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Thesis: The Gift of Doubt (59,360 words)

Exegesis: Theory into Practice (5,702 words)

January 2014

An exegesis and thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing (MCW)

AUT Centre for Creative Writing

Table of Contents

Page 1:	Cover page	
Page 2:	Table of contents	
Page 3:	Attestation of authorship	
Page 4:	Acknowledgements	
Page 5:	Intellectual property rights	
Page 6:	Confidential material	
Page 7:	Abstract	
Page 8:	Title page The Gift of Doubt	
Page 24:	Chapter 1.	Martin
Page 47:	Chapter 2.	Sarinda
Page 71:	Chapter 3.	Restoration
Page 95:	Chapter 4.	David
Page 114:	Chapter 5.	Conflict
Page 137:	Chapter 6.	Hercules' Choice
Page 160:	Chapter 7.	Gabe
Page 183:	Chapter 8.	The Deep
Page 200:	Exegesis: Theory into Practice	

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Catherine McNamara

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I have received no substantial assistance from any source or person in the preparation of this exegesis as regards sponsorship, collection and processing of data, interpretation of results, and editing and word processing.
I would like to acknowledge all the quality discussion with fellow students, friends and teachers at AUT which assisted me in the preparation of this exegesis and novel.

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ABSTRACT

The Gift of Doubt is a contemporary novel set in a rural coastal region of New Zealand, the far north. Two characters are juxtaposed in their concern for aspects of the community around them, most significantly in their concern for a young P addict. The novel is narrated in 3rd person (limited and subjective), present tense. It uses intertextuality, and ironic understatement as well a playful tone and construction, to explore an idealistic cast of mind that could easily seem outdated. The novel both aims to represent the world beyond the text as well as to construct a self-reflexive document in the form of inserted texts, allusions and conflicting world views ending with some devices that throw the whole narrative into question. The exegesis, placed intentionally at the end of the novel, will explore the link between my reading of postmodern theory and a possible new emphasis within my writing.

EXEGESIS: *THEORY INTO PRACTICE:*

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6373 words
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2014

INTRODUCTION

The *Gift of Doubt* is about the indeterminacy of the world and how hard it is to escape our own limited interpretations of events. It questions the value of trying to do the right thing as it is impossible to be absolutely sure of the consequences of any actions and interventions. The main character, Martin, has lost his faith in organised religion and himself. He meets Sarinda, a woman who lives for the moment and seems purely self-interested. The novel shows a range of responses to economic conditions in an area of the far north of New Zealand with high unemployment and associated alcohol and drug issues. A third important character is David who loses himself in the details of his beach setting, the quirkier the better.

I became interested in the West Coast beach area in the north of New Zealand when I saw the situation of youth, both Maori and Pakeha, within that wild and natural setting. An image which did not make it into the novel but started me thinking is that of a bunch of teenage boys gathering to sit on rocks beside the access road to the beach, drinking beer and cheering as tourist vehicles became stuck in the hillocks of increasingly aerated sand. The group were provided with plenty of entertainment as tows had to be arranged and other vehicles, detouring around the stuck ones, themselves became mired. It seemed that the inevitable strandings provided a rare chance for the dispossessed to view the wealthy momentarily at a disadvantage.

Given the broad range of ages, views, incomes and activities within this setting, I felt there would be scope to aim for a pluralistic aspect to my

writing, given the extra time and space I would have in a novel to develop a complex plot. I had in mind the kind of detailed moral exploration that I have admired in Australian writer and academic Helen Garner's writing, both her fiction such as *The Spare Room* (2009) and her non-fiction, such as *Joe Cinque's Consolation* (2004). I wanted to acknowledge, however, the fact that it is futile to try to depict any absolute truths.

As an idealist and ex-Catholic myself I am generally driven in my writing to try to resolve anomalies and to make a point, usually sifting through situations to identify and sympathise with victims and damn the strong and confident. I wanted to avoid that. I looked for ways to broaden my view and made Sarinda the sort of character that it would be easy to be dismissive of. This provided a tension as I was forced to find ways to reinstate her and the novel genre gave me the space to do that. The mystery about what Martin had actually done was sufficient to draw the reader into the story and David provided a focus for plot development.

