

**CONCEPTUALISATION AND EXPOSITION:  
A PARADIGM OF CHARACTER CREATION**

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## Abstract

While the concept of the fictional character has been widely discussed at an interdisciplinary level, a foundational theory of character creation in Creative Writing is yet to follow. As a result, Creative Writing students refer to post-construction analysis in Literary Theory, or even the formulaic advice often suggested by popular writing manuals.

Aiming to fill this gap, and at the same time reconcile the chasm between Literary Theory and Creative Writing, my thesis shall initiate a paradigm of character creation, by combining creativity with craftsmanship.

More specifically, my approach consists of two interrelated stages: *Conceptualisation* entails the conception of the character by means of authorial perception, imagination and judgement, which precedes her textual birth; and *Exposition*, which pertains to the conveyance of such a priori knowledge on paper. My research is conducted through both synthesis and critical analysis. I will be presenting, analysing and thus substantiating my own method of work and at the same time I will examine existing theories I wish to encompass or challenge. My sources are interdisciplinary: Literary Theory and Criticism, Cognitive Psychology, Theory of Mind, Theory of Person and Linguistics are some of them.

Examples from Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (1994), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) will be used to support my hypotheses. I will not be presuming upon the novelists' original intentions, but rather testing my own method against their texts.

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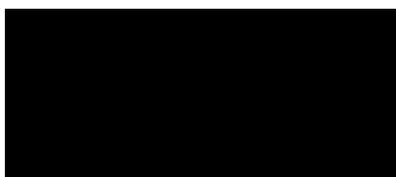
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## Dedications

To my parents  
whose infinite support and encouragement  
made this work possible

To my beloved husband,  
for all his patience, guidance and advice on this project,  
and throughout the years

To my daughter,  
who came to change everything, inspiring me to be a better scholar,  
a better professional, and a better person

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**1. INTRODUCTION:**

**TOWARDS AN ENCOMPASSING THEORY OF CHARACTER**

The idea for this thesis was born out of a nascent need to explore, and as such, understand everything I could about the very reason behind my love for writing and reading. Fascinated by the complexity of the human person, and the multifarious possibilities of her existence, I have always written and read anthropocentric narratives. Yet I had never attempted to solidify the instigating forces behind such attraction, which alongside inspiration, imprinted memories, and fanciful imagination shaped my daydreams into fictional texts. Until I realised I wanted to transform my endeavours into acquirable knowledge: I wanted to know what the fictional character is all about.

During my research, I was able to investigate and as such define my own creative processes and strategic methods, rendering them comprehensive to an applicable degree. I soon developed a strong interest in Creative Writing as an art, craft, and academic discipline, and embarked upon exploring possibilities and creative solutions as teaching methods and creative approaches. It was then I discovered that a theoretical framework to support research and practice inside and outside of the academy has not yet been solidified, and extra-disciplinary work, in the likes of literary criticism, is helpful, but not applicable in its entirety. As Dominique Hecq (2013) argues,

[F]or creative writing, there is a difference between theory that *triggers* or *produces* creative work and theory that *informs* creative work. In certain contexts, theory can function as a painting can to inspire creativity, but that is not the same thing as having theory that becomes integrated with the work or that functions in a way so as to produce new knowledge. (Hecq, 2013, p. 181).

The analyses I encountered within the literary criticism field could be classified into two predominant approaches: they either reduced character to a

mere summary of textual symbols, completely denying its anthropomorphic properties (Barthes, 1990; Todorov, 1977); or deconstructed famous fictional personalities, often resulting in trait theories (Chatman, 1978), hierarchical structures (Ferrara, 1974), and compounds (Williams, 1994). Such theories however did not shed any light on the a priori conception and creation of the fictional person. Deductions based on published work were not the tool I needed for my approach of the de novo construction. As Michelene Wandor (2008) affirms,

[T]raditional literary criticism ... does not have as its project the matter of how a finished work 'might be improved', but addresses the 'complete' work in its published form. Any Machereyan 'gaps' or 'absences' derive from the process of critical reading/interpretation and exegesis, and have as their object a hermeneutical outcome, not one of changing or literally rewriting the original object (..) Reading and writing entail different actions and processes, applied to different 'objects' at different moments, with quite different outcomes. Even where they may take place within the same procedure, they are analytically distinct. Reader-response and reception theory have developed precisely out of this understanding. (2008, pp.146-147).

At the same time, I found that popular writing manuals keep multiplying on the shelves in bookstores, offering step-by-step instructions on character creation. They may entail personality quizzes (Maisel and Maisel, 2006), checklists and exercises (Viders *et al.*, 2006), categorisations of traits (Edelstein, 2006) and psychological archetypes (Indick, 2004). Again, I appreciated their function as possible creative triggers. However, they do not provide much more than a superficial outline of the function of characters, endangering a formulaic, rather than a creative process.

As it emerged, there is an absence of an encompassing study that focuses on an in-depth exploration of the fictional character, both as a conceptual schema, and a textual element. This is precisely the gap I aspire to bridge. What I aim to initiate

is an applicable model of thought, which will provide a thorough explication of the character concept, as well as how it functions within the narrative as per the novelist's own techniques and artistic endeavours.

This Creative Writing thesis is not going to be a practice-based one. Instead, I aim to introduce a theoretical model of thought for the creation of the fictional character, and the submission of practical work, whilst indisputably enhancing, would deprive me of the much needed time and textual space to present my thoughts and arguments inclusively and in comprehensive detail. My research covers a wide range of topics and spreads across a number of interdisciplinary works, which comprise the entirety of my theory.

More specifically, I introduce a creative *approach*, rather than *method*, or *process*, acknowledging Graeme Harper's (2010) suspicion toward the latter term:

[E]ven though one act may follow another, and be linked in any number of ways, it is difficult to imagine the concept of a 'series' adequately copes with the movement associated with conception, perception and memory that impact so greatly on Creative Writing. (Harper, 2010, p. 63).

Yet my approach is systemic, in that, as Harper (ibid, p. 89) illustrates, "one element interacts with another". As he explains,

We can also consider the systemic nature of Creative Writing in terms of choice — in this sense, using the idea of system to refer to both conscious and unconscious choices that can be made by creative writers in Creative Writing. ... So the systemic entails competing writerly choices and the question of how, and when, and in what form those choices are made, with what results. ... This may also relate to how a creative writer establishes, within the context of their Creative Writing, a paradigm of behaviour and results that equate with their own definitions, and assessments, of utility, achievement, aesthetic worth, progression, communication and, indeed, art. (Harper, 2010, pp. 89-90).

Drawing from the study of creative processes, from problem-solving to stage theories (Gilhooly, 1996; Smith, 1982; Gregg and Steinberg, 1980), I came to view

character construction as an act of various phases, from conception, to exposition. Such act need not be linear, although it can be, but rather bidirectional. It cannot rely on the automatic application of rules and strategies, but on an all-inclusive comprehension of its dynamics, both conceptual and practical. I therefore propose a division into two stages: *Conceptualisation* and *Exposition*.

*Conceptualisation* could be viewed as parallel to prewriting, but not in the usual attributed sense of the fixed a priori organisation of material. Smith (1982) explains prewriting as,

[T]he “incubation” of ideas that may constitute the basis of a text can occur when we do not actually have a pen in hand—minutes—or hours, even days or weeks before we actually put words on paper. ... Creativity is the business of the brain it is the manner in which the brain copes with the world—and ... the way it learns about the world. ... [T]he brain is constantly creating possibilities for the future. Its normal mode of operation is to generate alternative worlds in order to anticipate the world which will actually come to be. ... [H]ypothetical thought is the basis of our perception of the world. (Smith, 1982, pp. 122-123).

*Conceptualisation* entails a multifarious exploration of those liaisons that define character ontologically. More specifically, I will be examining the concept’s interconnections to the reader, the real human person, and the novelist respectively. The purpose of this stage will be to provide an elaborate exegesis of the reasons behind a reader’s choice; to explore notions of realism and its correlations, if any, to believability; and to examine the relationship between creator and creation.

*Exposition* refers to the application of this a priori understanding on paper. It will include an ontological analysis of character, her function within the text, as well as those dynamics that govern its bidirectional relationship to the narrative in its entirety.

My approach views writing as a bilateral act, both as an art and a craft, the common denominators of which are interdependent, as the two phases of my proposed theory will demonstrate.

My investigation will entail both a synthetic approach, as well as critical analysis of current stances. The theory proposed in this thesis will reflect my personal methods of working, which will be tested against existing works. Put differently, I will not be hypothesising upon other novelists' intentions and techniques, but rather attempting to establish whether my own can be applied to them. This is the reason I have not opted to include the opinions of the very authors whose works I have selected to explore; I do not wish to presume upon their methods, but rather pretend *I* have been writing in their place. In essence, I endorse Harper's (2010) following clarification:

[I]f the creative writer who is also a reader applies the empirical information they have accumulated, more or less over time, from experience and active observation, from the *doing* of Creative Writing as well as the reading of final works of literature ... final works produced by Creative Writing then post-event knowledge is matched by the knowledge of the event (acts and actions) of Creative Writing. (Harper, 2010, p. 21).

I have decided to use Sarah Waters' (2002) *Fingersmith*, J.M. Coetzee's (1990) *Disgrace*, and Rick Moody's (1994) *Ice Storm*. Many reasons lie behind my choices.

First of all, all three are contemporary novels of the last thirty years, depicting convincing human portraits through a variety of perspectives and socio-political situations. All three novels present a diversity of narration modes, each establishing different sorts of alignment with its characters. Furthermore, each novel is paradigmatic of different aspects of characterisation. For instance, *Disgrace* proffers an excellent example of the anti-hero at work, as does *Fingersmith*. *The Ice*

*Storm* presents an exemplary depiction of character relations. *Disgrace* proffers a unique opportunity to examine the relation between setting and character as per socio-political norms. The protagonist, David Lurie, sees his imposition on Melanie Isaacs as romantic impulse within the academic urbanism of Cape Town, while he is shocked by the brutality of his daughter's rape amidst the vast rural setting of the continent. In *The Ice Storm*, Moody entwines his character relations with the weather shifts, as if catharsis is brought by the ice storm's peak. And in all three works, plot derives from character, and vice versa. Moody weaves his plot as a sequence of cause-and-effect series of interpersonal relations; Waters has her two heroines determine each other's fate; and Coetzee explores issues of accountability and consequences in pragmatic catharsis.

To support my theorising, I have used a range of academic works across different disciplines, primarily Creative Writing, Literary Criticism, Drama, Philosophy and Psychology. Drawing from Creative Processes (Kroll and Harper, 2013; Boulter, 2007; Morash, 1995) Phenomenology (Poulet, 2001), Structuralism (Barthes, 1997; Culler, 1983), Film Theory (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996; Smith, 1995), Theory of Person (Glover, 1998; Kupperman, 1991), Social Psychology (Burr, 2002) and Trait Theories (Allport, 1937), I have challenged previous stances or substantiated current propositions. My choice to port over resources and material from drama (Aristotle, 1996; Moore, 1984; Egri, 1960;) and film studies (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996; Smith, 1995; Chatman, 1978), is based on the herewith substantiated notion that the same theoretical infrastructure for the creation of the fictional character spreads across all forms of fiction. In each case, further

explications as to how certain views are applicable to Creative Writing are proffered throughout the text.

I have also included commentaries by contemporary (Burns, 2008; Brayfield, 1996; Frey, 1987), as well as Victorian novelists (Allott, 1959) pertaining both to poetics and personal philosophies, encompassing a timely range of genres and artistic tendencies, to demonstrate the longitudinal reasoning of my propositions. My choice to embed Constantin Stanislavsky's (Moore, 1984) approach is founded on the compatibility of his philosophy with that of this thesis: the artist touching the inner life of her creation. Gordon Allport's (1937) personality theory, even though expanded, has served as a solid infrastructure for valid comparisons to be drawn between the human and the character as organisational systems in constant flux. And the Kantian exegesis for creativity, as expanded by Mark Johnson (1987) has served as a platform for some of my propositions pertaining to issues of experience and imagination.

Finally, I decided to quote from several popular manuals, as their advice served as a helpful explicatory tool in many of my propositions. Predominantly, Linda Seger's (1990) method has been applied in marketable scripts for years now, aiding writers of all media towards explicatory ways of thinking.

The analysis presented in this PhD thesis does not aim to inspire a new specific technique, or even dispute the existing ones, insofar as character construction is concerned. Rather, my purpose is to provide an in-depth understanding of the fictional character's *raison d'être* in the novel, by enhancing the author's understanding of both its ontological nature, as well as those inherent mechanisms underlying Creative Writing as an act. Such dissection will aid the

novelist to establish and develop her own unique method of working, as its predominant goal is to provide the foundational infrastructure upon which fictional person can be born to populate imaginary worlds.

## **2. CHARACTER AND THE READER**

The purpose of my first chapter is to provide an encompassing understanding of the interaction between the fictional character and the reader. I will begin by placing certain types of readership under the scope, in order to establish whether such categorisations can be useful to the creative writer. I will investigate the motivations behind perusing a literary work and any possible underlying common denominators. Finally, I will explore issues of emotional response, also examining popular terms such as 'empathy' and 'identification', so as to decide on their applicability on an academic level.

### **2.1 THE READER OF FICTION: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL EXEGESIS**

During the course of literary history, as narrative texts were born, diversified and changed in technique and focus, the reader ceased to be a blurry figure and instead became an active participant in the process of text reconstruction, fictional world building, and meaning assemblage (Poulet, 2001; Cohan, 1983; Iser, 1974; Preston, 1970). As the twentieth century established literary criticism and narrative poetics as solid scholarly fields (Myers, 2006), the reader's role was centralised like never before (Bonney, 1995; Iser 1974; Prince, 1971). Thereby emerged a new scholarly path that was baptised as 'reader-response theory' (Leitch *et al*, 2001).

In its introduction, the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001) includes a brief presentation of reader typology:

In reading a novel, one can sometimes extrapolate from it an implied reader, a figure whom the text seems to be addressing and who occasionally functions as a character in the work. ... An implied reader differs from both a virtual reader, to whom the text is vaguely addressed by the author, and from a historical reader who actually reads the text at the time of its publication. The hypothetical perfect decoder of the work, who knows everything necessary to make sense of it, is the ideal reader but the most original and innovative texts require a superreader, a special ideal reader endowed not

only with extensive linguistic and literary knowledge but also with superior aesthetic sensibility. (Leitch *et al*, 2001, p.18).

My aim in this chapter is to detect the common denominators under all such types of readers, highlighting those aspects that render reading a universal experience. I will first attempt to establish a determination of the contemporary reader.

### **2.1.1 THE READER AS A CONSCIOUS AGENT AND PARTICIPANT**

There has been many a debate as to who the author is writing for (Phelan 2005; King, 2000; Calvino, 1989; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983; Iser, 1974; Preston, 1970; Allott, 1959). Theories of moral responsibility (Phelan, 2005; Atwood 2003; Calvino, 1989; Allott, 1959), reader response (Iser 2001; Poulet 2001; Iser, 1974; Preston, 1970) and textual comprehension (Chartier, 1995; Williams; 1993; Calvino, 1989) have been analysed in many scholarly works.

These studies, aiming to dissect the purpose behind the pen and ascribe motives to the author, are characterised by a conjoining factor: the author does write for someone (King, 2000; Prince, 1971), sharing a collaborative relationship with her, as the text is created by the former only to be constantly recreated by the latter (Oatley, 2003; Cohan, 1983; Iser, 1974; Preston, 1970).

More specifically, literary theory proposes that the text exists insofar as there is someone to re-conceive it, guiding its constructs, such as the fictional character, to come alive within the reader's imagination (Cohan, 1983, pp.5, 10). The reader is an integral part in every text, even though she may not always be the flesh-and-blood recipient that holds the book. She may assume the form of another character

in the novel, or the narrator that addresses her very self (Prince, 1971). In some instances, the author may not even write for a recipient.

While a text is visually and technically complete once the last words have been added, its dynamic character cannot be unfolded, its inherent codes deciphered and its meaning realised, without the participation of the reader (De Certeau, 1995; Barthes, 1977; Iser, 1972); or, as Keith Oatley (2003) states, the reader's individual interpretation is but the rewriting of the author's story. Wolfgang Iser (1972, p.279) made a distinction between these two levels of participation, the textual production of the narrative and its reception by the reader, nominating them as artistic and aesthetic respectively. As he explained (ibid, pp. 280-285), the literary text creatively challenges and enhances the reader's imagination, and she, in her turn, makes sense of its spatiotemporal sequence, filling in the gaps where necessary.

A writer's task toward her readership, therefore, is bilateral. First, she is called to recognise them as predominant figures in her text's re-construction. Second, she must apprehend those dynamics and prerequisites that render a narrative consistent and accessible to the reader, whoever she may be. Such comprehension ensures the creation of a liaison between author and reader that is characterised by mutual respect and trust, and constitutes the foundation upon which the work is built.

### **2.1.2 THE SIGNIFIER AND THE RECIPIENT**

Whilst reading tendencies vary, and each reader may enjoy her own thematic, stylistic and genre-related preferences, the author should not discriminate between a sophisticated readership and the naive masses (Vermeule, 2010; Williams 1993;

Harding, 1962). Such classifications based on the reader's presupposed perception ability (Williams, 1993) as well as the capability to critically decode the 'secret' meanings of the text, or control her emotional response towards the fictional characters are not uncommon. In fact, it is often implied that the reader whose emotional responses toward the narrative are more intense, is not academically competent to understand the text in comparison to the one who maintains a certain aesthetical distance (Vermeule, 2010; Harding, 1962).

I firmly disagree with such a depiction of the reading public. An author that is led to share the preconception that the majority of people are easily manipulated by popular media professionals (Vermeule, 2010) is a dangerous hypothesis that can distract her from her very purpose, guiding her toward a distorted idea of who she is writing for. Such a hypothesis places literary texts in contradistinction with popular novels, raising a pseudo-dilemma between quality and sales. Yet as Harper (2010) indicates,

[C]ommercially successful works of Creative Writing that do not receive critical acclaim – or, indeed, are dismissed entirely by critics and scholars – still can have recognised value and that value, while of a different kind to that perhaps favoured by professional critics and scholars is not necessarily lesser in terms of the activities of the creative writers who undertake such work. (Harper, 2010, p. 10).

Michel de Certeau (1995) suggests that the source of the problem is rooted within the belief that works of mass consumption can have a significant impact on the reader's perception and response, and that the interpretations suggested by a scholarly elite is the only solution to the problem; which renders the common reader a helpless recipient of what it is that she consumes (1995, pp. 151-153). The

following passage by Blakey Vermeule (2010) is very indicative of what de Certeau is talking about:

In my view, most stories are gossip literature. The distinction, so carefully cultivated by literati and academics, between high and low, between popular and polite, pales beside the overwhelming similarity of gossip literature in all media. (Vermeule, 2010, p. 7).

Vermeule's (2010, pp. ix-x) point is explicit in her preface, where she shares her disconcertment when her students expressed their disapproval toward the character David Lurie in Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). According to Vermeule (ibid), this class had to be immediately redirected towards interpretative lucidity.

There is no doubt that hasty dismissals demonstrate a failure to understand the complexity of the human condition as so meticulously depicted by Coetzee. Still, I find Vermeule's rigour academically alienating, for it fails to encompass the diversity in thought and experience of humans as readers. As Patrick Colm Hogan (2003, p.37) underlines, "[W]e might say that any perceptual feature has a certain degree of saliency for a particular perceiver in particular circumstances. ... Various qualities of the feature, the perceiver, and the context determine that degree of saliency".

De Certeau's reasoning makes one thing clear: that the author's intentions and narrative technique aside, a text can be interpreted in a number of different ways by a number of different readers. Iser (1971, p. 4) has similarly commented that each reader's individual experience will affect her realisation of the text. And Gordon Bower's (1978) research on story comprehension revealed that, not only the textual meaning depends on the reader's own interpretation, but such

interpretation is dependent on the character she will choose to identify with, for a variety of reasons.

It is thus clear that, should an author accept that she is writing for a certain elite, whose readings are rendered legitimate by specific criteria, she is automatically accepting the hierarchical distinction presented by de Certeau, and inevitably violates the aforementioned communicational contract. This is why theoretical attitudes such as Vermeule's cannot serve the Creative Writing discipline. As Maureen Howard (2008, p. 170) explains, "I want to tell my stories. I don't think of the best-educated reader at all; I don't think of it on a scale of 1 to 10. I want to appeal to the reader and make everything quite accessible".

I suggest that the author writes for one and the same reader, a reader that will peruse, and enjoy, and share her narrative experiences with others. This reader may be an academic scholar or a member of the public that reads to understand, experience, or out of pure pleasure. Like writing, reading is a private activity, even when it takes place in public gatherings. Therefore, there is nothing to substantiate the claim that one category of readers enjoys the privilege of understanding the text or the author's intentions better than another, even more so when the author herself is most of the time unavailable to confirm or dismiss any interpretations, scholar or layman alike. As Daniel R. Schwarz (1989) illustrates,

[W]riting, like speech, assumes an audience from which it (and its creator) expects a response. While the audience whom the author had in mind is different from the contemporary savvy reader—conditioned by the interpretive communities of which he is part—it is well to remember that the potential audience is whoever knows how to read. (Schwarz, 1989, p.102).

Stephen King (2000, p.255) summarises the possible diversity of his readership in the term 'constant reader', explaining that his most important goal as a writer is

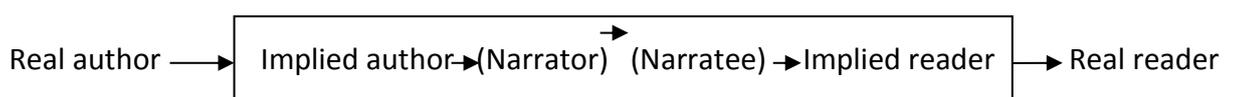
resonance. This is not to deny the indisputable diversity in reader choices and tastes, nor to imply that the author should attempt to satisfy all of those. Instead, I propose that she should comprehend the common denominators underlying the reasons and motivations behind a reader's perusal of literary works.

### 2.1.3 READER: CONSTANT, IMPLIED, UNIVERSAL

I will now take some time to examine the concept of the 'implied reader', as it will constitute the basis of my further investigation into the possible initiation of the 'universal reader' term.

Seymour Chatman (1978, pp. 147-150 ) proposes that apart from the real author of a text, there is the need for an implied one, referring to narrating agents other than the author herself or the narrating character. Likewise, the 'implied' reader refers not to the actual, physical reader of the text, but rather to an always-present receiver presupposed by the text itself.

More specifically, Chatman (1978, p.151) suggests that the narrative communication can be schematically represented as follows:



Disputing the necessity of Chatman's distinction between real and implied authors and readers, David Bordwell (2007, pp. 128-129) explains that it only serves to complicate, rather than facilitate the comprehension of the narrative communication processes. As he argues, there is no requirement for 'ghost' agents to substitute the real, flesh-and-blood communicators and receivers.

I appreciate Chatman's conceptualisation of the process, recognising that the implied reader, much like the implied author, refers to an impersonal entity not

present when the writing and reading take place. Yet I contend that, insofar as Creative Writing is concerned, a simplification of Chatman's model, or else, the adaptation of a simpler, yet adequately descriptive term, can describe the multi-directional relationship that interconnects the author, the reader and the text.

I begin with the term 'implied reader' as used by Iser (1974):

This term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process – which will vary historically from one age to another – and not to a typology of possible readers. (Iser, 1974, p. xii).

Iser's study followed the development, expansion and diversification of the role of the reader through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by examining how the text itself is reshaped as per historical and cultural changes, forming different expectations and communicational codes. In that respect, the term 'implied' reader assumes universal existence, describing a reader who recognises, comprehends and responds to cultural and historical norms different to her own. Iser (ibid) also underlined the importance of consistency in reader response as well as the existence of 'controls' to ensure that the reader's subjective perception does not obscure the versatility of the text's meaning and ideas. He asserted that human experience is embedded in the text as a process of understanding, and the question is, how the reader can be guided into acquiring it. In other words, the implied reader is not an immaterial entity standing between the real reader and the narrator(s), but rather the person, any person throughout history and culture, the author may be writing for.

Once again emerges the question of whom the author writes for. The determination of the reader shaped in the author's mind should encompass the

prerequisite that the text needs to be comprehensive enough for her to mentally submerge in it. Wayne Booth (1961) accordingly indicated that,

The author creates ... an image of [herself], and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement. (Booth, 1961, p.138).

Such a reader may share the author's national and socio-cultural identity, or she may not. She may interpret and respond to a text as per her own cultural, socioeconomic, ideological and miscellaneous preconceptions (Iser, 1974) but the text itself is not interchangeable. Its contextual consistency and comprehensiveness will appeal to the reader, and whether familiar, or unfamiliar, it will still be inviting to explore. Hence, any reader, at any given time, has the ability to understand narratives written in previous centuries, by authors of different cultures. Indeed, if reader interest was dictated by socio-temporal restrictions, the literary establishment would be undoubtedly impoverished.

Still, one is called to scrutinise all those dynamics that render extra-cultural and extra-temporal texts comprehensive to any reader in the world. As Gerald Prince (1971, pp. 119-120) comments, a narrative needs to contain signals familiar to the reader, so that the reader can construct the text's meaning based on codes familiar to her. The level of explanation given by the text should depend on the level of its 'uncommonness'. In other words, if a narrative contains 'less ordinary situations in a less ordinary way', one should expect a much higher level of explanation. It is precisely the universality of human experience that aids any reader to decipher codes initially perplexing to her, if proffered adequate cues by

the author. As Iser (1971) explained, it is not the historical circumstances per se that define the text, but rather its inherent aesthetic structure:

[T]he text must offer a certain amount of latitude, as far as its realization is concerned, for different readers at different times have always had different apprehensions of such texts, even though the general impression may be the same- that the world revealed, however far back in the past it may lie, comes alive in the present. (Iser, 1971, p.5).

Expanding Prince (1971), I suggest that 'less ordinary' may refer to situations

a) grasped yet not experienced by the reader, b) altogether unfamiliar or c) purely fantastical. An example of the first case would be *Fingersmith* (2002), taking place in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. A contemporary reader, English or other, is still able to understand the plot as emerging from the characters' lives, the ethos, social classifications and human weakness depicted in it. Indicative of the second case is *Disgrace* (1999). David Lurie cannot understand why his daughter, Lucy, refuses to seek justice for her rape, in the rural remoteness of the Eastern Cape. The setting, a directly post-apartheid South Africa, dictates rules and mentalities, and Coetzee manages to convey its reality, which may be hard to understand, let alone accept, for many readers. The third example refers to stories that fit into certain literary genres, such as fantasy and science fiction, such as Isaac Asimov's novels.

Even though one may come up with a plethora of differences among those variations, there is a common denominator unifying all three of them: most of the time, they evolve around human experience, and being human is a universal concept (Hogan, 2002). All types of situations and spatiotemporal narrative frameworks involve fictional humans; or, as David Lodge (2002, p.14) writes, fictional human-like models moving through time and space. And David Shields

(2010, p. 27) explains: “I’m interested in knowing the secrets that connect human beings. At the very deepest level, all our secrets are the same”.

Thus, the reader has to follow the author’s textual codes to virtually assimilate the spatio-temporal and situational map of the novel, even if she has never been in that world before. The main tool in the author’s disposal in order to achieve such illusion of familiarity is consistency. As Iser (1974, pp. 83-84) suggested, these codes need to form a ‘neutral ground’ between the novel’s, for example, chronological context and the reader’s present reality, rendering the narrative comprehensive to follow.

Hogan (2003) asserts that there are far more commonalities among human stories in worldwide literature, than the variances that have so far been explored in the study of literary works. As he explains, what unites all narratives and attributes them their universality is that they focus on human emotion.

Lajos Egri (1965, p. 27) emphasised the importance of human emotion as a prerequisite for universality, “linking man to man all over the globe”. Egri (ibid, p. 23) used the example of humiliation, characterising it as ‘universal and timeless’. *Disgrace* is built on that concept, its implications emerging clearly for the reader to grasp. The ideological, socio-cultural and temporal dynamics triggering shame may vary as per one’s ethnicity, religion, educational status, and so on. Yet the feeling itself is shared globally, once such dynamics are explicated. The character is born and grows within a certain fictional spatiotemporal set-up. Once this set-up is identified by the reader, the characters acquire their extra dimensions, and thus their actions, emotions and motivations become plausible. As Chatman (1978, p.150) highlights, the reader does not have to adopt the character’s own ideological

framework in order for the imaginary possibilities of the text to become valid or acceptable. And Schwarz (1989) argues that,

Characters must be understood in terms of the historical situation which gave rise to them, the historical situation within the imagined world, as well as the historical situation of the contemporary audience, and we must acknowledge that this latter situation is different for each reader. (Schwarz, 1989, p.98).

The concept of the universal reader dictates the awareness of cultural and ideological diversity, as well as the ingenuity to reach beyond them. Stephen J. Quigley (2009), an American author who moved to Cambodia in order to teach and also study, warns of the dynamics governing the translation of cultural identity, and indicates that cross-cultural writing pertains both to language and culture (2009,p. 90). For Quigley, translating culture entails considering both one's characters as well as their readership (2009, p.92). And he observes that,

Empirical knowledge is that which someone experiences and is believed to be true, but second-hand [sic] empirical knowledge usually comes in the form of words, sounds, and images. For example, we as audience members watching television may see a snake wiggle or hear the sound of a snake coming from the speakers on our television, but not know the way a snake feels in the hand or what it smells like. Just as a snake must be translated, in writing a setting must also be translated from one culture or region to the next, especially when a reader living at antipodes has not had exposure to the place being written about. (Quigley, 2009, p. 93).

Summarising, the author needs to make her fictional world familiar to the reader, and the reader is to use her own experience and imagination in order to reconstruct, understand and familiarise herself with it. The centrality of human experience is too important to be overlooked in the author-text-reader schema, constituting the core motivation of literature reading.

## 2.2 WHY DO READERS READ?

The question to emerge is why a reader reads in the first place: why she consciously surrenders her sense of current reality to temporarily enter someone else's consciousness (Poulet, 2001; Iser, 1974); and what is it that draws the universal reader to a constructed personality that does not exist outside the one-dimensional space of the text.

I propose that the main motive is anthropocentric. The reader absorbs stories about the 'human condition', both because she is curious and inherently investigative towards her own nature, but also out of interest, altruism or the need to access imaginary experiences impossible in her everyday reality.

Still, there are scholars that resist the idea of reading *for* the character or emotional gratification, dismissing it as 'unsophisticated' or 'naive'. One of them is Vermeule (2010, p. x), who is vehemently against comparing literary characters to real people, claiming that her view is the one "single rule of her profession that needs to be honoured".

The misapprehension of what the novelist refers to when she speaks of the reality of her characters, inspiring the reader to care for them, points toward the conclusion that such a school of thought places an unjustified overemphasis on semantics rather than the artistic essence of this idea. This is evident from the way Vermeule (2010, p. 45) attempts to explicate what she calls 'offline reasoning', by falsely drawing an analogy between the author-character dynamic, and a person's desire for communication with a deceased loved one. The vehemence in her polemic is almost perplexing, since a plethora of authors use the metaphor to refer to the act of character-creation (Taylor et al., 2003; Watkins, 1999). Vermeule

(2010, p.247) refers to such advice as a “cliché that is passed unquestioningly among writers”. The cliché of course, lies with Vermeule’s statement, not the author herself. The supposed hyperbole of the novelist who ‘talks about his characters as if they were real’ is nothing but a refusal to acknowledge the creative processes governing character creation. I hope to illuminate many of its aspects in this thesis.

Since this discussion revolves around *Disgrace* (1999, p. 189), the following passage describing Lurie’s struggle with inspiration is worth quoting: “Sometimes he fears that the characters in the story, who for more than a year have been his ghostly companions, are beginning to fade away”. Whilst I cannot, with certainty, allege that Coetzee portrays his own artistic perceptions here, it seems highly improbable that he would depict Lurie as delusional, naive, or fond of clichés.

In the Q&A section of her novel, *The Misbegotten* (2013), Katherine Webb is asked to name some of the authors she admires:

The writers I really enjoy are the ones whose books hold me completely captivated, so that I forget that I’m reading and feel like I am actually inside the story; who make me care so deeply about their characters that I develop genuine feelings for them, be they positive or negative. Some favourites include Ian McEwan, Jim Crace, Margaret Atwood, Helen Dunmore, Kate Atkinson... (Webb, 2013, p. 545).

In any case, if Literary Theory and Creative Writing have any chance to constitute a unified disciplinary foundation for the study of literature, debates of this sort are both disorientating and irrelevant.

I will thus be navigating my investigation into alternative theories, which encompass both the aesthetic as well as the empirical parameters of reading and understanding character. My proposition is that the universal reader reads in order

to experience lives and situations different to her own, with a perspective to both escape her own reality and also to enrich her knowledge of human nature, achieving a more encompassing understanding of herself and her surrounding world.

Lisa Zunshine (2006) explores the relationship between fiction-reading and human communication. She (ibid, pp. 4-6) suggests that fiction enhances our mind-reading capacity, in other words our ability to ascribe mental states to a person as per their observable actions. Such a process enables one's meta-representational capacity, a prerequisite to interpreting the fictional character's thoughts and actions in order to make sense of their behaviour. I suggest this works in a bidirectional mode: the reader uses her knowledge of the real world, acquired through her interactions with others, in order to make sense of the fictional one, which in its turn enriches her experiences, guiding us toward a better comprehension of different circumstances and idiosyncrasies of real people. I'm using the word 'experience' because, even though the reader cannot be physically present in the spatiotemporal dimensions of the narrative, she is still able to recreate the fictional world virtually and surrender her consciousness to that of the characters while 'seeing' through their eyes.

For George Poulet (2001), reading entails a mutual surrender of one's spatial existence to the other, for the reader finds herself inside the book, and the book inside her. As he illustrated,

I am on loan to another continued, and this other feels, suffers, and acts within me. ... When I am absorbed in reading, a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me. ... At this moment what matters to me is to live, from the inside, in a certain identity with the work and the work alone. It could hardly be otherwise. (Poulet, 2001, pp. 1323-24).

This second self Poulet refers to represents the reader's conscious and subconscious activity when she engages in interpretations of Theory of Mind. As Zunshine (2006) remarks:

[O]ur tendency to interpret observed behaviour in terms of underlying mental states ... seems to be so effortless and automatic (in a sense that we are not even conscious of engaging in any particular act of "interpretation") because our evolved cognitive architecture "prods" us toward learning and practicing mind-reading daily, from the beginning of awareness. (Zunshine, 2006, p.6).

It is the ability to make meaning of people's actions in real life that allows for the perception of consistency in the behaviour and attitudes of fictional characters (Palmer, 2002; Bower 1978). In that respect, separating characters from their contextual representations by implying they should not be seen as 'real people' renders comprehension of their narrative existence impossible. They become mere textual summaries, deprived of unity, purpose and thus, coherence. As Schwarz (1989) points out,

[W]hen we respond to fictional characters, we think of the personality of the characters ... their anxieties, frustrations, and obsessions, and the quality of the individual's moral strength and reputation. In one sense, when we speak of a person's character, we mean the quality of a person, his text as we perceive it. (...) It is well to remember that because this qualitative issue – what kind of character does a person have? – is part of our response to our aesthetic and life experience, we cannot speak of character as if it were only a formal element in fiction. (Schwarz, 1989, p. 92).

Indeed, rejecting the 'reality' of the fictional character is ignoring the metaphorical usage of the term, stating instead the obvious fact that she is not to be perceived as an actual physical entity – as if it was ever implied that this is so. Speculating what a character did or would do after the story ends is not indicative of some sort of delusional fixation, but rather demonstrative of how vividly the author portrayed her characters, how their less ordinary circumstances are

convincing enough to be, or have been, ordinary in other cultures, times, and terms. The engagement into an activity of such fictive speculation is consciously voluntary, and one can shake off its illusiveness at any given time (Zunshine, 2006; Smith, 1995).

On the other hand, Zunshine (2006, p.13) does correctly warn that one ought to be suspicious of any 'effortless' mind-reading when it comes to literary characters. Reading a novel is different from interaction in everyday life in many respects, most important being the lack of immediacy present with real people. Even though the reader holds the physical manifestation of the text – the book – in her hands, there is always an intermediary between her and the fictional characters, despite the latter's transparency and absence. This intermediary is the author. When one interacts with a real person, she has immediate access to all visible and aural clues – speech, mannerisms, body language and so on. On the other hand, the portrait of the character as a fictional entity is painted by the author, who has to offer clues and signals to be decoded by the reader. It is such cues that guide her towards a spectrum of interpretations, and lead her to exclude others (Zunshine, 2006, p.14).

In summary, the juxtaposition between character and the real person is valid within a certain conceptual framework, which requires both the awareness that one's deductions about the former's attitude are guided by a textual constructor, the author; whereas her communication with a flesh-and-blood individual relies on the signals of the person in question, as well as her own interpretational tendencies, without anyone standing in between. Therefore, the use of the term 'real' when referring to a fictional character should not be taken literally, except in

certain cases – for instance, the depiction of real people through fictionalised biographies or historical fiction. In this thesis, I will use the term ‘real’ to refer to the linguistic simulation of a person that could be, not that already exists or has existed in the past.

Still, the fact that the narrative world does not have physical dimensions should undervalue neither the intellectual nor sensuous significance of the reading experience. According to Zunshine (2006),

The cognitive rewards of reading fiction might ... be aligned with the cognitive rewards of pretend play through a shared capacity to stimulate and develop the imagination. It may mean that our enjoyment of fiction is predicated – at least in part – upon our *awareness* of our “trying on” mental states *potentially available* to us but at a given moment differing from our own. (Zunshine, 2006, p. 17).

For Schwarz (1989, p. 98), our response to character is mimetic, metaphorical and aesthetic. As he points out, the relationship between the fictional character (the virtual representation on paper) and characterisation (her textual manifestation) is a constantly changing, multidimensional, dynamic one. I propose that it is also interdependent because it is impossible to conceive the fictional character without her linguistic structure, yet such semiotic elements fade upon the convincing depiction of a human portrait.

Fiction offers the reader the prerogative to be simultaneously inside two minds – her own, and that of the narrator/character. Poulet’s second self surrenders to the hypothetical awareness of the fictional character, while the first stays alert to interpret, dismiss or voluntarily immerse deeper. These two selves occupying the reader’s consciousness co-operate to offer her a second-level experience through the fictional world – or, as Oatley (2003, p. 165) remarks, a

relived experience in the form of a dream as a mental construction – that will be accumulated into hers. The reader follows the character and her thoughts, often sharing her feelings, yet remains alert to dismiss anything that may not be compatible with her sense of coherence. In that respect, she is never entirely inside the character’s textual mind, nor is she unequivocally alert to its non-existence. Her preconceptions affect her reading and the text itself reshapes, and sometimes altogether alters them. (Zunshine, 2006; Iser, 1972; Harding, 1962). Therefore, the reading experience does entail an empirical dimension since the reader’s potentially altered preconceptions can influence her stances and behavioural patterns in the world. To quote Zunshine (2006, p. 18) again, “It is possible, then, that certain cultural artefacts, such as novels, test the functioning of our cognitive adaptations for mind-reading while keeping us pleasantly aware that the ‘test’ is proceeding quite smoothly”.

Abraham Stahl (1975, pp. 112-119) presents twelve possible impacts of literature, including “[W]idening of interests, relative increase in mediated experience, fiction affecting the perception of reality, fusion of literary and actual experience, inside knowledge of others, seeing oneself from the outside, increase in self-consciousness and loss of spontaneity, literary characters as models for the planning of life, and formation of independent judgement”. Even though he introduces his hypotheses discursively, without moving to a deeper analysis, it is noteworthy that nine out of his ten suggestions concern personal and interpersonal experience formation. Stahl is not suggesting anything different to Zunshine – that engaging in a Theory of Mind activity with fictional characters stimulates one’s own

imagination and cognitive apprehension (Zunshine, 2006, pp. 24-25) – when he refers to influential interchanges between fiction and reality.

Again, it is the textually anthropomorphic agents, the fictional characters that serve as vehicles in the reader's journey through the fictional world, and render the acquisition of new experiences plausible. To quote Schwarz (1989) again:

Our interest as readers depends in part on the temporal movement of characters' lives that mime our lives, the way that the plot plays upon our expectations for meaning, the way we can seal off the turmoil of our world and participate in a not –I world without risk. (...) We need to have our humanity validated – to be able to move beyond our self-conscious place in time and to be able to have an emotional life (tears, laughter, anxiety, fulfilment) without risk. We read to be in a world elsewhere. (Schwarz, 1989, pp. 102-103).

Henry James (2001, p. 864) asserted that what motivates people to read is life itself; for the reader, literature is another experience of what he can relate to. Iser (1972, p. 286) also notes that the pattern of acquiring experience in real life is not dissimilar to that of navigating oneself through fictional paths, guiding the reader to comprehend aspects of her reality. In fact, D.W. Harding (1962, p.136) explains, detached observation may sometimes save one from the trap of biased, subjective interpretation of the participant.

This is to say that a reader may decide to peruse a piece of literature for many a reason. Despite the versatility of her motivations, a certain underlying interconnectedness unifies them. Whether she seeks pleasure, intellectual or emotional stimulation, or the amelioration of her communicative processes, the anthropocentric parameter in all such aims serves to enrich her real-life experience by involving her in hypothetical (fictional) scenarios. She consequently applies her

newly-acquired deductions to situations in her real life, which in their turn will be encompassed in her prospective literary endeavours (Smith, 1995).

My next goal is to establish how such experience is acquired through the reader's inherent curiosity and interest in human nature, when such nature manifests in the textual anthropomorphic figure of the fictional character. It is the intellectual or emotive alignment with the latter that renders such acquisition possible.

### **2.3 RELATING TO THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER: ISSUES OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE**

There has been many discussions as to whether the fictional character should be regarded as a psychological construct. In fact, this is where the famous debate between structuralists and realists, or else the supporters of either the thematic or the mimetic function of character, is founded upon (Phelan, 1987; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). The former reduce character to a mere textual summary of symbols (Barthes, 1990; Cohan, 1982; Culler, 1983; Todorov, 1977); the latter insist upon her psychological dimension, even if merely textual (James, 2001; Paris, 1997; Smith, 1995; Schwarz, 1989; Forster, 1974). Again, the schism derives from the misapprehension of the notion that the character is made in the image of real people. It should be a presupposition that the fictional character's dimensions are purely virtual, not physical. She only comes alive through an accumulation of linguistic signs, assembled to form idiosyncratic attributes, which in their turn lead to actions. The dynamics interlinking such attributes to motivations and behavioural patterns as demonstrated by textual coherence, and invite the reader to align with the character, render the latter a textual psychological construct. Assuming that the concept of character entails psychological attributes does not imply a thorough

psychological investigation of them. It simply serves to aid the reader to connect the dots and comprehend the text. It is a consequence of reading, rather than a prerequisite. I will discuss this topic further in my final chapter. For now, I propose that the relationship between reader interpretation and the assemblage of a psychological portrait by the author is interdependent in order for the character to come alive through the text.

As for the thematic versus the mimetic parameter of the debate, it is worth wondering why the two functions are regarded as mutually exclusive. Characters need not be used as mere tools for the emergence of thematic ideas, yet their fictional uniqueness cannot presuppose that they are not representatives of their cultures, historical eras or textual geographical origins. They should be neither two-dimensional stereotypes, nor inconsistent to their pre-structured nature.

In order to create a unifying theory of the two poles of the axis, Phelan (1987, pp. 284-285) suggests that the character's nature is neither solely mimetic nor thematic, but rather, synthetic, entailing both the representational and the didactic functions. Indeed, a person's existence in society as an individual does not collide with the idea that she remains representative of socio-cultural norms. Likewise, if one accepts that the fictional character is the simulation of a human being (Oatley, 1994), her fictional idiosyncratic mosaic and her thematic function should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as parameters that encompass her concept. Such functions may depend on the author's intentions and construction of the text, even though, as indicated, the way character and text will be interpreted also depends on the reader.

A respective misapprehension of the term 'real' lies within the resistance of certain scholars to acknowledge emotional response to characters as an integral part of the reader-response process. I will begin by suggesting that treating emotional involvement as a process separate to cognitive and aesthetic response is both essentially and epistemologically problematic. As Harper (2010, p. 70) highlights, "[W]hile it might be true that works of Creative Writing can induce emotional states it is neither a challenge to certain works having aesthetic appeal nor confirmation that they do".

Indeed, emotive response is part of a human's cognitive functions. In particular, empathy emerges as a cognitive operation instigated by memory, the ability to endorse another's point of view, and one's own empirical deductions (Keen 2006). As Suzanne Keen (2006, p. 213) notes, "[N]arrative empathy invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations". And she expands:

In its strongest forms, aesthetics' empathy describes a projective fusing with an object – which may be another person or an animal, but may also be a fictional character made of words, or even, in some accounts, inanimate things such as landscapes, artworks, or geological features. The acts of imagination and projection involved in such empathy certainly deserve the label cognitive, but the sensations, however strange, deserve to be registered as feelings. Thus I do not quarantine narrative empathy in the zone of either affect or cognition: as a process, it involves both. When texts invite readers to feel, they also stimulate readers' thinking. (Keen, 2006. p. 213).

In a recent article published in *Cognition and Emotion* (Mar, et al., 2011, p.822), the authors suggest that the emotions arising from the perusal of a literary text can be either aesthetic, should the reader wish to maintain a certain distance to the text, or narrative, if she chooses to emerge into the fictional world.

According to the article (ibid, p. 822) both categories can merge, with the former modifying the latter, thus contributing to a wider sense of reading satisfaction.

### **2.3.1 IDENTIFICATION AND EMPATHY: AN EXPLORATION OF APPLICABILITY**

It is precisely the resistance to emotional response that renders many scholars antithetical to the notion of reader identification and empathy. For example, for Harding (1962, p. 141), 'identification' is "[A] good deal of pseudo-psychologizing that sees the process of novel-reading as one of identification and vicarious experience". Furthermore, he proposes (ibid) that, since 'identification' entails many different contextual exegeses, it would be better to dissect the process into more specific terms, such as empathy, imitation, admiration and so on, for clarity's sake.

Harding's polemic towards 'identification', which he will later on refer to and compare with pathological exaggerations, such as delusion of identity (1962, p.141), is indicative of how the term and its subsequent purposes tend to be overanalysed. As Iser (1972) explicated,

Often the term "identification" is used as it were an explanation, whereas in actual fact it is nothing more than a description. What is normally meant by "identification" is the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself – a familiar ground on which we are able to experience the unfamiliar. The author's aim, though, is to convey the experience, and, above all, an attitude towards that experience. Consequently, "identification" is not an end in itself, but a stratagem by means of which the author stimulates attitudes in the reader. (Iser, 1972, p. 296).

