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How Sure Are You About That?: Narratorial Uncertainty in Third Person Fiction

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Abstract

In third person fiction, if the narrator makes his or her presence felt in the text, the reader may embody the narrator as part of a naturalisation process. What happens then, if a third person narrator appears unsure of the facts or events in the story world, or if it becomes unclear whether it is the narrator or a character who is telling the story? The reader must engage with some misgiving. However, if we consider the narrator that discloses their unreliability and appears to have good reason to be unreliable, the reader must first decide if the narrator is telling the story to the best of his or her ability: if s/he is being as accurate as possible and not withholding information about the story world. If the reader perceives the narrator as telling the story in the best way s/he can, then the reader is less likely to doubt the narrator.

With disclosure *and* acceptance of unreliability, the narrator continues to be unreliable but s/he can also be described as “uncertain”. In narratology, “uncertainty” constitutes a different form of unreliability. With an uncertain narrator the reader and the narrator must work together in order to uncover the truth of the story. In the case of an uncertain narrator, the reader returns to the “natural state” of trusting the narrative voice, but with the awareness that s/he may also have a role in meaning making.

This thesis hypothesises that the use of overt narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic fiction develops a reader-narrator relationship based on trust, rather than suspicion, as found in other types of unreliable heterodiegetic text: that is to say, the disclosure of uncertainty by the narrator, together with an awareness of narratorial uncertainty by the reader, changes the way in which the reader relates to the narrator.

Introduction

Readers often relate to a fictional story world in the context of their experiences, regarding and comparing story world events against the reality they experience in their own lives. In doing so, readers naturalise story world events using a blend of their understanding and the narrator's discourse. If the narrator makes his or her presence felt in the text, the reader may embody the narrator as part of this naturalisation process. Reading fiction narrated from a position outside the fictional world begins with the expectation that the narrator "knows what they are talking about". What happens then, if a third person narrator appears unsure of the facts or events in the story world, or if it becomes unclear whether it is the narrator or a character who is telling the story?

In this case, the reader will likely accept the narrator as unreliable and treat the narrator's information as provisional: they will read with suspicion. However, the manner of mediation, or delivery of a story to a reader, offers almost limitless possibilities for nuance, thus offering a wide range of narrating styles. What is more, unreliable narration occurs across a spectrum and in differing manners. Narration can be deemed unreliable, either for ethical or factual reasons. A narrator that discloses his or her unreliability, for example, may remain reliable in one sense, since they have confessed this deficiency. If we consider the narrator that discloses unreliability *and* appears to have good reason to be unreliable, they may appear to be compromised by the deficient recall of a story world character, or by too close an association with a character. In this case, the reader must decide if the narrator is telling the story to the best of his or her ability: and s/he is being as accurate as possible and not withholding information about the story world. If the reader perceives the narrator as telling the story in the best way s/he can, then the relationship between reader and narrator changes and the reader is less likely to second-guess the narrator. With disclosure *and*

acceptance of unreliability, the narrator continues to be unreliable but s/he can also be described as “uncertain”. In narratology, “uncertainty” constitutes a different form of unreliability. In this situation, the reader and the narrator must work together in order to uncover the truth of the story. In the case of an uncertain narrator, the reader returns to trusting the narrative voice, but with the awareness that s/he may also have a role in meaning making.

The study of unreliable narration has, until the mid-nineties, focussed on narratorial authority and competence. A widespread assumption in the study of unreliable narration is that heterodiegetic narratives (commonly referred to as third person or authorial narratives) are reliable, due to their narrative perspective. This viewpoint appears to be based on the classical understanding, which links unreliability to an embodied speaker (Martens 78). As recently as 2005, Zerweck stated that, “The concept of unreliable narration is inapplicable if a narrative is transmitted in an impersonal mode” (155). However, recent discussion by critics such as Nunning, Olsen, Phelan and Martens, in regards to narratorial unreliability in heterodiegetic narrative, has added to this debate and challenged some long-held beliefs.

Recent critical discussion has also drawn cognitive theory into the unreliability debate, with theorists such as Fludernik joining Nunning, Olson, Phelan and Martens in discussing how the reader *naturalises* text, in order to construct a personal and individual understanding. These recent critics have taken a theoretically balanced approach, seeking and understanding of the affects through rhetorical, cognitive and linguistic frames. This has allowed an expansion of critical discussion, which now includes Fludernik’s “reader naturalisation¹” and Phelan and Martin’s position² that heterodiegetic narration can support unreliability through a process of “naturalisation”, where the reader embodies the narrative voice. My research expands on this position in

suggesting that when the reader perceives the narrator as telling the story to the best of his or her ability, the nature of the unreliability changes from narratorial fallibility to narratorial uncertainty. Including the reader in the enquiry of literary relationships in unreliable authorial fiction has thus created new critical space for discussion of a specific style of heterodiegetic narratorial unreliability, which I call “heterodiegetic narratorial uncertainty”.

The use of overt narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic fiction develops a reader-narrator relationship based on trust, rather than suspicion, as found in other types of unreliable heterodiegetic text: that is to say, the disclosure of uncertainty by the narrator, together with an awareness of narratorial uncertainty by the reader, changes the way in which the reader relates to the narrator. An open but uncertain literary relationship is based on a partnership between reader and narrator, where authority and meaning making are shared, rather than seen as the responsibility of the text and narrator. By including the reader in meaning making, narratorial uncertainty has the potential to give the reader sanctioned authority when making judgements about story world events and the way the story is told.

The importance of narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic fiction appears to have been overlooked, mostly due to the assumption that authorial, or third person omniscient, narratives are reliable by definition. In my research, I have found that the development of the literary reader-narrator relationship, through narratorial uncertainty, is practiced by relatively few recent fiction writers.

In most heterodiegetic fiction, the narrator, regardless of reliability, relates to the reader from a position of authority. This thesis will consider texts that exhibit traits of narratorial uncertainty and demonstrate how a fictional work, through reader awareness of narratorial uncertainty, may support a different type of literary

relationship between reader and narrator. Critical analysis and reference to existing theory will highlight that a reader-narrator relationship, underpinned by narratorial uncertainty, supports readerly awareness of both the matter of the story and the manner in which it is told. By means of examining existing texts and through the composition of an original work of short fiction, which exhibits characteristics of narratorial uncertainty, I will show that narratorial uncertainty can be used to develop an intense and reciprocal literary relationship that differs from the traditional authorial reader-narrator relationship in heterodiegetic fiction.

Scope and Methodology

In order to understand how narratorial uncertainty functions as a sub-set of narratorial unreliability, it is necessary to come to terms with how both unreliable and uncertain narration function, as a part of the mediation of a text. A full understanding of the drivers, effects and way in which authors' create and readers' assimilate narratorial uncertainty, can only come from discussion based on existing rhetorical and cognitive linguistic theory and close analysis of texts applied as evidence.

This thesis will focus on heterodiegetic narratives, or narratives narrated from the point of view of narrators outside of the text, which are commonly referred to as a third person or authorial point of view texts. The nature of narratorial uncertainty has long been acknowledged to change in the first person, or homodiegetic narrative: a narrative where the narrator is a character involved in the action of the story. First person narratorial unreliability is best discussed in terms of the perceptions of a character, because a homodiegetic narrative is filtered through the character and unreliability, therefore, becomes a character trait (Stanzel 152). In this way, expectations of the reliability of a first person narration differ from expectations of a third person narration.

Narrative discourse is a complex subject and refuses to be categorised or reduced to simple terms. Indeed, Martens sees “as many narrative voices as there are fictional works” (83). I would take this a step further and say that there are as many narrative voices as there are reader-narrator relationships. It will, therefore, be difficult to locate examples of authors or complete works where narratorial uncertainty is applied in isolation. In my consideration of the topic, I will look at how instances of narratorial uncertainty fit within the text as a whole: and how the reader may relate to not only the uncertainty effect, but also to the entire text.

If we are to better understand this complex narratological effect, we will need to investigate the style of writing that creates narratorial uncertainty and the type of literary relationship narratorial uncertainty supports. Part of this project will involve understanding the ways in which the narrator may appear (or be perceived) in a text — a discussion of embodiment and naturalisation — in addition to examining how the reader-text-narrator relationship works both cognitively and linguistically. I will also consider the forms, style and literary techniques that produce narratorial uncertainty, as I critically assess examples of narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic fiction.

It is important to note that the thematic concerns of a fictional work may or may not have a strong relationship with narratorial uncertainty. The overarching concern of this thesis relates to mediation, where the act of story telling, or narration, may carry an element of uncertainty. Such narratorial uncertainty can be reflected in the thematic concerns of the fictional work but, equally, may be inherent in the style and voice of the work. This spectrum can be observed when comparing the major theme of uncertainty relating to who is speaking in *Towards Another Summer*, by Janet Frame, with the minor theme of narratorial uncertainty in Alice Munro’s “A Real Life”. Throughout

my analysis I discuss connection with theme where the relationship is strong in the fictional work.

The texts, *Lord Jim*, by Joseph Conrad, Munro's *Open Secrets*, *Towards Another Summer* by Frame and my own short story "Note to Self", have been chosen for analysis and these will provide the focus for the discussion. I will apply a combination of discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis to my reading of these works. Discourse analysis will focus on the text and semantics, drawing its conclusions from accepted semantic theory, in order to provide a cause-and-effect argument. When qualified language is used, for example, indicating possibility rather than certainty, semantic theory tells us that the reader must treat any received information as provisional. I will also seek to understand, through rhetorical analysis, the *manner* in which the text affects literary relationships. For example, if a reader sees elements of the story as being provisional, how does that viewpoint affect meaning and the reader-narrator relationship? I will also use cognitive theory to analyse how the text and its effects may be received and processed by the reader, as a part of the rhetorical enquiry into how the reader relates to narrative voice

I will begin by defining the narratological taxonomy I plan to use. This requirement is driven by the conflicting use of existing terminology, where common terms, such as "focalisation", may carry differing meanings depending on whether you are referring to Franz Stanzel's model or Gerard Genette's. I will be using Genette's terminology throughout my critical discussion, but I will refer to concepts and discussion from both theorists. I will limit the use of narratological terms to those which are useful in the context of my semantic/rhetorical/cognitive approach.

Background and Occasion

Critics, such as Booth, Stanzel, Nunning and Phelan, agree that it is possible to affect the relationship between reader and narrator through the manner of discourse in a work: that is, through the voice and style of a work of fiction. The voice and style of a work is an influence that pervades every part of the story, including diction, structure, perspective and tense. In fiction, the narrator is the conduit through which information is released to the reader: s/he is termed “the agent of mediacy”. This concept of mediacy is complex and it has an enormous potential to influence the way in which a work of fiction is perceived by a reader.

As the agent of mediacy, the narrator provides all the words read and therefore s/he carries the narrative viewpoint (or perspective) of the work. Narratives can be filtered through a character in the story world or a presence outside that world. An intra-story character is called either a reflector character (Stanzel) or a homodiegetic narrator (Genette), while a narrator existing outside the boundaries of the fictional world may be termed a teller character (Stanzel) or heterodiegetic narrator (Genette).

In order to better describe and analyse narrative situations, Genette pioneered a new understanding, which refined the concepts and terminology relating to the understanding of mediacy and point of view. Genette’s model is based on an understanding of who is “speaking” and who is “seeing”. Genette’s terms heterodiegetic and homodiegetic are now commonly used to describe the involvement of the narrator (the speaker) in the story world. Heterodiegesis refers to that situation in which the narrator is not a character within the story world and homodiegesis refers to where the narrator is a character. Who is seeing, on the other hand, is captured by the term “focalisation”, with the focaliser being the agent through whom the story world is perceived and interpreted. Although critical discussion continues around these

narratological terms, they are useful for analysing texts uniformly and therefore for applying judgements to specific textural situations. Recent discussion has described focalisation as a continuum rather than as a set of positions, thus making it more difficult to apply discrete linguistic terms.

In terms of Chatman's fundamental levels of narrative, Story and Discourse, narration may impact on both levels: the manner of telling and the story itself. As a result, we find the way in which the story is mediated, through the narrator, influences the reader's perceptions of the story world and the dramatic action that occurs (story), in addition to influencing the tone, style and underlying themes and messages (Discourse)³ (Alber & Fludernik, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*). The way in which an author can present the narrative discourse through manipulation of mediacy is bound only by the reader's understanding and the language itself. Critics agree that an informed **use** of mediacy allows authors to **use** something other than a commonplace or consistent narrative perspective.

Whatever the viewpoint of the speaker, it must be understood that narration does not have to be entirely reliable. In fact, unreliable narration is widespread and it crosses literary boundaries: from written fiction to film and drama. It is seen as creating tensions and complexities within a work, which may lead to a more engaging style (Yacobi 114). In a text using unreliable narration, a reader may perceive tensions between passages in seemingly factual accounts, as observed in the epistolary story "A Wilderness Tale" by Alice Munro, where letters which offer differing accounts of the same events make up the narrative. Or a reader may sense a changeable or disagreeable ethical or moral stance in the narrator's discourse, while the narrative logic and story world appear lucid and reliable, as in the case of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, where the narrator sides with Jim — the imperfect protagonist. Unreliable narration, which straddles issues

of ethics, description and interpretation, can have a fundamental effect on any fictional work (Nunning 90).

The concept of narratorial *uncertainty* is not new. Narratorial uncertainty is generally seen as a sub-set of unreliable narration and it has been touched on in discussions relating to the fallible narrator, such as that found in Olson's 2003 essay "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators". The drivers for creating narratorial uncertainty appear to differ from those that lead authors to introduce narratorial unreliability (Olson 105). Olsen shows that narratorial unreliability can lead to dramatic irony — where the reader and implied author have privileged knowledge — at the narrator's expense.

Although the concept is not new, the affects of narratorial uncertainty have yet to be fully explored. Due to expectations of reliability, narratorial unreliability can be highly intriguing for a reader, particularly if the narrator is not a character in the story world and is not "involved" at the story level, but exists only at the narrative level. The narrative position, loosely gathered in the term "third person narrative", has the potential to develop a curious type of narratorial unreliability: one where an embodied narrator is perceived as (or signals that s/he could be) uncertain, and as a result creates an opportunity to work with the reader to resolve the matter of the story. I see the dramatisation and associated embodiment of the narrator, coupled with narratorial disclosure and reader awareness of unreliability, as critical elements of narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic narrative.

In heterodiegetic narrative, the narrator may be embodied by the reader through dramatisation in the text: that is to say, the narrator may have opinions and may refer to themselves in the text, such as seen in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, where the narrator remains outside the story world, but exists as a dramatised character in the discourse

(intradiegetic-heterodiegetic narration (Genette 186)). Such overt narrator dramatisation leads to an unproblematic acceptance that the teller of the story may be uncertain about details at times: after all, fallibility is a common human trait. In *Tom Jones*, the highly dramatised narrator is dealt with by the reader as a character rather than a teller, when considering reliability. Although the text is heterodiegetic with the narrator sitting outside of the story world, the dramatisation and subsequent embodiment of the narrator allows for straight-forward disclosure of uncertainty — which in this case is not explored.

Genette terms a distant-from-story world narrator or one who is not overtly dramatised and who has an omniscient viewpoint as “extradiegetic with zero focalisation” (the equivalent of Stanzel’s authorial narrative situation). In this case, the initial reader expectation, based on the closeness of the implied author and the narrator, is that the narrator is qualified to tell the story: the narrator should know what s/he is talking about (Martens 78). The lack of obvious personality or humanity, underpinning the telling of the story, allows a reader to start from a default position of trust and later revise his or her view based on evidence in the text (Stanzel 150). If the narrator then contradicts her/himself, or appears otherwise unreliable, the reader must reconsider their trust.

Therefore, reading fiction that is told from a position outside of the story world with an omniscient perspective, in addition to finding the narrator unreliable, creates a reader-narrator relationship where the reader is unable to fully trust the narrator. However, when the narrator admits his or her unreliability— by being uncertain — the reader may end up trusting the narrator, in spite of this admission.

Literature Review

Wayne Booth proposed a straight-forward definition of the unreliable narrator in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1966). As fiction developed from modern to post-modern prose, a great deal of experimentation occurred with styles of mediation, including the use of unreliable mediators. Critical discussion followed these trends, with Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator gaining widespread support in the latter part of the twenty-first century. Booth proposed that unreliability in a narrator can be identified by how closely they speak to the implied author's norms (*Rhetoric* 158). The difficulty in this situation, recognised by critics such as Nunning and Bal, is that the implied author's norms (or standards) are notoriously difficult to pinpoint: and without that point of reference, it is impossible to state whether a narrator is reliable or not. Booth noted a further complication in that unreliable narrators differ, depending on the manner and extent of their deviation from the implied author's norms (159). Irrespective of the conclusion of the debate as to how an unreliable narrator is to be defined, Booth and other critics tend to agree that narratorial unreliability demands more inference — what I would call *narratorial discourse engagement* — from the reader. This becomes significant when we discuss how readers process and engage with an unreliable text.

As mentioned above, Stanzel sees unreliability of narrative as being most usefully discussed in teller-character narratives (heterodiegetic narratives), further explaining that, for reflector-characters (homodiegetic narratives), the inquiry would relate to the personality of the character (152). Booth discusses the idea that narrators may be dramatised regardless of perspective (152): by this, I mean any consciousness, through which the story world is perceived and then told, can develop a personality. Booth also recognises that every case has inflections of its own. For a “camera eye” or “objective” narrator, the personality may be very discreet and only evidenced by what

is included and what is omitted. Many contemporary critics, including Marten, Olson, Phelan and Nunning, support the Bakhtinian notion that all text is inflected through context and use. If we consider how a reader naturalises a fictional text and we understand that the reader is aware that the text has been constructed, then we must conclude that a fictional text can never be wholly impersonal (Lawn 88). I agree with Stanzel that a teller-character draws the attention of the reader to the manner in which the story is being told (discourse level), more than a reflector-character (150). However, it is the separation of focalisation (seeing) and voice (speaking) that creates the opportunity for a unique kind of unreliability: that what is perceived may not be what is reported. As Stanzel's model does not separate the seeing and speaking functions of the narrator, we must turn to another model in order to continue this enquiry.

Genette introduced the concept of focalisation to the perspective debate in order to account for the aspects "he who perceives" and "he who speaks". This is now the predominant taxonomy in narrative theory and the one I follow in this thesis. With heterodiegetic narration, the distinction between perceiving and speaking may be less apparent, but the theory remains valid. The difference is easily observed in texts where the narrator's commentary does not match described events and descriptions, such as that found in the retelling of stories in Munro's "The Albanian Virgin", where differing versions of events are described, one by a homodiegetic narrator (a character in the story) and one by the heterodiegetic narrator.

In *Living to Tell About It*, Phelan proposes changes to Genette's theory that place focalisation on a continuum rather than at discreet points: and in doing so he successfully argues that heterodiegetic narrators can be focalisers. Phelan explains that any reportage is an act of perception *and* interpretation. If a heterodiegetic narrator is reporting, they have the opportunity to put a "slant" on the report (115). The narrator's

role is to provide information that is “fit for purpose” for the story at hand. This requires perceiving and interpreting things from a particular stance and it may result in withholding information. Thus, we see that, by separating the seeing and speaking functions of the narrator, we create the need for the narrator to act as a mediator, which infers a personality on the narrator: however discreet his or her presence may be in the discourse. In accepting Phelan’s continuum of focalisation, the reader’s perception of the narrator — one of the critical elements of both narratorial unreliability and uncertainty — can be applied to heterodiegetic fiction.

