

Practice-based mode PhD submission:

‘The Double Illusion: Fictional Diaries’

Part One: ‘The Wild Blue Yonder’
(Creative component)

**Part Two: ‘True Histories and Fictional Strategies:
diary fiction and its illusions’**
(Critical component)

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**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in total fulfilment of the requirement of this degree.**

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP:

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. This work was supported by a La Trobe University David Myers Research Scholarship and an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

CATE KENNEDY

25 January 2021

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the fictional diary and the literary attributes which make the form unique; namely its reliance, for effect, on mimicking a factual 'found artefact' while simultaneously exploiting the contrivances of a fictional unreliable narrator.

A diary, by definition, is not a representation of a 'stream of consciousness' or a narrator's unmediated thoughts, but a record of what that narrative persona has written down, so a fictional diary, as an illusion of that record, creates an artifice of both form and content. Many literary effects may be capitalized upon in this particular epistolary form, and its narrative devices may be strategized to serve a rich variety of ends.

In my creative component (70%), a fictional diary entitled *The Wild Blue Yonder*, I explore some of these embodied effects built around 'found' textual presentation and narrative unreliability provoked through the mediating effect of making a record. In my critical component (30%) I examine a range of fictional diaries, journals and accounts, beginning with Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*—a text which created such verisimilitude that it was taken as factual for decades after its publication—and ending with Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, a text posing as a 'manifesto' account by a real historical figure, in terms of literary strategies their authors employ.

I question whether contemporary metafictional texts which utilise a fragmented first-person narration may be considered 'fictional diaries', concluding that the perceived status of its narrator as a fictional construction, exploited for unreliability, is definitional. This narrative status also informs parodic and hoax diaries.

I therefore see the exterior presentation of the text as a mimetic 'found artefact' and the apprehension of the narrator responsible for this record as an unambiguously fictional entity, separate from the author, as the dual simultaneous literary illusions required for the form to be effectively strategised.

‘THE WILD BLUE YONDER’

(Creative component)

(53909 w.)

Cate Kennedy.



AQIS

AUSTRALIAN QUARANTINE
AND INSPECTION SERVICE



**Biosecurity
Vanuatu**



Australian Government

Interim Inspector-General of Biosecurity



ApisProtect

Apiculture Project #7
[Centre for Pacific Agriculture]
transcribed reports as submitted

Author ID 18789034

Envelope one (1):

Contents under electronic file title 'CPA MAIL AND MISC' retrieved from Cloud archive located with password access; email record retained by Central Pacific Agriculture and sourced from external Google account. File/report contents transferred intermittently across dates shown when Wi-Fi accessed over the course of project at Ilariki Resort (now IsoSpa), Vanuatu.

Defunct laptop recovered, allowing additional cross-referencing through hard drive data. Permissions granted through CPA. Additional hard copy archive contents recovered from Latonga Island Sanma Province (-15 37' 59.99"S 166 09'57.00"E) to follow. All material accessed via CPA Secretariat and cleared through Customs and Border Protection's Detained Goods Storage Management system (PEQ facility) located in Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, subject to standard Departmental quarantine protocol. Transcriptions date from MID JUNE.

FROM: juliamc@WHOint.southpacific.org

TO: bbuckley@CPAsecretariat.org

Dear Bryan and Christine,

Thank you for the prospectus and for making time to meet with me at such short notice regarding the Centre for Pacific Agriculture's apiculture program and this new position in particular. I am keen to confirm my interest and have attached my relevant resume, including the completion of the previous year's work with targeting and monitoring diabetes via a series of community-based nutrition and health programs funded through the Pacific Community Sustainability Charter. My report on this twelve-month implementation will soon be published, and I would like to remain living and working in the region a little longer.

As we discussed, my professional background is in Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies and I have no direct experience working with apiculture projects in the tropics, but my previous position in PCSC and its research have definitely focused my attention on food security and biosecurity in the South Pacific, especially in the wake of Cyclone Hydra. I also understand this to be a monitoring position with setup already in place through the program and liaison and basic training provided. Looking forward to hearing from you and potentially confirming a new six-month contract for a placement extension through the Secretariat to oversee this very timely and interesting trial.

Attached is my current medical and immunisation record and a reference as requested.

With thanks

JUNE INTERVIEW/BACKGROUND NOTES JMc.

Varroa mite present in all beekeeping countries worldwide except Australia.

V. never been eradicated from a country once established.

*Reproduces on the drone brood of the Asian honey bee (AHB—*Apis Cerana*).*

AHB established, widespread and can't be eradicated in South Pacific/Asia.

*European honey bee (*A. mellifera*) has less or no resistance. Vector for viruses, also multiple threat.*

*V. could breed on and be vectored by *mellifera* in Aust.*

[Research in PNG 2013 confirmed mites already doing this—'jumped' from natural host.]

Find: Agrifutures Australia project, bee pathogen survey.

*PNG, SOLOMONS mites with genetic differences reproducing ONLY on *mellefera* drone brood.*

FROM: julesmac@memail.com
TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

Kaz, it's me, out of radio silence, back in the only cafe in town with Wi-Fi (you have to buy a drink to plug your device into the power point, too). I've been busy finishing up the reporting on the diabetes project, also on pretty low rations energy-wise - P and I have decided to go our separate ways. Not going to bore you shitless with the whole sorry saga - just unfit for human interaction at the moment. Will explain, definitely, when I get home at the end of the year, meanwhile let me know if you get this because I'm using new private email.

Just can't face returning home to Oz in present state, so decided to extend my placement here for six more months on a one-off apiary project. Just got confirmation that the job is mine. I will need some stuff - can you post if I send a list? Also, can you pay another six months on the U-Store-It container? Details and dockets etc. in that folder I left you. It'll all be over by Christmas. Btw, I still check online news now and then - has this whole shutdown thing affected you? Are they calling an election? Keep your head down.

J

FROM:juliemc@WHOint.southpacific.org
TO: manager@IlarikiParadiseResort.com

Dear Warwick,

Nice to hear from you, and thanks for that kind offer, but the hut on the island itself will be fine. The resort looks lovely and I'm sure the staff accommodation would be a great Option B.

I appreciate your offer of delivering me supplies by one of your boats, though. Christine at CPA tells me there's a lagoon with sufficient clearance at high tide for a boat with an outboard to come ashore and being able to stay

in contact with you via text about this would be great. I'm sure the CPA Apiculture program has sent you the specs for maintaining quarantine and biosecurity for the breeding colony so if you could do that quick check-over procedure before anyone brings a boat over, that would be much appreciated. Can you liaise with the CPA's project manager regarding a stipend/budget paid for utilising the resort boat, staff time, keeping me in the loop re weather warnings via text, etc? The project lasts only 6 months, so I'll be off the island before cyclone season (not that anyone can schedule the cyclone season these days). Thanks for the info re patchy mobile reception; I'll follow it up.

lukim yu later

FROM: julesmac@memail.com
TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

OK, wish list:

KINDLE (please load up with whatever's on your hard drive)

BACTROBAN (as much as the chemist will give you)

HYBRID WIND UP SOLAR AND RECHARGEABLE AM/FM RADIO WITH USB
(saw one the other day here some Peace Corp dude had; there's a little hand crank on the side, a solar battery panel on the back and down the edge a panel of led flashlights - that's the one I want, just let me know how much).

THE SERIOUS SUNSCREEN (going hardcore now)

TI-TREE OIL

Send package to the CPA address, not the post office box. In fact, make the package look as official as possible, and maybe stamp it with your NGO logo, anything which will stop it going AWOL at the airport.

You're right, I have no idea what I'm doing re the job but have already been given a mighty report on tropical beekeeping to keep as reference. The project consultants who've set this thing up tell me I'm basically babysitting a bunch of hives on an island hoping they breed up into some new superbee which is mite resistant. Then onto the CSIRO. That's it. The project apiarist from Brisbane has explained just how little I'll have to do; in fact, they've stressed I can't actually interfere too much with the bees, just let them breed. Make brood. Whatever it is. Let the DNA magic do its work in pristine quarantine conditions.

Also, please lose the idea that I'm banishing myself to an empty desert island indefinitely. It's 6 months, just the dry season, the flowering cycle of what the bees feed off. So they're my controlled conditions, then out. The Biosecurity Project has already done three trips in to make sure the place is all equipped and ready, and a team of people has already come and set up the hives. I've just got the glory job, the babysitting.

I get some quick on-the-job training once I arrive, then I'll be on my own. Just me and the bees. Looking forward to that bit.

I'll be getting frequent visits from the staff at the nearby resort, an island just across the channel (click on Ilariki Paradise Resort to see just how authentic the \$400-a-night remote tropical island experience is there) - they get deliveries from Santo (let me call that the mainland to avoid more confusion - since now I'm going to be living on an island off an island) to keep those tourists happy.

See ya.

REPORT DETAILS FOR BRIEFING

Verroa massive biosecurity risk for Australia (proximity to Solomons, PNG, Papua)

Aust. bees compared to US-"Italian" honeybees showed catastrophic lack of resistance. 50% death rate after exposure. (Russian honeybee only 4%).

Possible to breed Varroa-resistant hybrid honeybee for Aust. environment?

Biosecurity Division/CSIRO experimental requeening and repopulating with resistant hybridised strain.

Larvae grafting CSIRO?

MELLIFERA LIGUSTICA ("Italian") most adaptable, has done well in tropics elsewhere. Brood hives will be collected at the beginning of wet season (starvation an issue) and transported back to mainland.

My principal job: watch for signs of predation damage distress aberrant behaviour.

Sign waiver re remote area allowance and medical immunisation record medical insurance.

DONE.

FROM: julesmac@memail.com

TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

Hey, thanks for checking out that mental health stuff & aid workers for me.

Good to know. Another Aid & Development worker I met here told me people who work in Antarctica get all this rigorous testing of psychological profiling and assessment before they take on the assignments, to make sure they're 'psychologically suited' to the isolation.

Here (hooray for the South Pacific) they just checked my CV and references and basically rubber stamped me. The Biosecurity team based themselves at Ilariki and went over in a boat each day, but the work crew who stayed there to set up the hives said there is a nice shack there, a water tank, little outdoor lean-to kitchen, etc. At interview they told me I could split my time and stay in staff quarters at the resort and just go over to the quarantine island three

times a week, but I told them I wanted to stay there and work on my dissertation (remember my dissertation, Kaz? Still going. I don't know how the world of classical art curatorship has survived without me) and keep a close eye on the bees and their food sources. I said I would see it as a six-month sabbatical. I just heard the words coming out of my mouth, like a robot.

Anyway, a done deal. Because who else here has put their hand up to do it and is such a bargain start-up-wise-and-looking-forward?

It's just under seven kilometres across water to the mainland, which is meant to be further than the foraging bees can fly - and the island's mosquitos, for the same reasons, won't be carrying malaria or dengue. So that's a plus. No rats, they tell me, which will be a change from the place I've been renting in town. Can't wait to get out of here now it's finalised.

The CSIRO bee guy has spent time up here on projects, but he's got family in Canberra and doesn't want to spend the whole 6 months away with the interim government shutdown on the cards. (what is going ON there, Kaz?).

I'm the obvious choice for the job - already here pitched up in a tropical backwater with a stamped and current work visa, rarin' to go and keen to lie low.

Remember that time you wanted me to come with you on that silent retreat? Maybe see it like that, only cheaper, and on an island.

I'm going to keep this email address and use the Wi-Fi when I drop into Ilariki (still trying to organise a mobile with connectivity - one spindly phone tower on a hill out of town here) and you can fill me in now and then on whatever political shitstorm is going down with the stalled talks, and let me know which new moron is suddenly the country's next Prime Minister, shoved onto the stage like Boris J when the U.K. drove itself off a cliff.

Oh, sending a pic through of me with the nurses at the farewell party for the diabetes education project. We're holding the kits you crowdfunded through MakeItSo—thanks, btw. Should have thanked you when they arrived—mind is like a sieve.

PS I know you're worried about the breakup, but don't be. Don't be. Just don't want to go into it and, yes, absolutely unreconcilable, but I've scored a job in a place where I can lie low for a while and get my shit back together and not have to talk to anyone. I'm like that old dog we had when we lived in Geelong that hid under the house when he got sick to get over it in private. King, right? The noble labrador.

lukim yu later—like end of the year!

FROM: julesmac@memail.com

TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

Kaz, I'm absolutely fine. At fighting weight. Hardly 'a shadow of my former self'—just lost a few kilos in the sweaty tropics. And you have to admit, that's a great tan I'm sporting in the photo.

Package arrived—thank you. At bit battered, but intact. Best. Sister. Ever. Stuff on Kindle looks great. I have this little rectangular home solar system to be installed, haven't got my head around it yet, but the project manager assures me it will be enough to power computer, radio, phone, and a light once I'm there. Most people in this country survive on less than 200 kilowatts of power a year each, so I think I'll manage: it takes a village to watch a DVD. You still fine to be my power of attorney? Will do a late tax return when I get home but at some stage I have to change my will. Also, as my P of A please close off the 'shared' account with P. I'm talking asap. Thanks. Makes me tired just thinking about this stuff.

J

FROM: julesmac@memail.com
TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

Thought there was a will in the folder but if it's not there, send the pro-forma to me if it makes you feel better. Stocking up on supplies in town today and heading over to the quarantine station by boat to check the place out with the project team on Tuesday.

If I can work out how to send some photos once I'm there, I will. Have tried to check out what you said about using the phone as a hotspot to send through the laptop, will see if poss.

Speaking of hotspots—95% humidity here today, steamy as ever. I have been lapping up the air conditioning in the bright, shiny new mobile phone shop that's sprung up. French-owned provider, and you need to buy credit from someone sitting at a table on the side of the road under an umbrella, who takes cash, then charges up your account somehow. The place still in throes of cyclone clean-up seven months after Hydra ripped through. These things go very slow once the TV cameras leave.

Zero else going on here. Bridge still not repaired; work truck broke an axle in a pothole the size of a hippo yesterday.

Not sleeping too well, so a bit fuzzy on details, but what gives with the interim vote of no confidence for the current PM I saw on news online? Who's the alternative? Strange seeing the comments when I scrolled down in screaming meltdown over the whole debacle - economic shutdown, eco-collapse, the world ending in fire and ice.

Ha! Not here. The world's not gonna end in fire or ice. It'll end in rot, rust, mud, and sweat. And apathy.

FROM: julesmac@memail.com
TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

In the bank this morning and saw you'd confirmed closing that other account. Thanks. Just transferred some \$\$ into your account from my new one for the Kindle and radio and stuff. That took an hour. Then to the post office to see if there were any last parcels or letters, and down to one of the Chinese stores for supplies I keep remembering. (Soap powder? Will I even need soap powder?). Now in the only café in town that has internet. There's a Peace Corps guy here from the U.S., sticks out like a missionary except for the eyebrow ring and many tattoos, he's here hanging out every time I come in here. Got talking today. Meant to be doing his placement teaching 'computer skills' to the kids at the high school, got there to discover that not only do they not have any computers, they don't have any power points. So he's just kind of seeing out his time, adrift, nobody to tell him what to do next, checking the basketball scores back in Texas or whatever on his own laptop in the café of a day, till his time is up. Join the Peace Corp! Help poor people in exotic locales!

Two days till I ship out of town. I remember reading that when Alexander Graham Bell was inventing the telephone, he wanted the standardised response not to be 'Hello?' but 'Ahoy!' Well, I'm nursing my radio, my Kindle and my solar panel kit like Gollum with his bloody treasure. Thanks, K.
Love and ahoy.

J

FROM: juliamc@WHOint.southpacific.org
TO: bbuckley@CPAsecretariat.org

Hi Bryan,

Thanks for notes. Bought the plastic boxes as suggested and silica. Will still need to get your phone number, sorry for email rather than text but rather than meeting at the wharf in the morning, since you and Phil have the manager's ute, can you swing by and pick me up on the way? I'm at Hibiscus Guesthouse near Greenlaet Kava Bar. 6 am, right? All ready. Thanks.

July 7

Got started at last. Left the wharf on boat to Ilariki with team and supplies, then across a deep channel another four nautical miles to quarantine station island: LATONGA.

Topography etc.

Island 5 square kilometres—500 hectares, high centre and low coast like all of them; inlet where hut and tank are established facing north/north west.

Could see the mainland today (very clear); east along the channel is Ilariki; resort on eastern side of island with deep stretch for cruise ships.

There's a reef with some coral on south eastern side accessible at low tide.

Between Ilariki and Latonga there is a tiny island we passed where they filmed for some show called "Castaway Beach". Too small for this project, not enough nectar and pollen.

Island hot, still and jungly, hut like a rustic holiday bure - concrete floor, single room.

A previous team has constructed it for some other small forestry project (small-scale sandalwood and vanilla plantations).

Concentration is completely shot. I couldn't recite my phone number if someone held a gun to my head. So spent the day jotting everything down for when the grey mist clears. Will be best to transfer to the computer night by night so I can send reports as attachments when I email CPA.

Tank and water off the lean-to roof (tin) and solid guttering. Natangora palm roof on hut itself. Outdoor island latrine, spade, and bag of lime.

Enough shade and some undercover storage.

Hut OK. Foam mattress on bed base inside, insect screens OK. There's even a table and chair inside where I'm sitting now using up the laptop battery, which I can see is going to be a scarce commodity until I get the new solar panel sorted for power. Outside there's a couple of benches set up—one's just a log and the other one's an old upturned wooden canoe. Moses and Joseph took about ten minutes to get a firepit dug and stones set up—they've been joking they want to set up a nakamal for kava. Huge banyan tree here, which is a good landmark from offshore about where the camp is because getting into the lagoon via the reef shelf is pretty tricky.

Food storage fine as long as I don't break the can opener. Hello tuna and rice for 6 months.

Went down to the hives with Geoff and the team. There are twelve boxes set up at two separate locations on island and eight more empty ones with a stack of empty frames ready to encourage new brood 'stock' when the bees requeen. My task, to be carried out through observation.

Hives are raised, timber, based on ones that have worked in the Solomons - canted roofs and termite capping.

Paths slashed to these colony clearings, a job done in an hour by Moses and Joseph with machetes while Phil explained about how the boxes are set up and which ones already have bees in them (which he and Geoff have done), how far apart to set up the frames, a bunch of stuff I had to take lots of notes on.

Bee boxes not in straight rows like I imagined but in shaded clusters around the two sites like cabins at a holiday camp.

Joseph painted a differently shaped design in blue paint above the flight entrance of each one. He said the bees will soon get to know which one's home, like recognising your own house number.

Nobody except me seemed to think this was amazing.

Felt like a moron when Moses and Joseph told me there was a surprise for me, and we walked down to this jungly bit of clearing, plants up to our thighs everywhere. I had to finally ask, "What am I looking at?" They laughed and said it was my garden. They had to walk me round stooping down with their machetes showing me pineapple, pawpaw, kumara seedlings and banana palms. Huge grapefruit they call 'pamplemousse'. So no scurvy, said Joseph.

They couldn't stop laughing. It was like the funniest thing they'd ever seen.

Months ago one of latest influx of U.S. Peace Corps guys was tilting backwards on a chair in a bar in town and it broke under him and he toppled over. Only about eight people were there, but within a week everybody had renamed this fella "Chairman." It was his claim to fame. Now I'll probably be "Blindwoman."

Long day today. I get the hut tonight, to acclimatise myself. Also, just out of my small reserve tank of sociable energy just trying to talk and smile.

8 July

Baking hot and sweaty by 9 am today. Brain like a puddle of butter by mid-morning. Moses and Joseph were up early, moving easily round in their threadbare t-shirts and shorts. They worked calmly getting the solar panel up and going and don't seem to feel the heat and humidity at all. Got through my job description with Geoff and Phil: a whole lot less complex than my last project – basically got to keep the bees alive and happy by making sure they have food (flora) and water (a shallow dish gets filled by rain every day at each site) and leaving them alone. Excellent.

Potentially, reasons for stuffing up the project outlined to me as:

- failure to leave sufficient honey in the hives to maintain the colony during low periods, causing starving or absconding;
- failure to provide enough space for colony development and honey storage, causing swarming;
- failure to provide a good source of water, causing inadequate brood rearing and colony development.

Well, maybe, but it doesn't look like it can fail at this point. Won't be harvesting any honey, extra foundation frames ready for requeening and expansion, pools of rainwater everywhere. And how much can I seriously mess up in six months?

These are hives designed for queen rearing and breeding rather than honey production, and the roofs are vented to get rid of excess moisture and humidity. Geoff tells me condensation inside can really stress them out, so I'll need to keep them vented. Says that once he's shown me the inspection process and walked me through it, I should only open the boxes up and inspect the frames once a week. If I bother them too much, they won't start making any comb.

The queens inside the hives are the special hybridised ones they've bred. After this breeding project is finalised, they'll requeen bees bred here to some other controlled hives back in Australia. They'll be the varroa-resistant superbees.

When there's not enough honey for the bees to keep producing brood, it's called a 'dearth'. Bees leaving a dying colony are called a 'hunger swarm'.

Geoff says tropical *A. millefera* are apparently much more prone to 'absconding' than European *A. millefera*; the tropics are unreliable because of rain and cyclones, and they take off and migrate to better forage areas. Won't be able to do this on the island. I'll be their warden. Standing guard in case of absconding like the headmistress at a boarding school. Might need to feed them emergency supplements if weather is really bad but we'll be safely finished and relocated before wet season really kicks in. There are ants everywhere. Ants having wars with other species of ants, ants creating civilisations underground and in rotting tree stumps. Will have to sweep and weed around the hives to discourage.

Already have a big pile of apiarist notes and even a photocopied handbook I need to keep in a sealed plastic box packed with silicate sachets so the paper doesn't go mouldy, and another plastic lunchbox with an exercise book and pencil inside stowed at each of the hive sites.

Typing up notes now while this laptop battery lasts, then will set up the mosquito net and go to bed early. The hut has a smell I already like of salt and moisture and the natangora roof. Geoff and Phil are camped outside in light swags; Moses and Joseph just cleared a space in the lean-to and said they'll sleep on mats in there. M and J explained there's a big crown of thorns starfish problem in the archipelago now. Dive resorts keep taking tourists to new reefs when the old destroyed ones have too many starfish – don't want to pay insurance if someone steps on one – so the COTS keep spreading. They cling to the hulls of cruise ships and cargo ships. Moses thinks I work for 'my government' here, asked why they can't send money for an eradication scheme? Told him my job's been in diabetes awareness, not marine biology. The familiar polite, resigned nod.

Solar panels didn't get finished today. A job for tomorrow before they leave.

July 9

Geoff and Phil gave me a beekeeper suit to practise putting on this morning, which was the second funniest thing Joseph and Moses had ever seen in their lives. Geoff took some photos for the project newsletter and I looked like I was testing for nuclear radiation. Ridiculous and even hotter, like a one-person sauna.

Couldn't see out of the mesh visor after five minutes because of dripping sweat. Hard to tear off the headgear with the gloves on no matter how much my eyes were stinging – that would be ironic considering how paranoid I am about being stung en masse if I'm here alone and not properly kitted up to do the hive inspections. Lots of velcro.

Under Phil's instructions I unsnibbed the lid of one of the set-up boxes and propped it open. Dropped the smoker fumbling for the thin bar thing I'm meant to use to do the inspection.

Felt my tiny reserve of confidence drain out of me as I stood there. I looked down and the bee box was just absolutely chock-full of moving, crawling bees like a tight-packed set of crowded office blocks crammed with busy little workers.

I told myself I had to do this every week, and the best time to do it confidently was when my training supervisor was watching.

Geoff called out to stay calm and consistent in my movements so the bees would get to know me. "These ones are CHILL," called Joseph encouragingly. So instead of picturing a wild stinging swarm, I imagined the bees all pouring out like bustling public servants at 5 pm crowding into exits and train stations, and I gripped one of the frames and slid it out, and Phil's gloved hand came over confidently and just gently brushed hundreds of bees off the surface of the comb.

They're insects. I get it. But still.

Geoff told me after we finished that a colony of bees, when it swarms, just lifts straight off, into the open air, and reforms there. But he says these Ligustica honey bees are well-known as the most docile, non-aggressive bees of all.

There's a famous beekeeper on Nuie, he says, who has kept multi-generational hives of pure Ligustica bees for years now and never wears a suit at all. No mask, no gloves, nothing.

They are leaving a sack of white sugar for the emergency feeding of the bees if flora here on the island turns out not to be enough (white sugar—couldn't be more ironic after diabetes project) and a ration pack of yeast and soy flour, vacuum-sealed in case there's

not enough pollen/protein. May end up eating that myself. God knows there'll be plenty of time to sit around waiting for bread to rise.

Felt same familiar depleted reserves for small talk on my part by the time the tide was high enough for them to leave. Feel always on reserve tank these days. Moses and Joseph kept looking at me as if I was going to crack at the last minute and run screaming to jump in the boat with them when they left. Who'd choose to be completely alone without company in Pacific Island culture? Am I crazy?

Just wanted it to end so I could stop smiling and nodding. I'm in the right place for my current state of sociability, that's for sure.

Final check of the phone (patchy reception but OK) and the charge on the solar voltmeter; switched on the single light in the hut, which worked fine, then Geoff took a few more photos of me standing by the new stash of bee boxes like I know what I'm doing, for the online newsletter the Australian funding bodies get. Handshakes all round, gear packed.

When they started up the boat I knew I should have felt secretly panicked by this, all these men who have actual competency leaving me there in charge for the duration, but truth was by then I was just holding it together, standing waving stiffly with a stupid vestigial hostess smile. Watched Joseph and Moses guide the boat out through the shallow neck of the lagoon, heads down and oars out to manoeuvre across the coral. They throttled the outboard engine, waved goodbye, and I stood waving back. Then off they went, into the wild blue yonder.

Must wind clock once I finish writing stuff up. Must get into a routine.

July 12

ADVICE from Geoff's "Training Course 101":

- Tie back hair when I inspect the hives.
- Things they hate: perspiration, soap, alcohol, perfume.
- When they are aggressive, they will go for dark colours first.
- Always take the smoker and enough fuel for the smoker, just in case.
- They get agitated before thunderstorms.

- Avoid banging the hive.
 - Do everything slowly and calmly. (In Phil's words: 'pretend you're a monk.')
 - When you get stung, first replace the frame back into the hive, then attend to the sting. Scrape it out sideways, kill the bee if possible.
 - The stings will swell up at first, but the reaction lessens the more times you are stung.
 - Note in book after inspection date: presence of brood combs, food supply, whether they are drone or swarm cells, how much honey there is, any aggressiveness.
 - Inspect hives during the day, in sunshine but not at midday, and not when there's a storm coming. Stay out of the flight path. Take cover off and place wet cloth over the frames, wait a while, then move cloth and loosen frames with hive tool.
 - Small amount of smoke.
 - Hold the frame above the hive, so the queen doesn't fall outside the hive.
 - Adjust the size of the hive (number of boxes and frames) to the size of the colony. The bees should be able to occupy all the frames to protect from intruders (if any – ants?) and kept at the right temperature.
-
- try not to fuck everything up.

Tried charging phone on solar-powered plug. Worked. Email account created through the CPA project and new private account now the only ones I have. A relief to go AWOL and know that I'm only going to be logging on once a week or so from Ilariki. Like the world's best get-out-of-jail-free card. And a weight off to delete previous account, and everything that went with it. Blip, and gone. All the querulous, nagging shit designed to make you feel indispensable, to keep you on the guilt treadmill.

I am going to be having what the locals call a spel from it.

I noticed back in Australia when people announced they were going off social media for a while they always carried on about it like they were kicking heroin and going into rehab, like they expected to be congratulated in advance for such a difficult, gargantuan effort.

I like the ration. It's never going to enrapture me. I like imagining all those other emails to my old account bouncing back to their senders with a single categorical message of negation. No correspondence will be entered into. The ultimate *fuck off*.

Keep trying now to imagine an island like Nuie, even more remote and isolated than this one, and can't. This is enough of a tiny speck in the Pacific for my tiny heat-cooked brain to deal with.

*Who to contact re a crowdfund or awareness campaign about the COTS? If people can fly to Dafur to raise charity money by running a marathon, why not pledge to kill crown of thorns starfish while you head to the South Pacific to get your dive certificate?

July 13

TIDAL patterns. First reading of high tide: set one, 1 am, set two, 12 pm noon. High tide just after 6 am, lowest at 12 noon, set two, at 7 pm. Six hours give or take from highest to lowest over four periods making up the 24 hours. Moon a 'waxing crescent'. The water uniformly comes up to a stake I have hammered into the sand at 1.3 metres then drops back to half a metre at low tide.

SOLAR panel. On the battery and charge controller is a sticker (in Bislama) warning of limited usage: battery provides three extra hours of light per day, but this refers to a single light bulb, so powering the computer will use this up much faster. Will need to wind alarm clock so I don't waste power turning on phone to check for time.

Need to refill battery fluid periodically to keep system going.

Someone needs a Pulitzer for translating usage guidelines and basic upkeep of system: mine says: "*Taem Yu Yusum For (4) Laets Long Wan Dei (Nait) Yusum Long Tri (3) Hawas Nomo.*"

Hawas = "hours". Only makes sense if you say it aloud: 'Time you use four lights in one day (night): use for three hours only.' That's the revenge of an oral culture with an arbitrary and imposed 'written language' – you have to speak it anyway, in order to even read it. You can't 'read' it in your head, it doesn't make sense until you hear it coming out of your mouth.

I have two small LEDs, 8 watts each, for turning on at night. Sun goes down around 6 pm and once it slips behind the horizon, bam, it's gone. No long twilit tropical sunset here on the equator.

System I have, Warwick assured me, was the same as he's seen on islands where communities power night lights, a radio, and tv for watching soccer videos, so should be plenty. Anyway, I have my *bateri* and *jarge kontrola* and *swij*, leading to the *waea blong laet*, so, bingo, I have my *laet*. Digital voltmeter runs on a small disposable battery. Can ask resort to get more of these if battery goes dead.

It's the laptop heating up that worries me – even now the fan is running at top capacity even though it's dusk – although Phil and Warwick both say it's moisture or ants crawling in I need to watch for. Will only use the laptop early in the morning and after sunset when it's cool. Another ration I can deal with.

Electrical equipment in the tropics. A very stormy marriage.

Bees very good at keeping themselves occupied.

July 18 (keeping dates marked on iCal)

Scheduled for first visit from boat at Ilariki tomorrow. Planning on going over for the day to check email, shower, drink a beer, have what Warwick calls 'decompression time' which I don't have the heart to tell him feels more like the opposite.

July 19th

Six hours at the resort and that was just enough time. Sitting here now back on the island, eating lettuce and tomato – luxury items which need to be brought in by refrigerated shipping along with mayonnaise, UHT milk, cheese, everything tourists love to eat.

July 23

Reading, reading, reading.

It's like rehab.

Archipelago has:

150 species of orchids, including 7 that are endemic.

21 species of palm trees, including 1 that is endemic.

12 species of araceae, including 8 that are endemic.

80 species of butterfly, including 5 that are endemic.

12 species of bees, including 7 that are endemic.

200 species of flies.

Many, many of them want to have a party around my lightbulb in the hut.

TIDES

Day fifteen, high tide set one, 12.45 am, and set two, 10.31 am. Moonrise times also increase by around 40 minutes each night until it works its way right round the clock as it waxes and wanes.

About 12 and a half hours between the two high tides. Low tide doesn't seem so low — stays at 0.7 metre mark.

Full moon and new moon phases will be Spring tides, quarter moon phases are neap tides. Moon's at a perfect first quarter tonight.

July 24th

BEES

need to keep:

Comb spacing 35 mm

Cell width 5.3mm

Slot width of queen excluder 4.2 mm

Got full bee suit on and took out one of the frames out to inspect today and in the big gloves I fumbled it and dropped it onto one corner. An angry wave of disturbance went through the bees like a shudder of annoyance. Had to steel myself to stand still and wait as they dived and swooped around me until the alarm had receded and they'd collectively given the all-clear. Slid the frame back in and set the lid back on, couldn't wait to get out of there.

Lesson learnt: no sudden grabs, don't bang anything. Don't panic, or they'll panic in response. I think it's a pheromone thing.

25th.

I am the only human here, the only person 'accountable' for them. There's a project on paper and someone's computer back in Vila, ready to fill in a spreadsheet and acquit the research grant and do the report once this program yields whatever it's going to yield; I know all that, but nothing else here could care less. I could make the whole thing up, and the whole island would shrug its shoulders. The bees are doing their thing regardless. I am a nuisance to the rest of the ecosystem, truth be told.

So I read, lounge around, walk into the lagoon when the heat gets too much. Best time is dawn. Comparatively cool and a chance to have a dip and write this. Ilariki tomorrow, so will send Kaz email to tell her I've fluked my dream job.

July 31

Still having a few problems sleeping. Quiet is intense – no big surf, no birds, extremely, blackly, thickly dark. Toss-up between no mozzies or feeling a breeze – door open, no net over bed is better. Reading a lot at night on Kindle, having a sleep in the afternoon instead, when everything is so hot and still that time stalls on a kind of inertia anyway. And actually not too many mozzies.

Remembering how women visiting the house on Vunamele Road would unselfconsciously lie down on a mat on the floor in the afternoon and sleep off an hour or two. Why invent yourself something to do in the hot hours like that? Sea feels coldest in the morning, so trying to swim then, although even 'cold' is actually about 26 degrees. Walked out onto the beach in the middle of the night to find high tide at 1.77 metres at 3.34 am.

King tide?

August 1.

Bingo, new moon and high tide highwater mark 1.80 metres at 4.20 am.

Sat up to watch this. Awake as if on vigil. Still like a soldier in a foxhole at 3 am every morning, wired, jaw clamped with toxic dreams, up out of the churn. I'm wondering if P. is still in town or in Vila and if he's made any attempts to contact me. Then I watch the moon on water for a while, and try to stow that thought to get to sleep again.

But each morning it still hits me as the sun comes up. Here, now. And almost been a month – longer than any holiday I've ever had.

So easy to believe, those stories of the old nutters going rogue on tropical islands. The sailors jumping ship and swimming back to the shore, declaring mutiny, preferring to stay with the lapping water at the shore and the breeze in the palm trees. A stretch of sand in the morning clean and empty, not a footprint on it, my rubber thongs slapping against my heels the only noise.

Apart from the endless tinnitus of clacking palm fronds and the steady vibration of bees, down at the hives,

I've read about those beyond-wealthy business executives, planning holidays to Raratonga and the Maldives, surrendering their mobiles to the staff at uber-exclusive health retreats because disconnectedness is the new luxury now, being off the grid is the new black. And all those overworked and taken-for-granted nurses and teachers and mothers and cleaners, when they open the glossy magazines and holiday brochures. Well, I'm in it. Stoned on solitude. I have that absolute executive exclusive privacy now. My mind as empty as if it's been scrubbed clean.

Mentally slipping now and then into 'emergency power only'.

I can walk around the headland, picking my way through white coral rubble, and there's a kind of optical illusion where the horizon bleeds into the sky, and you can imagine/see the curvature of the whole planet.

Of course, there are things to be done. This, for one thing. This is what needs to be done. Dutifully writing stuff down at the beginning and end of the day is the only thing on my executive schedule.

So I store the sun's energy in this small whirring machine, and sit gazing into its rectangle of glowing blue light. The minutes pass as it waits for me, the cursor patiently ticking like a silent heartbeat.

I watch the little battery logo slide from black to white, slowly burning up the power it's stored, blank as a buddha.

It has nothing but time either, and zero expectations.

August 2

Ilariki. Hot chips and cold drinks, web surfing pretending to research for my dissertation. Swam in the pool. The smell of chlorine in my hair now is the only thing that has a chemical scent on this whole island. Seem to remember Geoff telling me the bees hate perfume so should maybe not use shampoo.

Aug 3

I go down to check each colony in the morning as they start getting active, so everything I actually need to do is finished by 10.30 am.

Sometimes I walk down again at the end of the day just to check bees in both colonies are flying in and out, there's clean water nearby, and signs of pollen left around the hive openings. Staying out of their way otherwise until the weekly inspection.

Trying to do a count of how many banana palms are here, because they're a great nectar and pollen source. So far have counted 32. Ezekiel who works at the resort said they would bring me bananas and whatever else was in season with my drop-off. Garden will produce different things at different times. I've been poking round in there, but it's sweat city trying to slash weeds and vines.

Should probably boil water, but can't always be bothered. Just need to make sure the pipe into the tank is still in place with mesh to keep out any wrigglers.

Otherwise, long stretches of luxurious reading, snorkelling when the tide moves, sometimes hacking away at weeds but mostly nothing.

Nobody watching, so nothing to feel under surveillance about.

Mental default settings are changing but still ambushed by residual shock every now and then. Every morning, waking up, assembling the brainpower to work out where I am and how I got here, then...bam. It's like putting my foot down on a step that isn't there. After that intake of breath and jarring quick stagger and recovery, the day can start.

5th.

Low tide this afternoon – very low at 0.30 metres – at 12.40.

Breaking the day up into orderly sections: clean up, swim, eat, stay out of sun through the middle of the day, put on a hat later and go and watch the bees foraging, look to see

what's in flower and if I can identify out of the book, mark where I see it and whether the bees are visiting it, keep an eye on the sun so I don't find myself out off the track in the dark, make a note every evening at dusk.

Starting to seem a bit ridiculous to be keeping tabs on something that's been happening the same way, undisturbed, for eons. Like there's a sudden need for a time-and-motion study from some interfering human who needs a graph filled out. Nobody cares, and nobody's watching. There's that hangover sense of surveillance I have to shake. I can rationally tell myself it's crazy but it makes no difference.

Still can't quite bring myself to believe there isn't an invisible camera somewhere, a guy with a boom mike, someone totalling up my hours on the job and hours spent sitting in the shade or sleeping.

Someone calculating my worth. Looking to find fault, assembling a case.

7th

Thought I would write in this every day but barely anything to 'report'.

Every day except for when I head to the resort I keep the same routine.

Heat is absolutely blinding so I just walk into the lagoon in my clothes when it becomes too much. Space out the afternoons sitting out on the bench where the shade falls, waiting for the inevitability of sunset, when night comes down like a block-out curtain and my single small solar light in the hut sputters on, and with that and the laptop both glowing after dark, every tiny black insect within a five kilometre radius sees this screen as the hottest nightspot in town.

Like the kava bars on the mainland with their one coloured light globe in a shack. Bluelaet Kava Bar, Redlaet Kava Bar – huts with one light strung down a dark track. Mecca. The way the men called kava time 'mi time'. Like they needed special time to themselves, after a long day hanging around waiting. Like every hour wasn't already 'mi time.' The word for the barflies who stayed drinking kava at the bars till stumps was 'kilim laet', because after there's no more kava left for sale in the plastic tub they turn off the light. 'Hem i man blong kilim laet,' I found out, meant 'he is a kava addict'.

So when the insects become too much, I kilim laet, crawl under the mozzie net, and try to sleep.

Aug 9th

I text resort (or they text me) TUESDAYS. WEDNESDAYS a boat comes with a couple of visitors with supplies, usually Rexley and Moses, or Ezekiel, glad to be off kitchen and maintenance duties at Ilariki. And probably curious to see how I'm doing. A good thing to focus the week around. I make them Nescafe 3-in-1 and they bring cookies and crackers which I open and they eat. I have never met such good-natured, easy to please people. Full of good cheer. And they're shyly curious about everything. They can't believe I cook everything on the gas camping stove – Moses told me today he's going to get his mum to make me a laplap and bring it over to me one week soon. I said I couldn't wait.

They shucked a bunch of coconuts with the machete and showed me how to make one break into two perfect halves by knocking it around the middle with the back of the machete blade. (Around the equator, in Rexley's words. Flipping the coconut planet around easily in his hand.)

There's a pile of coconut husks by the hut now, ready to make a fire for laplap, they say. Lots of laughter. I think they must know I really don't like the stuff.

Went with them in the boat over to the resort for a fix of internet/Wi-Fi and to check in via email with CPA. Phone very unreliable for anything but local texts.

Getting into that aluminium boat, feeling the sensation of buoyancy and the sudden dragging power of the diesel engine as we take off, is already starting to feel weird, like a weightless deja-vu dream. Sometimes there's hardly anyone at the resort and that's the way I like it best —just a chance to talk to the bored staff watching the soccer on the tv in the lounge bar (apparently the World Cup is on or imminent), the beach loungers stacked away. They've put in a new dock for the smaller cruise ships for day visits.

That's the future, Warwick tells me.

Otherwise, it's just me and the bees. Nothing to do but keep an eye on hives, read, sleep (remember how to sleep), hide out.

I have nothing expected of me that I'm not doing. IQ rusty with disuse.

Warwick reminded me today that a month has passed. Like sands through the hourglass.

11th

Yes, a month has slipped by, so time to get cracking on "Images of Paradise". If not now, when? One hour a day writing about one item/jpeg in the file on the desktop, then assemble research stuff and when I get back I can check submission dates after extended leave of absence at the Uni. File on desktop should be called 'Morgue' rather than 'PostGrad', but if I do a couple of hundred words a day I'll have 10,000 words by Dec no probs.

There's no-one looking over my shoulder here so no matter how dead and irrelevant and unfocussed, I can fix it up later. Will finish what I'm reading on the Kindle first.

It's really hard to get kitted up in the bee suit when there's nobody else to help you zip up and put the gloves on and off so sometimes I just put the mask and visor on – have learned to give a few puffs of smoke which seems to make them drowsy when I slowly slide a frame out. They're not as crazily industrious as I first thought – just organised and no wasted movement. They all know exactly what they're doing. It's always a relief to just put a row of ticks down the inspection column and be done with it. They'd be better off if I just didn't even disturb them in the first place. Not putting that in my report, though.

Odd surges of nervous energy, the stupid fear of getting something wrong.

But more like a bruise fading now, or a swelling going down.

Remembering how Geoff told me to pretend I'm a monk.

Read Kindle tonight. Solar powers light for about one hour after dark as well as charging up devices during the day. Winner.

Aug 14

Tide at midnight around 1.30 metres, slept through low tide I guess because when I woke up, it was already at 0.70, or else I've made a total shambles of recording these tide and moon patterns.

Rain, heat, pounding humidity, water at about 28 degrees, like a bath. An aqua blue bath. When the sky's clear, it's blue as Windex. Headache bright. From the shade

outside the hut the lagoon and the palms bending over it are as unreal and creepily flat and perfect as a screensaver. There's nowhere to go to escape it. Like a New Year's Day hangover in broiling heat. Three most valuable items I have here – rubber thongs, hat and sunglasses.

Afternoons spent longing for a breeze, then praying for that breeze to turn to wind, to churn the clouds up, change the temperature and barometric pressure, anything. Had a lot of Joni Mitchell playing in my head: I've looked at clouds from both sides now, the ice-cream castles in the air and feather canyons everywhere and all the rest ... mainly they're just a relief from the belting sun and hopefully bringers of a shower of rain, but the clouds are also good as just a visual change of scenery (they're my screensaver that changes by itself after a while).

When they're massed up like a pile of sticky grey wool, humidity reaches an oozing saturation point of 90%. A hot fog of steam. There's different kinds of shade depending on how full-on it is – thin shade, deep shade, insect-infested shade and cool shade (over damp sand, under banyan tree).

The hut gets so hot the cured concrete floor gives off damp efflorescence, like a saltpan. A relief just to remember that all weather changes, eventually. When it does blow in, I let it. I have no window, just a door, and nothing inside the hut to protect or salvage – just this laptop and the pile of papers, manuals and notes, which I am trying to keep extra dry in a sealed plastic bag. Nothing ever dries, though. My shorts and t-shirt hang limply on me like the damp's made them give up the ghost.

Or maybe I'm the ghost, in my mud-coloured rags, stiff with salt, staggering around stupefied.

So hot it's impossible to think straight.

Still, all notations in the books at each colony site filled out neatly, top marks for the guardian of the empire, here in the land of Catatonia.

Aug 15th

7.30 pm. Off to Wi-Fi Land at Ilariki tomorrow, so going to write an email draft to you Kaz! Just noticed the time on the laptop – time for "The 7.30 Report" in Aust. I'd kill right now for a cold shower with enough water pressure to wash my hair, and then sitting in an air-conditioned room for a while, feeling chilled, having a glass of wine

with you. Maybe even watching the news and finding out what lacklustre spineless wonder is running my country now. Thanks for the photos of the festival – they all downloaded OK. Seems impossible such big crowds of people get together to hear live music – not sure how I'll go re-entering the zone when I get back, even thirty people packed round the pool at the resort feels too crowded for me. Rolling transport strikes sound like a pain, but very distant from here. There's a regular flight I hear taking off and landing on the mainland out of Brisbane, so clearly the 'holiday sector' isn't too disrupted. Have chewed through 24 books on the Kindle! Oh, and the bees are good too, much more productive than me and take their work way more seriously.

August 16th.

Ilariki day. I am getting used to the visits when the guys come over on the supply run, making 'kopi' (2 sachets of 3-in-1 per cup), practising Bislama. Rexley hands me a packet of Oreos out of the box, I open the packet just as solemnly and offer them back, two at a time. Both men put so much extra sugar in their coffees it's like syrup. I can't even eat the Oreos – they taste like a horrible chemical paste foaming in my mouth. Today it was Ezekiel here, and he walked into the jungle of the 'garden' and came out with six pawpaw and a big manioc tuber – more jokes about laplap.

Every time we get to Ilariki and punt into the resort's pier I see how the tourists who are there exert a wall of lordly silence and distance around themselves as they strenuously act at relaxing. Fine by me. But I can tell it's weird for the staff, how they can't quite align me with the white guests staying there. Rexley and Ezekiel turn to me and start speaking in terse deferential English as soon as we pull in.

On some kind of unspoken signal, all eye-contact drops.

A shock to see white bodies in bikinis, so much pale flesh on display. The tourists are always changing, of course, so after a quick up-and-down assessing glance at me arriving (maybe they're expecting an incognito celebrity) they get on with ignoring me. And I feel myself welcoming this. Seclusion is what makes you an introvert, not the other way round. The less contact you have, the less you need it. It's like cutting something out of your diet and then the smallest amount is too much. Zero desire to speak to any of them once I'm there. Sunglasses, hat, reflect back to them their stony unsmiling suspicious faces. The default mode.

August 18

6 am. No more excuses.

Notes on Thomas Cole, 'Expulsion from the Garden of Eden', painted 1828.

A tropical paradise with palm trees, waterfalls, verdant vines. You have to look hard to find Adam and Eve in this painting – off they stagger, two tiny stunned human figures, into a darkness of volcanoes and jagged rocks, the coconut palms bent double by a blast of divine energy. A wolf waiting in the gloom for them.

Cole and his weirdly prescient vision of the future. Divine energy looks like a flash atomic detonation, like the one that blasted Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands not too far from here and not many years ago.

Note for dissertation's main points re Cole's chain of association with other images, patronage, legacy, etc.

Obviously Michelangelo.

Remembering the sprawling world vision on the roof of the Sistine Chapel and being hurried along on a tour there, pressed along. Feeling myself a gawker in gawking crowds. Conservators saying the Chapel needed a rest from the constant pilgrimage of humans. That the combined breath exhaled by thousands of people looking up was starting to damage the paintings.

Restoration took longer to do than the frescos themselves.

Detail from the work relevant here: the sword the angel is laying across Adam's back as he and Eve trudge out of Eden onto the open plain, into land blighted by emptiness and the promise of endless strife.

When I saw the ceiling itself, craning up, I thought it was a stick he was holding.

Holding a sword to someone's neck is probably more of a statement. Maybe extrapolate on why angels, why agents sent to do work of expelling? Why does God need stormtroopers?

Tree of life, tree of knowledge.

Here in Vanuatu, 'the tree where God Papa putum tabu.'

"God Papa wetem God Pikinini mo God Tabu Speret, trifala."

That's the Catholic Trinity for you, put through the sieve of kastom: Jesus is a pikinini, and the Holy Ghost is a Taboo Spirit. All that must not be eaten lest eyes be opened and innocence is suddenly seen as ignorance.

Cole influenced by John Martin's illustrations for 'Paradise Lost'. The light streaming through a rocky portal (none shall pass!) to Paradise is clearly derivative of Martin's Expulsion. (1827).

Could say... Martin's use of cliffs, oceans, skies, natural forces horrifying and dangerous to the romantic mind? Nature as perilous, Arcadia as fortress?

Martin's vision of Milton's hell, called Pandemonium. Beyond an ocean of flames and soldiers, a massive city of buildings. Hell as the State Capital.

Saw these mezzotints at the Baillieu exhibition – absolutely tiny. The size of an A4 page. Something about the grandeur of scale in the prints, but the need to get up close to see the detail – Martin must have gone blind himself, etching these.

Read somewhere that the wind changed after the Bikini detonation and delivered white drifts to other islands. A witness said the children played 'in the snow'. Later came the birth defects, the hush money, the moonscape nobody could ever live on again.

But enough of that.

Nothing to be done about that, or the knowledge of it, the no going back.

Aug 23

TO: karenmackay@makeitso.com.au

Hello again from Ilariki! Thanks for your great email. Yes, laptop and radio and kindle still working fine – the solar system is actually working fine at charging everything up. (Can't believe I just wrote 'the solar system' and didn't realise the planetary connection).

An option B to waiting till I come here to Ilariki is to try turning on my phone and walking to the highest point on the island (a small but very jungly hill) where I can usually see bars appear and possibly, depending on weather or clouds or the universe, open the tethering on the laptop to connect (possibly) to the internet. I guess I'm dependent on someone else (the powers that be at CPA, probably) for keeping this data account topped up with more deposits, but I've hardly used it – want to keep it as

emergency power and GPS source (although I don't think 'Find my Phone' is going to have much luck locating me: I'd be better off giving you latitude and longitude). Some days if I do power it up to take a photo, my phone just says "SOS only" for no reason. Sometimes only the Kindle seems to have any connection bars when I charge it up. So weird. Random bouncing off the satellite.

Had a thirty second phone call with Christine at the resort today.

C: Just checking in to see that everything's ticking along.

Me: Seems to be.

C: Are the bees making comb?

Me: Yes.

C: Great. That's all we need to worry about. Can you take some photos of frames in a month's time?

Me: I guess so.

C: Great. Talk again in October, bye.

So you can see the urgent nature of this very high-powered project, Kaz. Lucky they've put such a technical specialist in charge.

J

9.00 pm, chez Hut:

Don't know whether to feel alarmed or relieved at that exchange with Christine. Jesus, what am I worried about, getting all conscientious about keeping tabs on everything and filling in columns thinking someone's going to make it all spreadsheet data? I'm babysitting, that's all. I'm not the headmistress, I'm more like a janitor who comes in over the school holidays and checks all the locks on the school buildings and waters a few plants.

Aug 24th

Dawn, cool and clean like always.

The locals, to say they were unoccupied (never complained about being bored), used to say 'mi laze'. I laze myself. I'm going to be LAX from now, and just let it all drop. The mind game where you can tell yourself it's a mindfulness workshop.

The fine line between mindfulness and mindlessness.

Later:

Inspection day today. They don't buzz, they vibrate. They hum. You lift out a frame carefully from where it's hanging and it's completely filled with a curtain of crawling, vibrating bees, packing and checking the comb. When people talk about watching an industrious workforce of people they use bee words – a hive of activity, people swarming around the factory floor.

These creatures are something else though, trembling with orderly work, all identical, never stopping.

25th

6.30 am. Folder of jpegs: Painting by Domenico Zampieri (Domenichino), Italian Baroque of the Bolognese School 1581-1641. 'God Admonishing Adam and Eve', painted between 1623 and 1625. Oil on copper, coll. Museum of Grenoble. (Another version: 'The Rebuke of Adam and Eve', NGA Washington.)

Shows God cuddled snugly into a pod of cherubs, giving Adam and Eve their marching orders like a pissed-off CEO.

God in this painting looks like Hugh Hefner with cherubic bunnies lolling around him, banishing two useless interns. Under him, the lion is literally lying down with the lamb. Above him, extra angels float in the air, one pointing, one finger to lips shushing three disembodied angelic heads watching proceedings for posterity.

But it's Adam who shows his true colours here. Standing there cringing with a look of sulky adolescent male non-accountability. He's caught in a gesture which would be familiar to women all over the world: shrugging, palms upwards, towards Eve. Caught out, and aggrieved, and will not cop it. The world's first certified dickhead, but not the last.

26th

Eating takes less than twenty minutes no matter how slowly I kid myself I can do it. I catch myself humming as I segment the food into bite-size pieces and chop up chunks of cold boiled sweet potato, pineapple in sliced curves I can hold in my hand, dripping onto the sand, pink grapefruit with every wisp of bitter white pith meticulously, industriously peeled away, because I have all the time in the world to do it. Everything tastes so extreme – so sour, so sweet.

Then segments of time cut into digestible pieces: staying out of the sun, a swim, out again, lazing until my head jerks awake, nothing to be alert for. There is just this blank ... what? Relief.

27th.

8.30 am, tide was at half a metre. Could not be bothered checking for high tide overnight but as far as I can see, the water's barely moved.

Saw a bird though. A frigate, I think. Never seem to see birds here on the island. I'll ask Warwick about that.

Scratch that about the mindfulness workshop. It's more like one of those fairy tales where all day long some princess unravels and unpicks some garment that she then spends all night knitting up tightly again, under some curse of doing and undoing. Snarl together, undo again, ebb, flow, wax, wane, tide in, tide out.

Beekeepers, here's the secret, have practically nothing to do. A job description for a place where there really aren't any 'jobs', where a civilisation runs like clockwork without interference from the clueless. Or clocks. No longer bothering to set or wind the clock.

Human contact once a week still just about the right balance; otherwise, absolutely fine here. Sequestered like Montaigne in his tower retreat.

Glutted on reading.

Need nothing.

Aug 29th

The all-important notation that the new moon peaked yesterday and this morning at ten minutes to 5 am the tide reached its highest point for the month at 1.87 metres and then at 11.30 am was at its lowest point recorded yet at 0.09 metres, and check me out, I'm still behaving like some prissy responsible prefect after the teacher has long since left the classroom.

Finished reading the Kate Atkinson book – other reader reviews said they found the jumps in chronological time difficult to follow. Not me.

Low tide just before 7 am at 0.70m, high tide was 1.30 at 1.20 metres, Sunday afternoon now, so going to do the weekly hive inspections.

Pm:

Moon suit is still just a huge heavy hot nuisance so I just wear the mesh veil that goes over my hat and gets tucked into the neck of my T-shirt – so much better. Gloves and boots way too cumbersome, but my face and head are protected in case they get cranky. They don't, though. They're chilled.

Didn't even use the smoker today. Channelled my inner monk and just went through the motions doing the same unobtrusive inspection quickly and carefully and smoothly. I just used the damp cloth, and the bees stayed calm. I had the gloves off and stayed calm myself even when a couple crawled onto my hand.

I don't have to armour myself or defend myself against them.

When I lean down close and ease a frame loose, there's a change in frequency in the hum. Instantly on the alert and cautious, but giving me the benefit of the doubt.

Missing nothing.

Sometimes I remind myself that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. I wouldn't have got to do this.

30th.

Ilariki, and a bag of salad ingredients, spaghetti and sauce, UHT milk.

Downloaded a bunch of photos once I had Wi-Fi. Laptop battery running very hot, Kindle perfect night time companion.

Friday.

Tide gains 40 minutes every night, quite consistent high and low tides, you could set your clock by them if you could remember to wind your clock.

From notes:

Varroa – two types of mite, Destructor and Jacobsoni. 'Destructor'! Sounds like an arch villain from the Marvell franchise. Both feed and reproduce on larvae of developing brood in the hive.

Weakens the bees. Causes malformation. Bees become crippled and have to crawl, those that manage to fly are impaired. They often fail to return to the hive after foraging. Lose weight. Deformed and shrivelled wings and bodies.

They live shorter lives.

WHAT TO BE ON THE ALERT FOR: Brood becomes abnormal, sunken and chewed, larvae slumped to the bottom. They starve, less bees born, no queen, colony fails.

Infected worker bees and drones can't seem to learn or navigate. They just blunder around. Bee zombies. Eventually colony's entire social organisation begins to deteriorate. Colony collapse.

Varroa currently the world's most devastating honeybee pest.

The Asian honey bee is the Varroa mite's natural host, so has evolved natural defences, e.g. they have nurse bees which detect the mite in worker bee pupae, uncap brood and destroy the pupae and parasite. They also seal up infected cells, entombing both, sacrificing the infected pupae for the hive.

Like the authorities in London during the Great Plague.

Time for obvious colony symptoms to appear can be up to 2 or 3 years.

Multiple viral infections also contribute; varroa mite is the vector.

Signs: crippled and deformed bees, scattered brood nest, loss of coordinated social behaviour, rapid de-population.

ABPV: Acute Bee Paralysis Virus.

SPV: Slow Paralysis Virus.

Varroa-transmitted. Front pair of legs become paralysed then bee dies. Reported from Britain, Fiji, Western Samoa. Would hate to have to watch that.

Loss of coordinated social behaviour. That would also be something to observe, but I hope I don't have to. I hope we all get full marks come December.

Disconcerting to feel unexpected swoops and readjustments of scale.

It's like a quick dizzy spell to look up, at a sky full of the light of long-dead stars.

I can make myself feel a bit sick gazing out at the expanse of ocean horizon, curving around this globe, trying to imagine that globe a grain of sand.

I am jerked big and small, the dial on the microscope twisted in and out, focused on infinitesimal mite and then a blur of pixels.

Remember being terrified, aged about, 7 or 8, of a particular kind of monster, one that rose up at me in nightmares, out of the swampy bit of land at the bottom of the lane next to Nanna's house, where we were always forbidden to explore. The monster's jaw emerged from formless layers of skin, eyeless, all mouth like a maggot. I think it was based on some picture of the deep-sea fish I'd seen in the Reader's Digest Great World Atlas, flattened by tons of ocean pressure, ghostly in the blackness, hinge-jawed, a zombie with dead marble eyes.

I'd wake up crying and incoherent – how to explain a creature with no eyes, no head, just a fanged mouth opening like a maw out of folds of deformed flesh? The second alien mouth emerging out of the first in the movie Alien years later came close. A mouth emerging from within a mouth. Then one day by chance I saw an image in black and white, of my own swamp nightmare from the bottom of the lane. It was a photo of a demodectic mite, taken with an electron microscope. It lives in human eyelashes. Its kingdom is the mountains and valleys of human lash follicles, and it consumes the microscopic flakes of skin and oils and salt that we shed from our bodies. The monster lives off me. Thousands of them, probably – some hapless laboratory assistant's job to count them per square millimetre of eyelash, no doubt.

I am a planet in my own right.

Sept. 4

Kaz's birthday.

High tide near 6 am, early dawn a beautiful sight with lagoon inundated to 1.8 metres. Everything cool for an hour or two. Walked up to the high point on the island where I got three bars on the phone and tried texting Kaz a birthday message. Something went out into the ether but hard to say where. Where is cyberspace? The distance between me on a speck here on the Pacific Ocean, a phone tower back on the mainland (also a speck but with a higher mountain) then up into space to bounce off a satellite? Just for three lines wishing my sister a happy birthday?

Bees cracking along, filling frames with honey, capping the brood the queen is laying. The frames feel so much heavier.

Singing this for Kaz this morning, lyrics out of a mental vault somewhere.

Way over yonder is a place that I know

Where I can find shelter, from hunger and cold
And the sweet tastin' good life is so easily found
Way over yonder, that's where I'm bound.

And Montaigne: "I do not depict being. I depict passage." That's what I'd write on a card if I could send it, with a drawing of a bee. When I think of Kaz, I can settle into a mental space where I can easily imagine her thinking about me, like we're both bouncing off another kind of satellite, a psychic one, orbiting, small again and whispering secrets under the chenille quilt we've made into a cubby between the couch and the dining room table, and it's hard to believe how sharp this image is; the smell of Arnott's Tic-Tocs and carpet dust and the caramel gloom of the light in under the bedspread is so clear it's like I'm there, feeling it with all my senses.

But when I wonder if P is thinking of me, worrying about me, there's nothing there. Nothing to be felt. Like the way your thumb reflexively rubs a new scar until it's so smooth it's become your skin, only visible in a certain light and if you insist on looking. Have to wonder, though, how he's extending his 'work visa' now, what position he's cooked up for himself, if any. What's funding him.

6th

Inside their hive it is the same temperature as the human body.

Five seconds to calculate through touch, antennae to thorax, the sun's position even though it's raining.

They have a language. They've evolved. They tell each other where the nectar is, using the sun. They can do it here when it's overcast, when there's rain about to reliably dump down every afternoon. And they can do it at night. This is because they can calculate the position of the sun on the other side of the world. I sit and try to do that, but I can't. I've got a brain 1.5 million times bigger than theirs, but I can't.

(Read in the beekeeping notes :Human brain: 100-200 billion neurons. Bee brain: 950,000 neurons.)

But in those brains is a map of the sun's movement across the sky over 24 hours, and those neurons fire to modify this map to fit local conditions. All decisions about where to fly are made within five seconds. My old GPS couldn't do that.

The more weeks I'm here, the calmer I feel.

Apart from the Wednesday visits and supply runs, I am almost guarding this solitude.

Remember my friend Helen when she resigned from her job, ringing to say "I'm calling in well."

I'd be happy slowly and surely closing down like a plant over these whole six months, accountable to no-one. Or like a bear, pawing a cave for itself, heart rate and metabolism slowing, breathing in and out. What does a hibernating bear dream of, what blurred shadowy things bloom in its brain as it shuts down and merely respires? Not email updates of its frequent flyer points, that's for sure.

The weekly drop-in of the supply boat is manageable. Can muster energy for this, even enthusiasm. I even catch myself saving up things to talk about, like some agoraphobic, neurotic 50s housewife with brain-fade. I'll be writing down conversation starters next.

7th Sept.

Raincheck on visit to resort, place packed with cruise ship visitors on mid-week stopover. Ezekiel and Moses came on the boat, didn't stay, just dropped off a box of groceries, and told me they had to get back to do some island dance routine for the cruisers' dinner and cultural evening. Poor guys.

11th.

When the bee who knows where the nectar is comes back to dance, the other workers are not actually paying attention to the wagging abdomen, they are touching the dancing bee's thorax with their antennae. They are hearing the directions to the nectar, not seeing them.

Found a picture in the notes of a strange-looking cylindrical honeycomb. Looked like nothing naturally made, but the bees had constructed it after some scientist put a strong magnet under their hive.

They are more sensitive to earth's magnetic field, said the caption, than any other creature.

15 Sept.

High tide at 5.15pm, 1.5 metres. Dropped at 11 am to less than half a metre, then 11 pm half a metre again. If I were a seashell collector, I'd be in seventh heaven.

Inspection day and time to start looking for drone brood. Lots of pollen now around the entrances to the hives.

Must email more photos of the brood frames I've taken to Bryan and Caroline next time I'm at Ilariki. Also check about the mid-point date they told me they were planning to return to inspect progress and remove some of the capped brood frames.

I'm already nearly halfway through. Sleeping better. Feeling as chilled as the bees.

21st

Big job keeping weeds down in garden but good to have enough kumara to add to tuna and noodles, and to make a fire to boil or bake them rather than always use up gas with stove. R and E brought me a big hand of bananas on the boat, and took away a bundle of taro in exchange, and I have been eating through the bananas, which start to ripen from the bottom of the hand and are green and then yellow and then black so fast it's like a wave passing through them. Black and yellow clustering on a huge bunch—like bees on the comb, or swarming. Things ripen and rot so fast. It's all compost before you know it. No electricity in villages, so no fridges or storage anywhere, surplus just thrown on a pile. Glut and scarcity, eating browning bananas as fast as you can, outpacing the rot.

Days still and hot and humid, so hard to force the brain to stay alert and focused on one thing. I catch myself moving at sleepwalker pace, slogging through the sauna air.

22nd.

A luxury, really, being unobserved. We're not good at it, us whitefellas. But the isolation feels like pulling a pale, pinched foot out of a too-tight shoe.

Not many people get a chance at that, however much they long for it.

I flex and uncramp. I test my weight. I sit with the numbness which spreads to fill the vacuum with its own particular shape. What I'm stretching is the ache. Dissolving it.

Each new thought or task, and the distinction is starting to blur, is like tossing out a line, watching it playing out.

There is no hook on the line, far less any bait. There's nothing which will ever need reeling in. This is the curative. When the gurus talk about wanting nothing, this is what they mean.

Later: 11 pm. The locals here, on the main island and everywhere I visited, could never believe that I could possibly be keen to be by myself. The women would want to accompany me everywhere, certain I would be grateful for talk and company, the endless meeting and greeting and exchange of small talk, the reiteration of plans. The constant checking in, the constant smoothing away of potential friction and dramas. The generous natural way they called me 'sister' and 'aunty' once we became friends. It was impossible to be solitary. Nothing is done alone in Melanesia. Those who want isolation seem peculiar; they are treated with suspicion, embarrassment, discomfort. I was looked after like this. They took me in hand.

Women would arrive at my gate, shy, holding a flower or a pawpaw, a bunch of bananas. Nobody wanted to be alone, or should be, so they would sit with me all afternoon as if I was recovering from some illness, 'storian' with me. Keen to bear witness to how I spent my hours when I wasn't working. Having to recount, to make an account of myself.

P. was never there, of course, never around. But that seemed normal to them – women and men had so little to do with each other day to day, I soon found out; none of them knew exactly what their men did or where they went of a day.

Men and women even stood separately on different aisles at church.

Men spend their day spinning out time, wait for kava time to sit and pontificate, women run the world, feed the children, carry the loads, walking miles.

