

**Why I Don't Keep a Diary or
A Secret History of Metamodernism
A Novel**

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Abstract

Why I Don't Keep a Diary or A Secret History of Metamodernism is a bildungsroman composed of a network of narratives that span a space of a few decades and broad cultural areas, from the communist Romania of the 1980s to Aotearoa New Zealand of the 21st century. Its protagonist, Raluca Teohar, has stumbled upon the concept of metamodernism, which she defines for the first time as a period term and a cultural paradigm that fosters authenticity, self expression, and a reevaluation of traditions as a potential link to the roots that define being in the world. Raluca's journey from Napoca to Arquata, and from Otipoti to Orcland, enacts aspects of the metamodern as a paradigm the dominant of which is the ethical, in the sense of care for the other and for the self.

In the tradition of postmodern playfulness, and in a continuous tension with the title, the narratives that make up this novel-in-stories take the form of diary entries and email messages, letters and Facebook posts, interspersed with poems and essay-like fragments of meditations. These diverse ways of story-telling converge in attempting to delineate some of the features of the metamodern condition as the protagonist understands it, much as shards gather to create the shape of trencadis. Raluca's progress towards self-realisation is the history of her attachments, her imagination, and sensibility, the roots of which go deep into the past of her family and the history of a people's strife for self determination. Raluca's individuation parallels the growth of the concept of metamodernism, which is revealed in some of its lesser known connotations, and is articulated in a story virtually unknown to the public.

Keywords

Metamodernism, postmodernism, novel, self-realization, paradigm, metamodern condition, Romania, New Zealand

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 or the references at the end of the novel, or in the text of the novel itself).

Preface

or Pro Exegesis

<Instead of Exegesis >

Dear Greg,

You have asked me to write an introduction to Raluca Teohar's text *Why I Don't Keep a Diary*. There is no easy way of doing it, but here is my twopence worth about her notes. I shall let her speak in her own words to start with, for I do love to hear her voice again. It feels as if she's back at her computer, half a smile hanging on the corner of her lips, a small frown forgotten above her eyes, of the colour of amber with green vines.

"Exegesis. If I remember correctly from hearsay, the rumours that I heard growing up, or perhaps from conversations with my father or TJ, an exegesis is a theoretical apparatus that accompanies a sacred text, the Bible most often. Theoretical means hermeneutical in this context, where meanings and symbols, themes and historical background are revealed and analysed to expose the meaning of the sacred text.

"This text is not sacred and as such does not merit an elaborate hermeneutical exercise. Suffice it to say that when people ask me what the novel¹ is about, I try to resist the temptation of saying that it is a *bildungs roman* about growing up in communist Romania and of travelling to live in New Zealand.

"Why don't I just say it is a *bildungs roman*? There's something in a *coming of age* novel, especially when written by a middle-aged woman, that's redolent of a midlife crisis. Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with a midlife crisis *per se*. It often offers the opportunity to evaluate what matters and what doesn't. That's mostly because *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, in the middle of the journey of our life, is when some of us decide to forsake pointless pursuits for *fata morganas* such as money, power, fame, or material

¹ I initially called it a *novel in stories*, then a *novella*, when one of the stories grew, through successive episodes of editing into something bigger than a story, but perhaps not as important as a novel, if by a novel we understand something of the dimensions, depth, and impact of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, or of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. But how relevant are paratextual elements such as *novel*, *novel in stories*, *novella* that usually follow the title? Gérard Genette would have a strong opinion on this, but for me what matters is a story well-told and one that is engaging, a story that gives me a glimpse of beauty and some wisdom. One that offers some encouragement to keep doing whatever I am doing – living, writing, reading – or stop doing whatever I am doing – procrastinating, being inhibited by the big Johnnies I encounter, or tempted to check my Tumblr and Instagram every other second. But I'm lying. I only do Facebook. And Twitter. And emails. Mostly to my father, Theo, and Cellin. My mother has warmed up to electronic means of communication only lately, and our conversations are a source of almost daily delight.

comfort, and undertake more meaningful pursuits. But a woman's midlife crisis is often derided. Centuries, nay millennia, of looking down on women don't just disappear in a few decades of feminism, whether modernist or postmodernist. Metamodernism, if actualised as I imagine it, will perhaps bring about a renewed respect for the feminine. That is, if women manage to eschew the temptation of Amazon-like attitudes and instead embrace positions of wisdom, empathy and compassion.

"I dream of a new paradigm where women are genuinely held in high regard, and their contribution to society and to knowledge is appreciated. An Indian proverb says that where women are respected, there gods reside. But for this, a subtle yet radical transformation of the self, of mentalities, and social practices is needed.

"So, *Why I Don't Keep a Diary* is a novel about growing up in Transylvania (yes, Dracula was my neighbour) and of moving to Aotearoa New Zealand. I should say *emigrating* to New Zealand, though I abhor the word and its connotations (stranger, not of this place, unquantifiable mentalities and experience, etc). I identify more with being human than with being *a woman who was born in a particular place*, and who happens to be living in another. Also, I should say *settling* instead of just *living*, but how can one judge after how long we start to settle, and start shooting roots in a new place? How much time should elapse till we identify with a new home, till we allow the soul (for lack of a better term) to touch the contours of the space we inhabit, and the spiritual epidermis of some of its people?

"These thoughts reveal an aspect of my novel (let's agree to call it a *novel*, though I could settle for monster, darling, or baby – on a good day, that is), namely its obsession with finding a place or a state of mind where the self feels at home. In these times of mass migrations and uprootedness, we have to redefine what home is. Do we seek a home for our body, where it feels comfortable and safe? For our emotions – where we feel loved and secure? A home where the mind finds its place, and engages in conversations with like minds? Or a home where the whole self finds itself?

"As I write, I'm listening to Lynyrd Skynyrd – 'Home Is Where The Heart Is' from their *Twenty* album, recorded in 1997. Perhaps music, art, and writing can offer provisional answers. After primary school I stopped painting, and, much as I love music, I never owned a musical instrument growing up, so I'll have to stick to writing."

