

# Long Thin Strands

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<b><u>Table of Contents:</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
1. <b><u>Attestation of authorship</u></b>	<b><u>III</u></b>
2. <b><u>Acknowledgements</u></b>	<b><u>IV</u></b>
3. <b><u>Abstract</u></b>	<b><u>V</u></b>
4. <b><u>Exegesis</u></b>	<b><u>VI</u></b>
5. <b><u>References</u></b>	<b><u>XXIV</u></b>
6. <b><u>Manuscript</u></b> <b><i>Long Thin Strands</i></b>	<b><u>Page 1</u></b>

**Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Margaret Allis

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis consists of the creative work ***Long Thin Strands***, and its exegesis ***Strands Untangled***.

***Long Thin Strands*** is a contemporary collection of interlinked short stories set in the northern part of the North Island of New Zealand. There are examples of various narrative voices: unreliable narrator, first person, second person, camera eye, and third person (both limited and subjective). The stories have been written over the past eighteen months.

Although each story is a stand-alone narrative they are linked to other stories within the collection. Characters are woven throughout the separate stories with life-like overlaps of people, places and time. It is the author's intention that the manuscript be read sequentially, as if a novel.

The exegesis ***Strands Untangled*** discusses the creative work ***Long Thin Strands*** and where it fits within the short story genre, placing it somewhere between the short story cycle and the composite novel. The exegesis examines the method and process in the writing of the work and demonstrates the unity of the work in terms of character, O'Connor's idea of a 'lonely voice', place and themes. ***Strands Untangled*** considers the future of the short story genre and discusses the ideas and authors that have influenced the work.

# Strands Untangled

MCW Exegesis to the thesis *Long Thin Strands*

***'There's nowt so queer as folks'***

**Yorkshire (anon)**

## Introduction

*Long Thin Strands* is a collection of short stories. The stories have over-laps between characters, places, themes and objects. The reader may recognize some links between the lives of the characters while missing others. Realising the connections is not immediately necessary for the reader's engagement as each story is a stand alone narrative. The connections may only be realised after considering the effect following reading the whole of the collection.

The category of this work may fall somewhere between a 'Story Cycle' and a 'Composite Novel'. Charles May uses the term 'short story cycle' to describe Joyce's *Dubliners* and Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio*, '... for the stories in these books are less integral parts of a novel than intense, self-sufficient stories linked only loosely together' (May, 2002, p. 134). Dunn and Morris argue: 'the 'composite novel' term emphasizes the integrity of the whole, while the *short story cycle* emphasizes the integrity of the parts' (Dunn & Morris, 1995, p. 5).

This exegesis examines the method and process involved in producing the work of *Long Thin Strands*. It goes on to justify the unity of the work showing the over-lapping of characters, the 'lonely voice', place and various themes. Rather like plaited hair, some strands may fall loosely while others are kept in their place over-lapping with other strands.

The stories in this thesis are inspired by real people and situations; often it is more a collage or patchwork of true stories that create the fiction. Some of the stories are a version of other people's real life experiences – a blend of truth and fiction, or 'faction'. *Eyeballing Snowflake* is based on an experience of a woman who, when she was fourteen was regularly talking on her father's CB radio with truckies. Eventually she snuck out of the house to take a ride with one of them and soon became 'out of her depth'.

The stories are character led, and in a similar way to Tim Winton's writing in his short story collection, *The Turning*, they are interlinked at times. Several characters appear in several stories, sometimes as main characters and in others, as minor characters.

The exegesis examines the unity of the work partly in order to justify where it may fall, between the Short Story cycle and the Composite Novel. It goes on to discuss the future of the short story and the various influences on the work of *Long Thin Strands*.

### **Method/Process**

My motivation for writing comes largely from the joy of telling a story, of capturing a life-sized character in a moment in time and watching how they play out their part. I am influenced by my own father who is a great story teller, and at eighty three years old he still has the ability to recreate characters in stories from his army days or his childhood in Yorkshire, or simply from his trip to the supermarket the other day.