As both literary criticism and narratological analysis have progressed, traditional accounts of narratorial unreliability, such as Booth’s, have been deemed too simplistic to account for the actual complexities of narration. Driving this viewpoint is the notion that understanding unreliable narration involves not only understanding the interactions within the text, but also reader synthesis (or naturalisation) of both textural signals and messaging. Any full enquiry into narratorial unreliability, therefore, includes a consideration of the reader’s interpretive strategies, in addition to the traditional text based approach (Fludernik N. pag.).

Olson, discerning the reader’s role in recognising unreliability, sees differences between factual unreliability and normative unreliability, where the narrator’s *interpretation* of events is questioned (104). Olsen describes a “fallible” narrator as one who gives the reader reason to suspect the rendering of the story, such as that seen with Marlow in *Lord Jim*, who finishes his tale based on scraps of second hand information: and an “untrustworthy” narrator as one who gives the reader reason to suspect that the narratorial interpretation does not agree with the events of the story world. Theorists now tend to agree that not only is narratorial unreliability perceived through textural signals — a rhetorical theory viewpoint — but it is also perceived within the reader’s

interpretive strategies — a cognitive theory viewpoint. If we accept that narratorial unreliability manifests in the text through narratorial decisions, we must also accept that reader response underpins any determination of unreliability. Our specific enquiry into narratorial *uncertainty* in heterodiegetic narratives must, therefore, discuss both how authors may use the text and how readers may perceive the text.

Olsen's concept of the fallible narrator is similar to that of our uncertain narrator: the difference lies in the disclosure of fallibility. Where Olsen's fallible narrator cannot necessarily be trusted to provide reliable information, the uncertain narrator discloses his or her limitations and (as we see with *Lord Jim*,) s/he can be trusted to *do their best* to provide reliable information or interpretation. It is worth noting that *Lord Jim*'s intradiegetic narrator, Marlow, takes a moral position that may be contrary to the implied reader's expected standards (Marlow approves of Jim, despite Jim being part of the crew that deserted religious pilgrims onboard the *Patna*) and therefore the novel adheres to Booth's definition of unreliability. Phelan and Martin also see differences in types of unreliability, thus framing unreliability in terms of an "axis of reliability" and explaining that unreliability may exist on a factual axis (a perception axis) as well as a moral axis (92). In *Lord Jim*, we see narratorial disclosure of uncertainty on the factual axis, in addition to unreliability (depending on the reader's norms) on the moral axis.

Thus far, we have seen that the separation of focalisation (seeing) and voice (speaking) creates the opportunity for unreliability to be discussed, inasmuch as what is perceived may not be what is reported. We understand that it is through dramatisation of the narrator that authors can introduce narratorial unreliability: and through naturalisation of the text that the reader embodies the narrator and perceives narratorial unreliability. We have also confirmed that narratorial unreliability in heterodiegetic

narratives demands more inference — what I call *narratorial discourse engagement* — from the reader. With narratorial unreliability (or fallibility) the reader is working solo, due to the narrator not disclosing his or her unreliability. In this case, the relationship tends towards suspicion: as when reading *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon, where the narrator remains distant and the textural clues are difficult and appear conflicted.

However, when the narrator's fallibility is disclosed, the effect is one of narratorial uncertainty and in this case the reader is required to make judgements on the text, as if in a type of partnership — as though s/he were helping the narrator through his or her uncertainty. Such a partnership develops a reader-narrator relationship founded on trust and a common need for understanding. With narratorial uncertainty, the partnership between narrator and reader not only draws the reader's attention to the telling of the story, it also has the potential to offer validity to readers' interpretations of a text.

Nunning describes a series of textural indicators of unreliability that help us work towards a textural definition of narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic narrative (qtd. Al-Mansoob 803). Nunning's categories, which I have refined and (in some cases) extended, create a set of textural indicators of unreliability that are relevant to heterodiegetic narrative, in that they do not relate to what a character is reporting (the act of homodiegesis). These indicators include: differences between various versions of the same events (temporal manipulation); remarks relating to the narrator, including linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and attempts to attract the reader's sympathy, including use of the inclusive "you" and "we"; syntactic signals denoting the narrator's level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; an admitted

lack of reliability, memory gaps and comments on cognitive limitations; and a confessed or situation-related prejudice.

These indicators of narratorial uncertainty fall into two groups. The first group includes indicators that the heterodiegetic narrator does not admit to be possibly inaccurate: differences in versions of events; direct address; and indications of the narrator's emotional involvement, such as can be seen in *Towards Another Summer*, where the narrating voice blends with the character Grace's thoughts. In these instances, the reader must receive the information but treat it as provisional, thus deferring judgement on accuracy until further information is supplied. This causes the reader to treat the narrator's discourse with some suspicion. The second group includes occasions when the narrator *admits* that the narrative is flawed. For example, Marlow's confession of fitting together fragments of information to "make an intelligible picture" would be classified as an indicator of uncertainty which the narrator acknowledges (203). The narrators in this second group, by an admission of their unreliability, are likely to be differently received by the reader, compared to those who have not disclosed their unreliability. In the case of the second group, the reader may register the information of the narration as being provisional, but s/he may not make the same judgement of the narrator, as in the case of undisclosed unreliability. When the narrator admits fallibility trust is not necessarily lost, since the reader may remain open to partnering with the narrator, rather than seeing the narrator as an adversary or some type of challenge. It is worth noting that any of the narratives in the first group could be framed in a confessional style, or through accretion reaching a "tipping point" of reader awareness, which may shift them into the second group.

Although Nunning's textural indicators are useful in *locating* areas of narratorial unreliability, as far as defining narratorial *uncertainty* the most definitive measure appears to be the narrator's disclosure of fallibility. The first three paragraphs of

Towards Another Summer, for example, can be read as a disclosure that the narrator and Grace are so conflated that Grace's story world viewpoints will appear as the narrator's viewpoints, thus resulting in an uncertainty about who is speaking. Until such disclosure is offered to the reader, the narrative may be called unreliable or fallible: but not necessarily uncertain. As with unreliability, narratorial uncertainty effectively asks the reader to accept the narrator as a partner in the telling and to accept a provisional reality posited, but to be ready to review that position based on further information. The difference between uncertainty and reliability is that, in the latter case, the reader may have increased sympathy for the narrator. By sharing his or her deficiency, the narrator may be said to bring the reader into his or her confidence. It is important to recognise that the tipping point for defining narratorial uncertainty is affected by both the style of the work (the disclosure of uncertainty) and the reception of the work (the recognition of uncertainty).

In Munro's short story "A Wilderness Station", for example, the textural clues of uncertainty (the disclosure) lie in the differing versions of events presented in the letters that form the text. The reader notes the conflicting evidence and recognises the narrative as being unreliable, since the truth of the narrative has not been established. Curiously, the reader is aware both that the story is a construct and that the narrator has provided conflicting accounts for a reason. In this case, since no definitive truth is presented in the story, the interpretation rests with the reader who considers the story world in terms of his or her own experience, in order to make meaning: a process Fludernik calls naturalisation (N. pag.). In the case of "A Wilderness Station", we cannot ignore the reader's role in the disclosure of narratorial uncertainty. Some texts may rely heavily on reader naturalisation, in order to reach the tipping point, as seen in "A Wilderness Station", where there is no narratorial discourse or disclosure: merely,

conflicting epistemic reports. Therefore, it follows that, in accepting the potential role of the reader in recognising narratorial uncertainty, we must consider a cognitive definition alongside a textural definition of narratorial uncertainty.

Since the turn of the century, a more concerted effort has been made to understand the links between cognitive science and literary studies (Richardson 2). These once disparate theoretical disciplines, termed cognitive literary criticism or cognitive narratology, are now seen as providing the basis for an improved understanding of the role of reader response when interpreting fictional narratives. It is useful for our enquiry into narratological uncertainty in heterodiegetic fiction to examine the readers' own experiences and cognitive processes — which have been grouped into the concept of “naturalisation” by Fludernik and endorsed by theorists such as Nunning and Olson:

According to theories of “naturalization” readers relate what they read to ordinary human actions, motivations, and behavioural scripts. They impose their expectations about how texts should work and how people tell stories...A part of this process of fitting the text into one's world view is identifying the narrator (if there is a clearly identifiable one) and deciding what sort of person that narrator is on the basis of the reader's referential frames. (Olson 98)

Naturalisation does not dispute cognitive theories, such as the way a metaphor is processed in order to help understand concepts but, instead, it looks at the strategies that readers apply in order to make meaning in terms they can best relate to. This manner of meaning making fits well with Text-World theory, which suggests that people gain understanding of a text by constructing a mental representation of it in their minds. Termed “world making” by Paul Hernadi, understanding is based on familiar concepts and memories (qtd. Richardson 4). I suggest that readers confronted with

uncertain heterodiegetic narration use a two-part strategy for understanding. Firstly, within the story world perceived (created by the text and reader's world making) the reader seeks a provisional understanding of the nature of the narrator, with regards to reliability. Secondly, if finding the narrator uncertain, the reader accepts or rejects involvement in judgements alongside the narrator in the story world.

Looking closely at how we might define uncertain narration, I suggest it is the cumulative textural clues that create the impression of narratorial uncertainty. In addition, I maintain that that the "tipping point" for the reader occurs when s/he recognises this uncertainty. Narratorial uncertainty is, therefore, dependent on both the style of the work and the reader's response: with both the text and the reader contributing to a literary relationship through judgements and interpretations of events in the story world. This reader-text-narrator relationship differs from the relationship developed by narratorial unreliability in its move away from dependence on the text, where the authority of the text is supported by the reader's expectations of reliability.⁴ I feel that uncertain narratives have the potential to develop a different type of literary relationship: that is, a relationship similar to a partnership with shared responsibility for meaning making. I call this relationship a *reciprocal narratorial discourse engagement*. Narratorial uncertainty can, therefore, be defined by the reciprocal relationship between the reader's awareness of, and narrator's disclosure of, unreliability.

In order to analyse the ability of fictional mediation to develop a reciprocal relationship with the reader, I will refer to Booth's measures of literary friendships found in *An Ethics of Fiction: The Company We Keep* (1989). Here, Booth describes the factors that he believes can influence the relationship between the text and the reader. Based on a friendship metaphor, his premise is that all fictional texts provide a

level of friendship and that components of this friendship can be described, in order to populate an interrelated spectrum of relationships.

One component of particular interest to our enquiry is the measure of *Reciprocity* (*Ethics* 185). Booth suggests that narrators can present themselves as “friends”, who rank anywhere on a scale from tyrannical or preacher-like, to fallible or incompetent. The reciprocity refers to the level of engagement and interpretation the implied reader is expected to bring to the literary friendship (*ibid*).

While useful for a rhetorical understanding of how texts seek engagement from a reader, Booth does not consider how the reader processes (or naturalises) the text, other than to say the reader resists when the author goes “too far” (*Ethics* 186). Clearly, the notion of “too far” sits with the reader and each reader’s “too far” will differ. In order to understand the reader’s role in literary friendships, Fludernik’s discussion on naturalisation is useful, in that naturalisation recognises that the reader uses extratextual information to make meaning of textural information (Nunning 98). Nunning further makes the point that the reader’s naturalisation of text, coupled with narratorial support for reader involvement in meaning making, such as that seen with narratorial uncertainty, creates a highly engaging environment for the reader (*ibid*).

Creating a role for the reader in the narration of the story begins with oral traditions of story telling. In oral storytelling, the storyteller is permitted some latitude to make provisional statements, gain feedback from the listener and refine or revise the narrator’s position as the story progresses (Fludernik N. pag.). In Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, for example, the focalisation of the orally-told story-within-the-story allows the narrator to put forward a provisional story world. Uncertainty is present in the novel, through the intradiegetic narrator’s own admission, qualified language and extradiegetic

references (references to the act of storytelling), which remind the reader that Marlow's story is being delivered orally.

The point made by Fludernik about provisional narratorial statements, in which s/he maintains that the reader accepts the narrator's stance as a possibility, is picked up by David Herman in his discussion on "Indirect Hypothetical Focalization". In his book, *Story World: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, he introduces the term "Hypothetical Focalisation", a concept founded out of the need to set the textural markers that indicate focalisation within a broader cognitive consideration of how the reader naturalises, not only the textural meaning, but also the position from which the story world is perceived: what we might call the *manner* of focalisation. What Herman terms as Indirect Hypothetical Focalisation is the category of perspectives that a narrator could adopt, but where the narrator is not "explicitly invoked, not directly thematised, by the narrative discourse itself" (318). These perspectives or possibilities remain as possibilities, until the reader naturalises them by using the surrounding text and his or her own world knowledge. We see Hypothetical Focalisation in *Towards Another Summer*, when the narrator takes a surreal perspective and observes Grace in the cold bedroom of her host's house:

Immediately the chilling air surged near her, touching spears of icicles upon her skin; she lay entombed in ice; anyone coming into the room would have seen the oblong coffin-shape of ice resting upon the bed containing deep within it the smoky darkening-blue feminine shape of a comfortless weekender..." (83)

This example relates to this study's heterodiegetic uncertain narrator, in that the narrator is describing an event but s/he is using textural signals, such as "would see" (83) and in an earlier example, "would remark" (18), in order to indicate a provisional

or possible position (Herman 319). It is the reader's awareness of the narrator's conjecture that aligns with narratorial uncertainty's requirement of disclosure and differentiates Herman's Indirect Hypothetical Focalisation from narratorial unreliability.

Thus far, we have discussed how authors may see narratorial uncertainty as being desirable in the way it affects readerly engagement. Narratorial uncertainty has the potential to offer different readings of the same story, through the development of a different type of literary relationship: that is, it can create a reciprocal type of reader engagement, which finds its basis in a reader-narrator partnership that makes judgements about the narratorial discourse, as well as in the story world. Through reader interpretation and by admission of uncertainty, the text reaches a "tipping point" where the reader is drawn to empathise with the narrator. We have seen how admission of narratorial uncertainty may be overt or covert. In the case of covert narratorial uncertainty, the reader's naturalisation and textural signals may play a more important role in reaching the "tipping point". By including the concept of reader naturalisation, we have found that there are two steps in the reader's meaning making of an uncertain text. Firstly, the reader ascertains that the narrator is uncertain: and secondly, the reader has an opportunity to make story world judgements in partnership with the narrator. I have also suggested that narratorial uncertainty creates a highly engaging environment for the reader.

It is important to recognise that the crucial "tipping point", where the reader *and* narrator accept the uncertainty of the text, is affected by the *style* of the work. There is not necessarily a single technique that drives the awareness of narratorial uncertainty, but a range of stylistic or textural factors coupled with the reader's interpretations, which are as individual as the work itself. There are, however, literary techniques (the

textural indicators we have already discussed) that play an important role in creating narratorial uncertainty: epistemic modality; value inflected narratorial exposition; temporal management and provisional realities; and particular uses of grammar and diction.

Epistemic modality (modality), in this study's written fiction context, deals with a narrator's confidence in (or belief of) a statement. In other words, epistemic modality is an expression of possibility and it refers to the way speakers communicate doubts. For example, when describing how Maureen, in Munro's "Open Secrets", tidies herself up after impromptu and less-than-romantic sex with her husband, the narrator qualifies his or her thoughts about the sex, but remains certain about other things Maureen is thinking:

So much for that, she *seemed* to be saying. Even while it was going on she had been able to think of other things. She had thought about making custard, she had thought about whether she had enough milk and eggs. (my emphasis, 156)

According to Stanzel, by using "seemed" in this passage, the narrator forgoes omniscience, thus suggesting a move towards homodiegesis and a personification of the narrator (156). Somacarrera agrees, saying "the more qualified or evaluated the statements, the more a sense of the narrator's personality is conveyed and the greater the awareness revealed of an implied addressee" (80). The result is readerly understanding that the heterodiegetic narrator can be related to as a person and s/he may not be certain about all the events described. Such embodiment of the narrator is one of the keys to narratorial uncertainty: and it is a point that I will return to.

Modality may also be concealed within value inflected authorial narration. This occurs when the narrator suffuses the narratorial discourse with a particular attitude and

then changes that attitude. A well known example of this occurs in Joyce's, *A Portrait*, where the narrative discourse mirrors the changing age and attitudes of the protagonist. It is important to recognise that covert modality of this type does not immediately signal doubt, but it creates uncertainty with hindsight, through the changing position of the narrator. Coupled with other narrative techniques, the reader may become aware of the unreliability of the text but, unless the narrator discloses his or her changeable position, narratorial uncertainty may not be reached.

Narratorial uncertainty can also be evident in the structure of a work. When the narrator describes a story world event and then suggests that meaning can be found in further discussion, the narrator — not the narrative — becomes the agent through which meaning is found. One of the ways of empowering the narrator, as the agent of meaning, is to move the events around in time (analepsis and prolepsis), in order that an event or outcome is described and then the events leading up to that point are investigated. Munro's use of this technique has been noted and it can be observed in stories such as "Open Secrets", "A Real Life", and "Vandals". "Vandals" begins with a letter from one of the characters, Bea Doud, who "never sent and in fact never finished" it (264). The narrator then shifts the focus and attempts to uncover some sort of truth or meaning from the situation described in the letter, by looking at the events that led up to it or followed it.

In addition to this style of provisional scene-setting and story world investigation, there are other literary techniques that develop an awareness of the narrator in heterodiegetic narratives⁵, such as direct address, inclusive pronouns "you" or "we" and references to the act of narration (metanarration and metafiction). Each of these techniques will personify the narrator (either directly or indirectly) and allow the narrator to communicate his or her uncertainty about the story world events. Still more

subtle vehicles for uncertainty exist, such as using a subjunctive grammatical mood (similar to modality, in that it expresses a condition which is doubtful or not factual), or the use of conflicting evidence in the story world which, when used overtly, points to narratorial uncertainty rather than unreliability. When the narrator in *Towards Another Summer*, for example, makes incorrect statements about how the Thirkettles feel about Grace, the reader is aware that the narrator's voice is being influenced by Grace's voice:

She had not been too timid, too absorbed; it was an act, because she felt she did not measure up to their expectation of her; they had expected a witty, wise, intelligent guest; instead they had this Grace-Cleave, as hyphenated as her name when it was spoken (intuitively) by little Sarah. (142-3)

With the reader understanding the relationship between narrator and character (the closeness of the two being disclosed early in the story), the unreliability becomes overt: and the reader sees the narrator's interpretation as uncertainty, rather than unreliability, because they know the narrator is complicit in the conflicting accounts.