In the novel we see the protagonist, Raluca Cristina Teohar, in a continuous, feverish, search for a place where the self feels at home. She searches for a home even when she still lives at home. She seeks her roots long before she's uprooted from her place, her culture, and

from her self. She looks beyond appearances for the root cause of things, the immutable, the self or the collective unconscious that Seamus Heaney gestures towards in his poem 'Personal Helikon,' when he says that 'I rhyme/ To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.' In Heaney's poem, writing is a gesture of self-reflection, a way of seeking the self as it reflects 'the darkness'. Writing is a way of clarifying the self to oneself, a way of articulating answers to questions asked and questions in the asking, much as the very personality of the writer is in the making while s/he writes. Writing is an epistemological exercise, as well as a self-edifying one. And presumably, an exercise in edifying others.

Much like Flannery O'Connor in *The Habit of Being*,² the Raluca Teohar of the novel writes "to discover" what she knows. At least until she reaches Otipoti, where she is supposed to write about metamodernism, or MM, as she sometimes calls it.

Then a new phase starts, when, like for Marguerite Duras, writing becomes a means of survival. In *Writing* Marguerite Duras talked of "finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole, in almost total solitude, and discovering that only writing can save you." Duras' words carry an urgency that Heaney's 'Personal Helikon' lacks. Raluca's dabbling into writing is placed in a midway position between the two, motivated as it is by a sense of restrained urgency at the confluence of Heaney's and Duras' imperatives.

After Otipoti, when she ceased to write essays and articles, Raluca starts posting poems and comments (or essay fragments) on Facebook. She does this not so much in a gesture of hunting for the instant gratification of "likes", but because she has grown up in a household where 'nihil dies sine linea' were the first inscriptions above the door, followed closely by 'publish or perish'. She feels that she needs to write to survive intellectually, creatively, and as a flesh-and-blood person.

Nonetheless, if truth be told, she does seem to derive a small thrill of recognition from the Facebook post likes, as well as a timid sense of validation as a writer and as a human being. Like the Na'vi (the blue people) in James Cameron's *Avatar*, she feels seen, and therefore she feels that she exists. Bishop Berkeley would agree with this epistemology based on perception.

Some of the poems that she wrote have made their way into the novel, some have been deleted. She has submitted the poems below for a poetry competition, and they were published online afterwards. She has sent them to me as well, in successive drafts. The

² Quoted in Joe Muscolino, '9 Flannery O'Connor Quotes for the Dogged Writer in Us All,' in *Signature*, March 24, 2014. Accessed 21 December 2016.
<http://www.signature-reads.com/2014/03/9-flannery-oconnor-quotes-for-the-dogged-writer-in-all-of-us/>

various avatars of the pieces that she has sent to me over time showed her growth as a person, and evinced a developing skill with words. She liked to preface some of her poems with a line that would contextualise them, as if the poems were telling a story that would be incomplete without such contextualising. Here's a clutch of poems that she sent to me after she had posted them on Facebook.

A Facebook post, 29 September 2016

It's raining again, so I had to edit this poem this morning

Ars Poetica

It's raining in Orland
if I had a guitar or a lute
if I knew how to play them
I would (I only know how to listen:
totally until nothing is left

but the organ in St Betrayer's Cathedral
resounding as that (in the Black Church
where benches are cleft)

this is the song I would sing if I could:
I write every day lest I should
betray myself and be tempted by sleep
I write to remind of the promise to keep
and the story to tell of the soul

abstract and timid – that matters
to at least three possibly four
I write whenever I can to remember
the things I should do to unearth
what is buried in noise

I write to revisit the childhood that slipped
between dreams of the future
and long summer afternoons,

I write to recover the presence
of all who are absent
the loves of those who are lost

I write to reach out to you,
my brother, my sister, my friends
my teachers, my foes

I write to find what I think, what I feel
who I am, and each word is a step

towards you

towards
home

Off to less poetic pastures now

And another one:

Message

Before I go to sleep
I'd like to tell you
the one thing that I didn't
when we sat by the sea

Rangitoto to our right
dark green as ever
insurmountable
as some of our dreams

I always come to you
when the world is on fire
your hand is hot you often tell
too many fires burn at once too many desires
too many battles simultaneously fought
little respite

there's one thing that I hope to tell you
in the breeze heavy with salt
that goosebumps your skin
but I don't know where to start,
and then where to stop

I describe circles large around you
as a drunk around a target
the meaning of which was forgotten
long before the dawn

with every word i say i reach visibly closer
with every dream i weave i touch your hand
as tentative and indomitable as a wave foamy
that licks the shore where it's meant to be
where the story's told

And a poem that I found quite intriguing:

Still here. A dialogue in three times

Quiet at night he remarks
where are the cicadas this year?
she asks all of a sudden aware
of the enveloping quiet

the clouds are still here he says
experimenting with form
eternally shaping spontaneous
plump brimmed or wispy
deliberate brush strokes
illuminated pink from beyond the horizons
- mine east, yours west -
by the sun already set
its light refuses to die
as a love already become
habit

*

the leaves are still here tonight
sempiternal
they die by degrees
one at a time
when we walk to Little Shoal Bay
I bend and pick one up
for you

This leaf shines dark red and this yellow
I offer you one, a stone, or a shell every walk
as devotees flowers
to a statue that incarnates a hope
a principle, a desire
that only dreaming and imagination
can conjure

*

it's midday now and I went for a walk
by myself
and I hurry to tell you
the leaves, and the clouds, are still here
hanging for life
in trees that await your return
and the cicadas are back

it's just a matter of time

*

Raluca loved to think that every poem was a story. She thought that originally, narratives had been a blend of poems, songs, and stories, all narrated and occasionally acted out by the storyteller. She told me that she imagined how the storytellers – i.e. the wise people of the tribe, who conversed with the angels of nature and with the higher gods – must have told their tales to people gathered around a fire. After the food had been finished and the immediate needs of everyone had been attended to, there must have been time for sharing stories, for marvelling at the exploits of heroes that were none other than everyone's who had the courage to pursue a dream.