That curious question I would always get: "Yu blong wea?" A way of saying 'where do you come from?' – that all-important question to a Melanesian – but also that sting.

Where, in fact?

"*Wet!*" I would hear as I walked along the road to town. Wait up, wait for me, let me catch up with you, so you don't need to walk along a road alone.

"*Wet smol!*" Wait a moment, hang on. We can walk together to a sister's, a cousin's, on some slow vague convoluted errand with no expectation.

How far is it, this place we're walking to? "*Long-way close-up.*" A smile, a wave of the arm. Kind, hesitant attention. Nothing escaping that constant curiosity.

So the exhaustion, the conscious need to search my mind for news, to summon an interest in gossip and trivia. Why do they call it depression? They should call it COMpression.

Sept 23rd

What gives me pleasure now: spacing the hive frames exactly the right distance apart, a careful, optimal arrangement which brooks no argument, a deliberate manoeuvring of everything in place for its own good. A building of new, clean comb into a scoured-clean frame. Quarantined by distance.

Here I can dwell on whatever I choose. I define it. Nobody else.

Through this lens of being here on the island some things lose their sharpness and some things bloom like they happened yesterday.

That rawness, the stomach-ache churn at 3 a.m, how I was in the echo chamber of it — here it's getting burned out of me. Evaporating off, remnants of cortisol and adrenaline getting sweated out through my pores.

What it is: a realigning of something. A resetting of a dislocated bone.

Every morning when I swing my feet to the floor I slip them into the rubber thongs I bought for \$4 at Leong Chin Store on the mainland and which are now already worn into the perfect shape for my feet.

Treating infected cuts and split or blistered skin is such a business that I wear these from the moment I step out of the hut in the morning to the moment I re-enter it as the light fades. I feel for them with my feet in the middle of the night, nudging my toes into them to walk out when there's moonlight, listening to the knock of water pulled and drawn back by that same moon. I can hear it now, the hushed rasp of the coral shingle lifted and knocked by each small wave. It's like the water's sighing, shrugging its shoulders. Fretting over nothing.

26th

Neap tide, full moon, lagoon like a Rodgers and Hammerstein set tonight.

Warwick told me the original story Michener wrote, "Tales of the South Pacific" which became the musical, was actually set on Santo, a highly fictionalised version of the U.S. military operations there during WW2.

Michener had a house there and everything—in ruins now. Samoa had Robert Louis Stevenson, Gauguin went to Tahiti, Santo got James Michener. And a hundred thousand U.S. marines, dropped in from outer space.

Wednesday 4th (Oct)

Afternoon at the Ilariki resort, I'm no better than any of the tourists and holidaymakers lolling on the banana lounges by the pool. I'm sitting wrapped in a sarong, clean from the shower (water cold!), hair washed, and I have brought my laptop across the waves in its plastic box because I am greedy for the internet, sitting here under the fan at a lunch table, using up my precious time scrolling through Google images. Telling myself, again, I'm still 'researching'. No email with midway visit or end date confirmation from CPA.

Sitting in a place with the word 'Paradise' emblazoned everywhere, stencilled on the staff t-shirts and vests, on the menus, over the entrances to the luxury bures, all of it, I google 'paradise'.

From the Persian *pairidaeza*, meaning 'enclosure' – pairi (around) and daeza (wall), translated into the Greek *paradeisos*. That'll be chapter one: paradise as a fortress, a walled kingdom. Here thousands of miles from any air-conditioned museum or art gallery the locals know the Garden of Eden very well; they are coached by their pastors and ministers to believe they live in it. They are a South Pacific version of the Chosen People.

Later, when one of the staff takes me back across the channel to the island, straightaway reality will slip, and I will be almost able to convince myself Ilariki was a bit of a tropical hallucination. It feels like that right now and I'm sitting in the middle of it. May as well be a virtual reality headset.

Later: All the stuff I did before I came here with P when he got the Aid and Development job – the idea of 'my life' before this line in the sand – is coming back to me in odd fragments. And not anything useful or constructive either – not doing the

Education Program at the gallery or setting up the visiting shows, it's stuff from right down in the wayback machine.

When I walk down to check on the bees my footsteps set up a rhythm and as I walk I hear Flintstones! Meet the Flintstones! They're a modern-Stone Age-family!

I'll be breaking up a coconut and realise I am humming, like an earworm, 'you put the lime in the coconut and shake it all up you put the lime in the coconut and call me in the morning ...'

I have all the time in the world here – days if I want – to recall nothing but the poems I recited at primary school eisteddfods ('oh what is that sound that fills the ear? Down in the valley, drumming, drumming? Only the scarlet soldiers, dear, the sound of the soldiers coming');

the precise arrangement of my mother's linen cupboard (from bottom to top: picnic rugs, beach towels, blankets, tablecloths and napkins, double bed sheets, single bed sheets, pillowcases, top shelf lightbulbs and extension cords);

the list of stations on my way home on a long train commute in a city I lived in once for a reason I can barely recall. Getting the order right can occupy me for an hour.

I have an inner voice and it is spouting nonsense, like someone talking in their sleep in a fever. It seems to spread to fill the mental vacuum and if I stay with it, I can will myself into small corners I would have said I had forgotten.

Galleries I have visited and their various contents, the order in which I wandered through them, the postcards I bought and for whom.

The jumble of images I've saved in the desktop folder called "Postgrad" and the other one called "Misc".

Countries and their currencies. Back when there were different currencies, and they were distinctive. The fifty Dutch Guilder note I had with the yellow sunflowers I couldn't bear to part with. The way it was folded into my wallet. Doing that drawing in the gallery in East Berlin before the wall came down when the guard told me it was verboten to draw the exhibits. Remembering what I drew: the sculpture of the man with a wheel on him and every spoke an upraised arm, making a Nazi salute, brandishing a rifle, holding up a document, a scythe, a sword, a pen.

That graffiti on the Wall: 'More bread, more meat, less Orwell.'

Everything I didn't take photos of, back in 1982.

7th

Today I stooped down to look in a flight entrance to examine the pollen there and slipped into a kind of trance because of this sense of wandering the vaults, with nothing waiting for me, just vaguely timing myself against the sun setting.

I willed myself into the room in the gallery where I stood for ages looking at Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights". I felt the bees coming in around me, and I slipped between times in my head – how small that famous triptych was, the tiny faces of his vision, the birds and eggs and spindly people and bees, too, all of it in Bosch's mystical vision, all the teeming detail I will probably associate forever with the mothbally woollen coat of the person next to me and the guard telling me, finally, to step back, I was too close. Bosch's weird giraffe creature.

That very moment, stored and capped in a single mental cell. Put aside as provisions, or why else waste the space?

Wednesday 11th

Moses and Ezekiel came today, replaced the canister for the gas stove, brought me some UHT milk and slashed back, in twenty short minutes, the weeds I'd been trying to hack at for two hours. Told them I wanted to mark out a coral path to the hives and they told me that next time they would bring a wheelbarrow from the resort and collect the chunks of dead coral I needed from the northern shore.

They asked me if I would write down on my list that I wanted some beers, and they could deliver them and drink them while they were here, and I said sure. It would take them a day to earn enough to buy one beer at Ilariki.

Moses ate a packet of chips and when he'd finished, he folded down the top of the packet and sat it in the corner of the hut. He said it was a cockroach trap—that cockroaches would go in to eat the salt and scraps and then the sides of the bag would be too oily and slippery for them to climb out again. I laughed and said I didn't need a cockroach trap because here on the quarantine island there weren't any, and Moses and Ezekiel laughed and said 'wet smol'.

12th.

Sure enough, this morning – trapped cockroach. From where? Blong wea?!

I should use it as bait. I have a fishing line kit here I haven't even used and a stack of canned tuna, and I am just like the people in my class at the diabetes awareness workshops, admitting they take the easy route in their reliance on tinfish because it is there, and the weather is hot, and fishing is tiring and unpredictable. And me, stepping in with a table graph to lecture them otherwise.

No sense then of this inertia, this exhaustion and will to minimise where possible.

14th

Joseph was right when he painted the different symbols on the hives. The bees always fly back to their own hive even if the hive has been moved or re-oriented. They are 'base-bound'. This is home for them. Maybe they do recognise the different symbols and the colour, but the bee notes say they also develop a hive-specific smell particular to their colony. Also, and I've been trying to watch this, they are not allowed to enter another colony unless they are carrying nectar, so both colonies operate like two separate fortresses, for now. Once the queens take off, it'll be a different matter. From the 8th to today, the 14th, the tides have been so consistent it hasn't been worth noting anything down.

Time getting very blurry now. Tide in, tide out, lapping the same markers, moon growing to what it is now, which is full. Rising like a romcom fantasy over the lagoon, nobody to see it but me.

The routine is the shape I am in; time passes and presses in, rises like bread to fill crevices. Temperatures recorded, the stolid reliability of rain in the plastic gauge, a squadron of tiny hermit crabs forever on the march on their way to the holy lands of the lagoon. The Camino of the Crabs.

I used to see kids on the mainland racing hermit crabs as a game, sweeping a big circle on the sand and dropping their crabs into it to see which ones got out first.

They would give them Western names: Nicki, Danny, Michael, Beyonce.

The best present I ever got those kids was five bottles of nail polish from the general store so that they could mark the shells of their champion hermit crabs and tell them apart.

15th

No phone connection at all again today. I'm sure this is a 'server problem' – used to have a lot of those in town. There's only the one phone tower on the hill outside town on Santo, blown down in successive cyclones, so not too surprising that I also can't get any reception. But why, really, turn it on to check the time and the date? Why wash my filthy shorts, except in seawater when I wade in to snorkel?

Pulling the glass mask over my eyes and submersing myself is like changing the channel on the mental TV anyway, or switching on the full-colour screen. Under there, floating, I hear my own breathing slow down in a way I could never make it do when I was sitting in yoga class. Hello, fluorescent Discovery Channel fish. Hello, light-zinging brain coral. Nothing happening, nothing to wait for, nothing to prepare for except eating and sleeping. So I float. Out there, ranging wide, the bees are drinking nectar, passing it mouth to mouth. My perfect industrious subjects. Under the water, I hear a faint rhythmic crunching and see it is a parrot fish, gazing at me glassily as its jaws work over the coral surface, nibbling the hard surface, its stripes fluorescent bright, neon blue. Here, now. Why even plug in the charger?

16th

Phone reception back but patchy. Kindle working fine.

From jpeg file: Masaccio: Cacciata del Progenitori dall'Eden, 1425 Firenze.

Adam sobbing in this one, face in hands. Eve open-mouthed with distress, hands covering nakedness still, conscious belatedly of shame.

Mathematically proportioned spaces and realistic anatomical structure, Masaccio differs from Giotto in that he portrayed figures as distinguishable individuals capable of confronting issues of profound moral moment. Contrast psychological depth with Masolina.

Angel looks calm hovering above them but is still pointing firmly and holding a sword. One of the Medicis three centuries later ordered that fig leaves be added for decorum. Fig leaves removed again in 1980s (discuss?) when work restored to remove centuries of soot laid down from accumulated votive candles and oil lamps. Original colours seen when an altar was removed show brilliant radiance. Contrast Masaccio's depiction of agony with Masolina's depiction of serenity.

Discuss Masaccio's influence on Michelangelo. Michelangelo's Adam and Eve large and muscular, like painted sculptures.

Genesis 3:21 says that God made Adam and Eve coats of skin to clothe them.

Extrapolate something about Renaissance, nakedness, painting over fig leaves, determination to diverge from doctrine to paint naked skin, symbolism of Eden as place of 'naked heathens'?

Benjamin West's 'Expulsion' 1791 went with the coats of skins. Schleppe to Washington once to see this to find it wasn't on view. Washington itself looked like Satan's City of Pandemonium, painted white.

Schraudolph's 'Adam and Eve' in the Imperial Cathedral of Speyer, Eve looks like she's wearing a sheepskin car seat cover.

Adriaen van der Werff's 'Expulsion from Paradise', 1711. Both glowingly naked, Adam with both hands raised in alarm and at least looking back at the divine light expelling them, Eve stumbling sprawling in front of him like she's about to trip. Maybe he's just given her an almighty push. Maybe he's going to fall forwards onto her and crush her. Into the darkness they go.

Need a stronger focalising agent for dissertation.

Or maybe need dissertation somebody somewhere might conceivably be interested in.

Or maybe don't need dissertation. Even the word is ridiculous.

17th

So much pleasure in having purpose, to see dots of rust and know I should sharpen the machete, and get the file, and squat down on the ground in the shade to do it.

Having something to do which requires judgement and precision even though there is nobody else here to see me or admire my handiwork.

I do it for its own sake. The blade meets the file, over and over. Once I would have knelt, or stood at a workbench. I would have only squatted like this at yoga and then felt my hamstrings pulling and my knees protesting. Now I prefer it to sitting.

I want the handle to become darkened and smoothed by the oils and sweat from my palm. That fit. The momentum carried from my twisting wrist into that 45 degree angle for clean slicing through, the whip sound of it, the steel filed and bright, resurrected; one of the few things humans make here which is not instantly on the path to crumbling ruin.

I'm sharing an island with an entire city of beings who all seem to know exactly what they are doing. I am the clueless and mystified outsider, hoping for a glimpse of the organisational operations manual. Here she comes, this lumbering invader, toiling up the track hot and red and sweaty, and the guard bees on lookout probably swoop back to the boxes, doing the bee equivalent of an eye-roll.

18th Ilariki. Washed my clothes in the staff laundry, lay on a lounge chair, watched the TV which was playing Brazilian soccer. The brilliant green of the pitch, the blurred hugeness of the crowds and the floodlights, the roar of humans chanting and cheering in unison.

The article Kaz sent me said that people who spend months in isolation in remote places like Antarctica think they will reacclimatise to their other life when they go back to it, but sometimes within a month or two they want to go back to Antarctica, the furthest point away they can. To a landscape where everything is hard and frozen, and it is only them.

19th

Got kitted up in the suit today to make extension to the hives as planned to give bees in both colonies more space. Brought fresh frames and the smoker. Waited till the bees were very calm then loosened frames in the full hive with the hive tool and transferred some to the new empty hive with fresh empty frames ready to go.

Had a good look for queen and new eggs. Had to transfer frames in their correct order so that the brood nest would retain the same shape, and stack the additional new frames either side of the transferred ones for them to expand out into. Did all of this without a single sting or sign of aggression, heart rate steady, hands steady. Probably could have even got by without the smoker.

Talked to them the whole time in my head. Took photos to send to CPA. Must confirm exit strategy again when they get back here, to make sure brood frames full of larvae at the right stage are ready to take back for requeening and breeding.

22nd

There is a kind of vine growing here. It's rampant. It sprawls itself into the tree canopy desperate for light and sun. It's so quick to colonise any bare space that when I walk

down to the hives I carry the machete and swing it back and forth, clearing a path for myself that only days before, it feels like, was clear of vines.

There is another vine, too, on the larger islands, with a larger flatter leaf, and this one is choking the jungle wherever it gets established; the two vine species competing ferociously for light and space. This second kind, I've been told, was introduced by the Americans during World War Two when it was used on Santo and every other military base as camouflage for huts, buildings, tanks, munitions, whatever. Apparently they only had to plant it and it would grow within days to disguise and sprawl as jungle camouflage over everything, making buildings and huts and hangers invisible from the air. So the locals nicknamed it "Mile-a-Minute".

It seems amazing, the forethought to bring cuttings of that plant with you when you set out to colonise an island as a strategic military base, ready for warfare far from home. Such attention to detail – to bring not just planes and ships full of tanks and jeeps and guns and food and Coca Cola and medicine and cannons and caterpillar vehicles and tons of munitions and grenades and bullets and shells, but cuttings of an invasive plant as well, ready to take over and cover your tracks. The thoroughness of it.

I hate the way this plant strings itself through the canopy, choking off light. The dankness and darkness, the way the jungle trees are crushed and borne down with it. Parasitic. There is none of this American vine on my island.

My island – listen to me. The small leaf variety keeps me busy enough, slashing, sweeping, seeing it springing up undaunted from the hacked piles I've already cut and cleared away. I should plant it all around the hut to hold it together. Use vines to hold the roof on, like cable ties. Make myself a little den.

23rd.

The garden planted for me before I started, which I could barely see until it was pointed out to me what was growing where, is already producing food now faster than I can eat it, replenishing in the daily showers of rain and damp heat. I let the pawpaws fall to the ground – there's a limit to how many one person can eat.

Even fence posts sprout – I saw that on the mainland. Sticks cut from trees and pushed into the ground to contain pigs and chickens and gardens would stand stripped and bare for a week or so and then suddenly burst back into relentless, unstoppable leaf. The

fence would make a hedge, a wild thorny afro topiary. I wonder if I should try it around the bee colonies as a windbreak.

No wonder they all believe in the literal truth of the Garden of Eden. Nothing needs encouragement to burst into fresh growth like this, to be cut and resurrect itself and fall back and die, endlessly, forever. It's all fecundity, dieback and germination. Some parts of it go so slow your whole sense of time seems warped, other parts of it are so fast you turn your back and suddenly everything's weeds, everything's choked with creepers.

24th

THINGS I MISS:

Dairy. (Cold milk. Yoghurt.)

Bread.

Dry, clean clothes. Pulled on to clean, dry skin.

Air conditioning every now and then.

Cold drinks. Ice. (Resort has them.)

Cold sea water.

Driving with the window down on a sealed road, going somewhere. On four good tyres.

Hot chips. (Resort has them.)

GOING TO RESORT TOMORROW. Send photos direct from phone using Wi-Fi.

It's after dark inside the hut, the humidity still so full-on that I'm sitting here glazed with sweat, the midges sticking to me like I'm glue, the computer's fan working way too hard for midnight to keep the battery cool.

Everything too hot and sticky to do anything but pack the computer away in its box and lie on the bed and hope that by morning, a breeze will have entered the hut leaving everything faintly damp, salt-smelling, even the lime in the concrete floor.

Listening to little chirrups as geckos rustle through the palm roof, stalking insects drawn to the light. They're huge. Maybe the chirrups are warring geckos playing their own version of Marco Polo. Two will fight each other for a moth. Once they fell from the ceiling onto the table, twisting and biting, big as jelly snakes. Nearly had a heart attack.

I think it must be them keeping the cockroaches down. Tiny deposits of shit adorn the table in the morning: white with a tiny black comma tail, perfectly digested midges.

OTHER THINGS:

Wine.

Colleagues.

Conversations.

Not being itchy.

Cushions.

Being awake, alert, and shivering, weather foggy or frosty.

Leaves changing colour.

Sound of trains and trams at night.

Cool, dry air.

Hand touching skin.

Bees are going gangbusters. The more I leave them alone, the better they are. When I bend down to listen to what's going on inside one of the hives, it's like a Geiger counter in there, hot and ticking.

25th WEDNESDAY visit from Joseph and Rexley late morning, they called from the boat: You want to come straight to Ilariki? Of course I did. I grabbed phone and laptop and cable to take in a double plastic bag, and waded out to the boat to sit at the resort and spend a few hours uploading photos of the brood frames, the honey frames, inserting the figures I have calculated, into a long and dutiful email to the CPA.

One answering email from them at last, thanking me, telling me they will pass the info on to Phil and Bryan in Canberra. Nothing about dates for assessment visit even though it's already practically November; would like to be warned before they turn up. Sent a bunch of photos to Kaz, too; arrangements to catch up at Christmas, couple of estimated dates of getting back to Australia.

Ate fish and chips, drank a bottle of beer, stood under the shower until the cold water ran out. Then back here for another week of unstructured, unresisting solitude. Reset the clock and wound it. Re-hammered the posts back in at the high-tide mark. Must get back to noting tidal patterns.

26th

Spending ridiculous amounts of time of a day watching each colony and taking notes. After early Dec. it'll all be over and the new queens transported for requeening and

rehiving; for now, though, it's my kingdom, and I don't have to but I visit that kingdom every day.

27th.

Nothing to report, Captain.

28th

New moon, a whopping 1.90 metre high tide, plunging down to a quarter of a metre at 11 pm.

I walk down the same track every day. My own feet are what keep it a track, gradually wearing down the same thread of path.

The weight of the machete in my hand has become so familiar that I feel unprepared without it as I head to the garden. I have learned to loop it through twining vines with an action I have seen so many times but never before realised was such a perfect and efficient motion: a sweeping figure 8 at a 45 degree angle with a sharp blade.

Perfect. The mindless wrist making the mindless shape of infinity without even noticing. My vigilance about not slipping into self-pity, not losing it, is like the stone I keep at hand to run over the machete's blade every now and then, keeping something bright that would go dull with disuse if I just dropped it and forgot about it. Then I notice the tiny pinpricks of rust. An invasion always waiting.

File it down another infinitesimal amount, a fraction more of my edge disappearing.

30th.

The bees have started making new comb in the hive extensions. Long comb, ready for new queens. Beautiful. Amazing how they just get on with exactly what they need to do. The new empty frames have a foundation strip of beeswax at their tops, to get the bees started. Like an idiot, before I took this job I always thought you needed to provide the wax from somewhere. I never really thought it through, just saw how perfectly symmetrical hexagonal honeycomb was, and assumed it was pressed by some machine. But the bees produce the wax themselves. Of course they do. They make it in their wax glands, pass it out through their abdomens, let it set in scales on the wax plate, then lift it with their legs and chew it until it's malleable and they make it into combs.

I've leaned in and watched them do it, at the times when I'm meant to be checking the frames quickly for brood and then replacing them. It's mesmerising, the shifting, trembling, vibrating industry of each frame, and what each bee is doing.

The nectar ripening into honey in these hexagonal cavities has been collected by the bees in their nectar sacs and passed to other bees, one after the other, the waters of the nectar evaporating and some kind of enzyme, like spit I guess, which converts its sugars into glucose and fructose, concentrating it before it is sealed in a cell with wax. The notes say they vibrate their wings to get the temperature exactly right, adjusting it, even here in the tropics.

So the two colonies just the right distance apart, in boxes just the right distance apart, filled with frames just the right distance apart, creating individual cells of wax, working it with their mandibles and smoothing it in place like potters.

Lining each laying cell in preparation, bustling, vibrating, keeping the heat constant with their own jostling, nurse bees and guard bees and worker bees all endlessly feeding and smoothing and cleaning and grooming the fur of their queen.

Each one an evolutionary miracle. Each one dead in 90 days.

Nov 1st

Only time to drop off some supplies today from Ilariki – there's some new exclusive or expedition cruise meant to be coming in and staying before they cruise on up to the Torres Islands where the locals will be no doubt standing ready in their traditional clothes. So still don't know the date CPA are going to be turning up; over a 'mid-point' check-in date already.

3rd

When the two colonies meet and breed, which will be soon now, maybe it will be like a football match played between two towns – a sort of ritualised competitive punch-up. Or maybe it will be like a dance in a country hall, meeting strangers from another town over the mountain, old rituals to avoid intermarriage.

A dance or fight in the air, though. In the notes is info about the medieval practice of 'telling the bees'. When a member of a family died or something important or consequential happened, someone would go and tell the bees. If a beekeeper failed to do

this, people thought the bees would desert the hive, give up producing honey, or die inside the hive. The colony would collapse.

So maybe beekeepers went down and hummed a sad funeral march to let them know. Or put a piece of wedding cake under the hive after a family wedding.

There's something so moving about this, the thought of someone knocking gently on a beehive to get the bees' attention, then breaking important news to them.

I tell my bees: I'll take care of you. Sometimes in my head, sometimes aloud. No wedding cake, but you're safe here, building a new kingdom, all the resistance you need already getting built into your DNA. All your nourishment stored and ready.

When I approach them I can sometimes tune in to the pitch of buzzing and hear a change in tone which is a danger alert and once they somehow discern I am no danger, I can hear another change in tone. Sometimes this pulse seems to come at me in waves, like the sound of cicadas on hot nights in the Southern Hemisphere – not here, though, there are no cicadas here, no eucalypts, no dry heat, even though it's November already – synchronizing itself with the blood beating in my ears.

A 500 beats per second pulse.

This is calming down the hive. Signalling an 'all-clear'.

Then the relaxed 250 beats of wings per second, amplified by the hive itself, something I can put an ear to and feel the vibrating, thrumming, tickling buzz as they fan the queen, the centre of the universe, keeping her cool, keeping her pumping out the new generation.

There are even words for the sounds they make themselves. The new queen 'pipes' or 'toots' as she hatches, a chirruping sound. The other females, curled in their cells, respond to her. They 'quark'.

Quarks, which form hadrons, which form protons and neutrons, which are the components of atomic nuclei. Which make all matter. Quarks, so small that scientists can't even prove they exist, so that we have to take it on credit.

Saturday

High tide point ready to be noted and observed and recorded, if I can be bothered.

I need to stir myself to be bothered. Summon my energy to pull my head off the crappy lump of synthetic pillow and kick aside the mosquito net, already sweating at 6.30 am.

The pulse in my temple, the chronic glare headache in the heat of the day, beats in tiny internal cymbal crashes. Like the endless rhythmic beat of the waves.

Small waves here in the tropics, no pounding surf. Just lapping tides in and out, the everlasting small collapses fetching up onto sand, the drenching sea draining away, leaving everything clean each morning.

Almost becoming a skill, to move through the wet compress of the heat and not think. To forget and accept everything that's out of your hands. To obliterate the footprints, synchronise your heartbeat with sighing wavelets. Sitting leaning up against the wooden tree trunk which is a slowly-rotting bench and pretty soon will probably sprout something.

Sunday.

Possible thesis titles:

"Paradise and its Discontents: the Representation of Eden in art."

"The Garden of Eden and its Patterns of Expulsion: ontological anxieties and existential losses."

"Genesis Chapter 3: the Knowledge of Loss and the Loss of Knowledge".

"Enclosure and prison: Eden, Dreams of Arcadia and the Loss of Self."

Every one feels literally more pretentious than the last.

'Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens'. David Byrnes' voice singing that, so heavy and dreamy. That languorous ennui of privilege, which congratulates us for domesticating the wild, for proclaiming ourselves bored with it.

Asked Lolinah once to explain to me 'mi laze' when I asked her if this was true, that there was no word for 'being bored' in Bislama.

First had to explain what being bored was – the feeling, I said, that everything's dull and pointless and nothing's worth doing. The feeling for not caring about anything, or (I was getting more desperate as she looked more and more mystified) having everything you want but not caring about anything.

Finally her face cleared. The expression, she said, was "waet pej".

White page.

"No plans," she replied. "Just empty."

That's it, alright.

One time at Champagne Beach – eight months ago? nine? – I swam with a giant turtle. When I put my head up there was a Japanese tourist on the beach, but she had her back to the water taking selfies with the ocean as a backdrop, and so I didn't call to her to tell her.

I have seen on Youtube three-hour long videos of a tropical bay and palm trees, videos actually of a lagoon just like this one I find myself living on, a copyrighted relaxation landscape you can dial up and project onto your wall and pretend to exist in. But those soundtracks of lapping waves and seagulls and breeze are on a loop, synthetically manufactured for consistency. After a while you start to notice. Because what we want is probably something reliably unvarying and repetitive, to give ourselves permission to feel sufficiently mesmerised, to relax into like we're being rocked in a cradle.

But imagine three hours turning to three days, and nothing to break that singular view, that reliable blueness, the tinnitus of that sound.

Then three solid weeks of the same loop, nothing but that. No, generally the holiday's over by then, and you're home on the plane and back to airconditioned climate control and the novelty is wrung dry. You're back from the abyss of expensive solitude and blank-brained rest, and tell me you're not secretly relieved.

My hair, I can feel, is stiff with sea mist. I lick my arm and taste salt. Everything goes slow. But that doesn't mean it's not powerful.

Heat and moisture day after day, just relentlessly rotting and corroding and rusting and loosening everything here. No fire and ice required when there's mould and decay.

The tropics plays a long game. It talks everything into giving up eventually. It has a poker face, takes ages to select its card. It speaks in insinuating whispers, with all the time in the world.

Making everything that's vertical, in the end, horizontal.

Nov 6th

Well. After reading nearly half of 'Kavalier and Clay' this morning on the Kindle in one long luxuriant burst, then getting scratchy telling myself, again, that it's actually detrimental to interfere with the hives too much, I went down mid-afternoon. Convinced myself I should go down there and take more photos of how much pollen is in the hive

openings, how much the workers are carrying back, or like I should make today my inspection day, and then I would draft, tonight, a lengthy email again to the project managers and pin them down on return dates.

Like an idiot I went while it was still hot, waited around for the bees to get calm, took too long. They DID NOT like the smoker. They were agitated but I wasn't paying the right attention. Selected frames hanging in each of the furthest colony boxes in each colony and diligently checked and took photos of each, one lifted up after another, each one heavy with capped cells – honey, pollen, larvae.

Took it very slowly and calmly, searching for the queen and finding her stacked under shifting adoring bodies. Took way too much time. Hypnotised with spinning this out. Looked up from my notes at the second colony to realize it was twilight.

Wind was blowing up and the sun took about twenty seconds to drop below the horizon.

An egg yolk slipping into a cup. A sudden last gout of light, then darkness.

Started retracing my steps along the track, slashing nothing now, just hanging on to the notebook and my machete. Cursing myself of course for not packing the wind-up torch, which gives a pathetically weak beam but at least would have been some extra bit of light to have on hand.

So hard to follow one simple linear thought: stick to the track. The whole island is less than 6 square kilometres and I had walked this track in moonlight a few times. Although not this far, not the whole thousand steps. My thoughts just skittered off, and I couldn't corral them. I thought about the American GIs who became hopelessly lost in the bush during WW2 in Santo. They thought they were taking a short cut to a swimming hole and were rescued days later, dehydrated and dazed, still tracking in circles, like the moron cast of Gilligan's Island, around the same small patch of jungle.

So I kept my eyes on the track as the wind came up hard and at first it was a pleasure to be cool, for once, but soon it was buffeting everything around me, and I could feel it was off the ocean, and the first shower of rain fell in a scattering squall.

At first it felt more an inconvenience than anything. I knew that no matter how wet I got, or how long I stayed out in the pitch darkness, I would not die of cold or exposure.

I was not striding, I was inching along. Crazy wind and bucketing rain as I reached the point where technically I should have been entering the clearing, but I seriously could not see two metres in front of me.

With my hand out in front of me like someone pushing through dark curtains.

Something dilates when you panic. A squeeze of cortisol. My whole brain was like a lens open to its widest aperture, straining for any kind of light.

My thoughts: that I'd become completely disoriented, in deep blackness and still no hut or clearing, and I would soon be stepping OFF something, something on the other side of the island, that what I was doing now was creeping blindly along the side of a ravine, about to skid and plunge into a hole.

I could visualise the hut perfectly even though there's so little in it: the lantern inside on the left hand shelf and the hit-or-miss damp matches next to it, the torch on the bed waiting to shrink this storm and cast some shadows and show me where the towel and my dry clothes were.

Out of every hypothetical option in the world, the one thing I wanted was just to grope my way inside the hut, then lie down. Shaky and drenched, creeping along with my hand out, no light but huge sound, rain coming at me in lashes.

Panicked sick terror that I was as dumb as those G.I.s and had strayed in entirely the wrong direction and soon would be sprawling forward into the hole and knowing it would be a good long while before anybody even started to think about missing me and it would be a long slow death, an Amelia Earhart death, lying dehydrated and delirious in a ditch in the middle of a speck of ground in the vast Pacific Ocean, eyes to the sky.

I tripped, of course, because that kind of thinking pulls your mind from where it needs to be. My foot hit some hard raised rim of tree root. At least had the sense to throw my machete away from me as I fell. Elbow and hip took the impact and I heard a grunt of pain come out of me like I was someone else and I thought "there's a human voice."

Then I got myself back together and felt around under me at the ridge of hard root like a spine and followed it up, my fingers like wet feelers now.

The root met an angle, a crevice, and continued higher, and I pulled myself along and up it, just thinking one thing at a time, one thought connected to the next thought.

When you get up in pitch blackness and you're not in your own bed but another room altogether, you feel around contours like this, blind and panting, half in your nightmare and half out. Felt with my hands where it connected with another rough joint of root, each intersection getting thicker all the time, like capillaries merging into veins which merged into arteries. A maze I followed. Tough ridged skin like climbing up an

elephant. I pulled myself towards it and into it weak with relief because I knew where I was now: climbing into the roots of the nabanga. The banyan.

Inside the tree's shelter I calmed down. Roots up and branches down, the hundreds of hanging vines and tendrils shivering and dripping and clacking around me. I sat enfolded between the legs of that elephant, protected.

Had my bearings then. There was lightning now, so I knew what I had to do, just wait for it to show me the dark shape due south, less than 20 metres: the hut.

When it did and I made a mental bearing I crawled out and squelched through the soft mud towards the hut, kept my hands outstretched to feel the pole of the doorway and when I touched it I stepped in under the roof.

Stood breathing. Felt for lantern, matches, towel. The smell of kerosene and mould. Damp but safe.

So curled now in my bed, the natangora roof with its tough woven pandanus holding watertight above me. A cell shape perfect around me. The earth outside still gulping its fill of water, gasping, pausing, drinking again. In the morning I will go back and get my machete from where I dropped it. Sharpen it. Feel the wooden heft of the handle.

Ink ocean. So strange to hear the howling wind and lashing rain outside and know I'm on an island in the middle of the ocean and open the laptop and see the blue rectangle of light beam out. Hear the clicking of my fingers on the keyboard and the date and time there next to the battery icon.

Nothing to fear. I'm too wired to sleep so just sitting here listening to it. This storming world with its rippling insatiable appetites. In the steamy heat of tomorrow morning it will all look so smashed and toppled, but then within days will spring up again, green and choking and voracious.

Every bit of fallen wood will be hollowed into chomped lace by termites, their endless slashing and tearing and consuming. All this water will be soaked up.

The termites will surface and pour like an army towards the new wood. The banana flowers will split, pumping out a scent like a neon sign at a roadside café beaming *open open open*.

And the bees will know exactly what to do, and where to go.

7th.

Bees all fine. Each clearing practically steaming.

No reception on my phone, though. Not uncommon after high winds and storm. Opened the spigot on the overflowing tank and ran some water through, put my head under and washed my hair with the soap. Solar panel fine, light reliably on, radio quietly charging.

Image: "Pottery shards" Post-Lapita, Mangaazi style, made about 750 years ago.

Excavated by Garanger at Mangaasi site, Eretoka, west coast of Efate, Vanuatu.

Exchanged from Musee de l'Homme, Paris, 1978. A66599—A66609

Pottery is made today in a few villages on the west coast of Santo; it is no longer made anywhere else in Vanuatu.

Ran out of the right kind of clay? Or arrival of people with superior technology, like a fifty vatu plastic bucket. Exactly like the three I have here with me, set out to fill with rainwater so I can wash my hair. Plastic tubs and plastic tarps – the very thing the people who lost their village after Cyclone Hydra asked for as aid. When everyone had enough, they said thanks, that's all we need. The rest they knew they could rebuild with a machete and the right trees.

Found my own machete lying in vines under the nabanga, waiting.

8th.

No boat, no message, no visit to Ilariki. I guess we'll do it another day. Sea still very rough. Texted Warwick but not sure if the text went through – sometimes it seems to register as sent when it's not, as I've learned in the past. Maybe the strange weather's putting him off sending out a speedboat.

One time, talking to Joseph and Moses here, trying to practice my Bislama, I wanted to say the sea was choppy and tried: 'Solwata i raf' and there was an awkward silence before they grinned and told me that 'the sea is rough' is idiomatic in Bislama for a relationship being on the rocks. 'Solwata i drae' – 'the sea is dry' means 'I don't have any money'. After they left I thought about that awkward silence, wondered how much they knew about what went on with P and me, and P's spectacular expat fail.

10th

Not sure why the solar panel seems to be working so sporadically – maybe leaks in the seal after that dump of rain? Climbed up this morning and checked and the seals seem OK, but something isn't quite functioning.

I have resorted to trying the experiment of hand-cranking the wind-up solar radio with the USB in it to try to charge up the Kindle, which feels as ridiculous as trying to make a loaf of bread by grinding up wheat in a pepper grinder. Which I think is from one of the 'Little House on the Prairie' books I read when I was 10.

Another big rain today. Pouring out of the top of the tank again. Schlepped down to bees in the mud to check roofs were keeping them dry. Hope they're sitting tight in there. Schlepped up to the top of the hill – no bars on the phone.

Thinking of a photo I saw of freak weather conditions on the island of Torba, where for the first time in living memory, which is the only timescale that matters in a culture with no written records, there had been a hailstorm. Chunks of ice had thudded down onto the tropical palm trees and pandanus roofs. The photo showed some local men holding the ice in their hands in front of the nakamal.

The expression on their faces – can't stop thinking about it. Stiff and caught somewhere between wonderment and sheer blank terror – the face of people exposed to the spirit world, unable to comprehend its portents. Clutching a piece of frozen water. The Risk and Resilience Unit of the Ministry of Biosecurity happened to take those photos.

Took a lot of photos myself when I visited villages. Men looking fiercely down into the lens, refusing to smile, chests out, scowl in place, not knowing what to do with their hands. Folding their strong, sinewy arms. Kids running forward to look into the small magic lens, howling with laughter at what they saw there, touching my hair and skin, sighing with affection, leaning on me, arms slung around my neck. Kids in the towns assembling for photos, arranging themselves, making gang signs. Mysterious finger signs they used to respond to the world they could only imagine, seeing this as mandatory.

12th.

Here we go. Kindle had a dead screen this morning. Scared to take the laptop or phone off the charger, regardless of what the voltmeter is doing.

People warned me this would happen. It's the humidity. Nothing to read now.

There is a state out the other side of boredom where I get to the very outer edge of having any sequential thoughts at all.

I thought at first these mental brown-outs were a problem. Something a doctor might have warned me about, had I gone to a doctor when they started. I see now that they are a skill. A survival mechanism.

I left the Kindle on the solar charger all day – this afternoon, still nothing.
I just slit open the bag of rice and buried it in there.

Here's something I read out of the beekeeping handbook, if the bees are 'underemployed', if there isn't enough for them to do, they get listless.

The hive only works if they stay industrious; they are TASKED by something to keep it all going, keep the wheels on, communications always open, vibrating, scenting, responding. Hive is a nucleus. They thrum with it. Put your ear to it and it nearly knocks you off your feet.

They know how to cross-breed and maintain good bloodlines, somehow. They are well aware of the other set of hives, waiting for them. They are making 'clean queens' and whatever honey they are producing is for them, for winter, for when things shut down and go quiet. They are doing this oblivious of disruptive human plans for them, or because WE have tasked THEM to fix up the fucking mess we've made of things in their environments.

Getting concerned about wet season and bees running out of pollen and nectar, not sure how much damage the storm did. Wrote draft email to CPA re timelines. I think (hope) it's Ilariki tomorrow. Have tried sending a few texts.

Draft to send:

Dear Christine and Bryan

The colony extensions have gone well and I attach photos of the brood frames from #4, 7, 14 and 19 as examples. Colour good and all full @ November 12th.

Both hive colonies are progressing well, one much more strongly than the other at present, but I'm a little concerned that we're not quite pinned down to a completion date – are we still on track for 25th November for assessment and mid-December for wrap-up? I would need advice and expertise if colonies start to exhibit early signs of splitting and swarming. Flora is also not so plentiful in the wet season as you know and weather has made it a little difficult to monitor honey and pollen sources.

Messages relayed to me through Ilariki Resort may not get through to me promptly because we are all having some problems with reception after storm and wind damage to phone tower on Santo.

I have kept additional frames and new box to set up prior to end date so capped brood for requeening will be ready over 12 day cycle once I hear from you, and would very much prefer Geoff and other project apiarists to both collect and monitor final stages of project and advise prior to completion re likelihood of swarming and potential absconding. If you could email me confirmation of your expected dates of return I can work backwards from these dates to ensure new brood larvae are at the right stage for removal as we wrap things up.

~~I am waiting~~

~~I have had no contact since~~

~~I require~~

~~WTF, Christine?~~

yours faithfully

SPEAK TO WARWICK ABOUT PROBLEMS WITH SOLAR VOLTMETER—NEED WATERPROOF TAPE/ SILICONE?

(END OF MATERIAL saved to hard drive).

ENVELOPE TWO (2). Transcribed material handwritten in lined exercise books 3 and 4 from pack of 6, some inserts pasted in. Dated from NOVEMBER 14th.

Laptop just failed to turn on.

No screen message, no apple logo, nothing but black. Just dead as a dodo.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I hope everything else is saved. Or in the cloud. And the photos and stuff I sent has gone through and is on record.

Although – what's the difference? The bees are alive and breeding, everything's functioning except technology, which in a place like this, just like I was repeatedly warned, is bound to fail. Will have to wait to send laptop for repair until I'm back in Australia (and out of this climate). And will have to borrow Warwick's office computer next time I'm at Ilariki and send emails from there to explain what's happened.

Fortunate, really, it's happened so late in the piece – only one more month to go. Still, maybe also arrange to get someone to come across and look at the solar power system to test it's charging OK. Writing on paper feels weird. My hand getting cramped from its lack of practice holding a pen for so long.

Nothing to read. Except the handbook and the training course notes with the lists of small-scale beekeeping projects from different islands. Wonder how they're doing. Will keep to a routine of writing in this morning or night and once the king tide hits again I'll re-establish my measure and start tide notations again. Realised last night that I'm menstruating with the moon. At last, Kaz! After all these years of reading about this in 'Women Who Run With the Wolves' or whatever it was!

Keeping the phone and laptop on the charger all day even though the power charge seems so sporadic. So I'm leaving the phone switched off to conserve battery and turn on to check only for messages and to remind myself what date it is. Note to self: stop telling yourself what you're doing as if you can't remember a thing from one damned day to the next.

LATER: You've got to hand it to those bees. They do everything with perfectly ordered precision, with a total absence of mistakes.

Today I lifted a frame out slowly, marvelling that they seem to know me and allow me to disturb them, pushing down the thought that if they attacked and stung me en masse, I would have no protection. It's been a while since I wore the whole mask and protective suit and gloves together, and anyway, they're impossibly hot, which means I sweat and put out pheromones of my own, which probably agitates the bees far more.

I put my face, mesmerized, way down close to the comb, each miraculous hexagonal cell capped and sealed, the brood safe inside, the bees crawling, vibrating, stroking, seemingly obsessed with their treasure.

15th.

Going to keep up my notetaking even though I can't access 'postgrad' file. Need the routine (one page a day at least). Going to do it from the mental hard drive. Search there in the far corners of the compactus and see what fetches up. God knows there's enough of it back there.

My poor memory, sorting all these stories coming to the top of my simmering brain like the scum you need to strain off a pot of soup on a rolling boil. This flood of chatter pours itself through my brain, everything that needs compressing and discarding, cache files of stuff I haven't thought about for years. Whole bundles of lyrics. Old number plates. Old phone numbers.

Walked to the hives this morning unable to stop reciting, in my head, "I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date!" And seeing in my mind's eye whole unearthed scenes of the white rabbit and Alice in her blue Disney dress falling elegantly down a dark hole, skirt like a parachute. And me alone watching it in the cinema, the scratch of the seat, sensory vault swinging open now so I could smell that cinema even as I moved along a track on a tiny island, hat on and already sweating, down a track I need to slash to keep it from disappearing, which I am lining determinedly with white chunks of coral like a GPS for moonlight. It doesn't have to make sense for anyone but me.

But it's OK. I can dwell on anything I choose. I am a rock. I am an island.

Somewhere at home in a box I have that album. Simon and Garfunkel live in Central Park. I can see Paul Simon in a turtleneck sweater, but I think that's another album. I think cap and long hair, beard. Garfunkel, dandelion-headed, in a vest.

Time asks nothing of me. No reciprocation, no analysis, no outcome, no consequence.
I am starting to stop reflecting or observing myself doing anything.

I am becoming still and inert as a lizard, waiting out the day, recharging like a big solar battery, in stasis.

Everyone thinks they want solitude, to feel it all drop away. Until they have it.

The pieces of white coral bake like bones in the sun, the sand endlessly abrading them as the tide creeps up and shifts them into new patterns.

Be like me, says the sand, over and over. Be sand. Disintegrate into this. Stop fighting.

Flowers blossom and wither, bananas go so fast from green to black.

Once I kept a careful compost bin, black plastic at the bottom of my garden, stirred with a special metal prong, dusted with enzyme powder of some kind to assist breaking down. Compost. All of it, here, is compost. The ground I walk on. The mulch underfoot. Me.

When I applied for this job I wanted to crawl into darkness like an escape hatch and feel nothing, cut off contact with all sharp edges and other people. I couldn't stand being in anybody's presence in case they asked me about P. Or if I had to tell them. Or try to talk to them wondering if they already knew. The feeling of shock, his cold resoluteness, like being flayed alive. I longed for an off switch. Landed here and there was no switch in any case. Just waves sighing and collapsing onto the shore, drawing in and out, humidity hatching out seething life. There are spores blossoming and multiplying not just prettily, along an epiphytic orchid, but across the page I am trying to write on. The pen stops working. I tear a damp hole when I use a pencil. Everything sweats and tears open. Becomes a surface for growth.

Skin surface is no different. Two days ago I scratched my shin, and up it came like a festering red line. I'm eking out cream to put on it because I need to use that cream for coral cuts and the little ulcerous sores that start up on my hands from the tiniest of grazes.

Pasting in here something from the old Tropical Beekeeping notes:

In practice, many experienced beekeepers find that these precautions are not always worth the trouble involved in taking them, especially in hot zones where the weight and bulkiness of a complete protective outfit make it inconvenient for use over long periods, or when bees are of a gentler race. Fig. 5/6 shows a beekeeper equipped for working with tropical African bees: his equipment is limited to the bee veil and gloves. Fig. 1/7 shows another, working with European *Apis mellifera*; he has dispensed with gloves. His colleague shown in Fig. 1/8 has abandoned the veil, and is wearing a short-sleeved shirt. As to the Indonesian honey hunters seen in Fig. 4/2 taking nests of the dangerous *Apis dorsata*, they are practically nude. In fact, skill and experience generally afford better protection against bees than protective clothing, and beekeepers accept the fact that they will be stung occasionally. The one piece of protective equipment with which no beekeeper dispenses is the smoker. The use of smoke is the most ancient and still the most common means of calming bees and driving them off. Sophisticated smokers are available on the market, but simple ones which are just as efficient can easily be manufactured locally, and home-made smokers can be constructed, for instance a tin with holes in the side and a tube at each end: the beekeeper blows through one tube, and the smoke comes out of the other (Fig. 5/7). Some skill is still required in giving the right amount of smoke: too much smoke or too little may anger the bees more than none at all.

It's the 17th, about 7 pm (phone switched on then off to check that). Already dark but one hour of light from the globe to use.

Mental notes for museum of Neolithic humans and their artwork.

Weird swoop between real and fake in this place when I went. Most of the artwork was in the actual caves but so many people over the years had clamoured to visit that they had been closed for fear of damage and artificial caves created in their place. Maybe because it's a big ask for people, to accept a facsimile rather than the real thing you have travelled great distances to see and experience, these reproduction caves and exhibits were perfect. Better than real. Recreated with lavish attention to detail and artfully lit with LED. Free of dust, dirt and smoke damage.

Alongside were dioramas and exhibits (21st century, so interactive: nobody ever content now to just witness and observe, we must get the kids and make our own Neolithic handprint art and weave rushes and stitch together tanned leather pieces too.)

Skirting the original caves now sealed off to our predations, a museum built by award-winning architects around the landscape itself.

Exhibits of Cro-Magnon Man (and woman) showed dimly lit cave-dwellers sharpening their tools. They had no metal. They were dressed in skins and layers of animal fur to protect them against the cold, they huddled in rock shelters and cooked their hunted food over open fires, and the bones which still exist from these fires tell us just what they hunted to survive, the massive megafauna of Europe, long gone now but ready to greet us around the corner of the interactive display – nicely placed, with sensor triggered sound effects, very artful – sporting huge curved tusks and lowering, desperate foreheads. Dioramas of men and women squatting in animal skins. Clothed by hunting and collecting, the brave masculine work of spearing and chasing, the intricate female work of sorting and digging and snaring and collecting and stripping and tanning. The tiny fishbones which themselves became hooks.

Trade currency: quartz chipped to a fine sharp edge and bound to sticks.

I want to say now, to those tourists who had come to marvel at their ancestors and their ingenuity and toughness: imagine a world where nobody is ever cold and nobody is ever hungry. A warm, tropical world where food is so abundant it falls to rot on the ground, where nothing is stored, no animal skin needs to be worn, all is profligate waste and fecundity, mud and insects, rain and sun, heat and green.

The artwork on the cave walls, pictographs and running animals, Picasso going to see it and climbing out of the cave saying 'We have learned nothing.'

I think of the dreaming stampedes of animals on flickering walls – art whose purpose we can only guess at. But all the time and work needed because they were hungry and cold, the need to store up their supplies, fence the common land, fear winter, fight to shelter and clothe themselves, make weapons to protect their stores of food, enact legislation to decide who got to hunt and who got to eat, work out the rules of competitive survival.

I realise to an outsider's eye I'm not far off that diorama myself now. I'm the figure squatting there sharpening her machete, worried only about repeated sunburn on their shoulders. And no outsider's eye, anyway. No fear of cold, no fear of hunger, just the need to keep reminding myself to move into the shade or find a shirt so that the tropical sun doesn't damage my white, ill-equipped skin.

King tide tonight. And cool enough to sleep I hope.

Next day.

There is nothing more annoying than trying to use the machete when it's blunt – untangling it from a mess of vines, working it free of thin sinewy fronds where it is stuck fast, not being able to chop taro into pieces small enough for me to cook and eat. It's the one Joseph chose for me at the store when he was selecting supplies with me. They were all cheap, but this was the most expensive of the cheap ones, the best one for sale there in the Chinese store where everything was cheap, shoddy, faded, already spotted with rust.

When I close my eyes now and recall that store I can still almost smell it:
damp matches
dented rusty tins
no-brand groceries
all those bolts of cheap fabric already smelling faintly of mould

Only the synthetic things like the plastic tubs and buckets and the bagged plastic packets of washing powder with brand names like 'Klin' and 'Pow' gleamed with permanence and newness. The desirability of things that will not rot away. The usefulness of a plastic tub.

“This one,” I remember Joseph saying as he picked it up. “Twenty inch.”

He put it into my hand and watched me. I could tell he was uncomfortable giving it to a woman, seeing how I would hold that half-kilo of weight, whether I would do something stupid like sweep the blade towards myself.

“And a file,” he said, picking one up, “for keep sharp.”

With these machetes, islanders chop grass, chop the ground, chop up their food, slash pandanus leaves for construction, hack food free from trees and the earth. They use it to farm, to plant, to hoe, to construct, to clear. Little children have them, along with some impressive cuts and scars. They gut tiny fish with them, make kindling out of coconut fibre for a fire to cook the fish, cut sticks to prop the fish. Clean the blade of scales and fish guts in the sand.

I saw a bigman from another island get off a small plane once wearing nothing but a lava-lava around his waist, carrying only a machete. In town on kastom business, or buying village supplies, but I don't know with what money.

Joseph put the new machete and file into my basket and I said, "Two, one for you. Or a spare if you don't want it." He looked at me quickly again, checking to see if I was serious, and put another machete in the basket.

"22 inch," he said. Each one cost less than ten dollars.

I'm so irrationally attached to it now, though. It has a wooden handle and metal studs holding the blade in place. It is not stainless steel, but it is steel made to withstand a great deal of use, to be spotted and stained with rust and then sharpened again, a weapon to be wielded, capable of thudding through bone just as it sinks deep in to green wood. The way they get worked free and swung again by a skilled hand which hits again in exactly the same place, sure as an axe. Chop, and the food falling free, the coconuts or bananas or papaya or breadfruit, hefted down or allowed to drop. And bang, one sure chopping motion after another and off comes the husk of the first coconut, peeled away in quarters like orange peel, and then the exposed coconut is held in the hand, tossed around confidently in the palm as the machete is turned to the blunt edge and hit around the coconut's centre, three four quick ringing strikes, done like a magic trick, like Rexley demonstrated, falling neatly into two perfect halves, spilling coconut water. Then the shells become cups for kava, a plant also chopped by machete. One shell of kava is the measure, cupped in the hand and skulled quickly down in one draught. The taste of earth and bitterness.

I would put this machete in a museum under a spotlight if I could, with a small card explaining provenance and use. Let it be marvelled at.

20th

Checked but no text message from resort. Would love to hear the sound of that outboard puttering into the lagoon.

Bees still all there doing their thing.

Have made myself a list of tasks to break the day up into segments of purpose. Doesn't matter what task. Sweeping the leaf debris from the front of the hut. Untangling fishing line. Anything that lets structure descend, something to lose yourself in which feels vaguely directed and useful. I look forward to these tasks like they are a reward.

Maybe that's all knitting or weaving are – something for the hands to do which has parameters and order, a pretence of functionality. The way I hum even though there's no-one here to hear me hum or be reassured by the normality of it.

The way I'm taking these notes right now as slowly as possible, moving the pencil like I'm weaving, keeping my handwriting neat and appealing so I can admire it as a job well done.

Later

Still no message or sight or sound of boat from resort. Must be another cruise ship week. I remember Warwick saying a while back he was expecting a run of cruise ships in November. The "Castaways" special 7 day all-inclusive tour, where they dock in the deep channel and get ferried like a bunch of invalids into inflatable boats and into the island's lagoon, tramping down the pier in their long shorts and t-shirts, pink and shining with sweat. A day of lolling, then they sail off round the corner and discharge bilge and sewage and fuel into the water as they wave farewell. Aloha!

Or some weather change of schedule or extra cruise time, and everyone busy keeping the tourists happy as they trundle on and off their floating city.

Maybe phone just not receiving Warwick's texts? Eating tuna, noodles, kumara, pineapple, bananas and green drinking coconuts. The tropical diet is great as long as you love the same few things, day after day. When the food's always the same you stop thinking 'what shall we have tonight' and just think of it as fuel. No wonder the guys used to love the novelty of the Oreos and sugary coffee. Once I boiled some rice when they were here and they both took a huge bowl of it and upended my soy sauce onto it until it was entirely brown. Talk about carb loading.

Sugar and salt. Everyone craves them, and there I'd be showing up to give my diabetes talk telling people to stop eating so much of them, and everyone would smile and nod. The part they liked the best was getting the certificates, when there was a chance to have a bit of a party.

Watching island men with their small canoes, paddling out at high tide, putting a net over the side in the deep drop-away, bringing in a little bucketful of fish, just enough for a meal, no more. Pulling it up onto the sand again. Now, the whiteman boat with the

outboard motor. Diesel fuel and the store, tinfoil and white rice, cement block houses and old lino and having to stay in town to work to pay for your kids' school fees for an education they will never truly be able to use until finally you all live there, dully and dutifully, and home becomes town.

That other strange desert museum I went to in Tucson Arizona, also a cave tour, which wound through caverns and caves full of stalactites and stalagmites, all lit beautifully. The deeper we went (big tour group of exclaiming Americans and Japanese tourists) the more incredible the natural features became – glittering walls of mica, glowing enormous chunks of amethyst, floodlit limestone, a burbling underground turquoise pool ... finally stepped outside feeling overwhelmed, nauseated by all that wonder. Leaned on a huge boulder and realised it was hollow – walked around behind it to see it was cut in half, revealing wire armature and fibreglass. Sign that revealed in booster-ish text that everything in this cave exhibit was actually a convincing reproduction, using state of the art techniques perfected at the complex. I remember the final line: "Look around you! Can you tell real from fake?" Like a big in-joke. Don't remember why I'd gone in there thinking otherwise.

Full moon. Will try to get notations of waxing, waning and tide patterns back on track. No input, no word that's even like the jargon of 'input', so my mind is undertaking its own mental defragging. Scanning and deleting, running virus checks, stopping for long minutes while a small hourglass upends itself over and over, stuck. Attention stuck on something.

Arrested.

Riveted.

Seized.

Better, much better, to move. To go through the motions, letting the autopilot self-correct, letting the hands do the work. Let the brain spin away from its moorings. A boat which is light and empty and drifting. A boat made of fibreglass, the battered tendons showing through, perishing.

The lines dissolve between me and the place I'm sitting in, and I can sit for an hour or more letting that idea spin its logical course to the end, and the idea of a 'me' starts feeling irrelevant. I catch myself and the trancelike way I follow my own fingers when

they peel kumara. Such an elegant skill, the peeling, with that small alien implement. I remember when I bought the vegetable peeler in the general store the day before I left for here. I keep returning and returning to the sensory world of those dim, cluttered stores on the main drag of Luganville. The smell of the air, the shelves of small things humans have made to make the basic process of living easier. Knives and matches, lanterns and kerosene, plastic tubs and rubber thongs. Am I going mad, if I peel a sweet potato with the stoned calmness of a monk?

No word from the resort, and no boat. Forgot to wind the fucking clock again so have to start up the phone to check date. And bad reception. Hit or miss.

Walked up to the top of the hill – a big climb – thinking reception might be stronger at the top. Tried texting Warwick's mobile number. A little red exclamation mark: 'not sent'. Using up precious battery power to read: 'Retry? Cancel?' Such a helpful algorithm.

Truth be told, the staff at Ilariki will know I do not need emergency rations – there is no emergency. I have noodles, rice, crackers, matches, kerosene, fruit, kumara, baked beans, tinfish. In their eyes, I am well-supplied: they have provisioned me themselves, so they are well aware of my stores. There is nothing I lack, really. Except faces and voices, and a reassurance that today is Wednesday, and there's a good reason for this absence, and nothing to be alarmed about, so jump in the boat and come to where there are other people.

24th?

Twelve bees, in their entire lifetimes of work, can only make enough honey to fill a teaspoon. One bee, to make half a kilo of honey, would need to fly 75,000 kilometres. Twice around the planet. It took me much longer to work that out, I'm sure, than a bee. I watch them and realise too late that in this vacuum of isolation I've set them up as my imaginary friends – I've seen them as individuals, operating within some kind of social value system I've made up and projected onto them.

I need to train myself not to romanticize this. Otherwise I will mistake this behaviour for joy and pain, love and betrayal. My own stupidly faulty understanding. Better if I learned to be more like them, and everything else alive here.

"Hey, hive mind!" people used to say playfully on the Facebook page at work.

It's a cold place, though, the hive mind. Cold and efficient. When it's time to mate with the drones, out goes the new queen, dazzling, plump, nourished and shining into the sunshine, swooping through the canopy's light. She is not humming, though. She is pumping out fresh pheromones. She is collecting sperm from her sex slaves, who will now die, their single function fulfilled, their time alive and wild in the sunshine finished. As for the worker bees, they are sterile slaves, worked to death. The queens give off a chemical which prevents them developing ovaries.

Never envy a queen, though. Imagine what it's like in there.

Her daughters cluster around her, feeding her, grooming her, massaging her, giving her sips of royal jelly, but the only goal, ever, is reproduction and usefulness. Once a queen's become exhausted with pushing out eggs fertilized by the 6 million odd sperm she's been storing in her spermatheca, she must stand aside and make room.

No more excitable thrumming and grooming and dancing and feeding. After she has outlived her usefulness and her wings become frayed and tattered, and her silky hair is worn away with grooming and friction, her pheromones begin to become fainter and less powerful. By then her daughters have been secretly stuffing another new queen with royal jelly, grooming her, hailing her, dancing around her in what only looks like jubilation and adoration.

This new Virgin Queen emerges. The other unemerged new queens quark, but they should probably quake instead, and stay silent, because guided by their calls the newly-hatched queen moves around picking them off, tearing open the cells. This is her cue to kill them, these rivals. Ripping off heads, stinging them to death. It's her first task after hatching. Sometimes two new queens fight to the death on the comb. At the end of it, regardless, only one will be left.

When the time comes, the rest of the hive will cease to feed the old queen, so that she starves to death. Or if she doesn't starve, they cluster around her, and together radiate an unbearable heat designed to kill her. A move which has to be as emotionless, as blankly instinctual, as the ants who race to pull apart that same queen when she lies, desiccated and dead, under the hive. Tear her up and carry her off to feed their own babies.

Checked both colonies, wondered if there's any point disturbing them at this stage for a pointless 'inspection'. They're going to do what they do regardless. The CPA team were meant to be here by now, taking over like real experts are meant to.

I sat there under my tree at a distance, making up flora counts to fill in the graph I invented back in September. It's like jetlag, this state of being between dreaming and being awake.

All kinds of old stored bits of detritus washing up like flotsam. Longings for things. Irrational things. The kit I wanted as a kid called Nature's Window; basically a couple of plastic petri dishes filled with agar jelly and a packet of seeds which children could plant and watch the business of roots spreading and shoots pushing up out of that transparent medium. The ad played over and over before Christmas the year I was seven. Remember aching for the chance to be godlike, to orchestrate and observe that slow-motion firework display of growth. To conduct it. *In time*, said the sonorous science-teacher voiceover, *you can even transplant*.

Now I am transplanted, myself, in a giant petri dish, sticky with moisture, anointing my scratches with antibiotic cream to prevent infection that just won't let up, the scars on my legs dark and hard as dried-up marshland. Yesterday I found my hair had dried in a salted clump after snorkelling, and when I tried to 'finger-comb' it, scratching hard at my scalp, a bunch of hair came away between my fingers – long, straight European hairs, hairs that will never willingly form dreadlocks or kinks – and they drifted on the breeze in the sun like floating gossamer thread. I watched myself laying them out and counting them. Of eighteen, ten of them were silver. Ten of eighteen. Just over half in an average random sample. Just writing this down now makes me glad there's nobody here to see me. I'll be painting eyes and a mouth on a coconut next and talking to it.

Doesn't matter though – one thing I forgot to bring with me here is a mirror. Nothing deliberate about it, no penance or dramatic exercise in self-effacement or breaking the old addictions of vanity. I just forgot.

So I spent a few more crazy minutes (because why not) weighing up whether to turn on the phone to gaze at myself, scrutinize the changes, take an eternal selfie.

Summoning the energy to do it made disinterest seep into me like weariness. What would be the point?

Checked phone – date is 25th. Phone on charger 24/7 but still only at half-battery. Still no message or sign of a boat from the resort. Whatever day they turn up, I'm just going to jump in the boat with them with all the devices and get everything charged up at the resort and see if someone can come back with me with some tools and check or fix the panel. I can spend the afternoon there, use the Wi-Fi again, drink a drink with ice in it, swim in the chlorinated pool. Maybe even stay the night in one of the tourist bures. Steel myself to take a long hard look at my own madwoman reflection in the mirror in the ladies' toilets. Got a bag packed ready.

It's when you can't make eye-contact with a mirror that you know you're in trouble. I remember one of the most damning things my mother could think of to say about another woman was 'she's let herself go.' No turning back once that's happened, once you've let go of the string and set yourself loose. I used to think of women releasing themselves like caged birds. Anything Kaz and me caught – beetles, butterflies, slaters – in the bug catcher, sooner or later one of us would cry: let it go! Slumped shoulders, unwashed hair, eating with my hands, relinquished and unresisting. I've let my self go, here.

26th.

Got smoker and covered head, pulled out and replaced one of the brood frames in the bee box #19 (blue square painted on it), felt it swollen at the edges, a colony growing like clockwork, and deep inside where I fear to disturb it lies the queen, laying and laying and laying with perfect stupefying functionality until it wears her thin and spent. Then, off with her head.

From the old notes—

We have encountered one particular problem due to the fact that a new swarm needs hardly any smoke for a period after it is hived. This may lead a beginner to relax his precautions, thinking that his bees know him, and will behave well towards him. As the colony grows larger its behaviour changes, and the result is likely to be a severe blow to the beekeeper's confidence; it may even cause him or her to give up. The "friendly" method can thus seduce a beginner into becoming careless and lazy. We learned that a certain mutual adaptation is possible between a beekeeper and his colonies, although they never know him personally. On the beekeeper's side, this adaptation leads to a kind of respect, but also to a reduction of fear.

"Personally". Hard when there's only one person involved.

When I go down to the hives, I stand still and bees rise up around me, countless. Me, speechless. And what's going through my head as I walk back down the track is how much of the back catalogue of Tom Waits I can remember, thinking, well, I'm upright and moving, so I must be awake. When I heave myself out of the water after a swim, it's like I surrender weightlessness and feel the effort of having to drag my gravity-bound burden around with me again. This floundering carcass of a body.

So wash hands and face. Do yoga stretches, drink a green coconut, put on hat and walk down the track to the hives, ready to put marks on a graph of my own devising. Figures nobody will ever do more than quickly scan, wondering secretly at my foolish diligence, so ridiculously conscientious as the notebook warps with humidity and starts to fall apart, giving way.

Nobody to care or pay the slightest attention.

Sunday? Monday?

Order of songs on Carole King's "Tapestry" album (album cover a perfectly preserved cell of memory: Carole with long frizzy 70s hair in a window seat, scrim curtain, holding a piece of tapestry, stripy cat in foreground):

I Feel the Earth Move

So Far Away

It's Too Late

Home Again

Beautiful

Way Over Yonder

Side one. On vinyl. The only album both Kaz and I listened to together and fought over when we left home. Side two began, I am sure, with You've Got a Friend, ended with Natural Woman. Rest of tracks something to chew over today.

Night time, light working in hut.

Waving a hand at the bees can incite them to sting because they interpret the wave as hostility and threat, says the handbook. For my only task here, I must move without panic, without greeting, never once forgetting myself with a sudden gesture.

This hand gesture reminds me of another museum, the ancient tar pits at the place in Los Angeles, so strangely placed there behind a fence in the middle of Wiltshire Boulevard, also completely coated in bitumen, full of carbon monoxide and slow predation.

