

Creative Nonfiction: Writing an Unauthorised Biography of David

Kramer

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

April 2011

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis takes a reflective look at the process of writing an unauthorised biography. To do this the thesis will briefly look at fiction and nonfiction, before placing the biography somewhere in the middle, as a creative nonfiction piece.

In explaining the decisions made whilst writing the biography *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* the thesis will investigate problems of research, the bilingual nature of the text, fictionalisation, ethics, influences, make-believe, approach to the biographical subject, intertextuality, and biography writing. The main areas of this study are fictionalisation, intertextuality and the use of English as well as Afrikaans in the biography.

There were three main decisions to make before the Kramer biography could be attempted: what, why, and how.

What

The biography hopes to give information and insight to the life and career of David Kramer, to illustrate some of his experiences growing up as an English-speaking boy in small-town South Africa in the sixties and seventies, and the battles he might have had as a liberal in a society of mostly conservatives.

The biography allows the reader to walk the path that Kramer had, from his childhood to his university education in the United Kingdom, and his return to South Africa. Then it chronicles his transformation from textile designer to successful musician and playwright. Some of Kramer's lyrics and drawings are included, as well as photographs of the singer, and the town he grew up in, Worcester.

Why

There is no biography available for any interested parties, and precious little information is to be found regarding the life of Kramer. Hopefully this biography will fill that gap a little. Furthermore, the author wanted to recreate his own memories, as he himself, like Kramer, was a Worcester boy. There is then an undercurrent of autobiography to the text.

How

Once it was decided to tell Kramer's story as a creative nonfiction text, the process went relatively smoothly. The next step was to choose a texture for the biography – the text tries to tell the story of Kramer in an entertaining manner, which is hopefully easy to digest, in the same manner that Kramer's work is easy to digest. Whilst a biography such as Kannemeyer's *Leroux: 'n Lewe* is a thorough work, obviously the result of intensive research, it was found to be too meandering for the target audience of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*. On the other hand, Shapiro's *J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter* was felt to be somewhat insipid and shallow.

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography is made possible by the luxury of having being written in recent times, where it is deemed permissible to write a biography as a creative nonfiction text. Recognition should be given to the work of the Postmodernists in this regard, where actual fact is mixed with fiction. (Koos Prinsloo included a copy of a passport in the short story “Die Affair”, from the 1992 collection *Slagplaas*, as part of his narrative.)

1.2 Chapters of the Study

Tracing the writing of the biography, the thesis investigates:

- (1) Fiction versus Nonfiction
- (2) A Brief History of Biography Writing
- (3) Comparing Biographical Styles
- (4) Findings – The Process of Writing the Kramer Biography as a Creative Nonfiction text
 - (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

(5) Conclusion

1.3 Conclusion

This thesis traces the problems encountered when creating a (nonfiction) biography of David Kramer which is at times fictional.

2. FICTION VERSUS NONFICTION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at how a text can be presented as nonfiction, but be written with elements of fiction. These passages are then seen as something which is neither fact nor fiction, but rather “creative nonfiction”.

A newspaper editorial may be seen as nonfiction, yet it is to a large extent but the opinion of the author, rather than fact. “Classic” nonfiction, such as a mathematics book, is a nonfiction which is only dry data. If this mathematics book claims that 2, 4, 6 are even numbers, then this claim can be disproved or substantiated. On the other hand, certain texts might be classified as creative nonfiction, because whilst they give the impression of being truth, there is an element of fiction about these works, that is, opinion, innuendo, titillation, and so on. These claims do not have to stand up to scientific testing.

This thesis would like to remind that there is a difference between “truth” and “nonfiction”. There is a popular saying: “truth or fiction”, which implies that nonfiction is the truth. This is sometimes true, in the sense that the data of the non-fictional work offered is neutral and only fact, as in the case of, say, a telephone directory. However, in many nonfiction texts, such as magazine articles, auto- and biographies, et cetera, the neutrality of the text is unwittingly or deliberately tarnished by the author’s desire to load the text with implied messages regarding the subject being written about.

It must be made clear that the thesis does not wish to address nonfiction presented as fiction, as in the case of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966). Rather, it attempts to make a case that sometimes a text calls itself nonfiction, and presents itself as truth, but falls short of being absolute truth, and should be seen as something other than nonfiction: creative nonfiction. However, *In Cold Blood* is considered the originator of the nonfiction novel and the forerunner of the New Journalism movement. The importance of *In Cold Blood* must be recognised, and it is worth pausing a moment for a brief look at this work.

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/capote.htm> says the following about *In Cold Blood*:

American novelist, short story writer, and playwright. Capote gained international fame with his 'nonfiction novel' *In Cold Blood* (1966), an account of a real life crime in which an entire family was murdered by two sociopaths. The Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama area provided the setting for much of Capote's fiction.

'Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans - in fact, few Kansans - had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of river [sic], like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there.' (from *In Cold Blood*)

Increasing preoccupation with journalism formed the basis for the bestseller *In Cold Blood*, a pioneering work of documentary novel or 'nonfiction novel'. The work started from an article in *The New York Times*. It dealt with the murder of a wealthy family in Holcomb, Kansas.

(As far as Truman Capote goes, one might also consider texts by Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, et al.)

In trying to establish where a piece of creative nonfiction might stand, Weber (1980:2) might be of some help, in that he is of the mind that there are more than one ways of presenting a piece, either as only fact, or a piece that imbues the text with mood, nuance:

Another way of defining the subject is by reference to Donald Pizer's distinction between two kinds of documentary narrative – one exploring a factual event simply as an event (documentary narrative), the other exploring it as meaning (documentary narrative art). Pizer uses William Manchester's *The Death of a President* as an example of the first, Capote's *In Cold Blood* as an example of the second. Manchester piles up factual detail but does not impose on it, or draw from it, significant themes; Capote, through selection, arrangement, emphasis, and other literary devices, discovers some meaning or theme in his factual materials.

In Cold Blood is then an example of the standard perceptions of fiction/nonfiction being questioned, and the notion of biography also raises its head here. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principals* (Little, et al, 1933:180) describes biography as:

[1.] The history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of literature. [2.] A written record of the life of an individual.

2.2 Background

This thesis is made up of two components: an unauthorised biography on the life and career of the South African musician David Kramer: *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*. The biography is based on research as well as the author's imagination. The second part of the thesis addresses the question of the relationship between fact and

fiction in the Kramer biography. In certain texts the lines between nonfiction and fiction become blurred. Koos Prinsloo's *Slagplaas* (1992) is an example, in that whilst the text is presented as a short story, certain characters are in fact actual people, and events described are real events – the text is well-known for Prinsloo referring to the musician Johannes Kerkerrel as his “sogenaamde vriend die pop ster (supposed friend the popstar – author's translation)”, which was seen as unacceptable by Kerkerrel. Also, Prinsloo included photographs and pictures of identity documents in his writing. This thesis charges that the Kramer biography should be seen as a sub-category of nonfiction, that is, creative nonfiction.

2.3 Fiction, Nonfiction and Creative Nonfiction

With regards to the matter of writing the Kramer biography, the first problem encountered was in which category to place the foreseen text, seeing that it would be nonfiction, but with definite tones of fiction. It is too straightforward and one-dimensional to claim that a text is either truth or not, non-fiction or fiction. These shades of fiction are often driven by the notions of objectivity versus subjectivity. It is problematic when trying to pin down the concept of nonfiction. Root (2003:244) says the following about the term *nonfiction*:

The problem with ‘non-fiction’ [sic] is that it is a one-size-fits-all garment draped over artifacts requiring something tailored.

This thesis supports this argument, and further charges that only data which can be scientifically proven should be considered as true nonfiction. But what then of texts which are not only dry data? As Root points out (2003:245):

[...] the terminology [nonfiction – author’s note] itself is still under construction. Once generic distortions start to leak, people bring in anything that might conceivably hold water. ‘Literary nonfiction,’ ‘creative nonfiction,’ and ‘lyric essay’ are some of the makeshift semantic hybrids in current use [...] - Arthur Saltzman, ‘Preface’.

Root (2003:243) speaks of the term *creative nonfiction*, and cites works such as Peter Mayle’s *A Year in Provence* or Simon Winchester’s *The Professor and the Madman*. Creative nonfiction is a useful and accurate term for placing *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*. The creative nonfiction Root speaks of refers to a text which is factual, but which reads as a piece of entertainment.

(i) Fiction

Chambers’s (sic) Etymological English Dictionary defines *fiction* as:

[...] *n.* a feigned or false story : a falsehood : a pretence: the novel as a branch of literature. – *adjs.* Fictional, imaginative, not restricted to fact ; pertaining to fiction [...]

Whilst it might seem harsh to label a text as *a falsehood*, these definitions support the argument that if something is not nonfiction (read: truth) then it is by default fiction (read: a lie). However, this might be too simplistic, and Currie’s thoughts might help. He

(1985:385) differentiates between fiction and nonfiction in the following manner: the former tells a story whilst nonfiction asserts. Furthermore, Currie notes that a sentence from a fictional text could also be found in a nonfiction text. The question is: is it the sentence or the context which makes a text fiction or nonfiction? Currie calls this the “Determination Principle” (1985:386).