She invoked some of the oldest narratives as arguments for her syncretic view of original storytelling – the oral tradition, and the epics of *Gilgamesh*, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. Diverse aspects, she thought – lyrical and

narrative, dramatic and sapiential, factual and fictional – combined to bear witness to a world that was preserved and invoked, or conjured into being, through the art of storytelling. Perhaps this is the reason why her novel comprises such diverse elements as diary entries, poems, anecdotes, essay fragments, Facebook posts. She thought that the storyteller should look, Janus-like, back to the past and forward to the future, while telling a story for the present.

*

Raluca Teohar was a strange person. Unlike AD, another friend of mine, who would rather write about “exploring the big bad world,” Raluca believed, perhaps akin to some gnostic tradition, that the substance of the world is made of love.³ She thought that the many kinds of love that we experience as humans are reflections of a subtler, more encompassing love. Yes, I know, love is an abstract noun that denotes too little by connoting too much, or the other way round.

Raluca told me that she had “watched a Facebook clip that said that if people looked into each other’s eyes for about four minutes, they’d start loving one another. Not in a fall-in-love way, but in a raise-in-love-and-in-one’s-humanity way.” The poems and stories that she used to post on Facebook are just small reflections of her iris looking at the world and its readers, in the naïve hope that the world and its readers will look back at it, and perhaps love her in their turn. Theo, Raluca’s sibling, had been the first to identify this streak of naïve trust, and called her a “silly puppy.” But siblings are seldom to be trusted.

Even if a dear friend, I have to say that nobody in their right mind walks about these days without a mask on. Or two or three. Nobody wears their heart pinned to their sleeves. Masks hide and reveal what their wearer wants to reveal, and no more than that. Like the make-up that a female teacher puts on before going to class, masks are the armour that provide strength and detachment.

However, Raluca believed in so-called authenticity, in being genuine and true to one’s self. By the self she meant that naked core of kindness and of love that she thought we are born with, and that we see in small children who haven’t been abused. She believed that we are born of love and we recede in love when we die. I hope that she was right.

*

Perhaps her obsession with authenticity is the reason why, after experimenting with

³ This gnostic tradition is gestured towards, I believe, in Laurence Durrell’s *The Avignon Quintet*.

second and third person narratives, she settled for writing her novel in the first person – the most direct, revealing, and perhaps the most misleading of points of view. I hope that her second and third person stories will be published in a separate volume, as will her poems.

*

In her own way she was an innocent. Yet the simplicity of her words is deceptive. It is the simplicity of someone who has experienced and has tired of unwarranted complexity. She also talked of what she called Sufi love, where one sort of affection slides into another, as a telescope that unfolds. Her poems talked of a “you” who could be a friend, a lover, or a god. She couldn’t understand the postmodern, but she loved to play with ambiguities that would leave enough room for the reader to clarify things for themselves. When she sent me a poem, she’d insist in the accompanying email that “the second person pronoun is not you.” Below is what she called her “tree poem,” one of her more polished ones.

I know that you did it for me

you waited in silence
absorbed with the promise of spring

‘Look at that red blossom tree!’
I say when we walk down the road
your company – the attraction

when darkness obscures all vision
but the adolescent tree under the street lamp

I know that you blossomed for me
I whisper as I walk past
and run my fingers on moist bark

a few leaves turn in the night wind
a petal falls to the ground

it doesn't make any sound

The innocence that I sense in her text is of the after-experience kind. It is perhaps tributary to her life-long attachment to William Blake, in whose texts she could see a pattern of evolution from innocence to experience, followed by a higher innocence. In a sense, her return to research heralds a stage of higher innocence. *Why I Don’t Keep a Diary* tracks Raluca’s path from innocence to experience, while her return to (higher) innocence is signalled in the article ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ (Annex 2). The article also indicates the end of a quest.

Her novel is a heroine’s journey of sorts, in the tradition of Joseph Campbell. The

heroine has been enticed out of her (relatively) comfortable and cocooned life into the big bad world by the waving of the golden branch of metamodernism. She has been challenged by antagonists such as Solomon Zeal and K, whom she eventually defies in the act of writing this new article, which, unfortunately, though she didn't know this at the time, was to be her last.

*

Perhaps recounting how we met and the effect that our meeting had on her would shed some light on both her novel and the article that follows. After our meeting she started writing in earnest, completed her research degree, and wrote 'What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?' after a silence of more than five years. Her keen interest in New Zealand literature, in which she could see strong metamodern traits, dates from around that time as well.

I met Raluca four years ago, at a Writers' Festival. She loved writing about our meeting as of a serendipitous event when synchronicity manifested. She thought it marked her birth as a writer. That is, after the writer of "academic fiction", as she used to call her scholarly pursuits, had been silenced.

"Exactly three years ago I listened for the first time to a writer talk as part of Auckland Writers' Festival," she wrote in her notes dated a few months after we met. "It was a talk by German phantasy writer Cornelia Funke, author of *Inkheart*. The room was full of children and adolescents. I was probably the oldest person in the room, but the fact didn't bother me and I felt in my element. It felt like a return home of sorts, a return to ideas and creativity, to things of beauty that love engenders. Innocence never bothers me.

"The university where I was working in administration was about to undergo a Faculty Administration Review (FAR). With a cruelty characteristic of (some) people in charge, who have power over the lives of their subordinates, the management had invited the staff whose positions were about to be "revised" to submit their opinions on the FAR process. Opinions that would be duly ignored. It felt like asking the people on the death row to dust the chair and sterilise the syringes that would administer the lethal concoction. It's beyond my comprehension why would any human devise anything that could kill or harm another living being. Let alone another human.