LaBrea. Shelves and shelves of identical animal skulls extracted from lakes of black tar. Going there with the friend I was staying with, Susie, when she was working as the publicity assistant, desperate to be a show runner. So – 1993? She had the day off and we were going to see the mammoth skeleton, the one that had had the top of its head sheared off by construction workers building a carpark there. On the way was a window in an apartment advertising palm readings for \$5 and Susie laughing at the thought of anyone thinking they would get a decent prediction of their future if they were only prepared to invest \$5. Their future, she joked, would be easy to foretell – one full of suspicion, cheapskatery, penny-pinching.

That tarmac smell and walking through the saved fossilized remains of animals that had wandered into the tar and become stuck, but also the predators which had followed them in order to kill and eat them, but which later became stuck themselves. All bones sinking together in soft deadly tar and now displayed in dead dioramas. An American lion, I remember. Sabre-tooth cats. The glass display cases full of skulls were sloths, I think. A lot of sloths, always lethargic and slow on the uptake.

I crossed the road where the red hand symbol ordered me to stop. The palm reader had another neon hand in the window – a palm raised in greeting, or admonishment, or warning, I couldn't work out which. Whichever it was, I went inside and paid my 5 dollars and learned I was impulsive, would have three children and live a long life.

“And your cynicism about the supernatural does you no favours,” finished the palm-reader, tugging her cardigan round her shoulders (couldn't she even have bothered with a shawl? Or a headscarf?). “I could tell you more,” I remember her saying, sitting back in her chair, “but for that you would need to come back tomorrow, and receive a special dispensation” (she was getting scrambled up with Catholicism, surely) “a bottle you could take away with you, as a protection from negativity.”

We were sitting in a small curtained alcove in her front room. A living room, really. From behind the curtain I could smell what she was cooking on her stovetop, and I said, “What about you – do you have children?” Imagining them coming home from school to do their homework, eating bowls of stew, the palm reader ducking out to spend my \$5 on bread and peanut butter, milk and juice. She smiled and said nothing, looking coyly inscrutable.

“For seven dollars,” said Susie when I got back to her place, “you could have bought a bottle of wine.” That woman was wrong about the children, dead wrong. For the rest, I can’t help thinking, even now: impulsivity and cynicism ... not the greatest mix in the world. What was I even doing there, on that trip? Researching something arcane and tenuous for my dissertation. My stupid ponderous doctorate, as dead as a sloth in a tar pit.

At least 14 days now.

Listening for the sound of an outboard motor the way I used to listen for the sound of a text message.

no boat no word

no boat no word

no boat no word

nothing else on the jukebox now. Just this one record with a massive scratch across it.

(three blank pages follow before record continues end of exercise book 4)

OK. Need to remember exactly what happened and the order it happened in.

What I heard as I was in the garden was the faint throb of the outboard engine, and I ran. I was so terrified they would miss me.

The tide was turning, wrong time to arrive, a grey line of waves pounding, and out in the break I saw Ezekiel, crouched low in the boat, and I waved.

My relief at seeing him was so great I didn't register at first that he was not waving. He was holding up his hand flat, outstretched, in entreaty. Pale palm and his face strangely pale too, no white teeth flashing but his head shaking, hand out, throttling the engine to idle out there in the rocking deep water.

I called: What? Come ashore. What happened? Has the weather been too bad?

Me: on the shore, clenched tight, and my sliding weakness fully evident to me, like a shame, uncontrollable – desperate not for food, supplies or batteries but for conversation. For anything. He shook his head, moved his outstretched hand to his face, covered his mouth, took it away, made a chopping motion in the air, called one thing:

Nogud.

I called back: What? I was still yelling. I'd decided that if he could get the boat to shore, I would not even wait, I would climb straight in and go with him back to Ilariki and shelter there at the resort, decompress for a few days, tell Warwick that I'd been wrong, that I was going stir crazy alone. I beckoned him in again, feeling my face smiling and nodding, stiff. The boat swept in a bit closer on the current, rocking and bobbing, and as I watched, impatient, he revved the engine and steered it out again, away from the reef line. I strained to hear what he was calling:

Mr Warwick say no. Say no come. Evriwan oli sik. Olgeta fulup sik.

He shook his head again. Perspiring face. Something struggling in it.

Mi sik, he shouted hoarsely. Mi sik.

In my kit in the shed I had malaria tablets I'd never opened, water purification tablets I'd never bothered with, full bottles of gastrolyte. I called: You got dengi? It's OK, I've got tablets! I was trying to gesture him to shore. The outboard engine idled rough and almost cut out. You take tablet blong me, I yelled, fumbling to find the words, unpractised, hoarse. You take and stop the fever you got.

Go bak long haos, I heard him call back. His good heart, seeing me alone, coming even though Warwick had told him not to. His voice was hoarse and rasping.

Mi kam long soa, yu go back and wait smoltaem. Me no wantem yu getim sik, me dropim food nomo, yu stap long haos.

OK, I said, OK. Wait a minute. Wait small.

I ran back to hut for malaria tablets at the bottom of my first aid kit, along with some paracetamol and gastrolyte. My water bottle. A strange feeling, this long-idled kick of adrenalin, like waking up groggy from a nap when a phone is ringing somewhere. When I ran back out again he was still in the boat, trying not to hit the reef. I started wading out, and he shook his head.

Kwarantín, he said. Water up to my waist, holding up my plastic bag of drugs and medicine.

I won't get sick, I called. There's no malaria here, I'll come back with you back to Ilariki, we'll go together. I reached the boat and threw in the bag of medicine, and Ezekiel handed me a grey plastic bag.

No, he said, sweat dripping off him. No. Got one bigfela fiva. Kwarantín.

Quarantine for what? I said. I was gripping the side of the boat to keep my footing. I could see the effort it took him to raise his hand, to mark off symptoms.

Soabodi, he said. Sobel. Sohed. Stikmasel. Koffing. Evriwan sik tumas. Sori, Miss Julie. Sori.

He took my hands off the side of the boat, his eyes dull with misery.

Not mosquito, he said. Sip. Turisbot.

Then he throttled it, hunched over the tiller, and was gone.

In the bag, four packets of two minute noodles, and a little carton of UHT milk. A packet of chocolate Oreos.

Turisbot. Cruise ship.

Of all the nights to lose it, this is the one. There's no-one to see me crying like this and call me weak, so it doesn't matter. The gecko sashays down the wall to the lamp and sits looking at me with its bead eyes. I think about Christmas shopping, the smell of plane cabins, four nautical miles of open ocean, what each of the keys on my keyring back home used to look like, and what they used to open.

I have to get to sleep, and then I have to make a list.

6 am. An hour of cool before the wet heat starts.

For the record: Remembering that time I walked four hours to visit the village way up in the mountains, how we had to climb sheer mud walls of mountains with a rope and a couple of gouged footholds. The hardest walk I'd ever done, not least because I wasn't prepared for it, they told me it was about an hour and a half, so I didn't take enough water. How lightheaded and hollowed out I felt when we finally staggered up the path to the village and we heard drums and singing. And the men and boys came out singing in lava-lavas holding tall palm fronds to welcome us, and how the chief had asked us for presents of sugar and salt. Which I had brought.

Behind the village: system of split bamboo channels which fed a drizzle of spring water out of the jungle into a central spot where people drank it and collected it, and when the chief showed it to me he explained how they used to flavour their food before gifts of salt. First, they would pull huge coconut palm fronds out of the fast-flowing river below us, which had been borne downstream from nearer the coast and had soaked in salty water. Then they would take the central spine of the frond and cut it up and burn it on the fire to charcoal. Then they ground that charcoal up and poured water on it and strained it through a scrap of thin material into a plastic bottle. The residual grey, gritty liquid was what they shook onto their yams, and it had just enough flavour from the saltwater in the charcoal dust to make the food more palatable. So they craved salt. Kept it with them to tuck into the side of their cheek in tiny pinches like any drug. They ate no fish. 'Sea mi fright.' Tabu to eat fish. Mountain people, not coastal people. Drinking out of a coconut someone offered me, sweating and panting with thirst that day, in the nakamal. Kids outside peeking in through the slats of pandanus looking at the gifts we had brought. The bigman, the chief, wanting to look at someone's mobile phone, and grasping perfectly, rapidly, with delight, what a selfie was. And me, the bringer of salt and sugar, the white poison.

Have woken up dreaming of that river. Massive and jade green, full of noise and rapids. A child swept away in that current would never be found, and it would take five seconds, but the village kids nevertheless swimming and playing on the banks of the river, their mothers sitting on the bank.

I was terrified to go beyond knee-depth into that river for fear of being swept away, looking around me at the children. Felt weak with terror. Imagining the finality of seeing one of them disappear. In the West: a phone, an emergency, a helicopter, a search and rescue, a coroner. Here, nothing.

Here not a river but an ocean
not a linear current but surrounded
in all directions nothing but ocean, held in place shivering with gravity keeping
everything from flying loose

I'm hot. Way hot. Going back to bed.

Envelope three (3): transcribed from loose sheets of paper folded alongside notebook used to keep record of flora sources and pollen collection at second colony site, extra notes stored in box with larger record; several pages water-damaged, illegible: pencil drawings/mappings, notated as found.

Hives, bees in and out, commuters on 1000 invisible lines.

Me. Here. Now.

Had some notations I meant to write. No energy to do it.

Throat on fire.

Must check bees have water.

Hut. Along the coral trail. When I snap my fingers you will come to.

[illegible].

She's still here. The one who keeps her hand on my back. Pushes me into the chair and presses my hand around the pencil. To move my hand to make that mark takes such effort, like I am a thousand leagues under the sea. She wants me to move my hand. When she opens her mouth to speak it's like a faint radio is on. Distant down the line. Hear her through the ringing.

Transmission as well as reception.

I will

[illegible]

Definitely fever down today. When I woke up someone had left a cup of water for me on the floor. Swallowed it in tiny sips past my swollen, stung throat.

There is one thing wheeling in my head, over and over, the same thing. Like waves collapsing on the shore.

If I write it down here I can leave space to think of something else.

Surfacing groggy state between being asleep + being awake is what?

Drowsing? Jetlag? Roadblock? Coming to? Fever's broken but feel like every bone in my body is broken too. Can't seem to get enough oxygen.

Green coconut on the ground. Looked for the face – the two eyes and the mouth, the sad orangutan face surrounded by wispy hair. Pushed in where the mouth is + let the coconut feed me sips of coconut water, from mouth to mouth.

The only thing my stomach will hold. Not sweet, not sour, but sterile. Pure.

With the wisps of fibre, started a fire. Found matches. Found pot. Filled with water. Held pot steady, held everything steady, so it will not spill.

Gather energy to go outside, get to the tank tap, remember how to turn it, put cup under the spout. Can't get enough water into me. Drink it unstrained, unfiltered, unboiled out of the spout – tastes like rain, rot and rust. Then sloth flounder through tar back to the mattress.

God, the effort required to get up, find the cup, punch two Ibuprofens out of their foil, take them. That wipes me out for the morning.

Nobody is here to save me.

Another day: I had a water bottle. In the bag, with the medications I gave to Ezekiel. Our hands touching. The effort spent on noting this down. The line unravelling, becoming hopelessly tangled.

Something viral, something Warwick wanted me not to catch. Not enough paracetamol in the world for this headache.

'Sohed' : sore head. 'stikmasel'—stiff muscles. Sore body. Coughing.

Before it all slips away like slush I need to try to slide it into order, get it in place + close the lid. Grip this pencil.

I woke up standing and did not know where I was. Sound first, the skin-buzzing drone.

All energy was whirling around a dark mass in tree.

My head was huge and splitting. My eyes were vibrating.

I put my hands out and stirred them. A cauldron of them. They covered my hands. They cloaked me. Drank the sweat off my face. Read my skin like braille.

They were in a tree. An enormous folding wave of hive hanging.

I opened my mouth to tell them I was sick + they moved inside me and crawled into the walls of my chest. They found my ribs. They made wild wax cells in my lungs.

Their weight on me was like a pelt. A thousand of them trembled on me, surrounded me.

The heat was terrible. I raised my hand in front of my eyes and it was a heavy glove of bees. All was whirring. They made a cavity in me and filled it with more heat.

This is how I will die, I said to them.

I ached. I couldn't carry the suffocating weight of them.

(illegible)

Everything happening here has happened for eons. The drum in my head counts it all in.

Every day exactly the same: grow, fall, wait. Spring up again. It is relentless.

Insatiable. Stupefying. Rust and blunt edge.

Looked up + saw the nabanga towering above the treeline + walked towards it. Past the garden. Found a pawpaw + ate it. Came down past the second set of hives for the notebook. Bees dancing in the air. A hot upturned dream.

I need to draw a map to show myself how to get back there.

[pencilled notations]

Line of thoughts queued up at a sign on a road, obediently stalled. Shimmering like exhaust. Temperature down now, though. A raised heat rash all over my body which prickles like a thousand stings. Throbbing all over. Poured a plastic tub of water and slowly, slowly, washed myself, standing on the dirt, bar of soap in hand. Washcloth from the Lo Chin Store. Exhausted me for the day.

Clearer now, though. And can't smell myself any more. Those bathrooms, over on Ilariki. Me turning on a tap made of metal, designed for the human grip, and cold fresh water flowed so I could brush my teeth with mint toothpaste.

The memory spins out and I can't stop it, it's like casting out a lure. The only sequence I can hold in my head. Tap made of metal for the hand. Cold clean water. Ilariki, with its Wi-Fi and satellite WiMAX dish on the roof and giant flat screen TV. A deep-fryer in the kitchen making kumara chips.

Out the back somewhere, out of sight of the tourists lazing on the banana loungers, would be the generator.

Reggae on the tape they play in the bar. Boney M singing Mary's Boy Child.

Ilariki. Only a channel of water separates me. Nothing to do but wait for them.

My heart has moved from my chest + installed in behind my eyes now, thudding like a snare. Water bottle. Head. A golf ball, packed tight with rubber bands.

Golf, a sport which greens the desert, drains the aquifers, even here, on the mainland a golf club for tourists slashed out of the jungle, white men forming a private club and hitting balls around an old coconut plantation.

I lie on my damp foam mattress in a hut and try to switch it all off.

I didn't spend that fever here on this bed, though. What I remember happened outside my head. It happened.

I held bees in my mouth and when I opened my mouth, they flew free.

Envelope Four (4) transcribed as handwritten in exercise books 5 and 6. Ballpoint pen and pencil.

White pages, now, to fill. To have something, anything to do which fills space. To practice talking, even to myself. White sheets. Like a line in a morgue.

Traem tingting smol. I thought at first this meant try thinking small, but it means 'try and think a little'.

No boat, nothing to read, no battery charge in the phone now, so basically it's a dead sliver of plastic and glass as well. No visitors turning up with instant coffee and cookies from Ilariki, no ride to the resort for a shower and all-important internet connection. Maybe all I need is fresh fluid for the battery? If I could just get the phone dry – maybe by taking out the battery and putting it in the sun, if I can work out how to unscrew the tiny screws – I could try powering it on the USB from the radio and I could try to text again. But I've got nothing small enough. The small corkscrew on the swiss army knife, maybe, if I filed it into a tiny flattened end. Then leave the phone on the sun all day and see if the warmth, maybe, is enough to dry out the battery. I'm telling myself complete crap. As if writing it down's going to make it work.

So if there was something contagious onboard the cruise ship, something which gave everyone fever, shakes, muscular aches, something like Dengue Fever but carried by people, how many days would Warwick quarantine everybody? How long will he think I can get by here on rice and kumara and tinned tuna? And has Kaz been trying to contact me, or did she take me at my word when I said I wanted radio silence?

Say this illness lasts a number of days, and the cruise ship has to stay docked at Ilariki because they can't go onshore at Luganville. How many days? 5?

Would they get it that my phone's not working? Bag packed ready.

Nothing requires me to get up off this bed inside this hut except thirst and the need to follow a required process of standing staring uselessly at the hives, nothing to write down there, cutting pieces of food and putting them into my mouth.

Such a pure place, quarantine. It is as if the only chemicals present here are the ones the bees produce (useful, perfect, trustworthy) and the ones my brain produces. Cortisol. Adrenaline I can taste and smell on myself when I wake up. The taste of dread and vigilance.

I would kill for the screen on my Kindle to kindle itself, and show me a book to read. Instead I'm driving myself nuts with this faulty mental jukebox. Can't switch it off. There are stanzas of poems out of school English classes still memorised under all these layers of detritus. "The moon was a ghostly galleon, tossed upon cloudy seas, the wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees." Today I was chanting this like a maniac, telling it to the bees, saying it aloud as I paced along, waiting for the rest to fetch itself up.

I know when I get there the first thing I'll see
Is the sun shining golden, shining right down on me
Then trouble's gonna lose me, worry leave me behind
And I'll stand up proudly in true peace of mind

A mango and a drinking coconut. Consumed, then skin and nut discarded, thrown back into the jungle. The cycle of old skin, new skin.

Best recall possible of stuff that was on my 'misc' file:
Photos of me with Kaz and Mum in hospice.
Photos of holiday in New Zealand at the glacier.
Me with Diabetes Awareness Team on last day.
Million Dollar Point beach, the sea full of trashed American war machines.
Church group waiting for boat sitting singing with guitar
Shots of students when they got their Year 10 certificates.
Custom wedding shots with gifts, ceremony, pig. The pig paid as bride price with the weeping ringbarked flesh around its leg where it had been tethered to a tree for months, being led towards the girl being exchanged

OK, think about this project another time

Sometimes I stop in the middle of the track or stand up in the water and there are these blank seconds it takes for the hard drive to reload. I need to tell myself where I am. On the island, alone and intact. I have to give myself a talking-to.

The bench out the front of the hut where I sit and wait of a day is made of coconut fibre but the old hollow canoe bench is some other kind of timber. The bench has warped and split open and the cells of the coconut timber inside are like honeycomb. What a plant. Probably saved more human lives than anything else. Even if the tank ran low on drinking water I know I have the stand of coconut palms and don't panic. Light a fire with the husk, drink a green one, eat a dry one. The kids used to hunt out the sprouted ones to break open and eat the fermented flesh inside, the sweetest thing they ever had until Coca-Cola.

One hundred thousand G.I.s on the island in World War 2, each of them probably drinking a bottle of Coke a day each, and now that mountain of fragmented blue glass, polished by the sea, the same colour now, along the beach. Maybe they stood and hurled their bottles off the shore to smash onto the coral. Maybe the locals watched them in wonderment.

What good is it anyway, this long memory, the stuff I never wrote, the stuff I've been saving in some dead file? And if it's gone, why this need to make a record, like some inventory? Who for?

A mammoth crazy distraction, like someone holding up a spreadsheet to an empty room. A mammoth head, shorn open by a front-end loader in a museum car park.

Note for dissertation, maybe find one of those vanitas paintings: everything accumulated perishes, there's no future value to it. Eat it now, share it out now, dance now, and then destroy the mask and costume, its use is finished.

Nobody in this part of the world could ever imagine themselves as entities separate from others. My woman friends in town confiding that their biggest fear is being alone, especially at night. Yolanda: telling me about fleeing after her husband beat her almost senseless, when I asked how she'd got the big ridged scar on her shoulder. How she ran to the house she cleaned for an Australian owner who was hardly ever there, who'd offered it to her and told her where to find the key, and Yolanda whispering how she'd

run in fear of her life, bleeding, but that the very worst thing about it was the thought of spending the whole night in that empty house, by herself.

Couldn't stand the thought of escape from violence because it would mean isolation, and that was unthinkable. You're not an 'individual' who works (works! how fucking ludicrous) to create or maintain relationships; relationships are the operating system, the condition for action. Your social persona is constructed for you. When you take on the right social relationships and take part in the right rituals, if you're a man, you become 'big'. It's taboo to breach these constructs. It alters your 'personhood'. It's like you only exist from the skin out.

Then in come the whitefellas, whining for solitude and exclusivity. Demanding space for existential thinking. We 'work' on it. We see it as our task, trained to believe that identity is some kind of personal and individual achievement, based on personal, self-correcting introspection.

That's crap, though. It's nothing but a record of your social behaviour. Other people get to define your identity, not you. There's nothing but an echo chamber and babbling self-talk inside an individual human with no company. You're trapped in a lift with yourself, stuck between floors. Numbly, helplessly pressing that button.

Terrified of realising there are no edges.

So extra notes for dissertation, museum items summoned from mental memory storage, summoned from 'the cloud':

Headdress, cap-shaped, made of tiny shells, Melanesian. Worn by a woman to signify period of bereavement/widowhood, sewn together into a cap to cover the head and eyes. During this time the head covering operates as a signal that the widow is not to be approached; she is bearing the weight of her grief and must do it in isolation. She wears it and bears it.

Footage of audiences in an early cinema in France jumping out of the way of the locomotive approaching them on the screen, terrified they will be run over by what is on the screen.

Young men working at the Dive Centre averting their eyes from the young German female tourists in skimpy bikinis, trying to keep expressionless in the face of so much taboo flesh, dismayed heads bowed, turned away in consternation, busying themselves with the flippers and snorkels and boat engine, the girls all the way from Stuttgart preening, tanned, oblivious, regal and cruel as queens.

Folktale from the Sia Raga people of Pentecost island: Once upon a time, the people of north Pentecost could not speak. They communicated by drawing designs on the ground with their fingers, in the sand. It was rocks and stones which talked. They were alive and sentient and moved around. The soil spoke too, as did the wind, rain and sea. But something happened and the situation reversed. Now it is people who talk, while earth, wind, rain and sea remain wordless. So, say the Sia Raga people, we must speak for the land, because the land cannot speak for itself.

All the books at the primary school furred with age and damp, the brown marks of old lost sticky tape, books dumped out of donations put into shipping containers, stories of kids with bicycles, houses, beds, cars. Those pages just falling to compost in the end like anything else.

Whose book was it – Chatwin? Lewis? about the missionary priest who arrived in Tierra Del Fuego to convert the natives and translate the Bible for them, who was still there a few years later when the natives had all but died out from disease brought by white invaders, and another priest, whose job it was to baptise the remaining Indians as Catholics as they lay on the ground dying, asked what was the point of labouring now over this failed Bible translation into a lost language nobody was alive to speak any more, and the first priest said: "You wouldn't understand."

The ministry in Papua New Guinea, determined to spend time and expertise and energy translating the Bible into languages there, only to find there were 400 different ones.

The Yucatan and priests burning all the old codices and holy books as superstitious witchcraft, and then burning the relics, and then burning the people. Because 'auto-da-fé' means 'act of faith.'

A legend I'm not sure I believe in: that a traditional technique to survive in the Arctic is to jam a knife, blade up, in the ice, and let blood, perhaps blood you have let from your own arm, freeze on the blade. A wolf will scent the blood and come, says the legend, and try to lick the blood off, and cut its own tongue, and bleed more, circle back and lick the fresh blood, lacerating its own mouth further, crazed and irrational with hunger, until it dies there. Then the hunter returns, skins the wolf, wears the pelt to survive, lives to kill another day. How an apex predator kills another apex predator. And then someone safe and sound makes an art installation out of the legend, like the one I saw in Singapore.

White western survivalists and 'preppers' and their lingo for what they imagined would be the End of Days – SHTF – meaning when the shit hits the fan. Except there is no electricity in the end of days, so no fan, boys. Sorry.

Tom Lehrer, being asked to say something funny and pithy about the state of the world, saying he felt like a resident of Pompeii being asked to say something humorous about lava.

London Museum of History and the gloomy, artfully-lit section on the Black Plague – the bell they used to ring in warnings of new outbreaks, the diorama of inner London and how much burned in the Great purifying Fire, the sudden fervent religious manias, as if displays of piety were going to protect you.

The crockery fired and painted in the year after the plague. It must have felt like Year Zero. That plate from 1661 with the message painted on its base, a grim reminder for when you scraped the last spoonful of gruel: "YOU AND I ARE EARTH."

The blackened bit of ancient London brick I saved. I found it on the exposed shore of the Thames at a rare low tide, under oyster shells and broken china and sedimentary layers of pebbles and dirt and bits of clay and detritus. I wasn't the only one, fossicking that day under the city's riverbed. But I was the only one, I'm pretty sure, who carried a piece of old brick back to Australia. It could have been any fire over the last 500 years, I guess.

(I wonder what box it is in now. In the storage unit. In a city of storage units, all the stuff I've shed but can't quite admit I've abandoned. Useless pages turning yellow like old wax. Nothing alive in there. Deserted.)

Piles of shell money, photos of children playing on stacks of old deutschmarks, that room on a small island full of pig tusks. All worthless currencies, full of worthless magic.

The greenish, broken old wreckage of fighter planes crashed in jungle sites all over Santo after the torpedo raids out of Guadalcanal. No wonder they look like relics from an alien civilisation.

Old rusted ordinance, bomb canisters and bullets and grenades. Collected and lined up in someone's shack like a reliquary in a makeshift church, full of magical power, and old G.I.s and history buffs come and pay to look at them.

That's civilisation. A pile of crushed metal and rusted wires. A cracked, mystifying odometer. Stuff in the undergrowth you find with a metal-detector. Dog-tags given as souvenirs, saved as fetish objects in a new religion, held to the ear for the messages they might speak.

All of this I can chew up and fashion a dissertation out of, like a lumpy papier-mâché model of something made in the absence of a real thing.

The wet season's arriving. The hives, and we're into overtime.

Original plan: to separate out the queens early to stop the first queen killing the others? To set up a new group of nucleus hives with hybridised mite-resistant bees? To not fail? Back in June, a hundred years ago, these sketchy parameters seemed fine – beyond November, it wouldn't be my responsibility. The nice experts in khaki shorts and white bee suits would be in charge, siphoning off the brood from the colony, arriving in a boat to take over. It's like scenes in a movie I dozed through. I sat there as they laid it out, nodding like a robot. Dissociated.

No boat. Must be over a week now at least since Ezekiel came but perhaps W is preoccupied with evacuating cruise boat as priority and in need of fuel from Luganville.

Maybe a quarantine in Luganville port as well or all infrastructure strained if everybody's got this lurgy.

Fewer bees flying out to forage. They're less active and have stopped building comb. I've read the notes so many times I know them off by heart, and I think the bees are going to swarm. Unless I intervene, they will divide themselves and keep doing it, and I will not be able to capture them because I have no more empty boxes and frames to hang in the chamber to keep the queen and the workers occupied.

Or I could limit the growth of the colonies by removing some capped brood, and kill the new queens, or clip the queen's wings so that when she leads a swarm out she'll fall to the ground and die, and once they realise they have no queen, they will return to the hive and a new queen will emerge from the sealed queen cells. So one or more secondary swarms will fly off.

Sitting reading this, wondering if I have it in me to open up the hive, find the queen, grasp her by her head and thorax and clip her wings with my rusty pair of nail scissors. Suddenly realised: what's the point?

What does it matter if they swarm? They'll just swarm to another part of the island and create another colony. The whole island is a quarantine reserve. It's not as if they can leave. Nectar and pollen supplies will dictate it.

All I'm doing is postponing

~~So I can't be expected. They knew I had no expertise in
I'm not doing anything wrong by~~

The other me, who observes all this, my scanning the horizon, my pacing up and down, is becoming ghostly and insubstantial, unable to intervene any more, her voice thin as distant birds. There she is, always hovering in my peripheral vision, the Shadow of my Former Self. She's the one I'm talking to, bouncing ideas off, checking in for song lyrics or the punchlines to old jokes. She's always clutching something, some talisman from the past. A watch? A report? Her old vinyl collection? I have shed her, but still she follows, annoyingly vigilant some days and needy on others. My sallow little twin. Poking me to get up and get a drink and Ibuprofen last week when I was sick, bullying me into keeping things going out of sheer spite. Finding more shit for me to fret about.

The air has an odd feel to it this morning, murky, metallic and spent, like a blown battery, or maybe I'm just obsessed with the thought that battery fluid is all I need for the solar system to start functioning again. Am heading down to the colonies to check that the roofs of the bee boxes are all firmly in place in case a storm is on the way. Barometric pressure feels way down. Wet season's definitely here.

Later, night:

I'd been paying attention to the wrong things, looking for a white apple on a black screen – signs that something is charging. But it's all been charging around me, and I haven't noticed. Bees noticed; must have walked into their flight path accidentally because they became way too agitated to get near. With the sky such a strange colour, the zinging feel in the air, its weird shake, I found myself backing away. The frequency of their humming seemed to wake me up out of a trance, sharpened me up. I imagined a thousand stings, a wild infuriated out-of-nowhere attack, something I wouldn't survive, where I would be found when the boat finally arrived. Even this catastrophizing was me wasting time. By the time I'd run back to the hut, clouds were banking like sheets of grey steel, the wind pummelling, surface of the water becoming opaque and grey. Wrinkled like a huge hide. A sense of being a speck on a shivering flank of vast ocean, clinging. Something I can name easily without a weather report or automated update, something building and building like suppressed fury. I tied down everything I could. Got the torch and a cup of water, the radio, all my clothes. Looked up at my pandanus leaf roof, and grabbed the plastic tarp, folded it ready, stowed it under the bed.

Out there there's a whirling rip, that's gathering up an ocean's force and tilting it horizontal. This is the tail end, the tail end only, it has to be, and yet it bears down upon the island slashing a path for itself smoothly as a monster zipper opening, with such stinging speed and force. Out from the open sea so that what I see here is only the edge, lazily spent like a loosened whip rippling. The smash of the end as the pressure whips. Wind going through every crevice like a razor, screaming. Jesus Christ.

Later:

Must be around 5 am now, but still dark. Hut's holding up but heard roof come off the storage shed. All I can think about are the hives. The twin cities of bees clustered in their colonies, hanging on even if the boxes are getting upended. Or bees in their thousands whipped into the air, up into the savage rip of cyclonic currents, swept away, dumped into open sea.

What is this doing to the other islands, Santo's coast, port and harbour? Those European Union-funded concrete bridges over the rivers as the first hundred tonnes of raging water hit them? I try to mentally picture it and don't know how much is my imagination, how much memory from Hydra, how much footage from CNN – coconut plantations and banana groves shredded and those villages in an ocean of mud, a multitude of hands clinging to the roots of banyan trees, the nakamal flattened. Where is the eye of this, where is it reaching landfall?

Light now.

The coconut palms – my God. The way they braced and flexed and were forced sideways. Bent and bore it like women in labour. Horizontal whipping howling torrents of rain. The roar of it.

Trees lashed and slashed, the beach a bombsite. Literally carpeted in debris of torn vegetation, the coconut palms bent but some still miraculously upright. Banana plants wrecked, their branches shredded. Garden looks trashed. Big pieces of live coral broken off underwater and littering the beach, dead fish retched up.

And the solar panel tilted sideways, the pole torn from the base, no chance of even sporadic charge now. Voltmeter steady at zero, pipe for wiring full of water.

OK. Think.

Don't panic. Think.

OK

First, the bees. A 'to-do' list.

Prepare sugar syrup mixture for both colonies assuming flora trees and plants all damaged. 500 mls per jar, 50% mix water and white sugar.

Break out some of the pollen supplement and place somewhere dry.

Thank God Geoff insisted on leaving the protein supplement in the storage box, and thank God I didn't pinch it to make some kind of experimental sourdough.

I'm sitting here, though, still assembling and reassembling the same set of information. As if listing it means something happens, or some responsible delegate in a fluoro vest arrives and takes charge shortly.

To reiterate, to myself, the only person here:

Banana palms knocked completely over (reduced nectar/pollen source).

Pawpaw tree down, garden wrecked.

Boil water and store.

Make fire once coconut palm debris dries out and sea dies down and wait for Maritime Rescue or Warwick's boat. Btwn 5 and 7 days?

Work to repair solar panel to try to recharge phone and get reception. Get news update, send message (DFAT? Project?)

Repair pole for solar or set up on ground or on natangora roof.

Sort out food and how to cook it.

Laptop and phone both now stored in plastic box with all the sachets of silica desiccant Geoff left with me.

It's an OK list but I am still sitting looking at it. Need to rouse myself to start. My brain is a churning stiff wheel in a slack, lethargic body. An engine firing, failing, firing.

Flooded.

This paper's damp, too. Once the sun comes out again it's going to start growing black specks of mould.

Took my machete to walk the track to the hives but it still took me forever to clear a path through knee-deep broken branches and leaves. Glad I had the white coral pieces to guide. The amount of mud and debris is unbelievable. Went back to the hut and for almost the first time since I've been here, put on a pair of boots.

Bees extremely agitated from moment I arrived in the first clearing and had to return to the hut again and get smoker, protective gear, etc. before I re-approached.

A squadron of guard bees repeatedly hitting the visor as I got the smoker ready to inspect. Hated to smoke them with everything they've been through and was just thinking this when one worked its way in through the tiny gap at the top of the zip in the bee suit and stung me in the middle of the chest. Retreated to the track and took off gloves to try to scrape off the sting, three more bees attacked as I did this and I think we had a general pheromone meltdown between us, so left them for a few more hours. If they're OK enough to send out an advance guard, they're obviously out and about and not dead and drowned or needing a single thing I could clumsily do for them. It's me. It's the way I smell. The smothered panic coming off me in waves.

Ballpoint pen I was using has stopped working, so writing now in pencil that will soon need sharpening, need to poke around in the supplies for the swiss army knife to do this, stupid banal things to think through which feel as difficult as doing calculus.

Yes, time for waet pej now. Summoning the energy to push the pencil across it. Nothing to do but this, now, and wait for Maritime search and rescue.

Sitting looking out to the horizon, reptilian, blinking out at it like I'm my own cursor. Every now and then some pre-programmed command fetches up something. Something fragged and glitched, a photo turned to pages and pages of binary code, unreadable; a document which is unstable and cannot be opened. Remembering my first Macintosh, the little slot for the floppy disk, the screen frozen in the middle of formatting my undergrad Uni thesis, text saying 'shut down y or n?' That gadget I had which played a little tune as 'animoto' came up on the screen. Where is it stored, all this, and how is it retrieved?

Cleaned up the beach. Have to keep moving. Hoping those shitty matches can still light, so I can start a fire once all the wood and leaves start drying out.

Went down to the bees later in the day with stings still throbbing and feeling weirdly weak and tearful. Frightened. Reluctant to spend too long at each colony in case maritime emergency boat arrives or Ilariki crew to evacuate me, but water is still very rough. I can hear it wherever I go on the island.

Bees are taking supplies from the pollen supplement I've set up. Hive vents down so minimal rain inside. They seem to have covered up the ventilation holes in the super with propolis over time and this has sealed the boxes. Wish I could take a photo of this ingenuity.

Ground around the hives so waterlogged I staggered in sucking mud and almost lost my balance. Moving in the bee suit felt heavy as lead. I could barely lift my legs to walk back here. It's like I am sapped of all energy. Won't open the hives again until they've had a chance to get working again. Don't want to be down there if someone turns up in a boat and can't find me.

They're like those hives on the roof of Notre Dame cathedral, getting on with staying alive while the spire collapsed and the faithful wept that it was the end of the world. Not the end. Take stock, prioritise, do not buckle.

Ants everywhere.

Zero birds.

Tank brimming. Worried it might keel over. Got a match to strike and lit one of the candles in the hut, and I reckon I might be keeping a candle burning until I get picked up, just so I can keep a beach fire going and boil water for kumara, rice and noodles.

The beach looks so awful. It spooks me that this little speck of land looks more like an exposed bit of bone now, a knuckle of a submerged, drowned fist. Dead coral like shattered pieces of weathered cartilage tossed up, grated into sand. The lapping tide is like some senile old woman, restlessly looking for some tiny thing she's misplaced, picking stuff up and tossing it down again, muttering.

So let's say a Category 3 or 4. That may have been downgraded prior to it hitting. So Warwick may have made the call to not take the boat out once he got the maritime alert, and he may well have tried to text me to warn me. And if CPA got a cyclone warning, then that's obviously why they've postponed and their messages to me haven't come through. So will sit tight. (As if that's a choice).

And if the signal's still out, the telecommunications tower must still be down. Maybe Category 5 after all.

But no Search and Rescue that I can hear or see.

May be overreacting. There will be a huge major clean-up required in town and in the port, moving at snail pace. May look worse from here than it really is. The resort will still be preoccupied with flood damage, and tourist flights will be suspended but waiting for the go-ahead from the airport for civilian flights in from Brisbane to resume.

Cruise ship might still be there offshore because of damage in port. Or cruise ship passengers evacuated. Much higher priorities.

But now, the sea is flat and I can see the smudged shape of the island from here; they have fuel and an aluminium boat with an outboard motor and they promised.

Late afternoon, could hear the distant drone of aircraft landing at Luganville airport – something big, not a light twin-engine plane. A carrier like a Hercules rather than a 747. I can remember the planes after Cyclone Hydra, dropping tonnes of cargo at a time over islands and their airstrips when everyone was stranded after it happened. Australian Airforce Hercules.

So airport open.

Would they use helicopters for Search and Rescue if there was a serious emergency operation? Or is there no S&R, only Medivac?

Wound up the radio and took it up to the rocky promontory where there's a clear line across to the mainland. Heard ABC Pacifika, faint news report with an Australian accent, something about state and federal, something about health services overstretched, then back to local radio patch-in of Seventh Day Adventist church service, wavering in and out like a seance. That's one thing they build here, churches. Christianity, and everything else stowed in the Cultural Centre. That was the first thing I saw in town the first day I arrived in the country: “Kaljoral Senta”.

Inside the building I read that on the island of Erromango the sorcerers, the 'klevas', would whistle for the wind if the weather was too calm and they needed wind to sail their canoes. They would call it, they told white anthropologists, like a brother. They called themselves masters of wind and rain. If they wanted to capsize an enemy's canoe, they would try to change the wind or bring on rain by enticing the gods with kava and coconuts and throwing herbs and stones into the sea. Or they would capture the spirit of the sun by sealing it up in banana leaves, then burying those leaves under a stone in a stream. Because the sun ate up the rain when it came out. If it could be removed or hidden for a while, the rain would return.

People desperate to bring rain to survive, then trying to divert cyclones with everything they had. What they had were shells, stones, leaves, dirt, puffs of their own breath and spells. Fruit and roots and nuts. Things to make magic out of. Axes made of split obsidian from volcanoes. Sails and walls out of pandanus fronds bound with vines. Pigs' tusks traded as currency. The limits of the island universe, and all its materials. The answer had to lie at hand, because there was simply nothing else, and nothing else that could be imagined.

No boat, no word.

I remember seeing *no word* in P's diary, the time I thought we'd had a pretty good day together, going to a beach barbeque with some other expats, a rare day spent in each other's company. Later I paged back to that date, wondering what P might have said about it, how he'd recorded it. Blank page except for two words under the date. 'No word.' All-consuming. Remembering him checking his phone all day.

I remember this sensation from the bust-up too, the constant repressing of dread, the nausea, the taste of adrenaline, metallic like I've been sucking on coins. Fighting back dawning realisation, not wanting to see it.

Time to get occupied – clear the debris from the foreshore, collect up fallen coconuts, find dry fuel, make a fire. Am getting to the end of the last exercise book but since everything given to me as notes is basically now scrap paper, I'm not going to run out of waet paj just yet. Warwick knows I'm here, CPA knows I'm here, Kaz knows I'm here, so someone will be coming soon to pick me up.

Radio picks up frustratingly faint signal of Pacifika news with no voice really audible.

Is it good to be all quiet or is it bad, is it SOS ONLY?

Six days since cyclone and bees behaving now as if nothing has happened, business as usual, so flora here on the island must be OK or recovering. Definitely hot and steamy enough for more flowers to open.

Very dark at night.

Disaster: from the Latin. Literally 'without a star'.

Radio again. I cranked it and turned three or four times through the dial from end to end. Once I heard the sudden, distant echoey blast of island string band music, like a bunch of people are in a boat offshore, faintly serenading me. Through the dial I go, like someone trying to crack a safe, shifting north and east. I remember those instruments they make out of sticks and rubber bands and old tins, little guitars constructed out of boxes and nylon strings and nails. The endless inventiveness, how they can step up and unselfconsciously find a harmony and join in. The big untroubled grins. Just across the channel, really, 8 nautical miles due north-west on that black-sand beach I can't remember the name of, where villages full of other people live. How have they fared?

Sweating and feeling very thirsty, still have a rash fading all over my arms and legs.

Straining and boiling water just in case – can't afford to get sick again now.

Still lots of palm frond debris to clear from beach but I dragged it into a big pile and eventually managed to set it alight and here I am, the Hollywood cliché, sending smoke signals from my desert island scanning the horizon for rescue, which is definitely white anxiety because usually what suffers the most damage after a cyclone is everything white people have stupidly built and called infrastructure, which can't withstand it, and what injures people is flying sheets of roofing iron. Nature's infrastructure bends.

White people's slices your head off. In the villages after Cyclone Hydra, when the palm houses fell over, they salvaged stuff, took machetes, walked into the jungle, cut down more palms, made more roofs. They never even use nails. A box of nails is a treasured gift in those villages, passed over with a courteous nod, no thanks given or needed.

So maybe seven days before they get around to doing a reconnaissance by boat or air, maybe even ten. There will be protocols in place.

So hold tight. Keep the fire going.

***Envelope five (5). Record written on reverse sides of photocopied handbook:
'BEEKEEPING IN THE TROPICS' B. P. SEGEREN, 2004. Undated. Some entries unclear.***

There will be a priority listing for aid and assistance. Or no more planes to spare if that cyclone picked up more intensity and hit the Eastern seaboard of Australia. It's possible. It's quite within reason that emergencies reshuffle priorities fast; a government can equivocate for months on parliamentary protocol but act overnight if things actually go into lockdown. In 24 hours police can go from rescuing a kitten out of a tree to shooting a looter.

Radio picked up extremely faint repeated announcement on ABC Pacifika – can't make out the words but it is in English, French and Bislama, one after the other, over and over. The kind of recitation of emergency procedures left on as a recording, when everyone's left the building. Can't help it – deep black dread. Have a terrible headache and so have broken into the stash of what's left of the Panadol. Skin still weird from fever – rashes and peeling.

A further fruitless three hours checking and reconnecting and realigning the solar panel, hoping if I rearrange it into full sunshine, the moisture inside will burn off, and maybe it will magically start to work again. Islanders pray for broken machinery to start up again, so why not? Wind-up radio light goes on, flickers, a hiss of static when I crank it. Tank yu tumas, Papa God, for whatever it is you're showing me, here in the garden Joni Mitchell insisted we had to get ourselves back into.

Two more planes heard today – big engines, so cargo or AME. Supplies or evacuation? Smoke on horizon in late afternoon from direction of mainland.

OK paper rationing or not it's time for a fresh page.

Possibilities:

Cyclone damage bigger in Australia?

Political meltdown with interim government/ flights and services grounded?

Cyclone damage too overwhelming on main island, no phone tower, emergency relief all-consuming?

Telecommunications knocked out, otherwise all fine?

Could be emails and texts piling up, but they don't realise I can't receive/respond?

Delayed by additional problems post-cyclone? (Poor sanitation and garbage build-up).

Water supply issues, roads?

Resistant strain of dengue? Or malaria?

Temporary shutdown/suspension of all foreign aid programs?

Warwick and island – maybe cruise ship still quarantined?

Legionnaires?

Mutated virus, something gastro-related?

Water supply or air conditioning units on ships?

I sit winding the radio. Will not panic because I have seen how useless that is. Across each band on the radio, a wash of static. Radio's not as good as the short wave one I had when I was in El Salvador, but I remember I had height on my side there, a long aerial I could attach up on the roof of the house where I lived and tune in to BBC 2, cursing them for broadcasting so much cricket when what I wanted was news. Still want bloody news now. Nowhere really high to go. Aerial fully extended, I turn the tuner dial and have to stop and shake my hands to stop my fingers trembling. Stress makes everything cloudy, and you make poor decisions. Can't come up with a reason for why a boat isn't here yet, and that's a lead sinker and a hook in my throat. An exhausting weight. A choking thing I have swallowed.

Another fire, another foray into the massive piles of debris to clean up what the tide won't take away, this time the stuff piled in a thigh-high dump on the north-eastern side of the lagoon. All of it knotted together, after its stint in the ocean, with fishing line and clumps of plastic twine.

Weeds and vines have bounced back, out of control. You can almost hear them growing. Hope the same is true of flora for bees. There is still kumara in the garden, and I can live on starch if I need to. And that other watercress stuff will grow as well with all this rain.

Disassembled, cleaned and reassembled solar panel and housing and re-affixed it to roof, checked battery fluid and voltmeter wiring, reorienting the panel into sunshine. What I've probably done is ruined it forever. I can see the condensation inside the panels; not sure if that evaporates off or what.

If I could just get the phone dried out and recharged, then try to take it to a high point, find a bar of reception and send a message or at least some kind of SOS.

Should have demanded a satellite phone. Nobody's got a satellite phone here though.

Maybe Warwick. Or the cruise ship, definitely, if the cruise ship is still at Ilariki lagoon.

After the other cyclone there was more malaria, more dengue, more gastro.

This isn't gastro, though. 12 days at least since cyclone now. Surely 10 days before that since Ezekiel came.

There will be a system in place for aid after the cyclone, and it revolves around need, and the ten day window while there is still stuff to eat, windfall that has fallen from trees, tubers and whatever is in the wrecked garden and still edible. Because it takes a couple of weeks for the gardens to recover and there is no storage. So aid will arrive and will need to be coordinated and distributed. The men who decide how and what to distribute are bigmen, not chiefs. Remember my boss telling me after Cyclone Hydra that that name is a Polynesian imposition. One of the rare times I'd seen him terse and unsmiling.

I've been a blip on a tracking monitor, and now it's as if the machine has been switched off. I'm still here, still in solitary confinement, the lone commander, in the no-man's land between perishable and perished.

There's a language to soil, but I don't understand the language. It speaks in weeds, vines, erosion, regeneration. I look at clumps of vegetation and try to understand what I'm seeing. Soil needing to breathe. Rain carving runnels into it, draining into it, the itch and burn of all the mites and midges that teem through it and the sand.

Dreams and daydreams starting to blur. It's all getting slippery now. I wish I could just hold onto the dream, all the bits of it, stop them from sliding away. Sort them into order. Stop overthinking everything. I can only clutch onto what feels like single pages, memories with no context, the rest just picked up in the wind and whirled off over the horizon. Or stuck together into a gluey compost of mouldy pages.

A quicksand feeling. The mental warm-up required to fall back from a dream into a physical body and its edges.

Had a dream: P. told me he wanted my left arm. "I could make better use of it than you," he argued. Always persuasive, like he's never asked for anything other than this. "I'm left-handed. I need it. It just HANGS there for you. You hardly notice it." As he spoke in the dream I ran my right hand over my arm, down the divot on the shoulder carved by years of bra straps, down the unlovely, unmuscled length to the elbow, down the forearm all the way to the hand. Felt panicked and defensive. I was wearing a wedding ring. He was right, I realised. The whole arm was a waste, a useless adornment. I opened my mouth but no words come. He was looking at me with an expression I recognise now as petulant. The hand already felt numb, anaesthetized and ready for this simple, unmourned amputation. Woke up, on some level thinking I was waking out of surgery. I did not reach over and check my arm. I lay there still and obedient, a model patient, struggling out of bleary unconsciousness in a hospital bed.

All of it collapsed and melted away like slush once I put my feet on the ground. To linger anywhere in that dark and bitter layer is a monumental waste of mental time. Of course I see that with crystal clarity. These dreams are a side-product, something residual created by boiling down a distillation. Something granular and toxic you're advised to discard, grateful for its separation. You scrape it off you, sticky and jammed up. Like propolis. Slice through it. If you want to survive, slice through it.

Puzzling out all the verses to "Let it Be" takes up a morning, Paul McCartney spaniel-eyed and doleful at the piano, me with all the time in the world to reformat whether "There will be an answer" comes before "Speaking words of wisdom", and my brain tossing up a whole playlist of then, unstoppable, a CD player on random shuffle somewhere in a world where CDs are something in op shops. Nobody to hear me so I realise there's no need to just hum. Keep singing, keep reciting words, because to forget – then what? Say it over and over again, or it will slip away. Recite it.

Sing loudly. Why the fuck not?

Don McLean songs today, followed by the Eagles, and my voice is a bray, a croak, a creak, a bullfrog. Every time I press it into service there's a sudden dislocating jarring

weirdness like it's another person's voiceover in my ear, reminding me of something. A thread pulled, something hidden unravelling.

Sketch the trees and daffodils, etch the breeze and winter chills, with colours on the snowy linen land.

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses? You've been out riding fences for so long now.

Clear memories arising now, out of the buried hard drive. All the useless stuff I've read, stuff I always meant to chase up. Useless because I made nothing out of it. Not even a scrapbook. Now it's all the pieces to a jigsaw I've lost the box to. Or just shells, washed up, sucked back, washed up again, licked clean and empty by the ocean. Starting writing and finishing writing is my only structured activity now.

Me and my sister, practising "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" on the guitar, trying for harmony. Chords were C, A minor, D minor and G. I could play it now.

I could fit my fingers to the strings and limp my way through it, all the way to the bridge. 'Tonight with words unspoken, you say that I'm the only one.' The way Kaz would do that little harmony in 'when the night meets the morning sun.'

I'm remembering all the verses in the right order too. That one's a keeper. Should have written a will when Kaz told me to. Everything should go to her, not P. Should do that automatically as next of kin. But what's a will anyway, except tasking someone to get rid of all your accumulated stuff, and a playlist for the funeral?

Remembering a guitar I saw on Santo, played by a man in a string band on a black sand beach, made out of an old oar. Nobody swam in that bay because of sharks, there because a fish cannery had set up and attracted sharks by tipping tons of guts and by-products into the water as they processed the fish in palm oil to make 'tinfish'. The factory had fished the area out and left, but the sharks still hung around.

Crazy, a word from the 15th century, meaning broken, impaired, full of cracks or flaws. Crazy quilt: where the pieces are not uniformly sized and assembled; crazy paving, ditto,

crazing in glass is where fissures have become exposed under enormous pressure, but the glass does not shatter.

In Bislama, to be crazy for something is 'bebet blong.' Bebet meaning insect.

To be crazy is to be stuck to something, constantly having something alighting on you, or biting you, or stinging you. Sending you mad. A crazy or stupid thought, scoffed at, is 'tingting blong rat' – a rat's thought. Gnawing, beady-eyed, furtive, picking through refuse, living in the dark.

Yes, stupid, to think like a rat.

Crazy, crazy for being so lonely. Willie Nelson wrote that. For Patsy Cline, who died in a plane crash after doing a benefit concert before a big storm. It's always the best singers who seem to get into those planes. Patsy. Richie Valens. Otis Redding. Jim Croce. Amelia Earhart just disappeared in a plane. But it didn't just crash and kill her somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, some people believe. Some scientists or researchers – can't remember – found some remains on a deserted island that had already been checked off as 'searched' in 1940. They found opened clam shells, a jack-knife shattered apart for its blade, as if someone tried to make a fishing spear. A fire pit. A plexiglass aeroplane window. A woman's shoe. And the bit that really crushes: ancient make-up and lipstick, which showed evidence that someone had tried to eat them.

There were bones and chips of bones they tested for DNA against some of Earhart's living relatives. So she and the navigator, marooned on a coral atoll, probably sure at first that a search plane would find them. The atoll had a central lagoon, with a flat outer reef at low tide. Maybe they waded ashore, injured. Maybe a few provisions. Maybe not low tide, maybe the plane had stuff torn off it by coral. Maybe blood in the water. Maybe sharks. Maybe running out of fuel in the Pacific, grateful to be alive, waiting for rescue, living off shells and rain. Slowly starving. One dying, then the other. Not so grateful, now.

A place checked off as 'searched' – a place they were left to ebb away in.

Once we live in our heads, there's no getting out of them.

Was sitting on the upturned canoe – other bench too busted up and rotten now, termites in every crack – when I had one of those delayed mental reload moments. Then I reached my hand down and dug through the sand to the buried lip of the thing and by getting my fingers in under that crack I felt the canoe move and rock a little bit. Got entrenching tool and crowbar out of the lean-to. Turned it over. It's only about two foot wide and about eight foot long and I realised it was very like the ones I'd seen at the beachside hostel at Port Olry, subject of a thousand instagram posts with the palm trees and blue sea behind them. But why would this one be a prop, because what would it be doing here, and how did it get here?

It must have floated, so it must have once been seaworthy, unless it was somehow carved by the crew who built the hut and set up here for the previous sandalwood project. Or the original kastom owners of this island – maybe based originally at Ilariki before the resort or came to fish out of the lagoon here? Really hard to see how old it is because everything gets weathered so fast.

There's a single oar ingeniously fitted into the cavity. Someone has patched a carefully flattened piece of metal over a hole on both the inside and the outside of the canoe and looking at it, I could tell it was from an oil tin because I could still make out the ghostly 'Shell' logo through the rust. This small, patient repurposing just about did me in.

I've only ever been in a one-person kayak which was so light I could lift it onto the roof rack of the car, so light it almost felt like it was blowing away on the surface of the water. But I spent a long time dragging this canoe down from the hut towards the shallows of the lagoon even though it was so heavy I couldn't quite believe it would float. Inched it down pulling and pushing and got it into about 18 inches of water but the moment I tried to climb up and onto it, it just unbalanced and tipped me out, so I righted it over and over, stayed buoyant for three seconds then tipped upside down each time. Just no way I can balance in it. Once my feet came up off the sand, it tipped straight over. So there goes that idea. Could barely drag it out back out of the water and onto the sand again. When people say they did something because they were clutching at straws, I imagine them in water, drowning and grabbing little bits of grass to save themselves. Lungs and mouth and nose full of saltwater, desperately kicking. I've just spent the day clutching at a log. Still, it filled in some time.

The bees, implacable, ever-purposeful, never terrified, never immobilised, never stranded, in the very centre of the middle of nowhere. The very middle of their somewhere. I haven't opened any of the hives for days. I remember how conscientious I was back in July, like they would know it was the right weekday to be inspected. They're the only thing here still in its own cycle. Worth remembering, so pasting it in here:

Swarming.

If a colony grows larger, it can raise new queens in the presence of the old queen. This allows the colony to split itself up into groups with one queen each. Such a separate group of bees with one (or more) queens is called a swarm. The event of a swarm leaving the colony is called swarming. This is the normal way for bee colonies to increase and disperse in the area. It is not known exactly which factors trigger the preparation for swarming. But too little space in the brood nest limiting the number of eggs that can be laid by the queen is often given as an important cause. At first you will find only worker brood in a growing brood nest. Later, drone brood will usually make its appearance and large numbers of drones are often produced just before the swarming period.

Weather is so strange and still. Like it's spent itself. No waves. Haven't been in snorkelling to check how the reef is doing after the cyclone because visibility is terrible out there and anyway, I've got too many cuts and rashes. Legs a mass of raised dots, burning with such a maddening itch, scraping off the tops of every sore with my fingernails. Small wounds everywhere. Anywhere else in the world you could walk into the sea and the saltwater would heal them, but here the sea is a soup of bacteria. Wade into it and by the next morning each sore is pressing a swollen drop of yellow pus. Not just insect bites. Fish spine. Seashell. Pandanus leaf scrape. Each graze lined with a thin ridge of pus. I spend time each morning anointing the worst infections with bactroban, but can't really cover them, so my legs are a mass of sores now. Sometimes even when they seem to be healed there's a fresh round of infection. No tropical ulcers yet, although my knuckles are raised scar tissue. They look like tiny volcanoes.

I wonder how many G.I.s during the war went home with Purple Hearts and valour awards not from combat but because they'd developed tropical ulcers playing football on the beach or wandering along bush tracks to waterholes.

I eke out the ointment, accept the scarring. Not that it matters. Looking at the callouses on my feet and hands, the weathered skin on my forearms, trying to guess at what my face must look like by now. But my face now feels no different from the rest of my skin. Something on my passport photograph (another thing fogged and curling, faded) to identify me. The time for using my face to be recognised, to be revealed, feels gone.

Enough. Can't be someone who sits staring into space in a stupor, losing it, or sitting here scribbling uselessly. I'm going to put on a hat and go and watch the bees foraging, then build up my beach fire and throw weeds into it to make some smoke rise.

Woke up fearful and shaky. Lost track of the days now. So many greatest hits to be fearful about in the churn: finding bees dead and hives abandoned, me here absolutely alone on this island then with this diary like a black box. Amelia Earhart's poor shoe and gnawed lipstick. The general barometric dread.

What has fetched up now onto the south-eastern shore:

polystyrene

rope

nets

dead seabirds

plastic drink bottles

buoys

broken eskies

busted rubber thongs

volcanic pumice

wads of wrappers and packets

more buoys snarled in fishing line full of beaks, claws, bones

Out in the ocean, this big floating slick of plastic. Nothing's going to wash away here, just be dragged back and forth for thousands of years. Thinking of that dying whale washed up on a beach in the Philippines a few years back with 40 kgs of plastic waste in its stomach, and rice sacks, banana plantation bags, shopping bags and that

can't think of the word for the plastic rope

Polypropylene.

Spent a while this morning thinking of the word for the mess of bones and skin and claws that owls vomit up after digesting prey. A pellet. That's what the debris looks like, after the ocean's tried puzzling out how to grind it down.

Peak capitalism: the ad from a store called 'Urban Outfitters' in Los Angeles I saw back over a decade ago, selling owl pellets. How? Why? What for?

Kava was originally ground up by getting boys to do the job of chewing up the leaves and roots and spitting the pulp into the bowl. Their saliva causing some kind of chemical reaction. Like the bees with their nectar. Now, in town, cast iron meat grinders imported from China do the job.

Three categories of healer:

'Man blo prayer' – a Christian faith healer

'Man blo lif' – a herbalist

'Kleva' – a sorcerer.

A man who belongs to a leaf.

Back last year I was giving a talk about sugar and salt in a hut on a pandanus mat, and we went outside for our break, and an old man was talking to some young men about a circle marked in the sand with stones. I didn't go over there, assuming he was telling some story, because so many of the islander stories are about stones and rocks; stones becoming people, people turning into stones, stones having the power of speech while humans do not, stones thrown by gods to the outer islands to re-populate them with stone-born humans. Easy to see where this originates, the pumice and obsidian from volcanic eruptions, or floating on a tide.

But someone told me no, he was drawing a map. The stones represented stars rising, and the old man was talking about how to chart a course on the water using a map of stars rising in concentric circles from the horizon, so you could find your way to an

invisible island. You can't take the map with you. You have to hold the story in your head.

So, another item for the dissertation list: carved canoe prow from Solomon Islands depicting frigate bird and flying fish, seen in an auction catalogue for collectors of such things. Fixed onto the prow of a canoe for symbolic direction-finding on an open sea with no compass and no map.

I asked an islander with a canoe once how he navigated because sometimes they would take out the canoes at night when the fishing was better. I thought he'd say using stars. But he said he just put his ear down next to the water and listened to the pattern of waves as they hit the canoe's side. But what if, I said, those waves had come from a landmass kilometres away? It didn't matter, he told me. The islands and atolls made the waves create a different pattern, and if you knew how to listen, you could hear the difference, and know which way to go.

Men like him, thinking just like that, paddled out of lagoons and crossed oceans 3,000 years ago. They rigged sails and outriggers to their canoes and reached across the Pacific Ocean. They got to Hawaii. They got to Easter Island. They travelled across thousands of miles of open water, navigating using ocean swells, stars, cloud formations, the paths of seabirds. They took coconuts and taro and pigs and chickens on board, ready to set up in the new place they visualised somewhere over the horizon. They had rowed out into the sea from Asia, left a DNA trail across an ocean that stretched halfway around the planet, floating on vessels made of wood and woven palm leaves. They passed down the sea routes in songs. Or they took frigate birds with them, and released them to see which direction the birds would fly in, because they always flew towards land if they could. In the Marshall Islands they made charts out of sticks depicting the swells and currents of the island chains and memorised them, then set out. Maps with bent sticks for currents, tiny stuck shells for islands and stars, the patterns they learned by heart about what they would find on the open water, and the currents and channels they would feel. They used everything they had to risk everything they had. Being human, they had no choice. When the U.S. wanted those islands for nuclear tests and naval and military operations, when it was time for warfare and landing strips and submarines and bombs,

the Marshallese had their occupied islands and oceans mapped with satellite technology, and those stick maps turned out to be accurate down to the last degree.

They stopped making them after that. Except for tourists.

I knew all this, and yet when I saw a photo of one, I couldn't help it – I instantly wanted it. I wanted it like a work of art, something to buy and hang on the wall and own. A glorified souvenir, really, for a rich-and-yet-bankrupt culture. Yes, I can pretend I'm a museum curator and art collector or a worker doing something useful and important in a poor island nation for a year, but really I am, bottom line, on the side of the people on the cruise ship, docking in for a barbecue and dance spectacle. I have a fistful of new currency which has usurped the old one, and so this is how I exercise my power. This is my natural entitlement. I am an *acquistador*. I sit here now with the weight of this on me. I want it otherwise, but can't make it otherwise. Tired of writing, hand aching, but nothing else to do but write.

The only thing I wanted to do when I came here was to find something helpful and not harmful, but what's the difference, really? In the long run? It's all damage control for damage caused. All the toxic crap of post-colonialism and everything it trails with it. To be a white alien in this culture, bringing your own virtuous lessons of everything they're doing wrong, and every way you're superior, and every virus you're bringing with you, to flourish in a new place. As long as I was a subject in a line of vision, a name in a line of an email, someone coordinating something, working hard to account for all moneys spent, all questionnaires filled in and returned, the white lady teaching about 'sik suga' disease, I had definition.

Case in point: among all the papers and reports I have brought and find myself using now as scrap paper, my own dutiful acquittal notes on effectiveness of the diabetes program:

"Perceptions regarding diabetes and significant community awareness of rising non-communicable disease trends":

Percentage who consider the disease to be of significant concern: 73.3%

Perceived causes:

the consumption of store purchased foods: 49%

eating too many sweet foods: 37%,

inadequate exercise: 31.2%,

lack of dietary balance: 26.3%

drinking too much sugar: 18.2%,

genetic causes: 15.9%.

kastom (loosely, 'traditional knowledge and practice', but more often referring to sorcery): 7.5%

posen ("poison", a common sorcery-related technique): 2.30%.

Trust in effectiveness of faith healers in treating sorcery-induced illnesses: 58%.

Trust in formal services in treating sorcery-related ailments: 48.8%

When asked directly, 62.6% of respondents considered sorcery (in Bislama, *blak masik*) a plausible cause of diabetes onset."

Sorcery. Nearly 63 percent. From the acquittal report I am writing on the back of right now: "As these findings indicate, despite confidence in the effectiveness of the formal health system, individuals are more likely to source alternative treatments, especially in the form of Christian prayer, in instances where an illness is believed to have resulted from sorcery."

So there you have it. My impact in a nutshell.

Today, morning, dead quiet low tide. Air strange and smoky.

A massive shoal of dead silver fish, all exactly the same size, dumped high on the sand. Swarming with crabs.

It's taken me half a day to clear them away with the shovel and bury them in a big hole.

I can't stop thinking of Lakamia, those small kids crouched, catching each fish, gutting it with a lightning slash of the machete, hurrying because nothing could be stored, everything must be quickly given away and shared out.

Muscles hurting, this is what overcomes the ache: repetitive motion, moving them the same rhythmic way over and over. This is the way to do it. To make everything supple. The tendons getting accustomed to being torn by tiny increments until they stretch and stretch, painlessly.

Trying to calculate days by the upside-down quarter moon but the tides are all wrong.

Too high, too slick, no waves.

Dirty and sluggish tide in and out again across the lagoon, lots of sand gone on the northern end, a greyish high tide line and smell of oil or petrol. A diesel motor would be loud enough to hear at any hour now. Even if I was at the bee boxes they would know to come ashore because they would see the fire.

In my peripheral vision my ghost is still watching me, assessing how far I have slipped, how steadfastly I am clinging to the mast. This observer, the Shadow of my Former Self, is grimly watching, judging. Her arms are folded. She's scrutinising me for any revealing evidence of ... what? of slippage, of hopelessness, of dismay. Of giving up.

Slashed around the bee boxes at both clearings, sharpened machete just for the pleasure of it, and slashed more. Raked weeds and vines into a pile. Everything looking orderly for no reason whatsoever. Some boxes I can't even get open now – stuck fast with propolis. A civilization gone feral in there.

Something like zika? (Mosquitoes breeding in tyres in shipping containers in open waters, in sub-tropical zones now?)

Resistant TB

Yellow fever

West Nile virus

Bird, mite, flea, beetle, microbe, bug ... something small we've overlooked

Japanese encephalitis

Chikungunya

Flu or bird flu

H5N1 virus

H7N9 virus

name your virus, really.

Widespread power outages

Rolling strikes

No 4G or connectivity, 5G issues

screaming urban psychotic breakdown, in a universe far far away?

The cruise ship, is what Ezekiel said. Remembering just what it was he said. I wrote it down. When I thought he was describing dengue fever.

When I gave him the anti-malarials, when he was sick and forbidden to make contact but came to warn me anyway.

Fiva soabodi sobel sohed stikmasel kof

Fever and chills. Sore body. Stomach ache. Muscle cramps. Coughing.

A severe acute respiratory syndrome, then, rapid onset, for which there is no immunisation. Something like SARS?

Incubation time, two to four days.

Like day three, say, of an eight day cruise.

And one of those days would be the worst, the day of peak fever. When there would be a hive swarming inside your lungs.

