

Volume Two

The Exegesis

Writing the Sixties

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# Introduction

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In 1968 my birth date was drawn in the national conscription ballot. My life had already been affected by Australia's foreign and domestic political debates. When in high school I opposed both the introduction of conscription in 1964 and the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam in 1965. Being called up merely increased my alienation, encouraged my radicalisation and motivated increased militancy. As the movement of opposition grew and police clashed with radical and moderate demonstrators, I was delighted to see the policy settings unravel, paving the way for the ALP to campaign against the war and conscription as part of the 1972 Federal election campaign. The end of conscription in 1972 and the gradual withdrawal of Australia troops were not enough. I left Australia in 1973 with no plans to return. Before going I researched and wrote a Master's Degree under the title *Demonstrations: Law and Society, South Australia, 1966-May 1972*. Despite my earlier intentions, in 1978 I came back to the University of Adelaide and the Department of Politics. For a few years I taught an honours course on the Big Books of the 1960s and then let the topic lie. Much later when I happened to be in Adelaide again, I walked the streets, visited familiar places and started to sketch the outlines of characters and stories for a novel about the 1960s. It was ill-formed and incomplete and I put it aside while I worked at other crafts.

I found myself puzzling over the gap between what I had done analytically to understand the era and what my recollections told me about how I felt at the time. There was little connection between the two. My analysis had been narrowly focused and confined to tracing the developing radicalism of students opposed to the war and conscription and the clashes between demonstrators and the police. My feelings, my

recollections, were of the warm relations between friends facing uncertainty and striving against government and social constraints, ranging from the fact of conscription to the everyday, routine vexations that came from frequent, trivial clashes over clothes, long hair and culture.

I wanted to revisit the events of the 1960s but not to write a history, a memoir or any form of cultural, political or social analysis. I wanted to write fiction, to find ways to write the Sixties, addressing the individual and emotional dimensions of the times so as to create a plausible sense of the period, centred as much around anxiety and tension as celebration of the pursuit of personal liberty. This exegesis takes just a few examples of the way the writing of the Sixties changed over the years and then explores related themes about research and creative writing. There were puzzles I needed to understand before I could complete the writing of such a novel. I began by reading widely, looking for the forms of a novel appropriate to my task and ambitions.

One of the first challenges was to be precise about the era. The kinds of characters and events which would easily encompass the spirit of the age associated with the rise of the Vietnam War and conscription were not confined to a single decade, the 1960s. If the term ‘the 1960s’ simply refers to the events of the years between the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1960 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1969, the broader social and cultural meanings shared with parts of the adjoining decade would be lost. For some projects this would not matter but, for this creative work the culture, spirit and politics of the age started in the middle of the 1960s and continued into the 1970s. In 1965 the first Australian troops were committed to Vietnam. Their withdrawal began in 1970 and was completed by 1972, leaving only a small logistics presence. The war

ended in 1975 when Vietnam was reunified. Reinforcing this span of years, conscription was announced in late 1964 just prior to the commitment of troops and ended in 1972 with the election of the Whitlam government. The key incidents of the creative work are linked to these political events, the rise of student militancy and all the other associated characteristics of the age; music, drugs, the counter-culture and the pursuit of personal freedom. I have used the term 'the Sixties' for this slightly off-set chronology rather than a strict decadal definition, as it captures better the essence of the era in question.

The phrase 'Writing the Sixties' also captures the essentially imagined, fictional construction of the era. I am interested in the way those who write about the 1960s, write the Sixties, where all the techniques of fiction are combined to depict the cultural character of the age. Hence the exegesis starts with novels about the Sixties, tracing different ways in which novels written either at the time or close to it compare with the research and writing strategies of those who come after or who seek, from a later vantage point, to re-imagine the Sixties. In this chapter a broad range of novels are treated as if they formed a genre: the novels of the Sixties. I am particularly interested in how authors characterise or judge the era they are writing about. The second chapter examines three novels, two by John Updike and one by Philip Roth, two distinguished American novelists whose popularity and fame started in the 1960s. The focus here is on the strategies they use to sign the time setting for their novels. This chapter is used to build a foundation for considering the role of research in creative writing and its relationship to the research strategies underpinning the novel *Stardust and Golden*.

To write the Sixties in the form of a novel, half a century later, involves various forms of research to retrieve the era and to characterise it. This introduces the question of how research and creative practice are related in the writing of fiction. What kind of research do creative writers do as they seek to reach back to the Sixties to make it live again as the setting for a novel? Is the research the same as that done by, for example, social scientists or historians studying the events of the era? How is research related to the creative practice of writing fiction? These are not new questions and the extensive Australian debate over practice-led research and its associated variants are central to a consideration of these themes in the third chapter.

# Chapter 1: Making the Sixties in Writing

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## 1.1 Variants on the Sixties Novel

The conflict and contention which marked the events of the 1960s can be found in the many novels which have sought to depict or summon up the spirit of the age, some with hostility some with affection. This chapter explores a wide range of different novels written to evoke the Sixties. They were either written at times close to the events or much later, looking back. I read many of these to understand the characteristics of a Sixties novel and to inspire and locate my own work.

An annotated commentary on a selection of books will be used to compile the generic characteristics of a Sixties novel. The selection was based on a number of factors to include novels written by both men and women; works written during the 1960s and the early 1970s in contrast with those published at a later time; some written as a contrast to works of documentation, reportage and analysis by the same author; a selection from different genres such as coming of age stories, thrillers, family sagas, popular women's fiction, and finally works from a number of countries including the USA, Britain, Italy and Australia.

### 1.1.1 Mailer and Michener

Norman Mailer, a formidable literary figure in America in the Sixties, wrote three books about Vietnam and the turbulent times associated with opposition to the war. The first was a novel, *Why Are We In Vietnam?*[1967. Date of original publication is given in square brackets]. The word 'Vietnam' only occurs twice: once in the title and once at the end, as part of the last words, 'Vietnam, hot damn.' Yet the novel is



‘about’ Vietnam and the social and psychological basis for American enthusiasm for military intervention. The meanings associated with ‘Vietnam’ are such that the word in the title looms over a novel which seems to be determinedly not about Vietnam at all. The novel is an elaborate, elegant, ranting, chanting monologue arising from a dinner party and involves a young Texan retelling a trip to Alaska to hunt bears in a bawdy/obscene invented version of hip language combining elements of black and white youth cultures (Banks 3). Mailer writes as a novelist to make sense of the war urge underpinning America’s foreign policy. The language and energy of the narrative break with the previous forms of Mailer’s fiction. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* was both praised when published (Fremont-Smith) and banned in Australia from 1968-1971. Although there were reservations over the language and the lack of an explicit discussion of the political issues, the novel represents a substantial creative outburst and achievement.

In his next book, *Armies of the Night*, [1968] Mailer moves to a form of literary journalism or creative non-fiction while pondering the ability of the novel and/or history to deal with the search for meaning in the events surrounding Vietnam. The subtitle is clear: *History as a Novel: The Novel as History*. This book is about the 1967 march on Washington and Mailer directly tackles the nature of the increasingly militant opposition to the Vietnam War. Mailer writes himself as a character in the story, a largely third person narrative describing his participation in events and probing their meaning for America’s troubled soul. *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, the third in the sequence, also published in 1968, is ‘an informal history’ of the Republican and Democratic presidential conventions. Mailer presents himself in the guise of The Reporter but he does more than report: his passions are aroused by the need to understand and to explain the meaning of the actions surrounding two

contrasting forms of politics: the normal party politics of the conventions and the wild battles raging outside as radicals and militants went up against the system and were beaten away by the batons and tear gas of the police. There is no doubt the two exercises in literary journalism are a valuable resource for finding appropriate events, and understanding what kinds of moods can be made to inhere in their telling. It is important to note that these books, striving for originality and impact, were committed to inventing appropriate language and literary forms for the times in which they were written; they were attempts at era making as much as era marking. They were not only written close to the period in question, they were part of its very invention.

James A Michener, famous for writing long family sagas, vast block busters and best sellers, published two books in 1971, one fiction, the other a 'report', about rebellious youth. For his non-fiction *Kent State*, Michener used a team of research assistants. He does not reflect on the relationship between fiction and journalism. Michener seeks to explain how the shooting of four unarmed students at Kent State by the National Guard was not a crime but a tragic accident. He blames Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) agitators for organising the protest and exploiting the corrosive and malign influence of a rapidly spreading youth culture to undermine respect for authority. For *The Drifters*, a sprawling tale, Michener assembles a cast of characters to exhibit their aimlessness and pleasure-seeking ways. A draft resister, a political activist, rich kids and other representative types all meet up in Torremolinos where they experiment with drugs, debate social, cultural and political matters, and drift from place to place, issue to issue until the group disintegrates at the novel's end. Both *Kent State* and *The Drifters* share sociological and political assumptions

about the dangers of Sixties youth culture. Michener was on a crusade to have the name 'Kent State' carry his interpretation of student activism and youth culture. Certainly his views were echoed by many at the time decrying the waywardness and irresponsibility of youth.

### **1.1.2 Farina and Eagan**

If Michener's work shows a shared sociological perspective between his two 1971 books and Mailer's work blurs the divide between fiction and reportage, then Richard Farina's novel, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me* [1966], is a bridge between the Beats and the Sixties generation. The novel is a continuously unfolding, multi-layered, contradictory and ambiguous telling of a 'coming of age' story. The events of the novel are from 1958 when the central character, Gnosos Pappadopoulis, returns from a year long quest on 'the asphalt seas of the wasted land' where he found knowledge, if not wisdom, and has trouble re-integrating into the world of Athené (Cornell) University. Campus life and unrest shadow the story as it unfolds. Gnosos is an outsider, an outlaw, marginalised and continuously experimenting with drugs. His tale is heavily inflected with an easy unquestioned male chauvinism in a world where women are to be used and discarded while Gnosos continues with his quest for true love. This was an age for young men to seek freedom, personal exploration and experimentation, risk taking and death. Politics has a shadowy, unstable and indistinct presence in the tale, including a side trip to Cuba and the death of a close friend. After clashes on campus, bad behaviour and pranks, the novel ends with Gnosos in the custody of the campus police being served with his call up notice. Plot and characterisation push the narrative forward and prefigure the energy of student movements opposed to campus restrictions and political authority at home and abroad. The novel's passage to mythic status was

hastened by Farina's death in a motor cycle accident a few days after it was published in 1966. The novel became a cult classic of the Sixties; an era making marker, a sign of the time in its own right.

In Jennifer Egan's *Invisible Circus* [1995] Phoebe, a younger sister, is obsessed with her older sister, Faith, who committed suicide in Italy in 1970 at the age of seventeen. Phoebe idolises her sister as embodying the spirit of the Sixties and believes, by following her journey, she will rediscover this lost age. The era is characterised in terms of questing, seeking, risk-taking, all captured in the image of spontaneity and 'the happening'. In Faith's life there are drugs and sex but not in a flamboyant way. Music is used to set moods and trigger memories; Janice Joplin, Grace Slick, and King Crimson, perhaps for its satanic tones. Faith's political views are never made clear. She seems ill-equipped for any political adventure. She is 'radicalised' by taking part in a demonstration where she is knocked-out by a cop. Her enthusiasm for risk-taking now takes a political form. Eventually Faith goes to Europe and seeks out the Red Army Faction also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Impressed by their unwavering political commitment she tries to join them. She fails in a task they set her and is abruptly left behind. Faith believes she failed because she was not committed enough, not brave enough. For her, terrorism is just another dare she is obliged to complete. She finds another radical group, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June Movement, and plants a bomb in an empty building for them. Her bomb 'accidentally' kills an innocent person who just happened to be there.

Phoebe gradually reconstructs the story of Faith's political career and its aftermath while locked into a flurry of sexual activity with her dead sister's boyfriend and eventually comes to understand the mystery of her sister's suicide.

With this knowledge Phoebe returns home to accommodate to a normal world. Like Egan, a number of American novelists use bombings as a marker of radical militancy and as a sign of the Sixties, including Roth in *American Pastoral*, Libby Fischer Hellmann in *Set the Night on Fire* and Dana Spiotta in *Eat the Document*. In America, political violence is not uncommon, from assassinations of presidents down to bombings, burnings and blown up buildings. In the 1960s there were sufficient bombing campaigns, from both the left and the right, to make ‘the bombing’ such a potent, possible way to mark the era. In the 1970s there were enough bombing campaigns conducted by the remnants of the radical student left to make such an evocation even more plausible.

### **1.1.3 Byatt and Amis**

A. S. Byatt has written two novels about the Sixties as part of a series exploring the intellectual and personal development of Frederica Potter, the heroine of *The Virgin in the Garden* [1978] and *Still Life* [1985], both set in the 1950s. Her story continues in *Babel Tower* [1996] set in the mid-1960s and *A Whistling Woman* [2002] set at the end of the decade. The novels are linked, not just by common characters but by their depiction of the Sixties as a time of unfolding destruction. Byatt made her negative views quite clear in an interview with Sam Leith:

I don't like the 1960s either. The last big novel I wrote was called *A Whistling Woman* and it was about utopianism on the one hand and a dangerous sort of mystical romanticism on the other. I don't believe that humans are basically good, so I think all utopian movements are doomed to fail, but I am interested in them. (Leith 4)

These comments well capture the tone of her characterisation of the Sixties in these two novels.

