



Finding the Words for Feelings: Narrative Fiction's Linguistic Interpretation of Somatic Markers

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Thesis (comprising of creative artefact and exegesis) submitted May 2012 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) at the Faculty of Arts and Business, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Queensland, Australia.

Creative Artefact (a novella): *Anaïs*

Exegesis:

Finding the Words for Feelings: Narrative Fiction's Linguistic Interpretation of Somatic Markers

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BA (Hons) (University of the Sunshine Coast)

Finding the Words for Feelings: Narrative Fiction's Linguistic Interpretation of Somatic Markers

Abstract

The creative artefact, *Anaïs*, and the accompanying exegesis explore notions of subjectivity and the limitations of language, particularly in respect to the possibilities for articulation of human feelings (somatic markers) and the process of attaining shared understanding.

Being written in first-person, the narrator in the creative artefact, *Anaïs*, is free to meander in labyrinthine thought among the pressing and the not-so-pressing details of his life. Spanning a contemporary period of a few weeks, *Anaïs* also includes an intra-text (as 'Notebook') written by the narrator some ten to twelve years earlier. The inclusion of vignettes from the Notebook allows comparisons to be made between earlier and later versions of the 'Self', as well as the stylistic approaches possible to re-present the fragmented nature of thought on the printed page. As with the exegesis, the creative artefact—via the narrator—is concerned with how shared understanding using language is achieved, despite the seeming fact that it is impossible to describe somatic markers in any literal sense.

In keeping with a practice-based (and practice-led) methodological approach, the exegetical component demonstrates the same research journey, albeit in a more overt fashion. The original, seemingly-innocent and ordinary decision to write a creative piece as a first-person narrative led me to question exactly what it was that I was attempting to re-present. In turn this led to the necessity (for me) of having adequate understandings of some of the 'basics', which I had—legitimately and non-problematically for the most part—taken for granted: in particular, language and thought. The exegetical component addresses questions related to these issues: the problems inherent in an approach based on Darwinian evolutionary theory in relation to the origin and function of language; the ubiquity of metaphor; and, the nature of 'thought'. The research leads to an innovative theory of writing and reading, before concluding with a critical reflection and close-reading of text from *Anaïs*.

Table of Contents

Abstract ...	ii
Table of Contents ...	iii
Declaration of Originality ...	v
Acknowledgements ...	vi

Anaïs: a novella

Zero ... Andrew, sometimes you can	2
One ... Anaïs' e-mail arrived the	6
Two ... Hmm, someone's telling me	15
Three ... Some say that the	20
Four ... There is no sign	28
Five ... Now I wish to	37
Six ... Islandic. In this sea	40
Seven ... The Notebook worries and	42
Eight ... As if history can	51
Nine ... Distant cloud to the	56
Ten ... Ah, yes, this is	59
Eleven ... More yachts than usual	68
Twelve ... In Sydney back then	71
Thirteen ... Well, says Charles, urinating	78
Fourteen ... Anaïs, Anaïs, is that	89
Fifteen ... There is a bizarre	97
Sixteen ... I should tie up	104
Seventeen ... In the early hours	109
Eighteen ... There is no doubt	112
Nineteen ... In re-reading the old	118
Twenty ... Siesta'd and rested. And	123
Twenty One ... I have invited Anne	125
Twenty Two ... There is a further	131
Twenty Three ... Last evening, walking back	139

Twenty Four ... Further phone calls from	146
Twenty Five ... They are somewhere over	150
 Exegesis	
Chapter One ... Introduction	153
Chapter Two ... On Language	160
Chapter Three ... On Metaphor	176
Chapter Four ... On Thought	190
Chapter Five ... On Theory	213
Chapter Six ... On Creativity	225
 References ...	 234
Appendices ...	
Appendix One ... <i>Portrait of the artist</i> ...	240

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this submission is my own work, completed under the supervision of the University of the Sunshine Coast. The substantive work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Michael Gardiner: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix One—‘Portrait of the Artist as a Goat’—first appeared in *Social Alternatives* 2011.

Referencing and Formatting

Throughout the exegetical component of this thesis I have adhered to the Harvard style of referencing as modified from time to time for internal use by the University of the Sunshine Coast.

In formatting the exegetical component of this thesis I have deviated from the above in-house style in one respect. I have arbitrarily separated and indented some direct quotations for emphasis: where the above in-house style would only prescribe such separation for quotations above 30 words in length, at times I do so for quotations less than 30 words. Where such separations of quotations from the main text occur, those quotations above 30 words in length do not carry quotation marks (as per the in-house style), while those quotations less than 30 words in length retain quotation marks (as would be the case per the in-house style if the quotations were part of the main text).

Anais

a novella

Zero

Andrew, sometimes you can be a total asshole.

This statement is one possible beginning. The disturbing accusation was recently directed at me by my so-called friend, Charles, a strangely endearing Neanderthal with a limited vocabulary—most of which is ruled by the grammar of profanity—but who, curiously enough, sometimes appears to demonstrate an understanding of the human condition more insightful than my own limited knowledge. I don't remember the exact circumstances. It was probably just something trivial, and he may not have even meant it to have the importance that I later gave it. Hell, he sprouted plenty of other nonsense that I ignored. Charles was like that; for him it was normal. But anyway, a statement like this from one of your friends—even one categorised as a so-called friend—is sometimes enough to give you a shock, a severe jolt to the accepted order. After the initial bout of petulance, incomprehension, outrage and indignation (absolutely justified, of course, I felt at the time), Charles' observation made me reflect. As a result, the previously unthinkable became a real possibility: what if he was right? What did it mean and how had it come about? From such innocent beginnings and incidents the narratives of life emerge. Who can anticipate when there will be a minor detail or event that makes us reflect, and that alters one of the stories of our lives? What causes change?

Anyway:

Andrew Faulk, at your service: writer, bachelor, a pushing-fifty-year-old teenager slightly bewildered at having so far survived this oddity called life and, among other things, I am intolerant. The recognition of the fact that I am intolerant pisses me off no end. I have no time for it. I don't like it, but that's the word that I've come up with after careful deliberation over Charles' allegation. It is the single word that best describes the

condition, even though no single word is ever adequate to describe anything, really: intolerant. So, I ought to apologise in advance for being intolerant, but I probably won't, because that's part of what it means to be intolerant; people who are intolerant (go on, say it, 'people like me') don't feel the need to apologise. It's not because we're stubborn or pig-headed or anything like that. No, we don't apologise because we don't even realise that the problem lies with us. Bloody Hell, we don't even realise that there is a problem, let alone acknowledge that the problem might be ours. All that we notice—and notice here that I keep slipping from first to second person, no doubt an unconscious attempt to implicate others, to spread any personal blame to the blameless—all that we notice is that the world is an inadequate, contemptuous place that rightly and fully deserves our collective derision. Luckily—and this is how we manage to survive what would otherwise be the downhill slide to self-loathing and depression—we can remain aloof from all of the humdrum, petty annoyances by insulating ourselves in the knowledge that we are superior beings. Put simply, intolerant people (yes, people like me) are arseholes, just as Charles stated so succinctly. So, like the alcoholic that stands up at the AA meeting and declares his addiction, that's my admission. I am intolerant: the first step. But intolerance is only a symptom of something deeper. That's the second thing I've realised.

I used to be happy. I remember a time when I was happy and it occurs to me that happy people are not intolerant, or at least not usually or unnecessarily, not in my experience anyway. Although, the idea of being happy—the state that I'm remembering—is somewhere in the distant past, so I might be misremembering, or investing too much content in the positive properties of the idea of happiness. But if I'm not, if my intolerance can be put down to a lack of happiness, then this lack of something (happiness) might be the problem. Now, I'm not saying that I don't have enjoyment, the various trivial pleasures

that occur from day-to-day and time-to-time and that relieve the tedium of an otherwise problematic existence. No, not at all: I have friends, I have a laugh, I have fun.

But still there's something missing.

And the more that I reflect on the ideas, whether it be tolerance or happiness or whatever, the more that I play around with it—because that's all it is, playing around with the semantics of things rather than getting to the real cause, admitting the real issue—the more I realise that I already know what it is that's missing, and happiness is just a by-product of the thing, not the thing itself. I want to change it, I want to go back to a previous time when I was happy, or more accurately, when I had this *other* thing and happiness was a by-product, but I don't know how. You see, I can use words like happy and tolerant and so on, and have a workable chance of defining what they mean, at least enough for my own understanding of the words, that is. That's not the problem. The problem is that the root cause of Charles' original comment is contained in a word so well known, but so overused, that it's lost all possibility of definition.

The thing that I used to have and that now seems to be missing is 'love'; it's as simple as that, or as difficult. The thing that I would like to change, the thing that I would like to get back more than anything in the world, is the feeling of being *in* love.

But is it possible? Can the past somehow be reclaimed? I for one would like to think that it can. Maybe I'm just optimistic—the intolerant optimist, if that's possible. Maybe there's no justification for such optimism. Or again, perhaps it's entirely misplaced and if we could actually salvage the past we wouldn't like what we find.

I'm not sure, but I am curious.

Proposition:

The imagination has a history, as yet unwritten,
and it has a geography, as yet only dimly seen.

Guy Davenport
(1984: 4)

One

Mount Coolum, Australia

Anaïs' e-mail arrived the day after Brian's visit, and to be honest, I didn't notice it at first, hidden as it was amongst the usual detritus of offers and updates. Although 'hidden', I admit, is a denial: the message was as vivid as a turd on snow—foreign, no less. Perhaps even at that point—seeing her name again after so long—I had, somewhere below the level of consciousness, attributed meaning of a type unjustifiable given the available information. But then, the fanciful notion of our thoughts or actions being limited by the restrictive confines of available information ... well ... what a novel idea.

Okay, so Anaïs' e-mail was another beginning, but it's not really *the* beginning. The true beginning is that I write. Some of what I write is gibberish, by the way, but it's what I do; I write for a living, such as it is. I can't help it. I write for relaxation. I write when I'm calm, I write when I'm anxious. It doesn't matter, I just write. Someone asked me once how I manage to do it. It's not that I somehow 'manage' to do it; it's that I can't manage without it. When I say I write, though, and even though I do it for a living, don't think of that as some sort of profession; don't think of me as a *writer*. Think of me as more like a witness. Things happen that I sometimes notice and I write. It's almost automatic: not causal but correlated, you might say. And I've always written and the reasons that I write are as countless as the words I've written. I no longer question the reason for writing, I just do it. It is pointless, then, to go into the reasons for jotting down these few unimportant recollections contained here. Whatever *I* think the reason might be I could just as easily be wrong. Now, I also realise that for some people this non-explanation is not enough. Some people always want to question: why? Why is he writing this particular story? (Is it a story?) That's understandable, it's natural to ask questions; there is a primal

need to know *why* something happened. Just listen to any child as soon as they start learning about the world, about people. It's all the time: why this, why that, why why why? So for those readers who need an answer, let's just say that writing this little piece is a form of therapy. I try to understand my thoughts by writing about them. Okay? It's a pretty good answer, as far as answers to anything go and you never know, it *could* be right. Anyway, since I'm being candid there's something else I should mention.

The Brian that I've referred to is my accountant, but that detail is not significant, except to Brian of course. And so when we've finished with Brian, just forget him: he is after all very forgettable. The thing is I'm someone who remembers events based on other events and the two sorts of events don't have to be related. I may not remember what day it is, but I remember that I have to put out the rubbish bins the same day that the housekeeper comes, that sort of thing; the arrival of the housekeeper makes me think of rubbish bins. See what I mean? Anyway, the important thing is Anaïs and the e-mail. It's just that, whenever I think of the e-mail I can't help but think of its arrival the day after Brian's visit. For me the two events are forever linked, even though there's no connection except for the one that I've given, entirely arbitrarily. Notice already how liberating, how powerful writing is; you get a free hand to make whatever bizarre connections you want—great.

In any case, the e-mail lay in wait, female, with infinite feline patience. Recognition of who the sender must be and what the missive might contain elicits the contradictory, but often-found-sharing-a-smoke-behind-the-shelter-shed feelings of anticipation and apprehension.

Apprehension and anticipation belong to the unknowable, the future. Memory, on the other hand, and as dodgy as it might be, belongs and constitutes the past, at least on a personal level. The subjective cumulative past, then, is all that we have. My friend Charles,

therefore, suggests not looking forward to anything. No point, he says, and pours another drink and farts and wheezes and lights another ciggy, as he calls them. But I—and my suspicion is that I am not alone in this respect—I have a feeling there might be more to it, that there must be a purpose. Despite the philosophical logic that dictates otherwise, I have always looked forward to things. I feel that it's legitimate, or at a minimum, shouldn't be illegal among consenting adults.

Allow me to be blunt; I want to be precise with this account, really. The problem is that precision eludes; it is the nature of precision to be elusive; all is translation. But there is a plan. In the interest of an approximation of veracity the intention is to interrogate the evidence, to cross-examine memory, metaphorically speaking; the task at hand is to haul in the usual suspects, identify the culprits—the use of semantic torture is not ruled out here—and make the bastards talk: clarity before originality. But as I explained, in my mind the whole thing started with Brian and so that's where I have to start. The day he came round I made the mistake of showing him some words I was working on. No, I didn't show him these words, these private jottings and ramblings, but words that (as unlikely as it may seem) someone might eventually pay me to have written. Words like this:

Mount Coolum, from the east, appears as a four-hundred-metre-wide pair of breasts, two hundred metres from ground to round headless neck, where, within the cleft of cleavage, a waterfall erupts during thunderous summer rains and tumbles down the sheer height toward the hidden navel below: a novel orifice in a lichen-nippled world.

“This is a tautology,” Brian says, poking an accusatory finger at the line of script.
 “*Cleft of cleavage*? Isn't one of them redundant?”

Bloody Hell, everyone thinks they're an editor (I'm still in my intolerant phase, remember), but I know that I've blundered, that it's my mistake, one that I usually avoid. Words in progress are premature, still needing the artificial womb, and shouldn't be bandied around like cigars and handshakes. One too many drinks at lunch probably. I should have been more cautious. My own fault, but it's better to be reminded of the error early on, stuff the yolk back into the egg, so to speak, rather than suffer the blank stare that he does so well. Always looks as if he's just scanned a crooked balance sheet and is waiting tight-lipped while the document's owner squirms under the weight of culpability. Bloody Hell, tautology indeed! I'm surprised he evens knows the word, and irritated that I'm impressed that he does.

"Yes, you're probably right," I say, giving me an opportunity to retrieve the offensive ink and pretend to ponder the possibilities of correction. Better change the subject.

"Not a very good host, am I? Here, let me freshen up that drink for you." At least I only have to go through the motions a couple of times a year, as he comes around to get papers signed and tell me things about myself that I'm too bored to care about for six months at a time. It's always the same. Oh no, no need for you to traipse into town, he says. I enjoy our little chats, and this time I'll get to see the new place. But it's not that. I know what he's really up to. There is some sort of weird voyeuristic fascination with the solitary scribe. It makes people want to prod and probe in an attempt to make sense of an alien creature. Ah, so this is where it all happens, this is the nerve centre then. As if a blank computer on a bare desk can somehow divulge the secret rituals of the black arts. Cleft of cleavage, indeed! No point in telling him that it's to do with timing, the rhythm of the phrase and the coarseness of consonants sounding silently in the head, and because cleft reminds of cliff and because the metaphorical head was once cleaved from the

monolithic torso: the duo of androgynous sex and violence meets in a duel to the death. And, there is something more than that, just a feeling that needs expression, a qualitative feel: qualia. No, no point. So, in a gesture of supposed common interest and shared understanding, I give him a fillip.

“So, Brian, what about those interest rates, hey?” Knowing full well that it doesn’t matter if they’re up or down or sideways—and I wouldn’t have a clue—but Brian will have something ready at hand for me to ignore for a while, at least until he forgets about the script; the primary task being to protect the frailty of the foetus. William Burroughs I am not, but I manage what I hope might be interpreted as a wry smile, as if I might be inspecting in a detached but addicted fashion, potential new merchandise: the bleached sports fan.

What are you after, Brian? What do you live for? Do you ever drunkenly howl at the moon, skinny-dipping in a warm sea and swallowing sea and sand and spewing back all that can’t be fathomed? Or is this your only entertainment? These ritual visits to a world of the imagination where even here you still succumb to the distractions of your own vocation and memory, so easily taken in with my guarded replies, because they’re vague enough to be able to fill in the blanks with fantasy. Hmm, fantasy infused in memory, an opening for a shrink to audit a bean counter.

Only the parent has the prerogative to indulge, I think to myself, as I sneak a further glance:

My licentious gaze observes precisely the brazen mammalian display from a second-floor window, the house strategic, midway between the almost-volcanic terrain and an unconcerned sea, a vigorous five minute walk in either direction, weather permitting. Joanna says that strenuous exercise is essential for a healthy body and wholesome mind.

Should I titillate, should I mention to Brian that she used to test the axiom regularly, by subjecting her petite frame to stellar bouts of sweat-raising endurance? Ah yes, her body I accepted but the mind intrigues, considering some of the more interesting things she wanted me to do. Still, that's in the past now. And I succeed in casually draping an arm over the side of the chair and sliding the cause for concern out of view. But I needn't have worried too much. Brian is focused as only an insider can be on the intricacies of the market and the inadequacies of the powers that be. What a marvellous thing it is, to play at charades when there is nothing at stake, nothing of value. Joanna and Charles make themselves scarce when Brian is due to visit. And of course, this time Joanna's whereabouts is infuriatingly elusive, with staccato blimps of terse messages on postcards being the only occasional contact. But then, in all this time we never really came any closer than that, did we Joanna? In some ways it's better that it ends now, the thing that lasted but never really started, the thing that was never really stated.

There is a sudden urge to fess-up to Brian, letting on that his visits inspire a general clean-up and that the alien is usually surrounded in literary filth and teetering piles of books and notes: a geriatric, gendered Iris. No, the image would be way too vivid, for him at least. Leave him to his own speculations and keep the library without shelves and the housekeeper's role out of view.

Interrupted by silence, I realise that Brian is watching me, waiting for my dutiful response to an unheard remark.

"Visited by the Muse?" he asks, in a conspiratorial gesture of understanding.

"Yes," I say, "very amusing indeed." And it's enough to elicit a chuckle from an accountant before the trivialities of calling for a cab and the attendant rituals of departure.

“Don’t stress,” he says, with a touch on the arm, “everything’s okay so long as we have something for the publisher on time, okay. There’s no pressure till then.”

Really? This is not empirical mumbo-jumbo that only needs sufficient application of diligent hours to meet a totally incomprehensible tax-law deadline, Brian. This is the stuff of alchemy, and all that’s required is turning lead into gold while making it look like a walk in the park, or at least covering the tracks and hiding the recipe. Bloody Hell, no pressure there, Boyo.

“Okay, Brian, safe trip hey, and see you soon.”

Are you wondering about Anaïs, who she is, what she’s like? Are you curious about the e-mail, and what it says? I know I would be if I knew about it. Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned it yet, and then it wouldn’t be a problem, because I still have to get through today: the e-mail doesn’t arrive until tomorrow, the day *after* Brian’s visit. It’s a time thing—literary not literal—but you’re quite right, I’d rather know now as well. Still, we both have to wait. I’ve got an idea though that might help. Just imagine that this is a real story, written by a proper author, and then the bits between here and the e-mail can be thought of as characterisation. You know, when you’re given snippets of disparate information that help you form an opinion about the protagonist. You get to decide whether you like them or not: whether you can identify with them. It’s your choice; it’s a free country (well, almost, and for the moment, at least), and it’s what I’m going to do.

There’s that bird again. I’d better watch more closely this time. This is a living dinosaur in action, extinction is a myth.

Fly if you don’t want to die.

Hmm, there is another postcard from Joanna among the sale items and real estate notices, insolent in its routine unexpectedness. Eyeing the motifs and speculating on content and whereabouts is enough for the moment. And when did we begin worrying about ‘re-sale value’? That must have been the beginning of the end, when collectively we failed to be outraged by the lies of ‘genuine leatherette’ and ‘organic vine-ripened tomatoes’.

And the bones in my wrist—carpal or tarsal or some such—ache in the mornings. Closing in on fifty, that’s what it is, and younger ones than me succumbing all over the place: the unavoidable magnetism of entropy. There is an unremarked milestone the first time you choose the ramp instead of the stair, as if choice was something that will always exist. And next it will be the waterworks, I suppose. Such are the signposts of failure. No, not that. Don’t even think about that. Thinking about things can make them happen, Joanna says. All very jolly and positive, but is the reverse also true? Well, shit happens, Charles would say, but is it possible that shit happens because enough people think about shit happening?

There is way too much testosterone in the world.

He has a routine, or maybe it’s a she. How can you tell the sex of a bird?

I met a guy once whose job it was to sex chickens, millions of day-old chickens. Don’t laugh, that’s what he did, day in and day out, thousands of them. Well, I don’t know how many but it sounded like a Bloody Hell-of-a-lot from what I remember. He picked them up, the baby chickens that is, one at a time and sort of blew softly on the underside, amongst the fluff. Apparently the tiny feathers moved enough for him to judge the sex and toss them into the appropriate box: hens to the left and cocks to the right, or some such, and the whole operation deft. An expert he was, been doing it for years, really accurate,

apparently. Really. Because they're only after hens for the eggs, you see, they don't want males. Waste of feed—which reminds me, I need to feed my goldfish, Fluffy.

A feather is a scale. Soar dino, soar.

There is way too much testosterone in the world.

I have looked him up (or is he a her?), *haliaeetus leucogaster*; he is the white-bellied sea eagle. Hey, dude, wait a minute, it says here you're not really an eagle. You're a kite.

I wonder if you know that.

And the thought leads to further thoughts: How much of our pale existence is inside the safety of categories—friend, partner, parent, author, son, colleague, citizen, traveller—that go unquestioned? Do we act differently when others label us differently? Can we place someone in an alternate category, with a new name and all the assumptions that go with it, making it real? What is it that changes, when we change the words that describe?

Two

Hmm, someone's telling me there's another quake somewhere and the usual tsunami stuff.

It's Bloody dodgy geography around here, and the geography has history.

History and geography. Mount Coolum almost made it.

A damn fine piece of rock though, Charles says, and it don't matter what she's made from. He regards Coolum as he might an ex-wife, a hardened and solidified version of a former supplier model, to be sure, but one that might still be spoken of, or even to, with a fondness only available to the raw selectivity of memory. Yes, she's damn fine!

Now that's interesting.

The sheer cliff rises and the bird follows, like a kite. First water—Diamond moves. It must be the updraught, the mechanics of it, I mean, or maybe I mean thermo-dynamics, don't know. Yeah, probably thermo-dynamics, it must have something to do with temperature as well.

Okay, let's see what Joanna has given us on the back of this post-worn postcard, depicting way too colourful, way too vivid, prayer wheels and flags. Do I detect the slight aroma of incense? Or maybe it's Charles smoking something different, a different brand of bullshit.

—— Crossing the border into Tibet, I suddenly realised that *I* was Tibet, to your China. The past is nothing; there is only the present.

Bloody Hell, Joanna, this does not help me. What the Hell am I doing? Does this mean it's over? It was already over, wasn't it? Sure. Maybe that's for the best. I've never really known where I stood with Joanna, never really understood anything about the way she sees the world, what her particular reality is. Yes, maybe it's for the best. It is for the best.

History is unhappily married to Geography, and both are having long meetings with their respective lawyers. Geography, the solid and reliable old Taurean husband, is frustrated by the inconsistencies of his young schizophrenic Geminian wife. History is only after the cash, throw the bitch out, says Charles, and I'm just the man for the job. But then Charles tends to overheat, having the full complement of calories, whereas one of my household gods, among a large and handsome and entirely necessary array, is Nonchalance. History is bedded to Geography, just as the terrene is welded to the temporal. So, adjustments need to be made, and more compatible living arrangements sought.

Compatibility as a concept, though, is unknowably obtuse.

I suspect that Charles is more compatible with Joanna than I. Their valency is in synch; it is more equal, it seems to me. But they barely talk. They ignore, or at least avoid each other when they're around. So, the nascence of truth in truisms remains true. Like-forces repel, lest the mirror image compel the onset of self-hatred.

A snake with tits, says Charles. Arrrrhh!

Joanna says nothing, except for this cryptic Tibet thing. How the Hell am I supposed to know what to do?

Is there a school for this stuff? Someone please tell me how the world works!

I intend to call it inattentive ignorance, superficial in-articulation of sensation, barring perception. Conceptual, says Charles, make the bastards work for it.

Anyway, it looks as if it's over, so I don't need to do anything, I don't appear to have a say in the matter, whatever the matter is. I understand nothing.

There is still a slight ache in one of my joints. I should get out of this chair and move around. But I like this chair. A comfortable chair is not a luxury. Italian red leather is a

legitimate business expense, isn't it, Brian? Charles has the annoying habit of commandeering my chair at odd times, legs splayed in testicle-scratching mode, with one unshod foot atop the desk, straining apparatus to full-tilt capacity. The starry shine of chromed aluminium under the weight of Charles' hairy forearm and the rich redness under rump and torso groans with excess. Yet I do have some strange fondness for Charles, unjustified by his general demeanour and his physique that will never encourage vanity. The callous disregard that he shows for my chair though, pushes at the limits of friendship.

The miscreant chair thief usually raises his eyebrows. What does it matter? says he, swivelling the machine and levelling his gaze. I need to do some work, that's what matters, says I. Be civilized for once and find somewhere else to park. To be civilized, Charles reminds (and I am translating his grunts), means to learn to live in cities, a possibility that he has no inclination of ever endorsing.

Work, yes I do have my work, whatever that might mean. Reading Davenport today, he had some ideas: the idea of work, like the idea of cities, is a recent invention, just as the notion of the archaic only begins to be studied in the twentieth century. Abbé Breuil studies bulls at Altamira, in the Spanish cave, and a young Picasso crawls in with him and sees primal clarity in the enigmatic: modern equals archaic. The more that we stylise, refine and simplify, the more we resemble our origins. Or as Charles paraphrased it, when I attempted to explain the subtleties of the notion: okay, so you study something enough, poke around at it, tear it apart, de-fucking-construct it, until it ends up disappearing up its own arse, leaving nothing but a well-polished skid mark. Seems a bit pointless, you know, a trifle excessive, even for a wanker like you. I mean, it sounds like you want to take a perfectly fucking good fillet steak, and turn it into mince! Hmmm.

Often, when I'd be working, Joanna had the delightful technique of insinuating interest: thin, downy arms wind around my neck, fingers firm-beating to a sternum rhythm,

head-nuzzling, the occasional tongue tip exploring ears and neck in a trembling shiver, bold. The spaces pulsing between two hearts—musical—are excused from the dilemma of time. Like chameleons, like words on a page, they change rather than die, having the stubborn propensity to display novel allegiances and to assume the colours of their new surroundings. I have no idea what Joanna's new colours will look like. They will not reflect me. That is to say, music invariably devolves to Muzak.

Watch a Coolum moon in a Coolum sky.

Do you see the same moon, Joanna? Is it reflecting on Tibet, reflecting on us? Or is it dying, like us? Doomed and dying.

D H Lawrence died when he was 45.

If I was D H Lawrence, I'd be dead.

Sitting on the upper balcony at night there are geckos that attract my attention as they stop start in their erratic meanderings over the outside walls of the house. One in particular—and despite the fact that no one *is* a name, I intend to call him Santayana, because I know that if we could exchange pleasantries he would be erudite—periodically scuttles behind one of the plastic light fittings, there being just enough room to do so between it and the bagged and painted wall. At first I thought he must be seeking added incandescent warmth, you know, cold-blooded and all that, but of course I was wrong. He just wanted to feed on the dust-speckled insects, also attracted to the benefits of the fixture. Santayana seems especially adept at the task, since, while he is not the largest of the geckos in residence, between courses he routinely and effectively discourages familial competitors by advancing with such speed and confidence that they retreat to alternative habitats. It makes one wonder, I suppose, just how many square metres of second-storey wall space, with just how many light fittings, are required to accommodate x number of geckos in a sustainable

manner. Anyway, since the outdoor lighting has obviously become an important element in the ecosystem, I resolve to leave them on permanently, lest I inadvertently forget and Santayana goes hungry as a direct result of my negligence.

Our constructions demand the responsibility of maintenance.

Three

Some say that the planet Saturn controls the first hours of the day. Maybe this idea arose because the unique gaseous orb of Saturn gives off more energy than it receives: it's a morning person. The planet Venus, on the other hand, only becomes a 'star' on those rare occasions when it rises before the Sun, a bit like a biddable teenager, which is to say, remarkable only as a result of infrequent occurrence.

Saturday morning, as with any other morning, has its routine: arise at 5.30 or so, stretching exercises to loosen the old frame, brisk walk around to the base of Coolum (the usual wariness anywhere near the Doberman terrorising Tanah Street; no fence can hold that mutt!) before the ascent, the climb, a few minutes to relax and to take in the expanse of view, the return journey, anticipating freshly-squeezed juice before turning on The Machine to begin the day's tasks at precisely 7.00. There is an assurance and reassurance in routine that goes beyond satisfaction. Chickens and children intuitively understand.

On this occasion, not surprisingly, it is Charles that disturbs my routine, twice; the first is indirect although not unusual, and leads to a disturbance both mental and emotional; the second is direct, physical, and profoundly unusual: interesting—something other than his usual two-dimensional response.

Moving through the upstairs lounge at 5.38am, according to the current arrangement of liquid crystals, I note that the computer is already on; there is a flashing message indicating I have messages—who is it, besides me, dear reader, just can't wait for the not too distant day when there is a message indicating a message, indicating we have messages? But I digress—I also note that, unless there is a wild bear loose in the house, noise and movements associated with the lumbering locomotion of Charles emanates from downstairs.

Charles must have been up late, the ample evidence of overflowing ashtrays and empty wine bottles suggests as much; satiation and revelry have apparently been the order of the evening. So, he has either been awake all night, or something else is afoot. Let's hope he's not the usual morose, gloomy and phlegmatic monster that he can be after such a session. At this point, an undetectable-by-others ursine sense must have alerted him to my presence.

Read your fucking e-mails, Soft-cock, rises the bellow from below, it just might be the fucking wake-up call you need!

I put it to you, ladies and gentlemen of the literary jury, that such a directive is difficult to ignore, especially if it be articulated with such grace and dignity.

Bolstering the remaining sense of my own dignity, then, I comply.

Upon inspection, there is in fact only one unread e-mail, and I momentarily consider whether Charles' comment refers to the offer to cure (with amazing, instant and astounding results, no less) any manner of impotence or performance anxiety that I might currently be suffering. Certainly not! No, that can't be it, but there are a number of other ethereal missives since yesterday that Charles must have already opened. It must be among those.

At first there is nothing worthwhile, the errand seemed pointless. I was about to hit control-click, and the unnoticed would have been added to the other unwanted that deserved the unread-delete treatment, when something struck me. It wasn't the name at first, that didn't register, it was something else. Maybe it was the dot-de, I'm not sure, but it was something, something that arrested movement and time. When understanding finally came, I was speechless, or more accurately, key-stroke-less, and it was as if twelve years had fallen away and Anaïs had walked through the doorway, was standing there watching

me with her funny, quizzical, aren't-you-the-lovable-eccentric-who-is-always-writing-or-typing, look.

anaisundaksel@unicum.de

< Hello, Andrew, will I state the obvious and say that it has been a long time? Of course I will, because it has, and certain things should be stated even if they are obvious. I know that we decided not to communicate, that it would be best, that it would serve no purpose, that it would make things more difficult, but I also know that you will understand once you read this. Understanding is perhaps not my meaning, but, as you would say, 'further and better particulars' will, I hope, allow you to see how the situation has altered, why I now need to do what I do. Our present has become the past and our past has become the present. This is not a riddle, Andrew, the proper adjective for our love should be 'geological'; the seconds are counted in millions of eons, epochs exist in milliseconds (and yes, of course I have always loved you, *bécassine*). But now the past and the present must be reconciled, or at the very least they must face each other squarely, assess their respective potentials, the possible must look for verification in the mirror of examination. See, I use your words! The scope of the probable must at some point—now is a good time—be identifiable.

Where to begin? I have written to you, no, I have begun to write to you many times since that cold morning outside the *Oliv* on *Münzstraße* (and I can tell you now that even though I suggested the meeting place, I have never liked that café, a black hole that attracts and entraps all the stupid waiters of the world. The fact that they remain is ample proof of their stupidity, as well as the dire forces at work, those forces that make the coffee totally undrinkable, for example, in the place—of course, naturally, even now I refuse to return). You may not remember, but, even though it had stopped raining by then (the eggs had already been dropped, you said), all around was bitter, icy. Was it the same for you? Of course it was. Anyway, no matter, much has happened since and I have followed your work with interest. No, not the esoteric, not the work on Ouspensky, we both knew from the beginning that while that idea showed some merit it would never amount to anything, if for no other reason than the general lack of critical thought nowadays—and to that end, your observation that the trend toward self-help, as a genre, was no more than profiteering from thoughtless thoughtfulness, has been shown accurate. No, I refer to the fictions you have created. It is true, Andrew, people are complex and complete; all have a story, yet fiction makes a better job of truth. Although I must say, and don't be so sensitive and so easily offended, as I know you can be, that when Aksel and I studied closely the photograph on the latest dustcover, well, that must be an earlier picture of you, surely, *non*?

I never told you about Aksel. At the time it was not necessary, it would have been a mistake. Now it is necessary, essential even. You see, Aksel has asked to meet his father. Since next week is his birthday, that will be a good time.

I have looked at the schedules. There are suitable connections on Thursday (LH9759 to Bangkok; LH773 to Frankfurt Main). We can meet the flight. Advise your position. Anaïs >

Hmm, she has acquired the German talent for the abrupt ending.

Psychologists tell us that the emotion known as surprise is our reaction to the unexpected, our astonishment. Notwithstanding that that particular discipline continues erroneously, some might say pig-headedly, to confuse feeling with emotion, the sensory fuel of thought with the mechanics of motor. That is to say, the cognitive map may depict a certain terrain, it cannot create it. In any case, in this instance there is only one acceptable reaction.

Bloody Hell, Anaïs, after all this time. Bloody Hell.

Exceptional news, when received about someone we know or have known in the past, is overshadowed by the thought processes set in motion as a result of the news. What I mean by this: while it is the news that might be sufficiently staggering to garner our unwavering attention, the focus of thought is always on the person. Only later, often much later, do we concentrate on the circumstances, the context. It follows that the closer we are to such a person the more this is so, the more remote, the less so. What we make of the world is obtained and contained by introspection and transference. My reaction to the e-mail's content, then, is provisionally content-less, except for visions of Anaïs. Despite the twelve-year gap, despite the lack of contact, despite the women (there is, as yet it seems, no coincidence between the person I ought to be and the person that I am; the soul demands that the woman I love be the woman I am making love to), despite everything, there has always only been Anaïs. Anaïs has always been with me.

It has been suggested to me on a number of occasions and in differing contexts that I love Anaïs, that I am in love with Anaïs, and that I have always loved Anaïs. Leaving

aside for the moment what subtleties differentiate between these notions, among others, Charles and Joanna, as well as my own inner voice, have made such suggestions. Anaïs has never made such a suggestion. Rather, Anaïs used to suggest that I had always, or only, if we are to be pedantic and precise, been in love with the *idea* of Anaïs. When I mentioned this to Charles at some remote point his response echoed mine, albeit in a different voice. The fuck is that supposed to mean? he said.

Love is one of those extraordinarily tangible, intangibles. You're supposed to know intuitively, so the theory goes, when it's 'the real thing', like the difference between Pepsi and Coke, I guess. Perhaps this was what Anaïs was referring to, since the hype around those particular products is selling the idea of something, not the thing itself. But then, the same sort of delusion applies to all forms of advertising, doesn't it? Is love a similar delusion, advertising the possibility of happiness, marketing to the inadequacies and insecurities of the gullible? Is love the irresistible lie, the 'vine-ripened tomato' on the grocery list of life?

Amazingly, distraction can occur within the interstice between heartbeats, regardless of circumstances.

Move your arse, *Daddy*, Charles says, I've been waiting hours while you've been poncing around in the snore-bag. Let's climb this fucking anthill.

Charles is not rude, just unaware of the concept of politeness. The embodiment of self-restraint for Charles, for example, is to cease drinking immediately upon falling unconscious. More to the point and the current context, he never exercises, so why the sudden interest in scaling Coolum? Charles, for the entirety of his adulterous adult life, to my knowledge, has never exerted anything other than his foul mouth. This sudden eagerness for physical activity is novel, even without the added distraction that Charles, in the unlikely guise of the Morning Star, is a vivid, visual feast. The wanton goat-man is

wearing shorts of a fashion-less nature, stained in various places so that the original off-beige (?) is now somewhere between mustard-green and claret-grey. The shorts are slung, they have no choice really, under the protruding gut, a surface disinclined to offer any measure of traction, one of the folds of fat below the gut being the location where the waistband will temporarily fall no farther, notwithstanding that this in itself could be classed as a physics-defying feat, without fear of contradiction. If the shorts are said to occupy the space below the abdomen, then the Shearer's Singlet, originally navy blue perhaps, occupies that space above. It too fails to obtain purchase on the pregnancy below, despite being stretched in sterling effort—a sports bra for a non-sporting Hulk. There is, however, little scope for further cataloguing the disturbing ensemble, as Charles' flip-flops are already slip-slapping a waddled rhythm toward the stair. Did he say, '*Daddy*'? Distraction, utter-less and complete. Finally, then, speechlessness does follow key-stroke-less-ness.

It is not until what must be some minutes later, when we crunch onto the gravel parking area, the one servicing those climbers that normally arrive from more distant realms, that focus returns and I realise we have driven the short distance, rather than walked. In an unguarded moment I have become a minor, silent character in one of Charles' stories, rather than my own. The 1959 two-tone grey Holden Special—a true 'classic', as Charles is wont to inform anyone prepared to listen—grinds to a halt, partly, if not entirely, the result of no further forward momentum being possible (for it, and for the moment, at least); the chromed bumper had careered into the timber guardrail with a menacing sound, much as might be heard when wild brumbies test the breaking strength of an unwanted enclosure. The then only partially-chromed bumper, witnesses later attest, came to rest at much the same instant as the bulk of the beast. The two occupants follow the example a short while later, after opportunistic research to ascertain whether vision is

improved by bringing noses and windshields closer together—in this geographical dimension, and for the purposes of the experiment, the basics of Newtonian physics obtain. The hood ornament's violent spasm recedes to a tentative quiver: an erratic interruption to the mechanical pulse. Subsequently, Charles must have disengaged or neutralised the device or mumbled mantra that activates the machine, as the loud glubba-glubba noises gradually subside and the leaking drapery of blue-grey fumes eventually disperse, events that the onlookers and, at a minimum, at least one of the occupants, are thankful for. The vehicle slouches in decrepit repose, perhaps despondent in the knowledge that any further mayhem has been temporarily curtailed. It occurs to me that pets really do come to resemble their owners, or is it the other way around? Then, as if Charles and the car are privy to my thoughts and the comparison is approved unreservedly, a residual belch, an aural stimulant that might have emanated from either party—the one as a result of alighting or the other as a result of being alighted from—provides additional, unnecessary sanction.

So, says Charles, what are you going to do about it?

It? Do? *Anticipation and apprehension.* Anaïs says that she has always loved me. It can't be true, but I believe it. Do? It? I have no idea. Writing is an evasive art, and I have always maintained a preference for contemplation rather than conversation. Silence, though, is an insufficient answer for someone like Charles. Charles' temperament demands certainty, action, swift judgements that, however inaccurate, obviate the necessity for further reflection. In Charles' world anything less is a weakness, an exploitable opening to be leveraged. Under his surveillance, unblinking eyes audit and document the shortcomings.

Listen, Dimwit, he says, using a hairy fat finger to punctuate, there are some major fucking issues you need to get straight, and you need to do it pretty Bloody quick. First,

it's been a fucking long time since Greece and all that airy-fairy nonsense, you should be well and truly over it by now, and you can't change the past, as much as you might still have a hard-on for that skank Frenchy. Second, how do you even know the kid is yours? The sprog could be anyone's. The bitch wasn't exactly the Virgin Mary, you know. And, Jesus H Christ, Andrew, what sort of a fucking name is Aksel? For fuck sake, the moniker sounds like it belongs to a fucking meccano set!

It is fair to say, I venture, within the restricted confines of my analysis, that while Charles might concede that physical borders can be crossed, for him, culturally-defined divisions remain unbridgeable. His current diatribe exhausted—perceived problems having been enumerated and either nullified or appropriate and concise (again, for him) solutions given—Charles lumbers off in the direction of the ascending pathway, the diminutive, hot-pink, Hello Kitty backpack strained tightly between his beefy shoulder blades. And the open image, the backpack, centred and splayed as it is against the darker context of singlet, surrounded by coarse tufts of protruding hair, conjures an unmistakeable vision.

Charles, you really are a cunt sometimes.

Four

There is no sign of Charles on the pathway, though the lingering black-tobacco scent betrays his recent proximity. The initial section of the track is always deceptively easy, gentle slopes and the occasional council-installed step, either in timber or hewn into the rock, provide accessibility for even the very young as well as the able-bodied elderly, a subsidiary benefit, since my preoccupation is internal, former and absent, rather than external, immediate and present. The *uber*-fit, of course, those alien beings recognisable in their uniform battle costumes of Nike air-gel-pump-fly-more-expensive-than-yours trainers, skimpy lycra, but seemingly bullet-proof vests and shorts, and with all the other essential accoutrements strapped to any available body part—reminiscent of a fully-loaded, ready-for-Armageddon New York cop—so that appropriate levels of narcissism can be monitored and maintained under any conditions of weather and terrain, are not intimidated by even the upper, steeper sections of the climb, let alone these lower more moderate inclines, as they routinely execute the up-down in less than thirty minutes. Their absence today is welcome; they do have the unsettling tendency of barrelling over any obstacle—the elderly in walking frames, new-borns in perambulators—that might impede their prompt arrival at the next coffee shop appointment to compare personal bests. What would Anaïs make of such uninspired dedication? Are the perpetrators as ubiquitous today on the streets of Berlin?

Berlin. I remember the street, *Münzstraße*, on that day, the grey stone of the building that was once quarried, carted and sculpted into a likeness of what it had been: a hill, a mountain, a place to survey certainty. How easy it is to take what is solid and refashion it, gouge it out for apartments, businesses, offices, lives: a mount of hollow caves in a valley of street. And yes, Anaïs, it was Bloody cold, huddled and waiting for the

taxi that seemed to take forever, hoping that it never came. Whatever was solid you took from me, altered it, sprayed it with the graffiti of convenience, allowed the plaster to crumble under words that maintained we didn't belong, that it was all a façade, to postpone indefinitely what had seemed inevitable.

I lost her, and now Anaïs, *now* Anaïs says she has always loved me. Bloody Hell! This simple statement is so complex, so riddled with contradiction, so difficult to say, so difficult that for Anaïs it apparently took more than a decade to acknowledge, more than a decade for me to be aware of, should it be true. And, even if it is true, what does that mean? In such a statement, in such a context, flows the lava of hope for the miserable and forlorn creatures whose existence has been that of banishment to the frozen tundra of loss. (Really, Andrew, you do go on sometimes!) The asymmetry of the situation, though, the power inherent in being the one to be able to unite or untie, to deny or to allow, also fills the simple statement with terror, and therefore danger. We all invent love. In loving Anaïs then, at that time, I *invented* Anaïs, I created the only possible Anaïs, of all the infinite possibilities, that could ever possibly love me. The Anaïs that I created, however, the Anaïs that I imagined into existence at that time, is also the Anaïs that disallowed that love, and yet, now the implication is that disavowal is part and parcel of what it means to love. How else could there exist an 'always', an infinity amongst the finite? From what other vantage can the paradox be surveyed? Men are specimens, experiments—

Frenchwomen like Anaïs amass their data, the art and architecture, from a young age: the occult rites of womanhood. Testing truth requires ideal conditions, control. Loss, or the premonition of loss, must be the key that unlocks love's initial attraction; the need that love inspires must only be proportional to the probability of loss; the terrain of need, therefore, equals the fear of loss. And, distance and time can only disguise the geography of neediness, not diminish it. Contradictions are splendid, and terrible.

Surveying Mudjimba from the more southern of the plateaus of the saddle that constitutes the summit of Mount Coolum, having rejected, as I normally do, the larger and slightly higher vantage afforded by the northern standpoint (the caged apparatus and attendant beacon, while no doubt a benefit for local aviation safety, is about as aesthetically pleasing as trekking to the interior of the most remote Brazilian rainforest, only to find that a local McDonalds franchise awaits behind the last machete-hacked turn in the track), I am filled with a sense of certainty, of promise. Despite the twelve-year parentheses there exists hope, terrible hope. Somewhere behind my back lie the Greek Islands, and somewhere a little to the west of those islands (in line with my right elbow?), Anaïs recently sat down at a keyboard and typed the letters that make up the word ‘always’. The word was included in the message and the message was sent. Anaïs wanted me to see the message; Anaïs wanted me to read the word. The word that had taken twelve years to materialise then re-materialised on my computer screen at the speed of light. I read the word. It is my job to know what words mean. Words are what I do. There is no equivocation about the meaning of always; there are no attendant qualifications that need to be ascertained. Anaïs is multilingual. She is French, living in Germany, and with a thorough command of the English language to boot; this is not a problem of translation *between* languages. The word always always means what it means, always! Doesn’t it?

Aircraft noise, a Jetstar commuter flight, probably an A3-something-or-other, accelerates to sub-critical shudder, before the flapping mechanisms come into play and the airline’s current safety record is subjected to further potential falsification. The blast carries easily across the old cane fields, and I gaze as the plane climbs over the beachside houses, seaward, and then banks to the south, scraping white contrails in the blue, carrying its load of hope and trepidation. (Hello, and what might that be? ... I think I can see a light

on, in New Zealand!) How many of the travellers on board, apart from the crew maybe, where a journey is no more than a routine task to be performed between meal breaks, are destined to be reunited with those they love, ones that perhaps they haven't seen for a lifetime? Will this ordinary flight, for at least someone up there, result in more-or-less happiness? Can the mundane precipitate the marvellous?

There is a delay in reaction sometimes—the processing cannot be linear—between the receipt of information and the realisation of the implications of that information, much as when a novice bingo player, attentively listening to the caller and diligently marking the associated boxes of random expectation, is suddenly jolted into confusion by the lack of continuity. Surely I was told something, it must mean something (now, and they hurriedly try to reconstruct their position, what was it again?) when pencil marks fill all the squares: a Eureka moment.

Bingo!

Bloody Hell. I'm a father.

I am a father and I have a son.

And we already have, or have always had, something in common.

The day passes in a spell of indecisive consternation and argument. Over a protracted lunch—I insist first, of course, that Charles change into more suitable attire—the only thing that he and I can agree on is that a reply of some type must be sent. The nature of the reply, the tone and content, if you like, is hotly disputed. That Charles is in utter disagreement with me doesn't surprise. And, it doesn't surprise me that it doesn't surprise me. It may even be that a divergence of opinion from Charles is a necessary precondition to being satisfied that one's own judgement is within the parameters of soundness. From that perspective, the balance of normality was therefore being maintained.

Consensus is a tyranny, although Charles would argue that the un-blinkered, those who might want to weigh the merits of differing positions, for example, are needlessly hampering themselves with a burden more easily resolved: they should just accept Charles' position. Why waste fucking time? he says. You know what you have to do—meaning that what I should do is acknowledge the correctness of his ill-considered opinion.

Charles' advice may be categorised as denial; to deny the past is to be in control of the future, so his false logic goes. Although to itemise the flaws in this reasoning is pointless, since his response is to not respond, rather like the ability of a politician to stay on-message, regardless of relevance, despite not addressing the question asked. Just don't mention the past, he says. It was a cosy little fling at the time, but it's over, time to move on. And for Christ's sake, don't mention the fucking kid, don't leave yourself open to a paternity suit, even though it's a given that a soft-cock like you couldn't sire anything apart from the drivel that leaks outa that pen. Don't admit a fucking thing; play dumb, that should be easy enough, hey.