I've been walking up and down the wrecked lagoon, watching my feet and the tracks of hermit crabs, the small buried nuggets of dead coral. Yesterday, a tidemark of washed-up pumice crumbs. Adrift from some ancient, distant volcano, fragments floating on a tide, looking for a landmass. Saw a photo once of rubbish just like what's washed up here, on that remote beach on the tip of Borneo, that time – flip flops and buoys and chunks of lurid plastic. Dire predictions back then (2013?) of floating islands of plastic the size of ... what? I can't remember. Widening gyres.

Germany – the size of Germany.

Stomach churning. Mind churning. One small internal gyre, in the eye of a sluggish storm, a nauseous pivot as the funfair horizon tiltawhirls. Collapses.

No boat, no contact. Nobody to tell but the bees. Nothing to do but write this, vomit up another hard little pellet of fear out of my gut.

From biosecurity report, index of notes:

1 mile = 1.828 kms

1 nautical mile = 1.852 kms

1 fathom = 1.828 metres

1 ton = 1.016 metric tons

Amount of water in the ocean: 326 million cubic miles (1.332 billion cubic kms)

Percentage of earth covered by water: 72%

Percentage of that which is salty ocean water: 97%

Sea level rise: thermal expansion of the oceans 42%

melting of temperate glaciers 21%

Greenland 15%

Antarctica 8%

Ice shedding in Antarctica: before 2012: 84 billion tons per year

after 2012: 240 billion tons per year.

All melting like gangbusters. So say some big shelf slipping and calving, the garbage smothering all. And Greenland – the permafrost thinning like ageing skin, drying in the wind down to rock and rubble. So the bacteria would thaw beneath. Algae.

The water warming, festering with new bugs. All that fresh water released, travelling.

Full of some unknown contagious virus or bacterial infection.

Pandemic. Panic. Pandemonium. Maybe. A phone ringing in an empty room until infrastructure frays and snaps and then no signal at all, nothing, satellites uselessly orbiting in silence, like the light from stars already dead.

Safe enough here because it is not an atoll, this archipelago pushed up out of the sea, the 72% water, the rising bit, gradually covered with mould and moss and dirt so that things grow in it, covering its bareness. Not submerged by waves (tsunami? rising water? slipped melted glacier? what are the dead fish about?)

An archipelago – the visible points and remains breaking through the surface of a huge submerged landmass, a being. And around me on clear days, inaccessible but visible on the horizon other bits of emerging skeleton. A ridge of kneebone. A scapula rimed with green. All of it drowned in endless sea the locals call solwata, and rivers and streams they call freswata. The constant surprise of fresh drinking water on the islands, in a world rimed and soaked with salt, brimming up through a strata of limestone underneath like a reprieve, trickling irresistibly back to the sea.

Any paper I leave out swells and softens overnight. After five days it will be pinpointed with microscopic black ecosystems, this notebook will end up feeling as plump and dampish as a loaf of bread. Unless it's stored in the plastic sealable box with silica

desiccant, there is nothing for it but surrender, just as the only antidote to this press of time is to stop measuring it and waiting in it, stop listening for the sound of an outboard motor.

Stepped out of the hut this morning to a terrible quiet, a feeling of aftermath.

In the lagoon, making a new high tide mark – much higher than any of my stick marks, higher than any king tide – was a new eaten-away shoreline rimmed with hundreds more small identical dead fish. I can't bring myself to wait another two weeks for the next king tide, so I used the plastic laundry dish to scrape them all back into the water, and turned my back on the scene for the rest of the day and the night, hoping they'll just be carried back out and gone. Garbage collection, island-style.

The plastics aren't going anywhere. Not for the next 15,000 years, either. At least the dead fish will break down. Something's missing here. Something I keep nearly naming but can't.

Later:

birds. Feasting on all these fish. Not a single bird.

Satellites?

Solar flare hitting satellites, knocking out comms?

Parasite of some kind causing flu-like illness, no resistance, or humans hospitalised with immune systems weakened, or no antibiotic to treat.

Mass infection and late detection?

Genetically modified superbug – terrorism? Mistake? (Or biowarfare?)

Virus mutated?

Pandemic?

Toxic spill somewhere.

Thwaites glacier.

Permafrost/iceshelf finally collapsed?

West Antarctic ice sheet.

Pine Island glacier.

Larsen C iceshelf.

name your melting glacier, really. Any or all.

Virus carried by migratory birds or mammals (wolves? geese? elk?)

Toxic waste dumps?

Meltwater?

Bilgewater?

Irradiated water?

Virus moving faster than vaccinations, quarantining or policy procedures?

Trying to remember what happened with measles in Madagascar? (Could it be measles?
Swine flu? Some new resistant SARS?)

It's possible I'm still a notation on a google calendar somewhere. Or else that program has been deleted, or that computer switched off, or that office evacuated. Or that user no longer concerned about deadlines.

Mail delivery subsystem report: message failure.

Force quit? Press yes. Windows is shutting down.

Force acquit. I'm assuming there's still a project, and something to acquit.

Writing it makes it a sort of material fact, like netting a thought and hauling it out.

Whatever the date, the fact remains. I have slipped out of frame. That actor. Hugo Weaving. Seeing him on stage in "Endgame" just after Mum's funeral must have been still pretty shellshocked – "Use your head, can't you, use your head ..." remember him ranting this, but nothing else about this production or what came after this.

Whatever the actual dates, the deadline is well and truly 'finis' now. Time to look that squarely in the eye. Write it. Say it out loud. Use my head.

There may not be a boat.

I am mired. I am cast away. The ache to wash this salt crust off my skin and out of my hair, to be somewhere inland and shady, away from the blaze and the inertia of being marooned on this exposed lump of dead coral and debris. Set down here and left like something beached. Like a dropped seed, unobserved and unremarked. Unremarkable, under the sun and rain, clinging to my little ration of soil. Un-remarked. No mark. The hermit crabs make more of a mark than me, just without the angst, without the ruination.

The interior creature, pressing against the hardening shell, feeling its way out, the tide always relentless, those small waves beating like a heart.

A pale blue dot

on a pale blue dot

on a Pale Blue Dot.

Hold on.

Circle back.

Hold on.

That story the old woman on Malo told me:

An old grandmother took her grandson to the spring and told him to wait while she bathed there. While he waited on the ground, she crawled out of her old wrinkled skin and left it there, and when she returned to her grandson he saw that she looked different – young and beautiful and unmarked by life. He was afraid of her.

“I’m your grandmother,” she said, “don’t you recognise me? There is no need to be afraid of me. I’m the same person.” But the grandson cried and was terrified, and would not look at her. So the grandmother went and found her old wrinkled skin, and clothed herself again in it, then came back and her grandson allowed her to pick him up again. “If you hadn’t been afraid of me,” she told him, “we would all be able to crawl out from our old skins and be young again forever. But because of your fear, we won’t shed our old skins any more. Instead we shall grow old and die.”

This was the beginning of death, said the old woman.

Fear brought it.

tundra peat burning/boreal forest burning/permafrost slumping open into pits/melting landmasses falling and slipping/the concrete coast of the world inundated

Things can get cleaned up, buried, tidied away, and the sea can look empty again. The memorial to market killing is absence, not scars, no mounds of skulls, no drifting hollow bones only here, on the tide, in it comes.

More rafts of pumice drifting over the ocean towards wrecked bleached reefs for new lifeforms to try their luck on. The tide shifts and churns. Back come the bones again, the

snarled fishing lines, the polystyrene buoys. Every few days I try to bury them and the tide digs them up again like a dog. Chews them and breaks them down more, into shards and beads into the guts of birds and dolphins, into little heaps of beached bones and feathers. Dried pecked eyes.

I am the only witness here at the high tide mark each dusk. I used to think I was a skeleton encased in flesh, but I'm not. I'm a brain encased in bone, driving this sad machine forward.

My hand fits perfectly sideways between the two curved protruding bones of my pelvis. Heel of hand against one, fingertips against another. A handspan. We all came from this cradle, are all going back to it.

Humanity's first tool: not a spear or a weapon but a cradle. Something hollow to carry water or strap your baby to yourself as you walked. What is this about except the desire not to die? The desire to continue?

I've given myself a task: dutifully raking the coral rubble smooth, tending the garden. If I put pencil to paper I inevitably make lists, so now I'm going to list tasks. I've let go of the idea that a boat is going to arrive any hour now, so I can leave my vigil outside the hut and do stuff. Better to worry now about getting more food to grow. What springs up like a weed on cleared soil is the green plant I got sick of long ago on the main island, the green vegetable they put in every stew, chopped up like spinach.

I stood there looking at it today, holding the knife, waiting for the word for it to fall into my brain like a droplet off a stalactite.

Kabis.

Cabbage.

I said the word aloud. Ridiculous tears.

The hives tended, too. Like those soldiers on islands who continued to raise the ragged flag, abandoned and forgotten long after the war had ended, continuing faithfully to ape the rituals. That's me and always has been – trying to behave well even though nobody is watching. That's what they can put on my headstone.

High tide last night hit the highest marker and then washed in further.

A line of foamy sludge that smells off, more plastic and debris this morning. There's a piece of corrugated iron left wedged hard into an inaccessible point in the rocks, and it's been faintly creaking as it bends back and forth all morning and if I stand and listen I can hallucinate it's the sound of rigging on a sailboat.

Bees checked, fire lit, kumara cooked, water strained and boiled, shade found – these activities have become habitual auto-pilot actions. Having something – anything – to do is what I can seize upon. Usefulness, purpose, a fire, a sharp blade, a weeded garden, a clear track, a full hive.

Everything, the islanders believe, began here. So why shouldn't the end start here too? That's how the pastors would have it, anyway. The alpha and omega, the genesis and revelation. Once this whole archipelago must have broken up from the surface of the ocean in a mighty molten volcanic boil, and after incomprehensible amounts of time it became a verdant island chain where all flourished and all trees bore fruit and the kingdom with no king was peaceable, the volcano an umbilical scar.

That's the world – God's big fat unerring finger jabbing the hot mineral ground, planting the seed which springs up.

Here, says God. This is where I'm starting.

When the seas began to rise, the god Qat in the Banks Islands shut up all his family and living creatures in a canoe when the great deluge came, just like Noah (a comparison very dear to the Skriptja Yunyon, and who are any of us to argue?) Now just the island chain remaining, the archipelago rising above the water like the folded hands of Papa God himself. Just the knuckles exposed now, worn and ridged, or the coral atolls like cartilage, swamped, bleached, calcified, flooded.

I have nothing else to read but I have blank pages and pencils so if I can keep my hand going I can compartmentalize this hour in the afternoon which is sometimes the worst and the emptiest.

Another thing retrieved:

On the island of Malo I was taken to a spot where the lagoon had been altered, a peninsula of rocks and dead coral heaped up to change the course and depth of the water,

stretching out into the deepening channel. I guessed this might be for fishing, then for pushing out canoes with more ease.

My two companions, young men from the copra plantation, exchanged cautious smiles at my confusion. Not fishing, they said. Trap for missionary boat.

I studied it again – just a kind of dam wall starting wide and tapering, something you'd barely notice unless it was pointed out to you, but a man-made thing in a place where nature rules. Once a missionary boat entered, though, it would have been marooned without the tidal push to reverse out of there. Like a fish trap – easy to get in, hard to get out again.

Take them off the boats, said one of my companions, studiously speaking in English, taking his role as guide seriously. He pointed out the track through the bush away from the beach and we walked 200 metres in to an arrangement of massive flat boulders.

Epiphytic plants were growing from them, you could still hear the sea from where we stood.

Lie them down here, said my companion. The two of them checked my face, still blank obviously, and something passed between them – humour? embarrassment?

bashfulness? – and then they looked away, from the ground to the sky.

Eat them, one of them said at last. Long while back. Dark time.

I stood in the spot. I put my hands down, flat, on the cool stones. I did this – I remember this. They wanted to make a sheepish joke of it, and so did I.

Not now, I said, matching their sliding, cautious smiles.

No, they said. Got Jesus now.

(Some pages obliterated here, text unreadable.)

Bees have no ears, they don't 'hear'. They communicate through vibration, up through their legs. They drum on the comb and it reverberates through the chambers, an echo chamber till it reaches the feet and abdomen of the queen. They drum for danger. Bee textbook: "They do not 'see' so much as reflect and register the position of the sun and the light it casts". Black eyes on their heads like solar panels, absorbing it.

I am a queen here, in a kingdom.

I created it out of wishful thinking. No-one can hurt you in that world, you can only hurt yourself. You invented that world, so you both hate and long to spend time there.

It brings something out of you. Out of the part of you that is damaged.

Mornings I spend walking up and down the foreshore of my kingdom, along the new deep erosion gully of dark oily sand. I press my foot down, the sand cliff collapses. I go all the way along, where the high tide has carved it out. I create a catastrophic natural disaster for hermit crabs. All this sand is ground-up coral, all of it was once a living organism, turned calcified. Bleached and dead.

‘Mi harem se’: I’ve heard it said, hearsay. ‘Tok long rod’: the word on the street.

‘Yu luk sik blong yu’: I told you so. Literally, and bitterly, ‘you’re sick because of yourself’.

Like something you circle and poke at over and over until it loses the power to shock you, until you can turn off the mains. I have trained myself to spend whole days and nights not thinking about it. I have a reserve of energy put aside for putting it behind me, not looking at it. It’s like shutting a drawer or pushing a door closed.

Seeing ‘no word’. Me saying what’s going on and P saying for fuck sake, nothing, it’s all in your head. The silence maintained at a kava bar, men staring glazed at nothing, hating light, hating noise, like an opium den. Not hungry, not restless, silent in the nakamal, where women are not welcome. Sullen, embittered hate, gazing inwards. Glowering.

All in my head, so of my making. My problem. My instincts: wrong.

My desire for opening up: nagging. My paranoia, my suspicion, my wrongness. Silence as a punishment, fed in crumbs of resentful talk. Starving. That’s really how everything dies. It starves to death. That pissed-off loathing, the look of Adam’s in the painting. A man in his element now, brazening it out. What followed me everywhere was wordless sisterly pity. Sem: shame.

No eye contact from any man. Not that any man in my whole year here could have ever been seen to approach me independently and start a spontaneous conversation. No need to explain to any woman why I needed to avoid everyone, and they needed to avoid me. These women live in a patriarchal custom culture where men do exactly as they please; they got it perfectly.

The look I felt frozen on my face – could feel set in place there – was that look the Coyote gets in the cartoon, when he's so caught up in such furious pursuit that he runs out into mid-air and hangs suspended until he becomes conscious that there is nothing under his feet at all. That's meant to be the part we laugh at, the seconds it takes him to realise he's run into thin air. Then that expression he turns and gives the camera before dropping like a stone. So nauseating, that plunge. The cortisol flooding the body. Something has led you to believe that while you're unaware of things, you can run out onto invisible air and somehow defy reality. A glance down into the empty canyon far below is all it takes. Then sucked instantly down.

So, do not look.

Look away. Keep busy. Keep working longest hours possible.

Step carefully around the charms and portents laid in wait for you on the road.

Run hard into thin air, and keep running on the spot as long as you can to sustain the illusion there's something solid under your madly-pumping feet.

Felt certain coming to this island was the survival solution. That's meant to be the cure, after all. All that psychobabble shit: 'Take care of yourself. Change the scenery. Go somewhere no-one knows you and have a holiday. Get home and find a good counsellor. What doesn't kill you makes you strong.' So leave house. Give notice. Write to program coordinator. Refuse 'outcounselling'. Tolerate strained hush-up. Say nothing. Call out nothing. Disappear. Relieve others of burden of acknowledgement. Hold it together long enough to make silent exit. Save the breakdown for later.

I'm talking to you, Shadow of My Former Self. I'm telling you this in the echo chamber of this place, in an isolation I was certain I wanted, an exile I myself imposed. Everything I have pushed down is a hive at the back of my head, the frames clustered and wedged and stuck together, and I have had to move them and rearrange them carefully,

terrified to disturb them, so that what's alive in them does not rise in a terrible cloud, so I am not stung.

Whatever admin officer in charge of writing the big fat policy and code of conduct booklet on the psychological health of aid and development workers who have experienced some shock or disruption (coup! civil war! natural disaster! quick! get them the fuck out of there!) would no doubt call this this desire to distance myself *disassociation*. Trying to write that letter to the in-country project coordinator *I would like to disassociate myself as strongly as possible* and taking that letter on a USB into town and finding nowhere to get it printed, nobody with a photocopier. Trekking down to the Post Office along broken potholed streets, the endless hot familiar trudge, the will ebbing out of me. A floundering sweating woman clutching a memory stick. Yes, to disassociate. To uncouple. Not my conduct. Not the way I conducted myself. But the line, as I imagine it for everyone observing white powerful people, is between being ignored and being implicated. The line between being seen as implicated and that implication calcifying into complicit.

So ignore, deny, minimise. Nothing will be done. The tactical wheels will turn and obliterate. Make yourself scarce, said that silence, now that you have betrayed this code. Here's how the powerful spend their power – stepping out of the garden looking beleaguered and pissed-off, pretending there is no hurt done, using power to be brisk, dismissive, absent, lofty, untouchable. Leaving what's fallen in their wake, dextrously side-stepping it. They have saved up this currency, and they always have some in reserve.

How to become invisible: learn that you have already been rendered invisible. That you are, in fact, visible only to the point at which you cease to be useful – useful as a screen, or a legitimacy, or a cover. After that, off with your head.

I was outmanoeuvred. I lacked tactical skills. I retreated into shock. I absconded. I did nothing wrong, but I was left holding the burden of shame like a stiff, stinking dead fish. It was mine to carry or discard. Me, then. Skinned alive. Wanting only to get away and

hide. Every instinct right, as it turned out. Every 'paranoid suspicion', scorned, denied and ridiculed, proved correct.

Infidelity is powered by secrecy and subterfuge, it is fuelled by lies. It needs heat and darkness. It seethes in there.

In his diary, left open on the table: *I know this will hurt her but it can't be helped, I love him and I must be with him* then a list of costs – such a strategic, cool-headed list considering the reckless infatuation – the expenses required for a passport and work visa application, the setting up of a bank account, himself as sponsor, himself as nothing more than an altruistic supportive 'friend'.

Enough of this, pointless, but here's my circle of pebbles and shells, here's my blade in the snow (Because why keep the wolf from the door? Why not invite it in?)

I came to this place with a man who stepped into a custom patriarchal culture shaped for generations by and for men, and liked, bloody LOVED, everything he saw there. Who saw how easily and unquestioningly it gave him prestige, power and pleasure.

Wanted it for himself, unchecked, unearned. Blunted himself on kava with the best of them. Sandpapered it all down, when finally confronted, until what he was doing was re-engineered as altruistic, positive, laudable.

'I'm not rejecting YOU', he said with put-upon contempt, rolling his eyes as if I was an idiot, Adam giving that 'here we go' gesture to God. 'But you have to understand, I've met the love of my life! My soulmate!'

The mania of infatuation. Its sufferers suddenly wild-eyed, clamp-jawed, sleepless.

Rewriting, revising, re-ordering everything. When they open their mouth, an unfamiliar voice comes out. A stranger, trying to talk you into their delusion: *It's more of a brotherly thing. It's not what you're making it. You just can't stand the thought of me being happy.* 'Swit maot': sweet talker. 'Giaman man': a gammon man, a fake. A liar.

A local young man, met at the same kava bar, who understood the currencies obviously much, much better than I could. My polar opposite in every way I could not change, and could not control.

The first aid book lists ciguatera symptoms from eating reef fish carrying this toxin, and all I see are such uncanny parallels:

chills, confusion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, trembling, muscle and abdominal pain, trouble breathing, numbness, dizziness, vertigo, hot and cold sensations reversed.

Temporary blindness. Paralysis. Extended period of recuperation required. Scar tissue.

All the same symptoms.

I am not a melodramatic person. I wish, I wish otherwise, that I didn't find myself a small, flayed, stunned thing, pulled from its shell. But I was that gasping thing.

This is the truth. Mi mi mas talem tru tok. True, but tabu.

This is my blade and my bleeding tongue. How ridiculously banal it seems now, the thing that laid me so low.

Not going to waste more paper being pulled back into the churn about this. The threshing machine. This is done, P.

You and I are earth.

(page inserted here with pencilled notations, moons, numbers)

Five stings today. It's like they are attuned to every little spurt of adrenaline, or else they can smell the cortisol sweating out of my bloodstream.

I scraped the stings off with a bit of shell. Because I'm out of antiseptic cream, a dab of toothpaste on each one, which seemed to work just as well.

Tin of fish mashed up with boiled kumara. Still tastes like cat food, and it's mostly grey discoloured offcuts in palm oil (canned in the Solomons now, owned by Chinese company), but if I catch a reef fish in the lagoon, I can't be sure it doesn't have ciguatera – I could probably handle the vomiting and diarrhoea, but the seizures and respiratory failure, no. Also, even if I did risk it, I'd have to cook it, and am limiting myself to a fire every three days, rationing matches.

Book says ciguatera toxin mainly found in predator reef fish. But still. Don't want to take the risk.

Ten cans of fish left.

Spent the morning stockpiling lots of tinder and coconut fibre in case I have to keep a fire going continually if the matches run out. Should have bought some of those Bob Marley cigarette lighters at the store. Didn't picture myself counting matches.

Then got an empty tin and pierced it with a nail to try to melt/distil coconut oil in because I've run out of fungal cream. Thinking I can mix coconut oil and ti-tree oil. The itching is driving me insane.

If a cut festers and gets infected – what? Already have five sores on my legs and nothing to treat them. Salt? Methylated spirits? Not healing. My legs look spindly as an old woman's. Seawater like bacterial soup – sitting warm and cloudy. Can't get in at all now.

I stopped this morning and thought: what the fuck is the matter with me? – I have a hive full of antibacterial ointment. (Use your head, can't you!)

Suited up and opened a hive, ran the hive tool around the edges stuck with propolis and lifted out one frame after another like big fat files in a filing cabinet until I found one at the end that was old with no live brood. Cut away chunks of comb into the plastic bucket and felt angry guard bees hitting themselves against my mask, the electrified change in the air as they thrummed and lifted off. Outrage all around me. I shook the frame once to gently knock them away and back they came straight for me, back trembling onto the wax, feeling around blindly, affronted, betrayed.

The first time I've 'stolen' something from them. Once I slid the frame back in and closed the lid, dozens followed me swooping all the way back along the track to camp – no way to lid the bucket, so I've left it under the tree and will have to wait till dark until they all abandon the comb and return to the hive.

Later:

The sun was so hot the comb was already soft by the time I checked it again, and honey oozing out. One roll of bandage still in a paper wrap. No pins but I fastened it with a drop of liquid wax which held it in place, then a knot. Tasted some honey. Of course I did. Then to bed with legs covered in honey. There's one bee determinedly crawling over the mosquito net still, a kamikaze. Pursuing what is hers. She is never going to survive the temperature of night away from the hive, but she has rationed her energy to use up the last of it trying to get in to sting me.

Legs look a bit better this morning. Honey, coconut and ti-tree oil melted together in a tin over the fire.

Thinking about the cult on Tanna tourists find so hilarious and primitive, the rituals of the old men whose fathers remember World War Two and the bounty it brought, keeping the grass slashed as an airfield, making air traffic control towers out of bamboo, waiting and waiting for the return of a plane full of cargo, going through the ritual steps and gestures to wish it into being. I'm in it now. Like them. Sitting waiting for the cargo to return, the magical sense of control and order ordained from elsewhere. Something coming from outside, to alleviate what is so patently not enough inside. Sitting in a hut thinking the process of filling up pages with marks is like a spell that will save me.

Been having a recurrent dream about a cargo hold. Not a ship, though. Waiting interminably for something onshore, something held up on the dock for no reason. Searching for the right corrupt official to pay a bribe to, to get it.

Hands switched on, head switched off. The antidote. Antivenom.

I make a bargain with my brain to 'earn' for myself another measure of time spent in inertia. Torpor is the word that comes to me today. There is nothing here to turn its back on me. Dearth. Dearth, and hunger swarms. I want my hunger back.

Still, I am alive. I am alive here. Tell myself that every time it rains and I see the tank is full. Tears roll easily down my face and taste like seawater. Storing dry kindling in the hut now – have tried fixing some tin sheets back onto the lean-to but not weatherproof. Tarp thrown over everything that doesn't fit into the hut.

More dreams of the same place: not a cargo hold, but a hanger, somewhere shadowy but full of urgent business. An aircraft is outside the hanger, its engines throbbing so loud nobody inside can speak. There are people on stretchers in the shadowy corners. Some urgent evacuation. But again, everything's taking forever. The right official can't be found. The cargo has to be offloaded first. The plane waits, using up fuel, engines roaring. The official – I can see him in the dream – is in his office, eating a cake out of a paper bag from the Lo Chin Store. In his desk drawer is the rubber stamp needed to

expedite offloading. The key to the drawer is clipped to a chain hanging from his belt. The patients on the stretchers lie still, breathing in jet fuel exhaust and dust. I wake up and then almost immediately slip back into the same dream, like it's a movie playing on a 24 hour loop on a cable channel I can't escape. Same dream, hours later. Three of the people on the stretchers have been wheeled away. The rest lie beneath the blankets stamped with the Red Cross. Finally, the cargo on the plane is unloaded. Nobody is allowed to touch the crates as they are stacked on the pallets inside the hanger. Inside some I see thousands of bottles of drinking water shrink-wrapped for distribution. In another, boxes stamped "Bible Society of the South Pacific". This cargo. We're bringing all of it. Asian honeybees spreading into the South Pacific, cruise ships and ocean liners and cargo ships. Set up the need. Make the need a weakness. Profit from the need. Catch the plane home again.

Had one more hunt for where the new swarms have gone, but if they survived they are deep in the forest. Or maybe I did dream them that time, these bees busting from my hands, alighting on my face, scenting me, naming me. Maybe it was my brain generating that heat and vision. I bet any of these islanders could make hive frames just with sticks. Bind them together in a square frame like a map, dip the top in wax for the bees to work from, insert them upright in a hollow log or box made out of woven pandanus and bamboo. Maybe a mud coating. No need for any foundation sheets. See what the bees do. See how fast everyone adapts.

Awful twilight zone dream of the hangar again. It's like a monster garage sale or expo this time, a place full of expats and missionaries and white businessmen swapping and trading their piles of booty. It's 'bustling'. It's the free market in action. It's hot in there and the goods are declining in value, reaching and passing their use-by date, and the bartering becomes ever more vicious and calculating as the odds shorten and there's a striving to maintain the illusion of order and altruism, the fervent performance of self-defending justifications and burnished untruths of their spiels as everything in those piles of loot is grabbed and picked through and priced and auctioned off and as I wake up I am sick with a different certainty. We are the cargo. The cargo is us.

The small bird flies, blown off migratory course, its nesting grounds gone, the bird with its small sad wisp of branch held in its beak. Plumes ragged or brought down with slingshots. Gone now, just feathers and ornamentation for headdresses.

Down blows the weather, up goes the temperature, Noah waits, out of food now, the menagerie dying, the sea slapping and rising against the side of the ark, giving away nothing. The atomic blasts on the horizon. The City of Pandemonium.

That's what the pastor says, that's the whole biblical prophecy gone awry, starting here where God started, ending when God decides to end it.

Because every brand of Christianity fetches up in the South Pacific like flotsam, I was never without people telling me earnestly, straight-faced, standing in their best clothes, that it's the end of times, as explained to them by their missionary ministers.

The 12 stars on the head of the prophet equal the 12 stars of the United Nations in this deformed version of Revelations, all this pentacostal destructive havoc wreaked over and over on these poor people, this sickening cycle where they are now told they should welcome seawaters rising and climate changing, that it is a good thing, because it will mean Jesus is coming in the cloud to carry them to safety and they will watch the sinners drown, and that is – halleluia! – how the world will end.

And, really, is this dream of a cloud any more foolish than the cloud God sits on in the medieval paintings, awash with power and prestige, or the cloud in which all my memory is supposed to be stored, where 'memory' has become lost data?

I have been inside a cloud, in a plane, grey mist saturated the windows.

What looks like a cloud is air at minus 30 degrees, ice crystals, darkness, autopilot.

So. Give the body food and water. Watch the tide rise and inundate the old markers reliably, now, every night. Wake up to a sick paleness of sky and bilge, washed up and worthless floating things left high and dry like rubble, the tide receded.

That whale which washed up, full of the plastic bags. Pregnant. Vomited blood.

Here's the glitch in memory – I recall there was a whale on the coast of the Philippines, and there was another whale on the coast of Italy. There were hundreds of whales, beached, dying, a problem now for tractors and cranes and winching machinery requiring fossil fuels, there was hand-wringing and online outrage, but essentially people

did nothing. They knew what they were doing and they kept doing it. And so we all kept turning and turning in the widening gyre.

The tsunami was information, not lack of it. Obliterating. Easier to avert your eyes, brazen it out, develop watertight first-world theories to place the blame elsewhere, take part in the collective trance. I did this myself. Easy, even when a whale in another ocean vomits up your plastic bags, when an island full of thousands of dead baby albatrosses renders up your memory chip, out of a small pile of plastic debris inside a picked-clean ribcage. Designed to fly, but never to fly. Easy, until the program finds a whole cache of new disk space to show you, again, all the data you thought you'd deleted.

Midway Atoll. That was the place. Ironically named, somewhere midway between two oceans, where the parent albatrosses had made the fatal mistake of being unable to discern between rubbish and fish and had crammed plastic scooped off the ocean's surface down their babies' necks. Thinking it nourishment.

I am stuck on my own atoll, certain that my own species has lost the ability to discern, crammed myself full of toxic stuff that will not break down, will not ever go away. I have nobody else to observe, and nobody to observe me, to tell me what it is I am choked by or consumed by. So better to keep hands busy and head empty, the better to keep it swallowed down. Hands on, head off. That's the best way to survive.

Remember seeing an image of a bowerbird's nest which must have been near a school or a shopping centre – all the blue treasures, meticulously arranged around the bower, were blue lids and blue drinking straws. Plastic garbage. That's one for the cloud list. The eulogy list.

Thoughts meander like a restless wind inside a letter box, they tumble blindly as they make their way across the universe

(something....) then:

nothing's going to change my world,
nothing's going to change my world

What's reliable now is the shelf of sand here left by the outgoing tide that in the mornings I stand and balance on, pressing weight down until it caves and collapses.

words are flowing out like endless rain into a paper cup

!! Remembered it!!

"Use your head, can't you, use your head; you're on earth, there's no cure for that."

The shadow of my former self, using a moment of my languishing and anguishing to step through the scrim, just shook me by the shoulders as I sat looking out at the sea. Get methodical, she said. You've got nothing but time.

She is stern and sunburnt. Her hair is pulled back off her face. Her hands are so calloused she probably doesn't even have fingerprints any more. Everything unnecessary, indulgent or soft is gone from her. Salt preserves her now. She crouches like a Cro-Magnon, her hard feet spread solid on the ground beneath her. She tears the peel from a piece of fruit with her teeth, saves the peel to dry and use as a firelighter. She is going to stay alive. I want her to.

Time, then. Hard to hope for a strategy, but I have an inkling. A day spent collecting. Empty plastic bottles, the smashed-up pieces of polystyrene foam, big chunks of it that have come god knows how far.

Amazing how something so weightless, so brittle and thin as these bottles could have come so far on the ocean and stayed intact, and will not break down.

Pasting this in to remind myself what to do tomorrow.

Hiving swarms

For some time before swarming, the queen's egg-laying is reduced, and the bees do little or no foraging. When the swarm emerges from the hive, the bees are very easy to handle. If they cluster on an accessible branch of a tree, the branch should be singly cut off and carried carefully, with the swarm, to a hive prepared and baited (preferably with foundation) for the purpose. The branch and swarm should be placed on the ground just in front of the hive, and the bees will enter it; evening is the best time for this. A swarm that clusters on a post or other fixed object is more difficult to capture. The bees may be loosened from a thick tree limb by shaking: if a prepared hive, from which the cover has

been removed, is placed directly under the swarm, and the limb is given a jolt sharp enough to dislodge the bees, most of them should drop in or near the hive. When necessary, the bees in the swarms can be brushed off into or near the hive. A lure can also be used. If the queen enters the hive, the entire swarm will soon follow. An indication that she is there is given when the bees are fanning at the hive entrance. On the contrary, if a cluster of bees begins to form on the ground, this may be a sign that the queen is there; the group of bees should be carefully scooped up and transferred to the hive. The hive cover should be replaced as soon as possible, because bees will go more readily into a dark place. A swarm that alights in an inaccessible place, such as the top of a high tree or building, may have to be abandoned; it is not worth risking an accident trying to climb up to it.

REQUEENING REQUIREMENTS:

1. Strong colony, with good queen. Ten frames of comb or foundation. Approx. 10% of total number of colonies in the apiary should be nucs.
2. Find larvae, 1 to 3 days old. Frame of this larvae needed, or empty frame to put into brood chamber of strong queen. All other frames in the colony must be filled to make sure that the queen can lie only in empty frame.
3. Cut the comb into strips. Medium-aged brood comb (not too dark). Strips 4 or 5 cells wide, and should contain larvae. Remove one side of the strip to the base of the comb. Attach other strip to top bar, attaching with wax. Two bars per empty frame. This frame goes into a queenless colony.

Conditions must be:

- no other queen
- no other uncapped brood
- enough honey and pollen

Sixteen days after being laid, new queens will emerge.

SEPARATE QUEEN CELLS A DAY BEFORE QUEENS ARE EXPECTED TO EMERGE.

Found and untangled a huge piece of netting and stuffed it full of plastic. Dragged it after me back here like a big weightless transparent whale. I must have looked like a kid collecting for Cash-a-Can after a Grand Final. The sea's had a good go at gnawing away at it but it's all flotsam now. Crammed tight and the meshing wound with fishing line, it's unsinkable. To flatten it out a bit, I just jumped on it and smashed it into shape, wedged in a few more bottles. How strange that the simple act of mashed-up conglomeration

makes it into something possibly useful again. With no weight to it, though, it will have to be towed. Permanence in a place of flux.

Another day beachcombing, searching for my prize: the plastic bottles with the small blue screw-on lids. Hours spent matching my pile of lids to lidless bottles, screwing them in. Raft shape. Whale shape. What makes this pile so terrible is also what makes it useful. Polystyrene floats no matter what. Plastic doesn't rot. If it's washed up here from a gyre hundreds of nautical miles away, dragging toxic destruction in its wake like a giant, leaching, snarled net of junk, then it can stay afloat over 10 nautical miles in the right current. 14 maybe, if I avoid the deep channel where the northwest wind comes through. It will not sink, and neither will I.

Kaz:

I think it must be about Christmas. Seems funny to be in a place so glaringly, dazzlingly bright with light and think of myself as 'in the dark' about what date it actually is, but think it's time to write to you regardless. Been thinking a lot about you and about Mum at the moment, since it's the anniversary of her death soon, I'm pretty sure. Once when I was little I crept into her bathroom as she was getting ready to go out to some function with Dad – you remember I'm sure the hot rollers, the sticky hairspray, the foundation, that glamorous red lipstick – and she let me try on some eyeshadow from that little disc that held blue, green, silver and grey. It was like greasepaint, that stuff. We both leaned forward and smeared some across our eyelids, and I'm wondering if I'm remembering this moment because it was so rare, but I saw how the greasy sparkly makeup pulled her tired eyelid slack, how young and unsullied my skin was beside hers. Saw her looking at herself in the reflection, assessingly, her newly-hollowed eyes in their darkened sockets. When she was dying, just before the hospice, when she was desperate to stay at home and trying to hide how much pain she was in so that she could be in her own bed, do you remember that? When you and I did the shifts?

She started getting her words mixed up, all the painkillers she was on, as we'd kept upping the dose. The visiting doctor had just been and showed me how to administer morphine to her if I needed to, and had left a syringe and a vial of it there in the drawer of her bedside table, and I saw what power I had, suddenly, and felt so panicked and sick, I

said to her, are you sure you're comfortable? Can I get you anything? And she said oh don't worry about me, this is lovely, I'm just languishing here!

She meant luxuriating, obviously. But still. Languishing. Sinking into a lake of pain and powerlessness. The sarcoma visible under her skin. Almost her last words to me were about handing her her lipstick and a mirror, long after she could even raise a hand to put it on. Languishing. I can see now it's a privilege to be with someone when they die, but I didn't think that then.

Do you remember how she was when we were teenagers? I'm glad she kind of left us to raise ourselves. Remember that blue mascara? Buying the crocheted string bikinis? Sunbaking? Watching 'Countdown'? Once I remember you getting up impatiently and hitting the side of the television when it flickered and went dead, and somehow it started up again and came back on. It seems impossible things might right themselves to the point where you will ever get this letter and know I was thinking about you at Christmas, but I remember that smack you gave the TV so who knows. Maybe the dead wire will touch the live one someday and the system will be restored with a blow of a big impatient hand, and loose ends will get picked up and someone will find this and put it in an envelope and send it to you, and you will find it. Like poste restante used to be. Something waiting for you in a post office somewhere in a foreign city you only went into by chance, and there was an airmail letter for you in familiar handwriting like a little paper miracle. It's almost an effort to summon the memory of that thin blue paper inked with words. A stamp, an address written by hand. Paper the same colour as the ocean, Kaz, which keeps me suspended and marooned here. We think the word is luxuriating but instead what comes out of our mouths is languishing.

Hope you get this.

Me

and my shadow.

PS: I didn't have the heart to correct her. No point, and she was probably right anyway, and that wasn't the Endone talking.

On the islands, working, visiting those villages where, compared to the ugly crumbling rusting chaos of 'town', every human incursion onto nature was tidy, cared for, orderly – pandanus huts, ground kept bare and clean with foot traffic, one communal clearing

swept with dry coconut brooms. I remember the kids in that one little school on an island, greeting me with a salu-salu to put around my neck, a scratchy but painstaking garland of leaves and flowers, folded like origami. Salu – from the French 'salute' – to greet, to salute, to honour. Hello, hello.

And lugging those textbooks with me in the backpack, the atlas and the reference book on the human body, to leave there for them. Taking a photo of their new "learning resources" for the project sponsors, of the kids eagerly, carefully, holding up those picture books.

And then the next time I got a boat there with the project manager (who ruined his shoes staggering into the shallows and sweltered in long pants, who clutched his plastic bottle of water) those same kids ran to greet me with another salu-salu, except now the flowers they'd used before weren't in season and they couldn't find enough pink-striped leaves, so they'd made the salu-salu with care and love out of the shredded, folded pages of the books.

Their warm, expectant smiles as they placed it over my head.

I wore it all day, that gift they made.

Felled a pole. It's only 2 metres long and it's sappy and flexible, designed to bend in high winds, to stay alive. I worked out how to lash it to the canoe, hammering on the metal clips that held the tank downpipe in place. Eased those nails out of softening wood of the pole frame of the hut and into the timber of the canoe. I slashed myself a pile of green pandanus. I ran the pole through the handles of the two 25 litre plastic water drums out of the shed. We carted them ashore on our first trip, one filled with powdered lime, one with a spigot and fuel for the lamp and stove. I decanted the lamp kerosene into a dozen smaller plastic bottles. Nothing to do with the lime, except empty it into the pit toilet and over the compost pile.

Now I take my machete like my hands remember how to do it or I dreamed it and I cut out a frond, slice the middle strip out of the stalk like a whipstring and coil it to tie it in figures of 8 around and around the join, binding the pole in place around the molded plastic handles. I wind a stick through the loop and tighten it. When the locals use plastic rope for this job they melt the ends with a cigarette lighter so it doesn't unfray, but I have a way to make the strip waterproof, and I melt wax and pour it on. I add another one and another, because why not? Then fishing line doubled over.

If it's going to work it's going to work better if it dries and hardens in place like sinew and when I think of it hitting a swell in the ocean I know it's not much but it's like thread and that is the thread I am hanging by.

I am making something for myself.

I am generating what I need from my own body working it until it is malleable and then I am making a cellular form with it little by little which is growing into three dimensions and it is something to store my own nourishment in. There is nobody here to approve or disapprove and I don't need anybody to tell me how to do it. What I am making grows and arcs up like a wave or a sail billowing, and I am slowly building it here every day and at night I plan and dream it, this thing that smells of me and is shaped by me, this thing that will bear my weight and save me.

New page. Getting to the end of the pages now. What I really should call this one is 'Final report to the Centre for Pacific Agriculture's apiculture project, and dissertation on Representations of Paradise.'

Lakamia beach. Workshops finished, me on the beach outside the tiny guesthouse in that part of the day when everything just runs down into one long continuous present. All seems lethargic, all seems anaesthetized – the woman sleeping head on arms at the table, the men lounging on mats and perched on coconut log benches, the kids arranging shells and sweeping sand clear like an EtchaSketch, starey and trancelike, all low voices and sprawled limbs.

On the sand a huge pig digs its snout into the sand, turning it over to find the cool wet beneath, where the spring water floods into the bathlike water, where I'm standing myself up to my waist, gazing stupefied out to sea, not a thought in my head, rinsed clear and empty as a tidal strand.

One of the men raises his voice, calls something to the woman, and I turn back out to the ocean, squinting in its million glinting lights, the impossible opalescent blues. Another man calls now, the first note of urgency I've heard, something imperative, and the kids stand slowly, stretching, dropping their sticks, and look out to sea as well. I glance back to the adults, the men are standing there suddenly full of attentive focus, the women raising their heads, awake, alert, reaching for a plastic bucket.

I strain to see what they're seeing out there on the water. The breeze has ruffled the surface into swirls offshore but it takes a cloud drifting across the sun to show me a dark patch visible there. Seaweed? Shadow? An indigo, inky, shifting mass. The surface dimples above it, and suddenly everyone is moving onshore, obeying the instructions of the man who strides into the hut and brings out something I can't see in the glare at first. A net. He folds it precisely across his arm, arranging it like a swaddling cloth or a matador's cape, his long fingers untangling it as he walks calmly down to the water's edge with his two nephews grabbing sticks to follow, the kids given curt instructions, the woman up and following now with the plastic tub, handing machetes out to the children. I start wading in to shore, but the man motions me to stay in the water. Gestures for me to stay, move to the side, go deeper, hold it there, all with a graceful hand, his eyes never leaving that roiling dark mass which seems to be creeping now, closer towards us. Careful and catlike, the men walk into the water, fanning out, their hands still and precise at their sides, out into the cold current of the spring where it meets the warm seawater, treading carefully. They are hunting, I suddenly see. They drive the swirling shadow sideways, spreading out in a pack like wolves. I see another shadowy mass moving in its wake, the water's surface rippling now with submerged energy and movement, and the men move the two darknesses apart, stepping carefully between the two, separating them like opposing currents, each step making a small surge of energy in front of them. It is a school of fish. They swarm, spiralling, launching themselves in one solid surge, turning in a single rippling silvery glint. A thousand tiny flashes as they bank and swerve back around. A cyclone looking for its eye. The men are not looking at the fish like I am. Their attention is fixed still further out to sea, watching the choppy blue horizon, then the man who folded the net reverses his movements, and opens it out piece by piece over his waiting arm and shoulder, and grasps one corner, and spins it out and over. Nothing catches, nothing snags; it twirls a perfect circle then sinks invisible into the water, and his eyes finally catch mine, giving a relaxed smile, motioning me further sideways, showing me how to dabble my hands just under the surface, directing the swarming surge at my edge. Somehow the woman onshore knows just when to clean her knife and the kids squat with their machetes, not playing now, all focused on the lean shapes of the men in the water, astride a massive dark cloud of fish. The men take a corner each and lift the net,

hand over hand, hauling it up like the apostles in a bible story, careful not to tear it, and as the shining smacking haul of silver comes to the surface, the first man is calling to his wife and children, saying two children to the village and two more, the older ones, to carry the rest to the other adjoining village, right away, as soon as they are ready.

Someone already hacking down fresh banana leaves to carry them in.

The men scoop and throw the fish one by one onto the shore, and the children run to retrieve them, even the toddler, squatting industriously, delighted to be busy, cutting and gutting with the machete, throwing the tiny parcels of guts back into the shallows, rinsing each small identical fish and tossing them into the tubs.

In my head is this memory: the swirling current of energy caused by the net being lifted as it surges and bolts again through the dark seething mass and the men turn calmly and drive them back towards the shore, and I see there are two schools, big fish pursuing small fish, still hunting them even in this panicked seethe, and that out to sea there must be even bigger fish, tuna or mali-mali, preying on these ones, and in the middle of this stampede of predation stand the family of graceful leisurely humans, watching, sorting the fish, throwing, murmuring, their black skin shining. They are so calm and so focused. Time blurs and whirls, irrelevant except as part of this swirl. The school turns and bolts again, swarming straight into me, thousands of them pouring around my legs in the threshing water. Occasionally one cannons into me when I shift my weight, a small cold startling collision. I am small here. Incidental. I am an eye in a huge yin-yang, made up of a giant dark helix spinning itself into the shallows, leaping and threshing the surface as it turns, a flurry of silver hail, power surging like light winking on and off. I lower my hands and the current of silver fish pours around them. I am the stationary eye.

I remember it. The current on my legs. The millions of them.

Later, the net gets perfectly refolded and the children are off, covered in scales and fish guts, taking the fish through the village huts. The adults make a fire on the beach and we crouch and eat our fill of small oily, smoky bodies, each side peeling away perfectly from the spine. The women and I squat silent and companionable, content, spitting needle-fine bones into the fire as the sun begins to sink. Then we rise to wash our hands and faces in the shallows where the cold spring bubbles and pours itself into the

saltwater. The children come home and rinse the empty buckets and poke at the fire and have their own feast.

Lakamia. I was there, temporarily useful, integral, companionable. My presence appreciated. While I have been writing this I have been there instead of here, and that in itself is a kind of relief. Remembering that somewhere this exists. No matter how much we try to wreck it and monetise it and poison it, it exists. It refuses to die.

Moon nearly full now and reef inundated over the channel break by high tide. Have separated the queenless nucs and queen-mating nucs.

Then carefully elevated and cleared around each hive as best I can.

Boxes now as solid on the ground as I can make them, building around each box a cairn of stone and coral. Each spare container I have is filled with clean water and piled with stones so they can drink without drowning.

Bottles of sugar syrup may end up fermenting, so I have slit open the sacks of sugar horizontally and left them stacked under the lean-to; the plastic outer sack will protect it for longest. With decent ongoing access the bees will be able to make their way in and out if nothing blossoms or the flower season is late, or another cyclone knocks down the new banana palms and there is no nectar or pollen for them to forage.

Not ideal, but the best I can do. They will eat the white emergency sugar and not starve. No other invading bees will rob these sugar supplies; there are no other bees. The population will self-correct.

Ants will vie with them for it, and insects will rule this world. As they always have and always will, they will fend for themselves.

The stopped clock which nobody winds will keep striking the hours into space where there are no ears but it is ticking just the same.

The kitchen supplies are wrapped in plastic inside the hut, under the bed.

Drawing a map of the camp and where things are in case the first one to hit the shore is a calm islander with a canoe full of taro and fishing nets, afraid of nothing, timing the waves to scud in over the reef.

Otherwise, instructions here. Good luck with the solar.

Also leaving: dry kindling, those useless damp matches, kerosene, a pot, the sack of rice. The swiss army knife I'm taking. Also the machete. That and my file and a stash of drinking coconuts, my ragged dry clothes, transparent with wear and turned the grey-brown sludge-coloured camouflage of earth.

Nothing else, because most of the room in the canoe is for the two bee boxes with the new capped brood. Six frames of new larvae, two frames of honey and pollen. Minimise flight entrances for the trip, but slide roofs open for air. Spray bottle of sugar water to feed them. Checked the strips I made in the two boxes with the new capped brood. They're in there, the new queens. They will emerge in 12 days to my reckoning. So that's how long I have. The temptation is so strong to make some kind of second raft out of plastic and foam, lash it all together with fishing line, carry more boxes of bees on that. But I can't take the risk. 10% of what I'm leaving are already nucs. So the boxes I am taking are the cargo carrying the real cargo. The infinitely precious.

This morning I practiced floating the empty canoe in the lagoon, measuring slowly the correct weight of water in the lashed-on plastic drums to keep them stable, balancing myself with the oar and dipping, knee to knee, side to side.

Training myself to shift my weight from kneeling to sitting, so I don't get stiff, making a mental picture of waves and currents.

The outrigger held fast, and the canoe dipped and wavered then suddenly righted itself in the water, solidly pushing back against my weight, stable and seaworthy.

I felt a slow rising sensation which took me a while to identify, something coming up through the layers. I remembered how to do it: how to feel pleased with myself. It broke open into my chest without resistance, and spread like sweetness.

I am not hungry or thirsty. I have 8 litres of water. The bag of green coconuts bundled in the raft tied behind me, the raft made of garbage that lives forever floating in the sea. Seagoing coconuts. Everything that grows here hitched a ride with something else. It's kind of a satisfying symmetry.

Everything here is neat, too – tidy and clean for the moment, as secure and dry as I can make it. The path from my hut to the two colony sites is still lined with white coral, a crumb trail into the forest for the tropics.

Will stow all this in its plastic box. My small trusting future colony is with me, drowsing and expectant, thrumming at their perfect rate and perfect temperature, the brood frames heavy with larvae I will keep alive.

Let the rest of it sink back

let the taro patch swell feral, the pawpaw and pineapple ripening, falling and blackening
let the jungle claim it for as long as it can.

Termites and mould spores and saltwater, hermit crabs and heat and bacteria can
get to work now.

Fifteen more minutes more for the tide to turn and pull itself back into the deep indigo channel which runs north west. That's just an estimate, of course; a segment of time without a clock. Just enough time to finish this page.

A stick in the sand which makes a shadow, the new high tide mark swept clean and I can measure everything I need with everything I have here: the time, the direction, the optimum moment to set off as the tide begins to draw itself back from the lagoon, the endless small waves nudging the sides of the canoe and the deep azure and green light shifting through the gardens of old coral beneath me, as if I am skimming like a cloud over a submerged cathedral. I have sat and gazed from the shore at these mesmerising swathes of colour as the water turns from aqua to turquoise then turquoise to blue for months, but soon I will be over it, floating above it and its depths. Looking down vertically at something I have viewed horizontally. Vertiginous, that drop, that vision of what is under the surface.

Four open nautical kilometres to Ilariki, six more to the Santo channel and the port, and I have no more idea of what I will find there than the first ones who made the pottery and stuck to the coasts, the ones who looked long enough at their materials and the line of endless horizon and saw what would serve them, who piled taro and coconuts into their own canoes and set out. They were beyond intrepid, taking it in turns to spell each other, eyes on the prow and reflected light in the piling clouds and listening to the tongue of the ocean speaking to them against the wooden sides of their boats.

This way, this way, the arrow of a bird's tail arcing towards warm earth rising, only a scent now.

Singing, yearning forward, calm as their paddles stroked hard into the deep water. The ocean's surface like a meniscus, curved and trembling, too blue to look at, spilling right to the edge, the unknowable tumble beyond. I'm going there too.

That's where I'm bound.

Time to swarm, supersede, abscond.

Salu.

Above transcribed records, including exercise books, loose pages and notebook bound with string, kept in A4 'Snapseal' transparent storage box stored in Latonga Hut.

Some undated pages not stacked but folded decoratively and threaded onto loop of fishing line; this arrangement placed on top of preceding documents in box.

Blue square painted on box lid, presumably by subject.

Feral Ligustica colonies detected across Sanma Province: Aore Island, Malo Island & Espiritu Santo, including Mount Tabwemansana, Big Bay and Port Olry. Twenty nucleus colonies located. Strong hives, no disease seen. Heavy honey stores.

No current funding available to undertake more detailed survey of locations.

Apiary	Beekeeper	Degrees south	Degrees east	Number of hives	Number of hives inspected	Number of hives sampled
Sara Beach	Simeon Lesley	17° 33.529'	168° 27.667'	2	2	
Presbyterian College	Mansez	17° 33.222'	168° 27.304'	4	4	
Havana Harbour	Nic Griffith	17° 34.534'	168° 14.930'	2	2	2
Agriculture Department	John Tinambualia	17° 42.222'	168° 19.277'	1	1	
Airport Area	Gwen	17° 42.167'	168° 19.168'	2	2	
Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union	Enikelen Netine	17° 43.010'	168° 18.763'	2	2	
Fresh Water 2	Wilue Kalo	17° 43.287'	168° 19.153'	2	2	2 (submitted as separate samples)
Fresh Water 1	George Saksak	17° 43.623'	168° 19.167'	1	1	
Unknown	Worearu Village	17° 29.112'	168° 23.523'	22	22	3
Lati School (Santo)	Mika	15° 31.405'	167° 09.377'	2	2	2
Lanivet Daves (Santo)	Lanivet Daves	15° 30.357'	167° 10.405'	2	1	

Location description	Degrees south	Degrees east	Number of hives	Number of hives inspected	Number of hives sampled
	17° 44.607'	168° 23.161'	1	1	1
	17° 42.295'	168° 19.138'	1	1	1
Wiana Village (Emao)	17° 29.728'	168° 28.943'	1	1	
Wiana Village (Emao)	17° 29.703'	168° 28.958'	1	1	
Wiana Village (Emao)	17° 29.728'	168° 29.028'	1	1	
Wiana Village (Emao)	17° 29.777'	168° 29.128'	1	1	1
Marad Village (Emao)	17° 28.893'	168° 28.510'	1	1	
			7	7	3

Study undertaken transnationally with assistance of National Bee Pest Surveillance Program/Biosecurity Australia, allied with National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement Initiative, re-established post-pandemic. Bee colony surveillance administered by the Sustainable Coalition of South Pacific Apiculture Programs.

Genetic testing on nests of feral Ligustica detected at Port of Townsville and surrounds led by Biosecurity Queensland have established, definitively, colonies of bees genetically identical to those bred through this project. Feral swarms also genetically characterised by hybridised disease resistance subsequently detected throughout Girringun National Park, Paluma Range National Park, Koombooloomba National Park.

Strong hives, no disease seen. No colony collapse evident. Source unknown.

**‘TRUE HISTORIES AND FICTIONAL STRATEGIES:
diary fiction and its illusions’**

(Critical component)

(50,000 w)

Cate Kennedy.

TABLE OF FIGURES:

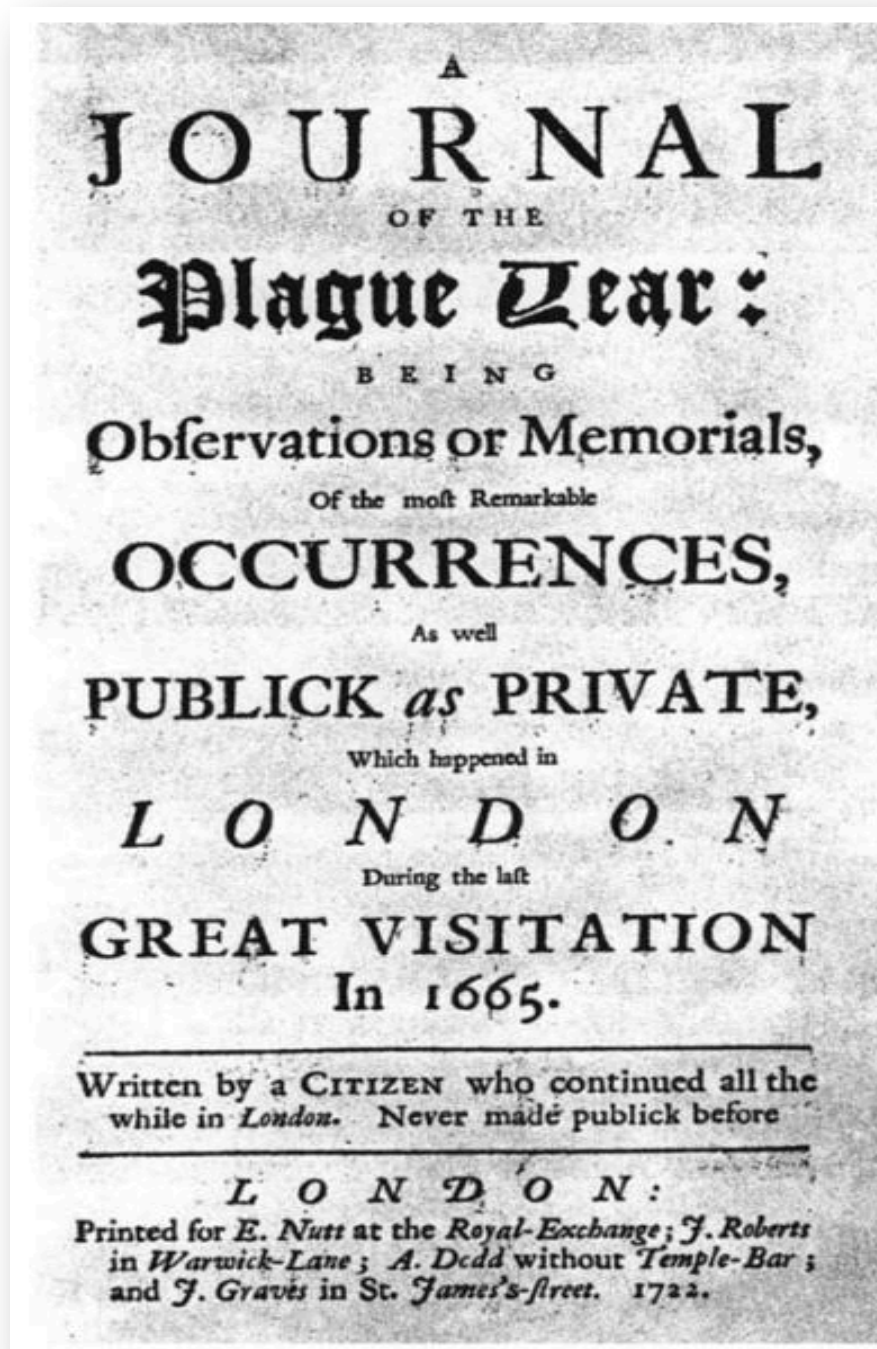


Figure 1: The 'broadsheet' cover of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, first edition, 1722.

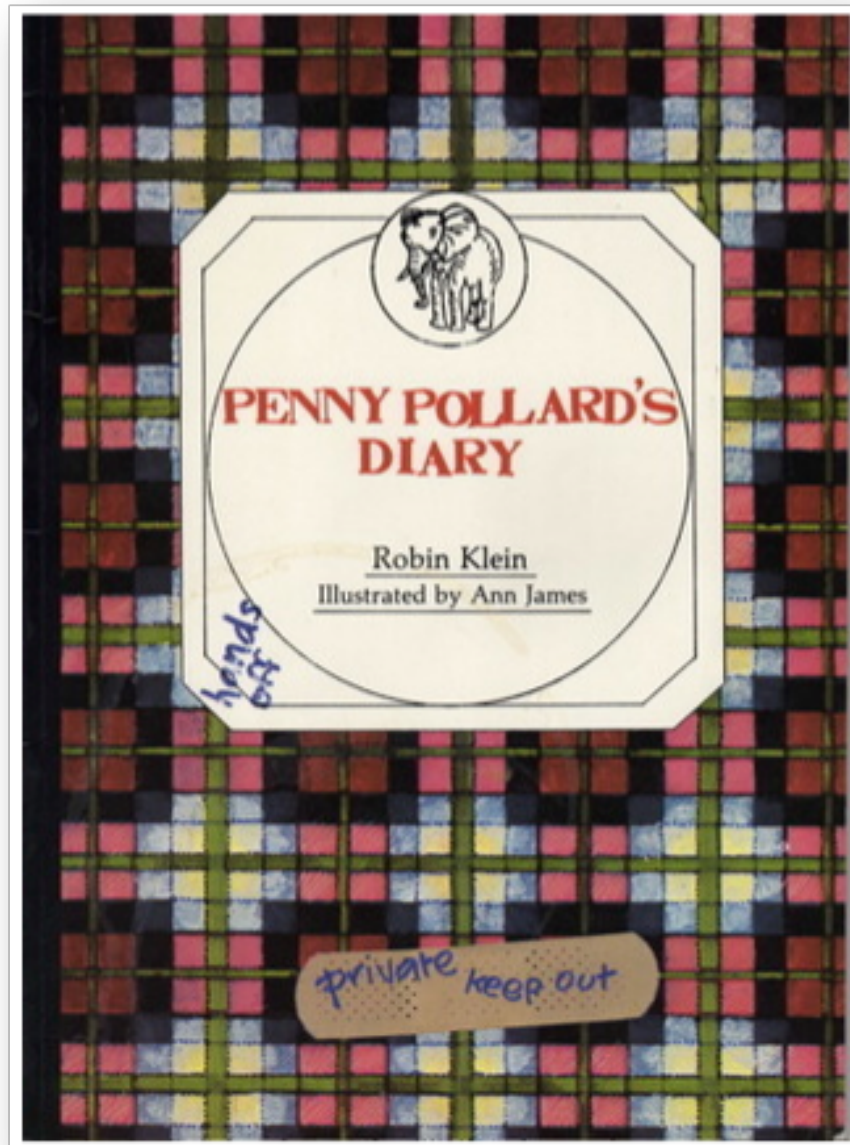


Figure 2: Cover of Robin Klein and Ann James' *Penny Pollard's Diary*, 1983

INTRODUCTION

Being OBSERVATIONS upon the fascinating Conjuring Tricks of the fictional diary form, with difficulties in Broaching a clear definition for NAMING the representing form which blurs the boundary of definition: much as boundaries are blurred, verily, in its Practice, both PUBLICK & PRIVATE. And thus is set up the endeavour, entire.

‘I fail to see—because I do not happen to be a ‘Somebody’—why my diary should not be interesting.’¹

7.30 am: Decide to open my introduction with an Illustrative Anecdote.

Over the course of three years in my teens, I encountered and read three memorable diaries. At thirteen, the text was *Harriet the Spy* (1964),² at fourteen *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947),³ and at fifteen, handed to me by my worried mother, *Go Ask Alice* (1971).⁴

Harriet the Spy was clearly a work of juvenile fiction. Its protagonist Harriet, training herself for some future career in espionage, keeps a diary (the text) in which she spies upon her friends and neighbours and reports her findings. The cover of our library edition heralded fun fictionality with the strapline ‘The Zany Adventures of a Child Spy’, and the book's plot becomes a salutary illustration of the causes and effects of spying, transgression, and Important Lessons learned about the betrayal of trust. The book was charming and humorous, and my best friend and I read bits out to each other as if we were Harriet, delighted by her voice and her droll, awkward outsider status. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was clearly a different kind of text, carrying with it the freight of worthiness from the nuns who pressed it upon me. Its cover was illustrated with a photo of the real Anne Frank, its preface explaining the text's tragic provenance and the determination of Anne Frank's father, Otto Frank, to see his late daughter's private diary published for the wider world as a testament to the all-engulfing tragedy of World War Two. There was never any doubt that the book was non-fiction and that it qualified as an

¹ G. Grossmith and W. Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (Collector's Library, 2008).

² L. Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* (Random House Children's Books, 2009).

³ A. Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Globe Book Company, 1992).

⁴ B. Sparks, *Go Ask Alice* (Avon, 1972).

'improving' text on the syllabus designed by the Catholic Education Department which believed itself responsible for my dutiful moral development. I must confess that the *Diary of Anne Frank* did not grip me, despite its authenticity. Had it not been required reading, I doubt I would have finished it. The narrator's imminent death in a concentration camp hung over the innocent entries like a pall, and the historical events it described, although proximate to my own fourteen-year-old life by only thirty years, seemed incomprehensibly distant. We read it because we had to and because, it was wearily emphasised, it was 'good' for us, and it was a 'true story', with the attendant charge of fascination that comes with that provenance. This in itself dictated its selection as a worthy text for us to study; the text did not need to be artful in a literary sense. Its artlessness, in fact, was proof of its reality and key to its pathos.

The third diary text was the one that made the deeper impression upon me. *Go Ask Alice* was a sensational contraband teenage text of the 1970s, purporting to be the found diary of a troubled teenage girl, middle-class yet lost in a world of drugs, sex and prostitution, all before she turns sixteen. 'You can't ask Alice anything anymore' began the ominous blurb on the early edition's back cover, confirming the terse text of the afterword at the end of the book that the narrator was found dead of an overdose which may or may not have been accidental, adding that the diarist's death was just one of thousands of drug-related deaths that year. The cover, like an image from a crime scene, showed a photo of a syringe and some scattered white powder on a blue background⁵, and the book was authored by 'Anonymous'. Dated entries, fragmentary and fluctuating, create a clear narrative, from the first entry—an innocent girl receiving this diary for her birthday—to an account of the descent into addiction and disaster. Some fragments of the diary, the editorial preface tells us, were written on loose scraps of paper, the backs of paper bags and the like. Now here, I remember thinking, casting aside *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was a story.

When the diary was revealed as a 'hoax' a couple of years later, written not by an anonymous teenage drug addict after all but by a Mormon youth counsellor named Beatrice Sparks (who'd allegedly penned several other 'diaries' supposedly by troubled teens), I couldn't understand what the fuss was about. The book had delighted me not in spite of it being a hoax, but because of it. I had thought its fakeness self-evident, all part

⁵ Sparks, *Go Ask Alice*.

of the sophisticated fictional game Louise Fitzhugh had started with *Harriet the Spy*, only taken to a new level. The grave platitudes by the 'editor' seemed a dead giveaway that it was anti-drug propaganda written by a moralising adult with a clear agenda, reminding me of much of the material I'd been given to read throughout my childhood at Sunday School. The strained plausibility of a genuine drug addict on the streets finding paper and pen to keep a record of her feelings seemed unlikely, and the word 'Anonymous' was an obvious signifier of borrowed form. 'Anonymous' always signalled suspect authorship, in my experience, from the letters to 'Dolly Doctor' in our favourite magazine to the saccharine poems and aphorisms printed on the 'Spiritual Sky' range of gift cards at our local hippy hangout.