(ii) Nonfiction

The Chambers Dictionary (10th edition, 2006) gives the following definition of nonfiction:

adj (of a literary work) without any deliberately fictitious element, purely factual.

Root (2003:243) airs his frustration at the inadequacy of any definition of the term *nonfiction*:

Most dictionaries claim that ‘*non-fiction*’ [sic] is simply everything that is not a more specific and circumscribed form of writing (*not* fiction) but none explain why all the other things it’s *not* (for example, also *not* drama and *not* poetry) aren’t included in the term [...].

It would seem then that to try to pin definitions on the words “fiction” or “nonfiction” would be a fruitless argument, seeing that it would be impossible to attempt to encapsulate everything about either of the two. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the two fields sometimes overlap, and that the modern reader quite readily accepts this.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/biography> lists these examples of nonfiction: almanac, user manual, biography, autobiography, statute, photograph, diagram, dictionary, films such as documentaries, journal, memoir, encyclopaedia, essay, history, journalism, letter, blueprint, literary criticism, diary, book report, scientific paper, textbook, travelogue, and so on. (Of course, these examples can sometimes have a fictive character, such as journals, memoirs or travelogues.)

Root (2003:246) has the following to say about nonfiction:

All literary genres essentially create representations of reality and require craft and design and discovery and process, but nonfiction is unique in that it alone is required by virtually unstated definition to apply those strategies and techniques to something that already exists. It's that preoccupation with factuality, with preexisting reality, with a world outside the writer's mind, that he or she has to interpret and represent, that separates it from the other 'three genres.' [Fiction, poetry and drama – author's note]

Root here appears to say that nonfiction deals with “pre-existing reality”, but before this he warns that, in the words of Mary Blew (2003:245):

The boundaries of nonfiction will always be fluid as water.
Mary Clearman Blew, 'The Art of the Memoir'

Thus it would seem that even the previously-thought stiff and unyielding nonfiction can be subtle and many-dimensional, and an example of this would be creative nonfiction texts.

Further, with regard to finding definitions for fiction and nonfiction, Currie (1985:1) seems to throw up his hands and confess that there can be no perfect definition which keeps the two genres apart, as they do at times overlap:

What distinguishes fiction from non-fiction [sic]? Seeking an answer, literary theorists have analysed the stylistic features characteristic of fiction and the genres into which works of fiction they may fall. But while stylistic or generic features may certainly count as evidence that a work is fiction rather than nonfiction, they cannot be definitive of fiction. For the author of nonfiction may adopt the conventions of fictional writing; and it is agreed on all hands that there are certain works of fiction which, considered merely as texts, might well be nonfiction.

(iii) Creative nonfiction

As the creative part of the study is a creative nonfictional biography, the thesis looks at the relatively new category of “creative nonfiction”. Gerard (1996:1) describes how the author and journalist Bob Reiss read his account of a recent trip to the Sudan to a gathered group of people. The events of the trip were real, but the texture of the text was fictive. Gerard labels this type of text as creative nonfiction, partly because the text reads like a mental movie. One *sees* the dusty plains of the Sudan, the bad roads, the armed rebels making deals about food which people stole, rioted for, suffered without. Perhaps it is the vivid way the weather is described, for example, which turns the Reiss text towards creative nonfiction.

Gerard (1996:5) uses the word *faction*, something between fact and fiction.

He presents five points as typical of creative nonfiction. His first point is (1996:7):

First, it has an apparent subject and a deeper subject. The apparent subject may be spectacular or mundane. Unlike in a feature article, it is only part of what we are interested in.

John Steinbeck's *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*, for instance, is the chronicle of a voyage in the Gulf of California. But it is also a meditation on the creative process [...].

The second point Gerard raises is (1996:8):

[...] partly because of the duality of the subject, such nonfiction is released from the usual journalistic requirement of *timeliness*: Long after the apparent subject ceases to be topical, the deeper subject and the art that expresses it remain vital. That doesn't mean it isn't triggered by today's headlines [...].

Thirdly (1996:9):

[...] creative nonfiction is narrative, it always tells a good story. 'So often it ends thirty minutes after it begins – something is happening in time,' Gutkind says. It takes advantage of such fictional devices as character, plot and dialogue. 'It moves,' Gutkind explains. 'It is action-orientated. Most good creative nonfiction is constructed in scenes.' And, he says, just as in a good short story or novel, 'there is always a magic moment. Your readers are waiting for that magic moment to occur, waiting for a change to occur, a lightbulb to flash, something to happen.'

Gerard's fourth point is (1996:10):

[...] creative nonfiction contains a sense of *reflection* on the part of the author. The underlying subject has been percolating through the writer's imagination for some time, waiting for the right outlet. It is *finished* thought.