Following the initial effort in the set up of the first paragraph which Gabriel Marquez equates with beginning a novel (Marquez, 1993, p. ix), there is a joy and focus that takes place in writing a story. Marquez refers to this process in the writing of his *Strange Pilgrims* short story collection: 'I sometimes felt as if I were writing for the sheer pleasure of telling a story, which may be the human condition that most resembles levitation' (Marquez, 1993, p. xii). My own process has involved the 'sheer pleasure' of writing a story. For a time, usually the time between having the beginnings of an idea through to completing the first draft, I am completely absorbed in the writing process and all other responsibilities lose priority. Often the gem of an idea makes me restless until I am able to begin the writing of my thoughts, and see them unravel and find themselves in a story.

Beginning usually with a character and a situation, or sometimes just a first line, I have started writing and found the story to unfold as the characters reveal themselves in the process of writing.

This is not so uncommon as a way of writing, beginning with little or no pre-planned structure. Writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Raymond Carver would sometimes write a story without knowing what would develop on the page, often starting only with a first sentence. In what seems like a confession

Raymond Carver describes his relief after reading Flannery O'Connor's essay *Writing Short Stories*, and realising other authors wrote in this way: 'I thought this was my uncomfortable secret, and I was a little uneasy with it. For sure I thought this way of writing a short story revealed my own shortcomings' (Carver, 1994, p. 276).

I am motivated by the cause of the underrepresented. Through reading O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice. A Study of the Short Story* I became aware of the idea of the short story being essentially about a 'submerged population' in need of a voice (O'Connor, 1962, p. 133). I am drawn to this genre as I see how the short story lends itself to the wider cause, that of human loneliness.

## **Narrative Unity**

### **Characters**

It is uncommon in this genre to have unity in anthologies involving characters with their own story arcs and development. Generally any character unity is with the collective protagonists or else in the separate stories built around a sole protagonist. Throughout the work *Long Thin Strands*, various characters emerge and transition in the new settings, for example, the cross-dressing dentist, Lawrence, in *Silk* begins experimenting wearing women's clothes. He ventures out in the story *Rochelle*, where he is at a friend's place having tea, wearing a pink taffeta dress. As a minor character he is part of the back drop, a mechanism in which an aspect of the character of Rochelle is revealed. His presence shows an acceptance and kindness in her character, which contrasts to that of Des Brown, the dog control officer.

'Come on mate can't we work something out?' Lawrence sounds calm. Sensible. And I'm thinking he will turn everything around for us. For a second, Des Brown looks into Lawrence's face as if he might reason with him, and then his eyes drop. They move up and down. He scans the dress and as if that was an answer he turns back to me. 'Ladies. Don't make it worse. Give me the dog.' (Allis, 2011, p. 145)

The fact of there being characters that show up again in another story replicates the nature of our island - our two degree distance from each other. There is interconnection in our small community of New Zealand, at least by global standards.

This aspect of the collection also reflects the apparently realistic nature of the short story. We are not individual characters with single stories, but rather, we are always linked in some way with others whom we encounter in our ordinary lives, others, who have their own remarkable stories.

### The Lonely Voice

Frank O'Connor's concept of a 'submerged population' has confirmed my understanding of the short story being a way to illuminate the human aspect of hardship. O'Connor portrays the short story as being essentially about a 'submerged population' in need of a voice (O'Connor, 1962, p. 133).

O'Connor sees Chekov's passion for justice as going so deep that it affects the unjust as well as the just. In referring to Chekov he writes: 'The tragedy ceases to be entirely one of justice and injustice of society and its submerged population, and becomes a tragedy of human loneliness...' (O'Connor, p. 83). He almost redefines his definition of the 'submerged population'.

May describes this loneliness as an 'essential aloneness' in the short story genre: 'in the short story we are presented with characters in their essential aloneness, not in their taken-for-granted social world' (May, 1994, p. 137).

This may be partly a product of the short story form: its brevity and lack of room for expansive exposition leaves more in subtext, showing characters which lack back story. Without the cushioning exposition of a history the characters hang in the moment and present as lonely figures.

May refers to O'Connor:

The short story always presents a sense of “outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society ... As a result there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel – an intense awareness of human loneliness”(May, 1994, p. 137).