Frederica marries, has a child, is ill-treated by her wealthy, landed, boorish, controlling husband and for much of *Babel Tower* is caught up in a nasty divorce

case and custody dispute. By the end of the novel she is able to start rebuilding her independent and intellectually curious life. Elements of the mid-1960s impinge upon and shape this personal journey. Through her teaching she meets an eccentric writer; she reads his novel and recommends it to a publisher she knows. Sections of the book, *Babeltower: A Story for the Children of Our Time*, are included as part of the novel. It is a tale of a utopian movement, a group of people committed to total individual freedom. They lock themselves away from the world until their licentiousness consumes and destroys the community. The book is fierce and sexually explicit in a Marquis de Sade, sado-masochist mode while setting up a morality tale about the consequences of such a foolish quest.

Given the purpose and scope of the novel, era markers abound and have been carefully chosen to support Byatt's judgement of the age. For example, there is a collection of detailed observations on events in 1967 combined with Frederica's involvement (as a spectator) in the counterculture. Many of the cultural references are obvious: *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*, Flower Power, the Maharishi, hashish fudge and happenings (*Babel Tower* 601 - 613). But these are not the only references. Byatt invokes Ian Brady, Myra Hindley and the Moors Murders, not a common motif for the Sixties, though powerfully reinforcing Byatt's perspective and a salutary reminder of the dark side to the era. (For the USA, the Manson Family killings would be an approximate equivalent.) In addition Byatt gives special mention to the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation held at the Roundhouse in July 1967 (*Babel Tower* 602-3). This conference was organised by the anti-psychiatrists R. D. Laing and David Cooper, among others (Cooper 'Introduction' 7). She quotes a passage from David Cooper's summing up, incorrectly describing this as a call for an end to a whole series of binary oppositions

(*Babel Tower* 603). Cooper's rhetoric ('Beyond Words' 199) is used for dramatic effect to signal the extremism and absurdity of utopian and radical demands.

Frederica Potter's story continues in *A Whistling Woman*, with Frederica learning to live as a single mother in London, wanting to be a writer but with a new career as the host of a TV culture talk show. She faces a dilemma in her personal life: stay in London and thrive on TV or move to Yorkshire to be with her lover who has been appointed to a position at a local university. She tries life in Yorkshire where many oddball dropouts are seeking to build alternative communities. The most important of these are the therapeutic community (including radical theology and doses of R. D. Laing style anti-psychiatry) and a student movement creating an anti-university. The therapeutic community is led by a charismatic half-mad figure, and much like the inhabitants of Babeltower, their radicalism destroys them in a fire. The radical student movement is led by a manipulative, aristocratic charismatic leader who lives in a student commune off campus. He controls a student uprising and a confrontation with a major international conference at the University. The protests turn into an occupation and a riot of violence leaving the university in partial ruin. From the wreckage, Frederica moves back to London, consummates a relationship with a scientist friend, becomes pregnant and drifts on to face an uncertain future still driven by a bewildering curiosity.

There are many elements used in *A Whistling Woman* to characterise the Sixties but crucial to Byatt's purpose are the social movements: new age religions, anti-psychiatry and utopian visions of a new kind of university under the control of students and teachers. They are vividly described and their fates in flame and fire are painstakingly documented: all are utopian, all are idealistic, all are distorted by charismatic leaders and gurus and all are, inevitably, doomed.

Kingsley Amis published many books in the 1960s and 1970s but only two satirise elements of the Sixties: *I Want It Now* [1968] and *Girl, 20* [1971]. *Girl, 20* is the more predictable of the two with its mocking attacks on stereotypical elements of the late 1960s and the characters of the young and those who dote on them. All the tropes and themes of an anti-Sixties novel are here but it is not as interesting as the much more ambiguous *I Want It Now*. Amis wrote this as an anti-Sixties satire and at one level it is quite effective but there is something in the plot and characters which subverts this attempt. *I Want It Now* is set in swinging London with side trips to Greece and the USA. Ronnie is a cynical, ambitious and driven TV personality (an embryonic form of a celebrity). He knows he is not rich and true to the spirit of the age he wants it all and he wants it now. He sets out to pursue Simona, the daughter of wealthy parents (a formidable mother and an indolent father, somewhat in the mode of familiar P G Wodehouse characters but with sharper and nastier edges) against their hostility and determination. After a series of disasters he manages to defeat and humiliate them (including a spectacular confrontation with the mega rich dragon mother on TV), wins the girl, gets the money and illustrates a nostrum from that time: love is all you need. Simona's father is the main source of the anti-Sixties sentiments but his lethargy is no match for the energy and conviction of Ronnie Appleyard who should have been humbled by the author's satiric intentions but survives to mark and celebrate the age in his own way.

#### **1.1.4 The Australians**

There are a number of Australian novels which use the events of anti-Vietnam and student militancy either to frame or to form a central part of their works. Some of these are discussed by Donna Coates in an article on women authors of the anti-



Vietnam era. There are certain shared aspects in these texts. Take this snippet from Janine Burke's *Speaking* [1984]. Lilly, the recovering political activist, discusses her attempts to write a history of the Sixties and is asked by a successful poet about the past:

She [Lilly] dragged at her cigarette and seemed to shrink a little more into the couch. 'Of the time? Remember? The demonstrations, the rallies, the marches, there were chants, songs. There were the sounds of what happened. Those words, and the words on the banners and the posters, that brevity, that essence. It was what I tried to capture. That's why I started with six pages of words. It was the part I liked best', she said humbly, 'but I imagine you thought it was dumb'. (Burke 284)

The large moratorium demonstrations of May and September 1970 are used to describe the mess, confusion and police tactics of containment. These events are given a strong fictional form in Nuri Mass's *As Much Right To Live* [1971], a mildly melodramatic family saga marked by a clash between a policeman father and a radical son. The son is killed in a demonstration as a result of the tactics devised by the father. An emphasis on generational conflict between father and son also frames *The Demonstrator* [1970] written by Elizabeth and Don Campbell. This conflict ends in a bizarre reconciliation in the midst of a car chase around Canberra trying to save a foreign conference delegate from abduction. David Haig's *One Wooden Marble* [2006] revisits this theme of generational conflict and mixes it with class differences and Christianity to produce another melodramatic telling of disaster, where two young men face the ballot: one is selected and one is not. The one not selected is a conscientious objector on religious grounds. The other has his case for conscientious objection rejected by the court and goes to Vietnam. He dies while rescuing a Vietnamese child on the day his own child is born in safety in Australia.

Sometimes the events of the era are incidental to the story. For example, Patricia Cornelius in *My Sister Jill* [2002] tells a tale about a returned Changi

prisoner of war and the impact his post war trauma has on the family. She uses the events of Vietnam, conscription and militant protest as a minor piece of background to the unfolding family disaster.

There is one novel which stands out in this company because it is so startlingly different, political and comic: Hardy's *Outcasts of Foolgarah* [1971]. There is some loose affinity with Farina's *Been Down so Long* and Mailer's *Why are We in Vietnam?* but the language, a blend of Barry McKenzie and cockney rhyming slang, with its frequent scatological and sexual crudities, would set it apart anyway. The novel starts with a quotation from Herbert Marcuse, a significant intellectual figure for the American New Left and a prominent theorist who fled Nazi Germany. Marcuse is often disparaged in novels about the Sixties but Frank Hardy sees him differently. He takes a passage from *One Dimensional Man* describing the political role of those whose 'opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not' (Marcuse 200) and uses this as the organising premise for his story. His creative practice reworks Marcuse's theoretically derived conclusion into a vivid, scatological and bawdy tale of oppression, struggle, resistance and unexpected (but partial) triumph. The central figures are a couple of garbos who break a local council rule and are fired but then refuse to acquiesce. Thus begins a minor rebellion mobilising other workers, trade union officials, a communist party activist, a writer, Aboriginal people and radical students; every layer of outcast noted by Marcuse.

There are other ways of writing the Sixties in Australian novels. For example, Nicholas Jose's *Rowena's Field* [1984] is the story of a young woman whose life is blighted when her mother kills her lover. Rowena is shaped by class, family background and her mother's social attitudes. She moves away from this world,

partly through contact with a group of students and others living in a shared household involved in radical politics and anti-war demonstrations. She experiences the Sixties as a combination of politics and a clash of generations; her concerns are with love, sex and the tensions in her relationship with her mother. After the death of her lover, Rowena runs to England (and to Europe) and gradually puts her life together, starting but not ending a kind of healing process. An urge to return to Australia partly arises from the contradictions and tensions in her English existence. The spirit of the Sixties here is nuanced and subtle; political (forms of radicalism, narcissistic, self-centred), drama making rather than dramatic and in the end futile and self-destructive. There is sex, for different social and emotional reasons, and a commitment to personal integrity, growth and change.

Liz Byrski, a writer of popular fiction for women, has written a book about the long shadow of 1968. In *Bad Behaviour* [2009] Byrski has her main character, Zoë, seek the meaning of the Sixties, urged by her daughter to remember (for a school project) and impelled by family circumstances to recall her life in the 1960s and to come to terms with its consequences, her persistent sense of guilt and failure. Byrski has constructed an extended family saga. Sex and politics both appear in this account of the 'spirit of the Sixties' but personal and family relationships come first. The Sixties are presented through relationships; the politics fades to a mere irritant embodied in one character's long standing attempt to make a documentary about 1968. Although the story is awkward in so many ways the central proposition illuminates the various roles open to women in the radical politics of the 1960s. For a great majority, the Sixties were not about activism. Radical politics was a minority activity and, until the rise of women's liberation, a predominantly male affair.

There are tonal similarities across this Australian literature and something of a national focus can be seen in the way the period is presented. Dissident politics and militant action is foregrounded and the counter-culture, sex, music, drugs, fashion, and alternative lifestyles feature more obviously than in their British and American counterparts with a few exceptions, Norman Mailer on the left and John Updike on the right. Perhaps more of the Australian authors share something of this direct involvement in the politics of the era.

### **1.1.5 The Sixties as Normal**

Reading Bryski raises the possibility that some kind of normalisation is occurring as the events of the 1960s are more easily assimilated into more obviously genre-bound fictions. This can be seen in a variety of books. For example, J. B. Chicoine writes a chick-lit novel, *Spilt Coffee* [2013], which has a man in 1987 trying to relive the events of an important day in 1969 when everything went wrong. As he re-enacts the key things which happened on that day he recalls people, and rethinks the significance of what was done. Only then is he able to resolve issues in the present and woo the young woman he thought he had lost in 1969. The novel is full of references to evoke the Sixties: drugs, music, consumer products, brand names, and fashions. Significantly, the happy ending only comes in the eighties. Hellmann has produced a thriller where crucial events from the 1960s have to be discovered so her central character can work out who killed her father and brother and is now trying to kill her. *Set the Night on Fire* [2010] is set in Chicago and ‘finding out’ involves gathering details about what happened back in 1968 and 1969. There are graphic accounts of life in a student commune, the politics of SDS as it crashes and burns and, inevitably, a bombing, which holds the clue to unravel the plot. Significant research of events and character are embedded in the story but it is the creative

practice of the thriller genre which animates the tale.

These two books illustrate ways in which a normalised view of the Sixties can be effectively incorporated into genre novels. There is another example which shows how genre fiction and the Sixties can be creatively combined to do interesting things with conventional forms. Jane Smiley has an affinity with historical novels, research and family sagas. She has just completed a trilogy, *The Last Hundred Years*, about the life of a family starting in the 1920s. Each year has its own chapter and this is used to discipline the telling and requires certain things to be left out (events in general, events in the lives of her characters and indeed whole characters are often absent for years at a time). The second volume, *Early Warning* [2015], includes the 1960s and 1970s as well as the Vietnam War and its associated disruption. With such a writing strategy it is obvious her creative ambition drives her research on events and characters. Nonetheless it must have been tempting to build into the chronology the key events of each year in American politics, culture and foreign policy. There is some of this sign-posting but not as much as might be imagined. Reviewers have been quite scathing about the way events crop up and characters struggle to give them due weight in their lives (Kellaway) but events come into the story only through the lives of the characters. It is the rhythm and patterns of their lives which determine how little or how much will be told about a certain incident, such as the origins, progress and the ending of the Vietnam War. Although Smiley has skilfully constructed a character to carry the tale into American foreign policy (he is a CIA analyst), the events of the war are both central and tangential. The death in Vietnam of Tim, the grandson of the parents in the initial volume, is more important than what is happening in the war. Creative practice rules over the mode of historical research. The Têt offensive does not get a mention in 1968 nor does the end of the war in

1975. That is as it should be. A great deal of research underpins this trilogy but it is her disciplining assumptions which drive the novel forward.

Finally there is one Italian novel worth including. It is different from these genre-driven novels and yet it too is a family saga of a sort and the 1960s are just an era through which the characters have to travel on their way to whatever ending comes. Elena Ferrante's novel, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* [2014] is the third in a series of *Neapolitan Novels* excellently translated by Ann Goldstein. The series covers the life of two school friends growing up in Naples, trying to escape their destiny in a grubby, crime ridden, bleak industrial landscape of limited horizons and depressing certainties. The story is about the conflict and affection between the two, with the balance changing throughout their evolving lives. The sections on the Sixties are graphic and compelling and different from the Sixties as told in other stories. Partly this is because of the setting, working class Naples, the combination of politics and crime, gang violence and the battle between communists and the fascist allies of key business figures in the story; and it is about the relationship between two women. It is not about students in affluent places rebelling against authority and going up against the police in mostly peaceful demonstrations. Its focus is on the continual and everyday struggle of young working class people both at work and in education acting to defend themselves against the assaults of business, police and political authority while trying to find ways to achieve the best for themselves and their communities. In doing so Ferrante provides a compelling immersion in the Sixties. But the events of the 1960s and early 1970s do not overwhelm the narrative arc of the personal and emotional development of the two leading figures, the one who leaves and the one who stays.