"Anyway, I did what I viewed as my duty. When I was done, my then manager allowed my colleagues and I to leave early. It was a sunny Friday afternoon as I crossed Albert Park. I was dragging my feet as I walked, while my head looped forward, my shoulders slouched.

“I was tired of workplace politics. I thirsted for something soothing and beautiful. I stopped to watch a mother and a child throw a ball to one another, while a bunch of students were lying on the grass, chatting. I sat on a wooden bench by the fountain. I was too numb to think. The whole FAR felt like the Industrial Revolution all over again. Replacing people with spreadsheets and processes. Firing people so that the academics would get to see who’s got the strongest muscles – human resources bosses, of course, rather than the professors and lecturers.

“When it started to get chilly, I stood up, straightened my clothes and walked down the hill to Aotea Square. Buskers were playing in the square in front of Aotea Centre, where the Writers’ Festival was advertised by orange, white and black banners. I walked up the marble steps and asked at the box office about the next speaker. It was Cornelia Funke.

“Funke didn’t disappoint: she talked about readers writing to her from far-off places, soldiers in action contacting her from deserts to say that her books had offered them portals to other worlds that made the one they lived in more bearable. She encouraged children and young people to write, with the proviso that they shouldn’t show their manuscripts to other people too early. Like a child who’s not ready to see the world for what it is, and who loses his or her innocence too early, a manuscript shown prematurely to others could wither and die.

“She talked about writing from a place of innocence, about looking for the child inside, for that part of the self that likes to fall under the spell of a story, and who takes off on flights of the imagination. She talked about trying to become a child again, like Picasso.

“I did not know exactly what she meant by her reference to Picasso, but I thought that we are now able to appreciate the beauty and value of childlike-ness, and also to enjoy stories and to grow with them, to allow them to expand our imagination and enlarge our hearts, stretch our minds. I do believe that story tellers can and do change the world.

“I collated some of the thoughts above in a Facebook post and I tagged Cornelia. She replied a few days later:

“**Cornelia Funke**

‘Dear Raluca! Excuse the late answer! I had trouble with my Facebook accounts and lost some answers. Thank you so much for the wonderful message. I am still homesick for New Zealand. The stay on your beautiful islands and all the encounters with my readers moved me deeply and I cannot wait to come back! warmest wishes from Sydney! Cornelia.’”

“On my way out from Cornelia’s session, a middle-aged man offered me a ticket to

another panel – Gutter Black, a talk about Dave McArtney’s memoir. I later met the man at a book launch and I was introduced to him. His name is Bob Orr. He is a poet and one of Auckland’s living legends. Was meeting him a sign? We met afterwards a couple of times. Each time we talked as if we were old friends.

“I enjoyed the session with Cornelia so much, and then the reminiscing about Auckland musician Dave McArtney, that I wanted to expose my son to the sort of intellectual and emotional stimulation that the festival fostered. I booked two tickets, for myself and my son, for a high tea at the Langham with Owen Marshall and Cellin Williams.

“I had no idea what a high tea is. I’m from a mixed background: my maternal grandparents were land labourers (or rather subsistence farmers, to be more precise) and my paternal ones were landowners that belonged to a class that had been levelled by communism to a uni-sex, uni-class society. The glorious communism that smoothes out all individuality. My parents were first generation middle class.

“Besides, I’m a migrant, and was new to Auckland at the time, so my ignorance was justified.

“My son couldn’t make it to the high tea. I had frantically tried to get hold of him, until my mobile went flat. Then I asked the Langham concierge to call him every five minutes. I ran between the Oak Room and the reception, passing by a delicate Asian woman who played the harp in the draught of a hallway. She was playing with such grace and such talent that I couldn’t help stopping to listen to her. For a split second my mind forgot its silly worry and dissolved into music while patrons were having their teas, chatting away and ignoring the musician.

“I eventually gave up trying to contact my son Mark. The high tea event was about to start.

“I was stuck at a table with complete strangers. We passed around multi-layered trays, sampling finger food and cakes, sipping yet another cup of tea. We tried to make conversation. Some of the people at the table of eight seemed to know one another. The woman on my left was a part-time teacher in Queenstown. She had flown up for the occasion. When it was over, she left without saying good bye.

“I have no problem talking to strangers. I tried to make the best of the situation. Before the conversation had time to turn awkward, the writers walked in. I had taught Owen Marshall’s short stories to year 13 students during my teaching practice in Otipoti, but hadn’t heard of Cellin Williams until a day before. I had been living in New Zealand for eight years; I had a degree in comparative literature, and had been watching the news pretty regularly. But

the name had never come up. I was trying to stay away from Facebook at that time.

“As my son was not there, I had time to talk to the writers and ask them to sign my copies of their books after the event. I had already bought the books the night before, so I went straight to the signing table. I was the first in the queue. People were still leafing through the books that were piled on tables to one side, deciding what to buy. The conversation that followed became one of those indelible memories that seem caught in a perpetual present, like a bee in amber:

“‘I loved *The White Clock*,’ I tell Owen Marshall, while he signs a *Collections of Short Stories* edited by Vincent O’Sullivan.

“‘I only started writing poems late in life,’ he says.

“‘I particularly loved ‘Girl on a Trampoline,’ with its fresh image of innocence in action.’”

Cellin Williams, who sits to Owen Marshall’s left at the table, overhears the conversation.

“‘Are you a poet?’ she asks when I proffer a copy of her book for her to sign.

”Oh, hmm, yes, a closet one,” I mutter, for I feel that my debut four years prior in an American Dadaist journal was not enough to validate me as a poet.

“‘We need more poets,’ Cellin Williams says, in an affirmation that to this day I don’t know if she can justify.

“I lapse into one of those awkward silences when you think that you are talking to people, when you are in fact following the train of your thought with no vocalisation whatsoever. I had been thinking what an indulgence poetry writing seems to many people, so I’m not little surprised by the assertion. In fact I’m so puzzled that I forget my usual inhibitions and blurt, quite abruptly:

“‘Give me your email. Please. I’ll send you some poems.’”

