

Sleepwalkers Songs

By James George

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

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Abstract

Sleepwalkers Songs is a multiple viewpoint, multiple time-frame tandem narrative ‘siege story’ featuring – as its Story in the Present – a cast of five members of a loosely assembled family journeying the length of New Zealand in a classic Cadillac to go to a country music festival. Each of the family members is on the journey for different reasons, with their hidden agendas and conflicts providing the story’s electricity. The various Stories in the Past of the characters’ lives are interwoven with the present day narrative, as backstory, as energetic plot and to build up layers of conflict, tension and misunderstanding. Conflict that threatens to (and does) ignite at various points on the journey and detonates in the story’s third act. The story’s central action is a moment of trauma that permeates all the character’s lives in different ways, to corrosive effect, and is played out in ever increasing (flashback) snatches throughout the novel. The truth of this is revealed finally, in the story’s climax.

The accompanying exegesis interprets and theorizes the thesis through several reference frames: the conceptualization, practice, and developmental issues inherent in creating a multiple viewpoint polyphonic siege narrative, the interweaving of written story with narrative forms and iconography found in folk and country music and genre Western cinema, and role of folk and country music as a form of working class literature.

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 any other institution of higher learning.

Candidate's signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'James George', written in black ink.

James George

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Imaginary Westerns: An exegesis to Sleepwalkers Songs.

James George

What is most personal is most universal.

— Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of
Psychotherapy*, 1961

All societies end up wearing masks.

— [Jean Baudrillard](#), *America*, 1988

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1. Introduction: primary threads

Imaginary Westerns is an exegesis accompanying the creative thesis – the novel *Sleepwalkers Songs*. The novel explores themes based around the legacy of traumatic experience on individuals and relationships. In terms of both an aesthetic and as a form of paratextual narration many of the novel's voice stylings are framed within discourses connecting with American Country and Folk music and genre Western movie iconography and mythology.

This exegesis engages with specific narratives in the genre of the cinematic Western, and in American Roots music that contextualize and inform the novel and its fictive world. I am using the term American Roots as defined by Santelli (2002) in *American Roots Music*.

In the 20th century, American roots music - gospel, blues, country, western, folk, Cajun, zydeco, tejano and Native American - was invented and nurtured in small communities and spread across the nation and the world. Eventually these traditional forms gave rise to the popular music that conquered the world: rhythm and blues, rockabilly, and rock and roll. (Santelli, 2002, p. 1)

It will also situate the novel within the framework of a multiple viewpoint, multiple timeframe, polyphonic siege narrative, then interrogate the process of constructing such a narrative.

2. Synopsis: Sleepwalkers Songs

It is 1985 and a young country singer Kathleen (later 'Cali') Shea wins a singing contest in the New Zealand province of Central Otago's Gibbston Valley, the prize for which is a six month, expenses paid trip to try and 'make it' in country music's version of 'Oz'¹ – Nashville, Tennessee. Her trip turns out to be traumatic and she returns home almost a year later, profoundly changed, and struggling to function. The text then employs its first act of anachrony, via a proleptic repositioning to a couple days before Easter weekend, 2014. This timescape then becomes the novel's 'story-in-the-present.'

¹ From 'The Wizard of Oz,' Victor Fleming's 1939 'road' movie about a group of travellers all of search of the one key quality they believe they lack – to be complete.

In April, 2014, the leaves on the trees in West Auckland are turning rust red, as the city slips into autumn. On the upper reaches of the Waitemata harbour the remnants of a once close – though ‘accidental’ – family live in a state of semi-siege, haunted by past events. The family, Naomi, a young film-maker, Cali, her former foster-mother and country singer, and Gil, an ex-Hollywood Western actor and a man Naomi has thought of as ‘uncle’ since her fractured childhood, go about their days in a barely observed emotional truce. Nine years earlier the family included two other members: Cali’s natural son, Aran, whom Gil raised as his own son, and Jackson, another foster-child of Cali’s and a foster brother - and ultimately lover to – Naomi. Their loss (Aran through his death – aged 18 - and Jackson through his sudden departure and disappearance at aged 19, two days after Aran’s death) has quietly poisoned Naomi’s relationship with both Cali and to an extent, Gil. Her own refusal to come clean with the secrets of the night Aran died and her growing sense that she must now grapple with those secrets, drives many of the novel’s opening sections. Naomi herself now has twin boys of her own, but she has told them little about their father – Jackson. And Jackson, whose whereabouts are unknown, is not even aware that he has two sons. He has not been in contact for years.

In the opening of the 2014 narrative an envelope arrives, but contains only a single early autumn leaf. Naomi has seen these solo leaves before, as Jackson sent them to her in the 12 months after he disappeared in 2004, but not since. And for the first time this envelope gives a return address – a small town in the plateau country of Central Otago named Glenkyle. This sets Naomi thinking of an ongoing conversation Cali now seems to have abandoned, of one day going back to visit her own roots in Central Otago, and to revisit the landscapes that influenced her music. Naomi convinces a very reluctant – and alcoholic – Cali, that now is the time to make that pilgrimage, but she doesn’t tell her the whole story, nor of her own ulterior motive for heading south. So they all set off in Gil’s 1953 Cadillac Eldorado convertible, to drive from west Auckland most of the length of the country, to Central Otago. Each of them knowing only some of the reasons they are on the trip, each of the cast having a different piece of the puzzle. In their journey further south, each characters’ individual story arcs and motivations are revealed piece by piece until each of them, primarily driven by Naomi’s secrets, are forced to confront the truth.

3. Process: Preparing the Ground

One logical point of beginning any engagement with a writer's creative practice and a manuscript's development would be a discussion about the stages of the creative process itself, specifically the gestation of this novel. My earliest thought on this text was simply a title: *Theme from an Imaginary Western*, which was a slight rewording of the title for a song written by Scottish musician (and rock star) Jack Bruce and English lyricist Pete Brown, in 1969. The title intrigued me, particularly its use of the term 'Imaginary' coupled with what would already be perceived as a journey into the imaginary – filmic Westerns. An imaginary of an imaginary has implications that could seep into all branches of storytelling. In addition the lyrics use imagery that echo the sprawling epic Western movies of mid-twentieth century film directors such as John Ford, whose visual motifs had always resonated with me – more so than the film's stories.