## 1.2 The Anatomy of a Sixties Novel

Despite the differences, taken together, these novels provide a set of themes and tropes that come to be expected in a novel about the Sixties. Such a novel is likely to include themes about youth, rebellion, confrontation, drugs, expectations (hope, despair) and experimentation (sex, drugs, relationships). There is likely to be an emphasis on cultural change, revolutions, or at least radical disjunctions in music, popular culture, fashion, assumptions about the future and the nature of the good life. In addition, politics is likely to play an important part: war, conscription, commitment and opposition. There may be some focus on gender relations, the male-dominated milieu of radical politics and the hesitant, disruptive emergence of a more distinctive and more radical female voices. There may also be a growing awareness of race, hierarchies and authority. Overall, there is often a deep anchoring of the Sixties experiences through family and relationships as these tensions are played out.

The survey also reveals how perspectives and writing strategies changed between those novels written close to the events and those written later. Contested as it was, the full nature of the era was not obvious at the time. Contemporaneous novels, in generating a sense of the immediacy of the age, played a part by developing a language, a vocabulary of references, through which the character of the times could be understood. This is as true for novels which embrace the radical potential of the age (*Why Are We in Vietnam?*, *Miami* and *The Siege of Chicago*, *The Outcasts of Foolgarah*) as those repelled by such possibilities (*Girl, 20*, *I Want It Now*, *The Drifters*). Novels looking back on these times, trying to retrieve them and make them seem immediate, have different opportunities and constraints. Research and, for those like me who lived through these events, memory and recollection are required, at least in part, to fuel imagination and creativity. A more fine-grained

account of how these are combined underpins the discussion in the subsequent chapter on Updike and Roth. Here I want to note a few shifts in perspective. There is a significant shift on gender. Later novels tend to give greater centrality and agency to their female characters. The earlier novels take over the male-centric nature of political activism to shape their accounts. More recent novels have given great prominence to the role of women and their cultural and political preoccupations. Once again this can be seen in novels hostile to the Sixties (*Babel Tower*, *A Whistling Woman*) and those less hostile and less sceptical (*Bad Behaviour*, *Rowena's Field*, *Invisible Circus*). With few exceptions, more recent novels have a greater sense of the contradictory nature of the Sixties than those written at the time.

The survey of selected novels has revealed several important points. Novelists have not been shy about their assessment of the Sixties as a setting for their stories. The divide between approval and condemnation continues. Nonetheless this account has identified a commonality central to this dispute. Those who approve see the pursuit of freedom and liberty as being at the heart of the era. Those who disapprove note the same feature but see it as excessive and damaging to social cohesion and civic virtue: licence rather than liberty. But something is missing from the symmetry of this contradiction. Both views serve to limit the scope to re-imagine the lives of those for whom the Sixties were not a time of freedom but of constraint, restrictions and threats to their liberty. Sometimes the pursuit of individual freedom meant having to deal with powerful constraints embodied in conscription, the war and the dominance of the socially powerful.



# Chapter 2: Signs of the Time

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The survey of the general characteristics of the Sixties novel provides a basis for an in-depth exploration of the writing techniques used by two American novelists to generate 'signs of the time' for their texts. Such era markers can come from research, memory and experience, the recording of contemporary events, reading other writers and considering a whole range of different media and cultural offerings. After considering the role of era markers in these texts it is possible to be more precise about how creative practice reshapes these raw materials of research, transforming them into fiction.

There is a prior methodological question. Finished novels rarely make obvious which elements came from research. Whatever research supports were in place have been erased by creative practice so that the finished product is seemingly whole unto itself, completely created and realised by the author. With the exception of exegeses produced for research degrees, submission to various research assessment exercises and occasional author commentary, it is necessary to reverse engineer the creative process to find the traces of research. In this chapter this involves examining fictionalised era markers for the research or recollection which stand behind them. This can only be done cautiously.

## 2.1 John Updike

### 2.1.1 Rabbit Redux

*Rabbit Redux* (RR) is set in 1969, mostly written in 1970 and published in 1971. There are no pre-existing, taken-for-granted era markers for him to use. He takes events from the era unfolding around him and, in part, captures and records these in

the novel. Writing *Rabbit Redux* is as much an exercise in era making (finding appropriate words and examples for the times) than era marking itself. He is not working with events with received meanings but is, instead, seeking to inscribe meanings into the events he is taking into his novel, giving them potency with the well-chosen and fine grained details saturating the text. Updike details women's fashions, films showing at the local cinema (*I Am Curious (Yellow)*, *Deep Throat*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Funny Girl*) as well as technological change in the print industry, the rate and character of suburbanisation, the development of shopping outlets and retail precincts and incidental political and social changes, such as the liberalisation of censorship. Updike's strategy to characterise the era is more direct than just listing details.

Towards the end of the 1960s Updike decided to write a second Rabbit novel ('Introduction' 448-449). *Rabbit, Run* was set in 1959 and *Rabbit Redux* was to focus on 1969. The story centres on how Rabbit, older and slightly bulkier, does not run this time but stays at home and is caught up in the turbulence of the time which mirrors the turbulence in his family life. Janice, his wife, is on the verge of leaving him for her lover, Stavros, who works with her at her father's car yard. Rabbit drifts into a relationship with Jill, a white hippy girl who moves into his bed, and a militant black nationalist, Skeeter, who joins the household. Jill dies when Rabbit's house is burnt down and Skeeter flees. Stavros is seduced away from Janice (by Rabbit's sister) and the family, more or less, gets back together to face their uncertain future.

In his 1995 foreword to *Rabbit Angstrom: a tetralogy*, Updike describes the relationship between each novel and the circumstances of the age:

In *Rabbit, Run*, there is very little direct cultural and political reference, apart from the burst of news items that comes over his car radio during this night of fleeing home. Of these, only the disappearance of the Dalai Lama engages in

the fictional themes. In *Rabbit Redux*, the trip to the moon is the central metaphor. ('Introduction' 454)

The text of *Rabbit Redux* is full of found objects of news broadcasts and markers of topicality. Updike recognises this and wryly observes 'Rabbit became too much a receptacle, perhaps for every item in the headlines' ('Introduction' 453). He also describes how he collected such time markers for *Rabbit is Rich*:

As these novels had developed, each needed a clear background of news, a 'hook' uniting the personal and national realms. In late June, visiting Pennsylvania for a few days, I found the hook in the OPEC-induced gasoline shortages and the panicky lines that cars were forming at the local pumps. . . . and Rabbit, at forty six . . . could well believe that he and the U.S. were both running out of gas. ('Introduction' 455)

For *Rabbit at Rest* Updike describes this process:

To give substance to Harry's final, solitary drive south, I drove the route myself, beginning at my mother's farm and scribbling sights, rivers, and radio emissions in a notebook on the seat beside me, just as, more than three decades previous, I turned on my New England radio on the very night, the last night of winter, 1959, and made notes of what came. ('Introduction' 458)

Some of the era markers for *Rabbit Redux* echo this process. Television news broadcasts are frequently cited and summarised; the moon landing, Vietnam, riots, political events and the detritus of the year. Here is a typical and extended example. On Saturday, 11 October 1969 - Updike's details are so rich and luxurious it is possible to be so precise - Harry (Rabbit) is spending time with Peggy, a long term family friend, while his wife, Janice, is off with her lover.

Harry and Peggy return to the living room and watch the week's news roundup. The weekend commentator is fairer haired and less severe in expression than the weekday one. He says there has been some good news this week. American deaths in Vietnam were reported the lowest in three years, and one twenty-four hour period saw no American battle deaths at all. The Soviet Union made headlines this week, agreeing with the U.S. to ban atomic weapons from the world's ocean floors, agreeing with Red China to hold talks concerning their sometimes bloody border disputes, and launching Soyuz 6, a linked three-stage space spectacular bringing closer the day of permanent space stations. In Washington, Hubert Humphrey endorsed Richard Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War and Lieutenant General Lewis B. Hershey, crusty and controversial head for twenty-eight years of this

nation's selective service system, was relieved of his post and promoted to four-star general. In Chicago, riots outside the courtroom and riotous behaviour within continued to characterize the trial of the so called Chicago Eight. In Belfast, Protestants and British troops clashed. In Prague, Czechoslovakia's revisionist government, in one of its sternest moves, banned citizens from foreign travel. And preparations were underway: for tomorrow's Columbus Day parades, despite threatened protests from Scandinavian groups maintaining that Leif Ericson and not Columbus was the discoverer of America, and for Wednesday's Moratorium Day, a nationwide outpouring of peaceful protests. 'Crap,' says Rabbit. Sports. Weather. Peggy rises awkwardly from her chair to turn it off. Rabbit rises, also stiff. 'Great supper,' he tells her. 'I guess I'll get back to the ranch.' (RR 333-34)

This is not quite a representative sample of the many news broadcasts mentioned, summarised or quoted in the novel since it makes no mention of the moon landing.

The news, mostly on TV but also in the papers or in Rabbit's typesetting work, is used to impart information about the time setting for the novel and the character of broader political and social issues. Often when Harry is in a bar, the TV news, without sound, provides detail of a physical setting but also conveys the spirit of the age. Early in the story Harry meets up with his father, Earl, for a quiet drink in a nearby bar. The TV news, with the sound off, is dominated by the preparations for the Apollo 11 mission, with extensive vision of the rocket launch at Cape Canaveral (RR 7). Later, in the same bar, the TV with the sound turned down shows cops patrolling the streets of nearby York, after civil unrest, with a cutaway to images of an American military patrol in Vietnam (RR 62). TV news plays a similar role in Harry/Rabbit's home. For example, after his initial drink with his father in the bar, Harry watches the six o'clock news dominated by the progress of the moon mission (RR 23). Later in the story Rabbit wakes to see the morning TV news covering shootings in York, the possibility Senator Kennedy will be charged for leaving the scene of an accident at Chappaquiddick, and preparations for the moon landing (RR 91).

The moon landing is a significant part of the presentation of character and plot, with a parallel between the launching of the story and the launching of the rocket ('Introduction' 454, Begley 333). In the initial bar scene the space mission is little more than background (with metaphors about lifting off) but moves to the centre with the actual moon landing when Harry visits his mother for her birthday. Harry's mother is dying of Parkinson's disease. Given the complications in Harry's life, he is reluctant to visit but eventually agrees to take Nelson (his son) with him to cover for his wife's absence. This visit coincides with the moon landing and the wait for the moon walk. Some of the technical language from the TV accounts are reproduced in the text and become a jargon joke between father and son:

Rabbit asks him, 'Want to head home?'  
'Negative, Pop.' He drowsily grins at his own wit.  
Rabbit extends the joke. 'The time is twenty-one hours. We better rendezvous with our spacecraft.' (RR 105)

These scenes at his mother's birthday are a combination of extended details of the television coverage of the moon mission with, perhaps, a parallel attempt by Harry to navigate his way around his mother (mother ship?) over his own landing in the uncertain world where Janice is drifting away towards a new alignment. At the time of the birthday visit it is unclear, to both Harry and Janice, if she has reached an escape velocity sufficient to take her beyond the gravitational pull of Harry and her son. The detail of the moon landing provides both an era marker, 1969, and reference for the evolving relationships of affinity and kin. Updike describes this metaphoric role quite directly:

The novel is itself a moon shot: Janice's affair launches her husband, as he and his father witness the takeoff of Apollo 11 in the Phoenix bar, into the extraterrestrial worlds of Jill and Skeeter. The eventual reunion of the married couple in the Safe Haven Motel is managed with the care and gingerly vocabulary of a space craft docking. ('Introduction' 454)

The final paragraph of Chapter 10 shows the subtle and skilled use of this metaphor:

On the bright box something is happening. A snaky shape sneaks down from the upper left corner; it is a man's leg. It grows another leg, eclipses the bright patch that is the surface of the moon. A man in clumsy silhouette has interposed himself among these abstract shadows and glare. An Armstrong, but not Jack. He says something about 'steps' that a crackle keeps Rabbit from understanding. Electronic letters travelling sideways spell out MAN IS ON THE MOON. The voice, crackling, tells Houston that the surface is fine and powdery, he can pick it up with his toe, it adheres to his boot like powdered charcoal, that he sinks in only a fraction of an inch, that it's easier to move around than in the simulations on Earth. From behind him, Rabbit's mother's hand with difficulty reaches out, touches the back of his skull, stays there, awkwardly tries to massage his scalp, to ease away thoughts of the troubles she knows he is in. 'I don't know, Mom,' he abruptly admits. 'I know it's happened, but I don't feel anything yet.' (RR 106)

Was the moon landing of July 1969 an era marker when Updike included it in his novel? It is unlikely the moon landing had accreted around it meanings that could be carried into the novel simply by naming the event or describing what happened. In fact, Updike takes an 'empty' sign and fills it with meanings, especially through the metaphors he weaves around it. As a skilled writer, he takes this found object and gives it significance in the context of this novel. Updike was not alone. In 1970 Mailer published his epic *A Fire on the Moon*, a full blown attempt to read and write the significance of the moon mission replete with verbatim quotes from the transmission between ground control and the astronauts. The live television broadcasts, the masses of newspaper stories and other popular cultural references all were doing their work to give the moon landing added layers of meaning.

