same way that reader response theory and various literary critics do. The truth effect of creative nonfiction narrative begins before the actual reading of the narrative with an extra-textual prompting.

Additionally, it is argued that the name on the cover of *Lucky* and the narrative 'I' within its pages are one and the same and the synonymity, the relationship of text and an authenticating presence outside of the text, further implicates the reader in the truth effect of the narrative. I link

this to the reader's desire for the real, a desire to identify with a real world of experience. Despite the voyeuristic implications of reading a story about violent rape, psychoanalytical reader response theory proposes that a reader's response is linked to psychological coping mechanisms and anxiety mastery.

I use the case of two notorious literary impostures to further illustrate the extent to which the reader is implicated in the production of the effect of truth. I use the impostures to highlight a point, in which Whitlock is cited, about the nature of grammar, language and narrative. I argue that there are no specific indicators inherent in language which can distinguish truth from lies—hence the use of lie detectors which rely on a person's physical response rather than audible answers.

The examination of the impostures also brought to light a number of significant points about assumptions surrounding autobiographical narratives. The conventions of autobiography guarantee a reader will assume a direct correspondence between the textual persona and the real world persona. This assumption, that an authenticating presence exists outside of the narrative, Egan states is 'the key to its credibility, and therefore, to its effects', effects which I emphasise, are created by the reader (*ibid.*).

I argue that from my comparison of creative nonfiction and fiction there is little in terms of clear distinguishable differences in the words on the page. Differences that are identified have more to do with matters of emphasis as per the particular genre that each narrative belongs to. A number of definitions of creative nonfiction—for example when Minot says, 'some short stories and novels that draw heavily on actual events and

characters *seem* like nonfiction'—underline difficulties in distinction. I argue that a narrative's truth-claim and the assumptions with which the reader approaches the text produce a powerful effect of credibility. The effect of truth is not what is in the text as it is what is done with the text, the assemblage of its parts by a reader. There is persuasive evidence that it is what the reader brings to the text and the synthesis of various meta-textual and textual elements, which this analysis points out, result in a truth effect. Just as reader response theory holds that a reader constructs meaning from texts as they decode and co-author the text, I argue that the sense of truth and unique reading experience offered by creative nonfiction narratives, is also constructed by similar processes.

In conclusion, one can argue that the narrative distinctions between fiction and creative nonfiction are, at best, marginal. What informs both genres, essentially, is the root word, fiction: to shape, or fashion.

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