And his fifth point is (1996:11):

[...] such nonfiction shows serious attention to the craft of writing. It goes far beyond the journalistic ‘inverted pyramid’ style – with interesting turns of phrase, fresh metaphors, lively and often scenic presentation, a shunning of clichés and obvious endings, a sense of control over nuance, accurate use of words, and a governing aesthetic sensibility.

2.4 Conclusion

Certain texts are neither absolute fiction nor nonfiction, as they contain elements of both, and should rather be thought of as creative nonfiction.

3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIOGRAPHY WRITING

3.1 Introduction

Biographies are quite diverse in length, approach, tone, level of serious study, and so on.

Just what constitutes a biography? Couser (2004:3) points out that even an obituary of a few words could be thought of as having tones of biography:

Debra Taylor observes that ‘despite the fact that the obituary is such a vital component of the modern newspaper, it is not a highly valued form of journalism’ (2001:668). And precisely because it is seen as mere ‘journalism’ – at least in the USA – it is infrequently regarded as a significant form of biography. Yet the obituary is undoubtedly the most widely disseminated life-writing genre and thus the most widely consumed by the general public.

Continuing the theme of how few words are required to create a biography, Benton (2009:47) quotes AS Byatt, who asks:

What are the Gospels but a series of varying attempts at the art of biography?

3.2 History of Biography

The first known biographies were those which had been commissioned by the rulers of ancient Egypt, Assyria, Mesopotamia, and Babylonia. These biographies were not written with pen and ink, but rather gauged and chiselled into clay or stone tablets, as can be seen in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which Hamilton (2007:13) describes as:

[...] recorded in cuneiform on clay tablets in ancient Sumer [...]

Another type of biography to consider, as Salami (2001:69) points out, is biography and historiography in an oral tradition.

Hamilton (p.21) says that biography which we are now familiar with was developed by the ancient Greeks, as in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* and *Life of Agesilaos*, where the texts had two functions: to commemorate, and to give insight into the "soul in its adventures through life". These Classical texts were simply known as *lives*. The word *biographia* was first seen in Damascus's *Life of Isodorus*, which was written in the 5th century AD. These biographies differ from the historiographical genre as they do not simply document history, but rather they praise the subject. Perhaps the most important impact of the Greek biographers was that they developed the modern idea of the *person*. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/biography>.)

Oduntan (2001:118) makes the point that biography is sometimes used to describe history. He differentiates between biography and historiography. He describes the so-called father of history, Herodotus, as (p.118)

[...] the acknowledged pioneer of the field [...] who ignored the narrow, '...centric' approach of his age, and included Egypt, India, Babylon, Arabia and Persia in his histories.'

As in the blurring of the lines between fiction and nonfiction, it would seem, according to Oduntan that biography and history also blur into something new, that is, historiography.

Returning to the development of biography and its chief players, of Herodotus Meiggs says (1968:16):

[...] he was sometimes regarded as little more than a romantic liar: but closer study of his work against the backdrop of his times has redressed the balance and justified his title. [the father of history – author’s note]

Regarding the biographical aspects to Herodotus’s work, Meiggs says (p.16):

Herodotus was fascinated by the interplay of divine and human forces, revealed in the rise and fall of great characters.

This is an important aspect of biography writing, the relation and identifying of the author to the subject: his/her desire to explain a life, at even such an early time as Herodotus’s.

The genres of biography and historiography merged somewhat during the Roman Empire, probably due to the influence of government. This is evidenced by Tacitus’s *History and his Annals* containing very similar data to Suetonius’s *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. (Hamilton: 2007)

Hamilton (p.52) says that during the Middle Ages there was a decline in the biography genre. Most works of knowledge and records were attributed to the Roman Catholic Church. Biographies of martyrs, saints and elevated members of the Church were written by priests and monks, such as Einhard's documentation of the life of Charlemagne. By the late Middle Ages the texts became more focused on kings and knights, rather than the Church. Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* displays a good example of a biography from this era. Following this time, an element of Humanism began to creep into literature, peaking during the Renaissance. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/biography>.) Nicolson (1933:19) says that English biographies during this time, such as *Life of Guthlac* by Felix and *Life of St Willibrord* by Alcuin were

[...] a bad tradition. The centre of interest was never the individual but always the institution [...]

During the late 18th century biography would reached its 'golden age'. This was when the words *biography* and *autobiography* entered the English lexicon.

Hamilton (p.95) writes that the romantic biographer Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions* (1781-88) exploited the point of view and the confessional mode.

Benjamin Franklin would provide the archetype for the American success story. His 1791 work, *Autobiography*, would remain an influential form of biographical writing. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Autobiography_of_Benjamin_Franklin.)