One could argue that, be that as it may, 'identification' remains a term that is quite vague, and that a closer inspection of the interactions between reader and fictional character would help define them more accurately. Another of the arguments Harding (1962, p. 145) raises against the use of the term is that it

presupposes a closer mental connection between the reader and the fictional character than the one that really exists. As he contests, even in the most empathetic of insights, a person cannot possibly experience the exact same feeling of another.

While this argument is valid enough, the significance of semantics should not be overlooked here. Hogan (2003) examines the Indian literary theory of poetics, initiated over two millennia ago. He (2003, p.47) analyses the distinction between two different linguistic terms, 'rasa' and 'bhava', usually translated as 'sentiment' and 'emotion' respectively. As he explains, 'bhava' refers to what a person feels in real life, while 'rasa' signifies what she experiences through art. As he (ibid) comments, "[W]hen I watch a romantic play, I do not actually love the hero or heroine (as I love my wife), but I do experience some sort of feeling". Analogously, Keen (2006, p. 209) presents the term 'Einfuhlung' referring to "[T]he process of 'feeling one's way into' an art object or another person".

In both the Sanskrit and the German literary traditions therefore, one can find specific locutions pertaining to the process of sentiment evocation through the narrative and its characters. Thence, a reader's disapproval of David Lurie's actions—his imposition on Melanie Isaacs, and his subsequent contempt of the committee—is not an 'overemotional' reaction, but an inseparable part of the reading act. Respectively, a range of emotions may arise by Lucy Lurie's rape, in *Disgrace* (1999); the interchange of betrayals between Sue and Maud and Mrs Sucksby in *Fingersmith* (2002); and of Mike Williams' death in *The Ice storm* (1994). It is not the delusion of a first-hand experience that stirs them, but the empathy

arising from the second-hand experience as occurring through Poulet's surrender of the second self.

I thus propose that 'identification' encompasses multiple aspects of reader-response to character, despite the fact that the emotive part of the process can be further analysed as to how the individual reader may position herself towards each character.

Murray Smith (1995, p. 2) defines identification as the reader's attachment to a particular character that possesses idiosyncratic attributes similar to hers, or ones she wished she possessed, guiding her thus to undergo the same emotional experiences. For Smith (ibid, p.3), the usage of the term is founded on a perception-and-response dynamic, and he proposes the dissection of 'identification' into three different levels of engagement: recognition, alignment and allegiance.

Recognition (1995, pp. 82 – 86) refers to the reader using all the textual cues at her disposal to construct an identifiable, distinct fictional person, by accumulating her linguistic, physical and idiosyncratic traits collectively. Alignment pertains to the access a reader is granted into the character's thoughts, emotions and actions. And allegiance concerns her decision to adopt an either sympathetic or antipathetic stance toward the character, based on moral evaluation and possible idiosyncratic, socio-cultural or miscellaneous similarities.

Whilst Smith's schema emerged from the examination of films, it is perfectly applicable to novels. As already noted, while the dynamics of the fictional character's presentation, i.e. the process of *characterisation* (to be examined later on), manifest in different ways across different forms of narration, the concept itself remains unified in its foundations and constituents. In this instance, what

essentially changes is the medium through which the reader receives the information she needs for the stage of recognition. In film, such transition is achieved through audio-visual elements. In novel, the text must accumulate and successfully convey it. Alignment and allegiance will emerge subsequently—or not. Harding (1962, p. 134) proposes a similar process: The character must draw the reader's attention, in order for the latter to evaluate her, thus adopting a favourable or non-favourable stance of various degrees.

The continuity and sequential relationship defining Smith's distinction is indicative of how cognition and emotion in reading are causally interrelated. Examining his schema vice versa, one can observe how each of his levels cannot exist without the previous one. Starting from allegiance, it is impossible for any feelings of empathy or antipathy to emerge without an a priori knowledge of the receptors' basic circumstances. Empathy, sympathy and antipathy are all consequential, deriving from the acknowledgment of existing idiosyncratic and miscellaneous qualities, or arising situations that can be related or not to such qualities. It is a prerequisite that the reader positions herself to the character perceptively before determining their intellectual and emotional attitudes towards her. For example, *The Icestorm* (1994) begins with the presentation of Ben Hood's infidelity. As Moody moves deep into his character, plot, values and causations are clarified in their complexity, defining the reader's stance along the way. Similarly, in *Fingersmith* (2002), any evaluations toward Sue or Maud are developed as their fictional paths progress. This is the stage of alignment, which cannot be evoked without a point of reference towards the object (in this instance, the character) it pertains to. Even when characters are interpreted as symbols of thematic unities,

they remain an accumulation of certain traits, both situational and idiosyncratic, no matter how stereotypical, that are represented by the presence of a textual 'physical' body and a proper name that signifies them. It is this accumulation of textual signs that constructs the virtual existence of the character the reader is called to identify with as a distinct personality bearing a certain proper name, and thus follow her perspective – or not.

Returning to 'identification', Keen (2006) makes a distinction between 'empathy' and 'sympathy' often used in relation to reader allegiance. As she remarks (2006, p. 208), "In empathy, sometimes described as an emotion in its own right, we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others. ... Empathy is distinguished in both psychology and philosophy (though not in popular usage) from sympathy, in which feelings *for* another occur".

In Mar *et al.*'s study (2011, pp. 822-827), the authors propose a taxonomy of emotional responses that classifies 'identification' as a separate level of response, rather than a general term encompassing finer and more detailed emotions such as empathy, sympathy etc.:

In sympathy, we feel bad for a character whose goals are not being met, but we do not need to model these goals on our planning processor in order to do so. In identification, we take on these goals and plans as our own, and see ourselves as the character feeling what he or she feels. In empathy, we understand a character's goals through our model of his or her mind, and feel something similar to what the character feels, but we do not see ourselves as that character and identify these emotions as our own rather than as the character's. (Mar *et al.*, 2011, p.824).

Identification can thus be regarded as a process according to which the reader temporarily leaves her own consciousness and surrenders her 'second self' to the character's textual frame of mind. She voluntarily enters her fictional perspective,

and sees through her eyes, 'experiencing' the emotions of another. Therefore, the term encompasses functions of imagination, empathetic response, individual perception of the world and its fictional depictions, and even memories of the reader's past.

Oatley (2009, p. 27) considers identification to be "the literary term for empathy", and describes it as follows:

We insert the goals of a protagonist into our planning processor, and as vicissitudes are encountered, we experience emotions in relation to them. We do not feel the emotions of the protagonist, we feel our own emotions, empathetically in the context of plans with which we identify and their consequences. (Oatley, 2009, p. 27).

Oatley (2009, p. 211) regards empathy as a two-staged process. Initially the reader understands and imagines the character's emotions and their sources by following the cues in the text. At the same time, having permitted her 'second self' to adopt the character's goals and intentions, she experiences the emotions as triggered by the character's fate.

A reader's own past memories may also trigger identification with a particular character. Mar *et al* (2011, pp. 824-825) call this process 'relived emotions', entailing the recollection of the reader's own experiences as evoked by the narrative. I contend that the evocation of relived experiences as an emotional response should not be viewed as different to the process of identification, but rather as a part of it. Recognising the virtual texture of an emotion triggered by similar experiences may subconsciously prompt the reader to empathise further, not experience an emotion altogether different. It is the a priori empirical knowledge that places the reader in the character's fictional shoes and thus relate to her even further, wishing for her well-being, success or a happy ending.

Respectively, the reader may develop feelings of strong antipathy or even hatred towards the antagonist or any other character that is either responsible for the protagonist's misfortune, or stands as an obstacle to her happiness.

Consequently, since empathy is to be regarded as a prerequisite to reader identification, relived emotions can be viewed as a possible stage towards it. I am saying 'possible' because, even though readers may be inclined to identify with characters with whom they share certain idiosyncratic attributes, such similarities may influence the identification process, but are not a prerequisite to it. Since the first step towards an empathetic response is for the reader to place herself in the character's imaginary shoes (Oatley, 2009), the only essential requirement is for the character's personality, goals, motivations and actions to be consistent and presented convincingly. Once again, Smith's engagement schema comes in effect. As soon as the reader is sufficiently acquainted with the character's history, current goals and intentions, and present circumstances, emotional proximity or distancing becomes possible. As long as the reader is persuaded of the plausibility of the narrative, no matter how fantastical or surreal its elements may be, identification automatically becomes a possibility.

This is why identification and its suggested variations are possible when perusing multicultural and longitudinal narratives, or non-realistic genres. A white heterosexual male reader should be able to identify with Waters' Maud Lilly (2002), Moody's Wendy Hood (1994) or Coetzee's Lucy Lurie (1999). Empathy is an inherently-manifesting human emotion, subconsciously triggered under specific conditions (Oatley, 2010). The novelist's purpose is to present the reader with such

conditions, not by focusing on the isolated goals serving a stratagem, but rather as emerging consistent outcomes of the creative process.

In conclusion, I find the term 'identification' sufficient to describe the reader's alignment with the fictional character, as it encompasses a variety of interchangeable emotions, which succeed each other as per the character's idiosyncratic changes, the situations arising by the narrative and the reader's perception and experiences per se.

### **2.3.2 EMOTIONAL RESPONSE AND CHARACTER COMPLEXITY**

Earlier, I mentioned Vermeule's (2010) objections to emotional response toward a character like Lurie, obscuring the more complicated themes behind Coetzee's portrait of him. Yet it is precisely such verisimilar complexity that allows the reader to explore deeper existential themes than the one-dimensional poles of a caricature. It is indisputable that the over-simplification of such exceptional and complicated a portrait manifested as overemotional reaction towards a hypothetical human being does all but justice to Coetzee's narrative, missing the entire point of literature perusal altogether. In that respect, Vermeule is, of course, quite right. Yet it is unreasonable to dictate a separation between the emotive and the aesthetic as the ultimate prerequisite for such complexity to be comprehended; especially if one takes into consideration that reader response can be defined by different factors, both perceptual and emotive, or a combination of both such as in the case of relived memories. Different readers may demonstrate diverse emotional reactions towards a character. Oatley (2010) has presented the results of a study that aimed to relate particular goals with emotion evocation, by asking a group of people to read a short story, and proceeding to examine their emerging

emotions. The findings suggested that emotions have 'directional effects'. As he explains,

Anger propels one to think forward from the current event (from the wrong that was done) towards what to do about it. Sadness prompts one to think backwards (from the loss) to analyze how it came about. Of course the emotion did not tell subjects what to think: that was up to them. (Oatley, 2010, p. 31).

The conclusions illustrated the diversity of reader response and alignment with the character and her actions. In *Disgrace* (1999), both anger and sadness as possible sentiments towards Lurie may surface from the reader's predispositions, defining her attitude towards him. Such an attitude may be reinforced, reshaped or altogether altered as the narrative unfolds, and so will emotions. For instance, an initial wave of anger may gradually become pity, sadness or even an expectation for redemption.

Furthermore, there is no sufficient evidence to substantiate the claim that sophisticated readers will consciously avoid emotional response, in contrast to 'naive' ones. Dictating reading patterns that exclude emotional response as disciplinary fallacy, and distinguishing the emotive from the aesthetic as two different, even contradictory processes is not just epistemologically unsubstantiated, but also serves to augment the gap between the theory and practice of writing and reading. Even if one accepts that uncritical emotional responses to fictional characters indicate a lack of proper comprehension of the characters in question, it would still be worth exploring the dynamics that guide them.

For Poulet (2001, p. 1328) extreme proximity or alienation from the text entailed dangers: completely losing one's own consciousness within the narrative;

and the possibility of distancing oneself to such a degree that excludes all alignment with it. He commented:

Extreme closeness and extreme detachment have then the same regrettable effect of making me fall short of the total critical act: that is to say, the exploration of that mysterious interrelationship which, through the mediation of reading and of language, is established to our mutual satisfaction between the work read and myself. (Poulet, 2001, p. 1328).

Still, Poulet (2001, p. 1329) did not reject either of the two spheres of the axis as fallacies in practising reading. On the contrary, he proposed that, even though extreme emotional attachment and extreme distancing cannot occur simultaneously, an alteration between the two will offer privileges, with one offering direct access to the heart of the work, and the other to intelligibility.

Moreover, it is unsubstantiated to assume that every single reader aspires to achieve pure intellectual stimulation through reading. Recent studies (Mar *et al*, 2011) even suggest that the reader's mood and emotional state may in fact influence the choice of narrative she will peruse, rather than simply emerge during the actual reading process. Mar *et al*. (2011, p. 819) propose that the pre-existing range of emotions affects the very reading of the text in terms of engagement, and continues to influence the reader even afterwards. The authors summarise as follows:

One's choice of fiction is a product of many things related to emotion, including: (1) current emotional state or mood. (2) an appraisal of what emotions will result from reading a particular text; and (3) personal goals with respect to felt emotion. (Mar *et al.*, 2011, p. 819).

Drawing on various theories of emotion, the article (2011, p. 822) proposes that emotional involvement is a reader's primary intention when engaging in the reading of fiction, and that emotions play an integral part in the overall reading

experience. Bower's (1978) research additionally indicates that mood constitutes an impacting factor on the choice of character identification by the reader. In that respect, emotion functions as a prerequisite to reading rather than a consequence. Taking into consideration that emotions are inherent, and not consciously triggered and maintained (Oatley, 2010), the study enforces the idea that separating emotional from critical response to a narrative and its agents is not just unnecessary, but actually impossible. Oatley (2009) explicates the term 'unfolding' as a sequential bidirectional process according to which one's emotions affects another, whose emotions influence in reciprocation, and so on. Oatley (2009, p. 26) also explains how emotions, plans and intentions are interrelated, referring to the structure of a narrative as a good example of how 'unfolding' works.

Furthermore, rejecting any type or degree of emotional involvement with a fictional character is equal to overlooking significant aspects of the reading process and its consequence in both a social and academic level. A recent study (Djikic *et al*, 2009, p. 25) has suggested that the reading of fiction, as a process that entails identification and self-implication, can initiate personal change, as well as "cognitive and emotional re-schematization". The conclusions (ibid, p. 27) demonstrate "significant changes in self-reported experience of traits under laboratory conditions". Therefore, if emotive response can lead to a degree of personal and social transformation, it constitutes an inseparable element of the reader-response theory.

One could argue that it would be a sweeping generalisation to assume that every reader is equally, or at all, affected by literature to the extent that she undergoes internal changes. Yet in another study (2009), Mar *et al*. have attempted

to rule out individual differences in the examination of such influences. The authors aimed to illustrate that reading fiction as a process enhancing social skills does not necessarily rely on personality traits, and that it is the very activity itself that promotes understanding of others, and empathetic responses in the real world. Their methods included the measurement of personality by the use of the Big Five Inventory (gender, age, English fluency, trait Openness and trait Fantasy), as well as parameters such as social isolation and loneliness (2009, pp. 412-413). As they concluded,

[F]iction print-exposure predicts performance on an empathy task, even after gender, age, English fluency, trait Openness, and trait Fantasy are statistically controlled. This finding helps to rule out the possibility that mere individual differences are responsible for the observed association between fiction exposure and empathy. (2009, pp. 420-421).

The same team (2006) had previously examined the association between reading fiction and social ability, suggesting that,

[C]omprehending characters in a narrative fiction appears to parallel the comprehension of peers in the actual world, while the comprehension of non-fiction shares no such parallels. Frequent fiction readers may thus bolster or maintain their social abilities unlike frequent readers of non-fiction. (Mar *et al.*, 2006, p. 695).

The study proposed that fiction promotes imaginary thinking and that narratives aid the reader to comprehend the real world better, enhancing her social abilities and ameliorating her interactions with real people. The authors also underlined the close correlation between narrative and reality, highlighting how fiction can influence beliefs and attitudes in real spatio-temporal environments (2006, pp. 696-697).

I will close this section by quoting Horace (2001):

It is not enough for poetry to be beautiful; it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer's mind wherever it will. [101] The human face smiles in sympathy with smilers and comes to the help of those that weep. If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; *then* your misfortunes will hurt me. ... For nature first shapes us within for any state of fortune – gives us pleasure or drives us to anger or casts us down to the ground with grievous sorrow and pains us – [111] and then expresses the emotions through the medium of the tongue. (Horace, 2001, p. 126).

## 2.4 SUMMARY

As this chapter demonstrated, the conceptual and ontological definition of the reader is essential for the author to understand whom she is writing for. An active participant in the text's recreation, the reader can be any person of any social status, education and origin, choosing to read for a variety of reasons. The novelist's task is not to attempt a determination of her ideal reader, but rather render her work as comprehensive and congruent as she can.

The act of reading encompasses an interchange of intellectual stimuli and emotional responses, both of equal gravity. The author should ascertain that her characters are complex enough to carry such emotions through in a way consistent with their idiosyncratic patterns and fictional endeavours. Such evocation of reader emotion should not be used as a self-ended stratagem, but rather emerge as a natural consequence from the narrative itself. Respective analysis will follow later. But first, a closer examination of the 'real' in relation to fictional characters and worlds is required, in order to define those interrelationships that govern the liaison between narrative and real spatio-temporal environments. Any analogies drawn or dismissed by such an examination will aid a better understanding of the fictional character's nature, function, *raison d'être* and the concept's dynamics of creation.

### **3. THE REALITY OF CHARACTER**

### **3.1 AN EXEGESIS OF REALITY**

A complex and multifarious notion, 'reality' has been the bone of contention among scholars of various disciplines since ancient Greece. Aristotle (1968) viewed reality of the universal in the object itself as its essence, which by reflection upon one could somehow access; for Nietzsche (1972), the real world has been subsumed by the apparent through the master-slave relationship with God; Kant (2003) believed there is only an experience of reality, rather than its existence; the Hyperrealists, like Jean Baudrillard (1994) and Umberto Eco (1986), spoke of the inability of one's consciousness to distinguish between reality and its simulation. And Shields (2010) has criticised what he considered to be an obsession for reality in writing, underlining the predominant role of personal experience and memory in the constructed narrative. As he (ibid, p. 13) indicated, "The origin of the novel lies in its pretence of actuality".

For the purposes of my research, I propose the following explication:

*Reality is the attribution of an individual's meaning of the world, based on her perceptions, ideologies, tastes, and miscellaneous opinions.*

Whether a novelist attempts to faithfully copy, or altogether abstain from her perceived reality depends on her own interpretations alone; one writer's intentional exaggeration and malformation, or amelioration, of what she thinks common and ordinary, is someone else's original, unaffected attribution of them.

#### **3.1.1 REALITY AND FICTION: POSSIBLE CORRELATIONS**

The issue of whether fiction imitates reality has been discussed widely, and it should come as no surprise that a unified conceptual framework is yet to be produced. On one side stand the formalists, who believe that it is futile to speak of

any such connection; on the other are the advocates of realism, who consider such connection indisputable (Boulter, 2007; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). Endorsing the latter stance, Paul Mills underlines that,

Fiction in the modern world has to earn its right to credibility, and does so in a style that uses reality effects and constant researched reference to the actual. It has to convince by experience, not by authority or tradition. Story thereafter aims to give *real* experience a shape, to remind us constantly of ourselves as its potential heroes and heroines, victims and criminals, witnesses and participants. (Mills, 2006, p.30).

Dwelling on the fiction-reality dynamic, Ursula Brumm (1968, pp. 368-369) also highlights that the novel cannot simply assume a symbolic function, since it precisely the individual experience it aims to depict. Similarly, Jonathan Gardner (1991, p.79) argues that the relevance to the real world is inevitable for all of fiction, since it reveals insights to the world, and the workings of human nature.

It is worth clarifying that this thesis does not advocate a blind devotion to a vaguely-defined concept of reality. It is such rigidity that inspires the Hyperrealists (Baudrillard, 1994; Eco, 1986) to accuse the simulation advocates of creating a meta-reality, a simulation over a simulation, which has sacrificed the multifarious experiential prototype: the blind devotion to a rigid perception of reality has in fact distorted such reality itself.

And yet it is precisely such lack of concurrence on the ontological meaning of the term that renders the rejection of any liaison between fiction and reality unsubstantiated. As Kendall Walton (1990) underlined,

What is true and what is false may be dependent on or relative to or conditioned by a culture or a language or a conceptual scheme or a theoretical framework or the constitution of the human mind. ... [R]eality is reality and facts are facts, however they are to be understood, and ... what is the case obviously *does* differ from what is not the case, even if the difference

is somehow conventional, culturally specific, dependent on this or relative to that, or whatever. (Walton, 1990, pp. 100).

The dissension between the defenders and the enemies of the imitation theory is futile, and the novelist should disentangle herself from it altogether. Joyce Carol Oates (2008) makes this point precisely when she remarks that,

It can be said that many human endeavours depend upon a “quarrel” with reality, whether these are scientific or philosophical or political or aesthetic. I think that, like many writers, I’m fascinated by the world that surrounds me, both the human world and the world of nature. I don’t know that I have a quarrel with it, but I do see myself as an observer, both admiring and skeptical. (Oates, 2008, p. 53).

The author uses a self-perceived analogy between the real world and her fictional ones as a reference and not an end in itself. With respect to this, Smith (1995, pp. 32-33) argues that when a work is praised as ‘realistic’, the acknowledgment of its actual distinction from the real is indisputable. In other words, there is no real question of ‘separateness’ between reality and fiction. Again, the impression of the ‘realistic’ is given by the audio-visual in films, while in fiction, the novelist is called to produce a convincing textual interpretation of it.

Fiction does not exist within a realm of reality outside the senses, and neither does it pretend to do so. Instead, it offers the reader new perspectives, by sharing attitudes that may be in the future, or could have been in the past. It is this correlation of fiction to the past I will explore next.

### **3.1.2 FICTION, REALITY AND HISTORY**

For Boulter (2007, p. 92), “[W]e humanise time by creating a narrative”. Indeed, fiction offers the reader the opportunity to embark upon imaginary temporal journeys, both to the past, through works of historical fiction, as well as to the future, through those of fantasy and science fiction.

History is represented by the chronological sequence of human existence. Historians and novelists attempt to recreate it through their texts, albeit with different methods and aims. The former recount or highlight events. The latter create fictional lives that are affected by, or simply navigate through, such events. Both may write for propaganda, but they will usually strive each for their assigned objectivity: the historian to report in an unbiased manner, free from personal prejudices and emotional involvement; the novelist by proffering the same occurrences through the diversity of her characters' perspectives.

The differences between the two writers have been discussed widely throughout the course of poetics (Aristotle, 1996; Forster, 1974; Sidney, 1965). This comparison indicates that fiction must bear a certain similarity to reality. As F.E. Sparshott (1967) underlines,

What is it that we are asked to imagine? Not that there was a man called Napoleon, for we know that there really was; nor that he escaped from Elba, for we know that he really did. Rather, we are asked to suppose that certain events in this well-known career took place in certain ways, although we do not know whether they in fact happened so, or otherwise, or we may even know that they happened otherwise; or to suppose, that among these known episodes, others were interspersed that we know did not in fact take place. (Sparshott, 1967, p.4).

Many historical novels revolve around personages of the past, guiding the reader to follow characters through an amalgamation of both constructed and real events. For example, Napoleon appears in many novels, including Jeanette Winterson's (1996) *The Passion*, Victor Hugo's (1955) *Les Miserables*, etc.

Among the first to draw the analogy was Aristotle (1996), who differentiated between the dramatist and the historian as per their function. His distinction dictated that the latter is engaged with what has happened, while the former is

concerned with what would happen under certain circumstances. For this reason, he believed that (ibid, p. 16), “[P]oetry is more philosophical and more serious than history”. But even if fictional and historical events coincide, the poet remains a poet:

Even if in fact he writes about what has happened, he is none the less a poet; there is nothing to prevent some of the things which have happened from being the kind of thing which probably would happen, and it is in that respect that he is concerned with them as a poet. (Aristotle, 1996, p. 17).

Sir Phillip Sidney (1965, p. 111) also held the view that the historian’s role is restricted to reciting the facts for the purpose of informing, while the poet may change and ‘beautify’ them for both didactic and entertaining purposes. For Sidney (ibid, p.113), the poet has the advantage of adding perspective to any story told, thus making the narrated events far more interesting.

Derek Allan (2001, pp. 145 - 147) dismisses the idea that history embedded in a narrative and history as an ecumenical concept are to be compared. Literature – even in the case of historical fiction – focuses on the individual, whilst history functions as an all-encompassing, catholic experience.

Indeed, there was never any real need for such a comparison altogether. Expanding Aristotle’s differentiation between the one that reports and the one who imagines, I propose that the novelist may use history to illuminate new insights and offer the reader perspectives and experiences set at an existent, and often ‘familiar’— either by experience or by acquisition through frequent repetition – setting. It is a correlation rather than a discrepancy between the two. The novelist may use the historian’s work as a platform for her own endeavours. As Iser (1974) explicated,

The imagination fills the framework of historical fact with the picture of dramatic human confrontations, and it is this which makes historical reality genuinely interesting. ... The imagination releases all the circumstances that cannot be perceived in the mere historical fact, and it brings to life all the conditions that led to the formation of historical reality. Imagination and reality interact upon one another, so that in the reality of the novel, neither history nor imagination can assume a completely dominant role. (Iser, 1974, p.95).

The historian and the novelist of the same period are not in competition, but work in parallel latitudes, each exploring different dimensions. When the author seeks to pen a historical novel, the work of the historian constitutes a prerequisite foundation upon which the author will construct her work through research.

In fact, without history, no type of fiction could be possibly written. Indeed, one way to comprehend history is to regard it as a past reality, a reality of cultures, past ideological frameworks and perceptions of life temporally anterior to one's own. The emerging analogy is as follows: since historical fact functions as a prerequisite to the creation of historical fiction, fiction evolving around current times is founded upon its own contemporary reality; in other words, reality as one perceives it today. Analogously, futuristic fiction is born out of hypotheses on the forthcoming reality, based on the human experience of the past and the present. In that respect, history may also be understood as a kind of fiction. As Iser (1974, p.96) stated, "[R]eality and imagination become virtually inseparable." And he concluded by presenting the principle of 'imitatio historiae':

The principle of *imitatio historiae* demands only that history be made vivid in the present; this involves translating factual reality into "fictitious characters" and "imaginary scenes", because only in this way can historical diffuseness be overcome and presented coherently for subjective comprehension and experience. (Iser, 1974, p. 100).

I will explore this concept in the following section with regard to the fictional character's role within the fictional narrative.

### **3.1.3 CHARACTER AS THE NAVIGATOR TO HISTORICAL JOURNEYS**

Iser's centralisation of the fictional character serves as the dominant vehicle for transferring the reader through the passage of time. For Forster (1974) the difference between the historian and the novelist lies within the key-role of the fictional character as the navigator through temporal journeys:

The historian deals with actions, and with the characters of men only so far as [s]he can deduce them from their actions. [S]he is quite as much concerned with character as the novelist, but [s]he can only know of [her] existent when it shows on the surface. The hidden life that appears in external signs is hidden no longer ... [I]t is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source. (Forster, 1974, pp. 55 - 56).

By using a variety of fictional perspectives, the novelist may transform the recounted event into a subjective temporal journey, denuded from the neutrality of impersonal dictation. Such versatility transforms the reported event into an imaginary subjective experience. The same events will impact differently on the lives of many different characters, altering and reshaping them, proffering the reader various, and often clashing, insights. And so the latter benefits from an encompassing depiction of historical reality, gaining not just knowledge, but also experience through history. Price (1983, p. 20) describes that, "[T]he narrative process may become more crucial than in history, less guided by expository suggestion and explicit assertion of pattern".

It can be concluded that the analogy between historical reality and fiction supports the argument that the novelist has to found her work on reality, the way she perceives and defines it. Reality however is not a temporal term; or rather, it

cannot be secluded within a timeframe. It is infinite. One's contemporary reality will be the historical reality of both an historian and a novelist one day, and they will attempt to recite it each as per their function.

### **3.2 A DISSENTION OF TERMINOLOGY**

Having already touched on the dissension between the advocates and the adversaries of the mimetic theory, I now wish to contend it as futile, contending that it stems from a misunderstanding of terminology.

When scholars discuss fiction's reference to reality, they use terms such as 'imitation' (Aristotle, 1996; Ricoeur, 1991; Sidney, 1965), 'representation' (Currie, 2010; Ouellet, 1996; Walton, 1990), 'simulation' (Mar *et al.*, 2008; Oatley, 1999; Oatley 1994), or speak of 'modification' (Sparshott, 1967; Zola, 1959), 'recreation' (Ricoeur, 1991), 'mirror-like reflection' (Boulter, 2007; Oatley, 1999; Ouellet, 1996), and so forth.

The form of art or discipline discussing such reference also determines it contextually. Dramatists, poets, script-writers and authors may have different tools in their disposal, as well as ways of conveying this referential liaison as per their medium. There is, however, a contextual denominator among all terms mentioned above, and I argue that the point of focus should lie on such common ground, rather than their individual meaning. The fictional text bears some similarity to reality, the degree of which is left to be determined either by the author's conscious choice (i.e. form of art, genre) or the reader/audience (i.e. believability as emerging from the narrative itself). Thus, I propose that fiction is *inspired* by reality. Aristotle (1996) regarded all forms of fictional compositions as imitations of agents and actions. Whilst the art of drama has known innumerable transformations, and

evolved in many a different direction since 'Poetics', it remains a worldwide, cross-cultural foundational infrastructure for fiction, providing insights and exegeses for fictional genres through time and space. According to the philosopher (ibid), tragedy entails the imitation of action, and even though this very statement has triggered debates prioritising action over character, or vice versa, it is applicable in every single fictional piece, no matter which stance one chooses to adopt. Imitation constitutes an inherent inclination of human beings, as a form of seeking pleasure derived from the acquisition of knowledge:

[W]e take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e.g. ... corpses). The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for others too ... [W]hat happens is that as they view them they come to understand and work out what each thing is. (Aristotle, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Indeed, fiction aims to satisfy an inherent curiosity about the surrounding world, which emerges as a natural thirst for knowledge. Aristotle's reference to the depiction of unpleasant things, the image of a corpse for instance, is indicative. 'Unpleasant things' does not refer to the brutality of images similar to those found in contemporary macabre genres, such as extreme horror or torture porn; nor did the philosopher mean that the audience derives pleasure from the image itself. It is the satisfaction of curiosity as to what a dead human body looks like, that brings any sense of gratification; in other words, the acquisition of knowledge. Put differently, it is the accuracy in depictions, the very resemblance to reality that attracts humans to fiction in the first place.

Still, one may wonder what Aristotle's 'imitation' entails. The answer lies within the aforementioned differentiation between the function of the poet and

that of the historian. In order to understand 'imitation', one needs to replace the question 'did it really happen?' with 'could it have happened, under fictional circumstances?', or otherwise 'what if it had happened?' It is the likelihood of the narrated events that encourage any mental correspondence to reality, events that would be plausible under various conditions.

Paul Ricoeur (1991) was also interested in the possible polysemous properties of the Aristotelian 'mimesis', which he interpreted as 'creative imitation'. Ricoeur purported to contextually conjoin 'mimesis' ("the imitation of action") with 'mythos' ("the synthesis of incidents into one story"). He initiated his theory of the 'triple circle of mimesis' by disuniting the term into 'mimesis1', 'mimesis2' and 'mimesis3':

Word artisans, I shall say, do not produce things but just quasi-things. They invent the 'as if'. In this median sense, the term mimesis is the emblem of that split ... that opens up the world of fiction, or, to use current vocabulary, that institutes the literariness of the literary work. Aristotle ratifies this pivotal sense when he says, 'the plot *is* the imitation of the action'. (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 139).

Again, it is evident that the relationship between fiction and reality is not an antagonistic one. According to Ricoeur (ibid), fiction as the product of creative imagination is the result of an interaction consisting of three sequential stages, the foundation of which interaction lies within the author's own perception and experience:

[T]he simple mentioning of an action brings into play the pre-understanding common to the poet and his or her public of what action, or rather acting, signifies. It is this familiarity, this prior acquaintance with the order of action that, by way of the mediation of fiction, will be intensified, magnified, and in the strong sense of the word, transfigured. (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 140).

Using the above proposition as its platform, 'mimesis1' entails a) the a priori understanding of fictional elements, b) the articulation of human action by signs, rules, norms and symbols and c) the understanding of narrative time. 'Mimesis2' pertains to the literary text itself. Here Ricoeur introduced the term 'emplotment'. 'Emplotment' is the process according to which the author is able, not to proffer the reader a sterile copycat of reality, but rather to interconnect diverse elements, such as characters and events, into an intelligible ensemble. That way, Ricoeur stated, the text is rendered independent of the author's possible intentions, the reader's own reception capacity, and any socio-cultural preconceptions surrounding its creation (1991, p. 143). He called this schema 'the triple autonomy'. Finally, 'mimesis3' concerns the procedure according to which the text, deriving from and inspired by the real world, has the ability to affect and even overhaul the world of the reader.

Two things emerge clearly from Ricoeur's theory. First, fiction is not, and should not aim to be, a replica of reality. This assertion was further enhanced by his distinction between reality and absence (1979, p. 126). Moreover, he explained (1979, p. 126) that, "Because fictions do not refer in a productive way to reality as already given, they may refer in a "reproductive" way to reality as intimated by the fiction". He proceeded (ibid, p. 127) to introduce the paradox of fiction: "Because [fiction] has no previous referent, it may refer in a productive way to reality, and even *increase* reality".

Ricoeur was right to emphasise the importance of experience in the author-text-reader schema. I will be expanding this point later, yet it is worth noting that the philosopher is not alone in his stance. As Harvey (1965) elaborated,

Any notion of a mimetic theory must satisfy two conditions; it must be both particular and general. By particular I mean something which inheres in the details of individual experience, which meshes inextricably with the dense patterns of life itself. These patterns differ with each of us and with each individual work of art, so that what we are looking for must accommodate these differences. ... Thus we must look for something which allows for the *thisness* and *thatness* of experience and yet which is general in the sense that experience – of whatever individual quality – would be meaningless without it. (Harvey, 1965, p.21).

Harvey (ibid, pp. 21-22) introduced the notion of the ‘constitutive category’ to function as a common denominator among the specifics of experience, and the innate inclination towards experience itself. The four categories he discussed were ‘Time’, ‘Identity’, ‘Causality’ and ‘Freedom’, because, as he claimed, a convincing depiction of them by the author shall render her work as lifelike, too:

The texture of the created fictional world – the society portrayed, the values assumed, the emotions rendered – may be alien, but the shape of that world will be familiar. ... Finally, these categories – because they are so basic to our consciousness – change more slowly than manners or morals. (Harvey, 1965, p. 22).

And for Pierre Ouellet (1996), it is precisely the human experience that allows for any comparison with reality:

[F]ictitious beings and fictional worlds ... can possess a logical or ontological status only if we are able to compare them with the world that we know, that is to say, with a certain experience that we have of the world – an experience against which these beings and worlds are found to be more or less compatible, or to contain a varying number of mimetic features. (Ouellet, 1996, p. 77).

Whilst ‘imitation’ remains a popular term, many scholars consider it insufficient to describe the referential nature between reality and fiction. For Oatley (1994), the terms ‘imitation’ and ‘representation’ do not properly illustrate Aristotle’s notion of ‘mimesis’, and he counters that the term can be better regarded as a simulative process according to which readers project themselves

into the world of the narrative, acquiring social information and comprehending life in a way otherwise impossible (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999; Oatley, 1994). While 'mimesis' allows for an imitative relationship between fiction and reality, it is founded upon a greater structure of coherence that renders a relationship between the work and its audience possible:

A play or novel runs on the minds of the audience or reader as a computer simulation runs on a computer. Just as computer simulation has augmented theories of language, perception, problem solving, and connectionist learning, so fiction as simulation illuminates the problem of human action and emotions. (Oatley, 1999, p. 105).

This is why Creative Writing students are asked to replicate reality via the senses. This process entails a sensory transmission from the material experience of the real world to its virtual reconstruction in one's mind. The dynamics of empirical sensory experience constitute the platform upon which the virtual analogy of such experience will be built.

### **3.2.1 REALITY AS A REFERENTIAL FOUNDATION FOR FICTION**

According to my proposition that fiction is inspired by one's perceived sense of the real, the author will use her knowledge of the actual world as a platform for the creation of a fictional one. The latter will be a modification, or reconstruction, or recreation of the former. As Shields (2010, p. 57) writes, "Anything processed by memory is fiction". Accordingly, Sparshott (1967) indicates that the novelist creates an ex nihilo fictional world using a number of cues the reader is then called to supplement by means of her own perception and memory of the world:

The memories appealed to are of two kinds: general knowledge of the kinds of things and persons and places and happenings that the actual world contains; and particular knowledge of actual events, etc., in the actual world. What the author does, and invites us to do, is not to imagine a world de novo,

but to suppose that the actual world that we know is modified in certain specified respects. (Sparshott, 1967, p. 4).

Many others endorse the idea of a creative reconstruction of reality. For instance, Gardner (1991, p. 80) believes that the writer of fiction “[R]estates what has already been known, finding new expression for familiar truths, adapting to the age truths that may seem outmoded”. This is where Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarisation (1925, cited in Shields, 2010, p. 12) lies: “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the story stony”.

Richard Kearney (2002) equates mimesis to creative recreation:

Mimesis is invention in the original sense of that term: *invenire* means to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short to recreate actual worlds as possible worlds. (Kearney, 2002, p. 132).

And for Boulter (2007), writers are both researchers and inventors:

[They] invent new worlds from the old, worlds that are possible rather than physical. ... As fiction writers, our research circles back and forth between the ‘real’ and the ‘possible’ so that the nature of creative writing research becomes a spiralling process of discovery that leads us back to the very roots of the word ‘research’: the Latin words *circus* (a circle) and *circare* (go round). (Boulter, 2007, p. 25).

It is this analogy between the real, the possible and the fictional world I will analyse next.

### **3.2.2 ON REAL, POSSIBLE, AND FICTIONAL WORLDS**

A fictional world is characterised by the impossibility of a physical, spatiotemporal existence (for even if the spatiotemporal setting may depict existent places and historical details, it cannot exist outside its textual framework).

The correlation of fiction to reality is also a referential one. While it is not determined by mutual exclusivity (either or), it is there to define the consistency and plausibility of the narrated events. Furthermore, not all fiction is realistic. Many narratives are set in fantastical worlds, governed by mythological and futuristic principles, founded on the novelist's hypotheses of what may have been under certain – alas, fictional – circumstances. Finally, indeterminate as the story's textual framework may be, the author can have those answers to questions the reader will never ask. For she may not know for sure just how many children Lady Macbeth had (Knights, 1973), but still predict her own characters' future.

Aristotle (1996, p. 16) held the view that, "Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The *universal* is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance to probability or necessity". The novelist does not speak of things that are true in the world, but rather, of things that could have been true, but are not necessarily so. It would be highly unlikely to be able to make a copycat of reality, even through historical or biographical fiction. As Shields (2010, p. 10) explains, "The etymology of *fiction* is from *fingere* (participle *fictum*) meaning "to shape, fashion, form, or mold". Any verbal account is a fashioning and shaping of events".

I will close this section by quoting Guy de Maupassant (1959, p. 71): "The realist, if he is an artist, will seek to give us not a banal photographic representation of life, but a vision of it that is fuller, more vivid and more compellingly truthful than even reality itself".

I shall now explore what 'truthful' may signify.

### 3.3 TRUTH IN FICTION: CONSISTENCY AND BELIEVABILITY DEFINED

Many scholars attempt to shed light on what the notion of truth in fiction may encompass (Mole, 2009; Lamarque, 2004; Matravers, 1997; New, 1997; Davies, 1996; Currie, 1990; Lewis, 1978). They frequently theorise over what truth signifies for literature in comparison to reality, and either support, or reject such a connection. For instance, Lewis (1978) proposed that, instead of attempting to differentiate between a fictional and a 'real' truth, one simply needs to presuppose that a phrase such as "In such and such fiction..." precludes the narrative's sentences. Thus, the author is unburdened from the accusation of recounting events that never really took place as true. As he explicated,

Storytelling is pretence. The storyteller purports to be telling the truth about matters whereof [s]he has knowledge. [S]he purports to be talking about characters who are known to [her], and whom [s]he refers to, typically, by means of their ordinary proper names. But if [her] story is fiction, [s]he is not really doing these things. Usually [her] pretence has not the slightest tendency to deceive anyone, nor has [s]he the slightest intent to deceive. Nevertheless [s]he lays a false part, goes through a form of telling known fact when [s]he is not doing so. (Lewis, 1978, p. 40).

Lewis (*ibid*, p. 45) advocated that fictional truth emerges contextually, as a contingent fact, or the reader's own perception as derived by her socio-cultural background. On the other hand, Christopher New (1997, p. 423) believes that the concept pertains only to the author's linguistic intentions of attributing a pragmatic sense to a congruous whole (the narrative) by terms of internal accordance. To which Derek Matravers (1997, p. 423) counters that, the very process of novel-reading entails imagining it's not fiction in the first place, but rather a known, reported fact. Both Matravers and Lewis speak of conscious pretence, in the same way Poulet (2001) spoke of a conscious surrender of self.

The first to encapsulate this notion was S.T. Coleridge (1983) who initiated the concept of the 'Suspension of Disbelief':

[M]y endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (Coleridge, 1983, p. 6).

In order to accept the extraordinariness of certain events and figures, the reader must find something recognisable in them, which will convince her that everything else could be plausible.

Truthfulness is not a perplexing parameter for literature, although I agree with Matravers that the author needs to present a confident narration that is concise and verisimilar. The novelist uses incidents and characters she may have heard of, or experienced, or met, as the under-structure of her fictional world. Fiction is an amalgamation of universal truth and fabrication. As Lewis (1978) stated, the act of reading fiction can be regarded as an interchange between factual and counterfactual premises:

We depart from actuality as far as we must to reach a possible world where the counterfactual supposition comes true (and that might be quite far if the supposition is a fantastic one). But we do not make gratuitous changes. We hold fixed the features of actuality that do not have to be changed as part of the least disruptive way of making the supposition true. We can safely reason from the part of our factual background that is thus held fixed. (Lewis, 1978, p. 42).

For Walton (1990, p. 41), truth and fiction are connected by analogy: "Imagining aims at the fictional as belief aims at the true. What is true is to be believed; what is fictional is to be imagined". Walton parallels works of representational arts to children's games of make-believe, proposing that there is such a thing as fictional truth:

[W]hatever is the case "in a fictional world" - in the world of a game of make-believe or dream or daydream or representational work of art - is fictional ... To call a proposition fictional amounts to saying only that it is "true in some fictional world or other". (Walton, 1990, p. 35).

I argue that attempting to decipher the oxymoron of the fictional truth will not proffer any creative insights to the Creative Writer. As Joanna Scott (2008) remarks,

Telling ourselves that fiction is true and at the same time not true is essential to the art of fiction. It's been at the heart of fiction from the start. Fiction can persuade us with its truths, yet we know it's based on a flat-out lie. (Scott, 2008, p. 61)

The novelist should instead focus on engaging the reader in a conscious make-believe game, according to which, she reads facts convincingly reported by the narrator. Put differently, the question is not whether fiction is entitled to its own truth, but rather, what is it that renders a narrative eligible to be compared to reality and its world to be viewed as 'possible'.

### **3.3.1 CONSISTENCY AS THE KEYSTONE TO SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF**

As mentioned, Lewis believed that the author's role when narrating a story is one of pretence and unwilling deception. I propose that one substitutes the words 'pretence' and 'deception' with 'persuasion'. The novelist's goal is to *persuade* the reader that the narrated events and characters could be real.

For Mole (2009, p. 497), plausibility can only be defined by reference to reality. As he explains,

[O]ur sense of how things might have been is conditioned by our understanding of how they actually are, and the engagement of our sense of plausibility involves a gauging of the distance between the world portrayed and the actual world. (Mole, 2009, p. 497).

As it emerges, juxtaposition with reality becomes inevitable to a certain, albeit indeterminable, degree. In order to convince her readers, the author needs to appeal to their perceptual experience of the verisimilar. I say 'indeterminable' since reality itself is a concept subjectively experienced, and the personal interpretations are dependent on such perceptions (Currie, 1990).

It is thus worth exploring how the author can convince the reader of the plausibility of her narrative, her fiction ranging from realistic to fantastical. I propose that suspension of disbelief can only be accomplished by contextual consistency and narrative coherence.

Michael Lebowitz (1984) explicates:

A story is *consistent* if properties and events of the story world (including properties of characters) do not include any explicit or apparent internal contradictions. ... *Coherence* involves the idea that events should be logically explainable, at least in retrospect, from the information available to the reader. ... While it is neither necessary nor desirable to provide the reader with enough information to actively predict every event that will occur in a story, events should make sense when they do occur. (Lebowitz, 1984, p. 177).

Returning to Smith's (1990) theory of the three levels of engagement, recognition comes as the first of three sequential steps, as the prerequisite to cognitive involvement with the fictional agents. I propose that recognition can serve as the keystone to further immersion in the narrative world in its entirety. As presented, recognition refers to the process of accumulating textual cues in order to follow the storyline and its primary elements (Smith, 1990). An undefined amount of such cues have to correspond to reality in certain ways in order for the story to make sense. As Sparshott (1967, p. 4) indicates, it is not the the narrated fact per se that may be disputed, but its likelihood in connection to the rest of the

narrative: “The discrepancy is one *within the imagined world itself*, between what in it is asserted as different and what is implied as unchanged”.

The reader must make sense of the narrated events, to comprehend the story's dynamics and recognise motives, actions, consequences and so on, in order to both understand and evaluate the narrative. Similarly, Currie (2010, p. 191) contends that the key to achieving textual coherence lies within the ability to construct a narrative with logically deducible interconnections among actions, incidents and agents. As he argues (ibid), “[E]vents that in the real world would be connected in a brute casual way will now also be connected by reason and rationality”.

Again, one may assert that the narrative is not an imitation, but rather an artistic depiction of reality, since it is characterised by a logically inferable micro-structure. The novelist needs to construct events and characters in such a way, that they seem both plausible and at the same time, non-orchestrated by terms of convenience. By ‘plausible’ I do not imply that narratives should present static and predictably dull storylines. The author must attribute a sense of pseudo-causality to her carefully manipulated creation, her narrated events varying from ordinary incidents, to extraordinary circumstances, emerging nonetheless naturally out of the narrative flow. As Aristotle (1990, p. 41) indicated, “Probable impossibilities are preferable to improbable possibilities. ...If one does posit an irrationality and it seems more or less rational, even an oddity is possible”.

Moreover, logical inferences are still expected in genres such as fantasy and science fiction, since an internal, contextual consistency is what renders the story comprehensible, even if inhabited by elves, dragons or aliens. As Mills (2006, p. 30)

comments, “However strange, the world of the story must be made habitable, believable. If it were not, his peculiar horrors wouldn’t be able to threaten or attack”. Similarly, Walton (1990, p. 329) draws attention to the fact that the resemblances to reality supersede the differences to the extent that fantastic fiction is congruent and comprehensible. And Matravers (1997, pp. 424 – 425) points towards the text’s internal information a reader is called to extract, for its very arrangement defines the level of intra-consistency that is later to be juxtaposed, if need be, to reality.

