Exegesis – Creating an Artist, a bulls#!t artist: An exegesis on
unreliable narration in *See You on the Otherside*

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An exegesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Creative Writing (MCW)

2013

School of Applied Linguistics

Contents

Attestation of Authorship

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

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Abstract

See you on the Otherside is the tale of a man who's unable to escape the past that plagues his mind. However, the events of his past are not as they seem, or more importantly, not as he leads the audience to believe. But as the unreliability of his past and the reliability of his present blur into one, the truth can't stay buried forever.

The primary focus of this exegesis, *Creating an artist, a bulls#!t artist,* is to explore unreliable narration, a technique that, in theory and if constructed effectively, can destabilise the reader's perception of the creative work. I'll discuss my motivation behind using an unreliable narrator in the thesis and outline the processes I went through in selecting an unreliable narrator that fit the right mould for the type of story and main character. It's that development process that will be the focal point for the exegesis.

Creating an artist, a bulls#!t artist: An exegesis on unreliable narration in *See you on the Otherside*

"Fictional texts that employ the device of unreliability can best be considered along a spectrum of fallibility that begins with trustworthiness and ends with unreliability"

— Greta Olsen

INTRODUCTION

See you on the Otherside is the tale of a man who's unable to escape the past that plagues his mind. However, the events of his past are not as they seem, or more importantly, not as he leads the audience to believe. But as the unreliability of his past and the reliability of his present blur into one, the truth can't stay buried forever…Unless the reader wants it to.

The primary focus of this exegesis is to explore unreliable narration, a technique that, in theory and if constructed effectively, can destabilise the reader's perception of the creative work. The thesis, *See you on the Otherside*, is a fictional story that is told earnestly in the narrator's account of the time frame he is primarily reflecting on—a time frame that I will refer to as the present to avoid confusion—but the past that has shaped his present state is misleading and intentionally so.

But why? Why use a literary device that deceives the audience in the first place. I guess it sounds funny, but the main reason I chose to manipulate and lie to the reader was for them – to enhance their experience and make it different for everyone. I don't just want the novel to end when the last page goes blank; I want it to continue in the reader's head. And for that to happen, I needed an ending that has a twist. An ending that discloses the unreliability of the narrator's past but, hopefully, warrants further consideration. In order to pull that off though, I had to the get the audience to like the main character, and so much so that the

revelations of his past challenge them in terms of morality. What becomes of their perception when they find out the truth? Does it change? Can it change? Should it change? That's why, in part, the narration had to be unreliable and leave holes in the main characters past that go unfilled until the end. If his past wasn't misleading or ambiguous, if it was reliable from the outset, it'd be hard for the audience to relate to this guy and especially hard for them to like him. After all; he is a murderer.

That was my motivation for using an unreliable narrator but it didn't come out of thin air; there were several fictional literary sources that I took into consideration when developing the thesis. However, unreliable narration comes in many guises, so I also took a theoretical approach in selecting an unreliable narrator that fit the right mould for the type of story and main character. It's that development process that will be the focal point for the exegesis. But first, I'll take you back to the start, to where the idea for the thesis came from; what inspired some of the stylistic choices I made; and how the creative work came to rely on unreliability.

THE BONES OF THE IDEA

It's sometime in July, 2007, and I'm sitting at the kitchen table in a small, dilapidated flat in Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast of Australia. I'm scratching a *Golden Casket* scratch ticket, Australia's version of an *Instant Kiwi*, while a good friend of mine sits on the sofa which is torn and faded and has springs protruding out it. He's clutching a lottery ticket in one hand, a beer in the other, and he's waiting for the live draw to come on.

We've been stranded in this flat for weeks now. The jobs that we assumed would be easy to come by have proven to be elusive, at least for him anyway. What he doesn't know, is that I'm still stuck in holiday mode and haven't even been looking for employment. After working in a job for over two years that was only suppose to be temporary while I readjusted to life after living in the UK, and recently becoming single for the first time in seven, I'm enjoying the freedom and am not in any hurry to get my life back on track. It's the middle of winter,

technically, but everyday over here dawns better than the last and even though I tell myself today's the day, my trips up the road to get the paper always seem to end in the pub. As do the interviews he thinks I've got lined-up every other day – the ones that don't exist.