In order to understand how these stylistic devices are used by narrators and received by readers, it will be important to support this enquiry with rhetorical analysis of texts that exhibit narratorial uncertainty. I will examine two critically acclaimed texts: Alice Munro's *Open Secrets* and Janet Frame's *Towards Another Summer*. I will also refer to examples of works that broke new ground in narratological terms when they were released, such as the early twentieth century, *Lord Jim*, by Joseph Conrad. Finally, I will discuss my own work of short fiction "Note to Self" and my use of techniques that I feel help develop narratorial uncertainty. In my work, "Note to Self", I have attempted to include elements of uncertainty that relate to both who is speaking and what is being said. Through, at times, blending the narrator's and characters' voices

and by using elements of style, such as modalised language and direct address, I have attempted to create the sense of both an active narrative voice and one that is overtly uncertain.

Critical Analysis

I have made the claim that literary fiction which employs narratorial uncertainty may promote a reader-narrator relationship based on trust. When the narrator discloses that s/he is unsure about aspects of the story they are telling, the reader is more likely to sympathise with the narrator and may be drawn to make meaning alongside the narrator, in the context of his or her own world experience. Such a trusting relationship differs from narratorial unreliability, where the reader-narrator relationship is hallmarked by suspicion: with unreliability, the reader is challenged to make meaning, despite the unreliability of the text. In linguistic terms, the unreliable narrator is one whose credibility has been compromised, whereas the uncertain narrator may remain credible — not on a factual or interpretive level, but on an ethical level⁶.

Where unreliability and uncertainty differ is indicated by their dictionary descriptors. *Unreliable: not to be depended on. Uncertain: not established; questionable* (Dictionary.com). Therefore, although uncertain writing is not to be relied upon, it has the capacity to be an honest account — and it holds the potential to be story world true. This difference has an effect on the way in which a reader relates to the telling of the story (the discourse) and due to the potential for multiple truths, it also affects meaning making in the story world.

Of particular interest is the reader's *recognition* of narratorial uncertainty, since it has been suggested by Olson that it is on awareness of uncertainty, as opposed to unreliability, that the reader's interpretive strategies change (102). In order to show how

the reader becomes aware of an uncertain narrator, we must understand how the reader recognises narratorial uncertainty — and conversely, how the narrator discloses uncertainty. Our investigation is, therefore, two-fold: how does a narrator bring narratorial uncertainty to bear; and how does a reader process a narrator's signals of uncertainty? The conclusions of this enquiry will inform the proposition that narratorial uncertainty alters the reader-narrator relationship, by highlighting the discourse and offering the reader authority to interpret story world meaning in the context of his or her own experience. This, in turn, supports my thesis that narratorial uncertainty can be used to develop an intense and reciprocal literary relationship, which differs from the traditional authorial reader-narrator relationship in heterodiegetic fiction.

Uncertainty in narrative is not a post-modern invention. Narratorial uncertainty has been used in classic works, such as Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Conrad's *Lord Jim*, where the narrators are given character status but remain ostensibly outside the story world. In the early twentieth century, the presence of the narrator in heterodiegetic modern fiction was an accepted standard and it was not until late in the century that the omniscient and de-personified narrator, pioneered by authors such as Conrad and Chekhov and applied by Hemingway, became a literary standard (Fludernik N. pag.).

Conrad's *Lord Jim* is a curious case and it attracted mixed reviews on its release in book form, largely due to the layering of focalisation. In *Lord Jim*, the first focaliser is the heterodiegetic narrator who remains de-personified and remote from the story world: that is, an extra-heterodiegetic narrator. This voice tells the story of Jim's early years and introduces the letters that serve to end the tale. However, early in the story, this narrator hands over the duty of storytelling to Marlow (a character in the story world) and for the remainder of the text he makes only fleeting appearances, seemingly

to ground the reader in the understanding that Marlow's story is just that — Marlow's recount of the story.

Therefore, *Lord Jim* is a story told second-hand⁷. The predominant narrator, Marlow, recounts his encounter with the crew of the *Patna*, who abandon their vessel full of pilgrims when they think it is about to sink. Marlow takes a shine to Jim, one of the crew, who appears to have been innocently caught up in the reprehensible abandonment of the helpless pilgrims. Marlow's story follows Jim's life after the misadventure of the *Patna*, until he eventually loses touch. The fragments of Jim's last years are then pieced together through Marlow's interpretation of evidence — in the form of letters and other characters' reports.

Marlow's storytelling is introduced hypothetically⁸, thus adding to the sense of uncertainty or potential. The extra-heterodiegetic narrator states that Marlow is willing to tell the story, but he does not commit to a time or place for the telling. Instead, the narrator offers a possibility: "Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped with motionless foliage..." (24). The narrator then keeps up the supposition by using "would" several times while introducing Marlow: "...with the very first word uttered, Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still" (24) and "'Oh yes, I attended the enquiry,' he would say" (25). In these cases, the term "would" carries the meaning of "might", thus offering a sense of possibility rather than certainty. However, the hypothetical scene is quickly given details and populated with characters. There are several men (one named Charley) sitting in wicker chairs on a verandah listening to the story, smoking cigars and talking on a warm evening in the hills after dinner. Once the detail of the hypothetical scene is set, it is naturalised by the reader and the extra-heterodiegetic narrator leaves Marlow to tell the story of Jim.

The point here is that the reader accepts the possible storytelling scene as a provisional reality, through his or her own naturalisation of the text. The reader needs a context and does not resist when the *possible* becomes the *actual*, through the addition of specific details. Therefore, when “Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly” (24), the reader accepts Marlow as the narrator, but understands that Marlow’s storytelling has the potential to be unreliable. Marlow also recognises his unreliability, by describing himself as “not particularly fit to be a receptacle of confessions” and by association not particularly fit to recount those confessions (25). Consequently, through Marlow’s admission of fallibility and the reader’s understanding of Marlow’s role, narratorial unreliability is transformed into narratorial uncertainty.

Due to being framed as the speaker of an oral story, the intra-heterodiegetic narrator (the inside-the-story-world narrator recounting in the third person), Marlow has some latitude of interpretation and style, before a reader will begin to question the text (Fludernik N. pag.). Heterodiegetic narrators are commonly presumed to be reliable, until proven otherwise (Martens 78). In Marlow’s narrative, asides and changes in narrative direction occur frequently. Reportage also occurs, through yet another layer of focalisation thus further distancing the narrator from the action such as the report from Ruthvel below, so that seemingly unrealistic passages are “forgiven” — naturalised by the reader — as turns of phrase, in this case using humour:

Well, Ruthvel says he was giving him [a clerk] a severe lecture—on official morality I suppose—when he heard a kind of subdued commotion at his back, and turning his head he saw, in his very own words, something round and enormous, resembling a sixteen-hundred-weight sugar-hogshead wrapped in striped flannelette, up-ended in the middle of the large floor

space in his office. He declares he was so taken aback that for quite an appreciable time he did not realise the thing was alive... (27)

Although this situation seems ludicrous, there is no narratorial reference to the extravagant hyperbole. The uncertainty about the “thing in the office” is presumed by Marlow to be clarified by the reader, due to the silliness of the report and the commonsense of the reader. After this description of the chaotic reception area, there follows confirmation that the “thing” is a man: “By that time the fellow had managed to tug and jerk his hat clear from his head, and advanced with slight bows...” (ibid). This report of the shipping-master’s encounter with the skipper of the abandoned *Patna* uses tongue-in-cheek humour and language that evokes a conversational style, in addition to details that Marlow has clearly added for effect. The result is an engaging text, but with the understanding that the version being told is Marlow’s version, one which has been recently framed as a possibility and referred to as a memory. With this multi-faceted narratorial acknowledgement of unreliability, the text becomes uncertain by our definition⁹.

Chapter 34 and 36 of *Lord Jim* see the return of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator. When Marlow stops speaking and the listeners on the verandah each “seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret” (200), we perceive an acknowledgment of the inherent possibilities of the story as told: that is, each listener takes away his or her own (equally valid) version of the story. Marlow’s influence then continues through a series of letters which take on the narratorial role. The use of epistolary produces yet another focalising agent. Thus, uncertainty appears again when one letter explains that:

I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce—after you’ve read. There is much truth—after all—in the common expression ‘under a cloud.’ It is

impossible to see him clearly—especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him. I have no hesitation in imparting to you all

I know of the last episode that, as he used to say, had ‘come to him’. (201)

Passages such as this one strengthen the readers’ awareness of the uncertain nature of the entire text and imply that each “listener” can have a personal interpretation, based to some extent on his or her own experiences and real world knowledge.

The expressed opinions of Marlow push the reader to make judgements about both the story world events and the narrator’s interpretation of them — but not the honesty underpinning their presentation. When Marlow offers to help Jim and explains that his reasons (his “morality”) are contained in the story he has thus far related, the reader must contextualise Marlow’s position in relation to his or her own world viewpoint: Marlow is adamant that Jim is of good character, but the reader may not feel the same way (93). The distance that separates the narrator’s and reader’s positions brings to light, for the reader, the reader’s role in validating the text. Furthermore, the confessional disclosure of Marlow’s feelings regarding Jim shows the reader that Marlow is trying to tell the story as best he can, given the uncertainty of the story world events. Marlow is offering an opportunity for the reader to make-up his or her own mind about Jim. The narrative is unreliable on the factual and interpretive axis, but reliable on the ethical axis, thus fitting our definition of narratorial uncertainty.

Almost a century ago, Conrad used a layering of focalisers — including locating the focalisation in written artefacts — in order to achieve narratorial uncertainty. More recent writers are infusing uncertainty into the narrative more directly, and they are not using an obvious additional layer of storytelling, or focalisation, within their fiction. What makes *Lord Jim* work as well as it does is the narratorial recognition and the reader’s understanding that it is a story told by a person who, although at times

uncertain, is attempting to tell the story to the best of his or her ability. In *Lord Jim*, the extradiegetic narrator is overpowered by the intradiegetic narrator, Marlow, who carries the uncertainty, while the extradiegetic narrator remains distant and reliable. In the comparatively recent works of Janet Frame and Alice Munro, the extradiegetic narrator carries the uncertainty and the reader may have a greater role in *recognising* uncertainty, but the common ground remains that the reader is aware of possible inaccuracies in interpretation — and s/he has some sympathy for a storyteller who is seen to be doing his or her best to recount the story.

There are many ways in which a narrator may disclose his or her uncertainty about story world events. Authors of recent literary fiction appear to be applying a range of stylistic and structural techniques, in order to influence the reader-narrator relationship: what Booth terms, the “Literary Friendship”. This may include the use of a focalising agent (a storyteller), as seen in *Lord Jim* and as Munro does in her short story “The Albanian Virgin”. However, authors may also blend character and narrative voices, or apply a combination of techniques such as direct address and modalised language, in order to convey a sense of narratorial uncertainty. Looking closely at the affects of a range of literary techniques used by the relatively recent authors, Munro and Frame, will provide support for my claim that narratorial uncertainty offers a literary friendship — a narrator-reader relationship — which is highly engaging and provides the reader with the authority to interpret story world meaning in the context of his or her own experience.

In Janet Frame’s *Towards Another Summer*, the narratorial uncertainty relates to the narratorial discourse, or to who is speaking. In Alice Munro’s work *Open Secrets*, the narrator also uses narratorial uncertainty, in order to keep the reader open to further signals, but with Munro the uncertainty of the narrator often relates to what is being

seen and what is being said about the story world. I believe that narratorial uncertainty, whether relating to *who* is seeing and speaking, or *what* they are seeing and saying, creates readerly awareness of the narratorial discourse. Consequently, regardless of the manner of uncertainty (whether relating to the discourse *or* the story world), the effect on the reader is to raise his or her awareness of the narrator and the *way* in which the story is being told. This awareness of the way in which the story is told supports my thesis, in that the engagement of the reader is heightened through a raised awareness of the narrator's manner of storytelling.

I will look first at *Towards Another Summer*, where the narratorial uncertainty relates predominantly to the discourse rather than the story world. Here, the reader's acceptance of narratorial uncertainty, in regards to the narrator telling the story to the best of his or her ability, is supported by information in the paratext. Uncertainty is a major theme in Janet Frame's early pseudo-autobiographical work, *Towards Another Summer*. In this case, it is the protagonist, Grace — not the narrator — who appears uncertain in the first instance. Grace is uncertain about her direction in life, in addition to how to behave in her daily interactions with the world. However, Grace's uncertainty rubs onto the narrator's discourse, changing the reader's perception of where the uncertainty is located. In *Towards Another Summer*, the distinction between the narrative voice and Grace's voice is blurred by the style of the narratorial discourse. Frame's interest in the role of signifiers, recognised by Paul-Matthew St. Pierre, leads to Frame treating narratorial identity as an arbitrary construct (20). St Pierre advocates that Frame sees characters in fiction "as sign transmitting organisms" and that "peoples identities are interchangeable" (148). In *Towards Another Summer*, for example, Grace may be observed by the narrator in one paragraph, only to be the focaliser in the next.

The closeness of the implied author to the narrator (and to Grace) leads to a blending of voices and therefore, at times, it may be unclear who is telling the story.

According to the dust jacket, *Towards Another Summer* “explores themes of exile and return, homesickness and belonging”. Thus the paratext labels Grace as a “migratory bird”, while recognising her as a writer by profession. The novel revolves around a weekend Grace spends away from her London flat. The matter of the story relates to Grace’s internal deliberations and her concern for who she is and how one should live life, with Grace “trying to establish in her mind the events of the next day, the day after, the day after, which would make living endurable” (203). In New Zealand, Grace was labelled a lunatic but, in London, she is a “self styled” writer (11). However, Grace sees herself as somewhat second class. So strong is her conviction of her inferior status that the unreliability of Grace’s reporting becomes apparent. For example, her “sense of relief [of not being in a first class carriage] out of all proportion to the occasion” sits at odds with her capable preparation for her next day’s work and her aspirations to write the perfect sentence (202–3). This sense of unreliability is heightened if we consider the closeness of the implied author to the narrator — and that Frame is a critically acclaimed writer. Yet, when Grace, the focalising agent at that moment, accepts her relief is “out of all proportion to the occasion” Frame recognises her deficiency in a form of narratorial disclosure of unreliability — one of the stylistic features of narratorial uncertainty¹⁰ (ibid).

For Grace, who is writing a novel in her flat in London, the invitation to spend a weekend “up-county” presents both a self confidence challenge and an opportunity to clear her writer’s block. In order to release her story, “she applied literary surgery to free her characters for their impelled dance or flight; she wrote the story of the weekend” (11). This overt admission of “literary surgery”, indicating an opening up, or

reflective work (something she was encouraged to do by her doctor), appears early in *Towards Another Summer* and it helps the reader naturalise the voices within the discourse and also to understand that the narrator and Grace are somehow intertwined. In *Towards Another Summer*, the reader is explicitly introduced to the layering of the narrative voice. The protagonist's name, Grace Cleave, is itself an indication that Grace has been cleaved off the narrator.

Grace's name also has story-world relevance: Grace is struggling with her migration to the UK, where she feels — and at times denies — an acute sense of separation: that of being “cleaved” from her home. In Grace's own narrative — where Grace is the focalising agent rather than the narrator — the deep emotional tie Grace has with New Zealand demands recognition and appears through the childhood memories she recounts. Grace uses these memories to both question and make meaning of her adult world and in doing so the narrator conflates Grace's adult and childhood voices. When Grace awakes in the night while weekendening¹¹, for example, she recalls how her dad would “bagpipe her to sleep” when she was young. Here, the recollection of strangeness appears to be focalised through the four year old Grace:

And their father played them to sleep, mostly with the full bagpipes...
...[sometimes] playing the chanter; explaining, with a resignation that seemed frightening, there was not even the stir of a struggle in it, that one day he'd only be able to manage the chanter, and then, gradually, not even the chanter.

—Some day, he said, I won't have the wind.

How strange to pass from the brilliant paraphernalia of bagpipe and kilt to the shorn drab chanter which never captured the full gurgle and skirl and wail of Highland glens and hills. (144-5)

The first line of this passage is clearly focalised through the narrator. However, the feelings of young Grace are then recognised by the narrator with “seemed frightening”. The modal uncertainty in “seemed” allows the reader to naturalise this as a reported memory. Her father’s speech is then quoted from Grace’s memory, rather than reported (as a reader may expect from a heterodiegetic narrator) thus bringing Grace closer to the focalisation. The new paragraph (“How strange...”) then appears to be a rendition of young Grace’s direct thoughts, with the focalisation shifting from the heterodiegetic narrator to Grace. This passage shows how textural signals lead the reader to moderate the focalisation: with understanding also relying on the reader’s naturalisation of the passage. This occurs often in chapters, such as Chapters Eight, and Eighteen, where sequences of childhood memories are described. The resulting effect is readerly awareness of a seemingly intentional blending of the narrator and Grace’s voices and the thematic concern of identity.

Another factor that supports the blending of the narrator’s and character’s voices is the information provided by the publisher on the dust jacket, which highlights the sameness of Grace and the narrator/author, even before the reader opens the book: “*Towards Another Summer* is an exquisitely composed precursor to *An Angel at My Table*, the autobiography Janet Frame wrote twenty years later” (back cover). This paratextual information makes it easier for the reader to accept, or naturalise, the blending of the narrator and Grace’s voices. The reader accepts a provisional arrangement where the narrator *could* be Frame, an amalgam of Frame and Grace, or just Grace, but defers a final judgement until textural evidence suggests a relationship, or the story is finished. Fludernik sees this reader contextualisation of the narrating voice as a form of naturalisation of the text, where the reader keeps his or her view open to further textural signals (Fludernik N. pag.). Fludernik’s interpretation fits with

our understanding of narratorial uncertainty, in that the unreliability of who is speaking is disclosed by the narrator, thus providing the opportunity for a reader-narrator partnership in the meaning making that is to come.

Frame appears to encourage a conflation of voices, going as far as to infer Grace speaking in place of the narrator: “The Friday before the weekend another stain marred Grace’s progress through her field (she used the word field rather than paddock) of ventures” (35). Here, the narrator uses the parenthesis to incorrectly imply Grace is speaking and in doing so confuses the two speakers, which leads to a blending of the voices and an uncertainty of who is speaking. It is up to the reader to make sense of the voices and (in order to do that) the reader will invariably use real world knowledge of Frame’s life and s/he may see the narrator and Grace as a single agent of mediation. Therefore, in *Towards Another Summer*, the reader’s interpretive strategies and awareness of narratorial uncertainty are largely influenced by the conflation of the narrator’s and character’s voices: and by extra-textural (external to story world) signals.

Furthermore, the reader will be drawn to consider why the author has blended the voices of the narrator and Grace, thus tying the problematic voice with the theme of identity. One assumption may be that it is in order to dislodge the writer’s block, through emotional scrutiny from a “safe” distance. Entire chapters, such as Chapters Eight, Sixteen and Twenty-two, are written from Grace’s perspective: where Grace is the focalising agent. In these chapters, many memories are recounted or focalised through the child Grace, rather than the adult Grace. Using the child focaliser as a way of describing how Grace feels about herself, these chapters stress how Grace (and in the reader’s view also the narrator) needs to revisit herself, in order to relieve the writers’ block that she is experiencing:

One of my favourite toys was a kerosene tin with a piece of rope tied to it, which I pulled along the lawn under the walnut tree and over to the fence for the beasties to share my pleasure in it. There was a song which I sang about my tin, but why did everyone laugh when I sang it?

‘God Save our gracious tin,
God save our noble tin,
God save the tin.’