With the emphasis on indeterminacy and irresolution in the storyline I looked to create an open ended novel which would incorporate many viewpoints in a polyphonic way. I had previously been interested in some of David Lodge's critical writings and decided to read some of his fiction to see how he put his ideas into practice. For example, *Kierkegaard for Special Purposes* (Lodge, 2003), an essay which explains the thinking behind his novel *Therapy* (1995), was useful because I could see how he used his reading of the philosopher to extend his characterisation and plot. Lodge makes the point that "If the whole novel were contained within Tubby's limited perspective and limited language, it might be rather monotonous" (p.272) and explains, "I felt the need of another discourse, another perspective, another (parallel) story" (p. 273). He adds, "For me, conceiving this 'structural idea' is usually the most important stage of a novel's genesis" (p. 273).

Lodge has been described by John Mullan (Mullan, 2012) as "once one of the foremost explicators of Mikhail Bakhtin in the Anglophone

world" and his fiction reflects this. Bakhtin (1986) states that "the utterance is filled with dialogic overtones, and they must be taken into account in order to fully understand the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, artistic – is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well" (p.92). Lodge, an academic, novelist and critic, pushes the polyphonic (dialogic) aspect of his work while keeping an emphasis on unified narrative. In an interview discussion (Thompson, 1984) of his novel *Small World* Lodge says:

> The idea was to superimpose a satirical comedy of modern academic manners on a pattern of mythic motifs and romantic archetypes, the interlacing of several plotlines in traditional romance licensing an extravagant use of coincidence to contrive connections between my numerous characters and their fortunes or misfortunes. Since academics love to talk shop, my characters could plausibly provide a kind of commentary on the proliferating literary echoes and allusions for readers unfamiliar with their sources, *but I tried to make the novel also simply enjoyable as a narrative combining suspense, mystery and comedy* (para. 6) Italics added.

Although my novel had no overarching borrowed structure, as Lodge's did, I had begun to use descriptions of well-known artworks and some literary allusions in my novel, all from the Western tradition which might link with or interrogate Martin's previous faith in Christianity. I wondered whether the reading and discussion habits of Martin and Sarinda could bring a higher register of language, along with a sense of the sacred world which Martin was habituated to, into the world of the more casual dialogue of the novel. Maori language quoted further gave a sense of mystery and the unknown. Along with this I was aware of working within a fictional structure with the many echoes and resonances of Western literary development. Like Lodge, I wanted to retain a sense of a unified narrative world and I enjoyed the element of play within his novels. I wondered whether the focus on dissonance and indeterminancy in the novel could be furthered by elements of the narrative structure.

With the above in mind, I began to explore literary theory with a particular interest in the postmodern use of device. I was interested to read in Bran Nicol (2009) that "Throughout this book I have been suggesting that if there is anything that defines the many kinds of fiction to have been labelled 'postmodern' over the past four decades, it is to be identified at the level of *form"* (p.185). Italics added.

As I read Lodge's novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) I found examples of playful juxtapositions of language and texts which lightened the mood. For example, his main character, Adam is earnestly attempting to follow church directives regarding birth control. At the same time he makes obsessive attempts to create an advertising jingle for a "Brownlong" chair in order to win a competition, culminating in his final desperate attempt, "I always choose a Brownlong chair/because it's stuffed with pubic hair" (p.157). Lodge seemed to me to be able to mimic the farcical elements of life and to alleviate the ponderousness that can sometimes take over when attempting to create a realistic narrative. This element of scatological humour also expanded the view of the sex-starved protagonist and, strangely, endeared him to the reader.

The British Museum is Falling Down also uses pastiche, smatterings of other writers' style usually accompanied by a clue of some kind. This nod to other authors is part of a literariness that Lodge is known for, particularly in his campus novels, one of which, *Small World*, (1984) features English teachers at a conference thus providing plenty of opportunity for intertextual commentary as described above. *Small World* uses a structural device which aligns the (university level) teachers with knights on a quest for the Holy Grail, again providing hints as to this 'parallel story', for example, character names but without necessarily needing the reader to pick up all the references, or indeed any of them. For example, an interview with Lodge (Raymond H Thompson, 1999) explains that the name of the hapless junior lecturer (engaged by his university by mistake), is "a play on both Perceval and Perseus" (para. 4).

Perceval is a naïve hero of the Holy Grail legend and Perseus was a heroic slayer of a dragon, rescuer of a maiden. These links show Lodge using texts in a dialogic way which reflects back on the originals as well as the originals enlarging his own novel (see later discussion in intertextuality section below) giving a sense of largeness to his storylines.