Nikolai Gogol’s character Akaky, the poor government clerk, in *The Overcoat*, represents the ‘little man’, and is a fine example of human loneliness in this story from 1842. May claims there is an ‘implicit call for human brotherhood’ of humanity in the story of Akaky (May, 2002, p. 23).

Gogol is often seen as the instigator of the modern short story. The characters in *Long Thin Strands* belong to this ‘submerged population’ and are representative of human loneliness. Even when surrounded by people that love them, such as Carl dying in *Shifting Light* and Hine in *Getting off Lightly*, there is a sense of loneliness – we all die alone. Lillian is a lonely figure facing her shadows from the past and possessing a total loss of power over her future. These characters are linked together – a sisterhood or brotherhood of the lonely, representing the human condition.

Often characters are paired in the stories for their common losses. In *Festival – Day Four* Rayna says to Anton ‘people who have lost their mothers somehow find each other’ (Allis, 2011, p. 66 ), or in the case of Harvey and Angel in *Festival – Day Two*, they are the flip side of the same coin. Harvey faces the issue of abandoning his own child in his discussion with Angel who faces being a single parent:

‘I have a child in Scotland ... apparently. He’s three now,’ he said. Angel looked back at Harvey, her hand resting on her stomach. ‘So who’s the lucky woman ... who gets to bring your child up?’

*Ouch.* Her name’s Tessa – Tessa Stevenson. We met at university and went out for a few months and then she dumped me, sort of.’

‘Sort of ?’

‘Well, it was mutual really. We didn’t have a lot in common. She was nice and I was a bit of a tosser. Then she told me she was pregnant ...’ (Allis, 2011, p. 51).

Gordimer suggests that in comparison to the novel, the short story has ‘the only

thing one can be sure of – the present moment’ (Gordimer, 1994, p. 264). It is this dependency of the short story character on the ‘present moment’ that May suggests is ‘precisely what makes them lonely – and this sense of loneliness is best manifested in a form that focuses on the present moment’ (May, 2002, p. 123).

### Place

The setting is significant as a unifying factor in the collection. The stories are all set in New Zealand, mostly in the northern half of the North Island. New Zealand is a relatively small country, and the issues, landscape and events that occur, affect the nation. ‘Place-as-setting involves much more than location, for place and people reflect and define each other’ (Dunn & Morris. 1995. p.44).

The stories are imbedded in the New Zealand landscape - both the physical and social landscape. Trees are named and placed in each narrative as part of the story they tell. The oak in *Round and Round the Garden* is the same as the one, years later, which appears in the story *Hinges*, and is a link to our historical connections with England, as well as the obvious link to the character.

Lillian holds the smooth acorn in her hand, and watches, as it rolls in her palm. Smooth and shiny. It had been in the bottom of the annual Christmas parcel sent from Lillian’s grandparents in England, along with the Smarties, British newspapers, licorice allsorts and kids clothes from Marks and Spencer’s. It came from the oak in her grandparent’s garden in Yorkshire that she almost remembered. She was just six years old when her parents left for New Zealand on the ship (Allis, 2011, p. 130).

Eucalyptus trees in *Rochelle* illustrate our links (and the character’s) with Australia. Kahikatea and harakeke in *Mangawhai Dream* place human history in context with the land – If trees could only talk.

Relationships in these stories are often played out through working together in the land, for example, Angel and Gloria’s friendship grows through gardening together in *Angel*. Men come together on a hunting trip surrounded by bush, in

the Ureweras in *Hello Girl*. In *Festival - Day Two* Harvey finds, and works with, Angel in the vegetable garden. In *Mangawhai Dream* in 1825 the mother and daughter collect flax in the Harakeke plantation before the massacre of Kaipara Ngati Whatua.

Hine and her mother got on to cutting the harakeke. After singing their karakia, each took the sharp edge of a mussel shell and began to take sharp diagonal slices at the base of the outer leaves. Hine had been taught by her Grandmother not to take the inside leaves. "Leave the rito and the awhi rito, just take the old ones, like me. The ones on the outside." Surrounded by the sound of birds and the stream in the forest they could hear in the distance the men making their way up the valley, heading towards the ridge (Allis, 2011, p. 35).<sup>1</sup>

Even such things as the safety Emily feels with her brothers in *Hello Girl* as they walk down the road towards their home, under the dappled light of the trees, just before she is kidnapped, emphasises the significance of the landscape. There is a communion of souls in the context of the physical landscape. Also there is a sense of history in the land, a sense of context as we build our futures. Tania in *Mangawhai Dream* recognises the sacredness of the land when she considers buying the land of her dreams.