By the middle of the 19th century the distinction between mass biography and literary biography had been formed. There was now a division made between high and middle-class culture. As with other genres, biography became more popular and available due to new publishing technologies. Hamilton states (p.312) that by the 20th century biographies were becoming more a part of high culture, as they were seen to be describing great people and their place in history as well as their noble causes. However, with the advent of periodicals and mass-produced texts the emphasis was now on self-made men and women. Hamilton also mentions (p.169) that film was an important medium for biography.

Autobiographies of the 20th century sometimes served as a form of therapy. In this thesis emotionally charged autobiographies such as Kiedis's *Scar Tissue* and Fraser's *My Father's House – a Memoir of Incest and of Healing* will be offered as examples where the author strays from hard fact, using Tom Wolfe's (not to be confused with Geoffrey Wolff, elsewhere in this thesis) so-called *saturation technique*, in order to reveal an emotional status quo. This makes these autobiographies, as far as the thesis is concerned, creative nonfiction.

Manovich (2001:220) mentions a new facet to autobiography, that is, the recent phenomenon of online portals such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and so on, where someone might upload photographs, a blog, video clips, et cetera, to chronicle a part of his or her life.

With regards to fictive writing which is based on fact, Hutcheon (1988) writes of a *historiographic metafiction* when a text is based on, or at least refers to, historic events. For Hutcheon such texts could only have been born from a postmodern environment. She argues that (1988:105)

[...] historical writing and historical novel writing influenced each other mutually. Macaulay's debt to Scott was an overt one, as was Dicken's [sic] to Carlyle in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

In these words she seems to be addressing the notion of intertextuality (intertextuality is discussed further in 5.9), and this train of thought is heard once again when she cites Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Salman Rushdie's *Shame* as examples. She says that Ondaatje's English patient found himself in World War 2, and the course of the narrative had to be true to the realities of that war. In the case of Rushdie, he had to be true to the Indian and Pakistani history in which his work is set.

Hutcheon continues (1988:106):

Historiographic metafiction, for example, keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge. Because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here – just unresolved contradiction [...] To Aristotle (1982, 1,451a-b), the historian could speak only of what has happened, of the particulars of the past; the poet, on the other hand, spoke of what could or might happen and so could deal more with universals. [...] Nevertheless, many historians since have used the techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real worlds. [...] The postmodern novel has done the same, and the reverse. It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past.

And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both.

History and fiction have always been notoriously porous genres, of course. At various times both have included in their elastic boundaries such forms as the travel tale and various versions of what we now call sociology.

For the second of the Courtney novels, *The Sound of Thunder* (1966), Wilbur Smith finds a treasure chest of information for his novel, but is also restricted by the very Anglo-Boer War history he is tapping in to. This novel is a work of fiction, but must adhere to the realities of the Anglo-Boer War, that is, dates, places, events, and such. This novel straddles two worlds then, the reality of the war, and the reality being created by Smith.

Hutcheon also has this to say regarding history meeting fiction (1988:108):

Historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to what I would call such late modernist radical metafiction, attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally.

For example, Christa Wolf's *No Place on Earth* is about the fictionalized meeting of two historical figures, dramatist Heinrich von Kleist and poet Karoline von Günderode: 'The claim that they met: a legend that suits us. The town of Winkel, on the Rhine, we saw it ourselves.' The 'we' of the narrating voice, in the present, underlines the metafictional historical reconstruction on the level of form. But on the thematic level too, life and art meet, for this is the theme of the novel, as Wolf's Kleist tries to break down the walls between 'literary fantasies and the actualities of the world.'

Hutcheon expands her thoughts on the line between fiction and history (1988:113):

'The binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant: in any differential system, it is the assertion of the space *between* the entities that matters.' Paul de Man

Perhaps. But historiographic metafiction suggests the continuing relevance of such an opposition, even if it be a problematic one. Such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history.

One might consider FA Venter's *Koning se Wingerd* (King's Vineyard) (1984) and its origins: *Koning se Wingerd* is often referred to as a Biblical novel as it is largely based on a Biblical story. In this novel the outcome is already known by the reader – there is little or no room for fabrication or other leeway. What is it then that the reader is experiencing? A sort of beginner's guide to the Bible? Where does the line between Bible and novel lie?

Hutcheon once more (1988:114):

First, historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. In novels like *Foe*, *Burning Water*, or *Famous Last Words*, certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error. The second difference lies in the way in which postmodern fiction actually uses detail or historical data. Historical fiction [...] usually incorporates and assimilates these data in order to lend a feeling of verifiability [...] to the fictional world. Historiographic metafiction incorporates, but rarely assimilates such data.