It seemed to me that Lodge's use of structural devices was ever-expanding, making each of his novels a discovery. I made the decision to emulate this while keeping the unity of a constructed world in *The Gift of Doubt*. I felt that the use of devices should not be simply a surface level stylistic characteristic, but should be justified by a deepening of character and add to the complexity of theme. Lodge, in his collection of essays *Consciousness and the novel* (2001) responds to an interviewer's question about his novel *Thinks* (2001):

> I couldn't bear to read a novel with just tricks. You have to believe in the characters and care what happens to them. These little jerks of the strings – which show you that it's actually a device – can give you an extra frisson, but then you go back into the flow of the real (p. 296).

I saw the use of such devices and disruptions as a less coercive way to prompt a reader to examine their own world than my previous writing.

Theo D'Haen (1987) in his article *Postmodern fiction: form and function* describes how he sees postmodern fiction operating. D'Haen describes how a conventional text can be disrupted and to what purpose. He explains:

> …a reader confronted with such an unconventional text will be forced to accommodate his expectations to what he actually finds in this text. The result will be an adjustment, or an expansion, of his horizon of expectations not only with regard to fiction, but also with regard to the 'real' world surrounding him. Seeing his world's familiar mode of projecting itself challenged, the reader's making the effort to meet that challenge also means his taking stock of his familiar world and its dominant world view, and recognising alternatives to it. As such unconventional works of literature subvert not only literary conventions but also social ones. (p. 149)

Bran Nicol (2009) says of the comparison of postmodernism with realism, "…it would be a mistake to regard postmodernism as the 'opposite' of realism, or as the equivalent of 'experimentalism' in fiction" (p. 23).

Nicol (2009) provides a definition of postmodern writing:

1. A self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text's own status as a constructed, aesthetic artefact.
2. An implicit (or sometimes explicit) critique of realist approaches both to narrative and to representing a fictional "world".
3. A tendency to draw the reader's attention to his or own process of interpretation as s/he reads the text (Nicol, 2009, pxvi).

Nicol, however, goes on to qualify this list with the caveat that "none of these features are exclusive to postmodern fiction" (p. xvi).

Tim Woods supplies a further list of characteristics:

1. The undercutting of an all-encompassing rationality;
2. An incredulity towards metanarratives and a challenge to totalising discourses, which is a suspicion of any discursive attempts to offer a global or universalist account of existence;
3. A rejection of modernism (Woods, 2009, p. 10)

Given my interest in *The Gift of Doubt* in disorder and indeterminacy I wanted to be aware of the postmodern stance in the world and how its potential could be employed to disrupt, unsettle and provoke the reader to re-examine their own thinking and the world around them. The following are a list of literary devices and approaches commonly associated with postmodern fiction that I attempted to explore in *The Gift of Doubt*.

SOME POSTMODERN APPROACHES

1. Intertextuality : *insertion of or reference to texts that bring in the world beyond the novel, creating gaps, anomalies, and unintended and intentional links and coincidences*[1]

Margarete Landwehr's introduction to a collection of articles, *Literature and the Visual Arts; Questions of Influence and Intertextuality (*College Literature, 2002*)* gives an impressive overview of the origins and use of intertextuality. She discusses two key terms, "influence" and "inspiration" and maintains that, "The concept of influence privileges an earlier text or artist over a later one for which it acts as a source. Conversely, inspiration regards the later text (or artist) as an innovative improvement over the previous one" (p. 2).

Landwehr cites Thais Morgan, "There are simply no data in literary history which are completely neutral 'facts'" (Morgan, 1985, 1). She notes that, "Thus, choice of texts and studies of influence were riddled with "value judgements". She further quotes Morgan, "The most salient effect of this strategic change is to free the literary text from psychological, sociological and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships with other texts, or semiosis. (Morgan, 1985, 1)"

From this discussion I could see that David Lodge's use of a variety of texts and allusions goes further than such writers as Mark Haddon (2003), whose novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* includes written and visual texts that the main character is interested in to both move the story along (as in the case of the train station information)

[1] Definitions in italics are my own.

or to give further detail about the character, whose autism prevents him revealing himself in a more straightforward manner. Lodge's appropriation of literary texts within his work shows greater ownership and openness to "infinite play" (above) and as such convey a more egalitarian relationship of reader and author, and a possible subversion of metanarratives of the past.