I could not understand how readers felt betrayed or indignant at learning that the book was fiction, posing as fact. My enjoyment of it, in contrast, had lain in this very pose; its fabrication was part of the pleasure. What difference did it make, in any case, to the apprehension of the story as a story? Where was the fraud? Fiction, I knew even as a fourteen-year-old, is about deception, creating characters who feel sufficiently real that a suspension of disbelief can take place. To express outrage because you've been fooled into taking part in this process of accepting fiction, temporarily, as real, seemed crazy.

Go Ask Alice, however risible its content, used a recognisable form—an authentic diary—which gave it verisimilitude. Depending on whether you admired or resented the artifice, this either gripped millions, or fooled millions. The contents of the book caused and still cause a stir amongst the moral guardians of the American Library Association, who persist in banning it for its depictions of drug use, prostitution and sex,⁶ but nobody, as far as I could see, cared about the fictional devices of the content, or its literary merit. They cared about the fictional devices of its *presentation*. There were two levels of artifice at work here, I could see, and the raw spot remained around the separation of 'author' and 'narrator'.

The power of fictional first-person accounts is to create an 'I' who feels real. The illusion of access to this narrator's interior unvoiced thoughts is one of the primary devices of fiction and has featured in most forms of the contemporary novel since Jane

⁶'Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books: 2000-2009', American Library Association, March 26, 2013. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/top-100-bannedchallenged-books-2000-2009> (Accessed August 29, 2020) Document ID: 8347a8a3-9920-490a-b846-fac34230b710)

Austen at least. One of the great pleasures of first-person fiction is unreliability, the sense that you are being led through a story by a narrator who may or may not be entirely trustworthy. Pleasure in unreliability, however—as the unmasking of *Go Ask Alice* and other literary hoaxes has shown—does not extend to the author.

10.45 am. Checked notes. Must remember to talk about the illusion of immediacy created by the imposition of 'entries' in a dated format.

The fictional diary is a literary form which brings this paradox immediately to the surface. It creates a fictitious first-person narrator—with all the attendant devices available to that representation, in terms of narrative—and marries it to a form which presents itself as 'authentic'—the private diary. Additionally, the thrill of reading such an account toys with a certain readerly voyeurism that we are, in reading this account, transgressing some boundaries of the private and the public, play-acting that we have somehow come across a document not meant for us—and this very characteristic accounts for the form's pleasurable tensions—and possibly some of its misapprehensions—as well as the more complex demand for 'authenticity' in its fictional play.

How is it that as readers we enter the pretence and contrivance of the fictional world-making and its devices but feel anxiety or suspicion over being 'taken in' by what is then fabricated by an author? When a reader encounters a diary, whether factual or fictional, they tend to fashion what Bernard Duyfhuizen terms a 'double response'⁷—a feeling of voyeurism as they read 'thoughts and life recorded on the private page', accompanied by a suspicion that the text may be contrived, particularly if the work is now through some means available to the public. This double response is compounded, in admitted fictional diaries, where the characteristics of the factual diary form are mimetically reproduced to both create an aesthetic effect and alert a reader to the employment of these characteristics as literary strategies.

The popularity of the diary form over centuries can be seen to increase concurrently with the rise of first-person fiction more generally, and the epistolary novel

⁷ Bernard Duyfhuizen, "Diary Narratives in Fact and Fiction," review of *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action*, H. Porter Abbott; *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries*, Thomas Mallon; *The Diary Novel*, Lorna Martens, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 19, no. 2 (1986), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1345552>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345552>.

more particularly, due to its non-retrospective structure to create uncertainty of outcome, suspense and immediacy. As Duyfhuizen claims:

Diary novels have been traditionally seen as descendants of both real diary writing and the epistolary novel, particularly single-writer epistolary fictions. Both forms employ the immediacy of writing within the midst of the experience while the future is always somewhat uncertain, and they are also highly aware of the writing act and its place in constituting the text.⁸

The artful representation of this single narratorial agent, self-consciously writing in the midst of an experience (often in dated entries) and creating a reflexive account in which the future is portrayed as uncertain or unknown, defines the scope of my study in this thesis, and motivates me to consider fictional diaries as a distinct form of epistolary fiction, with their own specific literary attributes and effects.

The literary strategising around the form and function of letters and correspondence has been explored by scholars such as Janet Gurkin Altman, who provided a broad definition of a work's 'epistolarity' as the use of the letter's formal properties to create narrative, figurative and other types of meaning.⁹ Ronald Rosbottom, who groups the fictional diary as a sub-genre of epistolary fiction more generally, named five areas he considered dominant motifs as denominators:

The motifs are five: **absence**, epistolary fiction being par excellence a literature of absence; **time**, almost every epistolary novelist has to deal with chronology, since awareness of time is a *sine qua non* of the correspondents; **exchange**, a term which encompasses all social aspects of epistolary correspondences; **reflexivity**, the thematic use of first-person narration which is, of course, the dominant narrative voice of epistolary fiction; and last, **epistolarity**, or the writers' awareness that they are writing and reading, and the effect that such narrative self-consciousness has on the work and its reception.¹⁰

It is clear that in most epistolary works there is an assumption of a co-recipient of letters, or a respondent who is responsible for part of the text, and the difference between letters and diaries, as Rosbottom and most scholars agree,¹¹ is that letters involve exchange and

⁸ Duyfhuizen, "Diary Narratives in Fact and Fiction." p 175

⁹ J.G. Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Yale University, 1973). p 4

¹⁰ Ronald C. Rosbottom, "Motifs in Epistolary Fiction: Analysis of a Narrative Sub-genre," *L'Esprit Créateur* 17, no. 4 (1977). p 283

¹¹ Altman, Abbott, Duyfhuizen, Martens et al.

diaries do not. In this study, I categorise unanswered letters alongside diary entries in my definition of 'fictional diaries', because the particular narrative tensions I wish to explore as strategies involve the absence of a respondent, and the potent tropes of psychic isolation and duress upon the narratorial consciousness provoked by this absence.

I have chosen this focus as a framework for literary strategising for a number of reasons. Epistolary texts in which there is no implied respondent, or where that respondent is absent or silent, allow for its writer to write either without expectation of a response or with added imposed duress created through the lack of exchange. For the author creating a narratorial agent, this provides an expressive transparency in which the lack of an implied respondent or the inherent privacy and secrecy around the production of the text may become part of the story. Pressures brought to bear on the diarist through this lack of response may plausibly create conditions in which the only 'narratee' or 'listening ear' is the page itself, or where the artefact is personified with a name or identity to fulfil this role, much as Anne Frank did in calling her diary 'Kitty'¹² since she lacked the kind of real girlfriend she longed for.

The lack of exchange evident in the diary form speaks to its particularity as a text posing as a privately-kept document yet one paradoxically 'found' in the public domain, and the trope of the cache of secret letters or unpublished clandestine manifesto written in a series of staggered entries fits within this framework as well. The text of Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000),¹³ for example, can be seen as a single long letter to an unborn child, written with no expectation or possibility of a response. Since my research focuses on the fictional strategies available to the form, analysing texts which impose the condition of writing in isolation and without a respondent allows me to examine closely the depiction of the narratorial consciousness writing, as H. Porter Abbott defines it, as 'in a bell-jar of self-communion', when the writer is 'cloistered'.¹⁴ In these circumstances of psychic isolation, the diary becomes a kind of 'letter to the self',¹⁵ allowing for a record of subjective material which has been allegedly produced with an element of isolated unselfconsciousness, uninflected and uninfluenced

¹² Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

¹³ Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (Australia Penguin Group Australia, 2015).

¹⁴ H. Porter Abbott, "Letters to the Self: The Cloistered Writer in Nonretrospective Fiction," *PMLA* 95, no. 1 (1980), <https://doi.org/10.2307/461731>.

¹⁵ Abbott, "Letters to the Self: The Cloistered Writer in Nonretrospective Fiction." p 23

by a respondent except in terms of their absence or lack. Duyfhuizen notes a potent locus of attention around an isolated or cloistered narrative persona because a diary where no correspondent is possible creates conditions in which there is an 'inherent logic of isolation and alienation [...] a place where you have a lot of time to think, and no one to tell your thoughts to; and so you tell them to yourself.'¹⁶ It is therefore the *lack* of exchange, and the heightening of the motifs of absence and reflexivity over time, which present, to me, inherent strategic opportunities for the depiction of character. In single-narrator diary texts, where there is no other character implied as respondent, it is the reader who becomes the 'respondent' of the work, making judgements and decisions on the narrative persona through inferential reading. The 'exchange', then, seems to be between author and reader, through the focalising device of a singular fictional entity and the particular drama of epistolarity the diary form provides. In these conditions, I suggest, the narrative progression of the text could be created not through externally-driven plot but via this cloistered 'bell-jar of self-communion' in which a narratorial entity undergoes psychological flux through the process and enactment of writing their private epistolary record.

I consider this imposition of psychic isolation through the lens of a diarist under duress to be a key device to be capitalised upon in fictional diaries, and one which is readily strategized as part of the drama of keeping an account which is urgently and sometimes secretively maintained. Because diary fragments sometimes appear as part of larger works which include reports, testimonies, transcripts, maps, omniscient authorial interventions, and so on, I have also confined my analysis to diaries, journals and accounts written in periodic instalments by a single 'author', although many of these also involve the pretence of editorial intervention of some kind. Obviously, these conditions are not found in all fictional diaries or texts posing as journals or periodically-kept private accounts, but they represent the specific diaristic literary endeavour I intend to examine here.

A diary, by definition, is not a representation of a narrator's unmediated thoughts, but a record of what that narrative persona has written down. A fictional diary, in turn, becomes a skilfully-created facsimile of that record—the fiction of the artefact rests on the illusion that the document the reader is holding in their hands is a

¹⁶ B. Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992). p 104

manuscript that a character has created, with the added possibility of this record being unreliable. In examinations of the fictional diary form as a genre or subgenre, the work's presentation and external mimetic guise as an authentic 'found' artefact has tended to be highlighted, but in my opinion this has subsumed a fuller examination of the second level of authenticity created for verisimilitude: the internal 'artfully artless' narrative record itself, and the specific fictional narrative strategies available to augment and buttress the depiction of this narrator. As Duyfhuizen points out, the illusion of reality that a diary fosters is twofold,¹⁷ and right at that nexus of why a text like *Go Ask Alice* sets up such ambiguity in terms of how it is intended to be 'read': it poses as an artlessly spontaneous internal and non-retrospective record, and also poses as a document which as an artefact itself claims to be real. I was keen to explore this paradox further in this study and have categorized these dual requirements as 'external' presentation strategies and 'internal' literary strategies in an examination of how I see them functioning in tandem in the fictional diary form.

Rosbottom's definition of epistolarity as 'the writer's awareness that he or she is *writing* or *reading*, and the effect that this narrative self-consciousness has on the whole work',¹⁸ is another related attribute which makes these texts unique among fictional first-person narratives, and I distinguish epistolarity as key in this study through how it is rendered, how it is apprehended and how it is strategized to provide narrative drama and impetus in the depiction of this narrating consciousness. I see epistolarity as instrumental to establishing literary devices around character representation in the form, in that it provides a process through which the narratorial consciousness is 'read' by a reader as an entity in psychological flux. This flux, as I have suggested, may be the narrative 'driver' which provides progression and emplotment in such a record.

Heightening readerly awareness of the act of writing itself as the territory for immediacy and revelation creates conditions for alteration of narratorial states over the course of the narration itself, turning the act of writing into the primary locus of what H. Porter Abbott terms 'reflexive drama'¹⁹ which is characteristic of the diary form; reflexivity being the last of the motifs Rosbottom identifies as definitional. The supposed impulse of the narrative persona to record a life story or account in the midst

¹⁷ Duyfhuizen, "Diary Narratives in Fact and Fiction." p 171

¹⁸ Rosbottom, "Motifs in Epistolary Fiction: Analysis of a Narrative Sub-genre." p 295

¹⁹ H. Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). pp 38—39

of an experience is what creates the artefact, so how this self-reflexiveness is rendered dictates how the 'plot' finds progression and development in the record itself and the impact it bears on the fictional narrator and the text. I see this as a melding of epistolarity and reflexivity in terms of strategising. While the events reported on may be retrospective, the act of writing and its shifting tensions and revelations are discernible in the present act of writing, a process which creates dramatic immediacy. To my reading, this is what defines diary narratives as 'non-retrospective'. Diaries in general differ from memoir or autobiography in that they render events and reactions across a periodic timeframe through which the narrator is uncertain of outcome. A memoir 'looks back' across those events with the perspective of hindsight, creating narrative unity through retrospectivity. Fictional diaries may replicate this shortening of timeframe and reportage in the midst of experience as a device to create immediacy and drama. The act of writing shifts the locus of plotting from reportage of external action or events to the psychological plane, and the story shifts to a rendering of the fluctuations of thoughts, attitudes and observations recorded by the narrative persona.

Burgeoning dramatic tension can be created because the reader is placed in an identical state to the narrator; uncertain of how things are going to play out and immersed in the immediacy of the ongoing account. Immediacy is generally seen as an asset in fiction to create visceral scenes and dramatic impetus, but in diary or letter form it is a strain on credibility to imagine a narrator writing 'in medias res' as an external action is in progress. Because the form dictates time constraints and temporal plausibility, the narrator tends instead to compose entries in fragmented instalments where the recording takes precedence over the action. Early practitioners of epistolary fiction such as Samuel Richardson encountered problems of plausibly rendering this so-called 'simultaneity' in their narratives. I suggest that the challenge Richardson grappled with in what he termed 'writing to the moment'²⁰ in the epistolary form becomes a device not just for creating suspense and dramatic tension, but also provide further strategic opportunities, along with the imposition of isolation and secrecy, for depiction of the narratorial 'I'. In his attempts to render dramatic action through the lens of a singular character engaged in writing down an account of those events, Richardson built tension over a discernible timeframe of episodic structure, involving the need for

²⁰ S. Richardson, J.J. Carroll, and J.G. Carroll, *Selected Letters* (Clarendon Press, 1965).

secrecy, intrigue and uncertainty of outcome. A text made up of unanswered letters kept for covert reasons by a character whose purview is occluded, innocent or misguided provides further opportunities for characterisation. The illusion is that the text, over the course of its production, has become not so much a record of events but an expression of the diarist's character. The depiction of this narratorial consciousness, therefore, strikes me as a far more complex endeavour than simply fostering the mimetic pose of authenticity in the external document itself, and offers a much more nuanced range of representational strategies for writers.

Lastly, it is impossible to look at literary strategising in the fictional diary form without observing it through the lens of the fundamental artifice itself and the particular reading experience it invites. The readerly response of being 'happily hoodwinked', to borrow scholar Jerome De Groot's²¹ term, by a text which is posing as authentic on two levels positions the reader in a collusive or collaborative position, conscious of the devices being created by the author while simultaneously in communion with the fictive consciousness through the record allegedly made by them. I consider the apprehension of authorial intent in terms of fictional 'play' important here to mitigate against the suspicion Duyfhuizen mentions that the work the reader has encountered is a hoax designed to dupe them. While the signifiers of what is 'fact' and what is 'fiction' are part of this play, provoking an inferential reading around authorial intent and patterns of expectation and reception, I examine narrative unreliability in terms of the apprehension of the narrator and the author as separate entities. A character may be seen as capable of both sincerity and self-deception, and in fact this may be readily strategised as a device to augment characterisation in a fictional diary, but an author seen as capable of sincerity and self-deception provokes a more ambiguous reading of a diary text. To my reading, this suspicion interferes with suspension of disbelief and the apprehension of fictionality, and I discuss this in my overview of literary strategies available in the form.

1.50 pm. Interrupted. Man from Porlock. Wonder to what extent reader will understand 'in-jokes': must remember to include thoughts on why diary form is so often parodied. Is it funny? Is it tiresome? No way of knowing.

²¹ Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (New York: Abingdon, Oxon : Routledge, 2010). p 6

I begin this study by analysing what I consider to be a prototypical example of the form: the 1722 *Journal of the Plague Year*²² by Daniel Defoe, the ambiguously-presented cautionary account which followed Defoe's other examples of alleged 'true accounts', including *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), but created a first-person narrator as an instrument of reportage, witness to a real event.

The fictional techniques Defoe brings to bear on this text in the employment of this singular fictional narrative persona inform my following chapter, in which I examine the ways various authors of fictional diary texts utilize the particularities of the form for verisimilitude in both exterior textual presentation and dramatic psychological tension and characterization of the narratorial persona. The diary strategy strives, as Porter Abbott describes, 'to give the illusion of a literary found object, something which people write but which is not supposed to be art'.²³ The illusion of textual formlessness or artlessness may then convey that this is the kind of document that an ordinary person, rather than a professional writer, would write. The illusion of the 'artless' narrator creates another paradox, whereby the illusion of artlessness itself becomes a formal attribute, since it feels 'real' and aids verisimilitude.²⁴ I therefore look at some of the techniques employed to buttress the illusion of reality in the diary artefact's exterior presentation, but also analyse more closely some of the fictional strategies which may be employed in the depiction and expressivity of the narrative persona seen to be responsible for the text. I suggest that the strategising of an 'artless' and unselfconscious narrator highlights the importance of readerly apprehension of the diarist narrator's status as a fictional construction, separate from the author. It involves, in other words, a recognition of the author's strategies as artful, via the representation of an 'artless' and unselfconscious record made by the fictive consciousness. I outline my reasons for seeing as paramount the separation of the author and narratorial agent in the fictional diary form, and suggest that the status of the work as fiction may be signalled and confirmed through strategising narratorial unreliability. The artefact can then be apprehended as a record mediated through the mixture of sincerity and self-deception

²² D. Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, ed. Louis Landa and David Roberts, Oxford World Classics series, (Oxford U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010, 2010).

²³ H. Porter Abbott, "Diary Fiction," *Orbis Litterarum* 37, no. 1 (1982), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0730.1982.tb00787.x>. p 2

²⁴ Abbott, "Diary Fiction." p 13

that governs this character and their reasons for keeping the record. Readerly apprehension that this narrative persona is fictive, to this reading, allows unreliability to flourish as a device built on authorial intent.

4.24 pm: Interrupted again! This time by daughter reading extracts from 'The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole' to me. Much hilarity. Attempted explanation of why Adrian Mole is not Sue Townsend, and the principles of dramatic irony, etc, in apprehension of narratorial consciousness, but she seemed distracted. Honestly! Teenagers!

In Chapter Three I apply the lens of narratorial unreliability to humorous, parodic and young adult fictional diaries which capitalize on comic self-conscious disclosure. What's so funny about parody, and how does it differ from hoax diary texts? I look at a text which straddles both forms, Dale Spender's *Diary of Elizabeth Pepys*,²⁵ and ponder what metafictional or metacritical agenda may be at play in such a 'spoof'. Some other overtly metafictional and postmodern assemblage texts which are marketed as autofiction or 'faction', for example Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009),²⁶ appear to mimic, on first glance, the diary's external presentation as an assemblage of fragmented, intermitted entries and intercalated documents, along with an internal self-reflexive narratorial voice making those entries, so suggest possible classification as fictional diaries. While these texts may be read as first-person explorations in narratorial reflexivity and/or intercalated assemblage, however, the separation between author and narrator tends to remain ambiguous. The experimental blurring of boundaries as a self-conscious metacritical endeavour, along with a knowingly reflexive exploration of authorial 'self' as subject in these texts, leads me to preclude them as fictional diaries. Peter Carey's Booker Prize-winning *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000),²⁷ on the other hand, is a text which broaches this ambiguity but makes a clear separation between author and narrator, illustrating how literary strategies and the interplay of intricate tensions between 'fact' and 'fiction', truth and fabrication—devices now recognised as contemporary metafictional techniques of novelistic exploration and reimagining—are dense with the same allegorical and historical interplay exploited by Defoe three

²⁵ E. Pepys and D. Spender, *The Diary of Elizabeth Pepys* (Grafton, 1991).

²⁶ M. Nelson, *Bluets* (Wave Books, 2009).

²⁷ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

hundred years earlier. I examine Carey's work as an exemplar of the characterization strategies made available through epistolarity, reflexivity, absence, time and lack of exchange.

Finally, in looking to narrative shape and what I see as the unique amalgamation, in fictional diary texts, of epistolarity, immediacy and a representation of a psyche undergoing discernible narrative fluctuations, I turn to further potential strategies an author may employ to foster a readerly alertness to narrative pattern in lieu of action or an externally-driven plot, and suggest that literalised, extended metaphor embedded as a strategy of motifs within the diary or journal form may operate as a navigational device towards meaning-making, providing a textual narrativised equivalent to the 'image systems'²⁸ used in cinematic art.

I conclude by maintaining that the fictional diary is a very specific form of first-person narrative, charged with the extra tension of posing as a real or found document, record or testimony; provoking a readerly 'double response' which may be successfully capitalized upon by authors intent on full exploiting the capacity of the form. A fictional diary is a text which exploits the strategies of fictionality while it simultaneously relies, for its effect, on the illusion of being genuine, and the challenge of creating dual conditions of both external presentation as mimetic and interior textual presentation as a sincere and believable record leads me to consider it not as a strictly-definable genre or sub-genre with its own classifications but as a distinct fictional form employing a range of specific and flexible narrative devices, made to serve diverse ends.

The specific 'play' that the whole artefact is a found document created by a fictive narratorial consciousness illustrates to me an opportunity to breach and subvert patterns of narrative expectation between perceived 'factual' and 'fictional' forms, both inviting and provoking a suspension of disbelief about both form and content. Exploring the boundaries and tensions of this interplay allows a closer analysis of the paradoxical 'illusion of authenticity' which hovers somewhere in the terrain between 'true' and 'fake', 'fact' and 'fiction': a dynamic edge for fictionalisers to explore. All fiction may play with suspension of disbelief, but a text posing as a real artefact and making efforts at mimesis is charged with a particular freight around what is 'real', what version we accept and the breaching of the boundary between private and public documents and domains. This

²⁸ R. McKee, *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (HarperCollins e-books, 2010). p 380

interplay of tensions creates a unique set of textual manipulations in the fictional diary form, and forms the basis of both my analysis, and my own creative component.

12.35: Alcohol: three units. And so to bed.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFOE'S *JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE* YEAR AND ITS FICTIONAL STRATEGIES

In which the aforesaid Author of this text admires to excess the stylistic postures of one Daniel Defoe, original exemplar and an author with the Right Bravura for the task, and a clear eye for the Allegorical task at hand of fashioning truth out of fakery. Includes history of the form, if 'History' may be adequately separated from 'Romance' without Pedantic Blowback, e&c.

PRECURSORS

Real (factual) diaries, as they traditionally existed before the fictional form became popular in European literature in the eighteenth century, tended to be records and compilations of events rather than impressions or feelings. Lorna Martens cites 'records of state, annals, merchant journals, monks' chronicles and compilations of scientific notations'²⁹ as precursors to the kinds of factual diaries which began to appear in the fourteenth century in Italy and two centuries later were common all over Europe. Ronald Rosbottom identifies these factual diaries and letters not only as the source of our earliest examples of fictional mimetic diaries, but one of the reasons for their ready readership: 'Because letters are a real form, their characteristics are recognisable and elicit common responses from readers upon encountering them as a text.'³⁰ Prior to the advent of the printing press, traditional stories, fables and narratives poems which had been the staple of human storytelling tended not to be pronounced as 'fiction' but were equally not taken to be the literal truth; they were seen as allegorically 'true', with no intention to deceive by masquerading as factual accounts. When praising Homer for the qualities he brought to the art of epic poetry, for instance, Aristotle wrote that the poet's greatest achievement was utilising a narrative shape which taught poets 'the right way to

²⁹ Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). pp 24—25

³⁰ Rosbottom, "Motifs in Epistolary Fiction: Analysis of a Narrative Sub-genre." p 280

tell falsehoods.³¹ Rosbottom maintains that the novelist's reactions to characterization illustrated in forms such as letters and journals 'can teach us a good deal about the development of prose fiction in the 18th and 19th centuries [...]. The epistolary novel is relatively isolatable historically, flourishing roughly between 1650 and 1800.'³² Diary fiction therefore—the genre of fictional work purposely written within the diary-like format—has existed for centuries. This mingling of 'fact' and 'fiction, in a more historical context, may help define how fiction has since come to be recognised and classified. Literary works now acknowledged as novels were also often written in the form of what we might now call false documents; works which pushed the boundaries of fact and fiction or mimicked other recognisable forms such as correspondence. While Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Noble-man and His Sister*³³ (1684) predated other epistolary fiction by some decades, several early novelists in the English language experimented with fragmented, discontinuous and composite narrative structures, creating epistolary narratives where the 'plot' emerged out of a series of letters sent between characters, or included sections of diaries purportedly written by these characters. One text which did so, and is a valuable early example of the forms examined in this thesis in the way it confidently blurred the boundaries of 'history' (fact) and 'romance' (fiction)³⁴ was a work posing as an account by a genuine historic personage published in 1719.

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the imagined autobiography of the title character, a castaway who spends twenty-eight years on a remote tropical island near Trinidad, where he encountered cannibals, captives, and mutineers before ultimately being rescued. While the book may have been loosely based on a genuine historical figure, Alexander Selkirk, Defoe employed a novel and ingenious technique of including this narrator's non-retrospective 'journal' is within the larger text. For the rest of the work, Defoe imitated the prevalent and contemporaneous genre, based on the traditional factual Puritan diary, of lapsing repeatedly into instructive moral lessons from an omniscient narrator, rather than sustaining the illusion of a journal throughout the whole

³¹ Vera Tobin, *Elements of Surprise : our mental limits and the satisfactions of plot* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2018). pp 174—175

³² Rosbottom, "Motifs in Epistolary Fiction: Analysis of a Narrative Sub-genre." p 280

³³ A. Behn, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister: With the History of Their Adventures* (1712) (Lightning Source, 2009).

³⁴ D. Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World* (W. Taylor., 1720). Preface.

text. The work also borrowed from its Puritan diary roots by creating a dated structure. John Mullan claims this timekeeping was also a moral exercise: ‘The Puritan habit of diary-keeping encouraged the belief that there was providential meaning in the very dates of events that were significant to the individuals who pored over the spiritual patterns to be discerned in his or her own life.’³⁵ Traces of this Puritan sensibility can also be seen in Defoe's defence of the book when called upon to prove its veracity. Writing in the guise of the book's editor rather than its author, Defoe defended its fictionalizing strategy by claiming it was written as an 'improving' text: ‘the Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is their (sic) any Appearance of Fiction in it’.³⁶ The pose of appearing as the ‘Editor’ was a trope many authors of supposedly ‘found’ epistolary texts would use in future fictional works. When he was later unmasked as the book's actual author and called upon to further defend his ploy of pretence, Defoe argued that the narrator Crusoe may not have been strictly a genuine historic personage, but allegorically the message should surely have been clear to all readers, schooled as they were in allegorical interpretation from Scripture and other texts designed to illustrate similar moral messages.³⁷ Samuel Richardson later wrote of the same set of impulses in defending his epistolary publishing sensation *Pamela* (1740), claiming that writing a non-retrospective text posing as a cache of letters from a 15 year old servant girl, far from being immoral and prurient, was a cautionary tale, designed to illustrate how virtue may be rewarded – this, in fact, was the book's subtitle.³⁸

It was Robinson Crusoe's first sensationally popular publication which sowed confusion amongst readers which resulted in accusations of deception. In this first edition, the story's protagonist appeared on the title page as author of the text, while Defoe's name appeared nowhere, making this work one of the English language's first ambiguously misconstrued texts.³⁹ It was only when Defoe was pressed, again, to admit that he had invented this character and was in fact the true author of the story that he claimed he had used both literal truth and allegorical allusion, and that episodes in the

³⁵ Owens, W.R. Owens et al., *The Novels of Daniel Defoe, Part II vol 7* (Taylor & Francis, 2017). p 15

³⁶ D. Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*. (W. Taylor, 1719). Preface.

³⁷ Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*. Preface.

³⁸ S. Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue rewarded [by S. Richardson]* (1811).

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=vxoGAAAAQAAJ>. With 1801 frontispiece.

³⁹ D. Defoe et al., *The Novels of Daniel Defoe: Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720). Vol. 3* (Pickering & Chatto, 2008). Introduction.

'imaginary story' may have been partly 'feign'd', but they alluded to events in a 'real story'.⁴⁰ A sense of the nature of the discourse around 'feigned' and 'allegorical' representation at the time, however, may be seen by Defoe's final flourish of signing this eloquent defence in the name of Robinson Crusoe himself.

The preface to *Robinson Crusoe* also demonstrates something of the 'game' around authorial misrepresentation, when Defoe-as-Editor writes: 'The Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant'.⁴¹ This reference to the narrator in the third person, separating editor from narrator and implying that this document is genuinely 'found' and written by a persona with a more limited purview than that of the reader heralds the separation between author and narrator I maintain is key in the apprehension of fictional epistolary work such as diaries and journals. The section of the text which is presented as a diary draws attention, too, to this narrator's desire to both document the experience in the immediacy of the moment and his limited means to do so: 'I began to keep my Journal, of which I shall here give you the Copy (tho' in it will be told all these Particulars over again) as long as it lasted, for having no more Ink I was forced to leave it off'.⁴² This incorporation of sections of diarised accounts into larger texts aids in the illusion of the document as the work of an authentic person and adds to its verisimilitude, as Zimmerman states:

a source that is incorporated without being entirely absorbed by the book, thus implying a claim to be historical verification of the narrator's later account and having the epistemological advantage over the retrospective account of being closer in time to the described events as well as the ontological advantage of being one of those events.⁴³

These techniques would soon be put to use again by Defoe. He consistently presented his fictional protagonists as 'real', and his other works prior to *Journal of the Plague Year*, such as *Memoirs of a Cavalier* and *Moll Flanders*, also utilised this device. He also typically went to the trouble of creating fictional editors, who wrote attesting to the veracity of these protagonists and their accounts, and persistently omitted to include his own name as author of these works. 'All Defoe's novels,' clarifies John Mullan, 'are

⁴⁰ Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*. Introduction.

⁴¹ Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*. Preface

⁴² Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*. p 56

⁴³ E. Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-century British Novel* (Cornell University Press, 1996). p 69

fictional memoirs. All were published anonymously. All except the *Journal* had prefaces apparently written by unnamed editors, explaining the origins of the narratives and how they have been “corrected” for publication.⁴⁴ Michael M. Boardman claims that *Robinson Crusoe* is a stylistic mixture of two modes, one ‘in the older tradition of replicating the effects of true stories’, the other ‘involving the pursuit of imaginative effects, even at the cost of destroying [...] historical referentiality’⁴⁵, a statement which reinforces the ‘double response’ principle explored in this thesis in chapter two, and for which Defoe’s work may again be seen as a precursor to diary fiction, with its dual illusions of textual and extratextual mimesis, more generally. In an examination of which fictional strategies in the ‘pursuit of imaginative effects’ may be usefully exploited in the creation of a text which relies on the illusion of appearing ‘real’ in both form and content, however, one work is not so much typical as prototypical: Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).⁴⁶

DEFOE AND HIS JOURNAL

Defoe’s characteristic stroke of neglecting to credit the account with his own name, creating ambiguity around provenance of the document itself, was only one aspect which makes *A Journal of the Plague Year* innovative, in my view. There is also the use of an invented first-person narrator as a solo eyewitness, reporting *in medias res* across a discernible timeframe to a compelling and genuine historical event. Defoe’s device of inventing this narrator, along with the inclusion of real documents, statistics and reports into his *Journal*, make it a highly significant precursor to the blurring of factual and fictional accounts to come as epistolary forms flourished. This technique of employing a witnessing reporter has come, in fact, to be used as a strategy in non-fiction, particularly the rise of the so-called ‘New Journalism’ reportage of the twentieth century,⁴⁷ which illustrates how the ‘embedding’ of a reporting eyewitness to chronicle a genuine historical event has remained a technique to augment a sense of veracity and immediacy to this day. While *Robinson Crusoe* had included partial diary excerpts within the larger

⁴⁴ Owens et al., *The Novels of Daniel Defoe, Part II* vol 7. p 3

⁴⁵ M.M. Boardman and D. Defoe, *Defoe and the Uses of Narrative* (Rutgers University Press, 1983). p 67

⁴⁶ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Oxford World Classics 2010 edition, ed. Landa & Roberts

⁴⁷ T. Wolfe and E.W. Johnson, *The New Journalism* (Harper & Row, 1973).

autobiographical pretence, in *Journal of the Plague Year* the single narrator's account makes up the whole text, and the illusion maintained is that this narrative persona is supposedly responsible for the artefact itself. The reader's viewpoint is therefore confined to the supposedly private recordings of this singular persona, driven to create a record of events as experienced. Presenting this work as an authentic found artefact featuring a singular fictional narrator writing in journal format makes Defoe, in my view, an exemplar of a unique form: the 'feign'd history'⁴⁸ we now recognise as the fictional diary.

Londoners of 1722, according to this narrator, were dangerously enervated by their 'Vices, which are already a Plague upon our Morals [...] a dreadful kind of Fuel for a Contagion, and miserably prepare us for a Plague upon our Bodies.'⁴⁹ Defoe had also written an accompanying volume to the *Journal* entitled *Due Preparations for the Plague, as well for Soul as Body*, both a practical work and one concerned with spiritual preparations, as the title explicitly suggests, much of which is taken up with an invented family of exemplary Christian characters (in the way Robinson Crusoe was exemplary in his industry and perseverance while marooned on his island), taking wise and rational precautions to save themselves. Just as Defoe claimed that *Robinson Crusoe* was designed as a moral tale to 'improve'⁵⁰ and instruct, the same may be said for his intentions in publishing *Journal of the Plague Year*. As a book which appeared alongside more than fifty other works about plague at a moment when demand for instructive texts must have seemed inexhaustible⁵¹, Defoe's cautionary tale stood out from the crowd in that it was presented as a journal, told by a purported eyewitness. As such it fell into no clear category, David Roberts asserts, 'but takes up temporary residence in each: this is fiction masquerading as history and vice versa, a dazzling hoax that deploys the mechanics of truthful inquiry.'⁵² Modern categories of 'literature', 'history', 'truth', and 'forgery', Roberts points out, were still in the making as Defoe seized upon the idea of creating such an artful masquerade.⁵³ In this work, unlike his

⁴⁸ Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*. Introduction

⁴⁹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 43

⁵⁰ Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*. Introduction

⁵¹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Roberts introduction p 4

⁵² Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Roberts introduction, pp 3—4

⁵³ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Roberts introduction p 3

previous *Robinson Crusoe*, there are no diary entries interleaved between a larger omniscient account, didactically bent, like the Puritan diary form before them, to offer allegorical examples of the worth of moral endeavour. Instead, Defoe's singular eyewitness is seen to be responsible for the whole text, creating the illusion of a 'found' artefact, one which, as promised on the cover, has only recently been brought to light. This alleged eyewitness gives a harrowing account of the London plague of the 1660s, reporting, in a detailed series of impressions, on dramatic progressions of events over a discernible timeframe—the course of a pandemic's attack on the city. Skilfully woven into the text are the extant 1665 Bills of Mortality from the actual Plague of London.⁵⁴ They not only aid verisimilitude by appearing as utilitarian and verifiable public service documents but are placed strategically to create a formal 'inventory' effect which builds tension incrementally and suspensefully as the numbers of fatalities grow. The inclusion of these 'memorials', with their ominous rising figures, along with details such as statistics, street names, vivid detail and assembled ephemera all contribute to the effect of an authentic found artefact.

It is, however, Defoe's creation of 'H.F.', the eyewitness narrator seen to be ostensibly responsible for the ordering of these documents and reporting on life on the street during the plague's rise, which distinguishes this text in terms of this thesis's focus. The utilisation of present tense is journalistic, creating added urgency and drama with many acute references to a disease-torn city the narrator is presently roaming about in. The deliberate blurring of immediacy and eyewitness reportage creates a text which is character-driven, story-like and subjective, making it, as scholar Robert Mayer suggests, 'quite possibly the borderline case in English fiction and as such useful in delimiting and defining the novel.'⁵⁵ In this text Defoe does not take up the pose of a faux 'editor' explaining how this document has come into his possession. H.F. undertakes that task, explicitly intent on exercising his authority over the account as self-styled historian, constantly interpreting and comparing the tallies in the Bills of Mortality and assessing their evidence, foregrounding himself as a singular author. Roberts points out: 'in the Journal, the editor is the protagonist. He marshals evidence from the Bills of Mortality, Lord Mayor's orders, and from medical tracts. He has

⁵⁴ Will Slauter, "WRITE UP YOUR DEAD," *Media History* 17, no. 1 (2011/02/01 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2011.532371>.

⁵⁵ R. Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). p 209

anecdotes, to hand, waiting their turn to be recounted and assessed' [...] the Journal claims authenticity through the process of its writing as well as in its content.'⁵⁶ Endowing the narrator of the account with fictional personality attributes in this way is a device to solve problems of continuity and veracity but can also be seen as the strategy of the author's intent on not intervening in any way into the text to spoil verisimilitude. The Journal's presentation upon publication did nothing to dispel this illusion either, with the 1722 cover replicating a popular public broadsheet style, the words 'PLAGUE YEAR' leaping like a headline in bold typeface and extra-large font.⁵⁷ This first edition distinguished itself from the crowd of other similar publications available at the time by advertising itself not as a treatise or medical guide but as a series of 'Observations or Memorials, Of the most remarkable OCCURRENCES' recorded during the 'last GREAT VISITATION in 1665' written 'by a CITIZEN who continued all the while in London' and only just come to light, 'Never made publick before'⁵⁸. As Roberts says: 'The promise of authenticity was Defoe's key commodity in 1722',⁵⁹ in a country rattled by news of fresh outbreaks of plague on the European continent. This authenticity was quickly reinforced by the character of H.F., who seems to feel a genuine urgency to communicate the reality of the crisis of the plague: 'I desire this Account may pass with them, rather for a Direction to themselves to act by, than a History of my actings, if they are brought to the same Distress.'⁶⁰

The literary strategies Defoe establishes in this text set up what I see as stylistic decisions still employed widely by contemporary fiction writers. First-person protagonists tend to be subjective and idiosyncratic, their observations providing a lens for readers who apprehend this subjectivity as artful since it allows character to be inadvertently revealed. The prose 'voice' Defoe employs is distinctly 'unliterary', creating its own impression that H.F. is not a 'writer' or literary stylist but simply an unpretentious 'Everyman', trying diligently to shape a narrative in a hasty manner appropriate to the urgency of the message: 'The truth is, the case of poor servants was very dismal, as I shall have occasion to mention again by-and-by,' he improvises, creating verisimilitude through seeming spontaneous and unselfconscious. The syntax

⁵⁶ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. introduction p xxi

⁵⁷ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Figure 1.

⁵⁸ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Figure 1.

⁵⁹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. introduction. p 5

⁶⁰ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 30

and punctuation of the voice at work here mimic the narrative hesitancy and repetitiveness of such a narrator: 'And here let me take leave to enter again, tho' it may seem a Repetition of Circumstances, into a Description' ⁶¹ H.F.'s personal testimony feels consequently intimate, confessional and improvisational, aiding the illusion that this is a true account written by a survivor.

Narrative subjectivity on the part of a first-person narrator making a claim as an eyewitness creates a dual role in which the narrator is both a participant in the events described and the producer of the text about them: a humble unskilled writer, tasked with making a record as testament. This simultaneity to the events described gives further immediacy, narrative impetus and dramatic tension to the *Journal*. While H.F.'s account is not dated, it describes a blow-by-blow account of a progressing event with its own burgeoning temporal arc as the plague breaks out, rages and subsides. The chronological shape of the account is provided by the subject matter itself, as is its effect upon the writing consciousness – an illusion Defoe is careful to reinforce through digressive asides on the ongoing series of events. As H.F. moves about the city, noting things down as he goes, he relates whatever unfolds as he encounters it as if he himself does not know what may happen next or where the 'story' might end.

This narrator's awareness of epistolarity is evident in his repeated stated intentions towards the task of writing: 'And here I may be able to make an observation or two of my own, which may be of use hereafter to those into whose hands these may come, if they should ever see the like dreadful Visitation'⁶², and the focus on time and its ominous progression as the disease takes hold are seen in his recurring comments about the need to keep this journal and the importance of its details for posterity. Very skilfully, in terms of plausibility, Defoe's 'man on the ground' also expresses his internal and stated doubts that he is the right man for the job: 'Perhaps it may be thought by some [I am] preaching a Sermon instead of writing a History, making my self a Teacher instead of giving my Observations of things; and this restrains me very much from going on here.'⁶³ This humility, of course, is crafted, yet it provokes in a reader a sense of reticence or decorum in the narrator, in that he feels ill-equipped to provide a full account since he is no expert. The reader is therefore required to interpret

⁶¹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 167

⁶² Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 64

⁶³ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 211

observations through this narratorial 'lens' of subjectivity, allowing for a version of the dramatic irony which unreliable first-person accounts create.

Reportage, or the appearance of reportage, was one of Defoe's chief powers; the naming of real places, the accumulation of small details, hearsay, behaviour of people, sights and sounds all lend a sense of authenticity. H.F. elsewhere is unselfconsciously loquacious, seeing and recording life on the street, impossibly present everywhere, even listing his own address with exactitude: 'I lived without Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate church and Whitechapel Bars, on the left hand or north side of the street'⁶⁴; both factual and observant in recalling particulars and minutiae. Specificity to lend verisimilitude is a device still used by fiction writers—and indeed, 'embedded' journalists—centuries later. Descriptive detail also functions to dispel doubts of authenticity because observations of life on the street suggest unimpeachable sources and direct first-hand experience of events. H.F.'s report, for example, that everyone carries 'small Money' as the Plague rages so that they will never have to receive change after a purchase is a telling detail, along with the vivid anecdote of a full purse being left on the ground, with everybody too scared to touch it in case of infection.⁶⁵

The effect of creating a diligent observer of such salient detail gives Defoe's narrator character dimension, allowing him to then lapse into confessional intimacy. He reports, for example, that doctors have advised him to stay inside while the plague rages, but confesses he is driven by 'unsatisfy'd Curiosity'⁶⁶ to walk the streets and commit himself to making a record of what he sees. He is haunted by the horrors of the plague, and voices his doubt that he is up to the task of conveying these horrors: 'If I could but tell this Part, in such moving Accents as should alarm the very Soul of the Reader, I should rejoice that I recorded those Things.'⁶⁷ It is the mark of a great fictionaliser that Defoe is able to blend this acute and vivid description with professions of inarticulacy. Among the first conditions the author sets up in the text are initial ignorance and denial of the magnitude of the crisis, which creates both dramatic tension and dramatic irony for a reader of 1720, who knew better what outcome awaited the ignorant almost six decades earlier:

⁶⁴ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 7

⁶⁵ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 83

⁶⁶ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 70

⁶⁷ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 103

People had for a long time a strong belief that the plague would not come to the city, nor into Southwark, nor into Wapping or Ratcliff at all [...] many removed from the suburbs [...] into those eastern and south sides as for safety, and, as I verily believe, carried the plague amongst them there.⁶⁸

The authentic and verifiable documents H.F. includes in his account, as mentioned, are the tables published weekly by the Company of Parish Clerks, recording the numbers of deaths in London's parishes as the plague took hold. These are interleaved in staged periods to build tension, suspense and immediacy, building both dramatic simultaneity as the epidemic seems to spread as the report continues and the illusion of uncertain outcome. A similar burgeoning dramatic tension is achieved through H.F. first uneasily predicting and then decrying the consequences of the practice of house arrest undertaken by the Lord Mayor's Office, which ensured whole families were condemned to a slow and agonised death inside shut up houses.

As well as the Bills of Mortality providing their own narrative progression, the plague's ominous advance mirrors the psychic state of the narrator. As he records the stressful impact of the experience in the Journal, dramatic tension shifts from an external 'plot' to the psychological tensions of the character himself. As the plague progresses, there is a steady but subtle sense of the rising duress of the situation upon the personality of the narrator himself, a slowly-accreting tone of fear and doubt in the entries as H.F. gathers stories and anecdotes on the street and in the pub, graphically recording the suffering which increases as the plague progresses. This duress is intensified through imposing a state of self-isolation, when H.F. is confined to his home as the virus tightens its grip and the death toll increases. Defoe uses this 'cloistering' to provide narrative opportunities for character revelation under duress, which, for its time, seems a highly sophisticated fictional ploy. Just as Robinson Crusoe marked out and defined his imposed space on the island and reported in his diary his attempts to remain as industrious as possible to prevent himself slipping into torpor and despair, H.F. shuts himself inside for a fortnight of the plague's worst depredations, and watches the dead-carts carrying bodies to the nearby churchyard from 'out of my own windows'⁶⁹. Witnessing details such as mass burials and survivors driven to insanity creates a cumulative intensity and a powerful sense of claustrophobia as the narrator circles

⁶⁸ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 97

⁶⁹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 154

around his own motivations in keeping the account, revealed to the 'eavesdropping' reader in declarations such as:

Terrified by those frightful Objects, I would retire Home sometimes, and resolve to go out no more [...] Such intervals as I had, I employed in reading Books, and in writing down my Memorandums of what occurred to me every Day and out of which, afterwards, I [took] most of this Work as it relates to my Observations without Doors: What I wrote of my private Meditations, I reserve for private Use, and desire it may not be made public on any account whatever [...] and therefore I say no more of that.⁷⁰

This alleged decision to draw a curtain over unguarded observations for the sake of privacy is a further fictional strategy for suspense and tension, and the act of writing itself can be seen as a spur for psychological avoidance or decorum. Likewise H.F.'s admitted remorse for obtuseness he only sees in hindsight: 'I cannot say, but that now I began to fail in my Resolutions, my Heart fail'd me very much, and sorely I repented of my Rashness'.⁷¹ Such strategies provoke inferential reading, as the hint of self-censorship only serves to increase the dramatic intensity of what is left out. By having H.F. claim there are sections of his diary he has himself edited out as not suitable for public consumption, in other words, Defoe leaves room for engaged heightened speculation on the part of his readers.

These techniques to provoke immediacy and dramatisation were lifted from the stage itself. Complex exchanges of dialogue are occasionally rendered in a kind of script form along with scenes of dramatic action. In one 'act', the narrator, walking along the riverbank, meets a boatman. The scene is rendered almost as a play, complete with stage directions:

“Alas sir!...all dead or sick. Here are very few families in this part, or that village (pointing at Poplar), where half of them are not dead already, and the rest sick... Do you see these five ships lie at anchor (pointing down the river a good way below the town), and do you see eight or ten ships lie at chain there? (pointing above the town) ... All those ships have families on board...I tend on them and fetch things for them.”

⁷⁰ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. pp 76—77

⁷¹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 66

The dramatic immediacy achieved using this syntactic style of broken dialogue and revealing action in the account rather than omniscience feels extremely contemporary in its dramatisation:

“Poor woman!” says he, ‘she is brought sadly down. She has a swelling, and it is broke, and I hope she will recover; but I fear the child will die, but it is the Lord—”

Here he stopped, and wept very much.

[...] I turned a little way from the man while these thoughts engaged me, for, indeed, I could no more refrain from tears than he.⁷²

Utilising a fictional character with the autonomy to report on his own reactions and opinions and who is seen to be responsible for the entire document allows Defoe to resist the authorial urge to moralise or sentimentalise about the Londoners who bore the brunt of the ordeal. It is H.F., therefore, who is the persona indignant about the inaccuracies of the official death estimates of the plague, and H.F. who offers anecdotal evidence that at the plague’s peak close to eight thousand people a week were dying. ‘I alone live!’ he writes at the Journal’s end in a tone of exultant wonder, eyeing his transformed capital. Near the end of the book, too, a previously silent editor intervenes (in italics) to assert that one of the burial grounds that H.F. mentions is where the narrator himself now lies buried.⁷³ Along with the ‘never made publick before’ claim of the title, this keeps up the illusion that the account, just as it gravely promises, is an authentic unearthed memoir, only recently brought to light—a trope that would come to be used as a motif in diary fiction for centuries.

Both the historically verifiable dates of the Great Plague (the work was published fifty-seven years after the event) and Defoe’s prior practice in fictionalizing were both well-known to readers when the Journal was published. It may be seen as something of a testament to both its verisimilitude and the novelty of his approach, therefore, that there is no evidence of the Journal being interpreted as fiction until well after Defoe’s death; the earliest attribution of the work to him is in the list of his ‘principal performances’ in ‘Lives of the Poets’ published in 1753, where it is titled *Memoirs of the Plague*. It was decades, in other words, before dawned upon readers that the Journal was not an actual eyewitness account, but a skilful literary hoax, and arguments about its authenticity

⁷² Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. pp 93—94

⁷³ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. p 199

seem to have persisted into the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Even until the early 20th century, some scholars were choosing to view Defoe as a historian scrupulously constructing a narrative from reliable and verified sources, rather than a particularly skilled fictionaliser.⁷⁵

To me, this Journal is indeed one of Defoe's 'principal performances'; a prototypical first-person epistolary narrative which makes scintillating play of posing as a 'real' found artefact while utilising sophisticated fictional devices in ways which seem fresh, intuitive and compelling hundreds of years later. In creating a fictional eyewitness to tell the cautionary tale of the plague Defoe sets up simultaneity, epistolarity, present-tense immediacy and a certain self-reflexive artlessness—the creation of a 'voice' which seems subjectively authentic, in other words, within a text also presented as an authentic found artefact.

THE FURTHER RISE OF THE EPISTOLARY FORM

The practice of utilizing the diary, journal and letter form to create fictional texts continued to feed a public appetite as the eighteenth century progressed, and the ambiguous or mimetic blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction continued to attract authors and readers. Many writers besides Defoe were experimenting with a variety of forms and their presentation; Laurence Sterne, for example, in his innovative and novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*⁷⁶, published in 1759, creates a sprawling non-linear narrative in which the author seems to relish undermining reader expectation, creating a narrator who constantly dissembles, doubles back, and pretends to start again. Jonathon Swift was another author who played a sophisticated game with verisimilitude in supplying a map in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) to lend fake cartographic veracity to the fantastical places the fictional journey describes, and published the book via an intermediary in order to disguise his own authorship, creating a text John Mullan describes as a 'delicious fake'.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe*.pp 530—535

⁷⁵ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe*.p 537

⁷⁶ M. Rowson, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Overlook Press, 1997).

⁷⁷ John Mullan, 'An Introduction to Gulliver's Travels', 21st June 2018, British Library.
<https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-gullivers-travels>

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded*, published in 1740, created a literary sensation. Constructed as a cache of letters secretly written by a young apparently innocent maidservant, this text, while epistolary, is credited by many as the first English novel⁷⁸ and was the first example of the phenomenon of the 'bestseller', spawning a craze for the eponymous character and associated merchandise such as fans and teacups.⁷⁹

Like Defoe, Richardson was at some pains to convince readers that *Pamela* was based on a true story. Like Defoe, he claimed the connection between truth and fabrication was intended to persuade readers that the moral of Pamela's character's story is 'real,' and therefore an efficient tool of ethical edification of young women, although again like Defoe, he pretended to be the 'Editor' rather than the author of the text. Many 'AntiPamelists' moralized on the effects of fictionalisation itself, which they claimed was a device capable of having an effect on susceptible readers 'almost without the intervention of the Will' as Samuel Johnson noted.⁸⁰ In the single year following the book's release nearly two dozen pamphlets, 'fanfic' versions, translations and parodies appeared, along with six new editions of the text itself.⁸¹

Catherine Ingrassia suggests *Pamela* was the definitive text in establishing generic expectations for prose fiction, maintaining that the term 'novel' in the early eighteenth century reveals that it was not seen as a 'codified genre', and instead was seen as 'diffuse, inchoate and tangled' and 'a hybrid form'⁸². The work of authors like Defoe, Alexander Pope, Swift, Sterne and Richardson owed part of its enormous popularity, Ingrassia claims, to its very novelty, 'because no one knew what a 'novel' was [and] authors could experiment in terms of plot, characters and narrative technique.'⁸³ Expectations and assumptions about the veracity or otherwise of authorship, hoaxes or other signifying textual sleight of hand devices were therefore equally diffuse.

Richardson's ingenious technique of creating dramatic suspense through epistolary secrecy in *Pamela* not only functioned, as he had hoped, to bring the reader

⁷⁸ J. Richetti et al., *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁹ Margaret Ann Doody, *Introduction to Samuel Richardson's Pamela* (Viking Press, 1995). p 7

⁸⁰ Turner, J.G. 'Novel Panic: Picture and Performance in the Reception of Richardson's 'Pamela'; 'Representations, No. 48' (Autumn, 1994), University of California Press. pp. 70—96.

⁸¹ Richetti et al., *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*.

⁸² E. Haywood, C. Ingrassia, and H. Fielding, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela* (Broadview Press, 2004). p 17

⁸³ Haywood, Ingrassia, and Fielding, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*. p 18

into close contact with the emotional and psychological world of the narrator, but to establish a temporal immediacy that meant that the reader had the illusion of experiencing events alongside that narrator, as if they were in the room seeing and hearing events unfold. Simultaneity, which collapsed the time of the action with the time of narration, aided this illusion, a technique he called 'writing to the moment'.⁸⁴ Foreshadowed to some degree in Defoe's constructed 'Journal' which also chose simultaneity over retrospectivity for its dramatic tension, the dramatic tension provided by this device, whereby a reader finds themselves in a position to infer and anticipate more than the character, would soon become genre-defining. The phenomenal success of this publication also built on the attention Defoe had precipitated in his creation of a first-person narrator writing in the midst of experience, making a record which appears 'artless' through its use of vernacular, spontaneous and subjective personal reportage. The appetite for the authenticity, intimacy and immediacy of epistolary works such as these helped create a subsequent market for novels in which, Ingrassia claims, 'fiction increasingly focused on the individualized experience, the personal reflections of the writing subject, and the moral relevance of both. Fiction was now more episodic (the division between Pamela's letters serving as ad hoc chapters), personally revealing, and, at base, emotional.'⁸⁵ Richardson saw it as the only desirable and verisimilar epistolary style which justified the form: 'The nature of familiar letters, written, as it were, to the *moment*, while the heart is agitated by hopes and fears, on events undecided, must plead an excuse for the bulk of a collection of this kind. Mere facts and characters might be comprised in a much smaller compass: but, would they be equally interesting?'⁸⁶ He attempted to stay, with subsequent novels such as *Clarissa*, (1748) with the same chronological method he had used in *Pamela*; the near-simultaneous recording of emotional experience to the event described. Again he faced one of the major challenges of epistolary form: the sacrifice made to immediacy where the act of writing, or even having plausible access to writing materials, stretches credibility. The technical difficulties of reducing the gap between narrated time, the reporting of events and their effects, and the rendering of emotional reactions to those events continued to vex him, as

⁸⁴ Samuel Richardson, *The history of Sir Charles Grandison* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). p 6

⁸⁵ Haywood, Ingrassia, and Fielding, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*. pp 17—18

⁸⁶ Richardson, *The history of Sir Charles Grandison*. Preface 1 p 6

he wrote to a friend about his difficulties with *Clarissa*: ‘The fixing of Dates has been a task to me. I am afraid I make the Writers do too much in Time.’⁸⁷

The mimetic requirement to create plausible and discernible gaps and spaces between the written entries of such a text still presents authorial challenges for verisimilitude, but the work of these eighteenth century authors contributed to a significant shift in the creation and foregrounding of compelling first-person characterization, particularly, for the purposes of this thesis, where this persona is seen to be responsible for the writing of the whole text. The psychological realism provoked through the utilization of a singular narrative consciousness and a unified event built around immediacy and response reflect strategies which are now ubiquitous in many forms of contemporary fiction: the technique of contrasting a narrator’s internal desires with the world’s external forces operating upon them.⁸⁸ While this was illustrated compellingly in Defoe’s *Journal* in existential form – the struggle to stay alive in the face of a fatal growing epidemic – Richardson’s work narrowed the focus to the intensely personal and private world of a young innocent maidservant being predated upon by her employer, so *Pamela* might be seen as a text posing as a cautionary memoir.

One major aspect of memoir is that it purports to be true, or at least a lightly-curated version of the truth, based on real incidents. Defoe used this defence about his own fictionalized character of ‘Robinson Crusoe’. The difference lies not only in the purview of the narrator and scope of the ‘plot’, but in the artifice around the text’s presentation. *Robinson Crusoe* was published claiming to be true, written by Crusoe himself or ‘a citizen of London [and] only now brought to light’. A novel about a fifteen-year-old maidservant written by a middle-aged man, however, was a ‘romance’ in the true fictive sense. The inherent tensions around the illusions of the text as authentic are played out on the page and in the intimate and seemingly sincere writings of the character herself, as well as in the text’s external presentation and appearance. In published memoirs, factual diaries and epistolary works marketed as ‘intimate journals’, confessionals and the like, the narrator often explicitly vows to give an honest account of events. A fictional character vowing to give an honest account, however, becomes an inherently ambiguous matter, as *Pamela* illustrates, and in line with the ‘double

⁸⁷ Richardson, Carroll, and Carroll, *Selected Letters*. p 63

⁸⁸ Adelle Waldman. ‘The Man who Made the Novel’. May 9, 2016, The New Yorker.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/16/samuel-richardson-inventor-of-the-modern-novel>

response' required by readers to apprehend the fictionality of such a text alongside its mimetic presentation, this honesty and sincerity becomes a characterization or emplotment device.

Urgent reasons for secrecy, subterfuge and confidentiality also quickly become staple narrative strategies in such texts. Lorna Martens writes: 'The assumption is that because the diarist writes secretly he writes sincerely, and that the self in the diary is the 'true' self and stands in contrast to the outward facade presented to the public.'⁸⁹ This utilisation of the private diary as a place where the true self might be spontaneous and unselfconscious is seen in those fictional letters and diaries created with a dramatic or suspenseful agenda, and the safety of the diary as a place of authentic soul-searching or reflection is a trope frequently and recognisably taken up by real diarists, and is therefore mimetically reproduced by fiction writers for verisimilitude.

The rise in public appetite for texts featuring an expressive first-person narrator, whether this was in the guise of Defoe's novels-posing-as-autobiographies, Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* or other novelists experimenting with form showed there was a public readership ready and willing to suspend disbelief in order to fully enjoy these hybrid presentations, and to go along with the pretence that the character and narrative they were reading was 'real'. Diary and epistolary fiction, so enormously popular in the eighteenth century, historically gave way to depictions of the psyche in action, where no self-conscious act of writing was there to trip up or delay the immersive experience. 'Authors who wanted to use the periodic form of the diary to show the psychological development of a character,' Martens writes, 'actually found themselves encumbered by the fiction that the protagonist was writing down his thoughts.'⁹⁰ That sense of encumbrance, however, clearly does not hinder all authors intent on exploring the form and capitalizing on its literary strategies. The fictional diary form counts among its practitioners in contemporary times some of the bestselling authors and most popular and iconic books of all time.⁹¹ This popularity shows no sign of waning, particularly in genres suited to intimate, confessional and artfully unreliable first-person accounts. By way of example, the field of Young Adult fiction is replete with popular texts which

⁸⁹ Martens, *The Diary Novel* p 38

⁹⁰ Martens, *The Diary Novel*. p 41

⁹¹ K. Mansfield, "The Novels That Shaped Our World: BBC reveals 100-strong list November 5th 2019," *The Bookseller*
www.thebookseller.com/news/novels-shaped-our-world-bbc-reveals-100-strong-list-1109401 (2019).

present themselves as revealing or humorous ‘secret journals’ of teenage protagonist, from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*⁹² to *The Princess Diaries*⁹³ and many other global publishing success stories in between. These texts have utilized the tropes of the ‘found’ artefact, presenting themselves, for example, as faux exercise books complete with doodles, stickers and notes, or photorealistic representations of diaries made secret with small locks and keys and hand-lettered exhortations to ‘keep out’ by their fictional narrators.⁹⁴

New postmodern forms which borrow from the diary's fragmentary style to create assemblages of documents, images or other forms to suggest a journal-like compilation have emerged which dissolve old boundaries of 'fact' and 'fiction' and set about creating new ones as an experimental metafictional exercise. The rise of these autofictional, antifictional and hybrid works that are neither factual nor fictional represent new challenges to first-person and epistolary fictional forms, in that they foreground the tensions of narrative expectations in regards to construction of meaning and signifiers of authenticity. Attempts at definition which assign rigid separations between real and fictional diaries, and Phillipe LeJeune's stance for pursuing diary writing as a private activity rather than a public or published one⁹⁵, no longer seem to fully encompass a definitive categorisation which will fit these hybrid metatexts engaged in self-consciously recalibrating forms of first-person narratives and clouding the distinctions between author and narrator, such as the autofictional ‘concealed autobiography’ novel texts of Ben Lerner⁹⁶ and Rachel Cusk⁹⁷.

Postmodernists insist that arguments around signifiers and delineations of ‘fact’ and ‘invention’ are irrelevant, that multiple frames exist to encompass subjectivity on all things, and in any case ‘true stories’ once classed as memoir or autobiography are as essentially fictive and unreliable as the memories and psyches which produced them. It's tempting to chart as partially responsible the twenty-first century's technologically-induced collapsed boundaries between the private and public self, a narratological locus which has so influenced the concerns, historically, of modernist first-person literary

⁹² Jeff Kinney, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days* (Camberwell, Victoria: Viking, 2010).

⁹³ M. Cabot, *The Princess Diaries* (Pan Macmillan, 2015).

⁹⁴ R. Klein and A. James, *Penny Pollard's Diary* (Oxford University Press, 1983). Figure 2

⁹⁵ P. Lejeune and U.H.M.B.R. Center, *On Diary* (Biographical Research Center, 2009). <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=r6H1s-aAcFQC>.

⁹⁶ For example: B. Lerner, *10:04* (United Kingdom: Granta, 2014).

⁹⁷ R. Cusk, *Rachel Cusk Collection: Outline, Transit and Kudos*, three vols. (HarperCollins Canada, 2019).

works, and has now, in times verging on the post-post-modern, led to new explorations in multiplicity in the presentation of self and interiority. Or perhaps the novel, in its many guises which mirror the psychological and cultural explorations which produce it, is returning to a freshly-imagined state of being 'diffuse, inchoate and tangled'.⁹⁸ Diary fiction, however, remains a form paradoxically straightforward in its illusions: a text mimetic in its presentation featuring a clearly fictional narrative entity engaged in the act of keeping a record.

Daniel Defoe's readers may have been duped by his mimicry of an authentic and artless account, but contemporary readers tend to approach a text with a more elaborate set of suspicions regarding whether it is factual, fictional, or playing a game which blurs these boundaries. Where the text's external presentation alerts them to the possibility of mimetic illusion or game-playing, this alertness provokes a reader to make decisions as to how to interpret this potentially 'false document', although Trevor Field claims that 'the rules and expectations which govern the pact between writers and readers of fiction make permanent confusion impossible, even though we may enjoy the games of pretence which [...] authors have elaborated with such skill.'⁹⁹ This game or 'pact' is key in modulating and controlling the way in which a fictional diary text is presented and apprehended, to mitigate the confusion Field refers to. The form demands that the reader plays along with the construction and its associated fictional devices while at the same time recognising the intentional mimetic representation of a found artefact – an unique attribute which distinguishes the fictional diary from other narrative fiction. Field claims: 'The diary novel is somewhat awkwardly caught between two worlds, the real and the literary, for its mimetic references to physical writing materials and implied dates will always distinguish it from novels which stand as autonomous literary artefacts.'¹⁰⁰ Readers encountering diary fiction are oriented to these signifiers of form and are required to suspend disbelief in postulating a fictional narrator for whom the story events are real and reportable. Katherine Thomson-Jones describes this willingness to play along: 'Perhaps it is fictional that I am reading the character's lost diary; this may be impossible, since I can't read what has been lost forever, but I am intended to

⁹⁸ Haywood, Ingrassia, and Fielding, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*. p 17

⁹⁹ Trevor Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988). p 6

¹⁰⁰ Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel*. p 22

and can imagine it all the same.’¹⁰¹ Irina Paperno, too, acknowledges the particular illusion of ‘authenticity’ and immediacy associated with the diary form, an effect predicated on ‘the presumed presence of self and presumed primacy of the living moment. To this day, the diary has a peculiar status of an ‘as if’ text: we write and read the diary as if it is a private text capable of communicating an ‘authentic’ self and an ‘immediate’ experience.’¹⁰² The scope to be exploited within these attributes is what I will explore in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ Katherine Thomson - Jones, "Cinematic Narrators," *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 2 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2009.00204.x>. p 5

¹⁰² Irina Paperno, "'What Can Be Done with Diaries?'," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004), www.jstor.org/stable/3663979. p 565

CHAPTER TWO: DUAL LAYERS, DUAL ATTRIBUTES, DUAL STYLISTIC DEVICES.

In which your faithful narrator lists, for the Enlightenment of all wishing to practice, the utilisation of DEVICES upon which Strategy may be predicated, and to which the form of the Diary may be skilfully bent, if aforesaid practitioners consider the possibilities of the Creative REPRESENTATION of a narrator, upon whom much is expected, engaged at their lonely and oft troubling task of writing, and thereby, Witless, revealing all.

The apprehension of a document taken to be a diary or journal which has found its way into a reader's hands begins, in this reading, firstly on the plane of the text's physical appearance and structure, then requires further interpretive activity on the part of the reader to imagine its narrator based on this physical record. H. Porter Abbott summarises that the sense of reality that the diary can then foster is of two kinds: 'The artless spontaneity of the internal, non-retrospective record is one. The other is the document itself, which, as a *document*, claims to be real.'¹⁰³ This dual layer of artifice is what I maintain makes the fictional diary a unique and particular literary form.