The unauthorised biography of this study will at times refer to the times it found itself in, as it has to be true to this reality, and will use the model of the historiographical writers in this regard.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the history of biography writing is traced, from when the lives of important men were gauged into clay or stone to modern day mass-produced paperback biographies. It is found that biography has a long tradition, and has blossomed in the twentieth century. It is impossible to sum up biography in one easy-to-read definition, as there are so many different biographies available. That being said, biography writing is now a recognised twentieth century literary form.

4. COMPARING BIOGRAPHICAL STYLES

4.1 Introduction

Two decisions had to be made regarding the Kramer biography. Firstly, to write it as a sometimes fictitious text or only based on fact, and secondly, the texture of the text had to be decided on – would it be an easy, “paperback” read, or a synthesis of literary criticism and biography, as seen in Kannemeyer’s Etienne Leroux biography (2008)? Also, this chapter looks at conjecturing: when words and phrases such as *perhaps*, *according to*, *it seems*, *maybe*, et cetera, were used in the studied texts, pretending that they were telling the truth, but actually they were factless statements disguised as fact.

4.2 Finding an Appropriate Style

Before the Kramer biography was attempted, various other biographies were referred to for inspiration as well as stylistic examples. These were mostly biographies chronicling the lives and careers of pop and rock musicians, as the subject of the biography of this thesis, David Kramer, is himself a musician. They varied in length, level of seriousness, style and attitude towards their subject. Some tried to reveal the “real” character of their subject with serious, respectful interest, whilst others were more titillating. Yet others, such as Smith’s Kylie Minogue biography, *Kylie – Confidential* (2003) were light-hearted “fluff” not to be taken serious – this is not a criticism, more an observation. This raised the very important question right at the outset of writing the Kramer biography, of what the nature of it would be – would it be light-hearted reading, or a serious academic

investigation? Early on it was decided that the text had to be an easy read. If this meant that it would be thought of as fluff, then that would be an acceptable criticism. However, it was hoped that the text would be more than just vacuous drivel, that whilst being entertaining it would also offer insight into the life and career of its subject. It was further felt that it would and should not be necessary to include racy passages.

Once the decision was made to write the biography as a creative nonfiction text, the focus became clearer. However, the texture, the “feel”, of the text still had to be decided on.

Some of the texts looked at were autobiographies, and often these texts were a result of the author wanting to set the record straight, as seen in the title of the Shaquille O’Neal autobiography *Shaq Talks Back* (2001). Other autobiographies went even further, purging resentment in a manner which was potentially uncomfortable for the reader. Fraser’s *My Father’s House – a Memoir of Incest and of Healing* (1987) was such a work. Others were more an *assemblage* of photographs, captions and paragraphs than biographies or autobiographies *per se*, as in Baltin’s *From The Inside: Linkin Park’s Meteora* (2004).

Kannemeyer, in his work *Leroux: ’n Lewe* (2008), supplies a useful foreword, in which he describes his decision-making process during the writing of the biography: his motivation, methodology, and what his agenda was, namely to write a synthesis of biography and literary critique.

The motivation for writing the Kramer biography was a desire to champion someone who shared the same hometown and similar experiences as the author, to trumpet the delight of someone making his dreams come true. Also, there was a frustration at not finding any Kramer biography on the library shelves. This biography hopes to offer interested readers some information regarding Kramer.

Apart from describing Kramer's life and career, it was also the texture of life in Kramer and the author's hometown of Worcester that was to be illustrated – the charm and frustrations the place brought upon its inhabitants. Here JM Coetzee's *Boyhood – Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) was an inspiration.

Returning to the Kannemeyer biography of Etienne Leroux (2008): in his foreword he mentions problems he encountered, such as the fact that his subject rarely dated his letters. The problem that the Kramer biography faced was the lack of information, as Kramer was not prepared to share information, refusing to partake in the biography. Therefore, this unauthorised biography had to find information elsewhere, and at times “link the dots”. This was a large factor in the decision to write a creative nonfiction text. Information was gleaned from the internet, interviews the author had conducted, newspaper and magazine articles, the body of Kramer's work, and tapping into the author's memory of life as a boy in Worcester (and South Africa) in the sixties, seventies and eighties.

Another problem was the question of ethics – the author felt extremely uncomfortable about snooping into another’s life, especially since Kramer had made it clear during a telephone conversation that he did not wish to assist in an authorised biography. He did say that the author was “welcome to write” such a biography, but it was felt that this was less of a go-ahead than a grudging acceptance that there was little Kramer could do to stop the process. Hence the text steers well clear of any “dirty laundry”. (Not that any was found.)