According to Nicol (2009):

> Metanarratives are a form of ideology which function violently to suppress and control the individual subject by imposing a false sense of 'totality' and 'universality' on a set of disparate things, actions and events. A metanarrative is like a literary narrative in that it is essentially a means of ordering discrete elements in a particular form and thus presenting a rhetorical case about the way things work or are connected (p11).

Earlier familiarity with the above intertextuality discussion would possibly have helped me expand my use of inserted texts substantially.

Gathering of materials to include in the novel was serendipitous for the main part. Anything I read during the year was likely to become part of the reading of the characters and, in some cases, drove particular plot moments or character development. Readers were alerted early to the interpolations of textual references, building an expectation or acceptance of this device through ensuing chapters and themselves being swamped with excerpts from readings at the end. This is a self-reflexive moment as we see Martin trying to build an alternative metanarrative (having given up on religion) by linking these texts to find a right way to act, finally resorting back to a biblical quote. The reader finds they are pushed through the same painful process themselves in this chapter.

A justification for the use of artworks in the novel is that Martin's job with the Franciscans in Australia involved working in their print shop producing the holy pictures, cards and calendars that have through the years reminded Catholics of the beauty and glory of the celestial realm.

The readings that Martin and Sarinda decode from the artworks mentioned become part of their dialogue about plot events and also hint at the presence of mystery, of the unknown and the limits of language, some of the detail of the scenes presented in the paintings being unable to be definitively interpreted even by experts in the field, leading to such discussion on the relevance of figures as can be found about the 'Adamites' in Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* (Maetzke, 2001) and Botticelli's mythological *Primavera* "the exact meaning of which remains unclear to this day" (Diemling, 2007).

The novel also makes extensive use of allusion to a wide range of written and oral texts such as an interview on National radio of Brian Turner (2013), a book review of two new biographies of Saint Francis from the *New Yorker* (Acocella 2013), a reference to Hobbitland *(Lord of the Rings*), and to the Greek myth of Hercules and many more.

The rather academic texts incorporated into the end of the novel, in Chapter 8 (Tzananaki, Raupatahana and Gladwell), do make Martin's viewpoint in this section lumpen and indigestible as signalled by my supervisor Siobhan Harvey suggesting further editing of this section. However, I see the section as a challenge and a message to the reader. Previous insertions of artworks/information made the novel a 'rocky' read from the first page when Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker*, combined with reference to Dante's long poem *The Divine Comedy*, would surely provide the reader with a jolt. This is Martin's spirit pervading the text. The jovial nature and slightly wacky narrative style that brings the texts together is Sarinda (serendipitous), lighthearted and intended to be entertaining. The intention is that her swift onward rush will carry the reader across the uneven terrain of the novel.

2. Ironic understatement*: two strands of thinking are simultaneously presented to provide dissonance,*

> *understatement being the throwaway nature of these moments, the undercutting of the overt narrative.*

Nicol (2009) states that

> …the postmodern attitude is predominantly *ironic.* Irony is a non-literal use of language where what is said is contradicted by what is meant (either deliberately or unwittingly) or what is said is subverted by the particular context in which it is said. It works because we are unconsciously aware that in language meanings are not fixed but contain other possible meanings. All words bear traces of previous and other potential uses, and their meaning changes depending on the tone of utterance or the particular context in which they are uttered. Irony is therefore not just cynical, not just a way of making fun of the world. It demonstrates a knowingness about how reality is ideologically constructed (p. 13).

Jane Austen is a master of this device and her work is well known, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) being the most famous example. Austen's narrator uses an arch tone that fits her period (1813) and opens a gap between the accepted view of marriage, and the real one introduced as early as the famous first line, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (p. 5). This tone, associated with a scepticism towards the accepted view of affairs, is a position commonly adopted in contemporary texts. Jack Ross' *Sleep of Reason,* a review of NZ poet Brian Turner's latest collection of poems *Just This: Poems* in *Landfall*[2] (Autumn 2010) provides a possible reason for the use of ironic understatement as he discusses audience reception of his work. "If you don't get that then there's no point in persevering really. And I'm not talking about 'fully understanding' Turner's lines – rather about seeing what he's getting at, that understatement is not so much a device as a necessity for a generation as soul-calloused as ours" (p. 185). This made explicit a feature of Turner's writing which has

[2] A biannual New Zealand literary magazine

always interested me as well as highlighting that the casual understatement was there for a purpose – a response to the way people are now (soul-calloused).