By now, of course, to cite the event is to evoke the era; emphasising space technology, the challenge and the quest, the moon landing now comes with received meanings but the process is never absolute or complete. Looking back, the moon landing is seen as the high point of inspiration and aspiration, an achievement of a more optimistic age. To write of the moon landing now evokes all of these meanings. By contrast, Updike worked on a relatively clean page to inscribe his meaning for his novel and the metaphors he creates are central to his achievement.

Updike also uses the characters he invents to give depth to his sense of the era. Two stand out: Jill and Skeeter. Jill is not quite a hippy, maybe a flower child, but she does have certain traits to reinforce Updike's view of the Sixties; she is white, young, estranged from her indulgent rich parents, into sex and drugs, the counterculture, and a casual form of peace politics. She hangs out with some of the black community in Brewer and is picked up by Rabbit who takes her home. She has sex with Rabbit and develops a sisterly relationship with Nelson; she cooks for the household, plays her folk guitar singing songs from the early acoustic years of Dylan and Baez, and she is a mess, undone by drugs, her self-indulgence, excessive optimism and poor judgement.

Skeeter is a messianic black Vietnam veteran who, at times, sells drugs, trades drugs for sex with Jill, and presents himself as a Black Jesus. Updike describes him as a 'black rhetorician' ('Introduction' 454). Skeeter moves in with Rabbit and becomes part of the household, playing basketball with Nelson and berating the others with an alternative view of American history, with his accounts of slavery, Vietnam and technology. Jill's presence increases the tension between Janice and Harry, prompting Janice to seek a divorce and custody of Nelson; more significantly Skeeter's presence antagonises the neighbourhood. A few neighbours challenge Harry to get rid of Skeeter. He refuses and persists in his refusal even after Skeeter's instability is obviously a threat to Jill who begs Harry to throw him out. Jill, back on drugs, falls ill and finally dies in a fire set by racist neighbours on a night when Harry and Nelson are out (RR 335).

Political debates about Vietnam, US intervention and the character of America are a frequent part of the dramatic texture of the story, in debates between characters and in political monologues. Dialogue, a key source of drama in the story,

is used to set up the contrasting views about the American intervention. Earl and Harry make their support for the war clear and their hostility to anti-war protesters explicit. For the most part they express the views Updike held and wrote about, at the time and subsequently. As Updike describes his construction of Rabbit for this novel:

He would be, my thirty-six-year-old Rabbit, one of those middle Americans feeling overwhelmed and put upon by all the revolutions in the air; he would serve as a receptacle for my disquiet and resentments, which would sit more becomingly on him than on me. (Updike 'Introduction' 453)

Indeed Harry and Earl, working-class print workers, achieve a form of class consciousness, with their hostility to the privileged backgrounds and supposed affluence of anti-war protesters.

Updike has explained he was not totally opposed to the cultural and sexual changes of the era, and he didn't mind the drugs but he was always vehemently opposed to the politics of the opponents of the war. In *Self Consciousness*, an episodic autobiography, Updike probes his own conscience to reaffirm his core beliefs and to settle scores with his opponents from the anti-war movement. The flavour of this denunciation with its echoes of Harry's and Earl's rage can be seen in the following passage:

The protest, from my perspective, was in large part a snobbish dismissal of Johnson by the Eastern establishment; Cambridge professors and Manhattan lawyers and their guitar-strumming children thought they could run the country and the world better than this lugubrious bohunk from Texas. These privileged members of a privileged nation believed that their enviable position could be maintained without anything visibly ugly happening in the world. They were full of aesthetic disdain for their own defenders, the business suited hirelings drearily pondering geopolitics and its bloody necessities down in Washington. The protesters were spitting on the cops who were trying to keep their property – the USA and its many amenities – intact. A common report in this riotous era was of slum-dwellers throwing rocks and bottles at the firemen come to put out fires; the peace marchers, the upper-middle-class housewives pushing baby carriages along in candlelit processions, seemed to me to be behaving identically, without the excuse of being slum-dwellers. (*Self Consciousness* 120)



Updike uses the opposition to Vietnam to characterise the Sixties as a poisonous era of division, civil strife destroying what he sees as the more cohesive society which went before (Miller 2007). These views are activated in clashes between Harry and Stavros, ostensibly over the US intervention and American patriotism but equally over their sexual rivalry, as in this passage:

He tries to explain. 'Listen, Stavros. You're the one in the wrong. You're the one screwing another man's wife. If you want to pull out, pull out. Don't try to commit me to one of your fucking coalition governments.'

'Back to that,' Stavros says.

'Right. You intervened, not me.'

'I didn't intervene, I performed a rescue.'

'That's what all the hawks say.' He is eager to argue about Vietnam, but Stavros keeps to the less passionate subject. (RR191)

The two rival masculine powers treat Janice as a piece of disputed territory but they have more invested in their debates over Vietnam.

The systematic and persistent detail provided by Updike conveys a strongly textured sense of the era of Vietnam and the dispute over US intervention. The most vivid and effective telling is vigorously negative about the campaigns against the war and the people who take part and highly sceptical about the kind of society coming into being in the United States. Harry, Earl and Stringer, a strong set of characters, denounce the protesters and support the war in their various ways. They are all male and white. The only significant white male to oppose the war is Stavros, the Greek car salesman. In the novel the other main opponents of the war are Janice, Nelson (a child), Jill (young, flawed, doomed) and Skeeter (messianic, deranged). Updike also provides strong statements of the cases being made against the war, by Stavros and especially in Skeeter's long monologues describing his war experiences and his arguments about American intervention in Vietnam (RR 275-283). Nonetheless,

Updike's own take on the era prevails with the death of Jill, the disappearance of Skeeter and the return of Janice to her family; the world has been changed, damaged, lessened but the family endures to confront this more unsettling time.

Defending the American intervention in Vietnam and criticising the opponents of the war may have required Updike to do some research but mostly it appears to come from his personal experience, recollection and reflection. In the many passages on Vietnam there is less work being done by creative practice than in the case of the moon landing. All the same the positions Updike held are modified. Dispute and dialogue require the other case to be made. Updike produces strong anti-war arguments to match the vehemence of Rabbit's support. Eventually, when Rabbit's morale and self-confidence diminish and his inertia grows, he comes to defend, mildly, the moratorium against the still savage condemnation of his father. One of the best examples of his method is the use of the US intervention as a metaphor for the state of play in the relationship between Stavros, Janice and Rabbit. So, in a book laced with found objects of a contemporary 1960s, where collection and recording is as important as research, the transformation of these through creative practice is at the heart of characterising the Sixties and explaining the challenges it poses for his characters whose lives are defined by the era and who could not exist as they do outside this historically imagined moment.

## **2.12 Witches of Eastwick**

*The Witches of Eastwick* (WE) is a simple tale about three young divorcees, Jane, Lexa (Alexandra) and Sukie, who are witches and use their powers for petty fun, to charm men and to punish those who oppose them. As they sense their powers growing they wish for a playmate. Into their lives comes Darryl Van Horne who

rents a mansion for the summer and has alchemical/chemical interests in finding an alternative way to make energy. The witches party and play with their devil but the situation gets out of control when he marries a young newcomer and they destroy her by causing her to have cancer and die. Van Horne leaves town with his dead wife's brother as his lover. The three witches and their prospective husbands also leave.

By the time Updike wrote *The Witches of Eastwick* [1984] the immediacy of the 1960s is long past and images and events from the era come with received meanings. This partly explains why, whereas *Rabbit Redux* is saturated with found details, *The Witches of Eastwick* is not. There are no more long news broadcasts and there is no specific date for the story. Miller suggests the *Witches of Eastwick* is set in 1968 (102-3) but this is unlikely. A close reading of the text noting the political events mentioned, references to Woodstock and the incidental music played by the witches (Joplin's version of *Me and Bobby McGee* was not released until 1971) suggests the action happens somewhere between 1971 and 1974. More important than the date is the way Updike puts the sense of era into the novel. There are only a few era markers in the text, skilfully deployed. They generate a symbolic coherence to convey the sense of an unstable, chaotic time when bad things had been loosed upon the world.

Here are instances from the early sections of the novel (WE 12-13) which show how the signs of the time are gently infused into the story:

Female yearning was in all the papers and magazines now, the sexual equation had become reversed as girls of good family flung themselves towards brutish rock stars, callow unshaven guitarists from the slums of Liverpool or Memphis, somehow granted indecent powers . . .

Later, as Alexandra drives towards the beach:

. . . the day was warm, and old cars and VW vans with curtained windows and psychedelic stripes filled the narrow parking lot . . . young people

wearing bathing suits lay supine on the sand with their radios as if summer and youth would never end.

Hinting at dark forces Updike describes, through Alexandra's eyes, the debris

washed up on the beach:

. . . beer cans so long afloat their printed labels had been eaten away; these unlabelled cans looked frightening – blank like the bombs terrorists make and then leave in public places to bring the system down and thus halt the war.

There may be fewer signs of the time in the text and their use may be more subtle but Updike's usual characterisation of the Sixties and the antiwar movement is concentrated on the Reverend Ed Parsley, who is introduced with this observation:

Though just into his thirties, he was too old to be a window-trashing LSD imbibing soldier in the Movement and this added to his sense of displacement and inadequacy, though he was always organizing peace marches and vigils and read-ins and proposing to his parish of dryasdust dutiful souls that they let their pretty old church become a sanctuary, with cots and hot plates and chemical toilet facilities, for the hordes of draft evaders. (WE 41)

The Reverend Parsley is doomed by his Sixties connections: he runs off with Dawn Polanski, a trailer trash hippy from a broken home. Later Sukie reveals she gets letters from him ' . . . saying he's gone underground. They've let him and Dawn into a group that's learning how to make bombs out of alarm clocks and cordite. The system doesn't stand a chance' (WE 134).

In the end he is killed while making a bomb.

This novel does not need the mass of period detail so essential to the telling of the *Rabbit Redux* story. Words, phrases, events and circumstances can just be mentioned and their received meanings are a sufficient frame. For example, Updike names some of the singers and some of the songs being played over the music system for the witches' hot tub sabbat and nothing more. He needs no further details for them to be relevant and effective. Updike is judicious in his choice of examples. The story of contemporary witches in Rhode Island is not dependent on any specific

‘recent’ era for its general effectiveness. It was published in 1984 and could have been set at that time. Cheap alternative energy production (Van Horne’s business venture) was as salient an issue as it had been in the early 1970s (the first OPEC oil shock). The story could have worked in that setting but Updike’s achievement is to make the era matter and his carefully crafted, incidental, at times casual, era markers are powerful and effective. They are essential, not to the tale of witches and their demon, but to the creation of an irrational imaginary space. As seen in the discussion of *Rabbit Redux*, Updike saw the Sixties of the counter culture and the anti-war movement as a poisonous, rancorous age. What better way to make the witches story more powerful than to set this unleashing of demonic forces in the same era, with the relationship pointed up by the sub-story of the radicalism of Reverend Ed Parsley and his death in a radical bomb factory?

## **2.2 Philip Roth**

Like John Updike, Philip Roth was a famously popular writer in the sixties. *Portnoy’s Complaint* [1969] and Updike’s *Couples* [1968] were both notorious and celebrated at the time. In their own ways they helped make the era, and also reflected it, with more open writing about sexual activity, challenging conventions and pushing forward the case against censorship. It was much later that Roth returned to write about the Sixties as the central focus of *American Pastoral* [1997]. The vision of the Sixties and the anti-Vietnam campaigns in this novel has moved substantially away from his works of the late 1960s and his 1971 satire of the Nixon presidency, *Our Gang* (1972). *American Pastoral* (AP) tells the story of a good man, Seymour ‘the Swede’ Levov, Jewish, an ex-high school sports star who marries an Irish Catholic beauty queen, succeeds in business, buys a home in an idyllic rural setting

and has his life implode when his sixteen year old only child becomes an anti-war militant and blows up the local post office in 1968, killing a kindly local doctor. There are many different kinds of research evident in this elegant and gorgeously overblown and lyrically written novel. There is research on specific acts and events, there is memory and recollection, and there is the work of fictionalisation with considerations about the form of the novel, all deftly handled and unified by Roth's exuberant and forceful creative practice. *American Pastoral* involves a structured set of nested narratives. Roth uses Zuckerman, a character in several of his novels, to set up the puzzle of the Swede's life. Then Roth has Zuckerman merge himself into the world of the fictional Swede so completely that he almost disappears and key incidents from his life are told as if by the man himself. This narrative play is essential for the tone of the novel and the compelling power of the creation of the character of the Swede; the product of great experience, skill and craft.

