

Hanging Out Eggshells

Kirsty Powell

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ABSTRACT

Hanging Our Eggshells is a New Zealand historical literary fiction novel, detailing the lives of three generations of New Zealand rural women, each woman carries the scars of a war that they never fought directly. A gripping fictional tale with an undertow of historical fact that can be absorbed into the pores of the reader by osmosis, helping to understand the grim lives of isolated rural women in 20th century New Zealand.

Protagonists include Kate from 1992, who sets out in search for her real parents, alternating with the voice of her grandmother, Meredith, from 1932 who travels from Wanganui to live in the remote farming community of the Mangapurua Valley beyond The Bridge To Nowhere. Logistically sandwiched between is Meredith's 16 year old daughter Jane (Kate's mother), solely represented as a poetic voice, written in 1958, from the viewpoint of a committed patient at Kingseat Psychiatric Hospital.

This is a story of resilient women coping in isolated rural areas of New Zealand with their war damaged men; a story of repeating patterns; a story of loyalty without reward; and a story of how reality and make-believe become welded together to make our pitiless myths more palatable for the generations who follow. A story of 'hanging out eggshells'.

The Exegesis that accompanies the text explores a number of the issues that exercised my mind in the writing of this book: to understand the literary concept of the hero's journey as it differs from a heroine's journey; how best to overlay fiction on a strong and well documented historical story; how to successfully use a poetic voice in a work of prose; how to utilise a metafictional structure in the hands of an unreliable narrator; how to structure a work with multiple protagonists; and how to leave the reader with hope despite a bittersweet ending. Also, how to best achieve all this in the 8 months allocated to the task by applying ergonomic principles to the writing process.

Let the work begin!

Table of Contents

Attestation of Authorship	4
Acknowledgements	5
Dedication.....	6
Novel	7
Chapter Notes.....	190
References	196
Exegesis	198
References	216

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.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Powell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J" and a clear "Powell" following.

Acknowledgements

While *Hanging Out Eggshells* is a work of fiction, I have tried to maintain it within an accurate historical context and I have located the fiction within accurately depicted geographical New Zealand landscapes and locations. Particularly the Mangapurua Valley, a remote location off the middle reaches of the Whanganui River which was settled by 36 WW1 Return Servicemen and their families who lived there between 1917 and 1943.

I would like to thank the descendants of the original settlers of the Mangapurua Valley who shared their family's memoirs and memories. Special thanks to Wayne Bettjeman, Muriel Roberts (nee McDonald) and Tom Mowat, who met with me and shared their stories.

I have depicted the families of the original settlers to the valley as accurately as I can. I have used some of the original settlers as secondary characters in this fiction. A summary of their history and my sources are detailed in the chapter notes at the end of the novel. The characters of Kate West, The West Family, Meredith Stanley (nee Innes), Jane Stanley, Ursula, Ian Dunn, Mr Dunn, Eric Heng, Toby Dougherty, Iris Dougherty, Joseph Ogden, Mrs Ogden, Beanstalk, Mac and their families are entirely fictional and bare no relationship to any living person.

I acknowledge quotes and or reference to the following authors: JM Barrie (Peter Pan and Wendy), Enid Blyton (The Magic Faraway Tree), Hans Christian Anderson (The Little Mermaid), James K Baxter (High Country Weather, Haere Ra), Janet Frame (An Autobiography), Keri Hulme (The Bone People), Arthur Bates (The Bridge to Nowhere) and Maureen Murdock (The Heroine's Journey).

I would also like to thank my family and the folk who helped me with the writing: my supervisor, Bianca Zander, and her fellow lecturers at Auckland Institute of Technology: Siobhan Harvey, James George and Mike Johnson. My long suffering critical readers: Rachel Houlbrooke, Suzanne Takiwa, Wendy Davidson, Michele Laing, Basil Connor, Alison Schofield, Jacquie McRae, Talia Henry and Michael Giacon. Also, my proofreader Odette Singleton-Wards.

Thank you one and all!

Dedication

To Witi Ihimaera, who gave me the confidence
to get started on this journey, and told me to twist the knife harder.

Exegesis

Hanging Out Eggshells

1. The Motivation for Writing – *Hanging Out Eggshells*

In 2014 I completed a paper for the Diploma of Creative Writing with Witi Ihimaera as my lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology. It was an inspiring course on the topic of 'Memoir'. Witi, at this time, was finalising his own memoir, *Maori Boy* (Ihimaera, 2014) and he shared parts of his journey with us. The goal for our course was to write a 3000 word piece, a creative memoir in the *pastiche* format, defined in this context as: '*An incongruous combination of materials, forms, motifs, etc., taken from different sources: hodgepodge.*'¹⁰

Witi challenged us to use a theme or motif to give structure and hold the hodgepodge of our memoirs together.