Words were so mysterious, full of pleasure and fear. (72)

The innocence of the child focaliser is clear here, with her confusion at other’s reactions and youthful understanding of the power of words. Here, Grace is recognising her talent with words, while acknowledging her difficulty relating to people. It appears to the reader that the narrator has put Grace on point duty, in order to unpack her identity, confidence and self-worth issues. Consequently, the reader can see it is through maintaining a distance, but still confronting the issue of her identity, that the narrator and Grace seek understanding and a way through the writers’ block.

Frame also uses a range of linguistic devices in order to strengthen the presence (or personify) the narrator. This is an important contributor to the impression of narratorial uncertainty and the issue of identity, since it allows the reader to embody the narrator more easily. Using a conversational style, such as introducing a paragraph with “Now”, Frame draws attention to the voice of the narrator and the narrator’s delivery of the story. The lines, “*Now* journeys were not a simple matter for Grace...” (13) and “*Oh* she could laugh at the fact now” (14), provide a more relaxed style, with the redundant words (my emphasis) identified as Spoken Language Interference by Krauthamer (37). Using this conversational style makes the connection with the reader more personal and it highlights the narrator’s voice. Therefore, we have a narrator that

exhibits a clear and individual personality, but whose voice needs support (such as a conversational style) if it is to be recognised as independent from the lead character.

As part of this conversational style, there is a single direct first person address from the narrator to the reader in *Towards Another Summer*. Here, the narrator is providing reassurance that the narrator is aware of the lead character's interloping voice and that this voice is contained: "Grace Cleave, as I have told you, was a writer..."

(18). This early-in-book instance of narratorial disclosure helps to generate awareness of the narrator and it is distinctive for its lack of what Cronin calls Frame's

"prescriptive authorial presence" or controlling nature of the narrative voice (174).

Frame appears to be encouraging readerly understanding of the difficulty of narrating from so close to the character Grace, thus suggesting there is a necessary negotiation of reality through the reader's own subjective lens (Cronin 185). This is in itself an indicator of narratorial uncertainty, through the involvement of the reader in meaning making based on his or her own world knowledge. In this case, the "negotiation of reality" relates to who is telling the story, not the detail of the story world: and it is firmly entrenched in *Towards Another Summer's* thematic concern of identity.

In the context of the entire text, the reader is aware that the narrator is carefully managing the balance between narrative voices. While presenting the work as heterodiegetic and non-autobiographical, the narrator is also offering the implied reader evidence of his or her complicity in the blending of voices, by relaying clearly autobiographical details. It is in the shared awareness between reader and narrator that narratorial unreliability exists which, in turn, defines narratorial uncertainty. The narrator of *Towards Another Summer* is clearly aware of the narrator's and Grace's collective identity. Indeed, the text concerns itself with issues of identity. However, it is through the shared reader-narrator awareness of the unreliability of who is speaking that

the unreliability is transformed to uncertainty: and the reader and narrator can work together to find meaning, in this case a way through the writers' block and an understanding of who is telling the story.

In Munro's *Open Secrets*, narratorial uncertainty more often relates to story world events rather than to who is speaking, as is the case in *Towards Another Summer*. More accurately, with Munro it is the recall of the details of the story world that is the subject of the narrator's uncertainty. Alice Munro has been noted for her "Probable Fictions"¹² by Munroian critics. Heble and Varley, for example, note the "possibility space" in which Munro works (Varley 18). Her use of temporal manipulation, modality, direct address and epistolary are seen as combining to form an active heterodiegetic narrative voice, which seeks judgement and interpretation from the reader (Springett 2).

Munro's manipulation of time often serves as the catalyst for the confession of uncertainty. Placing the central event foremost, for example, is structural property of oral storytelling and it creates an opportunity to question the initial interpretation of that event (Fludernik N. pag.). Consequently, although Munro's characters may exhibit certainty around his or her accounts of events, this is often qualified by the narrator using a structure that supports uncertainty. In regards to Munro, we also observe textural signals that give impressions of narratorial uncertainty. The manipulation of time, alongside the use of direct address, narratorial questioning and modality, are common in the stories of *Open Secrets*.

Alice Munro has stated that, when writing, she has a desire, "to *not* know what the story is all about. And for me to keep trying to find out" (Munro qtd in Heble 142). In order to achieve this sense of "not knowing", Munro may place the seminal event first and (in a way) work backwards towards understanding. Munro's narratorial uncertainty is not necessarily connected to her story's themes, as we have seen with

Towards Another Summer. For Munro, the narrator's uncertainty reflects the inherent nature of storytelling as an act of reflection on past events. In "Vandals", for example, the narrator begins with the final act, a letter written (but never sent) that ruminates on the state of the protagonist's life. Munro uses a structure that looks back in time, using recall to support a sense of uncertainty. The narrator in "Vandals" is present and active through regular direct address and through the manipulation of time, but never discloses the "truth" of the narrative. A sense of narratorial uncertainty is created through the combination of positing a provisional reality, making regular direct contact with the reader¹³ and working through how the stated reality came about. In "Vandals", the impression of narratorial uncertainty is formed through an accumulation of evidence. In order to be seen to be presenting an "honest" account,¹⁴ the narrator actively uses techniques, such as modalised language and direct address, to remind the reader that the narrator is telling the story to the best of his or her ability.

One way this impression of honesty manifests itself in Munro's text is through the narrator directly expressing his or her uncertainty in the first person. We see this in "Carried Away", where the feelings of a staid gentleman, overcome with emotion about the female protagonist, are described by the narrator. The narrator fails and gives up, appealing directly to reader: "He could no more describe the feeling he got from her than you could describe a smell. It's like the scorch of electricity. It's like burnt kernels of wheat. No, it's like bitter orange. I give up" (Munro 40). This is the only first person reference to the narrator in the heterodiegetic stories of *Open Secrets*: and it is noticeable for its single appearance. The effect of such a direct appeal is to bring the constructed nature of the story to the surface and to generate reader sympathy for the narrator. Interpretive strategies for the reader include perceiving the story as a story; acquiescing to the humanity of the narrator; and accepting that, as a reader, they are

able to make useful interpretations — or contributions to meaning — within the story world. In this case, the narrator is admitting his or her humanity and asking for help. The effect is to raise the profile of the narrator and, in Booth's terms, to increase the reciprocity¹⁵ of the reader-narrator relationship.

More subtle forms of direct address also contribute to the presence of an identifiable heterodiegetic narrator in "Open Secrets", which is a story about the mysterious disappearance of a young girl from a school hike. A direct address by the narrator, suggesting some of the events reported should not be relied upon, highlights the narrator's uncertainty regarding the reliability of the character's accounts of story world events:

[Maureen] could not be a gossip, because of her husband's position, and she didn't think it was her nature, anyway, but she let Francis get away with plenty of mean remarks, and wild, uncharitable, confident speculations.

(For example, what Frances was saying about Heather Bell's mother, and what she said about Mary Johnstone and the hike in general. Frances thought she was an authority on that, because Mary Kaye Trevelyan was her granddaughter.)

Mary Johnstone was a woman you were hardly meant to mention in Carstairs... (133)

Here, the parenthetical aside — a direct address — is a complete sentence, removing it from the context of the surrounding narrative. Furthermore, the content is privileged with Frances's thoughts, such that it can only come from the narrator. As a result, the narrator appears through direct address and implies that the reader should not trust Frances's speculations. So, in the first pages of "Open Secrets", Munro's narrator generates a sense of narratorial uncertainty, by relaying Frances's account of events and

then confiding with the reader and describing the accounts as “speculations”. Although present through direct address, the heterodiegetic narrator does not offer clarity following Frances’ qualified report, but instead travels back to the event itself and describes the child’s disappearance first hand — focalised through the narrator. Here, the reader recognises the narrator as the mediating agent between possible truths. The narrator is not being misleading, rather s/he is clarifying that going back to the event is necessary, prior to making any judgements.

In a subtle example of the narrator placing the locus of his or her uncertainty on story world character reporting, we see a *blending* of focalisation — which we have already seen in *Towards Another Summer* — that helps migrate the narrator’s apparent uncertainty to Maureen, when Maureen meets Marian in “Open Secrets”:

She had put on a quantity of makeup, and perhaps that was another reason Maureen hadn’t immediately recognised her. It was pale and pinkish and unsuited to her olive skin, her black heavy eyebrows. It made her look old but not pathetic. It seemed she might have put it on, like the suit and hat, to demonstrate that she could get herself up the way other women did, she knew what was expected. But perhaps she intended to look pretty. Perhaps she saw herself transformed by the pale powder... (143)

The predominant focalisation in “Open Secrets” is through the narrator; and in this passage the narrator appears uncertain about why Marian has put on makeup. However, the act of Maureen perceiving Marian, “Maureen hadn’t immediately recognised her”, leads the reader to naturalise Maureen as the focaliser. The reader then reads the uncertainty, brought about by the blending of Maureen and the narrator’s focalisation and the use of strongly modalised language (“seemed”, “perhaps”), *as if it were* Maureen’s. The transfer of uncertainty, from narrator to character, helps the reader

naturalise the uncertainty within the passage, when the expectation is a reliable heterodiegetic narrator¹⁶.

The effect of Munro's manipulation of who is speaking and who has authority also highlights the potential for there to be versions of story world "truth", depending on the viewpoint of a character or narrator. This is particularly effective when the story focalises through its characters and seeks to investigate a happening or mystery. Stories such as "A Real Life", "The Albanian Virgin", "Open Secrets" and "Vandals" all rely on versions told through the perceptions of characters, with each being an honest reflection of the characters' point of view. The book title, *Open Secrets*, also evokes the tension created by recall between honest storytelling and what remains unsaid or misspoken. The potential for versions, in turn, elicits reader consideration of the accuracy of the version being presented, not through omitting or presenting conflicting facts (as seen with unreliability) but through the disclosure of possible truths, each with the potential to be useful for a fuller understanding of the story world events. Therefore, we see that, by introducing narratorial uncertainty, changes in the relationship between reader and text occur, such as having to see the story world as provisional: and changes in reader and narrator relationship also develop, such as having to trust the narrator to provide further information or possibilities.

The works of Frame and Munro demonstrate different forms of narratorial uncertainty. In *Open Secrets*, we have seen how the narrator indicates uncertainty by directly addressing the reader and disclosing his or her supposed deficiency in perception and interpretation. However, the detail of the story world in *Open Secrets* remains reliable, thus giving the reader an anchor in a realistic environment from which to make judgements on versions of events. Consequently, in Munro's fiction, the reader's interpretive strategies are principally based on textural signals. In *Towards*

Another Summer, the narrator's story world is also reliable but the focalisation, where the character's voice at times blends with the narrator's discourse, is less so. Frame's narrator does not personally express his or her uncertainty and therefore, in *Towards Another Summer*, awareness of narratorial uncertainty sits predominantly with the reader's interpretation and extra-textual information, as opposed to the narratorial disclosure and textural clues seen in Munro's *Open Secrets*.

From this enquiry, we see that each of these authors has accentuated narratorial uncertainty through differing mechanisms, but in each case s/he has placed the uncertainty within a reliable story world. While accounts of events may be qualified or conflicting, there is security for the reader in a story world that obeys natural laws. Furthermore, the narrators in Frame and Munro are not perceived as purposefully misleading or being intentionally disruptive. In Munro's case, the narrator admits his or her fallibility. In Frame's case, the reader recognises the double personality in the text and (knowing the background of the author) accepts that the uncertainty inherent in the narratorial voice has a purpose. In both cases, the reader accepts some responsibility in meaning making, but is able to see that the narrator is telling the story in the best way s/he can. This perception is the source of a changed relationship between reader and narrator — a relationship where the reader can have confidence in the narrator, because s/he is reliable on the ethical/moral axis.

We have seen how Frame blends narrative voice and focalisation in *Towards Another Summer* to indicate a level of uncertainty, or allow the reader to infer uncertainty, in order to generate readerly sympathy for the narrator's position as the teller of the story. We have examined Munro's use, in *Open Secrets*, of techniques such as direct address, modalised language and the manipulation of time, in order to develop a sense of narratorial uncertainty and draw attention to the narrator and the uncertainty

that is inherent in the stories we tell about our lives. The conclusions of my initial research suggest that narratorial uncertainty, when written in such a way that the reader perceives the judgement space offered and understands that the narrator is recounting the story to the best of his or her ability, heightens the reader's engagement with both story world and story-telling: and, perhaps more importantly, it also strengthens the literary relationship between the text, the narrator and the reader.

At this point, I will turn to how the manipulation of voice and focalisation — and the use of specific literary techniques associated with narratorial uncertainty — may be applied to strengthen the reader's engagement with the work. In order to assist this part of the enquiry, I have written a short story, "Note to Self" — using styles and techniques that I feel promote narratorial uncertainty. A reader's judgement of engagement is subjective and therefore, it will not be possible to conclude that a particular application of narratorial uncertainty is effective in every case. However, by examining my application of style and use of techniques and justifying their use by comparison against successful examples in *Towards Another Summer* and *Open Secrets*, it will be possible to discuss the intended affect. Furthermore, writing fiction deploying an uncertain narrator will increase my understanding of how the narrator relates to the reader through the text. I believe this is an important step to understanding the interchange connecting reader and narrator — and narrator and reader.

"Note to Self" is a reflection on how misunderstanding can make a compounding difference to a life: and that judgement on the quality of life is subject to the circumstances at the time the judgement is made. "Note to Self" is a reminder that we should reconsider life choices as we mature. In "Note to Self" the thematic concern of uncertainty about choices we make in life works together with the narrator's own uncertainty.

Note to Self

Simon Gregory told me the solicitor's letter, which said Delyse Cranshaw passed away, arrived on the morning of his sixty-fifth birthday. Simon wondered who else would be getting a letter. "I won't be going to that funeral," he said to his wife, Anne, who looked at him sternly, then smiled and continued with the cake. Simon's enigmatic brother, Daniel, was coming to Simon's birthday dinner and she didn't want the cake to flop. Daniel had long since separated from his family and now it seemed he hankered for company, seeking out Simon's family in recent years and visiting regularly. Anne expected him early.

Delyse was Simon's step-mother and she lived until she was ninety two. Simon's father, Frank, died when he was seventy two, in the Midlands quarry where he had worked. Frank and Delyse divorced several years before Frank's death and his brother, Brian, only occasionally made contact. Frank's body was not found — he was not even missed — for almost a year. The police described Simon's dad as an eccentric. They said he died of natural causes.

After his father's body had been discovered, Simon visited Delyse in London. It was the English summer of 1980. Simon was 45. He remembered thinking he should visit Daniel on his boat in Thailand on the way but, if he was honest about this recollection, he was jealous enough of the dream his brother was following to avoid seeing him in his element.

The envelope from Delyse's solicitor contained another, already opened, letter. This was addressed to Delyse at her home in Camden, London and was from Frank's brother, Brian. It was dated September '79, during the time Frank lay undiscovered.

The solicitor's letter explained that Delyse had requested Brian's letter be forwarded to Simon on her death.

Simon's father had died without anyone seeming to care. Simon had gone to the UK to find out if his dad was content when he died; what sort of life he had lived; if he had been happy. Daniel, Simon's only sibling, had not made it to the funeral, returning in death his father's lack of interest in his life. Simon had mentioned the eulogy he gave to a small group (only a dozen or so) in the cloisters of a London church: Tottenham or somewhere, he said.

He recalled he said some men have a dream but may fail to see it completed. He said that this does not diminish the man, but instead, if the dream lives on — if the dream has touched other lives — then a man with a dream may live beyond his passing. He said his father was such a man. His father had dreamt of a sustainable future. Simon said this without believing it.

When he looked up from reading his eulogy, he saw tears in Delyse's eyes and thought harshly that, without her, things may have been better: better for Simon and Daniel — and for Dad. She left the funeral without speaking to anyone.

David Bellamy, a moderately famous English botanist who had worked with Frank, had spoken to Simon at the wake. In his sputtering manner, he thanked Simon for his words. He mentioned his regret of not being closer to Frank, especially in recent years and they allowed themselves to laugh a little at the foibles of men: men who followed their own grand schemes to loneliness. Men like Simon's father, but not like me, Simon had thought, for it was through the lesson of his father's life that Simon decided to change plans and head back to New Zealand.

Twenty years later, sitting in the morning sun on his diminutive patio reading the letter within the letter, Simon's world changed forever — and then continued

regardless. Something about the letter made Simon reconsider what he had said, what he had believed, standing in the hazy London sunlight, looking at the pitiful few that had come to farewell his father. He remembered missing his family at the time but was now mystified by that home-sick state.

Dear Ms Cranshaw,

09 Sept 1979

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your offer of financial support to further Frank's work at the Tuttle Hill quarry. However, I have recently visited Frank at the quarry and I am greatly concerned for his wellbeing and state of mind.

Hinckley College has decided to cease funding the project and with there being no other financiers or workforce involved, I feel your financial support would be an unwise investment with Frank as frail as he is.

Frank and I have discussed the matter and we feel it would be prudent to place the money in the Gregory Family Trust, so that it is available to Frank should he require it for healthcare support at some later date. Frank has decided to continue with his work at the quarry in his retirement. He said he likes to keep busy and seems happy enough in that environment.

If you wish to discuss the project closure with Hinckley College, feel free to telephone Gareth Swindell at the College on 03 457 7654

Please find enclosed details of the Gregory Family Trust account in order for you to forward the aforementioned funds.

Thank you again for your kind support.

Sincerely

Brian Gregory

(on behalf)

Simon sat for a while feeling old, thinking of the party that his family had planned for him tonight in their cul-de-sac home. Did he wonder how his dad was most likely dead in September '79 and how a man, broken by self inflicted inadequacy, can turn on a brother? Something had happened to Dad at the quarry and Brian had attempted to extract money from Delyse while Dad lay dead and unmissed. Did he understand now that Delyse had been there for Dad when it mattered, that Delyse was the one person that really knew his father and she could have (but didn't) put Brian in jail for what it seemed he had done? Perhaps Simon felt the need to make amends for his treatment of Delyse. He told me he wanted to set things right, to tell his story.

Delyse had left Simon some money (money still being usefully spent now Simon is in care), but her funeral tears seemed to well anew in Simon's eyes: stinging tears mourning the loss of a life, Simon's life. He pictured himself twenty years ago — fit, sharp and off to the UK to look for work: six feet tall, a trim goatee and a full head of hair. Simon looked again at the letter and seemed puzzled by the life he had lived. Was it even his own?

* * *

“If he died in New Zealand it would have been different,” Simon said to Daniel on the phone, just after the news of their dad's death. What did he mean? Daniel would think it laziness: that, if Dad had died in New Zealand, Simon would have to organise everything. Simon would have to place the notices, contact everyone, organise food. A

funeral in England meant Dad's brother, Brian, would do the leg-work. Would they burn him or bury him?

Perhaps there was a little self interest in Simon's excitement, but the chance to meet his father's friends and relatives and the circumstances of his father's death, more likely intrigued Simon — made things different. Besides, he had been planning a trip to the UK. At forty five, Simon had a now-or-never feeling in his gut: not about finding his father's family, but about finding his own way in life.