When the wagons leave the city
 For the forest, and further on
 Painted wagons of the morning
 Dusty roads where they have gone
 (Brown and Bruce, 1969)

The wagon train motif of the song is itself metaphoric, as the song's authors were reflecting on the life of touring rock musicians, as Jack Bruce himself was said to be tiring of touring at that point.² I progressed from that single title image to a set of starter notes for what was envisaged as a novel.

Road story
 Four key characters
 Setting partly in New Zealand, partly in the U.S.
 Features country music, Western movies, in its visual and descriptive voice

² In November 1968, Jack Bruce had performed his final show with the British supergroup *Cream*, and in 1969 was taking time out to work on solo projects. His 1969 album *Songs for a Tailor* included *Theme from an Imaginary Western*.

My fiction writing practice prior to *Sleepwalkers Songs* had been concerned – more by tenuous connections and tensions than by any grand design – with a few recurring concerns mobilized as tropes in the texts themselves, or as thematic underpinnings. My work had repeatedly explored how traumatized individuals and social groupings (primarily family relationships) work to make meaning and rebuild identity as part of dealing with traumatic experience. My previous work contextualized that ‘breakage’ and recovery within the contexts of war narratives, partly because the incendiary mechanisms of war are so visible and so dramatic (and therefore fertile ground for long-form storytelling), and partly because war narratives (like so many growing up in the post-WW2 generation) had informed my own family history. I had stepped into their legacy in my cultural upbringing.

It became clear though that remaining entangled in these (war story) contexts also carried a danger for the author – which this novel is partly a reaction to – that the enormities of those conflicts could lead my work to slip into melodrama, in particular relying on big events to give me a ‘big’ story. There is another danger, as Vaughn (1989) notes in her discussion of the inner mechanisms of Ernest Hemingway’s 1924 short story collection:

Any writer responding to the atrocities of World War One at that time (the 1920s) could have complained, as Philip Roth did in 1961, that "The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist." (Vaughn, 1980, p. 224)

Further interrogation of my past practice identified though that my primary concern was never war itself or even the specific legacies of war, but was and is **fallout**. Fallout from choices made, choices avoided, actions taken/actions avoided, paths taken/paths avoided. In a previous text *Ocean Roads*, (2006), I had explored this via characterizations of New Zealand soldiers recently returned from the Vietnam War, and scientists involved in the first atomic bomb project of World War Two. These questions led to a design of the characters for this novel that would situate them within some form of family grouping, though I was not interested in portraying a traditional family. This thinking then intersected with another recurring story trope in my own work, that of a missing person, a person who leaves, or is cast out of, the family unit. This trope

is not unusual in New Zealand writing, the most famous example of which would be John Mulgan's novel *Man Alone* (1939)

In *his survey of New Zealand literature*, McCormick (1959) extrapolates out from Mulgan's specific example to a recurring motif:

. . . the solitary, rootless nonconformist, who in a variety of forms crops up persistently in New Zealand writing. (McCormick, 1959, p. 130)

In terms of authorial framing the missing person narrative also fundamentally interrogates fiction on a more practice level basis. Writing about Michael Ondaatje's *English Patient* (1992) John Bolland (2002) notes in *Michael Ondaatje's English Patient, a Reader's Guide*:

The novel is at one level a wartime spy story and the context of espionage reinforces its concern with the unstable shifting self. As Catherine Bush suggests to Ondaatje in an interview, his narratives are often structured around the search for a missing person, and he agrees that there is a physical parallel with the writer trying to get a fix on someone or trying to understand or hold someone long enough to understand him. (Bolland, 2002, p.34)

The missing person narrative of escape or banishment had resonance with another concern I was keen to explore, in terms of my writing practice, the contemporary 'road story.' Again, my previous practice had housed examples of this trope within larger narrative lines, but not included a text that was wholly or mostly a road story. In considering narrative strategies and characterizations, one reflection of the missing person/road story confluence I was interested but didn't want to directly explore was the often enacted narrative of a (predominantly) male character's need to escape the domestic³. As Crang puts it in *Cultural Geography* (1998):

³ *Thelma and Louise*, Director Ridley Scott's 1991 movie (from Callie Khouri's script) is an example of a road story, featuring an escape from domesticity, undertaken by female characters.

We have then, a particular configuration of space and time, a dream about male flight from domesticity – linking man, machine and mobility in a potent combination. Indeed, only in the last ten years . . . have road movies such as *Thelma and Louise* challenged this basic foundation. (Crang, 1988, p. 89)

Other examples I perceived as being more resonant with what I had in mind were the solo stories-within-a-story undertaken by two of the Maori characters in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984). In these, Joe (in the section: *The Kaumatua and the Broken Man*) and Kerewin (in the section: *The Woman at the Wellspring of Death*) are on the road in response to traumatic experience. In both cases, the first steps on the road (as they often are) are metaphoric for the beginning of an internal journey, and are prompted, as in *Sleepwalkers Songs*, by a need to both escape from a traumatic event and to eventually come to an at least partial understanding of culpability in that event. In Hulme's story, the break from the character's surroundings is expressed via signifiers of both otherness, and turning points, in the physical landscape:

'Here?' says the bus driver, incredulously. 'Here?'

'Here,' says Joe.

'But it's the middle of bloody nowhere!'

'That doesn't matter. I can walk to where I'm going.'

The bus pulled away in a rising whine of gears. The late afternoon sun glinted on the back window until it turned a corner. The noise faded. (Hulme, 1984, p. 335)

The bus driver's incredulity voiced in dialogue takes the place of a diegetic narrator's descriptions of the particular locale's isolation (and by reflection the character's isolation). Hulme therefore enlists the bus driver as an expository force. In addition the whine of gears can symbolize the difficulty of the 'break' and the bus turning a corner (and therefore leaving Joe alone, not just on the road, but with his conscience) signals the end of one piece of narrative and the beginning of another.

In *The Bone People* there is a strong sense of letting go of the intoxicating and illusory sense of agency and potential to shape the immediate world around the characters. Hulme's Maori characters are striated through with the legacy of colonial conquering of the whenua (land), so if anything are re-claiming rather than claiming.

But ultimately the territory they are reclaiming is their sense of cohesive self. In this sense their stories do echo Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939) in being framed as potential redemption narratives, or perhaps cleansing narratives.