In stark contrast, he's up every morning at first light; scouring the paper, knocking on doors, dropping his CV off at employment agencies. But his list of credentials are limited (sorry mate, hopefully you don't read this) and he hasn't obtained any of the bureaucratic but necessary "cards" you need for getting any of the unskilled labouring jobs that are in abundance (i.e. a *red card* that certifies the cardholder has undergone a safety course, or a *blue card* which means the cardholder has passed a criminal background check). It's taken him weeks but now he realises that the only jobs available are in the service industry or telemarketing. These kinds of positions don't exactly appeal to either of us but we're content to do them if it means we don't have to go back to the grey skies of Auckland. On this day though, we've decided to try our luck playing the lottery before we swallow our pride and start pestering people on the phone or making juices for a living.

I scratch the ticket and win $20. I'm really stoked, I've never won anything before, but when I tell him about it he turns his nose up and points out that it's hardly life changing and we wouldn't be able to live on that for very long. Then as I start to tell him that it's better than nothing, he shushes me because the balls are coming out. He watches them roll out like he's watching a game of tennis and when the last one comes to a stand still, he looks at the ticket, then the screen, then screws it up mumbling profanities, throws it past me, towards the bin, and continues drinking his beer.

I'm quite amused by his naivety, he's always been a glass half-full kind of guy, but I also feel sorry for him. The "Gold Coast dream" of finding a cushy, stress-free job that pays the same as a corporate job in New Zealand but doesn't cramp your lifestyle is, for now, over for him. But he certainly wouldn't do anything untoward to keep the dream alive; he just accepts it and moves on.

That's when an idea for a book comes to me. It's not the first idea I've had for one of these books that I keep on telling people I'm going to write, but it's got a

good feel to it. What if that ticket did win and this guy (he's a fictional character now) who's so obsessed with starting a new life on the Gold Coast doesn't tell his mate about it and takes the money and runs. He devices a plan to make sure he's gone in the morning without a trace, and it works. His unsuspecting friend has no idea what's happened to him at first, but he soon figures it out. And then, hell bent on revenge, he embarks on an adventure to find this guy that has betrayed him.

So that's how the idea was conceived; it was spawned out of real life, sitting at the kitchen table that evening. And for that reason, I wanted the story to have a sense of realism so I decided to write it in the first-person, along the lines of a fictive memoir. However, I wouldn't necessarily classify the thesis according to that genre. Fictional memoirs generally concentrate on an actual event or time frame in the author's life but incorporate fictional techniques (Bryce, 2009). As far as the thesis is concerned, it is autobiographical to the point that we did leave Auckland and head to the Gold Coast, and we did buy a lottery ticket before resigning ourselves to reality. However, the events prior to getting on the plane and after the lottery ticket have been drastically fictionalised and recreated to give the story a more dramatic arc. And all other aspects have been altered as well, i.e. characterisations, names and settings.

For instance, Murrays Bay is not a sleepy town, disconnected from Auckland and I can ensure you there have never been any dismember bodies dug up in the Pine Barrens. In fact, the closest thing you'll get to Pine Barrens in Murrays Bay is a line of Norfolk Pines along the beach, that are situated about a hundred metres apart.

Moving on. I've got this idea for a creative piece and I've decided on the narrative mode in which I'm going to convey the plot to the reader – first-person point-of-view with the narrator as the main character in the story. Now I need to decide on the other stylistic choices I'm going to use (voice, tone, etc). Initially, those decisions would be primarily influenced by a Stephen King novella entitled *The Body* (1982).

The Body is a coming of age adventure/mystery story about four adolescent boys who set off on a journey to discover the body of Ray Brower, a local kid who's

gone missing and is presumed dead. Although on the surface it appears that King's story and my intended one are worlds apart, I can relate to *The Body* in terms of my own work; it's written in the first person with the narrator as a major participant in the story who is reflecting on an earlier experience in his life. Also, King's idea for *The Body* originated from—I can't directly quote or even paraphrase the following because I can't for the life of me remember exactly where I heard it—his recollection of a real life event in his childhood in which he and a bunch of friends went camping in the woods. Then everything else surrounding and including that event was fictionalised. Sound familiar?