There was mystery surrounding their dad's death. Simon thought his dad had been living in New Zealand (he hadn't seen him in over twenty years) but it turned out his father was resident in the UK. The email from Brian included a link to a June 1980 newspaper cutting: *Body Found at Quarry Project*. Simon told Brian he would be coming to the funeral and Brian emailed more about the circumstances of Frank's death — and what happened after he was found.

They thought Frank's body had been there for about a year before it was discovered: partially grown-over in a quarry project, where a group of conservationists had been trying to make a park out of a hole in the ground. They had run out of money and interest and the work had stopped. Frank was one of the project founders. Simon visualised his Dad's skull lying face-up in the tall weeds with its cavity full of earth and a weedy sapling growing from an eye socket.

Frank was retired at the time of his death. There was no mention of Delyse or next-of-kin in the article: it had been written in the early stages of the police investigation. The coroner had ruled natural causes and that was that — according to the law. But his death was not the whole mystery, there was something more.

Frank's brother, Brian, after hearing of the death (a friend and then the police had phoned him) had located Delyse in London, surprisingly close to where he lived.

Delyse now lived comfortably in an apartment in Camden. Comfortably in Camden, Simon thought, she must have done well out of the divorce. Brian told Simon that he was not happy with the situation. Apparently Delyse told him not to contact her again when he started pressing for information about the divorce and the will.

Brian explained that he had looked into Frank's estate, but apparently Frank had nothing left. (Brian said he was out-of-pocket with the costs of looking into things.) There was little evidence of Frank's life following his split with his wife and — although his Will revoked Delyse (as a divorcee she could not claim anything on his death) — she had already siphoned off his money. At the time of the divorce, Frank was already involved in the quarry reclamation, but the project funding had dried up in the years after their separation. Brian seemed sure that little money had come from Frank to keep things going. David Bellamy was the other documented project founder. However, Brian had not been able to speak with David, although he had received consolations and advice of his expected attendance at the funeral. Frank would be cremated. The service would be on July 17th at the Hampstead Parish Church.

Simon wondered why no one had missed Frank. Did he have no friends? It seemed he died in such a sad way. Simon remembered one of the last times he had seen his dad: he was eighteen and a freshman at University. He and his girlfriend went to visit Frank and Delyse on their recently-purchased lifestyle block. They pulled up in Simon's banged-up car and presumed they were in, because they saw his dad's old Rover in the drive. The place had been described as a small-holding, fenced for deer and sheep, but they could not see any stock in the surrounding paddocks and it looked like they were going to make hay. Simon called through the open back door — the table was set for lunch for two. Simon and his girlfriend looked around the house. Out back,

ducks burst off the green water in the swimming pool. Frank had been married to Delyse a year or so at this stage.

They wondered at the haggard looking tennis court. A pine tree had come down on the surrounding mesh fence, crushing it and hanging over the court like a second decrepit net, shedding brown needles onto the weedy court.

After a while, they had driven back down the long metal drive but, looking back as they turned onto the road, they had seen two figures in the garden, clearly Frank and Delyse, standing in the shadows looking towards them. When they stopped the car, the figures backed into the bushes.

Simon spoke to Daniel about the dishevelled house and skulking father when they met months later. “I can’t get him on the phone and the house was freaky. I’m going to have to visit him at work if we want to see him,” Simon said.

* * *

In the summer of 1980, Simon flew to England. He took the Tube from Heathrow right through to Kings Cross. It had been a grand trip: it was thrilling to be on a big plane again and to be travelling alone was incredibly liberating. Before he left, he made contact with several recruiting agencies in London and organised to meet Brian in the ticket hall of Kings Cross station. It excited Simon to smell the dirty, dry-baked London tube stations again, with great masses of people plunging in and out of the trains. It was hot and it seemed as if young, trendy, Euro-flesh was everywhere — at least everywhere Simon cared to look. Simon remembered he had once been one of those carefree youths, on his OE with a few pounds in his pocket, surfing around London looking for something.

After two days of travel, Simon was thoroughly knackered. People would think him simple as he sat there rocking with the carriage, a languid smile on his drained

face. His legs balked at standing as the train slid into the Cross. He stood on the left of the long escalators and watched the backs of Londoners hurry past.

Brian was easy to spot in the voluminous ticket hall. Sprite and button-nosed with silver hair and eyes that Simon recognised from his father, he wore a short-sleeved shirt, slacks and dun Nomads — they wore Nomads in those days? — and spoke like an extra on Eastenders. It was fantastic to see him and Simon's energy returned as Brian led them to the Victoria line, which would take them close to Brian's home in Tottenham.

It came as a surprise that Brian's home was so modest: Tottenham was no Camden. The house was one segment of a two story block that contained a dozen homes: like a centipede, with each segment marked by a door with a slightly different paint job. Theirs had an unremarkable and worn red door and next to that a window into the front room. There was one more window on the floor above, which would be the front room upstairs, probably Brian and Fran's bedroom.

Well this is pretty shitty, thought Simon, as Brian introduced his stooped wife, Fran, and told him to make himself comfortable on the floral couch in the front room. Fran looked her age — she would be over seventy — and wore a dress that seemed to match the couch and faded wallpaper. She had unruly, wispy-white hair that made her look like she was wearing a bantam.

Simon had met Brian in London as a twenty year old on his first overseas adventure. Then, Brian had seemed dashing and fulfilled. He worked in sales. Now it occurred to Simon that Brian had been beaten — beaten by his circumstances and his inability to shed an ever-hardening skin.

What had happened to Dad in those twenty-plus years they were out of touch? Twenty five years. He was near my age when I saw him last, Simon thought. Would he

have been like me, pondering some ethereal half-way mark in life and feeling rudderless, wondering how the hell he could climb to the surface: how he could find open air in which to make a name for himself? Unlike Brian, Dad shed his skin and emigrated. Look where that got him.

Brian, Fran and Simon discussed the mystery of Frank's death, as they ate corned beef at the kitchen table. Fran had set an early tea knowing Simon would be weary (Fran was really quite lovely, if you had the patience).

Brian leaned over the table. "We never saw them," he said in low voice. "They never invited us to theirs, not even at Christmas." Fran nodded and chewed silently, looking from Simon to Brian and back.

"When the kids were here we didn't notice. We had plenty on. It was a busy little house, eh Fran?" Fran smiled, her hair a halo under the kitchen light.

"Ay, a busy house indeed," Brian said distantly and they ate a while in silence.

"And you kept in touch... how?" Simon asked. The beef was good and the meal reminded him of home. Anne and the kids would be getting up about now, dressing in the mid-winter dark. It would be chilly as they organised breakfast and the school lunches. It's so nice to feel of the warmth of summer, he thought.

"Oh, we would phone. They lived in Warwickshire when they first arrived, oh, about '69 I think. That's where that quarry is," said Brian. "Warwickshire," he repeated, as if it were some exotic holiday location. "Up until the mid-seventies we heard snippets of news from a friend, Gareth, who was working with Frank at Hinckley College. Frank was a lecturer there. Permaculture, whatever that is."

"It's so sad," Fran said suddenly, getting up with her empty plate. "We got a call from a policeman and there he was, divorced and dead. Nobody had even noticed. Makes you wonder really," she said, looking into the sink where she had put her plate.

“Oh, I don’t mean...” she turned, unsure how to put her point. “You know, that you should have been more... well, more in touch.”

There, she had said it. And perhaps innocently she took it further. “Your brother, he said he can’t make it didn’t he?”

Simon understood what was being said but was jet-lagged enough not to care. Brian was looking at him, his head on an odd angle, as if expecting some reaction, but Simon chewed his last mouthful and sat back in his chair. He had lost any connection with Frank, Dad — whoever he was — twenty years ago. He felt no responsibility to be there for him. How could he? He had no clue where he was. The last time he saw him was at his work. He had met him by chance in the tea room of the Zoology department of Massey University: Simon had been attending a short course there. After a minute or two of pleasantries, Frank had turned away to continue his conversation with a colleague. He turned back and said “Right-o then,” when Simon said he was leaving.

Sliding under the blue chenille bedspread on the guest room bed, Simon thought about his kids and how he felt he would always know where they were. But, what if they travelled and left no contact details? The same thing could happen in reverse. But then again, he was not about to hook up with a new wife, was he? Simon had no capacity to think any further. He slept.

And woke in the dark, wondering where he was. It was three am and he was starving. He lay in the warm musty room with the bedside lamp on, thinking.

Dad had disappeared from family life when he was Simon’s age. What was he thinking: that there was something more? Mother said Dad thought *we* (is that us brothers or the whole family?) were stopping him from living his life. But that was Mother: she had a vicious streak — and a heap of baggage. What happened when he

met Delyse? Did his world suddenly open up? Did she have so much to offer? It seems such a waste, to walk away from twenty years of family life.

Simon saw himself now at that same junction, but for him there was no catalyst. He remembered seeing a full-cup-of-tea stain on the ceiling in his parents' bedroom about that time. Six months later the house was sold with the stain still there. Years earlier, when he was a young teen, one of Dad's postgraduate students had been swimming with Daniel and Simon in their back-yard para-pool: a Dutch student with big boobs and dark hair leaking out of the crotch of her bikini. Surely Dad was screwing her. Perhaps she was screwing him. It hadn't occurred to Simon at the time. What's the point of all that screwing around? It seems so superficial.

But, for Simon, there was something exciting in the idea of a life lived in the moment. Lying in the little bed, he played with himself, pondering differing realities. (Perhaps he thought about taking a big-chested woman back to some musty hotel, or just saying "No", I won't be going back to family life.) It seemed he could change. It seemed he was getting closer to some understanding of his father: his father's life.

Simon got dressed and put on a collared shirt. He would see Delyse today if he could. He packed so he could grab his bags and leave if he fancied. The unknown quantity of the day carried an air of excitement. He was enjoying this really.

At breakfast, Fran said how Frank had seemed so nice the few times she met him. "Once was in a restaurant in Nuneaton. He didn't say much, except to explain his work. He was Head of Faculty, Natural Sciences, or something like that. He was working with his university-days friend, David Bellamy. Do you know Bellamy? He's very big over here. Coming to the funeral he is." Fran drank her tea and shrewishly

nibbled the crusts off her toast, putting the round remnant back on the plate in front of her.

Simon explained that Frank had been a botanist in New Zealand: a professor.

“Well, what I really remember was his excitement,” said Fran, adjusting her toast-disk so it sat in the exact centre of her plate. “He said he was working on a world-changer. That’s what he said, a world-changer: all about getting people to live sustainably.”

Brian came into the kitchen while Fran was talking. “Permaculture and sustainable living systems,” he said, pouring tea from the pot. It sounded wrong in London brogue, as if it were learned by rote. “Didn’t work, did it? The project went bust,” he said. “If you ask me, Bellamy was the one that sent him off the edge.” Brian sat down heavily. Fran made her toast-disk smaller, teeth working like a sewing machine. (She enjoyed her false teeth, as if she thought they were better than the real thing.)

Did Dad go off the edge? He had failed to get famous, to get on television like Bellamy, to stay married, to connect with his children. Did that matter? Does that matter, thought Simon?

“I visited him at the quarry once,” Brian said suddenly. “He didn’t even have a phone-line — you had to visit. He refused to leave, even though the project had wound up.” Brian looked into his tea and sat immobile, like a weary old waxwork. Fran was silent too.

“So, you have lived here a long time?” asked Simon, wanting to take some stress out of the situation. He was thinking he must crack on with the day and wondering why it was Dad had to leave the quarry.

“Thirty years,” said Brian distantly. “Thirty years,” he said, as Fran cleared away the breakfast plates.

Simon said, “You mentioned that Delyse lives in Camden. Do you know the address?” He planned to knock on her door on the off-chance she would answer. He had written a letter, which he could put in the post-box if she wasn’t in. Later in the day, he thought he would visit one of the recruitment places he had been emailing before he left.

“Yes, yes, I’ll get it for you,” Brian said, struggling out of his chair. “She’s very well-to-do you know: close to Regent Park, but not that far from here.” He rummaged in the kitchen draw under the phone and pulled out a small address book. “The policeman gave me her number, so I’ve spoken to her a few times recently. She knows you are coming to the funeral.” He smiled as if he had done Simon a favour. “I am afraid she seems, ah, well, a bit slow.” Brian found the page and placed the little ring-bound book on the table in front of Simon, who put the details into his phone.

“I thought I would go into town,” Simon said, “to meet with a recruitment agent I’ve been emailing. Is it okay if I spend another night here?”

“Of course, Simon,” said Brian and they sat and talked a while about their last meeting twenty years ago, in an upstairs room of a Brixton pub where Simon had been working. Brian marvelled when Simon told him the girl he was travelling with in the sixties was now his wife, who he was hoping to bring to the UK, along with their children — once he had found himself a job. Brian seemed to relax and talked about a retirement village they visited a couple of weeks ago. Fran thought it was too expensive, but there was no harm in investigating.

“We had a lovely day out, didn’t we Brian,” she said. “It’s been a while since we went up country together,” she finished vaguely, her voice trailing off.

Finding Delyse's house in Camden was not difficult. The difficulty was that it had been made into apartments. The large four-story building, once a very regal home, had been divided into seven apartments. Each had a bell with a name plate at the front entrance, none of which said Gregory, Simon's surname. She must have reverted to her maiden name, whatever that is, thought Simon. There were two residents with the initial D.

Rather than phone, where Simon feared he would be flatly refused a meeting, he rang the bell for one of the two D apartments. No answer. He rang the other, a top floor apartment labelled D. Cranshaw.

"Hello," came a hesitant voice through the speaker. "Stand where I can see you," it said, now recognisable as a woman's voice.

"Ah, okay," said Simon, stepping back from the steel-grey door. "I am hoping to speak with, ah, the ex-wife of Frank Gregory". He looked to the top of the door, trying to locate the camera.

"Really?" the voice said.

Simon waited, expecting more. When nothing came he said, "Yes, I am Frank Gregory's son. I am here for the funeral but thought I might speak with, ah, you?"

"Oh," she said. "Why?"

Simon paused to think. This was going badly. Should he say he wanted to know more about his father's death? What he didn't want to suggest was his concern, shared by Brian, about the whereabouts of Frank's money. How could she be living here when Dad had nothing? They had only been divorced a few years.

"I need to write a eulogy and you knew him better than me," he said, feeling like a fraud. Was he lying and cheating his way towards Dad's money? You hear about that sort of thing in the news, see it on the television soaps. It usually ends badly.

There was a long silence with the intercom still connected. Simon could hear her breathing slow wheezy draughts. “Hansen will show you up,” she said. The last word clipped by the intercom switching off.

Immediately, the large door was unlocked and opened inwards. In the hallway stood a slim gentleman in a dark suit wearing white gloves, buttoned at the back of the wrist.

It took Simon a moment to take him in, to deduce he was real. The man stood patiently. “Thank you, I am here to see Mrs, ah, Gregory,” Simon stammered.

“Certainly,” the man said. “Ms Cranshaw asked me to accompany your visit,” he said, dipping his head to emphasise her name.

The hallway was wide, with artworks on the walls and fresh flowers on a table near the elevator. Simon struggled to accept this was somewhere people lived, a home, not a hotel. Later, when trying to describe it to his family, he said it felt like he had journeyed back a century.

Upstairs was no different: perhaps the carpet seemed a little thicker, the light brighter. Here, the hallway had two ornate doors facing each other and at the end an arched window overlooking the street. Hansen knocked on the left-hand door and then asked Simon for his name.

The door opened slowly and a small woman peered out. Simon stood where he could be seen, well behind Hansen.

“Ms Cranshaw,” Hansen said eloquently, then paused. “Simon is here,” and he stood back a step.

Simon realised he should have given Hansen his full name. Thinking back, he figured Hansen should have asked. That conceited English bastard, he thought.

Ms Cranshaw peered at him from the doorway. She huffed and turned into the room. Hansen followed and closed the door after Simon. Hansen stood there with his back to the door, silent and waiting: entirely disturbing.

Simon was sure it was Delyse. He recognised her, although she seemed much smaller and of course, older. She was stooped, but walked with quick steps. She waved him to a low couch and sat opposite on a Victorian-era chair. The room was spacious, with what seemed a few well-chosen antiques on the sideboard and coffee tables. There was a dining table and a large bookcase. The French doors onto the balcony let in a slip of cool air. She smiled.

“Welcome to my private world,” she said.

Simon didn't know what to say. He thought about the letter he had written in case he could not speak with Delyse. What did that say? That he was interested in how Frank passed his last years. But now, there were a multitude of other questions yammering at him. How the hell can you afford this? What did you do to Dad? Simon felt too hot. Sweat fouled him, making him conscious of himself: his smell, how he had come accusing.

“Well,” he started, “I am Frank's youngest son. We have met, in New Zealand.”

She cut him off. “Yes, I know who you are,” she said.

“Yes, sorry.” Simon couldn't stop himself apologising. “So, well, I didn't know my father. Not as an adult. His years in England are a mystery. I have to say something at the funeral but all I have is childhood memories,” he paused. “So I was thinking that talking to you would help.”

“You feel that your memories are not enough?” she said. “You will have spoken to Frank's brother. He knew him.” Her sharp eyes looked down at him over slim

spectacles. Her jaws seemed to clench, making her lips disappear, as she mentioned Brian.

Simon was not expecting an interrogation. Sweat oozed down his flanks. Brian had said little about Frank as a person. Simon had presumed he had not seen him, other than on the few occasions Frank had spoken of. Uncertainty muddled him.

“Well, no. I just thought you may have an understanding that I did not, ah, appreciate,” Simon said, pleased he had been able to put it delicately.

Delyse, Mrs Cranshaw, stood and crossed the room with efficient steps. Taking a card from the table, she caught Hansen’s eye and he moved to open the door as she returned to Simon, holding out what appeared to be a business card.

She stood there a moment and Simon saw a lick of doubt, or was it pity, on her face. “You had better go. Stick with your memories: they will be the better ones. To understand the details of Frank’s will, you may speak with my lawyer — at my cost.”

Simon stood: he was shaking but not sure why. It seemed he had achieved nothing here. He had obviously touched on a sensitive subject — Frank’s will — although Simon could not see how. Standing there in a dither, Simon tried to find something positive to say.

“I am sorry,” he said, apologising again, “I really just wanted to understand,” he finished lamely, as he was ushered out.

“Good for you, Simon,” she said in an impossibly sincere voice — and she turned away as Hansen closed the door.

It took Simon some time to calm after being let onto the street. He walked through Camden suburbia: streets lined with trimmed trees, Range Rovers and Porsches. He wondered if he should ring Delyse’s lawyer instead of the recruitment

place. Why? Why would he do that? Simon needed time to think about why he was here. What was it that disturbed him about his father's death, he wondered, something that was not an issue before he had spoken to Delyse: no, before he had spoken to Brian. Why had Brian been so keen to see Frank leave the quarry project?

As he walked back to St John's Wood station, the streets became busier, the buildings taller. On Circus Road, he found a raft of cafés and chose one alongside a Starbucks: Richoux Brasserie. He longed to sit in a quiet Kiwi café, enjoy a flat white and the newspaper. The Richoux coffee was revolting, but he got a seat by a window and it was quiet.