Although Roth and Updike are sometimes cast as literary rivals there are links between them embedded in *American Pastoral*. Claudia Roth Pierpont in her book, *Roth Unbound: A writer and his books*, makes the strongest possible case for the connection. In recalling Roth's account of the debates he had with Updike in the 1960s, she notes:

Updike recalls his revulsion at the anti-war extremism of the era, particularly 'the totalitarian intolerance and savagery epitomized by the Weathermen.' For years he carried in his wallet a slip of paper printed with a Weathermen slogan, the same lines (with small grammatical changes) that Merry Levov puts up on her wall: 'We are against everything that's good and decent in honky America. We will loot, burn, and destroy. We are the incubation of your mother's nightmare.' Broadening the subject to the morality of war, Updike notes that some religious systems recognise that merely to be alive is to kill: 'The Jains try to hide this by wearing gauze masks to avoid inhaling insects.' It's a startling conjunction of subjects: Roth, the Weathermen, and the Jains, all within six pages, published about five years before Roth began *American Pastoral*. It's hard not to see the tiny seeds of Merry's terrible development here, and it certainly does not detract from Roth's monumental

fictional construct to say so, or from the details that give it life: wretched Merry, in order to 'do no harm to the microscopic organisms that dwell in the air' makes a mask from an old foot stocking. (Pierpont 303-4)

Whatever the significance of such coincidences, there are other 'Updikean' elements in *American Pastoral*. The central figure is based on an actual Weequahic high school sports star, Seymour (Swede) Maslin from the 1930s (Pierpont 207-8). The name makes a link to Harry Angstrom's Swedish descent. At high school the fictional Swede was a star baseball, basketball and football player (Harry/Rabbit was 'only' a basketball star). Both were adulated and envied. The Swede remained unmoved by his personal achievements, modest, humble and balanced in his appreciation of his talents, satisfied with his life and his duties. Unlike Rabbit in the 1950s, he does not run but stays at home, moves into the family business and seeks to realise a quasi-rural version of the American Dream. Miller's comment on Updike's version of US history could be extended to include Roth: there is a 'pastoral' element in both associated with childhood and growing up, the solidarity of World War Two and the late 1940s and the 1950s, disrupted sharply by the politics of the anti-war movement in the 1960s and, for the Swede, by his daughter's bomb.

There are also some shared writerly aspects. Both authors were enthralled by the significance of detail and could have written: 'The detail, the immensity of the detail, the force of detail, the weight of detail.' This version comes from *American Pastoral* (42-3) but is echoed in many comments in other novels and essays by Roth and Updike. When it comes to the specific 'signs of the time', as a result of Roth's choice of narrative strategy, they are many and varied. As with so many Roth novels, including *Portnoy's Complaint*, there is a broad sweep of American history to frame the novel, from World War Two, through growing up, school and college in the

1950s and facing crises of various kinds in the 1960s. In this version, there are moments of inspection and retrospection from the 1960s, the 1970s (circa 1973 and the Watergate hearings) and the mid-1990s. As with Updike but rarely in the same style or with the same techniques, Roth lays down detail after detail, all organised and shaped by the need to establish the contrast between ‘paradise remembered’, ‘the fall’ and the dystopia, the post-sixties ‘paradise lost’. In characteristic and expansive form, Roth has Zuckerman, in the opening of the second chapter, set up the optimism and shared enthusiasm of the late 1940s:

Our class started high school six months after the unconditional surrender of the Japanese, during the greatest moment of collective inebriation in American history. And the upsurge of energy was contagious. Around us nothing was lifeless. Sacrifice and constraint were over. The Depression had disappeared. Everything was in motion. The lid was off. Americans were to start over again, en masse, everyone in it together. (AP 40)

Roth has Zuckerman recognise there was a clash of generations in this post-war paradise with the young and the returned straining against the accepted conventions and expectations of parents. In this era he notes ‘the intergenerational conflict never looked like it would twenty years later. The neighbourhood was never a field of battle strewn with the bodies of the misunderstood (AP 42-3)’. Throughout the novel the contrasts are repeated and reinforced; the era of the 1940s and the 1950s against the 1960s as the explanation for the disorder and dissolution of the times that come after.

This can be seen in the detailed, nuanced account of glove making and the history of the Newark Maid Company started by the Swede’s father (AP 11ff, 24, 26-28, Chapter 4). The rise and fall of the company involves an exciting combination of research and imagination. No matter how well written as an economic history of glove manufacturing and its decline in the USA, the account, by itself, is not emblematic of the Sixties. Roth transforms this basic, researched account of glove



manufacturing into such an era marker by two related techniques. One is the generation of rich descriptions of the glove trade. The other is the narrative sweep he builds around its rise and fall. The factory is started by his father and grows on the back of government wartime contracts to supply the military. The company makes a relatively smooth transition to peace conditions through its harmonious workplace culture, the strong, paternalistic leadership of his father as boss and the supply of cheap and disciplined black labour. This success and harmony is systematically dismantled through the 1960s as the black workers become restless and work discipline (and hence quality) declines. The pivotal moment comes in the 1967 Newark riots when blacks (marginalised by a white power structure in an overwhelmingly black city) took to the streets, lashing out at police behaviour. In the novel the riots are portrayed as a black version of the white civil unrest over the war and the draft, with perverse and destructive outcomes for the local population (AP Chapter 4). At the height of the riots, the Swede and Vera, his black 'forelady', cooperate to defend the factory. Ironically, the windows, having been spared by the rioters, are shot out by either white cops or vigilantes. Despite the riots, the Swede wants to keep the factory in Newark as an act of family obligation and this wish is reinforced later because he doesn't want his daughter to accuse him of exploiting black workers by moving production away. In the end, economic imperatives prevail. The broad chronological narrative sequence of the larger story is crystallised in the smaller story of the rise and fall of the Newark Maid glove factory. Research provides a ready array of details but it is Roth's imagination and craft which turns the simple history of a glove factory into a key element of his account of the Sixties.

Roth works continually to establish a contrast between life before and after the chaos of the Sixties. This is reinforced through his rendering of the changing

rural setting. The house in Old Rimrock, the rural retreat the Swede craved and bought, was the place where the American pastoral was played out, with the Swede imagining himself as Johnny Appleseed and Dawn, his beauty queen wife, embracing the rural idyll by raising cattle. Particularly effective is the deeply lyrical elegy for the American pastoral moment as it shapes the contrast between paradise and the fall as the Swede's life passes from perfection into the American berserk (AP 86). Tellingly, the imagined return of Merry to the American rural idyll, again written with lyrical beauty (AP 419), is the prelude to the end, the mocking laughter of a deranged social critic condemning the life of the Levovs.

Key figures from the 1960s are invoked to give a feel for the times and its inherent senselessness and viciousness: Marcuse, Fanon, Angela Davis and LeRoi Jones. As Updike had the messianic black nationalist Skeeter come to give Harry long rants on the condition of blacks in America, Roth has an imaginary Angela Davis appear to the Swede in his kitchen where he tells her things about his life and his daughter's actions, claiming to himself that Davis can lead him to his daughter (AP 157ff). The Swede imagines Angela Davis providing a Sixties critique of his character. Although the Swede says he believed every word his imaginary Angela Davis said to him, the text is equally clear her views of the American condition were false and irrelevant.

The Swede also describes Merry's bedroom with its books by Marx and Angela Davis and her hand written poster of a quote from the Weathermen on the wall. One important example of Roth's technique can be explored through this quotation. He describes the poster in the following terms:

The poster was the only thing he had dared to remove from her room and destroy, and even doing that much had taken three months; appropriating the property of another, an adult or child, was simply repugnant to him. But three

months after the bombing he marched up the stairs and into her room and tore the poster down. It read: 'We are against everything that is good and decent in honky America. We will loot and burn and destroy. We are the incubation of your mother's nightmares.' In large square letters the attribution: 'WEATHERMEN MOTTO.' And because he was a tolerant man he'd tolerated that too. 'Honky' in his daughter's hand. Hanging there for a year in his own home, each red letter shadowed heavily in black. (AP 252)

If Updike's version was the source, are these just 'small grammatical changes' as Pierpont suggests? No. The changes were made deliberately to serve the purposes of the narration. The rhythmic and rhetorical effectiveness of the quotation is enhanced in Roth's slightly reworked version. The change from 'that's' to 'that is' increases the impact of the declamatory effect of the opening words – 'that's' is softer, 'that is' is harder and more determined. The removal of the commas between 'loot, burn, and destroy' (Updike's version) turning it into 'loot and burn and destroy' enhances the rhythm of the words and their sequential impact. A similar enhancement comes from multiplying the nightmares of a mother. Roth's version gives the Weathermen words their best shot at being meaningful, memorable and appropriate to the dramatic context of Swede Levov's tolerance of Merry's use of these words for a poster.

But the most significant change Roth has made is to the date of this quotation. The words copied on the poster were spoken by John Jacobs on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1969 at a National War Council called by the Weathermen (Gitlin 399). Merry put the poster on her wall in the middle of 1967. At that time SDS may have been riven by internal disputes of every kind but SDS had not split, the Weathermen did not exist and the bombing campaigns associated with the slogan 'bring the war back home' had not begun. Pierpont treats this change lightly, only writing 'Roth was somewhat premature in suggesting Merry's engagement with the Weathermen (217)'. It should be noted that Roth had first attempted a novel based on a female

radical anti-war bomber in 1971 when the bombing campaign of the Weathermen (by then the Weather Underground) was a live issue (Pierpont 74, 206-7).

Why did Roth deliberately push the violence associated with the Weathermen back before 1969? The focus of the story in *American Pastoral* is shaped by a consideration of three periods, named in the headings for the different parts of the book: Paradise Remembered, The Fall, and Paradise Lost. Moving the poster and the bombings more deeply and unambiguously into the 1960s re-enforces the centrality of this narrative dynamic and transmits the totality of the story more effectively. And Roth is right. The image of the Sixties in the USA includes the Weathermen and the anti-war bombings and the campaign to 'bring the war home' which sneaks into the decade in late 1969 but flowered most obviously in the early 1970s. A reader who did not live through these events, or has not studied them closely, will relate more directly to them through the use of the Weathermen as shorthand for all of the militancy of the campaigns against the Vietnam War. It may not be accurate, it may undermine the nuances of the politics of the era, but it amplifies, concentrates and makes emphatic the point which Roth/Zuckerman and/or the Swede want to convey about the Sixties. This reinforces the point that the Sixties is an imaginary with its own tropes and internal coherence.

If considered overall, there is a significant amount of research manifest in the published text of *American Pastoral*. Some of this concerns the techniques and decisions over narrative strategies and some provides details of events, arguments, characters and circumstances. Regardless of the volume of research and the marks it leaves in the form and content of the text, creative practice transforms the research in the process, giving the novel the texture and tone which it has.

## 2.3 Conclusion

The distinction between received and achieved meanings has been used to understand what happens in the development and deployment of era markers and signs of the time in the Sixties novels. In texts written at the time or close to events, there are few received meanings to be invoked and the project of generating achieved meanings is unstable and incomplete. Works produced at the time such as *Why are We in Vietnam?*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *Couples* and *Rabbit Redux*, are as much about era making as about evoking an era. In their time they partially succeeded and partially failed to fix their achieved meanings to be passed on and act as received meanings for others. More work, more repetition and other more diffused cultural processes were needed to cement such meanings as taken-for-granted ways to name or characterise the era.

With novels of recollection and re-creation, the situation is different. Both *The Witches of Eastwick* and *American Pastoral* work with at least some received meanings available from their cultural context. In *American Pastoral*, for example, there are named people who evoke an image of the Sixties, especially Angela Davis and Franz Fanon whose utterances and quotations hint at the discordant image of the times. For both novels there are the militant bombing campaigns against the Vietnam War; to mention them is to invoke a certain tenor of the times. Once again, received meanings are rarely enough; both novelists seek to intensify the meanings condensed in such events to increase their narrative power. The close consideration of Roth and Updike here provides a basis for exploring more precisely the contribution of research to creative writing, particularly the writing of fiction.

# Chapter Three: Research and Creative Writing

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The first two chapters of the exegesis have dealt with aspects of research that also underpin *Stardust and Golden*, the creative component of this thesis. These chapters provide details which suggest a way towards answering questions about the role of research in creative writing, what it might be, how it might be done and why creative writing needs research to prosper. This chapter needs a different approach. It needs to consider more general, more reflexive and more theoretical literature on the nature of research as well as the research practice involved in producing the creative work.

## 3.1. Practice-Led Research

The Dawkins reforms of the 1980s moved creative arts into a university environment. The rise of creative writing research degrees (Kroll and Webb 173) and the introduction of forms of national research assessment encouraged a debate over the research character of creative practice (Webb and Brien 187-9). Creative artists came to argue art production was a form of research in its own right (Webb, Magee). Arguments about creative practice as research were developed and refined by descriptors such as practice-led research (where the urge for research comes from the act of creative production and the results of research are fed back into the work of art) and research-led practice (where innovative research is taken into creative practice, opening up new possibilities, techniques and providing new resources) and, for some, the claim that successful creative practice was a form of research in its own right (Smith and Dean 1- 6).

Significant advances were made in explaining the research status of art practice, as with Paul Carter's work on the concept of 'material thinking' and the publication, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Biggs and Karlsson), with its careful collection of arguments for architecture and design, sculpture, painting, dance and an important chapter on creative writing by Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien. The fit between creative writing and the creative practice of the broader arts community was not close enough to explain the research claims of creative writers though (Webb and Brien 192-3). A more precise description of the research component, originality and research character of creative writing was needed (Kroll). The journal *Text* and those associated with it worked hard to make the case for creative writing practice as research and to encourage creative writers to experiment with possible modes for the exegesis and the research statements required for national research assessment (*Text Special Issues* 7, 15, 27, 30). From initially borrowing and adapting arguments from other creative arts there has been a move towards developing more disciplinary specific terms for this debate (Magee; Haseman; Hecq). Jane Goodall, a trained historian and a creative writer, has noted that often '... research is assumed to be practice-led and to be understood to be the factual dimension of a fictional work; the writer's job is to make that dimension intriguing or adventurous' (Goodall 200). She argues it is necessary to go beyond this position to provide a justification for the research methods of creative writing practice since much of the research done by creative writers is about writerly processes, including the form of the work, reinforced by the learned craft of writing itself.