I concentrate on my toes; the nails are in need of cutting. My silence, or whatever Charles can glean in my features, staring as he is, as if waiting for an acknowledgement of the complete good sense of his proposal, prompts a reaction. Jesus Christ, you're really going to do it, aren't you? he says.

Do what?

You know, you're honestly thinking of traipsing off to Europe. You dumb fuck. After all this time and the bitch still has you by the balls, doesn't she?

It's an option, Charles, that's all.

Option, my arse, you've got it bad, pal. You need help.

At this point, Charles' arsenal of weaponry seems exhausted. Or else he has just given up on a hopeless case. He wanders off to wherever and whatever it is that he does. Needless to say, the reply to Anaïs is not a draft that Charles would have composed, or approved of.

<Dearest Anaïs

It is marvellous to hear from you. I cannot express, really, how wonderful it is, and unexpected. You must know that thoughts of you are never far away, even though, as you say, it has been a long time. Yes, I want further and better particulars. ☺ You must tell me everything, I want to know everything that you have been doing, absolutely everything that has happened—send me photographs, give me a phone number, so that we can talk, so that I can hear your voice. Do it now. You will do it, won't you?

And, Anaïs, to hear that I—that we—have a son. Unbelievable. There must be reasons why you chose to keep this from me, no matter. It is fantastic news. I can't wait to learn more, to meet Aksel, my son. My god, how amazing. Please be in touch soon. I look forward to it. It really is so good to hear from you. The memory of those days in Greece, the best days, Anaïs, the very best. I intend to hunt out my diary—the journal, do you remember—although I'm sure I don't need any *aide de memoire*. I'm sure I still have it. Love, Andrew.

PS. The travel arrangements seem possible, I will do what is necessary>

And to you, good and patient reader, it is at this juncture necessary to apologise. Is your reaction the same as Charles' would be? Is this too lurid, too exposed, too sentimental, too pathetic? Of course it is. I'm sorry. It can't be helped. In my defence, I can only refer you to Anaïs, the Anaïs that I know more intimately than any other. Perhaps you too have known such a person, someone that you craved, desired to possess, needed, but who possessed you instead: someone that you feared to lose. I can only hope so.

Anaïs, during that time, whenever it might have occurred to her to notice my various jottings and scribbling, always referred to it as my 'journal'. To give something the title of

journal may be presumptuous and may indicate that the artefact referred to possesses intrinsic qualities that are not justified on close scrutiny. The expectation is that a journal, should it qualify for such a title, contains information that illuminates pertinent aspects of the lives of Notable People, notwithstanding that public interest is temporal and contextual. I have never considered what I do to constitute a journal—neither the act of creating, or the content of same, nor the medium. Granted, I have only now, much later, consciously attended to the question, but I believe upon reflection that I must have referred to the ‘journal’, if I did at all, as no more than a notebook, a different and entirely lower species on the hierarchy of the potential repositories of the symbols of language. The notebook from that time, then, is no more than a single, slim, nondescript volume filled in my own cramped and disjointed style. I recall that the notebook is well worn from constant handling.

The Notebook is in a box, the box is in the loft, and the loft is in the partially-floored-off space in the ceiling of the first-floor lounge, of the house, of course. (Writing these words, that sentence, it occurs to me that the idea conveys the beginnings of the quality of a progression or a regression in reverse, the reassembly of matryoshkas or Russian dolls—accidental, I assure you. While the journal is in a box [just like Jack], and Bob [the Jack-of-all-trades, not the builder] built the house, the absence of farmers, cocks, priests, maidens, cows, dogs and rats, or for that matter, bulls [as the accessible Minotaur] anywhere in the narrative, should be further reassurance that there is no deepening labyrinth of an alphabet of uncertain origin that might indicate a Jack-built relationship—Jack Joyce, Jack Calvino, Jack Faulk, or any other Jack, for that matter.) Fortunately, the housekeeper does not venture anywhere near the loft; the contents should be undisturbed. The intention is to retrieve the Notebook for perusal at leisure, perhaps later in the evening, if conditions are right. I find that reading, to be enjoyed, requires the careful attentiveness

of detachment, rather than the rushed opportunism of the addict. Besides—and I know this might sound strange—I need to reacquaint myself with the author of the Notebook. I really can't remember what he was like.

My evening interactions—it is too nascent to call it a relationship or even a friendship—with the gecko, Santayana, have thrown up an interesting fact. He does not bark. That is to say, I had been led to believe all geckos bark, but this is not the case. For Santayana, the verb is a metaphorically (as well as an onomatopoeically) incorrect description of the noises he makes. I wish it were possible to accurately describe Santayana's sounds so easily; it is not.

Imagine a child's plastic toy that when squeezed emits a sound somewhere between a staccato chirp and a squeak. Further imagine that the sound begins at its loudest (which is not so loud) and deflates with seven or eight rapid repetitions. Inadequate, I know, but that is the best I can do.

Compared to Santayana, my communication skills embarrass.

Proposition:

...the fact that it happened at all [if it did]
is remarkable.

Anon

Five

‘Now I wish to introduce the following idea.’ Those words belong to Vladimir Nabokov, so innocent, yet so full of promise. Ideas are wonderful things, capable of delightful teasing as well as terrible torment. Now the idea that I wish to introduce, the proposition that I want to put forward for your consideration, is not nearly so radical or disturbing as HH’s might have been for the 1950s reading public, but it is, like his, equally as provocative. Or at the least, I believe it to be the case in the absence of further and better particulars. The idea is this: the power of the Genie in the Bottle is not the unlimited magic; the power of the Genie is in words.

I should explain. Loitering in a local bookshop recently, a place where yours truly is often likely to be found when not under the spell of *The Machine* (as with Descartes, I think [I write] therefore I am [a reader]), and hopeful of picking up a copy of Matterly’s latest guide to rare diseases of goldfish, the idea occurred. In prominent display among the New Releases and the Bestsellers and the soon-to-be-made-into-a-movie Blockbusters, perched the age-old Classic, *Arabian Nights*, with the cheeky grin of Aladdin on the cover as he coveted the brass lamp. And we all know what the lamp contains. This in itself is not so curious, classics are Classic for a reason, but while I was browsing a mother and grubby-fingered child actually purchased a copy of said book; fairy tales apparently have contemporary social relevance. It made me think.

Everybody can remember from their childhood, from the time when they’re still learning the necessities—what’s up and what’s down, if you like, or as Charles would say, who’s up who and who’s paying the rent—stories along the lines of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, right? The basic premise, anyway, is that there’s a genie trapped in a bottle, or in Aladdin’s case an old-fashioned oil lamp, and they will reward who ever frees them from

their imprisonment, usually with three wishes, or some other limited number. This is no big deal for genies and the like—apparently they have infinite powers—so for them granting outrageously impossible wishes is as easy and natural as blinking is for us mere mortals. But the usual caution, the moral if you like, is that you have to be careful what you wish for because it just might happen, literally.

Charles, for example, has a rather crude version of the tale where the recipient of magical largesse covets an unnaturally large penis ('a dick that touches the ground') and so the obliging genie immediately cuts off his legs. This is a drastic illustration, needless to say, of poorly-chosen words. In any case, countless similar stories abound.

A variation on the theme is where a powerful king (I forget the context) rewards someone for favourable service with whatever they desire. Being mathematically inclined, they ask simply for a few grains of wheat—one for the first square of a chess board, two for the second, four for the third, eight for the next, and so on. The outcome, of course, is that 2^{64} of anything is more than enough compensation to bankrupt even the richest kingdom. Anyway, the point is that just as this fellow understands the power of exponential numbers, so the various genies understand what words mean, precisely and literally. The genie's power comes from a command of (literal) language, and for us mere mortals we are always stuck with the real possibility of ambiguity. But it's not the words, as such, that are the problem.

The contention here is that the words used, even the literal meanings of the words used, are irrelevant; what we need to strive for—the only important thing—is shared understanding.

At some time or other we've probably all thought about what our three wishes would be if we'd been the one to un-stopper the Genie. We have probably all thought that we (alone) would be able to find the right words so that we could say exactly what it was

that we wanted. But it would need to be more than just what *we* wanted; there would have to be shared understanding. If we could only find the right words, words that were precise and unambiguous, we would be, quite literally, unstoppable.

My tangible connection to Anaïs is through the Notebook. And so the Notebook takes on the aura of a long-lost artefact—an old brass lamp, perhaps—stored and forgotten and covered in dust and time until an Aladdin like me comes along, naïve, unconscious and unaware of the power being held in his hands, the power of words. It occurs to me that I'd better be Bloody careful what I wish for.

Six

The Notebook, Greece:

; ... Islandic. In this sea of islands. The Aegean Cyclades. Isle of Sykros. Steep cliffs small tides and temperate norms. But the season is almost gone. And Sykros' islandic situation looms large. Foreshadowing shadows bold as a Nietzschean moustache. And the Paris Institute beckoning. Pending. And impending. A sea of islands. Spiralling. Seeing. And the island will soon sleep. Safe. *Sans*-tourist, *sans*-traveller mode and mood. Without us. Decisions, therefore, need to be made. Imperatives as *aperitif*. Changing seasons herald action. Movement and direction. Even the now-placid sea will awake and stretch and remember its wintry employment. The constant contempt. And attempts at encroachment. If it can. Fleet-foot running in the runnels of an inner life. Perpetual self-editing. Interrogating. A duologue of the mind. Coming from. Where? Is it this scraggly landscape, much suited to the production of snarly and dusty Socratic feet? Ruggedly thought through. With all the corns and calluses of cerebral dead ends. Perhaps. Most importantly. What will Anaïs do? Will she come with me? She says that I am her tunnel's lighted end. *Ça je pénétrer* heart and mind. And, that I am part of her long-term plan. But the plans and choices of girls I can never comprehend. As quality choices are created—diligent sifting, solid information—or so we are told. Durable datum from which to deduce. Yet so much remains unknown. *L'inconnu*. Unknowable. How then to bare and base the basics? Before Time has its stop. For the Delphic Oracle sings silent. Science is in its ascendant. And the whole is as curia to the Greeks as a Roman see.

Looking up and two little goats have appeared. To tease at my thought with a quizzical turn of neck and head. A patent inquiry of a goatish kind. For a hairy mind. And their unspoken thoughts intrigue. Intimately. In our unfamiliar roles. Well, says I, seeking insight from the marble-eyed duo. If feelings can never be changed. How then to challenge? How then to construct without constraint? And in answer, the snuffling shaking of mused heads. As if further words, or thought, be wasted. And a massive pronk. Twice their own narrow height. Onto my window ledge. A Herculean feat, showcasing the hoof's advantage. The window open. But they are content to balance easily on the sharp incline. And stare me into philosophical defeat. Singular. Their neck-bells oddly silent during the performance. Underlining the unpredictable side of the ledger. At the least. A sign with an

unknown signature. Presaging what? And the red-ochred sails. Of a crisp and sturdy little ketch as it tacks. Distract from the goats' apparent departure. Epistemology and ontology intact. Centred. Within a goat-centred realm. Leaving lonely lingering odours. Asafoetida and ammonia. Armpit and piss. To be conjured anew in the language of literature. Alone. Phillip says that there will be octopus and crab tonight. *Nous verrons* we shall see. Phillip is a worrier. And the ubiquitous souvlaki will no doubt suffice. Or goat. More intriguing, Phillip worries about thinking. And in doing so sometimes neglects to do it. Yet further cause to love him. A delinquent chef and fat-footed friend and the incongruous paradox of dextrous mind and hand. In the kitchen. The paper on Ouspensky coming along apace now. Well-pleased. His view of Time noumenally obscure. But cracking it ...

Seven

The Notebook worries and perplexes in ways that I need to think about further before I understand the nature of the problem, if a problem exists, that is. The author of the Notebook, this Other Narrator, also causes some concerns. While he seems totally grounded in terms of place—I can ‘see’ the islands, as if through his eyes—he is at the same time uncertain of his role: grounded in place but not positioned. Also, he is not immediately recognisable, in the similar way that an old photograph is not immediately recognisable as the same person that I happened to see in a mirror, just recently in fact. There is an apparent lack of shared history. I don’t know what his game is, what motivates him, what purpose the Notebook serves. Is it *his* story? If it is, then he doesn’t appear to be in control. The fear, I suppose, if it can be called fear—perhaps a worrisome trepidation is a better description—is that in making these few jottings of various thoughts *now*, then I may be reproducing what he did then; the fear that neither of us may have anything except our own story, or at least, the story that struck us as being our story at the time. Not only does neither of us seem to be in control, we don’t seem to know each other. So I suppose it can be said that at least we have that in common. But if I can’t even be recognisable as the protagonist in my own story, even to myself—and, admittedly, this particular translated version of a story, rather than any other possible version—then who the Bloody Hell is pulling the strings? Where does the agency lie?

From the semi-public exposure of the upper balcony I periodically see one of my neighbours, Anne, pegging washing onto lines within the diminished space between house and fence. My censored view, decapitated as it is by hardwood palings, sees only the pegs, a text whose use of punctuation is limited to innumerable, plastic exclamations. Anne is of

an imprecise middle age, neither remarkably young nor determinably old, and is attractive, I suppose, in a way that makes one wonder why her husband is so regularly ‘away’.

Oftentimes, a casual wave or a few polite words—from my perspective these appear as mutual, incomprehensible shouts, since neither of us seems capable of immediate and unambiguous understanding (translation?) across the chasm of suburbia—are sufficient for Anne to invite herself up to the balcony where she invariably produces, honestly, I-just-made-them-and-otherwise-they’re-going-to-go-to-waste, culinary morsels and delicacies to go with the bottle or two of wine (very well, if you insist, but just one) deemed essential to surviving a long afternoon.

Anne is unaware of the truly ordinary nature of my work, although she supposes (did I give her that impression?) that I have a minor, casual role, somewhere or other, something vaguely connected to ‘writing’, that is sufficient to satisfy her curiosity as well as account for the odd, none-of-that-nine-to-five stuff, hours that I keep. These middle-of-the-day diversions are not bothersome, and, on the contrary, the mundane and the domestic—for example, sessions always begin with the vagaries of a climate unsuited to the planned execution of household chores, washing, perhaps—have their own reparative quality: reparation through idle relaxation. Nevertheless, the topic of books always puts in an awkward brief appearance, a hump, if you like, in the otherwise smooth agenda, given our supposed mutual interest: Anne is a Reader. Anne is a devotee of the crime novel, more particularly, the subspecies of crime novel that describes, in the relentless and meticulous detail that would only be available to a true insider (and I imagine the author’s justification, the first author, perhaps, with the temerity to expand the genre, to their publisher: ‘Of course it’s all relevant! It’s essential. I’ve done the Bloody research and all of it stays, *all* of it), the inner machinations, as well as the necessary hardware and software, that the various agencies entrusted with law and order deal with on a daily basis.

Are there really that many serial killers in the world? In any case, all harmless, all well and good, if one is so inclined. The difficulty if any, and it is entirely of my own construction, is that I don't want to be seen as feigning interest in a genre when no such interest exists, but neither do I want to be seen as unnecessarily impolite. As I say, it's no more than a personal conceit that relates to a minimal, at the least, form of social etiquette. Anything less would seem rude, in a way that recalls maternal admonition.

"It really is pleasant, to have these little chats," says Anne.

"No problem ... anytime. You're always welcome." Hmm, how easy it is, to keep intolerance internal.

"You know, with hubby away so much ..." she might continue.

And it is at this point that I can never recall the name of Anne's husband, just as I can never seem to recall the crime author who happens to be her current favourite, despite both pieces of information having been given on numerous occasions, perhaps even within the last few minutes.

When I know nothing the tendency is to say it: nothing. Contemplation before conversation. She is clearing the little table of the evidence of our indulgence. "Anyway, come over some time. It really is my turn to play host. Honestly, any day is fine," she says.

"Sure, of course. I mean, I've got a bit on with work this week, but sure, we'll make it soon, no problem." But what I mean of course is, not Bloody likely!

Revisiting the old Notebook, it occurs to me that reading a new, previously unknown to us author is an act of faith and hope. Too often experience is *papier-mâché'd* over in the layered history of our cynicism, the necessary history of disappointment and acceptance that can quickly, and then permanently, solidify to a protective shell of distrust. Under such jadedness, gone is the lure of cracking the shell, shucking the oyster in search of a

pearl. Also gone are the feelings of awe, the reasons for the initial desire. Understandable, then, is the attraction of the concept of genre for people like Anne: reassurance of type and sequential conformity. Always preferable is the stability associated with the strictures of a zone previously found comfortable; it is contained within the nature of the species that the irresistibility of change is resisted. For such a Reader, the novel is not novel. Rather, it is the episodic continuation of events that cling tenuously to a long-forgotten original premise (and promise). The fragmentation of experience in this intervallic manner becomes the division of the otherwise monotonous diet into bite-size chunks making them more easily digestible, though satiation remains elusive. Another key, perhaps, to the allure. The premise itself, the genesis of the *oeuvre* that constitutes reading habit, as with many other preferences, remains unchallenged. This is not so much because of the desire for conformity—although conformity assists in the easy recognition of that which is believed to be desired—but because conformity also comes with the security of predictability.

In direct opposition to this homogenisation of the printed page, there remains, for some readers, optimism: hope. Suppose it is possible to imagine an Other Reader, one different to Anne and without the confined comfort of the monogamy of genre. Of course, it would have to also be supposed that it was not part of the conditions of employment of such a reader to be so inclined—that it was not part of their job—since an overabundance in any context can be deleterious. For such an Other Reader, lacking remuneration but having an abundance of patient expectation, the contention is that there is always hope, hope that the next encounter with book, article, or in fact text of any type, will deliver the antithesis to genre: in short, the antithesis to assurance, dependability, conformity and predictability, but that will be executed in such a way as to also convey the essential elements of reader-recognition and self-identification. Now, the objection might arise that

this line of thinking is elitist, that it privileges one form of text above another. I would simply respond: too Bloody right it does. There is literature, and there is Literature; restaurants don't get more or less stars—or no stars at all—for just any reason. But I am aware that there might also be a further objection: that there is nothing new, that everything that can be done, has already been done. Purists may even date the end of such all-encompassing literature: Tristram Shandy. This is a more serious indictment, one that will take more than a metaphorical reference to the rating of culinary establishments to dispel. However, despite the gloom inherent in the thought that novelty is dead, hope remains for the many of us so inclined. I for one want to retain the possibility—to maintain faith in the possibility—of reading something new, something novel, something creative. And sometimes, for some of us, the desire also includes the possibility of revisiting a relationship from the past, one that had at that time defeated us, with a renewed optimism: to change history. All I can say at this stage of re-reading is that the Notebook certainly does not conform.

The first word in the old Notebook is enough to elicit caesura: *islandic*, what does that mean? What sort of narrator wants to alienate their potential reader with the first word, by having that word unrecognisable, as a word? At first blush, this Other Narrator would never make it as an author; I hope he keeps his daytime job. But, even before the moment of recognition that the idea, the sensation to be conveyed has something to do with the concept of those qualities that obtain in such a thing that might be called 'island', I remember that there was, firstly, hesitation, and that the hesitation was abrupt; the word seemed familiar, but in a way that confused rather than aided understanding. Thinking about it further, though, I am rather impressed that this Other Narrator, whoever he might have been, is sufficiently confident in his inadequacies of description—and therefore open about the acceptance of his inadequacies—that he resorts to made-up words. Indeed, rather

than admonition for audacity, the question naturally arises as to why there doesn't exist an adjectival form of the noun, island? Has no one ever required it before? Even if his intention was as a gerund, what difference? The subtlety of distinction would probably elude most users anyway (it eludes me!). What do we normally write when we want to describe something as having the qualities of an island? What does it mean, anyway? What is the sensation that this Other Narrator is attempting to convey? Even if someone were to be so poverty stricken in experience that they had never seen an island, the concept must be prototypically imaginable, and as a result, there must be, notwithstanding all the possible variations of understanding, an appreciation of some aspects of what it is, what it constitutes, to have the qualities of an island. In any case, possibly this Other Narrator has something to offer after all, despite this perplexity of style. This Other Narrator, then, must be intended for an Other Reader. And, it might be argued, who am I to be judging him too harshly, since I am no more than another unreliable first-person person, a mere Narrator with an under-edited sense of self-importance, and, trapped in my own limited perspective, with nothing but history to rely on. History? That's the whole point, isn't it? How reliable, after all, is mere history?

Rather than being an object, the completion of an idea realised, the contents of the Notebook seem now to inhabit preliminary perspectives, still frames in a movement yet to show what the totality of the dance might entail, pencil sketches for a future oil, just as easily erasable as given the solidity and permanence of colour: a study that suggests x , but never actually becomes. It is unfinished business, then, but at the least that might mean that the possibilities remain open.

I can't imagine what alternate possibilities for narrative this Other Narrator might have had; like matter floating in open space, all of our lives could go in any direction at any time, and a different story might be told, or privileged, or kept hidden, or altered, or

reinvented. But even with those infinite possibilities, is that all we are, floating matter ready to be pulled in the direction of greatest gravity? Is it only the squeaky wheel that gets the grease? I detect in the Notebook, in the unwritten words of his story, though, the commonality we had: Anaïs, and the premonition of loss. This dude is just as fucked-up as you, Charles would say, and he did. This Other fucking Narrator of yours is not in love, he just thinks he's in love. If he wanted the girl he'd do something about it, rather than sitting around whinging. Jesus! Growing up means learning to catch and kill your own. It's no wonder that the only thing you bastards are good at is writing stories. Get a fucking life.

But I don't think we're the same, me and this Other Narrator from twelve years ago, not in this respect, not exactly, anyway—I'm jealous of this guy. However uncertain he seems to be about what his future with Anaïs contains, he's coming across as content, in an uncanny way. There must be another agenda; there must be something else that he's trying, attempting to ascertain, that's more important. Maybe jealous is the wrong word—I don't normally do jealousy—so what do I mean? I think I'm envious of whatever it is that he has. He seems secure in his uncertainty, and I know that sounds ridiculous, but that's how it seems; it sounds like he's happy enough to be subject to the uncontrollable force of gravity. Or, if he's not happy about it, he's realised that sometimes it's better to do nothing, to not push the issue, to wait patiently for something (do I mean someone?) to come to you, that the slightest movement in the undergrowth will otherwise cause flight; he seems to have learned to be able to hunt, without being hungry.

But I could be wrong; I might have missed the important point, or placed entirely too much emphasis on a particular point. This Other Narrator, if I read the Notebook's passage objectively and without Anaïs as the magnified centre of attention, is detached from the personal in a way not justified by memory. Sure, he mentions Anaïs and speculates on achieving an outcome, but that doesn't come across as his major concern; he

is altogether much more engrossed in matters of the intellect, with the relationship or potential relationship—along with whatever importance it held for him at the time—being almost peripheral. His admission of ignorance over the motivating forces for the opposite sex seem out of place, not because he ought to have any special insight, but simply because memory demands that he had a greater emotional investment in the outcome to that being admitted. The posturing is disingenuous, or else there is more (or less) to the situation than meets the eye currently scanning the page. My suspicion, and only a closer and more exhaustive examination of the Notebook will show the validity, if any, of the distrust, is that at that place and time this Other Narrator had succumbed to the school of thought that characterises any form of sentimentalism as utterances to be avoided, at least in print and even within the relative safety of a private text (is there such a thing?). Perhaps the Notebook is a contrivance, with a provocative agenda known only to the author. I need to delve further back, to the beginning of the story, to the time before the Notebook and before Anaïs.

Santayana is devouring a moth, slowly, patiently. Partly this care and attention to detail is due to the moth's size: more than three times the dimensions of the gecko's head. It is the wings that require the maximum accommodation. Eventually though—ten minutes, perhaps—the task is accomplished and the previous moth becomes enshrined in the distended belly of the little reptile.

The efficiency of the operation demands respect.

Santayana completes the process with a twitch of his longish tail, curving the appendage in a satisfying, and presumably sphincter-tightening, arc before straightening and resuming the more customary position of motionless intent. Would a literate gecko take any interest in articulating the mundane? Would Santayana's descriptive passages

around his latest gustatory success be waited for by other, like-minded geckos throughout the known gecko world, and would they, as the unfolding drama was read out loud to an expectant reptilian fan club, evoke the shared understanding of dining on moth? I wonder.

Or would a sophisticated literary-gecko palate only desire entertainment packaged in the exotic, the fantastic, the remote and the unexpected, rather than the familiar and commonplace? Either way, where would such a story begin?

Eight

As if history can be denied, in the late '90s, Sydney, along with the rest of the country, was already adjusting to the new rhythm of conservatism that was the pendulum's response to the excesses of the decade before, justified—and with the justification accepted by most—by the logic that, while there was nothing fundamentally wrong with Capital's approach, patience and caution were the order of the day; the house of cards could still be (and should be!) built, just more slowly. This beach house in Queensland that I would later occupy, for example, was still during the '90s an unrealised sketch in a developer's mind (Jack, the Jack-of-all-trades), and the land itself languished as it always had as part of an extensive, mosquito-ridden tidal swamp. If entrepreneurs of the 1980s had noticed the site, the house would have already been built and I would be writing this now, sitting on the first-floor balcony, and dangling my feet in seawater. Even in the late '90s though, some of us were still unaware that the '80s had ever existed, let alone required ideological redirection; we were still just doing our own thing, as the remnant hipsters would have said.

Sometime in early June I was meeting my friend Phillip for lunch, toward the lower end of George Street, in a Sydney that I didn't yet realise, that I no longer recognised. Phillip was a chef, had just returned from a month in Thailand: a traveller truly obsessed with travel, rather than destinations. I had come down for a few days to park my underfed arse in the Mitchell and do a little research, part of a project I had on the go. The restaurant was tight with dealmakers and the food was mediocre, at best. Phillip didn't seem to notice; he was busy pushing his own deal, to me.

"Look," he says, "it's very simple. I'm British but with residency here, but it means I can have a British bank account. The payment for the contract work—the next little

stint's in Greece, in the islands—gets deposited straight into the London account. The Greeks don't take any income tax, because they think the Brits are sorting it. The bank takes five per cent, because that's what they have to do with money coming into the country, you're supposed to sort it out with the taxman later, or something. That never happens because I never go back to Britain. I can just draw on the quids from wherever I am. Anyway, take into account that food and board is included in the contract, and the five per cent is all that you pay in tax, couldn't be simpler: a doddle. So, are you in?"

"But I don't know the first thing about hospitality."

"Doesn't matter," says Phillip. "The contract is for three: chef, wine, and front-of-house. You'll be wine, piece of piss, really. The locals are great, very cruisy, and the paying punters just want someone that speaks English."

"And what about my paper, there is a bit of a deadline?"

"Listen, the work's easy, plenty of time for relaxing in the sun. What better place to write than the Greek Islands? You'd have a free holiday, pocket some cash, and get the job done at the same time, sounds ideal given your current situation."

"Okay, count me in," I say, since, if the truth be known, my single objection to what sounds like manna from Heaven was only ever going to be the question of the writing. But if it really is as easy as that, and there really is plenty of down time, then it sounds better than ideal. It sounds Bloody fantastic.

"So," I ask him, not knowing at the time the gravity of the question, "who's going to be the third? Who's doing the meet-and-greet?"

"Name's Anaïs," Phillip says, as if the word can be spoken without the backdrop of fireworks, lightning, applause, "a great little French girl I know, you'll like her. Not my type, as you're well aware, but very tasty all the same. She's in Sydney now, with her

boyfriend, but he's going back shortly, tomorrow I think. Anyway, we'll catch up with them later on today, soon in fact."

Notwithstanding that differing people have differing perspectives of relative time, my recollection is that it is much later—more than three bottles of red and a darkening-sky type of later—that we finally extricate ourselves from one eating-house, and wind farther down George Street in the direction of The Rocks towards another, with the aroma of the largish spliff that Phillip has lighted identifying our location to others, even if our precise grid-referenced whereabouts is not immediately clear to ourselves.

Down a side street among the sandstone steeped in a two-hundred-year history of urinating inebriates, fuelled perhaps, initially by rum, then by beer, and latterly by wine, we find the dog-cart narrow alleyway where a couple of troubadours—Phillip is singing by this juncture and urging me to join in—might take advantage of support from either wall without the inconvenience of having to move their feet. A doorway encourages entrance to the pleasures of a Chilean restaurant, a Massage Parlour (therapeutic only, stresses the signage) and the premises of one, 'Clara the Clairvoyant' (no appointment necessary). And I am still sober enough to hope that not all these delights are in the one room.

A flight of stairs, a deserted dining area and a similarly deserted kitchen—though the home fires still burned, so to speak—later, and a small back room revealed three people, two of whom had apparently just finished snorting lines of coke off the surface of a glass-covered print depicting Marilyn Munroe attending to the apparent enjoyment available to young ladies who stand above sidewalk ventilator shafts: a physics experiment, something to do with hot air rising locally and having an effect globally. My subsequent memory of the evening, for reasons unimportant to this context, is vague. Suffice it to say that I awoke the next morning in my temporary Darling Point hotel room secure in the knowledge that I would see Anaïs again that day. This seemed imperative at

the time, given that I was, by that stage, madly and utterly in love with her. Associated with this feeling was the less imperative notion that there existed someone (a boyfriend perhaps?) called Siegfried, a person I ought to dislike, but for the life of me I couldn't: firstly, because he was a really nice guy, and secondly, because I wasn't the least bit jealous—I didn't care how many boyfriends she had, just so long as I was counted among them. The important thing, I seem to recall, is that whatever words were exchanged between Anaïs and I as we parted company the previous evening, had been sufficient confirmation that affections were mutual, that the feelings were reciprocated.

Two weeks later, three friends were on a scheduled flight to Athens.

Given that Anaïs has already recently referred in the e-mail, albeit latterly and belatedly, to the metaphorical geological nature of the attraction, I feel justified in defining the day we met as our personal Big-Bang; anything occurring afterward could only expand to encompass the love that was released in that explosive moment. I don't care what Charles might say, how he might bluster away his abhorrence of sentimentalism; for me, this was it. I remember a recurring dream from the time, a simple dream of the pleasure of watching someone sleep, a strange dream in which there was confusion for me, knowing that I was dreaming, but not knowing if I was dreaming words that conjured images or dreaming images that conjured words:

Anaïs sleeps. Here. Scattered in bed's bedding adrift. I am transfixed. In the doorway. Watching. White cotton knickers stretched taut. Crossing tanned buttocks tight. The word watching allows me to see. For all of us. The word doorway is the place from where I watch. The proper noun Anaïs is the one that I am watching wearing the adjective white. Who is she? What is she like? Someone may ask. The word transfixed gives me—ample—time. To watch to write. I am *auctor* in control of event. In the event that anything.

Happens. I have. Authority. The white cotton knickers are scattered in bed's bedding. Adrift. Not bound or contained by contours. Folded neatly. With care. In the drawer. The noun authority—actualised by writing, verbalised by reading. Silently. The word knickers lay on the floor near the word doorway. Where I watch. Anaïs. Sleeping. Scattered in bed's bedding adrift. Do not question who she might be. She is the one that I see. And the nape of her neck. Trailing hair. Is beautiful. And all the stars still there. Invisible in visible light.

There are some books that I've read over and over, sometimes years and years going by between picking them up yet again. Sometimes it was because the first time round I couldn't get what I wanted from the text; I persisted because I wanted something that I knew must be there, but couldn't find it. Other times it was (is) purely out of awe: raw emotions that real writers capture the essence of much better than I ever could. In either case, though, whenever it comes time for those revisitations, there is always something new to be found, something unpredictable and unexpected and unnoticed in previous encounters. The text doesn't alter, so it must be us that have changed.

And sometimes there is simply the outright pleasure of recall.

Nine

The Notebook, Greece:

; ... Distant cloud to the north. Obscuring some of the other islands. Conservative in its covering. Enveloping protecting comforting. And distorting the possibility of closeness. Of belonging. To which. And to whom. The young dishwasher, Theokratos, says that soon he will be wearing shirts again. Hints of black magic about the little imp. His meaning, or the intention, running deeper than the words. As chest-thrusting as a bantam cockerel. Longhaired and languid. Graceful as youth itself. Disconcerting. Phillip and some others down at water's edge. A place to paddle. Plump English feet. At least now a jubilant brown. Rid of the ochre-blotched sadness. As good a time as any. To plead the case. Find Anaïs reading in the tabled courtyard behind the taverna. Laid back with bare feet. Ankles crossed on the table. Beauty. Exposed in repose. Zeldin's *An Intimate History of Humanity*. Sunlight through the voukanvile-flower-enclambered pomegranate trees. The whole making uncanny shadows on the page. And on her dress. Coloured blue. Which must be in honour of the nymphs. And the other-dimensional water creatures. Living and loving in the fountain. Female. The right light and lustres for a flute-playing Pan. And on the table. A letter. Recognition of Siegfried's scrawl. Bound in and to Hamburg. Anaïs' Sigi. No doubt wishing her home. And with him. But. He is there. We are here. Cheek kissing before a lingering one on the lips. And tongues twirl and collide inside. In anticipation. Of appetite fulfilled. Mmmm *mon cheri*, she says, with a playful push. But you must wait. And she gives my scrotum a scritch. Much as one does with a cat. Behind its head. Making me lose track of the practiced argument. The weaknesses of men. Easily positioned and possessed. The hidden strengths of women. It being an absolute that Socrates' caustic fishwife would have advanced the better truths. The gendering of philosophy. And now. Lightly held fingertips. Touching and touched. Buoyant above the earth-bound table. And space and time gently dilates and contracts to hearts' beats. And the silence reflects and refracts the smiles and sighs. All around and about. Dazzling all thought. Until. I have told Sigi about *us*, says Anaïs. As she casually exposes my soul with a precise steel-green gaze. Gauging reaction. Calculating. Diagnosis and prognosis combined. The sugarless medicine of fact. Not easily denied. And? says I. While I try and process what this means. For Siegfried is *sehr* conservative. If the very least be said. And I think of the *Nibelungenlied* and the other heroic Sigi of Teutonic legend. Wondering how

our Siegfried might react. It is undecided, says Anaïs. But some things he says surprise me. *Absolument* they really do. He intrigues. *Au reste* he has always known that I love him. But not *in that way*. What can I say? And so I say it. Nothing. My case being adjourned yet again. Awaiting further and better particulars. *Non liquet*. Unclear. It being unnecessary, as a result, for Anaïs to turn a deaf ear to my eloquent speeches. As such of the Erinnyes had done to Athene. The non-Solemn-Ones that is. So I sit and massage her feet. A toe-filled delight. While she enthrals me with diverse datum. Snippets from a spectrum: That the Taurians were so named because Osiris once yoked bulls (*tauroi*) and ploughed their land. And they lived by rapine, which may not be pleasant on the receiving end. That witches invoke the moon because reflected light has more power than direct illumination. That unglazed porcelain is called a biscuit but *bisque* is unglazed *white* porcelain. That a decent *blanc-mange* must be made from either arrowroot or maize flour. And never a blending of the two. That spin one-half particles always obey Fermi-Dirac statistics. That a hamadryad can be a snake (in India) a sacred baboon (in Egypt) or a wood nymph (anywhere). If the latter, then she always dies with the tree to which she was attached. When it dies. And, as nexus to thought. The small silver ring on Anaïs' tiniest of toes is possessed and giggles and listens with unabashed naked interest. And, its tiny chain motif. Twinkles where it twines. Impossible to stop pondering. The problem of Sigi. And how it might all end. You do *want* me? I finally manage. *Bécassine* silly boy, she says with a grin. I want you to want me. And that's *almost* the same thing, isn't it? Is it? So, says I. And if I do, what then? And the grin becomes a giggle. Why then I get to decide if *I* really want *you*, she says. Mindbloc. *Assez* enough, says Anaïs. And a letter serves as a bookmark. And delicious feet flex into leathered sandals. A shoulder bag shouldered. *Où alors*, I inquire. Are we going? We have time for a swim. Before work, she replies. With a sparkle in the lip-curved perfection of lips. Licking. Looking into the pools of her eyes. Looking up at me. Language is inadequate. Unutterable. To be in cosine-twined. Close. Like being tickled. From the inside. Maddening glorious. *Allons*, she says. Hurry up.

And waisted arms propel us forward in a four-legged march to the sea. To a sandy little unseen cove. Where we have swum before. And before it is fully in view she sprints. Dropping the bag. And sandals somersaulting skyward. And the blue dress pulled up and over her head. And she must have been naked. Under it. As she is now. An argument. In favour of poetic form. See the coltish body gallop. Buttocks drum-taut. Drum-beating.

Rhythm. Solo. Into the silence. Into the sea. Before water's weight and pressure. Prefaces forward momentum toppling. Where it dives and strokes. Powerful. Toward an unseen goal. Then, stopping and turning. Spiralling. Treading where there is no foothold. Anaïs watches as I undress. And toss clothes next to the discarded dress. Which looks more and more like a no-longer-needed skin. Shed. To allow growth. Outlining its previous owner in perfect detail. A skeleton. Of a skin. In the sand. I approach her. Leisurely. Breast-stroking. And a clinging kiss. Before she pushes down on my shoulders. Pushing me under. As I know she will. To kiss her. All the way down. When I break the surface. Tension. Her mouth is open. Silent. She smiles and nods to the shore. And glides. In Anaïisian grace. To the water's edge. Land and sea. In productive ecologies of difference. Meeting. Lying in the space. We embrace. My chest squashing her hard *dix-centime* nipples. And they are. Alert. But not alarmed. Before she rolls and subdues. As if we were a pair of cautious crocs. Each cognisant of the other's power. And potential. Sitting upright and pushing outstretched arms hard into my shoulders. And loins hard into my loins. And squeezes and relaxes. And briny chlorines mix with a briny sea. In a tiny death. What is your goal? Anaïs had once asked. I want to translate theory into more than digestibility, I said. And, I want to be myself but remain anonymous. Oh that's easy, she replied. Make a friend of uncertainty. *Que pour le reste*, she added. What you *need* may be more important than what you want. Thus we hack and trade. The yet-to-become clichés. And seek to balance the accounts. Of affection. Where unknown deficits always lie in wait. To be audited. Later ...

Ten

Ah, yes, this is more in keeping with the vividness of memory: individual instances of time spent with Anaïs that were nothing less than euphoric. It was as if the time I had wasted prior to Anaïs was only justifiable on the basis that I knew no better. It wasn't until Anaïs that I even knew that there was anything I'd been missing out on. Anaïs, as if it came as naturally and unremarkable as breathing, showed me that there existed an ideal against which all else could be judged. As a result, I can see that I would have been prepared to put up with the uncertainties attached to the liaison.

Unfortunately, it also means that post-Anaïs no other woman could possibly and logically fulfil the expectations that I had been privileged enough to know were possible. I may have been given a thermometer of love capable of measuring the vibrations of the emotions, but I was to forever dwell in a climate where the mercury barely rose.

I admit that recalling banishment made me—still makes me—wary.

Email to: anaisundaksel@unicum.de

From: Andrew@bigpond.com.au

Hi Anaïs (and Aksel, of course)

<Something has come up, an appointment that I really can't put off; or rather, the appointment was always there but I thought it could be rescheduled, that it wouldn't matter. Anyway, it does matter—an issue with work, that's all—and so the plans will need to be changed. The problem is that the meeting will probably lead to further complications that can't be avoided. I'm now not sure whether it will be better for me to go there, or for you to come here (does Aksel have a passport?). In any case, let me know how you're situated over the next two or three weeks and we'll see what can be worked out. Love Andrew>

Anaïs' reply, when it came, was a relief. If you use pressure then you must expect breakage. The skilled lawyer only asks what is already known. As crazy as it seems, there was a brief period when I thought that I might have dreamed it all, imagined it, made it up,

or that it might be just further evidence in a long line of incidents that showed the unmistakable signs of a mental disorder: that I was going mad, or that it was no more or less than another story, anonymous words in an anonymous mind that had no connection with reality. Madness, as with any story of high drama and action, would resolve into ever increasing complications, points of ever-increasing tension. For madness, this would affect even the most basic aspects of existence; the unaided brushing of teeth might require its own, long and tortuous chapter, the sort of story where death becomes a blessing, a salvation. I imagined forgetfulness evolving into dementia, the odd hesitation or stammer evolving into the total inability to communicate, as with someone who has suffered an accident or stroke resulting in the loss of speech and movement. My life support would eventually be turned off; no one would realise that behind the blank stare I still existed, as an 'I'. Or perhaps worse, the illness would have no drama at all, just the gradual decline and loss of abilities that go almost unnoticed, unremarkable, until one day you realise you are alone and helpless and that death, when it comes, will have no meaning at all, as if an 'I' never existed. I would have been, and I would remain, nobody: unknown, unloved, and unread. Frustratingly bizarre: like having vision when the singular account is in braille.

Confirmation of my own sanity, if it was needed, was not the only fixation, however. Anaïs' reply was a reprieve for another reason; I wanted Anaïs in my narrative. The story, for it to be worthy of being called a story, to be published in the journal of love, needed to be *our* narrative. Affirmation that Anaïs wanted me included knowing that she was prepared—no, more than prepared—knowing that she was *ready* to accept that mutual attractions, to be successful, to have any future, mean that any power inherent in such a relationship needs to be shared. To participate is to share.

Is this manipulation? Is this game playing? Of course it is. But it is at the same time much more, and at the same time much less. It is the re-establishment of the rules of

engagement that go to make any relationship, and, for both parties, the rules that should have been established twelve years ago. There needed to be a dynamic construction, or reconstruction, of whatever theme the story might contain, and it was essential that I played an active role in whatever that ended up being: the author of a life, rather than merely the chronicler of fate. About fucking time you woke up to yourself, Charles said, but he misunderstood. Charles thought it meant that I was rejecting Anaïs, that it was a power play for the right to say no. This was no power play for its own sake; this was a power play for the right to fulfilment of desire. This was the desire for love to succeed. The problem always is, though, that love never knows what it is that it desires.

Email to: Andrew@bigpond.com.au

From: anaisundaksel@unicum.de

<Dearest Andrew

Of course I understand completely. I can see that my first message was too terse (perhaps I have lived too long in Germany, hehe). Anyway, it is just as easy for Aksel and I to go there, he is already quite the little traveller, and the passports are up to date. Don't be too harsh on us because of the way I sometimes push too much—we have been alone for a long time. xxox Anaïs and Aksel

PS: Aksel also greatly enjoys photography (see the attached collection), I hope that you will be pleased, surprised and amused>

There is a shared history. My son has large brown eyes, just like his father, and when he looks at the lens of the camera, it is as if the eyes are focused only on the future viewer of the image; Aksel is an actor, a magnificent imp, and his mother is as beautiful as ever. To see someone for the first time, as with Anaïs in Sydney, and to know within a short space that this is a person that you can love, is a wondrous, bizarre and inexplicable thing.

In Sydney, back then, I'd had no thoughts of romance, or even stories, for that matter. The idea of destiny seemed to me an act of faith not justifiable by logic, and 'real' writing, as far as I was concerned, had to do with the rational explanation of phenomena,

not some idle dalliance into the superficial lives of invented characters. I'd had my share of relationships, of course, Bloody Hell, hasn't everyone, but there was no one waiting for me at home and there didn't need to be. I felt myself to be self-sufficient and at least partly in control of my existence. As Joplin said: 'I thought I had my shit together pretty good, Man'. As with Joplin, though, the decisive word in the quote is 'thought', because despite the air of completeness, previous relationships were pervaded by a sense of incomprehensibility, like a fog or mist that covered the landscape called love in a haze that I didn't understand. In relation to my history with women, I had always gotten on tolerably well, but I didn't know why or how, just as I didn't understand why those relationships eventually failed, some sooner than others; it was a mystery, complete and unqualified. I was quite prepared to believe, as many did at the time, that men and women may as well be from different planets, such were the unbridgeable chasms between ways of seeing. Within ten minutes of meeting Anaïs, however, I had fallen in love with her and was certain that she was my soul mate: that the hand of destiny must certainly be at work. In such cases love easily defeats rationality and inwit outwits itself.

I never had an image of the 'ideal' woman. This is to say, that the concept occurring to me as it does now, does so as a strange new concept, one that hadn't figured in any literal, meaningful way before. Oh, I was aware that various men expressed a preference for a particular 'type', or for that matter, that they habitually assessed, when first meeting a potential mate—for that is what we do, isn't it? We subconsciously and continually assess new acquaintances as potential mates, with an inner eye on a specific aspect of physical appearance, usually one associated with the understanding of sexual desirability. Charles, for example, in his usual crass style, is an avowed 'breast-man', although secondary mammary glands, for me, have never been of intrinsic interest and I believe my various girlfriends to have exhibited the full range of potential diversity. In any

case, I suppose my conviction was that—apart from the obvious fetishisms of helpless creatures such as Humbert Humbert—the notion of fixating on specific physical features or a specific ‘type’ was to a certain extent disingenuous, albeit harmless. It seemed as if preferences were exhibited in the same way and for the same reasons that expressions of support for a particular code of football, say, were a requirement for statements of gender solidarity, regardless of any actual interest in sport, or that they were a result of blinkered conditioning, such as Anne’s preoccupation with crime novels to the exclusion of the stimulation of variety. As I say, in such matters I was a heathen, a non-believer, or I was, until I encountered Anaïs’ neck that first time in Sydney.

Despite the unappealing context of the restaurant’s dingy backroom, seeing the nape of Anaïs’ neck was like reading Joyce, a revelation as to what was possible with form. She tied her long straw-coloured hair in a perfect braid. Like Joyce, the interwoven layers seemed to have been invented by and for the author, showcasing the unique nature of what was being experienced in the translation. The nape of her slender neck—and I am acutely aware of the absolute pitiable nature of the admission—was beautiful, the single most arousing vision I have ever witnessed. And, as if to enhance something that could never be improved upon, tilting her head to one side to address me exposed tiny wisps of pale hair that had defeated the plait: flaws that proved the diamond’s worth. The smile indicated that she was aware of the focus of my attention, knew what I was thinking.

“So, Monsieur Andrew, what is it to be? Do you want to bite it, or break it?” The open taunt, the combination of strength and vulnerability: captivating. Fortunately, the present friendly grouping of alcohol, drugs and Anaïs’ subsequent melodic (what else could it be?) laughter, diffused my thoroughly stupid but honest reply.

“I want to worship it,” I said.

The following day, ensconced in hangover-curing mode at the Volare Bar of Sydney's International Terminal—ostensibly to farewell Siegfried who had to return to Germany, but in reality to continue the necessary flirtations that would eventually decide and affect our future, should we have one—I found Anaïs to be inquisitive in a way that was both charming and intelligent. Siegfried had already disappeared to face the bureaucratic machinations within the passengers-only-beyond-this-point section of the departure lounge, after hurried kisses and handshakes and much—lost in translation for me—garbled Germanic phraseology. Perched in the bar with almost uninterrupted views, it was possible to observe travellers in transit, as well as the planes that carried them, an activity that under normal circumstances would provide ample, open-minded entertainment. I existed, however, in blinkered abstraction: with your future as stakes, nothing is normal. Anaïs was interesting; my hope was that she was also interested.