In *Sleepwalkers Songs* I have sometimes deployed physical landscapes for their metaphoric and symbolic power as much as for their tactile reality as physical spaces. In this sense I am externalizing the character's inner reality via the landscape. An example would be the Desert Road of the North Island's central plateau, when Gil stands alone against the mountain backdrop. In this passage the narrative employs imagery from Gil's own history, but in a New Zealand context.

Gil crouches and takes a handful of dusty dirt, lets it sieve through his fingers. He looks across the plain to the foothills, almost purple in this autumn light, then over them to the mountains. He can hear the boys' voices in the distance, rising and falling as they ride in and out of the hollows. He takes another handful of dirt, closes his palm and fingers around it, then raises his closed fist against his lips.

He turns back to the highway. A white and green campervan passes, heading a line of cars waiting to pass it. (p. 107)

I have used the autumn light and the sounds of children playing as two opposite points on a temporal continuum, as metaphoric of Gil's own journey. Even the wagon train motif makes an appearance, in the guise of a camper van and a following queue. The motif of autumn is explored in the novel also via Jackson's sending on an autumn leaf to Naomi in the inciting moment of the 2014 story, as an indicator of both a change of season, and perhaps also of last chances. As other examples, in the sections towards the end of the novel in Central Otago the wind blowing through the yellow grasses, the layering of hills, act as a connecting device between the rural South Island New Zealand landscape and the American West, and also by extension, Cali and Gil's backstories.

4. Roots and Routes

In the reading I was then doing in and around country and folk music to background Cali's character, I found connective narrative tissue between my fictive explorations in

literature, dealing with traumatic experience, and many of the themes in Roots music. Dawidoff (1997), writing of country music icon Johnny Cash, notes: “‘Sometimes,’ he [Cash] writes in his album notes for *Unchained*, ‘at night, when I hear the wind, I wish I was crazy again.’” (p. 194). According to Dawidoff, Johnny Cash’s older teenage brother, Jack (who wanted to become a preacher), had died in devastating mishap while working with a table saw, while Johnny himself was out fishing. This haunted Johnny Cash for the rest of his life, and its sense of both loss and personal culpability pervaded much of his music and fuelled the psychological duality which manifested itself in his music (and much of his life) as constant battle between ‘good and evil’.

On the day he [Johnny Cash’s brother Jack] died, J.R. [Johnny Cash] had tried to persuade him to go fishing, but Jack felt he had to work [to support their family] When they got home . . . Ray Cash [father] got out of the car carrying a blood-soaked paper bag. “I want to show you,” he told J.R., leading him into the smokehouse. There, among the curing hog carcasses, he opened the bag and removed a shredded shirt, a pair of trousers torn open down to the crotch, and a thick leather belt that had been chopped in two. Cash had seen his mother cry, but never his father. “We’re gonna lose him, J.R.,” he said, and he wept. Cash ran out of the smokehouse. (Dawidoff, 1997, p. 179)

Recovery from trauma, and in fact survival narratives in general, were a common trope in early country music, especially in forms where its working-class origins, and therefore power disparity and often poverty, were explored. *Sleepwalkers Songs* opening protagonist, Cali Shea has two key traumatic experiences, the first of which echoes in everything she says and does, the theft of a piece of music she penned, which she feels was her one chance at stardom. She then gives birth to a son fathered by the ‘thief,’ (who becomes commercially successful with the song) so her ability to actively be a mother to the child is disrupted. Her son’s later death, at eighteen, is the second experience, and this then permeates the almost ten years between its occurrence (2004) and the opening of the novel’s 2014 storyline. With Cali, her depression brought on by trauma has the opposite effect to that of Johnny Cash; it silences her music.

Country music itself had a dark, disturbing heart, barely visible now in contemporary commercial country music. One example that personifies the conflicts

central to early country music was the banjo player Moran Lee 'Dock' Boggs. As O'Connell notes in his essay: *Down a Lonesome Road: Dock Boggs Life in Music* (1998):

Dock Boggs became famous in the conventional sense twice in his life- - became known, that is, to a public beyond his home precincts of Wise County, Virginia and Letcher County, Kentucky. In 1927 he recorded eight songs for the Brunswick recording company in New York City and a few years later, four songs for Lonesome Ace in Chicago, a one-man company which went under in 1929, shortly after the recordings were made. Dock's hopes for a recording career went with it. (O'Connell 1998, p. 3)

Boggs and his music enacted unnerving, almost gothic perceptions of rural life, featuring such Appalachian mountain staple plots and characters as murder ballads, train songs, prison songs, and, tales of sexual abuse. Even Boggs' sound, an unmelodic growl of a voice and a worryingly insistent claw-hammer banjo, was subversive, in that there were only ever a very few white bluesmen pre-World War Two. But his 'first' career stalled in the 1930s:

Dock was unable to embrace wholeheartedly a professional musician's way of life. His reluctance to take money was not the only sign of allegiance to older cultural practices incompatible with a musical career. Secular music had long been condemned as "the devil's work" by several influential religious sects in the mountains. His own parents belonged to one such sect. Dock always had a tangled conscience about his secular music-making being sinful. Long before the advent of commercial recordings and radio, especially gifted musicians were suspected of being "rambling men," unreliable, transient, too loose about the conventional forms of family and economic life. (O'Connell, 1998. p. 8)

That Boggs star faded in the Depression Era 1930s and the 1940s of World War Two perhaps also illustrated that ominous soundtracks perhaps don't fit well in deeply disturbing times, when people, and certainly power structures tend to reach for safer narratives.

My initial brainstorming for voices that would inform the novel, aesthetically and culturally, also led me into the territory of the ‘Road Story,’ one of the more beloved tropes of both roots music and Western movies as a genre. In the guise I was interested in pursuing, this pared down and gritty child of the classical quest narrative⁴, can be seen as a distinctly twentieth century artefact, in its dependence upon the age of the automobile and the highway, and the sense of the potential and freedoms they symbolize.

The Road, and especially its destination, in this context is sometimes mobilized as something of a mirage or simulacrum. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) French philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard posited his views on what he termed Simulacra, and begins the work with an epigraph purportedly from the biblical book of Ecclesiastes:⁵

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth - it is the truth which conceals that there is none’ (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 1)

In enacting through the novel’s the original metaphoric sense of Jack Bruce’s lyrics in *Theme for an Imaginary Western*, I was conscious of how so often genre Westerns and road movies I can be seen as simulacra in their purported accurate representations of America. Baudrillard posits successive (orders) phases of the image:

- it is the reflection of a profound reality
- it masks and denatures a profound reality
- it masks the absence of a profound reality
- it has no relation to any reality whatsoever
- it is its own pure simulacrum.