### Other themes and Issues

Beyond the obvious connections of character and setting there are the connections of themes and issues between the stories. The stories often involve power imbalance. They involve the elderly having others decide for them as in *Round and Round the Garden* and *Cystitis*. Children are under threat of violence in *Small Victories* and *Hello Girl*. Teens are up against an older sinister world in *Eyeballing Snowflake* and *Mum's the Word*. A deaf child is overpowered in a hearing adult world in the story *Hinges*, and women are faced

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<sup>1</sup> The rito is the central shoot. The leaves protecting the rito are called the awhi rito or mātua. Like parents, they protect the baby. The grandparents (tūpuna) are the outer leaves.

by men who would sabotage their welfare through alcohol abuse and violence in *Small Victories*, *Hinges* and *Getting off Lightly*:

And the old man - a year after the accident we buried him. Dave was with him in the end ... The doctor said it was his sick heart and he'd died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Dave said Dad was trying to say something just before he died. He thought it was 'sorry' – just 'sorry' the unfinished sentence. We had no trouble finishing it for him - each in our own way (Allis, 2011, p. 117).

Female characters are however not passive in this, for example Emily actually manages an escape from her kidnapper in *Hello Girl*. Angel is feisty and direct. Lillian takes control of her life and attempts to end it her way rather than the slow futile way of her own mother who suffered with Alzheimer's in *Round and Round the Garden* and *Cystis*. May and Hine in *Small Victories* toy with the idea of food poisoning to rid them all of the toxic effects of poor male role models. Even the women mentioned in the newspaper article that May reads aloud, about a warring tribe in Papua New Guinea, were taking control of their lives, albeit in an extreme way, by killing off their boy babies to stop the cycle of violence.

Other issues with wider ramifications are hinted at, for example in *Hello Girl* Emily faces a weekly ordeal watching a graphically violent television program with her brothers. It highlights the concern that immunity that has developed in society towards graphic violent crimes through media. Various criminal forensic television series are frequently aired, and even young children are exposed to them.

My interest in the short story is in its depth and diversity, and in its ability to show a wider issue beyond the narrative.

'The surface of a great short story is like a sponge; it sucks up hundreds of impressions that have nothing to do with the anecdote' (O'Connor, 1962, p. 67).

In *Round and Round the Garden* the character Lillian does little in real time except sit in her chair, lie on her bed and move into the kitchen. Yet her real world is more the one of memories. Beyond the narrative there is the issue of

memory and ageing. The past is often more real to the elderly, this is why I have written the past in present tense, and the present of real time, in past tense. The story highlights the effects across the whole family of the accidental death of a child - of the guilt and grief that can last a lifetime. It is intended that the reader will be prompted through the subtext to consider the wider issues of euthanasia and the powerlessness of ageing.

*Rochelle* is one of the shortest stories, a story about a woman with uncertain identity who cares for animals and rides a unicycle. It is, in another sense however, one of the biggest stories, for in its subtext there is the global issue of the displacement of children, in particular the 'stolen generation' of Aboriginal children in and from Australia. In this parallel narrative the truth is hidden in a story that highlights not the tragedy, but the elevation of the character, the survivor, Rochelle. It attempts to hint at an identity she has created, herself the rescuer, the risk taker, in a home where there is love. By choosing to create the story based around a three dimensional character rather than drawing vivid descriptions of human suffering of the 'stolen generation', I believe it puts a face to the issue. The character is 'more than her suffering'. In a discussion of fictional writing on humanitarian issues, May comments on the need to present full characters: 'Humanist empathy devoid of the distinctly human is finally not art but merely grim reportage' (May, 2009).