The mutual exchange of truncated and heavily edited biographical details is customary, and perhaps necessary, under such circumstances. The necessity increases when attraction requires feeding. For, when the hunger of attraction is involved there is an urgency associated with disgorging our own history and devouring snippets of data about the other person—data that, by the way, ultimately tells us nothing significant about whoever the person really is, and is similarly uninformative for them. Nevertheless, at the time it seems not only urgent, but important. I learn that Anaïs can ride horses but not a bicycle, that she likes reggae but not hip-hop or rap, that her favourite colour is green, although yellows and blues compete for her preference at regular intervals, and, that she studied art history through the *Lycée René Char*, but works by choice almost exclusively as a waitress, an occupation that allows the freedom of movement she evidently requires. Born in the provincial city of Avignon, France, she now has residency in Germany, and has 'lived' with Siegfried for nearly three years in Hamburg. She finds France to be

‘culturally stifling’ while Germany is ‘vibrant and sexy’, in part because of the frequent trips she makes to Berlin. Really? Why, I wonder? But on this point I was unable to comment, apart from a conspiratorial nod of the head, and the obligatory ‘ahh!’, since I had been to France, but not Germany. The term ‘perpetual friend’, used by Anaïs in relation to Siegfried, was studiously avoided by me, since some forms of personal disappointment I prefer to delay as long as possible.

For my part, I believe that I managed to sound sufficiently convincing, and that non-completion of a doctorate in philosophy can sometimes—more often than is acknowledged, I believe I argued at the time—be attributable to the academy, rather than the student (it’s not my fault, really). In any case, I was now conducting my own research under my own terms, and if certain previous supervisors had found my thesis unacceptable, then that signified a short-sightedness on their part, didn’t it? More importantly, the fact that we shared green as a favourite colour clearly meant we were destined for each other, and that the hand of fate was certainly at work. After all, what else could possibly explain such compatibility? Despite the confluence of destiny painted by primary colours, however, the occasional extended silences—my own, not Anaïs’—were of some concern. Love, I only realise much later, requires silences devoid of expectation.

To be silent in the company of beauty, I thought at the time, might be perfectly acceptable when viewing the Mona Lisa, but when attempting to impress the person who controlled the possibility of future happiness, well, the word ‘inept’ came to mind. There is neediness in the pursuit of acceptance, much as the unpublished wills their cherished manuscript to be miraculously plucked—and found to be a work of genius—from the teetering pile of the unsolicited. The fact that I had found and catalogued further reasons for the infatuation that besotted me—additional to the unsurpassable nape of neck—that is, the way she spoke to the waiter when ordering, a slightly crooked lower tooth, and the way

she held her glass, was no excuse. Day Two of the Rest of my Life ended, I was convinced, with the conviction that this was a love that would remain unrequited, and I was deeply depressed at the prospect of loneliness, not to mention knightly celibacy. With such thoughts, I steeled myself for the inevitable chaste European-cheek-kiss of departure, the one that signified friendship, nothing more.

When the kiss was directed squarely at the mouth, when the kiss was passionate, when the kiss seemed to last forever, when the kiss involved complicated manoeuvring and intertwining of tongues, and when, during the kiss, Anaïs busily explored the front of my trousers with a free hand, then, then I knew that I was dealing with the novel: something utterly new.

“Well, Andrew,” she said, “this is the time when we adjourn to your hotel, *non?*” And, I have to report, as scared as I was, and given the unsettling event—sufficiently disruptive to affect the orderly flow of messages from brain to tongue—I had no option but to concur with a silent nod of heady head. And the wordless mouth tasted what it was to be in love, and to be loved: the tang of risk that accompanies being loved in return.

Santayana is a pest.

This disturbing revelation is brought to my attention by the ever-vigilant neighbour, Anne-of-the-absent-husband. Apparently I’ve been harbouring an illegal alien. *Hemidactylus frenatus*, no less—she saw it on the news, and anything foreign-sounding is enough to incite the parochial locals—another boatperson who probably made their way into the country via Indonesia. Really? How do I feel about that? To give him his due (Santayana, I mean), he hasn’t been a bother at all. On the contrary, the little fellow dispatches a useful quantity of insects and so on that I would consider more verminous than he, regardless of weather conditions, too: a pest for all seasons, you could say. He

works hard and keeps his metaphorical nose out of trouble, so let him stay, that's my considered opinion. And, in any case, things must have been tough at home for the little blighter's ancestors to have made that perilous sea-crossing, so he and his mob are not aliens at all: genuine refugees. We have a duty, as a nation, to accept him. Don't worry Santayana, you can count on me, comrade.

"But they take over from the local species," says the neo-Nazi, so easily impassioned by the Fuhrer's border protection speech on the six o'clock propaganda session.

"Locals? None of them were interested in the job; my good friend here had vacant possession," says I, perhaps taking a liberty in articulating my evolving relationship with Santayana.

"But...but..."

"But me no buts, Good Neighbour, this gecko harmed no one, just filled a position that the locals didn't care for. He's like a Sydney cabbie in that respect, just happens to have migrated to Coolum, that's all. He's an explorer, a pioneer, a hero to the downtrodden, prepared to do whatever it takes to survive in a hostile world."

"Seriously, Andrew, sometimes I just don't know about you."

"That's right, Neighbour, you don't."

Eleven

The Notebook, Greece:

; ... More yachts than usual. Covering the compass. On the move. We have another late late night at the taverna. Music and dance and the full endless selection. Spend a considerable time watching Phillip perform. He cannot dance. At odd and unexpected times, wayward feet accidentally move in time to the rhythmic beat. It is wonderful. Gas! Theokratos as willing accomplice. Phillip drunk. On the rascal's presence. His Dervishness. Fetta'd and olive'd. *Mezedes*. Sipping ouzo and—later—*tsipouro* while bare toes on toes send sensory messages buzzing softly. Pigeon-homing in and landing to an almost audible sigh at legs' junctures. Tightening. And more *tsipouro*. Twirling with bristled laughing faces. Language lost. Impassioned theories expounded and condemned and forgotten. In an instance of slow slippage. Striking chords harmony in the noise of movement. Silence and sound. Overflowing into the courtyard. A pinch of hashish.

Afterward, Anaïs and I somehow manage the bungalow. And curl up sheet-defeated. In the cuddle-huddled. Nipple-nuppled luxury. Of cycladic calm. And wet-warm dark. Entombed. In the air bubble of the contemporary.

A light dewy rain that clears. As we are still abed. Phillip, with Theokratos, arriving early. Much too awake for my liking. And looking like they are yet to sleep. A detached child-like happiness with the world. Exhibited in the pair. As if bragging. Using laughing eyes alone. And much muffled conversation. Or atavistic grunts. Between the two. The idea of coffee. Too much. Theokratos to the rescue. And shows us all how to make an infusion of local herbs. Ideal idea! And he dashes about outside. Broad brazen feet flying. Collecting. Ideas? Diderot called his ideas his 'whores'. But this is only a confusion. If true then he must be either, whoremaster, or client. The ideas must dutifully trundle forth and earn bread for the intellectual table. Or be an expensive habit. Existing only to seduce and reduce. Desire. Either way I cannot concur. An idea, an exemplar: As with *sentiment amoureux*, freedom is only a starting point from where choices have to be made. A certain 'curiosity' essential in both. Or, consider the !Kung bushmen's proverb: 'One man does not have enough thoughts for one woman.' Kalahari wisdom. A lesson in anthropology. Humanity. A bubble-pricking thought. Light as a spear. The herbal tannins of the tea

elusive. Unsubtle. Yet somehow. Uncanny. Like being able to taste one of Nietzsche's essays. Sour and sobering but with the promise of superhuman enlightenment. To follow. A vague plan emerges within parts of our little group. That bikes will be procured. And we will ride to the southern tip. To the old lighthouse. The plan a disaster. In my mind. Already. I am not up to using the feet. For pedalling, says I. Not today. No problem, says Phillip. Scooters, says Theokritos. And revs the imaginary machine with his right hand. — —Brmmm brmmm, in Joyce-speak. Already enjoying himself. Much more than the plan demands. I just want to go back to bed, says Anaïs. To sleep. Be ready in an hour, says Phillip. We'll be back. Perhaps the tea will live up to its infinite promise. But. I am not the *übermensch*. Yet. The two scooters lack speed and suspension. The first no doubt a benefit. Locally. The second not. They do, however, have noise. In a quantity that belies their modest stature. A pitch-enriched squeal. That pierces points. Somewhere behind the eyes. And at the roots of teeth. Anaïs. Sensibly sitting behind me. On our bike. Holding firm. Theokritos. At Phillip's back. Intent on a Cirque du Soleil satisfying performance. Over-loaded. Antics and aerobatics. Making the unstable machine. Moreso. Teasing the borders of balance. And the contours of space. Obstacles and overhanging branches. And goats. Mostly missed. On the gravelly track. As we arrive more or less unscathed. Miraculous considering the ridiculous short odds. That a bookmaker might have written. Dismount from the saddle and have to walk the last hundred metres. Across stupendous and slippery rocks. Scattered through giants' fingers along the peninsula. Looking back. And the bikes appear as two animals. Peripatetics who meet and stop. To sniff. And compare tails. The handle-bar horns. On the red-coated beasts. And oily arguments of odours and red lines and temperature. And the comparative benefit of various roads. Surfaces. On the feet. Shod or unshod. And, the rituals of service and maintenance. *Sehr* civilised and Socratic. Theokritos in the lead and knows where the spare lighthouse key is to be found. On the grounds. Under a well-worn doormat of slatted wood. The key a Gothic affair. Big and brassy with age and rust. And night-time tales. The light is automatic now, he says. No one comes. But us. The staircase. Not a neat spiral as expected. An even neater gradation of inclines. On the pentagonals. Precise and delightful. To the eye. And the footsteps' sounds solid and endearing. And chaste. For all of the hundred and twenty-two steps. Upward. To step out onto the landing atop. Outside and around. And we disturb birds. And feathered flurries of light at their unsettled flight. Yet they keep tension and integrity intact. A tensegrity of stylised uniform spirals. Formed and

flowing. Cohesive and stable. And the wind is working. A hundred feet above the calm. Searching for equilibrium among the highs and lows of unseen pressures. As we all must be. See the nearby islands in a different light. And height. They are the protruding portions of the topography of another realm. Underworld. Underwater. Joined in a journey that maps an alter dimension. Mirrored above. And see for the first time a low long-ridged specimen of an Isle. Eastward. It could easily do service as Archilochus' Thasos. The backbone of an ass. And our own island an exclamation in pointed retort. Punctuating. A statement that exists. Without explanation. Or guilt. In a sea of holiest communion. Religion without recrimination or reward. A place to share a Marley-sized spliff in the sheltered lee. That a chef must have pre-pared earlier. Rearranging the imponderables. Of connection. All in sight of a distant horizon ...

Still a slight chop to the sea. And the weekly ferry due with supplies. The intimidations and rituals of maintenance. And the nature and procurement. Of nurture. The ferry captain. A weathered old barrel-chested ox called Nikos. Always seen in tattered shorts alone. And the grey-curled hair over the almost-black body. Everywhere over muscles muscling. Small cigar puffs and the cigarillo manoeuvred with energetic rearrangements of the lips. Under the bush of moustache. Socratic feet. As big and cracked and leathery as any pair of boots could ever be. Phillip calls him our Zorba. I think he is hot, says Anaïs. I want to fuck him. And? says I. It being the choice not the desire. That astounds. *Un problème de la logistique*, says Anaïs. The boat is here for less than an hour. And he's always *très occupé*. The unloading. You see? She has been researching. It would appear. Then assistance might be appropriate? I tender tentatively. Oh would you thank you yes please, says Anaïs. *Absolument*. And Phillip and I put forward a suggestion. For consideration. That we could volunteer to assist with the cargo. Diverting attentions. Leaving a window of opportunity below decks, so to speak, adds Phillip. Sounds like a plan, says Anaïs, eyes wide and brimming. Thank you my darling darlings. And climbs and covers in cuddles and kisses and an arms-hugging walk for the tricky trio. Feet skipping. Conspiring. And the plan works. Wonderfully. Says Anaïs. After...

Twelve

In Sydney back then, getting a cab was the easy part, but when there's a ten to fifteen minute taxi ride from airport to hotel (no Charles, I was not looking at my watch), it's difficult to know what to do, what to say, how to act. Anaïs and I had just spent two (glorious for me) hours dabbling in and valuing each other's minds, and soon, we both knew, we would be exploring each other's bodies. Detail becomes parenthetical. And there appeared to me, if I thought about it (and I did), a vast chasm between visualising the public, mental and verbal display—fully clothed—and the forthcoming private, physical and non-verbal (or would I turn out to be a screamer?) display—naked. Would she want to be naked? I didn't know. Would she want me to be naked? I knew less. And, would it make any difference if the lights were on, or off? Wait, it's still daylight, it shouldn't matter. Maybe I should close the drapes. I don't even know if they close. Hell, I don't even know if there are drapes.

“You are tense, Andrew, is everything alright?”

“Of course, yes, no problem.” And she gave my arm a squeeze. I was only half listening, busy watching the back of the cabdriver, Tawfiq's, lively head, lost in unexpurgated thought (as the teller of history is free to claim).

She sat on my right side in the rear of the cab, her left arm hooked through mine, and her other hand clasping my forearm: a two-handed grip, no escape. I wondered if I should kiss her, again. I wanted to kiss her. But when I turned to assess, turned to see if kissing again was what she was waiting for, Anaïs wasn't looking at anything, at least anything that was connected with me; she gazed out the window; she held my arm tightly but stared out the window. South Dowling Street seemed to me the same as ever: endless renovations on one side, and the wide avenue separating the vulgarity of these from the

‘better’ suburbs to the east. The only real change, if change was a constant to be relied upon, was the increasing traffic. Maybe that’s what she was looking at, because if the lesson from the ‘80s had been to tone-it-down, then this didn’t transfer to transportation; this was the beginning of what would become the Big-Beefy-Car era, where if you didn’t have a six-wheel drive and ten cylinders and sit two metres off the ground, well, you were being a fool to yourself and a burden to others.

She turned, and I guess caught me looking, or had known that I was all along, and her smile had a sort of impish inquisitiveness. I realised again that I knew so little about her (with his constant happy chatter, I knew more about Tawfiq than my own beloved), but that I was learning new things—all of them exceptional—about her constantly: the crooked smile that made her lower lip sit in just such a way, and how the equally crooked lower tooth nested against the lip; they seemed to be made for each other, as indeed they were. These were not imperfections, but rather, they must be the tell-tale insignia of perfection, and I had been, like most in the world, totally unaware of the correct criteria until meeting Anaïs. It seemed a simple, plausible truth. Plato had gotten it miserably wrong, and his aesthetic of a prototypical object of perfection missed the crucial point; no, not that beauty was in the eye of the beholder, just that the eye of the beholder sees what it yearns to see. Nobody else could or would see the beauty that I saw in Anaïs, since I was the only one that knew what I was looking for.

“Whatever is it you are thinking, Andrew? You look like you want to eat me,” Anaïs said, with a chuckle and further squeeze of the imprisoned arm. “Do you?”

“I want what you want,” I said, trying to sound in control of myself, if not the situation or its outcome. So, the mouse pretended to be a lion. “In fact, what I want right now is to kiss you, and you want the same.” So we did. And Tawfiq briefly suspended his animated autobiography—he was up to the chapter where he languished for four and a half

years in a refugee camp—and gave encouraging nodding of head and beard via the rear-view mirror.

The apartment was as utilitarian and empty as when I'd left it in the morning, full of the anticipation and apprehension that make up the unknown: the mysterious that might resolve, carefully edited, to a narrative worth translating; the desire and hope that events will turn out; that happiness might actually be possible. I distinctly remember entering the flat. I believe I had to kick the stubborn door shut with a shoeless foot, as both hands were by that stage occupied; the 'lost' door keys I later found dangling outside in the lock, relegated to the status of neglect once their mission had been accomplished. The immediate problem (for me), however, soon became evident: thought and sex should never share the same bed.

"Be as rough as you like," said Anaïs, so close to my ear that I could feel the succulence, "I need you *now*."

I knew that I shouldn't be thinking, but I was; I couldn't help it. While locked in a fervent embrace and at the same time conducting mutual un-tyings, un-buttonings and un-zipperings, it was as if there was a limited third-person narrator orchestrating events. Not only was the unwanted interloper itemising the farce—now she's fumbling with his belt, he'll never get that damn clasp undone, not that way, not without help, that's better, she's showed him how, his trousers will trip him up if he doesn't watch out, she looks about to sneeze—but the chronicler's agenda included attributing, to me, random thoughts more suited to unhurried rational enquiry, rather than the context at hand: I know almost nothing about this girl; I think I forgot to charge my laptop; we've only just met; consider the consequences of action; high tide coincides with dusk today, or is it tomorrow? Hell, I have forgotten the laptop; I'd better remember to ring Phillip, etcetera, etcetera.

The problem with rational thought under such circumstances is that it implies analysis, which leads to the further implication of the potential for judgement, regardless of how non-judgemental we think we might be. And, all of this would seem to require the detachment of a Masters and Johnson experiment, rather than a scenario of physical desire being assuaged in the throes of passion. I have read somewhere that the brain commandeers twenty five per cent of the body's blood flow so as to be sufficiently and constantly fuelled by a porridge of oxygen: cogitation's energy source. In stealing blood from the brain, then, the engorged prick fulfils the secondary but equally important function of shutting the bastard down, or at least, appropriately subduing the brain's workings so it can relax in a hammock with a beer for the average twelve and a half minutes while the cock gets on with the important business of sex. There is a necessary insanity involved: literally, losing one's mind. Or at least that part of it that keeps hogging the porridge and then, like little Oliver, asking for more. Not a deal-breaker, but an unnecessary distraction, so to speak, much as this paragraph could have been more enjoyably employed in recounting (tastefully, of course) a study in steamy erotica.

Fortunately, biology is a persistent little bugger, and Anaïs, when she lets her hair down—literally as well as metaphorically—is an enthusiastic assistant. Suffice to say that mutual satiations were achieved, although statistical averages might need to be revised expansively as a consequence.

Still, there is always the worry of a deceit being implicated when, for whatever reason, attentiveness to the beloved is compromised. After all, if love is what it is, then a necessary condition ought to be that it overrides other, less important diversions, shouldn't it? Confidence undermined in the minor, destabilises the major. And, perhaps even more disturbing, what if Anaïs was as equally distracted, what would that mean? How would I

ever know? Is this normal, or tragic? I admit thorough ignorance. Despite an endless parade of former girlfriends, these matters were for me, novel.

During the traditional post-coital cigarette (I don't care how healthy it is for me, I still miss the addictive rituals) Anaïs made the customary enquiry, although in this instance the innocence of the question precipitated dread.

"So, Andrew, what is it you are thinking, eh?"

"I'm thinking we should just stay naked," I said, and it surprised me that I could even conjure anything remotely appropriate. "It'll be much easier, save all that hassle."

"*Mais oui, naturellement*, but of course, I like the way your mind works, Andrew."

"In fact," I said, "we could go and collect your things from the backpackers, stock up on some food and wine and so on, and then I could spend the next two weeks exploring your magnificent body."

"This is a plan that I too would be happy to put into practice, Andrew, but it means getting dressed, to go out, *non*?"

"Ah, yes, I see the problem," and I did a passable job, I thought, of pondering the dilemma for a moment. "Okay then, let's agree that the plan is good, it'll just have to wait awhile."

"Very well, agreed," said Anaïs, with a chuckle and an exaggerated handshake to seal the pact. "You know," she added, "it's okay now, but I was a little worried ... concerned, before. It's stupid, I know, but ... ah, what can I say. I was dreaming perhaps. Just silly thoughts, eh?"

"It's alright," I believe I said. "Everything's going to be just fine, wait and see."

And when I say now, or more accurately, when I write now that 'I believe I said', the problem is that I really do believe *now* that that's what I said *then*; memory obscures

reality, because I can't be sure. The detail itself is not important, but if this particular—and relatively insignificant—memory has been massaged into a comfortable state of acceptance, then the implication might be that other, much more important events are misremembered. Can I honestly remember words that were spoken so long ago? It just seems too contrived, too conveniently neat, as if they were the sorts of words expected and therefore unexamined. Uncertainty doesn't rule out the chance that the words are accurate, but it also means that they might just be words that I wished I had said. Anything that I say (write) can't be what *really* happened; it must only be like a story that I've told and retold to myself so often that it becomes reality, at least for me. Memory only becomes worthy of expression after truth has been edited and revised into a consumable mass. Surely it's impossible to remember an exact sequence of words and phrases and expressive emotions in a conversation, a dialogue with the past, isn't it? And, if memory is contrived (invented?) or embellished into a plausible narrative of what *might* have happened, isn't that just as legitimate as what *ought* to have happened? On the one hand, there might be something called facts, but then there must be something else more important than mere facts. My memory tells me that the conversation took place, but I have no memory of the conversation; does that make sense? It does to me. It has to make sense because the detail has to be important because the detail is somehow symbolic of the truth of the memory. The detail in the conversation must stand for the general truth of the relationship I believe I had, that I remember having. In any case, it's the sort of detail that you would expect me to remember, so it must be true: necessary and sufficient.

Proposition:

... the harmony between thought and reality
is to be found in the grammar of the language.

Ludwig Wittgenstein
([1953] 2003: 76)

Thirteen

Well, says Charles, urinating absently through the balcony railing onto a young citrus below, well well well, Lover Boy, how is this little drama unfolding, hey? Have you been in touch with the Frenchy? Charles is present even in his absences, unfortunately, but it is still his presence that grates more assuredly than the essences left over by departure. I decide to ignore his attempted provocation for as long as possible, despite knowing that ultimately avoidance is futile, that it only fuels Charles' drive to annoy. That characters like Charles have the uncanny ability to locate, isolate and then penetrate the defences guarding emotional weakness is sobering as well as maddening. I concentrate on the task at hand—the appointment book. Procrastination is a fulltime job:

Things that I'm supposed to do but can easily put off:

- Clean Fluffy's bowl
- Ring Anaïs

Things that I probably shouldn't put off any longer:

- Ring Anaïs
- Clean Fluffy's bowl

Things that I must do but don't want to:

- Ring Anaïs
- Clean Fluffy's bowl

Things I'll definitely do unless something else happens:

- Clean Fluffy's bowl
- Ring Anaïs

Fluffy has been a loyal and faithful companion for more than ten years and resides in a patterned, terracotta flower pot—a vessel more usually employed as a domicile for flora and the attendant growing medium, rather than fish. Although from time to time (when not eaten by the primary inhabitant, that is) a species of water plant also shares the space. And the vessel currently stands in a corner of the balcony, a sufficiently well-trafficked area so that the necessary rituals of maintenance are not ignored: an occasional visual reminder of the responsibilities attached to proprietorship. That the flower pot is patterned—a pseudo-Aztec design that attracted me for some under-analysed reason at the time of purchase—is a detail that almost certainly eludes Fluffy, notwithstanding my ignorance of piscine colour or pattern perception, as the interior of the pot is unpainted clay, although, to be honest, this surface more frequently corresponds to the blue-green or algae-black of neglect.

Despite the stimulus of the flower pot's presence and, I usually have to presume, Fluffy, somewhere in the murky depths of same, I regularly procrastinate in undertaking the task of changing the water and cleaning the bowl. Often the impetus only arrives via the caustic tongue of the housekeeper, who refuses to incorporate 'that stinking pot', or indeed Charles' ashtrays and general detritus, among her cleaning duties. And, fair enough too. Although it occurs to me that the housekeeper is probably not even aware of Fluff's existence—she has never mentioned him (her?)—and must simply think that I'm a particularly inept amateur at cultivating water plants. This lack of information is doubtless for the better, since I suspect she would be one of those people who, if she knew, would then insist on the whole equipage of tanks, filters, lights, pumps and whatnot that constitute the normal and totally unnecessary arrangement. I should mention that, when I say Fluffy, I refer to the current incarnation—two have departed due to (presumably) old age or unidentifiable disease and the initial recipient of the sobriquet succumbed to an

enterprising kookaburra, one that might teach a kingfisher a thing or two. In any case, fish come and go but the name stays.

The acquisition of Fluffy Number One was a confluence of events, prompted first by the concern of friends. The consensus of opinion at the time was that I must be lonely, with the apparent evidence being the litter of failed relationships, the revolving-door of unsuitable girlfriends and the absence, either currently or in a foreseeable future, of either wife or offspring. The preferred solution, for this society anyway, is the acquisition of a Pet-as-Companion, otherwise the unthinkable could happen and I might actually have to navigate a whole day alone, a prospect that would presumably lead to some undisclosed form of Durkheimian ‘anime’. Needless to say, I resisted these entreaties until the day I happened to pass a pet shop and, out of curiosity more than anything else—through the plate glass window the female shop assistant looked interesting, in a way that could not be totally disassociated from the familiar manner with which she handled the enormous diamond python—anyway, I entered. The rest, as they say, is history; Fluffy Number One was the compromised result, although he (she?) did have to endure, happily I suspect, the first few days in a waste-paper basket, suitably equipped with plastic bin-liner, until an appropriate flower pot could be located: a flower pot not punctuated with the customary drainage hole, for obvious reasons of utility. At least I hope, given the fatal kookaburra incident, that Fluff was happy, albeit briefly. I only mention this domestic digression because I’ve just now changed the water or, more correctly, written this while the dribbling hose overflowing in the flower pot for a time accomplished the task for me.

I notice, now that I can see Fluffy clearly for the first time in a while, how big the little fella has become and I’m reminded of a caveat that Snake Girl had given; fish growth is restricted by the size of the pond that they inhabit. Or in her words, ‘don’t worry, they can never get too big for the tank they’re in.’ Flower pots were probably not on her radar

as I left the premises, just as a pet of any description hadn't been on mine as I entered. In any case, size wasn't an issue, apparently. All well and good, and no doubt the evidence obtained from observing countless instances points to the fortuitous—for the fish as well as the fish keeper—biological fact that this is the case. Nevertheless, on subsequent reflection this indicates to me confusion between force and form, for it can happen that it is force that evolves a form to contain it, and not the container that restricts the evolution of force. Or, to put it another way, the sentiments aroused by an emotion might be accommodated in a novella, but in the end, it is the novella (or the novella-ist?) being accommodated, not the emotion.

The idea of fatherhood eludes me. I have no understanding or experience of the paternal, beyond a vague notion that, had the situation ever arisen, adjustments would need to be made; having children, one is led to suspect, brings with it attentions and responsibilities more insistent, say, than the care of a goldfish, but less than those that ought to be mandatory to be a competent national leader. That the idea resided somewhere on the continuum, I could be reasonably confident about, notwithstanding that some guppies are probably more troublesome than others and that competent national leaders are a scarce commodity. Beyond such a generalisation, I am entirely bereft of the specific. To be close to fifty and to be childless (or in this instance, to be unaware of the status, which amounts to the same thing) has never been an issue that pressed for resolution in the same way, for example, as other concerns that motivate action—questions that insist on answers or urges that demand satisfaction. The matter never arose; the need as it were, to be a father, never occurred. There is one thing though.

There is awareness, in one of the many recesses below those of the conscious (the ones that open unexpectedly and disgorge remaindered information, as when we come

across a book previously read but long forgotten and a possible, underlying theme re-reveals itself) that my own childhood should not be taken as exemplar. That is to say, that my father's role, or lack of it, was not one to be emulated should an ideal be strived for. Not that he was negligent in any of the usual drunken, violent or otherwise abusive manners that seem to be more common than acknowledged. It is simply that he was absent, or at the least, minimally present. So, without having clear criteria under which fatherly attributes might be judged, I suppose I realised that being there was a primary requirement: participation requires presence. In remembering my father I have vague associations rather than any clear image. Imagine country lanes, narrow tracks or pathways that you are following or perhaps exploring, and you come across an intersection where you might decide to go one way or another depending on whether there's a destination in mind. There might be a signpost at the crossroad, which, if you can decipher the meaning, may or may not be helpful. My father is that signpost: limited information that in any case requires translation, otherwise mute. And it also occurs to me, rather strangely I suppose, that my father being a particular signpost of a particular type at a particular time is a kind of theft, just as all writing is a theft; stolen from me are the possibilities of any other potential stories that might have occurred should he have been a different signpost, or not a signpost at all. It is ironic then, thinking about it, that I've unwittingly been party to reconstructing the same state of affairs: paternal absence leading to intergenerational consistency; an accidentally-negligent act likely to need more than a hose dribbling into a flower pot to remedy. But how, how to translate when we don't know the rules?

There is an informal (is there any other kind?) barbeque that I'm going to, mainly because it's within staggering-home distance and, if I have to socialise, my preference is daylight hours, and the see-able, rather than the night. It's probably another of the signs of age, or

maybe intolerance, when, as with children, we need the comforts and securities of the known. Or perhaps we just can't be bothered anymore, having experienced most of the adrenaline-enhancing ordeals of the evenings and found them to be less than advertised: ordinary, in a disappointing way. The sensory impairments of night bring a heightening in other areas, including imagination—singles' bars, among others, take advantage of this with their subdued lighting, just as casinos don't have clocks to distract the inner eye, and the metaphorical blind-date is more than often a literal disaster; the promises and premises of the unknown are usually found to be empty. Joanna (most recently, but memory assures that the complaint has been general) had a grievance that I didn't get out enough, and by that she meant that most people are reassured of their own existence by contact with others, and therefore by implication, why wasn't I? In Joanna's case this required the extreme measure of travelling to Tibet. The point being, I suppose, that under that schema the solitary person can't be certain that they even exist. One can only wonder at the validity of a philosophy that worries about such things. In any case, barbeque it is, and the distraction of the alternate stories of friends of mine, three couples whose dramatic narratives I've been keeping track of, because barbeques can be great spaces for stories, they are a great 'invention'.

Those proponents of the concept of a National Identity would have me believe that the barbeque is of uniquely antipodean origin, only being recently exported back to northern realms: codswallop. The excuse to share food around a campfire may well be the beginning of civilisation, and no doubt similarly outrageous lies and dubious tales (for storytelling, not eating, is the primary purpose) were told by our ancestors over haunches of whatever roast was roast-able at the time, although the relative success of such occasions, then as now, depends on captivating the audience, more than capturing the cook-able.

Stuart, an agreeable if erratic host usually, is a bit younger than me but has already traversed the slippery matrimonial slopes for the third time and, if things continue in the Stuart-reality-as-normal range, he must soon be due to strap on climbing boots for a fourth. Does the degree of difficulty lessen, I wonder. Is that why once you start it's easier to just keep going? Or is it because he's a poet—two slim volumes of poetry published, in fact, a not insubstantial feat for this country—and that he's still hopeful of someday understanding the distilled essence of the act? Financially, the continuing marriage-go-round drama has ruined him, as he persists in reminding, but he and current wife, Lisa, still manage to procure king prawns and scallops wrapped in bacon for the odd barbie by writing bit-pieces for various magazines, a steady but uninspiring way with words that doesn't utilise anything like his full potential. Although, I must admit, he does get the opportunity to contemplate some off-the-wall stuff.

"Have you ever wondered what it would be like to kill something ... or someone?" he asks casually, while offering around the beers.

"Saywot?" says I, more than slightly taken aback. Bloody Hell, is this the same guy that's squeamish about stepping on ants, so to speak? On top of that, Stuart is small and weedy, anaemic looking, and usually anxious as Hell. He could make Woody Allen look neurotic.

"I mean, like just getting a weapon, something with a bit of grunt, something with balls, like a seven-point-six-two, and just going for it."

He is positively beaming: excited eyes behind the bottle glasses. Bloody Hell. Does he intend to shoot her? At least with his other wives the relationship just petered out in the usual, no-need-for-excessive-violence way. But Lisa is right here. He wouldn't tell her in advance, would he? I have no idea what the protocol is before you shoot someone. I suppose they deserve to be informed; it seems the polite thing to do.

“Don’t worry,” helps Lisa, “he’s been writing a piece for *Sporting Shooter* on fox hunting. Stu’s been getting a bit carried away ... projecting, that’s all.”

“Thank Christ for that,” I say. “Putting up with a poet is bad enough, but having them running around armed with seven-point-whateveryousaids, whatever they are, is quite another. I’m pretty sure the average poetry reading public isn’t ready for that, Stu.” But it makes me think that whoever said the pen was mightier was probably sitting safely at home when they did, and not tooled up as in Stuart’s fantasy. The conversation inspires Bernard to launch into his own anecdote about fox hunting, as a child in the Ukraine.

“The wintertime is best,” he says, “the skins are much better, worth more.”

Bernard—a version of his name less complex than the original—emigrated with his parents in the late ‘70s, and he’s the only one of our group that I could actually visualise using a weapon. At least he has the muscle for it, and looks more like a woodsman that could set fox-traps one-handed, rather than a teacher of literature. His beefy paws gesticulate as he recounts the one about the elusive, silver-white fox. I’ve heard it before.

Bernard sports a younger, second wife, Louise. The first—also a refugee from eastern Europe—died of some rare cancer not long after they married; a tragic enough story in itself after the drama of their respective parents’ dissidence and flight to the west. Louise is one of Bernard’s ex-students and we all assumed that the classic student-teacher crush would be short-lived, but they seem settled and happy, at least to the extent that settled-ness and happiness can be viewed external to any relationship. For whatever reason, they haven’t bothered with children and, despite Louise’s petite stature, she is protective of the old goat in a way that’s almost maternal, particularly about his work. Bernard is a good enough wordsmith, from what little I’ve seen, but is unpublished and has been toiling away at his one and only narrative—a semi-autobiographical account of escaping the feared regime—for all the time I’ve known him.

The problem is, I suspect, that fiction trumps most lives, hands down. Despite maintaining enormous respect for Bernard, I no longer persist with the early advice I gave him to fictionalise some aspects of the narrative. When I did, not only was there no understanding of what I meant, he looked at me as if I was instructing him how to catch foxes using cotton thread and a wet paper bag. Still, he's a dedicated scholar and in a lot of ways has achieved more than I ever will.

The other duo at the barbie, Jack and Debra, have always been a contradiction, which probably means that they're the most normal. If you didn't know them you would say they were the perfect couple: high-school sweethearts, always been together, romance and wedding followed by a tribe of kids and still, they will tell you themselves, as much in love as the day they met. The paradox is that they fight like mongoose and snake: teeth, claws and venom. After thirty years, each knows the other's flaws and faults intimately. And they let the other know, that they know, constantly. This afternoon they're on cooking duty, so their mutual, verbal assessments of irredeemable shortcomings is restricted, for the moment at least, to background bickering about Jack's latest literary offering, while Bernard is still in the northern wilds and moving on from foxes to bears.

Jack might be the writer in the family, but Debra is the critic and often the more insightful, which is to say, creative in a different way. And what I mean by that, so that my prejudice is absolutely clear, is that more often than not I agree with her assessment, rather than Jack's. As I have said candidly already, clarity before originality.

Debra in critical mode: "... of course it's the form, but that's not the point."

"I have to write what people want to read, it's no Bloody good being a neo-Joyce when the average attention span is a thirty-second damn commercial."

"Bullshit, Jack."

“It’s not bullshit. The public might know bugger all about art, but they know what they like.”

“Yes, oh mighty Caligula, all hail Caesar, but that doesn’t mean it has to read like another instruction manual. Don’t be so pig-headed. It’s not all black or white.”

Sotto voice: “... fucking Christ ...”

“Listen, Jack, give them some credit. *Real* Readers don’t want to be led by the hand around some maze of plot. They don’t want directions on how it all fits together. They don’t want to be told a *story*; they want something that defines a state of mind.”

“You might want to consider sometime that it’s *your* state of mind that’s the damn problem, not the way that I write—which most people find quite acceptable, by the way. And don’t turn that steak, I’ve told you a hundred times it only needs once. Christ, you never listen to anything ...”

When the squabbling pair manage to cooperate sufficiently to get food onto plates and plates onto table, and when Bernard’s bearskin tale is resolutely nailed (literally and metaphorically) to the shed wall—I always feel sorry for the bear at that point, he was only being a bear—I decide the time is right to share information with friends. Or more probably, for some things there is never a right time, and so when in doubt caution is just as problematic as action. They must sense that I have something to say; the uncomfortable tend to make the comfortable uncomfortable.

“It would appear,” I begin with cautious abandon, “that I am in imminent danger of becoming a father.” The wordsmiths are momentarily devoid of words. My friends don’t know Anaïs, but they know *of* Anaïs.

“Joanna?” says Debra. “Is it Joanna? But isn’t she off trekking somewhere? How did you find out? Have you spoken to her?” The others are watching closely, mouths watering at the possibilities, ready to dine out on good gossip: hunger being general.

“Ahh, yeah, no, not Joanna. She’s in Tibet, yeah, look, and ... in any case, that’s over, it’s not going anywhere, it’s finished.” Nobody seems too surprised at this obvious non-revelation, but it still managed to irk the self-esteem momentarily.

“Are you having a go, Andrew,” says Stuart, “taking the piss? Is it that Bloody goldfish of yours that’s expecting a tadpole or two?”

“No. No, I’m being quite serious,” I say, and proceed to explain the updated version of the situation vis-à-vis Anaïs, with much stop-start question and answer—to the extent that I’m capable, and without bothering to quibble about the fact that it’s frogs that have tadpoles, not fish—in an effort to satisfy appetites.

“Bloody Hell, what do you intend to do?” seems to be the consensus.

“Honestly, I have no idea.”

And I wish I did.

Fourteen

“Anaïs, Anaïs, is that you?”

“*Mais oui*, of course, Andrew, and no need to be so loud, I can hear you. The connection is fine, really. It’s as if you were here with me, in the same room even.”

Her voice is unchanged, exactly as I now remember, although if I’d been asked a few seconds before to describe her voice, what it was like, the accent even, I would have been unable to begin; it would have been no more or less than a pleasant recollection, unforgettable but also indescribable. Now it’s different. Now it’s as if we had only spoken yesterday, instead of more than ten years ago. Perhaps there is slightly more of the breathlessness that intrigued me so much; there had always been a certain quality, a certain something to do with pronunciation and accent that made it sound as if her words were like a long train of sentence, each passing carriage increasing the pace of urgency; as if, with every word you drew closer to the important final word, the destination where ultimate meaning, or pleasure, perhaps, might lie. “Anaïs, it’s been so long. How are you? Tell me what’s been happening. And Aksel? Is Aksel with you?”

“I’m fine, Andrew, everything is fine. But it’s morning here. Aksel has already left for school. He is at the *Gymnasium Französisches* now, it is much better than before. Now he can have French and German and maybe not complain so much about his mother’s mixed up languages.”

“Oh, I wasn’t sure ... the time difference, I mean. I wasn’t sure if both of you would be home ... if anyone would be home. I’m glad ... I mean I’m glad that I caught you.” And I was glad that she was there, although I didn’t say that I had checked and double checked the time differences, knew them by heart, and that I purposefully made sure, or hoped at least, that Aksel wouldn’t be there. I don’t know how I could handle it if

Aksel had answered the phone. I want to talk to him, of course, but what would I say? I felt I needed the distance of talking to Anaïs first. Apart from that, I didn't know anything about their arrangements there: house, apartment, alone, living with someone else. Was there another man somewhere in the picture that I was trying to piece together in my mind? I didn't know ... anything. It didn't seem likely, given the e-mails, but how could I be sure? How could I be sure of anything? In any case, I had no idea what I might say to Aksel if I had to speak with him first. What do you say to your son that you've never met? Bloody Hell, I didn't even know if he spoke English, and I hadn't used French or German for more than a decade. But really that was minor; the real problem was one of content, not of translation.

"It's great to hear your voice, Anaïs," I said. "You sound exactly the same, it's wonderful. You haven't changed a bit."

"Of course I've changed, Andrew. Everybody changes, everything changes. People get older, if nothing else. Sometimes I feel like an old woman already." And if I had been standing in front of her, I knew that this would be a cue for compliment, that all women, even women as normally self-confident (and un-self-conscious) as I remember Anaïs to be, meander on these little fishing expeditions; nobody minds the reassurance that they've somehow outwitted time, whether it's disingenuous or not, and it usually is: the compliment, quickly followed by the denial. In any case, she doesn't sound old, and I wish I was there to say the meaningless things that mean so much. But I'm not, and I can't, and it's not my place.

I was acutely aware of having no rights.

"Look, Andrew, I know that this must all be a big shock for you, *non*? I'm sure you didn't expect it. I'm sorry for that. I ..." Anaïs' voice seemed to trail off, and for a moment I wondered if the connection had been lost, feeling again the distance between us.

“Anaïs?”

“It’s okay, anyway, no matter. There will be time to talk. Perhaps. Anyway, I hope there will be, there is so much to explain ... *les détails des détails* ... you deserve that, whatever happens.”

“Yes, well ... whatever happens. Whatever happens I’m glad that you finally found me again, Anaïs. I do want to see you, and Aksel, of course. We’re going to have to organise some things, aren’t we? What are we going to do? Do you still want me to come there?” There was another long silence, but this time I knew she was still on the line, thinking perhaps. I waited without speaking and I could hear quite clearly the sound of her breath through the phone: Anaïs, only a mere satellite or two away. It’s ironic really, since I’d put off ringing her for so long, unsure what to say or do, and now that we were talking, or at least waiting to talk, I was confident that I wanted Anaïs to be the one to make the hard choice. I needed her to be the one to accept vulnerability, to articulate somehow the plan that she must have in mind, the plan that she must have had in mind from the very time of sending the e-mail, or even well before that. It was a form of self-protection, I suppose, not that I felt I’d been taken advantage of before. I just wanted to be as sure as possible that whatever she had in mind she was serious about. In a weird way, saying nothing for the moment was my way of saying that I wanted it to work, or wanted something to work, or at the least, that I was prepared to give it a go, whatever that meant.

At last she spoke.

“*Il faut profiter*. Look, Andrew, I’m glad you called. I have to go out soon, I have an appointment.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t realise.”

‘It’s okay, don’t worry, it’s only a job I have to do—some small translation work. But I’ve been thinking about it, about the situation, the position, and I think now it might

be best if we come there, to Australia, at least at first. *Naturellement*, it will have to fit in with what you are doing, your work and so on. Anyway, we can talk more, but I was planning to come maybe in two weeks' time."

"But that's great, that'll be wonderful."

"Good, I'm glad you think it's okay. I really wasn't so sure."

"No, it's fabulous, of course I agree."

"*Bon*. Now, unfortunately I really do have to go, for the moment."

"What if I call you on Sunday then? In the evening, your time?"

"*Oui, naturellement* that will be good. Aksel will be home. I'm sure he is anxious to talk to you as well."

"Okay, until then, then."

"*Adieu*, Andrew, we will speak soon."

"Bye." By the time I've said it, though, Anaïs is already gone. The phone is silent in my hand, and all the unsaid words remain unsaid, in the Big Book of Relationships yet to be written.

The sensations that accompany throwing the telephone handset at the southern wall of the lounge—hearing and seeing the fragility of it as technology shatters, so that the pieces lie scattered in a well-that's-the-end-of-that attitude—are satisfying in a manner that defies articulation, let alone logic. The phone call with Anaïs had gone as well as could be expected, as well as could be expected under any circumstances. Nothing had been said—either negative on her part or stupid on mine—that warranted my irrational response: nothing. Bloody Hell, she said they were coming here, didn't she? What more do you want? There was no reason, then, for the outburst, for the petulance or display of temper, no reason at all. Charles quickly reminded me of the salient fact. What the fuck you do that

for? he asked quite legitimately. And there was no answer to Charles' question because there is no answer. Still, it was satisfying. Jesus, what the Bloody Hell did you expect? I need a drink.

What had she said? *Il faut profiter*. Translation is always problematic. There's no exact equivalent in English; maybe something like 'seize the day' or 'take advantage of' captures it in some way. But all the metaphors are confusing, rather than assisting shared understanding. Are we making hay while the sun shines? Does she mean that this is the only chance? The problem inevitably arises, regardless of being loved, or being in love, that sooner or later small annoyances accumulate into something more significant. The only trouble was that whatever had annoyed me also eluded me: a multiplication of annoyance.

But alcohol is more insistent than arithmetic, just as mental meanderings are more inconsistent, and before too long I find myself suitably ensconced with chair and wine—both red, as befits the mood—and inexplicably, I find myself immersed in a memory of Paris: a late-winter ride on a bus via the *Fauberg Saint-Honoré*. Along there, I see the cashed-up Madams and Mademoiselles rugged against the chill in fox, mink and any other furry creature unfortunate enough to be born with a wearable coat, lining up to be overcharged in establishments like *Hermès*. I remember being amused but not annoyed; why should I care? I was just travelling through, just a passer-by with time enough to take a leisurely bus rather than the quicker, but overcrowded, *Métro*. Onward to the *Place de la Concorde*, arguably the widest Bloody street in the world—add it as a new and more accurate meaning for the word 'vast', O you sacred Keepers of Dictionaries—before getting to the main attraction, the reason for the little excursionary diversion: my first view of the monumental *Arc de Triomphe* on the *Champs-Élysées*. Question: are buildings such

as this designed to celebrate the glory of the past and the conquering heroes? Or is it, glorious heroes and conquering the past?

My suspicion—and I shall require another glass or two of red before the winning envelope is opened—but my suspicion is that immortalising the past is all in vain; the past will always conquer us. Change might be inevitable, but rewriting the past is a delusion best left to the winners' of wars.

The roots of depression lie in self-pity and it is one of the many tasks of the Gods of Writing to be ever vigilant against the product of such an incestuous union—usually recognisable by the two heads and six fingers of sentimentalism, gibberish, or both. Did I mention that I write? Yes, of course I did. What I probably didn't mention is that there are times, plenty of times, when upon sober reflection what has been written deserves nothing more or less than the 'select-all-delete' treatment. To wit:

... a little ramble no cut and paste job just the way it comes out what's thought and by omission what's not thought because after all there isn't anything else is there just the melee of malaise of disjointed unoriginal jargon put into intelligible cliché for daily consumption and in any case no-one listens reads or cares about the humdrum dull of the subjective other always interrupting with pertinent stories of self they hear or read in others words so when they do the movie of this life I'll have to be disinterred to do my own stunts that's a laugh hey but then if it's not a joke it's a problem of some other sort is that what we're doing here trying to decipher the joke or work out if it is a joke or unmask the joker and pull his face off because that's what it feels like sometimes often always and to prove it just remember that this so called civilization invented the leaf blower Viagra and the fiction that a nuclear war might be winnable but to get back on track we have to keep on track apparently that's what being responsible means getting up knowing how to

tie shoelaces wearing ill-fitting clothes that make us move unnaturally so it's plain we're not plain but up to speed on the ball and with it wherever the it might be at the time and that's another thing who said who and who's up who and who's paying the rent as my old friend Charles used to say but he was a horse who went via hearse so maybe it don't count but if you're in hiding and need an anti-spy then he would have been your man so to speak but to speak of the past lessens no kills the content so if it's sayable it has to be has to have a payoff what's the payoff for the reader I remember him saying after I explained in great depth and detail the structural elements payoff says I there is no payoff but there has to be he says no says I then what says he the fact that I know is enough what he says incredulous baffled and befuddled they won't know anything he asks no says I they won't but I will and that's enough Jesus isn't it the god of Nonchalance is enough or ought in any reasonable normative sense be enough why the fixation on fixed the with us or without us strategic locating of outer forces at an inner ingrained positioning ready for action against poet and troubadour alike disliked and feared for what might in a peripatetic rambling but instructive way method or is that methodology say tell inspire fill with anger fear trepidation and wine readiness to fight or flitter or just flutter fall as a failed birdling burgled of flight and even that little small bit part feels better but not best throw the drowning man a lifeline and if he was married what would his wife say hey let the prick drown the drone in his own being bullshit and haemorrhoids and heartache and if he had a voice all he wanted the only fantasy he ever had was to be of use to make someone else come that's all ...

Santayana has disappeared.

In fact—and I make a night-time foray armed with torch and scribble pad, the first to see with and the latter to catalogue what is not seen—in fact, there are no geckos at all.

None, nope, gone. It is puzzling, since the evening weather is a balmy, gecko-friendly twenty-two degrees and the numbers of moths and other insects of the gecko-staple-diet variety are as abundant as has ever been the case. Somehow sad, as well.

I am alone, but I've been alone before; I'm used to it; I like it. I have always managed better on my own, haven't I? It is strange, therefore, to feel more alone—colder in the blood—because of the absence of Santayana.

But it is a special form of loneliness, or coldness, the unreal form that at the same time is aware of its unreality and powerless to act, as in a dream.