Other than the technical problem Kannemeyer faced due to Leroux often not dating his correspondence, Kannemeyer (2008) speaks of his relationship with Leroux. The relationship between Kramer and the author was not intimate – Kramer was a few years ahead of the author at school. The author and Kramer saw one another in passing mostly, with various mutual friends and friends-of-friends filling the gap between author and subject. For example, the author was friends with Mark Jones, the youngest son of Reverend Jones, whilst Mark’s older brother and sister were on friendly terms with John and David Kramer. This led to the two separate groups sometimes overlapping, as in the sharing of the loft above Reverend Jones’s garage for get-togethers. There were other shared experiences – school, teachers, games, and so on – of growing up in the small town of Worcester that the author wanted to recreate. It was felt that this small-town ambience was an experience shared by many future readers, and it would be a pleasant charm to share and reminisce about.

Kannemeyer (2008) declares that his biography is not in the least a psychological study of Leroux, that he was constantly aware of the difficulty of trying to reach the subconscious of another and how problematic it is to portray this in a written work. *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* encountered similar difficulties, and it was decided not to attempt to present the “real” David Kramer, as this David Kramer is not known to the author. However, the text does at times attempt to show the inner mechanics of the man, his moods and feelings, in an attempt to construct Kramer as an artist, and also as a man moving through his life, with its ups and downs.

Two works were studied but rejected, with regards to an emotional dimension being revealed: Fraser’s *My Father’s House – A Memoir of Incest and of Healing* and Kiedis’s *Scar Tissue*.

(i) Fraser - *My Father’s House – A Memoir of Incest and of Healing*

Sylvia Fraser was a Canadian woman, a teenager in the 1950’s, a star student, and leader of the cheerleading squad at school. As an adult she worked as a reporter. In her 1987 memoir *My Father’s House – A Memoir of Incest and of Healing*, Fraser seems to use the text as a healing catharsis, and it is important for her that her opinions and feelings be aired. At times she describes the traumatic events in a novel-like manner. This allows her to load this nonfiction text with emotion one might expect from in fiction (1987:20):

I stand in front of my vanity mirror, examining myself with Sharon Battersea’s merciless eye. My hair has been twisted into bona fide curls, even tied with a yellow ribbon. My bright-penny self, newly buffed and polished, stares back at me, and yet, and yet ... A spot clouds the mirror. I rub. It grows larger. I scrub

harder. Now I see a smudge where my face used to be. For an instant, it turns into a girl who looks like Magda, with thumbprint bruises and fangs for teeth.

At other times she is more direct regarding her sexual relationship with her father. However, Fraser employs the technique of writing these passages in italics, as though this will create some distance from her, and replicate the separate character she had created for herself to be during the times when her father molested her (1987:10):

I lie naked on my daddy's bed, clinging to the covers. His sweat drips on me. I don't like his wet-uhms. His wet-uhms splashes on me. The scroll on my daddy's headboard looks like my mother's lips, scolding: 'Don't ever let me dirty dirty catch you!' I try to count my pennies but my mind gets frightened and goes away like when the big boys at Beechnut playground push you too high on a swing and you scream to get down. I'm afraid to complain because daddy won't love me won't love me won't love me.

In this work, she is finally allowed to be an equal to her father, in the sense that she now also has a *voice*, just like he has, and she can shout him down, as an equal.

As the work is a memoir, Fraser doesn't need to be scientific or "[...] substantiated by positive knowledge or proof" (www.thefreedictionary.com/opinion). The work may be as biased as she wishes to be, and in fact, a work such as this seems to require the unabashed selfish version of the teller. However, the question then arises: just how much nonfiction is this text? The fact that the events are told in the first-person seems to heighten the feeling that this is the *truth*, but is this truth really truth which will be able to withstand serious query? Even though it is written as creative nonfiction, it should still be provable truth in order to be nonfiction.

It was felt that this type of text was too intense, too uncomfortable a read, and would be inappropriate to use as a model for describing Kramer's life and career. This would be unnecessarily shocking.

(ii) Kiedis (with Larry Sloman) – *Scar Tissue*

Anthony Kiedis, the singer for the Red Hot Chili (sic) Peppers, writes his tell-all autobiography, in which his drug misuse takes up a large part of the text. Kiedis (2004:391):

I was high, and blood was leaking out of my arm, and now I had to grab the needle through my skin and pull it out from the inside lest it get released into my bloodstream. I managed to get it out, but my next dilemma was that I had no heroin to come down from this coke with. I ended up drinking the entire contents of my minibar [...] and finally passed out. Always, you wake up to an unpleasant memory and an unpleasant body and your spirit is reduced to a pile of dirty ashes residing somewhere inside of your ass.