(Baudrillard, 1981, p. 6)

⁴ Quest narrative, as per Booker (2004): ...the archetype of the Quest, the plot which more explicitly than any other presents human life as a journey towards a goal of Self-Realisation.

⁵ Research on my part on this quote’s provenance, in terms of origin, leads me to think that it never in fact appears in the biblical book of *Ecclesiastes*. In which case it is perhaps an intended irony on Baudrillard’s part.

Much of the representation of 'America', and American identity as concepts, within the framework of the 'west' in genre Western movies are in themselves copies of copies of copies, to the point where they become imaginary spaces with no real original referent, except in the viewer's multiple viewings of the copies and in their imagination. They would then fit into Baudrillard's third and fourth orders of simulacra:

- it masks the absence of a profound reality
- it has no relation to any reality whatsoever.

Simulacra though can become powerful referencing devices, in the process of defining identity via storytelling, sometimes with unintended comedic irony. As Neil Campbell notes in the introduction to: *Post-Western: Cinema, Region, West* (2013):

In 2003 stories started to appear about the destruction of "Laramie Street," a Warner Brothers back lot used in the filming of many Hollywood Westerns since the 1930s. As one report put it, "It's an old Southern California story: Tear down a piece of history, replace it with a slice of suburbia." But in this case, the bulldozed site is not a real place but a part of the collective cinematic imagination: Warner Bros.' legendary outdoor set, Laramie Street, where the likes of Errol Flynn, Randolph Scott, James Garner, Clint Walker and, more recently, Jeff Bridges and Bruce Campbell played cowboys, lawmen, outlaws and cavalry riding their horses, firing their six-shooters and romancing saloon gals and schoolmarms." (Campbell, 2013, pp. 1-2)

Cowboy and Indian Westerns representations of a white nation forged upon a terra nullius in acts of courage against a marauding foe (who were actually defending their homeland) functioned as powerful mythological tropes, for a long time relatively uncontested. It wasn't until the 1960s in mainstream cinema, with revisionist westerns such as John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn* (Ford, 1964) with its sense of an apology for the constant framing of Native Americans solely as obligatory adversaries, empty of emotional and psychological depth. Though Ford's film still has white protagonists and is framed through white characters' sense of injustice as an insult to *their* sense of

decency (rather than empathy for the Indians themselves), the treatment of the Cheyenne by the American government is at least heavily critiqued. This much more contested space opened up a troubled future for the genre Western, which partly saw its demise as a mass-appeal commercial artefact. Bergland, suggested in *Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, (2000) that:

Ghosts haunt American literature because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject. (Bergland, 2000, p. 22)

Some of my own early movie engagement was with late 1960s and early 1970s road movies, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) and *Two Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971). These films were building on a new way of looking at travelling motifs, not as journeys of discovery or ownership or the forging of identity, but in far more random and often chaotic narratives. In 1965 and 1966, Monte Hellman directed two movies shot one after the other, and involving many of the same actors: *The Shooting*, and *Ride in the Whirlwind*, two of the most sparsely wrought Western 'road' movies, which subvert the grand pioneering narratives of D.W. Griffith and John Ford. In his critique of these two now iconic cult films, which barely caused a ripple at time of release, film critic Peter Sobczynski (2014) states that:

Even in the latter days of the (Western) genres heyday, when the once-simplistic sagas of good guys and bad guys gave way to films that critiqued the earlier approach while offering new levels of psychological nuance, one generally did not see oaters that found their characters wandering about aimlessly while trying to come to terms with their place in the universe instead of the usual acts of derring-do. And yet, that was the bold approach taken by Monte Hellman in *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind*, and the results, for the few that were lucky to see them, were two of the most audacious examples of the genre ever produced. (Sobczynski, 2014, para. 1)

Some of these narratives share lyrical contexts with other forms of roots music, with its lack of traditional heroes and a lack of a clearly positioned morality, or a clear binary between good and evil.

At the same time Dock Boggs was drifting out of commercial music, some of the (later) iconic Mississippi Delta bluesmen were first being recorded. Lyrics in American Roots music songs, echoing the traditional ballads of the musicians' countries of origin, were often an attempt to convey the complex familial and economic power relations of working class people. The Mississippi Delta Bluesmen's lyrics had a meta-physical dimension that added portents of doom and the vengeance of a punitive God to their narratives.

The African-American bluesmen and songsters inhabited their own often horrific trailways, with their music infused with the psychological legacy of three hundred years of slavery. Famed (posthumously) bluesman Robert Johnson in such titles as *Crossroad Blues* (1936), *Hellhound On My Trail* (1937), *Traveling Riverside Blues* (1937), created dark, brooding road narratives wrought with existential dread, and with voicings reminiscent of the Biblical *Book of Revelations*.

I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
 I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
 Asked the Lord above, "Have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please"
 Standin' at the crossroad, baby, risin' sun goin' down
 . . .
 I believe to my soul, now, poor Bob is sinkin' down
 (Johnson, 1936)

Monte Hellman's cinematic narratives had a contemporary echo in American singer/songwriter Townes van Zandt. In these lyrics the road is the mode of the protagonist's descent into hell, but it wasn't the road to hell played out as a cautionary morality tale, as per iconic Country and Western singer Hank Williams' *Lost Highway* (Payne, 1948), with its sense of a good man ruined by bad choices. In Van Zandt's lyrics, such as *Waiting around to Die*, (1968) there are no choices to be had.