Aside from the similarities in the conception of each story, what really appeals to me is the voice King uses which is consistent with the language of that period and the narrator's world (growing-up in 1960's America). On that basis, I decide to use a similar voice that is plain spoken and mirrors the vernacular of the world around the narrator. And a similar authorial tone that is at times light hearted; at times laced with sarcasm and irony; and at times nostalgic and melancholic. I should add though, in terms of tone at least, it was more coincidence than influence; my writing style has always had a certain tone.

So, basically, *The Body* would serve as a template for the thesis. It would be an adventure/mystery piece but read as a fictive memoir with a narrative mode that can reflect realism. In fact, such was the influence of *The Body* on the early development of the thesis, that once I'd fleshed out the story to where I had determined that the main character would end-up murdering his nemeses when he finally tracks him down, I even chose to start it in a similar fashion.

It would begin with a prologue/monologue in which the narrator tells the audience that he has killed a person and then it would retrace the events that led to that moment:

> It's never easy to see a dead body, especially when that body is the person you've just murdered. But before you jump to conclusions and label me a homicidal maniac, you should know that I certainly didn't wake up one morning intending on becoming a murderer; it happened out of necessity rather than want…
>
> It's been over three decades since I killed a human-being, a long time ago now but only in terms of years. His life-less brown eyes are as fresh in my mind today as the night I made them that way – they still follow me around the room like the Mona Lisa.

> I have never spoken a word of this until now.
> —excerpt from the prologue of *The Corpse Trail* (early title of the Thesis)

Compare that with the prologue of *The Body* and it's pretty easy to see the resemblance:

> I was twelve going on thirteen when I first saw a dead human being. It happened in 1960, a long time ago…although sometimes it doesn't seem that long to me. Especially on the nights I wake up from those dreams when the hail fell into his open eyes (King, 1982, p. 3).

The philosophy behind that initial decision to begin with a prologue/monologue similar to that of *The Body* was to create instant intrigue and mystery. When I read King's novella, the opening really drew me in. I had to read on because I had to know how this kid had come to be looking at a dead human being with hail falling into his open eyes. It really set the story up and the tone. However, there were a lot of foreseeable problems with that approach in relation to the thesis.

It did capture the reader's attention (or at least I think it did) but it didn't create any mystery. The narrator's telling the reader what happened; he's killed someone. Sure, the audience doesn't know why but from the moment his friend betrays him and fleas with the money, they'll know exactly who it is. Also, if the reader hasn't made a judgement call already based on the prologue, and decided not to read on because they don't want to invest their time in a murderer, is stealing a sum of money a good enough reason to kill someone. These characters aren't mobsters or criminals, they're normal people. Who's going to like this guy who hunts down and kills someone over a matter of a few hundred grand? Perhaps the most pressing issue though, was that the ending wouldn't be a surprise what-so-ever. *The Body* did end with the characters discovering the corpse of Ray Brower like we knew it would, but it was more about the loss of innocence and self discovery rather that the discovery of a body.

It was time to seriously reconsider that approach. I scraped the prologue and decided that the ending needed a twist. I've always been a big fan of surprise endings in literature, especially when you don't see it coming. Then it came to me, the narrator's present state was already developed according to his past; he was

depressed and had taken to the bottle because his wife had left him. But what if there was more to his past than meets the eye. Maybe the narrator's misery stemmed from guilt rather than longing. Maybe he's capable of murder because he's done it before. And with that, the narrator's wife wasn't just gone, she was dead. He murdered her; that would be the twist in the plot. Through flashback's the narrator would tell the back-story of their relationship and how they'd came to part. But how could the narrator conceal his past in order for the ending to work. There needed to be some rather large holes in his account of the past. There was only one way forward; the narrator had to be unreliable.

UNRELIABLE NARRATION

Now that the decision had been made to use an unreliable narrator, I had to workout what type of unreliable narrator I would go with. In order to have an ending with a twist, and force the reader to reconsider their perception of the story, I needed to develop an unreliable narrator that could conceal the revelations of his past until the end.

Ever since the term "unreliable narrator" was coined by Booth (1961), there have been numerous studies carried out on the concept of unreliable narration. However, most theorists have concentrated their research on defining the term or redefining/modifying Booth's earlier model. Although all theories on differentiating reliable and unreliable narrators are not without there merits and cannot be discredited, for me, the definition lies somewhere in-between Rabinowitz (1977) interpretation that:

> An unreliable narrator is not simply a narrator who does not tell the truth – all fictional narrators are false in that they are imitations. Rather an unreliable narrator is one who tells lies, conceals information, misjudges with respect to the narrative audience (p. 122).