So there are two modes of research supporting creative writing; one is concerned with the craft of writing and the modes of literary production, in this case

fictional strategies, and the other is about content, events, detail and interpretation.

Smith and Dean developed a notion of ‘creative practice and research in the iterative cyclic web’ to document movements between practice and research in the act of artistic creation:

Research, therefore, needs to be treated, not monolithically, but as an activity which can appear in a variety of guises across the spectrum of practice and research. It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorisation and contextualisation of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator. Although they overlap . . . it is important to distinguish between these different modes of research. For example, research undertaken for the writing of a novel may involve the consultation of known historical sources. However, this research is normally ‘secondary’ rather than ‘primary’ because it does not usually constitute activities which are central to basic historical research, such as comparative interpretation of sources or the discovery of new sources. Having said that, the novel may convey the impact of historical events on the lives of ordinary people in ways which are difficult to glean from the sources, which show the information they contain in a new light, and which are intellectually and emotionally extremely powerful. (Smith and Dean 3)

Webb and Brien also point to the heterogeneity of research relevant to creative writing and pick up the idea of a bowerbird approach from Tess Brady reinforced by reference to Levi-Strauss’s use of the term *bricoleur*. This can be seen in their discussion of how different research methodologies may be used in creative writing:

The creative writer researcher may, for example, borrow the techniques of conducting quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews from sociological research, careful observation and recording from the natural sciences, close reading and textual analysis research from communication, and/or the process of studying organizations from business research. They may use all of these in combination and at different times in the research process. Writers take what they need, from wherever they can find it. And though such a process may sound slapdash and too casual to be taken seriously, it is in fact, grounded on very careful and sophisticated investigations into research methodologies and how they function. . . . The point . . . is that methodology does not direct creative writing research (or art) practice; rather the practice directs the bricoleur-as-bowerbird’s selection of method. (Webb and Brien 199)



These two quotations set up an underlying puzzle. How are the various modes of research, about the content of a novel and about the issues of writerly techniques combined? There is another more fundamental question, not about the how of creative practice but the why: what is the purpose, function, or utility of research in creative writing practice? Why do creative writers use research in their writing and what ends does it serve in a literary form committed to creativity, imagination and making things up?

### **3.2. Research for Re- Writing the Sixties**

The creative work for this PhD thesis involved re-thinking the nature of events of the 1960s and 1970s in the era of militant student struggles against the Vietnam War, conscription and authority in the university. It also involved thinking about how to write the Sixties as an era and how to write the account of young people involved in such conflicts. Thinking turned into a research and writing experiment on the relationship between research on the form of the writing and on the events and characteristics of the times. In more formal terms the question became a variant on this theme:

How do we conceive of research in Creative Writing, and what is the relationship between creative writing and critical understanding that is integral to that research? (Harper and Kroll 2)

Coming from a social science research background I was familiar with research questions and methods relevant to describing events and assessing their significance but less comfortable with what was meant by creative writing practice and its implications for research. The meaning of practice was open ended:

Thus practice here means an approach to a subject based on knowledge acquired through the act of creating. This knowledge is not superficial. It results from sustained and serious examination of the art of writerly practice and might include not only contemporary theoretical or critical models but

the writer's own past works as well as predecessors and traditions. In some incarnations, practice as research functions as the formal autobiography of an individual's craft, taking into account the significant influences and methods. (Harper and Kroll 4)

These words resonated. I had been a student activist at the University of Adelaide and while working there as a tutor I researched and wrote an MA thesis on student demonstrations in the 1960s and early 1970s and this, along with my recollections, was the relevant starting point (McEachern). The thesis was never an adequate basis for writing a novel but it certainly had a role to play in the 'formal autobiography of an individual's craft' and as a point of departure for thinking about the Sixties and the challenge of re-writing the era.

### **3.2.1 Research**

What kind of research was necessary for this novel? For detail, especially period detail, research included reading other accounts and interpretations of the events to give a feeling of verisimilitude for the circumstances of the story. The Master's thesis was an approximate guide. It provided a wealth of information about what happened and the politics of the clashes between demonstrators and police and the court cases which followed. The information in the thesis came saturated with interpretation, analysis and theoretical underpinnings. In the thesis, individuals, their personalities and ambitions, played little or no part in the interpretation of events. It was not necessary to use all the research from the thesis for the novel and the broader analytical framework was, at best, irrelevant. The novel could have been written without the MA but the new research would have been shaped differently. More attention would have been given to the importance of character, individual motivation and action and local details. Indeed, with the limitations of the thesis in many of these areas, further research was essential. There was no need to revisit the

original archival resources but different kinds of information became important. For example, it was useful to reread the student newspaper *On Dit* for accounts of the social and cultural life of the University in the period 1966 - 1973 with its details of the leading public figures in student life, the major social events, changing fashions and tastes in music as well as a glimpse of the ways in which radical politics erupted into conventional student life. For example, Robyn Archer (then known as Robyn Smith) performed at the commencement ball in 1969 and made a great impression. Although *On Dit* was silent about the music it did show what she wore. Such matters as the quality and range of food served in the refectories, the prices and the complaints as well as the student guide to eating out in Adelaide all added a greater sense of texture to the times than the more analytically and theoretically conceived MA thesis.

As with generations of writers, I found it extremely valuable to walk the ground where the action took place. From Melbourne Street in North Adelaide, time and time again, I walked and looked, gathering details as I moved along the roads and streets, cul-de-sacs, dead ends and laneways, up and down Stanley Street and Kingston Terrace, looking at the houses and the places I had known when I was a student at Adelaide, places where the student squats and shared houses had been, where Students for Democratic Action had their headquarters, and other places like the then run down and decaying Carclew, the venue for many an atmospheric party. I walked the route from Stanley Street to the University, to the Adelaide Market, around the parklands and visited the music venues from the 1960s. The streetscapes and skylines had changed, so I sought books that documented such changes (ranging from Bob Byrne's *Adelaide Remember When* to Patricia Summerling's *The Adelaide Parklands*), old business directories, and collections of photographs. I walked the

city streets trying to spot the old and remember what had been replaced by the car parks, new buildings and renovations. Obsessively I would walk the ground, looking at what had been built or had grown, trying to recapture, or more accurately, imagine how the place might have looked or smelt at the time; the discarded vegetables being swept aside at the market, the smell of coffee being ground, relatively unusual for an age dominated by tea and instant coffee, of Asian cooking at the few Asian restaurants in operation, of Greek and Italian cooking in Hindley Street, of the pancakes at the Pancake Kitchen, stale beer in the alleyways round city hotels, and of the hot parklands and the resin scent of pines. Anything and everything was fuel for the fire of my imagination, sparks to make the evocation of the time and place of the novel more powerful.

Past experience and memory also prompted further research and investigation. For many events I have uncertain recall but my imagination supplied vivid details to fill in the spaces. I found I needed research of a different kind; to provide an assurance the details I made up were plausible. Often the MA was of no help at all. The kind of detail or texture I was seeking could neither be confirmed nor refuted by its near obsessive narrowing of the focus to groups of people as sociological actors. To get more of what I needed I sought out all the usual sources: archives, on-line and on paper, popular commentary and academic writing. I looked for photographs and press clippings on all kinds of things, not just student demonstrations and their political impact. I was interested in fashion, shopping, eating out and eating in, changing cultural assumptions and the popular reactions to the times. The price of real estate, levels of rent and availability of flats and potential shared households, all were flash points of inquiry, just to pile detail upon detail, even if such details never made it to the final text. I was especially interested in

music, including local bands, burgeoning, blossoming or disintegrating. Films, documentaries, magazines and many other potential sources were used then to give me some flavour of the times, to prompt memories to come forward, renew curiosity and inspire new imaginings.

In addition I used more general works, documentary collections and memoirs to help locate this story in the context of more general arguments about the nature of the times. These ranged from books about specific years in the 1960s, especially 1968 (Kurlansky) and 1969 (Kirkpatrick), to documentary collections (Charters, Unger and Unger) bringing together primary documents and commentary. The essay collection *The Sixties in Australia* was particularly helpful, especially with its pointed reminder:

The reality is that the vast majority of Australians were neither hippies nor dope-smokers; involvement in youth protests movements was, in the main, an experience for middle-class university students; and sexual liberation was a hotly contested debate. (Robinson and Ustinoff xii)

Of equal value were the assortment of memoirs and recollections of the era. Anne Summers' autobiography included her years at the University of Adelaide as a radical activist and Michael Hyde was refreshingly frank about his militancy and Maoism at Monash. Richard Neville's memoirs were more cosmopolitan while Frank Moorhouse's *Days of Wine and Rage*, although about the 1970s, was fascinating for its bricolage charm and energy. Taken together such books form a resource for a creative writer wanting to set a novel in the Sixties. With their richness they provide a basis for extensive secondary research. In the end, few of these details may have found their way into the text but the deep background of such volumes is invaluable.

### 3.2.2 Writing Strategies

As well as research into the background details of the era, there was the other research on the forms of the story and the writing techniques that would best communicate it. Again, this is the kind of research any writer could undertake and through this research make a contribution to knowledge. Narrative strategies, the choice of point of view, dialogue and argument and characterisation were all included in my research and reading. Having decided to write fiction, I was confronted with a large number of questions. What kind of fiction? What narrative voice? How was this story about past conflicts to be told? What was the appropriate style or form of the novel? I had little choice but to experiment.

I considered the choice between a first person and a third person narrative and examined a number of examples I thought were relevant to the likely assemblage of settings, characters and a core relationship between two young men growing up. Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, a tale told of Sebastian by his friend Charles, was attractive because their initial relationship is set at university before Sebastian is sent down. The story also started from the end, with Charles finding again a place he had known well in his youth, then recreating and re-telling the story. F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* had Nick telling the story of his discovery of Gatsby and their relationship with impressive brevity and economy of style. David Malouf's *Johnno*, an Australian novel with a similar form, a male narrator telling about his relationship with another male, combines elements of fascination and distaste in the relations between them.

Given the novel is largely set at university I obviously considered the genre characteristics of the campus novel. *Faculty Towers*, Elaine Showalter's analytical

map and evaluation of the genre, outlined both the potential and the limitations of this form of novel. There is a considerable body of work to discuss and Showalter finds much to approve. She praises Amanda Cross's *Death in the Faculty* for its ability to deal with blended genres, crime and campus, and contemporary academic issues. By contrast, Ffion Murphy investigates why there are so few Australian campus novels. After much searching I found about twelve Australian novels loosely connected to university settings. Michael Wilding's *Academia Nuts* and his short story 'Campus Novel' came closest to the traditional satiric spirit while Laurie Clancy's *Wildlife Reserve*, set in the seventies, adds a smattering of protests and demonstrations to the tale of the unexpected triumph of an underqualified ex-pat English academic. In the process I found that the University of Adelaide had its very own campus novel set in the 1950s, *North Terrace*, by Joseph Gordon. Its unpromising subtitle gives a flavour of its range: *A Novel about Love and Hate, Life and Death and of Campus Life in the City of Adelaide 1952-1956*. I have been unable to find any biographical information on the author.

Within the British and American tradition there were so many to choose from, and for the most part, they were a pleasure to read. Of particular interest were Malcom Bradbury's *The History Man* and David Lodge's *Changing Places*, both written in 1975 (although *Changing Places* is set in 1969 and the *History Man* in 1972); both are satires and both strongly focus on the life of academics and the conflicts between them. It would have been possible to write my novel as a satire. I have sufficient experience of university life to imagine the full range of characters and conflicts needed but, in the end, I chose not to follow the path to satire and mild or severe mockery so characteristic of the genre. Indeed I wanted to focus this story on students not staff and not on the travails of contemporary academic discontents.

After a forty-year career as a well published social scientist, certain habits of mind and of writing had been ingrained by continuous and successful repetition. It would not be easy to move from analytical prose writing to writing creative fiction. I knew this would require hard work and a degree of conscious self-reflexive effort. Creative fiction and analytical prose diverge around the difference between narration and analysis. Leaving aside the category of creative non-fiction and the use of creative non-analytical elements embedded in analytical works, analysis operates under the sign of truth and accuracy: no matter how good or how creative the analytical writing is, the standard of judgment and the ground for conflicting assessments of quality turn around the object of the analysis and the adequacy or otherwise of the combination of argument and evidence to the task of making sense of a given social or natural phenomenon. Disagreements abound, theoretical perspectives are many and interpretations are unstable across time and fashion but the grounds of disagreement are disciplined by the pursuit of accuracy. If it can be shown that an author of analytical prose has made up evidence, an event or a character, then the credibility of the work is fatally compromised. Creative fiction is different: good writing and creativity trump any simple-minded fascination with literal truth.