Thus far, it has been agreed that consistency as the precondition for the suspension of disbelief can only be achieved by an indeterminate degree of correlation to reality, and that it is the inner structure of the narrative that allows for such connection to be established in the first place. I will now discuss the consequences of an unpremeditated deviation.

### **3.3.2 AN ACCOUNT OF INCONSISTENCY: CONTEXTUAL DETERMINATION AND CONSEQUENCES FOR AUTHOR AND NARRATIVE**

Aristotle (1990, p. 43) believed that, “It is less serious if the artist was unaware of the fact that a female deer does not have antlers than if he painted a poor imitation”. Expanding, I argue that the author should aim to both acquire sufficient knowledge of all her story’s elements through research and, at the same time, draw a plausible depiction of reality that will not be characterised by contradictions. Obstructions to the reader’s logical inferences will ensure distractions from the narrative thread, and the reader may even refuse to engage further in the proffered game of make-believe.

Indeed, the author's inability to produce coherently assembled fictional texts can imperil not just the content of her work, but her very reliability as a storyteller. As Mole (2009, p. 499) underlines, "The distraction of inaccuracy is ... an impediment to the work's achieving the very things that it [sic] is trying to achieve – because it interferes with the mechanism by which poetry makes its achievements". Mole (ibid, p. 502) moves on to underline the possible impact of incoherence on the novelist's own credibility as an artist and craftsman: "Recognizing the authority of an author depends in part on gauging the authenticity of [her] portrayal. Accuracies and inaccuracies are revealing of the author's attitude, and of [her] astuteness, and they thereby figure in our judgement of a work".

For Currie (2010, pp. 10-11), the reader's verdict on inconsistency depends on whether she considers it intentional or not. He does, however, underline that, "We expect specificity in belief systems, as well as coherence. ... With narrative, the emphasis on particularity is strong; we expect narratives to track the histories of individual things". This suggests that the author should aim for both clarity of content and compatibility, not necessarily with the real, but with the potential. That way she ensures that her reader will remain, both voluntarily and consequently, immersed in the narrated events of the pages, without being distracted by questions that may disrupt the suspension of disbelief and result in distrust, and even rejection, of her intentions and craftsmanship.

### **3.4 CONSISTENCY OF AGENT**

Using the above conclusions, I will embark on a complementary analysis on the fictional agent.

### 3.4.1 THE LIFELIKE CHARACTER DEFINED

Often used to describe the vividly painted character, the epithet 'lifelike' encompasses both the process and philosophy of character creation, as it points towards a referential relationship with the concept's prototype, the real human being. I therefore find it useful to embark upon a further exploration of the term.

I begin by clarifying that 'lifelike' is not a contextually restricting term, and as such does not refer solely to the character of the realistic novel. Rather, it pertains to inner and outer states, in order to describe a textual entity comprehensible by the reader, even if not designed to evoke sentiments of sympathy. As Mar and Oatley (2008, p. 185) explain, "Writers attempt to create characters that possess a recognizable psychology ... A science-fiction novel that takes place on a distant space station may have greater psychological realism than does a pulpy novel set in modern times in a familiar locale".

Put differently, characters that are placed in realistic, somewhat familiar settings, as well as those inhabiting supernatural worlds need to be recognisable and understood in terms of fears, goals, wishes, and so forth. Gardner (1983) elaborates accordingly:

A talking tree, a talking refrigerator, a talking clock must speak in a way we learn to recognize, must influence events in ways we can identify as flowing from some definite motivation. ... Thus the process by which one writes a fable, on one hand, or a realistic story, on the other, is not much different. (Gardner, 1983, pp. 21- 22).

In the previous chapter I discussed the objection to juxtaposition of the fictional character with a real human being. I will now introduce the concept of the 'real fictional character', initially appearing to entail mutually exclusive notions. I propose that 'real' is the character that could be perceived as possibly existent in

possible fictional worlds, under possible circumstances; a character that is convincing enough so as not to appear fabricated in order to serve pre-constructed plots, or purely didactic aims, and whose attributed personality, actions and motivations, lead the narrative to unfold. For Forster (1974),

[A] character in a book is real ... when the novelist knows everything about it. He may not choose to tell us all he knows - many of the facts, even of the kind we call obvious, may be hidden. But he will give us the feeling that though the character has not been explained it is explicable, and we get from this a reality of a kind we can never get in daily life. (Forster, 1974, p. 69).

This is not to suggest that the novelist must exhaust herself in an endless invention of meaningless details, which will never reach or interest the reader. Moreover, novelists do not work on identical patterns, and so the ostensible rigour in Forster's view cannot be applied indiscriminately. Notwithstanding these reasonable objections, Forster has encapsulated a fundamental principle in character creation: a fictional character can only be perceived by a reader as real, if she appears to have a hypothetical past, and a future that will continue beyond her textual existence.

One may argue that fictional people cannot be regarded as 'possible', since the reader is not in position to provide determinate answers or explanations to questions not addressed in the rigid spatiotemporal framework of the text. I counter that the author should hold at least *some* knowledge of her characters, both on an intra-textual and an extra-textual basis. As Gardner (1983) comments,

The writer's characters must stand before us with a wonderful clarity, such continuous clarity that nothing they do strikes us as improbable behaviour for just that character, even when that character's action is, as sometimes happens, something that came as a surprise to the writer [her]self. We must understand, and the writer before us must understand, more than we *know* about the character; otherwise, neither the writer nor the reader after [her]

could feel confident of the character's behaviour when the character acts freely. (Gardner, 1983, p. 45).

Analogously, Boulter (2007) states that,

If as writers we imagine our characters as people living in a different dimension, then it might make us more responsive to them. As writers working with a plot we will inevitably manipulate our characters into uncomfortable situations, but their reactions to those situations should be their own. (Boulter, 2007, p. 142).

And Price (1983) underlines that,

[C]haracters are, within the frame of their fictional world, no less than fictional persons. They have a clarity of definition and relationship that allows us to speak with more assurance and directness about their actions than about those of people. (Price, 1983, p. 64).

While the textual frame itself does not retain spatiotemporal dimensions, the narrative does. A story, even if non-linear, is written and perused with a presupposed past and future encompassing it.

Likewise, the fictional agent carries with her a hypothetical past, and a possible future. The former is referred to as 'character background' and will be discussed later. The notion of the latter has been frequently dismissed, often encapsulated in the question 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' (Knights, 1973). The reasoning behind the irony lies within the idea that a character is an indeterminate story element, and therefore it would be naive to discuss a future for her.

I counter that the concept of character future is not useful just for the reader – who many a time seeks reassurance in reaching the final catharsis; having embarked upon endeavours of mental representations of fictional beings' lives, the author may refuse to break them off – hence the concept of the 'open endings' or 'ambiguous endings', or the sequels to many a popular story. This is not to imply

that all readers and authors alike spend time daydreaming about fictional lives; nor do I suggest that it is a prerequisite for writers to dwell on these lives once their work is finished. Rather, I propose that the novelist should have a sense of who her character used to be, and what she may become, in order to proffer the reader a convincing account of her narrated present. The future speculated need not be precise or with episodic detail. The notion of a future pertains to a character's idiosyncratic qualities, and a thereof modification or preservation, and not a specific series of interview-style questions demanding a determinate response. Reaching her journey, a character may have undergone a metamorphosis (to be discussed), or found herself in the beginning of new paths. It is such possibilities that intrigue the reader, rendering the text complex and believable.

At the end of *Disgrace* (1999), Lurie finds himself in a new situation, partly chosen *by* him, and partly chosen *for* him. His future is somewhat visible, but not concrete:

What will entail, being a grandfather? As a father he has not been much of a success [past, depicted in present narration], despite trying harder than most. As a grandfather he will probably score lower than average too. He lacks the virtues of the old: equanimity, kindness, patience. But perhaps those virtues will come as other virtues go: the virtue of passion, for instance. He must have a look again at Victor Hugo, poet of grandfatherhood. There may be things to learn. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 291).

Looking through Lurie's eyes, his past choices are, in a sense, to blame for Lucy's fate, and as such, his own. Now he wonders whether his future will be different, and within the context of post-apartheid Africa, such a future has weighty thematic emphasis as well. The possibility of Lurie's future exists directly in relation to the non-fictional South Africa.

Moody (1994) lets the reader glimpse into a part of his characters' future, the part concerning the relationship between the Hoods and the Williamses:

This quarter hour was the last time when the Hoods and the Williamses would be this close, when their stories would be so easily told together, when, if there was going to be conversation on the subject of those keys and that party, or about dry-humping and teenaged drinking, or about the misshapen affection that bound these people, such talk should have taken place. They would be neighbours for a while yet. (Moody, 1994, p. 259).

Again, this paragraph allows the reader to imagine a life for the Hoods and the Williamses beyond the text. Such small clue suffices to attribute realism to Moody's narration.

In summary we can say that it would be impossible to predict the future of a flesh-and-blood person, let alone that of a fictitious one. But if a reader catches herself wondering what may become of the characters, this means that the author convincingly conveyed them. As Forster (1974, p. 57) indicated, "[P]eople in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner, as well as their outer life can be exposed".

#### **3.4.2 INCONSISTENCY OF AGENT: A DETERMINATION**

To begin with, I propose that inconsistent is a fictional agent whose ascribed personalities, actions, motivations and emerging emotions do not exist in harmonic interconnection but more as if they were designed or forced for convenience.

Richard Cumberland (1959) wrote:

I do not propose to make any demands upon my hero that he cannot reasonably fulfil, or press [her] into straightens from which virtue, by its native energy, cannot extricate herself with ease; I shall require of [her] no sacrifices for the sake of public fame, no pedantic ostentatious apathy, for [her] lot is humble, and [her] feelings natural; I shall let [her] swim with the current, and not strive to tow [her] against the stream of probability. (Cumberland, 1959, p. 62).

Similarly, Henry Fielding (1959) believed that,

[T]he actions should be such as may not only be within the compass of human agency, and which human agents may probably be supposed to do but they should be likely for the very actors and characters themselves to have performed for that may be only wonderful and surprising in one man, may become improbably, or indeed impossible, when related of another. (Fielding, 1959, p. 60).

Indeed, it is not enough for a fictional agent to be characterised by terms of compatibility to the real person (i.e. general plausibility of actions) but also by internal congruence, i.e. to be logically explainable as an entity acting and reacting within the narrative.

This is not to imply that characters need to be linearly monotonous and unvaried. To quote Fielding (ibid, p. 61) again, “[T]hough every good author will confine [her]self within the bounds of probability, it is by no means necessary that [her] characters, or [her] incidents, should be trite, common, or vulgar”. Since life itself is full of contradictions, and humans have no option but to deal with obstacles, a diversity of such reciprocations is to be expected.

Aristotle (1990, p. 24) stated, “[E]ven if the subject of the imitation is inconsistent, and that is the kind of character that is presupposed, it should nevertheless be consistently inconsistent”. Again, the applicability of Aristotle’s suggestion in the novel is evident. A character may present versatile and even contradictory properties if they manifest through interchangeable circumstances, which will either trigger or justify them. Antithetical properties which emerge as the result of comprehensible plot advancement actually enhance characterisation, since it is precisely such multidimensionality that characterises humans. To return to Currie (2010) and Lebowitz (1984), it is the correlation of character motives,

actions and events that attribute congruence to the narrative, and such interconnection functions on a multi-directional mode, to be later analysed. For the time being, I am concentrating on the possible repercussions of incompatibility among those elements.

At the Harolds' key-party in *The Icestorm* (1994), a different aspect of Elena, to that point in the narrative conservative and distant, emerges:

[S]he found herself suddenly elated at the party; there was no other way to put it. She felt the loosening of the constraints that had bound her since she had come of age, and she realized she would play. She would select a key. She would clutch it to her, permit it to dangle around her neck, between her small, subdued breasts. She would play. The decision was a function of her Parent, her Child, or her Adult. A function of one or more of the three. (Moody, 1994, p. 153).

As David Davies (1996) elaborates:

The Reader, reading the text T, in which S is narrated, in the light of this inference concerning the author's intentions, would infer that the author is inviting her to make believe that the painful events that befall the central character C in the story S arise because of C's prideful nature. But, given what she infers herself to be invited to make believe in virtue of other things explicitly stated in T, the Reader takes such an explanation of C's conduct to be psychologically implausible. The Reader cannot make sense of what (explicitly) happens in the story in terms of the sorts of psychological mechanisms posited in [HM] unless the Reader also infers, simply on the basis of this difficulty, that the author is further inviting her to make believe that the world of the story is one in which standard assumptions about human psychology fail to apply. (Davies, 1996, p. 50).

It is the random and unwarrantable ascription of discrepant traits and motives that deprives the fictional agent from its credibility, misleading the reader toward false assumptions, as well as speculations that extricate her from the narrative altogether. Margolin (1987) cautions respectively:

Characterization is severely problematized if a narrative agent is ascribed semantically incompatible properties without restriction or specification for time, place, situation or object. In this case we may say that several irreconcilable strands are superposed on one another, turning the individual

into a plurality of mutually exclusive characterization possibilities which cannot be conjointly asserted in any narrative universe. ... The different properties of the narrative agent cannot consequently be forged into the image of a single person and the construction of any internally consistent literary character is obstructed. (Margolin, 1987, p. 114).

It is therefore essential that the novelist constructs her agents so that the reader is able to recognise them, align with them and decide whether she supports them or not through their fictional quests and endeavours. Otherwise, she is in danger of committing what Gardner (1983, p. 20) considers the “chief offence in bad fiction”.

### **3.4.3 THE STEREOTYPE EXPLAINED**

It is not inconsistency solely that may deprive the fictional character from the illusion of a possible existence.

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary* (2006, p. 1415) defines ‘stereotype’ as “[A]n image or idea of a particular type of person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held”. Lebowitz (1984, p. 179) presents a simpler definition: “Stereotypes are common descriptions associated with people in various classes such as occupations, social groups or personal backgrounds”.

I will start by quoting Forster’s (1974, pp. 73-81) distinction between ‘flat’ and ‘round characters’, according to which, the former are built around a single trait, and can be described in solely one sentence; the challenge of the latter lies within her ability to surprise the reader. Forster concluded that (ibid), “If [the round character] does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it.

In reality, Forster’s (ibid, pp. 74 – 75) distinction aimed to distinguish between minor and major characters. Flat characters may enhance the narrative by aiding

the author with the conveyance of her ideas, and are frequently essential to the novel. However, his description, both nominal and contextual, can be used to depict the stereotypical character in the contemporary novel.

Smith (1995, p. 117) dismisses Forster's distinction as simplistic, and offers an alternative explication, according to which, "A flat character would be one that never challenges the stereotype schema it invokes on its first appearance. A round character would be one where the initial schema is subject to considerable revision".

I concur that a typology such as Forster's fails to capture the principles of character construction so as to caution against the creation of a stereotype. One thing becomes evident from both views however: a fictional character that is considered, or rather criticised, as being stereotypical lacks individuality and complexity, and has been designed as such either on purpose (so as to function as a prosaic symbol or idea), or because the author failed to attribute uniqueness and vividness to her. For since the character's prototype — the real human being — is essentially an accumulation of innumerable diverse elements that constitute her distinct idiosyncrasy, there is nothing to indicate that her fictional counterpart should not be created as such. Harvey (1970, p. 44) accordingly cautioned that "[A]cutely aware of the dangers of creating puppets, [authors] must strive to give at least the illusion of autonomy to their characters". Similarly, Chatman (1972, p. 61) underlines the point that, "What seems fundamental to the modern fictional character, what gives [her] the particular kind of realistic illusion acceptable to modern taste, is precisely the heterogeneity or even scatter in his personality".

On a parenthetical note, I wish to provide a few exegeses for 'individuality'.

For Boulter (2007):

'I' becomes the position from which we look out onto the world, and because no one can stand where I am standing at precisely the same moment as me, this position gives my 'I' its uniqueness. The same is true of the characters we write. They fill their 'I' with the meaning of themselves because no one can stand where they stand. Their place in the world and their view of that world is unique. (Boulter, 2007, p. 142).

And for Margolin (1987, p. 115), "Uniqueness implies the adequate criteria exist for the numerical distinction of individuals in any given story state, assuring their separateness".

A fictional character should be depicted in many shades. Characters of unrealistic perfection or pure evilness, with no apparent motivations, that remain static and unalterable during the course of the narrative, are unconvincing, and often called 'one-dimensional' or 'cardboard'. I therefore agree with Price (1983) who argues that,

The complexity of novels comes ... of those tensions between resemblance and difference among characters. If characters are too symmetrically disposed about a simple principle of good and evil or life and death, they impoverish each other. If they are disposed in asymmetrical but still palpable relationships, they create questions about principle and arouse disturbances of feeling – and thereby give energy and life to events. (Price, 1983, p. 53).

Moreover, even if most humans bear characteristics indicative of their socio-cultural, ethnic and often religious background, they are always much more than a mere summary of signposts, each with their own attributes; so should the fictional character be. As Harvey (1974) highlighted,

The individual goes beyond [her] own individuality, and is related to a general type. But [s]he is never merely an example of that type, for [s]he always evokes in addition a multitude of other characteristics. ... Each character has infinite possibilities; [s]he remains enigmatic and complex by virtue of all the

ties which link [her], quite humanly, to a great many other people. (Harvey, 1970, p.70).

In the *Icestorm* (1994), Moody narrates the lives of two seemingly ordinary middle class, white, American families in the 1970s. Each of his characters stands out like no other, their individualities causing conflicts, dramatic peaks, and finally personal redemptions—or not. In fact, Moody's novel can be viewed as a statement against the indiscriminate lumping together of national identities, of habits and tastes and beliefs, highlighting precisely that the expected conformity to such labels proves destructive for private lives. The author also makes a point by depicting the stereotypical perception of the black community by New Canaan, through Paul's perspectives:

Paul Hood had met a few of them, black people. Though there were none in his elementary school—East School—there were five in Saxe Junior High when he was there. They all came from the middle of town, from the rented rooms above Fat Tuesday's or Pic-a-Pants. ... Brian Harris ruled Saxe Junior High. He wore his hair long, in a Black Panther Afro, and this spooked everybody. And he was a superior athlete, but maybe only because every white kid in New Canaan had been brought up to believe that Afro-Americans were superior athletes. This was something Paul's dad had actually told him. In basketball, Brian Harris had developed this double-pump reverse lay-up thing that some white guys were trying hard to copy. All he had to do was walk to the basket—they let him through. (Moody, 1994, p. 196).

In *Disgrace* (1999), Coetzee presents the binding codes of the Native South African culture, by depicting the complexity of one's actions and their implications through origin. When Lurie seeks to confront Petrus about protecting Pollux, Petrus responds:

"You go away, you come back again—why?" He stares challengingly. "You have no work here. You come to look after your child. I also look after my child".

"Your child? Now he is your child, this Pollux?"

"Yes. He is a child. He is my family, my people".

So that is it. No more lies. *My people*. As naked an answer as he could wish. Well, Lucy is *his people*.

Additionally, the stereotypical character often serves as the vehicle for sweeping generalisations. Examples include the aggressive black male that lives in a ghetto, listens to a certain type of music and speaks a certain kind of argot, the foolish, beautiful girl, often depicted in blonde hair, the Muslim terrorist, or the Jewish lawyer often portrayed as ravenous, exploitative and ruthless. Subsequently, the author may be criticised for conveying personal prejudices and propaganda, and her work considered as formulaic and unimaginative.

Furthermore, a stereotype in fiction is often a type of character initially introduced as uncommon, that has nonetheless been so widely used and exhausted that it is now considered trite. The most typical example is that of the prostitute with the 'heart of gold'.

Finally, it is also essential that there is a distinct degree of difference among a novel's characters, so that the illusion of personhood is convincingly conveyed. As Margolin (1987) asserts,

Differentiation fails when acts cannot be uniquely ascribed to agents, being unanchored on interchangeable, or when all agents assume the same pass-produced, replicable masks, preventing the identification of any underlying unique features. (Margolin, 1987, p. 116).

In summary, each character needs to demonstrate a variety of versatile characteristics that can be justified in terms of either their personal histories or current fictional journey, and not be introduced as if their traits are an inherent part of an identity inspired by real-life preconceptions.

### 3.5 SUMMARY

Recapitulating, the narrative bears an indefinite relation to, and is inspired by, reality. As such, contextual consistency is a keystone to the writing of fiction. Correspondingly, the character is inspired by her counterpart, the human being, and needs to be likewise constructed, in order for the reader to be able to follow her through her narrative quests.

I will close this chapter by proffering two quotations. The first one is Walton's (1990), who pointedly underlines that,

Fictional worlds, like reality, are "out there", to be investigated and explored if we choose and to the extent that we are able. To dismiss them as "figments of people's imagination" would be to insult and underestimate them. (Walton, 1990, p. 42).

The second is by Thomas Hardy (1959) who stated that,

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal. This is done all the more perfectly in proportion as the reader is illuded to believe the personages true and real like [her]self. Solely to this latter end a work of fiction should be a precise transcript of ordinary life: but the uncommon would be absent, and the interest lost. Hence, the writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality. In working out the problem, human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters; and the writer's art lies in shaping that uncommonness while disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely. ... The whole secret of fiction and the drama – in the constructional part – lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal. The novelist who knows exactly how exceptional, and how non-exceptional, [her] events should be made, possesses the key to the art." (Hardy, 1959, p.58).

## **4. CHARACTER AND THE AUTHOR**

The analysis that follows aims to cast light upon notions of authorial identity, dispelling myths about her obligations and intentions, aiding towards a definition that will serve not only existentialistic dilemmas but also creative objectives pertaining to her art. I will scrutinise issues such as the correlation between the contemporary author and the ethos of her time, her degree of responsibility on the (re-)formation of society, as well as the quality and quantity of conveyance of her experience and personal interpretation on her text. I will also examine her relationship with her characters, investigating the nature of such connection in terms of authority and creative freedom. Finally, I will discuss issues of narrative mode and perspective, in order to clarify the novelist's place in the narrative pertaining to knowledge and exposed authority.

#### **4.1 THE AUTHOR OF FICTION**

The author of literature has been widely discussed, glorified, criticised, and even proclaimed dead by many scholars (Foucault, 2001; Paris, 1997; Eagleton, 1993; McCann, 1993; Barthes, 1977; Allott, 1959). Her intentions, technique, moral duties and preconceived personality have been the bone of contention among writers of all capacities since the birth of literary theory (Bennett, 2005; Eagleton, 1993) and conclusive, satisfactory answers to such dilemmas are yet to be established. I suggest that the reasons for this lie within the contention that the correct questions are yet to be asked. I will thus be exploring issues of the authorial role and function, in order to discover the common denominators that characterise all those different individuals, professionals and artists, at more than one level.

#### **4.1.1 THE AUTHOR DEFINED: ESTABLISHING AN IDENTITY**

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2006, p. 88) defines the author as either “[A]n originator of a plan or idea”.

Andrew Bennett’s (2005) exegesis summarises this interpretation:

[The] notion of the author involves the idea of an individual (singular) who is responsible for or who originates, who writes or composes, a (literary) text and who is thereby considered an inventor or founder and who is associated with the inventor or founder of all of nature, with God (with God-the-father), and is thought to have certain ownership rights over the text as well as a certain authority over its interpretation. The author is able to influence others and is often thought of as having authority over matters of opinion, as being one to be trusted, even obeyed. (Bennett, 2004, p. 7).

It emerges that the simplest explication of the authorial function would be to create, compose, or, as frequently stated by writers, ‘breathe life into’ the text. Before I embark on any analysis of this though, it is worth pondering over the status of the novelist. I will not be producing linguistic or ontological interpretations pertaining to the author’s identity. Rather, I will attempt to define the motivations and role assigned to the individual who writes.

#### **4.1.2 IS THE AUTHOR DEAD?**

In his work *Image, music, text*, Barthes (1977) declared the death of the author by contextually de-personifying the text, drawing the emphasis on the impersonality of language and rendering the (impersonal) reader the epicentre of the constructive process:

The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. ... The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (Barthes, 1977, pp. 145 – 148).

Embraced by a number of theorists, Barthes' view essentially dissociates the author from her creation thus rendering her irrelevant to it. It could be viewed as an act of liberation from the tyrant-creator whose presence until recently has been imposed and overemphasised over her speculated intentions, bore upon by her socio-temporal and ethnographic origins. The text belongs to no one, it exists independent from defined subjects, and can only be decoded by the concept of a faceless decipherer – the reader.

Presenting a counter-analysis to Barthes' ideas, Foucault considered (2001, pp. 1622-1636) the author to be an extra-textual predecessor of the narrative, albeit its originator. For Foucault, the text is neutral, independent from the authorial, god-like figure, but at the same time pointing to it. As he wrote (ibid, p. 1624), "[T]he quibbling and confrontations that a writer generates between [her]self and [her] text cancel out the signs of [her] particular individuality". Concluding his thoughts on the authorial function, he explained that (ibid, p. 1631), "[I]t does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy".

Unsurprisingly, many disagree with Barthes. For instance, Graham McCann (1993) rejects it as playful cynicism, attributing a possible distortion of literary theory's best intentions. As he writes,

Although critics often seek to justify the importance of language as a means of eliminating the aggressive authority of the human subject and its history of misdemeanours, they cannot escape this same history, and they end by erecting the edifice of language upon the tomb of the human self. (McCann, 1993, p. 77).

I contend that, while it is arbitrary to enslave the narrative to a series of hypothetical intentions by an absent creator, it is also unreasonable to banish her from its circumference. The text did not originate itself, but bears the unique style, language, artistic signature and even the personal views – either subconscious or premeditated – of the person that composed it (Booth, 1961). As demonstrated in chapter one, the author cannot have total control over the way the text is deciphered, since decoding is a bidirectional, dynamic process. However, not all meaning is ambiguous and not every statement is ill-defined. As Harper (2010, p. 110) asserts, “While open to interpretation, the written is aiming to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation and, while involving reification, to nevertheless standardise and prescribe language”. If the author’s projected sense of reality is coherently displayed, the reader will recognise it, and use her own to recreate the neutral text *ex novo*.

Foucault (2001) argues:

[T]hese aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author ... are projections, in terms always more or less psychological of our own way of handling texts. ... In addition, all these operations vary according to the period and the form of discourse concerned. (Foucault, 2001, p. 1629).

Put differently, the novelist engages into a conscious process of constructing a fictional world from dust, without an *a priori* knowledge of how the reader will perceive it. Her mission is to deliver work as concise as possible, without contextual indeterminacies prompted by inclinations of ostentatious didacticism or self-aggrandizement. Even if she did construct her every sentence by means of hidden intentions, there is no guarantee that they would be discerned by her readership. Ergo, the narrative emerges as an artificial print of the author’s existence, entailing

the products of both her subconscious and consciousness. As Margaret Atwood (2003) notes,

It is altogether too close for comfort ... when the reader confuses the writer with the text: such a reader wants to abolish the middle term, and to get hold of the text by getting hold of the writer, in the flesh. We assume too easily that a text exists to act as communication between the writer and the reader. ... The thoughts and emotions in a book are not necessarily those of the writer of it. (Atwood, 2003, pp. 120-121).

This is the point Frank Smith (1982, p. 87) makes when he notes that, "Writers cannot reach through a text to the reader beyond, any more than a reader can penetrate the text to make direct contact with the writer".

As becomes apparent, the author should neither be reduced to deadly absence nor augmented to divinity. Her connection to the text begins and ends owing to her very status of personhood. It is within this understanding that her role should be examined.

The concept of the human identity is connected to those parameters surrounding and moulding it. Much like everyone else, the novelist is characterised by many a sociological, ethnographical and historical feature which, as inseparable parts of her identity, are bound to influence her work. Intentions or artistic mission aside, the author bears and transmits her social as well as temporal attributes. Whether bequeathed or involuntary, her cultural heritage will be passed from generation to generation in order to inform, enlighten or even disenchant readers of different times, places and ideologies.

Raymond Williams (1992) writes on this point:

Real social relations are deeply embedded within the practice of writing itself, as well as in the relations within which writing is read. To write in different ways is to live in different ways. It is also to be read in different ways, in different relations, and often by different people. (Williams, 1977, p. 205).

At the same time, the author is not to be identified with her spatio-temporal setting. What Harper (2010) suggests is,

[T]o look at Creative Writing and creative writers in terms of the identity of the activities that are undertaken; and how these activities relate to the identities of creative writers, personally, and socially. In this way, discourse, collective identification, ideologies, symbolisation, social patterns of expectation and sense of self all play a role. (Harper, 2010, pp. 96-97).

Despite the universal themes unifying human stories (Booker, 2004), two writers can never narrate the exact same text. In that respect, a narrative becomes part of the author's identity, as it represents her perceptual and often emotive abilities conveyed on paper. Such imprint however is not intentional, or one would talk of memoir, reportage or mere propaganda. The thoughts and emotions in a piece of fiction should represent those of the characters. The more complex and authentic those characters will be drawn, the less didacticism and one-dimensional depictions the novel will entail. The author may still ascribe aspects of her personality to this character or that, those however, will constitute a part to a wider picture, not mirror her monolithically. Therefore she will not be defined by the text in its entirety, but leave her cognitive traces in the unfolding narrative.

In any case, McCann is right to question the overarching domination of language over the human subject. Language is the product of thought, and a fundamental means of its communication. As such, the signifier cannot possibly be replaced by it. Rather, she will use it as her primary tool in order to convey ideas and mould concepts, whether she acts as a propagandist, a moral missionary or a simple story-teller. A. Leon Pines (1985) writes:

In language, relations and whole networks of relations are frozen into concepts labelled by words. These concepts and words capture the way a

culture slices up reality: what relations are considered important enough to discriminate and preserve, what patterns and regularities have been worthwhile preserving, and so forth. ... Language serves the dual purpose of thought and communication. The ability to acquire and use language enables the amplification of meaningful experience. (Pines, 1985, pp. 103-104).

The novelist constructs, creates, originates and does so by utilising and cultivating language. Language is the only tangible implement that can be used by the author, and can be discerned by the reader. Symbols, hidden meanings or hypothetical intentions, can only be evaluated as meta-linguistic devices without escaping their hermeneutic nature. In that respect, the author cannot be separated from her text, nor can she be fully identified with it.

The author is not revealed through her social and historical status circumstances. On the contrary, it is she who reveals her own formed perceptions of them through a process of exploration that in their turn may affect her state of being, through what many scholars have described as a process of self-exploration (Price, 1983, p.61). It is worth remembering that for decades now, art and its time and place of genesis have been considered inseparable. As Williams (1992) explains,

An essential hypothesis in the development of the idea of culture is that the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life', and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated. (Williams, 1992, p. 130).

The culture begets the artist, who in her turn will originate the work of art. To what extent such work will represent or influence her contemporary status quo, or the forthcoming generations, will be determined by a number of parameters outside her own control. Whether she intentionally purports to exert such influence in the first place, as well as her possible motivations for doing so, is the next issue to be scrutinised.

#### 4.1.3 THE AUTHORIAL PURPOSE

As has been demonstrated, the debate over the author's omnipresent influence on and ownership of the text should be considered futile as it fails to respond to fundamental questions pertaining to her role. I will thus focus on exploring the motivations behind an individual's wish to write, as well as what the authorial function entails.

Whether the author bears any moral duties to society, or not, has been widely discussed and remains unresolved (Phelan, 2005; Atwood, 2003; Booth, 1961; Allott, 1959;). On the one hand, there are those who regard the author as a social reformer, whose primary mission is to ennoble; her role is cathartic. For instance, George Eliot (1959) believed that,

[The] ... woman who publishes writings inevitably assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind. ... [S]he can no more escape influencing the moral taste, and with it the action of the intelligence, than a setter of fashions in furniture and dress can fill the shops with [her] designs and leave the garniture of persons and houses unaffected by [her] industry. (Eliott, 1959, p. 94).

Similarly, Tobias Smollett (1959) confessed that,

If I have not succeeded in my endeavours to unfold the mysteries of fraud, to instruct the ignorant, and entertain the vacant ... I have, at least, adorned virtue with honours and applause, branded iniquity with reproach and shame, and carefully avoided every hint or expression which could give umbrage to the most delicate reader. (Smollett, 1959, p. 91).

Yet the idea of burdening the author with the duty of enhancing virtue in her readers has been rejected by many. For them, the author is considered no more or less an artist, liberated from all sorts of chastising purposes, and her sole obligation is to be loyal in the truthfulness of her art (James, 2001; Thackeray 1959). Many authors have voiced their opposition to being assigned the role of the social

preacher. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1959) saw the implementation of personal ethics as an intrusion into the novel's viability. He wrote:

When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The author has considered it hardly worth [her] while, therefore relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod, –or rather, by sticking a pin through a butterfly, –thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. (Hawthorne, 1959, p. 93).

And as Doreen Baingana (2008, p. 54) remarks, “I think fiction, perhaps as a side effect, can be educational, but I don't write to teach people. I just write to answer questions for myself and hope to reveal some truth. If people learn something from it, that's great”.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the correlation between literature and reality, dwelling on issues of consistency and the preservation of the suspension of disbelief. I now suggest that a premeditated intervention for purposes of moral didacticism will interrupt the natural flow of the narrative, abruptly extracting the reader from its textual dimensions and compromising its believability.

This is not to imply that literature bears no influence on society, or that novelists cannot be viewed as inspirational figures. Booth (1961, p.71) questioned the existence of pure impartiality, stating that the author leaves her convictional print on her works even if she doesn't intend to do so. At the same time, he warned (ibid, p.70) that the author does not frequently have the luxury of moulding her work as per her own personal prejudices.

Phelan (2005) comments that,

Any character's action will typically have an ethical dimension, and any narrator's treatment of the events will inevitably convey certain attitudes toward the subject matter and the audience, attitudes that, among other

things, indicate ... her sense of responsibility to and regard for the told and the audience. (Phelan, 2005, p. 20).

I disagree with Phelan that character actions are ethos-defined, and that the author bears any sort of responsibility toward the reader's chosen interpretations. It would be arbitrary to assume that Coetzee (1999) justifies David Lurie's actions when he imposes himself on Melanie Isaacs. Worse, the gang that rapes Lucy Lurie is never punished; on the contrary, Pollux is protected by Petrus as a family member. This is hardly indicative of Coetzee condoning rape. What he proffers is a complex portrayal of life, where ethos and morality are not one-dimensional notions.

Similarly, Waters' (2002) characters define their own fate. Sue Trinder and Maud Lilly plot against each other, yet they find themselves united in a happy-ending. This isn't indicative of Waters advocating dishonesty.

And *The Icestorm* (1994) revolves around the causes and impacts of marital infidelity, amongst which a tragedy occurs. Indeed, Moody does not propagandise betrayal; he displays a meticulous depiction of human relations in a small American town in the 1970s.

Morals should naturally emerge from the narrative, as opposed to being simply stated. As Egri (1960, p. 9) stated, "We, the readers or spectators of your play do not necessarily agree with your conviction. Through your play you must therefore prove to us the validity of your contention". This is not to suggest that the author should propagandise in indirect ways. As already explained, she should rely on the plausibility of character.

Flannery O' Connor (1969, pp. 33-34) used words such as 'shock' and 'shout' as means of emphasis to influence those whom she referred to as the 'hard of hearing' and the 'almost-blind'. As explained in chapter one, the role of the reader can be assumed by anyone universally. This automatically points toward a versatility of ethical interpretations stemming from socio-cultural norms as well as personal experiences. Consequently, if the author chooses to consciously embark upon a moral education of her own accord, she may reinforce ideas, convince about certain values, or provoke disbelief, and anger. This is not to ignore the influence of art on socio-political affairs. After all, I have argued that the author does leave her cognitive imprint on paper. It is the level of premeditation, as well as the degree of didacticism to emerge, that will ultimately define the artistic outcome, resulting in an acceptance thereof, or rejection. To quote Booth (1961) again,

Everyone is against everyone else's prejudices and in favour of [her] own commitment to the truth. All of us would like the novelist somehow to operate on the level of our own passion for truth and right, a passion which by definition is not in the least prejudiced. (1961, Booth, p. 70).

The narrative's reality will merge with the reader's perception of her own reality, and any conclusions of moral substance will be drawn on a subjective level. The imposition of subjective ethics in a novel which is supposed to be inspired by any reality could be regarded as little more than propaganda by many. Even if the author's incentives were of the purest intentions, her moral codes would still not conform to those of every reader that would ever shift through the pages of her book. Subsequently, the author-and-reader contract would be violated, and the author herself mistrusted. To quote Thomas Hardy (1959, p. 98) "[A] novel was

never written by the purest-minded author for which there could not be found some moral invalid or other whom it was capable of harming”.

Moving on, I present a variety of possible writing motivations. Julia Casterton (2005, p. 1) believed that writing satisfies an inherent need. Celia Brayfield (1996, p. 21) speaks of “unconscious wells of fantasy in our minds”, observing that the narration of stories serves to provide an understanding of the surrounding world, and has evolved along with human intellect. Mills (2006, p. 16) notes that the writer “builds new links between self and world”. O’ Connor (1972, p. 53) admitted that the author’s primary aim should be communication – thus rejecting the myth of the lonely, introvert writer that is striving for some sort of liberating privacy. And Viktor Shklovsky (1990, p. 21) considered the author’s purpose to be the “deautomatization of perception”, in other words to present world and its elements anew.

As it emerges, the esoteric engines that activate the writing mechanisms are as subjective and versatile as every other motivational force that guides human beings toward choosing and acting in a certain way. There is however, one element that functions as a common denominator under all such triggers, idiosyncratic or practical: the interest in the human psyche, and its inexhaustible possibilities. I shall return to this suggestion, but first, I wish to complete my exploration of the authorial *raison d’être*, by discovering whether the author is a craftsman or an artist.

#### **4.1.4 THE ARTIST AND THE CRAFTSMAN**

In the *Art of Poetry* (2001), Horace posed the following question:

Do good poems come by nature or by art? This is a common question. For my part, I don't see what study can do without a rich vein of talent, [410] nor what good can come of untrained genius. They need each other's help and work together in friendship. (Horace, 2001, p. 133).

Whether one is born, or gradually becomes, an author is yet another theme of dissention among scholars, and once again, no answer is to be agreed upon. Many are convinced that creating fictional worlds is an attributed gift and any attempt to apply technical principles on it is futile (Kundera, 1988; Gardner, 1983; O'Connor, 1972; Scholes and Kellogg, 1966); others contend that writing is a skill to be learnt (Casterton, 2005; King, 2000; Seger, 1990; Egri, 1960). The author is regarded as either the talented artist who creates guided by her instinct alone, or as the self-made craftsman who seeks, and with practice achieves, constant amelioration. The arising dilemma divides the participants into the advocates of writing pedagogy, and the ones who believe that if the muse is not there, she will not be appearing at all.

Initially proposed by Professor Anders Ericsson, the idea that the expert is created by a certain number of accumulated hours of practice was introduced to the public by British sports broadcaster and former table tennis international champion, Matthew Syed. Motivated by extensive research and his own life experience, published an analytic presentation of the nature-versus-nurture debate, in order to dispel the myth of the natural-born genius. By providing numerous examples from a variety of fields, Syed (2010) convincingly argued that the common denominator under the world's greatest champions and artists was the accumulation of ten thousand hours of practice. The purpose of his work was

not to annihilate the notion of talent, but rather to emphasise the importance of practical experience and intensive effort.

Indeed, research on creativity (Hahn, 1968) has demonstrated that its 'trait' is observable in every individual, in different degrees. Marshall Hahn (1968, p. 5) has indicated that, "Masterpieces in any field are usually end products, often developed after much trial and error, during which time the understanding, skills and facts necessary to achieve the objective of the creative impulse are acquired". J.P. Guilford (1959) initiated three major categories that the traits of creativity may fall under: fluency, which refers to the individual's ability to retrieve stored information from her own memory; flexibility, pertaining to her problem-solving adjustability and approach; and elaboration, which constitutes the completion of the concept with details.

Casterton (2005) also dismissed the hypothesis of the born genius:

The myth of the 'natural' writer, who spins vast, architectural webs of exalted verse or prose is a treacherous lie which many writers have done their best to rub out. ... No matter how much writers protest, non-writers seem to like the idea that writing is easy, not the arduous manual, emotional and intellectual labour writers know it to be. (Casterton, 2005, p. 1).

Whilst I do not reject the notion of natural talent, I do argue that it subject to epistemological analysis itself. At the same time, Syed's research, the range of which encompassed fields from sports to the academia and poetry (2010, p. 15) has demonstrated how practice as the means to constant amelioration solidifies such a notion. In that respect, Creative Writing is an art subject to formations of craftsmanship. I thence agree with Harper (2010) who comments that,

The intention, the will, the desire, that brings about numerous acts of Creative Writing involves person choice. But it also involves neurological activity that is sometimes independent of such choice. ... We can say that

[Creative Writing] can be learnt, and therefore taught, but we need to acknowledge that some of its elements involve long term neurological developments. (Harper, 2010, p. 91).

I also suggest that the term 'technique' is often misinterpreted, as it does not equate to the precise directions one can find inside textbooks. The act of creating fictional worlds *ex nihilo* does not abide to instructional specifications, but is organic, perceptive and even unpredictable. As Brayfield (1996, pp. 14-15) observes, an author's technique should not be perceived by the reader, allowing her thus to fully immerse herself in the story, making the most of the experience. And she adds (*ibid*) that, "Learning to construct a narrative ... means understanding the elements of a story, learning the techniques which make it lifelike, and learning how to help your reader follow your thoughts".

Put differently, the muse shall favour the author that is both able to comprehend the process and philosophy surrounding Creative Writing, and eager to work, much like every other professional, on achieving constant improvement at every given chance.

At the same time, the significance of technique is not to be highlighted solely for the attention of the novelist. The synthetic or analytical assumptions deriving from both the creation and the study of literature aim to enlighten, not just the disciples of Creative Writing, but also those of theoretical analysis. Even if one endorses the view of Scholes and Kellogg (1966, p. 272) that "Criticism can never reduce art to rules. Its aim should be not to enact legislation for artists but to promote understanding of works of art", one would still need to explore how such understanding is generated. The authors (*ibid*) may argue that Creative Writing is an 'unruly art', but the nomination of a field as 'art' should not exclude the concept

of orderly information or comprehension. It is precisely through consistency and harmony that the novelist is able to convince and gain the trust of the most demanding of modern readers, who will not surrender to the authority of a maker's name anymore. For this reason, the nonnegotiable polemic against theory can be more dangerous than beneficial to the writer of fiction. As Egri (1960) argued,

Instinct may lead a man once, or several times, to create a masterpiece, but as sheer instinct it may lead [her] just as often to create a failure. ... We know there are rules for eating, walking, and breathing; we know there are rules for every manifestation of life and nature— why, then, should writing be the sole exception? Obviously, it is not. (Egri, 1960, pp. xiv-xv).

Constantin Stanislavski defined inspiration as the result of conscious hard work, emphasising that in art, nothing is accidental (Moore, 1984, p. 12). Stanislavski rejected the idea of a mysteriously gifted actor as dangerous to the evolution of the art itself, and an excuse for laziness (ibid, p. 15).

It is true that art cannot possibly be encased within the rigid, unbent framework of a set of rules. This however, should not exclude the existence of propositional indications pertaining mainly towards a philosophy, or even comprehension of what Creative Writing, as an act, entails. To quote Harvey (1970),

We do not mean enough by technique if we mean only those particular skills or methods of articulation— control of dialogue, point of view, stream of consciousness and so on. Behind these particular skills may or may not lie the really valuable qualities of human vision, understanding and response. On the one hand, a novelist may conscientiously include in [her] work every aspect of character and yet remain finally unperceptive because [s]he lacks the technique whereby these elements are composed into a living whole. Technical inadequacy here points to a more radical failure of the imagination. (Harvey, 1970, p. 30).

As previously mentioned, the fictional text could be viewed as an imprint of the author's consciousness on paper. Her aesthetic, emotive and perceptual abilities constitute the primary instruments at her professional disposal, guided

within the realms of her cognitive maps and imaginative routes. Her own critical thinking and her ability to judge and define the outcome of her creative work should derive from both subjective impressions and the comprehension of the critical reasoning embedded within the disciplinary principles of theoretical analysis. Hence, imagination is not just linked to creativity, but also to critical judgment (Johnson, 1987).

## **4.2 THE MUSE AT WORK**

The question to emerge from the above analysis is how one may come to understand and define 'inspiration'.

As already agreed, fiction-writing and reading are anthropocentric acts . I thence propose that the key to an author's inspiration and her work's qualitative evolution lies within an encompassing exploration and understanding of the human nature. The author should be on an assiduous, perpetual investigation of the idiosyncratic, emotive, physical and miscellaneous properties that constitute the concept of the human person. The ultimate tool at her disposal at such exploration is her experience.

### **4.2.1 DRAWING FROM EXPERIENCE**

Frequently, in a variety of advisory resources, one comes across the recommendation to write about what one knows (Seeger, 1990). This particular advice is often ambiguously interpreted, or altogether misinterpreted to imply a contextual restriction to what is experientially familiar to the author. This is a misleading and even counter-productive interpretation. As Stuart Dybek (2008, p. 72) warns, "[W]hat you have to remember is that the imagination doesn't feast on fact". Boulter (2007, p. 92) also explains that, "If we 'write what we know' without

questioning the way in which ‘what we know’ is itself an interpretation then we might find ourselves limiting our fictions”. Similarly, O’Connor (1972, p. 4) suggested that the author’s creative instinct may aid her to write about places and events she never herself experienced.

I shall now dissect the term ‘experience’. Mark Johnson (1987) elaborates:

“Experience”, then, is to be understood in a very rich, broad sense as including basic perceptual, motor-program, emotional, historical, social, and linguistic dimensions. ... [E]xperience involves everything that makes us human – our bodily, social, linguistic, and intellectual being combined in complex interactions that make up our understanding of our world. (Johnson, 1949 p. xvi).

The notion of the novelist’s experience and knowledge of the world does not entail those occurrences and consequences with her physically present, but rather the accumulation of her perceptual, emotive and even imaginary involvement to incidents, acquaintances and distant observations. As each person is unique, so is her creative imprint, constituting the creative product of the acuteness of her senses, as well as her perceptual and empathising abilities. As Mills (2006, p. 16) indicates, “Experience beyond the personal range of the writer can still be felt – through imagination”.

For John O. Head and Clive R. Sutton (1985, p. 94), the way a person perceives and evaluates herself and her relations to others, both in terms of similarities as well as differences, constructs segments of experience, and so ‘experience’ is defined by interactions with others in a bidirectional way.