Sometimes I don't know where this dirty road is taking me
 Sometimes I can't even see the reason why
 I guess I keep on gamblin', lots of booze and lots of ramblin'
 It's easier than just a-waitin' 'round to die
 ...
 A friend said he knew where some easy money was
 We robbed a man and brother did we fly
 The posse caught up with me, drug me back to Muskogee
 It's two long years, just a-waitin' 'round to die
 ...
 (Townes van Zandt, *Waiting around to Die*, 1968)

Van Zandt's narratives inhabit similar territory to Hellman's masterpiece, *Two Lane Blacktop*, (1971) which is both a re-imagined mechanized Western (the 'riders' have a hotted-up 1955 Chevrolet instead of horses) and a road movie, without ever really appealing to the familiar story tropes of either – and without appealing to the entertainment needs of its (logical) demographic. Even the scenes where the two protagonists drag race for money – in theory, the heart of why the two protagonists are on the road in the first place – are deliberately presented without any appreciable tension. As if to close the gap between roots music and road movies, Hellman cast two musicians, singer/songwriter James Taylor and Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson as the two protagonists. Their non-actor performances are suitably untheatrical. The movie, funded by a major studio (Universal Pictures), unlike Hellman's previous work, and its poor financial return signalled the end of the director's major studio career. *Two Lane Blacktop* is a movie that both defies and invites criticism, but at its release was met mostly with silence. As Adam Webb (2001) writes in an online essay in preparation for his later book: *Dumb Angel: The Life and Music of Dennis Wilson* (2001):

It was released in 1971 after all, when the road movie genre was at its peak – a by-product of the endemic introspection sweeping the remnants of the US counterculture as it limped wearily into the new decade. Collectively Woodstock, Monterey, Free Love and LSD achieved little of what they had promised. Altamont and Manson had exposed the fraudulent Hippy Dream, LBJ's 'War On Poverty' had failed, conflict in Vietnam had escalated, and arch

conservative Richard Nixon was secure in the White House. . . . He (Hellman) took the road movie genre far beyond the failed dreams of *Easy Rider*. Intelligent and thought provoking, *Two-Lane* in all its glorious open-ended detail was a perfect allegory to the early 1970s. (Webb, 2001, para. 4)

So 1971 was the time when road movies as symbols of the new energy of the counter culture lost steam, and also the time when the traditional Western as white pioneer actualization narrative entered its cinematic dotage. John Ford was dead, John Wayne had become a counter-culture enemy and even his supporters were bored with him: his last key role, *True Grit* (1969), had come, won him an Oscar, and gone. Ganser, Pühringer, Rheindorf (2006) wrote:

For one, the 1970s are the decade immediately following a shift of paradigm in the genre that began with the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in 1957 and found a filmic codification with the release of *Easy Rider* in 1969 (Cohan & Hark 6). In what we call the 'post-*Easy Rider*' era, the very term 'road movie' had entered the landscape of US popular culture. Secondly, with the advent of mass tourism and the crisis of home and the nation for the Vietnam generation, place and space as socially constituted categories were renegotiated in the road movie. Whereas in the decades before, the genre had articulated traditional American values like family, nationalism, and patriotism, the post-*Easy Rider* movies interrogated the old ideological securities and ultimately disrupted the notion of home whether as 'the family' or 'America.' (Ganser, Pühringer and Rheindorf, 2006, p. 2).

1971 is also the year I had one of the key characters of *Sleepwalkers Songs*, Gil Clancy, make his one successful movie – the big, family friendly epic *The Man from Colorado* – (the clichéd name is deliberate) then sink back into obscurity. On its arrival on the American cinema landscape of 1971 it already represented a bygone cinematic era. As Gil himself puts it in the novel:

'A few good years then everything changes,' he said. 'Instead of western actors needing inscrutable faces, immune to pain, they suddenly want guys who can shed tears, break to blubbing on screen. Show existential angst as one guy put

it, whatever the hell that is. Shoot up all their enemies, then shoot up all their friends. All the while cackling or grimacing. But my face never did show anything. Only my hands. All my history and the history of guys like me are in the cuts and nicks, the bent fingers. So my career stiff.' (p. 173)

In that passage, 'Shoot up all their enemies, then shoot up all their friends,' (p. 173), Gil is obliquely referencing the so called 'Spaghetti Westerns' of Sergio Leone with their amoral (by classic Hollywood genre Western standards) protagonists and lack of fixed positions of authority – e.g. sheriffs, marshals on one side and villains on the other. These films, particularly *A Fistful of Dollars* (Leone, 1964) *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966), and *Once upon a Time in the West* (Leone, 1968) became another nail in the coffin of the heroic genre Western. Neil Campbell notes in *The Rhizomatic West* (2008):

For some, Leone's analysis of capitalism and his interrogation of Hollywood codes constituted an 'anti-Western'; for others such as Lee Clark Mitchell, it was all about 'parody', 'spoofing', and 'wry mockery' of the classic Hollywood text via an 'impudent route.' (Campbell, 2008, p. 129)

By the end of the 1970s the big budget Western would go into a long hiatus, and road movies would mostly become just about expensive car-chase stunts. Both the Western landscape and the open road were losing not so much their symbolic power, but their psychological traction for American audiences tired of revisiting their rural roots. In wider discourse post-colonial theory contested white settler narratives, with the truth that colonised land was rarely empty, that pioneering and colonising societies often wrought ecological disaster and genocide. The road was never as open or as free as it was portrayed.

The geographical centres for Irish and Scottish musical influence in New Zealand were rural Canterbury and Otago, and for the USA the Appalachian mountains, in particular Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Much of it had a distinct working-class worldview and sense of power relations. Songs became methods of keeping solidarity, of stating political aims, of forging a distinct identity away from owners.

This view has lost much of its heat, as folk music has become more a musical and media form than a political necessity, and narratives in modern folk are more personal.

Folk music, unlike modern country, shared one commonality with the road stories of the counter culture era of the late 60s/early 70s - the voices (and narratives) featured in it came from people on the margins. Or as Frank O'Connor (1962), writing of the short story genre had it:

There is no character here with whom the reader can identify himself, unless it is that nameless horrified figure who represents the author. There is no form of society to which any character in it could possibly attach himself and regard as normal. In discussions of the modern novel we have come to talk of it as the novel without a hero. In fact, the short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged population group. . . . That submerged population changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. . . . These aren't just voices of those from underground but also of those standing against convention, marching to their own drummer and illuminating uncomfortable truths about the way we live. (O'Connor, 1962, pp. 17-19)

O'Connor's words speak to a much larger range of textual forms than just short fiction, though his central points about the form are still valid, and repeatedly brought out in contemporary short stories. But for me, as both reader and writer that lack of heroes, though the narrative may resemble a traditional quest, resounds. When the character of Cali arrives in Nashville in 1985, the city as a cultural centre is in a disrupted state, torn between its dying adherence and relevance to American Roots and Folk music, and the very lucrative market of country pop. This conflicting genealogy was in the process of distorting country music away from its clear-eyed portrayal of rural working class life towards a more cinematic reflection of conservative tropes – meta-narratives such as: designated authority, home, family, father, the conservative monumentality of America (only a decade past its much celebrated bi-centenary). Country music by 1985 reflected more a trust in the positions of power and authority, and a shift away from folk music's subversive origins. This was the era when country music (as a successful commercial and cultural entity) became a tight pattern of signifiers based around faith in metanarratives: God, America, authority. So country

music had cemented its reactionary leanings of the 1950s onwards, and epitomized a taking back from any of the dark counter-cultural narratives of Dock Boggs.