Creative Writing tutor and supervisor Mike Johnson noted the use of understated and ironic humour in my own novel and my second supervisor and tutor Siobhan Harvey suggested that the work of Salley Vickers, has aspects in common with my work. Vickers not only incorporates references to art history in various ways in her narrative (as I do), but also has a great facility with use of ironic understatement, often ending paragraphs with a cynical twist. For example, in her short story collection *Aphrodite's Hat* (2010); "A part of her suspected that Hugh knew all about the dinner and sensed that it was important to her: he had the uncanny, intuitive flair of the ill-disposed (p. 139)".

Nicol (2009) states that:

> the most characteristic practice in postmodern fiction is *metafiction*, the technique by which a text highlights its own status as a fictional construct by referring to itself. Self reference is the literary version of the postmodern ironic attitude, for it indicates … that we cannot accept the reality we are presented with in a novel at face value (p. 16).

There are moments of metafiction in the storyline of *The Gift of Doubt* such as the narrator's occasional interpolations. At this stage the narrator is not identified as Sarinda and the ending of the following moment showing her response to being no longer the centre of attention should be puzzling to a reader. "'Weird,' Sarinda notes. 'Very weird and unnecessary'. *She would edit the event out if she could* (italics added)" (*The Gift of Doubt* p. 43). The hint that Sarinda is narrator is confirmed by the end of the novel and other unacknowledged comments such as "Stupid Martin," (*The Gift of Doubt* p. 104) can then be retrospectively attributed to her. The discovery of the narrator's identity at the end is itself metafictional and ironic.

3. Playfulness : *a stance that diminishes any sense of the gravity and solemnity often associated with metanarratives.*

In an author statement Lodge (2011) states that he finds immensely appealing the view of Bahktin that "the novel is an inherently carnivalesque form, subverting monologic idealogues by laughter and a polyphony of discourses". Landwehr (2002) also refers to Bakhtin's idea of the "carnivalistic" (Bahktin, 1929) in her introduction when she notes that he:

> ...criticises historicist literary criticism and its views that the novel consists of a homogenous representation of reality, expresses an author's opinions, or reveals his or her psychology. Instead he proposes the concept of the "polyphonic" novel, which includes a variety of idiolects employed by characters as well as extra-literary texts such as newspaper articles or anecdotes and, consequentially, offers a multiplicity of ways of viewing "reality". A polyphonic novel differs from a realistic work by its "carnivalistic" stance, which parodically dethrones dominant ideologies or institutions (p.2)

One of the aspects of postmodernism identified by many theorists is an "incredulity towards metanarratives" and I believe that an element of play makes this stance more palatable. Selden et al (2005) note that "as some theorists have seen, the decentering of language itself has produced a great deal of playful, self-reflexive and self-parodying fiction" (p. 199).

There is a randomness to the collection of characters and strangely bizarre events described, which in fact fit the setting very well[3]. The character of Sarinda doesn't take herself seriously but Martin takes himself far too seriously and this provides another blow to the metanarrative of religion as his search for truth seems sadly outdated. David, the third and least developed of the three who are so ceremoniously introduced, is plainly deranged, but at the same time very credible, "David had had a wonderful beach childhood with the constant awareness that it could all unravel at any time. He now preferred to live with his disasters out in the open" (*The Gift of Doubt*, p. 93). David's use of the drug P and resort to

[3] The original for this fictional beachside community provided a fund of quirky and subversive models.

self-harm is thus justified but his whimsical nature and strangely apt pronouncements ensure that he retains dignity and power.

A further playful aspect of the text is the fact that the reader is given the views of specific animals and David is closely linked with one of these, a small spotted cat. "The cat hears as well and begins to mouth her strange language towards the trees. David laughs at her. 'Go for it Ninja,' he urges. She looks around and smiles. She does!" (*The Gift of Doubt,* p.108). This extract shows both a moment of offbeat narration which could indicate David's mental space but also his communion with the cat. It stops short of magic realism as this sentence is the only moment when actual animal human communication is in fact indicated, but throughout the text the jaundiced views or disdainful behaviour of a large orange cat are shown in brief, as a commentary on human life or perhaps an abbreviated Greek chorus.