The process of enhancing one’s experiences through exposure to those of others does not automatically release the author of the prejudices and inherent subjectivity of her temporal and socio-cultural bonds. After all, the acquisition and

application of omniscient impartiality in one's work is regarded as an unrealistic expectation (Booth, 1961). The author will still interpret, and thus convey, the essence of her apprehensions through the prism of her evaluations, conscious or not. As Marianna J. Hewson (1985) explains,

Different people strive to make sense of the world; ... [T]hey use their idiosyncratic existing knowledge to do this and therefore different people will acquire different conceptions even when presented with the same information. In this way, it is possible for different people to construct alternative conceptions from the same information. (Hewson, 1985, p. 156).

The evaluation of such compiled data will be influenced by the author's idiosyncratic and physical entourage, moulding them into the personal ascription that will reach the reader. Hewson (ibid) introduces the concept of 'intellectual ecology', according to which,

The intellectual environment in which a person lives (including cultural beliefs, language, accepted theories, as well as observed facts and events) favors the development of some concepts and inhibits the development of others. ... Conceptual ecology involves a dynamic interaction between a person's knowledge structure and the intellectual environment in which he or she lives. (Hewson, 1985, p. 154).

Such subjectivity however does not impair the author's work either creatively or technically. It is precisely the contextual and linguistic uniqueness of each narrative that captures the reader's attention. Much like an actress, the author encompasses herself within the imaginary realms of another person's existential sphere different to her own, proffering the possibilities of the experience to the intrigued reader.

The Kantian exegesis of a unified notion of experience can clarify this stance further. For Kant (Johnson, 1949, pp. 150-151), it is the ability of human imagination, as a 'synthesizing activity' that attributes objectivity to one's

subjective experiences. It shall come as no surprise then that Johnson (ibid, p. 148) himself defines knowledge as “[T]he result of judgments in which the contents of our sense perception are organized by concepts”. As he explicates, knowledge is the summary of judgments, consisted of unified and organised general mental representation. Subsequently, the attainment of experience could be viewed as a synthetic, multi-dimensional act that ultimately ‘fills’ Forster’s bucket with its ‘subconscious stuff’. In conclusion, I shall agree with Boulter (2007) in that,

[A]lthough it is vital that we draw from our experience, our emotion, our research ... of how action works and is interpreted, if we limit ourselves to ‘what we know’, without questioning how and why we know what we do, then we can become locked within our experience rather than inspired by it. (Boulter, 2007, p. 93).

#### **4.2.2 THE AUTHORIAL EXPERIENCE**

As suggested, the author’s most resourceful tool in the construction of the narrative is her experience. I shall now examine what the notion of ‘experience’ signifies.

I will begin with life memories. The accumulation of knowledge, both intellectual and emotive, as well as their interpretation, can be regarded as the foundational material of the author’s personal creative input into her work (Seger, 1990). In his own definition of creativity, Huhn (1968, p. 5) underlined the principal role of personal experience: “Creativity is the ability and initiative to create new ideas and/or things by the restructuring or redefining of past experiences into new forms”. Whether such input will be conscious or strategic will depend on how the author chooses to use it.

Sonia Moore (1984, p. 43) highlighted the primary function of emotional memory that, “[N]ot only retains an imprint of an experience but also synthesizes

feelings of a different nature". It is precisely such emotional impression that renders extra-cultural and universal principles and habits recognisable, instigating empathy towards doers and recipients. Similarly, Oatley (2003, p. 165) indicates that the synergetic process of perception and memory invocation equals the constructive projection of knowledge. As becomes evident, childhood memories do not serve only as a direct source of creative material, but also as enhancers or interpreting devices of the experience of others. For O' Connor (1969, p.96), "The fact is that anybody who has survived [her] childhood has enough information about life to last [her] the rest of [her] days. If you can't make something out of a little experience, you probably won't be able to make it out of a lot".

I propose that the creative process frequently referred to as writer's intuition or inspiration is in reality the result of a sequential and multidirectional course of the following stages: *Observation, Perception, Empathy and Imagination*.

#### **4.2.3 APPREHENSION VIA THE SENSES**

In his famous essay, 'The Art of Fiction', Henry James (2001) wrote:

It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; ... It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience (James, 2001, p. 860).

I propose that James' sense of reality begins with what one's eye can see, both physically, and mentally.

One of the most frequent pieces of advice an apprentice writer may receive is to pay close attention to her surrounding world. Indeed, the author should always be alert to detail, focusing on sounds, and images, all movement and manifestation in life encompassing her at any given moment. The impressions of all such

accumulated images will constitute the solid platform on which she will build her narrative universe. As Gardner (1983, p. 24) indicates, the novelist's task is to proffer "concrete images drawn from a careful observation", observation of people's behaviour imprinted in meticulous detail.

Yet the author will not be a mere observer, but also a participator. Observation itself cannot be fruitful unless accompanied by a certain degree of comprehension, subject to the observer's individuality, in order to translate images and sounds into meaningful occurrences. The overall purpose of observation is not philosophical, and thus the novelist need not concern herself with any illusion of objective interpretations. It is the uniqueness of her own interpretations that should be conveyed in her narrative. Lee Martin (1998) illustrates this point accordingly:

[F]iction writers are "spectators" of their characters, who are "participants" in the worlds of their stories—worlds that present situations containing their own demands for decision and action. If we imbue our fiction with aspects of ourselves—if we are ultimately both spectator and participant—it stands to reason that the key to learning something of ourselves and our worlds from the fiction we write lies in a successful merger of the two roles. (Martin, 1998, pp. 173-174).

Boulter (2007, p. 16) invites the author to look beyond the obvious, and become part of each moment she experiences. Each phenomenon is contextually forged by the author's own account of it, and as such conveyed into her textual world.

Flaubert considered the products of the author's observations to be the mould with which the author will shape her own world. As he wrote (1959, p. 126), "[I]t isn't enough merely to observe; we must order and shape what we have seen".

And Guy de Maupassant (1959) spoke of every writer's unique, subjective prism of looking at such surroundings:

Everything contains some element of the unexplored because we are accustomed to use our eyes only with the memory of what other people before us have thought about the object we are looking at. The least thing has a bit of the unknown in it. Let us find this. In order to describe a fire burning or a tree in a field, let us stand in front of that fire and that tree until they no longer look to us like any other fire or any other tree. That is how one becomes original. (de Maupassant, 1959, p. 130).

Every little occurrence of everyday life may result in a number of different outcomes, and as such, they are worth scrutinising and contemplating upon. This is the material with which fictional universes are built, and the part of fiction that is inspired by reality lies upon such foundations. To quote O'Connor (1972, p. 67), "[T]he nature of fiction is in large measure determined by the nature of our perceptive apparatus. The beginning of human knowledge is through the senses, and the fiction writer begins where human perception begins".

One may argue that the mere textual impression of a perceived reality does not suffice to create a fictional world *ex novo*. Creative Writing entails more than the simple recitation of an author's interpreted observations. I suggest that the next stage in the inspirational sequence is the creative crafting of all observations. This is the time when the author will reach for recalled images, memories, dreams and impressions, reforming, and amalgamating them into unique constructs, in order to create a literary universe like no other.

The role of imagination in the writing of literature is of course indisputable. Without it, fiction could not exist. Yet many a time it is overlooked as a given, without any consideration of the immense possibilities it proffers.

As Mills (2006) underlines,

Worlds and spaces in writing as art can't be made real without the imaginative play of the mind remembering, selecting, attending. Memory is often the primary source of imaginative experience. ... Imagination ... is the main directive. It selects; we follow. ... Imagination, starting with memory, does lead to a widening out beyond the confines of an inert privacy. (Mills, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Placing the Kantian concept of imagination under scrutiny, Johnson (1987)

analyses the concept of 'reflective judgement', according to which:

Reflection is an imaginative activity in which the mind "plays over" various representations (percepts, images, concepts) in search of possible ways that they might be organized. ... In reflective judgement ... we must reflect imaginatively on a series of representations in an attempt to come up with a concept or other representation under which they can be organized. (Johnson, 1987, pp. 157-158).

I suggest that the subconscious amalgamation of experiential representation is what constitutes the concept of inspiration. The interpreted scenes of daily life are not organised into sequential patterns, but rather are stored and rearranged in the vastness of the writer's mind, either to emerge accidentally or be intentionally evoked in order to be transformed into new ones. Locations, idiosyncrasies and physiognomies, will become disarranged and intermixed into textual constructs, modified and restructured by the author's ability to perceive.

David Novitz (1987) considered fanciful imagination to be a prerequisite in the comprehension of one's environment:

[Fanciful imagination] plays an important role in adult attempts to decipher the more bewildering aspects of everyday life. For whenever established knowledge fails us, whenever there is no adequate conceptual apparatus with which to ease our confusion and bridge the gap between ignorance and insight, we fall back upon the fanciful imagination. (Novitz, 1987, pp. 32-33).

Novitz's theory essentially refers to an author's meta-perceptual activity, which entails translating united and dispersed images into logical sequences in order to decipher one's spatiotemporal surroundings. Subsequently, perception

and fantasy may not be viewed as two distinct functions, but often the former encompasses the latter (Watkins, 1999, p. 146). It also becomes clear that fantasy and imagination do not serve to distort reality, but rather enhance or reshape it into different structures. In that respect, imagination does indeed become a contributor to knowledge, rather than its conceptual alternator. As O'Connor (1972) noted,

Fiction begins where human knowledge begins – with the sense – and every fiction writer is bound by this fundamental aspect of [her] medium. ... [The writer is] looking for one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in by [her] firmly, just as real to [her], really, as the one that everybody sees. (O' Connor, 1972, p. 42).

O'Connor (1972, p. 72) also explicated the term 'anagogical vision', referring to "[T]he kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation". Imagination lends the author a second, secret 'eye', allowing her to envisage and enter a fourth dimension that will later acquire textual substance. By uniting the products of her optical observations with the conjectures of her imagination, she recreates the world anew, and invites the reader to navigate through it.

It is worth pointing out that the exercise of fanciful imagination does not presuppose either the mitigation or the altogether exclusion of logic. On the contrary, fantasy and reason are to be used inseparably and in synergy (O'Connor, 1972, p. 82). Here comes the intersection between the two, and the point where the authorial judgment becomes an important factor influencing the conceptual outcome.

Recapitulating, I propose that the notion of authorial inspiration begins with the senses: the author closely observes and listens to all that surrounds her, taking in every little detail no matter how insignificant it may appear. This constant accumulation of images and sounds will constitute her material, which she will keep crafting in order to create a world anew. It is precisely the unique combination of all such received impressions, enhanced and reshaped by her creativity that will guide her to build her fictional universes.

#### **4.2.4 PRACTICAL RESEARCH**

Seeger (1990, p.3) outlines two different types of research. The first is general research, and it pertains to the apprehension via the senses analysed above. The second is specific research, and entails the author's practical investigation for information she does not have inherent access to.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the consequences of limiting oneself to the rigid framework of empiricism, explaining that an author's experience is not restricted to what constitutes her own familiarity. Still, the world is a vast space, and the socio-cultural attributes inhabiting places and minds are so diverse that it would be impossible for one to claim thorough knowledge and understanding of all its aspects.

Such heterogeneity however should not be regarded as either restricting or impoverishing to the author's inspirational reserve, or her thematic range. A narrative can be textually situated in any place around the globe, and inhabited by any race, religion and ethnicity. The novelist's ability to perceive and infer on humanity is one prerequisite. The other is the efficient acquisition of information.

Boulter (2007, pp. 17-23) discusses several types of reading, including 'reading as a writer', 'reading with admiration' and 'reading as an editor', in order to guide the writer towards a cognitive acquisition and enhancement of her own experiences. Indeed, reading with the senses alert leads to deeper levels of comprehension. Once again, the role of imagination and her creative ability to judge, hypothesise and daydream will guide her beneath the textual symbols, where the diversity of meanings and conclusions lie to steer her towards individualised impressions.

The types of reading Boulter analyses can be applied to both fiction and non-fiction. A similar study of literary works can broaden one's horizons, proffering aspects and views unfamiliar to her, enriching her knowledge of the world. Much like observing and listening to others, the author can benefit from an exposition to other viewpoints, emotions and fanciful impressions, as they open up yet another dimension abundant with information.

At the same time, she warns against a sterile perception of research, which solely entails the accumulation of resources. As she remarks (2007),

We need to stop characterising research as the 'gathering of facts' and begin to understand it as a creative and critical process: a process of discovery that embraces the chaotic musings, the leisurely observations, the struggle for words, and the search for story. All this is research, and only through this eclectic research process can we really discover the kind of 'foundations' we need. (Boulter, 2007, p. 24).

In summary, research is an author's lifetime purpose, entailing the constant acquisition of empirical and theoretical knowledge. The linguistic construction of such acquisition is thence a derivative, and entirely dependent on the results. Put differently, writing is the textual imprint of such knowledge.

### **4.3 THE AUTHOR AND HER CHARACTERS**

So far, I have discussed notions of creativity and craftsmanship as per the narrative in its entirety. I will now explore those dynamics that lie behind the origination of the fictional character, also examining the relationship between the author and her literary inhabitants.

#### **4.3.1 THE CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER**

Since the great dramatists of ancient Greece, fiction has been built around the desires, fears and frailty of the human psyche. As the rendition of this world is perceptively anthropocentric, analogously, the epicentre of the narrative cosmos is the fictional character. It is this correlation between humans and fictional persons that places the author in such a unique position, for, in principle, she should be inherently predisposed to comprehend the essence of her subject. As Forster (1974, p. 54) noted, "Since the novelist is [her]self a human being, there is an affinity between [her] and [her] subject-matter which is absent in many other forms of art".

I thereby propose that the germination of every fictional character is founded upon the comprehension of the nature and dynamics of this aforementioned connection. The novelist's task is both to invent and discover her characters through the human person. Invent, because every textual being is conceived and born ex nihilo; discover, because her individual textual elements, both 'physical' and idiosyncratic, will emerge from the author's cognitive informational storage processed by her imagination. Put differently, the fictional character can be viewed as a disproportionate amalgamation of existing human beings, and the author's ingenuity. It is the creative conglomeration of all received data that constitutes the author's inspirational provisions. In fact, most of the time the employment of such

collected elements takes place subconsciously. Lawrence Block (2003) describes this process as:

More often, the characters we create are drawn in part from people we have known or observed, without our in any sense attempting to recreate the person on the page. I may borrow a bit of physical description, for example, or a mannerism, or an oddity of speech. I may take an incident in the life of someone I know and use it as an item of background data in the life of one of my characters. Little touches of this sort from my own life experience get threaded into my characters much as bits of ribbon and cloth are woven into a songbird's nest—for color, to tighten things up, and because they caught my eye and seemed to belong there. (Block, 1985, pp. 74—75).

For example, in the Q & A section following the end of her novel, *A Half Forgotten Song*, Katherine Webb (2012) reveals:

I think they [my characters] all have at least one trait I can relate to, or see a little of in myself. I have some of Hannah's practicality and stubbornness, and also some of her self-reliance. But I also have some of Zach's self-doubt and uncertainty, and I can be a bit of a fantasist, just like Dimity. (Webb, 2012, p. 478).

Moreover, the insertion of one's own characteristics in the formation of a fictional character may be premeditated, or intuitive. Thus, a detailed self-exploration becomes a vital part in the author's research. Ultimately, the author who is able to understand aspects of herself, also possesses inherent knowledge of humanity in general. This is because the very procedure of such exploration renders its dynamics explicit, thus serving as a guiding 'pattern' to the introspection of other idiosyncrasies. O'Connor (1969) underlined the importance of knowing oneself as the connecting link between art and the real world:

Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other. To know oneself is to know one's region. It is also to know the world, and is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world. (1969, O' Connor, pp. 34-35).

One may contend that the fanciful integration of accumulated characteristics is not enough for the construction of a coherent fictional entity. Indeed, such accumulation needs to be both original and harmonic at the same time, for the author's ultimate goal should be consistency. Further analysis on the practical aspects of originality of creation is soon to follow. For the time being, it should suffice to say that the source of such verification lies within the novelist's own ability to comprehend and judge. As Seger advises (1990, p. 25), it is ultimately her own inherent knowledge of humanity the writer must turn to.

As it emerges, an author's ability to create a fictional character, from conception to textual exposition, is a process both inherent and consciously methodical at the same time. The perceptual derivatives of her comprehension, and the artefacts produced by her creativity, imagination and critical thinking will ultimately demonstrate such ability, once conveyed on paper. Referring to the art of performing, Moore (1960) wrote:

Stanislavski realized that an actor has to learn anew to see and not just to pretend to see, to hear and not just to pretend to listen ... that he has to think and to feel. ... Stanislavski knew that an actor's mind, will and emotions – the three forces responsible for our psychological life – must participate in the creation of a live human being on stage. (Moore, 1960, pp. 8-9).

Much like Stanislavski's actor, the novelist is called to conceive the most delicate threads of a new identity, and bring it alive, not on stage, but through her text. These same three 'forces' will also aid her to create a textual human being that will appear 'alive' in the one-dimensional world of a novel's pages. As Marisha Pessl (2008) explains,

[W]riting is a sort of acting exercise. You have to bring yourself and your own sensibility to your character, and yet you must diminish or augment certain

aspects of yourself, see the world through their eyes, and judge the world according to their moral compass. (Burns, 2008, p. 38).

And so the character becomes a separate entity, one the novelist is called to understand and follow. And yet such 'independence' is not always received well.

#### **4.3.2 THE CHARACTER DELUSION: DISPELLING THE MYTH**

Many resist the existence of any type of extra-textual connection between a novelist and her characters, with some going as far as to speak of lies and delusions (Vermeule, 2010; Williams, 1993). I contend that this is a very superficial approach indeed.

First of all, many fictional characters have been based on, or inspired by, real people. In the afterward of *Fingersmith* (2002), Waters explains:

The index upon which Christopher Lilly is at work is based on the three annotated bibliographies published by Henry Spenceer Ashbeen under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi. ... Mr Lilly's statements on book-collecting echo those of Ashbee, but in all other respects he is entirely fictitious. (Waters, 2002, p. 549).

Similarly, in the afterward of *A Half Forgotten Song*, Webb (2012) writes:

For two weeks, I hand-collated a book about the artist Augustus John, and saw, again and again, his glorious portraits, which were often of the women in his life. I was captivated by them. I took a copy of the book home with me, and learned a bit more about the man—one of Britain's foremost twentieth century artists. ... His portraits are strikingly sensuous. He manages to convey mood, expression, and atmosphere with just a few strokes of his pencil, and often worked quickly, spontaneously, to capture a moment. ... When I saw it [a portrait of his family enjoying a picnic], I started to wonder – what must the residents of a quiet place like Dorset, in the early part of the twentieth century, have made of such Bohemian living arrangements? So the character of Charles Aubrey was born, inspired by but not based upon Augustus John. (Webb, 2012, PP. 475-476).

I have already mentioned the example of Napoleon Bonaparte appearing in a number of novels across time (Winterson, 1996; Hugo, 1955). Virginia Woolf is one of the central characters in Michael Cunningham's (2002) *The Hours*. And Sigmund

Freud and Carl Jung can be found among the fictional cast of Jed Rubenfeld's (2006) *The Interpretation of Murder*. Another example would be that of *Oranges are not the only Fruit*, by Jeanette Winterson (1985), a semi-autobiographical novel. As David Shields (2010) argues, the boundaries separating reality and fiction, memoir and the novel, have long been blurred, and a strict loyalty on either side would only impoverish the art of writing.

Furthermore, I once again underline that 'real' is not to be taken literally. The notion of a novelist engaging in conversation with her characters refers to an important part of this creative act. I have heard of no author to this day who has claimed to have encountered her heroes and heroines by means of her sense organs. As researchers Taylor, Hodges and Kohanyi (2003) explain,

In the positively-regarded context of creating writing, we are willing to accept the possibility of phenomenological peculiarities; we do not question the adult's mental health. Writers certainly become immersed in the fantasy world they create and, as they work, may lose track of their real-world surroundings, but we doubt that novelists are seriously confused about the fantasy/reality distinction. (Taylor *et al*, 2003, pp. 365-366).

Indeed, it is a hypothetical, imaginary experience that takes place in the author's mind, one that will guide her to explore all possible paths of her character's cognitive map—her mind, will and emotions as Stanislavski put it (Moore, 1984). Asked whether she likes her protagonist, Zach, Webb (2012) replies:

I do, very much – he is genuinely kind-hearted, and honest, even if he's not perfect. He's sometimes uncertain, and slow to act – not exactly an action hero! But I sympathise a great deal with the nagging feeling he has that he ought to be doing better than he is. People often expect an awful lot of themselves, and give themselves unrealistic deadlines and milestones to reach. ... I'd like to sit Zach down and tell him not to beat himself up so much! He's doing his best, which is all any of us can do. (Webb, 2012, pp. 479-480).

There is no doubt that Webb speaks in metaphor about the portrait she herself has painted, moving into a deeper level of analysis in juxtaposition with fundamental conditions of life and the human mind. Before I investigate the parameters of this experience further, I wish to argue against the myth of the delusional author, and thereby dispel it.

Describing the mental process that renders the fictional character 'autonomous', Taylor *et al.* (2003, p. 366) introduce the concept of 'illusion of independent agency':

[T]he process of imagining the companion or the fictional world could become automatized until it is no longer consciously experienced. As the person readies him or herself for the imaginative act, the fantasy characters present themselves automatically. Their words and actions begin to be perceived, listened to, and recorded rather than consciously created. As a result, the imagined characters are experienced as speaking and acting independently. (Taylor *et al.*, 2003, p. 367).

The idea that all imaginary dialogues are symptomatic of psychopathology is refutable. As clinical and developmental psychologist Mary Watkins (2000, pp. 1-2) points out, it is common for people in everyday life to silently address their mirror reflection or someone in a photograph: "Even when we are outwardly silent, within the ebb and flux of our thought, we talk with critics, with our mothers, our god(s), our consciences".

A hypothetical interaction with a physically absent interlocutor should not automatically exclude the premeditation for such a process, depriving it from a conscious and specific purpose altogether. There is no reason why a conjectural conversation with a character in terms of creative inventiveness should be regarded as different to the invocation to a deity, or the silent appeal to a deceased loved one. The analogy, of course, is not as Vermeule (2010, p. 45) perceives it: it is not an

irrational urge of nostalgia, or her faith in a dogma, that motivate the novelist to look for her character in imaginary realms. On the contrary, it is a conscious act, during which her critical judgement and creativity are at work.

Furthermore, a hypothetical, imaginary conversation between the author and her character(s) does not automatically presuppose that the former believes to be hearing actual voices. As has been established, the fictional character is an inspired amalgamation of idiosyncratic attributes accumulated by a process of observation and comprehension of others, as well as thorough self-introspection. Subsequently, the symbolic soundless 'voices' of the characters speaking to the author emerge as variations of her cognition. Watkins (1999) explicates this as follows:

[W]e shall define "Self" as the collection of different characters ... who can be said to populate an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions. In other words, the Self is that world of characters whom one entertains and/or identifies with. ... Hence, when it is said that a dialogue is being carried out between self and imaginal other, the self here is the experiential locus of consciousness associated with the feeling of "I". (Watkins, 1999, p. 2).

Watkins (1999, pp. 18-20) moves on to analyse Mead's account of children's fanciful play. According to his theory, such inner conversations contribute towards a realisation and determination of selfhood and society, through the adoption of alternative perspectives. Similarly, Keen (2006, p. 221) suggests that "[T]he activity of fiction-writing may cultivate novelists' role-taking skills and make them more habitually empathetic". Evidently, the purists that dismiss the notion of 'imaginal' dialogues with characters as frivolous overlook this point precisely: that it is a premeditated, imaginary experience. Whether intentional or not, the decentralisation of creativity and imagination as generators of such imaginal dialogues for the purpose of character germination, as well as the persistent

contradistinction to a vague concept of reality, disorientates from the topic in question. The constant appeal to the delusion of influence bypasses the aforementioned point in its entirety. Here is Watkins' (1999) analysis of Henry Corbin's distinction between the imaginary and the imaginal:

[I]n modern non-premeditated usage the "imaginary" is contrasted with the "real". "Imaginary is equated with the unreal, the nonexistent. Our high valuation of the sensible world, the material and the concrete (what we take to be "real"), shines a pejorative light on the "imaginary". By using the term "imaginal", Corbin hopes to undercut the real-unreal distinction, and to propose instead that the imaginal not be assessed in terms of a narrowed conception of "reality," but a broader one which gives credence to the reality of the imaginal. (Watkins, 1999, p. 4).

Subsequently, the concept of character autonomy should not be examined outside the framework of a creative process. As Watkins (1999) indicates,

In using the term "autonomy" I make no claim that such characters exist in objectified nature, in and of themselves, independently of their being experienced. Nor do I mean that their apprehended qualities are independent of their relationship with a particular ego. (Watkins, 1999, p. 105).

Moreover, the diversity of those hypothetical voices permits the author to exist in a perpetual exploration of material, assuming the role of both an observer and a participator. It is not simply the accumulated, incorporated data that is being synthesised and moulded; a semi-experiential discovery of new ones is also taking place. To quote Watkins (1999, p. 95) once more, "These articulations are not only aimed at establishing a rudimentary sense of self but are an ongoing and changing way of participating in the complex meanings and correlative definitions of self and world".

The novelist can thus be viewed as an active participant in the constant interaction between self and the world, resisting the impulse to ignore her creative instincts from fear of losing her authority and the control of her narrative.

Characters always remain a product of the author's ingenuity and can only exist dependently and interrelated to it. Essentially, the author surrenders to what Taylor *et al* (2003) have described as 'flow':

Flow refers to the pleasurable experience of becoming so totally absorbed in an activity that the sense of the passage of time is suspended, one loses track of the self and immediate surroundings, and the activity becomes effortless and unselfconscious. Authors often report the experience of flow while writing, as we suspect that flow might facilitate the development of autonomy in fictional characters. (Taylor *et al*, 2003, p. 367).

Evidently, the intentional interaction between the author and her characters is a process quite dissimilar to those experienced by persons with delusions or pathological conditions. Watkins (1999) argues against such arbitrary inferences by stating:

In [pathological states] there is no imaginal dialogue, only sequential monologue. The person identifies with or is taken over by various characters in a sequential fashion. The ego is most often unaware of the other voices. It is paradoxical that the illness of multiple personality is problematic precisely because of its singleness of voice at any one moment, not because of its multiplicity. ... The multiplicity we are advocating from a dramatic point of view is one where the characters are in dialogue. (Watkins, 2000, p. 107).

Another noteworthy difference pertains to the depth and dimensionality of manifestations. In a study with patients of schizophrenia, Watkins (1999, p. 115) noted that, unlike the popular belief that holds imaginary beings extensively characterised in order to overcome the patient's ego, characterisation is shallow, enhancing only egocentric aspects that influence the 'I'.

The novelist is called to embark upon a thorough exploration of her creation's idiosyncratic and physiognomic characteristics, so that she does not end up constructing superficial, improbable and unconvincing fictional entities.

Consequently, any inference on authorial delusions is unsubstantiated, failing to serve any purpose, academic or theoretical. Instead, focus should be placed on the exploration of those dynamics governing this and other creative processes, opening yet new interdisciplinary paths.

The analogy of the parent is one way to look at the novelist's role. Other comparisons would be with that of a Goddess, and an actress. I will examine them next.

#### **4.3.3 THE ABSORPTION OF ARTIFICE: THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL**

It has already been suggested that the more thorough and multifaceted an author's exploration of her character is, the more realistic and complete the character will emerge in the narrative. It is now time to examine how the author can attribute the illusion of the character's free will on paper. I propose that this can be achieved if the author holds adequate knowledge of her creation. The methods of acquisition will be examined next.

Many popular textbooks recommend the interview method to help the new writer get acquainted with her fictional creations, usually entailing sheets of standard questions she should 'address' to her characters. Whilst these techniques may prove to be helpful in instances, I overall find them formulaic and superficial. Forced answers to a fixed checklist are more likely to project the author's own reasoning rather than reveal something about the character herself. Instead, I suggest that the author assumes two different roles: that of the meticulous observer, and that of her character(s), much like an actress would.

In the first instance, by observing her subject from a close, symbolic distance, the novelist's critical judgement and creative imagination will guide her to follow

the character as she will naturally unfold her innumerable idiosyncratic possibilities through the diversity of hypothetical, extra-textual situations, her actions, thoughts and reactions different each time. In that respect, the information surrounding the character is accumulated through an instinctual process, according to which the author trusts her knowledge and understanding of the real world, as well as her critical judgment. Consistency and logical inference emerge in an unbiased manner, by constant contemplation and self-reflection, and as such the character appears to flow through the narrative freely.

In the second, the author immerses herself inside the creation. She is not merely an observer, but a participator. She adopts her character's idiosyncrasy, 'wears' her physiognomic and psychological features, and places herself in the symbolic world she created, in order to explore it through the eyes of her protagonist. Brayfield (1996) encapsulates this process as follows:

You work like an actor and become the person, feeling their emotions and sensing their behaviour. Imagining yourself inside the character, you look outwards through their eyes and react to the events of the story, discovering how they feel and what they are going to do. You find yourself speaking their lines and adopting their body language. (Brayfield, 1996, p. 52).

Stanislavski insisted on the actors 'incarnating' their characters, in order to capture their essence, rendering it explicit to the audience. As Moore (1984) explained,

Stanislavski never tired of repeating that an actor must incarnate the behaviour of the character to make it seen and heard— to be clear to the audience in every way. ... In good theater an actor creates the inner experiences of the character, incarnates them, and makes this creative process understandable to the audience. (Moore, 1984, pp. 12-13).

Investigating how the author can assume the role of her character, I shall begin by underlining the necessity of authorial realisation for the character's

symbolic independence. It has already been indicated that iconic character autonomy ensures coherence and believability. Watkins (1999, p. 115) proposes that the degree of character development is interlinked to character autonomy: “As the character becomes more autonomous, we know about its world not just from external observation or supposition but from the character directly”.

The author surrenders her consciousness — much like Poulet’s (2001) reader does — and trusts her perceptual and imaginative aptitude in order to connect with her fictional beings, in both a godlike and maternal relationship with them: godlike because, all metaphors aside, she remains their one and only germinator, to decide upon their fate; maternal because she will have to tentatively listen and learn their needs as they will reveal them to her in the process. As Watkins (1999) asserts,

[J]ust when we begin to treat all characters of the imagination as mere projections of self, a central paradox emerges. Although the other may bear some resemblance to myself or my experience, this is not always the case. I often do not plan [her] appearance. In the midst of my thinking, my activities, my speaking, I find [s]he has appeared and spoken to me. In some cases, I cannot predict what [s]he will say or know when [s]he will end. ... Even if one accepts that I have created [her], one must also acknowledge that this creation, like the procreation of a child, leads to my offspring’s existing independently of my conscious intention. (Watkins, 1999, p. 94).

The novelist is called to make her strings invisible, conveying the illusion that her characters seal their own fate according to their individual idiosyncrasies and actions. Using her perceptive, emotive and imaginative dexterity, she designs their fictional paths without ‘abusing’ her authority to force dialogue and actions incompatible to their textual idiosyncrasy. As Gardner (1991, p. 43) warns, characters that are designed to serve as tools to a ‘mechanistic universe’ are deprived of convincing values, and as such are helpless against an uninspiring depiction of their thematic context.

It is the latter case the authors refer to when they speak of their characters 'rebellling'. Essentially, the term refers to the author's instinctual resistance to proceed with incongruous ideas. Forster (1974) elucidated:

The characters arrive when evoked, but full of the spirit of mutiny. For they have these numerous parallels with people like ourselves, they try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book. They 'run away', they 'get out of hand'; they are creations inside a creation, and often inharmonious towards it; if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces, and if they are kept too sternly in check they revenge themselves by dying, and destroy it by intestinal decay. (Forster, 1974, p. 72).

Between these two poles, the author is called to maintain the balance in the narrative by means of judgment, self-reflection and creative instinct. As explained, a character's internal inconsistency will guide the story, plotted or not, into several dead ends. If her individual characteristics do not constitute a coherent ensemble, the flow of the narrative will be interrupted, guiding the author to unconvincing solutions and story patches, disrupting thus the suspension of disbelief. On the contrary, ascertaining coherence in the narrative will also ensure proper character exposition. As Daiches (1960, p. 13) asserted, "Sometimes the character as we see [her] first is a shadowy and indeterminate creature, but after [her] reactions to a chronological series of events have been presented we feel that [s]he is now a living personality".

Again, in order for this transformation to take place, the novelist needs to make sure that the reactions Daiches referred to as well as their manner of presentation occur convincingly. This requires adequate authorial knowledge of character.

Only a certain amount of such knowledge will make it to the text. The approach proposed in this thesis is founded upon this very notion: the stage of Conceptualisation, which precedes that of Exposition, entails both the accumulation and the filtering of all data pertaining to the character's identity. The author harvests all information but then is called to select those details that will ensure accurate and interesting character exposition in the narrative. Forster (1974, pp. 57-58) similarly indicated that, "[P]eople in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner, as well as their outer life can be exposed. ... The novelist is allowed to remember and understand everything, if it suits [her]. [S]he knows all the hidden life".

This 'hidden' life is what a novelist aims to virtually experience when she sees through her character's eyes. Seemingly insignificant details may lead her to comprehend fundamental aspects of her textual personality, guiding her to form innovative, coherent plot decisions. As Seger (1990) writes,

The depth of a character has been compared to an iceberg. The audience or reader only sees the tip of the writer's work— perhaps only 10 percent of everything the writer knows about the character. The writer needs to trust that all this work deepens the character, even if much of this information never appears directly in the script. (Seger, 1990, p. 2).

One may argue that, since a script-writer's work is significantly guided by structural restrictions – economy of space corresponding to screen time – her advice may need to be adjusted when one discusses novel dynamics. In reality, Seger simply uses Ernest Hemingway's famous 'Iceberg Theory':

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as through the writer has stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway, date, p/ 183).

Along these lines, Brayfield (1996) also proposes:

The writer needs to imagine the character holistically, then select telling details from the picture as they are needed. ... If you know the cast of your story the way you know living people – whole and usually beyond rational explanation, however much people chew each other over in absentia – you will be able to get them down on the page in a form which will seem lifelike to everyone. (Brayfield, 1996, p. 169).

The author can never know real people in the intimate, microscopic way she understands her characters. For, as mentioned, she creates them ex nihilo, and as such is granted access to all their thoughts, emotions and doubts. This meticulous knowledge will manifest through the text. Consequently, the reader will also be able to understand, align and even empathise with them. As Harvey (1970, p. 32) pointed out, “Life allows only intrinsic knowledge of self, contextual knowledge of others; fiction allows both intrinsic and contextual knowledge of others”.

On the other hand, as Forster warned, characters are fictional creations inside a textual construction, and if not handled with dexterity, the entire foundation of the narrative becomes unstable. Indeed, by proposing that the novelist should surrender herself to her character’s conscience, I do not imply she should forget who is ‘in control’. The novelist remains the conscious creator, and the only decision-maker (Harvey, 1970).

Subsequently, the novelist’s aim should not be to convince herself that the contents of her narrative are real, but rather to persuade the reader that they could be. Encapsulating this, Moore (1984, p. 33) spoke about the artist’s intention to “treat things or persons as if they were what [s]he wants the audience to believe they are. ... [Her ability] to make [her] audience believe what [s]he wants it to believe creates scenic truth”.

Much like an actress, the author enters the virtual mould of the character in order to discover, understand and convey to the reader her inner and outer attributes. It all thus comes down to a game of symbolic embodiment and fanciful imagination. Her aim is not to abandon her own idiosyncrasy or critical judgement altogether, but rather to unite the two 'selves' so that she both observes and evaluates at the same time.

This process is the outcome of critical judgment and empathy in synergy. The author is constantly alert to see, feel and evaluate through another's eyes in both hypothetical and realistic situations, and at the same time judge and reflect on such evaluations in omnipresence.

Frequently, a character's principles and viewpoints do not coincide with her creator's. The degree of the ability to adopt another's viewpoint aiming to comprehend those driving forces behind motivations, actions and sentiments will ultimately define the extent to which the reader will choose to identify with, or at least comprehend the character's behaviour.

#### **4.4 THE NARRATOR WITHIN**

I now return to the dilemma posed earlier of whether the author is still present in her text, or has been substituted by the individual deductions of reader interpretation. This section will investigate modes of narration and their evolution through time.

##### **4.4.1 AUTHORS AND NARRATORS**

The germination and expansion of literary theory has put under the scope ideas that until then were taken for granted, endorsed critical thinking and set higher standards in the art of fiction-writing. Artistic craftsmanship began to be

scrutinised, and there emerged a range of analytical tools, concerning the author, her intentions, her presence within the text as well as her many faces. Indeed, today one comes across well-established terms and distinctions, such as the internal or external narrator, the implied author, the reliable or unreliable narrator etc. (Currie, 2010; Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Chatman, 1978; Booth, 1961).

For instance, for Booth (1961, pp. 70-71) there should be a distinction between “the real author” and “the various versions of [her]self”. Scholes & Kellogg (1966, p. 240) suggest that a clear distinction between author and narrator characterises the more sophisticated narratives. They also introduce the concept of the ‘histor’, defining it as:

The *histor* is the narrator as inquirer, constructing a narrative on the basis of such evidence as [s]he has been able to accumulate. The *histor* is not a character in a narrative, but [s]he is not exactly the author [her]self, either. [S]he is a persona, a projection of the author’s empirical virtues. (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966, pp. 265-266).

Similarly, Chatman (1978, pp. 146-158) expounds the notions of direct presentation, mediated narration, real author, implied author, narrator, real reader, implied reader, narratee, introducing his own schema of the narrative text. As he writes:

[The implied author is] is not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative. ... [T]he implied author can *tell* us nothing. [S]he, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. ... We can grasp the notion of implied author most clearly by comparing different narratives written by the same real author but presupposing different implied authors. (Chatman, 1978, p. 148).

Rimmon-Kenan (1983, pp. 86-105) dissects levels of narration as per the former’s proximity to the narrative itself into extradiegetic, diegetic and hypodiegetic; and types of narrators as per the degree of their textual participation

into heterodiegetic and homodiegetic. And Currie (2010, pp. 69-70) holds the view that the difference between 'internal' and 'external' narrators lies within the distinct perspectives between the real novelist, and the one the reader thinks is revealed through the novel.

Many scholars have disputed such distinctions as redundant, arguing for simpler explicatory devices. Currie (2010, p. 65) himself moves on to contend that a distinction between authors and narrators is futile, for as he writes, narrative-making and narrative-telling are not to be regarded as two different processes:

Narrators, as they are discussed in critical and academic debates on narrative, are beings about whom it is sometimes appropriate to ask such questions as: 'how does he/she know about these things?', 'is he/she reliable?', 'what is the narrator's point of view'. Answering these questions may be important for someone who wants to understand the narrative. None of this applies to the agent who merely acts as a facilitator or postman. (Currie, 2010, p. 66).

Similarly, Bordwell (2007, P. 128) evaluates Chatman's (1978) schema as unnecessary, arguing that, "To undergo the experience of a roller-coaster ride, I don't have to imagine a ghostly intelligence standing between the engineer and me, shaping the thrills and nausea I feel. The very concept of a storyteller doesn't entail a virtual storyteller of the sort that Chatman proposes".

I suggest that such distinctions should not directly concern the creative writer. As already indicated, the interpretation of fictional texts constitutes a subjective activity on which the author's influence is limited. I moreover endorse Atwood's (2003) perception of the communication between author and reader, according to which,

Messengers always exist in a triangular situation – the one who sends the message, the message-bearer, whether human or inorganic, and the one who receives the message. Picture, therefore, a triangle, but not a complete triangle: something more like an upside-down V. The writer and the reader

are at the two lateral corners, but there's no line joining them. Between them — whether above or below — is a third point, which is the written word, or the text, or the book, or the poem, or the letter, or whatever you would like to call it. This third point is the only point of contact between the other two. (Atwood, 2003, p. 113).

Atwood's conceptual schema requires the emergence of no intermediates, and is accurately descriptive of the author-reader contract. All that stands between the two is the text, and its elements are the only thing the author should be concerned about. The literary critic is interested in an in-depth comprehension of the narrative by means of deconstruction. On the other hand, the author's job is synthetic and constructive. The author creates, the critic dissects. They simply implement different methods for different purposes.

the same time, as established, the novelist conveys a part of her identity through the text but is not to be identified with it. In that respect, the novelist and the narrator are not to be defined one through the other. The author is one entity, constructing the fictional world and its inhabitants. The narrator is the one telling the story. She may assume the role of one of the characters, or recount as an omnipresent storyteller. A novelist's choice of narration is what I will be examining next.

#### **4.4.2 POINT OF VIEW**

'Point of View' refers to the mode of narration the author chooses to adopt in order to present the narrative's events from one or more particular angles, either coloured by the subjectivity of a character's thoughts, or by the all-knowing narration of an omniscient story-teller.

Many have dismissed the term as conceptually inadequate. For instance, Rimmon-Kenan (1983, pp. 71-73), considers it imprecise, as it attempts to treat the

two separate questions of who sees versus who speaks as indistinguishable. She instead argues for the concept of 'focalisation', separating it from narration altogether. Chatman (1978, pp. 151-152) thinks 'POV' to be 'troublesome' and distinguishes three aspects of point of view— the perceptual, conceptual, and that of interest— contending that the term cannot encompass them all at once. And Forster (1974, pp. 81-82) disputed the effectiveness of the device altogether, countering that it is simply up to the dexterity of the writer to appear convincing through her narration, without having to adopt respective methods for aesthetic purposes.

For the writer of this thesis, the conceptual clarity of 'Point of View' is precise enough to describe the function it serves. The term pertains to narrative mode, diegetic status and possession of information, entailing all aspects Chatman spoke of. It is due to its encompassing conceptualisation that it remains one of the most significant choices the author is called to make. As Percy Lubbock (1986) elucidated,

The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of point of view— the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story. ... The story may be told so vivaciously that the presence of the minstrel is forgotten, and the scene becomes visible, peopled with the characters of the tale. ... If the spell is weakened at any moment, the listener is recalled from the scene to the mere author before [her], and the story rests only upon the author's direct assertion. (Lubbock, 1968, p. 251).

Scholes & Kellogg (1966, pp. 240-241) assert that the primary function of POV is to control the narrative irony, which they define as "a function of disparity" among the author-narrator, the character and the reader, whereby "lies the essence of narrative art". The writers (*ibid*, p. 275) also challenge the notion that P.O.V. serves exclusively the author's aesthetic purposes, arguing that it is the

primary device with which a novelist's work is formed, affecting the narrating language and the way light is cast upon characters and events. Furthermore, as they add, it is a perceptive apparatus for the reader, as it helps shape her impressions and stances towards the work.

Subsequently, the choice and consistent implementation of point of view ascertains the suspension of disbelief. The author is thus faced with a task that will ultimately define her work's viability: she is called to appoint her narrators and analogously decide what they will see, conveying it to the reader. As Margolin (1986) elaborates,

In the context of characterization, we distinguish between the implications we draw from the reported acts about the psychology of their doers (including the reporter-as-doer) at the time of the act, and the implications we draw from the act of reporting about the psychological nature of the reporter [herself] at the moment of reporting. (Margolin, 1986, p. 219).

I will now proceed to investigate the criteria which will determine the choice of point of view by the author.

Boulter (2007, p. 150) suggests that one thinks in terms of viewpoint, pertaining to a character's visual and perceptual standpoint and access to information; voice, which reflects the character-narrator's unique way of transmitting information to the reader; and distance, referring to the extent of the reader's potential emotional alignment to the character in question.

And Tilford (1968, p. 307) has noted that, "One of the basic functions of fiction, paradoxically, is to sound true. The point of view from which the story is told has much to do with verisimilitude. How, we ask, does the narrator know what he tells us? For we want to believe our fiction, at least while we're reading it".

I wish to propose that POV is understood as serving two separate albeit interrelated functions: that of revealing the character's subjectivity, pertaining to her intellectual interpretations and emotional reactions; and that of defining the degree of alignment, both cognitive and emotional, the author wishes to establish between her textual creations and the reader. I shall examine all established types as per the above criteria.

#### **4.4.2A OMNISCIENT**

The oldest and erstwhile predominant form of narration, the omniscient POV is still regarded by many as the most reliable and even prestigious of all (Gardner, 1983; Friedman, 1955). Omniscient refers to an extra-textual narrator with unrestricted access to all characters' cognitive and emotional states, and an a priori knowledge of the textual events to come, as well as their outcomes. Margolin (1986, p. 219) describes the omniscient narrator as the one who "[C]an possess full and certain information about the mental states and acts of others and report them with certainty". Indeed, the omniscient narrator has been known to make all sorts of inferences, explanations and comments on the fictional characters.

Since the use of omniscient POV characterised an era of canon formation, many contemporary scholars still regard it as the most effective form of narration. Gardner (1983) goes as far as to embark upon a polemic against first and third subjective person narrations, dismissing them as less sophisticated and even gossipy. As he argues,

In the authorial-omniscient point of view the reader escapes the claustrophobia he may feel when boxed into a limited opinion; he sees and celebrates, shrugs off, or deplors a variety of opinions; and he sails along securely, confident that he will not be tricked or betrayed by the wise and thoughtful narrator. The cards are on the table. (Gardner, 1991, p. 157).

The omniscient P.O.V offers the reader a panoramic view of the fictional world. Gardner's assertion on its infallibility may be challenged though, since omniscient, as used in classic literature, carries alongside it the author's own prejudices, depicted in her indirect social and ethical commentary. Furthermore, it deprives the reader of the opportunity to enter the character's textual mind-frames. As Mullan (2006, p. 43) indicates, "Omniscience ... is a way of describing potential knowledge rather than practical revelation".

Examples of omniscient POV from canonical literature include Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1994) *The Scarlet Letter*, Leo Tolstoy's (1993) *War and Peace*, and Victor Hugo's (1955) *Les Miserables*.

Omniscient POV has evolved, and accordingly adjusted to contemporary fiction (Watkins, 1999; Daiches, 1960; Friedman 1955). Friedman (1955) speaks of 'editorial' and 'neutral' omniscience distinguishing them as per the degree of domination of the authorial presence:

The characteristic mark, then, of Editorial Omniscience is the presence of authorial intrusions and generalizations about life, manners, and morals, which may or may not be explicitly related to the story at hand. ... At any rate, it is a natural consequence of the editorial attitude that the author will not only *report* what goes on in the minds of [her] characters, but [s]he will also *criticize* it. (Friedman, 1955, p. 1171).

According to Friedman's analysis, editorial omniscience refers to the narrative style adopted by classical novelists, who guided the reader toward certain evaluations, providing commentaries on the ethos of their times. With the subsequent shift of focus from society to the individual, and the decentralisation of the paradigmatic status quo that gave way to its constituent units, the necessity for expansion and modification became obvious. As Daiches (1960) wrote,

Those novelists ... who were content to emphasize the social documentary aspect of their art and to rely on the traditional changes in status and fortune to mark the high points of significance, often produced interesting and skilful novels, but novels which are now more documents of interest to the social historian or the historian of taste than illuminating explorations of aspects of the human situations. (Daiches, 1960, pp. 6-7).