## **The Future of the Short Story**

### **The Challenge**

Generally, as collections they are not well accepted by publishers and readers, though individually they may fare well in various mixed anthologies, magazines and journals. It may be that one reason they are often not as popular as the novel is that a good short story leaves the reader with something to mull over, a subtle subtext to contemplate. By its deliberate economy of totality, where there is more in the story than there will ever be in the text, it requires hardworking readers. They are not generally, as Barbara Kingsolver states 'Lit Lite'.

I have often wondered why short stories are not more popular in this country. We Americans are such busy people you'd think we'd jump at the chance to have our literary wisdom served in doses that fit handily between taking the trash to the curb and waiting for the carpool.... Most Americans would sooner read a five-hundred-page book about a boy attending wizard school or how to make home décor from roadside trash or anything than pick up a book offering them a dozen tales of the world complete in twenty pages apiece.... It may be that most Americans don't read short stories because...a good short story cannot be Lit Lite; it is the successful execution of large truths delivered in tight spaces (Kingsolver, 2001).

Some readers may be in the dark and fail to make the connections the author intends the reader to make. This aspect of the short story makes it similar to a parable. Though they reveal a larger truth to some, they appear to obscure it for others. This is often a feature in the ancient stories of many eastern traditions that seek to illustrate spiritual truth. The listener is invited to participate in self-discovery in unveiling the truth themselves. In the same way, the short story writer expects the reader to do some work in making connections that hint at something beyond the obvious narrative.

It appears Jesus Christ used parables to hide his message from 'temporary listeners' or those who purely wanted light entertainment. For the unreceptive, such as many of the religious leaders of that day, Jesus appears to have hidden the truth in parables (Parables of Jesus, 2011). In response to a question from his disciples as to why he spoke in parables, he answered, 'The reason I speak in parables is that seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand' ( Matthew 13:13, NRSV). For those that missed the metaphor it was almost as if the message was deliberately obscured from them.

'Large truths' in 'tight spaces' are what this genre often attempts to present (Kingsolver, 2001). It is rather like a fable, using the ordinary everyday events to teach great truths.

Apollonius of Tyana, a first century philosopher, is attributed with having said about Aesop, '... like those who dine well off the plainest dishes, he made use of humble incidents to teach great truths, and after serving up a story he adds to it the advice to do a thing or not to do it' (Conybeare, 2011).

The contemporary short story writer attempts a more subtle approach in requiring the reader to make their own discoveries but there is no doubt the writer is attempting to shine light for the reader in some way.

### Survival

Even on a national level the short story has its origins in 'fragmented society' and it seems to thrive best there, rather than in 'cohesive' societies such as Britain (May, 2002, p. 13). 'Cohesive' is not how one would describe the Britain we see today, perhaps the short story will have its day there yet.

The short story is commonly the way by which colonial and indigenous peoples prefer to write. Gordimer claims, 'almost all the interesting fiction written by local Africans (not white South Africans) has taken the form of short stories' (Gordimer, 1994, p. 267).

Also in Latin America the short story thrives, 'almost all the Spanish-speaking countries of America give the story great importance, which it has never had in other Latin countries like France or Spain' (Cortazar, 1994, p. 245).

The short story is primal. It is basic to our humanity in our need to understand the nature of the world we find ourselves in. We dream in montages of metaphor that we construct into short story narratives. We tell them over coffee, in the pub, at family gatherings and to anyone who will listen. In the mythological world of primitive man the short story was the means by which they interpreted the world around them in context with the world unseen. It is the primal aspect which leads to the sacredness of story. May quotes Eliade: 'Primitive man desires to live in the sacred as much as possible, for to him it is equivalent to true reality as opposed to the illusion of everyday experience' (May, 1994, p. 139).

Because short fiction is so bound up with the experience of the sacred and mythic perception, it is no accident that the short story as we know it today got its most important impetus as an art form from the Romantic effort in the early

years of the nineteenth century to regain through art what had been lost in religion (May, 1994, p. 139).

Historically religion had 'lost helium in society at large, the Real Presence crept back into the realm of art' (Atwood, 2002, p. 53). The artist's role became one of 'assisting in the creation of sacred space' (Atwood p. 53).

The short story focuses on the 'sacred rather than the profane, the universal rather than the particular'. However unlike the early romantic poets it's 'revelatory moment' is with the 'individual perceiver' rather than as a 'result of the direct intervention of an absolute, transcendent reality' (May, 1994, p. 22).