In moving from writing analytical prose to creative fiction the challenge is how to abandon the pre-occupation with accuracy and any concealed analysis lingering in the fictional work. In this I was not alone. Other creative writers who have a background in another research discipline note that they too had to move away from this obsession with accuracy, experienced as liberation from analytical constraints (Goodall 200-1). I did not try to write a disguised analysis of the student movement at the University of Adelaide in the 1960s, nor did I try to reproduce in a fictional



form the analysis I had previously developed for the MA thesis. Instead I sought to explore in fiction the choices confronting those opposed to the war and conscription as their actions took them into conflict with government policy.

To make progress required harnessing the insights from the research about content to experimentation about form and the writerly techniques appropriate to the story being created. Terms to describe the process of imagination and creative practice can be of the ‘iterative cyclical’ (Smith and Dean) variety or the ‘practice-led research loop’ (Kroll ) or writing experimentation with testing and research (Brien ‘Creative’) since all these describe the experience of creative writing research practice, with its movement between these two modes of research and the discipline that comes from the primacy of creative practice. Mostly creative practice worked to discipline research about content but occasionally a stubborn ‘fact’ would intrude and require more imagination and creative thinking to reconcile the demands of the novel with the residual complication of accuracy. For example, at one point I wrote a scene where Stryder gives Mark a copy of Miles Davis’s *Bitches Brew*. This had to be set in late 1969 when I thought the record had been released in the USA in December and released in Australia in early 1970, since the record is commonly ascribed to 1969, when the recording sessions occurred. But the record itself was not released in the USA until late April 1970. What was I to do? Should I enjoy the liberation from the demand of accuracy and simply leave the scene unchanged or should I find a new way to reconcile the imperative for the scene to occur in late 1969 and for the record still to be given? I wimped out and changed the scene to accommodate the actual date of its release in the USA. The rewritten scene killed the pace and purpose of the narrative at that point and weakened the characterisation of Stryder. After much hesitation I finally cut the scene completely. This sensitivity

about accuracy only concerned minor matters. On major matters, such as the court scene, I was willing to write things not found in actual court cases. Stryder and Mary share a trial and the magistrate makes clear his thinking on their sentences when he provides his judgement. These things were not likely to happen so neatly. The pace of the story could not survive two court cases and two further sessions to provide the judgement and determine the sentences. The requirements of the novel came first.

In the end the tension between these various modes of research and the experiment of writing was resolved by what worked to make the novel more dynamic and matched the pace of the story to the needs of mood and emotion. This required careful reconstruction and redrafting until, piece by piece, word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, the work achieved the appropriate coherence of research, writing and tone, evoking the Sixties with its contradictions and potentialities intact.

### **3.3 The Role of Research**

How are we to understand the role of research in creative writing? What role does research play and why is it important? How is research identified and justified to a sceptical audience?

#### **3.3.1 The Scientific Hypotheses**

In explaining the why of research and the significance of research in creative writing, it is often useful to argue by analogy to other research methods in other disciplinary domains. There is a temptation to defend the research element in creative writing by arguing that it is either the same as, or parallels the nature of, research done in other branches of the humanities and social sciences, or, the gold standard, the physical

sciences. Jane Smiley, in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*, provides a well-constructed version of this claim. Smiley suggests that ‘a novel *is a hypothesis, a dream, a therapeutic act, an ontological construct and an assertion of self*’ (Thirteen 40). Her claim that a novel involves a kind of hypothesis is based on the strongest possible analogy with natural sciences.

A novel is a hypothesis. A novelist shares with a scientist the wish to observe. A novelist also shares with a scientist a partial and imperfect knowledge of the phenomenon he wishes to observe. And so both novelist and scientist say ‘what if?’ . . . The scientist then does his experiment, which he may refine over and over until his findings are clear and unequivocal. The novelist begins his novel. The test of his experiment is not whether its results can be reproduced, but either plausibility or accountability. His own mind is the first judge. . . . For this test, the novelist is required to have observed enough people to know what is plausible; in many cases he enlists the aid of friends or editors to help him make this judgement. But the plot point or character action may fail the test of plausibility. In this event, can the author account for it in an interesting or believable enough way to persuade the reader to accept it? For this, the novelist often uses his own experience to supply an unusual but right-seeming or appealing explanation. . . . – not plausible, but logical and idiosyncratic – and the reader is induced to accept . . . [this] as a form of truth, even though it is new to her.

..... Ultimately, the novel has to do what the scientific experiment does – it has to withstand the observation and disagreement of other people. The novelist’s hypothesis and the novel that grow out of it have to coincide with the worldview of editors, reviewers, book salesmen, and readers sufficiently for them to accept, at least provisionally the author’s hypothesis. If they do, then the novel, like the scientific experiment, adds to the store of human knowledge. (Thirteen 42-3)

For Smiley, the test for fiction lies in persuasion, plausibility and accountability underpinned by an assumed consensus able to determine which accounts of characters and their behaviour are plausible and which are not. This ‘consensus’ is fairly malleable and can be expanded by innovative writing to overcome initial scepticism. Although there are elements of plausibility and persuasion in the broad practice of science, neither element is central to advances in scientific knowledge. For science, the test is its accuracy and the ability to replicate experimental results to confirm or disprove an hypothesis and in doing so to advance

knowledge. Earlier in her commentary Smiley recognises this as a significant contrast between the requirements of analysis and fiction when she writes: ‘The historian is required to give up dramatic interest in the pursuit of accuracy, but a novelist must give up accuracy in the pursuit of narrative drive and emotional impact’ (Thirteen 21).

How well-founded is the comparison with the scientific method? Can this be used to describe, explain or justify the research used for fiction? As an example of what happens in science consider the case of Barry Marshall and Robin Warren and their Nobel Prize winning research. Robin Warren had observed some anomalous results in the x-rays of people suffering from stomach ulcers. Warren referred these images to Barry Marshall who was looking for an interesting research project. Marshall sought to identify what the unknown things were (an example of finding something new). The two researchers concluded they had found the bacteria *helicobacter pylori* in the gut and they hypothesised that this bacterial infection was the real cause of stomach ulcers, not stress or diet as was commonly believed. For a time they were not able to convince their peers; articles were rejected and attempts to win grant funding were unsuccessful. To break this consensus Barry Marshall drank a sample of the bacteria to see if it would infect him and provide evidence to support their hypothesis. Even after he was successful, scepticism remained and it was years before other doctors were willing to prescribe antibiotic treatments. The measure of the correctness of the research findings did not come from a medical consensus or peer review but from the fact they were right; stomach ulcers can be cured by the use of antibiotics. The final evaluation of the work of Warren and Marshall was not based on its plausibility, a compelling narrative or the acceptability of their results.

There is little point in applying a scientific rationale to explain the role of research in fiction making. The two enterprises are substantially different and the nature of research and the use of research need to be treated separately. Nonetheless, there is value in the metaphor proposed by Smiley, in thinking of an idea behind a novel as involving an hypothesis of some kind, with the writing of the novel as a quasi-experiment to test the hypothesis. Smiley notes that she ‘especially likes’ (Thirteen 537) J M Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*. This work she says:

. . . evocatively explores the question of how a man of good will can negotiate daily life in a tyrannical world, portrayed in the novel as hypothetical, but clearly based on anticolonialist ideas growing out of Coetzee’s life in his native South Africa. (Thirteen 537)

Hypothetical might not be quite the right word. Her guiding assumption can be rephrased as a hypothesis about the nature, character or form of a novel. It could look something like this. Coetzee speculates it would be possible to write a novel, inspired by contemporary events in South Africa, where all the details suggesting/ documenting/ emphasising South Africa as the location are erased. This would give the novel a more universal and timeless setting, allowing a stronger focus on the enduring drama of colonial rule and the inevitable resistance by the colonised peoples and on what happens to those who rule, resist or seek to be detached observers. The proposed hypothesis would challenge some general assumptions about successful novels where it is expected to use extended description to make the location vivid to the reader. Coetzee writes his novel. It is published, it is reviewed, it is acclaimed, it is successful and the hypothesis is vindicated. Not everyone is convinced; Smiley herself seems to have doubts about Coetzee’s approach to writing. Of his novel *Foe* she comments:

Infinitely nesting thoughts eventually gets tedious, even in 157 pages. . . . Coetzee can’t reproduce Defoe’s characteristic practical, clear, and generous

tone or his illusion of real concrete life, so his accusation against Defoe –that he exploited and misrepresented the ‘real’ subjects of his work – falls flat. (Thirteen 539)

Nonetheless, if *Waiting for the Barbarians* had been written with an hypothesis of the kind outlined above then it would have been a successful experiment proving its point. Even if this is not what Coetzee did it is possible for critics to use this form of reasoning to explore the growth and changing ambit of the novel. Nonetheless, the effort to think about novels as experiments confirming hypotheses ‘falls flat’ if it relies on a comparison with the scientific method: hypotheses formulated in science are not of this kind and their validation, refutation or refinement is not akin to the process underlying the evolution of the novel.

Looking for similarities and building analogies around the scientific method is unnecessary but there is something to be learned from considering what is different between creative writing and doing science. Webb and Brien produce a nuanced account of the differences:

. . . creative writers cannot ‘advance’, as science can advance; we can rarely ‘prove’ or demonstrate that our findings are correct. But we can interrogate our own field, offer new ways of seeing and, in doing so, contribute some interesting and perhaps provocative facts to the knowledge community. By defining, reflecting, intuiting, paying attention, and experimenting . . . it is possible to make an original contribution to knowledge. This contribution is about writing . . . but it is also about observing and analysing context and, perhaps, about human society. (195)

This is given a more precise illustration in considering the relationship between geology and Zbigniew Herbert’s poem ‘Pebble’ which they say can be read ‘as the outcome of research’.

This work explores ways of perceiving a stone, and demonstrates the use of a research question, context and methods: the observation of the natural world through a phenomenological encounter and observation. But the knowledge presented in ‘Pebble’ does not contribute to the field of geology – it presents ways of looking, sensing and otherwise experiencing a stone that may illuminate the work of a geologist, but it tells us nothing about geology. It does, however, force both poet and reader to reconsider not only the

properties of stone, but also human encounters with stones, and by extension, the natural world. (Webb and Brien 202)

Here Webb and Brien propose a domain specific strategy to describe research and creative writing practice, strong claims in its own area but humble and cautious when making claims in the disciplinary domains of other researchers.

Brien, a trained historian and a creative writing academic, is able to reflect on this domain-centric practice of research in an account of her PhD 'fictionalised biography' ('Creative' 57). She comments on reading trial transcripts in the following terms:

The historian-reader was interrogating these texts to establish 'what happens', attempting to fit every piece of evidence into a coherent whole, noting gaps and discrepancies, constructing personality profiles and testing possible motivations against them. Simultaneously, the creative writer-researcher was absorbing the bigger picture, asking questions and making wild and unconnected notes in the margins of the historian's neat information rich files about what these texts suggested for the one yet to be written. ('Creative' 56)

But this doesn't solve the puzzle. Smiley has identified an important point when she notes the experimental character of the research and writing process in fiction. As creative writers reflect on their research and writing practices and routines, the part played by experiment, writing, drafting, redrafting and doing further research is brought to the fore. This is also well expressed by Brien when she identifies 'A cycle of reading, writing, testing, reading, rewriting and retesting promoted a further series of research problems' ('Creative' 57). Summarising her experience she writes:

These research strategies – reading, imaginative speculation and reflective thinking; experimental and exploratory writing; rewriting and editing; and public circulation, testing and discussion of results – coexisted in a state of generative/ cross-fertilisation to the point where it is impossible to identify what part (if any) of the work I completed . . . was entirely 'research' or 'creative practice'. ('Creative' 58)

This refers to the experimental aspect of creative writing acknowledged by many writers to be an essential part of their writing experience. Webb and Brien tease out the nature of this experience and relate it to the challenge of identifying how creative writing may add to the stock of knowledge like other research disciplines:

In order for creative works to be understood as these ‘stocks of knowledge’ in themselves, creative writers must understand themselves as researchers and the work they engage in as experimental development. Once the research starting point has been clarified . . . it is possible to begin making the creative work and then, using the lines of thought that it generates, to tease out and analyse the contextual, theoretical or formal questions that are likely to deliver the required ‘stocks of knowledge.’ The initial work of thinking and structuring allows the subsequent creative research practice to develop experimentally in its own unique way: to move between order and improvisation; to make intuitive leaps or guesses; and to go off in unexpected and tangential directions. (Webb and Brien 196)

Treating creative writing as a form of experimental practice might suggest a link back to Smiley’s argument where experiment is such an important component of the scientific method. But it should be noted that practice and experimentation are fundamental to the learning of a craft. It is hardly surprising that such experimentation should form a fundamental part of research practice in so many disciplines. Experimental science includes craft skills, learning a method for an experiment and, through practice and repetition, acquiring the expertise (the skill) to be effective. However, as creative writers we cannot rely on spinning out variants on the methods of other disciplines and noting the similarities to our practice to authorise our research. The distance from accuracy to plausibility is too great to be bridged by emphasising the similarities between analysis and fiction. It is not possible to establish the ‘form of truth’ of the novel on these analogies with natural science, with hypothesis, experiments or peer review. The value of creative writing



and claims about research in the novel need to centre on something more obviously inherent in the creative process.