Friedman (1955, p. 1179) mourns the authorial absorption by the text, speaking of an equal extinction of literature, since he considers the authorial presence a prerequisite for textual vividness and reader comprehension. Furthermore, he writes that,

To argue that the function of literature is to transmit unaltered a slice of life is misconceive the fundamental nature of language itself: the very act of writing is a process of abstraction, selection, omission, and arrangement. But why, finally, need we go to a novel for a slice of life when we can go to the nearest street corner for a much more vivid one which we can experience at first hand? (Friedman, 1955, p. 1179).

Notwithstanding the obvious hyperbole in Friedman's claims, I argue that it is consistency, particularity and creative flexibility that render a narrative appealing and interesting to the reader, not the constant explication by the narrator. Additionally, as Bruce Morrissette (1962) underlined,

If there is a single key idea here, it is that of the evolutionary nature of artistic growth. Evolution leads the investigator back into the past from which it emerges, and calls for a setting up of perspectives on the present. ... The twentieth century is the first to see general acceptance of the view that art evolves, and that art which does not change or evolve, dies. (Morrissette, 1962, p. 2).

I contend that artistic evolution is founded upon its temporal principles, and as such, erstwhile practices never altogether disappear, but are rather longitudinal. Moreover, Friedman's argument of literature's significance lying in its encompassing generalisation of life is arbitrary. The depiction of such 'slices of life' confers on literature its very grandeur, for it finally reaches deep into life's finest

threads, representing its very essence. Life can be regarded as a mosaic of liaisons, bifurcations and outcomes of human relationships, shaped and defined by individuals. Here are some indicative passages from *The Icestorm* (1994):

Family was a bad idea he got because there were no other ideas in those days. It was the outer margin of one little universe and nobody knew what lay beyond it. ... He loved his wife and children, and he hated all evidence of them. The noise of children, and the terrible quiet just after, which augured – always, every single day – some broken heirloom or injury: it squeezed the life out of him a little but at a time. (Moody, 1999, p. 14).

Moody's text depicts a very realistic 'slice' of Ben Hood's fictional life, one that portrays the complications, restrictions and social etiquette of a rural American town in the seventies, where marriage was a natural outcome, and the ordinariness of life quite not so expectedly ordinary. The narrative has remained anthropocentric, the images have become representational. Moody simply 'zooms' into the scene, rather than describe his view of the actions, remaining impartial. At a later chapter, Elena Hood's perception of the same family is proffered via a simple visit to the fridge:

The order was impeccable. First Wendy, then Benjamin, then Elena carried her plate to the table and returned to the refrigerator in search of a beverage. After a long, fruitless investigation, Wendy settled on pasteurized, homogenized, vitamin D-enriched milk. As Wendy held out the milk carton for her father, who accepted it and poured himself a glass – it would sit next to the scotch-on-the-rocks – Elena concluded that her daughter and husband each looked into the refrigerator in the same way. Hopefully. While she and Paul recognized what limited offerings were concealed there. (Moody, 1999, pp. 66-67).

As per Friedman's (1955, p. 1173) distinction, in neutral omniscience, the author is still there to report and transmit, albeit without the use of direct interventions and commentary. She will still, however, describe and analyse the events in her own voice: "The mental states and the settings which evoke them are

narrated indirectly as if they have already occurred— discussed, analyzed, and explained— rather than presented scenically as if they were occurring now”.

The conceptual adjustment of omniscience did not automatically signify the perishing of the author, as Friedman alleges. Instead, she has become invisible, substituting her subjective imprints within the narrative by the sense of upcoming realism that was to dominate the next century. By withdrawing the emphasis of her presence, the novelist succeeded in achieving simplicity and realistic attribution, as Moody’s passages reflect, liberating the reader from the rigid framework of restricted interpretation, and revealing the innumerable possibilities of human nature to her. A character that is introduced only through external perspectives can only be grasped in fragments and superficially. Failing to reach a deeper level of understanding, the creator only touches on those aspects that promote her own ideas and plot advancement (Watkins, 1999). Watkins outlines this thread of thought as follows:

The imaginer often assimilates and reduces the character’s actions to the set of meanings which are important to the ego, thus failing to allow the character’s presence and point of view to de-center the habitual stance of the ego. The imaginer too quickly assumes she understands what a character wants or feels, without so much as attempting to ask. It is such assumptions that change a basic *telos* of the experience of imagining itself from counteracting egocentricity to sustaining it. In the latter instance the imaginal scene and its people become servants to the usual, most powerful point of view. In the former, as a character’s thoughts, feelings and motivations become known from its point of view, it is freed from being but a prop to the habitually central voice. (Watkins, 1999, pp. 117-118).

This does not render the author absent, or irrelevant to her text. On the contrary, it enhances the trust in the author-reader contract, ascertaining suspension of disbelief, and the consent to consciously take part in a make-believe game.

It is interesting to see how swiftly Moody changes the focus on his narration when it comes to describing Mike Williams' death. It is the first time his omniscient narrator acknowledges himself, pulling the reader out of the story's ambience:

Okay, the time has come in this account for a characterization of the mind of God. Just briefly, for thematic reasons. Happily there's no need to concern ourselves with this mind as it has expressed itself directly – because it hasn't, really. (Moody, 1999, p. 205).

Later on, he makes his first real value judgment on Mike:

Look, he was not a brilliant kid. He had not scored well on standardised tests or on any other tests. He was a little lazy, in fact. Mostly he tried to sit next to Mona Henderson and copy answers. But he knew about live wires, about the lore of live wires. So he made a wide berth several hundred feet around the moiling electrical field and then back onto that thoroughfare, Valley Road, back onto his trail. He wasn't lonely now. He was full of life. (Moody, 1999, p. 211).

In this passage, the narrator addresses the reader directly. His invitation to 'Look' acts as an explicatory device for the forthcoming tragedy. Moody's intentions aside, the passage could survive without the emphasis of the narrator's perspective. The evocation to the reader could be altogether omitted, as Moody has been consistently convincing in persuading her to follow his narrator through the narrative thus far. I will return to this point in due course.

Standing panoramically outside the fictional world, the contemporary omniscient narrator still has access to all characters' thoughts and feelings, as well as to knowledge of future events to come. But rather than acting as a judge, she embeds herself in the narrative, allowing its thread to unfold in an unbiased manner. As Harvey (1965, p. 73) contended, "The narrator— and behind the narrator, the author [her]self— is clearly part of the total network of relationships between character and reader which make up the human context". Atwood (2003,

pp. 98-99) also comments that, "Value judgments on the characters or the outcome need not be made by the author, at least not in any overt fashion. ... The reader will judge the characters, because the reader will interpret".

I thus argue against Gardner's (1991) reasoning that dismisses all other P.O.V. modes as limiting, especially as far as the fictional character is concerned. The evolution of omniscience has allowed for deeper submergence into the character's conscience, but it has also proffered direct and often simultaneous access into it. As Friedman (1955, p. 1174) admits, "The prevailing characteristic of omniscience ... is that the author is always ready to intervene [her]self between the reader and the story, and that even when he does set a scene, he will render it as he sees it rather than as his people see it". Indeed, the contemporary novelist lets her characters narrate their own tales, without attempting to speak on their behalf, Watkins agrees, adding that "the tale of each is relativized by the voices of the others" (Watkins, 1999, p. 122).

I now return to Moody, to pinpoint his interchanges between various modes of narration. For the most part, he uses the contemporary form of omniscient narration, viewing his characters panoramically, yet close enough to familiarise the reader with their mental states, motivations and perspectives. Each chapter follows one of his protagonists: Benjamin, Wendy, Elena, and Paul Hood. Mike Williams' death is narrated by the distant voice announcing itself as the 'God-like' narrator. Yet, in the end:

Or that's how I remember it, anyway. Me. Paul. The gab. That's what I remember. And this story really ends right at that spot. I have to leave Benjamin. There with that news, with a wish for reconciliation that he will bury in himself; I have to leave Elena, my mom, whom I have never really understood; I have to leave Wendy, uncertain, with one arm around the dog,

and I have to leave myself – Paul – on the cusp of my adulthood, at the end of that *annus mirabilis* where comic books were indistinguishable from the truth, at the beginning of my confessions. I have to leave him and his family there because after all this time, after twenty years, it's time I left. (Moody, 1999, p. 279).

The revelation that the story has been narrated by Paul from the very beginning should not come as a shock, as Moody has been leaving cues for the reader all along. His very introduction reads (p. 1): “So let me dish you this comedy about a family I knew when I was growing up. There’s a part for me in this story, like there always is for a gossip, but more on that later”. Yet the amalgamation of first person and omniscience appears to be perplexing at times. In the concluding paragraph, Paul clarifies that ‘this is how he remembers the story anyway’. Yet Moody’s narrator has been sinking in and out of the characters’ consciousness, presenting fine details, perspectives, and images that only an omniscient narration could proffer.

For example, Paul confesses that “he never understood his mother”. Yet her idiosyncrasy is portrayed explicitly in certain passages:

[S]ilence was a tongue Elena understood. Silence was her idiom for support and caring. Silence was permissive and contemplative and nonconfrontational and there was melody to it. It was both earth and ether. (Moody, 1999, p. 65).

And:

She knew that if she ever suffered a real and debilitating mental illness, its onset would not be the result of a failed marriage or because of twentieth-century spiritual impoverishment; it would be caused instead by these details, by a pen mark on the designer pantsuit she’d bought for the holidays, by the slight warp in her Paul Simon album, or by the acrid taste of old ice-cubes. Those small things led to a bottomless pit of loneliness beside which even Cambodia paled. (Moody, 1999, p. 67).

One may argue that, presumably, this is not an objective account but Paul’s view of things. Yet the depiction conveyed by Moody is multidimensional and too

complex to be recited by weak memory. Another example would be that of Ben navigating through Janey Williams' house, after she abandons him in the guest room. When he reaches the bathroom:

[H]e began to peruse the remedies on the other side of the mirror: Cover Girl Thick Lash mascara, Revlon Ultima pancake, Max Factor lipstick (chocolate), Helena Rubinstein Brush-on Peel-Off Mask, Kotex tampons, Bonne Bell Ten-O-Six lotion, Clairol Balsam Color (blond, although she frosted her hair), Summer's Eve disposable douche, Spring Breeze. Valium, Seconal, tetracycline, the first of these in a renewable prescription. No diaphragm case. In a tiny space at one end of the top shelf, Jim Williams apparently kept a few things. The Dry Look, Old Spice deodorant, Noxzema Shave Cream, Water Pik teethcleaning system. Vicks VapoRub. (Moody, 1999, pp. 25-26).

Through Ben's vision, Moody characterises Janey and her household. Still, it is strange to speculate that Hood went through this minutia with his son, and that Paul kept them in his memory. The scene of Mike's death illustrates this point further:

His last thought, a simple, adolescent oh, no, was all he had time for; in fact it was exactly simultaneous with his electrocution, because through some strange celestial circuitry, he knew at the moment of his death that it was his death. A jumble of images appeared at once to him, as jumble of dreams and recollections, condensed and displaced. And then Mike said, oh, no, subvocalized it. And then his consciousness split from this plane[.] (Moody, 1999, pp. 214-125).

This is a piece of information Paul could not have possibly access to. It is precisely the sort of knowledge only an omniscient narrator can hold. This is perhaps why Moody's narrator chooses to interrupt his normal flow and define himself as such.

One may argue that all such details pertaining to technique are overshadowed by Moody's most engrossing, skilful narration. Still, they may bewilder a reader.

In conclusion, the adaptation of the omniscient mode of narration in the contemporary novel did not nullify the latter's presence or function. Instead, it provided the reader with flexibility of interpretation and allegiance to the fictional character; it also guided the author towards subtler, yet equally sufficient methods of narrating a world she is to know everything about. Interested in a deeper level of understanding and exposition, novelists allowed omniscience to evolve, rendering the authorial presence discreet thus bringing reader and text one step closer.

#### **4.4.2B FIRST PERSON NARRATION**

As stated above, the de-centralisation of the author, and the shift of focus to the human situation as depicted by the contemporary fictional character is indicative of the wider change in literature, manifested in the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1960, Daiches observed that,

[W]riters have realized that a psychologically accurate account of what a [hu]man is at any given moment can be given neither in terms of static description of [her] character nor in terms of a group of chronologically arranged reactions to a series of circumstances. They have become interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments, but which are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature and are independent of the given moment. (Daiches, 1960, p. 15).

It is this modification in the relationship between author and character that has driven many novelists to adopt alternative viewpoint techniques. Watkins (1999, pp. 124, 126) attributes this creative shift in the radical changes of the twentieth century, such as the war, the emergence of conflicting ideologies, the rapid advancement of science, technology and psychology, concluding that "[T]hus the author had to find a different place to stand in relation to the characters. ... With a decline in omniscience there was a heightened sensitivity to character".

The realistic rendition of events in first person may even attribute the sense of autobiographical narration. The more precise and vivid the narrator's descriptions, the more encompassing and multidimensional the depicted picture will be for the reader. In fact, as Tilford argued (1968, p. 307), skilful first person narrative rendered the differences between fictional and real biographies insignificant, with such credibility characterising even fantastical genres.

Indeed, first person-narrated stories can be regarded as fictional autobiographies, for they often recount a character's life through her eyes; the narrative is most often an accumulation of events as she experiences them.

Yet first person narration is not exclusively linked to the biographic immediacy Tilford speaks of. A narrator may be conveying her own life-story, or reporting as a witness. Friedman (1955) therefore distinguishes two different functions of first-person narrators, that of the protagonist, and that of the witness. Similarly, Scholes and Kellogg (1966, p. 256) explain that, "The eye-witness can be employed in a wide variety of ways. [Her] eyes can be turned inward so that [s]he is [her] own subject matter or outward so that the other characters or the social scene itself become the dominant interest".

First person POV is primarily characterised by the subjective interpretation of one or— in certain cases, such as in Waters' (2002) *Fingermith*, or Kundera's (1992) *The Joke* — more narrating characters. Consequently, the narrator can only convey with certainty her own thoughts and emotions, unfolding the narrative's thread under the individual prism of her observations, perception and judgment—what Friedman (1955, p. 1174) calls "the wandering periphery". Information about the

mental states and motivations of the other characters can only be accessed through the narrator's inferences. Tilford (1968) respectively advises that,

Authors have to use all manner of devices so that the narrator can report, as necessary, other characters' thoughts and events he does not see: intercepted letters, overheard conversations, other characters' accounts, and often the manifestation of considerable naiveté on the part of the narrator. (Tilford, 1968, p. 308).

First person inferencing does not threaten the credibility of the narrative, as long as it takes place within the frames of consistency and logical deduction. Successful hypotheses establish the narrator's idiosyncratic attributes and lead towards the natural unfolding of the story. Mistaken presumptions enhance dramatic irony, since they trigger activity in the characters' interrelations and plot elements. Furthermore, they cast light as per the narrator's own reliability or unreliability, to be discussed later.

The threading of the plot as per the character's alternative motivations and misconceptions of one another is predominant in *Fingersmith* (2002). The story is narrated by the two protagonists, Sue and Maud. Waters creates a strong suspenseful drama proffering both versions of the same story, where the complexity of ethos and the significance of inner and outer conflict build a longitudinal historical drama.

When Sue passes to Maud the letter Richard Rivers has given her, she believes it to be a fake reference note from her imaginary ex-mistress. In reality, the letter is a conspiratorial note to Maud. Sue stands observing her as she reads it:

She rose and broke the wax, then walked to the window to hold the paper to the light. She stood a long time looking at the curling hand, and once sneaked a glance at me; and my heart beat a little fast then, to think she might have noticed something queer there. But it was not that: for I saw at last that her hand, which held the paper, trembled; and I guessed that she had no more

idea what a proper character was like than I did; and was only figuring out what she should say. (Waters, 2002, p. 68).

Yet, from Maud's POV:

I have thought myself as cool as he. I am not, I am not, I feel her watching—just as he describes!—and grow fearful. I stand with the letter in my hand, then am aware all at once that I have stood too long. If she should have seen—! I fold the paper, once, twice, thrice—finally it will not fold at all. I do not yet know that she cannot read or write so much as her own name. (Waters, 2002, p. 244).

Each character projects her own fears, as per her own intentions, to the other. They both worry about being found out, of having their plans exposed. Sue cannot read. She has no idea what that letter truly contains. Sue is threatened by her own misinterpretations, Maud by the knowledge she possesses.

And when Rivers arrives at Briar, Sue misinterprets his interactions with each of them, guided by her own idea of the supposed plan:

He made a bow, and went to the door; then, when he was almost out of it he seemed to remember me, and went through a kind of pantomime, of patting at his pockets, looking for coins. He came up with a shilling, and beckoned me close to take it. 'Here you are Sue,' he said. He lifted my hand and pressed the shilling in it. It was a bad one. 'All well?' he added softly, so that Maud should not overhear. I said, 'Oh, thank you, sir!' And I made another curtsy, and winked. (Waters, 2002, p. 106).

In reality, it is Rivers and Maud that engage in pretence, plotting against Sue.

As Maud narrates:

When those eyes meet mine, they are veiled and blameless. But when they meet Richard's, I see the leap of knowledge or understanding that passes between them; and I cannot look at her. For of course, though she knows much, what she has is a counterfeit knowledge, and worthless; and her satisfaction in the keeping of it—in the nursing of what she supposes her secret—is awful to me. She does not know she is the hinge of all our scheme, the point about which our plot turns; she thinks I am that point. She does not suspect that, in seeming to mock me, Richard mocks her: that after he has turned to her in private, perhaps to smile, perhaps to grimace, he turns to me, and smiles and grimaces in earnest. (Waters, 2002, p. 264).

As mentioned, the shift from omniscient to alternative modes has been met with suspicion by some. For example, Gardner (1991) advises against its use, alleging that,

First person allows the writer to write as he talks, and this may be an advantage for intelligent people who have interesting speech patterns and come from a culture with a highly developed oral tradition, such as American blacks, Jews, and southern or down-east Yankee yarn-spinners; but first person does not force the writer to recognize that written speech has to make up for the loss of facial expression, gesture, and the like, and the usual result is not good writing but only writing less noticeably bad. (Gardner, 1991, p. 155).

Gardner's statement is misleading as to both the purpose and the opportunity first-person narration offers both the author and the reader. Unlike the claim that it echoes the author's own voice, it requires that it is adjusted to the idiosyncrasy and unique speech of each narrating character. The author's voice must dissipate, so that the character's emerges dominant and unmistakably clear.

Furthermore, Gardner's polemic seems to overlook the fact that first-person narration is one of the most effective ways to achieve realism. As Scholes and Kellogg (1966) explain,

We can almost go as far as to say that the natural form of mimetic narrative is eye-witness and first-person. Circumstantiality, verisimilitude, and many more of the qualities which we recognize as identifying characteristics of realism in narrative are all natural functions of the eye-witness point of view. (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966, p. 250).

Indeed, first person POV is considered a proximity-enhancing device by many (Keen, 2006). For instance, Mullan (2006) suggests that its function serves to attract the reader's sympathy for a less-than-perfect character and her misdeeds.

This is evident in *Fingersmith* (2002), where the two protagonists proffer, along with their unique view of the story, their motivations and justifications for

their deeds and choices. An 'objective' narrator may have presented a different account: that of two ruthless young women who, inspired by greed or selfishness, attempt to trap each other, only to be purged by guilt, and redeemed by the chain of events themselves. Yet Waters' narration offers a completely different perspective. The story begins with Sue's account, which is more discursive than apologetic, and uses the past tense:

My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's; and for father I had Mr Ibbs, who kept the locksmith's shop, at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames. (Waters, 2002, p. 3).

Maud's narration (2002, p. 180), on the other hand, is explicatory and defensive, in the present tense, following Sue's incarceration in the madhouse: "The start, I think I know too well. It is the first of my mistakes". After reciting her personal history, and the reasons that instigated her to act as she did, she recapitulates, confessing (2002, p. 204): [I] am inside the cabinet, and long to get out... I am seventeen when Richard Rivers comes to Briar with a plot and a promise and the story of a gullible girl who can be fooled into helping me do it".

Finally, first-person narration allows the author to enhance the sense of the character's originality, through the filtering of her own perspectives. Returning to the concept of defamiliarisation, Lodge (1992) describes it as entailing the unique presentation of otherwise familiar and common concepts and images through the unique prism of the reader; or, in accordance with Shklovsky's (1990) exegesis, as if they were happening or were observed for the very first time.

Indicative is the scene where Sue smooths Maud's pointed tooth with a thimble:

It does not hurt, I do not scream. But it makes for a queer mix of sensations: the grinding of the metal, the pressure of her hand holding my jaw, the softness of her breath. As she studies the tooth she files, I can look nowhere but at her face; and so I look at her eyes: one is marked, I see now, with a fleck of darker brown, almost black. (Waters, 2002, p. 255).

Another example is Sue's return to the Briar, in search of Maud. The mansion has been abandoned, and along with the intensity of the events that followed, Susan feels it is another place altogether she is revisiting:

The road ran down, then began to climb. I remembered driving along it with William Inker, in the dark. I knew what was coming: I knew where it turned, and what I would see when it did... I knew it; but it still made me start, to come so suddenly upon the house again—to see it seem to rise out of the earth, so grey and dim. I stopped, on the edge of the walk of gravel. I was almost afraid. It was all so perfectly quiet and dark. The windows were shuttered. There were more black birds upon the roof. The ivy on the walls had lost its hold and was waving like hair. The great front door—that was always swollen, from the rain—bulged worse than ever. The porch was filled with more wet leaves. It seemed like a house not meant for people but for ghosts. (Waters, 2002, pp. 538).

And:

I looked about me—back, the way I had come; and then, across the lawns. They ran into dark and tangled woods. The paths I had used to take with Maud, had disappeared. ... [I] began to walk, around to the back of the house, to the stables and yards. I went carefully, for my steps sounded loud. But here, it was just as quiet and empty as everywhere else. No dogs started barking. The stable doors were open, the horses gone. The great white clock was there, but the hands—this shocked me, more than anything—the hands were stuck, the hour was wrong. The clock had not chimed, all the time I had walked: it was that, I think, that had made the silence so strange. (Waters, 2002, p. 539).

Indeed, the conceptual ana-synthesis of the familiar reinforces the sense of the subjective, inviting the reader to reconsider ideas, images and concepts, through the narrator's eyes.

In conclusion, the use of first-person narration allowed authors to explore alternative ways of conveying the inner thoughts and emotions of a character,

enhancing the reader's experience and achieving closer proximity between her and the narrative. As Watkins (1999, p. 136) clarifies, "The decline of the omniscient narrator in fiction— often it was the author's voice— did not entail the end of narrators. Rather narrators joined the ranks of characters. They too became fallible, their perspectives assailable".

#### **4.4.2c THIRD PERSON NARRATION**

Refined by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* (2001), who aimed to render his emphatic authorial presence invisible, the third person narrator initially constituted the evolved mode of omniscience, entailing the account of the observer that was nonetheless no longer impersonal (Morrissette, 1962). As Morrissette (1962, p. 4) illustrated:

It was his effort to remove *himself* from the narrative that led Flaubert to the discovery that if the omniscient author is eliminated, the only remaining basis for the "point of view" that justifies the text has to be the *consciousness* of someone: a character in the novel, or a plausible observer placed at the realistic level of the action within the novel. (Morrissette, 1962, p. 4).

Third-person POV is classified by degrees of penetration and aesthetic distance (Card, 1988). It can serve as a type of omniscient (Tilford, 1968; Friedman, 1955), or an alternative option to first-person narration, substituted by the third-person pronoun (Tilford, 1968). Such segmentation can include third person limited, third person limited close, and third person multiple. The terms 'limited' and 'close' refer to the author's access and proximity to the character's mental states, and the distance analogously created between character and reader.

In the case of third person limited, which Tilford (1968, p. 311) describes as "restraining of omniscience", the author limits her access to only one of her characters, following her narrative path, respectively conveying information. The

narrator can still report facts outside of the character's temporality, events to come, as well as the actions of other characters which the surveyed character has no way of knowing, enhancing thus dramatic irony. As Lubbock (1968) elaborated,

The seeing eye is with somebody in the book, but its vision is reinforced; the picture contains more, becomes richer and fuller, because it is the author's as well as [her] creature's both at once. Nobody notices, but in fact there are now two brains behind the eye; and one of them is the author's who adopts and shares the *position* of [her] creature, and at the same time supplements [her] wit. (Lubbock, 1968, p. 258).

Examples include Cormac McCarthy's (2006) *The Road*, and George Orwell's (2004) *1984*.

In third person limited close, the author abandons her all-knowing status and assumes the identity of the character. Similar to first person, she becomes occupied by the mind-frame of one of the characters, observing, deducing and as such narrating through her eyes. Essentially, it is the third-person pronoun that comes to substitute for the first, although Lubbock (1968, p. 257) also highlighted that: "[T]here are no longer stretches, between the narrator and the events of which he speaks, a certain tract of time, across which the past must appear in a more or less distant perspective".

Objective presentation is once more replaced by subjective explanation and the conveyance of personal experience, and the author again assumes the role of an actress embodying her character, 'living' through her textual world. Without nominating it as such, Friedman (1955) explains:

[T]he reader perceives the action as it filters through the consciousness of one of the characters involved, yet perceives it *directly* as it impinges upon that consciousness, thus avoiding that removal to a distance necessitated by retrospective first-person narration. ... Mental awareness is thus dramatized directly instead of being reported and explained indirectly by the narrator's voice, much in the same way that words and gestures may be dramatized

directly (*scene*) rather than being summarized by the narrator (*panorama*). (Friedman, 1955, pp. 1164-1165).

Pondering over the concept of direct dramatisation, it should be noted that, in both direct and indirect discourse, the voice of the third-person limited narrator needs to echo that of the character, not the novelist. In other words, in the emergence of both dialogue and the reported thoughts, the reader must discern and recognise the character's idiosyncrasy and unique speech.

A characteristic example of third person close is Coetzee's (1999) *Disgrace*. Indeed, David Lurie's idiosyncrasy emerges in clear self-reflection:

That is his temperament. His temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body. Follow your temperament. It is not a philosophy, he would not dignify it with that name. It is a rule, like the Rule of St Benedict. He is in good health, his mind is clear. By profession he is, or has been, a scholar, and scholarship still engages, intermittently, the core of him. He lives within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means. Is he happy? By most measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of Oedipus: Call no man happy until he is dead. (Coetzee, 1990, pp. 2-3).

When Melanie seeks temporary refuge in his house, his thoughts on the way she settles become explicitly evident:

When he returns at noon, she is up, sitting at the kitchen table, eating toast and honey and drinking tea. She seems thoroughly at home. ... She gets up, carries her cup and plate to the sink (but does not wash them), turns to face him. ... He is vexed, irritated. She is behaving badly, getting away with too much; she is learning to exploit him and will probably exploit him further. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 36).

And later on, when he contemplates his own part on his daughter's chosen path:

He nods absentmindedly. Attractive, he is thinking, yet lost to men. Need he reproach himself, or would it have worked out like that anyway? From the day his daughter was born he has felt for her nothing but the most spontaneous, most unstinting love. Impossible she has been unaware of it.

Has it been too much, that love? Has she found it a burden? Has it pressed down on her? Has she given it a darker reading? (Coetzee, 1999, p. 99).

Coetzee establishes Lurie as a passion-driven scholar from the very beginning. Lurie's idiosyncratic stamp is consistently maintained throughout the novel, via the uniqueness of his voice, and those characteristics ascribed to his fictional personality.

In some cases, an author may choose to narrate her story through the perspective of more than one character. She may still designate one distinct protagonist, but will use a number of other characters to tell the story with their own subjective voice. Consequently, as Mullan (2006, pp. 55-56) notes, "There is no all-knowing narrator to see the truth". The narrative becomes a net of interconnected mind-frames, where individual parts complete the narrative mosaic. Examples of third multiple viewpoints include Katherine Webb's *The Unseen* (2011), and Kundera's (1998) *Farewell Waltz*.

The germination of the third person multiple allowed the novelist to experiment with her own so-called disappearance, exploring the human existence like never before. Moreover, it contributed to an encompassing conceptualisation, and as such exposition of the fictional character. Recounting a series of events through the unique perceptions of many fictional individuals, the novelist allowed her characters to become rounded and multi-dimensional, enhancing the reader's participation. As Mullan (2006, p. 56) indicates, "One ambition of the Novel has always been to show how the truth about human behaviour can depend on one's vantage point".

Furthermore, multiple third POV ensured the author's impartiality toward her characters, rendering such polyphony as multifarious as never before. As Kenneth Burke (1962) illustrated,

[T]o consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A ... It is by the approach through a variety of perspectives that we establish a character's reality. If we are in doubt as to what an object is, for instance, we deliberately try to consider it in as many different terms as its nature permits ... [W]e could say that characters possess *degrees of being* in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived. (Burke, 1962, p. 504).

And Harvey (1965, p. 52) believed that it is precisely such polyphony of perspectives that renders the novel different to any other art form, and the 'reality' of characters a legitimate concept.

The novelist is therefore given the opportunity to present her cast through many different angles. The illusion of this implemented subjectivity implies the same sense of the so-called objectivity of the omniscient narrator, albeit without the novelist's emphatic presence interrupting the narrative flow.

#### **4.4.2D THE CHOICE OF POINT OF VIEW**

So far, it has been agreed that the choice of POV will determine the reader's alignment with the fictional character. This is exactly the point Friedman (1955, p. 1180) makes, when he states that, "The question of effectiveness, therefore, is one of the suitability of a given technique for the achievement of certain kinds of effects, for each kind of story requires the establishment of a particular kind of an illusion to sustain it".

Irrespective of the author's dominating viewpoint, the perspectives and emotional framework of the other characters will emerge as the action unfolds. The main narrator's POV defines and denudes the idiosyncrasies of her surrounding

cast, if the author so wishes, even if this occurs under the subjective light of the narrator's own interpretations. This is what Watkins (1999, p. 118) calls "Degree of complexity of perspective of character". According to her theory, character can be revealed from an external perspective, an internal one, or an alternating combination of both.

The importance of consistency is once again evident. As Friedman (1955, p. 1182) emphasises, consistency "[S]ignifies that the parts have been adjusted to the whole, the means to the end, and hence the maximum effect has been rendered". I propose that consistency in point of view is achieved when the novelist maintains her narrator's perspective within the scene, without alterations in either degree or distance. This is often referred to informally as 'head-hopping'. Block (1985, p. 151) respectively warns that, "[W]hen you make this sort of viewpoint switch within a scene in a book where characters are shown from within, the result is apt to confusion— the reader can't remember who's thinking what— and a slowdown in the book's pace".

Art of course, cannot be moulded to the strict form of a set of rules. Novelists challenge the established every day, and as such, create innovative paths in the evolution of Creative Writing. Moody's shift of perspective has been already analysed. His method could be viewed as an artistic challenge to the norm, or a confusing deviation. In any case, the authorial consistency in narration ensures the reader's suspension of disbelief, renders her role as a constructor discreet, and ultimately, proffers the reader a vivid literary experience.

#### 4.4.3 ON RELIABLE AND UNRELIABLE NARRATORS

In his essay, *The Doer and the Deed*, Margolin (1986) analyses the narrative process according to which,

*Truthfulness* and *completeness* mean that all details of the reported act known to the reporter or at least believed by [her] to be true are mentioned, and none is omitted, replaced or transposed. ... If the reader does not know what the reporter actually knows/believes, the alethic dimension is truncated. However, if [s]he does know, a whole array of implications can immediately be drawn about the reporter: honest, truthful, exaggerator, liar, one-sided, etc. (Margolin, 1986, p. 221).

As it emerges, the intentions and experiential renditions of the narrator will define the reader's allegiance, as long as they convince her of their ingenuity and congruence. The reader will therefore infer the narrator's credibility and motivations, and will respectively determine her cognitive and emotional alignment to her. She will then decide whether the narrator is reliable or not as per her conclusions upon joining the pieces of the narrative mosaic together. Such pieces will emerge from the narrator's own account, the actions of the other characters, as well as the plot twists.

The term 'reliable' refers to the narrator who is believed to objectively guide the reader through the events of the story, unburdened by biases, partiality or self-interests. Harvey (1965, p. 75) defined reliable narrators as "[T]he spokesmen of reality— not the reality of our world but the reality as it figures in the world of the novel".

Respectively, 'unreliable' is the narrator whose attribution of events appears unconvincing, or distorted by the impact of strong emotions, personal prejudices and the urge to justify and over-intellectualise one's choices. Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 100) considers the unreliable narrator as "[O]ne whose rendering of the story

and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect". And (ibid): "[T]he main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, [her] personal involvement, and [her] problematic value-scheme".

A predominant example of an unreliable narrator is Humbert Humbert, in Nabokov's (2004) *Lolita*. Other examples include Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's (1994) *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Dr Faraday in Waters' (2009) *The Little Stranger*. Phelan (2005, pp. 49-53) initiates a taxonomy of unreliability, introducing the following categorisation: misreporting, misreading, misevaluating, underreporting, underreading and underregarding which he correspondingly connects to character and event, knowledge and perceptive abilities, and ethos and evaluation. [Her] taxonomy purports to clarify the misconception that the narrative and its elements in their entirety should be condemned by a single and rigid framework of unreliability or lack thereof, proposing instead that they should be evaluated in terms of its interchanging parts.

Yet any narrator that is assigned an active role inside the text— in other words, a fictional character— will live through and as such narrate the events she experiences in accordance with her own motivations, subjectivity and personal prejudices, much like a real person would. The last causation of unreliability in Rimmon-Kenan's exegesis is quite indicative.

It is worth examining what renders a value-scheme problematic. This is not to imply there are no universal ethics that surpass the subjectivity of cultural boundaries. However, the novelist is not to present the reader with an already tried and a priori condemned character, but rather proffer her exegesis of her perspectives, motivations and viewpoint. In other words, the author enters the

unreliable narrator's mind-frame, exposing the events through her own prism, leaving any moral judgments to the reader alone. As Booth (1961, p. 159) indicated, unreliability does not necessarily derive from the narrator's intention to lie, but rather, her misconceptions of herself, and of her surrounding reality.

Rimmon-Kenan (1983) brings another parameter to attention:

When the views of other characters consistently clash with the narrator's, suspicion may arise in the reader's mind; and when the narrator's language contains internal contradictions, double-edged images, and the like, it may have a boomerang effect, undermining the reliability of its user. (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 101).

And for Scholes and Kellogg (1966, p. 263), the unreliable narrator "lends an especially ironical cast to an entire narrative, laying on the reader a special burden of enjoyable ratiocination, as [s]he seeks to understand what the character telling the story cannot [her]self comprehend".

It is important to ponder over this last phrase. Whilst many would claim that the unreliable narrator is purposively misleading, Scholes and Kellogg's proposition for lack of comprehension encapsulates the principle of character-creation perfectly. Encaged inside her own subjectivity, the unreliable narrator fails to understand the social, ethical or intellectual bifurcations of her experience, conveying them through the misshapen prism of her own justifications and deductions.

A prime example is Sue in *Fingersmith* (2002). The first of the two protagonists to be introduced, she convinces the reader to follow her through the supposed germination and thereof evolution of her scheming against Maud, only to reveal that her perception of reality was a false one. Sue is indeed an unreliable

narrator, albeit to her own ignorance—what Mullan (2006, pp. 50-52) refers to as the ‘inadequate narrator’.

In *Disgrace* (1999), Lurie gives his own version of the events, which are quite distorted comparing to what everybody else sees. When his lawyer asks him about the allegations against him, he responds (p. 55): “True enough. I was having an affair with the girl”. What Lurie perceives as an ‘affair’, is nothing less than rape for the other characters. Yet Lurie is not an unreliable narrator per se.

This is not to dismiss the concept altogether. On the contrary, it constitutes a valuable tool for the novelist who wishes to demonstrate all the dimensions of human nature. As Scholes and Kellogg (1966, pp. 254-265) warn, “Unreliability itself requires a fairly thoroughgoing conception of reliability before it can be recognized and exploited in fiction. Its frequent use in modern fiction is also an aspect of the modern author’s desire to make the reader participate in the act of creation”.

The subjectivity that characterises all human beings, as prototypes to the fictional character, renders unreliability a powerful device in the attribution of realism in the contemporary novel. The manifestation of the unreliable narrator is indicative of human complexity, allowing the reader to creatively participate in the reconstruction of the narrative, by widening the frame of her hypotheses.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I analysed notions pertaining to authorial identity, intentions and function. As I demonstrated, the artistic shift that extricated her emphatic presence from the text, rendering her discreet, fathomed the range for reader participation and allowed for deeper explorations into the human condition.

Moreover, I proposed that the *raison d'être* of the novelist should not be defined by purposes of didacticism and moral education, arguing that she should instead focus on anthropocentric explorations, depicting her creative impressions through the text.

I also investigated issues of talent and craftsmanship, deducing that Creative Writing is above all an art of comprehension and creative expression. Notions of sensory experience, imagination and practical research were put under the microscope.

I proceeded to explore those dynamics governing the creative liaison between novelist and character. Initially, I touched on the concept of the character's free will, moving on to dissect its creative process.

Finally, I dwelled on issues of point-of-view, as well as reliability of narration, in order to examine contemporary narrative modes and their function.

This completes the stage of Conceptualisation, as per my proposed methodology. I shall now proceed to the next one, the Exposition itself.

## **5. CHARACTER AND THE NARRATIVE**

In this chapter, I initiate and analyse the phase of *Exposition* through the narrative. As I will argue, the writer uses her encompassing understanding of the character concept in order to consistently place her fictional characters in the text, based on her a priori understanding of the *Conceptualisation* stage.

Initially, I aim to conceptually define the notion of the fictional person, drawing from Theory of Person, Social Psychology, Trait Theories and Literary Criticism. I will proceed to propose and expand my own classification of characters. I will then embark upon an ontological investigation of the fictional character, dwelling on issues of uniqueness and psychological dimensions.

Finally, I will be exploring those dynamics that constitute the fictional identity, and continue to examine their synergetic connection with the narrative's other elements.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the contemporary character concept functions, rather than propose a specific method of construction.

## **5.1 NOTIONS OF PERSONALITY AND PERSONHOOD**

As previously argued, fiction can be correlated to reality in a certain, albeit indeterminable degree. I now propose that the fictional character is inspired by the many facets of her real-life counterpart, with the aim to render both the concept itself, and the functionality of all her constituent parts, comprehensive. My first step will be to nominally and contextually define the term 'character'.

### **5.1.1 THE PERSON SCHEMA**

A unified definition of the human person is yet to be established within philosophical, anthropological and psychological societies (Rorty, 1976). The question of what constitutes a person has been complicated by a range of issues,

the analysis of which lie outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, I aim to establish a common denominator among theories, or else, an outline of personhood that can serve as the foundation upon which the fictional character can be built.

Charles Taylor (1985) notes:

Philosophers consider that to be a person in the full sense you have to be an agent with a sense of yourself as an agent, a being which can thus make plans for your life, one who also holds values in virtue, of which different such plans seem better or worse, and who is capable of choosing between them. (Taylor, 1985, p. 257).

For Vivien Burr (2002, pp. 7-8), the person is the “[F]ree-thinking moral agent with its own unique thoughts, beliefs and values, an individual contained within its own psychological space, separated from material reality and from other individuals”.

And Jonathan Glover (1988, p.88) considers that, “[A] person is someone who has the self-conscious thoughts expressed by ‘I’”.

Reflection on those definitions produces a list of prerequisites upon which the foundation of personhood can be built. For example, Smith (1995) proposes the concept of ‘the person schema’, constituted by the following set of capacities: a continuous physical corpus; a perceptual ability and the awareness of oneself; intentional states; emotions; the ability of verbal communication; the ability to act and as such evaluate; and the existence of traits and attributes within the system.

As Smith (1995, p. 110) explains, “The person schema ... represents a conceptual structure central to human cognition in general”.

Daniel Dennett (1976, pp. 177-194) has also analysed six conditions of personhood, moving on to inspect their efficacy or lack thereof: rationality,

intentionality, reception of attitudes/stances and thereof reciprocation, verbal communication and self-consciousness.

A further investigation would no doubt produce yet more variations and similar propositional sets. For the purpose of my analysis, I propose that a basic yet sufficient corpus of the person schema may entail, without necessarily being limited to:

- A physical embodiment.
- A proper name as a point of (self-) reference and (self-) determination.
- The capacity to perceive and as such reason.
- Intentional states.
- The ability to self-reflect, evaluate and as such react.
- The capacity to communicate.

This list of capacities should characterise any entity that qualifies as a person. The extent of their applicability constitutes the person's individuality. For example, as Jon Elster (1983, p. 1) explains, "The connotations of the word 'rational' range from the formal notions of efficiency and consistency to the substantive notions of autonomy or self-determination".

For Gordon W. Allport (1937, p.1), "[One's] outstanding characteristic ... is [her] individuality. [S]e is a unique creation of the forces of nature. Separated spatially from all other[s]... [s]he behaves throughout [her] own particular span of life in [her] own distinctive fashion". And as he moved on to add,

In addition to separateness and uniqueness a human being displays psychological individuality, an amazingly complex organization comprising [her] distinctive habits of thought and expression, [her] attitudes, traits and interests, and [her] own peculiar philosophy of life. It is the total manifold

psycho-physical individuality, commonly referred to as personality. (Allport, 1937, p. 24).

I would now like to embark on a parenthetical discussion of the term 'personality'.

### **5.1.2 PERSON, PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER**

Even though the notions of 'person', 'personality', 'self', 'character' and 'identity' appear to be contextually similar, they acquire different epistemological meanings under the scope of different disciplinary fields. I therefore find it essential to clarify and justify the reasons behind my selection of certain terms.

In the literary postscript of her collected essays, Amelie Rorty (1976) takes the time to embark upon an elaborate analysis of the various terms, because, as she explains,

"Heroes," "characters," "protagonists," "actors," "agents," "persons," "souls," "selves," "figures," "individuals" are all distinguishable. Each inhabits a different space in fiction and in society ... The explanation of the recent concentration on the criteria for personal identity, rather than character identity or individual identity, is not that it is logically prior to the other concepts in that area, but that it affords a certain perspective on human agency. (Rorty, 1976, pp. 301-302).

In her work, *Concepts of Person*, Catherine McCall (1990, p. 7) proposes a distinction among the terms 'person', 'self' and 'human being', as bearing different, yet interrelated meanings for one's perception of the individual. According to her analysis (1990), the 'person' refers to the specific way an individual is understood by her social surroundings, and can therefore only be used in a social context; on the other hand, 'self' pertains to one's awareness of one's existence, intentional states and actions; finally, 'human being' refers to the individual's existence as a biological entity of a certain species.

Adjusting McCall's analysis to mine, one can speak of the fictional person, as perceived by the novelist, the readers and the other characters; the fictional self corresponds to the illusion of a semiotic existence with a virtual consciousness; and 'human being' correlates to the fictional agent, as the entity populating the narrative world. All three notions are interrelated, and cannot exist individually, but only be encompassed within the realm of the person system. The following quote by Price (1983) explicates this further:

If we are asked to recount our intellectual history, many episodes will remind us that our intellectual life is not autonomous, but affected, even shaped, by other elements of the self. ... The self is rarely a simple, massive conception. More often we are drawing out of it those aspects that meet attention because they serve some immediate purpose. The purpose is usually a social one, set by our regulations with others, directed by their claims or demands upon us. (Price, 1983, p. 39).

Expanding Price's account, a person's attempt at self-definition cannot occur outside the awareness of her social existence, as it is precisely the latter that motivates and even shapes such a definition. Therefore, the 'self' may indeed reflect esoteric states of being, but it does not exist separately to its external surroundings. Moreover, the part of the fictional self the novelist chooses to reveal within the limited chronological framework of her narrative is motivated by the emphasis on this or that segment of her intellectual history, shaped by the social role assigned to her.

On a parallel note, Taylor (1985, p. 265) regards self-awareness as a necessary prerequisite of the personhood condition. Its products, however, can only be determined by an understanding of the governing principles within one's existence, her sense of belonging, and a thereof perception of her environment.

Allport (1937, p. 47) also stated that ‘personality’ cannot be monopolised by any discipline or school of thought, and defined it (ibid, 48) as “[T]he dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine [her] unique adjustments to [her] environment”. As he explained, ‘dynamic’ refers to the constant regulation and adjustments within the system. The concept of ‘psychophysical systems’ entails (ibid, 48) “Habits, specific and general attitudes, sentiments and dispositions of other orders”.

The notion of personality as elaborated by Allport will also accommodate my analytical framework. Firstly, this is because I view character as an organisation of interrelated components that change, evolve and are reorganised according to miscellaneous plot elements; in other words, a virtual personality with dynamic organisation. Moreover, the ‘psychophysical systems’ constitute some of the concept's fundamental attributes, navigating the character’s (re-)actions towards different directions as per the narrative’s stimuli and logical outcomes. And even though a textual construct cannot entail actual biological and psychological dimensions, the novelist’s creativity and intellect ascertain its virtual personality is conveyed in coherence. Burr (2002) defines the coherent personality as follows:

[W]e do not normally feel ourselves to be a random mixture of incompatible or inconsistent attributes. We certainly recognise inner conflicts, and can feel pulled in different directions by different sides of our nature, but this is experienced as a problem and one that needs resolving back into coherence. We see our actions as the outcome of rational deliberation and decision-making – at least we feel that it *ought* to be so. (Burr, 2002, p. 4).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I examined those parameters that render a narrative consistent, as well as the possible outcomes of an unpremeditated inconsistency. Based on my findings, I provided an exegesis of what renders a

fictional character lifelike, and consequently, consistent. Applying Burr's account to my conclusions, the coherence of a fictional personality refers to the internal congruence of its constituent components, as they form and become modified by the process of their dynamic organisation.

Put differently, despite the anticipated shifts in the personality organisation's order, modifications as reflected in the character's actions and choices should not bewilder the reader. This does not mean that the character must be constantly predictable, but rather that any alteration in her status should be either consequential or deducible, even though the author has chosen not to emphasise its cues. Aristotle's (1996) concept of the 'consistently inconsistent' character has already been mentioned. Since the human personality is a constantly evolving system, causally-triggered shifts may lead to the formation of new patterns, and even attributes. In that respect, acting out of character does not indicate a dysfunctional personality, but simply unpredictable behaviour. As Kupperman (1991) explains:

[S]omeone's character may be the engraving of ways of thinking and acting which have become predictable but which do not preclude a person's acting out of character. If someone acts out of character, there still may be a cause of this behaviour within her or [her] character, that is, the character may be such that certain forms of behaviour that are uncharacteristic of that person become less unlikely in circumstances X,Y, and Z. (Kupperman, 1991, p. 4).