And the ideology shared by more contemporary scholars (Nunning 1997; Cohn 2000; Zerweck 2001; and Hansen 2007), who tend to define it as an issue that is reader dependant. Hansen (2007) states that:

> A narrator's (un)reliability is not a matter of inconsistencies or deviations internal to the narrative structure, but dependant upon the reader's preferences … If reader and narrator share a world view, a moral standard, values, or beliefs, the narrator will be reliable. If not, he/she will be unreliable (p. 227).

Although in general terms it was important to comprehend the concept of an unreliable narrator and therefore create a narrator who conceals information with respect to the reader's experience, I more centred my research on the different types of unreliable narration. I wanted an unreliable narrator that, ultimately, did not share the same "moral standards" etc. as the reader. The audience had to see him as unreliable in order for there to be a twist in the ending. Otherwise, as Hansen (2007) outlines above, the reader could perceive him as being reliable and not be challenged by the ending.

Like I mentioned earlier, the majority of theory concerning unreliable narration centres on defining the concept. However, in recognition that it was an arduous and, some might even say, impossible task, there was somewhat of movement away from defining the concept as a whole. Many scholars (Riggan 1981; Wall 1994; Bal 1997; Allwrath 1998; Phelan & Martin 1999; and Olsen 2003) believe that unreliable narration should be theorised according to the varying forms of unreliability, and based their research on attempting to provide a taxonomy for unreliable narration.

Phelan and Martin suggest there are six different types of unreliable narration based on failure to report, evaluate, or interpret the text sufficiently. Whereas Olsen only identifies two kinds of unreliable narration: fallible narrators and untrustworthy narrators. Others theorists, however, have done in-depth studies on the different textual indicators of an unreliable narrator (Wall 1994; Bal 1997; and Allrath 1998), but tend to leave out more generalised categorisations of their findings.

Perhaps the most insightful (or in other words, easy to digest) taxonomy on the different types of first-person unreliable narration, is Riggan's list of classifications. His work unquestionably serves as the framework for more "intricate" lists that, in my opinion, use more technical terminology but have the same connotation. Riggan outlines that there are five types of unreliable narrators:

- The Pícaro: a narrator who is characterised by exaggeration and bragging.
- The Clown: A narrator who does not take narrations seriously and consciously plays with conventions, truth and the reader's expectations.
- The madman: A narrator who is either only experiencing mental defence mechanisms, such as (post-traumatic) dissociation and self-alienation, or severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia or paranoia.
- The Naíf: A narrator whose perception is immature or limited through his or her point of view.
- The Liar: A mature narrator of sound cognition who deliberately misrepresents himself, often to obscure his unseemly or discreditable past conduct.

Riggan's typology certainly doesn't cover the entire spectrum of first-person unreliability, but from Riggan's list, I identified two possible types of unreliable narration that would allow me to conceal the revelations of the narrator's past until the end: "The Madman;" and "The Liar." At this point I leave the theoretical approach behind me, and turn to the literary world for inspiration and guidance.

Firstly, I consider the idea of developing an unreliable narrator that Riggan classifies as "The Madman." The three novels I've read along those lines that immediately spring to mind are: *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk; *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter S. Thompson; and *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. These texts employ a first-person unreliable narrator that can be described as "psychological," and in essence, "portray the unreliable protagonist as a certain psychological type" (Skalin, 2005, p. 7). In all these cases, the author uses that "certain psychological type" in the form of an unreliable narrator who is suffering from "mental illness." However, they use it to different effect.

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk uses an unreliable narrator that is suffering from severe insomnia. And as the (unnamed) narrator's mental health deteriorates, his mind forms a new personality to escape the problems of his life. This new personality, however, is portrayed to the reader as a different character altogether (Tyler Durden), and it's not until the end that it is revealed that Tyler Durden and the narrator are the same person. Before that revelation though, the reader is led to believe that Tyler Durden is an actual person that the narrator has meet; they converse; fight each other; and engage in destructive activities together – destructive activities that are the brain child of Tyler Durden. The reader and

narrator have no idea he's a figment of the narrator's imagination until towards the end, when the narrator himself, discovers that he is actually Tyler Durden.