The contemporary short story may today fill the role that poetry in the Romantic era used to fill, and sharing that contemporary role with popular music.

In the last thirty years the two arts of both cinema and short story have been accelerating together. 'They have affinities – neither is sponsored by tradition; both are, accordingly, free; both, still, are self-conscious, show a self-imposed discipline and regard for form; both have, to work on, immense matter – the disorientated romanticism of our age' (Bowen, 1994, p. 256). Action in the novel must be 'complex and motivated,' in the short story it 'regains heroic simplicity' (Bowen, p. 256).

Readers are developing new preferences and as cinema has developed and addressed the effects of post-modernism on viewer's expectations, so the short story may yet take its place amongst post-modern readers.

Gordimer claims the 'short story is more equipped to attempt the capture of ultimate reality at a time when (whichever way you choose to see it) we are drawing nearer to the mystery of life or are losing ourselves in a bellowing wilderness of mirrors, as the nature of that reality becomes more fully understood or more bewilderingly concealed by the discoveries of science and the proliferation of communication media outside the printed word' (Gordimer, 1994, p. 264). She goes further to present socio-political reasons for the survival of the short story. She quotes George Lukacs in stating that the novel is a bourgeois art form whose enjoyment presupposes leisure and privacy. It

implies the living room, the armchair, the table lamp,' I will add to this that it implies too, the luxury of time, which is short, for most and certainly for the poor.

So where do we go with Kingsolver's conclusion that the time hungry still choose to get lost in 'lit lite' longer works? Perhaps the Short Story will eventually take its place as the reader's first choice at times, like cinema, as people are exposed to its various forms causing expectations and preferences to change. Viewers are being educated through exposure and are therefore more likely to appreciate the forms which are not purely 'lite' escapism.

The short story is able to be told and read by anyone, regardless of socio-economics. It is something accessible to youth who are enculturated into an age of short attainable experiences requiring limited concentration, in time, not intensity.

In comparison to the novel the short story is 'more flexible and open to experiment' (Gordimer, p. 264). It is this opportunity to experiment that should insure the survival and development of the genre. In terms of time economy, experimentation is better for the reader *and* for the writer in the short genre rather than in the novel. Time is short and if a novel fails it is a greater loss of time and effort than a failed short story – a few years of writing compared to a only few months.

The short story seems to be 'remarkably independent, gloriously eccentric, adventurous, and free' (Gordimer, 1994, p. 267). It is this freedom which keeps us experimenting with this form, in a society where 'flashes of fearful insight' alternate with 'near-hypnotic states of indifference' (Gordimer, p. 265). The 'gloriously eccentric' should appeal to any that appreciate art, and the 'adventurous and free' to the young in all of us, while recognising time is short and there are too many tales yet to be told, we are caught up in the adventure of it – reveling in the 'present moment' of which the short story writer tries so hard to encapsulate and is 'the only one thing one can be sure of' (Gordimer, p. 264).

## Influences

May links the development of the short story to impressionism of which Anton Chekov is 'the most influential' (May, 2002, p. 51).

The elements of style, 'limiting point of view, constructing elliptical or metaphoric plots, using representative details for setting and character development go hand in hand with the impressionist's attention to stylistic economy and the foregrounding of style' (Ferguson, 1994, p. 226). Rather than a genre, the short story can be seen as a 'manifestation of impressionism' (May, 1994, p. 208). Some of these impressionist elements of style have been attempted in the writing of *Long Thin Strands*.

With economy of words and with minimal subjectivity, the reader needs to draw conclusions about the characters based on their actions, dialogue or the depiction of landscape, rather than by having the characters relay their feelings and thoughts directly. This stylistic economy is often shown in the use of third person limited and in the use of metaphor from the landscape and in representative details that reveal character. The two most recent stories in the work are *The Gap* and *Rochelle* and they are a move further away from plot development and further towards embracing these simple brush strokes of impressionism in order to represent character and present thematic metaphors. I have been influenced by Tim Winton's style of writing, arranging and structuring of his short story collection *The Turning*, which involves several story chains and some stand alone stories. The significance of his writing is as much in the intertextuality as in the quality of each stand-alone narrative.