I therefore suggest that when a fictional character is acting 'out of character' she manifests 'behaviour' that is simply less expected by the reader, rather than altogether irrational; in other words, behaviour that can be explained by internal motivations, or the effect of external events.

It is precisely this deviation from the utterly predictable that gives the character lifelike dimensions; or, as Chatman (1972, p. 63) phrased it, “some respite from the relentless needs of the plot”. The concept of the fictional character’s behaviour will be analysed later in this chapter, but for now it should suffice to mention that it entails her choices and actions occurring in the narrative according to a logical thread of reactions and circumstances. Margolin (1986) highlights:

If mental attributes are altered although neither knowledge nor type of situation have changed, the change may remain unmotivated. ... If the change in mental attributes is a directed vector (goes only one way), one may speak of change of personality: crisis, development, degeneration, etc., motivated by internal factors, mechanisms or events (identity crisis, illumination, etc.) (Margolin, 1986, P. 217).

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Elena Hood decides to participate in the key-party and leave with Jim Williams, while her husband is passed out in the bathroom. Thus far, she has been portrayed as an introverted, conservative person, trapped in herself and her marriage. Yet it is her past, her husband’s infidelity, and his drunken shame when he competes for Janey Williams at the party, that ultimately drive her to act out of character. Once the deed is done, she retreats to her predictable self:

They each fell into their own remorse. They were just neighbours again, if they had ever been anything else. Elena felt cheap and isolated. It had been as romantic as a pap smear or a home breast exam. She would rather wait in a gas-rationing line; she would rather watch war footage; she would rather – she was shocked to learn – clean up after the drunken Benjamin Hood. She let herself do certain things because of fashion, though she didn’t think of herself as fashionable in any way, and fashion brought the unexpected along with it. (Moody, 1994, pp. 177-178).

In *Disgrace* (Coetzee, 1999, p. 232), David Lurie, an arrogant and proud scholar, kneels in front of Melanie Isaac’s family in pursuit of forgiveness: “With careful ceremony he gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor. Is that enough? he thinks. Will that do? If not, what more?”

This is indeed an out-of-character moment, and Lurie is aware of this spontaneous decision as he is in the act of materialising it. The setting, the ambience of the house, his ambiguous emotions toward the Isaacs, and all things past trigger it, without rendering the character unconvincingly surprising.

## **5.2 THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER AS A VIRTUAL PERSON**

So far, I have examined issues of personhood, personality and self, in order to adjust them to the concept of the fictional character. Before I investigate the dynamics of such applicability, I shall discuss the notion of ‘character’ itself, as employed within the literary field.

### **5.2.1 THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER: CONCEPT AND FUNCTION**

In *The Art of the Novel* (1988), Kundera writes that,

All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the self. As soon as you create an imaginary being, a character, you are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self? How can the self be grasped? It is one of those fundamental questions on which the novel, as novel, is based. (Kundera, 1988, p. 23).

The metaphysical implications of this question of course can be innumerable. Theories of personhood and the self are inexhaustible, and individuated responses are further complicated by principles of science, theology, various schools of psychology and so on. Kundera himself (1988, pp. 33-34) resists the idea that the fictional character is a simulation of a human being, but rather speaks of “an experimental self with an existential problem”—referring thus to the type of narrative Harvey (1965, p. 134) described as “the subjective novel”. Different views have been held by various writers throughout the history of literature, and this is precisely where the creative attribution of each comes into the equation. With that

in mind, I shall nonetheless attempt to produce an encompassing analysis of the concept, beginning with my own definition:

The fictional character is the textual object that encompasses the functions of initiating and reciprocating action within the narrative, thus weaving the thread of the plot.

As already mentioned, the debate between supporters of the primacy of action upon character, and vice versa, is one of the most notable in the history of literary criticism (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983; Chatman, 1978). Depending on the author's purposes, the character will either assume the uncomplicated role of the action-carrier, or will beget and receive it as per her own constructed idiosyncrasy; after all, there exist the so-called 'character-driven', as well as the 'plot-driven' stories; or, described by Rimmon-Kenan (1983, pp. 35-36), the 'psychological' narratives, and the 'a-psychological' ones.

I disagree with the purpose of this dissention altogether, suggesting that the point in question should not be whether the plot shaped the character or the character shaped the plot. Rather, I propose that character and action co-exist in a bidirectional mode within the narrative system, and that the gravity of research should be placed on the dynamics of such interchange, rather than the pseudo-dilemma of superiority. As Chatman (1978) asserts,

[T]he question of "priority" or "dominance" is not meaningful. Stories only exist where both events and existents occur. There cannot be events without existents. And though it is true that a text can have existents without events (a portrait, a descriptive essay), no one would think of calling it a narrative. (Chatman, 1978, p. 113).

Similarly, Egri (1960, p. 29) indicated that "In a well-constructed play or story, it is impossible to denote just where premise ends and story of character begins". In any case, the production of novels does not come out of a blueprint. The narrative

is a novelist's creative imprint on the page, and as such, her cognitive hierarchies, her overall perception of the world and its functions, are reflected in the text. The following definition of the novel by Kundera (1988, p. 142) is quite indicative: "[The novel is] the great prose form in which an author thoroughly explores, by means of experimental selves (characters), some great themes of existence". And yet Kundera (ibid, p. 23) also believes that, "It is through the action that [one] steps forth from the repetitive universe of the everyday where each person resembles every other person; it is through action that he distinguishes [herself] from others and becomes an individual".

Whether our actions determine our identity, or they derive from it is not a new question. This is, however, where the substantial distinction between reality and fiction lies. As discussed, the character acts under the attributed illusion of a free-will, rather than the imminent effect of her own choices, or even the predispositions attributed to her by nature, which, in their randomness, come to complete the real person in her entirety. Mudrick (1968) commented:

The fictional event does not terminate in itself, its aim is to ascertain the shape and meaning of those individual lives, and of their relations with one another, that are created by, and with steadily increasing salience figure in, and may therefore ultimately be said to constitute, the total action. (Mudrick, 1986, p. 105).

Kupperman (1991) links character to behaviour, and defines the notion of having 'no character' as follows:

[T]o have a character is to act in such a way that the person one is plays a major role in any explanation of one's behavior. To have no character is to act in such a way that one's behaviour might be viewed as (at least approximately) the product of forces acting on one (Kupperman, 1991, p. 7).

Kupperman's theorising may serve as a solid platform for the discussion of the fictional character's principal qualities. Her personality co-exists within the textual sphere of created, received and reciprocated events. The conditional sets of personhood manifest in action triggered by the character's actions and reactions in external stimuli, i.e. narrative elements. A character that appears to float through, rather than stir, the story's events is lifeless.

It has been established that the fictional character cannot exist without a referential relationship to the human being, and that the concept is founded on the idiosyncratic imprint of the real person. As Schwarz (1989, p. 90) asserts, "Character is an extended personification or prosopopeia, a sign endowed with human attributes". Similarly, Ferrara (1974, p. 250) defines character as "[A] partial or total, stylized, rationalized and interpreted reconstruction of a human being capable of fulfilling itself in a story". And for Smith (1995, p. 31), "[T]he spectator 'projects' a schema (initially the person schema) and revises it on the basis of a particular text". Kundera (1988, p. 115) agrees that, "Every situation is of man's making and can only contain what man contains; thus one can imagine that the situation (and all its metaphysical implications) has existed as a human possibility "for a long time".

This is the point Christopher Booker (2004) makes in his study *The Seven Basic Plots*. As he elucidates, the inexhaustible possibilities of human nature as depicted through fiction fundamentally abide by a small number of plots, albeit with their own degree of deviation. Booker's point also illuminates the universal character of fiction. And so, in this unified platform of human pathos, individuality emerges and is as such shaped by the interaction with the developing reciprocated events.

I shall now investigate how those two predominant narrative elements emerge from one another.

### **5.2.2 CHARACTER AND CHARACTERISATION: CONSTRUCTION VS. EXPOSITION**

One frequently comes across the terms ‘character’, ‘characterisation’, or an interchange between the two (Palmer, 2002; Lothe, 2000; Schwarz, 1989; Garvey, 1978). For Schwarz (1989, p. 99), “[W]hen we use the term “character”, the emphasis is upon a fully developed person function in diverse social and family situations, although the degree of externalization varies from text to text and from period to period“. Characterisation, on the other hand, is viewed (ibid) as the “[P]resentation of the trope of personification within the structural context of an imagined ontology, an ontology that is ever-changing through time”.

Analogously, Garvey (1978, p. 63) differentiates between ‘identification of character’ and ‘characterization’, proposing that the former is limited to the assignment of names or general descriptive sentences, while the latter pertains to the attribution of traits and qualities which add descriptive depth.

And for Paisley Livingston (1996, p. 151), “Characterization ... should be understood as a species of intentional action.

I propose that ‘character’ signifies the stage of Conceptualisation, while ‘characterisation’ is another way to refer to Exposition. The process of character construction entails the theoretical framework discussed so far – the understanding that links character to the reader, the author, and the source of her inspiration, the real human being – as well as the comprehension of the dynamics that determine her function, to be analysed below. Characterisation, on the other hand, is the process according to which the author puts the product of the aforementioned

deductions on paper, or, as Lothe (2000, p. 81) explains, the way “the characters are introduced, shaped and developed”. Phelan (1989) encapsulates this by differentiating between character ‘dimensions’ and ‘functions’:

A dimension is an attribute a character may be said to possess when a character is considered in isolation from the work in which he or she appears. A function is a particular application of that attribute made by the text through its developing structure. In other words, dimensions are converted into functions by the *progression* of the work. Thus, every function depends upon a dimension, but not every dimension will necessarily correspond to a function. (Phelan, 1989, p. 9).

Indeed, the constructed identity of a fictional character will unfold in various points throughout the narrative, revealing its constituent parts along the way, reforming and evolving until the conclusion of the story. As Schwarz (1989) indicates,

Characterization depends on the author’s conscious and uncharacteristic decisions; it is a structure of effects perceived by the reader in her ... process of reading. ... The relation between character—human voices and actions—the formal and linguistic embodiment of character—is dynamic, ever changing, inextricable, and messy. (Schwarz, 1989, p. 98).

I have already proposed that the better the novelist’s knowledge about her characters, the clearer and more concise they will emerge in the narrative. Not all such knowledge is to make it to the text, though.

For James Frey (1987, p. 2), a novelist should reveal only those elements of inner life that will account for a character’s actions and motivations in the course of the plot. One may argue that this recommendation does not take into consideration the contextual diversity and aims one finds across types of fiction, and as such sounds more formulaic than helpful. I counter that detail which is both exhaustive and irrelevant can render a text of any type incoherent, and difficult for the reader to follow. This is the process Henry James (2001, p. 861) referred to when he spoke

of 'solidity of specification': "The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel ... All life solicits [the author], and to "render" the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business".

Price (1983) also writes that,

Every realistic novel gives us innumerable details: how people look, what they wear, where they live. ... They give us the air of reality, the illusion of life, without which the novel can hardly survive. Yet clearly there can be no end to such specification if we allow it full range. (Price, 1983, p. 24).

Indeed, one of the author's most important tasks is to select which details to use and which to withhold from the plethora at her disposal. The information revealed will aid the reader towards reconstructing the text in terms of coherence, believability and narrative logic; the details to be left out are exactly the ones the reader is called to complete, by following the author's cues. As Chatman (1972, p. 67) asserted, "[T]here are qualities or existents in the characters beyond the merely relational ones and ... we begin early in the game to predict what they will do on the basis of what they are, as well as vice versa". It is those elements that form the imaginary dimensions of the fictional world, and render its inhabitants integrated figures that can be perceived, and even related to, by the reader, forming, as Garvey explains (1978, p. 65) "an integral and independent part of the narrative base component".

The selection of the conveyed information, both quality and quantity-wise, is bilateral. The first part pertains to the authorial creativity and judgment. It is up to her style, strategy and aims to decide what to reveal, and what to leave to her reader's imagination and deductions. To quote Chatman (1972, p. 77), "The author

must somehow be granted the right to the decision about what and how much to include: it is not only the kinds of statements [her] 'system' permits [her], but which of these [s]he actually elects to make”.

The other side has to do with the narrative and its dynamics. Not all events and plot elements carry the same significance, and not all members of the fictional cast have been assigned the same roles. It is the latter that I will analyse next.

### **5.2.3 A CLASSIFICATION OF CHARACTERS**

Price (1983, p. 37) writes that, “If characters exist for the sake of novels, they exist only as much as and in the way that the novel needs them”. Indeed, the number of fictional persons that appear in a novel varies from work to work, and their selection and thereof introduction is based on their function within the narrative. Such function is usually referred to as character typology (Galef, 1993; Seger, 1990), and encompasses concepts such as the protagonist, the antagonist, major and minor characters, etc.

I have already presented Forster's (1974) distinction between 'round' and 'flat' characters, which attempts to classify a novel's cast by means of descriptive depth, as well as its primary function within the plot. Such differentiation is, however, too generalised and not introspective enough for the purpose of this thesis and, if applied to twenty first century fiction, it may even encourage the creation of stereotypes. As David Galef (1993, p. 6) points out, “Even when a minor character is truly minor because of [her] insignificant role, [s]he may not come across as flat. Rather, [s]he may appear to have unplumbed depths, mainly because the light of exposition never fully illuminates [her]”.

Schwarz (1989) makes a similar attempt by distinguishing between:

[C]artoon, caricature, and character—moving from the least to the most mimetic form of characterization. While fully developed characters change more than cartoons or caricatures, all characters are realized in partially mimetic, partially aesthetic dimensions by the action of plot presented by language. (Schwarz, 1989, pp. 99-100).

Schwarz's distinction is more encompassing, but not expanded enough to capture the detailed mechanics of a novel's cast. Harvey's (1965, pp. 55-58) categorisation of protagonists, background, and intermediate characters seems closer to the aims of my anatomy, which nonetheless entails further analysis.

I therefore propose a distinction of characters as per the *raison d'être* in the spatio-temporal framework of the work, as well as the duration of their presence, and its significance for the plot and the other characters. Such criteria are not mutually exclusive, but rather interlinked, affecting and shaping the thread of the narrative.

Speaking of his classification of the 'fully developed' characters, Schwarz (1989) suggests that,

[They] are understood both in terms of what they typify and as individuals within psychological, sociological, and historical dimensions; their individualizing qualities are what engages our attention and separates them from others and from the basic plot. (Schwarz, 1989, p. 100).

This proposition may serve as a basis for my own hierarchy, which entails:

- a) The primary characters: the protagonist, the antagonist, and the anti-hero.
- b) The principal characters,
- c) The minor characters, and
- d) The extras.

Egri (1960, p. 106) spoke of the "pivotal character, without whom ... there is no play. The pivotal character is the one who creates conflict and makes the play

move forward. The pivotal character knows what [s]he wants. Without [her] the story flounders ... in fact, there is no story”.

Similarly, Mills (2006, p. 114) explains that, “[O]ne character’s point of view will dominate, and we call this character the *protagonist*. We see through their eyes, get to know their speech, attitude, physique; in other words it is their rhythm which claims our attention the most”.

In a novel, characters’ lives become directly or indirectly entangled, forwarding the plot. The protagonist is the character whose particular life is placed under an illuminating spotlight in a particular moment, a moment which lasts throughout the novel. As Stein (1995, p. 49) writes, “The plots of individual books are chapters in [the characters’] lives”. The protagonist, thus, is the character whose thoughts, motivational forces, actions, their reciprocations are narrated above all others. There need not be only one protagonist. Many novels are focused on the lives of two, or even more characters, with equal exposition of detail.

This is the case in both *Fingersmith* (2002), with Sue Trinder and Maud Lilly as the two protagonists; and in *The Icestorm* (1994), where the Hood family—Benjamin, Elena, Wendy and Paul—all assume primary roles.

Against the protagonist, usually, stands the antagonist. Some writers (Brayfield, 1996; Stein, 1995; Seger, 1990) use ‘villain’ instead, a term which I dismiss as misleading. The function of the villain is to stand as the opposite pole in a moral axis, emphasising the virtue of her opponent, the protagonist, and causing the reader's antipathy, presupposing an ethological dimension which denudes conflict of its finer threads. As Kundera (1988, p. 18) underlines, “The novel’s spirit is the spirit of complexity. Every novel says to the reader: “Things are not as simple

as you think". That is the novel's eternal truth..." Smith (1995) respectively asserts that,

The graduated moral structure is characterized by a spectrum of moral gradations rather than a binary opposition of values. Characters are not sorted into two camps, the good and the evil, but rather occupy a range of positions between the two poles. ... The more complex a person's interiority, the less she can function as a personalized emblem of a clear moral state. (Smith, 1995, pp. 207-214).

In fact, the novel can be precisely the medium to explore character movement along this spectrum. The term 'antagonist' stands for exactly that, the conflicting force that dictates evolution and development. Much like the protagonist, she is another textual person in the narrative world with her own constructed ideas, desires and goals. When the two personalities cross, conflict arises, triggering the plot's mechanisms.

Speaking of "[P]rojects and categorical desires with which [a person] identifies", philosopher Bernard Williams (1978, p. 211) noted that "[s]he wants these things, finds [her] life bound up with them, and ... they propel [her] forward thus they give [her], in a certain sense, a reason for living his life". Analogously, the *raison d'être* of an antagonist in a novel is the acquisition of her own projects and desires.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), for example, the antagonist is Richard Rivers, also known as 'Gentleman', who involves both Sue and Maud in his schemes for personal gain. Initially, the two girls seem to be placed in an antagonistic relationship themselves. As the plot progresses, however, they both strive to be free of the tricks played against them, and are united, albeit unintentionally, by the same hatred for Rivers.

It is worth noting that the role of the antagonist does not even have to be assumed by a separate character. Often, the protagonist may have to face her own self, called to resolve her internal conflict, in a self-revelatory catharsis (Varotsis, 2013). In *The Icestorm* (1994), the characters have to fight their own demons, their idiosyncrasies as built by choices and circumstances, and the consequences that have shaped their family lives. Benjamin Hood fights his alcoholism and infidelity, constantly trying to redefine himself through choice and regret. His wife, Elena is perpetually bound by familial strings— her parents when she was younger, and now her husband and children—struggling to escape her reality, and along with it, herself.

Thus emerged the concept of the anti-hero, a pivotal figure lingering between the two aforementioned roles, whose moral values and actions the reader is likely to disapprove of on a surface level. The deeper into her the narration takes one though, the more complex she is revealed to be, representing the perplexity of the eternal existential self.

For Mullan (2006, p. 91), the anti-hero is the “[P]rotagonist who draws us into sympathy despite doing things that should appal us”. I propose that the anti-hero is not designed to provoke the reader’s allegiance, but is nonetheless able to capture her in alignment for the entirety of her journey. Moment by moment, the reader may find herself immersed in the anti-hero’s personal journey, developing in the process ambiguous feelings and thoughts, yet surrendering her second self like she would do to any other character. Unlike the caution-triggering uncertainty of real encounters, fiction offers the opportunity of gradual experimentation and comprehension, without the sense of self-exposure to danger. Without the

prevalence of self-defence mechanisms, curiosity and imagination are freely at work (Smith, 1995, p. 234).

This prerogative of distanced examination is the key to the alignment with the anti-hero. Due to her multidimensional reflections, she may appear intriguing, augmenting the reader's interest in the most delicate constituents of the human condition. The dynamics behind the anti-hero's existence, her speculated history, the clues given and those left for the reader to hypothesise upon, render her one of the most multifarious elements in literature. She may consciously act in a calculating manner, or merely submit to the pathos of her human-like existence. The following quotation on self-deception by Jonathan Glover (1988) illustrates this point:

The way we assess evidence usually depends on our standards of plausibility, which are rarely spelled out in any detail. This leaves room for manoeuvre which can be exploited by unconscious preferences for the more comfortable belief. At the time there need be no awareness of the bias: we are not consciously rejecting evidence, but unconsciously discounting it. (Glover, 1988, p. 29).

Coetzee (1999) presents a prime portrait of an anti-hero in the character of David Lurie. Indeed, the professor's self-perception becomes evident from the first sentence (p. 1): "For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well". The romanticised self-image of the passionate scholar whose temperament cannot be tamed explains the lack of inhibitions in his deeds. When Soraya, the prostitute, disappears, Lurie pays a detective to track her down, and calls her at home (p. 13). His surprise at her direct rejection is indicative of his oblivion at the impropriety of his actions. Then Lurie meets Melanie Isaacs, and is too engrossed in her, and too absorbed in himself, to

appreciate the weight of his actions. Upon imposing himself on her, he thinks (1999):

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 32).

And later on (p. 37): "If he does not sense in her a fully sexual appetite, that is only because she is still young". Even when he is called to face the committee, he still does not see the cynicism of his intrusion (p. 67): "I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year old divorcee [sic] at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros". When the reporters ask him whether he has regretted his actions, he responds (p. 72): "I was enriched by the experience". And yet, Lurie does not try to justify the situation against better judgment; his words reflect his perceptions. As the novel unfolds, he is forced to re-evaluate them, albeit always carrying his idiosyncratic mosaic with him. Lurie's anger at the assumption that he cannot speak for his daughter's experience when she's raped is indicative:

*You weren't there. You don't know what happened.* He is baffled. Where, according to Bev Shaw, according to Lucy, was he not? In the room where the intruders were committing their outrages? Do they think he does not know what rape is? Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter? What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining? Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is? Whatever the answer, he is outraged, outraged at being treated like an outsider. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 187).

Indeed, Lurie is outraged at being denied the prerogative to empathise, to support, and to constitute a part of what has happened. At the same time, he refuses to acknowledge his own situation, his ignorance of how rape is not confined by the interpretational boundaries of culture, and to walk in Mr Isaacs' shoes.

Even when he visits the Isaacs' home to apologise and meets Desirée Isaacs, he cannot help his own thoughts:

He does not say, I know your sister, know her well. But he thinks: fruit of the same tree, down probably to the most intimate detail. Yet with differences: different pulsing of the blood, different urgencies of passion. The two of them in the same bed: an experience fit for a king. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 219).

In the Q&A section following her novel, *A Half Forgotten Song* (2012), Katherine Webb speaks of her character, Dimity:

I'm always interested in the grey areas of human behaviour and morality—the fact that good people sometimes do bad things, and vice versa; and that none of us really knows what we might be capable of doing under extreme circumstances. With Dimity I wanted readers to be able to see why she ended up the way she did, and perhaps understand how desperate she had become and why. (Webb, 2012, p. 481).

Other examples of the anti-hero include Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (Nabokov, 2004), Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Highsmith, 2008), and Alexander DeLarge in *A Clockwork Orange* (Burgess, 2013).

A plethora of other characters may be frequently, discreetly or barely present in the narrative, serving different purposes. For most writers, a basic categorisation between major and minor characters is sufficient. The acceptance of their significance however is unanimous. As Galef (1993, p. 1) notes, “[T]hey carry out much of the mechanics of the fiction, so that understanding how an author deploys [them] helps one understand how the work is put together”. Galef (1993, p. 11) categorises by means of plot, theme, space and action, and dissects (ibid, p. 12) his own typology of the minors into ‘cameos’, ‘bit parts’, and ‘minor roles’.

Proposing my own classification of secondary figures, I respectively nominate them as principal and minor characters, and extras.

Principals are the characters encircling the primary figures. Their presence is essential, both as expositors of the protagonist's and the antagonist's personas, but also as significant plot schemata—the type of character Harvey (1965, p. 63) called 'the ficelle'. Their actions generate actions and reactions, either as direct acts, or indirectly by triggering external stimuli. They also provide strong contrasts with the primaries, highlighting them further (Seeger, 1990).

In *The Icestorm* (1994), the Hoods are constantly defined by the Williams' family. Jim, Janey, Mike and Sandy are all primary figures in the lives of Ben, Elena and Wendy, reflecting their choices, driving their actions, determining their moods. Similarly, in *Fingersmith* (2002), Mrs Sucksby and Christopher Lilly have shaped Sue and Maud's pasts, and as such, account for their future actions.

And in *Disgrace* (1999), Lucy Lurie becomes the epicentre around which her father's life becomes entangled, reformed, and even re-evaluated.

Principal characters should be complex enough to appear believable, but not outlined in every detail so as to overshadow the primaries. As Braine (1974, p. 61) warns,

Pay too much attention to them and you confuse the reader. Treat them as extras, anonymous waiters and taxi-drivers and shop assistants, and the novel becomes dead whilst they're there. For in real life they are actual beings; if you have dealings with them, you register their appearance and voice. The character concerned sees and hears them; so must the reader. (Bairne, 1974, p. 61).

Indeed, the construction of the principal characters should entail enough information for the author to be able to select and as such expose what she renders essential. In this case, her focus will not lie on those characters per se, but rather on

the effects of their presence on the primaries. Their existence is supportive, not predominant. Price (1983) underlines that,

We do not live our lives among complex personalities, nor do we live all of our conscious lives *as* complex personalities. We rely on other people maintaining their roles, and we feel an obligation to do the same ... There is ... a flexibility in role-playing that makes it work without sheer dehumanization. But much of our lives depends on others' maintaining their roles and requiring of us only so much of a response as the role itself demands. (Price, 1983, p. 41).

Similarly to the predominant figures, the exposition of principal characters should extend to an adequacy of apprehension. Their differentiation from the primary characters lies upon the extent of focus. In *The Icestorm* (1994) Paul Hood is defined by Libbets Casey's circumstances:

Libbets was crying as he helped her in. It was the day after Thanksgiving and her family had gone away and hadn't invited her. They had gone away on a ski trip. Paul saw her predicament, and his own. He wished he could have spirited her to safety like a Human Torch, like a roadrunner. Abandonment was in the parlors of America, in the clubs, in the weather. He wanted to abandon her, too, this vomiting girl. He loved her and he wanted to abandon her. It was 10:28. (Moody, 1994, pp. 186-187).

And Mike Williams is the only character who, unlike everybody else, sees something beautiful and extraordinary in the ice-storm. It is his adventurous nature that renders him different to all other members of the cast, alas, ultimately leading him to his death.

Everywhere New Canaan was sheathed in this ice, in this coating that seemed to render the stuff of his everyday life beautiful again – magic, dangerous, and new. He recognized trees in a way he never had, recognized the vast, arterial movement of roads in his neighbourhood, recognized the gallant and stalward quality of telephone poles, recognized even the warm support, in the occasional candlelit window, of community. Man against the elements, man. Everything was repackaged, sealed into a cellophane wrap that assured singularity and quality control. Mike was happy. (Moody, 1994, p. 210).

In *Fingersmith* (2002) Maud proffers a sufficient account of her uncle's eccentric and cruel idiosyncrasy, as well as his delusional self-perception as a 'scholar', in various points of her narration:

Should I fidget...—should I cough, or sneeze—then my uncle will come and snap at my fingers with the rope of silk-covered beads. His patience has curious lapses, after all; and though he claims to be free of a desire to harm me, he harms me pretty often. (Waters, 2002, p. 195).

[I]f I should be so unlucky as to let fall a fork, or to jar my knife against my plate, then he will raise his face and fix me with a damp and terrible eye. ... Then he has my knife taken away, and I must eat with my fingers. The dishes he prefers being all bloody meats, and hearts, and calves' feet, my kid-skin gloves grow crimson. (Waters, 2002, p. 196).

The world calls it pleasure. My uncle collects it—keeps it neat, keeps it ordered, on guarded shelves; but keeps it strangely—not for its own sake, no, never for that; rather, as it provides fuel for the satisfying of a curious lust. I mean, the lust of the bookman. (Waters, 2002, p. 199).

The principals' presence need not be continuous, or even frequent. A character can still appear briefly and act as a determinant in the shape of the plot. Referring to the filmic character, Smith (1995, p. 133) explains that, "Characters do not have to be major, in terms of the screen time they occupy, but if they perform an action which has casual consequences within one or more of the major lines of narrative development in the film, they will invariably be individuated". Respectively, a character in a novel may appear briefly, but carry contextual significance for the plot and the rest of the cast.

In *Disgrace* (1999), Melanie Isaacs is only seen in the beginning, and toward the end. Yet she represents the inception of life-changing events for Lurie. Similarly, Bev Shaw appears sparsely in the text, yet is an important supportive character for Lucy.

And in *The Icestorm* (1994), Libbets Casey and Mike Williams appear only in a few pages, albeit instigating painful shifts and realisations in the primaries' lives.

We might, therefore, say that characters who serve individual scenes are minor. Their presence may be temporary or dispersedly continuous, but its function remains static, surrounding principals and primaries. Their actions can still serve as determinants in the plot, also highlighting aspects of the primaries' characterisation. They stand in equal distance between major characters and the reader herself (Galef, 1993). Harvey (1965) remarked:

[A] stranger, briefly met and totally unknown, may illuminate a new possibility of life for us. So also in fiction; a background figure, a mere stereotype, may be granted a moment of dramatic intensity in which he achieves fullness as a human being. ... This brief illumination of an otherwise sketchily realized character is one of the many ways in which the novelist legitimately provokes the reader to speculate about, and thereby give substance to the character. (Harvey, 1965, p. 55).

An example of a minor character affecting the plot is Charles, from *Fingersmith* (2002). Desperate to find Rivers, the boy's search ends up in the madhouse where Sue is kept. Taking advantage of his fear and weakness, Sue convinces him to help her escape, and together they make their way to London, where Charles will help her uncover Gentleman's machinations, and reclaim her place in the Borough. When Rivers is murdered, Charles is the one to call the police, the plot taking its final course into resolution leading to Mrs Sucksby's execution, and Sue's return to Briar.

Minors need not be indistinguishable stereotypes. The author's ability to recreate the human image is still challenged, for now she is called to convince without the prerogative to expand. They may still evoke reader inferences, so if the author chooses to momentarily emphasise their presence, she may simply add an

extra dimension by means of habits in action, dialogue, etc. (Galef, 1993); or, to put it in a less formulaic way, render them unique in their lifelike individual existence.

Stein (1995, p. 71) advises that “[C]haracterizing a minor character through the eyes of an important character is a valuable technique”. Indeed, such a choice renders the minor unique in her own textual existence, without misleading the reader to expect a further involvement in the plot.

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Moody uses George Clair to define both Ben and Elena, emphasizing the chasm in their relationship. For Ben,

Hood began to be isolated within Shackley and Schwimmer not long after Clair arrived. His assessments of things, of upcoming trends—suddenly they just didn’t want to hear from him at sales meetings. The salesmen began to report late on his revisions of quarterly figures, or they would double-check behind his back. Or they would ask who his sources were. As if he had to be joking. This was a lone, slow, incremental process of isolation. (Moody, 1994, p. 118).

At the weekly research meetings, Clair was constantly leaping in to help out with the media and entertainment securities. And it wasn’t that he wanted to cover entertainment stocks: he just wanted the space Benjamin Hood took up, Hood’s air and water and space and pension and office. (Moody, 1994, p. 119).

Hood swore that he would never live life like George Clair, at the expense of others, if he ever worked again—after that pink slip turned up in his In box. He would be a benevolent supervisor, a friend and confidante to working men and women, no matter how insignificant their positions. Then he would arrive at the office and shout down his secretary, Madeleine, for failing to make his coffee light enough. (Moody, 1994, pp. 119-120).

Either way, Hood detested George Clair. Detested him. He was the truest suburban phony: without culture, without native character, who was compelled here and there only by expedience. Hood would have liked to yank tight Clair’s squeaky-clean bow tie and to watch him, in the process, swell and burst. (Moody, 1994, p. 121).

On the other hand, Elena (Moody, 2002, p. 155) simply “[H]ad a conversation with George Clair, a man her husband couldn’t stand. Seemed nice enough”. At the

end of the gathering, the reader is informed that, unlike the Hoods, Clair does not participate to the key-party, leaving with his own wife instead (p. 165).

Finally, extras are the anonymous figures populating the textual spaces of the novel. They function as what Galef (1993, p. 11) refers to as 'animated scenery', highlighting or simply encircling the rest of the cast.

For example, extras are the guests in *The Ice Storm's* (1994) key-party.

In this blue mood, she snuck in the door, past Dot and Rob Halford, past the Armitages, the Sawyers, the Steeles, the Boyles, the Gormans, the Jacobsens, the Hamiltons, the Gadds, the Earles, the Fullers, the Buckleys, the Regans, the Bolands, the Conrads, the Millers. Past the old families of New Canaan, the Benedicts, the Bootons, the Carters, the Newports, the Eels, the Finches, the Hanforts, the Hoytts, the Kellers, the Lockwells, the Prindels, the Seelys, the Slausons, the Talmadges, the Tarkingtons, the Tuttles, the Wellses. And past the new elite crop of divorced New Canaanites—Chuck Spofford, June Devereaux, Tommy Finletter, Nina Kellogg. (Moody, 1994, p. 155).

These names correspond to non-active textual objects, yet they proffer a vivid, convincing scene of the party, and Elena's habitual reality.

Recapitulating, I shall use this most descriptive quote by Seger (1996):

Imagine a painting of a wedding. There is much detail around the two main figures of the bride and groom. And there are many figures, most of them somewhat indistinguishable from each other. But among them there are several who are sharply and broadly drawn: a young girl in red, for instance, in the foreground, playing with a kitten who has wandered into the scene; the minister, looking self-important, in full view as he stands on the top steps of the church; the mother of the bride, in a bright yellow lace dress, hovering near her daughter, weeping with joy. In this picture, the supporting characters are just as memorable as the major ones. Although there are some who are indistinguishable (the guests who are the extras), there are others who round out the story being told, and who expand upon the theme of love and marriage. (Seger, 1990, pp. 120-121).

Likewise, characters in fiction stand out, draw momentary curiosity, capture the reader's glimpses, or simply exist as a vivid setting for the portrait of life.

### 5.3 THE CHARACTER SCHEMA: AN ONTOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

So far, I have discussed notions of personhood and identity. I will now be applying my conclusions to the fictional character construct, in order to provide an initial understanding of the concept.

#### 5.3.1 THE UNIQUENESS OF CHARACTER

As discussed, a character is the textual construct of a hypothetical human being. The nature of the correspondence between character and the real person is defined as much by the similarities between the two poles, as by their fundamental differences. As Frey (1987, p. 2) asserts, “Real human beings are fickle, contrary, wrong-headed – happy one minute, despairing the next, at times changing emotions as often as they take a breath. *Homo fictus*, on the other hand, may be complex, may be volatile, even mysterious, but he’s always fathomable”.

Characters may also assume the form of personified animals or objects. Frey (1987, p. 143) defines personification as “[G]iving human qualities to inanimate objects”, and Smith (1995, p. 24) as, “[T]he use of the human as a model for understanding non-human forces and entities”.

The common denominator of all character manifestations and types though, is that they are designed as separate entities. I therefore wish to discuss what individuality signifies in this case. Harvey (1965) remarked:

When, in real life, we try to describe a person’s character we generally speak in terms of a discrete identity. We think of it as something unique and separable from all other identities. We do this, of course, because the most intimate sense of character we can possibly have—our knowledge of self—is of this kind. ... From this we extrapolate a similar sense of the characters of others; they may be private and unknowable but they are like us at least in this respect. (Harvey, 1965, p. 31).

And Chatman (1973) comments:

The 'meaning' of a character I take to be the set of personal traits that delineate [her], set [her] apart from the others, make [her] memorable to us. Even in [a] highly stylized novel, one may find character traits which are 'irrelevantly' idiosyncratic, bits of behavior that cannot be accounted for by the character's function or role in the strict sense. (Chatman, 1973, p. 63).

Indeed, what renders a person unique is her diversity, all those elements that differentiate her in one's memory, constituting her identity. The last part of Chatman's quote reflects precisely those dimensions that render character more than a mere tool in the text, for, much like a human being, internal consistencies shift and new elements manifest within the dynamic organisation of the fictive personality, without being strictly related to the linearity of the plot.

Kundera (1988) regards individuality to be the ultimate manifestation of subjectivity, for as he writes,

[I]t is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and the unanimous agreement of others that man becomes an individual. The novel is the imaginary paradise of individuals. It is the territory where no one possesses the truth ... but where everywhere one has the right to be understood. (Kundera, 1988, p. 159).

And in such individuation of the self lies the author's ability to create believable fictional persons, as it requires a clear understanding of one's own being, as well as of others. Human relationships are built on the basis of such similarity and dissimilarity. The individuality of character stands on the other pole of the axis from the dimensionless stereotype, the one that is devoid of any personal truths. I do not imply that a character should possess unconvincing capabilities, or even constantly deviate from the patterns of her socio-cultural norms. This would depend on the genre and type of story one wishes to narrate. The relation of the individual to her socio-cultural stereotype is pivotal. She is defined by the degree she conforms to, or deviates from it. This is why Frey (1987, p. 21) warns that such

deviations should emerge as a 'natural outgrowth', not imposed by the author in order to serve her own purposes. Again, consistency enters the equation, relying precisely on the qualities rotating around the axis of the norm, the expected.

Harvey (1965) elaborated as follows:

Beneath the superstructure of the individualized character, we may sense those depths in which identity is submerged and united within a greater whole. And with the very greatest novels one feels that the individual character is thereby immeasurably enriched, that [s]he is not obliterated, or dehumanized into allegory or symbol, but filled with an inexhaustible reservoir of meaning so that [s]he becomes, as it were, a shaft of light defining the greater darkness which surrounds [her]. (Harvey, 1965, p. 129).

At the same time, it is the summary of such individuation that forms societal norms. The distinguished characteristics each person carries shape the social construct and form the spatio-temporal status quos around the globe. The extent to which each person is able to reason, self-reflect, communicate, as well as the triggers and products of her intentions, play a role in the formation of her surrounding reality. Similarly, the individual amalgamation of characteristics that constitute the character's individuality are synthesised to form the fictional narrative. This is a bidirectional process, the stereotype affecting individuality, which in its turn shapes the norm.

### **5.3.2 CHARACTER AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT**

The debate between structuralists and realists has been mentioned many times in this thesis, and as I previously stated, I find it disorientating for the creative writer. A character *is* a textual construct, based on the psychology of a human being. She cannot have any true psychological dimensions, much like she cannot possess a real body, or exist in a real setting. All her dimensions exist behind the

textual cues, within the sphere of the author and reader's cognition and imagination.

Replacing 'psychological' with Kundera's (1988) 'existential', makes no difference either. A character's actions matter only if the reader is able to interpret them, and such interpretation is based on the inherent understanding of the human person regardless of the concept's extent of deviation. Internal consistency ensures the external congruity of the narrative.

At the same time, a character cannot be viewed as an exact imprint of a real person. Real people can be random, chaotic and unpredictable, since others do not have access to their mental states. An imitation of this kind presupposes a certain understanding by the novelist, whose purpose is not to convince the reader that her character *is*, but rather *could be*, under various circumstances.

Attempting to dissect the character concept, writers have initiated trait theories (Chatman, 1978), hierarchical structures (Williams, 1993; Ferrara, 1974), as well as conceptual components (Mills, 2006; Stein, 1995) and dimensions (Seger, 1990; Egri, 1960). At the same time, one comes across collections of personality quizzes (Maisel and Maisel, 2006), checklists and exercises (Viders *et al.*, 2006), categorisations of traits (Edelstein, 2006) and psychological typologies (Indick, 2004).

Whilst I consider most of these analyses interesting, and even helpful to the developing novelist, I argue that they fail to provide a comprehensive tool as to how character creation works. I shall nonetheless present some of them.

One of the most notable theories of character structure is Chatman's (1978), who recognised the complexity of the modern character (in comparison to the

structuralists' symbolic figures) as the decisive parameter that aids the modern reader to liaise with the concept. He examined character as an open construct, initiating his notable Paradigm of Traits, according to which (1978, p. 130):

$$C = T^n$$

where character (C) equals an infinite amount of traits (T).

Similarly, Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 37) proposes that character can be viewed as “[A] tree-like hierarchical structure in which elements are assembled in categories of increasing integrative power”. Garvey (1978) analyses “structural or non-structural attributes”. And Ferrara (1974) initiates a model of the surface, middle and deeper structure of character.

Such theories may constitute a useful tool for the a posteriori study of literature. They cannot however perform as foundational platforms for character construction. While typologies aim to organise and clarify, they also obliterate individual fragments, those little, albeit significant, elements that constitute one's uniqueness (Allport, 1937, p. 296). As Allport (ibid) underlined, “All typologies place boundaries where boundaries do not belong”.

Analogously, the creation of a fictional persona is not a matter of additions or subtractions of traits. Taking it one step further, inferencing is very likely to beget ‘pseudo-traits’ (Allport, 1937, p. 325) rather than actual ones—and by actual, I refer to the ones originally attributed by intention of the author. In any case, traits do not dictate behaviour themselves, together, or in isolation (Allport, 1937). Idiosyncratic manifestations occur by shifts in a personality's dynamic organisation. A predominant trait may be led to extinction; a trait the writer wasn't even aware of may emerge as a response to an external stimulus. Narrative components exist in

constant multidirectional interaction (Varotsis, 2013), continuously affecting one another until conclusions emerge consequentially. And so hierarchies change, new paradigms emerge, and the story often results in a total recreation of the self. Moreover, as Allport (1937, p. 297) explained, “[N]o two persons ever have precisely the same trait. Though each of two men may be aggressive (or aesthetic) the style and range of the aggression (or aestheticism) in each case is noticeably different”.

At the same time, authors have dissected character into compounds, upon which the writer may build her own construct. Egri (1960) initiated his theory of the three dimensions: the physiological, the sociological, and the psychological one. Stein (1995, pp. 62-63) proposes that the ‘extraordinary’ character can be composed by the criteria of Personality, Disposition, Temperament, Individuality and Eccentricity. He (ibid, pp. 74-81) speaks of ‘character markers’ as tools of successful character exposition. And Mills (1996, 2006) suggests that a character becomes recognisable in her uniqueness by means of ‘character rhythm’.

I contend that the author’s primary aim is consistency achieved by means of perceptual creativity, in order to depict the complexity of life into her pages. As Smith (1995) writes,

[W]e would not find ourselves attracted to (and so could not become allied with) an inert bundle of traits. We perceive and conceive of characters as integral, discreet textual constructs. Just as persons in the real world may be complex or entertain conflicting beliefs, so may characters; but as with persons, such internal contradictions are perceived against the ground of (at least) bodily discreteness and continuity. (Smith, 1995, p. 82).

My proposition is that the author’s focus shall lie within the perceptual attribution of a fictional identity, displaying the complexity, diversity, and logical

contradictions of real life. I will now be determining what the concept of such an identity entails.

#### **5.4 FICTIONAL IDENTITIES**

Peter Childs and Mike Storry (1997) note that,

[I]dentity is perhaps two things: who people take themselves to be, and who others take them to be. ... At one end of the scale, identity is partly prescribed by what the state considers to be important about people: their physical characteristics, place of birth and area of employment. ... At the other end of the scale, many people might consider the most important aspects of their identity to be their emotional life, their aspirations, their sporting or intellectual achievements and so on. So we are also inevitably left with *versions* of identity, rather than a single definitive identity for each individual. (Childs, 1997, pp. 6-7).

Based on this encompassing exegesis, as well as the six deduced conditions of personhood, I shall attempt to define the identity of the fictional character. I will begin at the first end of the scale.

##### **5.4.1 PROPER NAME**

“What is a name?” asks Brayfield (1996, p. 175), and proceeds to answer: “Two words which express a whole human identity”.

While not a natural determinant itself, the proper name is an integral part of a person’s self-definition, as well as the recognition of her distinct existence by the rest of the world.

For Barthes’ (1990), the proper name is the referential point of the summary of textual symbols that constitute the concept of character. As a structuralist, Barthes, claimed that the inevitable uniqueness the proper name signifies may be falsely interpreted to imply of a non-existent individuality. This argument though ultimately fails, since a name itself is a referential point of identification much like

any other characterising element, whether we talk of a fictional construct, or a real person.

For many novelists, deciding on a character's name involves a process of meticulous consideration, since it becomes an integral part of their creation's identity. This is why some find it hard to change it later (Lodge, 2002). Depending on the type of fiction and the authorial intentions, it may have symbolic function (Mullan, 2006), or simply designate the individuality of each character, and often typify her by indicating her socio-cultural background (Smith, 1995).

In her examination of rape depiction in *Disgrace* (1999), Lucy V. Graham (2003, p. 437), proposes that Melanie's name is a symbolic reference to darkness – Indeed, Lurie (1999, P. 22) spends time contemplating: “Melanie-melody: a meretricious rhyme. Not a good name for her. Shift the accent. Meláni: the dark one”. On the other hand, Lucy's is associated with the light. Graham (2003, p. 439) expands:

Although Shakespeare's Lucrece names the one who has raped her, her account does not save her from perceiving herself as 'disgraced', or from giving herself death. Philomela, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is raped and has her tongue cut out to prevent her from naming the crime and the perpetrator. Yet she sews her account into a tapestry, thus making it possible for her sister to discover the rapist's identity ... It is no accident that the names of Melanie and Lucy in *Disgrace* echo those of the two mythological rape victims, highlighting Western artistic traditions in which rape has had a fraught relationship with articulation or representation. (Graham, 2003, p. 439).

The second case is the character Petrus. Coetzee (1999, p. 81) does not need to describe his race or cultural background upon his first appearance; his name is indicative enough.

In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 517), after Rivers' murder, his true name is revealed to have been Frederick Bunt. The adoption of the false name purported to convince that Rivers had been a man of noble heritage.

Authors may choose to assign ordinary names to predominant characters, and exotic ones to minors, in order to shift the weight of their importance in the novel, so that they outbalance their significance as per the elements of characterisation at their disposal (Brayfield, 1996). Brayfield even suggests that androgynous names attributed to female characters may purport to elicit sympathy from male readers (1996, p. 175). In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 90), Waters makes a minor character stand out simply by giving her a very unique name, cleverly introducing it through Sue: "How are you, Mrs Cakebread?' (That was the cook: that really was her name, it wasn't a joke, and no-one laughed at it)".

At times, a character's name may serve as to characterise others, such as her parents, or any other member of the cast that was assigned the role of the name-giver by the author. In *Fingersmith* (2002), Mrs Sucksby names her daughter Maud, a name obviously suitable for the environment and heritage of Christopher Lilly's family, where she will be raised. On the contrary, Marianne Lilly chooses to call her own daughter Susan, leaving her in the care of a group residing in the Borough.

The usage of names as expository tools is also evident in ways characters refer to each other. As Deborah Tannen (1992, pp. 80-81) explains, "Forms of address are among the most common ways of showing status and affection. Solidarity reigns when two people call each other by their first names. Power reigns when one uses the other's first name but it's not reciprocal".

Indeed, nicknames, pet-names, informal variations of a first name, and prefixes or surnames are all evocative of status, attitudes, predispositions and cultural diversities (Brayfield, 1996; Smith, 1995). Moreover, the choice of addressing another person acts as a self-defining element, more than a characterising one. It reveals the addresser's attitudes and sentiments towards the character in question.