Fifteen

There is a bizarre dream, the clarity of it, though—the detail—making it somehow at least as real as reality itself. And it is insistent. The dream demands attention: demands understanding, demands translation. And the dream—despite the fact that all the while I know it is only a dream—asserts that it is a truth more reliable than the known, a perceptual construction more rational than rational thought. And at the same time, this cannot possibly be so and it must be meaningless, surely.

It is wintry dark in Hamburg and I am to meet Anaïs at the restaurant near the canal on *Fährhausstraße*, but she is late. Siegfried is already inside, but I don't go in. I can see him seated toward the rear and in animated conversation with one of the waiters, or perhaps it's the *maitre d'*: a blur of words and gestures in a duologue that only visually penetrates, and then only vaguely, the frosted plate-glass at street level. I know that I should go in, that I should wait inside, but I don't. The restaurant is quickly filling up and I wonder if this is the conversation that Siegfried is having with the waiter, or perhaps the *maitre d'*: that our reservation for three is in danger if we take too much longer. Should I go in and tell them that I'm just waiting for Anaïs, that she will be, should be, here soon? No, I have to wait. I somehow know that if I go in and say this that they won't understand me, a foreigner, and that I will need the evidence of the three of us, of Anaïs' physical presence, to be understood. And in any case, I can't be sure that that is the reason for Siegfried's energetic conversation with the waiter (*maitre d'?*), for I now see, through the frost of frost, that the interaction is even more heated: an argument, perhaps. There is a strange sensation, something that has a certain feel, a quality, but I can't articulate it. I don't know why. I long for some of that heat, to be part of it, privy to it.

I am out in the cold and I wait for Anaïs because it seems, for an unfathomable reason, to be important that I wait for Anaïs outside. There is a harsh drizzle, sleet-like, and people are scurrying back and forth under the solid protection of coats, umbrellas, scarves: scheduled certainty. My jacket is totally inadequate against the cold and I have no gloves and I'm acutely aware that despite the appointment, the reservation, I have no justification for being in this space, no fixity of purpose. The halos around the street lighting diffuse in a glow that is at once familiar and inviting, foreign and dislocating and the traffic on *Fährhaustraße* crawls, more pedestrian than those on foot, as if searching for an unfamiliar address, afraid that it might be missed, insulated, but lost in a ceaseless procession of examination.

A low, dark Mercedes (a taxi?) with the ambivalence of a thug, a street-fighter, shoves aside traffic as it approaches from the wrong direction, stopping in front of the restaurant amidst blasts of discontent, unconcerned. I see first Anaïs' head as the rear window slides downward, hair piled high, continuing some unintelligible conversation with the driver—a thick-necked bald man with an impressive, visage-dominating moustache—in a language that I fail to comprehend. Russian, perhaps? Or Latvian? I feel that I ought to intervene, but stand inert, unable to move. Just before Anaïs alights from the vehicle the conversation intensifies and the man grasps Anaïs' forearm, a gesture of intended restraint perhaps, or urging, but she says something brusque—a different language again—and he relents (accepts? resigns? dismisses?) with a contemptuous snort. Anaïs gets out of the car and it smooths silently back into the flow, a black shape in a world of shadow. Perhaps it was never there, because of course it wasn't, was it?

Incongruously, Anaïs is wearing a sleeveless summer dress of blue Thai silk, the material hugging the curve of hip and the flat of stomach. A golden dragon motif splashes its supple existence around the curves. She is radiant, beautiful, exotic. She ought to be

freezing, but on the contrary exudes nothing but heat: fire and flame. She doesn't see me or deign to acknowledge my presence and pushes past me into the restaurant's interior warmth. A blast escapes, steaming the air, as the waiter, or the *maître d'* perhaps, holds the door open and ushers us inside; I am dragged in the wake.

Once inside the restaurant we move directly to the small table at the rear where I first saw Siegfried, although now he seems to have disappeared somewhere: the toilet perhaps, or is there another bar? Only when Anaïs is seated does she seem to notice that I am there and speaks to me in French, or at least a version of French that I manage to comprehend, to translate in my mind, albeit slowly. Andrew, where have you been? It's such a long time since I saw you. Come, sit down, eat, I'm famished: starving. I can't seem to speak, to reply. I am mute. In any case it doesn't matter, because Anaïs is not waiting for an answer and signals the waiter.

The waiter brings dishes of food, but only for Anaïs, and when I look at the waiter he is familiar in a way difficult to place, to contextualise. It must be important so I concentrate on trying to match the appearance of the waiter before me with a known person, someone in the depths of memory. He is Germanic, aloof but courteous, and I strain to hear the few words spoken between him and Anaïs. There is no comprehension and the scant words or phrases or clipped sentences are hushed or garbled or in another tongue and I want to talk, to ask questions of the waiter, or the *maître de*, as well as Anaïs, but I can't; I am still voiceless, mute, unable to do anything except observe as if looking on the whole scene from a distance: the scene of Anaïs eating. And when the waiter moves away, somewhere toward the deeper recesses of the restaurant, I see that Anaïs has finished whatever dishes had been brought and is licking her lips, rubbing her stomach, massaging her breasts.

A different waiter now brings dishes of food, again just for Anaïs, and the whole scene is repeated, as if the drama has been rewound to begin again, or rewound to begin again at a place in time further along, or rewound to begin a new scene of the same drama at a place in time unrelated to the earlier (or is it later?) place in time. The waiter hovers speaking to Anaïs in unintelligible words, answers are given, again indecipherable, I remain mute, Anaïs eats and eats and eats and then licks her lips, rubs her stomach, massages her breasts. Her stomach is engorged, bloated with the food, the many dishes, and her breasts are swollen, and soon they are breaking free of the confines of the blue Thai silk that had made them appear as low smooth contours under the landscape of material and they have grown and the nipples, with their surrounding darker aureole, are flushed: hard and intense and pushing upward at the air as Anaïs leans back, a small noise emitted from the parted lips.

The restaurant is now like a tunnel, an elongated cone of light with our table at the apex, away in the distance, and I see myself at the same time sitting across from Anaïs as well as from the distance. Any other patrons must have departed—intent on their own destinies—and are no longer part of the story, the dream. The first waiter has reappeared and I now recognise him as Siegfried but when I try to converse, to acknowledge his presence and to attempt to ascertain what it is that is happening, his reply is in Spanish, or Portuguese perhaps, a language or languages that I don't understand. Anaïs pushes her chair back from the table and spreads her legs and I see now that the stomach is even more engorged, filled to bursting as if with a watermelon, or some other equally foreign object of discomfort: the bare breasts even more swollen, flushed, and insistent. As the stomach has grown so has the dragon; and what must be the huge head of the dragon is now hidden by the underside of exposed breast, the dragon's tail twitching between her legs. And

leaning, with her head tilted backward, Anaïs again emits a long slow noise: a cry, a moan, an orgasm?

I attempt to speak. I attempt to say that my wife (are we married in this dream?) needs help, that we need a doctor, but my English, and then my French and my limited German are to no avail and Siegfried ignores or seems mystified by the request, answering (in Italian or Spanish perhaps) with smiles and waving of arms and gestures of incomprehension and continues, with fingers flying, totalling a bill, of all things: a docket of paper that reels off the cash register endlessly and endlessly—Kerouac drug-crazed and frantic on the road, as if thought and reality can be compressed and beaten into the grammar of numerals: the haste of recollection essential before it is all lost.

Pushing through the enormous swing doors—there had been an initial jumbled confusion as to whether an operating- or an opera-theatre was needed, a matter of translation—signs indicate both *Marienkrankenhaus* and *Deutsches Schauspielhaus* directly ahead. Siegfried and the Bald Driver manoeuvre the wheeled hospital bed with Anaïs outstretched. I try to keep up, but it seems to me that urgency is being wasted; we need to make a decision and neither Siegfried or the Bald Driver appear any better informed than me. They alternately surge forward and hesitate. There are signs everywhere but none of them make sense, give direction. The corridors are endless in all directions and the pictographic signs are in Japanese (or perhaps Chinese?) and we all rush toward chaos.

Ahead, going through one of the multitude of doors I see what must be doctors, gowned and masked, moving. I urge the two to follow through the same door and when we enter the decision is justified; bright overhead lights and a cast of doctors and nurses at the ready, machinery with dials and gauges and tubes everywhere, all indicate that assistance is at hand. On the far side, the entire area is curtained off. The head man—the doctor or

surgeon—gives directions with grunts and waving of arms and we are relegated to seats remote to the activity. Anaïs lies, quietly now, on the table. And a sheet, as pale green as a new leaf, covers her body except for the exposed stomach, a protuberance that rises through a hole in the fabric like a monolith. The doctor, or surgeon or whatever, raises his arms high with a glint of scalpel. Silence settles and as it does so the great curtained-off side of the room slowly draws open.

Applause begins almost immediately with the people in the front rows. The audience is attired in formal evening wear and the rows continue filled to capacity from the stage to the upper tiers of the theatre: hundreds, thousands of people, clapping and cheering and then standing, a standing ovation that goes on and on and on. An orchestra strikes up from deep in a pit and can soon be heard along with the applause. I know nothing of music but my brain automatically tells me that this is Handel: The Watermelon Waltz. The doctor bows slightly and Anaïs raises head and shoulders from the table, smiling, waving and then pointing a finger in an exaggerated and farcical manner at the engorged stomach she is carrying. It is slapstick, bizarre.

With the crowd still on their feet the curtain slowly begins to close and as it does so the table, with Anaïs, and the doctors and nurses and all the paraphernalia of the drama, moves and begins a descent into the bowels of the theatre, below the stage, until finally disappearing from view and leaving me alone on the stage behind the now-closed curtain: no sign even of Siegfried or the Bald Driver. The noise of the music and the crowd on the far side of the curtain gradually subsides and I am alone, unable to move or speak and I am forced to remain this way for a long time, until the spell of whatever is happening lifts.

Finding myself once more in the maze of the building I am again confronted by endless corridors in all directions with rooms, some open some closed, but with no clear indication of where I am, where I need to go or how to get there. A multitude of signs

supposedly give information and direction but to me they are incomprehensible, seemingly written in every language except one that I know. Even the few signs that I see that are in English are enigmatic and unhelpful: ‘This way to TGRpFD. All other destinations – turn around’. But whichever direction I turn the corridors and doorways and the useless signage confound to the point of murderous frustration. I need to find Anaïs.

Then, at a distance in one of the hallways I finally see something, or someone, vaguely familiar and as I draw closer I see that it is Charles, seated on cushions on the floor and surrounded by empty Steinlager bottles—a full one in hand—and smoking a fat cigar. So there you are Dimwit, he says, I’ve been waiting for your lazy arse to get here. As I approach he lumbers to his feet and points the beer bottle at a pair of swing doors. Through there, he directs me. That’s what you’ve been waiting for, isn’t it?

I cautiously push open the door and behind a glass partition I’m confronted with row upon row of babies in identical plastic capsules as beds. The rows stretch across and beyond to what seems the horizon of sight, right-dressed in military precision: hundreds and hundreds of dark-haired dolls on parade. The door closing behind me acts as a signal and the entire galaxy of babies raise their heads; and the heads are adolescent heads on the bodies of babies and they all look like Aksel. And each of the Aksel-headed babies raises a straight arm skyward: *Hiel Hitler*.

As I said, bizarre.

Sixteen

I should tie up two ends that are not really loose. Both threads require explanation because I don't want to give the wrong impression, or at least, I want to give a balanced impression, if only for my own satisfaction. Two strands of authorial misinformation dangle in front of imaginative vision like a veiled web and impede the possibility of narrative progress, one because of inadvertent overstatement and the other due to a total lack of statement. It's time to set the record straight, as it were. To redress the first fault first, then:

I don't believe in dreams.

Or what I should say: I believe in dreams; I believe that they exist and that everybody dreams. I just don't believe that they have any particular significance, not in a Freudian sense or with the interpretive power that new-age spiritualists might want to give them. No, for me dreaming is just random brain activity, that's all. To be considered alive in any meaningful way, brain activity—the basic stuff of chemistry and electricity—never totally stops, even in sleep. So dreaming is just a part of whatever that minimal activity happens to be. Technicolour hallucinations primed with rainbow clarity, or sinister monochromes edged in Da Vinci-style *sfumato*, they are all just dreams. Of course, I could be wrong. I can't explain, for example, why I've just spent considerable time recounting the detail that I can remember about the latest dream; I can't explain why I bothered to write it down. But that's a different issue. At least I think it is.

Now I'm aware that dreams have been studied and careers have been made and whole volumes have been written asserting that dreams have an importance that I'm denying any attachment to here. So be it. All I'm suggesting is that innocent and simple explanations can usually be found for the specific content of a dream, if one is so inclined,

rather than the more fanciful interpretations that the dream specialists would have me believe are the causes and concerns associated with the nocturnal goings-on in question. If I dream of clear, still water, does it really mean that I am calm and serene? If I dream of a deep, dark well instead, does it mean that my mood is black? Does it mean anything?

I recall seeing a play. Charles and a couple of friends were with me; the story of *Salomé*, I think it was. Anyway, one of the actors was fervently espousing the qualities of the moon, the power that it had over love and lovers, how it affected and controlled emotion. In his usual gruff manner Charles snorted: The moon? The moon is the fucking moon, that's all there is to it, mate. And, in this instance I have to reluctantly concur with Charles' succinct assessment: dreams are just dreams, as the moon is no more than an orbiting satellite of rock and the star sign under which someone is supposedly born is a construction—an empty hypothesis backed up by no more than the imagination that created it. But let's give imagination and creativity the weight it deserves; let's lighten the load of objection; what people get up to between the sheets is their own affair, and if they feel the need to analyse it later, so be it. Let the dreamers dream on, it's just not for me.

Of course, despite all this, I still found it necessary to devote the entire last chapter of this little tale (is it a tale?) to recounting a dream—an overemphasis that goes against the stated position and that I'm at a loss to justify. Surely this is a contradiction demonstrating my unreliability as witness. But knowing that it was wrong it still felt right. Weird. More than weird: paradoxical. Do not trust my judgement, the message seems to be. It happened but I don't know how or why. It was outside my control.

The second strand of authorial laxity, though—one of undeniable misinformation—is more blatant, and therefore more demanding than the timid arguments of a psychological or astrological nature tending to suggest a lack of agency. On the contrary, an omission is a form of deception and flagrant omissions confirm agency.

And the omission that cries out to be acknowledged is that ever since Anaïs' e-mail arrived so unexpectedly, a large portion of my response has been one of anger. Why haven't I written—in this anger, given that a lot of the time I've been thoroughly pissed off? Has the effort expended on the relative unimportance of dreams been to conceal this issue that I couldn't—or didn't want to—confront? The basic question that has caused so much personal annoyance is simple: why wasn't I told? And even that simple question raises more questions than it answers, even if it was answered.

Why didn't Anaïs tell me she was pregnant? Why wasn't I told the child was mine? As a consequence, why have I been denied eleven years of my son's life? And, do any of the answers to these questions have any bearing on why we didn't remain together at the time, why Anaïs ended the affair? An affair. Is that what it really was, or only was? If I had known the answer to any of these questions, what difference might it have made?

In any case, pissed-off I was, pissed-off I still am and even more pissed-off now because for some stupid unknown reason I haven't been able to acknowledge the fact within these rambling jottings. Why? I don't know.

It seems to me that being part of bringing new life into the world is a momentous thing, perhaps the only important action for any member of a species. Fuck, it's what we do. It's what biology does; it's the way, the only possible way, that there can be any meaning to all of the other petty and meaningless things that we fill the space between birth and death doing. Realising (late) the importance of parenthood, I'm pissed-off that up until now I've been denied the role of parent, apart from the obvious initial act of conception. I have no idea what sort of a parent I would be, but I'm Bloody-well sure I should have had the opportunity to find out.

As a result of not being told, the experiences that I have never had now take on the importance of novels that I could have written, like words that were mine but that have

been stolen from me, not to be plagiarised by some pretender but to be discarded: a part in a drama with no character to take on the role. This is as if whole chapters are arbitrarily ripped from someone's life. Surely no-one has the right to do that. Good, bad or indifferent, don't we all deserve the chance to share in the joys and contemplate the mistakes and take the opportunities and make of them whatever we can? And, what about Aksel? When someone's too young to have a say in the matter, shouldn't there be checks and balances that stop decisions like this—decisions that affect their lives so profoundly—from being made? Pissed-off? Yes I'm pissed-off.

From whole chapters, whole novels even, that might have been written, I'm left with nothing but a theoretical and therefore unknowable paragraph. I wanted to be there as Anaïs' gorgeous belly swelled with a growing baby, to make plans and preparations and to comfort and support. I wanted to be there at the birth, to be the one holding her hand, mutually solid in the knowledge that whatever happened we had each other. I wanted to be there through the tears and the nappies and the sleepless nights and all the minute treasures of watching and cataloguing a new human being's first this, and first that. I wanted to be there for the birthdays and the never-ending choices and decisions that need to be made. I wanted to be there to select books and read stories and hear the words and noises of childhood. I wanted so many things, and the fact that I didn't know it at the time doesn't diminish the hurt, the loss. And anything else that might be able to be salvaged now is a long long long distant second or third or fourth best compared to the real thing, compared to being there and being an accepted and integral part of the process. Pissed-off? Yes I'm pissed-off.

And mostly I'm pissed-off because nothing I can do will change the situation. I am a dealer in words, but this time changing the words cannot change the way I feel. I could rewrite the past, flesh out the parts for the characters, myself as father, Aksel as son, and it

wouldn't alter a thing, only add to the fiction. All that I can do I can only do from now on. I can try and understand the past, but I can only live in the now and have some vague hopes for the future. If I did have a wish, maybe it's just the thought that it would be fitting that I now get to write my own ending.

Or I could be Charles (just ditch the bitch, I can imagine him saying) and deny that the past has anything to do with me, with who I am now. Couldn't I? Or perhaps it was never a novel, was never any more than a short story with a single, concise message: end here, end now. Even if it was a novel, it would be no more difficult than giving up on a story that I couldn't finish, unable to find the right words, to see where it might be headed, regardless of how far I'd already come. Wouldn't it? I could just say that it wasn't the right story, that it just wasn't me, that it just wasn't the right time. I thought I could do it, but now I accept that I can't.

But I want the story to have an ending, that's the truth. I want Anaïs.

And the dreams, now that I think about it, have always been there. Maybe I'm wrong about dreams, maybe they've been signposts along the way and I've never recognised them, unable to translate the meaning or imagine the connections. If so, where are they heading? What is the message?

Seventeen

The Notebook, Greece:

In the early hours. In the early hours. Dreamy thought conspires to unseat rest. Thought. Uneasy and unreliable thought of past. Pushing at the present. So close. The sudden memory. As provoking as an unexpected crack of summer lightning. Memories of Her. The feminine Feminine Other. Demanding the soul's attention. What was the causal connection? That made me think. What vagaries of a cerebral retrieval system that cannot be duplicated or fathomed or planned were activated? What multitude of unrecognized stimuli weaving their own net of intricacies within the labyrinth of an ever-changing mind? Mnemosyne the many-daughtered. Memory. Not summon-able but attaching itself. Object-like. To the most ephemeral of percepts. Perceived. What? A phrase. The delicacy of a hand brushing hair from forehead's sweet sweat. A blue dress? A sideways glance? Perhaps. Somatic markers etched on the problematic map of the maze of the soul. Memories that scorch scald and burn and need only the flintiest of sparks to re-ignite. White-horned bulls on a white-hot moon. The other Her. Being the case in poignant point. More than exotic. A different species. Almost. *Retroussé* in profile. Dark and delicate. With an indefinable almost over-ripe quality. Cytherean. The feminine, Feminine Other. Body-moulded into a blue sheath of blue Thai silk. Blue, blue. The un-cooked crayfish blue that stimulates its own briny wetness. As well as the salivary glands. Blue. A full fresh-fish market of blue with the un-subtle hint of immanent change. To red. Heat the universal catalyst. The lips a universal portent. She exuded blue and the very blueness made me blue. Blue. And the soon to be bound to be abundant redness of the red red promise. Presentation preceding pleasure. Anticipation announcing arrival. A golden dragon motif. Arrogant. Clung to the right hip. Slung as nonchalantly low as a gunfighter's well-oiled colt. She moved. The awakening dragon moved. Was she moving the dragon or was the dragon dragging her? Who was moving who? I try to imagine what it might be like in her world. The world where she is not different but one of many. A sea of exotica. I cannot. It is beyond me. The idea of so many of her. All at once. Is too much. I gape and swallow and wish myself dead. And sigh. And the memory works at my throat and clutches my eyes. And I breathe deeply of her scent and colour and contour and taste. And sigh. And the mattress inhales the dilemma. And Anaïs stirs and searches and clasps me rigid. And bites at a vulnerable ear. And whispers, with a barely held giggle that,

everything will be alright. Won't it *mon cheri*? The gendered rhythms of thought. *Mais oui naturellement* but of course, I have to say. So I do. Which is what she is waiting for. The vixen. As she knows where to tickle me. And does. And we slide and slip and giggle through the not-quite dawn as the rain begins. Before she purrs and meows and curls face down with a languid leg. Draped possessively. Over mine. For she is Chinese in the eye. Persian in the heart. And Indian in technique. To comprehend true companionship. Study the cat.

The steadiness of plop-tockle-plicking rain. The sound on roof's metal reminds that plans are always revisable. The rain-check as the expectant norm, together with all of its unnecessary subordinate clauses, qualifying and evading, erecting and collapsing, teasing and tormenting. And only ever dependable in its uncertainty. As to what it might mean. The stagnant terror of being unwanted. Unloved. Worse yet. Unread. With all the divinities in raucous spasms of unstoppable laughter. At the pettiness of it. Insignificant ... and therefore supreme. Isn't it the subject's Prime Subject? The supremacy of timing. From comic response to cosmic collapse. Weather as a gauge. Water as the purest form of thought. A force to reckon with the solidity of stone. Honed and gouged to essential elemental constants. Socratic ... Droplets, drops of material-ised Time clinging to impurity. In quantity. Mistakes in the making. Mistakes that delineate. As a species distinct. The creation of a theory of accidental theories. Created. Extra-genetic evolution. Subtler than restraint. An outer membrane. A veneer on the limitations of the knowable. A thin-skin coating to reality. The intangible net. Unseen-ceiling like. First principles applying themselves regardless of the petty wants and vagaries of the organism. What the incurious might term 'facts'. Curiosity as keen catalyst. The sharp blade of a truth that slices without the knowledge of pain. Awareness only as blood flows. Drip. Drip. The exposed nakedness of raw rumination. Pelvic. Red. And rain's watery wetness. Changes. Alters all colour. Cleaner deeper clearer. Mirroring thought. This rain will change things, says Anaïs, as she wakes to read minds and clouds. All girls are natural weathermen. Always knowing which way the wind blows. And what's up. Without looking. Up. Yes, says I, it might.

Proposition:

... the tragic limitations of language which imprison us when we would be meaningful, and betray us, whatever our caution.

Guy Davenport
(1984: 217)

Eighteen

There is no doubt in my mind now that, in Sydney after meeting Anaïs and later in Greece, I was in love: totally situated in love, totally available to love. There is a point, a boundary that is mentally crossed without conscious attention, where the peripheral has miraculously become the centre. It's probably not possible to be aware of such a thing happening in real time; awareness would negate actuality, since under the thrall of those ideal conditions it's impossible to perceive anything beyond the singularity of the beloved and the self.

Science, at least those branches of the tree content with investigating the hard data of root and trunk, rather than the aesthetic appeal of the blossom, would have it that the basis of love is no more (or less) than neurological reward pathways, the various actions and reactions of hormones, neurochemicals, serotonin, vasopressin, oxytocin and the like. There may even be acknowledgement that all this rampant electrical and chemical activity might be responsible for attachments, complexes, conditions and disorders. As Charles A Horse would have it: So you're horny, so what else is new? Go and get laid and get over it ... doesn't mean you have to go gaga over the bitch. The subtext of the scientific argument, backed up by Charles' ontological stance, is that this form of love is somehow less-evolved, and therefore immature: delusional, if you like. A mature love, for example, would realise that the nape of someone's neck is insufficient material on which to base a relationship, regardless of how much desire it be supplemented with. In this view, we are all anatomically destined to love—in a DNA-attempting-to-reproduce-itself manner—but that doesn't mean that we are destined to love any particular person.

The thought that the idea might have validity, I find depressive to contemplate for any length of time. It seems to me that valuable ideas ought to have inherent qualities that go beyond self-interest. The implication of this not being the case is that there seems little

point in many of our activities, undertakings that consume much of our waking life, if the way that we need to be viewing reality is as a form of epicurean nihilism, because that's what it would be. I don't mind being fallible—I'm prepared to readjust, constantly if necessary—but I would like to be doing it for a reason. Anaïs is that reason. Perhaps delusion is the only thing that can last forever. So be it. At some point, words (always) go numb.

But it occurs to me that unless you were at the end of life—somewhere close to death, that is, but presumably still able-bodied enough to reflect—there is a difficulty in specifying that someone was the 'love of your life'. Even the existence and persistence of the phrase in common usage carries the implication that most people will have more than one love (rather than merely, *lover*, say), and that for some lucky few there will be a beloved that transcends the usual mediocrity of relationships to become something special: the love of your life. The question naturally arises, when (if) it happens, how does one know that it has happened?

Charles and I went to a reunion once, one of those twenty-years-after-the-fact things that usually end up as pissing competitions to compare the before and after. The whole affair was even duller than either of us had anticipated, and believe me we had anticipated the depths of dullness. And Charles spent most of the time at the bar, espousing a convoluted theory of world peace based on benign dictatorship. I was seated at a table with one, Donald Passmore, supposedly a former classmate, but if he was I hadn't noticed him at the time. Donald, it seems, hadn't changed much: quiet, timid and forgettable. After the initial introductions where we learned that Donald was married (Marianne, or Marsha, or some such) and that he had managed to sire four hearty and healthy offspring, Donald then spent the better part of an hour or so contemplating a spot somewhere to the left of his

untouched plate. Given the prelude, I was surprised when he nudged my arm to garner attention, and apparently had something conversational to contribute.

“I met a girl once,” he said, “at a bus stop, of all places. We were both just waiting for a bus.”

“As you would be,” says I, “waiting for a bus, I mean.” Not much in the way of logical reasoning gets past me. But it didn’t matter; Donald didn’t even notice that I’d spoken, and continued as if I wasn’t there. He was off on some private memory.

“Quite stunning, she was, really beautiful, I thought.” And this time he did look at me, gauging my reaction.

“We talked for nearly ten minutes,” he said. And this innocent fact appeared to hold considerable significance for Donald. He emphasised the ‘ten minutes’, in a way that could never be emphasised on the written page without prior warnings for children and those with over-sensitive, vital inner organs.

“And ...?” His long pause made me ask.

“We agreed to meet the next day. She had a lecture at two, and I finished at four, you see, so it would have worked out fine. Everything could have been wonderful.”

“Could have been ...?”

“Yes,” said Donald. “I don’t know why, even to this day I don’t know why, but I didn’t go. I didn’t meet her. I didn’t go when I could so easily have gone.”

“Jesus.”

“Quite,” said Donald. “I loved her.”

So, Donald loved her (loves her?), the unknown girl at the bus stop from years before. It’s almost impossible for me not to speculate. For ten minutes of Donald’s young life he saw the future mapped out before him, and he rejected it. Why? What force can stop the onset

of the seemingly inevitable? Perhaps even within that ten-minute timeframe it might be possible to specify the exact moment, the nanosecond in time, when Donald knew that he was in love. Did the beautiful girl also feel the rush of attractive force? Presumably the feelings were reciprocated; the limited information that we have is that she had, after all, agreed to meet the next day. Not much to go on, admittedly, but enough. Did she go to the rendezvous, filled with the happiness and nervous hope of youthful expectation? How long would she have waited? What would she have thought, as the passing minutes that might easily explain away Donald's lateness increased to the inexplicable? And what has become of her, what has her life entailed through the years as Donald marries another, fathers children, maintains his timid, forgettable self, and all the while still guards those precious ten minutes that remain as his one and only link to love? And always the unanswerable remains in liminal space: why? It seems to me that there is the past, history we usually call it, and then there is the dream of the past: memory. Both can be vivid. And neither version is necessarily privileged. There are only ideas that might converge, become meaningful in relation to each other, in the imagination. The folly of youth—let's call it Donald's Folly, so as to have the idea at least once removed and so there is no hesitation in thought as a result of it being self-referential—is contained in the contradictory pressures of either fear or arrogance, or both: the fear of taking a chance, and the arrogance that there will always be other chances.

In the meantime the Ethernet—or whatever digital tollway it is that the virtual digits travel their photonic journey aboard—between Berlin, Germany and Mount Coolum, Australia, is clogged to the point of paralysis with missives hurtling in both directions and the lexicon of potential terms of endearment in at least three different languages expands. No wonder there's so little poetry in the world nowadays; nobody has the time to reflect and

compose; respond immediately or be accused of double-chatting. And don't, under any circumstances, make the mistake of allowing Charles to answer in proxy, should the workload of love tire the non-virtual digits doing the typing. The contemporary relationship, it seems, needs a different set of flexible muscles. And everything filed forever in cyberspace, a more reliable repository, we are told, than memory alone. We may not be able to find it, but nothing ever disappears, ever.

Santayana has returned.

There I am, just settled in relaxation mode out on the balcony and about to delve into the old Notebook again when the little imp appears, out from behind the light fitting as if he had been there all along and nothing had changed. My close inspection to check whether or not he has sustained any physical harm leaves him totally unconcerned: one small twitch of the tail, involuntary perhaps, and two unblinking eyes, as inscrutable as crystal balls. And Fluffy over in the flower pot plops a gold lip above the water's surface, senses that all is as it should be, and disappears into the grey-green depths.

Wherever Santayana might have been, he has developed an appetite, and picks off two slower-than-the-average-gecko moths in quick succession; as if after waking from a strenuous dream he is hungry. I imagine that Santayana has a philosophical spirit, rather than any one philosophy. This in itself intrigues. To be a gecko must of necessity mean also to be a connoisseur of destiny, one's own as well as one's dining companions. Appetite, after all, is to have correct discrimination. And Santayana, being the colonising type of gecko that he is—at least according to Anne-of-the-absent-husband fame—will always, when establishing a new world, replicate the world that he has left, as will all of us. The question of whether a gecko like Santayana might harbour regrets from decisions made in a youthful past (Donald's Folly) remains moot.

Charles, emerging to find out who my partner in conversation might be, has nothing to contribute except to bark (unlike Santayana, who does not bark!): for Christ's sake, shut the fuck up, I'm trying to watch the fucking news.

The interruption is sufficient to elicit a gecko blink, no more and certainly no less: a self-collapsing system that has the ability to cancel itself out more eloquently (and elegantly) than Einstein's cosmological constant. It is a succinct commentary on the art of criticism, concise and precise, and from Santayana I would expect nothing less.

Within the ensuing silence, reverberating in the mind like a tuning fork struck against the tough outer covering of a tangled concept, there can be only one thought: Anais. And in the presence of beauty—and, given the physical absence of the cause, the precise image envisioned by thought is sufficient—there is nothing to do, nothing that can be done, except contemplate it.

In many ways love is a sort of madness, a contradictory consuming obsession that both nourishes and gnaws away at the flesh of being. Otherwise intelligent people, under the maddening spell of being in love, become mindless irrational creatures given to behaviours of the insane. It's not their fault; it's the nature of the genre. We may all have the right to author our personal narrative, but love is never autobiographical; love is written for us and we have no choice. Little wonder then that a sort of madness is the result. The self no longer exists as it did, autonomous. The various pieces are in the process of being torn apart, rearranged and eventually reconfigured, because from now on they can only exist as part of a novel entity, an entity that encapsulates the beloved: the two books can only ever be published as one.

Love is a disease, yet no one wants a cure; they're not even looking. Weird, eh?

Nineteen

In re-reading the old Notebook I realise that I've been trying to do more than I thought I was doing. And in trying to do more the paradox is that I have achieved less. The initial impetus was to unravel the knottiness of this Other Narrator and find the points of reference, should there be any, where I might identify a discernible 'I', a position if you like, where text and memory sufficiently align so as to be legitimately called reliable. At least, that's what I thought I was doing. What I find, though, is that I've been unwittingly attempting a much larger project. The Other Narrator wasn't (isn't) just foreign; he was always going to be alien, unknowable in any useful sense. No, the more that I was doing without realising it was the desire to find out if my feelings now were the same as my feelings then and the implications for the answer to such a quest would then (supposedly) point toward the course of action I should take now. Below the level of consciousness I'd been testing—or at the least, attempting to test—feelings rather than facts. It is little wonder then that results have been so meagre. The mere facts of three months on a Greek island are easily retrievable to memory—the taverna, the bungalow, the lighthouse—whereas how I feel or felt at the time is in a lot of ways distant and indistinct.

(Writing is a pathway that ought to lead somewhere, but there is no map. The territory has all been surveyed before, that's not the problem. The difficulty is that all the maps in the drawer don't seem to correspond to the landscape. It's too easy to write fish but conjure bird. No, what I mean is that it's too easy to think fish, when bird is right. And if I do somehow manage to make my way from *a* to *b*—or more usually, end up closer to *k* or *p*—then I can't say how it happened, could never give adequate direction to anyone following. I might know that I've been somewhere, might know that I've felt something, but I can't say where or what it was. Let me put it another way: writing about a memory

makes it more real, but I can never tell if the place I started from is really the place I ended up, rather than the other way round, or any other way around. So if that's true, you don't need a map to show you where you're going, you need a trail of crumbs to show where you've come from.)

On the plane from Sydney to Athens I had had the coveted window seat, with Anaïs to my right and Phillip favourably ensconced three or four rows farther forward, where he was wedged between a jovial pair of Greek business types who seemed to have a limitless supply of alcoholic delight. Stretched across the wide body of the craft, and as well as forward and aft, the full complement of travellers (or so I imagined) were filled with the twin pleasures of movement and direction. Regardless of wherever and to whatever we were all headed, confident anticipation appeared general, improved happiness imminent, and any thoughts of turbulence out of the question. The window seat, I should mention, was allocated to Anaïs' ticket, but she had insisted that I take it in her stead: No Andrew, you have it, *mon chéri*, there is nothing for me outside. In any case, I won't miss anything important ... you will make sure, eh?

A consequence of this generosity in seat sharing was that throughout the flight, Anaïs, when she did feel the need to be updated on weather conditions or whatever (often, as it happens), leaned across and into me to peer outside. And the nipped points of pleasure, surely naked under the light sweater, pricked me into a constant cycle of tensions, not altogether concealed by the book I was reading. The situation amused her.

"Are you alright, Andrew?"

"Yes, of course, no problem."

“It’s just that you seem ... distracted. Perhaps I can help?” And the last is accompanied by a twinkled chuckle that dares me to respond, because she knows that I know that she would.

“No, I’m fine, really, don’t worry,” says he. Is it possible to be relieved at not being relieved, so to speak?

And it occurs to me now, for no particular reason, that as passive as we might be in flight, it is in the take-off and the landing where we know that we are being moved.

My recollection is that we actually spoke very little during the outward trip to Europe, yet I also know that there were innumerable occasions when I wanted to talk, to discuss any and all of the doubts and concerns that I had. Invariably, it seems to me, as soon as you’re in a relationship you start to consider and account for the things that might sustain or otherwise affect it. My belief has always been that Anaïs understood me (and therefore all the myriad of things that I didn’t say) better than I understood myself. During the flight of ‘not-talking’, not giving voice to the questions that raised themselves as the most pressing to be answered, the glances and smiles and the gentle stroking of an arm or thigh, had at the time an effect of reassurance, notwithstanding the tensions—the justification for passivity. When the plane had taken off from Sydney I was conscious of becoming emotionally closer to Anaïs, rather than physically closer to where Siegfried had retreated. I admit I should have been more alert. But by the time the aircraft landed in Athens there could never be any doubt; my entire life had moved; the narrative was being rewritten and the authorial hand was silent on the crucial matter of resolution.

In the same way that the Notebook hovers over disparate vignettes of action and inaction, the deluge of experience from the time re-collects only in remnant pools of memory,

neither stagnant nor distilled, simply the resultant forces as they must have found their final resting place in the mind.

The ferry trip out to the island must have taken hours, half a day at the least, but recall focuses only on Anaïs and I standing on the upper deck, braced against each other and facing forward. Was there ever a time, during that time, when we weren't touching? I understood, in that endless instant, the idea of a complement, how the two parts need each other to become more than the sum. Other passengers, probably too used to the washed-out greyness of northern and western Europe, were captivated by the colours, the light (Bloody Hell, they should come to Australia, to Queensland). My concentration was intent on the horizon. As the ferry propelled us toward the still curve at the edge of the world, the islands appeared to rise up out of the sea, a mythical underworld staged for our pleasure alone.

"It makes me wet," said Anaïs, murmuring. "And it makes me want to cry."

"Yes."

Life on the island soon settled into an all-too-easy-to-get-used-to routine. Late into the nights we played at managing the taverna, spilling out into the courtyard on the mixed aromas of music and food, before stumbling to our bungalow, too exhausted and ecstatic to sleep. In the mornings there was always (what I considered, at least) my real work, with the sleeping form of Anaïs a continuous and intriguing and enjoyable distraction, before the long afternoons of simplicity: solace and sex, satiation of the soul's demands.

Even on those occasions when pressed by the social—usually by Phillip and Co. with outlandish schemes better suited to fiction and fantasy—the results somehow ended more satisfying than first expected. The summer seemed endless; the possibilities seemed to belong to us alone. What we didn't realise, of course, is that we were far from home.

The signs were there, they must have been, but the problem was one of difficulty of translation, rather than clear vision.

Although things change they stay the same, and although things appear the same, in reality they are now different. The Other Narrator is me, but not me. Every action in the drama of life and love, supposed or imagined, is specific to time and place: temporal and contextual. Like old photographs, we review the album and the things most easily captured are the family resemblances. Less recognisable are the things most obvious, the style and tone. What gave rise to a particular smile? What did that campfire smoke smell like?

Twenty

The Notebook, Greece:

Siesta'd and rested. And we join the long slow snaking caravan of villagers. And trek to the summit. Single file on the treacherous little spiralling track. A ladder made of loose gravel. And goat-hoof-depressed footholds to find. Phillip, sweating usefully. And when he has the breath, updating us on his continuing botanical search. The elusive and the exhaustive. From the exhausted. Theokritos willy-nilly-wildly scampering. In his element. Elemental. Anaïs and I managing. And convincing ourselves that our frequent stops are to enjoy the ever-expanding vista. Broaching the summit. A little plateau perched atop. Natural seating around and about by the leftovers of what once would have been walls. Part of the monastery. And the only full structure found standing. A single room. A whitewashed wooden cross. Askew overhead. A thick-walled cave of a room. Wood-shuttered and shaded. Fascination with the simple and the strange. And the ancient. An ancient Corinthian bronze plate, so we are told, at doorway's side. Images engraved of the half-goat, sprites and nymphs. Grapes and bladdered wine. Broad and brazen. And the whole arena people-filled and moving. Fires cooking and music making and hububbing being general. En masse musings. And tomato-stewed goat for the body. And a concoction of fermented honey for the soul. By way of a delicious massaging of the mind. Bottomless skins of *tsipouro*. Somehow miss the sunset. Notice, of a sudden, all colour has disappeared. A continuum of greys. Lights and darks. Ought to be sad but not. It is apt. Appropriate. Shapes and silhouettes deformed by flickering light of torch and fires cooking. Cooking fires that evolve into campfires and into bonfires. And everywhere musical and magic. When and how did it happen? The torch-fire haze. And Theokritos now in goatskin headdress. A living dancing apparition. Dancing and wav-òppering and weaving. Phillip, somewhere in the throng. And I, feeling as powerless as a Eurydician plea. Puppet-limp. A waif and a stray. Ming-Liao-Tzu travelling in the Land of Nonchalance. Making me dream that I say to Anaïs. Love can only exist if there is a future. Love is not of the present. The presence of love demands a future. Love shatters the crystal of our being. Melting us liquid. Mixing us like water. The entangled fluid of a new being. Yet the separate selves remain. Stronger and better. Unsure if I actually state it or only think it. Anaïs glowing. Either way the message appears to have been sent. Opened. And read. Reply pending. Fogginess. As in a world of dreams. A world where things

might appear out of nothingness. Only to vanish or metamorphose into something else. An instant later. A child's world without the boundaries of given knowledge. A world sans sanctions. A world with fewer words but more meaning. A world with words for the sensations that have no words. A floating ethereal world of dreams of the possible. Beyond inspection and analysis and expression. Either by intellect or sense. Cubic time. Desirable. And we are in it. On top of a little hill. In a sea of sea. Seeing. Could happily jump off. Or not. This is Burroughs' 'ideal state of absolute impulsiveness'. If it is. Then. What? The thought inspires me to concentrate on the possibility of 'depraved feet', in honour of both William and Socrates. Decide quickly that it must be oxymoronic. And Anaïs, with head cradled in my lap. Star-staring and telling me delightful trinkets of bliss about every one of them. Blazing down on our little scene. And all the gods at play. Above and below. And behind and before. Impossible I know. But Theokratos is saying, it's morning. It's time to leave. To return. We have only just arrived, says Anaïs. An apparent fact. Surely. It seems to me. Apparently not. And down the mountain we float. Which is easier to do. Than say.

Twenty One

I have invited Anne to the beach.

“But it’s dark,” she says.

“Exactly,” says I.

I should say at the outset that while I might live at the beach I’m not a beach person, not in the daylight hours anyhow. There are plenty of others to do it for me in this country of coastlines, people who want to kick around in the sand in the sunshine and splash about in their various watery pursuits in the surf. No, all that is all well and good—for them—it’s just not for me. I’m a dedicated night person, at least as far as the beach is concerned. I live at the beach for those infrequent nights when the confluence of moon, tide, balmy weather, red wine, company and inclination, indicate the potential for a relaxing stroll, conversation and whatever else, all without the annoyances of oppressive heat, crowds or convention. For me the beach is a bedtime thing, if you like.

Auspiciously, some might say, as we top the sand dune at the end of the boardwalk, the panorama of deserted sand and stillness of sea is lit by the rising moon. Perhaps in deferent gratitude to the oddity called life, or perhaps merely due to an excess of wine, I am helpless to stop the lines erupting from the lips of yours truly:

“And the erubescient, cratered face of the entire moon issues above the horizon, reflected and suffused in a tranquil, specular sea; the rosy-red, roly-poly head of a jolly, pockmarked drunkard, breasting a well-polished bar. And, I am at your service.”

“My my, Andrew, you do use words in the strangest way,” Anne says, in neighbourly fashion.

“Exactly, Anne, words are very strange things. Or hadn’t you noticed.”

Though she giggles, she also reprimands. “People should just say what they mean, don’t you think? It would make everything so much easier.”

“Ah, if only that were possible, Anne. If only that were possible.”

So, the traveller has returned, eh, says Charles in the morning, as he bustles about in a very un-Charles-like manner, tidying and generally cleaning up from the night before. His florid countenance sports what must pass, in the Land of Charles at least, as a grin. As usual I decide that silence is the best defence against whatever attack might be imminent, knowing of course that the inevitable is not called the inevitable for nothing; to ignore Charles is to be ignorant of Charles. What’s the matter, cat got your tongue? But I am determined that his magic be impotent. He continues to prod, knowing that sooner or later he will expose an exploitable weakness. I turn on The Machine and work at being at work (an attempt at maintenance of the status quo, should the improbable prove possible). Charles hovers and circles, a north Queensland mosquito, hungry and ready to zero in on the scent of blood.

So, how was it then? He can’t resist. Okay, how was what, exactly? What do you mean? But he knows that he has me. Oh, don’t come the fucking innocent with me, Boyo. You’ve been gone all night. You’ve been ... Nextdoor. And he stretches the word as if it might span a week and a mountain, instead of a night and a neighbour. What’s it to you? Mind your own business. The duologue continues in such juvenile fashion, not entirely without precedent between Charles and I, it must be said, but tedious nonetheless. The truth is that I have nothing of any interest to say (to Charles anyhow) and just want to get on with my work. Perhaps if I move the chair and desk outside under the terrace—something that I’ve been meaning to do for some time—maybe then I’ll get some respite. He really is suffocating. Or maybe it’s time Charles and I parted company for good; whenever he’s around he has a tendency to take over, to control whatever limited

incidentals might become the plot and purpose to life—help me out, oh God-of-the-Separation-of-Story-from-Plot, help me out will you? You’re the only one that can at this late stage. I’m being overshadowed and undermined here, you know.

Oh come on, Charles says, don’t be so fucking coy. You did fuck her, right, our little Annie from over the fence? Was she any good? She’s had the hots for you, Boyo. I bet she went off like a firecracker, eh ... what with hubby being away all the fucking time, and her not getting any. Come on, Sunshine, give daddy the details. But I am most definitely not talking about sex to Charles, not to anyone, in fact. So he gybes onto another tack.

I bet it made you forget all about the Frenchy, hey, Andy. I bet that Bloody Anaïs that I’m sick of hearing about didn’t even rate a mention while you were doing the business. But what would he know? Jesus. Charles couldn’t differentiate between sex and love to save his life. He might blather on like a teenager about sex—anything scatological being the only form of humour he is capable of responding to—but mention the ‘L’ word and he reverts to the mute moron: unevolved simian as he is. And, I belatedly realise, therein lies escape, because Charles suffers a strange form of chastity, an intellectual chastity that won’t let him discuss the possibility of love. For Charles, relationships are always and ever only equivalent to that of the clickety fox or the blissoming ewe.

It may be instructive for you to know, Charles, and I ensure that I say it very slowly and very deliberately, that I am in fact, in love, very much in love, as it happens. And last night has nothing whatsoever to do with it. What I do not mention, the thought that occurs to me as I’m voicing this to Charles, is that mine must be a hitherto unknown form of tropical love: altogether much warmer and wetter than anything previously discovered—after all, certain information, even as weaponry against Charles, would be too too much. In any case, the desired effect is already achieved. Jesus fucking H Christ, says Charles. I

fucking give up. And he exits the scene in the much-more-Charles-like morose, gloomy and phlegmatic manner, mumbling inaudible expletives that could well be heralding the end of the world as it is commonly perceived. Is a declaration of love really a disaster in the offing, a tragedy waiting at horizon's line?

To declare love is to be exposed: total nakedness among the clothed, and with all the attendant vulnerability. The clichéd language of romanticism, overused and corrupt, might be useful to counter attacks from those like Charles, but the greater danger is a lack of shared understanding. If we do declare love, will our own conception of what love is match that of the beloved? If Anaïs and I read the same book, will our separate interpretations coincide? But then again, if love had a precise atomic weight—if a book had a singular interpretation—wouldn't that somehow detract?

In any case, I stand by the (what ought to be self-evident) principle that love and sex should never be conflated. Last night is irrelevant in the overall scheme. Anne-of-the-absent-husband is just Anne; sex is just sex; the moon is just the moon; that is all. Anaïs and I never had any such difficulties of differentiation, squaring the circle of actions and affections. If anything, a night with Anne only proves and strengthens the love for Anaïs. For all of Charles' blustering, his is an inability (unwillingness?) to articulate sensation, and hence he denies the sensation's existence. But the confusion is one of language, not reality, surely? Unless we are content for meaning to remain in the poverty-stricken realms of the literal, or for the overused cliché to be our only bread and butter—for meaning to become meaningful, in other words—the right words have to be somehow found. Or perhaps the problem is entirely a philosophical one, an ontological dilemma: it's not an explanation of what reality is or might be, that's required; no, what is urgently needed is a plausible explanation for what we already know to exist. But I digress, there is after all still plenty of dirt to scratch and eggs to lay before any idea might be called novel.