“‘Oh, okay,’ she says. She fixes me with a gaze that doesn’t disguise her surprise, then takes a blue square of paper and writes her email.”

*

Raluca wrote to me that very night. I could see that she’s one of those people who speak out their minds, and who display their feelings, rather than keeping them private. It tugged at my heart to see how ill-prepared she was to live in the Western world.

The poems showed promise, and I admired their passion and directness of self-revelation. I gently encouraged her, and found a good word to say each time she sent me a fresh bunch. I made it clear, however, that the prose fragments that she sent to me were stronger and more evocative than the poems.

In the process of exchanging emails, we became friends. Pen friends first, then she took to visiting me in Nelson every now and then. After a while, she attended a course that I taught at the time.

*

There is undoubtedly an element of *bildungs roman* in *Why I Don't Keep a Diary*, perhaps after the model of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. Like Goethe's novel, Raluca's captures the development of a soul, as well as glimpses of the society and times that surrounded the protagonist through the years of apprenticeship and travels. However, Raluca's novel is also the saga of an idea and of the mind that has carried that idea for a while. The idea is that of *metamodernism*. In her emails, Raluca often referred to the "story" of how she came about this idea.

My Story with Metamodernism

"At the end of May 2001 I was briefly relieved of my duties as a young mother and a lecturer. I had exactly six days to write a research proposal. My husband and my mother had taken our son to the country. We had decided that this would be the easiest way to wean him. I was to join them at the end of the week to celebrate my grandfather's eightieth birthday.

"So I was home alone, and could now focus on an idea that had been circling my mind for a while. My readings and conversations at that time had led to the crystallisation of an awareness that postmodernism, with its attendant relativism and permissiveness, had lived its days. Another paradigm was afoot. I felt it in my bones.

"I was reading three books at the time: Brian McHale's *Constructing Postmodernism*, Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity*, and Shri Mataji's *Meta Modern Era*. My father had insisted that I start researching for a PhD. Looking after a young child wasn't what he'd expected of his daughter. Though my son has never had a more devoted devotee than my father.

"I was reading very little fiction at the time. You read fiction for pleasure, not for finding answers to your questions, I thought. Besides, after getting married, reading seemed an indulgence. Still, I allowed myself the joys of theory, and of philosophy, occasionally. It

was job-related research, I told myself. My teenage love affair with philosophy hadn't run cold yet. However, I favoured theory, for it seemed to be a middle ground between the cold reason of philosophy and the sensibility of literature; an area where balanced answers could be found.

“Those three books seemed to be talking to one another. The indeterminacy and elusiveness of McHale's postmodernism, with its fluidity and indecisiveness, appeared to be but a facet of modernity. Modernity, Calinescu proposed, was a crystal with many faces, a paradigm predicated on questioning tradition, on relying on reason and the senses (as opposed to the God of medieval times), and on progress. *Meta Modern Era* was interrogating the progress of Western culture, and the unquestioned supremacy of rationality. What about all the strife in the world? The Wars, inequities, ignorance? The powerless ignored by the powerful while care and empathy were such rare virtues? Shouldn't we be looking beyond the confines of this goddess' Reason court? Doesn't the answer lie closer to home than we think? (Or the answers, as postmodernist supporters of plurality insisted.)

“The intuition that I had then was a natural progression from these readings and the thoughts that they triggered. Following from the idea of a meta modern era, I thought that we were on the brink of a paradigm whose proponents and actants would search in their hearts for answers to collective problems. Such people would be, presumably, less confused, less uncertain in their choices and values than the postmodernists were. ‘Everything goes’ seemed to me to be the postmodernists' core philosophy; while their stances, I thought, were quite relativistic. I would have had specific examples in mind then, but my memory of them has faded to oblivion by now.

“I wasn't envisaging, however, a paradigm⁴ of absolute certainties derived from Enlightenment-like trust in rationality, mathematics, and science. I knew that few things could ever be definitive. Still I thought that we needed to keep seeking until subtle and lasting solutions were found, solutions that heeded individuals, groups, and nature. I knew from

⁴ A woman in a FB group has asked me about the distinction between a paradigm and an episteme. I had used paradigm to talk of metamodernity in my research, but I am little inclined to split theoretical hairs at the moment, so perhaps I should strategically ignore the question. Nonetheless, here's my twopence: In my mind, an episteme is a specialised term for a system of knowledge accepted at a given time, while paradigm is a more widely used term to signify the assembled beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, tendencies, etc, that a society entertains at a point in time. But I might be wrong. And whether the metamodern is an episteme or a paradigm might seem irrelevant to the South Orland mother who committed suicide because she couldn't bear to see her children suffer with asthma and starvation. However, if everyone (from public servants to politicians) agreed that we live in times when we absolutely need to care for one another- that would have made a difference. Just saying.

Blake that such solutions should be evolving continuously, ever improving, for the person ‘who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind.’ Absolute certainties could turn oppressive. Especially when imposed on others.

“I had seen and experienced enough of the pressures of an autocratic regime to realise how imperative it was to preserve the freedoms and the human rights that the post/modern eras had secured, and to champion freedoms, even the ones not yet granted. The infringement of individual and collective rights and freedoms would mean denying humankind its humanity. Blake’s phrasing became obsessive: ‘A robin red breast in a cage puts all the heavens in a rage.’

“The paradigm or the era that *Meta Modern Era* announced was to be a *meta*-modern paradigm, where the *metamodern* means *beyond* the modern. I read this as a paradigm whose people would not strive to dominate and control nature and the other, as the supporters of the values of modernity had done (when they brutally colonised countries outside the Western culture in the name of civilising them, and built dams that displaced millions of people “for the greater common good”). Moreover, the metamodern would *not* try to cancel centuries of evolution or traditions that had grounded the self, as postmodernism could be read as attempting (with its New Age and hippism).