Using an unreliable narrator that is a "madman" in terms of schizophrenia, and creating a character that would turnout to be a figment of his imagination, was certainly something I considered in the early development stages. Employing an unreliable narrator similar to the one Palahniuk uses in *Fight Club*, would enable me to have a twist in the ending that no one saw coming. However, there was one main reason why, by my reckoning, this type of psychological unreliable narration wouldn't work in the thesis. The events I wanted to conceal from the reader happened in the past. The events that unfold in *Fight Club* are written in the present tense. Therefore, it was easy for Palahniuk to conceal the narrator's unreliability because we the reader have to perceive Tyler Durden to be a real character that the narrator meets along the way. Then from that moment on they interact as if they are two separate entities until the end. Take this passage for example:

> When we invented fight club, Tyler and I, neither of us had ever been in a fight before. If you've never been in a fight, you wonder. About getting hurt, about what you're capable of doing against another man. I was the first guy Tyler ever felt safe enough to ask, and we were both drunk in a bar where no one would care so Tyler said, "I want you to do me a favour. I want you to hit me as hard as you can. (p. 52).

If you're reading that for the first time, even with the knowledge of the narrator's insomnia, it would be pretty hard to perceive the character of Tyler Durden as anything but real. If I was going to develop an unreliable narrator that had this level of mental illness, I'd have to create a character who was a figment of the narrator's imagination in the past. And then, like in *Fight Club*, that character would have to coerce him into doing something he couldn't do himself – murder his wife. If I did that, such a character would have to pop-up again in the present tense of the thesis and talk the narrator into doing something similar. But if that happened, the narrator's forced solitude, abandonment issues, and budding relationship with Heather would be compromised. So, with that logic, I ruled this type of "madman" out.

The next avenue I explored in the development process was employing an unreliable narrator similar to that of Hunter S. Thompson in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Thompson's approach was of particular interest to me because his book is a non-fictional memoir. Since I wanted elements of realism in the thesis, and for it to read like a fictive memoir, his use of unreliable narration was worth considering. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson reflects on a weekend he spent in Las Vegas under the influence of drugs and alcohol. And through his use of these external influences, he as the narrator becomes unreliable. As can be seen in the opening passage of the book:

> We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like 'I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive....' And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming: 'Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?'
> Then it was quiet again. My attorney had taken his shirt off and was pouring beer on his chest, to facilitate the tanning process. 'What the hell are you yelling about?' he muttered, staring up at the sun with his eyes closed and covered with wraparound Spanish sunglasses.
> 'Never mind,' I said. 'It's your turn to drive.' I hit the brakes and aimed the Great Red Shark toward the shoulder of the highway. No point mentioning those bats, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough (p. 1).

Aside from being one of my favourite passages of all time, you can see that the narrator is clearly misjudging the world around him but conveying that information to the reader literally. Therefore he is a "madman" in the sense that he is hallucinating (through drugs and alcohol) and seeing things that aren't there but he doesn't realise it – just like the narrator in *Fight Club*. Therefore, he narrates the events that unfold to the reader as if they're happening for real. So his narration, in his mind, is reliable.

This type of "madman" was not without its merits, and I did entertain the concept (albeit briefly) of developing a narrator that could conceal the events of his past through external influences. However, there were two reasons why I thought it wouldn't work in the thesis. Firstly, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a non-fictional memoir that reads more fictionalised than most of the fictive works I've read (baring in mind that I'm not a Fantasy or Sci-Fi enthusiast). And if I was to use an unreliable narrator that was crazy, and would deceive the audience and

himself on account of drugs and alcohol, I could see any semblance of realism being picked up and flown out the window by a large bat that swooped down out of the sky. And secondly, it doesn't provide a platform for a twist ending. The reader right from the outset knows he is an unreliable narrator.