5. Voicing, plotting, and structuring the novel: an author's negotiation with the future text

Since this project was a novel, although I could harness in selected moments the specific cinematic and musical energy I was influenced by, the text required a novelistic framework, with a novel's language and a novel's modes of realization of its central characters (with the novel's more internally driven focus) and plot arcs. So conceiving such narratives contained within a novel – and one where a major part of the road component would take place in New Zealand, required thinking of my influences in transtextual terms, e.g. looking at, as French Narratologist Gerrard Genette puts it in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982):

. . . all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts (Genette, 1982, pp. 83-84.)

I decided not to develop a plotline about the search for the missing person from the 2004 narrative (Jackson) as it didn't have sufficient dramatic potential for character development and would simply take up space. It is covered briefly by Gil in conversation with Naomi.

'...I hired a private detective. He traced him via his school and his friends, to see if they'd heard. Then back to the foster service. The guy hit a wall when it came to Jackson's original family. He got information out of the service about Jackson, after some considerable prying, but the family was a mystery. It was like they'd never existed, like he'd been born at the age of five.' (p. 189).

Jackson's own decision to reconnect with Naomi, worked as a more effective catalyst to give the 2014 sequence sufficient early momentum, as Naomi was the one most emotionally affected by his disappearance. As she and Jackson had both been foster children, the connection between them was one of the novel's Character Story's emotional bridges. In this way, the fallout on the characters would be the key focus,

with plot elements included to increase pressure. In Monte Hellman's *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1966) the unfortunate cowboys Vern, Wes and Otis simply become hunted, mistaken for being part of the outlaw group they happened to camp next to and share food with. There is no plot line where they seek to have their innocence proven, and no one in the story interested in letting them prove it. The plot works as a vehicle to put the characters under emotional pressure, individually, and in terms of their relationship.

After some consideration I decided to delay the introduction of Jackson as a viewpoint character until the beginning of Act Two. His presence as a character is first noted on p. 22, when Naomi looks at the photograph of him (and Aran, and Naomi) stored on her tablet computer.

She flicks at the screen with her thumb. She opens a couple of files, then another, until a series of images fills the screen. She pauses her finger over one, then touches it.

A black-sand beach. A boy, another boy. A girl. Behind them terraces of surf layer away into the distance beneath shoals of grey and white cloud. The three of them are further apart than she remembers, even their slanting shadows don't touch. In the photo Aran's fringe is as wilful as ever. Jackson's face is angled down, as if he has seen something in the sand. And between them, Naomi has her hand raised, shielding her eyes from the sun. (p. 29)

The fact that he is just an image, and is coupled with Aran, (who is effectively also missing) alerts the reader to both his presence and absence. The developmental work from there to the beginning of Act Two, when Jackson appears, was aimed at exploring the legacy of both his presence in the character's emotional lives and psychological and absence in their physical world.

That playing with presence/absence is turned around in one of the novel's final scenes (in 2014) when Naomi gives the tablet computer to Jackson so he can scroll through the photos of the sons he has just found out he has.

He turns and looks at her. There are wrinkles at the edges of his eyes, and he has grown into his body. Tall and lean, his cheeks not as smooth as they once were, his hands sun-scored, his fingers rough. But he is still Jaks and now

she has a Jaks to put ahead of the one who stood on the jetty in the rain, telling her they [by inference, the police] would be coming.

‘It’s been too long,’ she says. ‘For, you know.’

He nods his head.

‘But still,’ he says.

She lifts the tablet from her backpack and hands it to him.

‘Every photo I every took of the boys is on here,’ she says, handing it to him. ‘Every one.’

‘Thank you.’

They hug, for a long time, his arms around her, his hands clasped. Then she turns towards the house. (p. 363)

So with that gesture Naomi refers to absence twice, firstly to note the effect of all the years they’ve spent apart, ‘It’s been too long,’ she says, ‘for, you know,’ inferring a re-uniting is problematic. Secondly since Jackson has now been ‘found’ it is the years he has not spent with the boys which is now the absence, which she addresses by her giving him access to their images.

I also made the decision early in my drafting to write Jackson’s character in the scenes where he is the perceiving protagonist in second person point of view. This required some focalizer gymnastics on the author’s part, as it may the audience. I identified this risk of endorsing and mobilizing too wide a spectrum of focalizing devices in that it may have a negative effect on the smoothness of the reading experience, but weighed that up against my task of trying to have the characters play out their narrative lines in the focalization and degree of psychic distance that best realized their interiority and motivations. A novel has sufficient scope in its methods, as much as in its scope of story possibilities to allow this experimentation. Second person point of view, employed in present tense narration and internal focalization, is still relatively uncommon in long form prose fiction, but is often deployed in interactive fiction, role playing games and game books, as well as in advertising. In a 1994 issue of *Style Magazine*, Monika Fludernik assembled an exhaustive bibliography of its use, from authors as diverse as Rainer Maria Rilke, Marguerite Duras, Tom Wolf, and Samuel Beckett, but only occasional full novel narratives. One example is Jay McInerney’s

Bright Lights Big City (1984), “You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head” (McInerney, 1984, p. 3). It is far more common in prose short fiction, or employed in a novel as a meta-fictional device that intervenes, via metalepsis, to directly speak to the audience on an extra-diegetic level, e.g.: Italo Calvino’s *If On A Winter’s Night A Traveller* (1979), ‘You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room’ (Calvino, 1979, p. 3).

Second person point of view can have the effect of blurring a direct connection with the perceiving character and it is at once intimate, almost to the point of confrontational (as the audience is being asked to feel as if they have a direct hand in the protagonist’s decisions and actions) but also distancing, as it’s never clear where this narrating voice is coming from. Jackson’s narration in second person has many of the qualities suggested by Pier (2010).