“The metamodern was to be a paradigm where modernist and postmodernist stances – such as rejecting traditions in the name of individual freedoms, and approaching reality through playful, even irreverent attitudes – combined to achieve new syntheses: a humankind where freedoms are respected, yet the self doesn’t take itself too seriously, and understands that one’s own wellbeing is a result of both self-realisation and positive relationships with others.

“If the modern paradigm worshiped reason as the queen faculty of the human mind, the postmodern dethroned it and embraced excesses of emotivity, while the metamodern project entailed searching for the roots of the human self, for the point where reason, emotions, and imagination combined. If modernism was the thesis, postmodernism was the antithesis, while metamodernism was the synthesis.

“In time I developed my views on metamodernism as a paradigm in which the self searches for authenticity and self-realisation, as *Meta Modern Era* (1) suggested, in which theories are seen as mere facets of truth (Calinescu 2), never the truth itself, and the limitations of theories are being acknowledged while they engage in dialogue with one another. MM was to be seen as a paradigm in which the feminine is respected as Luce

Irigaray hoped (3), in which ethics and care for the other (Nel Noddings) take precedence over technology and rational motivations that ignored the human factor (Stephen Toulmin, *Return to Reason*).

“Metamodernism was initially conceived as a synthesis that is grounded in the roots of what defines humankind, often expressed in narrative forms in old stories and traditions, that nonetheless had not lost all relevance, and that had to be re-evaluated. Metamodernism is to be a synthesis that evolves continuously, as a boat that is being built, adjusted and repaired as it sails. A work in progress, much like edifying our own humanity is.

“I believed that the dominant of metamodernism was the ethical. This idea of the dominant I had borrowed from McHale (1992), who had in turn borrowed it from Russian formalism. McHale had proposed that the dominant of modernism was epistemological (of the whodunit sort, as in William Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!*), while the dominant of postmodernism was ontological (think Thomas Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49*).

“In articles and conference papers, I suggested that theories talk to one another, and integrate previous developments, as my own theory of metamodernism was (hopefully) doing. I saw metamodernism as an organic development and natural progression from the Enlightenment-based modernity and its ideas, many of which had been challenged by postmodernism. But MM was to be a paradigm that both challenged and adjusted the excessive reliance on reason. I trusted the ability of human society to self-adjust.

“In the wake of Stephen Toulmin’s and Annette Baier’s philosophies of the reasonable and of the ‘ethics of love’, metamodernism represents for me the efforts to achieve integrations of reason and emotions, as well as syntheses of traditions and cultures. Such synthesis would not be reductionist or colonising, but empowering, inclusive, and enriching.

“Alice Munro’s short stories, Arundhati Roy, Michel Tournier, Kent Haruf’s and Fiona Kidman’s novels and many of the poems by Mary Oliver, Bill Collins, Ana Blandiana, and NZ poet laureate Brian Turner are, I believe, metamodern. However, these are not the only writers that I consider metamodern.

“Some of these authors’ texts evince a return to a tell-able story, where the narrative is a vehicle of delight and enlightenment (by which I understand conducive to epiphanies, self-realisation, and/or positive changes in attitudes and behaviour). They all tell stories that are not confined to the perspective of a masculinist gaze, which Irigaray thought reductionist, and against which she advocated the more feminine approach of the touch (*To Be Born*, 2017). Accordingly, more than one sense are invoked in metamodern narratives. Many of them are

deeply ethical, simple, unburdened by unnecessary language games, but they do not preclude the ludic either.

“Such writers that I deem metamodern show trust in the power of the written word, and of art and creativity in general, to transform and to touch profound levels of humanity. They propound innocent and unassuming virtues and joys (as the children, Ammu and Velutha in Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*), as well as ethical responsibilities, and an awareness of the interconnectedness of all living things, of all sentient beings. Such texts are grounded and subtle, hopeful and optimistic in the ability of people to transform and reach their own authenticity, individually and collectively.”

Raluca concluded her long message:

“This is, in a nutshell, what I understand by metamodernism and what I hope to further articulate in subsequent research, one day when time will have more patience with me. It is a reflective effort and one of synthesis; it is an endeavour to reach to the core of some of the contemporary ailments and reveal possible avenues out of some of the current conundrums.

“Cellin, I hope that this doesn’t sound too out-there. Perhaps you’d agree with me that from under the ruins of our dreams of progress and unquestioned trust in science and technology, a new paradigm emerges. A paradigm the outlines of which are delineated by average people who seek self-expression and the welfare of their communities, which they might have an intuition of as integral parts of the complex system that is humankind.

“This paradigm is being articulated by everyone’s who perform acts of kindness and manifest human qualities without ulterior motives. It is shaped by writers and artists who leave their ivory towers and engage in their communities.

“It is not an abstract or theoretical development, but a living happening, a process that is being shaped by people who enact values that go beyond modern individualism, and postmodern indulgence and consumerism, people who evolve towards a care for, and an interest in the welfare of the other (and their stories) as an instantiation of the self.

“I might have said this already: as I see it, MM is being shaped by people who seek their self-realisation and are keen to share their experience with others, and help them along the way.”

Then, in another message, she added:

“The concept of self-realisation was to be central to my understanding of

metamodernism, understood as a solution to contemporary malaise. By self-realisation I understood both

1. an awareness of one's self as a spiritual being – rather than a being of greed for money, power, or gratification of the senses – and,
2. the fulfilment of one's own potential, which to me meant identifying and pursuing one's natural talents.

“I thought, perhaps naively, that everyone had the potential to express themselves. From Carl Jung I had learned that we can identify our talent(s) through introspection, through connecting with our deeper self by means of dreams and intuitions. This connection is a gradual development that Jung called individuation or self-realisation. It amounts to awakening one's potential, a sort of rebirth not as a physical being, but as a spiritual being.