The consciousness of the ill-disciplined dog is unexplored generally but, as a force for disorder, it provides the last statement, "It shakes its head and stretches. Wtf[4] next, it thinks, and ends the story with an existential yawn." (*The Gift of Doubt,* p. 199). The dog really doesn't care. This is opposed to the cat, a political being which, however, seems to align itself with Martin as the story proceeds, a hint of the strange attraction that altruism has for the self-interested and wealthy.

Nicol (2009) notes that "where modernist art forms privilege formalism, rationality, authenticity, depth, originality, etc, postmodernism … favours bricolage or pastiche to original production, the mixing of styles and genres, and the juxtaposition of 'low' with high culture. Where modernism is sincere and earnest, postmodernism is playful and ironic" (p. 2). The two main characters of my novel embody these stances; Martin looking back and searching for unity while Sarinda surges ahead with great faith in the multiplicity of the world and the variety of life events to transpire.

[4] A common SMS expletive

4. Plurality: *The viewpoints/beliefs of different social classes, religions and races are represented within a narrative and presented as equally valid responses or contributions to narrative events. The world of late capitalism is represented in its multiplicity.*

I have earlier linked Landwehr's (2002) discussion in her introduction to *Literature and the Visual Arts: Questions of Influence and Intertextuality* to the use of intertextuality and playfulness in this list of postmodern approaches. Her important summary of intertextuality also links to the concept of plurality as follows. Landwehr points out that Roland Barthes:

> …introduces similar ideas (to Julia Kristeva) when he states that writing constitutes the destruction of every voice and every point of origin. Abolishing the notion of an author, which he regards as a product of Renaissance humanism and capitalism, and of origins, Barthes claims that the text does not consist of a line of words "releasing a single 'theological meaning' (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (p. 3).

Barbara Kingsolver's recent novel *Flight Behaviour* (2012) juxtaposes the lives of struggling local farmers, environmentalists, scientists and tourists to explore a fraught situation around an environmental issue (monarch butterflies' habitat and habits). Her facility with dialogue means that the reader identifies with subgroups and experiences the issues in a less judgemental way than if they were involved in the real issues themselves.

However, Kingsolver as author is still very present in her writing, usually through the literary techniques of visual imagery and emotive words. An aim for *The Gift of Doubt* was to remove myself as author by the revelation of Sarinda as narrator at the end of the novel. Sarinda's emphasis on events cannot be trusted. This challenges the idea of the "Author-God" of Barthes previous statement.

I wanted a plurality of voices and world views within my novel in order for it to be a relevant response to the setting depicted and to explore some issues that can be difficult to discuss within the community chosen, such as racism, drug use, income disparity and the culture of entitlement. Following Kingsolver, I used dialogue to make characters credible and surprise twists to show depth (such as Gabe's mature response to family difficulties). Plurality in novels is not limited to postmodern texts but the following discussion has some bearing on why it is an integral part of the impulse of postmodernism.

Woods' presentation of a moment when architecture moved on from modernism to postmodernism helped me to identify the political impulse which seemed to make a postmodern approach necessary in literature, as though the metanarratives contained in the theory of modernist architecture had not worked and, further, that this kind of experience prompted a common feeling of disillusionment with idealistic approaches across the arts.

> 'Modern architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 5, 1972, at 3.32 pm.' So Charles Jencks ironically stated upon the blowing up of the infamous Pruitt-Igoe housing development, which had sucked in thousands of dollars in renovation plans and repair bills for severe vandalism. Dynamited along with the block of flats was the vision of social equality which underscored Gropius' belief that clean lines, purity and simplicity of form would play a social and morally improving role in society, for there was by now clear evidence that such housing projects were unable to solve modern social problems. (Woods, 2009 p111).

The above anecdote fitted well to explain why in this day and age we must acknowledge the plurality of the world around us. We can no longer be sure that whatever group/s we belong to have the moral high ground or a definitive answer with an awareness of the controlling structures of language and disorder in science where previously we would expect order[5]. I believe that my second main character embodies this

[5] See David Lodge's discussion on quantum physics and his link of these discoveries with postmodern thinking (Lodge, 2003, p.7).

thinking, in her own thoughtless way. In my novel, Sarinda's frivolity is a valid response to the plurality, contradictions and ambivalences of the world, although her stance comes at a cost with indications of mental illness/anorexia.