As a child of the 1960's growing up on an isolated sheep and cattle farm in the North Wairarapa, I titled my piece *Wool Girl* and used the act of shearing a sheep as the theme to structure the piece. I learnt several things as part of this exercise: how easy and enjoyable it is to write about something you know well; how sensuous the act of shearing really is; how resilient, matter-of-fact and knowing rural children are about life, death and the ways of the world compared to those with a city upbringing; and how my colleagues delighted in this piece of writing.

From discussions with my class it became clear to me that the lives of New Zealand rural women over the last three generations have not been clearly explored in novel form. A germ of an idea was born which I shared with Witi. His response to me was that I needed to get on and write a novel before I got too old.... I took his comment as the compliment intended, but I also took the hint. '*Hanging Out Eggshells*' is the result of Witi's challenge to me.

This is also the year that New Zealand's consciousness about WW1 has been heightened as we celebrate 100 years since the 1915 landing at Gallipoli. There has been an outpouring of memories, with thousands attending ANZAC parades and an explosion of literature about this campaign. But what of the women who stayed

¹⁰ OxfordDictionaries@Oxford University Press

home, what was the effect of war on women as damaged men returned home, or didn't return home in the years that followed?

My goal: to write a historical New Zealand literary fiction novel, detailing the lives of three generations of New Zealand rural woman, each woman carrying the scars of a war that they had never fought in directly. A gripping fictional tale with an undertow of historical fact that can be absorbed into the pores of the reader by osmosis, helping to understand the grim lives of isolated rural women in 20th century New Zealand.

A secondary, but no less compelling goal: to write a sensuous sex scene to be played out in a woolshed and to conceal a murder, by pressing the unfortunate into a bale of wool. Things that only a 'Wool Girl' can write about.

When I shared my idea with Witi, he suggested that I not try to write an epic novel at first attempt.

At Witi's advice, I narrowed my scope to write the stories of two generations of women. I chose the alternating voices of Meredith from the 1930's and Kate her granddaughter from the 1990's. Logistically sandwiched between these two, I have added Jane from the 1950's, solely represented as a poetic voice.

It is a trans-genre piece with touches of poetry, quoted history and literature. A pastiche style, which my sister has helpfully labelled as '*Chook Literature*'. Possibly a small hen sitting within the Literary Fiction Genre, (eggs are used as a motif in this book).

This exegesis addresses the following subjects which have exercised my mind as part of the creative and academic process of writing this novel:

- To understand the literary concept of the Heroine's Journey as it differs from the Hero's Journey with examples from previous New Zealand historical fiction and how these insights have impacted on the final form that '*Hanging Out Eggshells*' has taken?
- To explore the works of other New Zealand novelists who have chosen a historical setting. My goal to understand how best to overlay well documented historical fact with the fairy dust of fiction to create a fast-moving, readable novel; how to find the balance between staying true to aspects of history while not upsetting the descendants of real life people; and how the landscape

inevitably becomes a character leading to my consideration of postmodern realism.

- To explore works of fiction and creative non-fiction that have successfully incorporated a poetic voice amidst prose and used paratext quoting from other writers.
- How to deal with a metafiction structure, including the juxtaposition of the conscious and unconscious in the hands of an unreliable narrator who measures up multiple endings.
- To review how the chosen narrative structure has effected plot development and the difficulty of endings. How to leave the reader with hope and resolution with a non-happy ending.
- To understand the craft of writing from an ergonomic viewpoint - both the process and practical aspects. How to create an optimal work environment and a personal timetable that is conducive for a first time writer to work 'in the zone' in a time-effective and pain-free manner, while maintaining a busy life away from the keyboard.

Hanging Out Eggshells – a synopsis

'I drag myself up to my full height and glare down at Ursula across the kitchen table. "Look at me, I'm six foot two without my shoes on and you know damn well my feet are size 12. Just call me Big Bird from the nuthouse. What if my mother was a madwoman, what if my father turns out to be a monster? Would you want kids?" I slump back down on the couch.'

Kate, at 32 is sitting on a fence that resembles a couch. Until now, Kate has avoided knowing the details of her adoption from Kingseat Hospital. Prodded by her flatmate Ursula, Kate finally sets out to find the truth. Why was her mother, Jane, incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital as a pregnant 16 year old; why was her grandmother buried at Jerusalem after her death in a house fire; what is her family connection to the *Bridge to Nowhere* in the deserted Mangapurua Valley and the identical *Bridge to Somewhere* near Whangamomona. Which pieces of history will she choose to pass onto her own daughter, not yet born?