“I had inherited my father's obsession with Blake, so Blakean imagery and tropes informed much of my early work on metamodernism. In *Jerusalem*, his last “prophetic” book, Blake had talked of awakening.

“England! awake! awake! awake!

Jerusalem thy Sister calls!

Why wilt thou sleep the sleep of death

And close her from thy ancient walls?

Thy hills and valleys felt her feet

Gently upon their bosoms move:

Thy gates beheld sweet Zion's ways:

Then was **a time of joy and love.**

And **now the time returns again:**

Our souls exult, and London's towers

Receive the Lamb of God to dwell

In England's green and pleasant bowers.

Blake's *awakening* entails a return to ‘a time of joy and love’ when ‘our souls exult’ and something like an epiphanic experience of an immanent transcendence occurs, for London's towers ‘Receive the Lamb of God to dwell.’

“Blake related this process of awakening to engaging in works of imagination.

Imagination is also called Jerusalem, and she is ascribed almost religious connotations – though I like to think of them as spiritual rather than religious. Jerusalem is a redemptive power or energy, feminine and motherly in nature.

“Even if Blake had explained about *awakening* more than two centuries ago, this process, I thought, was manifesting in contemporaneity, when an increasing number of people are aware of being a bit more than a body, a mind, and a complex of emotions. More and more people engage in artistic pursuits, as well as in actions motivated by altruistic values, actions that show an awareness that all that lives and all human beings are interconnected. Remember the Greek farmers who housed and fed refugees? That’s an example of such awareness that leads to supporting life because it is life, with no ulterior motives.

*

“Between 2001 and 2004 I looked after my young son, taught, commuted between countries, studied philosophy for one year, talked to some of my old professors about metamodernism and sent research proposals at universities in Europe and America. Many people scoffed and rolled their eyes. Another *-ism*? Haven’t we had enough?

“In 2004 I started talking about metamodernism at conferences in Napoca, Romania, then in Leeds, and in Prague. In 2006 I moved to NZ where, on 1 April, I started a research degree with a project about metamodernism in literature. In the subsequent years, I told myself that I should never start anything significant on April Fools’.

*

“‘Why are you going so far?’ my grandmother asked. ‘Couldn’t you find somewhere closer? You know nothing about these people!’

‘But I do. They are the descendants of British colonists. And many are new Kiwis.’

‘Kiwis? As in the fruit?’

‘Yes, it’s a New Zealand fruit. Developed from Chinese gooseberries. But I mean migrants. NZ is a country that’s being shaped as we speak. Thousands migrate every year there, and are accepted and integrated. It feels like an experiment in tolerance and inclusiveness. A utopia come true.’

‘How about Māori? Do you know anything about them?’

‘No, but they are *people*. People with hearts and minds like us, like me. I’ll find a way to communicate with them.’

‘They have brown skin and full lips, and they like strange dances.’

‘Beauty comes in many guises.’

*

“Would the metamodern define beauty in new ways? As something that comes from deep within the self, pleases or challenges the senses, and inspires the self to seek its own ways of expressing beauty and itself.

“Between 2001 and 2006, I was aware of a single previous text on the subject: *Meta Modern Era* by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi. Once at Otipoti, I had access to databases. I discovered that the term or concept of metamodernism had been used previously by scholars such as Andre Furlani, Anthony Elliott, and Stephen Feldman. Elliott mentioned *metamodernism* just in passing and in a pejorative way. For Stephen Feldman *metamodernism* was a way of triangulating left and right wing politics, while for Furlani it was a sort of early postmodernism that allowed for the sublime and for a sense of presence, unlike the later versions of postmodernism.

“I continued to talk of metamodernism as a paradigm and its reflection in literature at conferences in NZ and Australia, while my articles on MM started to be published (in 2005, 2006, 2007).

“Now the metamodern is, presumably, a fact of life, and a google search yields 91,700 results.” <My Story With Metamodernism ends⁵>

Raluca thought that the metamodern means revisiting some original traditions (by original meaning traditions not yet adulterated and transformed into systems of power). She insisted that a syncretism that combined the diverse means of storytelling was peculiar not only to an *illo tempore* (those days) when stories began to be told, but it is also particular to our times.

⁵ References

- (1) Nirmala Devi, ShriMataji. *Meta Modern Era*. 2nd ed. Pune: Computex Graphics, 1996.
- (2) Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- (3) Irigaray, Luce. *Sharing the World*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2008.
- (4) Dumitrescu, Alexandra. “Bootstrapping Finnegans Wake.” *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 7.1 (2005). <<http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v7/main/essays.php...>>.
- . “Foretelling Metamodernity: Realisation of the Self in the Rosary of Philosophers, William Blake’s Jerusalem and Andrei Codrescu’s Messiah.” *Constructions of Identity*. Ed. Adrian Radu. Cluj: Napoca Star, 2006. 151-68.
- . “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space.” *Double Dialogues*.7 (2007). <<http://www.doubledialogues.com/.../interconnections-in-blake.../>>.
- (5) McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1992.

“These are times of integration,” she’d say in her emails, “when we cannot ignore the gains of previous paradigms, and we feel compelled to assimilate them in our views of the world. We have survived the individualism of modernity, the fragmentation and alienation of postmodernity, but now in the metamodern paradigm, we have learned the lessons that modernism and postmodernism (or pomo) had taught. We are now able to find ourselves, our own roots as human beings, as creatures of love and of care for nature and for the other. Or so I hope. The metamodern is a dream and a reality. On a clear day I can hear it unfolding. I hope that my novel would be a step, however small, towards accomplishing that dream.”

