

**David Kramer – an unauthorised biography**

and

**Creative Nonfiction: Writing an Unauthorised Biography of David  
Kramer**

by

Mario Maccani  
(student no: 28599102)

submitted towards the requirement for a  
Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in the subject  
Creative Writing

in the Faculty of Humanities  
of the  
University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof. HJ Pieterse

April 2011

**David Kramer - an unauthorised biography**

by

Mario Maccani  
(student no: 28599102)

submitted towards the partial requirement for a  
Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in the subject  
Creative Writing

in the Faculty of Humanities  
of the  
University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof. HJ Pieterse

September 2010

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people and institutions for their kind assistance which made this study possible:

My supervisor, Professor Henning Pieterse, who was consistently an incisive reader, and always brought clarity to the problems I encountered,

The financial assistance given to me by the University of Pretoria via the Humanities Faculty (Ms. Marieka Schoeman was especially helpful in this regard),

Ms. Adrienne Warricker, Information Specialist, Humanities Library, and Ms. Alett Nell, Acting Information Specialist, who supplied me with reading pertinent to my research,

Those people I interviewed who so kindly gave me their time and insights,

Friends who willingly offered up their time to proofread the biography and thesis, especially Ms. Amber Kinimont,

And of course, the focus of this work, David Kramer, whose work has brought so much delight to so many.

## CONTENTS

Abstract	p.6
Opsomming	p.8
<b>Part 1 - David Kramer – an unauthorised biography</b>	
1. Foreword	p.11
Chapter 1	p.18
Chapter 2	p.22
Chapter 3	p.25
Chapter 4	p.32
Chapter 5	p.47
Chapter 6	p.66
Chapter 7	p.70
Chapter 8	p.82
Chapter 9	p.88
Chapter 10	p.93
Chapter 11	p.107
Chapter 12	p.137
Chapter 13	p.147
Chapter 14	p.156



Chapter 15	p.173
Chapter 16	p.189
Chapter 17	p.200
Chapter 18	p.213
Chapter 19	p.223
Chapter 20	p.227
Chapter 21	p.229
Chapter 22	p.242
Chapter 23	p.244
Chapter 24	p.253
Chapter 25	p.256
2. Epilogue	p.259
3. Discography	p.260
4. Musicals	p.261
5. Shows	p.262
6. Prizes and Awards	p.263
7. Printed publications	p.264
8. Timeline	p.265

## **Part 2 – Creative Nonfiction: Writing an Unauthorised Biography of David Kramer**

1. Introduction	p.269
2. Fiction versus Nonfiction	p.273

3.	A Brief History of Biography Writing	p.283
4.	Comparing Biographical Styles	p.292
5.	Findings – The Process of Writing the Kramer Biography as a Creative Nonfiction text	p.315
	(i) Problems of Research	
	(ii) The Bilingual Nature of the Text	
	(iii) Fictionalisation	
	(iv) Ethics	
	(v) Influences	
	(vi) Make-believe	
	(vii) Approach to the Biographical Subject	
	(viii) Intertextuality	
	(ix) Biography Writing	
6.	Conclusion	p.358
	Bibliography	p.360

## ABSTRACT

This study is comprised of two parts: an unauthorised biography of the South African musician David Kramer, as well as a reflective look at the process of writing this biography. In this regard the following aspects were looked at closely: finding an appropriate style, biography versus propaganda, conjecturing, the bilingual nature of the text, problems of research, ethics, influences, make-believe, approach to the subject, intertextuality, and fictionalisation. The central question of the biography is to highlight the success of a fellow Worcester (the author's hometown) boy. The central research questions of the thesis are the fictionalisation of the nonfiction text, intertextuality, and the question of a text written in both English and Afrikaans.

With regard to the aforementioned fictionalisation, a biographical text is classified as “nonfiction”, because it deals with a real person and real events. However, a text such as *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* presents an alternative perspective, in that the narrative often moves into fiction, or “creative nonfiction”.