While each story is complete as a short story I am interested in the way in which he has carried the characters along into other stories. This has the advantage of showing several 'moments' over the course of a character's life revealing character development or, as in the case of 'Max', who is present in three stories and only seems to get meaner, you can see how he is used to

reveal the development of other characters such as his brother Frank, and Max's abused wife, Raylene.

While Winton sets his stories in one geographical area, White Point, in Western Australia, I have set mine in the Northern half of New Zealand. Like Winton I have attempted to use a vernacular voice and plain speech. While the stories in *The Turning* reflect themes of coming of age, small town thinking and lack of opportunity, I have included a wide range of themes which reflect a wider social landscape. Winton has used a variety of points of view and also he writes from the perspective of a child, a woman and a man. I have experimented with this variety of perspectives, points of view and tenses as well. Winton has one story in second person, *Long Clear View*, which puts the reader in the 'what would I do?' situation. A young son of a policeman, is fearfully responsible and when he babysits for his little sister one night, he holds a weapon at the window and stays awake and alert all night. My one second person point of view story is *Cystitis*. I have attempted to draw the reader in, that they may imagine what it would be like for them to be elderly, frail and confused, with loss of power.

Another writer I am influenced by is Ernest Hemingway. He wrote with an objective voice and many of his stories were minimalistic. May quotes Hemingway regarding this spare style. The writer 'may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is truly writing enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them' (May, 2002, p. 63).

Charlotte Grimshaw is a New Zealand short story writer whose writing style I have compared and contrasted to my own. Her book *Opportunities* is a collection of short stories set in New Zealand and told all in first person. Her subjective voice, her generosity with words, and her middle class protagonists place my own work some distance from hers. She writes largely plot driven stories, often with a twist in the tale, closer to the anecdote than to O'Connor's notion of the short story 'offering hundreds of impressions that have nothing to do with the anecdote' (O'Connor, 1962, p. 67). My own stories are more focused on character rather than plot.

Kent Haruf is a novelist who has influenced me in my choice to use a limited perspective. He writes successfully and solely in third person limited. He avoids overtly emotive writing though his stories contain a deep emotional core. In his detailed account of what seems non-essential, such as setting a cup down on the table, and with simple vernacular dialogue, he creates a community of ordinary folk, of frail humanity where the reader fills the gaps. He creates a sense of kindness and compassion shown in the context of the personal suffering of ordinary folk. His writing gives clues via the landscape and the concrete actions of the characters rather than revealing through subjective perspective the thoughts and feelings of his characters. There are similarities between Haruf and Chekov, though they are far apart in style, they both skillfully depict ordinary human lives in such a way as to touch the heart of the reader/viewer.

The challenge remains as to where and how to place my work. My feeling is that it would, at least for genre, be placed somewhere between Winton, Wells, Updike and Munroe. There are limited short story authors of themed anthologies, but it is rarer still, to find short story collections that have interconnected stories with character arcs and narrative structures which overlap.

Why bother? Why not just write a novel? Or if short stories, then why not keep them as entirely separate stand alone narratives rather than a collection which is somewhere between the short story cycle and the composite novel?

People enjoy the aspect of a novel where they can return, chapter after chapter to find characters they have come to know. This form of interconnection of short stories in *Long Thin Strands* attempts to satisfy this need while providing, in our time-short lives, the opportunity for moments of completion, in reading a finished story in one sitting. The intention is that the work will be read sequentially as one would read a novel.

## **Conclusion**

The commercial survival of the short story may be uncertain yet its potential for experimentation, and relevance in the context of fragmented societies, as well

as having its ancient roots in all cultures, make it clear, that in one form or other the shorter story is likely to stay, and may yet evolve and find, like cinema, its wider audience.

The short story will continue to depict O'Connor's 'submerged people' in society as well as the issue of the ultimate loneliness of humanity.

Finally in writing this version of blending truth with fiction or *faction*, there are so many characters truly worth writing about, ordinary folk, 'queer' folk, that I shall be kept busy for a long while now, keeping up my Yorkshire family tradition. There truly is, as my father would say 'nowt so queer as folk', and I will no doubt continue to feel compelled to write about them.

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