EXTERNAL PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

The artefact's material form and appearance and the content and arrangement of its discretely-ordered entries and elements all contribute to its resemblance to an authentic diary and consequently the apprehension of mimetic effect. Many authors have been at pains to present their fictional diaries as old, damaged, or fragmentary documents, to augment this pretence of authenticity. Defoe and his publishers created covers which imitated the popular broadsheets of the day, and many young adult contemporary diary texts, as I have said, trade humorously on their appearance as a 'real' journal, creased, worn, scribbled on or marked up in some way by their narrators.¹⁰⁴ Hammond Innes's *The Last Voyage* (1978)¹⁰⁵ purports to be the recently-

¹⁰³ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 19

¹⁰⁴ Klein and James, *Penny Pollard's Diary*. Figure 2

¹⁰⁵ H. Innes, *The Last Voyage: Captain Cook's Lost Diary* (Knopf, 1979).

discovered manuscript of the diary of Captain James Cook, written on his fatal final voyage in the South Pacific. The first edition of this book imitates in its presentation a 'real' diary with a reproduction of fragmented text on the front cover and the 'blurb' on the back cover also presented wittily as fragmented, appearing mysteriously water-damaged and only partially readable. Innes enters the game himself in the introductory note, in which, posing, like Defoe, as an editor to the text, he explains the mysterious provenance of this lost diary, 'which only recently came to light in the cellars of the old St James' Club.'¹⁰⁶

Peter Carey's first edition of *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000)¹⁰⁷ also imitates a genuine aged document, with publishers University of Queensland Press going to some lengths to recreate the illusion of a found document, creating a quarter-bound leather volume with the spine untitled, as if it were an individually-bound manuscript, speckled endpapers and textured paper stock. In the first edition, the numbered manuscript parcels inside were even cut into individually-guillotined sections to aid this mimicry.¹⁰⁸ Carey's narrator, Ned Kelly, makes reference to the manuscript's 'splashed and speckled' appearance, and intercalated editorial notes to the text also attest to the pages being creased, stained or marked in other ways.¹⁰⁹

This use of an editorial presence to present or order the documents, explain their provenance or intervene with explanations of gaps, omissions or damage to the artefact itself has also been a trope since Defoe's fictional works at least and serves several purposes. The maintenance of continuity is chief, especially if we are to take as valid Irina Paperno's claim¹¹⁰ that a diary operates through both continuity and discontinuity – one contributing to the shape, framework and structure of the text, and one representing the more discontinuous psychological progressions of the narrating persona. An editorial entity may therefore be used to sort the fragmented entries into a chronology, or provide a preface or note to explain why so private a document has ended up in the hands of the public. They may be used to give a plausible account of why the diary exists in the first place or explain how the artefact had been found in an attic, desk drawer or cellar, as Innes does above. They may give an account which incorporates a story involving the

¹⁰⁶ Innes, *The Last Voyage: Captain Cook's Lost Diary*. Introduction.

¹⁰⁷ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. (St. Lucia University of Queensland Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. (Cover of UQP first edition).

¹⁰⁹ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. pp 45, 79

¹¹⁰ Paperno, "'What Can Be Done with Diaries?'"

text's alleged discovery, help address problems of rendering simultaneity in relation to reporting *in medias res* on verifiable events, or be utilized to cover up contextual holes in the narrative game of presenting the work as 'real'. *The Missolonghi Manuscript* (1968)¹¹¹ for instance, purports to be Lord Byron's last diary, kept three months before his death. A complicated foreword describes the finding of a lost manuscript by a 'transcriber' named T. H. Applebee, who in turn interjects with his own comments on Byron's writing – a layered device of intervention also taken up by Carey. Another historical diary based on an actual personage is Colin Thubron's *Emperor* (1974),¹¹² a diary made up of the supposed inner thoughts of the Emperor Constantine as he marches towards Rome for battle. Thubron utilises many adept fictional tactics to devise plausible ways that Constantine is bothering to write in his diary while in the heat and stress of imminent battle, including inventing a loyal scribe as intermediary who makes his own observations of Constantine and includes them in the text.

The appearance of a scribe or editorial persona who curates and organises these supposedly found manuscripts may also add an extra dimension of possible unreliability and ambiguity to the artefact. Each character who handles the manuscript may have a private undisclosed agenda, or may have altered, deleted or re-ordered parts of it. An editor who takes on the task of ordering, assembling and commenting upon the discrete narrative units of the record may become a character in his or her own right, with stated and unstated reasons for preserving this compilation becoming its own tale and covert motivations only hinted at. Again, the reader—as the real person handling the manuscript—enters into a complicit game here. The inclusion of fictional editors is a technique to increase the reader's alertness to the whole illusion, a point Trevor Field makes when he asserts that the writers of fictional journals attributed to real people 'include editors precisely in order to prevent the reader from taking the work as real and to increase his enjoyment of the make-believe world.'¹¹³ Readers, Field claims, are not only capable of taking part in the 'sophisticated game' of apprehending mimetic tropes and adjusting their interpretations accordingly, but actually enjoy doing so¹¹⁴. When the alleged author of the fictional diary is a real historical personage such as Captain Cook or Lord Byron, the actual author may increase the illusory game by claiming the author

¹¹¹ F. Prokosch, *The Missolonghi Manuscript* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968).

¹¹² C. Thubron, *Emperor* (Random House, 2012).

¹¹³ Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel*. p 63

¹¹⁴ Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel*. p 70

is 'anonymous' or leaving attributions off the artefact entirely, as Daniel Defoe did, or appear in an 'afterword' like a magician appearing before the curtain after a show, as Hammond Innes does.

A diary's staggered composition of discrete fragments or sequential entries, whether dated or undated, creates dramatic impetus and narrative tension because it is non-retrospective. Between entries, events take place and the diarist records them at intervals uncertain of their eventual fate, so the intervention of a supposed editorial presence responsible for collating or ordering the fragments allows for a sense of retrospectivity without sacrificing the immediacy created by uncertainty of outcome on the part of the narrative persona.

The appearance of material incompleteness or the effect of an entry broken off mid-flow is a further technique to plausibly replicate the fragmentary and incomplete nature of privately-kept personal records. The many-stranded novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell, for example, begins, after a title page in an antiquated font as 'The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing', as a series of dated entries which plunge the reader into a suspenseful account of a ship's journey in the South Pacific which ends:

'Reading my entry for 15th October, when first I met Rafael' ¹¹⁵

This account abruptly ends mid-sentence, followed by a blank page and a new chapter of different letters written by a different narrator in a different era. This deliberate jarring of a reader's sense of narrative continuity and immersion draws attention to the way these fragmentary entries, intercalated into a larger text in which multiple viewpoints and timeframes are explored, keep a reader alert to unexpected authorial designs and the materiality of the fragmentary record itself. The trope of diaries allegedly uncovered in dusty attics, or found concealed and damaged in libraries or in old suitcases augments this illusion of the fictional drama around their existence, where the fragility of the documents themselves aids Porter Abbott's claim that 'the drama of the survival of the text has become a part of the drama of the tale.'¹¹⁶

This fictive drama leads to a further textual attribute which characterizes much diary fiction: the contrivance that the document has come to the reader via secretive or covert means. Reading such a manuscript breaches the divide between a 'private' document now mysteriously in 'public' hands, with the associated tensions and

¹¹⁵ D. Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2008). pp 39—40

¹¹⁶ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 187

‘voyeurism’ (to use Duyfhuizen’s expression¹¹⁷) which come with that presentation. When this secrecy is established, readers are forced to assume some kind of position – someone who has found the document, perhaps, or been charged with investigating what it is, or has read it even though it wasn’t meant for them. To come across a document bearing the greeting ‘Dear Diary’, even as a fictional document, is not the same as discovering one that begins ‘Dear Reader’. Brindle maintains this contributes to the creation of suspense: ‘With the strategy of the epistolary form in place, texts may layer or intercalate the kinds of passages (as journal entries, jottings, etc) which suggest secrecy or subterfuge, as in [...] breached confidences or subversive agendas, for the purpose of dramatic suspense.’¹¹⁸ The lack of a fictive co-respondent or addressee also places the actual reader in an interesting position of complicity, in playing along with the illusion that they are ‘eavesdropping’ on a private work not intended for them. As Field asserts, there is an element of enjoyable subterfuge at play when the reader collaborates in the pretence that they are trespassing onto another person’s subjective experience and private correspondence, which may explain the popularity of the form for young adult readers: they may know the text is fiction, and know it has been created to deliver just such an unsettling experience, and yet its verisimilitude and incongruity works to blur the boundaries of what fiction is, and why they are ‘believing’ it. A sense of trespass or voyeurism into what is being presented as private or censored testimony, therefore, may create further implicit tension, through the discomfort of a covert reading—an experience, in fiction, that may be scintillating because it is discomforting, rather than in spite of it.

The incorporation of intercalated documents.

While the sense of secretly trespassing on a ‘private’ document provides one transgressive tension, another is provoked through the mimetic authority material documents possess. Documents headed with official-looking letterhead, for example, or which take the form of a police interview or a series of legal demands, claim such an authority and set up a particular tension in the receiver, because real documents possess

¹¹⁷ Duyfhuizen, "Diary Narratives in Fact and Fiction." p 171

¹¹⁸ Kym Brindle, *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction Diaries and Letters* (London : Palgrave Macmillan UK : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). pp 21—35

their own material power and gravitas, as anyone who has ever received a court summons, divorce papers or a speeding infringement in the mail can testify. The rising death rates on the official parish records included in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, for example, tell their own ominous story, because charts, graphs and statistics need minimal textual intervention to carry their message; as the starkly simple pictographic images of the rising infection rates of the present-day COVID epidemic also illustrate. These incorporated other documents such as maps, lists and reports may be entirely fake, as we can see in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, or verifiably real, as in the Bills of Mortality included in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, or sometimes both, as in Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, which uses both real and fake newspaper reports interwoven into the text, and ostensibly mimics the tone, grammar and punctuation conventions of its subject's historically authentic 'Jerilderie Letter'¹¹⁹.

This technique of intercalation gained in popularity as the epistolary form developed and print media became the norm during its literary history, where newspaper clippings and other public documents were presented alongside textual entries to increase verisimilitude and create narrative structure. Mary Shelley in 1818, for instance, devised a framing device of using letters to privilege the primary narrator's knowledge of features of the plot they could not have known otherwise in her novel *Frankenstein* (1818),¹²⁰ when a scientific explorer writes of his encounter with a dying Victor Frankenstein while attempting to reach the South Pole, and records the doctor's narrative and confessions in the process. By 1897, almost eighty years later, Bram Stoker radically composed his novel *Dracula*¹²¹ entirely of letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, telegrams, ships' log entries, transcripts from dictation cylinders and the personal notes of characters. A great deal of suspense in this compilation of documents is generated through the innocence of the narrative reporters of the significance of the events they are reporting on, while the reader, piecing together a more complete picture through the assembled evidence collated, experiences the sensation of dread and foreboding that dramatic irony can bring. One such fragmented account, allegedly stored in a bottle in a dead man's clothing, is included in the manuscript as the entries which become disjointed, terrified jottings:

¹¹⁹ Ned Kelly, *The Jerilderie letter / Ned Kelly*; edited and introduced by Alex McDermott, ed. Alex McDermott (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001).

¹²⁰ H. Bloom, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Facts On File, Incorporated, 2013).

¹²¹ B. Stoker, *Dracula* (Lightning Source, 2009).

I dared not go below, I dared not leave the helm, so here all night I stayed, and in the dimness of the night I saw it, Him! God, forgive me, but the mate was right to jump overboard [...] If we are wrecked, mayhap this bottle may be found, and those who find it may understand....¹²²

The genre of 'horror' based on this kind of helpless knowledge on the part of the reader as they collaborate in interpreting accreting information they are unable to 'warn' characters about became a staple motif; less than 80 years after Stoker's famous text Stephen King took on the same epistolary techniques of the incorporation of police transcripts, and news reports and realistic-seeming documents in his debut gothic horror classic *Carrie*.¹²³

Each of these texts made up of intercalated documents require, to some extent, that a reader is prepared to read between the lines to find narrative progression. The technique, as Brindle states, 'foregrounds a degree of writerly authority from within the text, but also places emphasis on the reader's role in decoding the narrative.'¹²⁴ The arrangement, inclusion or assemblage of these documents operates, therefore, as an invitation to readers to create their own internal chronology and eventual narrative coherence based on the arrangement and make-up of the documents. *Up the Down Staircase* (1964) by Bel Kaufman¹²⁵, a portrayal of an urban American high school which is made up of collated documents such as memos, notes dropped in the trash can, student papers, lesson plans, class achievement graphs, notes from students, letters to a friend from college and the like, operates in this way. In this work, a teacher strives to teach well in deteriorating circumstances, reflected in the contents of the collated documents. This skillfully-arranged compendium requires the reader to discover the story, (or the 'understory') through charting a narrative line via these documents, from the narrator's initial illusion to eventual disillusion. This text exemplifies the fictional diary form's capacity to operate on two planes simultaneously, both in external presentation of the artefact and its content and the inferential reading required to 'believe' that this written artefact is the product of a singular narratorial consciousness. The narrative locus shifts from an expectation of 'plot' to this representation of consciousness, only 'knowable' through what they have written down or gathered to

¹²² Stoker, *Dracula*. Chapter VII

¹²³ King, S. King, *Carrie* (Doubleday, 1974).

¹²⁴ Brindle, *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction Diaries and Letters*. p 6

¹²⁵ Bel Kaufman, *Up the Down Staircase* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1964).

include in their material record. Porter Abbott speaks of 'the potential of the form's intercalated mode of production to give the writing itself a causal agency in the unfolding story'¹²⁶: the drama of the 'plot', such as it is, is enacted on the page, in the process of this consciousness incrementally making entries.

INTERNAL LITERARY STRATEGIES

The power of first-person narrative fiction lies in the construction of a narratorial consciousness may carry the freight of the thematic material alluded to, obviating the need for an omniscient commentator. This was illustrated in the early fictional diaries which found such ready readerships. In *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, the diary form sets up a thematic structure of imprisonment and deliverance, underscored with epiphanic shifts in self-perception which lead to further cathartic moments. Related experiences, delivered across a temporal timeframe, provoke Crusoe's subjective responses and his gradually-accreting insights, a ubiquitous trope now in first-person fictional accounts across genres. The perception of the narrator, in other words, can create consequential narrative shifts, and when there is no external 'plot' this progression can create its own burgeoning narrative pattern.

Valerie Raoul's study 'The French Fictional Journal'¹²⁷ creates a useful taxonomy for seeing diary narrators in context with other narrators of first-person writing, including factual diaries.

	I	'I'	write	in medias res	about myself	for myself
real journal	+		+	+	+	+
memoir/confession						
novel		+	+		+	
letter novel		+	+	+	+	
interior						
monologue		+		+	+	+
fictional						
journal		+	+	+	+	+

¹²⁶ Marie-Laure Ryan, David Herman, and Manfred Jahn, *Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹²⁷ Image from: Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel*. p 5

Here Raoul differentiates the narrator in a real journal with the 'I' character construction found in a fictional journal, maintaining that apart from this essential difference, both forms feature the same characteristics: only the fictional status of the 'I' narrator defines the fictional form from the authentic form it mimics for verisimilitude. As Field comments, it becomes obvious that 'just as the act and fact of writing is a crucial difference between interior monologue and the journal, so the essential difference between real and fictional journals is the transposition of the real 'I' to a fictional persona.'¹²⁸ The formulation of this 'I' as a recognisably fictive persona writing *in medias res* about themselves, and for themselves, then, creates a workable framework to begin looking at strategies possible in the depiction of that narrative persona.

The elements which make a fictional diary distinctive from more general first-person fiction, therefore, become stylistic strategies and opportunities for characterisation. A fictional diary as a 'found' artefact, for example, capitalises on the act of writing as a supposed act of externalisation, best exemplified in a character not only preoccupied with self but with the urgent desire to express that preoccupation. The temporal framework of the diary allows its staggered entries to slowly accrete and chart progression in self-representation, the 'stream of consciousness' first-person tropes of self-analysis, self-justification and self-awareness become a process worked out on the page, and discernable in the record remaining. The intermittent nature of the entries, elisions, gaps and spaces, a cloistered narrator or an occluded, unreliable viewpoint may all be considered as potential devices to not just create verisimilitude but to actually structure and propel the dramatic arc of the narrative. Several forms particular to the fictional diary may then be turned to advantage in depiction of this narratorial persona.

Immediacy and tension through the act of writing

A major challenge in the diary form which may be usefully exploited as a strategy in fictional diaries is what Field calls the act and fact of writing; the attention within the text paid to the act of writing by the narrator. This epistolarity, as I have stated, is what separates the diary artefact from other forms of first-person narrative fiction in which the reader is granted the illusion of access to the character's inner

¹²⁸ Field, *Form and Dunction in the Diary Novel*. p 5

thoughts via stream of consciousness, interior monologue or free indirect discourse – the staples of modernist psychological portrayal. In fictional diaries, on the other hand, the illusion to be maintained is that this narratorial consciousness is not thinking, but writing, making the record remaining the tangible artefact the reader has now come to hold. The page, therefore, becomes the locus of plot, action and dramatic tension. This epistolarity becomes textual evidence to provoke interpretive activity on the part of the reader; if the work has the appearance of discontinuity, disorder, fragmentation or inclusion of other documents, this demands interpretation as a representation of either the narratorial psyche or the work of another fictive agent. The result is a complex set of inferences on the part of the reader, who draws their own suppositions and reading strategies from the artefact. This strategy is 'collusive'¹²⁹, whereby a reader apprehends this narratorial fictional representation as a device created by an author to alert them to the necessity of navigating the text as an intentionally-structured whole with its own narrative unity and coherence.

This strategy speaks to the problems of rendering simultaneity and the difficulties to credibility of a diarist writing 'in medias res', in the thick of action, where the illusion of there being no gap between the event and the rendering of it is almost impossible to do plausibly. Instead, as H. Porter Abbott states, 'the principal advantage of diary fiction on this score is *the immediacy of the writing itself*, however variable its distance from the action'¹³⁰. While these reactions and recountings may have taken place in the narrator's past, they are written in the immediate present of the diary-writing, and this non-retrospective procedure, Porter Abbott claims, 'with its potential for heightening our awareness of the process of writing and with the possibilities it affords of allowing an alteration of the narrator's point of view *over the course of narration*, can convert the narration itself into a kind of action.'¹³¹ Textual evidence of 'crises of honesty, deception, passion as that mind reflects not only on itself but on everyone and everything else'¹³² can clearly be seen Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938)¹³³, in which a diary form is utilised secretly by the narrator Roquentin to emphasise that within its pages, he is sincere and incapable of self-deception. His diary seems to mirror his own

¹²⁹ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*. p 6

¹³⁰ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 29

¹³¹ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 29

¹³² Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 30

¹³³ J.P. Sartre, R. Howard, and J. Wood, *Nausea* (New Directions, 2013).

inner state, finding his disorganised notebook the only authentic mode of composition in which he can record his attempts to keep pace with the present, constantly imitating what he calls 'the jerky, incoherent aspect'¹³⁴ of his life. These disruptions are recorded as immediate sensations: 'The body lives by itself once it has begun. But though I am the one who continues it, unrolls it. I exist. How serpentine is this feeling of existing, I unwind it, slowly. ... If I could keep myself from thinking!'¹³⁵ The book he ends up writing, which he attempts as a true mirror of lived experience, ends up being not the pure novel he hopes for, but a record instead of his own psychic disorder and discontinuity. For the reader, the accreting depiction of his psychological disintegration has become the real 'story'.

In fictional diaries and accounts, while the narrator may be recounting events which have brought them to their current state, they are also uncertain of a final outcome, and the reader is placed in the same state of anticipation and ignorance of outcome as the narrator. The pressures of this tend to become progressively more evident as the reader reads; this uncertainty and tension, in fact, may well be the central reason an account is being made in the first place. This is evident in Ned Kelly's progressively more urgent attempts to set his own record straight in *True History of the Kelly Gang* about the events leading to his criminal behaviour as he sees his options for escape dwindle.

This feature in which final ends are unknown differentiates diary and journal texts from retrospective writing such as memoir and autobiography, and in fact illustrates a major device of fiction in that it allows an author to create the illusion of writing 'to the moment' as an attempt to represent consciousness, rather than event. Hilary Mantel claims this immediacy differentiates the work of the novelist from the historian: 'Unlike the historian, the novelist doesn't operate through hindsight. She lives inside the consciousness of her characters for whom the future is a blank.'¹³⁶ When the illusion is maintained that this is a representation of a character committing their thoughts to the page over time, dramatic tension is borne out of the narrator grappling with time in the continuous present as they make their record. The tension in a fictional diary is bound up in the act of writing where both anticipatory and retrospective

¹³⁴ Sartre, Howard, and Wood, *Nausea*. pp 12—13

¹³⁵ Sartre, Howard, and Wood, *Nausea*. p 170

¹³⁶ Geoff Dyer, "'Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction'," (London (UK): Guardian News & Media Limited, 2015).

references are juxtaposed, because the immediate act of writing becomes a locus of drama in itself.

The writing 'self' as a self-reflexive entity

The 'writing self' in a fictional diary appears as improvisatory and unselfconscious because the diarist is, as Porter Abbott claims, 'writing with emotional immediacy, unrestrained by a concern for an audience beyond himself and sharply attentive, because of his form, to the molecular details of the present.'¹³⁷ The narrator and their account, become the subject of the text, making them essentially reflexive; the illusion generally being that this unselfconsciously-revealed self is sincere and 'authentic'. The strategy of reflexivity allows for delineations of that recorded and mediated 'self' which then creates opportunities for the psychological progressions to create narrative out of a mixture of sincerity and self-deception. Martens suggests that the urge to write, particularly 'in medias res', 'implies a state of turmoil or excitement, an inability to predict the future, an urge to master and purge overwhelming experiences or intense emotions'¹³⁸ and it is clear that the preoccupation with 'self' and the urge to write combine to produce a character who may appear to both consciously and inadvertently reveal themselves to the reader. The diary presents itself in this way as an invitation to readers to infer, deduce and predict the truth or sincerity of those emotional states, positioning themselves to 'become attuned to situating themselves as intrigued voyeur to a narrator preoccupied with 'self''¹³⁹. This allows an author to focus and intensify a reader's attention on how the narrator's self-perception is dictating the course of narrative progress, under the impact of whatever duress their conditions cause them.

Isolation and the 'bell-jar of self-communion.'

Intrinsically related to the self-reflexive narrator, in my view, is the strategy of creating a state of isolation or cloistering for the narrative persona. Not every fictional diary utilizes this strategy, but I find it of great interest because the diary form is

¹³⁷ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 24

¹³⁸ Martens, *The Diary Novel*. p 3

¹³⁹ Martens, *The Diary Novel*. p 51

recognised as a location for self-conscious disclosure and secret-keeping, so the fictional diary may readily use this characteristic for verisimilitude. The trope of imposing isolation upon the diarist is useful in augmenting the narrator's unselfconscious representation, and alternatively to impose pressures of this continued isolation, whereby as Abbott Porter states: 'whatever growth or failure to grow takes place does so within a bell jar of self-communion.'¹⁴⁰ In creating the condition of physical and psychological isolation, and in making the account immediate and impressionistic instead of retrospective, the author is able to intensify the reader's concentration and direct attention on what Abbott calls

the central narrative figure's private drama of self-awareness. These fictional writers [...] are essentially writing to themselves. The text we read [...] is a means by which the writer either discovers a new self or shores up an old one. And the unique dramatic character of these works stems from the contest between these alternatives.¹⁴¹

Various motives or reasons for cloistering, secrecy or clandestine record-keeping may be employed to heighten this effect. The duress of possible discovery may create valid psychological pressure on the character, so that this urgency or fear of discovery may be not only a thematic motif, but one which characterises the diarist's style of writing. Richardson, for example, has Pamela state at the outset that she intends to keep a journal so that she will be able to look back on her conduct at some later date, and learn from it. Defoe's H.F. stressed that he felt an obligation to keep a record of the plague he witnesses ravaging his city because God seemed to have spared him for the task. Carey's Ned Kelly speaks of the psychological loneliness of trying to attend to his 'true history' as the other members of his gang sleep, leaving him to commune with the idea of his unborn daughter: 'while the boys lay quiet as dogs wrapped up in their coats I sat with my backside in a puddle my oilskin above my candle & my paper. I begun again they could not prevent it.'¹⁴² Psychic and/or physical isolation becomes a potent locus for the restless narrator driven to create a record, and the external world is refracted through the lens of this awareness. Porter Abbott points out: 'Their solitude is a continual refrain among the keepers of such texts, particularly as they seek in the variable mirrors of their

¹⁴⁰ Abbott, "Letters to the Self: The Cloistered Writer in Nonretrospective Fiction."

¹⁴¹ Abbott, "Letters to the Self: The Cloistered Writer in Nonretrospective Fiction."

¹⁴² Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 430

diaries some genuine image of themselves [...] A condition of the drama in these reflexive works is acknowledgment of the objective world [...] that carries on independently of the writer's consciousness.'¹⁴³ The act of record-keeping may be seen as an attempt to break out of the psychological 'echo chamber' of diaristic isolation, or as a wish to establish some kind of connection other than 'radio silence' with the world. Field remarks upon the potency of this trope: 'For the lonely, isolated individual, mentally barricaded behind a rampart of pages even if not physically locked away, the journal does become the most intimate part of existence.'¹⁴⁴

Perhaps the character losing control of their own sense of sanity writes to actively try to escape that echo chamber. Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* (1835)¹⁴⁵ depicts its narrator as a government clerk gradually descending into madness. Within the temporal framework of the narrative chronicling this progression, this narrator begins rationally enough, recording his frustrations and humiliations, but a rising obsession with his work superior's daughter leads to gradually increasing hallucinations. Finally, he believes himself to be the rightful king of Spain, whose enemies have conspired to engineer his exile. Intermittent interludes of lucidity provide an unsettling counterpoint to his deepening psychosis, and soon the dates of the narrator's entries, begun in a logical progression, become disordered and non-sequential: 'The Year 2000, April 43rd', 'Marchember 86' and ultimately 'no date. the day had no date.'¹⁴⁶ Here both self-reflexivity and isolation delineate the claustrophobic state of the individual's mind, while the scrambled dating and intermittent time structure allow the reader to notice immediate changes in the protagonist's views and the degradation of rational 'sanity', allowing what Barbara Johnson identifies as the 'contradictions, obscurities, ambiguities, incoherencies, discontinuities, ellipses, interruptions, repetitions, and plays of the signifier'¹⁴⁷ which a reader may encounter in a text when alert to narrative disorder as representative of consciousness imaginings. Textual disorder and inattention to dates, punctuation, etc., may be 'read' and interpreted as part of this psychic duress, as can be seen in the fictional diaries of Sartre and Gogol. If dated entries are used, intermittent gaps in time may be

¹⁴³ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 45

¹⁴⁴ Field, *Form and Function in the Diary Novel* p 159

¹⁴⁵ N.V. Gogol, A.R. MacAndrew, and L. Stilman, *The Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* (Penguin Putnam, Incorporated, 1960).

¹⁴⁶ Gogol, MacAndrew, and Stilman, *The Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. p 24—26

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Johnson, "Rigorous Unreliability," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (1984), <https://doi.org/10.1086/448288>. p 279

exploited to signal that the fictional diarist is forgetful, ill, physically absent, or unable to write for some reason. Here it can be seen that strategies such as this go beyond verisimilitude, and actually function to create character dimension, plot, structure and suspense.

The depiction of psychological alteration.

The diary's essentially periodic structure, however it is mimetically represented, necessarily charts some narrative depiction of change, a framework which operates not just in fictional diaries, but in all fiction; the central question driving reader engagement becomes, as Abbott claims: 'will the protagonist's self-conception change?'¹⁴⁸ This locus is found not so much in the secretive internal 'self' or the external presentation of a masked identity, but the contest between these two states made dramatic through the writing process itself. A narrative character in a fictional work is perceived to undergo a process of burgeoning self-awareness which creates a discernable 'arc' through a story. In the fictional diary form, as I have suggested, the artefact itself becomes a record of that contested space. Because the act of writing is necessarily performative, a 'voice' is seen to be at work: 'voiced' in the sense that it is expressively committed to the page rather than merely 'thought', and this defines why the epistolary or diary form creates such a specific effect on the narrative character's development. The extent of the effect is gauged by how much the character is altered by the experience of attempting to record their own physical and psychological states and changes.

Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*¹⁴⁹ (short story 1959, novel 1966) achieves these ends through the characteristic tropes of non-retrospective narration where the narrator does not know the outcome of events and imminent alterations in store, thereby charting accreting psychological changes discernible to the reader but not always the narrator. Posing as the private journal of an intellectually disabled janitor at a research facility who temporarily becomes a super-genius during a medical experiment, the text is made up entirely of entries in a diary which Charlie says he has been encouraged to keep as part of this experiment. His intellectual and psychological rise and fall are charted through changes in grammar, punctuation and style in the entries as he writes his

¹⁴⁸ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 37

¹⁴⁹ D. Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon* (1972). <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=Fgn65IL3q4wC>.

‘progris ripots’¹⁵⁰, illustrating his concurrent rising and falling competencies and self-awareness.

Dramatic irony is created as Charlie's cognitive flowering and inevitable faltering: the lapses, spelling errors and growing confusion with the process is observed and anticipated more clearly by the reader than by Charlie himself. Suspense and verisimilitude are augmented by Charlie sincerely relating what his doctors are telling him according to his own limited understanding: ‘I asked Dr Straus if Ill beat Algernon in the race after the operashun and he said maybe. If the operashun works Ill show that mouse I can be as smart as he is. Maybe smarter. Then Ill be abel to read better and spell the words good [...] If it works perminint they will make everybody smart all over the world.’¹⁵¹ The tangible changes evident in the entries create drama through unknown outcomes, from a baseline of occluded, 'retarded' self-insight: ‘They said you know it will probly be tempirery. I said yes. Miss Kinnian told me. I don’t care if it herts’.¹⁵² But as his intelligence level rises, the entries become longer, more detailed, and more tortured: ‘I have a feeling of shame burning inside me. This intelligence has driven a wedge between me and all the people I once knew and loved. Before, they laughed at me and despised me for my ignorance and dullness, now, they hate me for my knowledge and understanding. What in God’s name do they want of me?’¹⁵³ The increase in his I.Q. incrementally affects his record, allowing him insight as he, as Porter Abbott suggests above, becomes a reader of his own record: ‘I have often reread my progress reports and seen the illiteracy, the childish naivete, the mind of low intelligence, peering from a dark room, through a keyhole, at the dazzling light outside.’¹⁵⁴

While Charlie is the narrative consciousness responsible for the record, it is the laboratory mouse Algernon who features as his 'double'—experimented upon, made to run mazes, evaluated in much the same way Charlie is. When Algernon dies, Charlie realises he is witnessing his own metaphorical demise, and he contemplates suicide even as his awareness of the significance of this journal for posterity is paramount in his mind: ‘It’s hard to throw off thoughts of suicide. I keep telling myself how important

¹⁵⁰ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 285

¹⁵¹ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 287

¹⁵² Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 286

¹⁵³ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 297

¹⁵⁴ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 299

this introspective journal will be.’¹⁵⁵ His entries become disconnected and lethargic, mirroring what he has witnessed in Algernon but seemingly unaware of the resemblance now, and as his faculties decline, the slipping-away of a consistent temporal framework affects his diligence in keeping a dated record, reflecting how his concept of time passing is becoming progressively more hazy until the diary ends with Charlie’s cognitive and literacy levels back where they were at the beginning of the story, and his previous existential ‘self’ and its transformed state now forgotten: ‘Its easy to make frends if you let pepul laff at you. Im going to have lots of frends where I go.’¹⁵⁶ This diary is a good example of the intimacy and tension created through the narrator making manifest their own psychological ‘arc’ in incremental dated entries on the page, emphasizing the powerful illusion of the artefact as an autonomous document ‘left’ by this character. The alterations in Charlie’s record, charted and implicitly understood by the reader, increase the pathos of the dramatic irony in the work’s narrative progression. Charlie’s dread of deterioration and prediction of his own imminent faltering is in part brought about by the act and enactment of writing the diary itself, an undertaking infused with its own urgency and sense of dedication to the task.

This speaks to the diary form’s ability to shift the drama of an external ‘plot’ to the plane of the psychological and locate dramatic impetus out of epistolarity. In the absence or diminishment of an external inciting incident—and many diaries are predicated on their authors being confined or cloistered in order to heighten the sense of secrecy and urgency—this charting of psychological change in the narrative persona operates as a device to order a collection of ad hoc journal entries as a unified literary artefact, shaped around the possibility of psychological transformation and flux. As Abbott maintains: ‘such narratives being written instead of voiced or thought (as one finds in monologue or interior monologue), they become independent documentary objects capable of exerting an influence on their creators [...] the writing itself can assist or impede change in the writer and thus help to determine the outcome of the tale – even as it renders the tale.’¹⁵⁷ Abbott’s further claim that a central question of the text for a reader is ‘will the protagonist’s self-perception change?’ in turn begs the question ‘when?’

¹⁵⁵ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 303

¹⁵⁶ Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*. p 306

¹⁵⁷ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 39

Unreliability.

Typical of most memoirs, factual diaries and journals is a recounting of select events in a definite chronology through which the reader is required to create the larger canvas of elements of life as it is lived. This recounting may be more or less scrupulous, subjective or biased depending on the narrator recounting the events. In a fictional diary, where this is mimetically reproduced for verisimilitude, the alleged narrator makes a record which can be assumed by a reader to be subjective, incomplete or otherwise impeded. The key difference is that in a fictional diary the reader must deduce whether information is being provided fallibly and infallibly by the *narrator*, whereas in a memoir, autobiography or factual diary they must decide on whether the information is being provided fallibly or infallibly by the *author*. A reader attuned to unreliability as a device may be effectively alerted to 'reading' this narrator's fluctuating self-perception as a signifier of the narrator being deluded, limited or 'unreliable' in some way. The condition is then created where the reader feels they know something the fictional narrator does not—the powerful device of dramatic irony, which is intrinsically bound up with the apprehension of unreliability generated as an intentional authorial device.

The definition of narrative unreliability made standard in literary theory by Wayne Booth¹⁵⁸ explains the reader's sense that he or she is not being told what 'really' happened in the fictional world of the story, but is being shown a version made by an authorial entity. James Phelan's influential study of unreliable narrators describes different types of fictional unreliability in terms of specific textual characteristics as well as the way it is perceived on the part of its readers, breaking unreliable narration down into categories whereby the reader must either reject the narrator's account of events and reconstruct an alternative, or look beyond the narrator's viewpoint and supplement it. Phelan observes that a given narrator 'can be unreliable in different ways at different points in his or her narration' and 'once any unreliability is detected all the narration is suspect.'¹⁵⁹ This distinction is highly relevant to the fictional diary form and its dual

¹⁵⁸ Wayne C. Booth, *The rhetoric of fiction* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1983).

¹⁵⁹ J. Phelan, *Living to Tell about it: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Cornell University Press, 2005). p 53

layers of both external textual presentation and internal representation of the narratorial consciousness.

I consider the apprehension of narrative unreliability key to the perception of the narrator as a fictional entity. Currie also articulates the separate and distinguishable status of the author and the narrator in terms of who is ostensibly responsible for the text as key to apprehending the fictional status of the narrator, stating:

insofar as the implied author is held responsible for creating story events by creating the work representing those events, he or she cannot get it wrong as to what happens in the story. Only a narrator can get it wrong, since he or she is charged simply with recounting story events, and his or her recounting may be more or less accurate [...] we need to recognise two different sets of intentions at work, belonging to two different agents—the intentions of the implied author and the intentions of the narrator concerning what he or she would have us believe is true in the story.¹⁶⁰

In other words, there needs to be a suspension of disbelief operating in the reader so that they can maintain the belief in the illusion that the narrator is ostensibly responsible for the text while simultaneously understanding that a different agent – the actual author—is genuinely responsible for it. If this understanding of two separate agents is disrupted, the suspicion of unreliability reverts to the author. To allow an inferential 'reading' of the narrative persona seen to be responsible for the creation of the text, then, a reader's alertness to these conditions as strategies rather than accidental slip-ups on the part of the author is paramount.

I see dramatic irony, a key source of inferential engagement in fiction, as predicated on the depiction of inadvertent self-revelation. A narrator's lack of self-insight into their own condition, as we can see from diary texts such as *Flowers for Algernon*, *Diary of a Madman*, *Nausea*, and many humorous diaries like *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, is like the Swiss Army Knife of literary techniques; it can be utilized to create a range of dramatic, comic or poignant effects based on a mixture of conscious and inadvertent self-revelation on the part of the narrative persona. When this inadvertent self-revelation is attributable to the author however rather than the narrator, the effect is quite different. As Monika Fludernik identifies:

¹⁶⁰ Currie, 'Unreliability Refigured': Narrative in Literature and Film *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53:1, 1995 p 20

When it comes to the status of the narrator, factual texts may also have unreliable narrators, but this lack of reliability stems from the ignorance or involuntary blindness of the authors. While factual texts may have authors-narrators who are liars (we have only to think about fake news and propaganda), they are not wilfully and openly unreliable. A factual text in which the author-narrator declares himself to be a liar is almost inconceivable —indeed, with most pseudofactual artefacts, the reader must take sides with the author-character.

Such a choice is inseparable from the phenomenon of belief.¹⁶¹

Unreliability as a fictional trope in this reading activates and consolidates the apprehension of intentional design rather than authorial ‘slip-up’. Being in the presence of a real memoirist who is a paranoid egomaniac, for example, is a very different narratorial proposition from a fictional narrator burdened by the same paranoid egomania. The moral ambiguity Nabokov conjures in the voice of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*¹⁶² is an example of an author playing with compromised fallibility as a deliberate and highly-skilled strategy, but if *Lolita* were a memoir, and Humbert the real author, this view of narratorial character sitting in jail depicting his obsession with a twelve-year-old girl as some grand romantic adventure would be entirely different. Unreliability in the author can also be seen as dishonesty or fraudulence, and is one interpretation why hoax diaries created for the purposes of duping readers generate such vehement condemnation and calls for ‘unmasking’. On the other hand, unreliability in the narrator, seen as a device made by a separate authorial entity in control of textual effects, works to expose fissures of that *character’s* limitation and self-revelation, not the author’s. The narrator may appear to be obtuse or self-bamboozling about the self-contradictions that are closest to them, or in possession of faulty, naïve, occluded or wilfully biased viewpoints. They may be ‘read’ as self-deceiving or even unbalanced; their psychological state is deduced by the reader based entirely on the record they have made and the implications of its creation, and readers enjoy hearing the story filtered through their skewed perspectives because while the narrator may assume they are successfully manipulating their reader, the reader sees ‘through’ them to infer and interpret characterization.

¹⁶¹ Monika Fludernik. 'Pseudofactual Narratives and Signposts of Factuality' chapter in *Narrative Factuality* p 589

¹⁶² V. Nabokov, *Lolita*, Penguin Modern Classics, (London U.K.: Penguin Books Limited, 2012).

Utilising the fictional device of dramatic irony through these means, the narrator may disguise a motive for writing from themselves, but they ideally are not able to disguise this motive from the attentive reader. I consider this particular device one of the most useful in diary fiction in that it involves the supposed keeping of a subjective and ‘private’ record, where the nexus of sincerity and self-deception is there as textual evidence on the page—suspended somewhere between the rhetorical, rational, deliberate soliloquy created through the act of recording and writing, and the associative, illogical, spontaneous and unmediated thought processes of a plausible consciousness. An unreliable narrator serves, in this way, as a key signifier of fictionality in the form.

Further hypothetical possibilities.

The literary strategy of foregrounding unreliability as a signifier of a character’s fictional status opens up many layers of representation which may be capitalized upon in an expressive first-person account such as a fictional diary. The dual layers of artifice in the artefact suggests that the fragmentary assemblage of the text itself may be used to mirror the nature of the psyche responsible for its production, a strategy which presents all kinds of possibilities in terms of this representation becoming the locus for narrative shaping. The fragmentary and discontinuous textual presentation characteristic of the fictional diary may be ‘read’ and interpreted as representative of narrative psychological fragmentation and discontinuity, described by LeJeune as ‘a series of entries with their own morphology [in] a continuum by which their discontinuities and irregularities can be gauged.’¹⁶³ Lejeune lists the characteristics of factual diaries which make textual continuity difficult as ‘Discontinuous /Full of gaps /Allusive /Redundant and repetitive /Non-narrative’.¹⁶⁴ In a fictional diary, textual disorder may signal psychological disorder, and the difficulties Lejeune outlines may be effectively strategized to represent psychological states of confusion, incoherence, avoidance or disintegration, as Gogol’s *Diary of a Madman* illustrates. Everything about an entry such as: ‘April 43rd 2000. Today is the day of great triumph. There is a king of Spain. He has been found at last. That king is me. I only discovered this today. Frankly, it all came to me in a flash of

¹⁶³ Lejeune and Center, *On Diary*. p 78

¹⁶⁴ Lejeune and Center, *On Diary*. p 170

lightning¹⁶⁵, from the disordered dating to the tone, signifies delusion, grandiosity and a break with temporal order and sense, illustrates the narrator's psychic disintegration and increasingly panicked attempts to self-correct. The textual appearance, spelling, punctuation and grammar of Charlie's entries in *Flowers for Algernon* also describe a mirroring narrative 'arc' of limitation, unwelcome insight and a return to limitation in the cognitive capacities of its narrator, with fluctuating self-awareness into this state.

Lejeune, in speaking of his own diary practice, alludes to the gaps and elisions that tend to make up the entries of a psychological record as 'a piece of lacework or a spider web [...] made up of more empty space than filled space' full of associative ideas and illusions which create their own shape: 'The discontinuous made explicit refers to an implicit continuum to which I alone hold the key, and one that does not require any numbering system.'¹⁶⁶ These gaps, indeterminacies and spaces require associative leaps on the part of the reader as they interpret this shifting representation of consciousness. Lejeune identifies a central paradox in epistolarity which I suggest may be strategized here. As modernist fictional 'stream of consciousness' texts acknowledge and exploit for artistic ends, the human mind tends not to operate with order and clarity. It skips, elides, makes and breaks images, circles and ruminates on unresolved material, leaps in associative ways that transcribed sentences can only suggest. In creating a mimetic text like a fictional diary, the paradox therefore lies in creating a structure which does not feel like a 'random compilation' but as a unified document intentionally ordered and constructed by the author, while at the same time creating a text that attempts to represent the disordered way a genuine human consciousness 'thinks'.

In *The Act of Reading* Wolfgang Iser posits that fictional characters and their implied motivations are interpreted and extrapolated upon by a reader in 'gap-filling activity activated by the text's indeterminacies'.¹⁶⁷ In this activity, a fine balancing act of expository information and implicit material is maintained whereby a character's inner world may be rendered credible through the manipulation of these gaps, omissions and avoidances, which the reader interprets as evidence of all that cannot be stated by this disordered consciousness. A reader of a fictional diary, in the absence of straightforward retrospective plot development, is instead prompted to actively seek out an alternative

¹⁶⁵ Gogol, MacAndrew, and Stilman, *The Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. p 23

¹⁶⁶ P. Lejeune. 'On Diary' p 181

¹⁶⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). pp 170—179

‘implicit continuum’ in the text through what is there, arranged and ordered for their attention, and what is not there, highlighted by the gaps and indeterminacies which demand inferential reading. They are encouraged, as Barbara Johnson claims, ‘to seek narrative coherence through watching and listening for how patterns and repetitions emerge on the psychological plane of self-representation.’¹⁶⁸ This strategy of creating a text which is fragmentary, incomplete and contradictory, again, is a staple of contemporary first-person narration, but is brought to full fruition in the fictional diary, where the artefact is composed entirely not of what the narratorial consciousness is ‘thinking’ but of the record they have left: not an unmediated representation of a psyche in action, but a representation of the dramatic enactment of making a record. That record, plausibly, is a fallible and infallible testament to psychological flux, and reader alert to authorial intentions around depictions of the narratorial persona is provoked to interpret gaps, silences and juxtapositions as strategic rather than random or accidental, as Suzanne Keen states: ‘[A] reader's activities of framing, problem-solving when confronted with gaps, and juggling previously framed, newly corrected, and discarded but remembered hypotheses about narratives, specifies key stages for the involvement of the emotions in narrative.’¹⁶⁹ If a diary narrator jumps from subject to subject, for example, fails to make entries on a strictly chronological basis, or contradicts herself, these elements may be ‘read’ as emotional volatility, discontinuity and contradictions, and work to suggest a psyche under the escalating pressure of some burgeoning tension.

Other writers may take these hypotheses in different directions when analysing diary fiction from a writerly perspective, but the depiction and delineation of these gaps which create the negative space of the journal, charged as they are with the psychic pressures of the narrator maintaining the record, create, in my opinion, the most potent and nuanced narrative possibilities in this form.

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Johnson, ‘Rigorous Unreliability’ *Critical Enquiry* magazine, (1984 University of Chicago Press) p 279.

¹⁶⁹ Suzanne Keen. *Empathy and the Novel* p 37

CHAPTER THREE: THE REAL AND THE FAKE: PARODIES AND HOAXES.

In which Much Is Assumed viz readerly apprehension of fictionality and the saving power of Good Humour. Your correspondent ponders aloud whether the Pleasure is obtained from being In On The Joke, and the Indignation, Conversely, from being betrayed viz: Expectations; and what this may show us regarding the Double Response toward Illusion & Sleight of Hand. Do we CHOOSE to be so Hoodwinked?

Parodic fictional diaries, clearly, are also ‘metafictional’ documents in that they draw deliberate attention to form for diverse ends – to make fun of it or mock it, to create a kind of elaborate in-joke or to create a hoax document which fools the reading public. In a literary form already posing as something else, the possibility of ambiguity or ‘misreading’ of textual clues and cues is always present, and the suspicion that the document may be a hoax or a sham forms part of the inferential reading of such a work. There is a difference, however, between a text created as a metafictional joke and one made as a deliberate attempt to deceive an audience into believing it is an authentic epistolary work by a real person. I see the characteristically indignant reception when a hoax diary is unmasked as related to a perceived rupture of the readerly contract created when the separation of author and narrator is confused, conflated or deliberately disguised, particularly for money-making ends.

Parody essentially mocks contrivance by drawing attention to it, in taking some perceived characteristic of an artform and, through pushing it to hyperbolic or ludicrous effect, making a humorous and exaggerated imitation of them. Through this imitation, authors of parodies also implicitly mock the authors of the original works, drawing overt attention to stylistic weaknesses, idiosyncratic traits and subject matter. Satire, in fact, may mock the whole endeavour or fashion of a form, and in doing so poke fun, by inference, at its audiences or readers. This may account for the sensitivity and often indignant vehemence of reading audiences who feel themselves ‘fooled’ and slighted by hoaxes, although exposing patterns of assumption, reception and cultural ‘blind spots’ through parody has a long and distinguished history, and satirisation is a much-loved form of exposing those cultural faultlines. The humour of parody, of course, depends on who is doing the laughing and who is being ‘skewered’ and made to appear ludicrous.

A fictional diary may also, via some readings, be viewed as a ‘hoax’ text in that it is posing as something authentic when it is actually an imitation of that form. Fiction itself, by this reading, is also one big hoax, especially narrative fiction which involves a ‘real’-seeming narrative character. The ‘suspension of disbelief’ that is required to temporarily set aside suspicion of pretence and deceptive agendas in order to take part in the collaborative process of believing in what is known on some level to be a construction is clearly related to the perception of deception for aesthetic ends, and a text which is seen to be defrauding a reader for nefarious or exploitative ends tends to shatter this state of ‘suspension.’

It is worth making mention of some of the chief ways in which diary fiction has been parodied in its history to illustrate the challenges and particularities of form have made it a target for satirisation in the first place, because an examination of what is parodied, and how, throws into relief the chief narrative strategies which define the form in terms of this thesis. An examination of why some diary artefacts are judged parodies and some outright hoaxes is also useful in delineating my claim that, in the collusive ‘dance’ of authorial intentionality and readerly expectation, a key indeterminacy and locus of potential ambiguity lies in the apprehension of the author of the text and the narrator of the text as two separate entities, and that this apprehension is informed by narrative unreliability.

A parody of a literary form or its characteristics points firstly to that form’s popularity, in that it needs a reading public who will ‘get’ the joke of what is being parodied. It also sheds light on the form’s intrinsic and recognisable difficulties and challenges; aspects which may make it ripe for satirisation. Every noteworthy form of prose narrative, according to Wallace Martin, has evoked a parody of its own materials and methods at some stage, so perhaps being parodied should be seen as a badge of honour: ‘Jonathon Swift satirizes the improbably ‘true voyages’ of his time, Fielding parodies Richardson, and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* leaves the very idea of telling a story in shambles.’¹⁷⁰ A mere five months after the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* in April 1719, a satirical publication appeared by Charles Gildon, titled *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. E—De F—, of London, Hosier*¹⁷¹ attempting (with many

¹⁷⁰ Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). p 43

¹⁷¹ Defoe et al., *The Novels of Daniel Defoe: Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720)*. Vol. 3.

rhetorical flourishes) to discredit Defoe for not admitting upfront that his phenomenally successful creation Robinson Crusoe was a fictional construct. Defoe's response was telling: he defended himself and his use of allegory just as eloquently, couching his indignant response in the voice of Robinson Crusoe, severely affronted at being called an invention.¹⁷² The excessively arch and theatrically outraged tone of both the accusation and its riposte suggest that perhaps the entire scandal was feigned for mutual publicity; its overblown rhetorical posturing suggests that such discourse was 'knowing' in the sense that it assumes a public readership capable of understanding irony, satire and masquerade. This tone of knowingness infuses parody more generally – to be 'in the know' assumes the comprehension of in-jokes, elliptical asides and references, puns and sly imitations.

The titles of works, their rhetorical or tonal mannerisms or the suggestion of duplicity in presentation were not the only aspects of these early works to be parodied. Problems in depicting simultaneity and immediacy in early epistolary accounts was also seen as fair game by detractors bent on mocking both the author and aspects of the form itself. Samuel Richardson's attempts to 'write to the moment' in his enormously popular *Pamela*, for example, was the very thing parodied by his contemporary (and rival) Henry Fielding in his unattributed satire *Shamela*, (1741)¹⁷³ in which the eponymous narrator attempts to write *in medias res* at ludicrously inappropriate moments:

Mrs Jervis and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come—Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the Door. You see I write in the present Tense, as Parson Williams says. Well, he is in Bed between us, we both shamming a Sleep, he steals his hand into my Bosom, which I, as if in my Sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake.¹⁷⁴

Fielding satirised the names of Richardson's characters as well as finding hyperbolic comedy in passages such as 'Parson Tickletext' exclaiming: 'Oh! I feel an Emotion even while I am relating this!'¹⁷⁵ elevating Richardson's attempts at simultaneity and immediacy to a level of ludicrousness.

¹⁷² Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*.

¹⁷³ H. Fielding and S.W. Baker, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (University of California Press, 1953).

¹⁷⁴ Fielding, 'Shamela' p 15, as cited: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/~link.aspx?_id=615A6EC53AA94D11B08C653A6D84F363&_z=z

¹⁷⁵ Haywood, Ingrassia, and Fielding, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*. Introduction.

The conventions fictional diaries relied on for their mimetic presentation was also parodied, including the pose that the artefact was wholly private and never intended to be read by anyone other than the author, despite the inherent paradox that this so-called private journal is clearly in the public sphere. By the turn of the twentieth century, the trope of the allegedly private diary made public was so common that this pose of pretended secrecy, clandestine production and disclosure was itself being mocked, as can be seen in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) where Algernon asks Cecily if he might read her diary she is coyly writing in. She refuses, saying 'it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form, I hope you will order a copy.'¹⁷⁶ Contemporaneous with this performance was the serialization of George and Weedon Grossmith's famous parody work *Diary of a Nobody* (1892)¹⁷⁷ in *Punch* magazine. In this diary, the banal quotidian entries of a Victorian-era gentleman Mr. Pooter create comedy out of banality itself, and introduce 'running jokes' across the duration of the serialization, for example the narrator's continual vexation at the way his name is misspelled when he writes tedious letters to the editor.

The Grossmiths turned the convention of a 'lost or incomplete manuscript' to their advantage when the 'diary', for delayed publication reasons, did not appear for several weeks in the magazine. Its narrator reappeared in a state of flustered annoyance after the absence, complaining to his diary (and the 'eavesdropping' reader) that a section of his entries had mysteriously disappeared. The eventual revelation that his wife had used the diary pages to light the fire mined a fruitful source of humour and irony in parodic diary fiction – the cluelessly unreliable narrator. Mr. Pooter, a man so boring people leave the room when he offers to read aloud from his journal, constantly fails to understand why nobody is interested in him and his observations in the journal. This device of making the diarist the unwitting butt of parodic jokes and their intrinsic narrative unreliability can be seen as a defining feature of humorous fictional diaries, and, in fact, a way of defining all humorous fictional diaries as parodies of real diaries, in their mimicry of authentic found artefacts.

¹⁷⁶ O. Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (L. Smithers, 1899).
<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=4HIWAAAAYAAJ>. (II, 1). p 85

¹⁷⁷ Grossmith and Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody*.

In discussing *Diary of a Nobody*, scholar Peter Morton claims parodic fictional diaries ‘emerged definitively in the late-Victorian years, when a flood of pompous, self-regarding diaries and memoirs finally drew the attention of satirists.’¹⁷⁸ He outlines humour and unreliability as the characteristics which distinguish the ‘mock-diary’ (the parody form) from the fictional diary more generally (which he terms the ‘pseudo-diary’ to distinguish it, in turn, from authentic diaries). Morton asserts that while in the fictional diary, every attempt is made to present the fiction as ‘a real diary, ostensibly written by the protagonist, and sometimes equipped with an elaborate editorial frame to reinforce its authenticity¹⁷⁹’, in the ‘mock-diary’ both the form and the narrative persona writing the diary are treated ironically, abandoning the illusion of authenticity for its own sake. These mock diaries, Morton says, ‘are intrinsically humorous in tone and always have an unreliable diarist-narrator.’¹⁸⁰ Morton’s assertion that a parodic text treats both the diary form and the diarist persona ironically embodies the necessity for a readerly ‘doubling up’: to view both the external presentation of the text and its constructed narrative persona as artful sleight-of-hand, and appreciate it as such.

Utilising the devices of a banal, reflexive and self-absorbed first-person narrator to comic and/or hyperbolic effect also partially accounts for the huge popularity of contemporary fictional diaries such as *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 ¾* (1982—2004) and *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (1996), which both feature on lists of the most popular bestsellers of all time.¹⁸¹ While Sue Townsend’s *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 ¾* began as a serialised newspaper column designed for knowing adults, and derived much of its humour, like *Diary of a Nobody* several decades earlier, from its young protagonist’s baffled yet pompous cluelessness, it has come to be recognised as a touchstone of a particular era in British history: the 1980s under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. A sequel even took Adrian into politics and, eventually, old age, with *Adrian Mole: The Wilderness Years* (1993); *Adrian Mole: The Prostrate Years* (2009) and *Adrian Mole and the weapons of mass destruction* (2012). The diary has also

¹⁷⁸ P. Morton, "Narrative Strategies in the Fictive Diary: Reader-Response Theory and the Grossmiths' *The Diary of a Nobody*" (Life Writing Symposium, Flinders University, 2006).

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*

¹⁸¹ K. Mansfield, ‘The Novels that Shaped Our World: BBC reveals 100-strong list’ *The Bookseller*, November 5th, 2019 www.thebookseller.com/news/novels-shaped-our-world-bbc-reveals-100-strong-list-1109401

been made into a TV series and a musical.¹⁸² The original diaries, hilarious in their teenage angst-ridden dramas, weave historical facts and events into the narrative only glancingly as befits such a self-absorbed narrator. 'Britain is at war with Argentina!!! Radio Four has just announced it. I am overcome with excitement,' writes Adrian on April 3rd, for example, but by 4 pm his attention is distracted by 'the most humiliating experience of my life' as he attempts to experimentally sniff the glue on the model aeroplane he's making:

I put my nose to the undercarriage and sniffed for five seconds, nothing spiritual happened but my nose stuck to the plane! My father took me to Casualty to have it removed, how I endured the laughing and sniggering I don't know. The Casualty doctor wrote 'Glue Sniffer' on my outpatient's card. I rang Pandora; she is coming round after her viola lesson. Love is the only thing that keeps me sane.¹⁸³

Adrian's pompously self-important reportage of his own adolescent angst marks much of this humorous dramatic irony – the section in which he paints his bedroom an existential black only to find the 'Noddy' wallpaper still showing through, requiring hours of work with a black marker to obliterate the bell on Noddy's hat, for example, may be enjoyed by readers of all ages. The ongoing popularity of works such as Townsend's famous series have made a contemporary trope of humorous fictional diaries designed specifically for young adult readers that also playfully dissect the often-tortuous inner world of misfit kids and teenagers lacking in self-insight, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*¹⁸⁴, *The Dork Diaries*¹⁸⁵, *Dear Dumb Diary*¹⁸⁶, *The Princess Diaries*¹⁸⁷ and a host of others. The fictional diary is now one of the predominant literary forms for young readers, following the trend of capitalising on the comedy and pathos inherent in a self-involved adolescent undertaking the project of writing a diary which attempts to present a curated public 'self' to the world. All trade heavily on their misguided and perpetually embarrassed narrator, and all make acute play of the strategy of a character

¹⁸² Marianka Swain, "The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 3/4 The Musical," *Broadway World UK* July 27 2017 (2017).

¹⁸³ S. Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*, Print. ed. (London: Puffin, 2002). p 175

¹⁸⁴ Kinney, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days*.

¹⁸⁵ R.R. Russell, *Dork Diaries* (Simon & Schuster, 2010).

¹⁸⁶ J. Benton, *Dear Dumb Diary Collection* (Scholastic, Incorporated, 2010).

¹⁸⁷ Cabot, *The Princess Diaries*.

engaged in making secret entries, treating the diary as a confidante in a world which doesn't 'get' them the way their imaginary friend, the diary itself, understands them.

In straining mimetic hyperbole as a device to call attention to itself, young adult fictional diaries in particular may be seen to constitute a whole genre built around the humorous depiction of unreliability and the dramatic irony effects it uses to its advantage. These 'mock diaries' not only utilise the fictional devices of reflexivity and unreliability for often comic ends, but the mimetic nature of secretive or private diaries themselves—in creating their diary as their confidante, their narrators make a secret confidante of their adolescent readers. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (2007–2010) has self-consciousness embedded in the title, while Margaret Peterson Haddix's *Don't You Dare Read This Mrs Dunphrey* (1996)¹⁸⁸ explicitly foregrounds the transgressive enactment of reading the private record of another in a work which deals seriously with some sensitive teenage issues.

It is interesting that these works are celebrated for their skill as 'mock' diaries, to use Morton's categorical term, rather than being accused of being hoaxes by a readership 'taken in' by their presentation. Clearly, there is no sense of the reader being mocked in their appeal—while many authors go to great lengths to present their texts as authentic diaries, incorporating doodles, drawings, images of locks and keys, intercalated and embarrassing attempts at writing song lyrics and poems, and so on, in humorous 'mock diaries' this is all taken to be part of the joke. These works tend to be interpreted and enjoyed by their readers as clearly designated works of fiction, letting a reader gratifyingly 'in' on the joke of dramatic irony, lack of self-insight and the ongoing dramas of life—the entity being gently 'mocked' is the fictional narrator, in the contrivance of their own limited awareness which works to gratify a reader's sense of their own more sophisticated purview. Into this genre-bending age of metafiction and postmodernism come diary works that parody their original source parody, such as *The Secret Diary of Boris Johnson aged 13 ¾*, released in October 2019. There's really nowhere to shelve this one except under 'Humour'—the self-referential parodic joke has nowhere else to go. A more recent Australian example, the parodic fictional diary *The Scomo Diaries: My First Eighteen Months at the Coalface* (2020)¹⁸⁹ posing as the

¹⁸⁸ M.P. Haddix, *Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1996).

¹⁸⁹ Tosh Greenslade Tosh and Weldon Andrew, *The Scomo Diaries: My First Eighteen Years at the Coalface* (Australia: Penguin Random House Australia, 2020).

‘unofficial chronicles’ of Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison, is bursting with knowing in-jokes at the expense of its predictably clueless narrator, and spells out on the opening page the dangers of taking the text at face value: ‘In case it’s not obvious to all readers, this is a work of satire, and while names may be real, the actions or statements or any person mentioned in this book must not be taken literally by anyone reading it.’

How, then, do parodic works of this kind differ from literary hoaxes, and why do exposed hoaxes incite such indignation of trickery and deceit? One distinction seems to be around imposture. Tosh Greenslade isn’t pretending to BE Prime Minister Scott Morrison, any more than Sue Townsend claimed Adrian Mole was real. An author’s name on the cover of the text or acknowledging the work’s fictional status in an afterword or note is a different proposition to an author presenting themselves as someone they are not to lend authenticity to a work that is essentially fiction. It is this sense that the artefact has been faked for dishonest, spurious or fraudulent ends which appears to provoke a readerly response which tends to demand the ignoble ‘unmasking’ of the authorial fraudster responsible. This undeclared act of imposture shows hoax texts as a kind of identity fraud, exposing the double bind readers find themselves in in wanting to believe in the ‘real’ness of the work, as I have suggested, but also wanting to be certain about the identity and authenticity of the author, a distinction which imposture disrupts.

Accusations of fraud around the presentation of diaries have also tended to be more sensational when the artefact taken at first for an authentic record by a real person turns out to have been created for nefarious or money-making ends, such as the farrago around ‘The Hitler Diaries’ created by forger Konrad Kujau and sold to the German magazine *Stern* in 1983. Kujau spent time in prison when the forgery was unmasked, and several newspaper editors lost their job; others simply had to tolerate being seen publicly as both credulous and mendacious¹⁹⁰. When the Howard Hughes hoax autobiography¹⁹¹ forged by biographer Clifford Irving¹⁹² was exposed, Irving persisted in defending the diaries as sophisticated works nevertheless, and believed until the end of his life that his skilled forgery of Hughes deserved to be marketed alongside his other

¹⁹⁰ C. Hamilton, *The Hitler Diaries: Fakes that Fooled the World* (University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

¹⁹¹ H. Hughes and C. Irving, *Howard Hughes: The Autobiography : the Most Famous Unpublished Book of the 20th Century-- Until Now* (John Blake, 2008).

¹⁹² Stephen Fay, *Hoax: the inside story of the Howard Hughes-Clifford Irving affair* (Viking Books, 1972).

works of fiction. Feeling aggrieved that your hoax diary is not appreciated as a work of art suggests a clear lack of alignment between the interplay of perceived authorial intention and readerly expectation around signifiers of factuality and fictionality – particularly seeing Hughes was still alive at the time of the hoax.

The sore spot of indignation and anger on the part of ‘fooled’ readers seems to lie, therefore, in an unclear distinction between ‘real’ author and ‘invented author’, especially where the actual author uses their ventriloquised narrator as a mouthpiece for some undisclosed social or moral propaganda agenda, such as Beatrice Sparks in the case of *Go Ask Alice*. As a tendentious, moralistic attempt at capturing the lingo and concerns of a teenage drug addict, *Go Ask Alice* is inadvertently hilarious, but only if a reader knows it is a hoax. Once the text is perceived as a fake, whatever its perceived authorial intentions, the spell is broken and the illusion of authenticity is compromised. The text may still be read with enjoyment, but the readerly contract is a different contract once the status of the author as deceiver is made clear. Scholar Lisa Zunshine finds this indignation at the failure to fully apprehend fictional signifiers unjustified: ‘why, in principle, should readers feel so angry about realizing that a story about a person they have never met is really a story about a person whom nobody has ever met?’¹⁹³ In fictional diaries, after all, the whole conceit rests on a sophisticated masquerade of a similar ventriloquism; the enterprise stands or falls on the apprehension of mimesis, not a suspicion of duplicity. As I have already suggested, the depiction of the narrative persona is paramount. A reader, in my opinion, needs to know who is doing the lying, and why. If the narrator is seen to be a fictional construct, duplicity, self-deception and misrepresentation may all be ‘read’ as fictional devices used to augment characterization through unreliability. In the fictional diary this is an overarching strategy and, in my view, a readerly expectation. If the narrator is seen to be the author in disguise, this strategy is immediately compromised. As James Phelan observes, rather gnominically: ‘the interpretive move to read an inconsistency as a sign of unreliability rests on the assumption that someone designed the inconsistency as a signal of unreliability.’¹⁹⁴ The deliberate creation or ‘seeding’ of unreliability on the part of the

¹⁹³ L. Zunshine and Ohio State University Press, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Ohio State University Press, 2006). p 70

¹⁹⁴ Phelan, *Living to Tell about it: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. p 44

fictive narrator by the author, then, is part of the implicit encoding process designed to nurture the suspension of disbelief in a work of fiction.

Parodic and humorous diaries are like admitted hoaxes, letting the reader in on the joke rather than attempting to fool them as a duplicitous exercise. This dance of intention and expectation puts the 'play' back into 'metafictional play' in the classical ludic sense: Sue Townsend creates a delicious and truly 'meta' moment in one of the later *Adrian Mole* diaries in which her character comes across the other most famous fictional diarist of the era: 'Wednesday, May 14th. I have been reading Bridget Jones's Diary in the 'Independent'. The woman is obsessed with herself! She writes as though she were the only person in the world to have problems [...] Drafted a letter to Ms Jones.'¹⁹⁵

Fictional diaries contain a central paradox in that they are, as I have illustrated, texts that rely for their impact on the skilful blurring of boundaries and which take something posing as 'real' to create a work of invention. A sense of masquerade and illusion is already in play for a reader encountering such a text; the form utilizes ambiguity in the incorporation of factual imitation to conjure a new mimetic artefact.