I am aware that Siegfried—or perhaps the idea of Siegfried, or the notion of, or the placement of Siegfried—has not been adequately addressed. Believe me when I say that this is neither an oversight nor avoidance, either intentional or unintentional. This is not, for example, one of those narratives where tempting and provocative titbits of information are strewn at various, arbitrary intervals along a meandering metaphorical pathway to lure the reader onward, under the dubious guise that all questions are answerable, and, more importantly, will be answered if only the long-suffering reader will endure the torments of a circuitous and long-winded route, with all the accompanying superfluous, but authorially conceived as necessary, words. No, the timing just hasn't been right. At least that's a good enough reason for the moment, though of course, it's not an excuse. So perhaps now is a convenient interlude to 'set the record straight', so to speak, because even back then there were plenty of people who couldn't, or wouldn't, understand what was happening. How can one girl have two guys and all three accept the situation? There now, I've said it.

When the three of us first met in Sydney I was still in my thirties, Anaïs was still in her twenties, and Siegfried was somewhere in between. In many ways, I suppose, Siegfried was always somewhere in between.

Sigi, as Anaïs affectionately referred to him, was outwardly conservative in a way that typified the Germanic preoccupation with progress and rule: the promise that life contains certainty, that all can (and should) be regulated. Siegfried had what we jokingly referred to at the time as a 'proper' job, in engineering; he wore suits and attended assiduously to the detail of life; he had an appointment book that gave equal weighting to barber and insurance broker alike. But, despite all this—the appearances, after all, were genuine aspects of the man, not a façade—there was also something deeper, more authentic, to Siegfried. It took me a long time to fathom the significance of our first real

conversation, although in reality it was no more than a few hasty words. Some words, though, become more important than others. We were all at the airport and Siegfried departing to return to Germany, leaving Anaïs with me, hugs and cheek-kissing being general.

“Well, good luck then,” I said, “I’m certain we’ll all be back together again soon.” My attentions were probably more focused on the immediate future with Anaïs, though, rather than what I was saying.

“If I were you, I’d be wary of being certain of anything,” Siegfried said, in perfectly modulated English, with no hint of the previous evening’s cocaine. For myself, I no longer needed anything to get high; the very act of breathing was euphoric and so existence meant absolute optimism. He smiled and I must have looked perplexed, not understood, and he elaborated: “Certainty is similar to blackmail—a mechanical force to be repelled.” An engineer’s analogy?

As I say, it took me a while to translate Siegfried’s words into a language that was meaningful for me: any sort of promise must also equal certainty, and therefore, is also a typical blackmail.

Twenty Two

There is a further and current, active mystification with the nature of the Notebook. It occurs to me—and I have scavenged through the storage files of both house and memory in an effort to confirm or deny—that the Notebook only covers the period of time toward the end of the summer we spent in the Greek islands: two or three weeks at most. Why? There is nothing that alludes to the first three months on the islandic isle of Sykros. Why is that so? And a close reading reveals something else, something that I'd missed while being carried along on the poignant vignettes of recollection; there is uncertainty.

As with me right now, this Other Narrator has no Bloody idea what the outcome will be. There is an underlying plague of doubt and apprehension. Can he only write when he doesn't know something, when there are questions still to be answered? To decide what to write, necessarily means leaving other things out. Who is it really, that is competent to make such a judgement? Perhaps the absence of reference to the first three months indicates smooth sailing on a tranquil sea of happiness: Pacific maybe, if we didn't know it was the Mediterranean. Did something happen to the Other Narrator that provoked him to break the silence and take up the pen in response? He's not a Kafka, overwhelmed by helplessness brought on by the irrational, but is his writing fuelled by a similar anguish, a loss of control?

Or is writing a kind of working through of a problem in the author's mind, and for personal benefit alone? Such writing would be the grammar and tone of discomfort—a self-editing of the soul—to produce (create) an articulate version, at least, of what the problem is, if not a solution. I don't know, but there must be an impetus that makes people write-out their worries, rather than, say, talk about a problem, if that is what's happening. And maybe distance has something to do with that. Maybe you can only really see the full

extent of something by standing back; you're too close to the action and need the detachment that you might get from a farther perspective. But is that a desire to understand, or to influence?

Joanna's theory, specified on more than one occasion in esoteric New-Age fashion, was that talking—thinking even—about something could make it happen, a possibility with both positive and negative potentials. Is this Other Narrator attempting something similar? Is he trying to influence the outcome in the writing? Is he authoring his own desired ending?

Throughout the time in the islands Siegfried remained in the background, geographically remote in Germany, but was also always a constant presence, somewhere in the atmospheric space between Anaïs and me. All three of us knew that a resolution had to be found, but for my part at least, I must have been content to let things drift, to keep putting off the inevitability of decisions, knowing that decisions contained a finality that I might not want to accept. Anaïs was flippant, or dismissive, or frustratingly vague whenever the urge to bring up the topic overwhelmed my sense of possible self-destruction.

"I love Sigi," she said at one point, "but not in *that* way."

I mean really! What the Hell can that mean? But they were statements that seemed to give hope if interpreted to suit, so mostly the questions went unasked. There is, after all, the ever-present dangerous potential of giving substance to thought. Language is implicated, an accessory before and after and during the fact.

And a good portion of the problem was logistical rather than, or perhaps as well as, relational. Anaïs had been happy living in Germany and wanted to return. For some reason, hinted at but never specified, she no longer had any affection for the homeland of France. I, on the other hand, had connections in Paris in relation to the work I was

pursuing at the time, work that I believed would benefit from an extended period in France. *Impasse*, as they say. Logically, Germany and Siegfried were my obstacles to France and Anaïs. I saw it as Anaïs' decision, Anaïs' responsibility if you like, to decide: Siegfried or me, Germany or France.

“You worry too much, *mon cheri*,” she would say. “The now is enough, eh?”

We did have one conversation, though, in a secluded and disused garden we had found on the island, about a week before we were due to depart, and that exchange must have been pivotal to what later came about. We both preferred the outdoors and the sun still bathed the little island in Aegean warmth, but early autumn winds threatened to chill the intended picnic. The garden was perfect: abandoned and overgrown but with solid stone walls all around, probably built at some stage to keep the ubiquitous goats in (or out). Maybe it wasn't the usual spot a couple of lovers might choose for a picnic, but for us it was a haven, a 'win-win' situation, some might say.

Anyway, we'd probably spent an enjoyable hour or two; maybe we were already packing up leftover food, wine, books, pens. Anaïs turned to me.

“I want to be with Siegfried, *mein Sigi*,” she says, “if it's possible. You do understand that. Don't you?”

“Yes, but where does that leave us? What about what we have?” She didn't answer straight away. She must have been looking for the right words.

“I cannot live again in France,” says Anaïs, a little later. “But there is *un plan bien que* that I might like to try ... and try out for size ... in practice ... *un situation nouveau* ... that may even succeed. *Tout autour*,” she adds. For everyone.

To truly travel requires effort: the unexpected, the unforeseeable, invention and surprise. And, there is the consequent fear that no one will understand.

“And?” says I.

“Well,” says Anaïs, “your work could be done from anywhere, Hamburg, *par exemple*. Your precious Institute could tolerate that, surely.”

Hamburg?

“And if it means sometimes a trip to France, *à court term*. Okay. I would go with you ... shopping excursions ... if nothing else.”

“But what of Siegfried?” says I.

“Yes ... Sigi ...” she says, drawing it out. “Sigi understands,” she says at last. “Sigi has always been *plus intelligent* ... more than both of us.”

“Really?”

Oh, I’m not stupid, I understood what she meant, alright; I understood exactly what she meant. I could, after all, count up to three. And purely as a matter of principle I had always believed that the idea that we could obtain all the things we need—emotional, physical, intellectual—from the one person, to be an absurdity that denies reality. I remember thinking: can the novelty of change and uncertainty somehow create stability? How would such a situation work? I had no real objection that I could give a name to, in terms of putting theory into practice, I just had no idea how it might come together. In any case, the planning of a mutual future, however novel, is the normal and predictable method of cementing a relationship so that doubt is covered over. The existence of a plan, in itself, becomes sufficient evidence for the belief in a successful outcome. This is the production, if you like, of an all-encompassing ‘Yes’ capable of containing the entire potential ‘No’s’. This is love purchasing insurance against its later demise, and so there must be fear attached. Love—knowing itself to be erratic and unpredictable—seeks to become unoriginal, to become a genre through conformity lest things fall apart. This is like writing a happy ending first, before the rest of the story is known, even to the characters. In any case, things did fall apart, but not for the reasons that might have been usual to expect or

possible to predict. Proof, I suppose, that stories tend to unfold in their own way, regardless of intention.

And the ordinary always outweighs the novel, or so it seems.

Am I happy with the person that I am? I can, discounted to half price if I join this month, lose those extra kilos and become the person that I always wanted to be. Really? I'm not sure I know who I want to be, so let me think about it, okay. Will I contribute to a fund dedicated to saving the spotted quoll from extinction, tax deductible if I include this little coupon? Maybe, but what's a spotted quoll? There is no picture of the little creature, something cute and adorable (but with spots, I presume) to tug at the purse strings. I wonder why there's no photograph, only this cartoon drawing, Japanese anime-style. Hmm, maybe it's already too late and there's none to be found, spotted or otherwise, worth photographing: invisible in extinction. Or perhaps the real thing is ugly—hard to raise money for the ugly, a sad commentary but true. Forget the terrorists and the drug runners—they'll fit into the system just fine, anywhere—it's the ugly and the old that are the truly unwanted: the real target of the war on disorder.

And what if I'm too old for her, for Anaïs, what then? I know the gap is no more than it was; it's still the same, it'll never change, but all of us are older. Bloody Hell, we might just get back together and I'll turn senile (intolerant without the benefit of memory, never remembering what I'm intolerant about). Or perhaps I'm meaning Alzheimer's; I can't remember. Bloody Hell, maybe it's already happening! Things disappear from the mind as easily as spotted quolls disappear from the planet—ugly fuckers though they must be. I'd better get in shape or else start writing the obit, instead of this other stuff that takes so long to get anywhere. Love will pull me through, though, that's the hope. Being in love means that you stop aging, you're indestructible, and you can write forever, and always

find the words. That's me, I'll be young and indestructible, but without the foolish daredevil stuff that goes with it: the wisdom of age in the body of youth, yeah.

So, I'm having a drink with Jack and Debra, a chaos of kids in the background like chimps on Benzedrine, and of course they want to quiz me on the Anaïs front. What can I say? It's not that they're judgemental, exactly. I think they find relationships—other people's relationships, that is—highly entertaining, better than television. The flexible liquid nature of lives they see around them is their view through the little screen into another world: National Geographic, the exotic Other.

"And? ... Come on then mate, what gives? Where is this amazing Anaïs that can break hearts at a decade's distance?" Jack is direct in such matters. Life is simple, apparently, if you know what you want.

"Jesus, Jack, give the guy a break." Debra is just as inquisitive, but at least has the instinct to approach quarry from the periphery. "Don't worry about him, Andrew. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." *But we want you to.*

That's right, I don't have to talk about it, but I am. That must mean something in the overall scheme. The fact that I'm trying to find the words must mean something. "It's okay," I say, "Really, I don't mind talking about it, but there's not much to give. Anaïs is coming to Sydney; I'll be flying down to meet her. That's about it."

"And the kid, it's a boy, right? He'll be there as well?"

Jack needs detail, the mundane social habits of the species that are really code for the main event, the mating habits, the only thing that interests the anthropological observer.

"Aksel, yes, Aksel will be with his mother, yes." A gathering of the family troupe.

“So, I suppose you’ll be bringing them up here then.” To the homelands? To the love nest? To be scrutinised and interrogated by neighbours and friends? To be watched, stared at, and have pronouncements made?

“Look ... there are no specific plans ... no plans beyond Sydney, that is.” And it is true but complicated. Or it is at least as true as words can be, and as complicated as not knowing the words that might make it truer.

Fluffy’s non-responsiveness from the depths of the flower pot is a silent and salient reminder that writing is a solitary craft. He swims in an idle figure-of-eight, ignoring me and oblivious to all of the world’s successes and failures, literary or otherwise, but I can’t wait. I am too excited to wait for piscine acknowledgement—excited: literally, stimulated to the point of agitation—and so Santayana, instead, will have to suffice as critical audience for the news I have to share. It’s not that he’s the most appropriate, but at least he’s attentive in a detached fashion, and his feedback, if any, is honest. Besides, there’s no one else here, and sometimes even writers have something to say that must be said out loud, rather than in ink. Nine months it has taken, nine months of parental expectancy and anguish to gestate eight satisfactory words.

But everything is contextual; Santayana needs background. Okay my little gecko friend, here’s the plot: There is a story that I may one day write and there is a scene in that story that I may one day use. Nothing is certain. The story is about someone dying and in the final weeks and days of life they are cared for by a friend, someone close. The illness has caused them to lose considerable weight and the scene I have in mind occurs when the carer has to lift and move the dying person from wheelchair to bed. The eight words belong in the carer’s thought process. He is ‘*shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell.*’ Shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell.

There, that is why I do what I do, those eight words. They may never be used; the story may never be written; it doesn't matter. A private celebration is in order. I need a drink. Cheers, Santayana.

Twenty Three

Last evening, walking back from Jack and Debra's house it was almost dark, that transformative portion of dusk when birds are noisiest in the trees and ready to proclaim their roost, and the stars, overshadowed by sunlight during the day, begin to reassert their distant prominence: a pleasant stroll. There is an unaccountable urge to slow down, to colonise the space, to clasp the hands behind the back: a proud and gentle burgher on his rounds as the last of the grommet surfers ambles past, tussling at hair already tussled and dragging the sandy feet that will later contribute their daily deposit indoors. As I said, slowing down. This must be why the circuitous route I follow takes me past newer dwellings in the division, those not yet dampened by the weight of experience.

And a particular picture draws me, framed in its uncurtained window: silica transformed to transparent. I am a voyeur under the spell of domesticity. A child, possibly seven or eight years old (accurate estimation of age eludes me, but without intolerance) ensconced in pyjamas striped to assert that all tigers should really be green, sits on a sofa reading a book. The young mother, successfully multi-tasking her way through the rituals of maintenance, stops occasionally to assist the budding linguist with a word here, or a meaning, perhaps.

It was never going to work, Germany I mean, Siegfried and me and Anaïs, it was never going to work. We wanted it to, I think we all wanted it to work, all three, but the gods conspire against the humblest of endeavours. At least that's how it seems. An old acquaintance of mine was wont to mutter, when being trialled under the Law-of-Murphy: everything in our favour is working against us. And it was.

Practical considerations came first. Siegfried's parents owned and operated a number of nightclubs across Germany and one of the benefits of their industriousness was that he had free use of spacious and (for me, at least) opulent apartments in Hamburg, Munich or Berlin, a situation that he took advantage of depending on his working commitments. All well and good. On leaving the Greek islands the plan was that Anaïs and I would meet up with Siegfried in Hamburg, after a short stopover in Athens on the way. Siegfried handled most of his engineering consultancy out of Hamburg, and Anaïs had opportunities there for translation work, so the circumstances seemed ideal. I was the 'odd man out' in the threesome, so to speak, as I had no prospective income and a singular dedication to complete the writing up of a philosophical project I'd been labouring under. Although to be honest, the only thing singular about it was the complete waste of time and effort, but, like a slow leak in a large boat, you tend not to notice these things until you're suddenly standing in bilge water. Why are my feet wet? Who pissed on the floor? Where did that come from?

Athens, after three months of unhurried summer in the Aegean, turned out to be a fast-paced autumnal gust of reality: cold and crowding. Just getting used to people again—people that are serious and involved and seemingly in a hurry to reinvent better and more compelling reasons to be more serious and more involved—required an effort of will, an effort that I admit I had the petulance to resist. It wasn't the fault of Athens, or of Greece, or even of civilization in general, I knew that. It was my fault. I wanted vegemite.

"Yuk," said Anaïs, "how disgusting." She had tried the home-grown staple while in Sydney. How could anyone not love vegemite? More to the point: how could I love someone who didn't love vegemite? It appeared impossible: a deal-breaker.

“I just want something decent to put on this toast. What’s wrong with that?” We were seated at a street café in Athens, breakfasting on the morning after arrival from the island.

“There is nothing at all wrong with that, *bécassine*, but there is already plenty of what you call ‘decent’ here. Your vegemite thing is not decent; it is obscene, fit only for the pig.”

“Are you calling me a pig, now? Is that it?”

That something as minor as the preferred spread for a piece of breakfast toast can easily deteriorate into an argument, says something interesting about love. The essence of an argument (vegemite, for example) is irrelevant. The guilty culprit is always elsewhere, skulking in the shadows and ever ready to poke and prick until the discomfort surfaces into action. In a society overly obsessed with cause and effect, we should at least try and be precise. In this instance, my mind still dwelled between the sheets in the hotel room from the night before. Snippets from a post-coital conversation: Hmm, it makes me happy when I make you come, I said. Don’t be silly, she said, that’s my job, not yours.

Now, while Anaïs’ sophistication in such matters easily persuades me of yet another valid reason to love her, the prickle still prickles. Courtly love, the unrequited sort encountered in narratives of princesses and knights and dragons and such, hurts no one except the smitten. In a real world with real interactions (a world of pillow-talk and vegemite-less breakfasts), though, the potential to cause hurt rather than just suffer it, emerges. The paradox is that if we didn’t care, if we were not in love, it wouldn’t matter; the prick would not prickle, or not nearly so much as to warrant argument.

During that day in Athens we heard from Siegfried. All was in readiness in Hamburg, he informed us, but in the meantime—certainly, it shouldn’t take more than three or four days at the most—he had to travel to Berlin to sort out some problem or

other, something to do with the compressive strength of concrete under the influence of smog, or some such. We should continue on as planned, and Siegfried would join us when he could. Our new residence awaited. The change in plan caused a minor debate: wouldn't it be better, perhaps, I said, to do some sightseeing for a few days so that we all arrived at *chateau de ménage a trois* (Anaïs' teasing phrase for the apartment) at the same time? But Anaïs had had enough—both of tourists and of being one—and argued that to be settled and rested in Hamburg would be better all round.

We went on to Hamburg, of course, but that's not the point. Was Anaïs genuinely tired, or was the expectation of re-joining Sigi more enticing? Could I translate the answer from a word, a gesture? Don't get me wrong; I don't mean to imply jealousy; there is something more, a simple but certain quality.

There is an utterly seductive quality about not knowing. Looking back, I think it's impossible to be in love with someone who always agrees, who is always available, and who never gives rise to the prickles of doubt. I could be wrong. Equally impossible would be the knights and dragon stuff—pining after the unattainable princess might work for a while, but sooner or later you get over it and move on, as the cliché goes; you find someone else. And there is always someone else. But when the words have to be interpreted, when there might always be a subtext of meaning behind the gesture, the sigh, the look ... ahh ... then it's different. When the differing stratas of subtle but maddeningly significant detail need to be mined and refined from the text, then, perhaps only then, Love becomes Art. But I digress—the admission of distraction—and naked truths are unwise in public (really, Andrew, you do go on!).

As a city, Hamburg is my kind of burg. More water than Sydney harbour and it comes right into town, not in that contrived, controlled, canal-way as in Venice; it's alive

somehow, it's bringing life in not draining it away; where does the estuary finish and the lake begin, huge in the centre? Flags everywhere; these guys are proud, and rightly so. The great bowed windows of the apartment overlooking it all: a nest, a haven, a place where I might even be able to stand the cold of winter, a place to breathe, inspire, work, love, write. Optimism abounds, you might say, once vegemite is relegated to an appropriate status in the pantry of the mind.

With three master bedrooms, as well as a further two-bed guest quarters, we were spoiled with possible choice. Siegfried, ever the Mr Efficiency-with-an-eye-for-detail, left an exhaustive list for the newcomers on the entry sideboard: sleeping arrangements were flexible, food, laundry, directions to various shops we might need, money, all of it, all taken care of. There seemed little to do but unwind and enjoy. Yet almost immediately I had a sense of unease and was unable to locate the source. Everything was as orderly as it possibly could be, yet ... there was something.

With a determination and efficiency that I hadn't seen before, Anaïs soon had two interviews for prospective employment organised, whereas I fiddled about arranging and rearranging a desk that I would use and reading newspapers, ostensibly to brush up on the German that I might need to be able to buy a loaf of bread or secure a haircut. Siegfried had telephoned on the first night to see how we were settled and to say that he might be further delayed. This seemed to irritate Anaïs, although I understood little of their conversation in German. Was it the impetus for the flurry of activity on her part? And what was it that was blocking me from writing?

"Will you be working today, Andrew?" Anaïs asked on the third morning. She had an appointment at two o'clock with *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*, a large media organisation: translations to and from German and French, as well as German and English. She was already smartly dressed in business attire; I lay sprawled on an overstuffed couch with a

book, crumbs of toast mingled with chest hair. I remember not being able to reconcile in my mind the animal passions of the night with the severity of the vision by day.

“Yes, possibly,” I said, and an honest enough answer it was, I suppose. The fact is that I really didn’t know. Anaïs’ eyebrows considered the alternatives before concluding, apparently, that I was being evasive. Something more substantial than vegemite was definitely on the menu.

“You know, Andrew, that this ... this philosophy thing you are doing cannot go anywhere. It’s not *content* for you. I mean ... I mean it will not make you happy.”

Really? What has happened to the previous supportiveness, I wonder? What has changed? Was it only tolerance, rather than support: tolerance for the eccentric Australian and his weird ideas about how the world works?

“How so?”

“Look, Andrew, you should be writing, I’m sure you could find your place, but not this philosophy. It is ... it is too formal, too *abstract*. People really don’t care. You can explain to them how the world really is, but they don’t care. If your reality, even if it is logical and provable as you say, is different to the common-sense experience, then they are bored. It means nothing to them.”

“It means something to the Institute. It means something to the colleagues I’ve been working with for years.” Bravo! A defence. Wipe off some of those crumbs and stand up for yourself, Boyo. Or at the least, half sit, with the full extent of indignant outrage that the unclothed can muster. It’s about time. You’ve spent years working on this important project, so it must be important, right?

“Andrew, I do love you, you know.”

“Love, what’s love got to do with it?”

The interesting thing, and I realised it only much later, was that that was the first time Anaïs had used the ‘L’ word. Of all the possible occasions when she could have made that small declaration, she chose the middle of what, to me anyway, was an argument. Does the meaning she attributes to the word (then or now) coincide with my own understanding? How could I ever know?

Charles is an anarchist, a terrorist in disguise, a chameleon.

Suspicion is always aroused by the unexpected. You think you know someone, their little likes and dislikes and the quirks that make them who they are, and then they do something out of the ordinary: curious. Knowing someone well—someone close to you—means being able to predict what they might do, how they might act in a particular situation. The unaffectionate husband one day brings home flowers for the little missus. Is she happy? No, she is suspicious; what has he been up to? What is he trying to hide? Naturally, all the plausible reasons for guilt will override the possibility of innocence. After all, to know someone—or to think you know someone—is like being in possession of a scientific theory: only useful for its predictive power. Anomalous data is suspicious, always, because we don’t like to admit that our theory might be wrong.

Charles has been pleasant, courteous even, all day, after appearing at first light clean-shaven and helpful and ready-to-please. And how is that little novella you’ve been promising coming along then, he asks politely. Even his diction has improved. I’d better watch out, be on my guard. Any moment now I might catch him reading Proust, or cleaning the toilet bowl.

I have an anarchist in the house.

Twenty Four

Further phone calls from Siegfried informed of yet further delays in his return. Anaïs cursed concrete and truck it rode in on. And I always thought concrete such a simple matter; mix a bit of this with a bit of that and stir it up and there you have it, like a recipe or a formula or a linear plot. Maybe the Berlin smog is a tougher character than the usual stereotype, an antagonist attempting a narrative takeover. But the Germans will fix it. They have the knowhow to know how, precisely.

At the end of our second week in Hamburg Anaïs returned from the bowels of broadcasting in an irritable state. “This is not working,” she said. *Simple, she must mean Siegfried.*

“Don’t worry about Sigi,” I said. “Engineers love technical problems. He’ll be back soon. I’m sure of it.”

“It’s not Siegfried,” she said. *Okay, not so simple, then. Not Siegfried. Then what?*

“Then what is it, my petal.” (Yes, that’s what I said, ‘my petal’. I really did! And I might have added, volcano of my loins, keeper of the hearth, and hypotenuse of Buckminster-Fuller-ish strength in this [conceptualised in theory but as yet unrealised in practice] triangular affair of the heart, but I didn’t. Anaïs’ concerns, whatever they might be, did not present as geometrical, whether abstract or applied.) She kicked off the ball-breaking stilettos and rubbed at tired feet.

“I have to go to Berlin,” she said. The irrational is never irrational *only* because it’s irrational; the irrational contains an elusive element, a puzzle to be solved: the elusive element of irrationality.

“So this *is* about Siegfried.”

“Don’t be so ... intense, Andrew. You are too driven by the mind. It’s not necessary, really. Sometimes things are just as they seem. There doesn’t have to be anything else.”

“But there is something. You say you are going to Berlin. It’s just that I don’t understand. That’s all. You said it’s not working. What’s wrong? What isn’t working?”

“The company wants me to work in Berlin. I said no, it’s not possible, but now I think I have to go. It’s for the best.”

“But ... Berlin? Have you spoken to Sigi about this?”

“I told you already, it’s nothing to do with Siegfried. I’m going to Berlin, that’s all, and I have to go alone.”

Alone? When things seem to be the opposite to what they are, when life turns into fiction and the fiction turns out to be Mills and Boon, when we are pressed to exhibit the full extent of our ignorance about how the world works, it is my experience that we usually comply, despite the full knowledge of hopelessness. We all balance on a tightrope. We’re going to fall, that’s inevitable, but on one side lies worry and the other trust.

“Is there somebody else?” There, you see: inexcusable.

I seem to recall it was a long time before Anaïs replied. Perhaps I’m mistaken. Perhaps the vividness of the memory only applies when it never really happened. But I do remember the words.

“Yes, Andrew,” she said, “there is someone else to worry about, but it’s not what you probably think. You will just have to trust me ... no, that’s wrong. Don’t trust me, because I don’t have the answer. I just have to believe that this is right, *c’est tout*.”

I’m moving a few things around in the house, rearranging some furniture and generally putting things in the places where I always thought they should be but never got around to

doing: addition of the missing obvious and subtraction of the cumbersome. A library should have shelving, after all, and Charles' junk in the hallway trips up everyone. I've tended to procrastinate. Life gets in the way and the path of least resistance has a quality about it that inspires and rewards the status quo: an Occam's-razor approach for the non-scientific portion of our brains. I approach the rooms of the house as if they are chapters in a narrative; I need to final edit and ensure that the interior design conforms to the theme I had in mind. There is always a mismatch, of course—there always will be—but it's impracticable most of the time to throw out some of the heavier objects we become attached to. Anchors might weigh us down, but they also give stability. Deadlines and airline schedules (the length of anchor chain available), if nothing else, constrain the possibilities. And sooner rather than later Anaïs and Aksel will be co-authoring their own sequel to the narrative.

So, the ending was brief, and sudden.

Anaïs moved out of the Hamburg apartment and went off to Berlin, despite the smog still eating away at the concrete in that part of the world. A little over four months—no more than a dot or a point, really—in the intersecting lines of our lives ended and new paths were drawn. And even if a line is no more than an abstract idea, when two lines cross, doesn't that give them width: substance? Anyway.

I stayed in Hamburg for a while, during the days wandering around the old warehouse area mostly, watching the boat traffic come and go. And the nights alone. The strange thing is that I started writing, a different sort of writing. I didn't even realise what I was doing at first, just started jotting down the odd note: a phrase or an image that stuck in the mind and refused to be dislodged; the ordinary bits and pieces—the detail, if you like—seemed to have importance. I wasn't even thinking about it, or didn't think that I

was thinking about it until I started to see connections: started asking, ‘but what if?’

Anyway, you can never be certain how something might turn out. Some things just demand the soul’s attention more than others.

I did see them both again, Siegfried and Anaïs, one last time in Berlin, although not together. Sigi was just as perplexed—devoid of explanation—as I was, but busy enough with his various calculations: stopping the rot in his own way. I met Anaïs for lunch or coffee or some such. To be honest the whole occasion is blurry in the mind, like an old tape that’s been rewound and replayed so many times that the image becomes grainy, the detail hard to translate as real. In any case, my limited perspective was never enough; what I really needed then was an omniscient narrator to step in and give an alternate point of view—but don’t we all?

And the funny thing is, what I remember most clearly from that moment in time is a word: scudding. We were outside the café on *Münzstraße* waiting for the taxi. It was bitterly cold, and that’s what the wind was doing, scudding along the street. I knew the word already, but what struck me was that that was the first time I had an image of what the word truly meant. The action of the freezing wind and the word coincided, precisely: scudding.

Twenty Five

They are somewhere over Southeast Asia, or the Indian Ocean, and it's an early flight, Sunshine Coast to Sydney, for me. Maybe they're sleeping, not aware yet that their tomorrow is already today, Aksel's dark head resting on Anaïs' shoulder. I see the nape of her neck, touchable. Or maybe they're awake, alert and expectant and watching some new-release movie where all the complications of intricate plotlines will be resolved: redemption all round. What language will it be in? Are there subtitles? Who can translate love?

Charles wants to come to Sydney—no way, though, not while I have a pulse. You need someone to cover your stupid arse, he says, not that it's worth covering. But his usefulness, as far as I can see, extends only to seeing me off at the airport, assuming he can manage the minimal. His time is up. Some things, to have value, need to be accomplished alone. Not a re-invention of the self—the analogy is all wrong—more like a peeling back of the layers to be able to see what was always there: learning tolerance, maybe. In any case, there is a careful regulation of self-estimation involved, the constant readjustment of fallibility. Wish me luck, Santayana, give me all the words that I might need and tell me what they mean.

Charles persists though, harassing me in the bathroom (and despite the Schick Quattro™ poised in my hand, I might add), mirrored and knowable as his old self by the bloodshot eyes and rancid breath, a character warmed and decaying in this climate. It occurs to me that he really is an alien being, a distant cousin to the species, a vague biological anomaly. The tip of his nose glistens in the harsh light, like an exclamation mark. No, no and no! I am firm. No need here for Charles' military-style backup (or gardening or meditation or macrobiotics, for that matter), I can just do it, alone. Irony: do

I mean alone, *and* in love? Regardless, the process must be incremental, the writer quietly tapping out a daily quota. No point in focussing wayward intentions on a distant goal.

And a little later, stopped at the airport's short-term parking station, waiting for the swinging arm of technology to raise and allow pay-by-the-hour entry, it suddenly comes to me that today is the day the housekeeper is due. That means I was supposed to do something—I know that much—but what was it? I can no longer remember.

It doesn't matter, though, because it also occurs to me that finally I have what I've always needed, what I'd been longing for all the time: a blank page, and the story that demands to be written is entirely up to me.

If I can tolerate a blank page, I can rewrite a life.

Exegesis:

**Finding the Words for Feelings: Narrative Fiction's Linguistic Interpretation of
Somatic Markers**

Chapter One

Introduction:

As the above title pre-empts, in this exegetical component of the creative research project I want to better understand not only *how* we, as writers, do some of the things we do in a particular way, but also some aspects of *why* this is so—and, more importantly as I have found during the research process, why this *must* be so. Subsequently, as a result of engaging in the exegetical process I develop a general theory of what writing is: of what it is we are doing when we write, and what it is that is happening when readers read. (My theory of writing is not dependent upon, nor does it make redundant, or even affect, any other particular mode or approach to literary criticism or interpretation; my theory is not a literary theory.) My general claim, applicable to all text, will be based on the notions of ‘provocation’ and ‘evocation’, but not—to my knowledge at least—in a way that has previously been used to understand writing and reading. The theory is therefore novel to that extent, but I have done little more than synthesise some relevant works and extrapolate from the philosopher Derek Melser’s theory of ‘thinking’—first introduced in *The Act of Thinking* (2004)—and found the result compelling. For this reason, the theory can be thought of as a candle in an already-lighted room, rather than a lighthouse beaming into the void. Other topics of interest to me are covered, but this will be my main claim; furthermore, the new theory will assist in ‘plaiting’ this exegesis and the accompanying, above creative artefact (hereafter, *Anaïs*).

There’s much to learn from the idea of the exegesis and artefact as plaited text. Barthes insisted on the death of the author because the exegetical wasn’t present. He asserted that because the writer wasn’t present in the work, the reader must alone create the work. But the creative writing doctorate’s combination of creative product and exegesis insists on the writer’s presence. The plaited text, in showing both the product and aspects of the process or its context, asserts the existence of the author. (Krauth 2011: n.p.)

While Barthes did insist on the death of the author, and while it can be said that Barthes’ insistence was due to the absence of the exegetical, there is also the possibility of unreliability, even if the author is present. Or, as Bennett and Royle state:

Just because it comes ‘from the horse’s mouth’ does not mean that the horse is telling the truth, or that the horse *knows* the truth, or indeed that what the horse has to say about the ‘words on the page’ is any more interesting or illuminating than what anyone else might have to say. (2004: 21 original emphasis)

So, perhaps this uncertainty should be acknowledged and we should speak of an eisegesis, rather than an exegesis, since any single interpretation, including the author’s own interpretation, will be partial and biased; the notion of a definitive meaning is always elusive. As a result of the research, I have some further remarks on the author’s role in Chapter Five—the author’s role is crucial to my theory. In any case, as author of both the above ‘product’ and this exegesis (I submit to the conventional word choice and usage), I ought to explain the ‘aspects of the process or its context’ referred to by Nigel Krauth, above, that will be applicable here.

I became a creative writer concurrent with becoming a sociologist and as such I am heavily (my supervisors might say, ‘cripplingly’) influenced by philosophy. My temperament requires ‘big-picture’ explanations that are at the same time founded on first-principles—or that can be theorised as being founded on first-principles—in at least a plausible manner. For me, philosophy and literature can always be found loitering at the same coffee-shop table, swapping and arguing scenarios that normally include, somewhere within the duologue, ‘but what if ...?’ In my view, the professions of philosophy and literature are almost interchangeable, but, given the choice, as with Iris Murdoch (see Conradi 2001), I would choose creative writing over philosophy; there is a personal, deep belief that novelists may have something to say to philosophers—but it cannot harm the enterprise to borrow some of their ideas first. And, asking to borrow the lawnmower implies prior knowledge of the lawnmower’s existence, as well as what a lawnmower does and how to operate it.

While Nigel Krauth, above, speaks of process *or* context, the two are also found to be plaited, at least within the restricted confines of this exegesis. The finished plait—perhaps best demonstrable analogously by the stylistic differences between those chapters of *Anaïs* (Gardiner 2012) known as ‘The Notebook’ and the main chapters of that text—will show the research ‘journey’: the process and the context; in fact, the movement in philosophical

position in the exegesis may be equated with the change in literary style (between The Notebook and main text) in *Anaïs*.

In relation to process and context, then: the research project arises as a result of philosophical and literary observation and reflection. Human subjectivity—as understood in the traditional western manner—would appear to contraindicate the possibility of shared understanding to the extent that, even if shared understanding exists, subjectivity precludes the certainty of knowing it to be the case. Magee calls it

“the *boundedness* of subjectivity: all perception, all experience, all understanding, all insight, can be only for a subject” (1997: 562 emphasis added).

Even if a person states that they understand another person precisely, or if a written description is claimed to be understood to the same degree, there is no guarantee that that is in fact the case. It is not possible to have knowledge about the understandings of others; all humans are equally unreliable in this respect, at least if viewed from the perspective of the rigour of western philosophical logic. In a more literary and linguistic analogy, although one given to us by a physicist: “consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown” (Schrödinger 1992: 89). The paradox, though, for the philosophical problem of human subjectivity is that, linguistically, shared understanding occurs or appears to occur relatively easily, despite the contraindications. That is, we tend to be able to understand each other, and, we take such ease of understanding for granted.

But, when I begin to discuss ‘large’ philosophical issues such as subjectivity and consciousness—and as soon as we start we must include notions like ‘self’, ‘mind’, ‘agency’, ‘thought’, and so on—it might be argued that the scope is too broad, or that the questions raised will in any case be unanswerable. Such an argument against my endeavour may be valid; after all, more than 2000 years of western philosophy and (among others) the relatively recent fields of psychology and neuroscience have failed to make much headway. As Carter says, “the secret of consciousness ... I don’t know it. Nor, I think, does anyone else” (2002: 6).

Despite this, I must beg the reader’s patience and indulgence. The large issues mentioned (and other issues that I see as related and will canvass shortly, also potentially ‘large’) are

addressed here and I believe plausible answers are posited. Should this not prove to be the case, then it may be said of me, as Goethe said of Byron's transgressions, "his misunderstanding with the world drove him to it" (cited in Wright 2010: 153). In any case, the striving in this exegesis is toward a 'sound' theory, what Munz describes—following the philosopher Karl Popper—as a theory that is potentially "falsifiable but, [currently] unfalsified" (2004: 149).

Of the 'other issues' that I have mentioned will feature here, the two main ones are a plausible hypothesis for the origin and function of language—relying on the work of Peter Munz—and a discussion as to the ubiquity of metaphor. In relation to the former, this also requires a brief analysis of the currently fashionable position espoused by proponents of Darwinian literary studies, as their 'evolutionary' approach would seem to satisfy my own big-picture yearnings. For example, Joseph Carroll, the self-proclaimed leader of the Darwinian literary movement, has avowed that the standpoint is set to "*subsume* all other possible approaches to literary study" (Carroll 2008: 105 emphasis added). This is a grand claim that invites attention. At the beginning of the research process I would have happily been an adherent, were the foundations found to be valid. The Darwinian literary studies' approach, if viewed as a desire for certainty, can also be interpreted as analogous to the rather didactic literary style encountered in The Notebook of *Anaïs*. Unfortunately, under even a cursory analysis Darwinian literary studies (as espoused by Carroll) is found to be not all that is claimed. Or, with the same implication being evident, Ellen Spolsky states it as: "I am being asked to believe in Tinkerbell" (2008: 285). She continues:

In his desire to be accepted as a practitioner (indeed as the founder) of the new social science of evolutionary literary theory, Carroll's production of a story about human nature fudges its crucial instabilities. (Spolsky 2008: 288)

A more reasonable alternative is therefore proposed (Chapter Two), although the idea is at first counterintuitive, since it is based on the premise that the evolved, large human brain is a problem, rather than an advantage; the human brain "has to be seen as a liability, not as an asset" (Munz 2004: 145).

In relation to metaphor, my interest arises because creative writing thrives on the technique of 'showing not telling'. That is, the advice in relation to *creating* writing is that

demonstration and analogy is superior to literal description, particularly in respect to the articulation of human emotion. Morley's advice in relation to a creative writing workshop exercise is representative:

Although you know what the character is feeling, do not mention this in your writing. Attempt to convey their emotions by personal details, their appearance and their setting ... It is a silent rule that you never tell your reader what a character is feeling. (2007: 166)

Granted, but why is this so? The rule is indeed 'silent'. Why cannot I just describe feelings—give them a name? Or a related example: *Anaïs* can be interpreted as a 'love' story, yet it is not possible to write in so many words—to describe literally—what the word *love* means. I, as with all creative writers, have resorted to metaphor. To merely name a feeling is always insufficient. As Goethe says: "Feeling is all, names are but sound and smoke" ([1831] 1962: 327). An important question, therefore (for me, and, acknowledging that for many this need not give rise to a difficulty at all), is why is this so? My research seeks an elucidation of *why* it is necessary to show not tell; what is different about feelings? Even 'science' seems baffled:

Given the ubiquity of feelings, one would have thought that their science would have been elucidated long ago—what feelings are, how they work, what they mean—but that is hardly the case. Of all the mental phenomena we can describe, feelings and their essential ingredients—pain and pleasure—are the least understood in biological and specifically neurobiological terms. (Damasio 2004: 3)

Thematically, *Anaïs* and this exegesis are integrated in the contemplation of all these notions: consciousness, self, mind, thought, shared understanding, and the ubiquity of the resort to metaphor. In other words, *Anaïs* supports, and is supported by, an exegesis designed to address the *perceived* divide between theory and practice. This is practice-based research. Within academia, there has previously been a tension between research and practice and where practice has

been dominated by research that acts to validate, explore, discuss, and/or dispute the practice. Inevitably, this has meant an uneasy alliance with research potentials and possibilities between practitioners and academics ... Traditionally, then, the relationship between practice and research has been a one way relationship: the practice is the object of the research and is always in the subordinate position. (Arnold 2007: 3)

Practice-based (and practice-led) research challenges the traditional notions of the natural-science model of how knowledge is attained and how research is conducted (Barrett & Bolt 2007). In doing so it validates the legitimacy of practice by exhibiting relationships that are (metaphorically) ‘dynamic’ between the previously separate domains of theory and practice. The exposure of the dynamics is through the interactions observable between this exegesis and *Anaïs*.

However, in fulfilling the above criteria I am acutely aware that the approach that I take here is not standard—supposing for the moment that the idea of a ‘standard exegesis’ for a creative-arts doctorate is not oxymoronic—but, on the other hand, I really had no satisfactory alternative, in the sense of self-satisfaction. The original, seemingly-innocent and ordinary decision to write a creative piece as a first-person narrative led me to question exactly what it was that I was attempting to re-present. In turn, this led to the necessity (for me) of having adequate understandings of some of the ‘basics’, which I had—legitimately and non-problematically for the most part—taken for granted: in particular, language and thought.

Consequently, the questions of interest to me that arise as a result of the research topic are:

- What is the origin and function of language?
- Why is metaphor ubiquitous in language?
- What is consciousness, and what is the relationship between consciousness and language?
- Can a general theory explain writing (and therefore, reading)?
- Assuming the above, what distinguishes writing as creative; specifically, why is it that a reader’s aesthetic response to narrative fiction is enhanced by authorial use of analogy (such as metaphor) when describing human sensations (particularly feelings and emotions)?

The remainder of this exegesis proceeds in a further five chapters to address pertinent aspects of the questions posed.

The first question to be addressed in the next chapter (Two)—On the Origin and Function of Language—relies heavily on the work of Peter Munz (1989, 2004) and demonstrates that language evolved in a social context to overcome the evolutionary ‘problem’ of a too-large human brain. Whilst in broad agreement with Munz’ conception, toward the end of the chapter I diverge from his hypothesis as I believe he gives language an un-necessarily-elevated status. That is, while Munz speaks *only* of language, I will insist (and give details in Chapters Four and Five) that language is but a single form of symbolic action, albeit the most effective (in context) so far.

Chapter Two

On the Origin and Function of Language:

At first blush it may seem irrelevant to refer to Darwinian literary studies, even briefly, given that I have already introduced the idea above only to immediately find fault with it. There are at least three considerations in my decision to include this discussion. Firstly, Darwinian literary studies are representative of that side of the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate that is biologically-determinist in focus; knowledge from such debates has a bearing on understandings of the potential capacities and limits of the human condition. And, since writers routinely write about aspects of the human condition and verisimilitude is paramount—even in ‘animal’ stories and the genres of fantasy and science-fiction, the anthropomorphic stance is a given—sound knowledge of the constituents of the human condition are essential. Secondly, as will be shown below, part of the allure of the Darwinian literary approach stems from the limitations and the misuse of language; this aspect relates specifically, for example, to my question concerning the ubiquity of metaphor (Chapter Three). Lastly, there is a profoundly personal reason, based on a serious incident that affected one of my brothers, and I will briefly outline and show the relevance of those circumstances toward the end of this chapter.

I might add that, despite the criticisms against it, my belief is that Darwinian literary studies—and similar deterministic perspectives in other disciplines—will continue to garner widespread acceptance in an unquestioned fashion. This point is consistent with my later analysis in relation to consciousness (Chapter Four) and, in particular, how dubious ideas are promulgated and perpetuated: ideas such as the existence of an entity called ‘mind’, although I admit the initial usefulness of temporarily accepting such concepts as somewhere convenient to peg one’s ontological doubts. In any case, my temperament demands that I highlight some objections against Darwinian literary studies, even knowing that the objections will not stem the flood.

Darwinian literary theorists, following their genealogy from the field of sociobiology (Alcock 2001; Wilson 1975) through evolutionary psychology (Evans & Zarate 2005; Tooby & Cosmides 1990, 1992), argue that if the human brain has evolved for the “logic

of inclusive fitness” then the human mind must also be so evolved (Carroll cited in Gottschall & Wilson 2005: 81). The capacities of the human mind—how we think and what we can think about—constitute the folk psychology notions of ‘human nature’, and so it is the “evolutionary models of human nature” that are the focus of study for the Darwinian literary theorists (Gottschall & Wilson 2005: 4). As Carroll explains,

“human nature ... [is] a biologically constrained set of cognitive and motivational characteristics” (2004: vii).

To overgeneralise slightly (and only for the moment), this is the assertion that human behaviour has (only) biological origins, rather than social. For example, my introduction of the character, Charles, to the reader of *Anais*, can be interpreted in just the same way—as if behaviour has a biological origin; Charles is described as

“a strangely endearing Neanderthal ... [and] Charles was like that; for him it was normal” (Gardiner 2012: 2).

My use of the word ‘Neanderthal’, for example, heightens the sense in which the evolutionary reference is unmistakeable; Charles is somehow less ‘evolved’. And the use of the word ‘normal’ is indicative that the behaviour in question is to some extent out of Charles’ control: an involuntary process (like digestion), rather than a voluntary action (like eating).

The model posited by Darwinian literary studies can be viewed as two-dimensional; there are innate instinctual responses to stimuli. This is because the approach by Darwinian literary studies—the very idea that there is something called ‘human nature’ that can be studied—is based originally on evolutionary psychology’s premise of the ‘modularity’ of the human mind. For evolutionary psychology, specific human traits are housed in the mind in “domain-specific modules” (Buss 2005: vi). Evolutionary psychology’s idea of domain-specific modules means that any behaviour can be (theoretically) traced to a specific physical location in the brain and that the behaviour is *limited to and constrained by* that evolved structure; this ‘fact’ is the primary implication of the notion of modularity. But it is the ‘purpose’ of the evolved adaptations in the human mind that sustains the key interest for Darwinian literary studies enthusiasts.

“Is it not reasonable that our understanding of the human mind would be aided greatly by knowing the purpose for which it was designed?” (Williams cited in Wilson 2005: 29).

So for example—and because this exegesis will concentrate on language—within this concept evolutionary psychology (following Pinker 1994, 1997) posits that the human mind has a “Language Acquisition Device (LAD)” or language acquisition module (Origgi & Sperber 2000: 146). But this is not a new claim in relation to language and dates back as early as the 1950s and the work of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky (1966) posited the notion that children come ready-equipped with a genetically-installed capacity for correct language use. His theory was based on a simple observation: if children learned via the traditional explanation of imitation, then imitation alone would be insufficient to explain the construction by children of sentences that they had never heard before. This implied an innate language instinct: universal and genetic. For Chomsky, it was when children were exposed to language that the instinct was activated and he termed this innate ability “universal grammar” (in Noble & Davidson 1996: 13).

Chomsky, concentrating on syntax and grammar, argued that some form of innate instinct was the only way that children would be able to form (and were able to, and were forming) a virtually unlimited number of syntactically and grammatically correct sentences—sentences that they had never heard spoken and could not have learned by instruction. The difficulty is that the idea of a universal grammar is unable to accommodate the fact that not only is it possible for humans to construct sentences that are syntactically and grammatically correct, it is possible to construct such sentences and for those sentences to be meaningless. For example,

‘Odourless acrid concepts dine happily’

is semantic nonsense yet grammatically flawless. The problem arises when grammar and syntax are given precedence over semantics, or when meaning is not even considered.

For example, statements can be made that contain meaning (for someone) yet the content of the statement can never be examined: “statements such as ‘God exists’” (Jarvie 2001: 38). That is, statements that can never be, even potentially, verified nor refuted. Additionally, Wittgenstein ([1953] 2003) has previously shown that (under the limitations

of strict philosophical logic, although we all do it routinely) meaning is not available through “ostensive definition”, the idea of being able to point to an object to indicate the intended meaning (cited in Munz 2004: 144).