For example, in *Disgrace* (1999, pp. 103-104), Lurie's inclination to contempt and arrogance is revealed by simple comments such as: "I'll go and help Bev Shaw. Provided that I don't have to call her Bev. It's a silly name to go by. It reminds me of cattle".

In *The Icestorm* (1994, p. 35), the reader is informed that "Mike and Sandy were the same way except Mike was loud about it. They called each other *Charles* (and it was a term of respect) and they never went in the other's bedroom, but they [sic] loved each other and would die inside when they parted for good". Sharing a bond, Mike and Wendy also call each other 'Charles'. When Mike dies, Wendy thinks of suicide, but at the end decides against it (p. 263): "[S]he was begging Mike to pardon her, telling Mike that she couldn't do it, that she was gonna have to stick around, *Charles*. She just couldn't".

In *Fingersmith* (2002), upon Sue's training, Rivers warns her that she should be mindful of the way she addresses him, and Maud's uncle:

"Ain't it Susan, *sir*. You must remember, I shan't be Gentleman to you at Briar. I shall be Mr Richard Rivers. You must call me sir and you must call Mr Lilly sir and the lady you must call miss or Miss Lilly or Miss Maud, as she directs you. And we shall all call you Susan". (Waters, 2002, p. 39).

Mrs Sucksby is referred to and called by only by her last name. Yet, when Rivers is stabbed,

I know there was the gleam of something bright, the scuffle of shoes, the swish of taffeta and silk, the rushing of someone's breath. I think a chair was scraped or knocked upon the floor. I know Mr Ibbs called out. 'Grace! Grace!' he called: and even in the middle of all the confusion, I thought it a queer thing to call; until I realised it was Mrs Sucksby's first name, that we never heard used. (Waters, 2002, p. 508).

Margolin (2002, p. 109) views proper names as “[U]nique in being fixed points in a changing world”, considering them rigid ‘tags’ of reference to an object that may otherwise change. In most narratives, Margolin's proposition is applicable, since a character's name is the signifying point that navigates her through the narrative's changes, ensuring that her existence in the reader's mind remains intact despite the shifts in her virtual personality. There are times, however, that a name may lose its determinant properties.

Indeed, name changes can be observed in the middle of the narrative. A character may choose to give up her own name in a symbolic act of rejecting her past relations or circumstances. In *Disgrace* (1999), David Lurie is relieved to find his surname misspelled in the newspaper article describing the attack at Lucy's land: “He is glad that no connection is made between Ms Lourie's elderly father and David Lurie, disciple of nature poet William Wordsworth and until recently professor at the Cape Technical University”.

A character may also be forced to assume a new identity, in order to escape a certain danger. At instances, a name given to the reader turns out to correspond to a fake persona, whose dishonesty will be revealed later on. This is exactly the case in *Fingersmith* (2002); the entire narrative is built around such significance of name

interchange, and is evident from the first sentence (p. 3): “My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder”. The first change of Sue’s name comes when Richard Rivers, aka Richard Wells, aka Gentleman, aka Frederick Bunt explains she needs to find a new one—signifying the adopting of a new persona altogether:

‘[W]e shall all call you Susan.’ He frowned. ‘But not Susan Trinder. That may lead them back to Lant Street if things go wrong. We must find you a better second name—’

‘Valentine,’ I said, straight off. What can I tell you? I was only seventeen. I had a weakness for hearts. Gentleman heard me, and curled his lip.

‘Perfect,’ he said; ‘—if we were about to put you on the stage’. ... ‘A fanciful name might ruin us. This is a life-and-death business. We need a name that will hide you, not bring you to everyone’s notice. We need ... an untraceable name, yet one we shall remember. ... Let’s make it, *Smith*. Susan Smith’. (Waters, 2002, p. 39).

Upon assuming this fake identity, Sue does not know it will play a significant role in her entrapment. In the madhouse, she tries to convince the doctors that she is not Maud Lilly, and not Sue Smith, but Susan Trinder; yet this worsens her situation. In the end, Sue finds out that she is indeed a Lilly, but not Maud; her real name is indeed Susan.

Concluding, the proper name acts for the character as a point of reference and (self-) determination, much like it does for a human being. A name that changes amidst the story signifies intentional or consequential shifts in the fictional character’s identity.

#### **5.4.2 PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT**

By physical I refer to all those elements that compose a person’s appearance as a referential point, and can be either externally attributed, or chosen by the person herself. A person’s appearance is part of their own essence, and changes in it may also mark and alter her nature of being. As Glover (1988) states,

[B]odies tell us a lot about people. We learn about their age, their sex, and perhaps their race, something about their strength, their state of health and their weight. We learn about their attractiveness, and we can see something of how they think of themselves and how they want to be seen. From their posture and from their style of bodily movement we may get an impression of their mood or even their job. (Glover, 1988, p. 70).

A person's external appearance is composed both by given features, as well as products of her own choices and tastes. Both these categories affect the plot. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983) asserts,

One should distinguish ... between those external features which are grasped as beyond the character's control, such as height, colour of eyes, length of nose (features which get scarcer with the advancement of modern cosmetics and plastic surgery) and those which at least partly depend on [her], like hair-style and clothes. While the first group characterizes through contiguity alone, the second has additional overtones. (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 65).

In the following passage, Coetzee (1999) gives a portrait of Melanie Isaacs sufficient to justify David Lurie's lust for her:

She smiles back, bobbing her head, her smile sly rather than shy. She is small and thin with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes. Her outfits are always striking. Today she wears a maroon miniskirt with a mustard-coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match the gold balls of her earrings. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 14).

In *Fingersmith* (2002), after she weds Richard, Maud begins to pass her meals to Sue, and finally offers her her own silk gown. Sue attributes this generosity to Maud's melancholia (p. 165): "'How well you look!' she said, her blood rising. 'The colour sets off your eyes and hair. I knew it would. Now you are quite the beauty—aren't you? And I am plain—don't you think?'" In truth, this is part of Richard's plot (p. 297): "'Why, how thin and pale you've grown!—and Sue grows sleeker by the hour, like one of Mother Cream's black-faced sows. Get her into your best gown tomorrow, will you?'"

It is of course indisputable that a purely mental construction cannot entail corporal dimensions, unless realised in another form, i.e. visual media. At the same time though, if the fictional character is a person, or a personified animal or object, the reader will automatically visualise a hypothetical physicality, the way she will envisage the setting or follow the sequence of the actions. Aspects of a character's physical appearance enhance exposition, attributing realism and vividness.

Waters (2002) gives an account of Sue and Maud's appearance, as the basis of their first impressions of each other:

I had expected her, from all that Gentleman had said, to be quite out of the way handsome. But she was not that—at least. I did not think her so as I studied her then, I thought her looks were rather commonplace. She was taller than me by an inch or two—which is to say, of an ordinary height, since I am considered short; and her hair was fairer than mine—but not very fair—and her eyes, which were brown, were lighter. Her lip and cheek were very plump and smooth—she did lick me there, I will admit, for I liked to bit my own lip, and my cheeks had freckles, and my features are a rule were said to be sharp. I was also thought young-looking; but as to that—well, I should have liked the people who thought it to have studied Maud Lilly as she stood before me now. For if I was young then she was an infant, she was a chick, she was a pigeon that knew nothing. (Waters, 2002, p. 66).

Sharper than expectation, comes dismay. I have supposed she will resemble me, I have supposed she will be handsome: but she is a small, slight, spotted thing, with hair the colour of dust. Her chin comes almost to a point. Her eyes are brown, darker than mine. (Waters, 2002, p. 242).

The disappointment in each of these accounts is ironic, since both girls will soon be infatuated with each other.

Not all authors consider the external appearance of a character important.

Referring to one of his characters, Kundera (1988) writes that,

[H]is body, as well as his face, remains completely unknown to us because the essence of [her] existential problem is rooted in other themes. That lack of information does not make [her] the less "living". Because making a character "alive" means: getting to the bottom of [her] existential problem. (Kundera, 1988, p. 35).

Depending on her aims, an author may choose to incorporate the attribution of specific physical features to her characters, or not. Even in Kundera's case however, the concept of a textual embodiment is unavoidable. Characters will move around, gesture, and speak — all manifestations of a virtual physicality. I do not intend to dwell on concepts of artistic dualism here. A character can be a ghost, a spirit of all sorts, even an element of nature, such as fire. Her spatial navigation through the fictional words though, her very ability to speak words or assume facial expressions, presuppose a basic sort of physical manifestation. As Smith (1995, p. 31) explains, "Characters are not disembodied clusters of traits until their physiognomies are described they simply have unspecified physiognomies".

Furthermore, one could argue that Kundera's view renders the inclusion of physical details and the discovery of the character's existential problem as mutually exclusive. In reality, the two can be closely related, by a cause-and-effect dynamic which attributes the story its logical consistency. As Gardner (1991, p. 52) indicates, the restricted meaning of individual elements acquires greater significance if seen in juxtaposition to another. Similarly, Seger (1990, p. 27) speaks of the 'evocative' function of physical description as a powerful tool to help highlight idiosyncratic aspects of character. This applies both to the character whose appearance is described, as well as ones that are exposed through the physical appearance of others. David Lurie, who knows his daughter's sexual preferences are different to his own, thinks of her appearance (1999, p. 85): "*Ample* is a kind word for Lucy. Soon she will be positively heavy. Letting herself go, as happens when one withdraws from the field of love". And:

He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy bustling little woman with black freckles, closed-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive. It is a resistance he has had to Lucy's friends before. Nothing to be proud of a prejudice that has settled in his mind, settled down. His mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 93).

Elements of textual corporality also pertain to the narrative's internal consistency. Unless obvious that the story takes place in a fantastical or futuristic world, certain restrictions are to be inferred by a character's build, age, physical strength and so on, unless otherwise substantiated. For example, one will not expect to see a small child lifting a vehicle, unless somehow justified by the text, even in symbolic association.

Moreover, the complete absence of a physical portrait may attribute a sense of vagueness. As Smith (1995) explains,

Far from being a hermetically closed system, the text relies upon assumptions and expectations brought to it by the spectator. For example, we assume – until cued otherwise – that a character will have one body, individuated by a particular set of physical features, just as a person does. Moreover, we could never grasp such a set of features in a purely differential manner. I could tell you that my nose – to take but a single feature – is not aquiline, not Roman, not birdlike, not bulbous, not ... an infinite number of things, none of which would enable you to grasp the specificity of it. (Smith, 1995, p. 19).

There are, of course, instances, when the author may use such vagueness intentionally. In *Disgrace* (1999), Melanie's race is never really revealed. Speculations that she might be Jewish, or black, raise deeper questions on the ease of identity attribution and labelling. (Coleman, 2013).

Finally, a character's appearance is also a valuable tool for her individuation. Indeed, a special feature may constitute the character's most distinct attribute, rendering her memorable and lifelike. In the case of a minor character, it may play a

predominant role, as it will help her stand out from the stereotypical framework her limited appearance exposes her to.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue describes Mr Ibbs' routine as a dealer of stolen goods:

Mr Ibbs would rub his hands and look expectant. But then he would study their poke, and his face would fall. He was a very mild-looking man, very honest-seeming—very pale in the cheek, with neat lips and whiskers. His face would fall, it would just about break your heart. (Waters, 2002, p. 8).

In *The Icestorm* (1994, p. 26), Ben Hood has been abandoned and upset by Janey Williams: "Her flaws sprang to mind: her stretch marks, the port wine blemish on her left thigh, her lipsticked teeth and inexpertly manicured nails".

The 'controlled' aspects of one's appearance can be interlinked to the social parameters of her identity, such as her religion, ethnicity, race, social class and financial status, or a thereof shift from them (Crane, 2001; Craik, 1994; Kochman, 1981; Stewart *et al.*, 1979). Elements of style, such as dress codes, haircuts, piercings and tattoos, may function in two different ways: a) as indicators of the narrative's historical, social and ethnographical background, and b) as highlighters of personal views. This isn't to say that all such elements acquire symbolic form, not that the reader will perceive them as such. Rather, they constitute an integral part of a coherent image painted by the author, left for the reader to envisage further.

Much like proper names, clothing plays a fundamental part in *Fingersmith's* (2002) plot. This becomes evident from the beginning, where Rivers has Sue practising how to dress and undress Maud Lilly:

After the corset came a camisole, and after that a dicky; then came a nine-hoop crinoline, and then more petticoats, this time of silk. Then Gentleman had Dainty run upstairs for a bottle of Mrs Sucksby's scent, and he had me spray it where the splintered wood of the chair-back showed between the

ribbons of the shimmy, that he said would be Miss Lilly's throat. (Waters, 2002, p. 37).

And:

Then Gentleman sent me upstairs, to put on the dress that Phil had got for me. It was a plain brown dress, more or less the colour of my hair; and the walls of our kitchen being also brown, when I came downstairs again I could hardly be seen. I should have rathered a blue gown, or a violet one; but Gentleman said it was the perfect dress for a sneak or for a servant—and so all the more perfect for me, who was going to Briar to be both. (Waters, 2002, p. 38).

Indeed, apparel, length of hair, beards and moustaches may indicate personal tastes, political stances, profession and spatio-temporal surroundings. As Glover explains, (1988, pp. 134-135), "Out of a mixture of natural development and conscious choices, people develop a distinctive style that can be their most recognizable feature. ... Style combines chosen forms of self-expression with what we are given naturally". The 'natural' part of Glover's equation in this case is provided by the author, as the inherent product of her perceptual and creative amalgamation, explicated in the form of a convincing portrait.

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Wendy is characterised through her clothes:

To class she wore ponchos and handmade sweaters ... She had toe socks and clogs and painter's pants. Wendy's Tretorn tennis sneakers were filched from Mike's Sports not two days ago (the day before Thanksgiving) and now the patent leather gear she was supposed to wear for the holidays was safely enclosed in a Tretorn box on the 5 ½ shelf in the back of the very same store. Wendy wore the uniforms other kids wore, but she thought a lot about black gowns and putting spiders in the pockets of her girlfriend's hip-huggers. (Moody, 1994, p. 31).

Different choices of apparel also indicate the idiosyncratic differences between Elena Hood and Janey Williams, as well as Ben Hood's tastes. While getting ready for the Halfords' party, Elena confronts her husband:

You want to wear your ridiculous ascot out to a cocktail party. That ridiculous ascot that doesn't go with those pants at all. You want to wear that out, and you want me to shake hands with your friends and make conversation. And you want me to dress up in some outfit that shows off a lot of cleavage. (Moody, 1994, p. 71).

Then:

Elena would not change her Hush Puppies or paint her face. The journey was about a mile, door to door, and they would travel by car. Still, Elena took the light-blue raincoat she had purchased on sale at Lord & Taylor in Stamford. (Moody, 1994, p. 73).

And when Janey appears to the party, Ben notices:

Janey was in black, silk pajamas, the top opened to just below her breasts. No bra. At her cleavage, turquoise beads swayed. As she leaned down to take up her drinks, she stilled the shimmering pajama top with one hand. Her earth-colored lipstick and eye shadow matched her brown stiletto heels. Her frosted-blond hair was flawlessly arranged, like a fibreglass waterfall. (Moody, 1994, p. 122).

In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 311), when Maud sees John Vroom for the first time, she notices his "extraordinary coat, that seems pieced together from many varieties of fur". When Mrs Sucksby and Dainty offer her gowns to choose from, she finds them hideous, much to Dainty's dismay:

Dainty sees them and screams. The gowns are all of silk: one of violet, with yellow ribbon trimming it, another of green with a silver stripe and a third of crimson. ... I have not known such colours, such fabrics, such gowns, exist. I imagine myself in them, upon the streets of London. My heart has sunk. I say, "They are hideous, hideous". ... "Haven't you a grey," I say, "or a brown, or a black?" Dainty looks at me in disgust. (Waters, 2002, p. 353).

Later, when Sue storms into Mrs Sucksby's house, she finds Maud transformed from a lady to a Borough girl:

I looked again at Maud—at her neat ear which, I now saw, had a crystal drop falling from it on a wire of gold; and at the curls in her fair hair; and at her dark eye-brows. They had been tweezered into two fine arches. Above her chair—I had not seen this before, either, but it seemed all of a piece with the drops, the curls and arches, the bangles on her wrist—above her chair there

was hanging, from a beam, a little cage of wicker with a yellow bird in it. (Waters, 2002, p. 493).

Specific dress codes and use of uniforms have always been dictated in many workplaces and professions (Crane, 2001); in western societies, fashion can be a statement of political power (Craik, 1994); during the eighteenth century, tattoos became so popular in Japan that they were considered an alternative to clothing (Craik, 1994); there was a time when the use of a hat indicated strong social affiliations (Crane, 2001); the shift in women's societal status and her entrance in the workplace were displayed by the change of her dressing choices (Crane, 2001); changes in the types of apparel purchased demonstrated socio-cultural shifts through the eras (Crane, 2001); the black culture is characterised by colourful, intense and expansive expressions of style (Kochman, 1981); and so in all cultures and societies, such elements of appearance play a predominant role. As Diane Crane (2001, p. 1) notes, "Clothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a major role in the social construction of identity". Later, she adds (ibid, p. 13): "Fashion contributes to the redefinition of social identities by continually attributing new meanings to artefacts". Similarly, Jennifer Craik (1995, p. 4) remarks that, "Codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions. In other words, clothes construct a personal *habitus*".

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Maud escapes Mrs Sucksby's house in a gown and slippers, with no hat on:

Everybody stares—men, women, children—even here, where the road is busy again, they stare. I think of tearing off a fold of skirt to cover my naked head. I

think of begging a coin. If I knew what coin to beg for, how much a hat would cost me, where it might be bought, I would do it. (Waters, 2002, p. 371).

When Sue flees from the madhouse with Charles' help, she makes sure to change her clothing (2002, p. 463): "I imagined men coming from the madhouse, asking about after a girl in a tartan dress and rubber boots". And so she has to steal someone else's:

[I]n a trunk upstairs I found a pair of black shoes, more or less my size, and a print dress, put in paper. I thought the dress might have been the one that the woman was married in, and I swear to God! I almost didn't take it; but in the end, I did. And I also took a black straw bonnet, a shawl, a pair of woollen stockings... (Waters, 2002, p. 465).

Indeed, as Craik adds (*ibid.*, p. 46), "The ways in which bodies are fashioned through clothes, make-up and demeanour constitute identity, sexuality and social position. In other words, clothed bodies are tools of self-management".

Indicative is the scene where Sue has to adjust her hair-style to fit her new position at Briar:

First, they washed my hair. I wore my hair then, like lots of the Borough girls wore theirs, divided in three, with a comb at the back and, at the sides, a few fat curls. If you turned the curls with a very hot iron, having first made the hair wet with sugar-and-water, you could make them hard as anything; they would last for a week like that, or longer. Gentleman, however, said he thought the style too fast for a country lady: he made me wash my hair till it was perfectly smooth, then had me divide it once—just the once—then pin it in a plain knot at the back of my head. (Waters, 2002, p. 35).

It is worth clarifying that a character's 'controlled' appearance can be a useful characterisation tool, not a necessary one. Nor do I imply that the author should be restricted to demonstrating the stereotypical aspects of a fictional person. As already suggested, a character can be defined both by her representation as well as her deviation from her stereotypical framework.

In conclusion, a person's physical appearance is a strong element of her identity, and as such can work as a useful tool for the author to achieve coherent character exposition. Like every other means of characterisation, though, it is not to be abused. Stein (1995, p. 187) warns against an abundance of information that will deprive the reader of her own input. As Ivy Compton-Burnett (1959, p. 307) wrote, "I should have thought that my actual characters were described enough to help people to imagine them. However detailed such description is, I am sure that everyone forms [her] own conceptions that are different from everyone else's including the author's".

#### **5.4.3 PAST IDENTITIES**

One may view a person as an amalgam of her collective histories, shaped and defined by past experiences. One's life history is an integral part of her psychological make-up (Allport, 1937). As Glover (1988, p. 141) points out, "If all my memories were obliterated, this would obviously have a disastrous effect on my sense of who I am". Egri (1960, p. 48) similarly stated that, "Our own childhood recollections, memories, experiences, become an indelible part of us and will reflect upon and colour our minds". Indeed, viewing the person as a unity moving through time, her previous selves do not perish, but rather stay with her, even if only partially.

While not sufficient in itself, background information can provide explanations to many a situation, sentiment, fear and goal. It is not an expository tool, but rather an explanatory device that may contribute to a story's internal consistency. I thus return to the a priori knowledge of the character, and the details

that, while will not necessarily reach the page, can be implied in order to render the character comprehensive and her actions coherent.

Indeed, background situations may account for present choices, or shifts in a person's existential, socio-cultural and spatio-temporal status. As Seger (1990, p. 47) writes "The current situation is a result of decisions and events from the past. And the choices that have been made will determine other choices in the future". And Glover (1988, p. 146) underlines that, "Contact with the past is a reminder of alternatives to the present pattern of life. This sharpens awareness of the relationships you have helped to create, and of the pattern of your own life while doing so".

Seger (ibid, p. 48) distinguishes between two types of background information: the first acts as a causative force in the construction of the narrative, accounting for present motivations, choices and conditions. The second serves so as to attribute the character those dimensions that make her 'lifelike', a convincing human portrait. She also (ibid, p. 49) emphasises the importance of the "sense memories", referring to the impact of past events on the character's present idiosyncrasy.

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Moody paints such a meticulous portrait of his protagonists' past that the narrative unfolds so naturally, it almost seems biographic:

Elena's mother slipped behind the curtain of alcoholism before Elena even graduated from elementary school. ... Her parents had separate rooms, of course; they never slept together. When her mother limped downstairs for dinner, it was often the first they had seen of her that day. (Moody, 1994, p. 57).

Her mother fell down the stairs and they left her there, at her father's instructions. Her mother disrobed on the front lawn. Her mother locked herself into a shed, looking for stashed treasure. She might have stayed there for days, if it hadn't been for the gardener. ... Her father made sure Elena knew about her mother's condition. He called her down from her room to witness each infraction against him, against his success. So when she was a child and her mother tried to take her own life with sleeping pills, he induced vomiting, called for an ambulance, and then brought Elena into the bedroom. (Moody, 1994, p. 58).

In *Fingersmith* (2002) character histories determine motivations and actions.

Sue's childhood enhances the impact of the betrayal against her:

[Mrs Sucksby] had been paid to keep me a month; she kept me seventeen years. What's love, if that ain't? She might have passed me on to the poorhouse. She might have left me crying in a draughty crib. Instead she prized me so, she would not let me on the prig for fear a policeman should have got me. She let me sleep beside her, in her own bed. She shined my hair with vinegar. You treat jewels like that. (Waters, 2002, p. 12).

Sue's past also helps her in present situations. Coming from a house of thieves, she knows how to grease locks, rendering them smooth and soundless, and also how to cut a key copy. This is how she and Maud escape the Briar, and the way she manages to flee the madhouse with Charles' help.

Maud's history, on the other hand, leads her straight into her present actions. Thinking herself the daughter of a mad-woman, Maud describes how she was taken from the place she considered home; how her uncle and his housekeeper, Mrs Stiles, abused her as a child; how she was forced to work on Christopher Lilly's collection of erotic material, unsuitable to a child her age, until Rivers appears.

An author may study her character's possible history thoroughly, or simply build a referential framework around it. For example, Kundera (1988, p. 36) reveals that, "Of the historical circumstances, I keep only those that create a revelatory existential situation for my characters". Such economy of information may suffice

to lead the author towards paths of consistent linearity, or she may find that the more she perceives, the richer her conveyed portrait. In both cases, however, only a minimal amount of such knowledge is useful to the reader, serving to proffer her more cues.

In *Disgrace* (1999), Coetzee gives little yet sufficient information of David Lurie's past:

He himself has no son. His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter. The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer. With his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he could always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that. That was how he lived; for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 9).

Referring to one's recollections of the past, Glover (1988, p. 149) speaks of 'abridgment' and 'editing':

To abridge the inner story is to edit it. The editing may take two forms. Wishful thinking, fantasy and self-deception may play their part: bits of the film we do not like are lost in the cutting room. This first kind of editing makes a gap between the inner story and how we really are. ... The other kind of editing does not add or leave out any incidents, but colours what happened by taking an attitude towards it." (Glover, 1988, pp. 149-150).

Much like all other aspects of the character concept, background information should not be forcefully constructed. Many popular textbooks suggest that writers go through interview-style questions and come up with checklists in order to understand their characters better. Once again, I argue that such information should emerge as a result of an encompassing comprehension of human nature, not a series of answers to poll-type questions—although these could be used as a creative trigger. In addition, background information that is conveyed through the

eyes and experience of the character should appear more as a subjective retrospection, than a detailed report.

#### **5.4.4 SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT**

As already noted in Storry and Childs' explanation, a person's identity is partly defined by those parameters that determine her as a designated individual in her surrounding environment. Such parameters include her ethnicity, race, religion or lack thereof, profession, education, sexuality, and social and financial class.

All such components may also define the fictional identity. As in real life, some of them can play an integral role in one's self-determination, or the formation of new identities. A person may be characterised by her participation in a group, as well as her detachment from one. She may choose to stay faithful to her origins, or distance herself from them by establishing a new identity within reference groups that will represent her idiosyncrasy better (Burr, 2002).

Stein (1995) encapsulates the functionality of culture and class as follows:

*A culture* consists of the behaviour patterns, beliefs, traditions, institutions, taste, and other characteristics of a community passed from one generation to another. ... *A class* is a stratum of society whose members share cultural and social characteristics. (Stein, 1995, p. 75).

Cultural diversity also dictates diversity of values, and values represent a significant part of one's identity (Williams, 1995). A culture may account for one's stances on notions such as involvement, independence and politeness (Tannen, 1992); expectations and presumptions of decency and morality do not burden women in the black culture, as they do in the white one (Kochman, 1981); and disclosure of personal information acquires different significance in these two cultures (Kochman, 1981).

In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 6), Sue describes how Mrs Sucksby would calm the crying infants in her care: “Mrs Sucksby would go among them, dosing them from a bottle of gin, with a silver spoon you could hear chink against the glass”. Growing up there, Sue considers this normal. Yet when she rides the train from London with an upper-class lady and her baby,

The baby began to cry. It cried for half an hour. ‘Ain’t you got any gin?’ I said to the woman at last. ‘Gin?’ she said—like I might have said, poison. Then she made a mouth, and showed me her shoulder—not so please to have me sitting by her, the uppity bitch, after all. (Waters, 2002, p. 53).

Moody (1994) touches upon the finer threads of cultural norms through Wendy’s views:

Wendy wanted to know why conversations failed and how to teach compassion and why people fell out of love and she wanted to know it all by the time she got back to the house. She wanted her father to crusade for less peer pressure in the high school and to oppose the bombing of faraway neutral countries and to support limits on presidential power and to devise a plan whereby each kid under eighteen in New Canaan had to spend one afternoon a week with Dan Holmes’s sister, Sarah Joe, or with that other kid, Will Fuller, whom everybody called *faggot*. (Moody, 1994, p. 50).

With respect to race and ethnicity, Joane Nagel (2003) defines them as follows:

By *ethnicity* I refer to differences between individuals and groups in skin colour, language, religion, culture, national origin/nationality, or sometimes geographic region. Ethnicity subsumes both nationalism and race. Current notions of *race* are centered exclusively on visibly (usually skin colour) distinctions among populations. (Nagel, 2003, p. 6).

Nagel (2003, p. 42) moves on to explain that these categories exceed simple notions of superficial representation, underlining that, for example, being white or black bears great significance and consequence in certain cultures, and that the contextual dynamics of ethnicity essentially emerge within the realms of human interaction, acquiring significant social meaning and impact.

This is precisely the essence in the following dialogue between Lucy and her father in *Disgrace* (1999):

‘You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone’.  
‘This place being what?’  
‘This place being South Africa!’ (Coetzee, 1999, p. 148).

Petrus represents a different reality altogether from what David Lurie is used to. Upon mentioning him, Lucy explains (p. 84): “He and his wife have the old stable. I’ve put in electricity. It’s quite comfortable. He has another wife in Adelaide, and children, some of them grown up. He goes off and spends time there occasionally”.

When confronted by Lurie for sheltering Pollux, Petrus offers to marry Lucy:

‘You will marry Lucy’ [Lurie] says, carefully. ‘Explain to me what you mean. No, wait, rather don’t explain. This is not something I want to hear. This is not how we do things’. We: he is on the point of saying, *We Westerners*.  
‘Yes, I can see, I can see,’ says Petrus. He is positively chuckling. ‘But I tell you, then you tell Lucy. Then it is over, all this badness’. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 271).

Moving on, a person’s profession can describe her multifariously: It may reflect a process of self-creation, or a sacrifice that leads her away from it (Glover, 1988). In many cultures, education and work constitute significant parameters of identity (Storry and Childs, 1997). Issues of power and solidarity are also indicative of one’s position, and the role expectations that form by it, and they may affect her relationship to others (Burr, 2020; Tannen, 1992).

In *Disgrace* (1999), Lurie’s profession is a significant part of his character:

Because he has no respect for the material he teaches, he makes no impression on his students. They look through him when he speaks, forget his name. Their indifference galls him more than he will admit. Nevertheless he

fulfils to the letter his obligations toward them, their parents, and their state ... He continues to teach because it provides him with a livelihood; also because it teaches him humility, brings it home to him who he is in the world. The irony does not escape him: that the one who comes to teach learns the keenest of lessons, while those who come to learn learn nothing. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 6).

Carried away by passion, Lurie does not realise that due to his position, the consequences on both Melanie Isaacs and his job are going to be grave. This is depicted in the words of Farodia Rassool, a member of the university examining committee Lurie is asked to attend:

Farodia Rassool intervenes ... 'Yes, he says he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 68).

The fact that Lurie is a professor in an established institution renders his position all the more difficult, his actions all the more grave. This set-up affects decisively the way this incident of sexual exploitation is treated. On the contrary, when Lucy is raped, there is no trial, no investigation for the culprits.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue cannot even bear to consider the possibility of a 'regular' job to live on after Mrs Sucksby dies:

How should I do, on my own? I might, I suppose, take a regular job, at a dairy, a dyer's, a furrier's—The very thought of it, however, made me want to be sick. Everybody in my world knew that regular work was only another name for being robbed and dying of boredom. I should rather stay crooked. Dainty said she knew three girls who worked, in a gang, as street-thieves, Woolwich-way, and wanted a fourth... But she said it, not quite catching my eye; for we both knew that street-thieving was a pretty poor lay, compared to what I was used to do. (Waters, 2002, pp. 525-526).

Allport (1979, PP. 321-322) explains the classification between 'achieved' and 'ascribed' social statuses as follows: "In the first type, the individual may by [her]

own efforts (or the efforts of [her] parents) attain a certain location in the hierarchy. On the other hand, ascribed status is hereditary in its force”.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue, the daughter of a noblewoman, is raised by Mrs Sucksby instead, as part of a family of thieves in the Borough. On the contrary, Mrs Sucksby’s real daughter, Maud, is trained to be a lady with refined manners by Christopher Lilly. And Rivers ‘works’ himself into an ‘ascribed’ society status, claiming himself to be of noble decent:

[H]e had been, he said, to a real gent’s school, and had a father and a mother and a sister—all swells—whose heart he had just about broke. He had had money once, and lost it all gambling: his pa said he should never have another cent of the family fortune and so he was obliged to get money the old-fashioned way, by thieving and dodging ... [H]e could mix with Society, and seem honest as the rest. The ladies especially would go quite wild for him. (Waters, 2002, pp. 20-21).

His deception is uncovered when he is murdered (p. 517): “[I]t turned out that all of his tales of being a gentleman’s son were so much puff. His father and mother ran a small kind of draper’s shop, in a street off the Holloway Road. His sister taught piano”.

Culture also shapes patterns of communication between men and women, forming expectations and conventions in etiquette. As Tannen (1992, p. 109) explains: “Male-female conversation is always cross-cultural communication. Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience, and women and men have different past experiences”.

Wendy’s thoughts of self-comparison with her brother, Paul in this passage from *The Icestorm* (1994) reflect this point precisely:

She thought Paul got all the breaks. He was the smarter one, the badly adapted one. There was no discussion of her being sent away, too. Wendy was a beauty, a pixie, a nymph, a sorceress, but she wasn’t going to be any

captain of industry. She could work the rooms of the P.T.A. (Moody, 1994, p. 135).

In *Fingersmith* (2002), when Maud escapes the Lant Street house and runs to Mr Hawtrey's shop of erotic literature for shelter:

Three or four men stand ... each leafing rapidly and intently through some album or book: they don't look up when the door is opened; but when I take a step and my skirts give a rustle, they all turn their heads, see me, and openly stare ... At the rear of the shop is a little writing-table, with a youth sitting at it, dressed in a waistcoat and sleeves. He stares, as they do—then when he sees me advancing, gets up ... 'Really, you oughtn't to have come to the shop. The shop is for selling books and prints—you know what kind?' (Waters, 2002, p. 376).

And as Graham (2003, p. 437) asserts: "*Disgrace* points to a context where women are regarded as property, and are liable for protection only insofar as they belong to men"; hence, Petrus' offer to marry Lucy for protection in exchange for her land (1999, p. 271).

The social position of women in relation to men has been the subject of Katherine Webb's (2013) latest novel, *The Misbegotten*. In the Q&A section following her novel, Webb explains:

With the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, what struck me most were the lives of women, and how different they were—subject to such comprehensive restrictions on their behaviour, their rights, their independence. Women could be and often were horribly abused, and had little or no recourse to law, and precious few ways to remove themselves from the situation. Of course, class was in the mix as well—if a lower-class woman was abused by a rich and powerful man, she was even more helpless". (Webb, 2013, p. 551).

Finally, a person's sexuality is an integral part of their being. At the same time, it is embedded in an ethnic construct's ethical and collective extensions (Nagel, 2003). As a result, sexual orientation bears the weight of externally assigned moral values, who determine a person's acceptance or rejection by other group memberships.

In *Disgrace* (1999) it is implied that Lucy is raped because she is 'unowned' and therefore 'hunnable' (Graham, 2003). Although her sexual orientation may not be what provokes her attackers per se, it is still a logical extension of the cause, rendering its impact of being violated by men even graver.

For Nagel (2003) sexuality pertains to,

"[M]en" and "women" as socially, mainly genitally defined individuals with culturally defined appropriate sexual tastes, partners, and activities. There is no single universally shared conception of natural or proper sexual desires, sexual partners, or sexual activities, rather, there is as much variety in sexual practice as there are human cultures. (Nagel, 2003, p. 8).

In *Fingersmith* (2002), in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, homosexuality is considered little more than a social disease. Upon the doctors' first encounter, Rivers uses what he has learned about Maud's true feelings to enhance the notion that Sue is indeed mad:

'Susan,' he says, 'you do well to feel shame in behalf of your mistress. You need feel none, however, in behalf of yourself. No guilt attaches to you. You did nothing to invite or encourage the gross attentions my wife, in her madness, attempted to force on you—' ... I have begun to weep. 'Surely', says Richard, coming to me, putting his hand heavily upon my shoulder, 'surely these tears speak for themselves? Do we need to name the unhappy passion? Must we oblige Miss Smith to rehearse the words, the artful poses—the caresses—to which my distracted wife has made her subject? Aren't we gentlemen?' (Waters, 2002, p. 301).

This piece of information will aggravate Sue's situation in the madhouse further. In the following scene, the nurses play a cruel game of jumping on Sue to see who will crush her harder:

She pushed herself up on her hands, so that her face was above me but her bosom and stomach and legs still hard on my own; and she moved her hips. She moved them in a certain way. My eyes flew open. She gave me a leer. 'Like it, do you?' she said, still moving. 'No? We heard you did'. And at that, the nurses roared. They roared, and I saw on their faces as they gazed at me that nasty look I had seen before but never understood. I understood it now,

of course; and all at once I guessed what Maud must have said to Dr Christie, that time at Mrs Cream's. (Waters, 2002, p. 442).

Some of these parameters will be directly related to the plot in a cause-and-effect mode, while others will simply serve to attribute realism to the created portrait. Since their function is specific, they will presuppose expectations of either conformity, or justified deviation. The individuation of each fictional personality built on this framework encapsulates the character concept itself.

Cultural diversity will also affect character relations, as it encompasses strong similarities and vast differences in the perception of ethos, codes of conduct, and the formation of expectations. If elements of a group membership define a person's identity, they will automatically emphasise the dissimilarities with others. As Taylor (1985, pp. 269-270) reminds us, "People from another society can be quite opaque to us." Conflict is likely to arise by miscommunication among representatives of different cultures, as it often happens in the international state of affairs (Tannen, 1992). The example of *Disgrace* (1999) given above depicting Lurie's failure to communicate with Petrus is indicative.

At the same time, a person may be assigned characteristics she never intended to represent (Burr, 2002). This is where the notion of the stereotype comes into play, and the author should ascertain that characters are consistent with their cultural identities but are also individualised within it. A primary example is given by Allport (1979, p. 109), who dispels the myth of aggressiveness being interlinked to physical features, such as skin colour. Allport (1979, p. 179) moves on to clarify that "[E]very label applied to a given person refers properly only to one aspect of [her] nature". If the character is created as nothing more than a small

particle of a stereotypical image, nothing more than the author's own prejudices will be conveyed. This is especially the case for minor characters, whose limited function in the novel does not allow for extensive characterisation. In their study pertaining to the various causes of criminality, Eysenck and Gudjonsson (1989) explain that,

Whether individuals are absolutely or relatively poor and deprived is less relevant to their actions than whether they feel themselves to be poor and deprived, and in any case such feelings, may lead to radically different actions according to whether one is or is not a religious Christian, a confirmed Marxist, or a Fascist. (Eysenck and Gudjonsson, 1989, p. 6).

In *Disgrace* (2002), Lurie thinks of Soraya, the prostitute he's been visiting:

In bed Soraya is not effusive. Her temperament is in fact rather quiet, quiet and docile. In her general opinions she is surprisingly moralistic. She is offended by tourists who break their breasts ('udders', she calls them) on public beaches; she thinks vagabonds should be rounded up and put to work sweeping the streets. How she reconciles her opinions with her line of business he does not ask. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 2).

Soraya is a Muslim (p.4), so her beliefs are reflective of her religion. Her occupation though, is not.

In *Fingersmith* (2002, p.8), Sue grows up in a house of thieves whom she loves as family: "They were better than magicians. For out from their coats and sleeves would come pocket-books, silk handkerchiefs and watches; or else jewellery, silver plate, brass candlesticks, petticoats—whole suits of clothes, sometimes". The thieves in Waters' novel are not depicted any more or less moral than the upper class. Christopher Lilly believes himself to be a noble scholar (p. 194) yet he cast out his sister, abandoned her supposed infant daughter to a madhouse, and retrieved her only to imprison her and make a secretary of her (p. 187).

As it becomes evident, all such components do not exist in isolation, but work with each other to compound the representation of oneself to the rest of the world. Cultural identities affect, and even define, a person's political beliefs, ethical values, external appearances and general codes of conduct. A character that wishes to flee a dominating religion may have to seek new geographical surroundings, endorse novel habits, and form her ethnic and socio-cultural identity anew. Issues of dignity will be challenged in racial or ethnographic platforms, such as in *Disgrace* (1999). A character's moral values may be shaped by class inequality, and reform in light of a new life, as in *Fingersmith* (2002). Once again, Allport's theory of the dynamic personality is reflected in the multifarious composition of identity, elements of which may shift and reassemble at any time.

#### **5.4.5 THE INNER SELF**

Moving on to Storry and Childs' second side to identity, we find that it entails three of the previously discussed conditions of personhood. Indeed, a person's awareness of herself, her intentional states, as well as her (self-) evaluating abilities constitute an integral part of her being.

I begin with Taylor's (1985, p. 263) statement that, "A person is an agent who has an understanding of self as an agent, and can make plans for ... her own life".

He proceeds to add that,

The general notion of a person includes not only self-awareness but holding values. ... Persons apply values to the facts and possibilities of which they are aware. These values can be seen as chosen or as arising from psychological causes, or as both. ... Guided by these valuations, we choose. And so we have the capacities definitive of a person: self-awareness, values, choices and from all these the ability to make life-plans. (Taylor, 1985, pp. 266-267).

In most cases, fictional characters are aware of their existence within their world, and are assigned their own thoughts and ideas, conveyed by point-of-view. For such virtual consciousness to bear any significance, they are also allowed the ability to feel and react towards such thoughts, and the reception of the fictional world's external stimuli. A fictional self is thus composed of attitudes, emotions and values, which she projects in the form of intentions, motivations and internal conflicts.

Dennett (1976, p. 179) explains the concept of the intentional system as follows:

An Intentional system is a system whose behaviour can be ... predicted by relying on ascriptions to the system of beliefs and desires. There may *in every case* be other ways of predicting and explaining the behaviour of an Intentional system ... but the Intentional stance may be the handiest or most effective or in any case *a* successful stance to adopt, which suffices for the object to be an Intentional system. (Dennett, 1976, p. 179).

A person's character can be defined by her stances towards her own goals and commitments (Kupperman, 1991). In the world, one can only presume upon the actions and choices of others. Such inferences may sometimes be valid, while others incorrect. In fiction, the reader uses the textual cues in order to assume upon the character's intentions and motivational schemata (Margolin, 1986; Bower, 1978). The author's a priori knowledge of them ensures that she can convey such cues in the quality and quantity she wishes, in order to be comprehensible by her readers.

A character's internal map, her desires, fears, wishes and values as motivational forces (Stein, 1995; Shand, 1926), guide the author to draw the entire

narrative. It may reflect the novel's causality, or constitute part of a more complex narrative web (Lodge, 2002, p. 183).

In *The Icestorm* (1994), the reader learns about Wendy:

When her mother scrunched up her face and dispensed morality, Wendy's ambition was to be as unlike her mother as possible in every way. In fact, this was almost always her ambition. Her mother's judgmental rap was her only real conversation ... [T]he significance of her mother's unhappiness settled over the house and gathered all of the Hoods around it. To avoid this trouble, Wendy got herself into trouble elsewhere. (Moody, 1994, p. 132).

This paragraph's effect is bilateral: it serves as an explicatory device for Wendy's behaviour and inner world; and also characterises Elena.

Paul wants Libbets (p. 89), but he also wants (p. 102) "to make a better family than the one from which he came", because he considers himself to be (p. 196) "a loser from a family of losers". Again, the conflict rising from familial relationships, shared by all members of the Hood family, is directly related to the plot.

In *Fingersmith* (2002) Maud's nightmares act as the instigating force that will bring her closer to Sue, resulting in the emergence of deep mutual feelings:

'Don't leave me, Sue' I say. I feel her hesitate. When she draws away, I grip her tighter. But she moves only to climb across me, and she comes beneath the sheet and lies with her arm about me, her mouth against my hair. She is cold, and makes me cold. I shiver, but soon lie still. 'There,' she says then. She murmurs it. I feel the movement of her breath and, deep in the bone of my cheek, the gentle rumble of her voice. 'There. Now you'll sleep—won't you? Good girl'. (Waters, 2002, p. 249).

Goals can be determined by external forces, or reflect the character's inner states (Varotsis, 2013). Whether part of a conscious authorial strategy or not, a character's motivation plays a predominant role in the narrative's unfolding.

Some writers, like Egri (1960), have equalled motivation to the premise itself. It is the creative attribution of life, interpreted by the inherent understanding of human

experience that is captured through the depiction of a character's motivational forces. And such forces should emerge as a result of her internal consistency (Currie, 2010; Lebowitz, 1984), not the application of a methodology that dictates specific intentional acts. Motivation emerges as part of a character's uniqueness, and the constituents of its pattern cannot be shared by any other (Allport, 1937, p. 321).

Alexander Shand (1926, p. 65) considered will a primary force in a person's character, and as he noted, "[I]t is an expression of the tendencies of emotions and sentiments; ... [I]n them its innate qualities are manifested, and its acquired qualities developed". Will is constituted by those elements in one's cognitive and emotional map that help her (re-) evaluate her position in the world. Its force is manifested by a person's struggle to (re-) define herself in the arisen and re-shaped circumstances through which she may, or may not achieve her goals. A complex web of past and present desires and occurrences, goals and events affect, and sometimes define, the future. A character's motivation acts as a principal initiator of action, the impact of which will create new responses (Varotsis, 2013).

In *Disgrace* (1999), Lurie is driven by desire to such a degree that he fails to predict the consequences of his actions. It is because of those consequences precisely that he will leave Cape Town and visit Lucy in the Eastern Cape. Lurie confesses himself to be "a servant of eros" (p. 67) and that Melanie "struck up a fire in [him]" (p. 222). He is driven by passion and impulse to such a degree, that he pays a detective to track down Soraya (p. 13), sneaks into the enrolment office to obtain Melanie's details (p. 22), and even marks her present and grades her despite her absence from his class (p. 32). When he comes across Melanie (pp. 14-15), "He

is mildly smitten with her. It is no great matter: barely a term passes when he does not fall for one or other of his charges. Cape Town: a city prodigal of beauty, of beauties”.

Gilbert Ryle (1975, p. 111) explicated the notion of motivation through consistency and purpose. As he wrote (*ibid*), “The class of actions done from motives coincides with the class of actions describable as more or less intelligent.” Endorsing Ryle’s exegesis, I propose that within this premeditation lies the conceptual difference between character motive and internal conflict.

Motivation and internal conflict exist in a sequential liaison, the former deriving from the latter. Egri (1960, p. 65) explained conflict as the result of a character’s internal and surrounding contradictions. Expanding this proposition, I propose that the original sources of such contradictions may lie within any of the parameters discussed above: her physiognomy, her personal history, or issues that pertain to her social identity. An accumulation of elements in her emotional and cognitive assemblage, they affect or even dictate, directly or indirectly, her navigation through the narrative thread. As Julia Bell (2001, p. 95) points out, internal conflicts enable the character to have her own perspective of the world. Indeed, this is how character is revealed.

In *Fingersmith* (2002) Sue accepts to become part of Rivers’ plot, her motivation being the promised payment. Her internal conflict is the guilt surfacing every now and again during the scheme, peaking when she falls in love with Maud. Her external conflict emerges as she tries to escape the madhouse and reclaim her position in the Borough.

Maud, on the other hand, seeks liberty. This is her motivation when she agrees to become Rivers' accomplice (p. 227): "This is the liberty—the rare and sinister liberty—he has come to Briar to offer. For payment he wants my trust, my promise, my future silence; and one half of my fortune". And (p. 230): "My liberty beckons: gaugeless, fearful, inevitable as death". Her internal conflict is the same as Sue's—sentiments of guilt that will consume her once she falls for her. Her own external conflict will be to flee Lant Street, and free Sue from the madhouse.