Outside, a couple with grey hair sat at a table on the footpath with a pot of tea between them. The woman looked around as the cars and people chugged by: the man read the Sun newspaper. She thanked the waitress when she came with their orders and the man looked up briefly then continued reading.

Simon tried to imagine his father in the man's place. He saw the man putting down the paper and starting to talk, gesturing as he did, explaining the next grand scheme, the next big thing. The woman in his vision picked up the paper.

Simon remembered visiting Dad in his newly purchased house soon after he had split with Mum. A bachelor's pad he had called it. Simon was sixteen and he marvelled at the bareness of the rooms and the way the bed, just a mattress, sat with its duvet spreading like thick liquid over the wooden floor in the villa's front room. A digital clock-radio and bedside lamp sat on the floor at the head of the bed and several sturdy cardboard boxes (sitting on their sides and stacked two high) formed a make-shift wardrobe. The perfect room, he had thought.

Outside, the trees in the large garden were overrun with climbing Jasmine and Wandering Willie covered the ground, wherever the rank grass could not get enough

light. There were numerous old sheds and a double garage with its structure on the verge of collapse. The sheds were filled with bits of farm-iron and broken bicycles. It was the kind of place left by a junk collector, the kind of place described as a handyman's dream in real estate windows.

Except Simon's dad was not a handyman. The family home, which he had now left, had a similar garden and the work-bench in the garage had remained bare, apart from a few basic tools: a hammer and some packets of nails. Simon, when he was ten or eleven, would look at the empty shadow board above the bench and wonder what the outlines represented. Simon's own garage had a clean bench, power-tools stacked neatly underneath it, walls loaded with tools that left peculiar outlines when they were taken down: and everywhere there were useful materials for building, or picture framing, or upgrading his son's go-cart. Simon was a finisher — if the job was not finished there was a plan to finish it. A callous part of Simon thought of his father as flake — a boy who could never finish a join-the-dots picture.

Not the sort of memories one would recount at a funeral, thought Simon. What was Simon going to say? It was Dad's life outside England he would have to talk about: the life in Australia and then New Zealand. What had made his parents emigrate to Australia, to move away from friends and family — another brilliant vision like the permaculture project in the quarry that killed him? It seemed that the quarry had a secret: the peculiar bitterness of Frank and the hesitation he had seen in Delyse just before she had closed things off between them. What had been going on? Had everyone finally given up on Dad? Who would know? That Bellamy chap? Brian had somehow suggested he would be difficult to contact. What about the work colleague Brian had mentioned — and the lawyer? He would have to speak with the lawyer. Simon decided he needed to know more. It was eight days to the funeral. He would see the lawyer and

ask Brian if he could put him in touch with Dad's old work colleague. He would also try to get hold of Bellamy.

Simon saw that the couple outside had been replaced with a younger pair, deep in conversation. Inside, the restaurant was filling up with lunch patrons. The waiter asked if Simon would be having lunch, which Simon declined, thinking he would grab something at the Starbucks. Looking at the bill, he wondered if the coffee at Richoux's could be that kopi coffee that was shat out by wild cats in Indonesia. He laughed as he put a fiver on table. The English are crazy paying for that shit.

The lawyer's offices were in Knightsbridge: Pickering Hale and Dorr. The secretary was very understanding, organising an appointment the following morning. Simon spent the evening with Brian and Fran and offered to buy some takeaways. They settled on Indian, which was a special treat for them. Brian's reaction was curious when Simon asked about the work colleague, Gareth, Brian had mentioned the day before.

"I'm not sure if I have his number," he said, "I was thinking about what we might say at the funeral," and he talked about his sister, who had passed away almost ten years ago and how Frank was always the leader when they were kids. Brian mentioned Frank's success at university — Brian had a rough time at school and went straight out to work — and Frank's ambitions when he left for Australia. "He was always full of grand schemes, he was on top of the world then — him and your mum were a fancy couple all right. She was such a pretty girl and they had you and your brother. Just two you were — just two and off to the other side of the world," he finished wistfully.

Simon thought Brian had avoided talking about Gareth. But Brian wanted to plan their eulogies, admitting he was terrified of speaking "to all those people." They

managed to settle on most of what they would say. After dinner, while Fran was putting the left-over curry away, Simon asked her about Gareth.

“Oh, he’s a good friend,” she said. “He didn’t really work with Frank. He was the grounds-man at the College. Brian knew him from school and his travelling work back in the sixties. They were good friends although they haven’t been in touch recently.”

“Do you think I should go and see him?” Simon asked.

“See him. Why?” Fran answered, “What good could that do?” It seemed she looked at Simon with distrust, her mouth a tight pink line. She started unloading the washing machine by the back door. “I’ll put these out in the morning,” she muttered, keeping her eyes on the washing.

Simon struggled to stay awake: at eight o’clock it felt like he had been up all night. He slept well and woke very early, thinking of what he would ask Delyse’s lawyer. He left the house just as he heard Brian and Fran come down for breakfast. As he walked the cool streets to the station, Simon thought about the brothers: Frank and Brian. It might be that he and Daniel carried the same baggage. Did Daniel resent the university education Simon had managed to achieve? Did that make Simon closer to his father, and Daniel Frank’s intergenerational doppelganger? Simon was sure there was some sort of tension between Brian and Frank: and he didn’t understand how Delyse had ended up being the sole benefactor of Frank’s estate. If he could find out why from the lawyer he thought that might help. Help what? Simon felt his stomach move. Was he just hawking for some of his dad’s money?

The weather was fine so, after an unhurried tube-trip to Marble Arch, Simon emerged from the Underground and walked down Park Lane, with Hyde Park on his

right and the tall London Hilton ahead. He thought about the time he spent working at the Hilton in his twenties. Dad would have been focussed on work at the time; the kids had gone; he had a new life with Delyse; he might have been looking to head back to the UK. Simon wished he had known him during that time. Working at the Hilton, he had never thought of Dad.

The lawyer's offices seemed excessively opulent to Simon. The cream leather couches, the Persian rug covered marble floor, and the floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over the Dorchester Hotel and Hyde Park: Pickering Hale and whatever revolted him. He was regretting this morning's rebellious choice of jeans and Keep NZ Beautiful T-shirt. The key question, he had decided (Simon did not understand the Law relating to wills in the UK), was: Is there a reason that Delyse — Mrs Cranshaw — received so much and Dad so little, following their divorce? Simon focussed on a single question, so he was not constantly returning to the guilt-pit inside him. Ideally, there was a simple explanation. Then, he could just get on with his own stuff.

The lawyer, who greeted him with big English hands, was younger than Simon and he led them down a porridge coloured corridor to a small windowless office at the back of the building. They squeezed in opposite each other with the lawyer's small desk between them. (Was he an intern? Simon remembered him as Harry.)

“At the time of Mr Gregory's death he owed several thousand pounds which was paid off by Ms Cranshaw, along with the funeral costs,” said Harry the lawyer, flipping through the pages in Frank Gregory's slim folder. “When Mr Gregory passed away, as is usual, the divorcee was excluded from the will. The family, unfortunately, was left with the funeral costs. So, it would seem Ms Cranshaw did the family a service,” Harry looked up, as if seeking approval for his interpretation.

“So where did Frank's money go?” asked Simon.

“Well, according to this, he, ah, had no money,” said the young lawyer.

Simon thought about how to manage this. He leaned over the desk and said, “Yet the divorced widow, Ms Cranshaw, lives in a fully serviced apartment in Camden. How so?”

“Oh, well there is a bit of history,” said Harry and went on to explain that, before they divorced, Ms Cranshaw received a considerable endowment from her family which was placed in a trust.

“There was a feeling among the surviving Gregorys that some of that trust would belong to Frank,” the young lawyer looked directly at Simon. “But according to the trust deed, not so,” he finished.

Simon struggled to keep himself from shouting out. He sat back in his seat. Brian’s a devious bastard, he thought. Why hadn’t he mentioned the trust? He must have known this would all come out.

“Look, I am just trying to work out what happened to Dad,” Simon said, trying to keep his voice even. “This business with the will and the trust is a little strange,” he said. “I simply have to presume everything was done within the law and move on. What I am really here for is to find out who Dad was and to be there at his funeral. It seems like I am the only one who actually cares about him.” Simon felt himself choke, his eyes were watering. Did he care about him? Is that why he was here? He had not expected this reaction — these emotions to come crowding in on him. Who was his father that he had so few friends, so few that respected him in death?

Simon walked far enough into Hyde Park for him to turn and see the Hilton without craning. He could make out the glass windows on the 29th floor and imagined the bustling restaurant there, with its young waiters, and ignorant tut-tutting customers

oblivious to the wait-staffs' daily shit-fight. Simon felt sour to the core. Questions piled up inside him, arriving like dishes to a buffet, each stacked on the others: What did happen to Dad?; Was Dad a good man to know?; Was he happy?; Did he find some sort of purpose?; How will I get my bags from Brian's?; How do I get the train up north? Without realising, Simon had decided to go to the quarry where his father's body was found.

Simon spent the rest of the morning walking through Hyde Park, the noise of London a distant fugue. So, there was no "Frank's money": Dad died penniless and without friends. Perhaps Brian had a go at Delyse's trust and failed. The thought that Dad had died lonely, reoccurred through the day and began to disturb Simon deeply. Dad had rejected a relationship with him and Daniel. Did that mean he could not sustain relationships? Simon recalled his mum saying we had no respect for him. And she was right, thought Simon. It wasn't a conscious lack of respect, but she was right nonetheless.

On the train to Nuneaton, Simon tried to gather the leads he had. Leads, he thought, leads to what? He was still struggling with the purpose of his quest. Had he moved on from a money-grab to trying to reassure himself he was not going to end up a lonely old man? Both motives were equally selfish he decided: Why can't I be bigger than this? I should be searching for meaning in Dad's life. Something that allows me to say at the funeral, "Dad was a contributor: men like him make our society a better place." Simon imagined a deep rocky quarry with lush growth next to a cold blue lake. His father was there, digging some gardens, planting and watering, with that self-satisfied look in his eye Simon remembered from the day he had come home with a new Ford Fairlane (it had gone back to the sales-yard two days later). In Simon's vision his dad knew what he had started would germinate and strike in the project supporters.

In his vision, Simon saw his father doing something good for the earth and for future generations.

Simon had the place where Frank had worked. He had Bellamy, who had not yet replied to his phone message (Simon knew he would see him at the funeral) and he had the location of the permaculture project: a place called Tuttle Hill quarry. Recalling his tears at the lawyer's, Simon formulated a new question. Who was his father, and who really knew him?

It had been tricky talking to Brian when he got back to the house. Simon couldn't remember if he had mentioned he was going to visit Delyse's lawyer. He said something about going off on a fact-finding mission for a future work opportunity and that he would be back a couple of days before the funeral. That gave him four days. He had no idea what he would do in that time, but he knew he could not stay with lying Brian and freaky Fran.

Nuneaton station was clean, brick and grey concrete and strangely warm when Simon stepped onto the platform: he remembered this place as bitterly cold from his one stop here twenty five years ago. He had left a bag at Brian and Fran's, so only had a backpack. It felt good to be walking around the town in the warm summer evening, passing the Railway Inn with its English pub-noise built from hearty conversations, beer and Babychams. He stopped a minicab and asked what accommodation he might find at Tuttle Hill. The driver suggested a place called The Punch Bowl, "Just down from the Post Office at Tuttle Hill, sir," he said.

The cab driver said it was not far to Tuttle Hill, but Simon was startled by the massive quarry that appeared such a short distance from Nuneaton town centre. The minicab drove along one side of it, a growing cliff appearing on the right as the road went up a hill that had been half removed. The road plateaued and through the bushes

and wire fence Simon could see into the massive cut-away and out over the northern suburbs of Nuneaton. Down in the open pit, the farthest part of the quarry was flat. There were tiny-looking trucks and prefab buildings dotted around. Beyond them, with no apparent sense of order, were clumps of bush and scrubland pock-marked with pools of water. Separating this untidy wasteland from Nuneaton's houses was a willow-lined canal. Simon saw all of this from the back of the cab, as if through a kaleidoscope, the image changing slightly each time a gap in the bushes flicked by. Eclipsing, then blotting the distant vista, as the driver announced The Punch Bowl, was a cone-shaped mountain of tailings, its base centred in the enormous amphitheatre of the pit.

Simon looked to the other side of the road and was surprised to see English Midlands suburbia. The Punch Bowl was two story and red brick, surrounded by a half full car park and that by a two metre tin fence. Simon thanked and paid the driver and went in the wide front door with his backpack on his shoulder.

The front of the building was divided into two bars, with most patrons in the larger room where pop music was playing over the talk. To the right was a quieter, smaller space with a few couples eating dinner and a group of middle-aged people standing at the bar. Simon set down his pack and leaned on the bar. A barmaid appeared and asked what he would like.

"I was hoping to get a room actually," said Simon.

"Oh, sure, I'll get Margie," she said. Simon ordered food and half a bitter. He listened in on the conversation at the bar.

A man in a fisherman knit jersey was talking, "...wouldn't want to live 'round Weddington when it's blowing though. That dust gets everywhere."

"Selwyn got sick from it you know," said a pink twin-set woman. "He worked on the crushers though."

“Well it’s a different problem now,” said fisherman knit. “They were going to build some fancy development down by the canal but nobody’s got money since the market crashed. Now it’s the dust in the summer and the run-off in the winter and nobody wants to take responsibility.” He took a long draught from his pint.

Simon looked over to try and catch the eye of someone in the group. Surely this has something to do with Dad’s permaculture project. But Margie appeared next to him: a big-breasted brunette, perhaps in her fifties and dressed for pub work — heels, uncomfortable looking jeans and a flouncy top.

Margie told him about the rooms; the keys; the back door; the twenty quid a night. She took time to look at Simon (was she judging him for some other purpose?). “Where are you from?” she asked.

“New Zealand,” Simon said, the pride in his voice surprising him.

“Wow,” said Margie

“I am actually here for a funeral. My dad worked at the quarry before he passed away.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Margie said. “Was he one of the ones that got sick?”

“No, but it is a bit sad. Dad died in the quarry. But his body was only found some time after his death.”

“Oh, really,” Margie raised her pencilled eyebrows, “I think I heard about that. Mystery body they said. I’m so sorry,” she said. “It would have been horrible when he was missing,” she added.

“Yes, that was him. But we didn’t know. Unfortunately, we weren’t in touch,” said Simon, looking down.

“Oh dear,” said Margie, looking away. “Look, I must crack on,” she added suddenly. “You’ve got the key. If there is anything I can do...”

Simon thanked Margie and went up to his room and sat on the single bed looking out on the twilight car park. The way Margie had looked at him had triggered a shudder of guilt, an understanding that society expected more of him: expected him to be there for his father; he should have been in touch; he should have been there to support Dad when the project went bust.

The eulogy formed in his mind as he fell asleep. He dreamt he was standing behind a lectern in a cavernous church filled with everyone who had ever been touched by his father in some way. First, he spoke of happy childhood memories but when it came to talk about the man his father was, his voice quavered and then reduced to a squeak. He woke before dawn freaking that he failed to do something important. It seems the dream was a manifestation of his guilt. At least that's how he recalls it.

Simon stepped onto the street at dawn and set off towards the quarry entrance down on the flat land near Nuneaton town. It was cool and quiet on the street. Simon looked into the quarry as he walked down the long hill, strangely hopeful of seeing some sign of regeneration work.

Just past the main entrance to the quarry was a bridge over the canal. Simon traversed a steep bank down to the pathway that ran on that side of the canal. As he walked, he could see the expanse of the quarry's flat land through the trees that bordered the canal. It was huge — nothing like the quaint picture Simon had imagined. It seemed entirely possible that someone could have an accident and not be found, especially if no one knew to look for them. Surely, there would be people here who remembered the case, perhaps even found the body: it was only weeks ago they found him. Ahead was another bridge that seemed to be just for quarry traffic.

It was simple enough to climb up the bank and push through the old fence to get onto the rail-less bridge. He could see now that the quarry works extended to this side of the canal, with what looked like a concrete-making depot. Trucks were moving about and the machinery was operating.

Simon felt nervous and unsure of himself. What was he doing here, he asked himself as he walked cautiously over the bridge? Back towards the main entrance, surrounded by a gravel car park, was a prefab building on 44 gallon drums. Men were going in and out, some getting into small trucks and pulling away, others arriving in cars and going inside.

Simon ducked away from the buildings and activity and followed the curve of trees that grew along the canal. To find out if Dad was happy, that was it, Simon thought as he walked. He felt more comfortable now, but in realising the question he knew he had to speak with someone here.

Simon walked in a long circle, skirting the ponds, passing the foot of the tailings mountain and coming back to the building on drums: what he now thought was the site office. Approaching the building he found himself walking towards a group of men that had just come over the rail-less bridge. They were big men, some carried shovels and they all wore orange overalls. Simon felt like someone would shout out any moment and he would be grabbed and thrown onto the street. The men reached the building as he did and they stopped and looked at him, one of them, older than the others, asked who he was.

“I need a bit of help,” Simon replied, “I’m looking for an old friend who knew someone who worked here.” Simon had worked out what he would say while he walked around the ponds. Actually, saying it had brought out a sweat. He unzipped his jacket and noticed his hands were shaking.

“You ain’t allowed here unsupervised,” the man growled, “You’d better come in.” The others looked closely at him as they tromped, mute, up the wooden steps into the prefab. “You’re not from around here are you?” the group leader said, pointing that Simon should go in.

“No. No, I’m from New Zealand,” said Simon.

Inside it was crowded and noisy. The building seemed to be one big room. Down one wall there were windows and a long kitchen bench. The other long wall had a massive notice board covered with writing, pinned papers and drawings of the site. Formica topped tables and plastic chairs cluttered the floor. Some of the men Simon had followed were putting their tools in racks behind him: others were making hot drinks. There were maybe twenty men in the room.

“I’ll get the foreman — stay here.” Simon’s chaperone left him standing near the entrance. A few minutes later, Simon saw him and another broad, grey-haired man standing by the notice board looking at him. The foreman, if that is who he was, walked over with a grim look on his face. The men close by quietened and watched.

“Are you a reporter then?” he asked before he had even reached Simon. The room was quiet now.

“No, not at all,” said Simon, standing as straight as he could, “I am here to find out about my father, but I am not a reporter. I am his son.” Simon felt his face heating up.

“Father’s son eh?” the big man said with a smile. There were chuckles all round. It seemed the work-crew could sense Simon’s nervousness: his embarrassment, but also his courage in coming here and standing in front of them all. Simon sensed something too and held the foreman’s eye.

“My father died here,” Simon said, “and I didn’t even know about it until a year later.” Simon almost choked on the last words. He stood there, confessed and shamed, as he felt he should be, for not knowing this dreadful thing. He stood there being judged by hard men he did not know. The room was silent.

“Sounds like you need a cuppa,” said the foreman, moving forward and extending his hand. “My name’s Billy. Billy the Boss they call me.” And he took Simon’s hand in a strong, kind grip.

Billy guided Simon to a seat and the noise picked up again. A few of the older men (and some of those who happened to be nearby) sat with Simon and Billy at one of the larger tables. Billy caught the eye of one of the grey-templed men who gave a five minute call for return to work. A mug of tea was put in front of Simon.