Written texts are traditionally divided into two fields: fiction or nonfiction. Nonfiction is deemed to be fact, truth, whereas fiction is the fruit of an author's imagination. But perhaps the notion of truth versus untruth is too limited, and one should include the words “objectivity” and “subjectivity”. Some texts incorporate both elements, be they newspaper editorials which are mostly opinion, advertisements which are highly subjective, or biographies such as Taraborrelli's *Madonna – An Intimate Biography*,

which often reads as a novel. This doctoral thesis looks at *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, which is at times “faction”, to illuminate the sections where the text fell somewhere between fiction or nonfiction.

In attempting this exercise, intertextuality was useful in two ways. Firstly, to ground the text in a reality the reader could believe, as it brought “real” things to the text, such as song lyrics, photographs, et cetera, all things which brought some credibility to the truth of the text, and secondly to place the events being described in a certain timeframe.

The use of English and Afrikaans in the biography was to reflect that Kramer uses both languages in his songs, and furthermore, to give an idea of the South Africa at the time of Kramer’s early success: the divides of English/Afrikaans, white/black, liberal/conservative.

Key words: David Kramer, propaganda, conjecturing, bilingualism, research ethics, influences, make-believe, approach to biographical subject, intertextuality, fictionalisation, fiction, nonfiction, creative nonfiction, faction, fact, truth, objectivity, subjectivity, novel, biography, text, writing process.



## SAMEVATTING

Hierdie studie behels twee gedeeltes: ’n ongemagtigde biografie oor die Suid Afrikaanse musikant David Kramer, asook ’n terugkykende blik na die skryfproses van hierdie biografie. In hierdie opsig is daar gekyk na die volgende aspekte: die soeke na ’n gepaste styl, biografie teenoor propaganda, gissing, die tweetaligheid van die teks, probleme met betrekking tot navorsing, etiese waardes, invloede, verbeelding, benadering tot die subjek, intertekstualiteit, en fiksionalisering. Die sentrale tema van die biografie is om die sukses van ’n mede Worcester (die skrywer se tuisdorp) seun te verhelder. Die sentrale navorsingsvrae van die proefskrif is die fiksionalisering van die niefiksie teks, intertekstualiteit, en die kwessie van ’n teks wat in beide Engels en Afrikaans geskryf is.

In verband met die voorafgenoemde fiksionalisering, word ’n biografiese teks as “niefiksie” geklassifiseer, siende dat dit te make het met ’n werklike mens en werklike gebeure, maar ’n teks soos *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* het ’n alternatiewe perspektief, in die sin dat die narratief dikwels na fiksie beweeg, oftewel “kreatiewe niefiksie”.

Geskrewe tekste word tradisioneel in twee kampe verdeel: fiksie of niefiksie. Niefiksie word gesien as feit, waarheid, terwyl fiksie die vrug van ’n skrywer se verbeelding is. Maar miskien is die idee van waarheid teenoor onwaarheid te eng, en moet mens die woorde “objektiwiteit” en “subjektiwiteit” insluit. Sommige tekste inkorporeer beide elemente, soos byvoorbeeld ’n redaksionele kommentaar in ’n koerant wat grotendeels opinie is, advertensies wat hoogs subjektief is, of biografieë soos Taraborrelli se

*Madonna – An Intimate Biography*, wat dikwels soos ’n roman lees. Hierdie doktorale proefskrif neem *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, wat soms “faksie” is, in oënskou om die gevalle waar die teks iewers tussen fiksie of nie-fiksie geposisioneer is, te verhelder.

Intertekstualiteit was in twee opsigte handig tydens die skryf van hierdie teks. Eerstens, om die teks vas te grond in ’n werklikheid wat die leser kan glo, omdat dit “regte” dinge na die teks bring, soos liedjie lirieke, foto’s, ensovoorts, alles dinge wat geloofwaardigheid na die waarheid van die teks gebring het, en tweedens om die gebeure wat beskryf is in ’n sekere tydperk te plaas.

Die gebruik van Engels en Afrikaans in die biografie is om te reflekteer dat Kramer beide tale in sy liedjies gebruik, en nog meer, om ’n idee te gee van die Suid Afrika tydens Kramer se vroeë sukses: die gaping tussen Engels/Afrikaans, wit/swart, liberaal/konservatief.