This is a story of resilient women coping in isolated rural New Zealand with their war damaged men; a story of repeating patterns; a story of loyalty without reward; and a story of how reality and make-believe are welded together in the pitiless myths we choose to make palatable for future generations.

2. Beyond The Hero's Journey

When I first discussed my plot ideas for *Hanging Out Eggshells* with Witi Ihimaera he commented that I was writing a Hero's Journey.

This took me to the books to discover exactly what he meant. I was pleased to find that the Hero's Journey as first detailed by Joseph Campbell is considered a time honoured structure that has existed in mythology and literature since story telling began. At first this circular model seemed ideal for my task.

“When it comes to structuring timeless stories, the hero's journey is widely accepted as the ideal template for a fictional construct. The hero's journey, according to many sources, is a structure that is implicit in our makeup – and has therefore become interwoven into the fabric of our story telling since the invention of writing.” (Parnell, 2014, Loc 81).

Keeping the circle of the hero's journey in mind, I began to write. However, I had a problem. My protagonist *Kate West* was not a hero, she was a reluctant heroine who did not fit the masculine mythological model. Likewise her friend Ursula was not playing the role of faithful companion in the hero's journey style. Murdock (2013) had also pondered this dilemma and was fortunate to be able to discuss this with Joseph Campbell; I find his response illuminating:

“My desire to understand how the woman's journey relates to the journey of the hero first led me to talk with Joseph Campbell in 1981. I knew that the stages of the heroine's journey incorporated aspects of the journey of the hero, but I felt that the focus of female spiritual development was to heal the internal split between woman and her feminine nature. I wanted to hear Campbell's views. I was surprised when he responded that women don't need to make the journey. 'In the whole mythological tradition the woman is *there*. All she has to do is to realise that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realises what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being a pseudo-male.'¹ (Murdock, 2013, Loc 306)

Murdock found this answer to be unsatisfying and looked to develop her own model of the heroine's journey. A model that better reflected the journey that women

make who are not satisfied to just be “there”. Her model incorporates ten stages which are summarised below:

- **Separation from the feminine** (a rejection of the feminine as defined as passive, manipulative or non-productive, often rejecting a mother figure as part of this process);
- **Identification with the masculine and gathering of allies** (orientating for success in a male dominated world by adopting a patriarchal focus);
- **Road of trials meeting ogres and dragons** (succeeding against the odds);
- **Finding the boon of success** (conquering but feeling empty with the victory);
- **Awakening to feelings of spiritual aridity death** (disillusionment, despair. While she has succeeded she has lost the relationship with her own feminine nature);
- **Initiation and descent to the Goddess** (a period of wandering, grief or rage which may be viewed by the outer world as depression);
- **Urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine** (may manifest as spending time with nature, becoming more aware of natural seasons and cycles);
- **Healing the mother/daughter split** (gradual healing of the wound that occurs with the initial rejection of the feminine, which may or may not also include a healing of an actual relationship between mother and daughter);
- **Healing the wounded masculine** (reducing the requirement for applause from a male dominated model of success);
- **Integration of masculine and feminine** (incorporating self-nurturing aspects into life, this may include a lifestyle closer to nature, a move to seek marriage and child bearing that requires voluntarily dropping some aspects of the patriarchal focus.

Murdock goes on to say

“It appears to me that the intense focus on feminine spirituality at this time is a direct result of so many women having taken the hero’s journey, only to find it personally empty and dangerous for humanity. Women emulated the male heroic journey because there were no other images to emulate; a woman was either “successful” in the male-orientated culture or dominated and dependent as a female. To change the economic, social, and political structures of society, we must now find new myths and heroines” (Murdock, 2013, Loc 436)

So is it the Hero’s Journey or the Heroine’s Journey which is reflected best in the journey of fictional heroines in modern literature? And which is the most satisfying to read? As my novel *Hanging Out Eggshells* has a strong historical New Zealand setting I limited my research to New Zealand historical novels which have a strong factual historical basis.

Patrick (2003) captured the hearts of New Zealand readers with her tale of a bleak 19th Century coal mining settlement in her novel *The Denniston Rose*. The protagonist, Rose, is a five year old child who against the odds manages to survive the harsh nature of her life, runs away from her mother and returns to Denniston which is to become her home. On the surface, this follows the model of the Hero's Journey. However, when read in conjunction with the sequel *Heart of Coal* (Patrick, 2004) the picture is different. Rose is now a young woman who uses her masculine characteristics to succeed in a man's world; she achieves a measure of success which is not on her terms or deeply satisfying. She falls into deep depression/despair, returns to Denniston where she reconciles with her adopted mother and finds a lifestyle which is a combination marriage, nurturing a family and continuing her masculine pursuits. The novel leaves her as a self-contained and satisfied eighty nine year old women surveying her world from the top of the Denniston railway incline. When read together these books do form a Heroine's Journey which is, in my opinion, a more satisfying read than the first book alone.