As is also the case in *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. The revelation at the end that the narrator, Patrick Bateman, is unreliable is not so surprising because it is strongly hinted at throughout the novel. The reader is lead to believe that the narrator is a psychotic serial killer but the narrator's account is laden with contradictions and so many so that one starts to wonder if everything is as it seems. In fact, some scenes are so implausible (i.e. the narrator killing a child in broad daylight just to see if he can get away with it) that, on a person level, the ending—when it's revealed that he wasn't a serial killer and that those scenes in the novel are just delusional fantasies—was a formality. Thus, any chance of a twist ending, or realism for that matter, is lost.

After realising that the development of a "madman" would not be a good fit for the thesis, I turned my attention to another type of unreliable narration that could possibly enable me to convey the intended plot to the reader: "The Liar." There were two books that I took under advisement when exploring this kind of unreliable narrator: *Attonment* by Ian McEwan; and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. Both the novels fit the criterion that Riggan's outlines for "The Liar;" they both use unreliable narrators of sound cognition that deliberately misrepresent themselves and lie to the reader. And when I re-familiarised myself with the texts, I soon came to the conclusion that this type of unreliable narrator could allow me to have an ending with a twist, and an ending that warrants further consideration. Ultimately (to use the literary device of foreshadowing), I'd develop an unreliable narrator that was influenced primarily by *The Life of Pi.*

Atonement did, at first, appeal to me as a possible template for developing an unreliable narrator because the narrator in McEwen's novel conceals information from the reader until the end. However, even though the narrator in *Atonement* is a "Liar," McEwen uses unreliability to minimise the effect of the narrators dubious past, rather that obscure it altogether. The reader learns early on in the piece that the narrator has done something undesirable in her past (falsely

accusing the male lead of being a rapist) but we are lead to believe that she has "atoned" for her sins.

Furthermore, although the unreliable narration in *Atonement* achieves an unexpected twist by misleading the reader as to the repercussions of the narrator's past conduct, the narrator herself is not the main character in the story. The events that unfold in the book are caused by the narrator, but the story focuses on how her past conduct altered the lives of the lead male and female protagonists. Therefore, when the twist at the end comes, it does force the reader to re-evaluate their perception of the story but more in terms of the lead characters, rather than the narrator herself.

All the fictional works mentioned above had characterises of unreliable narration that I could relate to in terms of the thesis, however, neither text individually or collectively fit the mould of the specific type of narrator I wanted (as outlined in the introduction). But one novel that did seem to mirror my ideology, or rather, my ideology mirrored the novel, was *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel.

It may not seem like it if you read the synopsis of *Life of Pi* and then the synopsis of the thesis, but the development of an unreliable narrator in the thesis was inspired by Martel's novel. The narrator in *Life of Pi* tells the story of how he came to be shipwrecked with a Tiger, Zebra, Orangutan, and a Hyena. In the narrator's account of events, the Hyena kills the Zebra and the Orangutan for food, then the tiger kills the Hyena. However, at the end of the book, when the story is dismissed by Japanese officials investigating the shipwreck, the narrator offers another account. In the narrator's "second story," he is adrift not with animals but with his mother, a sailor, and the ships cook. In this version, the cook kills his mother and the sailor out of starvation, but then the narrator murders the cook for the same reason. The investigators draw parallels between the two stories and determine that the Zebra symbolises the sailor; the Orangutan his mother; the Hyena the cook; and the Tiger the narrator.

Since the first version of the story is so far-fetched, the reader has to perceive the second version as being the real account of events, therefore making the narrator unreliable. He concealed and "lied" about the actual events in the first version to obscure his immoral and discreditable past conduct, i.e. killing the cook. This is

where I drew my inspiration for the thesis from. The concealment in the first version provides a twist in the ending and forces the reader to make a choice about which story they will accept. Being that the narrator in the first version is so likeable and that the Hyena is so undesirable, it's a difficult choice to make when compared with the actual version in which the narrator murders the cook. Does the reader change their perception and accept the actual account of events? Or does he/she ignore that version and their moral standard in favour of the first version?

It was this type of unreliable narration that I decided to use as a template for developing my own unreliable narrator. I identified the unreliable narrator in *The Life of Pi* has having similar characteristics that I wanted to explore in the thesis.

Firstly, I wanted to use an unreliable narrator of sound cognition who could conceal, mislead, and obscure the misconduct of his past until the end, and therefore create an ending with a twist. The following excerpts from the thesis highlight how I developed an unreliable narrator that could deceive.