Frey (1987, pp. 39-40) presents a distinction among static, jumping and slowly rising conflict, describing it by degree of change, speed and coherence. I prefer simpler exegeses: conflict should follow a coherent rhythm that renders it natural and believable. Abrupt or unjustified transitions will only serve to perplex, and since narrative is a constructed foundation of character and event, unpremeditated complexity will jeopardise the suspension of disbelief. As Elster (1983) notes,

Consistency, in fact, is what rationality in the thin sense is all about: consistency within the belief system; consistency within the system of desires; and consistency between beliefs and desires on the one hand and the action for which they are reasons on the other hand. (Elster, 1983, p.1).

Recapitulating, I have proposed that a fictional identity is inspired by the fundamental elements of a real person's, constituted by social and idiosyncratic parameters. For Ronald De Sousa (1976, p. 223), "[A] person is a rather messy hierarchy that includes wants and beliefs, and more besides". And for De Sousa (ibid, p. 221), such beliefs and desires are characteristics of an intentional system. Emotions, attitudes and values are all part of the character concept (Seeger, 1990) and, in collaboration with the external stimulus they define intentions, conflicts and motivations. This second 'version' of one's identity thus, is shaped by and is

indicative of, the one discussed above. As it emerges, identity becomes a bilateral concept the constituent parts of which co-exist in interaction.

I will close this section by presenting Kupperman's (1991, p. 7) account of 'no personality': "If personality is, in many contexts, a projection of oneself into other people's consciousness in a distinctive and possibly appealing way, then any failure to project can count as no personality".

The fictional character is not allowed the prerogative to stay hidden behind limited textual signs, for since she is inevitably deprived from an actual physical presence, it is only the mosaic of her identity that can render her explicit and distinct in the reader's mind. The author is thus called to amalgamate the common and the extraordinary, in order to present the reader with memorable fictional identities.

#### **5.5 THE CONCEPT OF CHARACTER ARC: SELF-CREATION OF CHARACTER**

Discussing a person's self-creation, Glover (1988) highlights that,

Consciously shaping our own characteristics is self-creation. ... The identity we create is often shaped, not by some heroic struggle, but through our choice of partners and friends, by the job we choose, and by where we decide to live. ... Self-creation is a matter of shaping our characteristics, even minor ones, in the light of our attitudes and values. (Glover, 1988, pp. 131-132).

As already demonstrated, the character concept, as a dynamic organisation, entails shifts and reformations motivated by her idiosyncratic elements, as well as the influences of the textual environment. Egri (1960, p. 49) pointed out respectively that, "Every human being is in a state of constant fluctuation and change. Nothing is static in nature, least of all men. ... [A] character is the sum total of [her] physical make-up and the influences [her] environment exerts upon [her] at that particular moment". Changes in the narrative occur within a developmental

continuum, essentially weaving it, until they frequently result in a cathartic metamorphosis by its end. This is what is often referred to as 'character arc'.

Daiches (1960) encapsulated its concept as follows:

As a result of the circumstance in which the character finds [her]self throughout the course of the story, [her] nature is modified and we are finally confronted with a different person from the one we met at the beginning. ... The final character is different, in the sense that events have made actual elements in [her] nature which before were only potential. (Daiches, 1960, pp. 21-22).

Similarly, Lothe (2000) writes that,

The novel's plot (and thus the form of madness that initiates and complicates it) changes the character in the course of the narrative, partly because the surrounding world to a greater degree meets the main character on [her] own terms and responds to [her] with various forms of counterplay. (Lothe, 2000, pp. 84-85)

My own definition of character arc is,

The gradual transformation of character, occurring through actions, reciprocations and thereof evaluations, which by the end of the story may result in novel perspectives for the character in question.

The recreation of the fictional identity is motivated by conflict. Egri (1960, p. 61) viewed that, "No man ever lived who could remain the same through a series of conflicts which affected [her] way of living. Of necessity [s]he must change, and alter [her] attitude toward life". Like many of his statements, this may sound like an absolute. Indeed, the re-evaluation of one's attitude is not a panacea in all literature, and many a time the character finds herself trapped in her own fictional self, rather than redeemed from it (Schwarz, 1989). This is the case in *The Icestorm* (1994), the resolution of which lies within the protagonists' realisation that the family they try to escape has been consisted by them alone, and that only facing the truth about oneself could bring redemption.

However, it is the diathesis towards that change that depicts the essence of human nature, and so whether resolved or not, the character will inevitably undergo many stages in the attempt of an anew self-creation.

When the evening at Libbets' apartment goes nothing like Paul had envisaged it, he thinks:

He was unaware. He had plunged himself into the netherworld of troubled adolescents. He wasn't a man at all. He was a boy. A privileged kid. His parents could get him out of what he had done. He would go to Silver Meadow. His dad had money. His dad could pay for psychiatric treatment. His dad would turn up during visiting hours with fresh socks. His dad would ferry him home to Silver Meadow after he got thrown out of St. Pete's. (Moody, 1994, p. 191)

And when Ben discovers Mike Williams' body, he wants to believe he's a different man:

Hood had been transformed on Saturday morning from a self-pitying and disliked and hung-over securities analyst into, however, briefly, an agent of sympathy. On the other hand, which life wasn't heroic? Just living was heroic. Just talking to your family in the morning, before coffee, was heroic. (Moody, 1994, pp. 221-222).

One thus returns to the absorption of artifice, the attributed illusion that the character is a free-willed entity enduring, determining and accounting for what is happening to her. Indeed, any primary character should be allowed the prerogative to her discoveries (Harvey, 1965). As Mudrick (1968, p. 109) remarked, "Character, in fiction as in life, is fate, but it is also potentiality". Character growth emerges not just by the effects of her conscious choices, but also those external occurrences that lie outside her will power. Harvey (1965, p. 113) respectively indicated that, "One of the obviously interesting things about a protagonist is the process of change and growth (or decay) which he undergoes during the course of the novel,

changes of which he—lacking our privilege of varied perspectives—is often unaware”.

The alterations in David Lurie’s character take place subtly, smoothly and very realistically. Lurie’s preconceptions and life stances are moulded by the enormity of the events, yet he seems to falter between emotion and intellect. When he goes to watch Melanie act, he finds himself contemplating:

In a sudden and soundless eruption, as if he has fallen into a waking dream, a stream of images pours down, images of women he has known on two continents, some from so far away in time that he barely recognizes them. ... What has happened to them, all those women, all those lives? Are there moments when they too, or some of them, are plunged without warning into the ocean of memory? (Coetzee, 1999, p. 258).

Yet the next minute:

*Enriched*: that was the word the newspapers picked on to jeer at. A stupid word to let slip under the circumstances, yet now, at this moment, he would stand by it. By Melanie, by the girl in Touws River; by Rosalind, Bev Shaw, Soraya: by each of them he was enriched, and by the others too, even the least of them, even the failures. Like a flower blooming in his breast, his heart floods with thankfulness. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 258).

The development in Lurie’s character also manifests in his stance towards the animals. When he initially arrives at Lucy’s land, his views about animal welfare are condescending (p. 95). Soon enough (p. 101), Lurie agrees to help Bev Shaw in her shelter, only: “as long as I don’t have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself”.

Yet as he reaches catharsis:

He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy’s kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake. He does not understand what is happening to him (Coetzee, 1999, p. 190).

And:

Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the damp and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway? For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing. (Coetzee, 1999, pp. 194-195).

Lurie's arc is reflected in the transformation of his Byron project, the opera he wishes to write and towards which he repositions himself through the changes in his and Lucy's lives. While he initially focuses on Byron himself and his relationship with young Teresa Guiccioli, he ends up contemplating about an aged Teresa instead, and Byron's own abandoned daughter (Graham, 2003).

Finally, Lurie surrenders to the realisation of his vulnerability (p. 267): "Standing against the wall outside the kitchen, hiding his face in his hands, he heaves and heaves and finally cries".

This amalgamation of possibility and authorial decision is what renders the character arc a smooth congruent process of micro-transitions, rather than one abrupt change of ethos to serve the purposes of formulaic, pre-decided plots. As Daiches (1960, p. 21) pointed out, development is different to crude change. Glover's (1988) following comment is indicative:

Not all self-creation involves strenuous efforts of will. It can be a matter of endorsing and encouraging tendencies that are already natural to us. ... [It] is not like the instantaneous transformations of magic, but more like sculpting a piece of wood, respecting the constraints of natural shape and grain. (Glover, 1988, pp. 135-136).

And Kupperman (1991) emphasises that,

Occasionally, we encounter someone whose character has been drastically transformed, and we say that so-and-so "hardly is the same person". ... [D]rastic changes are exceptions that prove the rule: The ways we hold people responsible for their actions and the ways in which we expect their loves to

maintain some continuity are keyed to the assumption that people's characters normally are highly stable. (Kupperman, 1991, p. 16).

Major changes may indeed occur by contextually justified causes in a narrative. A prime example in *Disgrace* (1999, p. 142) is Lucy's instant transformation, all but unexpected:

Lucy keeps to herself, expresses no feelings, shows no interest in anything around her. It is he, ignorant as he is about farming, who must let the ducks out of their pen, master the sluice system and lead water to save the garden from parching. Lucy spends hour after hour lying on her bed, staring into space or looking at old magazines, of which she seems to have an unlimited store. She flicks through them impatiently, as though searching for something that is not there. (Coetzee, 1999, pp. 151-152).

And in the note she slips under his door, she admits (p. 215): "I am not the person you know. I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life".

In the face of such a life-changing incident, Lucy's abrupt metamorphosis is inevitable. However, it is also temporary. Reaching closure, Lurie watches her as she works in the garden (p. 292), "She looks, suddenly, the picture of health".

The coherence of pace and conceptual restructuring is achieved by the narrative course Egri (1960, p. 129) described as follows: "The small conflicts, which we call 'transition', lead the character from one state of mind to another, until he is compelled to make a decision".

And so the need for consistency emerges once again. It is only if the character is envisaged as a conceptual unity moving through her spatio-temporal surroundings that any transformations may take place. To quote Kupperman (1991),

Even if character changes, in the process growing or deteriorating, the continuity of character can provide a unifying thread among different

episodes. Not only will there be connections provided by continuity in the sort of person who is doing or responding to various things, but other unifying themes may well emerge as a result of the ways in which characters shape events. (Kupperman, 1991, pp. 135-136).

And as Harvey (1965, p. 120) wrote, “[C]hange is ... reconciled to the idea of a stable ego; one’s identity lies precisely in the unique pattern of past changes which constitutes one’s individuality. And this pattern also involves the future to the extent that it allows for some possibilities of development and excludes others”.

Indeed, a character may be called to defend or re-examine past beliefs, possibly deviating from them, endorsing new ones, and thus create new versions of her identity, which is an inseparable part of one’s self-creation (Margolin, 2002; Glover, 1988). As Taylor (1985, p. 261) pointed out, “consciousness goes along with a transformation of the significances we live by.”

At the end of *Fingersmith* (2002), Maud has been transformed from a fragile upper-class lady to a girl of the Borough, and then into a writer of erotic context. Sue, on the other hand, is considered ‘brave’ but not particularly clever at the beginning of the narrative (p. 12): “‘That’s Susan Trinder,’ someone might whisper then. ‘Her mother was hanged as a murderess. Ain’t she brave?’”. And:

I think the people who came to Lant Street thought me slow.—Slow I mean, as opposed to fast. Perhaps I was, by Borough standards. But it seemed to me that I was sharp enough. You could have not grown up in such a house, that had such businesses in it, without having a pretty good idea of what was that—of what could go into what; and what could come out”. (Waters, 2002, p. 14).

Sue cannot suspect the true motives behind Mrs Sucksby’s protection. Then, after Rivers’ murder and Mrs Sucksby’s incarceration:

They talked about my mother, and the bad blood that flowed in me. They didn’t say I was brave, now; they said I was bold. They said they wouldn’t have been surprised if it was me that put the knife in, after all ... When I

walked out in the Borough, people cursed me. Once, a girl threw a stone at me. At any other time it would have broken my heart. Now, I did not care. (Waters, 2002, p. 511).

Such multidimensional interactions between character and text, and the consequential reformations one bears upon the other, describe the dynamic nature of the novel as an active system of interrelated components (Varotsis, 2013), within which all parts assume equal significance and as such work in synergy.

#### **5.6 CHARACTER IN THE NARRATIVE: INSTIGATION, RECEPTION AND RECIPROCATION OF ACTION**

In this final section, I will be discussing the phase of Exposition, or else characterisation, through the concept's properties as action instigator, receiver and reciprocator. The mechanics underlying the multidirectional interaction among character and the rest of the narrative could not possibly be exhausted in a single chapter. The fictional character may well be viewed as a complex system of interrelated components in constant synergy and interaction (Varotsis, 2013; Egri, 1960), and as such would require a thorough, multifarious analysis, which restrictions of economy do not allow me. I will therefore focus on those elements that pertain to the agent's navigation through the plot, through which characterisation manifests and the concept of character arc becomes a potential.

Examining the character as a begetter, recipient and reciprocator, I will be analysing a) the manifestations of her previously discussed identity through possible expositors, b) the relations among characters and c) the basic principles of interaction between character and the narrative's external stimuli. I begin with a few definitions of the terms 'story', 'plot' and 'event' that I will be using.

According to Forster's (1974) distinction,

[A story is] a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. (Forster, 1974, p. 87).

Chatman (1978, p. 28) defines story as "[T]he continuum of events presupposing the total set of all conceivable details, that is, those that can be projected by the normal laws of the physical universe". His account (ibid, p. 44) for 'event' entails that, "Events are either *actions (acts)* or *happenings*. Both are changes of state. An action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient. If the action is plot-significant, the agent or patient is called a character".

And Lothe (2000, p. 72) considers it to be "[A]n integral part of the action: it involves a change or a transition from one situation to another ... and this transition is usually caused or experienced by one or more characters".

I define 'event' as,

The manifestation of an occurrence created either by the character's actions, or the environmental forces of the author's constructed spatio-temporal environment.

Moving on to 'plot', I suggest it is,

The sequential narrative thread weaved by the character's illusive free will and the author's direct mechanics, guided by causality and, most often, temporal succession.

From this explanation emerges that character and event co-exist in a synergetic, bidirectional interaction, and as such presuppose a balance within the systemic universe of the narrative (Varotsis, 2013). An emphatic shift towards this or the other end results in what Forster (1974, p. 92) described as follows: "Sometimes a plot triumphs too completely. The characters have to suspend their

natures at every turn, or else are so swept away by the course of fate that our sense of their reality is weakened“. I have demonstrated that the novel can be viewed as an interchange between textual fate and possibility (Mudrick, 1968; Egri, 1960); I shall now proceed to investigate what such symmetry entails, and how it can be achieved.

### **5.6.1 CHARACTER EXPOSITORS**

By ‘character expositors’ I refer to all those indicators of her a priori constructed fictional identity that emerge throughout the text.

The last of the conditions specified in the person schema was the individual’s ability to communicate. For Taylor (1985, p. 273), “Language creates what one might call a public space, or a common vantage point from which we survey the world together”.

It is through communication that a (fictional) person reveals the assemblage of her identity. Such conveyance can be accomplished by both verbal expression, and movement.

A character’s unique speech can be exposited both by indirect discourse, i.e. internal thoughts, or direct monologue or dialogue, and is one of the most powerful tools of characterisation in an author’s disposal (Boulter, 2007; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). Not only does it serve to define character relations, but most importantly, it is indicative of the fictional identities’ social and idiosyncratic dimensions, conveying stances, ideologies, socio-cultural background (Tannen, 1992), her goals and desires (Frey, 1987) as well as attitudes towards other characters (Burr, 2002). In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 36), Sue refers to ‘chemise’ as ‘shimmy’, and Rivers corrects her: “‘Her chemise, you must call it,’ he says”. Sue must adopt vocabulary and

manners very different to her own, a prerequisite for her transformation from a Borough girl to a lady's maid.

In *Disgrace* (1999), Lurie and Lucy argue over the position of animals:

"I'm sorry, my child, I just find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It's admirable, what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some *raping* [emphasis mine] and pillaging. Or to kick a cat".

...

"You think, I ought to involve myself in more important things", says Lucy. ...  
"You think, because I am your daughter, I ought to be doing something better with my life. You don't approve of friends like Bev and Bill Shaw because they are not going to lead me to a higher life ... But it is true. They are not going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals".

In order to achieve exposition of a character's social dimensions, some writers attempt to render dialect, accent, and social position by cramming vowels or consonants together, or omitting syllables. By mimicking speech patterns of certain socio-cultural groups, they believe they attribute reality to the fictional voice. This is what Mullan (2008, p. 128) refers to as "*Idiolects*-forms of speech distinctive of an individual". In reality, (ab-)use of this technique renders the text indecipherable and the dialogue hard to follow. Much like fiction in its entirety, verbal communication in novels should not appear as transcripts of real-life speech, but rather an inspired, created version of it (Boulter, 2007; Stein, 1995). Mullan (2008) accordingly explains that,

Even novelists who like to render the brute patterns of colloquial language will tactfully avoid the repetitions and redundancies, the endless qualifications and unfinished sentences, that characterize 'real speech'. Fiction smoothes speech. It also often translates it. (Mullan, 2008, p. 129).

If a writer wishes to convey ethnic, racial and/or socio-cultural attributes through dialogue, she may use 'speech habits' (Mullan, 2008, p. 131). Speech habits

pertain to colloquial verbal patterns such as word omissions, syntactical errors, shifted word order in sentences, substitution of pronouns, slang, professional jargon and so on (Mullan, 2008; Stein, 1995; Gumperz, 1982). Mullan (ibid) clarifies that “Distinctive speech habits are not necessarily distinctively informal”. Here are two indicative examples from *Disgrace* (1999). The first is from Lucy’s encounter with the rapists, at her farm:

To the men she says: ‘What do you want?’  
The young one speaks. ‘We must telephone.’  
‘Why must you telephone?’  
‘His sister’—he gestures vaguely behind him—“is having an accident.”  
‘An accident?’  
‘Yes, very bad.’  
‘What kind of accident?’  
‘A baby.’  
‘His sister is having a baby.’  
‘Yes.’ (Coetzee, 1999, pp. 121-122).

It is not simply colloquialism explicated here. The men’s’ inability to provide consistent answers to Lucy’s question alerts the reader that something worrisome is to take place.

The second is from the scene where Lurie confronts Petrus over Pollux for a second time:

‘You say it is bad, what happened,’ Petrus continues. ‘I also say it is bad. It is bad. But it is finish.’ He takes the pipe from his mouth, stabs the air vehemently with the stem. ‘It is finish.’  
‘It is not finished. Don’t pretend you don’t know what I mean. It is not finished. On the contrary, it is just beginning. It will go on long after I am dead and you are dead.’  
Petrus stares reflectively, not pretending he does not understand. ‘He will marry her,’ he says at last. ‘He will marry Lucy, only he is too young, too young to be marry. He is a child still.’ (Coetzee, 1999, pp. 270-271).

The attribution of realism constituting the uniqueness of each character voice should not be substituted by overly stylised formality. As Egri (1960, p.238) warned,

“[R]eally fine dialogue is impossible unless it follows clearly and validly from the character that uses it”. Similarly, Boulter (2007, p. 157) advises that “[B]y differentiating your characters’ speech patterns, you will crystallise their individual identities”. And Stein (1995, pp. 116-117)) designates vocabulary, tight or loose wording, sarcasm, cynicism, and poor grammar as ‘speech markers’.

Again, from *Disgrace* (1999, pp. 60-61), when Manas Mathabane asks Lurie: “[I]s there any member of the committee whose participation you feel might be prejudicial to you?”, he replies: “I have no challenge in a legal sense ... I have reservations of a philosophical kind, but I suppose they are out of bounds.” Lurie’s unique voice of scholarly arrogance and wit, depicted both in dialogue and internal monologue, is exemplary.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue curses and uses contractions:

I said, ‘Ain’t there a cab-man could take me?’

‘A cab-man?’ said the guard. He shouted it to the driver. ‘Wants a cab-man!’

‘A cab-man!’

They laughed until they coughed. The guard took out a handkerchief and wiped his mouth, saying, ‘Dearie me, oh!dearie, dearie me. A cab-man, at Marlow!’

‘Oh, fuck off,’ I said. ‘Fuck off, the pair of you.’ (Waters, 2002, p. 55).

It is not simply speech patterns that illuminate a person’s character, but also her choice of words and attitudes towards others. As Stein (1995, p. 114) underlines, “[W]hat counts is not what is said but the effect of what is meant.” Gumperz *et al.*, (1982, p. 30) also argue that, “We can never say anything without intoning it, and changing the intonation of an utterance entails changing some aspect of its meaning. Any one way of saying something is understood as a choice – it can only be explicated by contrast with other possibilities”.

Similarly, Seger (1990, p. 148) refers to 'subtext', and Tannen (1992, p. 13) to the 'meta-message', considering it relationship-defining. As she explains (ibid, p. 14), "Whereas words convey information, how we speak those words... communicates what we think we're doing when we speak. In other words, how we say what we say communicates social meanings".

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Elena wants to know what Ben had been doing wandering at the Williamses':

'So what were you doing in the basement anyway?'

Only a slight hesitation. 'Just dropping off a coffee cup. Jim left it, last time he was over. It was on the dash of the car. You were, you know, reading. I was just dropping off the cup.'

...

'Oh, right,' she said. 'The mustache coffee cup. The one that was sitting on the dash.'

'Yeah, sure,' he said. 'That's the one.'

'That one.'

Benjamin nodded vigorously.

'That one.'

Her husband simply laughed. As if the flimsiness of his deceptions wouldn't adhere to him. (Moody, 1994, p. 65).

Later on:

'Stupid mustache cup[,] [Elena said].

'What do you mean?'

'Don't be dim.'

'I don't know what you're talking [sic] about.'

'I'm not surprised,' Elena said.

... 'Listen, honey, if you're gonna pull the passive aggressive stuff on me again...'

'Your *unfaithfulness*, she said. That's what I'm trying to talk about. Your unfaithfulness, your betrayal. Your *dalliance*. Okay? And you won't do me the dignity of being up-front about it.' (Moody, 1994, p. 70).

Whether habitual or premeditated, one's verbal manners reveal the social and idiosyncratic aspects of her identity respectively. In that sense, dialogue also becomes a relationship-defining tool. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 64) notes, "What

one character says about another may characterize not only the one spoken about but also the one who speaks”.

In *Disgrace* (1999), referring to Petrus, old Ettinger says (p. 144): “Not one of them you can trust.”

In *The Icestorm* (1994), Jim Williams has spent the night with Elena in an act of unspoken retaliation against their spouses’ infidelity. Yet when they discover that Sandy and Wendy have spent the night together, albeit misreading what really happened, Jim berates and preaches:

Imagine, Sandy, if Wendy were to get pregnant right now. ... Do you expect us to carry the expenses you two incur through stupidity? Hell, no! And who’s going to teach this kid the morals it needs to have? Its morality is already a little sloppy based on the job you’re doing now. Get it? You two aren’t even done learning morals yourselves and already you want the responsibility of taking on a kid? And add to this the fact that you don’t know how you feel about each other, because there are other ... extenuating relationships going on around here. You don’t even know what you think exactly. (Moody, 1994, p. 246).

Another form of communication lies within the interpretation of bodily movements, depicting ethnic and social habits, as well as emotional stances and attitudes. The way a person walks, her postures, facial expressions, and habitual movements all serve to characterise her idiosyncratically (Stein, 1995; Tannen, 1992). These are also to be used bilaterally—by signifying the character’s social background, as well as to define her relationships with the rest of the cast. As Mullan (2008, p. 139) explains, “Gestures and affections carry characters beyond their languages. ... Reaching between languages becomes a special intimacy, for it is a way in which a person loses [her] certainties and assumptions”.

In *Disgrace* (1999), when Lurie visits Mr Isaacs in the latter’s office (p. 221), “Isaacs has a cheap Bic pen in his hand. He runs his fingers down the shaft, inverts

it, runs his fingers down the shaft, over and over, in a motion that is mechanical rather than impatient”.

Similarly, in *The Icestorm* (1994, p. 113), the reader is informed that “Elena smiled faintly when she was distressed.”

And in *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 42, Sue narrates: “Mr Ibbs [was] only drumming his fingers a little on the table-top, by which I knew that he was nervous”.

Later, Sue must learn to curtsy like a lady’s maid. When Rivers arrives at Briar, she attempts to wink and curtsy at the same time (p. 106): “I said, ‘Oh, thank you, sir!’ And I made another curtsy, and I winked.—Two curious things to do together, as it happened, and I would not recommend you try it: for I fear the wink unbalanced the curtsy; and I’m certain the curtsy threw off the wink”.

Habits, obsessions and rituals are equally expository, individualising primary and secondary characters all the same. In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 50) the reader learns that John and Dainty never rise before 1pm; that Sue is not a ‘crying girl’ (p. 62); that Christopher Lilly (p. 75) has painted his library windows yellow to protect his precious collection from sunlight, and (p. 76) that he keeps a brass hand with a pointed finger on the floor to mark the boundaries nobody is to surpass; that Maud is bad at stitching (p. 81), and that she keeps a picture of her mother locked up in a box, which she kisses every night before she goes to bed. Sue perceives this as an act of nostalgia, a tribute (p. 85); in reality, Maud hates her mother, does it only to torment Mrs Stiles (p. 197).

Other character expositors include personal tastes depicted in a character’s own constructed environment, personal objects or, as already seen, choice of

apparel (Mills, 1996; Stein, 1995; Lodge, 1992; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983; Braine, 1974; Harvey, 1965).

In *The Icestorm* (1994, p. 15), the reader is informed that, during college, Ben drove a Jaguar which he later had to replace with a family Corvair (p. 15); that Wendy watches *Watergate* (p. 40), doesn't mind winter (p. 41), and loves *Chiller Theater* and *Nanny and the Professor* (p. 151); and that Paul is "a compulsive reader of comics" (79). And the Hood's key-ring becomes an object of significance at the Harolds' party, when Janey recognises it, sets it aside in the salad bowl and goes for a different one instead, instigating a series of events (p. 169).

In the beginning of the story, Ben walks into Mike's room:

Hood headed for Mike Williams's room. He was sure the doorknob would be rigged with home electronic alarms. The apparatus for this alarm would be arranged on the floor just inside the room, rigged with pipe cleaners and roach clips and a nine-volt battery he had lifted from somebody's automatic garage opener. Mike liked whoopee cushions and rubber dog excrement. He often wore a Nixon mask. ... Mike's doorknob released no shock, however. ... Black-light posters and tapestries covered the walls, tapestries that, in light of the dim table lamp Hood switched on, were full of burn holes and unidentifiable stains. A water pipe the size of a barber pole stood in one corner. (Moody, 1994, pp. 21-22).

Indeed, Mike is the curious, the inventing boy, whose love for experimentation will lead him to his death by electrocution. Another example is the Hood's house, pointedly depicting Elena's mood and their life rhythm:

The hall was blue-gray and the master bedroom was blue-gray and the rug was a deeper shade of blue-gray and the curtains were a sort of blue-gray. The bedspread on the master bed was blue and red, checked. The light outside was blue-gray, and when Elena switched on a light by the bed it hardly did the trick. (Moody, 1994, p. 63).

This description does not only serve to characterise Elena's conservative nature, but also her dissimilarity with Ben's mistress, Janey Williams, who has a waterbed in the master bedroom (p. 28).

In *Fingersmith* (2002, p. 77) Maud hates eggs, as they remind her of the day she was brought to Briar. She has also been made to constantly wear gloves, so that her hands are smooth enough to handle her uncle's books (p. 189). Sue steals one of them (p. 148), and it becomes a souvenir, something she grows to hate, but fights to keep (p. 406). And Nurse Bacon's hand ointment becomes the object that will set Sue free, when she moulds the key copy in its grease (pp. 455-456).

In *Disgrace* (1999) David Lurie is fascinated by Byron's life, he does not play jazz (p. 19), and finds Melanie's rodent slippers tasteless (p. 31).

All discussed expositors should be used appropriately, not abused. Abundance of gesturing, meaningless dialogue and unnecessary details that are neither linked to the plot or serve as to individuate the character may render the writing amateurish and incoherent. Dialogue that is over-stylised, dense with idiolects or a copy of a real person's incoherent mumbling is likely to alienate the reader rather than entice her into the plot. Above all, the author should remember that elements of characterisation are exactly that—the means by which she may accomplish coherent character exposition and as such ascertain the reader's participation at the other end of the communication axis; not the ends themselves.

### **5.6.2 CHARACTER RELATIONS**

Character relations pertain both to actual connections between primaries and the rest of the cast, such as family, friendships and so on; and to those connections among the agents as textual elements interacting with one another, creating new

dynamics for the plot. A narrative may be regarded as an intersection of dissimilar fictional paths, a web knitted by the consequences of choices. As Harvey (1965) explained,

The human context ... is primarily a web of relationships; the characters do not develop along single and linear roads of destiny but are, so to speak, human-crossroads. It is within this pattern, this meshing together of individualities, that they preserve their autonomy, yet through our perception of the pattern their significance extends beyond themselves into a general comment of the world. (Harvey, 1965, p. 69).

The clash of conflicts, fears and desires emerging as a sequence of occurrences create crossroads for the characters (Stein, 1995). As Williams (1995, p. 4) has written, "All choices operate in a space of alternatives constrained by the contingent cause of various possibilities".

The entire narrative of *The Icestorm* (1994) is built precisely on such interactions and clashes. *The Icestorm* is primarily a novel about human relations, the effect of personal choice on them, and their reciprocating impact. Ben is unfaithful, because (p. 12) "Elena had been shy and brilliant and beautiful and impossible to talk to". For Wendy (p. 39), "her family was chilly and sad. ... She had never seen her parents embrace". Elena, on the other hand, is aware of her husband's infidelity (p. 55), and sick of his drinking and 'impotence' (p. 54). At the end, she decides to retaliate by sleeping with Jim Williams (p. 176), only to regret it the next day. Janey and Jim Williams face their own marital problems (p. 177). The Harold's key-party is the epitome of the seventies' American culture Moody aims to depict:

In New Canaan, word had come of the key parties long before the first had been thrown. Local marriages awaited key parties the way a smart boy, already having pored over the dictionary definition of masturbation, awaits the day when he will understand it. The first one, thrown by some younger,

unhappier residents over in the West School district ... was viewed publicly with contempt but privately with much interest. (Moody, 1994, p. 110).

Conflicts will not emerge only by antithetical choices, but also by misinterpretations of stances (Tannen, 1992; Kochman, 1981). One therefore returns to the consequences of miscommunication as an indisputable external conflict-instigator. This is the foundation upon which bipolar dynamics such as the protagonist-antagonist are built upon to develop. As Egri (1960, p. 133) indicated, "On the surface, a healthy conflict consists of two forces in opposition. At bottom, each of these forces is the product of many complicated circumstances in a chronological sequence, creating tension so terrific that it must culminate in an explosion".

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue, Maud and Rivers are bound in a triangle of deception. Sue believes she is plotting against Maud, while in reality it is Maud scheming against her. Yet Maud will soon discover that she has herself been a part of a darker, long-prepared plan by a group of thieves, led by a woman who turns out to be her real mother. It is her familial bond with the girl that leads Mrs Sucksby to betray Sue.

Character relations will form, change and reform attitudes, resulting to an ex novo creation of situations. The perception of oneself by others plays a significant role in one's own self-determination, and as such the (re-)shaping of one's personality (Burr, 2002, p. 95). An integral mode of characterisation, relationships define their participants, highlighting aspects of their personality by similarity or contrast (Seeger, 1990; Margolin, 1987; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). As Harvey (1965, pp. 52-53) pointed out, "So much of what we are can only be defined in terms of our

relations with other people. ...[W]hat... characters do not share is more important than what they have in common". Boulter (2007, p. 141) similarly believes that, "The way a character is unique can only be understood in relation to other characters".

In *Disgrace* (2002) Lurie views himself as a man of impulse and pathos, while cultivating an increasing hatred for the three men that raped his daughter. He places himself not in juxtaposition with the rapists, but in direct contrast. He considers his imposition on Melanie Isaacs different, both by motivation and outcome, from the attack against Lucy. Melanie and Lucy are also different, guided by limitations and status quos. Protected by the institutional urbanism of the Cape Town University, Melanie reports Lurie; Lucy on the other hand, will not even think of pressing charges in the vastness of the Eastern Cape.

Character relations are not determined only by derivatives of comparison, but also by means of premeditation. As Burr (2002) outlines,

Human interaction ... demands that we have some conception of the meaning that our actions hold for others, and that we know that they will know that we have such a conception. Meaningful social interaction is distinguished by this characteristic: we are able to imaginatively anticipate the effects of our actions on others and act accordingly. ... Our role in a situation is therefore always a function of the roles of others. (Burr, 2002, pp. 66-67).

The complexity of human relations as depicted in the fictional narrative, their impact and consequences render the novel more than a simple form of entertainment, an inexhaustible source of human truths and possibilities. Harvey (1965, p. 52) analogously argued that, "It is precisely because the novel can establish a greater range and variety of perspectives than any other art-form ... that we may legitimately talk of the reality of fictional characters".

*Fingersmith* (2002), *Disgrace* (1999) and *The Icestorm* (1994) all demonstrate exemplary characterisation, with characters driven by convincing motivations and desires, defining their actions, leading to outcomes which in their turn instigate yet new actions and motivations.

In *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue goes to the Briar motivated by the promise of three thousand pounds, and to make Mrs Sucksby proud. Yet she will be betrayed by Maud, who longs for her freedom more than anything, thus ending up in the madhouse. Driven by hatred and love, her new purpose will be to escape, uncover Rivers' deception and resume her place in the Borough. She will achieve this with the help of Charles, who, grieved by Rivers' departure and the ill-treatment he's been getting at Briar, will flee in search for 'Miss Lilly', hoping to be led to Rivers himself. Sue and Maud's life paths inter-cross creating situations for themselves and the others, which in their turn have consequences, and so on.

In *The Icestorm* (1994) amidst the havoc of the Hoods' and Williamses' family life degradation, Mike Williams dies. At the night of the ice-storm, he exits his house unsupervised, leaving a bundle of clothes in his place on the bed (p. 138), seeking adventure. His absence will not be noticed until much later, after Jim and Elena have discovered that their children have spent the night together, and Janey has returned home from her own night with a teenager.

Characters will love and be loved, fear and be feared, noticed or bypassed, and so their fates will be sealed or seal that of others. Outside the solipsistic cage of her own existence, the reader's surrendered self enters into a variety of virtual others, gaining insides and views she otherwise has no access to. And so the novel becomes nothing less than a great study of humanity.

### 5.6.3 EXTERNAL STIMULI

By 'external stimuli' I refer to all events affecting or altogether altering the emotional and situational status of a fictional agent, lying outside the scope of her illusive free will. These can pertain to the spatio-temporal environment, ranging from natural disasters to delayed trains; or the consequential impact of character relations discussed above.

Lothe (2000, p. 3) defines 'narrative' as "[A] chain of events which is situated in time and space". The time and space in a text constitute the narrative's environment. Since a narrative entails only its textual dimension, conceptual adjustments of the terms 'time' and 'space' need to be made. And so for clarification purposes, I embed Rimmon-Kenan's (1983, p. 44) account, according to which, "[T]ime in narrative fiction can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text". At the same time, the notion of 'space' equals the fictional setting within which the fictional character is placed.

A character and her assigned environment co-exist in constant interaction, and as such are closely interconnected (Varotsis, 2013). External stimuli will trigger responses, and shifts in the character's systemic organisation, which in their turn will instigate further events, whether by constructed premeditation or involuntarily. Whether the original initiator is the agent—"a vital determinant of events" as Currie (2010, p. 186) states—or an external stimulus, the cause-and-effect equilibrium of the narrative remains the same. As John Searle (2004, p. 151) indicates, "Every event that occurs in the world has antecedent sufficient causes. The sufficient causes of an event are those that, in a particular context, are sufficient to determine that that event will occur". Similarly, the interconnection

between the external stimulus and the character is both bidirectional and consequential: either by direct or indirect impact, the constantly reformed equilibrium between character and external stimulus creates the plot.

Moody's (1994) narrative reaches its resolution when the ice-storm peaks. The characters' moods and actions move parallel to the deterioration of the weather, bracing themselves both against forthcoming encounters and their implications, and the ice-storm. It is because of the ice-storm that Mike dies, yet in reality his death is the outcome of the crystallisation of relationships.

As Bell (2001, p. 95) explains, "Development of character relies on consequence, on the way in which the world creates and shapes us.

In *Disgrace* (1999), Lucy's rape is the event that will lead Lurie to his catharsis, resetting his perspectives and even sense of place in his life.

And in *Fingersmith* (2002), Sue will discover Marianne Lilly's will in Mrs Sucksby's taffeta dress after the latter's execution (p. 528-529). It is this letter that finally leads to the novel's resolution, with Sue deciding to seek out Maud, and reconcile with her.

External stimuli redefine the narrative causing shifts in its organisation, forcing the character to make decisions anew by (re-)adjusting elements of her personality, such as priorities, values and needs, assuming the form of external conflict and motivation. It is by such continuous shifts and reformations that the character arc is completed.

I will close this section by quoting Currie (2010):

Narrative is suited to the representation of Character. It is able to represent richly individuated temporal and causal connections between motivation, decision, and circumstance in ways that other representational forms cannot

match. It provides the space within which we can see a person's Character gradually revealed, and perhaps gradually changing in response to events to the actions of others. (Currie, 2010, p. 190).

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a thorough investigation of the fictional character, from its ontological definition, to its function in the text.

By dwelling on theories of personhood, I have established a propositional set for the 'character schema', to serve as the foundation upon which the individual identity of each character can be built, substantiating as such my previous proposition that character is inspired by the real person.

Moving on, I demonstrated how the bipolar character-plot does not constitute an antagonistic relationship, but an equilibrium from which the narrative emerges.

I proceeded to explicate the dynamics of my theory's second stage, that of Exposition, by pinpointing the difference between 'character' and 'characterisation'.

My own classification of character roles followed, in order to render the qualitative and quantitative application of the expository principles possible.

Next, I presented how character should be seen as a unique, textual construct inspired by basic principles of human psychology. I also explained why theories of character traits, structure and hierarchies, parameters and dimensions, as well as methodical advice offered by textbooks, may be useful, but inadequate.

Furthermore, I studied character as a self-created agent, by dwelling on the concept of character arc.

I then examined the notion of character identity, demonstrating how it can be perceived by the author, and dissecting it into ontological as well as societal parameters, which I analysed. In addition, I studied the tools that could serve as expositors of such identity.

Finally, I explored the interaction between character and the narrative environment, with an emphasis on character relations and external stimuli as fundamental plot-instigators.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This thesis set out to identify and shape experiential notions of thinking and synthesising into an explicatory approach, pertaining to the creation of the fictional character.

The continuous expansion of Creative Writing as an academic discipline, as well as the cultural commodification of its artefacts (Harper, 2010), highlight a fortiori the need for a distinct and coherent theoretical framework. As Kerry Spencer (2013) indicates,

[C]reative writing researchers have advocated the need for creative writing to establish its *own* theoretical approaches – approaches independent from conventional or postmodern literary ones. After all, literary theories are not fundamentally concerned with the *act* of writing, but with its *result*. (Spencer, 2013, p. 80).

The contribution to such a framework is this thesis' ultimate goal. My study does not aspire to serve either as a panacea, or as the only applicable tool in the creation of character. It is, however, a brick in the construction of a theoretical foundation, also acting as an interdisciplinary link for bidirectional influences with Literary Criticism and Cognitive Psychology. It provides an explanatory platform for the apprentice writer; a didactic direction for the academic; and an exegetic device for the literary critic. Additionally, it proffers an alternative route to character construction, founded on the practical application of substantial comprehension. The author need not design, or organise, or strategically prepare; she should understand.

Methodologically, this thesis combined synthesis with critical analysis. The creative writer synthesises *ex novo*; at the same time, analysis illuminates alternative creative paths. In that respect, Literary Theory as a sister discipline can

certainly advance Creative Writing, as demonstrated by its contribution to several of my propositions.

This is predominantly evident in my second chapter. Indeed, the exploration of Reader-Response Theories helped exemplify the significance of reader participation in the text. As Katharine Coles (2013) indicates,

[Y]oung writers often think of writing as being primarily about the writer rather than about the reader, about creating an experience for oneself and perhaps one's friends rather than about creating a complex experience or expression for an unfamiliar other to enter and take on. (Coles, 2013, p. 157).

The chapter underpinned the Reader's existence, and also her universality. It warned the writer that she is to be acknowledged, but not to the extent of impairing her own creativity and judgment. The Reader should be respected, but not allowed to dominate the text. Moreover, it cautioned against the demonisation of emotional response as 'unsophisticated'. By highlighting the anthropocentric interest in reading, it illustrated how fiction encompasses human nature in its entirety, and emotions constitute a vital part of it.

The third chapter scrutinised the notion of realistic attribution in the text. A writer's one perception of reality will determine the degree she will choose to deviate from it. Yet realism is not an end in itself, but the means into achieving coherence, a logical stream the reader can follow. The writer is inspired by the world to construct hers *ex nihilo*, and it can be radically different to the real one, as stories across different genres demonstrate. The idea of consistency is contextually adjusted, not applied in the altar of realistic precision. Subsequently, believability emerges from congruence and complexity, as does character. The novelist's task is

not to explain her definition of 'reality', but rather depict it through her creative performance.

In the fourth chapter, I illustrated the uniqueness of the authorial identity, along with her artistic right to self-definition. Having extricated herself from the narrative, she remains a discreet presence, allowing the reader the prerogative to participate without manipulating her into traps of morality and propaganda. Instead, she engages into Creative Writing acts as per her own intentional and idiosyncratic motivations, yet always in an anthropocentric exploration. The relationship between author and character is multifarious. The author assumes a role analogous to that of an actress, a maternal figure and a goddess at the same time. With her perception, practical research, imagination and craftsmanship at work, she applies her understanding of human nature into the moulds of her character material, albeit letting them shape themselves for consistency. That way, the narrative emerges as a natural consequence, rather than an episodic sequence of forced authorial decisions. By establishing her intended mode of narration, the author also defines, to a degree, the reader's alignment with the character.

In the last chapter, I synthesised a set of character conditions based on proposed person schemata. Defining the character ontologically helped me to examine her in relation to the narrative in its entirety. It is there that the a priori conceptualisation of the fictional character will be explicated. With a range of devices at her disposition, the author selectively conveys the information she wishes, painting a convincing portrait for the reader to follow. The relationship between character and narrative is a dynamic one, with constant shifts and

interactions systemically reforming it, until the story reaches its conclusion and the character arc is, or is not, completed.

As a project aspiring to fill a theoretical gap, and at the same time serve as an interdisciplinary tool, this thesis inevitably has its many limitations.

To begin with, each of my chapters could constitute a thesis in itself, both pertaining to character construction, as well as other aspects of the Creative Writing act. Achieving consistency across genres, examining closely notions of perception and imagination, and analysing what Creative Writing as a craft may entail are only a few examples. The substantiating explications of my propositions on these matters could be expanded and analysed *ex novo*, enriching Creative Writing theory all the more. The systemic analysis of the interaction among narrative elements may constitute an entire field of study (Varotsis, 2013), casting light upon different ways of story-telling, focusing on different elements or the narrative holistically.

Another issue to be considered is the absence of an original work of Creative Writing which would serve to demonstrate how the products of my own approach are practically applicable. Word count restrictions did not allow me the prerogative, and a practical-based Creative Writing PhD would mean I would have to abandon a considerable part of my theorising. The use of post-event (Harper, 2010) examples aims to illustrate how my paradigm functions; I have not been speculating on authorial intentions, but testing my hypotheses against the texts. An original creative work would nonetheless enhance my theorising even further.

Ultimately, the purpose of this thesis is to provide a solid explicatory tool, guiding the creative writer to develop her own methods and techniques of

character construction. Understanding the nature and function of the character concept is foundational, and on such foundation an encompassing approach to character creation should be built.

## APPENDIX

### “The Ice Storm” by Rick Moody

Setting: New Canaan, a small suburban town in the outskirts of Connecticut

Period: Thanksgiving, 1973

Narration style: The author uses interchanges between third limited and contemporary omniscient in order to blend the experiential perspectives of his four protagonists with the narration of events outside their scope and knowledge. Yet at the end of the novel Moody surprises the reader by declaring Paul Hood as the sole narrator in first person form.

#### Plot précis

As a ghastly ice-storm rises over the suburban town of post-Thanksgiving New Canaan, the Hoods and the Williamses struggle to disentangle themselves from the asphyxiating web of family relations. Benjamin is trying to define the nature of his extramarital affair with Janey Williams; Elena is absorbed by the boundaries of her self-isolation, and her revulsion caused by her husband's infidelity; Wendy is devoted to politics, television and various sorts of sexual experimentation, especially with the neighbours' sons, Mikey and Sandy Williams. And Paul is lost in his world of comics, self-determination and drug intake. The novel follows each of the Hoods into their respective

spatial and mental paths during the night following Thanksgiving, when a party, an ice- storm, and a burst of realisations will leave their inerisible imprint on the remaining of the characters' lives.

## **“Disgrace” by J.M. Coetzee**

Setting: Cape Town and the Eastern Cape

Period: Post-apartheid South Africa

Narration style: Limited third person, touching in style on first-person autobiography.

### Plot précis

Driven by his passions, David Lurie, a middle-aged, twice-divorced professor in Cape Technical University, is accused of raping his student Melanie Isaacs. Refusing to demonstrate any sincere regret, Lurie is dismissed and dishonoured, and relocates to his daughter’s land in the Eastern Cape of post-Apartheid South Africa. Despite his apparent distaste for Lucy’s life plans, views and companions, Lurie settles in harmonically and becomes part of the farm’s daily life. Yet a brutal attack on the land, in which he is violently assaulted and his daughter raped, will challenge everything he thought he knew, leaving him amidst the shambles of implications and realisations.

## **“Fingersmith” by Sarah Waters**

Setting: London and suburbs

Period: 19<sup>th</sup> Century England

Narration style: The story is narrated by the two protagonists in first person multiple.

### Plot précis

Raised in a family of thieves, Sue Trinder is persuaded to assume the fake identity of Susan Smith and serve as young aristocrat Maud Lilly’s maid, in order to convince her into marriage with Richard Rivers, who plans to abandon her in a mental institution and share her inherited fortune with his accomplices. During the time she spends at the Briar, Sue falls for Maud and is overcome by guilt. Yet as she will soon discover, she was not a partner, but a victim of Rivers’ plans. Sue will eventually find herself locked inside the sanatorium intended for Maud, desperate to escape and avenge.

Brought in the Briar against her will, Maud Lilly is abusively trained by her uncle to become a secretary for his collection of pornographic books. One day, Richard Rivers arrives to the mansion and promises her freedom in return for her allegiance on a scheme, and half her fortune. Desperate to escape her uncle’s tyranny, Maud agrees.

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