Another similar example where the initial story could be considered a Hero's Journey and the sequel rounds the story out to a Heroine's Journey is the combination of *Once Were Warriors* (Duff, 1990) and *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* (Duff, 1996). In the first book, Beth follows a hero's journey, overcoming the passive nature of her life with Jake, turfing him out and making a new life for herself. When combined with the sequel we see both Jake and Beth undertaking aspects of the heroine's journey, Beth reunites with her family and roots. But it is Jake's story that really fits this model, Jake goes through a period of depression/despair where being the pub hero is not all it was, finds a new family of kindred friends through a return to nature/earth with the Douglas men, hunting and playing rugby. Jakes also reconciles with the more feminine side of his personality, cleaning up his house, buying flowers for the vase, and putting sheets on his bed for the first time.

Murdock (2013 Loc 345) points out that her Heroine's Journey model can be equally applied to journeys of either gender who are seeking to balance the masculine and feminine aspects of their lives.

The Parihaka Woman (Ihimaera 2011) takes the reader on a satisfying full circle of the Heroine's Journey model within one book. The protagonist, Erenora, takes on the psychological and physical appearance of a man to go on a journey to find, save

and seek revenge for her husband, Horitana. She then returns to a simple balanced life and is seen at the end of the book as a mature woman tending her fields with her family around her.

The *Book of Secrets* (Kidman, 1987) is the closest read that I have found to my own novel. This book is historically based following three generations of women from the Highlands of Scotland via Nova Scotia to finally settle in Waipu, New Zealand. It follows the historical journey of the real life character of Norman McLeod who led a religious group to New Zealand in this manner. The main characters in the story are fictional. The book details the point of view of all three woman using both first person and third person. The book follows the Heroine's Journey to the eventual resolution and death of Maria McClure.

My consensus is that the Heroine's Journey as a model is a more satisfying read than a Hero's journey when considering a woman protagonist.

Has this influenced my writing in *Hanging Out Eggshells*? My plot line altered after reading Murdock. Ursula's role in the story moved from the faithful companion in a Hero's Journey to initially the role of a mother-like figure from which Kate must break away (becoming estranged and later reconciled as the love of Kate's life, although separated by Ursula's death). Kate's decline and rise from despair was not part of the original plot, nor did I plan a Heroine's Journey ending. A final flash-forward chapter was added, advancing twenty years to show that Kate does achieve a balance between feminine and masculine qualities and brings together a satisfying conclusion on her own terms in the style of the Heroine's Journey model.

3. Getting The History Right

Hanging Out Eggshells is partially set in the Mangapuru Valley which is the home of the historic *Bridge to Nowhere*, a well-known landmark and tourist attraction on the Whanganui River. This is a piece of New Zealand History which is very well documented. The valley was settled by 36 WW1 Return Soldier Lessees who moved into the valley from 1917 to 1920 and had all moved out again by 1943 when the Government closed the road to the valley. I was drawn to the well documented accounts of the settlers lives (Bates, 1981) and the remarkable recollections of some of

their children, still alive, but now in old age. My dilemma was how to use this rich material without offending the families who lived through this history.

Do I use just the setting and fictionalise all the characters as Patrick had done in *Denniston Rose*? Patrick chose a real historic setting but created an entirely fictional story. She loosely based her characters on settler archetypes but changed the names.

Do I closely follow a factual historic story but fictionalise both the characters names and place names, but write in a manner that allows the reader to clearly see through the veneer? An example of this is Carl Nixon's novel *The Whale and the Virgin* where the author outlines in the prologue the wish of his historical source not to be identified and carries on to set his story in the fictional 'Mansfield' which is easily identified by the reader to be Christchurch, New Zealand (Nixon, 2013).

Do I use real history where the protagonists are real historical figures using their real names and as much fact about them as is available in history? Fiona Kidman does this cleverly in her historical tale *The Captive Wife* which is a retelling of a real event from early New Zealand with the co-operation of the descendants (Kidman, 2005).

Or do I use a background of real secondary characters, real events and real settings and overlay this with fictional main characters? Ihimaera achieves a seamless story in *The Parihaka Woman* using this technique where the reader enjoys a history lesson while being carried along by a gripping story (Ihimaera, 2011).

The Landing (Patrick, 2008) is also based on the historic Whanganui River area. Patrick has placed her main fictional characters over a strong historical background using real figures such as Mr Hatrick who ran the early steam boat service. Kidman (1987) uses a similar structure in *The Book of Secrets*.

Of interest to me, Ihimaera has included a section of historical notes at the end of the story; Patrick has inserted historical notes at the start of some chapters and a further section of historical dates at the end of the story; and Kidman has added a preface detailing how she has combined historical and fictional characters.