“I think I know who you are talking about,” Billy said. “Frank Greenfingers we used to call him. Had some pretty big ideas,” Billy shared a smile with his men.

“Yeah,” said Simon, “That’s Dad. Permaculture was his thing. He wanted people to live sustainably. He was a bit of a hippy, I suppose.”

“Yeah, that’s him,” said another. “I remember. He was just a little old guy but he carried on like he ran the place. He was here in the morning, with his plants or whatever, before anyone else — crazy.”

Billy put a hand on Simon’s shoulder, keeping him seated and stood up. “All right, let’s get going. Back on the job, you lazy slob,” he said grinning around him.

When the room had cleared, Billy told Simon how Frank had spent countless hours planting what he called the forgotten corner of the quarry. He had been accepted as part of the crew, even though no one knew where he lived or what he did when he was not at the quarry. He was always cheerful and easy to talk too, although he had argued with his brother who had visited a few times.

“You must know Frank’s brother”, Billy said. “He wanted Frank to live with him and his wife, or go into care or something. Frank wasn’t having a bar of it — told him where to go.”

Simon sat listening with a growing sadness and confusion. Sadness for his father who, it seemed, had been alone in those years: and confusion about how it all came about — how it was let to happen.

Billy became quite angry at one point, almost shouting, “If they had just let him alone. He was getting along just fine. He was working some kind of magic,” he said. Others at the table nodded and muttered agreement.

One of the old men said he had kept up the watering after Frank had left, but in the end there didn’t seem much point. “Once the building project was canned, there was never going to be any self-sufficient community. They said it would be the first of its kind in England. They’ve got them in California you know,” he said, looking around, getting grunts of support from his mates. “They don’t need anything from outside their own walls, not even power. They make that out of their own poo.”

Some of the men laughed, but most were quiet. It seems that Frank’s life was too close to their own — edging towards hopelessness. Billy took Simon to where Frank had been planting, a small plot of thick brush by the canal.

“This is what this whole area could have looked like. But it was just too much for one old man,” said Billy. “I’m sorry it ended how it did. He deserved better — no offence mind,” he said.

Later, as Simon was saying goodbye to Billy and a few of the old codgers who had hung around, Simon realised he now knew more about — was more in touch with — his father than anyone. He did not know, he did not think about, what had happened to his dad’s money — if he ever had any — or what sort of relationship his dad had

with his work, or his brother, or his wife. That was no longer important. In the days preceding the funeral, Simon stalked about the Warwickshire countryside and said goodbye to his English dream. He came to understand how he felt about his father's passion for grand, futile dreams, that only death had stopped him chipping away at. He came to understand his tolerance for pointlessness.

As Simon walked up Tuttle Hill to his room, with the dust from the quarry worrying at his eyes, he thought of his family at home in New Zealand. He sought out the patch of young trees by the canal, staring through the tall chain-link fence. It came to him, like a bladder-emptying piss, that he could respect his father in death, but could not live as he had: with each failed vision setting him apart from those who would love him. Simon would not allow it — and surely he was right.

END

Deploying the Uncertain Narrator

I have argued that narratorial uncertainty in heterodiegetic narratives relies on the reader embodying the narrator and perceiving the teller of the story as human. Using the literary techniques previously discussed, I believe this perception can be managed, so that the reader sees the storyteller as fallible, but honest and open about his or her fallibility: that is, s/he is at times uncertain. In order to fit the definition of uncertainty, rather than unreliability, where the reader senses the narrator is withholding information, the teller either admits his or her uncertainty, or the narrator's unintended fallibility becomes apparent to the reader through cumulative clues. Ultimately the reader needs a believable reason for the narrator to be uncertain — or the effect is compromised. In “Note to Self”, such believability is delivered by textural clues that indicate the narrator is relaying or interpreting a story or series of conversations s/he had with the protagonist, Simon.

Understanding that believable narratorial uncertainty is dependent on the embodiment of the narrator, in “Note to Self”, I have attempted to assist the reader's embodiment of the narrator by referring to the narrator immediately and directly: “Simon Cranshaw told me the solicitor's letter which said Delyse Cranshaw passed away arrived on the morning of his sixty-fifth birthday” (46). The reference to “me” is a direct acknowledgment that the narrator is a person known to Simon, the protagonist. This first person reference creates space for the reader to naturalise the narrator as a person. The reader becomes aware that the narrator is separate from Simon and s/he is relating the story from some time in the future — just how far in the future is indicated by the dates in the letter and Simon's recall of his time spent in the UK: “It was the English summer of 1980. Simon was 45” (47). Therefore, in the first paragraphs of

“Note to Self”, the reader is told that the story is recounted by someone known to Simon, at least ten years after the letter has been received. This is reinforced by direct narratorial comments, such as “(money still being usefully spent)” (48), which indicates an ongoing knowledge of Simon’s current situation.

The narrator’s reference to being told about the letter by Simon and his need to “set things right” (50) and “to tell his story” (50) suggests the story is being recounted from a conversation between the narrator and Simon. If narratorial uncertainty requires an embodied narrator, successful application (or believability) relies on there being a reason/s why the narrator may be at times uncertain. These early-in-story clues to how the story came to the narrator — a conversation a decade ago: and how the story is being recounted — by the narrator, not Simon — underpin the reader’s acceptance that there could legitimately be elements of uncertainty in the story.

The first person reference, in line one of “Note to Self”, mirrors the first person references in *Open Secrets* and *Towards Another Summer*, which have been previously discussed. In *Open Secrets*, the reference to the speaker, “I give up” (40), acts to alert the reader to the narrator’s fallibility. Whereas, in *Towards Another Summer*, the narrator appears to be clarifying the existence of the narrator — as distinct from the character. Either way, the first person appearance of the narrator and the direct address to the reader by the narrator are obvious indications of the presence of the narrator.

Changing focalisation is a more subtle technique that can be used in creating narratorial uncertainty. The focalisation, the perspective through which the story world is perceived, in both *Towards Another Summer* and “Note to Self”, changes throughout these stories. In “Note to Self”, as with *Towards Another Summer*, the narrator (at times) focalises through Simon, the protagonist. In *Towards Another Summer*, direct address is used to blend focalisation and to create uncertainty about who is speaking¹⁷,

whereas, in “Note to Self”, the changing focalisation is intended to help readers understand that the narrator is not privy to the protagonist’s thoughts, but s/he is willing to suggest an interpretation:

Did he wonder how his dad was most likely dead in September ’79 and how a man, broken by self inflicted inadequacy, can turn on a brother?

Something had happened to Dad at the quarry and Brian had attempted to extract money from Delyse while Dad lay dead and unmissed. Did he understand now that Delyse had been there for Dad when it mattered, that Delyse was the one person that really knew his father and she could have (but didn’t) put Brian in jail for what it seemed he had done? (49-50)

In the first sentence, the narrator poses a question, thus admitting s/he is uncertain about what Simon is thinking. From the second sentence, this paragraph is focalised through Simon, clearly evidenced by the use of the familial term “Dad”. Here, the reader is offered Simon’s thoughts. The final sentence (a question) blends a narratorial question with Simon’s perspective: it is as if Simon had asked the question of himself. The effect is not to dispute the facts, but to question Simon’s understanding of the situation and ask the reader to make a judgement.

Similarly, questioning a character’s understanding, but without changing focalisation, the narrator in Munro’s “Vandals” looks to the reader, when trying to explain why the rude and indifferent Ladner appeals to the character Bea. “Vandals” is a story in which the two female protagonists are influenced by a gruff and secretive, yet powerful man, Ladner. His power to influence women is shown through Bea, a mature woman in a relationship with Ladner — and Liza, who recalls her visits to Ladner’s house in her childhood summers. When trying to understand Bea’s attraction to the

unpleasant Ladner, the narrator asks (and then answers) a seemingly rhetorical question:

But driving out to Ladner's place during the school week, a few days after she had first met him, what was her state of mind? Lust and terror. She had to feel sorry for herself, in her silk underwear. Her teeth chattered. She pitied herself for being the victim of such wants. (169)

The narrator's question creates a sense that the narrator is uncertain and it provides the readers with an opportunity to answer the narrator's question for themselves. The narrator follows up with his or her own answer, but then overlays an opinion: "She had to feel sorry for herself" (ibid). By using "had to" the narrator asks the reader to buy into his or her interpretation. It is as if the words "don't you think?" are missing from the end of this sentence. This combination of question and answer, followed by narratorial supposition, develops a narrator who appears uncertain, but s/he is not afraid to share an opinion and be honest about his or her fallibility. The narrator being perceived as fallible but honest, in this way, fits our definition of narratorial uncertainty: the narrator has disclosed s/he is uncertain and includes the reader in meaning making.

By simply stating that the narrator is uncertain about story world details, Munro's narrators also achieve reader engagement and meaning making that can be seen as a shared endeavour. In "The Jack Randa Hotel", a story about a woman who covertly follows her ex-husband to Australia — seeking to understand both herself and her former partner's needs — a series of letters is written¹⁸. The narrator, through a direct question to the reader, is explicit about his or her uncertainty of what is in one of the letters:

But what was in the letter that Will has written Ms. Catherine Thornaby, on Hawtre Street?

Dear Ms. Thornaby,

You do not know me but I hope that once I have explained myself...

(172)

Following the disclosure of his or her uncertainty, the narrator provides the letter, italicising and indenting it to reinforce its existence as an artefact, rather than a report of the narrator. The effect is to allow the reader to *discover* the content of the letter at the same time as the narrator. The uncovering of the truth is a partnership, thus resolving the narrator's uncertainty and offering the reader a role in meaning making alongside the narrator.

“Note to Self” employs a similar technique in bringing the attention of the reader to an epistolical piece of evidence, in order to resolve a perceived gap in narratorial knowledge:

Twenty years later, sitting in the morning sun on his diminutive patio reading the letter within the letter, Simon's world changed forever — and then continued regardless. Something about the letter made Simon reconsider what he had said, what he had believed, standing in the hazy London sunlight, looking at the pitiful few that had come to farewell his father. He remembered missing his family at the time but was now mystified by that home-sick state. (48)

The letter (italicised to suggest it is an object in reality rather than a creation of the narrator) follows this passage, which is in turn followed by narratorial suppositions of what Simon is thinking. The effect is to ask the reader to make judgements about the letter and the effect it has on Simon. It is important to note that the narrator is not

explicit in his or her explanation, because s/he does not have a complete understanding of how Simon feels. This is due to the story being told second-hand — recounted from a conversation with Simon — not because the narrator is withholding the information.

In these examples from “Vandals”, “The Jack Randa Hotel” and “Note to Self” the reader is confronted with textural evidence that a narrator with human traits, such as honesty and fallibility, is telling the story. The more overt and direct the admission (and the greater the accumulation of textural clues) the stronger the reader’s embodiment of the narrator and perception of the narrator as an unreliable storyteller (Martens 87). It is in the reader’s understanding that the narrator is disclosing all the information s/he has and is telling the story as accurately as s/he can, that unreliability is transformed into uncertainty and the reader is able to have confidence in the narrator.

We have seen how narratorial unreliability relies on the reader perceiving the narrator’s failings against the backdrop of expectations of reliability and authority. When the reader accepts the narrator’s shortcomings as being reasonable, then unreliability is transformed to uncertainty. These steps appear to be the embodiment of the narrator — the admission of unreliability by the narrator: and the reader’s acceptance that the unreliability is uncertainty. The difference between unreliability and uncertainty appears to be the matter of possibilities. That is to say, uncertainty is a reflection of the fact that the narrator is describing how things *possibly* were. It is in this way that the reader is invited to have a say — invited to personally interpret the situation. The result is a different type of readerly engagement than a simple receipt of information, or puzzle-solving, where there is a known answer, such as seen with fiction written with traditional third person authority. The evidence, so far, indicates that readerly engagement with a story exhibiting narratorial uncertainty is a more intense and reciprocal type of engagement.

The introduction of possibilities, particularly when provided through the narratorial discourse, allows the reader space in which to make-up his or her mind about aspects of the story. Munro's use of modality (indicating a possibility, not certainty) to create opportunities for reader interpretation has been recognised by critics such as Heble, Varley and Skagert (Springett 5). Described as "possibility space", modality often underpins the uncertainty of Munro's narrative voice. As with *Open Secrets*, "Note to Self" uses direct address and modalised language to suggest the possibilities of interpretation of story matters. When Simon wakes after dreaming of his father, for example, the narrator suggests an interpretation of Simon's dream:

First, he spoke of happy childhood memories but when it came to talk about the man his father was, his voice quavered and then reduced to a squeak. He woke before dawn freaking that he failed to do something important. It seems the dream was a manifestation of his guilt. At least that's how he recalls it. (74)

The use of "seems" (final line), in the present tense, places the discourse with the narrator. The modality of the word "seems" tells the reader that the narrator is not certain, but the information may help with overall meaning making. Such narratorial statements of possibility, provided through modalised language (and in this case supported by the direct address that follows) alongside an accumulation of story world evidence, let the reader know that they have a place in making story and world judgements in partnership with the narrator (Olson 98). However, as previously discussed, this partnership must be underpinned by believable reasons why the narrator does not have this information. In the case of the excerpt above, the reader must understand that the narrator is not always sure how Simon is feeling, due to the story being retold from a conversation with Simon.

My intention in writing “Note to Self” is to point to the possibility that narratorial interpretation is not the only interpretation available to readers of fiction. With the identity and limits of understanding of the narrator established, I have used direct questioning, as exemplared in “The Jack Randa Hotel”. I also incorporate epistemic modality (the narrator’s expression of possibility, not certainty) in the rhetorical answer. In “Note to Self”, I see the narratorial question and answer process as an opportunity to bring the narrator’s voice to the fore. By being uncertain about some parts of the story, the narrator’s voice is brought to the reader’s attention:

“If he died in New Zealand it would have been different,” Simon said to Daniel on the phone, just after the news of their dad’s death. What did he mean? Daniel would think it laziness: that, if Dad had died in New Zealand Simon would have to organise everything. Simon would have to place the notices, contact everyone, organise food. A funeral in England meant Dad’s brother, Brian, would do the leg-work. Would they burn him or bury him?

Perhaps there was a little self interest in Simon’s excitement, but the chance to meet his father’s friends and relatives and the circumstances of his father’s death, more likely, intrigued Simon — made things different. Besides, he had been planning a trip to the UK. At forty five Simon had a now-or-never feeling in his gut: not about finding his father’s family, but about finding his own way in life. (50)

Here, the reader has information reported as factual — the phone conversation — in addition to a statement of possibility — the second paragraph. This indication of a possible interpretation suggests that there could be a range of interpretations. Unlike a narratorial disclosure of the “truth”, the reader processing qualified statements, such as this example of a modalised statement, must accept an evolving understanding. With

qualified or uncertain statements, a reader draws on his or her own experiences and makes provisional judgments based on the possibilities given. These provisional judgements then concretise as further information accumulates, so the reader progresses towards understanding, as new information is received. This occurs because determining the likelihood of an event relates to how readers contextualise and assimilate information (Nuyts xvi). Furthermore, in the “possibility space” offered by narratorial uncertainty, the reader is given some latitude to form his or her own opinions about the story world events (Skagert 162). Modal indicators, such as “perhaps”, and “seems”, trigger the need for a reader to consider the reliability of the text, not as they may with a mystery (where there is an expectation of revelation or closure), but where the reader is given authority to make judgements alongside the narrator.

As previously discussed, the reader’s sense of authority to make judgments is based on the reader accepting the narrator’s uncertainty: that is, the reader understands and accepts the reasons for the narrator’s lack of knowledge. In the above excerpt from “Note to Self”, the focalisation supports the reader’s acceptance of uncertainty, by offering information from differing perspectives. Following the narrator’s question, “What did he mean?” (50), the narrator offers an interpretation: “Daniel would think it laziness; that if Dad had died in New Zealand Simon would have to organise everything” (ibid). Here, Daniel becomes the focalising agent, evidenced by the use of “Dad”, and the question, “Would they burn him or bury him?” (ibid). The narrator has answered the question through Daniel. However, for the reader, the question remains as to why the narrator did not know.

The narrator then reassumes the focalisation and suggests a second possibility, “Perhaps there was a little self interest...” (ibid). The impression becomes one of a

narrator who is attempting to answer the question, but does not hold the answer. To further support this effect, the narrator proceeds to offer what they do know: that Simon was planning a trip to the UK and was dealing with some sort of mid-life crisis. The point here is that the reader is given clues to understanding why the narrator suggests a possibility, rather than being certain. The narrator takes a known phone conversation, offers a response from Daniel and then suggests an explanation from Simon — and finally, offers further facts about Simon. A reader considering this situation could reasonably conclude that the narrator is offering all s/he has and filling-in some gaps with plausible interpretations — which in turn allows the reader to speculate. With such readerly awareness of uncertainty, the reader considers the reliability of the text and s/he is able to make interim or provisional judgements that allow progress towards an understanding in partnership with the narrator.

Narratorial uncertainty, whether developed through modality or direct address, creates a need for readers to make provisional judgements about story world matters, or about the work's narratorial voice. Similar opportunities for readers to make judgements as they read also occur when the narrator or character appears to *recall* an event. Here, it can be the story's structure that creates the need for the reader to make provisional judgements, rather than grammar and diction, as we have seen in the discussion on the use of modalised language and direct address. Both Frame and Munro use structure to place the narrator in the position of recalling the story from the future¹⁹. The narrator creates a “provisional reality” by placing a central event of the story world near the beginning of the story: then recounting how the event occurred or what the event meant (Heble 49). That is to say, the story world event is described and then explored, in order to ascertain if the initial interpretations are accurate.

Frame, for example, in the first paragraphs of *Towards Another Summer*, places the narrating instance in the future: “she wrote the story of the weekend” (11). The future event, the act of writing the story of the weekend, is used as a starting position, even though it occurs after the story of the weekend emerges. The reader accepts the initial reality described (that the story will be written) and remains open to textural indicators that flesh out the context of the initial statement. In this way, the initial statement remains provisional until the story is fully told.

Similarly, but with characters recalling an event, three of the eight²⁰ stories in *Open Secrets* begin with an event described by a character — the understanding of which becomes the matter of the story. In “Vandals”, the initial focalisation describing the seminal event is through Bea. Her perspective — the narrator’s provisional position — is provided in a letter which laments the vandalising of her vacant home. This is followed by narratorial discourse that looks back in time, in order to explain the letter’s contents. The recall and actions of characters and the interpretations of the narrator are brought under the spotlight, thus providing clues to meaning. Ladner’s suggested predatory nature in “Vandals” has an impact on both women: Bea seeks a relationship where she is “able to live surrounded by implacability, by ready doses of indifference which at times might seem like scorn” (169); Lisa becomes a devout Christian when she matures, but returns to vandalise Ladner’s house.

Ladner’s deviant behaviour towards the young Liza is not resolved by the narrator, while Bea is implicated through her lack of (or late²¹) reaction to these inappropriate events. Therefore, in order to explain the matter of the story, the narrator leads the reader on an exploration of how these women felt, before, during and after their relationship with Ladner. In order to do this, Munro manages time, allowing Bea to ruminate on the trashing of Ladner’s house and then, at times, focalising through

Liza, by unpacking the events that led to Liza's vandalistic behaviour. At a meaning level, the narrator never states "the truth" but, through describing the behaviour of the characters or perceiving things through their eyes, s/he develops possibilities of interpretation.