This distinction lies at the heart of why reception to 'hoax' diaries differs from the enjoyment and popularity of those parodying the form for humorous, playful or otherwise confabulatory effect. Confabulators may claim 'play' as their defence, and even claim the text has a salutary effect anyway, or simply stay silent on their intention and let the reception of the work tell its own story. It is clear that the tensions around the maintenance of the diary's illusion and the skill with which an author modulates readerly expectations defines the manner in which the text is read, as Wallace Martin implies when he states that a reader's decisions about a text are related to the sense of actuality, truth, or 'realism' they obtain from the story: 'We believe it, yet we don't believe it, in a sincere and duplicitous manner.'¹⁹⁶ In his study of historical fiction and its public reception as potentially misrepresentational of real people, Jerome de Groot addresses a similar issue: 'It seems to me that the historical novel, whilst happily hoodwinking its audience, does so with their collusion.'¹⁹⁷ An awareness of contrivance is part of the fictional play of positioning the reader both inside and slightly outside the fictionalised

¹⁹⁵ S. Townsend, *Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years* (Penguin Books Limited, 2000). p 97

¹⁹⁶ Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*. p 59

¹⁹⁷ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*. p 6

experience—the marriage of the simultaneous pressure of wishing it to be real while all the time taking pleasure in the verisimilitude of the form – the state de Groot terms being ‘happily hoodwinked’ which differs considerably from being resentfully hoodwinked at being allegedly ‘fooled’ by artifice.

A hoax diary, of course, may intentionally subvert and blur these boundaries in order to be ‘read’ as a skilful parody of that very expectation as Dale Spender’s *The Diary of Elizabeth Pepys* (1991)¹⁹⁸ slyly illustrates. This text straddles, to my reading, territories both of ‘literary parody’ and ‘literary hoax’, bringing the intersection of authorial intention and the patterns of readerly expectation of form to the fore and provoking a more studied metacritical evaluation. Generally seen as a ‘literary spoof’ purportedly designed as a ‘feminist critique of women’s lives in 17th century London’¹⁹⁹ the work—as if more evidence is needed that pervasive misconceptions around factual accounts and fictional constructions still occur in the field of publication—is still occasionally cited as an authentic diary, ‘edited’ rather than written by Spender, as the cover asserts. Several University libraries cite Elizabeth Pepys as author and Spender as editor, and a number of academics cite the diary as a historical source.²⁰⁰ Author Neil Hanson cited the text and quoted ‘Elizabeth’ as a factual historical source²⁰¹ in *The Dreadful Judgement*, his 2001 book on the Great Fire of London, just as authors cited Defoe’s plague journal as an authenticating factual account of the bubonic plague of London for many years after its true provenance was unmasked (and just, I suspect, as Townsend’s *Adrian Mole* may yet become the definitive source material for 1980s Britain in the Thatcher years.)

Spender’s book contains expected authentic details a reader might take for real—an acknowledgements page offering thanks for assistance ‘during this extensive editorial exercise’, a glossary of seventeenth century terms, ‘notes on the Text’ describing how Spender has modernised spelling, etc., and a great many footnotes. The cover ‘blurb’ gives readers no cause to doubt the diary’s veracity, stating that Elizabeth Pepys was married as a teenager to Samuel Pepys, the world’s most celebrated diarist, and to the point of this publication has been unknown except for what can be gleaned of her,

¹⁹⁸ Pepys and Spender, *The Diary of Elizabeth Pepys*.

¹⁹⁹ From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dale_Spender Spender herself has not publicly spoken about the book or her intentions.

²⁰⁰ Claire Tomalin and Caroline Cook, "Review: Letters: Spoofs and Pepys," (London (UK): Guardian News & Media Limited, 2002).

²⁰¹ Tomalin and Cook, "Review: Letters: Spoofs and Pepys."

glancingly, in the refractive lens of Pepys' work: 'Recently, however, the unpublished writings of Elizabeth Pepys have surfaced [...] No doubt Elizabeth's papers were lost amongst the mountains of notes, jottings, journal pages and books that Pepys had accumulated.'²⁰² Spender's metacritical agenda becomes more likely, however, as these cover notes become hyperbolic, describing this modest publication as 'far and away the most creative literary revelation this century'²⁰³ promising not only insights into the predicament of seventeenth-century women but an insider view of Samuel Pepys that contradicts accepted accounts.

Spender's unapologetically feminist credentials as the author of many texts about patriarchy, the control of language and the cultural silencing of women's voices may begin, here, to colour the apprehension of the text as 'authentic'. The role of 'editor' in an endeavour to reclaim lost or forgotten voices of women in literature and history also becomes suspect in light of these credentials: creating a text allegedly by the wife of the most famous and prolific male diarist in the English language, thereby giving 'voice' to a woman from whom no actual written record exists, is foregrounded by Spender's subtle editorial dig that these papers have been buried in the mountain of words produced by Samuel Pepys which have been unquestioningly preserved for posterity.

It is only one small sentence on the copyright page: 'The Author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work' which gives the hoax away. (Well, that, and Spender's publication history for readers informed and alert to possible satirical or confabulatory play on the basis of this record.²⁰⁴)

Because this text is technically an unattributed imposture, the term 'moral right' deserves more attention. Accusations of fraud and duplicity seem to arise in circumstances where the invented narrative persona of a given text is claimed to be an authentic person, and indignant or accusatory responses by readers to authorial misappropriation and masquerading of these texts as authentic records often point to the posture and ethos of the author of the work in question. This ethos – or assumed intention—is then a determinant in seeking judgement on whether or not this feigning of truth or deliberate falsification is defensible. Defoe, clearly, was intent on defending his moral right in his response to detractors and critics when Robinson Crusoe was

²⁰² Pepys and Spender, *The Diary of Elizabeth Pepys*.

²⁰³ Pepys and Spender, *The Diary of Elizabeth Pepys*.

²⁰⁴ P. Clarke and D. Spender, *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries, 1788-1840* (Allen & Unwin, 1996).

uncovered as 'feigned' on grounds of allegory permitting a deeper, more ethically significant truth to be revealed²⁰⁵. Perhaps Spender, if pressed, would defend her literary hoax as a more serious parody designed to draw attention to gendered assumptions about whose diary claims historical precedence in terms of veracity and worth.

To my reading, the ongoing silence on the part of the author on both her intentions and the text's reception is part of the statement, and, as a text with a small print run which is now a hard-to-find collectible, the 'diary' makes its own statement about readership, attention and silencing. If the text is to be read as a 'spoof' or parody, it is clear Spender is not mocking diaristic conventions or the unreliability of her narrative character. The conditions she seems intent on 'unmasking' in creating an unadmitted hoax text in the absence of a genuine one are the assumptions about silence, voice, gender and worth. Giving fictional voice to a subsumed or ignored historical voice in a 'found' artefact seen to be figuratively 'buried' by the most celebrated and prolific (male) diarist in English seems a highly metacritical agenda, intent on stressing or breaking open those assumptions by calling explicit attention to them. Spender asserting her moral right to conjure this absent voice to the page raises provoking questions over the boundaries over fraud and duplicity. Hoaxes tend to make readers (or newspaper editors, historians and experts) the butt of the joke, rather than the narrator; parody allows readers the sense of being in on that joke. I maintain that this positioning relies on clarity about where the unreliability lies, and the clear apprehension that the narrator and actual author of the text are clearly delineated as separate entities, to avoid ambiguity and suspicion around whose claims are unreliable or suspect.

It is not hard to see that this becomes a matter for the reader in terms of who is trustworthy – the narrator or the author. Diary strategising allows for a text in which narrative unreliability then creates conditions for characterization and emplotment, often to highly humorous and parodic effect within this play, while simultaneously utilizing the mimetic function of posing as a found artefact – not for dishonest or fraudulent ends, but strategic narrative ends. Unless the reader can trust that the narrator is fictive, the suspicion of unreliability reverts to the author.

The blurring of boundaries is both artful and playful in this reading, part of the larger interplay of 'real' and 'fake', which, like 'romance' and 'history' or 'truth' and 'lies',

²⁰⁵ Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World*.

may involve misreadings, re-evaluations of the text's purpose or, as we have seen, the utilization of fiction as a source of re-imagining or even authenticating historical perspectives. To what extent, then, can the fictional diary, playing on the fundamental illusion of being an authentic document, be considered a 'metafictional' form? How important is this aspect of fictionality of the narratorial consciousness to more experimental hybrid forms which imitate diaries?

CHAPTER FOUR: 'MAY I BURN IN HELL IF I SPEAK FALSE': metafiction, autofiction, real historical personages, concealed authors.

In which your narrator reviews Diverse authors experimenting with New, Cunning and Interesting ways to Assemble disparate pieces of seemingly random pieces of information to find that lo! sometimes the marriage of Form and Content is a Strained Relationship; & considers the inherent ambiguity in the term 'true history' and an Author who gives controversial voice to a National Icon wholly Reimagined in a Country troubled by both its own Truth and its own History.

'Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth' Albert Camus²⁰⁶

'There is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative.' E.L.Doctorow²⁰⁷

If we are to take as valid Patricia Waugh's definition of metafictionality as 'a term given to fictional writing which consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality',²⁰⁸ then the diary strategy as a fictional endeavour is an exemplar of metafictionality, and has been throughout its history. Waugh, drawing upon the literary and cultural theories of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes²⁰⁹, goes on to say that 'books in this category [...] are self-reflexive and fragmented. Their writers seek complexity and archness, and this is in many ways due to an awareness within society of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday 'reality.'²¹⁰ The 'arch' and self-conscious use of the 'found document' form itself can be viewed, in this light, as metafictional or metacritical in that it foregrounds

²⁰⁶ A. Camus et al., *The Stranger* (A.A. Knopf, 1988). Preface

²⁰⁷ Quoted from preface of Barbara Foley, "Preface," in *Telling the Truth*, The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction (Cornell University Press, 1986).

²⁰⁸ P. Waugh, *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Routledge 1984) p 2

²⁰⁹ Waugh, p 2.

²¹⁰ From De Groot, *The Historical Novel*. p 117

assumptions of truth, falsehood and artifice and draws attention to it, as I have suggested Dale Spender's *Diary of Elizabeth Pepys* demonstrates. Timothy Baker could be speaking specifically of Spender's text when he writes that the trope of the found manuscript:

problematizes the relationship between texts and history. While cultural memory is always personalised and particular, allowing for a vision of the past disowned by historians, the found manuscript by necessity cannot fully be incorporated into a unified cultural memory, insofar as it is recognised as what is neglected and forgotten. The found manuscript, in many instances, not only exists outside codified history, but actively resists it: such texts are used both to explain and contradict received notions of the past.²¹¹

Deliberately created ambiguities may include devices other than the depiction of the narratorial entity; the physical shape and appearance of the artefact may also be utilized in the metafictional exercise. There may be blurred distinctions between real intercalated documents and invented ones, or the use of authentic-seeming forms which disrupt the boundaries between public and private documents (a secret, suppressed personal testimony brought to public light, for example). Tensions created around the inclusion of real documents or photographs, repurposed for the new artefact, may intentionally play with the readerly chain of expectation around 'real' and 'fake'. Deliberately blurred boundaries of what is historical and what is imaginary, on both the text's exterior presentation and its interior narrative shape, may reveal provocative agendas on the part of those authors responsible for the work to do with the apprehension of mimesis, patterns of expectation or contradictions of established mainstream 'narratives'.

Many contemporary authors now challenge and subvert readerly expectation by creating works that hover ambiguously between 'fact' and 'fiction'; and indeed a categorising term for these new hybrid genres is often 'faction'. These works resist easy classification, and may play with form based on what is included in the record other than letters or diary entries, such as images, unattributed quotations, pithy observations, clippings, maps, lists and, more recently, transcriptions of texts, emails and skype conversations.

²¹¹ T. Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014). p 89

Equally common in metafictional texts – often to the point of overt critical commentary²¹² – is the trope Waugh mentions of narratorial self-reflexivity, identified by scholars as a characteristic narrative device of the epistolary or diary form:

‘preoccupation with self, coupled with the desire to express that preoccupation, is one of the informing principles of this narrative sub-genre.’²¹³ H. Porter Abbott claims self-reflexivity is a device to displace ‘plot’ in order to focus attention on ‘the effect of the plot (now past) on the suffering consciousness.’²¹⁴ Clearly, depiction of this narratorial consciousness becomes a paramount focus in such hybrid or assemblage texts if external ‘plot’ is displaced, which is a characteristic I also maintain is highly typical of fictional diaries.

How closely, then, may metafictional assemblage texts, or the images or collated or intercalated documents found in contemporary works of autofiction, bricolage, and hybrid experimental texts, be considered fictional diaries? After all, they frequently utilise a journal-like structure of assembled and collated documents and images arranged over a discernible timeframe, and equally frequently, some or all of these fragments are written entries, made by a recognisable narratorial persona. Likewise, a book made up of discrete fragmented entries composed by a narrator expressly concerned with the act of writing and keeping a transcript of fluctuating moods and reflections over time also seems a highly likely contender, although this also defines forms such as personal blogs and factual diaries which have found their way into the public sphere. Texts where no narrator is immediately present, but the artefact is presented as a ‘found’ assemblage of fragments, constructed and re-integrated into some discernible narrative shape or pattern by some authorial or editorial hand, may also constitute radical or borderline examples of the form.

Problems of how to classify and interpret these shape-shifting texts become more evident, I suggest, once they make the claim of being works of fiction. A text presented or categorised (that is to say, marketed and sold in the public domain) as a novel calls into question both authorial status and authorial intention. This ambiguous reception around the agent responsible for authorship of the text echoes public confusion around

²¹² Harvey Giles, ‘To Decode White Male Rage, First He Had To Write In His Mother’s Voice: How Ben Lerner Reinvented the Social Novel for a Hyper-Self-Obsessed Age’ *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct 8th 2019.

²¹³ Rosbottom, “Motifs in Epistolary Fiction: Analysis of a Narrative Sub-genre.” p 295

²¹⁴ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 34

the very first mimetic fictional texts published three hundred years ago, however, so perhaps deliberate ambiguity becomes a metafictional trope in itself. Certainly, the question of how to 'read' and identify an assemblage, 'autofictional' or fragmented text based on both its exterior appearance and interior narrative construction is still key to its reception. While a text may progress in an elliptical or discontinuous fashion, its components alone, however expressive, reflexive or skilfully mimetic, may not be enough to create for a reader a sense that these elements have been organised or synthesized for a narrative effect which is accretive and purposeful. Marketing a book as a 'novel' implies that some of this activity has taken place, and that the text is not just a random grab bag of jottings or notes bundled together by a bored writer with no unified purpose.

One example recently published and reviewed at the time of writing which is illustrative of this ambiguity is Kate Zambreno's autofictional novel *Drifts* (2020), prompting critic Alexandra Schwartz²¹⁵ to attempt to describe the work in terms of its textual construction: 'Her method is the sketch, the note, the Internet search, the photograph' before hazarding a summary of its thematic and narratorial preoccupations as 'a work of autofiction about the state of inertia and 'inoperativeness' where all the narrator (also named Zambreno) can produce is thoughts on why she is not writing. 'Is a finished book really going to cohere from all this woolgathering?' the critic wonders rhetorically. This plea for narrative coherence is telling in a work presented as a fragmented assemblage of entries, and Schwartz encapsulates the risks to narrative unity when she identifies a problem characteristic to the form: 'the state where the writing of the fragment replaces the work [...] the aperçu takes prescience over the scene; the acknowledgement of the disjointed is valued over the effort to synthesize and combine.'²¹⁶ It is clear the critic is conscious of both the textual and extratextual presentation of the text-as-artefact: 'Blocky paragraphs are encased, on the page, in chic white space, like paintings on a gallery wall. The form, with its suspicion of unified narrative, is ideal for capturing the flitting, distracted modern mind, pulled in every direction at once [...] but it also gives cover to the inability to sustain a unified narrative in the first place.'²¹⁷ Zambreno (the character) self-consciously states she is interested in

²¹⁵ Alexandra Schwartz, "Kate Zambreno's Present Tense," *The New Yorker* August 5th 2020., 2020.

²¹⁶ Schwartz, "Kate Zambreno's Present Tense."

²¹⁷ Schwartz, "Kate Zambreno's Present Tense."

‘the writing one is doing when one is not writing.’ Giving lack of purpose a semblance of purpose by endowing the narrator with the trait of inoperativity seems a curiously self-defeating fictional move.

The illusion of a unified narrative which turns out not to be sustained or cohesive is clearly a central challenge in the creation of a text made up of seemingly unrelated fragments which require the reader to decode or arrange the sense of interior unity or narrative coherence for themselves. In the light of my argument in this thesis, it deserves some examination to decipher how such a narrator (that is, an author appearing as a self-named character in a text engaged in the act of writing about failing to write) is to be interpreted by a reader required, as I have suggested, to view the text through the double response of both immersion in its fictionality and attunement to its artifice.

I have suggested that diary fiction shifts its plot to the plane of the psychological, and this psychological portrayal of the narrating consciousness is central to the endeavour. I have also suggested that the purpose in a fictional first-person text which may be called ‘psychological’ is the embodied and incremental depiction of progression and change. Upon this arc, a psyche's written record—or potentially the documents, images, and miscellany this entity has collected—is arranged and narrativised. The reader is encouraged, in this reading of how a first-person protagonist operates, to look ‘through’ the text and its suggestive arrangement to the narrator herself, interpreting representations of both conscious and inadvertent revelation. When that narrator is not a fictive presence but the author herself, that revelation, and with it the mixture of sincerity and self-deception that governs the fictional record, is hindered and/or disrupted. Schwartz identifies this unclear or ill-defined delineation of narratorial fictionality as characteristic of why this form seems frequently to be an exercise in covering up ‘the inability to sustain a unified narrative in the first place’ saying: ‘the barrier between writer and protagonist is rubbed so thin as to be transparent [...] That's not to say there's no difference between them—an ‘I’ is always a character. But as with other recent works in the genre, the term ‘narrator’ has come to seem descriptively outmoded.’²¹⁸ So why ‘fiction’, then, and not ‘assemblage memoir’ or ‘fragmentary personal essay’? Come to that, if ‘narrator’ has come to seem descriptively outmoded,

²¹⁸ Schwartz, “Kate Zambreno's Present Tense”.

and there is no separation between narrator and author, why not create a new term, such as 'automemoir'?

In a work of first-person fiction, the narrator is the subject. In a work of memoir, the author-as-narrator is the subject, and this division creates, to my reading, a key difference in the readerly perception and acceptance of the narratorial consciousness as a *device*, created intentionally by an author to fulfil a focalising function in the work. If a narrator is not clearly fictive, to follow this logic, their unreliability, reflexivity, omissions, discontinuities and so on are potentially 'read' not as narrative devices, but as inadvertent authorial 'slips'. Unreliability and self-deception in a character are strategies employed by an author; the suspicion of unreliability and self-deception in an author, as I have discussed in the chapter on parodies and hoaxes, makes for an entirely different reading.

While metafictional and assemblage texts may be toying with the boundaries between 'real' and 'fake' in presentational aspects, the borrowing or mimicry of form and representational play around this presentation is only one layer of the artifice – its content must also be 'mimetic' in that it replicates a 'real' narrator through the artful creation of a fictive one. When this distinction is blurred, I maintain that a reader is likely to find immersion impeded by suspicions that the author and narrator are the same 'I', however skilfully the text may incorporate the diary-like features of self-reflexivity, an overt or implied dated structure, simultaneity, epistolarity or the self-conscious act of writing. In other words, I would suggest that whatever blurring of boundaries are experimentally employed as textual presentation, what needs to be clear is who is responsible for the text, because that narrative entity will inevitably be viewed as a focalizing device for the work.

This status of impeded immersion due to ambiguity over the fictional status of the narrator is also evident in Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009),²¹⁹ a well-known and often-cited example of fragmented assemblage writing which on first glance appears to fulfil many criteria which would classify it as diary fiction since it is clearly a journal text concerned with reflexivity and epistolarity. Through 240 disparate fragments of writing, focused to a greater or lesser extent around the colour blue, the narrator charts the course of psychic pain experienced in isolation, stating her aim to write a sort of 'pillow book'

²¹⁹ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (Wave Books, 2009).

assembled around her philosophical meditations on life, love and the colour blue, but then—promisingly, in terms of diary fiction’s strategies—that agenda is subverted, seemingly through the writing process itself. There is plenty of chic white space, but there is also evidence of a burgeoning and accreting sense of change and epiphany discernible over the course of the book’s aphorisms and fragments. While the entries are presented as present-tense jottings in discrete numbered segments and the text creates a pattern of discontinuity and distraction, the material is not disconnected or contextless; there are micro-level resonances and unities which imply a progression.

The hybridized form—part memoir, part lyric, part prose poem (the book’s publisher, Wave Books, publishes only poetry)—resists an immersive, character-based reading, however, because any fictional unreliability utilized as a narrative device is impeded by a postmodern playfulness around naming, identity shifting and the blurring of a clear distinction between narrator and author.

This literally ‘self-conscious’ shape-shifting is viewed by some critics as a radical metafictional or antinarrative device; reviewer Jocelyn Carr states: ‘Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets* takes aim at one of today’s most beloved forms of writing—the autobiography—coily challenging the genre’s attachment to truthful stories of the self and the form thought best to convey them: that of the realist novel’²²⁰. Is Nelson ‘taking aim’ at autobiography, though? Or is she essentially creating a collage of research factoids, held together with the chronology of an elliptically referred-to failed affair? If the entries represent the framework through which the reader looks ‘through’ to the narrator’s psychological representation, in *Bluets* this creates the effect of looking through solipsism into a mirror of solipsism, where instead of epiphany, Nelson provides a self-conscious commentary on epiphany, reflexively referring to herself as real and disrupting the illusion repeatedly that this unreliable narration is anything other than a studied construction. This self-conscious tactic of referring to the reflexive self as subject makes this work more classifiable not as a fictional diary or work of epistolary fiction using mimetic form for verisimilitude, but as a philosophical literary memoir.

While Nelson may be accused of literary solipsism, other authors push boundaries in the other direction by doing away with a narrator altogether.

²²⁰ Jocelyn Parr, ‘The Review: *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson’ *Brick Literary Journal* 96.

Leanne Shapton's *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry*²²¹, a book in the form of an auction catalogue, is an audacious example of an experimental postmodern work posing as a 'found' artefact which may yet conceivably be considered epistolary. In this minutely-imagined assemblage the invisible author stays so true to form that, like Daniel Defoe, she does not even include her name on the cover.

The book contains nothing but photographs, terse descriptions and catalogue captions of personal objects that purportedly belonged to a couple who have now broken up and put these items up for sale at auction. Due to the invisibility of the 'authorial presence' and the desire to be alert to authorial intentionality in terms of unified effect, it is all too tempting to assume that the woman in the photos is Leanne Shapton herself. In fact, the text is entirely constructed—nothing is 'found' or 'real'; instead the reader discovers that the author purchased all the objects in second-hand stores and then hired two actors to pose for the photos only through investigation. In creating these sources so that they resemble 'found artefacts', Shapton engages in a sort of playful double-bluff: pushing the boundaries of mimesis while encouraging the seeking out of a submerged narrative or storyline buried artfully in this mostly visual arrangement. Once the reader realises the people in the photographs are 'characters', the fictional game is on. The form of the auction catalogue—a recognisable, utilitarian document in the 'real world'—provokes the tension between 'real' and 'fake' that alerts a reader to the ambiguous, potentially subversive nature of the 'important artifacts' in the actual artefact they are reading.

Important Artifacts appears authorless, and in fact technically, superficially, storyless. The 'story' is told through the snippets and captions that identify each 'lot', providing prompts for the reader to see the collected lots as repositories of a relationship, while resonances and discrepancies between the images and their verbal representations uncovers the story buried 'between the lines', arranged in a chronology which replicates the beginning and end of a marriage. It is the reader who composes this likely story, out of what is omitted. This audacious text raises questions around verisimilitude, and the activation of meaning-making around assemblage and ordering where, in the absence of a narrator, the reader 'narrates' the submerged story to themselves. There is no

²²¹ L. Shapton, *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris: Including Books, Street Fashion and Jewelry* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

separation of the 'I' of the author and the 'I' of the narrator, because there is no narrator, apart from the reader, precluding it from being considered a fictional diary, although in its assemblage form, it is clearly a work of fiction—an artfully mimetic text which utilises highly stylised imagery compiled alongside a submerged narrativizing principle. The 'story', such as it is, requires following a crumb trail of other fragments or clues, making the book the kind of 'delicious fake'²²² which uses borrowed form to provoke a 'choose-your-own-adventure' narrative.

The strategy of composing a text entirely from an assemblage of extratextual forms without any narrator-written entries at all puts the readerly activity of seeking pattern and potential hidden or embedded narrative in a literary work to the test. Explicitly 'antinarrative' writers such as David Shields and Ben Lerner claim that narrative is dead and new forms must take its place, a stance evidenced by their own works of assemblage and appropriation. Shield's *Life Story* (2003), a pastiche made up of assembled 'found' bumper stickers, for example, is 'narrativized' in the sense that the stickers are arranged in a kind of life chronology starting with birth: 'First things first. You're only young once, but you can be immature forever' and ending with death: 'Of all the things I miss, I miss my mind the most. I brake for unicorns. Choose death'²²³ Whether Shields intended this pithy pastiche of 'found' bumper stickers to be an experiment in autofiction, in which authors use their own lives as fictional representation, or simply as experimental antinarrative, the fact that it first appeared in an anthology of personal essays nevertheless illustrates the difficulty in classifying these hybrid, assemblage and metacritical forms more generally.

John Barth wrote his innovative metafictional story collection *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968: now that funhouse seems to have become something of a hall of mirrors, as experimental life/fiction writers like Rachel Cusk argue that inventing 'character' is no longer appropriate for our cultural moment;²²⁴ Maggie Nelson's newer book *The Argonauts* is advertised as a work of 'autotherapy';²²⁵ and proponents of autofiction wonder, sometimes in self-reflexive works of autofiction, whether it is

²²² John Mullan, "An Introduction to Gulliver's Travels," *The British Museum 18th Century Literature collection* (2018).

²²³ Jacquelyn Pope, "The Next American Essay," (Cambridge: Harvard Review, 2003); Pope, "The Next American Essay."

²²⁴ A. Schwartz, 'I Don't Think Character Exists Anymore: a conversation with Rachel Cusk' *New Yorker* Nov 18th 2018.

²²⁵ <https://www.textpublishing.com.au/books/the-argonauts>

appropriate to inhabit voices other than their own, often voices they have invented and named as themselves. Ben Lerner self-consciously grapples with this in, for example, '10.04',²²⁶ where the narrator 'Ben' refers to himself intermittently in third person as 'the author', importing not only real people and events into the novel but extracts from Lerner's other published poems and essays, creating a work, according to critic Stephanie Bishop, which 'rearranges our understanding of the form of the novel and complicates our idea of fictionality.'²²⁷ There is a chance, of course, that texts posing as fiction posing as concealed autobiographies posing as fiction may not be genre game-changers but another wing to be lost in within the metafunhouse, which may turn out to be not so much fun after all. As genre-bending, genre-defying and genre-repurposing continues to blur the malleable boundaries of what is 'true' and what is 'invented' in new hybrid texts, there is the danger that readers may still be left to wonder, as Schwartz does, whether a story is going to cohere out of all this elaborate game-playing, or whether, as Dyer suggests, the mix-and match stylings becomes a matter of rote and 'the no-man's-land could become predictably congested.'²²⁸

As Defoe, Fielding, Sterne, and many others have shown, there is nothing particularly 'novel' about playing with the boundaries of what is considered authentic and true and toying with readerly patterns of engagement in what is considered 'made up'—the interplay of such tensions for stated or unstated aesthetic ends has characterised printed and textual forms of storytelling for centuries. Dyer points out, in scrutinizing the repeated pattern of seeing 'new' situations turn out to have long and distinguished pre-histories: 'The most viable label in the end might well turn out to be an old one: 'literature''²²⁹. In this light, Zambreno's self-stated claims of examination of inoperativity and inertia as reflexive subjects in *Drifts* does not seem particularly radical when read next to the already-parodic statement of intent: 'I am now trying an Experiment very frequent among Modern Authors; which is, to *write upon Nothing*'²³⁰ written by Jonathon Swift in the very postmodern era of 1704.

²²⁶ Lerner, *10:04*.

²²⁷ Stephanie Bishop, 'The same but different: 10.04 by Ben Lerner' Sydney Review of Books, February 6, 2016. <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/10-04-ben-lerner/>

²²⁸ Dyer, "'Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction'."

²²⁹ Dyer, "'Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction'."

²³⁰ Jonathan Swift, *Volume XX. of the author's works. Containing the tale of a tub* (Dublin: Printed by George Faulkner, 1771).

As I have suggested, since their first appearance fictional diaries and other epistolary texts have always relied on what could be termed a conceit which is already fully metafictional: they mimic an authentic artefact to create an invented one. Authors of such works have experimentally incorporated real and fake documents in the name of aesthetic effect and verisimilitude, and have blurred boundaries between factual and ‘feign’d’ stories, and genuine historical figures and invented ones. When accused of playing fast and loose with the facts, these authors have defended themselves on grounds of allegorical ‘truth’ or, in the case of Daniel Defoe, in the assumed voice of their own fictional alter-egos, which feels like a pretty postmodern manoeuvre for 1720.

Their particular fragmentary nature and imposed temporal immediacy, as it augments suspense and uncertainty of outcome, has created innovative and compelling emplotment frameworks and characterization strategies. In this they contain something of the ‘paradox of authenticity’ found in historical fiction which de Groot characterizes as an almost uncanny ‘double effect [where] the “real” and the “wrought” stand together in the same room’²³¹, creating a similar double effect in readers as they must simultaneously apprehend that while the artefact and the narrator may ‘feel’ genuine, the construction is a fictional game intentionally devised to play with that very apprehension. The suspension of disbelief in such a document rests on this dual state of both belief and doubt in the construction, and the diary’s particular tensions and intrigues created around mimetic and ‘borrowed’ form and the illusion of the ‘found’ artefact has long proven a provocative challenge to their reading public. As metafictional texts, they utilize literary artifice around their narrative protagonists to achieve these ends.

Narrative or documentary assemblage works such as those cited above may mimic or resemble diaries and epistolary novels in appearance, and their non-linear, discontinuous and fragmented prose entries may be plausibly reminiscent of a narrative psyche at work, but the separation between the ‘I’ of the author and the ‘I’ of the narrator remains a crucial distinction, to my reading, to allow for an apprehension of narrative unreliability as a device.

Textual observations have a different status if they are put in the mouths of a character rather than if they are made by a factual memoirist, because they permit the

²³¹ J. De Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions* (Taylor & Francis, 2015). p 24

illusory effect of inadvertent self-revelation as a narratorial tactic. This tension around authenticity is particularly acute if the narratorial consciousness represents a genuine historical figure. A first-person account of such a figure necessarily becomes a conjuring act, treading a fine line between invention, extrapolation and historical appropriation.

One notable contemporary text in this form is Peter Carey's 2000 work *True History of the Kelly Gang*,²³² an artful arrangement which succeeds in creating what scholar Tom Griffiths calls 'an intriguing dance between history and fiction'.²³³ This text not only overtly toys with boundaries between truth and history in reimagining the untold life and supposedly suppressed written account of a real historic personage, but extrapolates that character's voice from a real historical document, bushranger Ned Kelly's so-called 'Jerilderie Letter.' This work highlights the complex state of play between author and reader over the strategic literary devices contained in an epistolary work such as this, courting deliberate ambiguity as it slips between the layers of veracity and verisimilitude.

'MAY I BURN IN HELL IF I SPEAK FALSE': PETER CAREY'S *TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG*.

'I lost my own father at 12 yr. of age and know what it is to be raised on lies and silences my dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but this history is for you and will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false.'²³⁴ begins the document purporting to be a private manifesto written by Ned Kelly on the run from the troopers in 1879. With this urgent and impassioned declaration, in which its narrator promises that everything to come will be an attempt to rectify lies and silences, Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* plunges the reader into a brilliant pretence: that this is a found artefact left by nineteenth-century Australian bushranger Ned Kelly. In conjuring and extrapolating this fictional voice from an extant factual document known as the Jerilderie Letter, thereby blurring truth/fiction and story/fact boundaries, Carey's work can be seen to be located squarely within the metacritical domain Jerome

²³² Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

²³³ T. Griffiths, *Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions*, Text journal 28 April 2015, edited C Nelson and C De Matos.

²³⁴ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 5

de Groot refers to when he speaks of a ‘crisis of representation that postmodern historical novelists have manipulated’ in their work, using ideological disquiet and the lack of a unified national narrative ‘as a new set of tools for challenging legitimating narratives and locating radical dissent.’²³⁵ Carey’s answer to this crisis of representation seems to be to summon a new representative voice out of the contested historical memory of a genuine national icon (and whose actual recorded testimony runs at less than 8,000 words) and recreate a larger, more expansive fictional world through the lens of this narrating consciousness.

De Groot is right to call these shifting cultural uncertainties a ‘new set of tools’ for authors with postmodern agendas intent on dismantling or challenging dominant narratives and norms of expectation. The tools Carey uses to give verisimilitude to his fictionalizing narrative are the tools of the fictional diary form: the mimetic pose of a private account, written with immediacy and uncertainty of outcome across a dated structure by a narrative entity driven to make this testimony by discernable psychic urgency and highly aware of the constraints of epistolarity.

Several features lead me to categorise this text as a fictional diary, operating on the dual levels of exterior presentation and interior literary narrative strategies, including the form and content of the record itself, in which Carey uses many well-known epistolary tropes. The text poses as a written account by a narrator made up of sequential ‘parcels’ in which uncertainty of outcome and narrative psychological progression create immediacy and drama. Spurred by indignation, righteousness, loss and bravado, the narrator both delineates retrospective events and his part in them, and describes ongoing progression in a quirky, headlong rush that mimics the impetuous rush towards disaster, creating burgeoning psychological flux through a temporal framework. Final ends are unknown for Ned, which contributes to the central dramatic tension in terms of suspense and also creates dramatic irony in that the contemporary reader knows the narrator’s fate better than he does.

The text’s intercalated clippings, news reports and even editorial intervention augment this tension, creating what Porter Abbott maintains is a major characteristic of diary fiction: ‘Even though the account as a whole is retrospective, the suspension of disbelief is augmented [...] by introducing a technique of intercalated narrative’

²³⁵ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*. p 112

including ‘the commonest convention attending this function—the broken entry.’²³⁶

While this account can be seen as retrospective, the ongoing writing and maintenance of this record and the stated and unstated urgent reasons for doing so make it dramatic and immediate. Carey opens the text by drawing immediate attention to the editorial intervention of a fictional third party, who introduces the manuscript to the reader and assures them it is ‘thirteen parcels of stained and dog-eared papers, every one of them in Ned Kelly's distinctive hand.’²³⁷ This curatorial fiction presence is seen to be responsible, retrospectively, for organizing this allegedly ‘found’ account and the accompanying clippings into dated discrete parcels, and is given its own signifying typography—interfering with reader immersion while simultaneously presenting an additional layer of realistic-seeming artifice. The fictive editor describes both the dating and condition of the parcels upon which the text is written, and also, for added verisimilitude, their materials: some, for example, are sheaves of paper with ‘National Bank of Australia’ letterhead, to denote paper stolen during historically verifiable hold-ups.²³⁸ As a framing device to solve problems of temporality and simultaneity, this editorial intervention is a deft move, but the strategy also creates the ‘double response’ for the reader of being simultaneously immersed in the mimetic record and conscious of its fictionality.

In creating a semblance of a real manuscript which has been amended in this way, the author blends factual events and personages with invented ones. While the reader knows that the character of Thomas Curnow is a real historical figure who betrayed the gang at Glenrowan, Carey also creates a fictional character named Mary Hearn who is his unborn child's mother. This character, Kelly writes, ‘sits watch on these sentences like a steel nibbled kookaburra on the fences in the morning sun’²³⁹ and corrects and interjects on the margins of the enclosed clippings. This creates the juxtaposition of both simultaneity to events and the dated textual record of the clippings themselves, marked and corrected by characters determined to provide a counter-narrative to the alleged bias of those reports. For a suspicious reader who tries to investigate veracity further, Carey seeds the text with both real clippings and fake

²³⁶ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. p 23

²³⁷ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 2

²³⁸ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 4, p 135

²³⁹ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 290

accession numbers of documents in the Melbourne Public Library system.²⁴⁰ Is the curatorial figure then reliable or unreliable? Do they have an undisclosed agenda? A further suspicion that intervention has interfered with our 'reading' of the account itself comes when an unidentified S.C., possibly a descendent of Curnow, claims at the end of the record: 'The evidence provided by the manuscript suggests that in the years after the Siege of Glenrowan [Curnow] continued to labour obsessively over the construction of the dead man's sentences, and it was he who made those small grey pencil marks with which the original manuscript is decorated.'²⁴¹ Now the reader has cause to doubt how many of the annotations have been made by Kelly, and how many are corrections and revisions made by Curnow.

Carey's own acknowledgements at the end of the book are also worth considering in the context of this analysis of this text as a fictional diary. De Groot discusses the trope of the 'author's note'²⁴², almost ubiquitous in the works I have mentioned in this thesis (but absent in the hoax texts), as a kind of paratextual commentary designed to orient a reader that the author is both making truth claims for the work but distancing themselves from a misguided expectation of complete veracity. Both Defoe and Richardson posed as editors to fulfil this function, and others, as Carey has, create fictive editors to fulfil various textual and continuity functions but still appear at some point to make orienting authorial claims as to intent. De Groot sees this as a way of framing the readerly collusion in accepting that the work may have something true to say about 'real' history although it is admittedly couched in fictional form²⁴³ – an endeavour clearly seen in Defoe's defence of his 'feign'd history' of *Robinson Crusoe*, where he stated that the reader needs to see the truth of allegory, not fact, and judge the work's edifying function accordingly rather than making claims of textual deception. Carey creates this author's note as an afterword rather than a foreword in *True History of the Kelly Gang*, citing his rigour in research and attention to detail but also thanking his editor, rather provocatively, for helping him make the work a 'tighter, truer, better book'.²⁴⁴ His inclusion of a statement of sources at the end of the book also implies a respectful nod to genuine historical reference. His acknowledgement in his own

²⁴⁰ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 4

²⁴¹ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 350

²⁴² De Groot, *The Historical Novel*. p 217

²⁴³ De Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions*. p 21

²⁴⁴ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 478

authorial 'voice' of his research sources and his stated obligation to trying to preserve historical accuracy stands in direct contrast, however, to the textual and extratextual fictionalising games he has been playing with his reader from the outset—the story's title, for example, with its nod to objective truth, and the epigram by William Faulkner that insists past and present are meaningless classifications.

There are frames within frames here, each drawing attention to the difficulty of a singular version of the 'truth'; and yet the reader is complicit in this interplay of truth and lies, aware that the whole project is a work of fiction using genuine sources to make its claim on 'realness'. (These frames widen, interestingly, in terms of the book's reception and fame: after the 'Jerilderie Letter' was donated to the State Library of Victoria, Text Publishing released a paperback edition of its contents, stating that this letter 'deeply influenced Peter Carey's bestselling novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*':²⁴⁵ an example of publishers trading on the success of a fictional work to sell copies of its original factual inspiration.)

The manuscript is 'bookended' by extracts of a mysterious report which describes the outlaw's capture and an account of the schoolmaster figure, Thomas Curnow, who, in this fictional text, met with Kelly and then provided the appropriately torn, stained and annotated manuscripts which make up the artefact. This textual content appears as an extended manifesto mimicking the tone, grammar, syntax and righteous rage of the original 'Jerilderie Letter', expanded here as a fragmented account made by Kelly while he is on the run. The character, in line with the strategising available through the form, is progressively revealed and urgently motivated through the enacted drama of epistolarity. The inclusion of intercalated clippings, marked up by one character or another with additional editorialising, sarcastic remarks, corrections, and other comments, are a powerful device to raise questions of authorship and veracity, and Carey integrates them seamlessly into the fiction by indicating that it is Kelly himself pasting the reports into the account, alleging that he is going to write his 'own damned history',²⁴⁶ to correct public misconceptions about his own character—an ongoing theme in his account:

For a change the ARGUS had no cartoons of Superstitious Mick or Ignorant Bridget the Irish maid instead the pictures was of the coppers their point being they did not have the brains to find the Kellys. Here is one from MELBOURNE

²⁴⁵ Kelly, *The Jerilderie letter / Ned Kelly* ; edited and introduced by Alex McDermott.

²⁴⁶ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 245

PUNCH I paste it down upon the page [...] From the time we went to Greta I had no school at all so there are much better educated men than me to write the story of our robbery and you may study this account as a fair example. yet not one of them scribes was sufficient for your mother's taste as you will note from her comments on the sides. Here's my cutting.²⁴⁷

These exterior presentation devices used to augment the illusion of authenticity, the references to the ongoing project of writing the testimony and the sly inclusion of both real and fake newspaper clippings into the text all contribute to its rather uncanny effect. In all of these mimetic devices and utilization of recognisable tropes, Carey fully utilizes the diary strategy.

The mimetic recreation of Kelly's own dictated text, however, is the strongest aspect of the novel, in my opinion, and the strategy I would like to turn to specifically here. Numerous reviewers and scholars including Eggert (2007), Gaile (2001), Reeve (2010), and Clancy (2004) have commented on Carey's virtuosity in 'capturing and then sustaining'²⁴⁸ Kelly's voice. Huggan calls it a feat of 'sustained ventriloquism'²⁴⁹ and Xavier Pons titles his essay on the text 'The Novelist as Ventriloquist'²⁵⁰. Ned's voice is reported as 'utterly convincing and continually surprising [...] and shot through with poetry.'²⁵¹ Victoria Reeve makes the analysis of the 'speaking' voice and its enunciation and attribution in the novel the basis of her entire study.²⁵²

The narrative framework Carey employs to fully utilise this voice, however, is not the illusion of an unmediated voice speaking or disclosing interior thought of the kind found in novels of first-person fiction more generally, even those attempting to re-animate historical figures. Instead, Carey adopts the epistolary form, in line with his source document, the Jerilderie Letter. Therefore the 'voice' telling us the story is not exactly speaking but is, allegedly, transcribing onto a page by making a written account.

²⁴⁷ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. pp 379—389

²⁴⁸ Laurie Clancy, "Selective history of the Kelly gang: Peter Carey's Ned Kelly [Review article.]," *Overland*, no. 175 (2004). p 53

²⁴⁹ Graham Huggan, "Cultural memory in postcolonial fiction: the uses and abuses of Ned Kelly," Critical essay, *Australian Literary Studies* 20 (2002).

²⁵⁰ Xavier Pons, "The Novelist as Ventriloquist: Autobiography and Fiction in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*," *Commonwealth : Essays and Studies* 24, no. 1 (2001).

²⁵¹ Jane Rogers, "Peter Carey *True History of the Kelly Gang*," *The Observer*, January 7th. (London) 2001.

²⁵² Victoria Reeve, "Who Cares Who's Speaking? Cultural Voice in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*," *Journal for the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* (01/01 2010).

While it is thought the actual Jerilderie Letter was dictated by Kelly and transcribed by Joe Byrne, who had a slightly better education, the reader here is assured within the text that this is not the work of a scribe, but of Kelly himself, written in his own hand. For these reasons I do not think ‘ventriloquism’ is quite the right term for an epistolary text such as this. Ventriloquism suggests a literal taking over of Kelly’s ‘voice’, a skill required of all novelists as they invent and inhabit the voice of a constructed imagined ‘other’ when they create a narrative character, and provide the illusion of access to unmediated thoughts through ‘inner monologue’, stream of consciousness or a voice ‘heard’ by the reader. A work posing as a found artefact based on an extant document which has allegedly been dictated for publication, however, is not so much a feat of sustained ventriloquism as a sustained and extended extrapolation, a conjuring trick which integrates fictional narrative techniques with epistolary process to achieve its ends. It is as if *True History of the Kelly Gang* makes a claim to be finishing what its original subject began, but was thwarted in making public. Carey said in 2001, of attempting the re-imagining of Kelly through the Jerilderie Letter:

It was Kelly's language that drew me to this story. In those eccentric sentences was my character's DNA. I found the letter reproduced but I did not attempt to parody Kelly's style [...] It is an extraordinary document, the passionate voice of a man who is writing to explain his life, save his life, his reputation.²⁵³

It is language he talks about here in attempting to reproduce, from Kelly’s only extant epistolary artefact, his extended fictional manifesto. It seems like an uncanny piece of luck that the actual Jerilderie Letter resurfaced, was purchased and made public via the State Library of Victoria website almost concurrently with Carey’s fictional re-imagining, which contains so many of the hallmarks of a genuine textual artefact ‘found’ and also made public as part of its fictional pretence.

In Chapter 2 I outlined how the fictional diary form capitalises on the act of writing as a supposed act of externalisation, exemplified in a character not only preoccupied with self but with the urgent desire to express that preoccupation, which spurs them to write. Porter Abbott speaks of this particular capacity: ‘The reflexive diary [...] is so plotted as to make the will of the writer in its freedom the central mystery and point of focus. Time and again one finds in these texts the possibility of a ‘true plot’

²⁵³ Robert McCrum, "Reawakening Ned," *The Guardian*
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jan/07/fiction.petercarey> 2001.

(actualised or suppressed) which at once grows out of and expresses the self that the writer both discovers and creates in her writing.²⁵⁴ The epistolary process is seen to create its own self-reflexive drama, in other words, and gives fictional diaries and journals their particular textual shape and immediacy, whereby entries accrete and chart progressions in narrative self-representation, and this process is discernable in the record. An artefact posing as a record made by a narrative persona is not the same as a text written by an omniscient author about that character, and the distinctive attributes around characterisation and verisimilitude fictional diaries create through the pressures that epistolarity brings to bear, are clearly utilised by Carey in this work. A great deal of the story's reflexive drama and its narrator's impassioned burgeoning desire for larger redress and redemption comes, to my reading, from the pressures epistolarity brings to the project of writing, as Kelly grapples with both the writing process and the accreting desire to create the text as a kind of memorial to his own integrity.

Once words are committed to a page, they cease to be spontaneous and unmediated thoughts. There is a sense they are being made into a permanent record, possessing their own material power. Additionally, because of the impossibility of simultaneity, there is a gap between the action and the narration of that action in which reflection takes place, or a revision of those events to skew a perspective, or a change in perceptions of agency, blame or defences. A writer has space to select what they plan to say and adjust their 'narrative' accordingly to fit their version, so that in writing, they may even be seen to assume a performative role. Carey's appropriation of Kelly's Jerilderie Letter, then, makes a kind of performance of an already performative epistolary 'voice' externalised and shaped for effect on the page of the original letter as Kelly first dictated it.

The character's impetus, what's more, is true to its factual origin in one crucial way: its author desires its publication, and has written his record accordingly.²⁵⁵ This narrator claims this personal record is his attempt to set the public and unjust record straight, to confess, to be *heard*, despite the odds being stacked against him by the authorities. He desires, like Defoe's creation of H.F., to edify, to make a manifest record

²⁵⁴ Abbott, *Diary Fiction : Writing as Action*. pp 44—45

²⁵⁵ Paul Eggert, "The Bushranger's Voice: Peter Carey's True History of the Kelly Gang (2000) and Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter (1879)," *College Literature* 34, no. 3 (2007). p 127

for somebody he will never meet, his unborn daughter, so that she may know her father's 'voice' and story in a way he was denied his own father's account and guidance.

The real Ned Kelly was also thwarted in his desire to see his account published as a pamphlet for public distribution. He had attempted publication with his earlier and shorter 'Euroa Letter', and had transcribed copies sent to men of influence, but the letter was suppressed, and the newspaper reporters who did gain access to it published their own varying reactions, refusing to allow Kelly's own voice to be 'heard' in print. This earlier letter was then subsumed into the later Jerilderie Letter, which again Kelly was anxious to have printed. During the raid on the town, according to accounts, he sought out the town's newspaper editor and printer, Samuel Gill, and when he could not find him pressed the letter on bank accountant Edwin Living with stern demands to have it printed. Instead, the letter was taken, copied, changed hands, renamed a confession, copied again, and handed in to the police. Eggert comments on the Jerilderie Letter:

the struggle of a voice to be heard, to which its mangled syntax and amateur presentation poignantly testify, is clear enough. We don't know what instructions Ned Kelly wanted to give the printer, what license to change, correct or regularize its text, but in view of the effort that the composition of the 7,500 word piece of prose would have involved [...] we can be fairly sure that Kelly wanted people to be able to read his self-defence in his own words.²⁵⁶

Here was a man, in other words, desperate to see his words in print, prevented by the very men he saw as his oppressors and silencers. This silencing and suppression seems to have fuelled Kelly's grievance to the point of festering rage: after losing control of his own testament and having to tolerate seeing it altered and dismissed by the very forces he claimed as corrupt, he threatens revenge as 'fair warning' at the end of the Jerilderie Letter: 'I do not wish to give the order full force without giving timely warning but I am a widows son outlawed and my orders must be obeyed.'²⁵⁷ While some newspapers published synopses of the Letter, many also passed commentary on why they were repressing it: the Burra Record in South Australia, for instance, reported: 'There is a boastful intemperate tone throughout the letter [...] There is much in Kelly's letter

²⁵⁶ Paul Eggert, "The Bushranger's Voice: Peter Carey's True History of the Kelly Gang (2000) and Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter (1879)," *College literature* 34, no. 3 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2007.0030>. p 127

²⁵⁷ Kelly, *The Jerilderie letter / Ned Kelly* ; edited and introduced by Alex McDermott.

unsuitable for publication, and it will consequently be withheld. It covers fifty-seven closely-written pages of foolscap.’²⁵⁸

The ‘boastful intemperate tone’ is given free rein in Carey’s extended remix of this original document. The indictment of a corrupt police force, the naming of names, the ominous vow issued by the articulate yet barely-literate Kelly that his detractors and oppressors would receive justice, all deemed ‘unsuitable for publication’ at the time, is committed to paper here in the same kind of ‘dazzling hoax’ David Roberts admired in *Journal of the Plague Year*, and with something of the same audacious and unapologetic confidence. What Carey reproduces from his source material is the grandiosity of Kelly’s sweeping claims to his own retributive power and public influence. Clancy also notes the grandiosity of Kelly in this fictional re-imagining: ‘Increasingly [...] he sees himself to some extent as a performer or even as a playwright. Of the troopers Hare and Nicolson he says that though they “thought themselves famous as the capturers of Harry Power they never imagined they would be captives in a drama devised by me.” And again, “We could look down from the Warby Ranges and see the plumes of dust rising off the plains and know the police was actors in a drama writ by me.”’²⁵⁹

As a narrator increasingly intent on formulating his own defence in the record—a position which depends upon him being painted as a victim—Carey’s Kelly sets up absolute dichotomies. Every powerful adversary uses their power to their own advantage, and nothing he as an impoverished Irish underdog does is reported fairly by the wealthy corrupt English system he is systematically oppressed by. Police and judges are brutal and predatory. Every act of the Kelly gang finds justification in self-defence. Carey also creates a progression from an initially naïve and overly trusting boy to an embittered outlaw. His belief in the corrupt police officer Fitzpatrick proves to be misjudged, as is his trust in the individual who he surrenders his manuscript to. He trusts, wrongly, in Curnow, against the advice of others in the gang. As time passes in the recording of his misfortune and perceived oppression, however, he comes to reflect on his own early naivety: ‘Perhaps it would be better had I know the true cruel nature of the world but I would not give up my ignorance even if I could’,²⁶⁰ finding his own early naivety a form of self-defence.

²⁵⁸ (From ‘The Kelly Gang’, the Burra Record, South Australia, Friday 21st February 1879.)

²⁵⁹ Clancy, “Selective history of the Kelly gang: Peter Carey’s Ned Kelly [Review article].” p 55

²⁶⁰ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 39

This ongoing defensiveness and burning need to gain restitution creates the plot, and the need to maintain the record fuels this urgency to avoid being silenced and suppressed. Kelly needs, as time passes and the net starts to close around him, to make a record which expresses fully how he has been goaded beyond endurance by injustice, and how he longs to let his daughter see his true nature as well as see this private record made public. Like that of so many diarists and journal-keepers, this account reveals both conscious and inadvertent disclosures, both sincerity and elements of self-deception, in keeping with the literary trope of the unreliable narrator.

In 1982 reviewer Graham Burns commented on Carey's fascination with complex central characters set against fabulist and surreal settings, saying that his fictions 'tend to resist any simple yielding up of their inner meaning at the same time as they touch the nerves of our general experience and social fears' [...] The central figures of his narratives are typically trapped in the labyrinth of their obsessions or delusions, they are solitaires, often [...] both victims and perpetrators of their condition' making Carey, asserts Burns, 'very good at dramatising the psychology of obsession'.²⁶¹

It would be hard to find a character more trapped in the labyrinth of their obsessions than Ned Kelly, and in this work Carey gives his supposed narrator the full force of enraged urgency and fury. The form presents Carey with the perfect narrative vehicle to allow his narrator to continue the arduous task of trying, often in the heat of the moment, to write his account and keep that record hidden, so that his unborn daughter would know his 'true history' even if he was not around to tell it himself. It is easy to see, too, how the Jerilderie Letter provided character impetus for Carey. He calls it 'a howl of pain; [Kelly's] language came in a great, furious rush that could not but remind you of far more literary Irish writers.'²⁶² This 'great furious rush' of urgent communication from a character who perceives himself as inherently wronged is evident from the first sentence, where the narrator opens his account like a witness in the dock testifying to tell the whole truth, as if he's giving sworn evidence before sentencing, which of course, in one historic sense he is. The epistolary narrative voice conjured here delineates the gravity of the character's own difficult writing enterprise but simultaneously articulates his own determination to have it done. 'How queer and foreign it must seem to you and all the coarse words and cruelty which I now relate are

²⁶¹ Graham Burns, "Review: Peter Carey's *Bliss*," *Australian Book Review*, no. Issue no. 41. (1982).

²⁶² McCrum, "Reawakening Ned."

far away in ancient time,'²⁶³ he says to his unborn daughter. Later, he refers to the difficulty of simultaneity and calls attention to his account's material damage: 'it is one thing to toil with your pen another thing entire to do it while you fight a war [...] I returned to this splashed & speckled history you now hold in your hand.'²⁶⁴ As he senses the impossibility of his freedom, his impassioned and accreting desperation to maintain the record becomes his reason to go on:

I had abandoned the letter to the government. I would of give up this very history too but I knew I would lose you if I stopped writing you would vanish and be swallowed by the maw. I see it now I were ½ mad but each day I wrote so you wd. read my words and I wrote to get you born.²⁶⁵

By writing it, Kelly seems to believe he will stay alive, and keep the idea of his progeny alive too. Holding onto the pages of the 'true history' he has attempted to make becomes an act of identity as well as defiance: 'My 58 pages to the government was secured around my body by a sash so even if I were shot dead no one could be confused as to what my corpse would say if it could speak.'²⁶⁶ Now the material written record itself has become talismanic for the narrator; despite being constantly thwarted in his attempts to see his words in print, he believes the pages will incontestably speak for him should he be silenced; a true 'externalisation' of the power of the document.

Perhaps Kelly's own act of writing as a form of redress and his intimate and urgent vow to correct the 'lies and silences' are also Carey's project in attempting to utilize fiction as the only possible way to 'redress the record' of a reimagining of an historical national myth, despite the assumptions about 'fiction' and 'history' it disrupts. These authorial concerns are borne out in Carey's 2001 interview about the book:

The Kelly story is like a great, dark plain on which, here and there, passionate or violent scenes are played. All around these bright scenes are black seas of unseen incident and unknown feeling. We Australians had not even begun to imagine the emotional life of the characters in our great story.²⁶⁷

In other interviews Carey speaks of a 'false consciousness' operating in the Australian national psyche, particularly about its white colonial past:

²⁶³ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 5

²⁶⁴ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 433

²⁶⁵ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 434

²⁶⁶ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 417

²⁶⁷ McCrum, "Reawakening Ned."

Our Mayflowers were prison ships. People didn't come by choice but in terror, having been cast out – flung out, wrenched out. They knew themselves to be abandoned and second rate. If you put that together with the dispossession and the war against the indigenous inhabitants, then you've got quite a heady mix of things that people would rather not think about.²⁶⁸

This 'heady mix' of silenced or unmentionable cultural blank spots are echoed by Geordie Williamson, when he cites the postcolonial turning away from 'negative, destructive and tragic aspects of our history [...] the site of environmental degradation and violent appropriation: the junkyard of our failures as a settler culture.'²⁶⁹ Dalziell and Genoni highlight how 'telling' national myths and retold stories are to gauge a nation's sense of itself: 'There may be no more certain marker of a nation than the stories it collectively chooses to tell and re-tell.'²⁷⁰ Carey's fictionalizing attempts to 'channel' more of the voice heard in the Jerilderie Letter and create a narrative of suppressed or forgotten private history from it, then presenting that account as a novel called a 'True History' is right at the centre of this disquiet around the stories we tell about our collective understanding of the past, and these discomforts around validity of fictional reinvention to tell us something about ourselves and the present invite contention around our larger repressed histories, inventions and revisions. Carey's choice to address this head on in a fictional version of a national icon's secret manifesto presents historical retelling as an inherently, sometimes subversive fictionalising exercise.

Because Kelly is a genuine historical figure, this consciously fictional re-animating of this cultural figure may also be seen as an endeavour to expose the host of assumptions the reading public make about reading, culture, truth-telling, historical 'accuracy', usurped identities and counterfeit authenticity in the first place, since assuming the identity of an actual figure as the entity responsible for the artefact text is very close to 'hoax' territory. It is, literally, 'speaking false', the very thing this narrator assures us he is not going to do. In reality, we all know there is no 'true history of the Kelly Gang'. Such an incontrovertible truth is impossible, because history and truth lie

²⁶⁸ J Murphy, "A Living Breathing Hoax," *The Atlantic*, 2003.

²⁶⁹ G. Williamson, *The Burning Library: Our Great Novelists Lost and Found* (Text Publishing Company, 2012). p 2

²⁷⁰ T. Dalziell and P. Genoni, *Telling Stories: Australian Life and Literature 1935-2012* (Monash University Publishing, 2013). (intro. xx)

in a very contested arena, armed with the same scraps of extant evidence, hearsay, narrative revisionism and wishful thinking. ‘True History’, in fact, is oxymoronic. In these epistolary aspects Carey’s text may be seen as an extended mirroring of Kelly’s own endeavour in making his *Jerilderie* manifesto: to question legitimacy of whose narrative is given precedence, to undermine authority and draw attention to what is forgotten, unmentioned or rewritten in a history. Carey’s tactic of taking on the form of a fictional first-person personal private record of imagined struggles and silenced grievances—along with the pose that this suppressed ‘found’ document has only belatedly been brought to light—adopts the potent and recognisable tropes of the fictional diary form, and creates a text which, in terms of its own presentation and narrative form, creates questions around the legitimacy of re-imagining, re-animating giving plausible ‘voice’ to historical figures for whom only fragmentary written records remain.

Complex inferential activity is required for a text to actively function in this way. It must be *read*, and, as Peter Brooks suggests, to set up, through a reader's hypotheses of interpretation as they navigate it, ‘previously unperceived networks of relation and significance.’²⁷¹ These progressive and fluid networks of significance lead me to consider alternative narrative strategies of progression for the fictional diary text. One final alternative path through the found artefact text which may be used to create narrative coherence is metaphor, which in a fictional diary may be seen to operate like an extended ‘image system’ in cinematic art, where a strategy of motifs is embedded within the work and creates a discernible narrativized pattern. Metaphorical associations maybe suggested by intercalated material included, or located within the narratorial entries themselves. It may be seen to emanate from the narratorial character's own capacity, or as a recurrent motif to signify burgeoning self-insight. The presence of this feature, whether recognised by the diarist or not, presents itself as a powerful stylistic device to provoke a reader towards a process of meaning-making. It is this ultimate associative leap towards coherence I would like to discuss in my final chapter.

²⁷¹ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York : Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012). p 322

CHAPTER FIVE: ARTEFACT AS METAPHOR & METAPHOR AS MAP

In which your faithful correspondent takes a metaphor to work, and finds it is the only way to travel. Ahoy!

‘The most basic way to get someone's attention is this: Break a pattern.’

Chip and Dan Heath²⁷²

‘Our metaphors go on ahead of us, they know before we do [...] Sometimes it seems to me as if metaphor were the advance guard of the mind; something in us reaches out, into the landscape in front of us, looking for the right vessel, the right vehicle, for whatever will serve.’

Mark Doty²⁷³

Michel de Certeau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, comments that in modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation—trucks, buses and the like—are called *metaphorai*. De Certeau elaborates that ‘to go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’—a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.’²⁷⁴ A story as a vehicle to move somebody somewhere – a vehicle understood as a literal metaphor—echoes the original word derivation of the word ‘metaphor’—to carry over, to bear across—and suggests, as poet Mark Doty says above, a kind of vessel or carrier. A reader, to follow this imaginative logic, is both literally and figuratively ‘transported’ by such a vehicle, along a path or road created by narrative, traversing a kind of landscape provoked in them upon encountering a text and beginning the immersive experience of reading it.

²⁷² Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Random House New York, 2007). p 286

²⁷³ Mark Doty. ‘Souls on Ice’, from *Introspections: American Poets on One of Their Own Poems* (Middlebury College Press, 1997.)

²⁷⁴ M. de Certeau and S.F. Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011). p 115

The fluidity and diversity of the epistolary or fictional diary form does suggest an ideal metaphorical vessel, presenting a capacious range of possible uses an author may usefully exploit for the journey. Paperno pursues a similar line of enquiry: 'Is a diary [...] an empty vessel invested with meaning (by the diarist, the context, and the scholar)? In a word, it is a mold waiting to be filled—a generic matrix that gives distinctive shape to the experience it records.'²⁷⁵

In creating connections between the abstract and the concrete in a text, a metaphor or extended set of metaphors may establish an entire framework through which a reader perceives a narrative pattern. Where the diary project is attempting to depict psychological instability or a disorder of core preoccupations, this imagery and its associative connotations may serve to represent something too slippery, charged or difficult for the narrating consciousness to name. Concretisation of this material to shift it from the abstract or unmentionable into something identifiable and repeated through the text may be what functions to make it noticeable, significant, and therefore navigable.

TAKING A METAPHOR TO GET SOMEWHERE

If the fictional diary form is an empty vessel invested with meaning by its narrator, its fictional context and its reader, as Paperno suggests, its fragmented matrix requires constructing and ordering by both writer and reader in order to make meaningful sense. The collaborative reading experience requires a willingness to traverse the text accumulating whatever embedded or disparate material suggests this order, constructing coherence, as Peter Brooks claims, out of 'a *combinatoire*: a game of putting together, a kind of generalized metonymy in which the given elements [...] provide, as it were, the metaphoric glue.'²⁷⁶ These elements alert a reader to significance via their arrangement, or, more conspicuously, patterns of repetition around them. Because a narrative shape gives a sense of 'plot' and meaningful progression, it must, as Brooks argues, 'use metaphor as the tropes of its achieved interrelations, and it must be metaphoric insofar as it is totalizing.'²⁷⁷ This statement is highly relevant to a discussion of fictional diaries, where the essential form of the artefact itself requires it to be 'read' as

²⁷⁵ Paperno, "'What Can Be Done with Diaries?'" p 571

²⁷⁶ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative*. p 316

²⁷⁷ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative*. p 91

a text posing as something else, and the content of that artefact is composed of fragmentary and possibly discontinuous discrete 'entries' which require 'putting together' for coherence. The fictional diary both *uses* metaphor and *is* metaphoric.

Metaphor itself, however, is slippery and hard to define. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have developed extensive theoretical approaches to how pervasive metaphor is in language and thought, and these approaches are relevant here in terms of the ways these abstractions are understood in fiction.²⁷⁸ Metaphorical frameworks have preoccupied literary and narrative theorists for years, and produced a vast range of highly interdisciplinary narratological investigations, particularly concerning the readerly experience of encountering textual patterns in so-called 'reception theory'.²⁷⁹ Michael Sinding, building on this set of theories, terms the strategy whereby metaphorical mappings are projected into the story world 'narrativisation'.²⁸⁰ If we take the standard definition of 'metaphor' as the 'mapping' of a source concept onto a target concept²⁸¹, and narrativisation as an ordered extension of these metaphors, it is possible to see extended or 'literalised' metaphor as a potential navigational route through a text.

According to Sinding, however, this kind of metaphorical mapping is a device not generally used as an organising principle in fiction. He asserts that analysis of allegoric forms shows that 'allegory is rarely if ever fully systematic, consistent or explicit. It is often occasional or episodic rather than sustained [...] implicit rather than explicit [...] and elusive and inconsistent in its mappings'.²⁸² This may be true of fiction more broadly, but I suggest the fictional diary form may offer a perfect vessel to experiment with this very possibility. In fictional diaries implicit, elusive and inconsistent textual inflection points may be strategized very effectively, and textual material on the page can be seen as a 'double' representation of both exterior and internal order and continuity (or, of course, disorder or discontinuity). Because the form

²⁷⁸ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980)., Ch.: 19,23, 24.