Hanging Out Eggshells includes real settings and real historical characters in some secondary roles and fictionalises all the main characters. There are also acknowledged historical quotes embedded in places in the text of the novel. I have followed the

example of *The Parihaka Woman* and *Landings* by adding a final section headed up 'Chapter Notes' to fully inform the reader where historical fact stops and fictions starts.

Over the course of the writing, as my characters become more consumed by their fictitious worlds, grounding the story through accurate depiction of real landscape became increasingly important to me. I visited all my locations throughout New Zealand to ensure an accurate description. With interest I read Scanlon (2008) who describes the postmodern realism used to advantage by authors such as Annie Proulx who visited her Newfoundland setting 8 times while researching her novel *The Shipping News*. This allowed Proulx to apply fictional characters effectively in realistic and tangible landscapes and situations.

'Proulx's work ultimately demonstrates the desire for contemporary realist fiction through its production, form and reception, while also exposing some of the politics implicit in contemporary readings of and for realism.' (Scanlon 2008)

My goal, in some small way to emulate the writing style of Annie Proulx in this regard at least.

4. Infiltrating Poetry And Paratext Into Prose

Is there a place for poetry in prose? Green writes:

"Some novelists aspire to the poetic; others conspire against it, like Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago, poems extend the work's themes and enhance its sensibility..... From antiquity on, a quite different possibility has also tempted prose writers: Satire. Rather than co-existing harmoniously, poetry and prose may form what Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) called "an oxymoronic combination" in which the sublime is brought low by an "inappropriate word". In such combinations, poetry can be used to signal a "poetic" view of life, which the surrounding prose then subject to scrutiny and 'parody.'" (Green, 2012).

My aim is that the poetry in *Hanging Out Eggshells* will fall within Green's former category of enhancing the work, rather than the latter category of satire. However it seems examples of the use of poetry in prose as satire are easier to find in literature than examples of enhancement. An example of the latter is the use of

poetry by Tolkien in *The Hobbit* where the elves and goblins are heard to sing stirring little rhyming ditties (Tolkien, 2001). It was not my intention to emulate this model.

I cast my net wide to find poetry that enhanced. Farrell's masterful juxtaposition of poetry in her creative non-fiction work *The Broken Book* (Farrell, 2011) was illuminating for me. I admire the way she used her poems about the Christchurch Earthquake to create clever earthquake-like crevices. The poems crept up on me unexpectedly, just as earthquakes do, between her essays. This gave the book an entirely different poignancy compared to the book she would have produced if she had stuck to her original brief which was to write a memoir-style book on the subject of walking.

But what of fiction? I looked for examples where poetry is embedded into a novel. *Pale Fire* (Nabokov, 2012) is a metafictional work which includes a 999 line poem written by the deceased fictional character John Shade with a foreword, an index and extensive notes written by his neighbour Charles Kinbote. It is Kinbote's interpretation of the poem which creates the story.

'Nabokov finds ways of refluxing the course of traditional narrative by allowing the intricate and forceful powers of language to flow into sensible plots and sometimes madly inspired visions those doubling and merging of syllabic and galactic orders that the poet Shade calls 'possibilities'.' (Seidel 1984, pg. 837).

While enjoying the juxtaposition that the poetry adds to the piece, I found the structure of *Pale Fire*, which requires the reader to constantly switch between the poem and the notes, a difficult format to follow. I preferred the simple structural style of *The Broken Book* where the poems sit in the body of the text used as transitions between disparate pieces.

A work I admire is *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Fowles 1969) which includes poems written by the author and pieces quoted from greats such as Tennyson and historical information as paratext in footnotes and epigraphs. Bowen (1995) comments *'that the paratextual elements do not always contribute to the effectiveness of the novel and often act to unseat the authority of the narrative voice.'* My learning is that such devices can be interesting but should be used sparingly. In *Hanging Out Eggshells* in my descriptions of the Mangapurua valley I allow myself only two direct

quotes (*Hanging Out Eggshells*, pages 93 and 94) from Bates (1981) which I hope are both of interest and relevant to the reader.

Possession (Byatt, 1990) has 1700 lines of poetry written by Byatt on behalf of her characters as well as other literary quotes. I enjoyed this work which has some similarities to my own novel. Both works feature a modern protagonist seeking information about a previous generation now dead. The book connects the two generations with the use of repeating patterns.

“Possession, in fact, teases its reader with such ‘repeating patterns’ of major and minor motifs, which in turn, produce a variety of textual pleasures.” (Hennelly, 2003, pg 442).