5. Unreliable narrator: *Where the narrator of a story is obviously, gradually perceived to be or is finally revealed to be untrustworthy in his or her perceptions, acting according to a world view which is not generally accepted or is deliberately obscuring events.*

First person narrators must always be questionable as they are part of the events unfolding. However, third person narrators, particularly omniscient, give an impression of credibility. But Stanzel (1984) notes that "personal features can, of course, become visible in an authorial narrator as well. That is why the criterion of credibility is applicable to him too – but these personality features are not linked with the notion of his physical existence and corporeality" (p. 90).

The Gift of Doubt reveals in Sarinda's last section, which ends the novel, that it was she herself who constructed the story. This *r*etrospectively throws the whole narrative into question. According to Stanzel, 'The main difference between a personalised first-person narrator and an authorial third-person narrator lies in the fact that the former belongs to the represented reality, the fictional world in which the characters live, the latter does not" (p. 90). Earlier the reader has assumed that the narrator is giving an impartial view of affairs. However, the revelation that she was in fact a major participant makes sense of many of the strange asides from the narrator and calls into questions some impressions given. Sarinda as narrator has a consistently assured tone, but nevertheless gives indications of frustration or an unwonted frivolity at times. The revelation that the reader has been reading her words makes sense at this level and may cause the reader to re-evaluate events and

impressions such as the saintly sexiness of Martin and a slight edge of nastiness or distancing when Tina, her high school rival, is mentioned. The reader may feel manipulated by the narrator and the moral and ethical character of Sarinda as it has been developed within the narrative will again be called into question.

Sarinda has said she wants to be listened to, she has been shown resolving to write, but the revelation should come as a surprise and a moment when the reader is jolted from the fictionality of the novel. The reader has to re-evaluate events and impressions, even to the extent that there may be some doubt as to whether later indications of the novel, of Sarinda's charitable and generous nature, have also been a construction of her own. When reviewing the impressions given of the character in the earlier part of the novel it may also reveal an element of self-loathing or rigorous self-examination and hard won self-knowledge, which fits with the character's trajectory.

The surprise revelation of the narrator is preceded a page or two earlier in a metafictional moment when the impression of Martin's integrity, built throughout the novel, is undermined by the reader being given the power to determine whether he was in fact an innocent abroad or a calculated thief. This can be seen as part of Sarinda's mendacious modus operandi and leaves the reader experiencing what it is like to be in relationship with her, a joke being played upon the reader him or herself.

Examples of first person unreliable narrators are the earlier mentioned *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon (2003) where there is a clear reason (autism) for the unreliability. Another notable example is *We Need to Talk About Kevin,* by Lionel Shriver (2003) whose narrator is persuasive but subtly builds an impression of obsessiveness, and the reader is left to decide whether this is due to events or a precursor of them.

CONCLUSION

The above are ways that I chose to open up the reading of *The Gift of Doubt* in order to extend my practice and acknowledge the constructed nature of reality. I was inspired to do this by the example of David Lodge's theory and practice and also by the themes I wished to address which included a juxtaposition of the world views of property developers, Maori *tikanga*, the dispossessed drug user, the teacher and a naturally blessed and bountiful beauty (beauty being an aspect of life which does seem to hint at a universal truth). There are no answers given in reality or the novel and the last chapter where Sarinda and Martin are shown separately, should throw many previous assumptions of the reader into confusion.

As Selden et al (2005) comment of the aims of their guide:

> The fundamental belief behind the book is that to be in a position to understand and mobililize theory – to be able to theorize *one's own practice* – is to enfranchise oneself in the cultural politics of the contemporary period (Selden et al. 2005 p. 12).

I feel that the learning for me in this year has been the possibility of achieving my aims of a representational novel while also using device (above) to unsettle the reader and possibly provide impetus for them to examine assumptions of their own about the novel and the world around them. I did not wish for this to be a laborious process for reader or writer and followed the light and playful manner of David Lodge. Like Lodge, (2011) I find the idea that the novel is "an inherently carnivalesque form" (para. 4) immensely appealing and would have pushed these elements a little further in my writing had there been time. However, I feel that the novel did touch upon the preoccupations I wish to explore in new and interesting ways which more than justified the year's work on it.

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