> I reached the top of the old cliff track that connected Murrays Bay with Shelly Cove. Exhausted but relieved. I let the black rubbish bag that was thrown over my shoulder slump to the ground and then I joined it…
>
> I got down on all fours and inched my way forward, dragging the last traces of my marriage behind me...
>
> After a short while the warmth dyed out and I came to the end of memory lane. It was time to take out the trash. I grabbed the rubbish bag and returned to the edge. Round and round like a windmill it went, then out into the darkness…gone…but not forgotten…
> (Chapter one)

In this excerpt, the (unnamed) narrator in the thesis is deliberately "concealing" and withholding information from the reader by not telling them what the contents of the rubbish bag are. The reader has no idea the narrator is unreliable and, hopefully, assumes that the bag merely contains bad memories of the past. It's not until the end when the narrator is revealed to be unreliable that the seeds of unreliability planted here will be perceived as so. Then the reader can discern that the bad memoires of the narrators past are the dismembered body part of his wife and her lover.

> Christ! Had it been a year already? Might as well of been yesterday as far as I was concerned. An entire year and I still hadn't been able to put the pieces back together – I was beginning to think I never would. I kept reliving the night she left me over and over again in graphic detail. The night my world turned to black. I never saw it coming; I got home from work and her bags were packed. She had outgrown me and took off with her boss. And since wives scarcely left their husbands in those days—not in Murrays Bay anyway—I was the talk of the town…
> (Chapter one)

Here, the narrator is intentionally "misleading" the reader into the whereabouts of his wife. She's gone alright, that much is true, but she's gone from existence. It is, again, unlikely that the reader will interpret that information as being untrustworthy.

> That's not anxiety,' he [Carl] said, 'its paranoia. And if you can't get these delusions out of your head, maybe you should just fuck-off home. But I'm doing it with or without you – because there aint no way I'm going back to that fucking town…I can't.'
>   Murrays Bay flashed through my mind. 'Neither can I.'
> (Chapter 6)

In this excerpt, the narrator is "obscuring" the reason as to why he can't go back to Murrays Bay. The reader will interpret his reluctance to go home along the same lines as Carl's reluctance. Not because the police are getting closer to discovering who buried those bodies in Murrays Bay.

Secondly, I wanted to create certain characters (i.e. Carl and Christina) that the reader would perceive to be similar to that of the Hyena in *Life of Pi* – undesirable. The more the reader dislikes these characters, the more they will like the narrator…In theory anyway. Carl, for instance, is designed to be unlikable through his greed, selfishness, eventual betrayal of the narrator, and obsession with image. And although it is through Carl that the revelations of the narrator's past begin to surface, and the narrator kills him in the same vein as the narrator killed the cook in *Life of Pi* (as a matter of survival, or, in other words, kill or be killed). The reader will, fingers crossed, only have a small amount of empathy for him.

Finally, when it is revealed that the narrator is unreliable, the twist in the ending will challenge the reader's perception of the narrator and the story. What will the

reader make of the narrator now he/she knows the truth? Will they continue to like this guy, if they ever did at all, and perceive it to be a happy ending (somewhat twisted, but happy)? Or will they now only perceive the narrator in terms of his murderous ways?

Unfortunately, I can't answer those questions; I can only hope I've placed them inside the head of the reader.

CONCLUSION & "POST-PRODUCTION"

Whether my motivation for developing an unreliable narrator, and the actual unreliable narrator I created align is something I'll never know. The answer lies in the eye of the reader. However, for the purposes of this exegesis, I thought it was important to focus on how and why I chose an unreliable narrator to convey the plot to the reader, rather than explore the themes etc within the exegesis.

As an aspiring author, I'm not necessarily concerned with themes, I let them write themselves. All I'm worried about is entertaining the reader and keeping them entertained once they've put the book down (of-course, there is always the possibility there will be no such book to put down). That's why I decided to develop and employ the type of unreliable narrator I did in the thesis. I know the reader's experience is going to be different depending on the individual, but as long as they're entertained, as long as I can take them away from the pressures of the "real world" for a few hours at a time, then what more can you ask for.

In terms of "post production," your guess is as good as mine. But I think I am going to try and get it published commercially. Who knows, I might get lucky. Maybe then I won't have to get a full-time job.

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