*

Raluca often talked about her novel. Perhaps too often, to a point where I came close to doubting that she would ever finish it. What people say (or write) and what they *do* are often quite different things, I thought. She would write long emails that comprised a sort of *ars poetica*, a poetics that, I suspected for a while, was too programmatic to allow for a genuine narrative to spring from it, to unfold naturally. I didn’t know then that she had already completed a first draft of her novel. These are her words, describing her text:

“This novel in stories attempts to show how an ethics of care, which I consider the dominant of metamodernism, has sprung from lived experience and a medley of (anti)communist philosophising. The un-hierarchical aspect of MM has crystallised as a reaction to the overwhelming levelling pressure of an authoritarian regime, as perhaps did the effort of trying to make sense of a world that I saw as transcending the postmodern, with its sense of uprootedness, fragmentation, meaninglessness, and blurring of the boundaries between dream and reality. (You know by now that what I understand by the ethics of care comprises

- care for the other and for the self,
- empathy,
- and a transformation of the self or self-realisation, also known as individuation.)

“The novel attempts to show

1. How the broken and fragmented self reunites in MM in new configurations, with new meanings. (A metaphor of the postmodern fragmented self that reunites in a new whole is the trope of the *trencadis* – a new object made of shards).
2. How the aggressiveness of authoritarian regimes is not as different to what

many of us experience in daily life, in the free world, whenever the ones in charge exercise their authority to control and crush the people who depend on them.

3. How each time such bullying happens, we give in to a something that's less-than-human in us, something that has nothing to do with the energies of creativity, imagination, and the 'human form divine,' the energies of humanity and evolution and spirituality. (Remember Blake?)

"Whether we perpetrate acts of bullying or we give in to them, we become accomplices in a trumpification of the world, in a Procrustean simplifying of the world that is not regenerating, but stifling, oppressive. By bullying I mean random acts of unkindness that the perpetrators can usually justify to themselves, and to others. Their aggressiveness and cunningness are the polar opposites of metamodern kindness and innocence.

"Similar to the article 'What is Metamodernism and Why Bother', the novel tries to show what the metamodern is. While the article spells it out, the novel is an attempt to enact the metamodern and show that even in times of extreme duress, the spirit can shine through. And where it does, there the home is.

"Critics (or theorists) try to make sense of the world (and tell their stories) by using the texts they are discussing, much as the writer tries to make sense of the world and of experience by telling stories or breaking in lyrical moments of poetry. Both critics and writers, if they are authentic and honest with themselves, gesture in the same direction, a direction that points to where things make sense, where experience acquires meaning, where some sort of truth, personal, or collective, resides – even if only partial, or barely glimpsed, 'as if through a glass darkly'. Of course this locus of meaning is not a place, but a state, a state of understanding and one of connection. Where we feel connected (is 'in touch with' a better phrase?) to one another and we have an intuition of being connected to something that Jung called the collective unconscious.

"In my creative writing and the theoretical pieces, it is towards this sort of awareness that I try to gesture – sometimes more successfully than at others."

*

Dear Greg, Raluca liked to finish things, so perhaps these notes are the last touches that complete her novel. She never liked things left hanging, and that's why our exchanges

never stopped. Our conversations never ended. One thing led to another, and then another, as a weaving of thoughts and feelings, of experiences and memories and of reading notes. A weaving that none of us knew how to end, nor did we want to. Well, at least not after a while, when we grew closer.

There are many more things to be said about *Why I Don't Keep A Diary* and its ludic intertextual allusion to René Magritte's 1929 painting *The Treachery of Images*, with its famed caption 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (This is not a pipe). Each of the following could be discussed in relation to the novel: The false memoir genre (Raluca's text is an invention from the first word to its last), the (not-such-a) misery memoir, the fiction of reality (a phrase that she borrowed from Gregoire de Kalbermatten's *The Legend of Dagad Trikon*), the unreliable narrator (of *the Pale Fale*, *The Remains of the Day*, and *Lolita* fame), the vagaries of the first person narrative, or the increasingly fashionable genre of novel-in-stories à la Philip Deaver in *Forty Martyrs*, Tim Winton in *The Turning*, or Anne Enright in *The Green Road* or *The Gathering*.

However, of all theoretical approaches that the novel could invoke, a meditation on the metamodern condition and its connection with the self would have been closer to Raluca's heart. This is what I have attempted, often leaving her to talk in her own words, for she was more knowledgeable when it came to MM than I would ever be.

*

Greg, you have asked me to preface Raluca's novel while touching upon the relationship between her text and her self, her text and the world and, in a meta-textual gesture, as an Auroborus that bites its tail, to emphasise where her text turns self-reflectively upon itself. I believe that this preface covers the **text to self** (in *My story with MM*) and **text to world** aspects (where I let Raluca talk about her novel and where she sees MM in relation to the world), while the **text to text** aspect is covered where I let Raluca talk about her novel and then in the Annex 'What is MM And Why Bother,' as well as in my notes and recollections.

This is my tribute to my friend, and I hope that I haven't let her down through my limited understanding of what the metamodern is and how her novel enacts aspects of it. We both know that, with her research, she took upon herself a task bigger than she could easily deliver, a task that she could have probably completed had she been stronger or part of a collective of researchers dedicated to studying metamodernism, rather than working by herself against cut-throat systems. Or had she had more time. But for this novel, time lost its patience, and ran out for her.

Warm wishes from frosty Nelson,
Cellin (Williams)

PS

You might have come across Raluca's Facebook post dated 25 April 2007. In case you haven't, here it is:

“Finished reading Stephanie Johnson's *The Writing Class* and enjoyed every word of it. Might read it again soon. In a conversation with a dear friend today I thought of this:

“All other things being equal, the difference between a great writer and a good one may be the degree of love: how much they love their fellows, how much they care to share their psychological insights, the knowledge and wisdom they've absorbed. It is also a difference of trust and courage: How much self-exposure would they risk, how deep would they dig into their characters' psychology and motivations. It is a matter of clarity of vision, too, in the ability to see the real behind the masks, to reveal just enough to set the reader in search of their own authenticity, and of course the ability to shape the revelation into pleasant and beautiful language.”

I do hope that her novel will speak to at least one person, and that its failures will be overlooked, for, as singer songwriter George Jones would say, “She loved a lot in her time.”