In *Hanging Out Eggshells* I have enjoyed playing with a wide range of motifs including work tasks, ie washing, cooking and shearing. As well as objects, eggs, acorns, characters named after fairy tale characters, peach trees, native birds, flowers and even the smell of lavender on handkerchiefs to connect the two story lines and the poems together. My goal was to enhance the ‘textual pleasure’ for the reader.

In all the works mentioned above, I enjoyed how the interpretation of a poem depends on the context in which the reader finds the poem, which in turn is controlled by the author when used as a transition device to enhance the material that the author has chosen to place on either side of the poem. Lecturer Siobhan Harvey (2015) used the masterful writing style of *Cloud Street* (Winton, 1991) to demonstrate how repeated words, ideas and motifs can be used to help the reader connect across transition points. This inspired a 3rd draft review of my transitions creating motifs that carry the reader across chapter transitions, i.e. droplets connecting the 9th and 10th chapter.

Hanging Out Eggshells has three concurrent story lines with the voice of Jane represented as poems she has written in the late 1950’s while a teenage patient at a psychiatric hospital. I enjoyed placing the poems to create relevance and transition between the story of both her mother Meredith in the 1930’s and her daughter Kate in the 1990’s. It is my hope that the poems enhance the reader’s enjoyment and understanding of the story. Several of my critical readers at second draft recounted how they had to go back and read the poems they skipped to get a full sense of the story line of Jane. I am unrepentant about this, at third draft I tried to embed the

poems more deeply. My goal that future readers will read them on their first trip through the book.

5. Metafictional Structure, Taming the Unreliable Narrator and the Possibility of Multiple Endings.

During the writing of *Hanging Out Eggshells* I found my protagonist, Kate, evolving into an unreliable narrator who seemed intent on acting as the commenting narrator of the tale for her unborn child, playing with fantastic alterations to the story to create an atonement of sorts following the death of Ian and mulling on possible stories endings. I took note of Witi's (2014) comment to me "*Kirsty, characters don't always tell the truth.*" I was inspired by the deft manner that the unreliable narrator is handled in *Atonement* (McEwan 2010) where the reader is offered two endings and only late in the piece comes to understand that the protagonist, Briony, has rewritten the real story as 'fiction' to avoid giving her readers a "pitiless" ending and instead gives her sister and lover the ending they deserved and Briony the atonement that she craves. Another example I enjoyed was Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* where the reader is tantalised by multiple possible endings throughout the book (Atkinson 2013).

The French Lieutenant's Woman (Fowles, 1969) offers three separate endings for the story. Smith (1988) has studied the final drafts that Fowles wrote and concludes that Fowles was struggling with how to conclude his book and switched the order of his endings at the request of his wife and the advice of his editor. Originally the unhappy ending where Sarah and Charles do not reunite came first, followed by the happy ending where they do. The final published story has the happy ending first after which the clock is turned back 15 minutes and the unhappy ending prevails. Likewise, Kate my protagonist weighs up possible endings.

Another layer that I hadn't initially planned in my first draft came at second draft with my realisation that the fixation with a fairy tale character by both my characters Meredith and Jane was similar to the hallucination of schizophrenia. Carl Jung, with a background as a psychiatrist, became interested in the concepts of the conscious versus the unconscious.

'The concept of the Collective Unconscious: "... becomes activated and a compulsiveness appears, which, like an instinctual drive, gains its way against

all reason and will, or else produces a conflict of pathological dimensions, that is to say, a neurosis.” (Jung, 1976, page 66).

This led me to further develop my protagonist, Kate, as an unreliable narrator particularly regarding her imaginary ongoing relationship with Ursula after Ian’s death as a hallucination/voice in Kate’s head. Likewise Kate’s partially imagined relationship with Eric, her doctor, is an example of transference as described by Jung.

‘In the course of treatment the patient transfers the father-image to the doctor, thus making him, in a sense the father, also making him a substitute for the man she cannot reach. The doctor therefore becomes both a father and a kind of lover – in other words, an object of conflict. In him the opposites are united, and for this reason he stands for a quasi-ideal solution... for the patient he seems like a saviour or a god.’ (Jung, 1976, pg 73).

Fight Club (Palahniuk, 1996) the novel (unlike the movie) is an interesting example where the protagonist, who isn’t named, is an unreliable narrator who gradually over the course of the book is revealed as having a mental health problem. By the mid point of the book the reader learns that Tyler, the antagonist, is not real but part of the protagonist’s split personality. Likewise in my story at second draft I chose to gradually reveal Kate’s mental health status through her unreliable accounts of her imagined interaction with Eric, and Ursula’s imagined second funeral. Feedback at second draft was that these cues were not enough for literal readers to discover that Kate is an unreliable narrator until the end of the book, resulting in their disengagement with the story. At third draft, rather than Kate’s mental status being a surprise at the end, I have added additional background and foreshadowing sufficient to give literal readers additional opportunities to guess outcomes that may or may not occur. My aim to keep literal readers better engaged in the story right to the end.