Tapping into the idea that there may be more than one reality, Munro sees the differing realities, or differing perspectives generated by recall, as equally valid. Munro feels that the reality a narrator presents and the reality observed as a character in a story may differ, but each is a true representation of the story world from that perspective (Varley 2). Aligning with this idea is Frame's belief that narratorial identity is an arbitrary construct. The position these authors appear to take is that, regardless of genre, there are multiple but equal ways a story can be told and interpreted (St. Pierre 20).

As seen with both Frame and Munro, time management or structural techniques that aid narratorial uncertainty follow a pattern. The narrator sets out a provisional reality, declares his or her uncertainty and then provides a provisional answer or series of answers. Following this pattern, in "Note to Self" I have placed the seminal event at the beginning of a story and then constructed an enquiry to unpack its meaning. Simon sees his life choices differently after receiving the announcement of the death of his step-mother:

Twenty years later, sitting in the morning sun on his diminutive patio reading the letter within the letter, Simon's world changed forever — and then continued regardless. Something about the letter made Simon reconsider what he had said, what he had believed, standing in the hazy London sunlight, looking at the pitiful few that had come to farewell his father. He remembered missing his family at the time but was now mystified by that home-sick state. (48)

The direct address in this passage is intended to develop the impression of an active (embodied) narrator, who is very close to the character, but not privy to (or able to) impart a singular truth²². In order to understand the significance of Simon's confusion, the narrator places the event of realisation at the beginning of the story and then uses an active voice to look back in time, by looking at the events that led to this life-changing moment. Regularly appearing in the text, through direct address, the narrator of "Note to Self" discloses some past events as possibilities, by using modalised language and recall: "Simon recalled the eulogy he gave to a small group, only a dozen or so, in the cloisters of a London church: Tottenham or somewhere he said" (47). The aggregation of textural clues indicating uncertainty, such as modality, direct address and the creation of provisional realities, is intended to lead the reader to embody the narrator and to see the narrating position as supportive and privileged — but not omniscient or all-knowing. It is this supportive but limited narrator who delivers the impression of narratorial uncertainty.

From our close reading of "Vandals" and "Note to Self", we can see that narratorial uncertainty relies on the creation of possibilities, or provisional realities, in addition to textural clues such as modality and direct address, which are inter-dependant on the embodiment of the narrator by the reader. However, the key to uncertainty (as opposed to unreliability) is the apparent support the narrator offers the reader in his or her enquiry, when the narrator's knowledge is compromised. In response to the two-fold investigation — how does a narrator bring narratorial uncertainty to bear and how does a reader process a narrator's signals of uncertainty? — I can state that narrators may use language and structure to indicate the *possibility* of narratorial uncertainty. However, it is an active narratorial presence, which demonstrates an attitude of support for readerly understanding that takes the reader past

the “tipping point” and transforms the unreliability into uncertainty. From the readers’ perspective, although it is the reader’s naturalisation of a provisional truth that creates the evolving type of meaning making associated with narratorial uncertainty, it is the reader’s embodiment of the narrator as a supporting voice, or partner in meaning making, that confirms narratorial uncertainty. Regardless of their perspectives — narrator or reader — the key to narratorial uncertainty is in the reader’s understanding that the narrator is supporting meaning making, rather than compromising it in some way.

Thus far, I have looked at how narratorial uncertainty may be delivered and how it is perceived. However, the question remains: To what end? In the introduction to this thesis, I put forward the idea that narratorial uncertainty heightened the relationship between the reader and the text, by increasing the reader’s awareness and involvement in both story world matters and the way in which the story is told: the narrative discourse. I have looked closely at how the effect is brought to the reader’s attention and also how it is received — the two essential enquiries needed to understand the effect. During this analysis, I have brought to light some possible affects of narratorial uncertainty. Now it is time to look more closely at these affects (such as a heightened awareness of the discourse) and consider what narratorial uncertainty achieves. I shall start by recapping that each reader has a literary relationship with the work they are reading: and therefore, there exists a relationship with the narrator. When the reader is confronted with narratorial uncertainty, we have found that s/he must think about both the reliability of the story world and the manner of discourse and (by definition) the reader must consider the discourse to be an honest attempt to tell the story.

In *The Company We Keep*, Booth explains that all narrative works of fiction develop a literary relationship between reader and narrator (170). It is the reader’s

perception of the narrator, as a supporting voice, that changes the relationship between narrator and reader from the authoritarian (or even suspicious) relationship found in other works of fiction, to one based on trust. Booth goes on to describe some measures of what he calls the “Literary Friendship” (179). I see these measures as useful in their ability to capture what is happening between reader and narrator in instances of narratorial uncertainty. The level of *reciprocity*, for example, Booth describes in terms of the degree of responsibility for meaning making that the narrator grants the reader (ibid). Through research and analysis for this thesis, I have found that, in regards to narratorial uncertainty, the reader acts as a partner with the narrator in meaning making. In Booth’s terms, the relationship is highly reciprocal: the narrator relinquishes the authority present in traditional heterodiegetic narration and places some of that authority, specifically the authority for meaning making, with the reader. This also has the affect of drawing the reader’s attention to the narrator and the manner in which the story is being told.

Another factor Booth discusses is *intensity*, which he says can be developed by “drawing the reader’s imagination into active reconstruction or into active caring about consequences” (192). We can relate this to the partnership model of meaning making present in texts exhibiting narratorial uncertainty, where the reader is required to actively engage with provisional story world realities. When the narrator uses modalised language, the qualified report makes the reader place the information in a holding pattern and then reconstruct a new understanding when new information is made available. In Munro’s “Carried Away”, for example, Louisa’s motivation for not mentioning the unreturned library books is uncertain: “She did not mention the books were connected with the man who had the accident. That would have made the story less amusing. Perhaps she had really forgotten.” (27). Here, the reader’s judgement of

Louisa remains open. Did she forget or was she looking to impress with an amusing story? Using information that follows this passage, the reader may reassess his or her view of Louisa in a form of Booth's "active reconstruction" (165, 167).

Furthermore, with narratorial uncertainty, the reader must consider not only the traits of the character being described but also the narrative perspective and expectations of authority s/he has of the narrator, who has admitted his or her uncertainty. The reader is therefore encouraged to actively consider the reliability of the narration and the reliability of the story world descriptions. I argue that authors using narratorial uncertainty increase both the reciprocity and intensity of their work. As a consequence, narratorial uncertainty has the potential to increase the involvement of the reader in meaning making and to heighten the intensity of the reading experience, compared to more authoritative heterodiegetic narration.

High reciprocity, where the narrator offers a high degree of responsibility in meaning making to the reader, matches an understanding of the affects of narratorial uncertainty: the narrator and reader become partners in meaning making. This is seen in *Towards Another Summer*, where the confusion about who is speaking is not resolved by the narrator and it, therefore, remains the responsibility of the reader. In this case, the reader may accept that the narrator is so close to Frame herself that, for his or her purposes, the narrator is Frame. Other readers may judge there to be a difference, but the point remains that both the reader and narrator are resolving these issues of identity.

Heightened reciprocity can be observed in the textural modality and provisional realities present in *Open Secrets*. The first lines of "A Real Life", for example, contain a provisional reality that is framed with uncertainty: "A man came along and fell in love with Dorrie Beck. At least he wanted to marry her. It was true." (53). The initial statement appears as a fact, but then it is immediately qualified, thus causing the reader

to naturalise the first statement as being provisional. The two statements together suggest the narrator is not completely certain of the state of affairs between Dorrie and the man. The direct address “It was true” then serves to embody the narrator and to signal that there are complicating factors: the reader will need to be convinced and the reader has a role in deciding the “truth”. Therefore, in “A Real Life”, the reader will eventually have to decide if “it was true”.

In an attempt to heighten the reciprocity of the work, the narrator of “Note to Self” also expects the reader to make judgements of their own based on the evidence supplied:

Something about the letter made Simon reconsider what he had said, what he had believed, standing in the hazy London sunlight, looking at the pitiful few that had come to farewell his father. He remembered missing his family at the time but was now mystified by that home-sick state. (48)

Here, the narrator is asking the reader to make a provisional judgement about Simon’s reconsideration of what he had said at his father’s funeral. This is followed by information that supports the narrator’s rationale for the enquiry — as if the narrator is suggesting that because Simon does not know, the narrator does not know. This excerpt is followed by the letter itself, presented as an artefact to show it is not the narrator’s creation. This epistollic evidence is offered, in order to help the reader resolve the question about Simon’s change of mind. The affect is to place the responsibility of understanding on both the reader (acting as interpreter) and the narrator (who is providing the information). According to Booth’s definition, this is a highly reciprocal reader-narrator relationship.

In such a highly reciprocal relationship, the reader *feels the need* to make meaning (Booth 186). In “Note to Self”, the story world clues lead to the possibility

that Simon's decision was flawed. Disillusioned with his father, Simon abandons his dream of living and working in the UK and returns home, following his father's funeral. However, the letter contained within the solicitor's letter — the letter from Brian to Delyse — suggests that his father's project in the quarry did have support from Delyse, thus indicating it was "worthy". Simon's decision, based on the apparent futility and selfishness of his father's projects, appears to have been made with incomplete information. Perhaps he was not correct to leave the UK — to have no faith in his father. The last line of "Note to Self", where Simon makes the decision to abandon his UK vision, has been phrased as a statement, but it also elicits consideration of the question: Was he right to abandon the UK dream? The reader, armed with more information than Simon had at the time, may then comprehend the significance of his earlier question "Was [his life] even his own?" (50): the significance being that Simon had made a life-changing decision — to abandon the UK dream — based on flawed information: Simon lived a life based on the premise that following your dream was foolhardy and it led to loneliness and poverty. With the information provided by the narrator, who is sometimes uncertain about specifics, it is the reader who must come to a final understanding, in order to gain resolution.

Working in a similar way to reciprocity, Booth's narrative intensity is present in works where there is some puzzle or mystery. However, if part of the puzzle is unavailable to the narrator — the narrator is uncertain in some way of story world details or of his or her own voice — the responsibility for the reader to make meaning *as the story progresses* may become apparent. It is the need for the reader to engage with provisional story world meaning making that differs from reciprocity, which has its basis in the level of authority granted to the reader by the narrator. With Booth's intensity, the reader is engaging with possibilities in a process of active reconstruction,

as the story is read. This differs from a more authoritative narrator, where the information is provided as needed, in order to make meaning: or in the case of an unreliable narrator, where there may be no clearly reliable information or interpretation and ongoing meaning making by the reader may ultimately be pointless.

In “Note to Self”, the management of time, the presentation of a mystery and the uncertainty of the narrator are intended to work together to heighten both the intensity and reciprocity of the work. “Note to Self” begins with an end-game²³ event: Simon receiving a letter on his 65th birthday. The events leading to (and potentially explaining) the contents of the letter are the matter of the story. The admitted gaps in the narrator’s knowledge lead the reader to construct provisional views of the fictional world, as they progress through the story. The difference between this active reconstruction during reading and shared responsibility for meaning making — the difference between reciprocity and intensity — lies in the way the reader engages with (or processes) the information offered by the narrator.

In reconstructing possibilities, the reader naturalises the information s/he has and allocates a temporary status to any meaning. This is a process that occurs constantly while reading and it relates to the intensity of the reading experience. The character Brian in “Note to Self”, for example, is judged and re-judged by the reader. Initial reports — the letter within the letter — suggest he has acted against his brother, Frank. The reader must include this in his or her judgement, as Simon meets Brian in London and begins to unpack the mystery of his father’s death. The dramatic irony and the narratorial uncertainty surrounding some of the details push the reader to constantly reassess Brian, thus increasing the intensity of the reading experience. However, unlike intensity, with reciprocity, the need to make meaning is imposed upon the reader. The reader reaches a point where they realise the narrator will not (or is not able to) provide

all the information required for understanding or meaning making, as I have attempted to do with the ending of “Note to Self”.

Although discernable as different effects, reciprocity and intensity have a similar relationship with narratorial unreliability, as they do with narratorial uncertainty. In regards to unreliability, the reader is active in reconstructing possibilities and active in making meaning, because s/he feels a need to make meaning, due to tensions between what is said and what is perceived. In regards to narratorial uncertainty, the reader is also required to make meaning, but the reader-text and reader-narrator relationship differs. If the text exhibits traits of unreliability on the axis of facts and perception, it can be said to be unreliable. However, if the narrator admits his or her failings, the axis of evaluation is said to be reliable and the text is then defined as uncertain²⁴ (Nunning 94). The difference, in regards to the literary relationship, is that the reader feels they have a partner in his or her endeavour — the narrator — who is also seeking understanding and s/he can be trusted to disclose his or her unreliability in interpretation and facts. In “Note to Self”, for example, the narrator appears outside the story world narrative, or declares his or her uncertainty on more than thirty occasions. The many appearances of the narrator give the impression of an active voice, thus evoking the sense that someone is telling the story and in this case providing support for meaning making. In “Note to Self”, the narrator can be perceived as recounting the story of Simon’s situation, based on conversations the narrator has had with Simon. The narrator’s uncertainty relates to what s/he has been told (or not told) by Simon and what the narrator is prepared to presume and then present as fact. In “Note to Self”, narratorial uncertainty exists when the narrator’s reluctance to state a “truth” is understood — with understanding based on both textural clues and reader naturalisation

— to stem from uncertainty about the reliability of information, rather than an unwillingness to offer information.

Conclusion

Looking back on this enquiry, it can be seen that, in fictional works exhibiting narratorial uncertainty, the reader-narrator relationship differs from that developed by a more traditional, authoritative, narrative style. Literary techniques that influence narratorial uncertainty, such as recall, direct address and modality act as levers on the reader-narrator relationship. Rather than an authority figure, with an uncertain narrator the reader is offered a partner in meaning making. Through the need to construct possibilities and make meaning, the reader becomes involved in the story in a different way from involvement in stories that are told more reliably. The narratorial uncertainty experience involves a heightened intensity, where the narrator leaves possibility space for the reader to create a series of provisional understandings, as they progress through the story. End-of-text meaning making is also affected by the way a reader achieves closure.

In regards to both an authoritative and an uncertain narrative voice, the reader may have the latitude to take home a range of meanings from a story. However, when the narrative voice is perceived as the authority, yet multiple interpretations of the story's meaning are possible, the reader must be satisfied with unresolved possibilities: the reader will remain unsure if they have "got it right". Without admission of shortcomings, such authoritative heterodiegetic narrative falls into the definition of an unreliable text. The narrator has effectively under-reported, in order to offer possibilities of meaning. *Towards Another Summer* gets close to this under-reported but authoritative end-of-story unreliability, with the recognition of narratorial uncertainty

hinging on extratextual information about the author. If the reader does not know the history or mental state of Frame, the conflation of voices — narrator, characters and implied author — will read as under-reporting or misreporting, thus fitting Phelan's descriptors of unreliability.

However, when the narrator discloses the under-reporting and discloses the fact that there is information missing, which may be important for meaning making, the reader-narrator relationship changes and the manner of end-of-story meaning making changes. In regards to disclosed or overt under-reporting, the narrator, through admission of unreliability, gives authority for meaning making to the reader. When the reader finishes a narratorially uncertain story that has the potential for multiple interpretations, the reader can have confidence that his or her own interpretation is as valid as any other. The result is an element of satisfaction with the closure that is not present with an authoritatively told story which presents possibilities of interpretation. The reader's role, when engaging with an uncertain narrative voice, is critical in the creation of a different relationship from that found in fiction with authorial authority — and the resulting intensified and collaborative relationship leads to a potentially different form of reader engagement and differing end-of-story experience.

The nature of storytelling, as an act of retelling, creates opportunities to develop an active and present narrator through specific techniques, even in heterodiegetic fiction. Narratorial uncertainty capitalises on the inherently fluid nature of storytelling, in order to offer a reader-narrator relationship that is based on a partnership. Therefore, with fiction employing narratorial uncertainty, through the recall and translation of the story and the embodiment of the narrator, both narrator and reader relate to each other in ways more commonly seen in face to face storytelling: as two embodied people, sharing not only the story world, but the act of storytelling — and for the reader, the

significance of this style of engagement can be a deep and personal connection with the matter of the story, not as an observer, but as a legitimate contributor to meaning-making.

Endnotes

¹ Also termed “Narritivation” by Fludernik — I will use naturalisation as it is an accepted term.

² Martens’s “Revising and Extending the Scope of the Rhetorical Approach to Unreliable Narration” (2005) and Phelan’s *Living to Tell About It* (2005).

³ From early in narratology’s development, narratologists understood that *story* and *narrative discourse* were two distinct modus operandi. The story, later refined to *story world* by David Herman (2002), captures the sequence of events, the detail of the environment in which the characters exist and the descriptions and actions of the characters. The narrative discourse, on the other hand, is the language through which the story world is described. Narrative discourse is distinctly the reader’s world: a reality of authors and text on pages (Fludernik 2009). In the context of our rhetorical enquiry, narrative discourse more accurately refers to the manner (tone, style, voice) in which the story world events are accounted for in the text.

⁴ Gunther Martins explains that heterodiegetic narratives are held to be reliable until proven to be otherwise by the reader’s experience (82).

⁵ Nunning’s textural indicators, p 15.

⁶ Unreliability occurs on three axes: facts/events, knowledge/perception, ethics/evaluation (Nunning 94).

⁷ The storytelling convention insists that all heterodiegetic narratives are a recount, or retelling. This means *Lord Jim* is told third-hand.

⁸ Hypothetical focalisation is a technique coined by David Herman and relates to a possible perspective (Herman 321).

⁹ Narratorial uncertainty occurs when a reader becomes aware of narratorial unreliability on the factual or interpretive axis, but s/he is also aware the narrator is committed to telling the story to the best of his/her ability.

¹⁰ Nunning’s textural indicators of narratorial uncertainty, p15.

¹¹ The term used by Grace to describe her and others’ weekends away at friends’ homes.

¹² *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts*. Ed. Louis K. MacKendrick. Ontario: ECW P, 1983. Print.

¹³ Contact in a way that supports the reader in their enquiry, such as additional information in a parenthetical aside.

¹⁴ Required as part of our definition of narratorial uncertainty.

¹⁵ Reciprocity is a term used by Booth to describe one of a range of factors that influence a literary friendship.

¹⁶ A widespread assumption in the study of unreliable narration is that heterodiegetic narratives, commonly referred to as third person, or authorial narratives are reliable, due to their narrative perspective.

¹⁷ See page 35.

¹⁸ The letters being evidence of miscommunication and uncertainty.

¹⁹ This is regardless of tense. Even in present tense, the narrator can speak from the future, as seen in "The Jack Randa Hotel".

²⁰ "The Albanian Virgin", "Open Secrets" and "Vandals".

²¹ Bea offers Liza money to go to college years after the childhood visits to Ladner and Bea's house.

²² I have discussed the potential for reader naturalisation of the narrator, as a person close to Simon who is telling this story, based on a possible conversation with Simon.

²³ An event that happened after the events described in the main body of the story.

²⁴ As per my definition.

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