Web and Brien usefully present their argument about the development of the concept of practice-led-research as part of the shadow cast by Plato's 'ancient quarrel' between poetry and philosophy in *The Republic* and Aristotle's subsequent partial defence of poetry with his reformulation of the educational and hence knowledge producing power of mimesis (Webb and Brien 187, 189-190). The terms of this ancient quarrel take the form of linked opposites which underpin distinctions between analysis and art, and here I use fiction as the relevant form of art. On the one side stands reason, rationality, logic and analysis and on the other emotion, inspiration, intuition and aesthetic pleasure. Plato feared the corrupting influence of poetry, persuasion without reason meaning the power of art to induce feelings and beliefs (Book X), and some fiction which involves fabrication and the telling of things that are not true (Book II). Versions of these linked opposites have persisted even though the terms emphasised and their meanings have shifted. This is most obvious in discussions of the relationship of literary texts to their social and cultural contexts, from the evolution of the concept of mimesis (Auerbach, Abrams and Taussig), form and content, the extensive post- structuralist debates over realism and representation, and a reformulated response stressing the worldliness of texts (Said). As Bennett and Royle conclude 'Texts cannot but be part of the world' (Ch 4). The consideration here of research inhering in the creative and imaginary elements in the writing of fiction carries traces of these previous formulations and partly rehearses these ancient debates.

### 3.3.2 A Metaphor for Research

If the ‘creative writing as science’ model does not work, if what happens in creative writing is different and the role of research is different, then another approach is needed. Here I would like to treat an account of a novelist’s practice of research in Roth’s *American Pastoral* as the metaphorical ground for this consideration.

In Updike’s *Rabbit Redux* and Roth’s *American Pastoral*, much of the detail comes from research of a kind: the details of the changing technologies in the printing business, the changing business model for the production of gloves, background political and social events and the changing ‘mood’ of the times. With his meta-fictional strategies, Roth is able to have Zuckerman explain his research and his approach to the ‘invention’ of the fiction at the heart of his way of telling the story of the crisis which hits the Swede. He has Zuckerman tell us about the kind of research he (Zuckerman) undertook before he could conceptualise settings, characters and plot. This may, in part, parallel Roth’s research strategy for *American Pastoral* but it is not a fictional rendering of it.

Here is Zuckerman’s account of the ‘research’ he did:

I had gone out to Newark and located the abandoned Newark Maid factory on a barren stretch of lower Central Avenue. I went out to look at their house, now in disrepair, and to look at Keer Avenue, a street where it didn’t seem like a good idea to get out of the car and walk up to the garage where the Swede used to practice his swing in wintertime. Three black kids were sitting on the front steps eyeing me in the car. I explained to them, ‘A friend of mine used to live here.’ When I got no answer, I added, ‘Back in the forties.’ And then I drove away. I drove to Morristown to look at Merry’s high school and then on west to Old Rimrock, where I found the big stone house up on Arcady Hill Road where the Seymour Levovs once had lived as a happy young family; later down in the village, I drank a cup of coffee at the counter of the new general store (McPherson’s) that had replaced the old general store (Hamlin’s) whose post office the teenage Levov daughter had blown up ‘To bring the war home to America.’ I went to Elizabeth where the Swede’s beautiful Dawn was born and raised, and walked around the pleasant neighbourhood, the residential Elmora section; I drove by her family’s

church, St Genevieve's, and then headed due east to her father's neighbourhood, the old port on the Elizabeth River, where the Cuban immigrants and their offspring replaced, back in the sixties, the last of the Irish immigrants and their offspring. I was able to get the New Jersey Miss America Pageant office to dig up a glossy photo of Mary Dawn Dwyer, age twenty-two, being crowned Miss New Jersey in May of 1949. (AP 75-6)

Continuing at some length, Zuckerman details his efforts to find the historical traces of the Swede. This is the kind of immersion in background any author might undertake, a version of the 'boots on the ground' approach of generations of writers, journalists, biographers, social and economic historians. Such journeys into detail may well provide inspiration for the creative act of constructing character and place for a novel, or of finding the convincingly accurate local detail which helps give verisimilitude to the broader fictions of the narrative. But such immersion is never, by itself, enough to provide a sufficient basis for convincing storytelling. Zuckerman concedes as much as he discusses his version of the Swede:

. . . whether that meant I'd imagined an outright fantastical creature, lacking entirely the unique substantiality of the real thing; whether that meant my conception of the Swede was any more fallacious than the conception held by Jerry . . . whether the Swede and his family came to life in me any less truthfully than in his brother – well, who knows? Who *can* know? (AP 76-7)

The word 'imagined' is the key. A few pages later he makes explicit the nature and act of invention, as something other than gathering facts, impressions and details.

First there is a preliminary stage of finding what needs to be explained or explored:

So then . . . I am out on the floor with Joy, and I am thinking of the Swede and of what happened to his country in a mere twenty-five years, between the triumphant days at wartime Weequahic High and the explosion of his daughter's bomb in 1968, of that mysterious, troubling, extraordinary historical transition. I am thinking of the sixties and of the disorder occasioned by the Vietnam War . . . (AP 88)

This is a stage of thinking about broader issues and complexities, thinking about grander historical, social, political and economic forces shaping the world in which the Swede faces his great challenge. Such thinking can be shared by all the social sciences (and creative writers too) and can prompt further investigation, further

thought and further research. But for the creative writer this ‘thought’ also needs to scaffold another moment: the moment of imagination, of invention, of fiction.

Zuckerman describes this starting point in the following terms:

[. . .] I lifted onto my stage the boy we are going to follow into America, our point man into the next immersion [. . .] To the honeysweet strains of ‘Dream,’ I pulled away from myself, pulled away from the reunion, and I dreamed . . . I dreamed a realistic chronicle. I began gazing into his life [. . .] and inexplicably, which is to say lo and behold, I found him in Deal, New Jersey, at a seaside cottage [. . .].(AP 89)

From here the full story begins, focused on the Swede and his ambitions, his dreams, his ordinary intentions and the family and personal crises that hit him when his daughter bombs the Old Rimrock post office and kills the local doctor. The preliminaries have been cleared away; the source, the inspiration for the story has been exposed, a rival version has been set out (by Jerry, the Swede’s tough minded, bluntly spoken and unforgiving brother) and a space has been cleared for this alternative and creative take on the Swede’s life and the demise of the American pastoral.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This fictional and meta-fictional sketch provides a different way of thinking about the role of research in creative writing. Creative writers may do research to find new facts or retrieve facts that have been lost or forgotten. It is certainly possible for a creative writer to produce a novel based on primary research, uncovering such facts and embedding these in a new interpretation, dramatised and made individual in the writing of a novel. Much research done by creative writers is secondary research, considering research findings already made and documented by others, with research providing inspiration, detail, settings, scenarios, incidents or characters. The degree of mastery of such secondary materials may be important or unimportant in a

creative work; sometimes it does not matter how good the mastery of the field is; even limited or inadequate secondary research may form the basis for a highly effective creative work. Some authors may need to do considerable research, to inspire and to inform their creativity. Being certain what pop songs were on the charts in a particular year, what fashions were worn, what slang was current, may require research, but not the kind which would stand as new knowledge unless separated out and refined beyond the use made of such elements in the creative work. In analytical work the results of the research must be congruent with the argument being made and the discoveries reported. At times the modes of research may look alike but their purposes and status remain distinctly different. In creative writing, research is most important for the foundation it provides for imagination and creativity.

# Conclusion: What Is Research for?

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It is possible to recognise at least two modes of research present in creative writing practice: research about the form of the novel and issues of writerly practice and research about content, context and detail. For this exegesis the distinction between received meanings and achieved meanings was used to explore the relationship between these two modes. Beneath this problem lies a more fundamental question. What part does research play in creative writing? What is it for? In the exegesis these matters are approached sequentially and at times, indirectly. This starts with an examination of the generic characteristics of a selection of novels dealing with the broad era of anti-Vietnam and anti-conscription militancy. This consideration was extended through a more concentrated analysis of how Roth and Updike ‘signed the time’ of their Sixties novels. The analysis was completed in an investigation of the role of research in creative writing through reflecting on the broad analytical themes and the creative practice of writing the novel itself.

The creative work and the exegesis combine to support the general proposition that research is an inherent part of creative writing practice and has the potential to produce original, innovative writing and contribute to the stock of human knowledge. Detailing the exact character of that research (its epistemology and methods) is a work in progress but the analysis here supports the view that research in creative writing can have two main purposes: to inform writerly practice and to provide a basis for content, character, situations and associated details. As in practice-led research for other disciplines such as, painting and dance for example, creative writing practice rules. In both modes the impetus for research comes from the demands of creative practice. Creative practice disciplines the modes of research

to serve the purposes embedded in the creative work. The two modes of research, in different ways, act as scaffolds for creative practice and imagination, as in the metaphor from *American Pastoral*. Hence, at a high level, the key way in which the modes of research are related is via creative practice which both disciplines and guides research. Creative practice inspires research and innovation on both the writerly aspects of a novel as well as problems of detail, character or setting. At times, and in more modest ways, research on content and setting may throw up problems for creative practice to solve. More or better research is often not the answer; only creative imagination can inspire innovation. As drafts are written and redrafted, as writing techniques are refined, the fruits of research remain embedded in the text even after the research scaffold is no longer obvious, partially erased in the final work. Here lies the essence of fiction: the making it up and the making it new, imagined and fictionalised. Fictionalisation involves transforming elements derived from research, according weight to what will be left alone and what will be changed, modified or subsumed, intensifying and giving emotional content, heightening effects, filling in gaps in the record, exploring alternative outcomes, revaluing the elements of received interpretations and building a plausible world for the fiction to inhabit. All this is achieved through creative writing practice working with both emotions and the intellect.

Being aware of the tensions which will invariably arise when creative writers pick like a bower-bird from the results of other disciplines means there are good reasons for caution when making claims about the research contribution of fiction to these domains. This is a lesson which could well be learned from the sharp exchanges between historians and writers of historical fiction. In such a context modesty recommends itself. Webb and Brien make this sensible point:

[. . . ]practice-led research in creative writing affords researchers the opportunity to build knowledge in their field. While they may cross disciplinary borders in the process of gathering information for their work, their knowledge generation is typically confined to the domain of creative practice - to narrative, to poetics . . . to the field in which they operate.

[. . . . ]In short, it is important that writer-researchers identify precisely what aspects of their work constitute original contributions to knowledge within the field, or in another field, and limit their claims to what can be substantiated by process and content. (202)

They also make this point:

But not all such practice is necessarily ‘research’. It can be, rather, a matter of writers informing themselves about well established areas of knowledge that they draw on to make their creative work. . . .

This mode of practice is not research, but a gathering of already existing ‘blue bits’, to use Brady’s term, in order to make a new nest. (201-2)

This is well stated and, at a certain level, describes what I did for the writing of this novel. I freely plundered other disciplinary domains for details and circumstances and none of this was ‘original research’ as had been the case of the MA produced in the 1970s. Does this mean that ‘knowledge generation . . . [was] confined to the domain of creative practice’? (Webb and Brien 202) Although working with secondary materials may not always be a form of research producing new knowledge it is not an uncommon form of research in both creative writing and many other disciplines. With secondary research new knowledge does not come from the discovery of new facts but in the interpretation and re-presentation of such materials. In analysis this may generate a new way of thinking about previously accepted interpretations and events or even new theories. If this is so for the re-analysis of ‘already existing blue bits’, such new versions, or new interpretations of existing material, could also come from creative writers transforming received meanings and research findings, intensifying through creative practice their impact on their readers. This is not a claim to have re-interpreted or re-analysed history but to have re-imagined and intensified the reader’s experience of such a world, one they may not



have imagined or been interested in, before. This also makes a contribution to the stock of human knowledge. Any such claim has to be advanced with modesty and due deference to the professional researchers working in the field and their conclusions. Creative writers are not bound by the demand for accuracy. In fiction, made up things are essential to the writing of the ‘conclusions’ derived from research and yet there may remain a connection between fictionalised imaginings and the research which underpins them. Creative works can be part of the dialogue about the meaning of events and eras and this may make a contribution to knowledge outside the domain of creative writing practice. Such novels can be challenged, refuted or confirmed by others working in their own disciplines and domains. To restrict research claims to the domain of writerly practice reduces the risk of disciplinary conflict but may miss something important in the (contestable) contributions of creative writing to the stock of human knowledge.

I came to write *Stardust and Golden* on the back of personal experience, having lived through the era and been politically active, with my life shaped by my engagement with the spirit of the times. I also came to the novel with a history of intellectual engagement with the legacy of the Sixties and some unease about the kind of analysis I had produced in academic work as a social analyst. My unease was not about the specifics of the research or the interpretation but of the analytical enterprise itself. For me analysis was no longer enough. There were meanings in these events not captured by social analysis, meanings that adhered to individuals, their consciousness, ambitions, hopes and despair. I was also weary of the way the Sixties were displayed and disputed as some kind of conflict between liberty and licence when the constraints and coercion of conscription and the war in Vietnam were also obvious but relatively undervalued. Writing *Stardust and Golden* gave me

an alternative mode for a more direct engagement to explore a different understanding of the Sixties. This was particularly relevant when writing about individual agency in a world of constraint and imagining the consequences of choices made by various characters for the long shadow cast down as a legacy of this contested era. Writing fiction provided an opportunity to explore questions not asked or answered at the time and to trace in imagination their implications for the way in which these tensions, contradictions and challenges played out far beyond the 1960s.

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