Sleutelwoorde: David Kramer, propaganda, gissing, tweetaligheid, navorsingsetiek, invloede, verbeelding, benadering, intertekstualiteit, fiksionalisering, fiksie,iefiksie, kreatieweiefiksie, faksie/faction, feit, waarheid, objektiwiteit, subjektiwiteit, roman, biografie, teks, skryfproses.

## Foreword

In 1982 I crammed into a Cape Town bookstore along with a horde of other fans, excited at the prospect of seeing David Kramer up close and possibly exchanging a few words with him. It was the book-signing of David's *Short Back & Sides*.

Of course I had seen David before, in concert at venues such as the now defunct *The Space* in Long Street, and around the hometown we both shared: Worcester. But this was different. David was now a star, and to me it seemed he had taken my Worcester with him. Magazines often mentioned the fact that he was born and raised there, and the town became part of David's lore. I was delighted that audiences liked his songs which described the very streets I had grown up on.

Even though David was to a large extent the same person I remembered from Worcester, there was now an aura around him. When standing in his company, you were aware that newspaper articles were written about him, that his voice was on the radio. My art teacher, Timo Smuts, had hosted dinner parties, where I had chuckled as David sang a song about kissing Sannie van der Spuy at the same swimming pool I frequented. After high school when we both found ourselves in Cape Town, I saw him wearing his armbank chic, as did a handful of the arty set. This attire was not new. In Worcester at the time, army greatcoats were high fashion in the winter, and velskoene were a must for boys, any season. Khaki shirts and trousers like those worn by farm workers were this avant-garde

group's idea of haute couture. So I truly felt that David was presenting me and my Worcester to the world.

There was something else, just out of the corner of my eye. By now the New Wave music scene had reached South Africa, with its philosophy that one didn't have to be American to have a voice. In addition, Mad Max had burst onto the cinema screens in 1979, and this non-American landscape had enthralled many. The time was riper than ever for a South African audience to appreciate a South African artist for what he or she was. And there was no mistaking David's South Africanness.

I remember the phenomenon of "Hak Hom, Blokkies". On the one hand I was glad that David was getting a lucky break, but on the other I was convinced that this song was just a novelty, and soon David would slip back to the folk scene from where he came, a handful of people (mostly friends or family) politely clapping. I was proved to be very wrong!

In 1986 I went back to study, this time at the University of Cape Town. I enrolled as a BA student, and in order to pay for my tuition fees I took a job at Campus Control, UCT's security section. Part of this job meant having to patrol the campus. One day whilst strolling through the university's theatre complex, Baxter Theatre, I came across a production being put through its paces. It was David's "District Six". I was surprised, and followed the "Broadway" part of Kramer's career as his musicals became successful internationally.

I was not as much a fan of the “musicals-David” as I was of the original poorwhite-bywoner-traveling-the-platteland-David, but I was glad for him, and those whose stories he was telling.

I dabbled with music myself, but very much as an amateur in a bedroom, recording three albums. As a fan of music, rather than a musician, I was constantly on the lookout for new sounds, new ideas. At that time there were virtually no international musicians to be seen on South African stages, so I settled for something else: auto- and biographies. I became a regular at the library in the Cape Town Town Hall, vicariously living through Elvis, the Stones, Jim Morrison, and many others. I often found myself wishing there was a Kramer biography, and this was when I first began toying with the idea of writing about David, although it was a very distant thought at that stage.

I began teaching English in South Korea and then Taiwan, living abroad for twelve years. During this time I enrolled at UNISA and completed my Masters degree in Creative Writing. By now the notion of putting something of David’s life on paper was becoming serious. I returned to South Africa a few times to visit family, ride the Argus, push my albums out on radio stations, and do research on the life and career of David Kramer. I went back to Worcester a few times, visited the graves of my parents, walked through the streets David and I had trod, feeling a tug at my heart when I saw boys wearing my old school uniform go by. When David attended high school, he went to Worcester Boys High, which later amalgamated with Worcester Girls High, becoming Worcester High

(now known as Worcester Gymnasium). I chatted to people in town about David, and there was always a sense of pride, as though the whole of Worcester had had a hand in his success. Many of the older folk were keen to talk about David's father, who had been injured in WWII.