6. Structuring My Story

In *Hanging Out Eggshells*, my protagonist, Kate, begins Chapter 1 in the first person and warns the reader that the story will be disjointed.

“I make no apologies for the disorder in this story.”

In my first draft I followed the structure of Moriarty who tends to write in short, sharp snatches jumping between points of view. For example her book *Big Little Lies* (Moriarty 2014) has 84 chapters, some only one or two pages long, written from the point of view of multiple characters.

The feedback on my first draft was that my structure was too disjointed, making my story difficult to follow. In the second draft I chose a structure more similar to *The Shipping News* (Proulx, 1993). While Proulx still has 39 chapters, these are divided down into shorter cameos with a knot motif depicting a change in action, time or place within a chapter. I have adopted a similar approach, reducing my chapters to a total of 13, achieving for the reader a story which is easier to follow, but maintaining my chosen disjointed structure of small soundbites separated by eggs - *oOo*s in the style of Jane's handwritten *oOo*s. Chapters alternate between Kate in First Person and Meredith in 3rd Person with First Person cameos later in the story from Beanstalk, Toby and Ginny, and Jane's poems interleaved throughout, predominately between chapters.

Prior to commencing on my third draft I put my second draft out to 9 readers and carefully reviewed their feedback. I took the advice of Aronson (2010) and King (2000) rejecting one-off criticism but taking careful note when two or more critiques made similar observations. This led me at 3rd draft to focus on narrative structure to understand why my story was still confusing to the reader towards the third turning point and climax resolution phase of the story. Upon reading Aronson (2010) I realised what a monster I had created, which can be described in her model as a tandem triplicate fragmented flashback narrative with multiple protagonists! In my third draft I have concentrated on aligning my turning points between stories and working on an ebb and flow of intensity. Aronson comments that often the modern story is the hardest to write, in my case this certainly is true with greater time spent revising and redrafting Kate's story than Meredith's.

Readers wanted to know more about the back story of Jane. After some thought I have purposely left Jane as an 'enigmatic outsider' which Aronson (2010) describes as an antagonist without a voice, instead being described by others characters rather than further developing their own point of view. In my third draft, rather than giving Jane a voice of her own outside of her poetry, I have maintained

Jane's enigmatic antagonist role but have allowed other characters to describe Jane more fully in their flashbacks to give the reader greater understanding of her character but not dispelling all aspects of her mystery.

At third draft, further development has styled Ursula/Ian into a mentor/antagonist role which is described by Aronson (2010) as the person in the story (even when dead) who continues to cause trouble for the protagonist, inciting a journey and the protagonist to fall in love with them. Ursula has become a more developed character in the story than was originally envisaged.

Several readers expressed their shock at how the story ends, however all reported that the story continued to exercise their thinking to a point of reconciliation after completing the read, which to my mind is a good thing. This story does not have a happy ending for the characters, although within her own frame of reference, protagonist Kate would argue that she is whole, in control, and this is a happy ending on her own terms, though bitter-sweet for the reader. AUT lecturer, Siobhan Harvey (Harvey, 2015) stated '*you don't have to write a happy ending, but you do need to give your reader resolution and hope.*' In my third draft I have aimed to give the reader greater resolution and some degree of hope for the future generation. But I remain unrepentant in that the ancestry between my three generations would make a '*happy ever after*' ending, which would be a hollow lie in this situation. Of note, Aronson (2010) points out that fractured tandem narratives often deal in tragedy. I see that the subject of happy versus unhappy endings has been long debated in the literature as far back as 1920. Matthews quotes a Mrs Wharton when he says:

'This predilection of our playgoers did not imply a preference for comedy, but that on the contrary, "our audience want to be harrowed (and even slightly shocked) from eight till ten thirty, and then consoled and reassured before eleven".' (Matthews, 1920 pg 356).

However I am relieved by his final conclusion:

'But I am inclined to believe that we do not shrink from the bitterest end if that impresses us as inevitable and inexorable, if this bitter end has been preordained from the beginning of time, if the author has been skilful enough and sincere enough to make us feel that his tragedy could not possibly have any other than a tragic termination.' (Matthews, 1920,pg 362).

With regard to the ending of *Hanging Out Eggshells*, ultimately it is up to the reader who must decide whether the writer has achieved this thing. Just as Fish's death at the end of *Cloud Street* (Winton 1991) feels inevitable and right, my aim is that Kate's death at the end of *Hanging Out Eggshells* will feel similarly right. Or did she die? Kate was wearing a life jacket after all and Kerewin was standing by. A sequel perhaps?