²⁷⁹ Ansgar Nünning, Wolfgang Iser, Paul Ricoeur, Wayne Booth, et al. P. Hühn et al., *Handbook of Narratology* (Walter De Gruyter Incorporated, 2014); M. Fludernik, *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor* (Taylor & Francis, 2012); Elena Semino and Gerard Steen, "Metaphor in Literature," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Jr Raymond W. Gibbs, Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁸⁰ M. Sinding, 'Metaphor, Allegory, Irony, Satire and Supposition in Factual and Fictional Narrative,' Monika Fludernik and Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative Factuality: A Handbook* (De Gruyter, 16 Dec. 2019, 2019).

<https://www.degruyter.com/search?q=allegory+systematic&source=%2Ftitle%2F521505>

²⁸¹ *ibid*

²⁸² *ibid*.

is predicated on the pretence of a record left by a persona writing spontaneously and unselfconsciously, if narrative pattern appears to be both explicit and implicit, and both elusive and inconsistent, these characteristics may be bestowed upon the fictional narrator as plausibly 'unsystematic' discontinuous progressions. Significant metaphorical meaning may be noticed by just the reader, or, more interestingly, by both the reader and the narrator, as part of the progressive shift towards epiphany and resolution, as Janet Burroway outlines: 'One important distinction in the use of literary symbols is between those symbols of which the character is aware, and therefore 'belong' to him or her, and those symbols of which only writer and reader are aware, and therefore belong to the work.'²⁸³ The interplay between these symbols recognized by the character and those seen only by the writer and reader, Burroway claims, can enrich the story in scope or irony.

However, John Gardner has pointed out that metaphorical, emblematic or allegorical material is often difficult to strategise because its appearance may come as much as a surprise to the author as the reader, and there is no guarantee that both will interpret the metaphor in precisely the same way. Gardner states that in first-person narration, the writer 'in the process of writing [...] follows out from suggestions that rise from his story, perhaps saying more than he at first thought he had to say.'²⁸⁴ Again, in a text posing as a record left by a fictive narrator, this confusion or discombobulation may be 'endowed' upon the subjective narratorial consciousness rather than compromising authorial reliability.

For 'plot' to be seen as an internally consistent interrelated pattern ordered intentionally by an author, a reader's alertness to this patterning must be provoked and rewarded with a sense of coherence. Peter Brooks asserts that narrative 'may work according to a model that begins with a blinded and collapsed, inactive metaphor', then as the reader follows the creator into imaginative territory, reaches a 'terminal enlightened, transactive metaphor'²⁸⁵ That configuration seems relevant in an examination of how metaphor creates a strategy of motifs and associative imagery through a text, in that it suggests a narrative causal progression and is capable of holding transactive or substantive meaning. A first-person narrator may shift, for example, from

²⁸³ Janet Burroway, *Writing fiction : a guide to narrative craft*, ed. Elizabeth Stuckey-French, 7th ed. ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007). pp 279—280

²⁸⁴ John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction : Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (Vintage Books, 1991). p 169

²⁸⁵ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative*. pp 322—323

some representational occluded state to an enlightened one, on a discernible 'journey' or path of change.

This narrative may be discernible as a pattern without being necessarily linear or logical. In fact, in a fictional diary form it may be a more convincing strategy to create a pattern which is NOT linear or logical, in order to replicate plausible psychic discontinuity, and to alert a reader to the employment of unexpected narrative shapes which appear and reappear in a text to suggest intensified significance and associative interrelationships. The associative correlation of motifs and images strung through the story in this way may be seen to extend and cohere. A place, for example, may operate on multiple levels as a textual signifier, such as a maze utilized as both a literal and figurative labyrinth – a recurring and accreting motif which can be seen vividly in the work of W.G. Sebald.²⁸⁶ An island may be equally allegorised as a locus of metaphorical meaning. As a literal place of remoteness and limitation, it may suggest such things as exile, incarceration and solitary confinement (a term with its own associative allegorical meanings). The symbolic values islands have been given in literature are myriad; they are places, as T. Baker has noted in his study of gothic literature, 'of shifting relationships, whether it is between ideas of centre and periphery, land and sea, or insider and outsider; they navigate the space between exile and belonging, between modes of expression and languages, and even between genres.'²⁸⁷

In this way islands are like texts waiting for narrative mapping; they represent a singular terrain upon which a psychological drama may be enacted 'both a world of its own and only visible in relation to other worlds', as Baker claims. Defoe himself, posing as his character Crusoe to write in defence of the use of allegory to create what he called an 'emblematic history'²⁸⁸ in *Robinson Crusoe*, spells out his own use of island symbolism in maintaining that his tale of shipwreck and confinement is actually an allegory of his own isolated and confined life: 'All these reflections are just history of a state of forced confinement, which in my real history is represented by a confined retreat

²⁸⁶ James Atlas, "W.G. Sebald: A Profile," *The Paris Review* 41, no. 151 (1999).;

W. G. Sebald, *The rings of Saturn*, ed. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 2002).

²⁸⁷ T. Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition*. pp 90—91

²⁸⁸ Maximillian E. Novak, "Defoe's Theory of Fiction," *Studies in Philology* 61, no. 4 (1964), www.jstor.org/stable/4173470. p 652

in an island; and it is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not.²⁸⁹

While this is by no means a prescriptive authorial directive in creating an overview of potential literary strategies for fictional diaries, viewing the whole artefact as a metaphor—a kind of encompassing literary container for emotion and idea—allows for all the literary strategising around fictional diaries to be to be created and sustained. The artefact as a metaphor of psychological representation creates a readerly framework, in which Defoe prompts his readers to understand that an island ‘means’ isolation and psychological confinement on both literal and figurative levels.

A pattern of motifs and associative material which may be discerned in a narrative work of fiction is not the story itself: in George Saunders's terms, it is not 'loadbearing' in terms of meaning.²⁹⁰ The pattern is the delivery device for that meaning; a way to execute it through the narrative course of the story. Even calling it a 'vehicle' or a 'driver' or a 'framework' inevitably evokes metaphorical analogy in terms of inviting and provoking interpretive readerly activity: if a *metaphorai* is like a bus, the creative endeavour lies in making a reader run for the bus, so that it may transport them somewhere. In an essay analysing escalation in Donald Barthelme's metafictional and ambiguous short story *The School* Saunders expands this vehicle metaphor by literalising it, as one might expect from an author so adept at practising such forms himself:

Once we've discerned the pattern, Barthelme is going to fling us forward via a series of surprises; each new pattern-element is going to be introduced in a way we don't expect, or with an embellishment that delights us [it gives us] an acknowledgement that the writer is right there with us: he knows where we are, and who we are, and is involved in an intimate and respectful game with us. I think of this as the motorcycle-sidecar model of reading: writer and reader right next to one another, leaning as they corner, the pleasure coming from the mutuality and simultaneity of the experience.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Novak, "Defoe's Theory of Fiction." p 652

²⁹⁰ George Saunders, *The Braindead Megaphone : essays* (First Riverhead trade paperback edition. New York : Riverhead Books, 2007). <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910063309102121>. 'Rise, Baby, Rise!' on Donald Barthelme's 'The School'. pp 134—41

²⁹¹ D. Eggers, *McSweeney's Issue 24* (McSweeney's Publishing, 2007).

In a fictional diary, or indeed any first-person work of fiction, of course, there are more than two of us on the motorcycle. Three entities are alert to associations in a fictional diary: the actual (or implied) author, the constructed narrator and the actual (or implied) reader. Somewhere on the terrain of the text itself, these entities meet. Now we're in our 'vehicle', traversing a terrain, as the reader is being 'transported' through the text. Terrain suggests ground, area, spatial representation, allowing a reader to visualise a space which is literal rather than abstract. I might equally refer to the word 'map', a term which works both as a noun and a verb to describe the act of reading as a kind of navigational direction-finding activity. A map, additionally, operates as a metaphor in itself. The notion of meaning being 'conveyed', in itself, is language suggesting movement, as is the sense of being 'transported' or 'moved' by a text. 'The brain,' as Antonio Damasio claims, 'is a born cartographer.'²⁹²

The fictional diary in its simplest form is an artefact which externalises a record of interiority and its self-reflexive processes, and creates a record left behind which becomes the lens through which a reader examines the narratorial creator. As H. Porter Abbott claims of this narrator, the psyche in flux leans towards transformational possibilities.²⁹³ The epistolary nature of the diary form itself—the narrator's act of taking unvoiced thoughts and attempting to commit them to paper—creates its own recognisable pattern: a replica of the narrative effect of making internal conflict manifest in external action. Words on the page are transposed, in this way, into an experiential force of associative imagery and perceived relationships between things and ideas. The artefact, while it is produced as a 'book' or a bundle of pages, in the case of fictional diaries playing with boundaries of verisimilitude, is not exactly where the metaphorical meaning-making lies. Semantically, of course, a book IS a metaphor, since it is a representational object, but the 'arc' takes place in a reader's head. The text, and its intercalated documents—whatever has been gathered to conjure the illusion of a found artefact—is necessarily navigated via extended interpretive activity on the part of the reader, including the willingness to play along with the pretence that the object they are holding in their hands is, simultaneously, both an intentional construction (fiction) and a diary left by a real person (an artefact worthy of suspension of disbelief.)

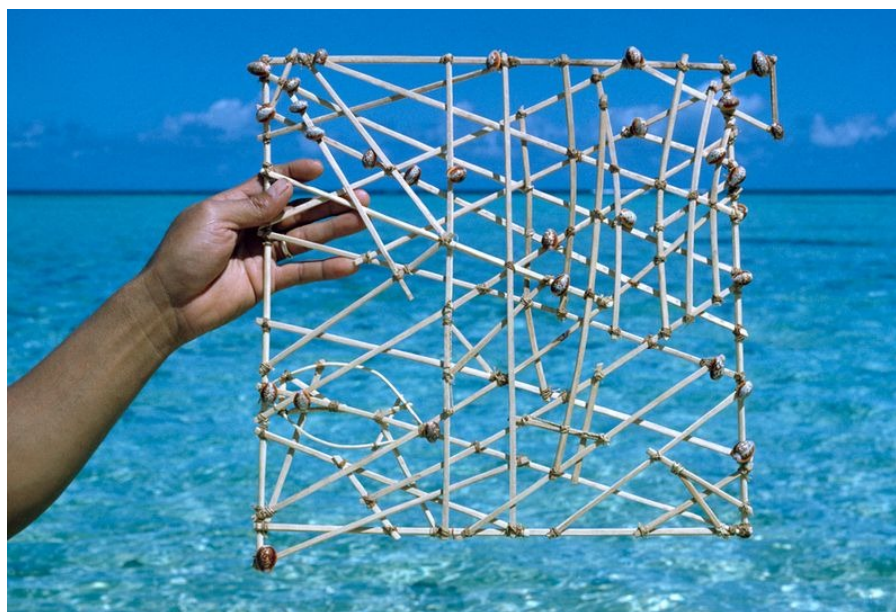
²⁹² A. Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (Random House, 2011).

p 64

²⁹³ Abbott, "Letters to the Self: The Cloistered Writer in Nonretrospective Fiction."

THE STICK AND THE SHELL

To illustrate what I am theorising is possible in a textual artefact, I turn to two examples of visual metaphors used as literal navigational devices which contextualise and metaphorise this 'plotting' a course and which informed my own research in creating a fictional diary. The first is the cartographic 'stick map' or 'stick chart'²⁹⁴ once used exclusively in various island nations of Micronesia, which, in the absence of other material technologies, permitted accumulated oceanographic knowledge to be recorded, stored and learned as a memory aid.²⁹⁵ The maps were visual representations of ocean swells, tides, wave patterns, the locations of islands and archipelagos too distant to see with the naked eye, and other features crucial to navigating in ocean canoes. The curved sticks show where swells are deflected by an island, while the short, straight strips indicate currents near islands. The longer strips may indicate the direction in which certain islands are to be found, and the small cowrie shells represent the islands themselves.



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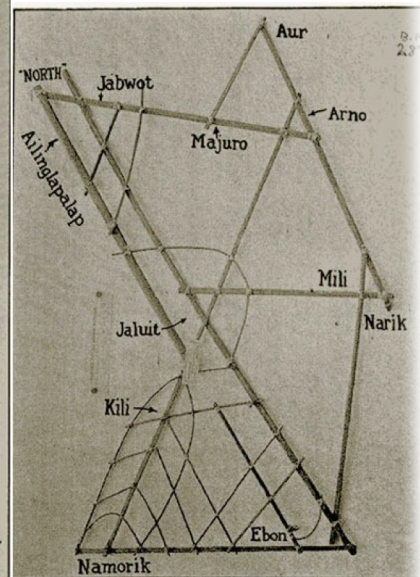
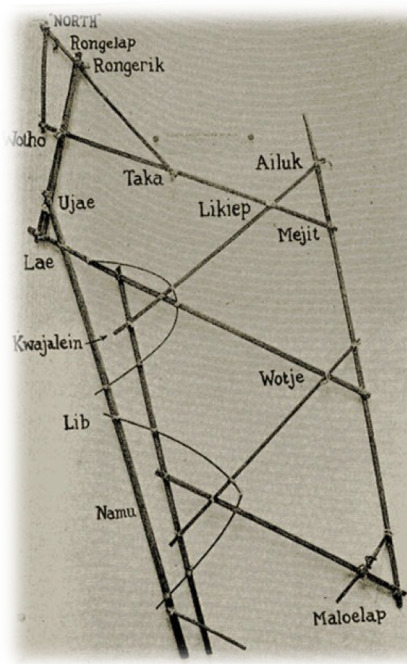
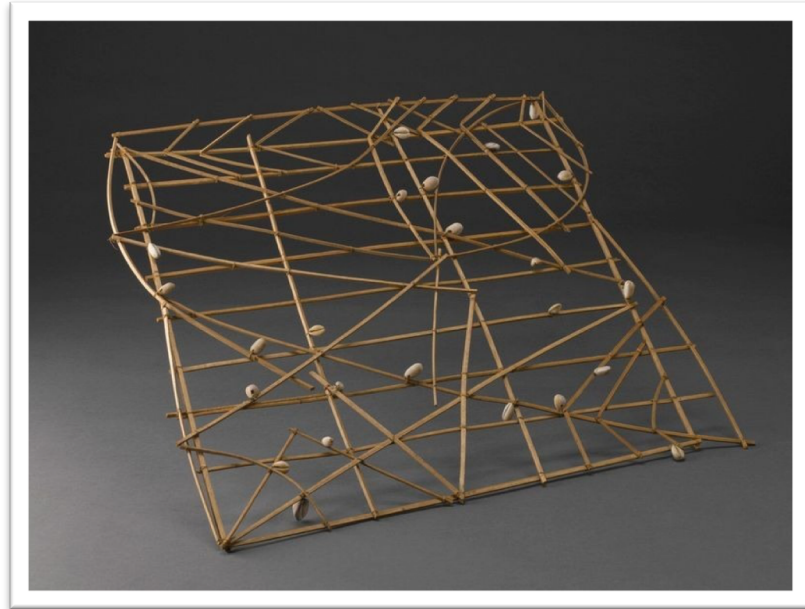
Unlike modern maps, stick charts are not literal representation of the sea, but an abstract illustration of the ways that ocean swells interact with land. The stick map could generally only be 'read' by the person who made it, because individual charts varied so

²⁹⁴ More correctly: mattang, meddo (or medo), and rebbelib (or rebbelith), the three main categories of stick charts.

²⁹⁵ Cari Romm, "How Sticks and Shells Became a Sophisticated System for Navigation," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 26, 2015.

²⁹⁶ Walter Meayers Edwards, *Micronesian Stick Chart*, *National Geographic Resource Library* (<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/micronesian-stick-chart/>; National Geographic Society, 2013).

much in form and interpretation. Sailors did not carry the charts with them when they made their journeys, or even if they did, probably did not consult them while travelling. Instead, navigators memorised the chart before the journey was made and then used a combination of their senses and memory to guide them on voyages.



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²⁹⁷ Kaushik Patowary, "The Stick Chart Navigation of Marshall Islands," photo credits: Smithsonian, (February 27 2016).

After World War Two, when these islands were circumnavigated via satellite navigational technology, these stick maps were found to be highly accurate within ranges of hundreds of nautical miles.

The second example of a metaphorical temporal progression narrative expressed as a symbol is the Camino de Santiago de Compostela shell symbol. Modern manifestations of this iconic symbol can be seen throughout the many pilgrimage routes leading to the shrine of St. James in Galicia, Spain. The carving takes the form of the scallop shell that is found in abundance around Galicia, and the various grooves of the icon, like a scallop shell, represent different pilgrimage routes that converge in a single spot—the tomb of St. James.



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²⁹⁸ 'The Scallop Shell and Other Symbols of the Camino' <https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/the-scallop-shell-and-other-symbols-of-the-camino/> photo credits: Getty Images.

This scallop shell icon has been displayed for hundreds of years on signposts along the Camino, to guide pilgrims along multiple routes to their destination. Like all emblematic objects, a lot of metaphorical meaning is packed into their symbology. Traditionally starting at one place and finishing at another, pilgrims navigate via these literal ‘signposts’ engraved with the shell symbol and additionally carry shells or images of shells themselves. As an object representing burgeoning spiritual growth, the shell as motif of the pilgrimage is taken up and repeated, not only a direction-finding device but a tool to unify and make coherent the undertaking of navigation itself. Wearing or carrying a shell allows walkers to identify themselves as pilgrims and locate themselves within the pilgrimage narrative.²⁹⁹

I suggest readers and audiences, when they encounter an unfamiliar text, may behave like sailors or pilgrims undertaking a journey. They are attuned to the accumulation of fragments of significant or meaningful imagery which may then cohere into a perceived pattern, which may further enhance a sense of continuity or burgeoning comprehension. This notion of marks and symbols becoming a form of cartography which reflects the materials it describes is noted by Kim Mahood: ‘A map allows you to align geography and metaphor, and to organise the multiple strands of narrative in a way that leaves space for the imagination’ who goes on to describe the nature of the creative investigation into this navigable terrain as akin to opening a map which tears open along an unexpected or worn-through fold, revealing ‘a line that is neither latitude nor longitude opens in the hidden geography of the place you are about to enter.’³⁰⁰ Like Saunders, Mahood is using metaphor to describe the process of mentally constructing metaphor for narrative coherence, and like him, she likens the process to a literalised forward movement into the territory of the unknown.

²⁹⁹ Marco Túlio de Sousa and Ana Paula da Rosa, "The Mediatization of Camino De Santiago: Between the Pilgrimage Narrative and Media Circulation of the Narrative," *Religions* 11, no. 10 (2020).

³⁰⁰ Kim Mahood, "'Mapping Hidden Geographies: the writer as cartographer'" (HDR Conference, La Trobe University, <https://youtu.be/A1-T3od65Hg>, 2018).

NARRATIVE PROGRESS TOWARDS MEANING

Peter Brooks defines plotting as: 'an activity of shaping, with the dynamic aspect of narrative—that which makes the plot “move forward” and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress towards meaning.'³⁰¹ These progressions may suggest narrative pathways through the text, visualised or memorised by the reader and incorporated into the experience of the text as a system of internal reference. Here, to my reading, is where Iser's 'concretization'³⁰² theory, which 'guides the production of meaning by gradually supplying skeletal aspects or schematized views of what will become the work of art, leaving between them areas of indeterminacy or gaps to be filled by the reader completing the artwork'³⁰³ seems most salient in terms of analysing how this feature may be fully incorporated into fictional diaries. A concretisation of significant details or meaningful locales makes up what the narrator notices, attends to or is otherwise affected by. Arresting juxtapositions of landmarks, signifiers, and the inclusion or circling or suggestive metaphorical material work together to create a textual set of hieroglyphs which work, through the text, like the embedded motifs of the shell symbols guiding a pilgrim.

The fictional diary text, itself a mimetic representation of a recognisable form, may then operate as a kind of encompassing metaphor which invites readers to step inside its form and move around, gradually, as Iser's theory suggests, discerning its schematic construction and the elements which make it up, alert to pattern in a collusive process of meaning-making. Both text and intercalated documents may create a cumulative pattern, where meaning accrues and reverberates for a reader attentive to narrative patterns. In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, for example, Daniel Defoe grasped that his assembled collection of parish plague reports and parliamentary submissions, compelling as these genuine documents were, needed the dynamic creation of an eyewitness narratorial consciousness to 'see' events on the reader's behalf, creating a

³⁰¹ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative*. Preface, xiii.

³⁰² Iser, *The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response*.

³⁰³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader : Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). p 34

visual and visceral illusion of a lens of perception and a comprehensible psychologically-driven narrative progression.

Metaphors may be literalised as any object, action, spatial relationship, or thing noticed, remarked upon or returned to by the narrator in their account, and the incorporation of items or documents as part of the diary may operate in this way via their inclusion alone. It may provide some kind of eventual epiphany for the narrative persona as well, as they too are alerted to their own repetitions and thematic contexts.

A great deal of the literary power of Peter Carey's meticulously-constructed text *True History of the Kelly Gang* is created and maintained, in my view, through the intercalation of literalised extended metaphors, woven into the larger story as recounted, and it is worth turning again to this text to examine in more detail the way Carey creates and controls the burgeoning narrative patterning around his extended metaphors. The tortured Kelly, once established as a voice capable of picturesque, image-rich language—‘When our brave parents was ripped from Ireland like teeth from the mouth of their own history’³⁰⁴—can refer again and again to the constant gruelling labour of splitting wood, his prowess at it, and the hardness and grandeur of Australian timbers: ‘We made our oath beneath a mighty ironbark it were 8 ft across as old as history its bark so black and rough it were like the armour of a foreign king.’³⁰⁵ That imagistic aperture opens out into extended metaphor as foreshadowing of disruption: ‘My father had been a stubborn ironbark corner post you could strain a fence with 8 taut lines and never see it budge but it didnt take a day to realise Uncle James were dug too shallow or placed in sandy soil.’³⁰⁶ Kelly offers a bitter comparison with the inadequate men who took up with Ned's mother who, in his eyes, were hollow and useless: ‘Shutup she cried and look around you. Look at his fences is they the work of a cove who plans to bolt? The posts are grey box they'll be eaten out inside 4 yr. Our da would not use grey box no road. It were only ironbark or red gum for him.’³⁰⁷ Cutting tall timbers with his brother Jem, both boys come close to death when a ‘grandfather’ tree falls:

If you have felled a tree you know that sound it is the hinge of life before the door is slammed [...] it is swift as a guillotine [...] The ironbark went. It fell like

³⁰⁴ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 118

³⁰⁵ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 123

³⁰⁶ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 51

³⁰⁷ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 228

a whole empire collapse its crown crushing into the adjacent grey box. I heard the sound of a thousand bones breaking all at once.³⁰⁸

Finally, appearing as an incantatory prophecy bitterly recounted at the end of a section, prior to an unexpected period of traumatic turbulence, the narrator can circle obsessively on allegory alone:

I was returned to the cells of Beechworth Prison and here the turnkeys stripped me and shore my cut and bleeding head while heaping me with threats & insults but even a green log will burn when the heat is high enough. Many is the night I have sat by the roaring river the rain never ending them logs so green bubbling and spitting blazing in a rage no rain can staunch.³⁰⁹

The language becomes biblical; the image of Kelly as Jesus being stripped and humiliated by guards prior to his execution is clear. The burning of green wood also has strong associative connections with waste and profligacy as well as echoing Biblical parables where 'the green wood' represents righteousness. (Here my Catholic education, finally, comes in useful.)

Fire, and the catalytic crucible in which resistance and defiance are formed, is another metaphor carefully threaded through this narrative. Coming out of prison to further family strife, Kelly describes his childhood 'boiled off me like fat and marrow is rendered within the tallow pot.'³¹⁰ When he sees police endanger the life of his lover Mary and her baby George, he visualises a moment of elemental transformation:

I order you cried Superintendent Brooke Smith & discharged his pistol through the roof. That were the moment George's eyes changed colour Kate will attest to that. One moment they was blue the next a yellow brown the colour of a ginger cat. In the heat of the furnace metals change their nature in olden days they could make gold from lead. Wait to see what more there is to hear my daughter for in the end we poor uneducated people will all be made noble in the fire.³¹¹

This savage and strange prose makes the vow to keep the account safe so that a 'true history' may be told even as the poor are sacrificed to forces beyond their control.

Continual repetition and return to nursed grievance and perceived injustice echo in the constrained psychic space—the literal prison—which cloisters and intensifies the

³⁰⁸ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 124

³⁰⁹ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 218

³¹⁰ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 215

³¹¹ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 341

narrator's resistance and chafes at his drastically limited purview: 'once the defeated tree lay ruined on the forest floor then my black mood would flood back and I would brood on how my life and land was taken from me. Thus like an idiot I spoiled my own freedom brooding day and night and this were like a lathe for it shaped the thing that were brooded upon.'³¹²

In the consciousness where it is lodged, whether consciously noted or not, the metaphor becomes the 'holding pattern' for the story. In a self-reflexive narrator engaged in the epistolary drama of trying to keep a self-vindicating record while on the run from the law, rhythm and repetition shape the things brooded upon. It returns like a ripple effect: intrusive, plaguing, reminiscent of unresolved conflicts or the effect of being 'haunted' by irresolution. As a reader moves through this kind of text, alert to numinous elements of visual imagery, repetition, juxtapositions and pattern, the unfolding entries over time yield connections and associative material in the process of meaning-making. Handled with aplomb like this, a strategy of accretive metaphorical connections make the work's thematic underpinnings feel propulsive, symmetrical and intrinsic.

The literal and figurative 'template' Kelly uses to make his iconic steel armour, for example, works in just this way. He makes himself a pattern from 'fresh peeled stringybark', promising that 'the British Empire has steam & factories & thousands come to toil each day carrying out its orders it cannot imagine what we colonials have in store.'³¹³ The suits of armour Kelly claims many other farmers made in preparation for the imminent showdown with authority are 'planted' again: 'Them suits was made and buried in the soil awaiting resurrection.'³¹⁴ The Australian native trees he fells and uses are further transmogrified both literally and figuratively into paper for his 'true history': he ends up wrapping his own record around his body and securing it there. The narrator's obsession to define himself and be heard via this account: 'I were the terror of the government being brung to life in the cauldron of the night'³¹⁵ is echoed again and again. It is clear that if a narrator finds within themselves sufficient inchoate material and sufficient reason to make a transcript, the epistolary form is no handicap; in fact, as a device focussing microcosmic attention on the unspeakable or ineffable, it may be said

³¹² Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 230

³¹³ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 441

³¹⁴ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 443

³¹⁵ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 430

to enhance it. Dramatic tension may, in these conditions, be plausibly brought to bear by the need to circle and re-address incendiary or unbearable psychological material.

As Burroway notes, dynamic interplay is possible when symbolism or allegory is recognised by the character as well as the reader. A reader comprehending Ned Kelly as green wood, difficult to light but difficult to extinguish once burning, is one layer. Ned Kelly himself bitterly recognising himself as green wood—wasted, tossed aside, capable of seething with unexpected, incandescent rage—is another. There is even a suggestion that Kelly unconsciously reveals his own subliminal preoccupations through the suggestion that he has absently marked up the text while confined in prison. The seventh parcel is described: ‘Linen-bound pocket diary (3’ x 4 3/4 ‘ approx.) of 50 pages. On the endpapers there are 6 drawings of people trees and fences, the quality of the artwork somewhere between doodling and drawing. Dust soiling along edges.’³¹⁶

For a writer as skilled as Carey, it's hard to believe the drawings' subjects aren't part of the crumb trail of symbology. People, fences and trees, drawn while heartsick and incarcerated—colonial Australia, in a nutshell.

In the dance of intention and expectation through which an author and reader communicate, I suggest narrativising, expanding or literalising metaphor creates a process of intensification, especially in a fragmented text such as a diary. The miscellany effect created in such a text may at first present the fragmented or staggered elements of the work as seemingly disparate or random, but the meaning-making process is provoked out of a readerly search for pattern and coherence in these fragments and their order. In writing on how metaphorical language is woven into his work poet and author William H. Gass wrote: ‘I ask you, finally, then, to think of every word as a wildly ordered set of meanings and relations.’³¹⁷ Echoing Lejeune’s metaphor of his diary’s structure as an ‘implicit continuum’ resembling ‘a spider’s web’ of associative material, Gass defined his words as ‘each one like a piece in chess, the centre of a network of astonishing relations. A poem or work of fiction is a system of such systems [...] a complete world [which] unfolds from the phrase like an auto map reveals its roads. In metaphor, meanings model one another, wear their clothes’. This, too, echoes Kim Mahood’s representation of meaning as a literal map, unfolded slowly through the

³¹⁶ Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. p 219

³¹⁷ W.H. Gass, ‘*Groping for Trout: On Metaphor*’, *Salmagundi* number 24, 1973, pp 28—29

process of reading. Repeated, literalised metaphorical imagery is not just a random jumble of mosaic fragments or 'chess pieces', however; each aspect of the network is an element in play, strategized and substantive. To be 'narrativised'—that is, 'read' as a coherent narrative by a reader—the fragments must be both accretive and cumulative, seen as a purposeful framework for narrative coherence from which meaning can be gleaned. Once a reader assumes there is an interrelationship among all the facets of the story, the patterns begin to interlock. Further elements, nuances, or fresh leitmotifs are then perceived to illuminate and deepen this pattern, and this interlocking may be perceived as some kind of metaphor in itself, creating a progressive course charted through association.

CONCLUSION.

‘There are very few human beings who receive the truth, complete and staggering, by instant illumination. Most of them acquire it fragment by fragment, on a small scale, by successive developments, like a laborious mosaic.’

Anais Nin.³¹⁸

7 am June 8th: Realise (belatedly?) that the apprehension of textual play in terms of imposing faux ‘diary entries’ in dissertation may induce readerly suspicion even where a statement of hindsight suggests the author is masquerading as a narrator, and at some point (Carey: in conclusion, not frontispiece) needs to declare interest. Wonder about inconsistencies. Consider the implications of narrative unreliability to any statements presented in a conclusion. That date and time, for starters.

In fictional diaries, which rely on mimicry of authentic diaries, it is clear that a range of literary strategies may be capitalised upon for verisimilitude, combined with the pose that the artefact itself is ‘real’. An alertness to both form and content creates the particular interpretive readerly activity which comes with the fictional diary strategy—the ‘double response’ Duyfhuizen speaks of, which requires that a reader must do two parallel things as they read: feel themselves immersed in the fictional world while simultaneously observing it at a remove, conscious (or possibly just harbouring a suspicion) that it is not an authentic private diary but an artful construction, created for particular aesthetic ends which may be stated or unstated. I have suggested in this thesis that for the apprehension of ‘artful artlessness’ to be activated in a reader, both the external textual shape and appearance of the artefact, and the interior narrative framework which contrives a ‘real-seeming’ narrative persona, must be in play simultaneously. This amalgamation forms the particular tensions and pleasures of the fictional diary.

In encountering a work of diary fiction, a reader is required to simultaneously recognise artifice in form and willingly suspend disbelief to acknowledge fictionality:

³¹⁸ A. Nin and G. Stuhlmann, *The journals of Anais Nin*, vol. 3 (Quartet Books, 1976). p 10

the state, for want of a better term, of being both happy and hoodwinked. This is not the only paradox which must be held simultaneously in the reader's mind: there is also the parallel apprehension of the exterior presentation as a mimetic representation of an authentic form coupled with the apprehension of the narratorial entity as essentially 'inauthentic' in terms of reliability—an artful representation of artlessness to create a narrative persona who is essentially an intentional hoax—a lie which feels uncannily 'real'. There is the inherent tension involved in a reader encountering a text ostensibly created as a site for private or secret disclosures, but which is now, paradoxically, a 'found' record in the public domain—a reading experience which evokes both the gratification of collaboration and the discomfort of voyeurism. These paradoxes of form are echoed by Langford and West in their study of marginal forms, in which they speak of the blurring of boundaries between literary and historical writing in diaries both factual and fictional:

The diary, as an uncertain genre uneasily balanced [...] between the spontaneity of reportage and reflectiveness of the crafted text, between selfhood and events, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the private and the public, constantly disturbs attempts to summarise its characteristics within formalized boundaries.³¹⁹

It is a relatively straightforward exercise to define the formal characteristics recognisable in a diary text—a self-reflexive voice in a dated structure, written with an eye to immediacy and incorporating simultaneity, epistolarity and the self-conscious act of writing. Plausibly engineering this readerly 'double response' on both exterior and interior levels of artifice, however, is clearly a much more demanding task for an author.

8 pm: Awkward attempts to grapple with simultaneity and the illusion of a psyche's fluctuating progress and uncertainty worked out on the page. Months have passed! Why pretend the writing process is not at its roots performative? Perhaps adjust dating and time noted to truly reflect lateness of the hour, but concerned this disrupts representation of self as inadvertently self-revealing. The curse of self-consciousness!

³¹⁹ R. Langford and R. West, 'Diaries and Margins' in 'Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History' Amsterman 1999. p 8

Alexander Pope published his own correspondence during his lifetime, famously even writing his translation of Homer's *The Iliad* on the covers and backs of his own letters and publishing them in that form. Later study revealed that this apparent repurposing of authentic and spontaneous documents was actually a studied and artful illusion, when the letters were shown to be as revised and edited prior to publication as his translation efforts. Can we see these published and reworked letters, then, as a hoax? And what are they 'faking'—authenticity? Spontaneous eloquence? Samuel Johnson, Pope's rival in prolific epistolary output and the most famous diarist in the English language, spotted the device, and wrote in his *Life of Pope* (1781): 'There is no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse',³²⁰ claiming that a published letter could not be a spontaneous and unmediated gesture but was rather 'a calm and deliberate performance', something which works to create a calculated effect in the presentation of 'self'. Pope is not guilty of pretending to be somebody he is not, in the manner of hoax texts. He is guilty only of attempting a kind of studied self-fashioned illusion of artlessness. He may have been 'caught out' in his ruse by Johnson, but he was really only reproducing a version of himself which was 'better than real' for the page—a sophisticated, if fallacious act of self-fictionalising.

I see this as an attempt to create another 'self', a slightly separate entity responsible for the seemingly unedited, spontaneously brilliant letters; a more talented version of the man of letters Pope is attempting to pass himself off as for his reading audience. As I discussed in Chapter Four, this self-fictionalising and editing tendency once a story is told or written down presents us with the near-impossibility of seeing a written text as genuinely spontaneous or unmediated. Memoir, autobiography, letters, blogs, Instagram posts, all are in some way performative once they are committed to a page designed for public view. In texts which blur the boundaries between author and narrator, this is important to remember. The diary, like every textual artefact, presents an account which is not a spontaneous outpouring but a record of what that narrating 'self' attends to in self-conscious disclosure. Here is where the illusion of a manuscript as a record 'left' by a narrator reveals itself as a having different strategic possibilities from the unmediated 'stream of consciousness' or interior monologue of first-person fiction

³²⁰ S. Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works* (G. Walker, J. Akerman, E. Edwards, 1821). p 283

more generally. In hypothesizing about attributes of this form which lend themselves to strategising, therefore, I would count the discernible drama of epistolarity as fundamental. The reader is reading a record built, allegedly, around the dramatic enactment of committing words to a page, and the text is a material and metaphorical representation of that process.

The word Johnson uses of ‘transaction’ resonates here. What is the essential ‘transaction’ taking place between a reader and an author in a work such as a fictional diary? Richard Walsh sees fictionality as bound up in the readerly pact: ‘neither a boundary between worlds nor a frame dissociating the author with the discourse, but a contextual assumption by the reader, prompted by the manifest information that the authorial discourse is offered as fiction.’³²¹ A fictional diary, as I have shown, creates a very specific and overt set of textual manipulations, designed to orient readers that the text in their hands, while it may ‘feel’ authentic, is deliberately feigning that veracity for aesthetic ends. These manipulations operate as an invitation for a reader to make their own hypotheses and assumptions based, as Walsh claims, on what is manifest in the text, in order to make accurate contextual assumptions. This awareness of a deliberately feigned verisimilitude is what positions the reader in the collaborative fictional ‘game’ of the text, but also dictates its shape and form, relying for its impact on the illusion of being just such a genuine unselfconscious account as Pope was striving to ...well, fake.

I also see the potential for literary strategising around the deliberate breaching of these boundaries. Even if the conceit of the diary is that the record is privately-kept and not intended for an outside audience, there is a breach between the private and the public, because the act of writing itself removes the interiority and guaranteed secrecy of the unvoiced or unwritten emotion, even as the writing itself may be clandestine. Further dramatic irony may therefore be created which may in turn dictate the style, tone and nature of the diary’s disclosures. As Martens points out, ‘instead of a narrator who creates a narrated world and addresses himself to a fictive reader, we have a narrator who takes himself as subject and is his own reader’.³²² These public/private interplays in themselves create rich potential for strategizing unreliability in the narrative character and their awareness of the potential breached secrecy of the record-keeping project.

³²¹ Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality - Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020). p 36

³²² Martens, *The Diary Novel*. p 5

The reader's awareness of the diary's status as fiction allows for a perceived violation of privacy that would be unacceptable in other contexts. Readers encountering a seemingly private document can mitigate the discomforting sense of violated privacy or voyeurism by taking part in a collaborative reading activity which allows intercalated documents, textual discontinuity or unexpected disruptions to be seen as narrative strategies designed by the author. Here the unique characteristics of epistolary fiction come into play, where the fragmented composition of the text lends itself to interpretations of interruption, resumption, self-perception and misrepresentation. Intercalated documents may also suggest fluctuations of observations or the accumulation of a collection of supporting evidence or testimony on the part of the narrator, as can be seen by Carey's Ned Kelly in his scorn of the press accounts of his exploits which he pastes into his account and then mocks and defaces in retribution.

The act of reading such a text breaches other boundaries, including the often-unstated tension between the private record and the public publication or alleged discovery of it, creating a reading experience further informed by a sense of transgression or subterfuge. This tension around breached boundaries also throws into relief the patterns of expectations and assumptions around the way such a text is 'read' and interpreted, something exploited by authors writing both 'hoax' diaries and metafictional, experimental texts which are presented as diaries or epistolary texts, since subverting readerly expectations around what is taken to be 'true' and what is understood to be 'fake' intersect with other perceptions of fallibility, reliability and susceptibility to artifice.

The diary form is a perfect vehicle for capitalizing on these sometimes unsettling or provocative boundaries of truth and fiction, since it creates what Duyfhuizen terms 'a myth of genuineness, an allegory of writing and reading the world.'³²³ The readerly discomfort around being 'taken in' by a text's 'myth of genuineness' may be part of the metafictional challenge of some authors intent on exploring and provoking those boundaries. More tension may be provoked in texts such as assemblage or hybrid works where no narrator is present or their status as fictional or authorial 'I' is unclear. The fascinating history of literary hoaxes points to the nexus of this discomfort, which in my opinion is embedded in the apprehension of either narratorial or authorial unreliability.

³²³ Bernard Duyfhuizen, "Diary Narratives in Fact and Fiction (Book Review)," (1986). p 178

While narratorial unreliability can be scintillating, authorial unreliability is an unmooring experience for a reader, creating uncertainty around intention and a likely suspicion of being ‘fooled’ by fallacies, lies and trickery; the state of being unwillingly, unhappily hoodwinked. For many readers, this is a breach too far. The rendering of narratorial unreliability, however, confirms faith in authorial devices created for aesthetic ends, and illustrates strategies which define the dynamic scope available in the form to practitioners. The apprehension of fictionality through a fictive narrator makes these devices possible because unreliability in this persona may be fully utilized without ambiguity, operating as the focalizing device which in turn shapes and directs the narrative and allowing a navigation through the text where these characteristics may be perceived as authorial choices, rather than inadvertent slips or deliberate attempts to deceive.

Geoff Dyer, author of many cross-genre books which are 'nonfiction but full of invention',³²⁴ claims the issue of a text's presentation and reception is not dependent, finally, on whether material is invented or factually reliable:

All that matters is that the reader can't see the joins, that there is no textural change between reliable fabric and fabrication. In other words, the issue is not one of accuracy but aesthetics [...] style itself can become a form of invention. And the did-it-really-happen? issue gives way to questions of style and form, so we are brought back to the *expectations* engendered by certain forms: how we expect to read certain books, how we expect them to behave.³²⁵

Dyer's claim that what's important is that the reader 'can't see the joins' between fabric and the fabrication speaks to the apprehension of texts which borrow elements of both fact and fiction to succeed as inventions, ultimately, through the stylistic integration of both form and content, amalgamated for artistic ends. This expectation and appreciation of aesthetic effect, in his opinion, transcends the more suspicious ‘forensic’ read where factual accuracy or clearly-stated purposes are promised and held to account.

Dyer is celebrated as an essayist, but what he articulates here is a desire for an integrity of form, something poet Mark Doty also speaks of when naming the search for metaphor as looking for ‘the right vessel, the right vehicle, for whatever will serve.’

³²⁴ G. Dyer. “Based on a True Story: the fine line between fact and fiction” The Guardian Books section, December 6th, 2015.

³²⁵ Dyer, ““Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction”.”

Both writers are speaking to the notion of synthesis; the inextricable link forged between form and content which creates its own singular irreducible effect in a given work. In discussing *But Beautiful*, his 1991 book *about jazz*, constructed in improvisational riffs which are mimetic *of jazz*—a marriage of form and content which has come to be seen as brilliantly genre-defining—Dyer says: ‘The essential thing [...] I discovered when writing *But Beautiful* as a series of improvisations is to arrive at a form singularly appropriate to a particular subject, and to that subject alone.’³²⁶

The fictional diary strikes me as a unique marriage of form and content which creates a highly singular effect. Scholar Irina Paperno says ‘The diary offers a unique narrative form, or template, for the tracking of self in time. Commitment to the calendar entails two narrative consequences: fragmentation and continuity.’³²⁷ I consider this juxtaposition of fragmentation and continuity among the form’s key literary strategies, and highly relevant to the lens through which a reader interprets the narrating consciousness and comes to collaborate in some kind of readerly pact or transaction, ‘reading’ the work of diary fiction as a constructed representation of a singular consciousness reflexively attempting to record physical and psychic states and changes, both consciously and inadvertently, through the act of writing and recording. Through this, the artefact itself undergoes its own textual transformation.

The range of characterisation devices available, once this unique feature is grasped, are myriad. It may literally and figuratively transmogrify, as Gogol and Sartre’s work illustrates, moving from a formal, orderly record of reportage on exterior conditions and observations to a tangled, cathartic and effusive representation of psychological anomie, disruption or unresolved problems. The sense of privacy or clandestine motives may be suppressed, or suggest that the secrecy of the text has been breached. A literal pocket of negative space—a break, absence, ‘white space’ or section break on the page—could operate to implicitly suggest some non-literal break, perhaps even a ‘psychotic break’ or psychic blank spot—to highlight estrangement or destabilization. The drama of epistolarity may reveal to the writer their submerged subject or preoccupation, or be part of a more elaborate project of concealing it. A diarist may be perceived as writing to *avoid*, and the representation of absences, gaps or elisions may then come to represent imagined aspects of what the narrator cannot bear to

³²⁶ Dyer, ““Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction”.”

³²⁷ Paperno, ““What Can Be Done with Diaries?”.” p 571

write or attend to psychologically. The reader may experience the narrative illusion of grasping, over the course of the story, that which the character is wilfully failing to. The active attempt of an unstable and unreliable first-person narrator to avert their eyes from themselves, in fact, could be seen as a clear strategy to provide dynamic structure.

This narrative tactic of rendering suggestive space around what is strategically left out, rather than manifest, in a textual artefact represents characterisation at its most nuanced. To (1) provoke in a reader a desire to believe in a fictional account left by a fictional diarist and (2) glean suggestive and inferential emplotment cues based on the gaps and elisions created through what is (3) consciously or unconsciously omitted, disavowed or suppressed in such a text is, in my opinion, equivalent to executing a triple axel on the slippery rink of first-person fictional representation. It speaks to the constraints and formal requirements of diary fiction which have always characterised it, but also its power to activate dynamic and potent new parameters in first-person fiction so that it is justly celebrated as an autonomous and distinctive literary form.

As Dyer states, the collaborative dance becomes one which pivots and steps around a nexus of authorial intention and reader expectation.³²⁸ In encountering a fictional diary or epistolary text, a reader is required to make decisions as to how to interpret cues and clues both within the textual artefact and in the presentation of the artefact itself—both the ‘fabric’ and the ‘fabrication’ Dyer claims are necessary. Identifying and recognising the ‘game’ of intertextual references, metaphors and framing devices are intrinsically bound up with a reader’s attention: the attention paid to tropes, the attention a text draws to its own artifice, and the attention drawn to the fluidity and instability of textual representation itself in the allusive, collusive game of reading.

Then the state of true collaboration may begin, whereby, as Paul Ricoeur once commented, ‘reading becomes a picnic, where the author brings the words and the readers the meaning.’³²⁹ I think again of George Saunders and his sidecar, because there are more than two of us at the fictional diary picnic. The author is there, arranging the spread they have laboured over, worrying about nutritional content versus enjoyment, probably, and praying there will be no ants. The reader is there, hungry, attentive, wanting to take home the leftovers to savour later, just as the author hoped.

³²⁸ Dyer, ““Based on a true story: the fine line between fact and fiction”.”

³²⁹ P. Ricoeur, K. McLaughlin, and D. Pellauer, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (University of Chicago Press, 1990). p 169

The fictional narrator is there too. They have summoned themselves into being through the writing of their account, they cannot vanish once the picnic is consumed. They are the focussing agent of the fictional diary text and the key to its verisimilitude—that voice and persona brought to the page may be magisterial, free-ranging, flat, melancholic, enraged, semi-literate or desperate, but the psychological viewpoint it affords the reader reveals, ultimately, the birds-eye view of a larger pattern, clearer from a distance. The sunshine is theirs, the hillside is theirs, the picnic rug and all its associative memories are theirs. It's their picnic, in fact; conjured in honour of them. If they're silent now, we feel we know them well enough to assume the reason: they're just wishing they'd remembered to bring their diary and a pen, to write it all down.

CODA.

In 2014 I lived for almost a year in Santo, Vanuatu, with my then-husband and young daughter, part of a volunteer program undertaken by my partner. I had undertaken another volunteer stint earlier in my life, working in a microcredit co-operative in Tequisquiapan, Mexico, as part of Australian Volunteers International, and had written a book about this experience published in 2005 (*Sing, and Don't Cry: a Mexican journal, Transit Lounge Press, 2005*). Published as both a poet and fiction writer, I found this sidestep into memoir an interesting experience. When writing of life experiences, I became the narrative "I", and therefore the subject of my own book: an experience of creating veracity rather than verisimilitude, which is the basis of the fictional endeavour. The expectation from publishers when I returned from Vanuatu was that I would, in turn, write a second 'memoir' account of this experience, since I had had the opportunity during the Vanuatu sojourn to witness first-hand many cultural traditions, a small Pacific society in a state of fascinating and troubling flux, the blunt end of climactic turmoil in the shape of a cyclone and subsequent dengue fever outbreak, and so on. I had seen the stark juxtaposition of tourism and local 'kastom' economies, watched cruise ships arrive and depart, heard stories, visited islands and taught at schools, all the while simultaneously seeing myself as part of a larger problematic incursion into that world.

The time on the island had been so personally tumultuous, however, that I found myself wanting instead to explore how this year of change and subsequent emotional and psychic disorientation and disruption through the lens of a fictional 'avatar' character. I also wanted to take my daughter out of the picture, which precluded the possibility of presenting the story as a memoir, no matter how 'true' its elements. I felt I could bestow a great deal of psychological flux upon a fictional narrator as an exercise in naming and acknowledging my own 'unreliability' in the separation of author and narrative persona or voice, and I was keen to try literalising psychic states as potentially allegorised 'places', creating a physical and psychological 'fortress' of isolation, such as an island, in order to create a locus of the work's concerns. I wondered how these metaphors might operate as narrative 'drivers' in their own right, either consciously or unconsciously noted by the narrator. A project of creating a fictionalised account of a psychological 'echo chamber' demands some kind of voluntary or enforced isolation on

the part of the narrator, and here again I saw that a psychological set of conditions might be allegorised into a physiological one for the purpose of verisimilitude. The diary form suggested itself to me as a potent arena to map out an ‘arc’ of burgeoning psychic coherence as a structure, from denial and disarray to, under duress, a reconstituted sense of self built out of the drama of epistolarity itself. I was struck, once I was on the path of literalised metaphors, by the notions of ‘colony collapse’ and the desire to create, as part of the dramatic tension generated by the fictional diary, a sense that larger and more pressing disasters were happening ‘offstage’, as it were, not fully comprehended by the narrator but discerned by a reader alerted to everything that narrator is failing to pay attention to. Apart from these literalised and potentially allegorical inventions of the island itself, the bee breeding project and the cascade of disasters which cause the full-blown isolation of the narrative persona, everything in the story is drawn from my own lived experience, reconstituted via the process of fictionalisation where retrospectivity can become a generative exercise.

The representation of an unreliable consciousness has always interested me in writing fiction. First-person narrators create a field of play which seems to reach its full fruition on the page, where rendering a subjective consciousness allows for the kinds of limitations which delineate that character’s distinctive interiority, limitations which may well emerge as key narrative drivers. The ‘psychological novel’ of the twentieth and twenty-first century demands a certain complexity—to represent the complex state of the narrative persona’s psyche, as rendered, in order to maintain a suspension of disbelief, and an alleged record left by this narrative consciousness also provokes a particular readerly response, around discerning the likelihood of whether or not the artefact the reader is holding in their hands is a work of fiction, and this narrator is a construction.

I knew this was the kind of project I wanted to explore in the creative component of this thesis. My close examination of other fictional diaries and their history illustrated how the fictional diary is a literary form which pretends or attempts to replicate the complex and confusing state of the fictional narrative psyche, so the narrative progressions can only be as neat and purposeful as the fictional psyche can allow. When intentionally attempting to represent a psyche in disarray, I could also see the potential of utilising the project of writing a record as that psyche’s method of attempting to make more understandably coherent, for themselves, that state of psychic disarray. I could see, too, that the shape provides a further opportunity to create a burgeoning narrative

arc—a shape a reader may ideally recognise as a ‘plot’ shifted to the psychological plane.

I pondered whether it was then possible to create, through the form, a kind of psychic echo chamber where the reader is fully immersed in a kind of simultaneous search for coherence, meaning and structure in the metanarrative of the diary, just as the narrator is engaged in this process themselves. If so, perhaps the record itself would stand as an artefact to the collaborative reading exercise, where the shape and limits of the fictional world, evoked by the text and the illusion of the kept record, go on to exist in the reader’s imagination, once read, in a kind of parallel circling of ruminative material which finds eventual coherence.

The stylistic inclusion of footnotes, seemingly bibliographic material, maps, photos, etc., all lend a sense of realism to imaginary subject matter, allowing a reader to ironically or consciously recognise the amalgamation not as a random assemblage but as an intentional construction. Providing a fluctuating dated structure also augmented that suggestion of arrangement and intentionality. The inclusion of intercalated material employed by other practitioners of the fictional diary form—footnotes, fake maps, photographs, pasted-in documents, references to real and extant events, music, people or works of art, and so on—inspired me further. Little by little, I learned about textual assemblage and arrangement through my own stitching together of components like these, borrowing the ones I admired the most, such as Carey’s use of editorial third-party intervention to not only disrupt the sense of verisimilitude in the text fragments themselves but to offer an alternative or additional set of clues to be gleaned for the artefact’s existence.

My critical reading also informed and clarified my initially rather inchoate thoughts about how a narratorial “I” may be perceived differently in a memoir and a fictional account, particularly in a form like the fictional diary, which relies for part of its impact on posing as an authentic diary. Because I had felt compelled to explore this material as a fictional account featuring a narratorial persona who was not ‘me’, I interrogated this impulse in terms of how unreliability is encountered and processed by an alert and engaged reader. A paradox seemed to be in operation whereby a work identified as a memoir in which the narrator is perceived as, for example, whiny, self-absorbed and unintentionally self-revealing, tends to be judged negatively, no matter how ‘true’ or powerful the story, because it reflects on a kind of faulty authorial self-

insight. A first-person psychological novel in which the narrator possesses those same traits, on the other hand, is conversely charged with authorial intentionality—a fictional narrator who lacks self-insight is fascinating because a reader senses imminent change will break down this state. I came to form the opinion that the “I” as subject in fiction strategically creates a ‘reliably unreliable’ narrative viewpoint as a deliberate stylistic technique, ideally recognised and integrated by a reader intent on following authorial clues and revelations over the burgeoning course of the narrative.

To create the kind of verisimilitude I wanted I therefore researched tropical apiary projects (of which there are many) and invented some feasible scenarios for a project of this nature, undertaken by a person who, also feasibly, might want to ‘lie low’ after a traumatic rupture to her sense of self; a difficult thing to achieve in Melanesian culture. The more pressing her need to isolate and ‘quarantine’ herself and create a psychological separation between herself and the psychic disruption she had experienced, I reasoned, the more her attention to the physical, geographic, tidal, task-oriented, material world of the island and its simplified requirements would plausibly be the focus and form of her official ‘record’. Once this record is stymied, her diary could transmogrify into something different; a testament to survival or a kind of epistle to an imaginary co-respondent in the absence of any other human interaction.

It was important to me that, emotionally and culturally speaking, my sources were as unimpeachable as I could make them in terms of what the narrator recounts and remembers about her life in Vanuatu, but I also researched accounts of solitary confinement and what people undergoing it tend to write—including lists and memory tests—and incorporated a semblance of these into my record. I researched compulsive rumination and catastrophising, and examined reports of ‘solastagia’, the kind of ineffable grief for environmental loss—a thread which runs through the account of my fictional narrator as she surveys the wreckage of the ‘tropical island idyll’ around her.

I was surprised and somewhat unnerved, once I had finished my first draft of this fictional diary and begun drafting my critical analysis, that a pandemic very like the one I had invented to serve this story appeared, involving contagion aboard cruise-ships and ad-hoc quarantining, in a case of what felt uneasily like life imitating art imitating life. A cyclone very like the one I imagined—which in a hypothetical global public health emergency ‘offstage’ would deliver a kind of double-whammy to the likelihood of rescue and communications—hit Vanuatu almost on cue in April 2020.

A word on cyclones as a literalised metaphor for the ‘psychic churn’ seems apt here. Vanuatu is ranked as the world’s most vulnerable nation to natural disasters, and I had experienced Cyclone Lusi while living there in 2014, and witnessed the coping and adaptive capacities and strategies of the communities it struck and damaged. When Cyclone Pam, one of the strongest cyclones on record, hit the island nation in 2015, infrastructure, housing and food crops were badly damaged and just as crucially, telecommunications ceased functioning, which informed some of the conditions of imposed isolation I imposed upon my character and her subsequent spiral into doubts over whether she had been abandoned by her project managers.

The device of replicating on the micro scale something happening out of the purview of the character on the macro scale was brought literally to bear by Cyclone Harold in 2020. Conditions were created which exactly replicated those I had invented for my stricken island-bound narrator: a category 5 cyclone causing widespread destruction during a time when an influx of foreign aid and volunteers to help with recovery was hampered by a global public health emergency. No emergency relief work could be undertaken when restrictions had been put in place to combat the COVID-10 pandemic. With food crops and gardens destroyed and 90% of structures blown away, aid agencies reported a state of emergency in which people simply had to fend for themselves, in isolation, with no telecommunications coming through to let them know just what was happening. The condition which most hampered an organised distribution of aid to remote areas were the quarantine measures imposed to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19—an unprecedented and unpredicted set of circumstances which create an unfortunate ‘perfect storm’ both literally and figuratively.

As I have said, close reading during the writing of my critical component served to deepen my admiration for those practitioners who had utilised the dual illusions of the ‘found artefact’ form to compelling effect, which led me to attempt, following Peter Carey’s example, integrating third-party editorialising into my fictional diary artefact and to subtly and unobtrusively utilise this to provide extra lines, effectively, for the reader to read between. Therefore the only ‘clues’ as to the outcome of the narrator’s escape from the island with the nucleus cells of queen bees are contained within these editorial interventions, based on real latitudinal and longitudinal locations of community-owned hives and apiary projects currently found across the northern islands of Vanuatu. The suggestion contained in these terse departmental notes that DNA-

identical mite-resistant bees have also been discovered on the mainland of Australia, creating, whether by accident or design, new colonies of hybridised, sustainable bee populations, creates, I hope, its own kind of coda to the artefact. Through inference, unanswered questions might be addressed, but it requires a reader engaged enough to hope for resolution. These larger and more expansive ‘themes’, of course, find fruition not in the text itself, but in the reader’s head, on terms an author can only suggest and direct with imagery and nuance.

Salvador Dali, an artist many associate with originality of vision, once stated: “Those who do not want to imitate anything produce nothing”. It seems counterintuitive, this idea that imitation leads to novel and original new work which finds its own direction and shape, but in the case of writing this thesis, I have found it to be true. The research I have done into my critical component has inflected and continues to inspire my creative writing, and the techniques employed by the authors of fictional diaries I studied so closely led me to see my own writing and rewriting as a process of applying a variety of templates and frameworks, employed and analysed by others, looking for the vessel that would fit, as poet Mark Doty described it. In constructing my own ‘laborious mosaic’ I learned, through imitation, the narrative constraints and limits of attempting to render the devices a fictional diary requires, especially the difficult conjuring tricks of simultaneity and epistolarity, and the paradoxical freedoms that such constraints create in the rendering of a text already masquerading as something it’s not—an authentic record made by a real person. As always, it’s about the dance; the desire to want to write well enough to make a reader want to join in that dance, and forget they are in fact only reading marks on a page. I found myself resisting using the term ‘strategising’, because this process of inspiration through imitation never felt like a strategy, only an inkling, but I am certain this transposition of critical research into creative work has shifted my understanding of how fiction works, and why it’s worth doing, and will go on influencing my creative directions in the future.

Cate Kennedy

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SONG LYRICS AND POEM FRAGMENTS REFERRED TO IN CREATIVE COMPONENT:

‘Across the Universe’

Song by The Beatles, (written by Lennon-McCartney) first released 1968
EMI Studios, London U.K.

‘Both Sides Now’

Words and music by Joni Mitchell, from the album ‘Clouds’, 1969
A&M, Hollywood, California, Reprise label.

‘Coconut Song’

Words and music by Harry Nilsson, from the album ‘Nilsson Scmilsson’, 1971
RCA Victor Records, produced by Richard Perry.

‘Crazy’

Words and music by Willie Nelson, recorded by Patsy Cline in October 1961
Nashville Tennessee U.S.A. Decca Label.

‘Desperado’

Words and music by Glenn Frey and Don Henley of The Eagles, from the album
‘Desperado’, 1973. Island Studios, London, U.K.

‘I Am a Rock’

Song by Paul Simon, copyright 1966, from the album “Sounds of Silence”
Columbia Studios, released 1966.

‘Let it Be’

Words and music by The Beatles (written by Lennon-McCartney), released 1970
Apple Studios, London, U.K.

‘Meet the Flintstones’

Theme song to “The Flintstones”, words and music by Hoyt Curtin, for Hanna-Barbera
Productions, 1961.

‘The Highwayman’

Fragment from a poem by Alfred Noyes, first published *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 1906,
Edinburgh, Scotland.

‘Vincent’

Words and music by Don McLean, from the album ‘American Pie’, released 1971
United Artists Records, New York N.Y.

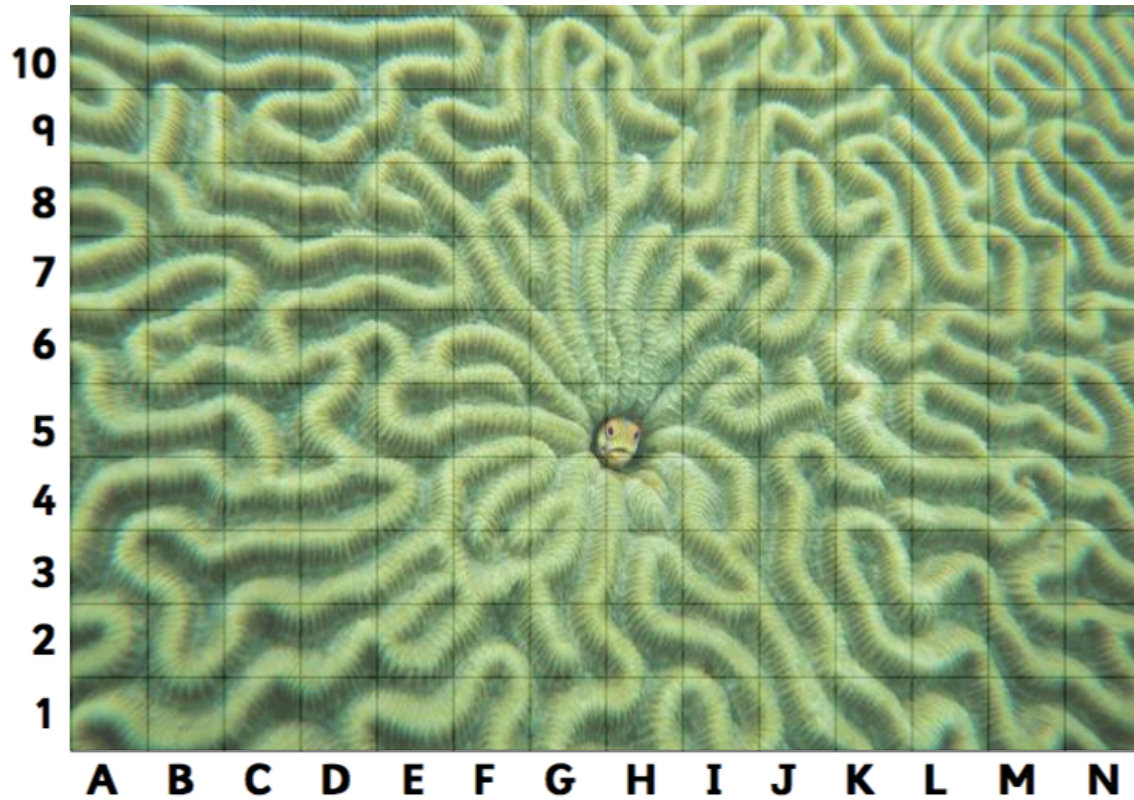
‘Way Over Yonder’

Words and music by Carole King, copyright 1971
Screen Gems-Columbia Music, Inc., New York, N.Y.

‘Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow’

Words and music by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, copyright 1960-1961
Screen Gems-Columbia Music, Inc. New York N.Y.

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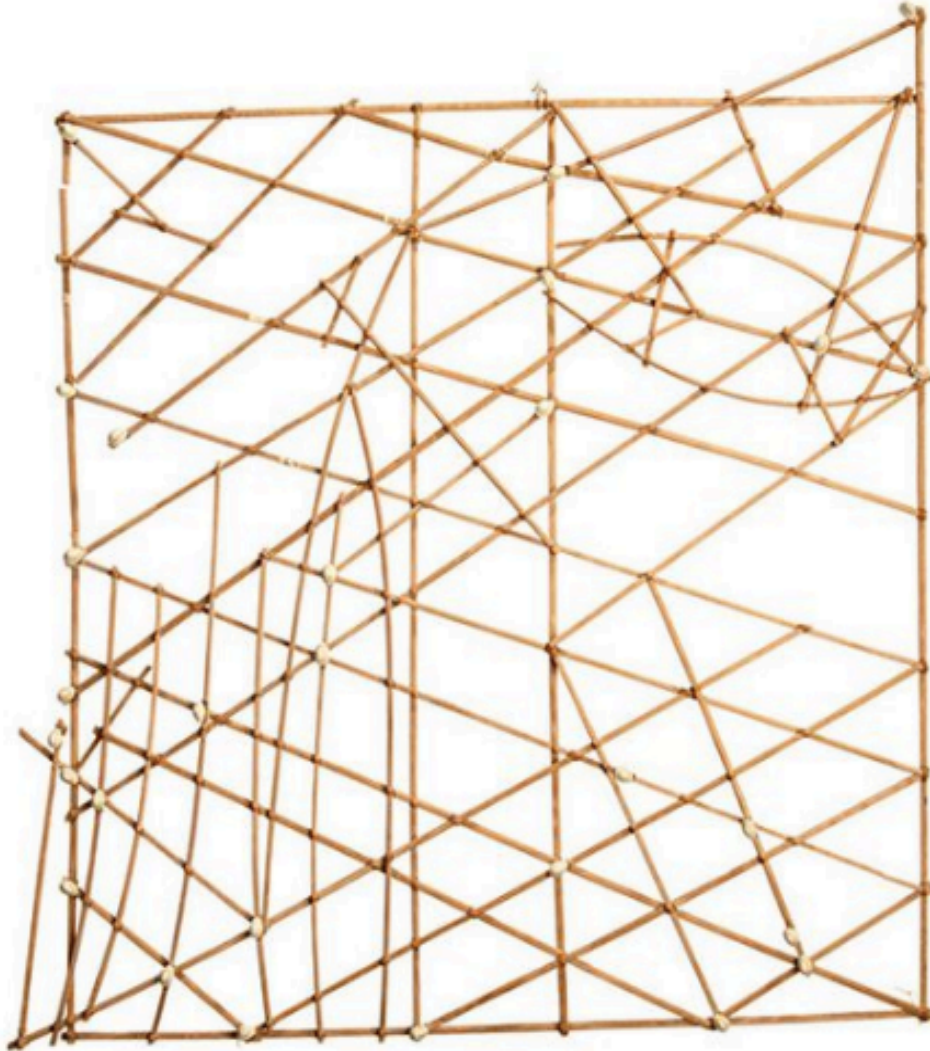
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