Monika Fludernik, in a special issue of *Style* devoted to second-person narrative, took fuller account of this form, noting for example the propensity of second-person narrators for present-tense narration, their tendency toward a certain complicity with the narratee and the affinity of such narration with interior monologue—features that are in no way incompatible with Genettian narratology. (Pier, 2010, p.9)

That ‘certain complicity with the narratee’ (Pier, 2010, p.9) can be potent. It also sets in play the various relations between the narrated story, the signifying narrative text and the narrating act. In the novel second person is deployed in two distinct contexts. The first is used to portray physical movement, without any implicit or explicit escalation of tension. For example:

The arrow headed flight of shags veers south when you cut down through the golden speargrass, through the mist rising off the alpine wetlands. Each beat of wings echo Grace’s hoofbeats as you tug on her reins and steer her west to cross the river that drains the snowbank. You ease her back, cut up through the scrub

and lichen and go on across the cirque of Scotty's Basin to where the snow tussock has ice on its tips. (*Sleepwalkers Songs*, pp. 130)

The second form of usage, which is more challenging to achieve is used in moments where the physical action is more visceral, therefore the reader's connection with and 'placement' in the story, is more intense:

The first time he kicked you your mother went at him with her fingernails and cut him but he swatted her away. You crawled into the corner of the room and crouched, wedged between the walls that came at you like fists. You looked through a web of your fingers, your wild breaths bouncing back from your raised palms. He stood over you with his fists balled and his chest rising and falling. But he didn't hit you this time.

She got that. (*Sleepwalkers Songs*, pp. 151)

As it was a priority to evoke and individualize the different character's emotional and psychological landscapes, it was important to individualize the perceiving and narrating voices. This required intra-diegetic narration with interior focalization and the use of vernacular voice in selected moments. Not just when their voice was externalized, (as in dialogue), but in the cadence of descriptive passages housed within their memory, e.g. in this passage when Gil recalls visiting his mother's grave:

The next day they hitched a couple of rides, man and boy, the man carrying an old carpet bag with loose threads shivering in the prairie wind. Early afternoon they stood next to the small stone in the dusty dirt, surrounded by a couple of dozen other stones. The boy held his crumpled coat in one hand, three stems of fading scarlet gilia flowers in the other.

Maire Eilis Clancy, nee Brady.

1916-1938.

The man looked down at the barren stone, at the sun and frost scoured grass around it. He turned and walked across to another grave, lifted a jar with some long dead greenery in it and tipped it over. He stepped over the marker stone to another plot with a small plinth. A pottery pitcher sat on a concrete

shelf. He peered inside the pitcher, then lifted it and poured some of its mottled water into the empty jar. He went back to the boy.

‘Well go on,’ he said, ‘you came to do this.’

The boy slid the flowers into the jar, tried to stand them upright but their stems were too long. He lifted them out again and broke the stems with his thumbnail and reset them, upright. He took the jar, set it on the edge of the marker stone, then brushed off his hands and looked up at his father.

‘What?’ said his father.

The boy just stared.

The man lifted off his hat, took a deep breath. (*Sleepwalkers Songs*, p. 84)

In that passage it is important to evoke the vernacular rhythms of Gil as a 75 year old ex cowboy in his plainspoken description of event, without embellishment, or obvious emoting. Any emotional connection had to be evoked from the images themselves, and their particularity, and a subtle inflection in the narrating voice.

In structuring the novel, tensions are brought out through dialogue and action between the core characters, in different timeframes. From the early draft work it became clear an anachronic structure was my most likely option, so I decided on a flashback narrative form. In this, the layering of the multiple timeframe narrative structure is crucial. In her review of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, Connolly (1992) suggests:

The developing relationships between these four people form the dynamic of the book, and the stories of their various past exploits are interwoven as its plot. (Connolly, 1992, para. 3)

The line about how the ‘various past exploits (are) interwoven as plot’ (Connolly, 1992, para. 3) has always resonated with me as both writer and reader, since I first read it when picking up the paperback version of *The English Patient* around 1993. It suggests a meta-plot in which key elements: rising tension, scene turning-points,

meta-structural turning-points, revelations (can be perceived to) play in a linear fashion, though across different timescapes

In conceiving and developing this story as a road ‘novel’ – while retaining my sense of the road trope in cinema and country music – was likely to be something of an act of translation, from cinema’s visual language and shot-to-shot structure to a prose fiction style that would include other forms of voice, in particular the whole issue of narrative focalization. As an author I am always conscious of the words of Roland Barthes, who, writing in *The Death of the Author* (1997) said:

A text is made of multiple writings, drawing from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations which make up the writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but its destination. (Barthes, 1977, p. 148)

This novel’s structure fits within a multiple viewpoint, multiple timeframe, polyphonic siege narrative. As realized, it is both a siege *and* a quest narrative. The term and concept of ‘siege’ has been given priority here based partly on the fact the Cadillac in the 2014 narrative is used as a crucible, a created and enclosed space in which to trap the characters and make them communicate and conflict, a space under siege. The forces impinging upon them though – guilt, inability to work through conflict, inability to be honest and open – are set in play by the trauma in their own backstories. These conflicts are interwoven between the characters, as they carry parts of each other’s’ backstories in their own psychological mapping and emotionality.

In general usage, the term crucible is often given two distinct (but complementary) definitions:

1. A ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures: *the crucible tipped and the mould filled with liquid metal*

2. A situation of severe trial, or in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new: *their relationship was forged in the crucible of war.* (Oxford Dictionaries, online, 2015)

I have framed the car as crucible in the novel as a metaphorical combination of both of these two meanings, in that the characters – once the journey has commenced – are confined within it on both a physical and emotional level. In this sense the car is metonymic of [?] the quest. In this way many siege narratives involve physically confining crucible environments to intensify emotional and physical tension, often appearing in mass appeal fiction as ships and lifeboats (*Titanic*), small towns (*High Noon*), and hijacked aeroplanes (*United 93*) to name just three.

The choice of the specific car – a 1953 Cadillac Eldorado⁶ convertible – is also deliberate. The 1953 Cadillac is a classic signifier of American post WW2 wealth, expansion and hubris (which contrasted greatly with much of Europe). The age of the classic American convertible coincided with the building of interstate highways, roadways to take those who could afford it away from the noise and grime of intense urbanism, where freedom could be automotively expressed. It allowed the affluent driver and passengers to bask in the resultant gaze of other – less well endowed – travellers. It is both imperial and imperious. The interstates meant the rural landscape then became a place to drive past or drive through, not to drive *to*. The 1953 Cadillac was also the car used in the inauguration parade of Dwight D. Eisenhower (in January, 1953), a fulcrum moment when the U.S.A. was declaredly post-war, though disquietingly sinking deeper into the Cold War. As a congruence between moments the American highway system was named (in 1957) *The Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways*, a laughably monumental term.