I can point to a book and say the word, ‘book’, but there is no logical mechanism to determine if I refer to the object itself, the colour of the object, the shape of the object, the texture of the object or indeed, any other feature of the object that I might mean to confer the idea of ‘book-iness’ about. As Lakoff and Johnson assert,

“there is no Chomskyan person, for whom language is pure syntax, pure form insulated from and independent of all meaning” (1999: 6).

Noble and Davidson agree:

“there is no more evidence for such engines in the machinery of the human brain as ... Chomsky’s LAD ... than there is for souls” (1996: 13).

Any proffered solution also requires an adequate accounting of the above anomalies. An important point is that the concept of a modular mind, regardless of the purpose of the modules, is an insufficient explanation; whatever it is that humans are capable of it is more than two-dimensional stimulus and response. But it is always worth posing theories that are subsequently found wanting. *Anaïs*, for example, can be interpreted as suggesting—not so subtly—to the reader that we are all, always, theory-testing:

“for the purposes of the experiment, the basics of Newtonian physics obtain” (Gardiner 2012: 26).

And this might even lead to the questioning of ‘folk’ theories, or if not questioning them, showing—more subtly this time—how strange and absurd some of them are:

“It occurs to me that pets really do come to resemble their owners, or is it the other way around?” (Gardiner 2012: 26).

In any case, Darwinian literary studies arise as a result of evolutionary psychology’s notion of the modularity of mind. And, the fact that some proponents of Darwinian literary studies now want to distance themselves from evolutionary psychology because of this obvious shortcoming, turns out not to be a defence. Carroll admits that

theorists [in evolutionary psychology] ... committed themselves to the idea of "massive modularity", the idea that the mind operates almost exclusively through dedicated bits of neural machinery designed to solve specific adaptive problems in an ecologically stable ancestral environment ... The idea of massive modularity thus carried within itself a general sense of humans as adaptation-executing automata. The idea of massive modularity over-generalizes from the most hard-wired components of the brain. (Carroll 2008: 124 and repeated in variant form 2011: 26-7).

All well and good, but the fatal problem remains in what is unspoken; the disease has still been diagnosed and the patient is still terminal. Firstly, while Carroll repudiates the notion of 'massive' modularity, there is an implied acceptance of modularity of some description and to some extent—but unspecified. Nevertheless, modularity of any type, massive or otherwise, is just as problematic to the logic of the Darwinian literary approach. Or on the other hand, if the above statement is read generously as a repudiation of modularity in any form, the situation is still dire because no other foundation on which to base the Darwinian literary position is ever given. Goodheart states it thus:

"The chutzpah [of Carroll] is breathtaking, given the absence of anything approaching a theory ... in the paradigm he presents" (2008: 182).

There is no possibility of studying 'human nature', as the proponents of Darwinian literary studies claim to be able to do, if the way that human nature is conceived—should such a folk concept even exist—is false. In any case, the proponents of Darwinian literary studies, for whatever reason, do not address these issues and continue as if the basic premises of their theory are to be taken as given; if the brain has evolved through adaptation, then the mind must also be adapted. Darwinian literary theory is explicitly an "Adaptationist Literary Theory" (Carroll 2011: 1), but 'adaptation', even by itself, is problematic.

Any use of evolutionary theory that focuses on adaptation rather than selection is at risk of being Lamarckian rather than Darwinian, that is, deterministic. This is so because, for the explanatory usage of an evolutionary theory to be sound, the mutation conditions and the selection conditions "must remain causally independent" (Harre [1979] 1993: 23). That is, mutations are random and have nothing whatever to do with the changes in environment that might (accidentally) then make those mutations more viable.

To the above problem of emphasis, I would add what I see as confusion between the metaphoric and the literal. The misunderstanding goes all the way back to Darwin who used terms such as ‘selection’ to describe the idea that the environment determined if a mutation could be retained (selected for) and ‘adaptation’ to describe the resultant species’ suitability for the environmental context (became adapted). What Darwin actually studied were examples of *artificial* selection by human breeders of animals and plants and he extrapolated analogously to the natural world. Therefore, Darwin used the term ‘selection’ in a metaphorical sense in relation to evolution. The term ‘adaptation’ in relation to evolution must also be viewed in a metaphorical sense. In the natural world during the process of species evolution, no environment selects in a literal sense and no organism adapts in a literal sense. In the process of the biological evolution of an organism the mutations in DNA that occur are entirely random. Most will confer no advantage to the organism whatsoever; most, in fact, will be harmful. Even those random mutations that do survive and become part of the genetic makeup of an organism need not convey any advantage; they just need to be not fatally harmful.

Further, Kevin Brophy shows how even the term ‘evolution’ is a metaphor borrowed by Darwin to enhance understanding of his theory, and having its roots in the idea of “unrolling” over time (Brophy 2009: 167). The use of metaphor is not unexpected, since Keller demonstrates how metaphor is “the principle explanatory tool” for biology (2002: 117). This is not an indictment against biology, since philosophy (among many disciplines) does the same thing (Cohen 2004). But there are inherent dangers to logical thought when the metaphorical is taken to be literal, particularly when the metaphorical meanings have become so embedded in usage that they result in a taken-for-granted and therefore unquestioned status as ‘truths’; a metaphorical fiction becomes a literal truth. Or perhaps it is the case that, as the character Anaïs states in *Anaïs*, “fiction makes a better job of truth” (Gardiner 2012: 22). Although the statement can also be seen as an agreement with Iris Murdoch’s career-path choice, already noted.

Should the patient still exhibit a heartbeat, there remains the question of potential explanatory power; even if the premises that underpin Darwinian literary studies were sound—or if there *were* premises that underpin the approach—what useful information for the field of literature in general can be gained as a result of the standpoint? For example,

what benefit to my understanding of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is there for me to know that, as a result of reader survey, Darwinian literary researchers are able to assign a value of "0.83" in "agreeableness" (Carroll et al. 2011: 186) to one of the main characters, Elizabeth-Jane? Agreeableness apparently has a bearing on mate-selection.

Despite the claims, the Darwinian-literary-style evolutionary approach is not the grand narrative that will answer all questions. The approach has to be set aside, just as the narrator in *Anaïs* eventually dismisses his reliance on the 'Neanderthal', Charles.

"His time is up ... It occurs to me that he really is an alien being, a distant cousin to the species, a vague biological anomaly" (Gardiner 2012: 150).

Based on evolutionary psychology and Darwinian literary studies and the limits of those viewpoints, there will never be, as Carroll asserts (following his mentor, Edward O. Wilson)

"an integrated body of knowledge extending in an unbroken chain of material causation from the lowest level of subatomic particles to the highest levels of cultural imagination" (2011: 5).

Better answers are required. And, I still want my big picture. The narrator in *Anaïs* pleads early on (perhaps on my behalf):

"Is there a school for this stuff? Someone please tell me how the world works!" (Gardiner 2012: 16).

To return to the question of the origin of language—having rejected the modular mind model—the philosopher/historian Peter Munz provides at least part of my required answer. [As an intra-textual note, Peter Munz and Derek Melser, who I will utilise below, are both New Zealanders. I suspect their potential illumination of my questions is what the narrator in *Anaïs* may have been referring to, in his otherwise enigmatic aside, while standing on Mount Coolum: "(I think I can see a light on, in New Zealand!)" (Gardiner 2012: 30).]

Sound evolutionary theory may still have something to contribute. But what follows here is analogous, not literal: evolution may be considered not only as a scientifically-falsifiable theory, but also as a theory of falsifiability (following Karl Popper [1959] 2002) in its own

right. To do this it is useful to view a biological organism as an “embodied theory” (Munz 2004: 127-128). That is, the genetic structure of every biological organism can be viewed as a theory about how the world (reality) is. If the organism’s theory is correct, or at least not dramatically incorrect, the organism survives.

For example, I can imagine myself as a bean seed about to sprout. I already have an ‘embodied theory’ of reality, including such things as certain expectations in relation to the parameters of light, temperature and moisture that I will encounter. If my ‘theory’ is correct, or not dramatically incorrect, I will survive to fulfil my normal beany existence. The theory always remains open to falsifiability—metaphorical selection or rejection—by the environment. In fact, it is impossible for a biological organism to exist as an embodied theory that is not falsifiable. This is a precondition, as it were, for biological existence.

Conversely, from an extra-genetic perspective, an idea or theory may be considered as a “disembodied organism” (Munz 2004: 204). That is, it is a freely-proposed hypothesis about the world (reality) that is open to falsifiability; rejection or selection by the environment as a result of criticism. In a theoretically-rational world—an admittedly unrealisable ideal—criticism decides the process of selection or rejection. In such a reality, theories that had been falsified would become ‘extinct’.

The formulation of an extra-genetic ‘theory’ (someone having an ‘idea’, but an idea that goes beyond the information given or without information) becomes analogous to a biological genetic mutation. Both are accidents, or mistakes, and may or may not confer an evolutionary benefit; selection or criticism will decide whether the proposal is falsified. We learn (in the sense of discovery or creativity) by making mistakes—and not *from* our mistakes—just as biological organisms evolve by accidentally generating mutations. By making an enormous number of mistakes we occasionally find (again accidentally) that a few were not mistakes after all and these are selected for retention. Kevin Brophy identifies the same creative relationship:

“One definition of a successful metaphor might be, a good mistake” (2009: 168).

Organisms as embodied theories, such as my bean illustration, can never present for selection a proposal (a mutation or a mistake) that is potentially unfalsifiable. Humans,

however, do this routinely by the invention of myths, for example. Creative writers also do it all the time. *Anaïs* is fiction: it did not happen. And, while there are parts of the fiction that *could* potentially happen, there are other musings that could *never* happen, such as the ‘dream’ sequence (Gardiner 2012: 97-103). Whilst this uniquely human ability (to specify things that could never happen) is a further refutation of modularity, the dilemma is that statements such as those formulated within myths, though unfalsifiable, still contain meaningful content (for some people). Statements such as ‘God exists’ are meaningful within those communities that have a notion of ‘God’, although the actual definitions will vary.

Even scientifically-sound falsifiable theories, for example the Special and General Theories of Relativity, contain statements about unobservable phenomena not deducible from data, and yet the statements are meaningful, for someone—or at least, I am led to believe that that is the case. So, at the centre of the philosophical problem is the evidentiary fact that statements (both true and false) can be made about things that cannot be observed, go beyond any given data (or without data), yet remain meaningful. Peter Munz believes that the answer to this dilemma (for philosophers and some sociologists who are also interested creative writers) depends on social context, and he uses Popper’s ([1945] 1966) criteria for an ‘open’ versus a ‘closed’ society and Wittgenstein’s ([1953] 2003) notion of a ‘speech community’, to show his reasoning.

For Popper, the signifying characteristic of an open society is the encouragement and tolerance of criticism (in Munz 2004: 92). Individual and collective freedoms—to criticise—within such a system are his central concern. In this view, for example, even the necessity for the democratic process of elections is subservient to the ability of the populace to criticise (to retain by selection or to remove by rejection) a particular regime by non-violent means. That is, how governments come to be in power is less important than how possible it is for those governments to be removed should it be deemed necessary. In the analogous extra-genetic evolutionary terms, the election of a government may be thought of as freely proposing a hypothesis about how a society sees its reality, with subsequent elections being a criticism of that hypothesis; selection or rejection. That is, the hypothesis must always be (potentially) falsifiable.

In contrast, a closed society is one where criticism is not only discouraged, criticism is not tolerated; for example, in a totalitarian regime. Alternately, closed may be equated with “pre-critical” or “non-critical” behaviour (Jarvie & Pralang [1999] 2003: 106). Again, in extra-genetic evolutionary terms the ideals of a regime in a closed society may be thought of as an unfalsifiable hypothesis. The terms ‘open’ and ‘closed’ are abstract considerations at either end of a spectrum, referring to “ideal types” (Munz 2004: 92), whereas in practice no society is either fully open or fully closed. Further, in relation to the unfalsifiable ideals within a closed society, the reference here means those kinds of traits that Habermas would say “enjoy a kind of fundamental validity” (1979: 111). The paradox is, however, that those traits enjoying fundamental validity within a society may actually be maladaptive.

Whilst it is axiomatic that organisms need to be (metaphorically) adapted to their environment, it has already been shown that evolutionary theories—even analogous ones—that concentrate on adaptation rather than selection are untenable. Adaptation, then, simply refers to a model “of selection; it is not a claim about the power of selection *in* evolution” (Sober 1993: 120 original emphasis). For evolution, though, no adaptation need be perfect and all adaptations are relative to a particular set of variants in a particular environment. Relevant here is the observation that humans routinely act in ways that are specifically maladaptive, for example, by what some might see as the economically-irrational use of resources—building cathedrals or pyramids, perhaps. Munz notes, however, that social solidarity is capable of “compensating” for maladaptive traits (2004: 288). Or as Nietzsche asserts, false judgements can be accepted as having the status of truth, if they provide a specific value: “the falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement” (Nietzsche [1886] 1990: 35). And, an explanation of how and why humans were able to create the original solidarity so as to later be able to engage in maladaptive behaviours is where we now turn—because language is implicated.

Munz argues that very specific maladaptations are the central requirement for the creation of social bonds (2004: 181-2). In fact, the greater the maladaptiveness of the credo, the greater will be the solidarity that is created and perpetuated. The maladaptations that create solidarity result from the creation of specifically-useful, unfalsifiable, economically-irrational hypotheses (Munz 1989: 285). In part, as will be shown, these maladaptations, together with a ‘closed’ society, answer the question of why cultures exist. As Munz states:

The most adaptive (that is, the most efficient) way of building ... cultures is to pick on the most maladaptive (that is, irrational and economically most wasteful and superstitious) practice conceivable, and use it as a foundation charter. For only maladaptive practices of this kind are sufficiently varied and differentiated to isolate communities and ensure that they differ from each other. (2004: 198)

In *Anais*, the narrator's Neanderthal friend, Charles, in his analogous relationship with the 'inclusive fitness' of Darwinian literary studies, would refuse to be a party to such an idea:

"To be civilized, Charles reminds (and I am translating his grunts), means to learn to live in cities, a possibility that he has no inclination of ever endorsing" (Gardiner 2012: 17).

Most theories relating to the unique features of humanity focus initially on brain-size and postulate that the brain became larger and larger until humans became sufficiently intelligent to develop culture (and language); in relation to brain size, "bigger is better" (Calvin 2002: 59). Under this schema a larger brain is an advantage and the notion has anthropomorphic (and anthropocentric) appeal. However, all these theories collapse in the absence of any evolutionary pressure that might have selected for an organ (the human brain), the greatest feature of which is the ability to make mistakes—invent myths, for example, or to create literary fiction—a seemingly maladaptive behaviour. That is, to be able to go beyond the information given or without information. Even evolutionary psychologists concede that there is an explanatory problem. Pinker notes that, in relation to literary fiction, he

"might have expected natural selection to weed out any inclination to engage in imaginary worlds" (2007: 162).

Munz' novel position is a plausible hypothesis and his starting premise is that large-human-brain size (that had accidentally evolved) may at one time have been a liability, rather than an improvement: "a large brain is a liability" (Munz 2004: 144). [The question of *why* the brain may have enlarged is not crucial to any argument, although Munz speculates, citing Robin McKie, a "predominantly fishy diet" (2004: 145). Additionally, Finlay et al. (2001: 263-78) convincingly demonstrate that the structure of the brain precedes its function (see also Noble & Davidson 1996: 32).]

The human brain, after it evolved to the current size, is too large to accommodate linear (two-dimensional or, stimulus-to-automatic-reaction) responses, because it would quickly become immobilised by over-activity. There is a “division of labour” within the human brain and sensations need to be reconstructed into something that is interpretable before a response, if appropriate, can be delivered (Munz 2004: 38). Moreover, the sensations as a result of external stimuli or internal neuronal activity have long been recognised as indistinct and infuriatingly vague. Contemporary neuroscience concurs, with Damasio explaining that the sensations are almost ineffable and may produce differing “feels” in different persons, or different feels in the same person at differing times as well as (at all times for all people) being felt severally in different parts of the brain at the same time (Damasio 1999: 49-53). These feels are what Damasio calls “somatic markers” (1999: 67)—as in the title of this thesis—and in later works Damasio’s “somatic-marker hypothesis” gives a possible representation of how feelings, emotions and action might interact (2004: 147-49), although I do not follow Damasio’s hypothesis here.

A further dilemma for any explanation is that the division of labour within the brain creates what neuroscientists call the “binding problem”: the method of restructuring to create a reliable interpretation (in Munz 2004: 11-12). Vague and indistinct somatic markers need to be interpreted in some way. The somatic markers are what have been called “qualia”: ineffable, and impossible therefore to articulate in any *literal* sense—even for the most creative of creative writers—but having a certain ‘quality’ or ‘feel’ (Carter 2002: 16, 22; Chalmers 1996: 4). For example, is there a physiological difference between the ‘feel’ of sadness compared to the ‘feel’ of melancholy? If so, what is it? If the same ‘feelings’ can be registered by the same person at different times, in different parts of the brain, how can it be known whether it is actually the same feeling?

A brain (such as the problematic human brain posited here) unable to solve these difficulties—at least to the extent so that the organism can function—would be a fatal liability for any species dependant on interaction with the natural world; that is, for any known biological species. If a ‘solution’ was not ‘found’ the type of brain specified would not be able to produce a response when required. This would have been true for *Homo sapiens* as well, unless they were able to ‘invent’ a compensating mechanism—or accidentally acquire a compensating mechanism. A domain-specific-modular brain such as

proposed by evolutionary psychology, for example, could not cope. Since as a species we still exist—that is, remain provisionally unfalsified—a compensating mechanism, however flawed in other respects, must have been (metaphorically) found and for Munz, the mechanism is what he terms a “three-dimensional language” (2004: 143). And, *pace* evolutionary psychology’s notion of domain-specific modularity, a brain capable of a three-dimensional language must be a *general-purpose* brain; it must be “malleable” (Herbert 2007: 14).

A “three-dimensional language” is one that is able to make meaningful statements about things and the meaningful statements made (can if the context requires) go beyond the information given or without information (Munz 2004: 143). That is, beyond the linear, two-dimensional, stimulus and reaction analogy. In Wittgensteinian terminology this means making meaningful statements that are not ostensively definable. That is, meaningful without pointing at the thing you mean—since ostensive definitions are (in philosophy anyway) meaningless. Such a language is necessary to overcome the binding problem caused by an over-sized, labour-divided brain that had become a liability, so that the imprecise somatic markers can be deciphered (translated). A strictly two-dimensional language would only be able to make statements about observable phenomena, as with modularity. The prerequisites for such an ‘invention’ (as Munz’ three-dimensional language) would have to have been the concurrent evolution of an extra-genetic as well as a biological set of traits.

From a biological perspective, as well as an upright posture, it requires the alteration of the larynx to facilitate the modulation and inflexion of sounds (in Munz 2004: 146). From an extra-genetic perspective, it requires the existence of a social group, tightly-bonded and distinct from all other groups, within which meaning can be created, for that discrete group—a Wittgensteinian “form of life” or “speech community” (in Munz 2004: 64). Somatic markers can never be described in so many words. The suggestion here is that the terminology attributed to somatic markers—as vague and nebulous as they are—is culturally and socially (and probably temporally) specific. That is, it has to be learned. Since the somatic markers are no more than subjective feels, individuals would never know whether the words used to describe one feel, at one time, were also appropriate for another feel, at another time. Meaning can only be interpreted within a speech community. The

societies in which this is first able to occur would be, in Popperian terms, closed societies. In Habermas' terms, these groups would have achieved "linguistically established intersubjectivity of meaning" (1979: 98) and it would be "embedded" (1979: 118).

This is the reason that we are able to understand each other when we give a name to the somatic markers (despite the fact that the name we give is never accurate or definitive with any certainty, except for us, and except for at that time). As Munz states, "the emergence of a speech community or a culture ... is a naturally selected, adaptive response" to a problematic human brain (2004: 65). It follows that meaning still needs to be continually (and socially) re-invented; language, an original "*invention* ... has since gone on being guidedly reinvented" (Noble & Davidson 1996: 20 original emphasis). Further, any other hominid type also under threat of extinction as a result of a problematic increase in brain size would need to 'invent' a solution equally as effective (creative). The fact that *Homo sapiens* are the only surviving hominid type among those known to have existed, indicates that others did not (become creative). As Noble and Davidson argue, *Homo sapiens*

"became dominant ... because among the variable populations of hominids ... language arose" (1996: 214).

The groups would need to be relatively small; sufficient group solidarity could not be maintained over distance in a time of primitive communication and transportation. Further, and more importantly, the more maladaptive—economically and politically irrational—the beliefs, rituals and customs that provided the uniqueness of the group, the more effective they would be. Specific falsehoods and delusions (unfalsifiable theories) work best precisely because they are not readily adaptive, with 'adaptive' in this sense meaning not easily transportable or transferable between differing groups. Regardless of how social theorists may view open and closed societies in a contemporary environment, under this schema there must have been a time when closedness was advantageous. That is, that ethnocentrism was at some point in the past the cost of the social cohesion necessary for the creation of meaning using a three-dimensional language.

As the narrator in *Anais* notes, again in relation to Charles:

"interesting—something other than his usual two-dimensional response" (Gardiner 2012: 20).

On a personal note, if I had needed any further convincing that the human brain must indeed be ‘malleable’ and ‘general-purpose’ rather than modular, a serious accident that almost killed one of my brothers would have been more than sufficient. At around the same time as the beginning of this research project, my brother was working in rural Tasmania when he fell from a two-storey structure and suffered massive head injuries. He was technically ‘dead’ when (an unknown time later) help arrived and he needed to be resuscitated. He ‘died’ again on the way to hospital.

After the urgent brain surgery necessary to stem haemorrhaging, he was in a coma in intensive care. More than 25 per cent of his brain was damaged—dead brain tissue is, apparently, non-recoverable. The coma lasted five months, and the on-again, off-again question was whether to literally ‘pull the plug’. The specialist medical prognosis during this time was that he would be (if he survived), among other things, severely disabled. He certainly would not regain speech, as vital parts of the brain necessary for speech were gone.

Three years after the accident, my brother lives independently, speaks eloquently without a trace of his previous ‘broad’ Australian accent, and the only remaining sign of the accident is a slight limp; he walks with a cane. He has had to re-learn all the basic skills, including speech, but apparently (and despite the medical prognosis) parts of his malleable and general-purpose brain took over the functions of the damaged sections. Even the limp—which is due to a slight problem with balance, rather than anything else—is (anecdotally) only noticeable on the return journey from the local hotel, rather than the outward trip.

While the basic elements of Munz’ theory seem to me to be eminently plausible—the theory provides better explanatory power than others—there are still some concerns, albeit minor. In particular, Munz elevates language to a higher status than it deserves. However, if we view Munz’ conception as ‘three-dimensional *symbolism*’, rather than ‘three-dimensional language’, then I think that all is salvageable. I address this issue in Chapter Four. Under the position that I suggest, language would be viewed as a type of symbolism, other types of which could precede the origin of language and could continue to co-exist alongside language. It would just be that language has been found to be the most useful

and practical of the forms of symbolism available. Additionally, I will argue in Chapter Four that Munz' strict correlation between brain and language is unnecessary. That is, while it is axiomatic that all biological organisms must have a brain, I will largely follow Derek Melser (2004, 2009) in relation to how language fits into the notions of mind, brain, consciousness and so on.

For the moment, how a three-dimensional language capable of creating meaning also results in that language being largely metaphoric, becomes the subject matter for the next chapter, Three.

Chapter Three

On the Ubiquity of Metaphor:

This chapter looks at some of the reasons why metaphor seems to be pervasive in language. As I have stated in the introduction to this exegesis (Chapter One) in relation to *Anaïs*, ideas such as ‘love’ do not seem to be able to be described in any literal way. I have given some initial indications of why this is so in the above chapter on the origin and function of language: the feelings involved (Damasio’s ‘somatic markers’) have been shown to require interpretation within a Wittgensteinian ‘speech community’. Munz’ conception of a ‘three-dimensional’ language has then given us the framework of how this might be done. Continuing on the same track, this chapter unpacks some of the particulars of language: the use of metaphor. Toward the end of this chapter, after the necessary theoretical aspects have been exposed, I will make some specific remarks about my use of metaphor in *Anaïs*.

Eagleton confidently asserts:

“All language ... is ineradicably metaphorical, working by tropes and figures; it is a mistake to believe that any language is *literally* literal” (1996: 126 original emphasis).

I do not question the validity of Eagleton’s statement; I just want to know why it is so; why is all language ‘ineradicably metaphorical’?

To begin: some explanations and distinctions. I use the term ‘metaphor’ throughout this exegesis in a rather loose and broad sense; I will just mean any analogous relationship that uses words. Where it might be necessary for clarity to make further sub-categorisations of the type of analogy that I want to refer to, I will do so. For the moment, I am only concerned with the distinction between literal language (saying A and meaning A, if that is possible) and what Barfield refers to as ‘comparative language’.

Sometimes the comparison is open and avowed, as when ... Burns writes simply: “My love is like a red, red rose”. And then we call it a ‘simile’. Sometimes it is concealed in the form of a bare statement, as when Shelley says of the west wind not that it is like, but that it is, “the breath of Autumn’s being” ... This is known as

‘metaphor’. Sometimes the element of comparison drops still further out of sight. Instead of saying that A is like B or that A is B, the poet simply talks about B, without making any overt reference to A at all. You know, however, that he intends A all the time, or, better say that you know he intends an A; for you may not have a very clear idea of what A is ... This is generally called ‘symbolism’. (1999: 57-8)

And, immediately, so as not to cause too much confusion, I place Barfield’s ‘symbolism’ as just another form of the metaphoric—I note the general, ‘symbolic’ nature of language in a moment. For convenience, I am largely referring to any type of Barfield’s comparative language when I use the term metaphor. In the previous sentence I have written the word ‘referring’, and at the outset this highlights the difficulties that anyone encounters as soon as they want to talk about talking or write about writing or think about thinking—for academics, I mean, not in ordinary interactions. We are limited by the available and the usual language (I explore this point in more detail in Chapter Four). In Chapter Two, I have mentioned that Wittgenstein shows that it is not possible to ostensively define anything (to be able to define what we mean by pointing at the thing as a referent—and again, admitting that in our everyday capacity as non-academics we successfully do this very thing all the time). What also could have been iterated at that point is that words do not refer to things; there is no sign that signifies, or there is, but there is also more. Put another way, as Trimble asserts, “[w]ords symbolize thoughts, not things” (2007: 59). This is so because words (and therefore all languages) are symbols, not signs.

The essential feature of human spoken and written languages is their symbolic nature. Symbols ... differ from signs. The latter designate contiguous relationships and are metonymic in form, whereas the former are metaphoric. Words act as more than signifiers for the thing signified; they have additional secondary (and then tertiary, and so on) links. Symbols are quite arbitrary; they need to be learned, and they are representative. Thus representations are arrangements of symbols, and it is such use of symbols in language that renders communication between humans “intelligent.” Symbols embody a power that allows us not only to think ahead but also to plan and tell stories. (Trimble 2007: 59)

While I return to some of these ideas in more detail in the following chapter, for the moment my interest is in the apparent pervasiveness of metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson assert that there is a traditional view of metaphor encompassing five basic understandings and all of those understandings are questionable; that is, they assert that the understandings are

“false beliefs about metaphor that have become so deeply entrenched that they have been taken as literal truths” (1999: 119).

And this generalisation about metaphor—becoming ‘entrenched’ and taken as ‘literal’—appears to parallel the particular instance noted in Chapter Two, where Darwinian literary studies take the (metaphoric) terminology of evolutionary theory to be literally true.

In any case, the premises in dispute (all from Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 119): that metaphor is purely linguistic rather than cognitive—“a matter of words, not thought”; that metaphor is novel rather than ordinary, “and typically arises in poetry” and the like; that metaphor is “deviant” rather than normal—“words are not used in their proper senses”; that any metaphor used in ordinary (non-literary) language must be a “dead” metaphor, “frozen into literal expressions”; and, that metaphors (whenever used) “express similarities” between the referents that are “preexisting”, and therefore literal.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that if the first premise—metaphor is a matter of words, not thought—were true, “then each different linguistic expression should be a different metaphor” (1999: 123). But, this is clearly not the case; large numbers of metaphoric expressions—although linguistically diverse—refer to the same idea, or set of ideas. For example,

“Our relationship has hit a dead-end street” should be distinct from and unrelated to “Our relationship is spinning its wheels” which in turn should be different from and unrelated to “We’re going in different directions” and “Our relationship is at a crossroads,” and so on. But these are not simply distinct, different, and unrelated metaphorical expressions. They are all instances of a single conceptual metaphor, namely, *Love Is A Journey*. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 123)

This example of some of the forms of the ‘Love-Is-A-Journey’ metaphor is also sufficient evidence against the second ‘false’ premise (above) in relation to metaphor—that metaphor is novel, rather than ordinary. That is, all the above expressions are in common, everyday usage, or at least are potentially available for use by those persons who (unhappily) happen to be in that circumstance. There is nothing particularly ‘novel’ or ‘poetic’ about any of the metaphoric expressions.

Lakoff and Johnson's Love-Is-A-Journey example is also sufficient evidence against the third 'false belief' in relation to metaphor—that metaphor is deviant, rather than normal. That is, the idea of conceptualising 'love', or any personal relationship (and many other things), as a 'journey' is a normal way that people think about such things. And, as a result, any difficulties associated with the relationship will be thought of as obstacles to the completion of that journey: 'hitting a bumpy patch', for example. Similarly, when writing a doctoral thesis one might 'take the wrong path' and momentarily 'lose one's way'. And, even the narrator in *Anaïs* occasionally laments:

Writing is a pathway that ought to lead somewhere, but there is no map. The territory has all been surveyed before, that's not the problem. The difficulty is that all the maps in the drawer don't seem to correspond to the landscape. (Gardiner 2012: 118)

The fourth 'false belief', according to Lakoff and Johnson, is that any metaphor used in ordinary (non-literary) language must be a 'dead' metaphor, 'frozen into literal expressions'. In relation to dead metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson class them as expressions that arose a long time ago but where now, in their terminology, the "conceptual mapping has long since ceased to exist" (1999: 124). If this is the case, then Lakoff and Johnson assert that it is difficult to find examples of dead metaphors: "it takes effort to come up with such cases" (1999: 124). They give the example of the word 'pedigree' originating in the shape of a grouse's foot—*ped de gris*—with visual similarities to the branches of a tree (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 124-5). The fact is though, most metaphors are in common usage (such as the Love-Is-A-Journey example) and they are alive and well enough to be constantly producing new variants on the theme. In fact, conventional metaphors are "so alive that they are used regularly without awareness or noticeable effort" (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 125). I also posit that the understanding of dead metaphors is a likely confusion or conflation with clichés—overused metaphors rather than deceased ones.

The fifth 'false belief' to be discredited by Lakoff and Johnson is that metaphors express pre-existing (literal) similarities (1999: 126-7). But, there is just no obvious connection between an idea such as 'love' and an idea such as 'journey'; the metaphor *creates* the connection and the connection cannot and did not exist prior to the metaphor. Further, even in cases where there may be a shared concept between the metaphor and the referent, this fact "does not guarantee that a metaphor expresses a similarity" (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:

126). For example, using the ideas of ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ as in ‘I see what you mean’: while vision (seeing something) can give us knowledge (of the something) and the referent in this case is also about knowledge (meaning), this still does not equate to pre-existing similarity. As Lakoff and Johnson confirm, “there can be no literal similarity between knowing what someone else means and seeing what someone else means” (1999: 126).

Also, any two referents expressing a similarity ought to be symmetrical. That is, it should be possible to express A in terms of B as well as express B in terms of A. Again using the Love-Is-A-Journey example, while we can express the idea of love in terms of a journey we cannot express the idea of a journey in terms of love; in other words, “we don’t use our forms of reasoning about love to conceptualize and reason about journeys” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 127). And finally, it would also be inconsistent with the similarity premise if the same referent could be (metaphorically) conceptualised in mutually-exclusive ways, yet this also routinely occurs. Lakoff and Johnson use the example of “Marriage As Business Partnership” and “Marriage As Parent-Child Relationship”, where both metaphorical conceptions exist, but cannot exist at the same time (1999: 127); one refers to an equal relationship and the other refers to an unequal relationship.

And the reason that Lakoff and Johnson (and now I) have devoted time to dispelling some of the myths about metaphor is because the claim is that “metaphor is pervasive in both thought and language” (Lakoff & Johnson 1981: 12, 1999: 45). My main interest, however, is how and why this might be so. Under Lakoff and Johnson’s explanatory scenario, the how and why is because metaphor “allows conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience” (1999: 45). So it is this further claim that I now wish to analyse. To slightly expand their idea:

Whenever a domain of subjective experience or judgement is coactivated regularly with a sensorimotor domain, permanent neural connections are established via synaptic weight changes. Those connections, which you have unconsciously formed by the thousands, provide inferential structure and qualitative experience activated in the sensorimotor system to the subjective domain they are associated with. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 57)

To unpack these statements, I first take a metaphorical step back. The underlying principle that causes all the misunderstanding is the perceived dichotomy between the notions of

“subject” and “object” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 93). This is the same ‘subjectivity’ that I have referred to in the introduction (Chapter One), for example, in relation to Magee’s notion of “boundedness” (1997: 562). The dichotomy has been perpetuated by formal philosophical thought, as well as ‘folk psychology’ for well over two thousand years, that is, before the time of Plato (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 350; Melser 2004: 157), with the ideas of Descartes being particularly persuasive (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 392-3). I would add that it is further perpetuated by ordinary and inescapable things such as the sentence structure of language: subject-verb-object—inescapable, since the structure also forms the basis of logic.

Lakoff and Johnson assert, however, that when subject and object are viewed philosophically as distinct and separate entities—a form of scientific realism that takes the awareness of the organism and the entities it encounters as incommensurable—then the idea of ‘objectivity’ must be taken as either a ‘given’, by the very existence of the object, or by a shared and agreed intersubjectivity by the aware subjects (1999: 90-93). That is, the position of scientific realism forever divorces *awareness* (consciousness, thought, reflection, reason and so on) from the possibility of having an existence in the ‘real’ world: “mental substance” versus “physical substance” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 392).

To return briefly to biological evolution: the random mutations in biological organisms that give rise to the possibility of a species’ evolution can logically only occur as a chance mutation of that which pre-exists; that is, nature can only work with the material at hand. Further, since there is no notion of progress or design, or a designer, then there is never any optimum configuration for any organism or component of an organism; if it works it is good enough, with ‘works’ taken to mean that, at a minimum, the organism continues to survive and reproduce.

For the biological evolutionary process, what this translates into is that, as well as new structures evolving, very often pre-existing structures will be co-opted into doing service in a new capacity. For Lakoff and Johnson, such is the case with human language—and, consequently, thought, reason and so on; their contention is that such things ‘piggy-back’ on sensorimotor neural connections (1999: 39-42). For example, Narayanan finds that

exactly the same neural structure that can perform motor control also characterizes the conceptual structure of linguistic aspect, and the same neural mechanism that can control bodily movements can perform logical inferences about the structure of actions in general. (in Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 42)

This contention seems eminently plausible, since it is already known that “structures [of the brain] emerged before the functions they now seem dedicated to” (Noble & Davidson 1996: 32). A precondition for Lakoff and Johnson’s hypothesis (although one not addressed by them) would be a “general-purpose” brain (Munz 2004: 142) that was “malleable” (Herbert 2007: 14), as has been posited is the case in Chapter Two of this exegesis. If true, then Lakoff and Johnson’s position also helps explain Munz’ “three-dimensional language” theory (2004: 143); the logic of human actions—someone doing X to Y—equates to the linguistic logic of subject-verb-object. It can then be said that even the ‘rules’ of a ‘language’ such as mathematics ($2 + 2 = 4$) are reducible as no more or less than representations of possible human actions; the rules of activity restrict the ways that activity can be referred to.

For example, there are neural structures in the human brain that allow for (or are somehow connected with or assist in or regulate—I am limited to the usual metaphoric language) action and motor control and when we learn to walk the myriad neural connections associated with the activity of walking are strengthened by increases in synaptic weight of the particular connections. The same is true for all learning, whether it be learning to ride a bicycle or learning about evolutionary theory (although, there is no claim here about the correctness or validity of the knowledge—incorrect bicycle-riding technique may be self-evident, but the same cannot be said for incorrect use of evolutionary theory, for example). What Lakoff and Johnson propose is that, from an evolutionary perspective, the pre-existence of structures to *perform* actions—the neural pathways of the sensorimotor system—provide a ready-made platform to be co-opted into the evolved task of *reasoning* about actions (1999: 39-42).

If this is correct in relation to the use by language and reasoning of the sensorimotor systems, then it follows that subject and object are inseparable; for Lakoff and Johnson, this is “embodied realism” (1999: 93).

While the notion of embodied realism has many implications, most relevant to this research is that Lakoff and Johnson argue that the above embodiment influences the way in which humans conceive the world; in particular, embodiment dictates not only the ubiquity of metaphor, but also the ubiquity of the *types* of metaphors that we use: overwhelmingly, that is, metaphors relating to spatial and sensorimotor applications and therefore referent-oriented.

For example, a primary metaphor is ‘More is Up’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 51). As biological beings we stand upright and our sensorimotor system determines the distinction between up and down. The More is Up metaphor might consequently translate in common usage as ‘the cost of tertiary education is *rising*’. That is, quantity is equated with verticality. As Lakoff and Johnson note:

A primary metaphor like More is Up arises via a neutrally instantiated correlation between (1) a sensorimotor operation (such as a determination of a degree or change in verticality) and (2) a subjective experience or judgment (such as a judgment of degree or change in quantity). The conflation of these two is the simultaneous activation of their respective neural networks ... the domains are coactivated in everyday experience, as when we pile more books on the desk and their height goes up. (1999: 55)

And there will be innumerable others. For example, terminology used in the medical professions routinely does the same thing, with the use of words like ‘anterior’ and ‘posterior’, being conflations of linear time for spatial orientation.

But, as well as being a logical extension of bodily function, as shown above, a largely metaphorical language is also a logical result for other compelling reasons. Not only does language (and thinking) ‘piggy-back’ on the physical structures in existence, but there is also a tendency for people faced with any situation to ‘take the easiest route’. For example—in relation to creativity—pre-discovery, or articulation of anything that might be considered creative, the thinking process (whether in science or the creative arts or, in fact, in any field) may be vague and analogous comparisons can be useful for the potential creator. In this respect, Brophy considers that thinking in metaphors is also “theoretical thinking” (2009: 167). And as Haack suggests,

“a metaphor’s combination of lack of specificity, of directedness, and of novelty is indeed what make it useful in the early, fumbling-around phases of inquiry” (1994: 16).

I take this to mean that we think of things in terms of categories of association and when thinking of new things it is easiest to attempt to see how the novel might fit with the known and whether, and to what extent, this aids in explanatory power. Further, I will argue that in many situations and for most of the time since the ‘invention’ of a three-dimensional language that mitigated a problematic brain, (most) humans have not—mainly because there has been no compelling reason to—had to go beyond Haack’s *fumbling-around* phase. What I mean by this is that, in many cases and for most people, the extent to which a metaphorical analogy is able to demonstrate meaning will be sufficient, and the necessity for exhaustive explication (anything that might approach literal) will not arise.

Additionally, I would posit that in the development of any language, the initial possibilities for usage (words at the disposal of the user for which there were already shared understandings within the particular Wittgensteinian form-of-life) would be limited. As such, metaphorical extension of the language to describe new things that might need to be described would be easier, quicker and more effective than the invention of completely new words; relating the unknown to the known would work best. As a result, most of language, regardless of cultural context, will be (and is) metaphoric rather than literal. As Carter suggests, “the fundamental roots of language are figurative” (2004: 70). The modern English language may be a slight anomaly in this regard, since it contains elements of a mixture of languages (Old English, French and German, and so on) and the options available for any user were (and are) greatly expanded compared to a language that had to begin from scratch, metaphorically-speaking. This cosmopolitan combination of linguistic choice also makes for enhanced creativity; the possibilities for analogous comparisons become exponential as a result.

Whatever the creative possibilities, however, the pervasiveness of metaphor in language is, as Eagleton asserts above, ‘ineradicable’. As Brophy also points out, “[t]here is no doubt that metaphors play a constant role in human communication”, but he immediately frames the larger issue: “the question is whether that presence is trivial or profound” (2009: 161). This thesis asserts the latter; the presence of metaphor is *profound*; metaphor is *essential* in

the type of language system humans have developed and continually re-invent. Since humans seem to perceive things in the world as relational (things stand in ‘rational’ relation to every other thing, although this might conceivably not be the only way to perceive the world), metaphor is inevitable; for humans, at the least, ‘reality’ is irreducibly analogical and therefore language is irreducibly metaphorical—and vice versa, one has to suppose. In this sense, even the origins of the word ‘metaphor’ can be said to be etymologically metaphoric.

In any case, metaphor is ubiquitous to such a taken-for-granted extent that quite often we take the metaphoric to be literal. But, metaphors have a “universal necessity” (Trimble 2007: 59); and I take this to be confirmation that given human physicality then a metaphorical language is inevitable. Or again, it may be that the distinction between the metaphoric and the literal is an unnecessary one. One of Derrida’s claims, for example, has been that “the distinction between the literal and the metaphoric is spurious” (in Freadman & Miller 1992: 123). Perhaps there is only metaphor, and even so-called ‘dead’ metaphors are merely resting—awaiting a Lazarus-type resuscitation by a suitably-creative writer to be brought back into the lexicon. After all, if we understand each other is that not enough? Shared understanding, or the lack of it, would seem to be the only measure. And, meanings (of words or combinations of words) are arbitrary and changing and need to be inter-generationally re-learned or, as Noble and Davidson have phrased it above, “guidedly reinvented”—itself, a metaphor (1996: 20). Also, any words used are only symbols.

To reiterate a portion of Trimble’s quote, above: “Symbols are quite arbitrary; they need to be learned, and they are representative” (2007: 59). Shared understanding—an empathetic standpoint, in all the various senses of the word—is arguably the single imperative. And, metaphor enables shared understanding by linking the unknown with the already known. This empathetic aspect also affects what we can imagine. As Modell argues,

metaphor not only transfers meaning from different domains, but by means of novel recombinations metaphor can transform meaning and generate new perceptions. Imagination could not exist without this recombinatory metaphoric process. (2003: 27)

In relation to some of the things most important to most humans—feelings and emotions—literal description simply fails to convey the intensities, the degrees and the ineffable

qualities of such experiences. For example, a (1966) Masters and Johnson-type *description*, itemising exhaustively the numerous observable and quantifiable physiological changes accompanying the normal act of sexual arousal, does not evoke the empathetic ‘feel’ of arousal. Whereas, the mere sight of the “nape” of the beloved’s neck may do (Gardiner 2012: 55, 63, 65, 112, 150).

Meaning needs to be learned. Regardless of the arbitrary nature of the symbols (words) that we attach to ideas, those symbols only have an existence as symbols in a social context. Again, following Wittgenstein, language cannot exist in isolation: there cannot be a language for one. Meaning always has a social context. In ‘normal’ childhood and adolescent development, none of this need be problematic, but there is still no assurance (nor can there ever be) that what we learn is accurate. For example, at some point we all need to learn what it ‘feels’ like to be thirsty, compared to what it ‘feels’ like to be hungry, what it ‘feels’ like when we need to go to the toilet, and so on. And, the understanding of the more-subtler gradations of feelings and sensations follow in due course, but in every instance we first need to be *told* what it is we are feeling. Our feelings need to be interpreted by others (problematic), a word (symbol) then needs to be given and attached to correspond with that feeling (problematic), so that next time we have the same or similar feelings we can examine them (problematic) to see how well they correspond (problematic); that is, to ascertain if we know how we feel. If all of this process works (problematic) the most expansive claim that can be made is that, *within this social group at this point in time* when I feel like *x* it means *y* (problematic).

The important thing, though, is that even if the whole process is very inaccurate—which it is—we need to do it as a direct result of the way that biological evolution has accidentally overcome the initial problem of a too-large human brain with an increased sensory input that needed to be managed. The organism cannot function without being able to categorise. “Every living being categorizes” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 17). Our categorisations can be wrong, but that almost becomes irrelevant; overstimulation of a human brain insufficiently able to categorise—the parent of any infant will confirm—only leaves the extreme choices of coma (sleep) or hysteria.

While I have relied extensively on Lakoff and Johnson above, this is not to suggest that I am not also critical of some aspects of their position. I diverge in at least one important area: Lakoff and Johnson have shown that the dichotomy between subject and object is unnecessary, yet their ‘embodiment’ is still an embodiment of an entity called ‘mind’. This notion is challenged in Chapter Four. In the meantime, a few specific remarks on my use of metaphor in *Anaïs* are apt.

The narrator in *Anaïs* seems to intuit, from the outset, the problem of the impossibility of literal description (possibly in relation to feelings), although he may be mis-ascribing the difficulty to cliché:

“The problem is ... contained in a word so well known, but so overused as to have lost all possibility of definition” (Gardiner 2012: 4).

If this is the case, then the narrator may only want to understand what it is that he is feeling (or remembers feeling): the thing called ‘love’. We are told that he is a “writer” (Gardiner 2012: 2). This may mean that to understand—for him at least—he needs to be able to state it in so many words. In this regard he tells us:

“I try to understand my thoughts by writing about them” (Gardiner 2012: 7).

The above statement by the narrator may or may not be correct; or it may be correct, but there might be more to it. An alternate interpretation might be, for example, that quite apart from being a straightforward ‘love story’, the love in the story (for a woman) may be analogous to the (love of the) act of writing, itself; and, the problem of literal description may be transferable to either domain of reference. The reader is informed early on, for example, that in relation to writing:

It’s almost automatic: not causal but correlated, you might say. And I’ve always written and the reasons that I write are as countless as the words I’ve written. I no longer question the reason for writing, I just do it. (Gardiner 2012: 6)

The presumed innocence of the statement may belie an underlying obsession. The question has to be asked whether we can trust this narrator about why he writes:

“Whatever I think the reason might be I could just as easily be wrong” (Gardiner 2012: 6).

This might be interpreted as an early hint that whatever the story appears to be about (an obsession with Anaïs) the real obsession lies elsewhere, or as well as. A little further on, at least one of the reasons for the obsession might be confirmed:

“Notice already how liberating, how powerful writing is; you get a free hand to make whatever bizarre connections you want—great” (Gardiner 2012: 7).

The ideas of ‘writing’ and ‘living’ seem to be conflated in the narrator’s world:

“In an unguarded moment I have become a minor, silent character in one of Charles’ stories, rather than my own” (Gardiner 2012: 25).

And:

“but this time changing the words cannot change the way I feel. I could rewrite the past, flesh out the parts for the characters” (Gardiner 2012: 107).

Before he suggests, at the end of the novella:

“If I can tolerate a blank page, I can rewrite a life” (Gardiner 2012: 151).

From another perspective, the narrator seems to be suggesting that words (writings) have some sort of power, even over the perception of reality:

Do we act differently when others label us differently? Can we place someone in an alternate category, with a new name and all the assumptions that go with it, making it real? What is it that changes, when we change the words that describe? (Gardiner 2012: 14)

Whatever it is that the narrator craves, however, it seems to be elusive:

“I understand nothing” (Gardiner 2012: 16).

The aspect of naming something—of an alteration in perspective (entirely) because of the words used—might be further borne out by the narrator’s interactions with the gecko. By designating the gecko ‘Santayana’, the narrator’s thoughts in contemplating the gecko seem to alter in more ways than can be accounted for by viewing the naming as just taking an anthropomorphic standpoint. The designation, perhaps, refers to George Santayana

(Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, 1863-1952), and the fact that Santayana (the man) was a famous philosopher as well as a novelist may be relevant.