7. Optimising The Environment

"It's the best feeling: being in the flow, seeing the scene unfold in my mind as my hands hurry to record the vision. Words pour out of me until WHAM! Pain jerks me out of the zone with the subtlety of a midnight fire alarm. Hands cramp – wrists ache – stiff shoulders – cricked neck... do any of these sound familiar?" (cherylreif.com)

While this section of my Exegesis does not relate directly to the text of my piece, I argue its relevance to the equally important process of concentrating to capture well written words in a time effective manner. With a background in physiotherapy and ergonomics, I believe attention to ergonomic detail and my conscious manipulation of physical aspects of the writing process has enabled me to achieve a state of productive writing flow. Fast accurate concentrated writing allowed me to complete three drafts over 8 months with sufficient time between drafts to seek critical feedback from a range of readers and additional time to personally read widely throughout the year for my exegesis. My conclusions are as follows:

WHERE TO WRITE? – I did not choose to write in my usual open plan home office with phones ringing and other people coming and going. Instead I chose the laundry in our back garage between my car and the washing machine/dryer. This gave me a warm, uninterrupted space away from phones with a door that firmly closes out the rest of my life. I find I'm in good company. Stephen King in his book *On Writing* reports he wrote his first two novels in the laundry room of his rented trailer home with his wife's portable typewriter on top of a child's writing desk balanced across his knees and the door firmly shut (King 2000, Loc 1727). This location obviously worked

for Stephen King and it has also worked well for me with minimum interruptions and maximum “in zone” writing achieved.

Of interest the noise of the washing machine or dryer was never disruptive; in fact using regular ‘white noise’ to mask any irregular background noise is proven to aid concentration (Staal 2004). I became so used to the regular sounds of the machines, when my ‘white ware’, stops emitting ‘white noise’ I would find myself drawn away from my story world and I would take a micro pause and look around for the next basket of washing before settling in for a further session of concentrated writing.

WHEN TO WRITE? – My question was how to fit regular fiction writing into a life schedule which also includes part-time work and normal family life. I read with interest that Stephen King advocates following a regular schedule. His preference to spend time in the morning completing 2000 words of new writing, the pm doing other business and non-business related tasks, and the evening for reading (King 2000, Loc 1688). This is the schedule that I also adopted to good effect. I have found rising early to write at 5am on days when other planned activities must be scheduled in the morning has ensured consistent writing time on a daily basis.

HOW TO WRITE? How do I best get myself comfortable and well set-up ergonomically to prevent the pain and discomfort which gravity inflicts on unsupported body parts undertaking prolonged VDU tasks and plays havoc with writer’s flow? My answer is to work in a Stressless chair with my feet raised on a foot stool, my laptop on my knees with a plastic chopping board between the laptop to protect my legs from undue heat or radiation. The Stressless Chair allows a semi reclined position much like a reclined airline seat with the hip/trunk angle at approximately 120 degrees which is known to reduce the intra-discal pressure in the lumbar spine, therefore reducing potential for low back pain (Grandjean 1988). This position also allow me to work with an optimal cervical spine posture when viewing my laptop screen and limits the effects of gravity by working with my elbows and wrists supported in a neutral position. (OSH 1996). The proof is in the pudding, I was able to maintain full concentrations, with no pain or discomfort while completing my novel’s 3rd draft to 73,000 + words. Yes, I am eager to start over on a new novel and do it all again, my writing formula is becoming an established and repeatable routine.

8. Summary

Witi's challenge to me has resulted in the completion of my 3rd draft of *Hanging Out Eggshells* which I now present for examination as my Thesis for the Masters in Creative Writing. The process of completing this project has given me confidence in the planning and crafting of a longer fictional piece, which I aim to continue to develop to publication standard.

My greatest discovery in my reading for this Exegesis is that the role of women as heroines in stories is limited. I read with interest the article 'We need better women's stories'. Natalie Kon-Yu, Lecturer in Creative Writing, Literature and Gender Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne, notes the dearth of prize winning novels where the protagonist is a woman. She also points out that '*when women win literary awards they are most commonly writing from a male perspective and or about men.*' (Kon-Yu 2015). She cites a number of examples including our own Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* which has a large cast of men. Similarly, Proulx is one of only two women to ever win the Pulitzer Prize with *The Shipping News* where the main protagonist is a male. Quoye is surrounded in his workplace by an all-male team of journalists with woman taking more minor roles in the story as his family members. Kon-Yu finishes by issuing a challenge, "*It's not enough to publish books by women, we need to focus more on telling women's stories.*" (Kon-Yu 1915).

Hanging Out Eggshells is an example of a woman protagonist telling women's stories. My goal is that this book can achieve publication and in some small way move the stories of New Zealand women more into the mainstream of the reading public.

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