The fact that the character of Gil Clancy, the ex-rodeo cowboy and one-hit movie star owns such as Cadillac is a nod to the way the convertible replaced the horse (of Western iconography) as signifier of both mobility through – and traction in – the

⁶ According to www.netcarshow.com 'The name Eldorado was derived from the Spanish words "el dorado", the "gilded one"; the name was given originally to the legendary chief or "cacique" of a S. American Indian tribe. Legend has it that his followers would sprinkle his body with gold dust on ceremonial occasions and he would wash it off again by diving into a lake. The name more frequently refers to a legendary city of fabulous riches, somewhere in S. America... The name was proposed for a special show car built in 1952 to mark Cadillac's Golden Anniversary; it was the result of an in-house competition won by Mary-Ann Zukosky a secretary in the company's merchandising department.'

landscape. It is, as is the Western movie in the text, *The Man from Colorado*, also a symbol of the transitory nature of visible success. Even Cadillacs fade. A search of internet databases for 1953 Cadillacs showed just as many rusting in automotive graveyards as those still reclining in stately repose on the roads of 2014. In this sense the gorgeous Cadillacs of the 1950s share as much with the poet Shelley's fallen king Ozymandias – as ironic narratives of self-perceived grandeur - as they do American immediate post-war imperial iconography.

The America presented in the majority of Westerns up to Monte Hellman's metafictional works in 1965-1966, never really existed. These were critiqued further by the 'Spaghetti Westerns' of Sergio Leone, which presented a distortion of Western movie mythology that showed that the original artefacts themselves were gross distortions – or simulacra. They were simply representations built on other representations. A statement of the obvious, perhaps, but in *Sleepwalkers Songs* it goes to the characters belief in what they were filming and singing, the patterns of representation they were living out in their real lives. In the same way more intimate mythologies within the distinct context of the core characters' lives and relationships are malleable, to the point of distortion, to where the whole issues of character unreliability becomes a beginning, a starting point for focalization.

Conclusion:

My intent, if novelists have intent beyond creating the next scene, in writing *Sleepwalkers Songs* was a very practical one. To reveal characters and their conflicts and the effects of their back stories on their responses, actions and decisions in the present, and do so from several different directions. Perhaps to find a wider truth, or a working definition of truth, in specific moments. The decisions on modes and balance of focalizing devices, the narrative structure, the plot development and revelations, were based on what seemed to hold the most potential in concept to bring this out.

In terms of practice, my intention was to echo some of the mythology of filmic genre Westerns and American Roots music within and sometimes as, the storytelling modes of the text. In this sense mobilize the research into these fields as development within fictive spaces, with fictional characters and situations. The psychological inheritance of these storytelling tropes on me not just as an author but a creative thinker,

is considerable. More than I was aware. In New Zealand, and particularly for a writer of Maori descent, this has a curiously pervasive history, partly generational, partly an illustration of the power of some kinds of media iconography on an audience. Somerville (2010) writes of this phenomena of identification:

In the contemporary critical, scholarly, artistic, and political moment, Maori are most often understood as “Indigenous” and, in turn, Maori are expected to most closely resemble other groups also understood as “Indigenous.” The moment in which the Maori boys in Witi Ihimaera’s “Short Features” simultaneously desire to be “heroes and heroines” and desire to *not* be “Indian” interrupts assumptions we might be used to making in comparative Indigenous studies: we are surprised to hear the Maori boys identify with “white . . . heroes” instead of “Indian[s]”; and this surprise points to our expectation that they will identify with Indians. (Somerville, 2010, p. 663)

The children of my neighbourhood in the late 1960s invariably chose to play as cowboys, rather than be the oppositional force, be they Indians, or other cowboys portrayed as villains. They would imitate the walk, the exact angle a gun belt was worn, the laconic dialogue, and the quickfire violence. Then go home for lunch. My first viewings of the various texts described as anti-Westerns (Hellman, Leone, Hopper) disturbed the safety that this iconography provided. It was only years later when Westerns no longer held that pervasive power over my young mindset, that I connected with myriad narratives that critiqued the grand old Western from many reference frames: post-colonial, gender, indigenous studies, sociology, film criticism.

My intention with *Sleepwalkers Songs* then was to have echoes of those tropes either play out directly in scenes built from models or influences of other texts, or in scenes created to critique those models. In the way that the fleeing and frightened character of Wes has a ‘rider in the sunset moment’ in *Ride in the Whirlwind* (Hellman, 1966), which is simultaneously a mirroring, an homage, an irony and a disturbance of a deeply embedded trope and perhaps need within the audience, my intention was to have Cali and Gil represent some of the storytelling structures of American Roots music and genre Westerns, but be ‘themselves,’ characters forged **in** their own personal and relationship conflicts.

The story outgrew my original intentions, both in terms of its levels of individuality and intimacy. It had to, to be a novel in any meaningful sense. To use an overused term: the characters took over the story. Regarding this phenomena, I am basically with Vladimir Nabokov, speaking to *The Paris Review* in 1967:

My knowledge of Mr. Forster's works is limited to one novel, which I dislike; and anyway, it was not he who fathered that trite little whimsy about characters getting out of hand; it is as old as the quills, although of course one sympathizes with his people if they try to wriggle out of that trip to India or wherever he takes them. My characters are galley slaves. (Nabokov, cited by Gold, 1967, para. 16)

So the author's realization of the audience's need to feel the characters' journeys are authentically evoked and rendered and made human, is a more realistic phrase. In the doing, the first and second drafts were very much approaching the text from the inside out, finding the characters.

Sleepwalkers Songs is not a genre Western, for all its mobilized research, nor an expose on the machinations of the world of contemporary American Roots music. Both the characters of Gil and Cali are a quarter century past any direct involvement in their industries so their view of their chosen form's present is in fact long past. It is demonstrably a road story (or several road stories) and a missing person narrative. The entire 2014 storyline is a search for a missing person, though beneath the search for Jackson, which only Naomi and Gil know about, and the search for the Cali who won the Silver Strings Contest in 1985, which is more problematic in terms of identity, it is a search for the answers to what is missing in different ways, in each and all of the characters.

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