In the second interaction with the gecko (Gardiner 2012: 35), where the narrator talks about and attempts to describe the noise that Santayana (the gecko) makes, he appears to be specifying the problem noted above, the impossibility of literal description. He laments:

“Compared to Santayana, my communication skills embarrass” (Gardiner 2012: 35).

In making this comment, perhaps the narrator is referring to the fact that the noise the gecko makes, although limited, is all that Santayana (the gecko) requires to have certainty of shared understanding in the gecko world. Or perhaps the comment refers to Santayana (the man) and is no more than an acknowledgement of a greater writing (and/or philosophical) talent.

Given the above possibilities, one interpretation of *Anaïs* might be that of using love as a metaphor for writing. If this is the case then the real dénouement of the novella may be:

“Shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell. There, that is why I do what I do, those eight words” (Gardiner 2012: 137-8).

In any case, I will have some extended remarks to make about ‘those eight words’ in Chapter Six.

In the meantime, the following chapter (Four) will address the third question arising as a result of the research topic: ‘What is consciousness, and what is the relationship between consciousness and language?’

Chapter Four

On Thought and Language; the Relationship:

In the introduction (Chapter One) I have mentioned ideas such as ‘subjectivity’ and ‘consciousness’ and those ideas are parts of a totality often found sheltering—for everyday usage and convenience—under the umbrella of the term ‘mental phenomena’. Also under the mental-phenomena umbrella are ideas such as ‘mind’, ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘imagining’, and many more. But I do not want to use the term ‘mental phenomena’: Chapter Three has shown the dichotomy between mental and physical to be problematic, and there is more on this matter, below. Still, for the moment, it suits my purpose to consider all these (possibly disparate) ideas as related enough to be the same, or to be *types* of the same; I would like to consider the terms interchangeable, knowing that the lack of distinction might initially confuse; I am referring to all mental phenomena, without referring to mental phenomena. Grant this concession, and the purpose should become self-evident later in the chapter.

To begin, I note the first of the superscriptions that I have used in *Anaïs* (borrowed from Guy Davenport): “The imagination has a history, as yet unwritten, and it has a geography, as yet only dimly seen” (in Gardiner 2012: 5). In perhaps more than a metaphorical sense, I am interested in the ‘history’ and ‘geography’ of the imagination. And my interest continues, despite the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis arguing that

“from the outset, the question of the imagination has been marked by the embarrassments, aporias, and impossibilities that will always accompany it” (1997: 216).

I have written *Anaïs* entirely in the first-person—a ‘subjective’ narration—so it is a reasonable expectation that I know (or at the least, have an opinion about or an interpretation of) what that entails, beyond mere adherence to grammatical formalities. As an aim for this chapter, I want a better understanding of Magee’s boundedness of subjectivity and Carter’s secret of consciousness and Castoriadis’ embarrassments and impossibilities of the imagination. The narrator in *Anaïs* is similarly absorbed:

“Isn’t it the subject’s Prime Subject?” (Gardiner 2012: 110).

This chapter relies greatly on the work of Derek Melser (2004, 2009) and crucial aspects of Melser's theory are unique. Among other things, Melser argues that *thinking is an action, not a process*; and this is a completely novel proposal. The difference—between action and process—I have already exemplified in this exegesis (p. 161), as in eating versus digestion. The theory proposed by Melser is based on 'concerted activity' between people and includes the idea of 'empathy'; and, for Melser, the act of thinking stems originally from the simple, innate ability and proclivity to imitate. The main implications are that thinking is *voluntary, learned, and (potentially) observable*. For the moment, Melser's 'thinking' can be my umbrella for mental phenomena.

The importance and relevance for my research—and subsequently for any substantive account of writing and reading—becomes apparent when we remember that the “notion of thinking helps us to explain people's behavior” (Melser 2004: 1), and I would add, vice versa. Significant also for my research, Melser locates as problematic (for explications of 'thinking') the entirely-metaphoric notions of 'mind':

the notion of an inner agent [the mind] and/or venue [the brain] of thinking rests on nothing more substantial than figures of speech. The notion arises because we employ metaphors to highlight some aspects of thinking and, for various reasons, we take these metaphors too literally ... [we] allow ourselves to be misled by the metaphors. (2004: 158)

Further, any explanations of 'mind' offered by philosophy or psychology or cognitive science or neuroscience (or indeed, any field) are dependent on, and are, an “uncritical indulgence of the metaphors” (Melser 2004: 164) and/or arise as a result of “becoming too blasé and credulous in our response to the familiar mind metaphors” (Melser 2004: 166).

Following Nietzsche, it is therefore time to express an 'active mode of existence': “the artist expresses an active mode of existence by exposing the metaphorical origins of truths and concepts so that we might develop new concepts on life” (in Spinks 2003: 55).

Importantly, Nietzsche asserts that one of the metaphorical concepts that have been falsely elevated to the status of a literal truth is the idea of a unified 'self' or 'identity'. For example, in the history of western philosophy one of the better known statements is René

Descartes', "I think, therefore I am" (in Magee 1997: 119). While all that Descartes was attempting to do was reduce philosophy to a known certainty, Nietzsche would problematize the 'I think' aspect of the statement. This is so because, for Nietzsche, it is *only* the grammatical structure of language that presupposes that an essential "subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'" ([1886] 1990: 47). But, this is no more than a particular interpretation—an inaccurate interpretation, according to Nietzsche—that retrospectively synthesises various physiological actions into the concepts of subject and object; the custom of grammar produces a non-existent entity, the self. For my purposes, the important point here is that any notion of a 'self' is also accompanied by a notion that the postulated self has a concept called 'mind'.

The ubiquity of metaphor has already been discussed in generalised fashion in the preceding chapter. The misunderstandings that can occur when the metaphorical is taken to be literal have also been noted above. Here, we look in detail at the particular case of 'mind'.

Melser locates his difficulty with the concept of 'mind' and 'self' with people taking metaphorical description and explanation as if they were literal; the 'usual suspect' is therefore again implicated. In attempting to 'grasp' abstract concepts, metaphors are useful and are perhaps the "primary or only means of understanding" (Melser 2004: 176), but metaphors become problematic if they are then used to theorise as if the metaphors were literally true. For Melser, in relation to the notion of 'mind' as an abstract concept, the situation is even more problematic than with other abstract concepts: "Our notion of mind is *entirely* a product of the metaphors" (2004: 181 *emphasis added*). He goes on:

The metaphors accompanying the word *mind* in everyday speech *constitute*, rather than just supplement, any understanding we have of mind. Furthermore, they do not furnish us with a concept, let alone a theory, of mind. They provide only numerous diverse and mostly incommensurable images, collectively undeserving even of the term *notion*. Collating a concept from such ill-assorted imaginings would be impossible. (Melser 2004: 181 *original emphases*)

Melser examines some of the above 'diverse and mostly incommensurable images' to expose the misunderstanding and the origins—the problem existing and evident by the various metaphors attached to the supposed entities (nouns) of mind, belief, desire, concept

and so on. The common assumption, for the lay person as well as for most philosophers, is that there are various ‘mental phenomena’ (inside the head, in some way) and that the different nouns refer to the mental phenomena in a straightforward fashion.

Firstly, Melser asserts that in everyday usage, the noun ‘mind’ *always* appears as part of a metaphor; this is Melser’s “exclusive use” claim (2004: 182). For example, there are such expressions as *it crossed my mind*, *my mind wandered*, *a load off my mind*, *out of sight, out of mind* and so on. Secondly, for every property attributed to the entity, mind, there is a precedent in some other familiar metaphor; this is Melser’s “precedent” claim (2004: 184). For example, the entity ‘mind’ is conceived as a place, usually inside a person’s head (*it stuck in my mind*, or, *in my mind’s eye*, are typical usage). Included in this idea—or logically following from it—are the characteristics of privacy, as well as privileged access (*tell me what’s on your mind*, *what do you have in mind?* And so on). Additionally, the entity ‘mind’ is conceived as having agency, an entity that interprets information gathered by the senses, usually rationally, but sometimes beyond its owner’s control (*his mind wandered*, *her mind must be playing tricks on her*, and so on). And the entity ‘mind’ is conceived as having intentionality; the mental phenomena relate to or are somehow linked to the outside world, explicitly or by implication (*his mind’s grip on reality*, or, *it never entered his head*, for example). Lastly, for Melser’s precedent claim is the idea that the entity ‘mind’ is conceived as being non-physical; the mind is somehow part of the person but separate from the physical body. But the idea of something existing, as a ‘something’, but being *non-physical* is itself a metaphor.

Melser’s third claim, the “no concept” claim (2004: 187), stems from the assertion that all of the everyday usage of mind metaphors does not amount to a theory of the existence of something called mind, as most philosophers, psychologists (even Darwinian Literary theorists borne out of evolutionary psychology), cognitive scientists and so on, assume. If everything that is known about the mind is only as a result of metaphors, “then we know nothing about the mind except a whole lot of *as-ifs* and *so-to-speaks*” (Melser 2004: 187 original emphases).

To round off the ‘no-concept’ claim, the metaphorical ‘themes’ for the entity, mind, are widely varied and “for the most part incompatible” (Melser 2004: 188). As Melser

suggests, “there is no hope of synthesizing anything even remotely concept-like, let alone theory-like, from this raggle-taggle lot” (2004: 188). (I note that although Melser’s ‘no-concept’ claim is contrary to Lakoff and Johnson’s general assertion that *all* metaphor usage is conceptual, the undermining of Lakoff and Johnson on this point is not crucial, since I have used them in Chapter Three merely to show how and why metaphor is ubiquitous.)

The final premise in Melser’s theory of the origin and subsequent problem with the entity, mind, is his “nominalization” claim (2004: 188). That is, that the noun ‘mind’ is really a “special, figurative noun form ... of the verb *to mind* [to think]” (Melser 2004: 189 original emphasis). If this is true then the noun, mind, does not have anything to which it refers; and, ‘mind’ is not the name of anything (real).

In the English language verbs are routinely nominalised—turned into a noun form—often by the addition of a suffix (particularly *-ation* or *-ing*) when there is a word for an action, but not for the practice, for example, *laugh* and *laughing*; it is simply a result of the formal requirements of logical sentence construction, and easier and simpler than inventing a new word. When a word is used in this way (as a noun) but unchanged, a conversion has occurred (for example, *dance*, *fall*, *kiss*, and *fight*). As well as referring to the action, nominalisation can also occur when the reference is to an accessory of the action; for example, from the verb *receive* we get *recipient* and *receipt*. The important difference, though, is that where in the first case the new noun is only for ease of use and does not refer to any actual ‘thing’, accessory nominalisation refers to something real, something that exists quite apart from the original action. In conjunction with metaphor use, Melser believes that accessory nominalisation of the word mind is what has occurred. And, it is only in conjunction with the ever-present metaphors that the nominalised, mind, is taken to be an implied ‘real’ entity. For example:

Cogitating is somehow like holding a discussion inside one’s head, and, since discussions often have venues, an intracranial venue for cogitating is posited. Solving a problem is in some respects reminiscent of successfully plying an instrument or tool, so there must be an instrument being brought to bear in problem-solving. And so on. (Melser 2004: 193)

To all the above considerations of ‘mind’ given by Melser, I would add that for most (sighted) people who receive the largest percentage of their sensory input visually, and since eyes are located in the head—along with, under usual circumstances, ears for hearing and a nose for smelling—the natural tendency will be to assume that the head (via the brain, perhaps) is the place where everything happens. Lakoff and Johnson’s ‘Seeing-Is-Knowing’ metaphor noted in Chapter Three (pp. 179-80) is surely implicated. In addition, I would also suggest that pre-scientific notions of bodily functions (for example, the idea that the heart was somehow the seat of the emotions, some of which thinking endures in metaphoric form: *he has a good heart, he has a broken heart*, and so on) probably included the notion that the head—the container of ‘mind’—was where all the ‘mental phenomena’ took place.

However, even if all the above is granted (if what we take to be the noun, mind, always appears in conjunction with metaphor; if the metaphors used in conjunction with ‘mind’ are all too familiar and if taken literally indicate that the entity exists in a place, has agency and intentionality, yet is somehow non-physical; if the metaphors used are disparate and incommensurable; and, if it is shown that the noun, mind, is no more than a special case of accessory nominalisation, yet no such entity exists in reality) an explanation for what is happening when we think—because we surely do that—is still necessary.

As Melser suggests: “A theory of thinking is required, not a theory of mind” (2004: 216).

The only innate criterion underpinning Melser’s (2004) explication of thought and his (2009) explication of speech is for (new-born) humans to possess an imitative ability at the most basic level. Such a premise is easily supported by the literature; for example, Meltzoff (2005) asserts that it has long been known that “newborns imitate facial acts” from a mean age of “32 hours” (2005: 70). I would add a further biological prerequisite not canvassed by Melser: a brain that is ‘general-purpose’ and ‘malleable’ (as demonstrated in Chapter Two), although in another context Melser does posit “the huge uncommitted cerebral cortex available” and a “roomy brain” (2004: 241). In any case, human infancy develops rapidly.

The infant, at perhaps no earlier than six to eight weeks of age, focuses on the caregiver's facial features. The caregiver smiles and the infant, in rudimentary fashion, imitates the smile. Importantly, there is at this point, *demonstrated awareness*, by the infant, that they "are performing the action in question 'together'" (Melser 2009: 558). Notwithstanding the physical apparatus required—perceptual ability (in particular, visual), basic motor skill (head movement, mouth, lips, facial muscles and so on), and, the ability to recognise and display awareness of successful imitation—the biological innateness that can be termed 'imitation', amounts to an urge or "a naïve desire to 'entrain' with others" (Melser 2009: 560), possibly arising (although not crucial to the argument) as a result of 'mirror neurons' (see Arbib 2002, 2006; Bråten 2007). And, this is the basis of Melser's theory: activity in 'concert'. Concerted social activity is where

"the participants deliberately conform their actions and act in unison, in concert, and are as it were side-by-side in the activity" (Melser 2009: 556).

Also important is the distinction between concerted action and 'cooperative action'; cooperative action being where people undertake different actions toward the same ends, that is, "acting-in-concert but with division of labour" (Melser 2009: 556). It is only concerted activity that we are interested in for the moment. Melser claims that other forms of human action (solo, as well as co-operative) are reducible to acting in concert; they are "derivative" (Melser 2009: 557); action-in-concert developmentally precedes any other form of action. Noted is the fact that the derivative assertion by Melser contradicts most of the philosophical, sociological and psychological literature.

The standard assumption is that individual activity precedes any form of 'joint' activity, as if joint activity is a calculated and rational act undertaken by individuals; that is, where "the rational and self-interested individual ... [is taken to be] the basic social agent" (Melser 2009: 557). In contrast, Melser takes action-in-concert to be primary, and examples to demonstrate the derivative claim will follow later in this chapter; but, other aspects of theory necessary to underpin the claim are required first.

Melser's theory can be seen as a developmental theory, rather than a form of behaviourism or neo-behaviourism. Biology delivers the infant with the innate ability and urge to imitate, then departs; society and a long childhood do the rest.

The education of the infant (some would say, socialisation, or acculturation) thus proceeds developmentally: “demonstration and imitation culminating in concerted performance” (Melser 2004: 64). While there are other reasons or motivations that eventually emerge for concerting activity—“*practical*”, “*recreational*” and “*ritual*” (Melser 2009: 558 original emphases)—the educative aspect remains the most important. And, an important aspect of this ‘educative concerting’ is “reciprocal imitation”, where one party performs watched by the other party, and then the other party imitates, culminating in the mutual awareness and acknowledgement of success; that is, where the joint activity is not simultaneous (Melser 2004: 66). The idea of a ‘delay’ becomes crucial, as will be shown. First, however, there is the matter of the introduction of language (speech) into the concerted activity.

As the caregiver introduces speech (vocal sounds, specific words and so on) into the ‘game’ of concerted activity, the vocal sounds become associated with the particular activity, or a part of the activity. The words can then be used to ‘cue’ the activity in question (although understanding what words ‘mean’ at this early stage is impossible for the infant, it is also unnecessary). As Melser states:

Vocal sounds are convenient and efficient in this attention-directing role because they reliably attract the pupil’s attention while leaving the demonstrator’s hands (and the rest of the body) free for demonstrating the action. Pointing and other manual gestures ... are also effective but they are more likely to disrupt the performance. (2009: 559)

Activities and portions (components of more complex sets) of activities can then have distinctive vocal markers, cues to get ready to perform an action, or the appropriate part of an action (*look! drink! yum yum!*). Additionally, the vocal markers can then also become part of the success-display, the crucial element of joint awareness that the action has been concerted (*good girl!*). Repetition, as well as the regular introduction of novelty (and initially, everything is novel), ensures a quickly-expanding repertoire of actional skills.

Learning to act in concert is a skill, or a set of skills, and for Melser this is also the beginnings of the acquisition of thought, or the ability to think. But before that happens at least one other important feature also begins to occur: truncation or abbreviation of concerted activity or, as Melser terms it, “tokening” (2004: 75). So, in relation to

subsequently inviting participation (soliciting) in a particular joint activity—assuming the necessary skills for the activity have already been mastered—a purely perfunctory ‘mime’ will be sufficient, rather than a full-scale demonstration:

instead of commencing a laborious demonstration of the shared activity, one can often make do with a greatly abbreviated and edited demonstration – a mime consisting of the performance of distinctive and/or representative fragments of it, including gestures, facial expressions, etc. The would-be initiator requires merely to ‘be-token’ the activity. (Melser 2009: 560)

In this regard, one of the most useful ways to ‘token’ will be to use a distinctive vocal marker (speech or other designated sound) that normally accompanies the activity or is representative of it (*Tea, anyone?*). Although to begin with, at least from the perspective of the infant, tokening to initiate an activity will be by gesture, just anything to attract attention to the desired activity: a signal to invite beginning the activity. For example, instead of asking, ‘tea, anyone?’ an appropriate mime indicating bringing an imaginary cup to the lips may suffice as tokening. Speech can therefore be considered both as a type of *gesture*, and as a type of *mime*. In tokening using speech, I note here, as does Melser, that the word ‘token’ is being used as a verb.

My use of *token* as a verb is unusual, but it should not be difficult to get used to. The verb use is anyway salutary, insofar as it helps remind us that it is an action being talked about. (Melser 2004: 76 original emphasis)

In any case, tokening becomes crucial on the journey toward learning to be conscious: it soon becomes expedient to learn to *covertly* token. Whereas overt tokening is visible—it is, from the perspective of the initiator, designed to invite attention and participation—covert tokening is just “where the tokening is done so subtly and quickly as to be unobservable” (Melser 2004: 82). In both cases of tokening (overt and covert) the action can be described as “commencing and abortings” of the activity in question (Melser 2004: 82). A useful example might be the difference between reading out loud and reading silently. To read silently, under Melser’s terminology, would be to covertly token the act of reading out loud, which would also imply an audience and therefore be concerted (or, the covert tokening of concerted) activity. Learning to read silently takes practice, and there will be varying gradations of ‘success’ more or less noticeable by the extent (or lack of) vocalisation and lip movement. In this way, covert tokening is also like a rehearsal,

readying the person for potential action; reading silently is a rehearsal for (potentially being in a context for) reading aloud.

The crucial usefulness of covert tokening (which also applies to the overt form)

“is to *ready* or *prime* the person for a performance of the action being tokened, enabling a quicker and more efficient performance subsequently” (Melser 2004: 85 original emphases).

I would add to this statement the qualification: ‘whether or not the action in question *is* ever performed, or even *can* ever be performed’. But before all this, we need, as infants, to learn how to do it; there are two main ways that we learn how to covertly token.

Firstly, the infant learns to wait. There may be a familiar joint activity between infant and caregiver and (for whatever reason) a delay is introduced into commencing the activity or a part of the activity. The infant might token in an invitational way to commence or to continue the activity—with the gesture or the sound appropriate to *drink*, for example, when the necessary accessory (the drink) is not forthcoming—but the caregiver “refrains from imitating or otherwise confirming these tokenings” (Melser 2004: 88). With delay, the infant’s invitations will tend “to be aborted earlier and earlier, and eventually become covert” (Melser 2004: 88). Confirmation that the activity is being concerted will still be there, by for example, the caregiver’s smile or nod or vocalisation (*drink ... yes, it’s coming ... in a minute ... I just have a thesis to finish*). The caregiver’s confirmation “rewards the less overt, more patient waiting display” (Melser 2004: 88). For example, in the game of *Peek-a-Boo* where an object, or one of the participants, is visible and then hidden:

When the object is invisible, both parties are covertly tokening the imminent perceptual behavior. In colloquial terms, while the object is obscured, mother and infant are nevertheless ‘imagining’ or ‘visualizing’ it. They are readying themselves for seeing it—suddenly and soon. This covert tokening, this excitement-packed ‘non-seeing’ of the object, is shared. (Melser 2004: 89)

The second major way that covert tokening is learned is through ‘make-believe’ or ‘pretend’ games. In the multifarious make-believe games that children universally engage in, valuable practice and experience is gained in rehearsing the covert via the overt: “The

overt cues the covert” (Melser 2004: 91). Melser suggests that, similarly—although parents, parsons and educators might cringe at the thought—“teasing”, “lying” and “tricking” also provide “invaluable assistance in mastering covert tokening” (2004: 91). The objection might arise that a good deal of the (overt) rehearsal in make-believe—the training of one’s dinosaur, perhaps—will not eventuate in a real performance of the activity and so there is nothing (covert or otherwise) to token. But the point is, for Melser, that the rehearsals in make-believe play a vital role in “rehearsing rehearsing”, such as for later conversational interactions (2009: 562).

I now look at how Melser believes that solo action derives from concerted action.

Concerted activity—that has its origins in the infant ‘games’ of reciprocal imitation—sooner or later has to ‘make-do’, because either an accessory to the activity or one of the participants is absent. For example:

“The ‘doing without’ is a matter of continuing with the activity as normally as possible in the absence of a given accessory” (Melser 2004: 97).

The segment of the activity that would normally require the (now absent) accessory—a cricket ball, say—is ‘overtly tokened’; the stroke and the hitting of the ball is mimed. Or, where the absence is the other participant to the activity rather than an accessory, the tokening can be ‘covert’, and the activity can proceed ‘as if’ the other were present. In a sense we can say that this is ‘imagining’ the other participant to be present, but the use of the word (imagining) only highlights the lexical limitations mentioned above—the limitations involved in talking about talking and thinking about thinking, and so on.

At the infant stage, the idea of learning to ‘make-do’ is related to the idea of ‘learning to wait’ and probably begins with the gradual withdrawal (and whether the withdrawal is purposeful or unintentional is of no consequence to the argument) of the caregiver during a concerted activity.

This pattern ... [of unilateral withdrawal] ... could be repeated across a variety of new actions and activities. As a pedagogic strategy, it would eventually streamline ... with appropriate verbal marking ... [and] the child will for some time accompany his subsequent solitary performances of that action with covert

tokenings of (perceivings of) the teacher's original demonstratings and related speech. (Melser 2004: 100)

In relation to the above 'making-do', Melser presupposes the ability to *empathise*, and the notion of empathy requires clarification, since Melser's use of the word is accurate but nevertheless slightly at odds with everyday understandings. Melser explains empathy as "roughly, attending to the other's behavior and covertly tokening it, while refraining from actually joining in" (2004: 100) and, elsewhere, as putting "ourselves in the other's position—that is, we must imagine doing what the other is doing" (2004: 223). What I would stress is that our everyday ideas about the notion of empathy come from the field of psychology and usually have accompanying 'baggage' not helpful for this discussion. That is, the psychological literature invariably includes the idea (explicitly or implicitly) that empathy is an emotional state where someone is "feeling" as if they were the other person (see, for example, the various definitions given by Duan & Hill 1996: 262). While I discuss the notion of 'feelings' later in this chapter, for the moment all that I am suggesting is that Melser is concerned with 'actions' and so to be able to put oneself in another's position is *only* to be able to imagine performing the activity that the other is performing; to empathise is to be an "'interested spectator' or would-be fellow-participant" (Melser 2004: 101). That is, empathy need not have 'emotional' content.

In any case, already shown above is that speech is used as a distinctive marker for an activity or portion of an activity, as well as a verbal cue to invite participation in concerted activity. The invitational aspect of speech is derivative of the marking aspect of speech and both of these "are the developmental precursors of hortation": getting people to do things (Melser 2004: 102).

Hortation is a matter of the speaker's using speech to invitingly token an activity but then refraining from participating in the activity herself. In the meantime, the words have done their work and the hearer is off doing whatever it is, on his own. (Melser 2004: 102)

But the above response to hortation, while a necessary developmental stage, is still not autonomous solitary action. In the further progression away from the origin of acting in concert, for autonomous solitary action to be possible the infant—or more correctly, the

now nascent ‘person’—“must self-instruct, must covertly token instructions of his own devising” (Melser 2004: 106).

“At least two components of concerted performance—the other’s presence and participation, and corresponding hortations and other verbals—are done without and are performed covertly tokened” (Melser 2004: 106).

The above, very generalised, developmental sequence described by Melser is the necessary (and sufficient) suite of learned activities that underpin the act of thinking. Before the notion of thought—or what action(s) we are performing when we think—can be detailed, however, an understanding of ‘perception’ is addressed.

Recalling the distinction I have made, above (p.161), using the example of the difference between eating (as an action) and digestion (as a process), the notion of ‘perception’ has traditionally been viewed as a process; there are things in the world and we perceive, via the sense organs, what those things are; in other words, those things would exist regardless of our perception of them; our perceptions (somehow) make “representations” of those things (see, for example, Milner & Goodale in Carter 2002: 32-35). Melser challenges this view and the claim is that perception (as with thinking) is a *learned activity*, or at the least, “perception is an achievement rather than an activity ... [but] achievements necessarily imply prior active strivings” (2004: 109).

“We have to learn how to perceive the things in the world” (Melser 2004: 111).

I must suppose that under the schema suggested by Melser that perceiving is also culturally and temporally specific. For example, if as an infant I am being shown a tree (that is, the concerted activity of concerted perception by demonstration of what constitutes ‘tree’ is being shown to me) then I must learn whether it is size, shape, tactile qualities, colour, possible uses and so on that we are jointly perceiving. That is, to ‘see’ a tree as firewood is different from seeing a tree as a future boat which is different again from seeing a tree as animal or bird habitat which is different again from seeing a tree as having inherent aesthetic qualities. The pragmatics of learning to perceive, however, are the same as any other learned action, similar to those demonstrated above.

What follows from this is that, in learning to perceive specific things in particular ways—and for the perceptions to be concerted—the demonstrations and the learning can carry similar verbal markers, or cues, as any other form of action, and these markers or verbal cues will be useful for “soliciting repetitions of particular concerted perceivings” (Melser 2004: 110). Further, it is the verbal markers in particular that allow for the perceptions to be concerted; without the verbal markers confirmation of concerted activity (that we were ‘seeing’ the same thing) would be much more problematic: “We would never know *which* perceptual behavior is to be concerted” (Melser 2004: 117 original emphasis).

From a developmental perspective, once concerted perceptual skills—with the attendant verbal markers that allow for the tokening of concerted perception—are sufficiently learned, it becomes possible for the infant to move on to ‘referring’ to things, even in the absence of those things. And the notion of being able to refer in this way is crucial to the argument presented in Chapter Two, in relation to Munz’ ‘three-dimensional language’.

Firstly, the infant requires much experience (of referring) where the thing being referred to is present during the perceptual-learning process, including as a leader as well as a responder to the activity. With such experience granted, wanting to refer to something in the absence of the something:

the speaker tokens the concerting of given perceptual behavior by saying a thing’s name ... Since the referent is absent, the perceptual behavior being tokened cannot be performed. The hearer could nevertheless token the relevant perceptual behavior along with the speaker. However, unless there is any doubt ... reciprocal tokening may as well be covert. So the hearer merely ‘visualizes’ or ‘imagines’ what is being referred to. He covertly tokens the perceptual behavior that would have been performable had the thing being referred to actually been present. (Melser 2004: 125-6)

The above explanation by Melser—admitting that his terminology takes some getting used to—is beginning to sound like actual experience as I understand it. If I use the example of ‘lawnmower’, say, then reference to an activity using a lawnmower (*Michael, you really do need to mow the lawn!*) where the lawnmower and even the lawn in question is not present (within sight, say), still provokes—however fleetingly or however detailed—an ‘imagining’ of some associated activity: filling the lawnmower with petrol, trying to start a cantankerous lawnmower, being hot and sweaty pushing a lawnmower, and so on. And, it

is *always an action* that is ‘envisaged’, or something reducible to an action; even if the image is only of a lawnmower sitting despondently in a garden shed, the activity is one of ‘inspecting’ the lawnmower, in some sense. Further, the envisaged activity is still concerted action, or reducible to concerted activity—as if inspecting the lawnmower *together*. The covert tokenings by both parties will be verified for shared understanding (nods, gestures, speech, sideways glances or whatever). The covert tokenings are rehearsals of perceptual behaviours and the associated referring expressions. A large suite of such skills amounts to

“a knowledge of things in the world” (Melser 2004: 127).

The actions—and the covert tokenings of the actions—have two basic components: a perceptual cue (the noun ‘lawnmower’), and an executive command (the verb ‘mow’). It is arguable that this ability to separate actional components—noun and verb—is what makes us human. It could therefore be argued that the ability to separate actional components is what allows us to go “beyond the information given” (Munz 2004: 143) as discussed in Chapter Two.

A language restricted to single speech acts (tokenings) to elicit actions—on a one-to-one basis, as it were—would conceivably have a finite number of possibilities. In Munz’ terms it would be “two-dimensional” (2004: 38) and the language users would be unable to perform (let alone ‘envisage’) actions not strictly specified and already experienced. On the other hand, the simple distinction between actional components (noun and verb) increases the possibilities exponentially, including possibilities that have never been experienced. That is, individual components of the action would still need to have been experienced; the novelty arises from new combinations of the executive and perceptual components (nouns and verbs) of actions. Such a language (and therefore, way-of-thinking) would be very useful when confronted with not-previously-experienced situations.

In any case, to return for a moment longer to infant development: I have described above the (concerted) covert tokening of perceptual behaviours in the absence of the referent, and the next progression is to be able to ‘go solo’.

One form of solo activity is where the referent ‘thing’ is present but there are no other participants with whom to concert; the perceptual behaviour can be performed but the accompanying speech markers and/or gestures do not have an audience. As an infant in the learning stage, though, the speech markers and gestures usually persist, for a while at least:

It takes children a while to stop talking out loud—to themselves as it were—when they are doing things by themselves ... perceiving alone and silently—while covertly tokening the usual accessories—is more sophisticated than being referred to things by, or referring things to, someone else. (Melser 2004: 132)

It is the previous grounding in concerted perceivings that allow the above activity to occur; we are social beings before we are individual beings. From being able to token perceivings, we learn how to token concerting. And, the final step toward (what can now be described as) consciousness is to be able to ‘do away with’ the presence of the referent as well as the presence of a participant. Such “solo imagining” is a “substitute” for concerted perceptual behaviour (Melser 2004: 133). These ‘silent conversations’, however, are not purpose-less: “Imagining ... is merely a way of readying oneself for concerted perceivings” (Melser 2004: 133).

Again, the above view of Melser’s in relation to consciousness opposes the conventional understandings (where understandings exist, that is). The prevailing opinion classes consciousness as a mysterious internal process—of whatever type—over which the ‘owner’ has little or no control (see Carter 2002: 6); ‘mental phenomena’ are equated with brain processes (as posited, for example, by the field of neuroscience), with the further implication that consciousness is a biological given. The above exposition of Melser’s ideas, on the other hand, firmly situates consciousness (for want of a better word) as the sum of learned actions. We need to learn to covertly token (both perceiving behaviours and concertings) in just the same way that we need to learn to ride a bicycle or to operate a lawnmower. Further:

We customarily think of solo consciousness as something autonomous and sui generis. But I am saying that solo consciousness is in reality an incomplete, solo-ized, diminished version of shared consciousness. Shared consciousness is always *concerted doing* of some kind. (Melser 2004: 135 original emphasis)

At this point, since what are being talked about by Melser are actions, not processes, it is possible to make some categorical remarks. If the above (and what follows in relation to thinking, below) is true, then the (folk as well as academic) notion of ‘mind’, including the notion that ‘consciousness’ and whatever it entails is something that goes on inside the head (an involuntary process), usually with the brain implicated, must be false (If A, then not B).

Actions are what people, and only people, ‘do’. While it is axiomatic that humans need a brain—and a particular type of brain as specified in Chapter Two—when an action is being performed it is not the brain performing the action. When I pedal a bicycle there is no doubt that there must be neural connections ‘firing’, or whatever they metaphorically do, as well as movements of various muscles in the legs and feet and so on, but it is me acting on the brain (and other things at the same time), not the other way around. Under this schema, the sum of consciousness cannot reside in something called ‘mind’ any more than the sum of pedalling a bicycle (or any other action) is in the mind (A, therefore not B).

Given all the above, it is now possible to specify the *action* of ‘thinking’.

While there are differing types and contexts of thinking that will be discussed below, all thinking is a form of covert tokening and the “aim of thinking, and of covert tokening generally, is to ready oneself for action” (Melser 2004: 138). Under normal circumstances it is not necessary during the act of thinking to ‘imagine’ or covertly token all of the constituent elements (the perceptual behaviours, the participants, the gestures or body movements, the associated speech and so on) and so some aspects will be prioritised and some will be perfunctory or entirely absent. In fact, “most of the effort in thinking goes into the covert tokening of the speech component” (Melser 2004: 138).

And again, while thinking is a solitary action the thoughts—the perceptual behaviours being covertly tokened—are about a concerted activity, most often some sort of transaction such as a conversation or a discussion. I might, for example, covertly token a conversation with my supervisor where objections to what I am writing are made, and as a result, I might silently enact fragments of potential future argument and counter-argument: thinking

is rehearsing. But to retreat half a sentence: the idea of thought being (largely) fragmentary is interesting (to me).

In *Anaïs*, the narrator (as an ‘authored author’) has written The Notebook sections of the text some decade or so before the main text (Gardiner 2012: 34). This is fortuitous for the current discussion since The Notebook is written in a fragmentary style, compared to the main text of *Anaïs*, and the differences between the former and the latter are also analogous to my own pre- and post-Melser understandings of the nature of thought. If I were to put myself in the place of the narrator, then I might explain it thus:

At the beginning of the exegetical process I had—purely as a result of my own ‘subjective’ experience—an understanding that much of what constituted thought (for myself, at the least) was fragmented, but I had no idea why this was so. The frequency and constancy of fragmented thought just seemed to be a given; that is, something that came along with being alive that I had only minimal control over. Brophy (2006) has noted the same fragmentation: thoughts may be in fragments rather than complete sentences. And, as a further example, Hofstadter shows that William Carlos Williams’s poetic lineation tends to be “units of thought” (1977: 455). As a writer, it became merely a technical problem associated with particular types of first-person narrative: how to best ‘translate’ or represent such seemingly random material into words on the page. As others have done, I looked firstly at the stream-of-consciousness-type writing as developed by the acknowledged master, James Joyce. A random sample suffices:

of course the woman hides it not to give all the trouble they do yes he came somewhere Im sure by his appetite anyway love its not or hed be off his feed thinking of her so either it was one of those night women if it was down there he was really and the hotel story he made up a pack of lies to hide it planning it Hynes kept me who did I meet ah yes [...] (Joyce [1922] 1986: 608-609)

As is evident from the above snippet, Joyce opted for virtually no punctuation: in fact, apart from word-spacing, there is only a single period (to mark the end of the novel) in Molly Bloom’s soliloquy, which takes up approximately 25,000 words and the entire final chapter of *Ulysses*. I admit I found it tedious to read. The ‘technical’ question (for me) appeared to be one of punctuation: not so much how to translate and transcribe thought, but how to punctuate the written transcription. For me, Joyce was not the answer.

Macris (2002), comparing Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) with Sarraute's *The Planetarium* (1960), draws the distinction that while the former has minimal punctuation, as noted above, and captures the essence of 'monologue', the latter uses fragmented sentences punctuated by ellipses and portrays a "flow of mental activity" more accurately termed "consciousness" (Macris 2002: 76). Perhaps using ellipses would suit my purpose; I wanted the text to be more accessible than Joyce's.

I experimented with the use of ellipses for *The Notebook*, unsuccessfully:

the red-ochred sails ... of a crisp and sturdy little ketch ... distract from the goats' departure ... epistemology and ontology intact ... centred ... within a goat-centred realm ... leaving lonely lingering odours ... (Gardiner 2012: 41, an early rejected version)

The ellipses did not achieve what I wanted. The disjunction that I wanted was there, but there was too much of it. I wanted the ideas to still maintain a (more) obvious connection, whereas the ellipses seemed to better suit ideas that were totally disparate. As with Henry (2006), in his examination of Meredith's disjointed syntax and frequent use of the ellipsis, I came to the same conclusion: that "they represent ... the abandonment of meaning, the supremacy of sensations over reason and ideas" (Henry 2006: 340). I did not want to 'abandon meaning' in *The Notebook*; I wanted to capture the essence of fragmentation of thought but maintain the 'rationality' of ideas. Further, I wanted the punctuation (after Joyce, there *had* to be punctuation) to be rhetorical- or prosodic-based, rather than grammatically-based. Brophy, in relation to poetry, notes that poetry "mostly has the line [rather than sentence] as its breath or unit" (2003: 28); I wanted to achieve the 'line' without lineation. I had firmly sided with Brophy—since large portions of *The Notebook* were beginning to look like a 'prose-poem'—and so I wanted to know:

"How far outside the apparent rules can we stand and still be in the game?" (Brophy 2003: 177).

The deciding factor ended up being Schou's observation that the dwindling nature of rhetorical punctuation has meant that prosodic relations are limited to use of the colon and semi-colon (both problematic for contemporary readers in my view) and that "the rest is left to the full stop and the paragraph break" (Schou 2007: 213).

In the end I opted for the version as seen in *Anaïs*; using periods where others might have used ellipses; creating disjunctions in otherwise (almost) syntactically and semantically-correct sentences; creating lines without lineation, notwithstanding the “risk and unpredictability” in the creative process (Attridge 2004a: 124). For example:

And the red-ochred sails. Of a crisp and sturdy little ketch as it tacks. Distract from the goats' apparent departure. Epistemology and ontology intact. Centred. Within a goat-centred realm. Leaving lonely lingering odours. Asafoetida and ammonia. Armpit and piss. To be conjured anew in the language of literature. Alone. (Gardiner 2012: 41)

In any case, to return thoughts to thought: the most important point (for humans) is that “speech plays the integral role in thinking” (Melser 2004: 142). As has been shown above, we are social creatures before we can learn to become individuals, and, therefore, before we can learn to become individuals capable of thought. The mainly educative (but also the recreational and the make-believe) concerting sessions—of the early learning phase—using speech as distinctive markers become crucial to the later, solitary, covert-tokening sessions.

Speech is also very easy to covertly token [as thought]. The muscular activity required to produce speech is already quite subtle and complex. Subtlety and complexity lend themselves to covert commencing and aborting. (Melser 2004: 143)

The ‘commencing and aborting’ is the prioritisation of thinking; the commencing and aborting is also the fragmentation of thought, a sort of minimal rehearsing. And, the context will create different types or forms of thought.

While the above exemplifies the typical conception of thought—an entirely solitary act (the thinker alone in his garret, contemplating art, perhaps) where all possible referents, accessories and participants are absent, and therefore need to be covertly tokened—at differing times thinking occurs in at least a partially concerted context. For example, one might be in a conversational setting and the thinking becomes a readying for possible contribution; thinking is always abbreviated rehearsals for potential concerting, or other actions reducible to concerting.

Thinking also encompasses the idea of being (when we are being) “self-aware” of what one is doing (Melser 2004: 145). In this instance, for example, I might be writing a thesis and at the same time covertly tokening (thinking about) the next meeting with my supervisor; I may covertly token, perhaps, “the giving or receiving of admonitions, commentary, or explanation concerning ... [my] performance” (Melser 2004: 145).

“This aware mode of action-performance, this covert self-educative tokening while you work, is one variety of consciousness. It is ‘self-awareness’” (Melser 2004: 145).

Similar to the idea of self-awareness where one is thinking about the activity at hand, is the also common scenario of ‘thinking-out-loud’. I have mentioned above that children need to learn to covertly token before being able to not ‘talk’ to themselves—and some of us will continue to do it, occasionally, as adults.

During play and problem-solving, the child learns to rely less and less on instructions from others and on audible self-instruction, and learns instead to covertly token the relevant instructions. (Melser 2004: 146)

Of the many other (metaphorical names given to) forms of thinking—imagining, remembering, intending, hoping, desiring, wishing, believing, contemplating, feeling, pondering, reflecting, cogitating, meditating, anticipating, intuiting, visualising, knowing, musing, empathising, conceiving, and so on, and so on—I will only have something brief to say about ‘feeling’ and ‘remembering’. The important point is Melser’s claim:

“that underlying all the above named varieties [of thinking] is one species of activity: the covert token performance of the speech-assisted educative concerting of some activity” (2004: 147).

In relation to ‘feelings’: feelings can be explained as the thoughts associated with the public display of expressive behaviour. To display the behaviour (grief, love, aggression, and so on) is to ‘emote’, to overtly express emotion, in some demonstrative, often speech-accompanied manner. Whereas, to ‘feel’ is to covertly token the performance of that behaviour; to ready oneself to perform that behaviour or otherwise act in an “as if” fashion (Melser 2004: 147). There may well be cross-overs between the two, where the commencing and abortings of tokening the behaviour (feelings) spill over into overt

manifestations of behaviour (emotions). The narrator in *Anais* has something to say (doesn't he always?) about those who might

“confuse feeling with emotion, the sensory fuel of thought with the mechanics of motor ... the cognitive map may depict a certain terrain, it cannot create it” (Gardiner 2012: 23).

Further, Melser notes that when feeling (covertly tokening the appropriate behaviour), “one would normally also covertly token appropriately sympathetic responses on an audience's part” (2004: 147). I would add to Melser's assessment that, the ‘appropriate’ behaviours and any accompanying speech (words attached to feelings to indicate meaning) need to be learned in a Wittgensteinian-type speech community as discussed in Chapter Two. In part the ‘speech community’ aspect also accounts for Melser's comment on audience response; the action of thought (in this case, feelings) is, at bottom, concerted action; without the prior learning *and* the audience, there is arguably no possibility of emotive displays.

In relation to ‘remembering’: according to Melser, when someone is remembering they are covertly tokening “a description (and possibly a demonstration or other re-enactment) of an action done in the past” (2004: 147). But even in the idea of ‘describing’ something, there is the element of concerting attached; to describe something is similar in many ways to inviting someone to come with you, and look at the thing, together. Melser also explains describing as “serial referring” that involves the speaker in a “sustained and complex course of perceivings” (2009: 564), dependant, one supposes, on the detail of the particular description (I follow up this idea in the next chapter, Five). And, again, the speech-mediated markers that accompanied the original overt activity are important in the covert tokening (remembering) of the activity. Beyond Melser's comment, I would speculate that learning to covertly token, including the appropriate language as markers, is a pre-requisite to being able to remember; this may well be the reason (or part of the reason) why the earliest childhood memories available to most of us as adults, are only to be found after the basics of those essential skills have been mastered—somewhere between two and three years of age. In a similar vein, it is also arguable (but not argued here) that what is known as consciousness or ‘personhood’ is not possible prior to the same learned set of skills.

In relation to remembering and the importance of the ‘word as marker’, I leave the last word to the narrator of *Anaïs*:

And the funny thing is, what I remember most clearly from that moment in time is a word: scudding. We were outside the café on *Münzstraße* waiting for the taxi. It was bitterly cold, and that’s what the wind was doing, scudding along the street. I knew the word already, but what struck me was that that was the first time I had an image of what the word truly meant. The action of the freezing wind and the word coincided, precisely: scudding. (Gardiner 2012: 149)

But there are still some concluding remarks that can be made about the idea of thinking generally.

If Melser’s account of thinking as an activity—and my understanding of Melser’s account of thinking as an activity—is accurate (or not grossly inaccurate), then the idea that thinking is a learned and voluntary action has (for me) at least one interesting implication. If thinking is a learned skill or set of skills then it follows that there will be wide variations in levels of proficiency, just as there is with any other learned skill; some people will have learned to be better at it than others. For example, the type of ‘deep’ thinking involved in working through a difficult or abstract problem will merely be a case of less-minimal, less-abbreviated, less-fragmented, covert tokening; all the ‘steps’ or alternate steps in the activity will be tokened. Further than this, the implication is that one’s thinking ability could (potentially) be taught to be ‘better’. And it seems to me that if this is the case then ‘creativity’ is also (potentially) teachable; whatever creativity is, it requires thinking in a certain ‘way’, or at a certain ‘level’ (see Chapter Six).

In creative writing there is a widely-held belief that “we can teach *revision* but we can’t teach *vision*” (Tomlinson 2006: 34 emphasis added). In potential, at least, this need not be the case.

The following chapter (Five) synthesises and extrapolates from all the above to put forward a theory of writing and reading.

Chapter Five

A Provocative Theory of Writing:

In this chapter I collect some of the themes and ideas that have been presented in the previous three chapters—in particular, I extrapolate from Melser’s claims in Chapter Four—to develop a general theory of writing, and consequently, reading. Any remarks that I have pertaining to *creative* writing, I defer till the next chapter, Six. While the theory below may be useful in further understanding the actions of writing and reading, it will not enhance textual analysis or interpretation. The theory to be proposed is a *general* theory of writing and reading, perhaps applicable to all text, not a literary theory. And, as noted in the introduction (Chapter One), the theory can be thought of as a candle in an already-lighted room, rather than a lighthouse beaming into the void.

My theory of writing and reading can be said to be one of provocation and evocation. In essence, the theory may be stated: writing provokes (the tokening of) a concerted activity and reading evokes (the tokening of) a concerted activity. I use the terms provocation and evocation because the etymological roots of those words relate to the voice: to the speech-as-marker being the most important aspect of concerted activity.

On writing:

In relation to writing I make three claims and will give some brief indications of the way that the claims might be justifiable. I will argue: that writing is symbolic (of symbolic) speech; that writing is a social activity, rather than a solitary undertaking; and, that writing is (symbolic) provocation (to act in concert or to token concerted activity).

It has been shown above that speech becomes the primary method for soliciting some form of activity: getting someone to ‘do’ something. And, the primary activity is concerted action. Other forms of soliciting—facial expressions, gestures, mime, non-speech vocal sounds, tone-of-voice, and so on—are all part of the early-learning repertoire (and predate the origin of language itself, and all remain very useful), but speech becomes dominant as the preferred activity-soliciting method; speech works best. In conjunction with Munz’

three-dimensional language able to go beyond the information given, speech is the soliciting method of choice. As Melser states:

“speech is very convenient for this purpose. Vocal/verbal sounds, different ‘words’, are easy to discriminate, remember and reproduce ... and they broadcast and attract attention well” (2009: 560).

As a result of this it has been stated above (Chapter Four) that speech is a form of mime or gesture (p. 198), as well as being symbolic. Words are symbols; and because symbols are metaphoric, arbitrary and need to be learned, so do words (see p. 177).

All the above I take to be reasonably familiar, but what is often overlooked is that it is not the speech (as such) that is doing the soliciting. Only people can ‘do’ things; the soliciting is always being done by the person, albeit via their use of speech. (If there remains any doubt that all speech is reducible to ‘soliciting’, then the point may become clearer in the expositions, below.)

Artefacts that could re-present speech were at some point (in the distant past) found to be useful; such artefacts are second-order representations in symbolic form of speech. Melser would call such things “objects” and “graphics” (2009: 566). Early forms would be such artefacts as smoke signals or marks cut into trees or marks otherwise made on something that could be ‘carried’. In the case of smoke signals, the advantage over first-order speech (in soliciting action) is in being able to have the message ‘heard’ over a greater distance than normal speech range, and in the case of marks on trees (to mark directions, for instance), the advantage over first-order speech is durability of the message as well as the availability of the message to ‘hearers’ in the absence of the original ‘speaker’.