The only problem was, being a Worcester boy gave me a certain "in", but when I indicated that I was thinking of writing something about David, as I felt I should mention, I sensed the laager being drawn in. There was that mistrust of some guy with a pen and notepad, as well as a protectiveness toward their favourite son. An example of this: I spoke to the Siddles, whose son Jamie had been a classmate of mine, and his brother Crispin a chum of David's, but the doors were very politely pulled shut when I fished for information about David. And I'm glad it was, as I wasn't comfortable snooping about, abusing my "in".

I left the Siddles, and walked past the house David and his brother John had grown up in. I looked at the garden, the front door, the roof, trying to establish some clue that this was a special place, a place of magic, where a boy could somehow breathe different air, which made dreams come true. As I stood there, aware that I was an imposter with my sneaky, private detective motive, I heard voices of children in a yard nearby, playing some game I couldn't quite pinpoint. But it reminded me so much of the games I used to play on the other side of the railway line in Hospital Park. It was so precious to me, and this mood, something almost tangible, is what I wanted to use as the starting point for my book.

It was clear to me that I wanted to tell the story of David, as well as myself – there would thus be an autobiographical undertone to the text, a melancholy trip down memory lane to the Worcester of my childhood, and to the South Africa that shaped (and still shapes) me. Thus, in the biography, I hope to move between fictional and factional writing, objective and subjective viewpoints. The fictional passages will help me to “create data” where information is unavailable, as this is an unauthorised biography, and the factional passages will hopefully ground the biography as a reality a reader can accept as plausible. This will lead to certain passages being more subjective than others. These passages will have to be reigned in, as they are not parts of, say, a poem, but rather passages to illustrate a real life. That being said, though, sometimes more can be said or inferred by being subjective about a subject’s character and motivations, and the matter of subjectivity as a useful tool cannot be denied.

Let me return to the biography. My thoughts began to gain clarity. I knew that I wanted to expose Kramer’s life from the Worcester that I knew, because it was the rural aspect that I was so attracted to in the early part of his career. I knew that there would be an element of autobiography to the intentioned text, as it was the Worcester and South Africa of my own early years that I saw in Kramer’s work, which motivated me to want to write about him. Those early songs and album covers really spoke to me on a level no other musician had, as I knew the ambience this art had been created in. There was an intensity to my relationship to the music and album artwork of Kramer’s early career, because I recognised many of the Worcester aspects from a first-hand experience, names of cinemas, restaurants, and so on.

I made up my mind to write a biography which would at times be fictitious. This was a way in which I could get around the fact that Kramer wasn't prepared to assist me in this project. When I spoke to him on the phone in 2008 he wasn't willing to participate in an authorised biography, but he gave me permission to write this unauthorised biography.

Seeing that Kramer wouldn't allow an authorised biography, I faced a serious problem, in that a huge source of information would not be available to me. There was an upside to this, though: if I had access to Kramer, I might have come under his spell and written little more than a public relations job. Seeing that I was on my own, I started with myself, my memories of the town we shared as boys, Worcester. I also began tracking down mutual acquaintances and conducted interviews, either by telephone, personal or correspondence.

In 2008 I enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. I would finally get to write a Kramer biography as the creative part of my thesis. I began putting my notes into some semblance of order. I interviewed people for this book, dug up old newspapers, magazine articles, and went to the internet. To a large extent I wrote of the Worcester that I remembered from my own childhood. When I wrote about David's time at Leeds University, for example, I referred to the interviews I'd had with the university staff as a starting point, and then let the creative, fictionalisation process begin.



Therefore, for the biography I knew that I wanted to champion a local boy, in a manner which would have hints of autobiography. With regards to the academic part of the study the research question also became clear. I was interested to see whether it would be possible to write a text traditionally seen as nonfiction, such as a biography, as a piece of fiction. I soon realised that this would not be possible, as the piece still had to be grounded in fact. In my research I came across Root's (2003:243) term "creative nonfiction", where it is possible to have both fiction and nonfiction elements to the biography, and this was the lightbulb moment for me. There are other elements to the study, such as intertextuality, bilingualism, et cetera, but it is the fictionalisation of the text which is the central research question.

Mario Maccani

Pretoria, South Africa

01.4.2011