Writing—in all its historical and contemporary styles, genres and contexts—is an artefact as described above. Writing is a second-order symbolic representation of speech, and speech is a first-order symbolic representation of action. And, whether done by quill or crayon or pen or computer, writing is an action; writing is something that people ‘do’. In addition, there are many cases of a third-order of symbolic representation, such as translations from one language to another (including mathematical and chemical equations, and from digital forms), Morse code (or any code), semaphore, and so on. And, I take the

above to be reasonable justification for my first claim, that writing is symbolic (of symbolic) speech.

My second claim—that writing is also a social action—is more problematic. My reservation is the same as with any inductive logic: regardless of the number of cases that verify the claim, only a single non-conforming case is needed to negate the claim. Nevertheless, I will argue that writing is not solitary or for solitary purposes; writing has an intended (or implied) audience. For example, the artist may be alone in his poverty-stricken garret, but he has a future reader in mind. While these statements seem obvious for such writing as texts intended for publication (books and billboards, say), the objection will arise that surely *some* writing is personal, rather than social. Since I cannot exhaust all possible examples that might counter my claim, I will look briefly at two of the most likely candidates—a shopping list and a personal diary—and give some indications why I believe that these types of writing are still social, rather than solitary.

Using the idea of a ‘shopping list’ as example: such a list is usually generated as an (interim or temporary) *aide de mémoire*: there is an expectation that, in the later context of shopping, one might miss an essential item (on the list) or be tempted by non-essential items (not on the list). Assuming that the list is not intended to be given to some other agent to shop on our behalf, or to give to a shop assistant to fulfil an order for us, it certainly seems personal, rather than social: conceivably, no one else will ever see the list.

I argue, however, that there is an intuitive understanding of Nietzsche’s discontinuity of the folk notion of ‘self’ (see pp. 191-2): the person that I am now (writing the list) is not the same person that will be in the shop (reading the list). To continue to exist is to experience an ever-expanding number of events that affect us (change us) and forgetting is one of the things we do well. As list-writer, my intended audience is (literally) my future self. In the future context of the shop, I will need to covertly token (‘remember’) the context of the original writing as well as other relevant aspects of my previous self—depending on whether the future reading raises doubts or confirms expectations. The narrator in *Anais* has a personal appreciation:

“Besides—and I know this might sound strange—I need to reacquaint myself with the author of the Notebook. I really can't remember what he was like” (Gardiner 2012: 34-5).

In the case of writings such as a personal diary I will argue along similar lines—as *aide de mémoire* of a previous self—and also for an additional possible reason, also related to the discontinuity of self. In the case of a future re-reading by the author of a personal diary, there can exist the desire to (or even the unexpected inability not to) covertly token (‘remember’) the experience (or experiences) symbolised by the diary’s words, *as if they were being experienced for the first time*, by that previous self. Derek Attridge has hinted at this phenomenon in an aside to a discussion of a Shakespearean text:

“(If I wanted to complicate the reading further, I could discuss the interplay between knowing what lies ahead and performing a certain ignorance of it.)” (Attridge 2004b: 30).

Arguably, this is what we are doing whenever we re-visit any beloved text of any type, regardless of how many times we have read it before.

Further, personal diaries kept can be a part of ‘make-believe’ concerted action as discussed in Chapter Four. In this instance, the object (diary) is anthropomorphised as a special friend and confidant (*Dear Diary, don't tell anyone this, but ...*). Or if not make-believe then there may be a more serious tone (*Dear God, I confess that ...*). All the above reasoning is indicative of my claim that writing is a social action, rather than for solitary purposes; the existence of a potential reader is implicit.

A final point in relation to the social nature of writing is that, if true, it is a refutation of Derrida’s (following Barthes) oft-quoted ‘death-of-the-author’ as well as the “intransitivity” of text (ubiquitous, but see for example, Evans 2000: 11). The social nature of writing very firmly reinstates authorial intention, should it have ever actually been in doubt. Writing is transitive, and the doing is done by an author for a purpose. And, as will become apparent (Chapter Six), authorial intention can be a “key to reading” (Brophy 2003: 178). Although the point may be moot if we allow that Derrida’s concern is for ‘interpretation of’ the activity, rather than ‘participation in’ the activity.

Grant that writing is social, then the next contention is that writing (as symbolic representation of symbolic speech) is undertaken to provoke activity, and, regardless of what the activity is, the activity is reducible to concerted activity; writing is *provocation* to participate in concerted action. (For simplicity, I generally treat actions here as if they are ‘single’ actions, when in fact most will be composite ‘doings’ comprising many component or individual actions.) Again, I give just a few indicative examples here, and I return first to the original notion of an artefact, above.

In relation to marks cut into trees to show direction, such prototype artefacts (‘objects and graphics’ for Melser) are second-order representations of speech. At the simplest level of analysis the marks are soliciting the action, *Go this way*, and by implication, *Don’t go some other way*. The claim, however, is that the simple (and accurate) interpretation is ‘shorthand’ (essentialised and abbreviated) for the longer concerted-action message that we have all learned and understand. The message might be stated: *If you follow me you will not get lost*, or, *I have been here before so just follow me*, or, *Watch where I am going and follow me*. The concerted activity is one of a ‘joint-perceiving’ kind (one of the most common types) where the ‘hearer’ has to covertly token the presence of the ‘speaker’. In line with my claim (but in relation to displaying objects), Melser gives examples including a ‘stop’ sign on a roadway:

the displaying of the Stop sign solicits from the motorist a minimal rehearsal of ‘seeing an appropriate authority figure telling him to stop’. Or perhaps, it evokes simply ‘his being told to stop’. (2009: 566)

I would go further and suggest—from a reduction-to-concerted-activity perspective—that the speech being represented is more like, *Stop here next to me*, or, *Watch me and stop where I have stopped*. Of equal interest is the fact that it is the original ‘writer’ (when writing or ‘constructing’ an artefact) who needs to covertly token (‘imagine’) the future joint perceptual behaviour (between motorist and stop-sign-as-stand-in-for-speaker); it is always the writer who speaks to (provokes participation in concerted activity with) the reader, not the text (or street-sign) that literally ‘does’ anything.

I now move to the example of description or narrative. As with most text, descriptions are provocations to participate in joint-perceivings, as a concerted activity. Regardless of the

text—travel writing, letter writing, recipe books, instruction manuals (or any instructive document), academic texts (including doctoral theses), advertising, poetry, fiction, and so on—the speech that the text is a second-order representation of is of the type, *Come here to where I am and you will see what I am seeing*, or, *Come and do this with me*. The concerted activities being provoked are investigative-type activities: touching, looking, inspecting, assessing, listening, smelling, evaluating, demonstrating and being shown demonstrations, measuring, feeling, and so on. Tom Robbins writes:

trekking toward jebel al Qaz-az in a late spring rain, the nomads were soaked and nearly giddy. Behind them, at lower elevations, the grass was already yellowing and withering, fodder not for flocks, but for wildfires; ahead, the mountain passes conceivably could still be obstructed by snow. Whatever anxieties the band maintained, however, were washed away by the downpour. In country such as this, hope's other name was moisture. (2000: 6)

As with any good description there is logic based on the concerted activity of joint perceivings: linear in time or movement or both or, in this case, behind and in front of the observer. *If you were here with us (the nomads) and looked behind you (where we have come from) you would see (as we do) and perceive it as we do (changing seasons) ...*

Examples from mathematical equations or scientific language might seem more problematic for the theory. Surely such languages are entirely literal, objective, detached from personal experience (of concerted activities) and so on? Despite this, I will argue that texts written in mathematical or scientific languages still conform to my account of what writing is: the provocation of concerted activity.

Mathematics is a further language for us all, and each of us has learned (to a greater or lesser degree) 'words' of that language. At the most basic level we all learn some numerals, and some 'actions' that can be performed with them—addition, subtraction and so on. When we are learning the symbols of mathematics (1, 2, 3, 4 ...+, -, = ...) we first need to 'translate' them back to our first language (one, two, three, four ... plus, minus, equals ...). The symbols of mathematical language are third-order representations and need to be translated to text, then to speech (in practice most of us learn to do this as if it is one operation rather than two). To do the action without speaking is to covertly token the action—again, something that we learn to do through practice. While there is little dispute

that what is being done (for example, when we do $2 + 2 = 4$) is an action, I argue that the action in question is concerted action where the speech component has been abbreviated. That is, just as the stop-sign-as-pseudo-speaker, above, is saying more than simply, ‘stop’, the writer of *two plus two equals four* is really saying something like, *if you watch me I will demonstrate that if we take two things and then another two things we will then have four things*. In fact, this is how most arithmetic is taught at Primary-school level—using a ‘longhand’ version of what is actually being done in concert—and it is only with practice and proficiency in the (otherwise concerted) activity that the learner is able to covertly token the participants and/or the accessories to the original prototype; that is, to do it by themselves or ‘in their head’.

Finally, in relation to ‘scientific’ language, the statement of scientific ‘laws’ would seem to be the most problematic for my theory. In such cases, the language is, as it were, ‘stripped-bare’: literal, precise and concise. Consider Newton’s third law of motion: ‘For every action there is an equal but opposite reaction’ (also sometimes written in third-order-representational mathematical language as $F_{ab} = -F_{ba}$), although any example would suffice. My argument will be that, as usual, it is what is left unsaid that makes the statement meaningful (for people). In writing—as in a statement of a scientific law—the writer is provoking the concerted activity of coming and seeing (testing, potentially falsifying, utilising, understanding, and so on) for oneself: *If you follow (watch, listen, take note of) me I will demonstrate experiments that we can do to show that X is the case, or, if you show me a force I will show you that there is an equal and opposite force*, or some such. The original imperative context is hidden, but remains essential. That is, devoid of the context of concerted activity (articulation of) the scientific law has no meaning or purpose.

Having elaborated a version of what writing is using the notion of the provocation of concerted activity, the articulation is much more straightforward in doing the same thing for the converse: reading as evocation.

On reading:

As with writing, above, in relation to reading I make three claims and will give some brief indications of the way that the claims might be justifiable. I will argue: that reading is the conversion of symbolic text into (symbolic) speech; that reading is a social activity; and, that reading is an evocation (to act in concert or to covertly token concerted activity).

I need not dwell on the first contention: reading as the conversion of text to speech. The symbolism and the orders-of-representation, and the primacy of speech as the marker for actions, have been covered, above. What can be added is the obvious observation that the conversion of text to speech can be overt (read aloud) or covert (read silently), or a mixture of the two. Such a mixture might involve some vocalisation, as well as some facial movements where the covert crosses over to overt, most often seen with children still learning to read silently, or in some cases of ‘thinking out loud’. Nor will I dwell on the given fact that reading is itself an action, of the person doing the reading.

As with the above argument in relation to writing, the second claim for reading is more problematic: that reading is also a social action. Nevertheless, I will argue that reading is not solitary or for solitary purposes; reading has a specific or a generic author by whom the reader is being provoked to interact with. For example, the reader may be completely alone and distant from any other person, but there is always a provoking author metaphorically in mind (being covertly tokened), whether this is known, or acknowledged, or not. While these statements seem obvious for readings such as letters from loved ones, or other authors well-known to the reader, the objection might arise that surely some readings are personal rather than social, that there is no author provoking the reader to interact, let alone to act in concert with. Despite these potential difficulties, I will argue that reading is social.

As a general case, my argument for the social nature of reading will be of the type: ‘as if the author were here to demonstrate the joint perceiving for and with me’. (In any actual reading, the reader may be pleasantly surprised, or bitterly disappointed, but it is the expectation of provocation that is central to the idea, not the result.) For example, if my reading is of a particular, known-to-me author (Stephen King, say), then my expectation will be to be provoked in a Stephen King-as-author type manner, perhaps with supernatural-type occurrences in the text. If I am reading a cookery book then my

expectation is to be provoked by an author who knows something about cooking. If my reading is of an instruction sheet to put together a do-it-yourself product that I have purchased, then my implied author is an author of the capable-of-writing-a-coherent-instruction-sheet type (should such an author exist!). If I am a tutor and my reading is an undergraduate essay, then my expectation is to be provoked in an undergraduate-as-essay-writer way. That is, all these examples show that in reading I am waiting—ready, willing and able, if you like—to be provoked by the (or an) appropriate author; reading is profoundly social, rather than private.

As with the previous argument for the social nature of writing, the social nature of reading firmly locates authorship as public. For some, this idea might imply a reversion to ‘pre-modern’ notions:

“What distinguishes premodern conceptions of authorship is their assumption that discourse is primarily an affair of public rather than private consciousness” (Burke in Krauth 2006: 187).

Whether pre-modern or not, the theory advanced here is one where all authors require a reader and where all readers require an author; should ‘authority’ be a precondition, under this schema authority is vested in both writer and reader.

If we grant that all reading is social, then the final contention is that reading (as conversion of symbolic representations back to symbolic speech) evokes activity, and, regardless of what the activity is, the activity is reducible to concerted activity; reading is an *evocation* (by the reader) to participate in concerted action. Here we are on slightly firmer ground, as Melser has had something to say. In relation to what I have termed ‘artefacts’, above, Melser’s

“contention is that communicative object-displaying evokes acts of speaking (sometimes embedded in other forms of demonstrating) which in turn evoke activities to imagine engaging in” (2009: 567).

As before, I will go further than Melser and claim that all the ‘evoked activities’ are reducible to concerted activities; the evocation (by the reader) is to act in concert or to covertly token concerted activity. And, it must be the reader—and only the reader—who can do the evoking because any evocation will depend on the reader’s (I have borrowed the

phrase from human geography) “situated availability” (Rose 1999: 184) to be provoked: experience, understandings, knowledge, thinking abilities, inclinations, current context, and so on.

In what could be termed an ‘ideal’ reading, the joint-perceivings evoked by the reader will correspond precisely with the joint-perceivings provoked by the writer. The narrator in *Anaïs* calls such an ideal, shared understanding:

The contention here is that the words used, even the literal meanings of the words used, are irrelevant; what we need to strive for—the only important thing—is shared understanding. (Gardiner 2012: 38)

But it would need to be more than just what *we* wanted; there would have to be shared understanding. If we could only find the right words, words that were precise and unambiguous, we would be, quite literally, unstoppable. (Gardiner 2012: 39 original emphasis)

And in relation to Santayana, the gecko:

Would Santayana’s descriptive passages around his latest gustatory success be waited for by other, like-minded geckos throughout the known gecko world, and would they, as the unfolding drama was read out loud to an expectant reptilian fan club, evoke the shared understanding of dining on moth? I wonder. (Gardiner 2012: 50)

In any case, assuming that ‘shared understanding’ denotes a ‘successful’ reading, I still need to indicate how the evocation by the reader relates to concerted activity.

Roughly, the contention in relation to the reader’s evocation is a mirror image of the contention in relation to the writer’s provocation. Whereas in writing the essentialised or abbreviated component of the imperative (the, *if you come, I will show ...* for example) remains only by implication, in reading the (missing, but) implied component is the, *I am there, and I can see ...*

In such a reading situation I would, for example, be able to effortlessly assemble a do-it-yourself product because the instruction-sheet author’s (provoked) perceivings of what part number 4b looked like and where it went would match my own (evoked) perceivings. The joint perceivings amount to concerted activity, albeit tokened by both the writer and reader

in the absence of physical proximity. And, I would argue, this educative example (where I actually want to engage in the further activity of assembling the product) is not different from a reading in fiction where I only want to covertly token ('imagine') engaging in some activity. For example, the joint perceivings that I evoke in reading Robbins' account of the nomads, above, means that I 'see' the changing season as if the author and I (as a shared experience) see the same thing in the same way: (covertly tokened) concerted activity.

As with Melser in relation to thought and speech, in the above theory I have emphasised the imperative and educative aspects of writing and reading. This imperative—or implicitly didactic—emphasis in the theory is similar to the distinction in creative writing between the ideas of 'showing' and 'telling'. That is, my theory may be seen as telling, rather than showing, and I would hasten to forestall such an objection, should it be seen as an objection, or should it be seen as undesirable.

There is no doubt that in the above theory, writing-as-provocation implies the imperative. For this reason I have chosen to 'balance' the events of writing and reading using the notion of the reader's evocation. In some discussions, for example, the word 'evoke' or 'evokes' is used to suggest that this is what the text somehow 'does', or sometimes it is the writer through the text, that does the evoking. For example,

“... the anguish and uncertainty *evoked* by Roland Barthes when he writes, of himself, as if he were ...” (Bennett & Royle 2004: 91 emphasis added).

My theory has the reader, and only the reader, as being in a position to evoke. In any case, I have suggested this 'balancing-act' of provocation and reciprocal evocation because concerted activity necessarily requires *participation*.

The root meaning of to participate is to share (as in the derivatives to 'partake' and to 'give-and-take'). Sharing is not just giving what you have; sharing is also a reciprocal taking. In the context of what I am calling the concerted activities of writing and reading, the activity does not occur without the participation of both parties, and by definition concerted activity (in the above theory) cannot occur without the participation or shared involvement of both writer and reader. That is, regardless of the implied imperative (in provocation) the reader's role (in evocation) is equally necessary and important.

If the provocation of writing, as in the above theory, really was an undesirable case of ‘telling-not-showing’, then it could more appropriately be termed ‘invocation’, where the reader’s role—if any—would be greatly diminished and devalued. However, since I do not subscribe to ‘invoking’ having any role to play (outside of magic and religious ritual), this is why I have stressed the importance of the reader’s participatory role in evoking the concerted activity. But the imperative of provocation is still equally important. I would argue: we all want to learn, but we also want to share in that learning activity.

Nevertheless, even in concerted activity one party has to be the instigator (be *pro*-active) and in writing and reading the (pro) role is always with the writer. I would argue, as a result, that to participate (in concerted activity) is, therefore, to be shown, not told.

In concluding this chapter that has articulated a theory of writing and reading, I am reminded what Taylor has to say about theories in general:

theories can serve to increase writer’s [sic] awareness of their tools (language), and their consequences within and for the social and psychological situations within which they exist. For this to take place, theories (or Theory) must be seen as descriptions of actuality, not programs for action. (2006: 231-2)

And so, the above theory of writing and reading is a ‘description of actuality’ as I understand it at this time, as a result of engaging in the research process. It is not a ‘program for action’ that might illuminate other texts.

This chapter has referred to writing and reading generalisable to any text. The following chapter, Six, looks specifically at creative writing, albeit in limited fashion. Chapter Six reflects on the creative process, using as a point of departure a close reading of ‘those eight words’ from *Anais* mentioned in Chapter Three.

Chapter Six

On Creative Writing and those eight words: ‘shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell’

This chapter is a critical reflection upon some aspects of the creative experience of writing *Anaïs*. In relation to *Anaïs*, I have selected for brief (creative) analysis ‘those eight words’ referred to by the narrator and foreshadowed in this exegesis (Chapter Three): ‘shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell’. The analysis, though concentrating on a finished product, may be a useful insight into some of the thought processes that are at work—consciously or unconsciously—from the initial conception of an idea or image that the writing strives for, through to the satisfactory articulation of that idea or image. To place the words back in their context:

There is a story that I may one day write and there is a scene in that story that I may one day use. Nothing is certain. The story is about someone dying and in the final weeks and days of life they are cared for by a friend, someone close. The illness has caused them to lose considerable weight and the scene I have in mind occurs when the carer has to lift and move the dying person from wheelchair to bed. The eight words belong in the carer’s thought process. He is ‘*shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell.*’ Shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell. There, that is why I do what I do, those eight words. They may never be used; the story may never be written; it doesn’t matter. (Gardiner 2012: 137-8 original emphases)

As it happens, the short story—including the eight words in question—referred to by the narrator has been written (by me, not by the narrator) and it has been published during the course of the research process (see Appendix One). The story is an ancillary part of this research and, among other things, is a further experimentation in the re-presentation of fragmented thought as has been discussed in Chapter Four (see pp. 207-8). To place the words in their published context:

Most times, he falls asleep. Often, even during conversation.
When I wheel him to his room. Lift him, and put him to bed. I am *shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell.*
I inhabit Time’s other space – beyond tears. (Gardiner 2011: 49 emphases added)

At the beginning of the writing process, to provoke the above image I had only a simple idea in phrase form ‘in mind’ (disturbed by how thin he had become, perhaps), and the

above is the finished product. Following the discussion at Chapter Five, I consider the foregoing highlighted eight words to be a provocation (by the writer) with the intention—assuming success—of specific reciprocal evocations (by the reader), notwithstanding that additional unintended or unimagined provocations and evocations might always be possible. In examining the above text, I need not re-cover the implied imperatives (essentialised and abbreviated) applicable to all text (see Chapter Five), but will concentrate on the potential provocations due to metaphor as well as some of the other usual literary devices.

The selected text begins with a metaphor very familiar—almost over-used and cliché, perhaps—to contemporary readers: I am ‘shattered’. Contemporary readers will be accustomed to usage where ‘shattered’ implies ‘broken’ in some way (*broken-heart, broken-spirit, shattered dreams, shattered his illusions*, and so on; but terms that are themselves metaphoric). The (literal) fragmentation of shattering is non-recoverable. The word ‘shattered’ also has a certain onomatopoeic quality, perhaps best suggested by the idea of breakage, as above, combining with something like glass as the thing being broken. And this carries the further implication that the thing being shattered (in the case of our text, the ‘I’) is, or was, in some sense, already a fragile thing. In any case, we have the beginning ideas of fragility and fragmentation, but there is nothing ‘unexpected’ at this point.

But the reading tendency is to scan and search for the ‘object’ of the sentence; we have the subject and verb but we want (or need) the sentence to make grammatical sense before semantics come into play. When we remove the ‘unnecessary’ words shielding the object—most likely after scanning back and forth once or twice—we find, or we realise, and try and comprehend:

... shattered ... by ... lightness ...

And, I would argue, this finding (of lightness as object) challenges the reading expectations. The ‘old’ metaphor of shatter is given the ‘new’ enigma of light. There is a disruption that disturbs. In what ways can ‘lightness’ shatter? Certainly, lightness cannot shatter (be responsible for shattering) anything in a literal sense.

The simple (root) word ‘light’ is itself ambiguous and metaphorical; in different contexts the word light can refer to shades of colour (*light-skinned*), or to ambient light (*sunlight*, *fluorescent*, *incandescent*), or to weight or the lack of it (*lightweight*). Even when we (fairly quickly) realise that it is lack of weight—probably and initially—being referred to (and there have been earlier textual references, not mentioned here, to assist this particular interpretation), the paradox still remains: how can *light-weight-ness* shatter?

Italo Calvino upholds the value of ‘lightness’ in a text, whether implicit or explicit, and one of the reasons he gives is when “a visual image of lightness ... acquires emblematic value” (Calvino [1988] 1993: 17). The question then arises: do we have a ‘visual image’ with the text under examination, apart from the primary image of the person being lifted?

When the type of lightness is further defined by the preceding ‘bird-like’, then we have an image (or secondary image), something that can refer and be referred to. Birds are light (weight); they need to be to fly; only things that are lightweight can overcome the ‘heaviness’ of gravity without assisted propulsion. As readers we might then recall that to metaphorically save weight, birds are hollow-boned, and the idea of bones might lead us back to a version of the primary image (*skin and bones*, perhaps). This idea might then lead to an alternate usage of the word ‘light’; the literal skin (of the metaphorical skin and bones) of an emaciated person might allow light to pass through: translucent almost.

If, by this time—and in real time it can all be very fast—we are ready to again take in the phrase in its entirety, then the word ‘shell’ comes into play and requires resolution. What sort of shell is being asked to refer? The metaphor, in reading, evokes further metaphors. Shotguns and canons certainly have shells, and those could shatter; and then there are sea-shells; but birds are already part of the image (*bird-like*) and birds lay eggs and eggs have shells. An eggshell would be easy to shatter, particularly if it was an empty shell; and shell can sometimes suggest emptiness; but it is not the shell being shattered, it is somehow the other way around: the shell is part of the lightness and it is the lightness of the shell doing the shattering—in fact, the bird-like lightness of the shell.

I will suggest at this point that the ‘the bird-like lightness of the shell’ conforms to another of Calvino’s observations in relation to the textual value of lightness: “there is a lightening

of language whereby meaning is conveyed through a verbal texture that seems weightless” ([1988] 1993: 16). Or, put another way: ‘the bird-like lightness of the shell’, in referring to lightness, also exhibits its own linguistic lightness. The text could be said to ‘float’.

To return to the full phrase: shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell. In the search for resolution (meaning), there is somehow a lightness that can at the same time shatter something already fragile: fragility fragmented by fragility. The lightness has airy, bird-like qualities, as if it might rise into the air of its own volition, or perhaps because of the fragmentation, as when a soul departs the physical body, within some understandings. The emptiness, if the shell be an empty shell (the shell of a former self, perhaps?), might be so explained as being empty because the contents have risen, or floated away: fragmented (from the body?). And, there is an emotional tone to the phrase: Sadness? Helplessness? Resignation? This emotional tone—helplessness or resignation, should it exist—might be further borne out by the passive construction of the sentence containing the phrase; nothing can be done; no action is possible (to recover from fragmentation), so even language itself is forced to be passive.

Beyond the metaphoric as discussed, I might then call attention to the structure (form) of the phrase. There is a balance, balanced between the (metaphoric) bookends of the ‘sh’-sounds of the sh-attered and sh-ell, and centred on the ‘l’-sounds within ‘bird-like lightness’. There is something poetic happening that has its own rhythm, metre, and this contributes in a different way to the overall thought evoked in reading: yes, sadness, perhaps. And the evocation arises partly because of the stress and timing of the phrase. To claim for language prosodic qualities (when it is not overtly a poetic context) is something difficult to articulate, yet prosody in prose can certainly affect the reading; Jarvis suggests that prosody has an “elusive yet undeniable cognitive character” (2004: 57); prosody somehow affects the way we think about the words (what we evoke in reading).

In poetry, for Attridge, stress and timing “become part of its meaning” (2004a: 71). This is so much so that poetics involves a “controlled use of time” (Attridge 2004a: 72). In relation to these elements, decisions about stress and timing (including word-choice) make a difference to both the author (provoking) and the reader experiencing the reading event (evoking the experience). In discussing the use of poetic techniques in prose writing,

Attridge acknowledges that, “to the extent that these decisions [about stress and timing] *do* make a difference, I am reading the novel as poetry” (2004a: 72 original emphasis). Additionally, in relation to creative experimental practice, Attridge asserts that “any borderline [between prose and poetry] we attempt to draw becomes a potential challenge for a future inventive practice” (2004a: 72). In terms of the prosodic devices at the disposal of the author, Fabb considers that, individually and collectively, these become the “content of thoughts about the text” and are experienced by the reader (evoked) as “aesthetic” (2002: 216). As Kevin Brophy asserts:

“A writer must read—and write—each sentence with the ear” (2003: 28).

And:

“The writer must hear sentences, not just see them” (2003: 34).

The suggestion is that in this instance the various attributes discussed—metaphoric and prosodic—contribute to an overall theme, or train of thought about the text under examination: sadness or helplessness, or a resignation based on the two. Calvino’s third and final claim for the value of lightness in text is when the reader evokes “the narration of a train of thought ... in which subtle and imperceptible elements are at work” ([1988] 1993: 17). The author, through the phrase, provokes an evocation (of the theme or ‘train’), a further act that begs to be performed.

If the above selected passage is read as a creative piece of text (and granting that there may be other, alternate ways for it to be read) then the suggestion is that we “*find ourselves performing it*” (Attridge 2004b: 20 original emphases). And when this happens, should it happen, then the joint perceivings (of author and reader) become evident *as* joint perceivings. My further suggestion is that the concerted action (of joint perceiving) then gains the added dimension of Attridge’s “eventness” (2004a: 56) and the new ‘act-event’ has the singular quality attributable to (literary) creativity.

The main contention of this chapter: I find that the examination of ‘those eight words’ of text from *Anaïs* demonstrates some of the creative elements in play within the selected text (that have potentially been provoked and are therefore available for potential evocation).

That is, the creativity in the writing (of *Anaïs*) is demonstrable. But, analysing the words as finished product is easier than any explanation of how those particular words emerged from the initial—relatively straightforward—idea or image that I wished to convey. The countless transformations, scratchings-out, discarded possibilities and unsuccessful attempts—even if they were all available for scrutiny, which they are not—would still not ‘answer’ the creative question of how something is done or comes into being. Literary theory, of one mode or another, may interpret the finished product, but the creative process remains elusive apart from endless mistakes required before finding something that turns out not to be a mistake after all. I think the positioning of literary theory is worth mentioning.

Literary theory—which nowadays I take to mean theories about creative writing, rather than any notion of a ‘canon’ of Literature—has followed similar shifts in emphasis as most of the arts and social sciences over the last hundred years or so: Freudian, Marxist, feminist, post-modern, post-colonial, and so on. And some theories have been more dominant at different times during that period. Literary theories, as with any theory, can be judged by the explanatory (or potential explanatory) power that they bring to a (literary) context. But literary theories are not ‘scientific’ theories; they are not designed to be.

“Literary study is not now, and never has been, a progressive science whose aim is ‘generating new knowledge’ in the form of scientific theories” (Seamon 2008: 261).

Literary theories can, and do, generate new knowledge, but just not (new knowledge) in the form of scientific theories. Melser’s theory of thinking as an action (Chapter Four) and my derivative theory of writing and reading (Chapter Five) are also not ‘scientific’. This is so because, not only do sound scientific theories need to be potentially falsifiable (see Chapter Two), but scientific method—in the ‘testing’ of theory—precludes an empathic stance; empathy is anathema to scientific objectivity; and, an empathic stance is a precondition for Melser’s and my own theory.

Yet I will still claim—until criticism annuls them or better theories are articulated—that both Melser’s theory of thinking and my derivative theory of writing and reading have ‘universal’ applicability. On the other hand, universality is not normally a feature of

literary theory; literary theories in general (or the critics using literary theories) tend to be selective in the texts they examine and,

“no one ‘theory’ is isolated or self-sufficient. Critical, theorized writing and reading already overflows, exceeds the homogeneity of the term theory” (Wolfreys & Baker 1996: 7).

I mention understandings of theories, and the positioning of literary theories within understandings of theories, because, in the writing of *Anaïs* and this accompanying exegesis, I was constantly asking myself literary-theory-related questions: Is what I am doing writing ‘toward’ a particular literary theory? Do I have a particular ‘perspective’ (whatever that might mean), whether I’m aware of it or not? Is there a particular literary theory that might best interpret what I am doing? And so on. I have come to the conclusion that such questions are not answerable, at least not answerable by me. My ‘perspective’ in *Anaïs* is neither more nor less than first-person narration, with all the limitations and liberties that that implies, and it has been the notion of the ‘subjective’ (because of it being first-person narration) in *Anaïs* that has informed—and been informed by—this exegesis.

The above is not to say that *Anaïs* could not be interpreted from the point of view of a particular literary theory—among the ‘overflowing’ number theorised—by someone else with a different (to me) temperament or agenda. And, in using a point-of-view from which to critique the literary, it may only be, as Clive James suggests, a matter of ‘personality’ that decides what that chosen critical ‘mode’ might be:

Critical ‘modes’ have no independent existence ... a critical ‘mode’ is never anything except an emphasis ... It is an expression of the critic’s personality. The critical personality is the irreducible entity in criticism ... [and critical modes] remain irreconcilable. (James 2003: 444)

Regardless, my overwhelming consideration during the research process—beyond ideas of subjectivity either in *Anaïs* or this exegesis, and beyond ideas of literary theories—has been to be creative. Creativity, as a concept, however, is found to be problematic; there is enormous interest—across varied lay, professional and academic circles—but the concept of creativity is as difficult to define (and for probably similar reasons) as the idea of ‘love’ in a work like *Anaïs* is impossible to articulate, at least in any literal fashion. The definitional problem seems to encompass three broad areas: what creativity is, how

creativity is activated, and, how creativity is recognised. I could never hope to solve these definitional problems in relation to creativity, but what I can do is make some remarks based on the process of writing (whether creative or exegetical), and the affect that process has had on my own understandings (of creativity).

I have discussed, in Chapter Two, the idea of going beyond the information given as being analogous to a genetic mutation or making a mistake. I borrowed Kevin Brophy's example in relation to metaphor: "One definition of a successful metaphor might be, a good mistake" (2009: 168). Chapter Three has examined metaphor, particularly the ubiquity and utility of the linguistic re-combinations that can result from linking the known with the unknown or the familiar with the unfamiliar. Mutations, as mistakes that turn out not to be mistakes, and the resultant perspective they allow, seem to be key elements of creativity. Even my two-dollar desk-calendar attributes to the scientist-inventor R Buckminster Fuller: "Most of my advances were by mistake. You uncover what is when you get rid of what isn't." And in the same vein, Pope (2005) uses an analogy between creativity within language and genetics within biology. Pope proposes that both "involve the ceaseless recombination of existing elements to make new configurations" (2005: 109). There appears to be some agreement, at least about this aspect of creativity. Derek Attridge sums it up:

"artists ... bring into being works that in some way go beyond the familiar—even if they do so only by presenting the familiar in a slightly unfamiliar light" (2004b: 19).

It seems to me that if all the above is correct then creativity requires action: demonstrable effort. While inspiration—with its connotation of being effortless—may occur for some people, it has not been my experience. To make lots of mistakes, so that eventually one is found not to be a mistake after all (after editing, perhaps), means lots of work. That is, any explanation for the artist who sits with paper and pencil and (effortlessly) draws a 'perfect' likeness of something, or the writer who (effortlessly) coins the 'perfect' phrase, is more likely to involve the countless prior hours of practice and mistakes that those 'creative' people have endured, rather than 'inspiration'.

That is, practice can certainly be led by research, but “the process is more intuitive and less easily defined” (Goodall 2009: 200). However, it is only the experienced sculptor’s knowledge of the properties of stone (their research), for example, that allows the hand, hammer and chisel to work intuitively, in much the same way that a competent driver is able to absorb some of the passing scenery, without having to concentrate on the ‘mechanics’ of changing gears. The learning has been done, but is also ongoing. Further, practice feeds back into subsequent research in a cyclical—but not necessarily systematic—manner; practice “can lead to specialised research insights” that may potentially inform future work of the artist and others (Smith & Dean 2009: 5). Using personal experience as exemplar, Donna Lee Brien calls this cyclic interaction between practice and research, an “exploratory cycle of reading, writing, testing, reading, rewriting and retesting” (Brien 2006: 57). It is no coincidence, therefore, that reading (as research) plays such a vital role in writing (as practice). Following a long tradition of practicing artists, Krauth (2002) asserts that to be a writer one must, of necessity, be a reader; it is how we learn. In my own terminology as suggested by Chapter Five: to be able to practice provocation one must have experienced evocation.

In any case, demonstrable effort—practice and mistakes—has been my experience in the production of *Anaïs*, as well as anything else that I have ever done that might subsequently be termed ‘creative’. Further, given the discussion of the ubiquity of metaphor in language (Chapter Three), I would suggest that one of the most common forms of creativity (if it is possible to have a ‘common’ form of creativity) in creative writing involves the use of metaphor: metaphors such as those found in the phrase, ‘shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell’.

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Appendix One

Portrait of the Artist as a Goat

Telemachus

Don't scribble any of this, Émile says. Don't 'journalise' me. He makes it sound like a disease.

He is comprehensively naked and reclining on one of the balcony settees.

He scratches at his testicles and sips from the tall glass – one from the set I brought back from The Hague – but he's not interested in either. It's that sort of day. Time, having made the effort to transform to mass, is now disinclined to move along at anything except a less-than-zephyr pace. The sea lolls in front of us with only a perfunctory effort at wave-making.

He thinks to shock me with his indulgences: an itemised inventory of his wicked past. As if that will goad me. To do what?

Exchanging one therapy for another, are we? But he won't answer. He's already launched on a divergent track, idling through memories or fantasies or a lurid combination of both. Émile needs someone to play passenger for his x-rated tour. It doesn't make sense for him otherwise. An attentive audience. An audience with a hairy mind, for preference.

The notion of hair momentarily fixates me. Hair evolved from scale as did feather. Intermingled motes of coagulated time.

Something that time became. Something that time stopped being, to be something else. Like us.

I wonder at the smoothness of his skin, the hairlessness.

He calls me The Goat.

Goat smells and wet-dog smells.

And dark-deep fungal stuff.

Doesn't all that hair tickle? Isn't it all so ... so unsanitary? he says, pretending to shiver.

Proteus

I hadn't seen, or heard of him in nearly a year. Frankly, and not that it matters; I'd been trying to put him out of my mind. Then, out of the ether instead, he calls.

Yes, it's Émile. Yes, fine. I rather thought I might come out to your little island for a bit. Well, perhaps a few weeks. If it's not too, too inconvenient for you. Well, actually. Actually, I'm on the ferry now.

A gut-churn. An effort to stay calm, controlled. Ferry? That means less than an hour. Fine, I'll put the kettle on then, shall I?

How did he find me? I wonder. More to the point. Why?

A point. A line. A square. A cube. A cube is an infinite number of squares, a square is an infinite number of lines, a line is an infinite number of points. Three dimensions. Some say Time is (also) three-dimensional.

Six, tea-chest-size trunks?

Books, he says.

I contemplate briefly whether books weigh more than corpses. I conclude that if they don't, they ought to. Good ones, at least, that is.

The plumbing in the old villa seemed to be speculating along its own lines. Or perhaps it just groaned under the weight of the unspoken. Pipes that don't know when to pipe down.

You have a housekeeping mind, Émile says. Are you sure you're not secretly a Dutchman, by some chance? Perhaps, a tinzy bit of Van Gogh, hidden away in the family closet.

Calypso

We met five years and four months ago.

After midnight.

A velvet underground, underground.

It's not the type of club that I would frequent. You know the form, under-lit but in every other respect over-exposed. Competing identities, individually insignificant. And combined, well ... like I said, not the sort of establishment I usually associate with.

I was propelled along by the usual suspects. Hattie, Ginger, Charles. And with George at the prow, ice-breaking, getting us through the suffocating throng. Then, about halfway to where I supposed we were going, for god-knows-what reason. There he was.

They surrounded him, close to the bar.

For effect, he stood on the lower rung of the barstool. Elevating him just enough to do the fishes-and-loaves thing. They were enthralled. But more than the obvious hype, he did, you had to allow, emanate *something*.

I have no idea what he was saying. Whatever it was he stopped, mid-sentence, and smiled in our direction. I admit I was vain enough to think it was because he saw me.

At some point we were introduced. George, strangely, knew most of them. I don't know how he found the time. The rest was a blur. An unnecessary hiatus. I wanted to be gone. Time, however, conspired.

Two-dimensional time, at the very least. Nothing linear.

Handsome personages were pressing him on to future engagements, but he stopped. Directly in front. To say something important.

I hear that you abuse your mind. And to excess, he said. His eyes wide-bright. Enticing in a ghoulish, vampire way. He liked to see blood.

Well, I thought, it's not something I would want to admit to, should it be true, which it isn't. So I said nothing, waiting for I don't know what. But then he had his own unwarranted admission.

I do it too, he said. Except I use my body. I find it much more ... adaptable, than the mind.

He pressed a card into my jacket pocket. It burned my searching fingers, but I wasn't letting go.

My number, he said. Call me. Anytime. I already have yours. The corner of his lip curled, just a touch. A double dare.

His entourage insisted on pressing on. Involuntarily retreating, he raised his arm and the back of his hand stroked lightly across my cheek. *Adieu*, he might have whispered.

I never called him. He never called me. Go, figure, as the crass Yanks would say, the cropped-haired, muscle-bound sailor boys. Anyway, I couldn't help but hear of *his* comings and goings.

Night creature. He was the news. And, he was only rarely out of it. A man for all seasons.

No other benchmark than himself.

Hades

It takes all of the first four days before he tells me.

This would appear to be it, he says softly.

I stare at the sea. Time could have had the decency to stop. That is, this particular aspect, of this particular time. Stop. Don't tell me this.

Innocence isn't regenerative. The thought erupts, and, I am unable to falsify it. I despair at my inabilities. I stay silent.

You understand me, he says, that's why I came. As open as you are to all the alternatives, when the ballot's been counted, so to speak, it's only the believers and the non-believers. And the differences are no more than farts in the wind.

The medications are no longer working. That's what he means.

It's only a matter of time, then. But then, that's the matter with matter, isn't it? It reverts. To Time. Eventually. Just a matter of time.

Inexplicably I am struck by the thought that I can cope. That I can manage. I am strangely at peace with the idea. Proud to have been chosen.

Then you must stay here, I say.

It is settled.

Aeolus

Rain for three days.

Émile refuses to come out of his room.

The first day: It's raining, he says, there's no point. I leave a tray near the door. It disappears but when I next see it, only about half of a meagre ration is gone. I worry. Like I suppose a parent might.

The second day: nothing but grunts and other unintelligible noise. As if portions of the young mind remain animalistic. And can revert at any time back to the adolescent male. Self-absorbed, inarticulate. Defiant of, and not open to, sophisticated inspection.

The third day I attempt to lure him with his correspondence. He's had everything redirected and hasn't touched a scrap. Who, I ask myself, could possibly get that much mail? Well, someone like Émile, apparently. My plea is almost direct. You appear to be needed, I say. Business, as well as personal.

I have severed all ties, he informs. You are my new umbilical cord. My only connection to the world.

Is he serious?

You deal with it, is his final word. And I understand that he is deadly serious.

To delve into the minutiae of someone's life is more than voyeuristic, it is almost obscene. To *have* to do it, therefore, amounts to being forced to perform an unnatural act.

I do it. For him.

Scylla and Charybdis

I must have fallen asleep on the balcony. I wake, and his hand is on my shoulder.

So.

I'm feeling much better, he says.

I can see he's losing weight.

Besides, he says, it's my birthday.

Tears become general. How many long and lonely years it's been between birthdays for us all.

Well, we'd best celebrate then. I find some party hats and balloons. Cheap, garish and loud. Just the thing. The essentials for any celebration, right?

My Pan has a flute, of course. Did Thoreau have a flute on Walden Pond? I think he did. How did *he* celebrate his birthday?

I rather think I shall play for you, Émile says, as he absently picks at some flaking plaster. But he refuses to start until I am ensconced. Tight with chair and drink.

It is the anticipation, not the act, that's important, Émile says, taking ages to 'tune' the thing.

I never knew they needed tuning, I say. But this gets a stern look. A what-do-you-know-about-practical-matters look.

When he does finally play, it really is good. I find myself wondering, did I expect otherwise? And, if so, why? Émile finishes with, *Somewhere, Over the Rainbow*, something I never knew could be played on a flute.

See, he says, all the many things you don't know.

I have to applaud. I can't help it. There's nothing else for it.

It's the anticipation, he repeats, not the act.

I am rather inclined to believe that as fact, I say.

Then: I've got an outrageously practical idea, he says.

And for hours. We surf the Net.

And spend. Buy.

A white coffin.

Wandering Rocks

We walk to the café.

More accurately, Émile walks and I ride the bicycle unsteadily at his slow, isn't-this-all-rather-pleasant pace, wobbling along and from time to time having to describe a full circle. On one occasion almost causing a bike to bony buttock collision.

A myopic decanter of ice water dominates the table. Alongside, a solitary flower wilts. Invitation on menu (below 'Dynamite Desserts'):

patrons' suggestions invited

He has a short black. I order the chai but don't remember drinking it.

They had pushed three of the tables together, so that none of their number was ignored. Probably fresh from some suitably athletic engagement or other, reeking of antiperspirant and gossip and assured futures. The girls listen with their eyes, the whites whiter than white, cramming for life's term paper – information sharing in that secret sisterly language. Their quick sideways glances confirm our lack of potential. Émile, by what he has become. And I, by association.

We make ourselves smaller.

Do I really look that bad? he half whispers. Émile is having vanity issues but there is only one acceptable answer.

Yes, I say.

Sirens

Losing weight, his skin takes on a translucent glow. I find myself thinking that, soon, I will be able to see through to the skeleton. I am at once appalled and intrigued.

Morphine is replaced with marijuana. I want relief, Émile says, I do not want to be comatose.

Cyclops

He has acquired, somewhere, a copy of *The Field Guide to Birds* and studiously attempts identification. I am to act as assistant.

My own meagre work, it must be said, hasn't suffered.

It has simply stopped.

Antique silver opera glasses, hand-held on their own slim stalk, are all that we can muster for surveying distant objects.

More than ample, Émile insists.

I soon learn the true nature of the task. He has turned green. That is to say, with an environmental bent. His thesis concerns the extinction of particular species. His proof will be founded on his inability to 'spot' them.

Train-spotting for those with a social conscience, he says. It's the very least we can do.

It's not as if we don't have time, is it?

I don't dwell on the shakiness of Émile's evidence. Limited absence equals proof? I think not.

Instead I ask, and what then?

Why, you will write letters, he says.

To whom?

To whom? he repeats, to whom? I don't know, you're the scribbler. You're the Man of Letters. Why don't you try. The Fourth Estate. Persons of Consequence. Movers and Shakers. Big Swinging Dicks. Whatever's appropriate. I leave it to your discretion, he adds, with a magnanimous wave.

The intention is more important than the result, he says, a little later.

I am rather inclined to believe that as fact, I say.

For not the first time.

Nausicaa

I engage a nurse. A certain Ms Throsby. They get on famously. Screaming obscenities at one another during the rituals of maintenance.

The first two potential candidates were rejected. Too young. Tits too big and bouncy and beckoning.

I do not require a baby sitter! And, I am not seeking invitation to give suck, Émile says. Secondary mammary glands may well have their place. But not here.

Ms Throsby's shrunken, never-given-suck dugs, *au contraire*, are admirable in comparison. She is a true 'Lady', he becomes fond of saying, when she is well out of earshot.

But he has rules.

Ms Throsby has the entire ground floor to herself. We rarely use it. But she is not to be seen upstairs once the daytime duties are complete. A ritual is established.

In the afternoons she attends to Émile. Once complete, she wheels him to the balcony where I take over responsibility.

It becomes *our* time.

A time to talk, reminisce, speculate, ridicule. Or just be silent. He chooses books. I read to him. When we talk our conversations are outlandish, extravagant, unfinished. Tangents are the norm. The moments are treasure, pearls and diamonds in a cardboard and plastic world. Gloom is forbidden, tacitly. If it surfaces, I threaten to take him to bed.

'Oooohh ... yes, please,' he can't help but joke in an affected manner.

He squeezes my hand.

Why do you think we never became lovers? he says once.

Because it would have ended bitterly and quickly, perhaps? I conclude without having to think.

And then we wouldn't be here, he whispers, almost to himself. He turns to me with his this-is-serious face.

Thank you for being so clever, he says.

Most times, he falls asleep. Often, even during conversation.

When I wheel him to his room. Lift him, and put him to bed. I am shattered by the bird-like lightness of the shell.

I inhabit Time's other space – beyond tears.

Eumæus

The night Émile dies he is especially buoyant. Wants reggae music.

I have prepared a warm Thai salad. He doesn't eat, but dips two fingers into the dressing. Brings it slowly and tenderly to his lips. Turns and smiles.

Don't tell nurse till the morning, he says.

I don't comprehend. Not at once.

There's something I've been meaning to say, he says. I want to thank you for...

I think he means something else, so start waving it away, as so much unnecessary politeness.

No, he says. What I mean is, I want to say thank you. For never once filling me with the platitudes and useless clichés. For never once saying, 'don't worry, it'll turn out alright'. For never saying, 'buck up, boyo, you'll get better'.

It is all an effort. He is grasping my hand, searching. Making sure I understand.

Penelope

When I moved to the villa I had thought to stay. Forever.

I leave the island, tomorrow.