Kiedis (2004:164):

The more Jennifer got into heroin, the easier it got for me to get into the house, because she needed a coconspirator [sic] to cop with, and I needed her money. She didn't mind me doing the dope, because when I'd do that, I was calm and we could actually be together and melt in each other's arms and nod out watching old black-and-white movies at four in the morning, enmeshed in the blissful, deadly euphoria of the opium. But she absolutely hated it when I was shooting the cocaine. Then I'd turn into a freak and disappear. Of course, I never wanted to shoot just heroin. So when we were shooting heroin in her room, I'd sneak out to do a hit of coke. But she was the total eagle-eye.

'No, you're not. Give me the coke. Give me the syringe. You're not shooting coke!'

I came up with these horrible and deceptive ways of getting high on coke. By then my hair was so long and matted that I'd slide syringes up into the undercarriage of my hairdo and consent to a full-body pat-down. I'd previously hidden the coke in a cereal box in the kitchen, so I'd rush downstairs and shoot up before Jennifer or her sister or her mom came in.

Here we find Anthony Kiedis the loser – having to stay with his girlfriend and her mother, as he has no place else to live. As the reader follows his exploits, he or she witnesses Kiedis falling ever more into a black hole of drug abuse. He speaks of *the blissful, deadly euphoria of the opium* (p.391), and the phrase contains two opposite notions, which is possibly a key to understanding his addict-mentality: the drugs are deadly, yes, but they also bring an irresistible bliss. This gives the reader an insight into Kiedis's mechanics, and makes this gushing of self-loathing understandable, and at times one even finds oneself having empathy and sympathy for him. Of course, when he repeatedly breaks his sobriety it taxes the reader's patience and emotions.

The function of this text is, it seems, to be a vehicle for Kiedis to exorcise his demons, a Sylvia Plath-like all-revealing purge. Kiedis mentions demons a few times in the text (2004:334):

That wasn't the first time I had experienced interactions with spirits while I was doing drugs. One time during this era of relapsing, I came back to my house in the middle of the night, pockets full of drugs, ready to be the mad scientist. I was fiddling through my pockets to get my keys when I heard this crazy scream. I figured it was somebody I knew who was on the balcony screaming at me like a crazy witch. But I didn't see anybody. I stepped back from the house and said, 'Hello? Anybody there?' Again I heard that horrifying scream. I looked up on the gable above my bedroom and saw a giant hawk sitting there, staring right down at me, screaming his lungs out in this tortured human voice.

I thought that this guy did not want me to do what I was doing. And if I didn't stop it, I would probably die. [...] When you're using drugs, you're driven by this mystical black energy, a force inside you that just won't quit. And the weaker you get, the more you feed into that energy, the more it fucks with you. When your spirit becomes dark and your lifestyle becomes dark, your existence is susceptible to infiltration by dark spirits. [...] I remember when Hillel died and I was just getting clean, I had a dream lying in my bed next to Ione. It was one of those horribly vivid half-awake, half-asleep dreams. All this terrifying energy came flying into my bedroom along the top of my ceiling. There were demons and goblins and ghouls and creatures, a full-assortment platter of scary motherfuckers. I could tell that they were coming to fuck with me, to say, 'Okay, we did our job on your friend, now we've come for you.' At first I was like 'I'm not having it, you guys, you come to the wrong house.' As I was putting up this psychic fight, the granddaddy of all dark forces, this vast dark angel, came flying in and encompassed the entire ceiling of my room.

Also (2004:366):

[...] I had a dream in which I was driving at four-thirty in the morning, the darkest hour of the night. [...] then out of nowhere, a hand came out and, whoosh, grabbed on to the steering wheel and started fighting me for control of the car. I looked over to see who the person in the seat next to me was, but he was all slouched down with a hat covering his face, so I couldn't make out the demonic person. We kept driving, and I became terrified of what I was about to see. Then we drove under a streetlight, and the light illuminated the face of the intruder. And it was me.

These two works are autobiographies, and are therefore allowed this intensely intimate texture. Whilst one would expect a biography, on the other hand, to be less free in its melodrama, the interesting thing for the author of this thesis was how the autobiography can at times reflect the emotions of its readers, and also the times the reader finds him/herself in. In this regard Roberts (2002:58) adds:

[...] autobiography connects with broader questions; it is a ‘microcosmic version’ of a wider crisis, which it represents and articulates: ‘Autobiographical consciousness, for example, has been held up as a mode of healthy self-awareness which could heal some of the wounds of the nineteenth-century spirit.’ (Marcus 1995:14).

However, it was felt that that a biography of Kramer should not be so revealing, that neither the “microcosmic version” (Kramer) nor the “wider crisis” should have this potentially tacky slant. Kannemeyer (2008:11) refers to Keynes, who states that:

Permissive biography has become more common and will doubtless become even more so.

Be that as it may, it was still felt that the above two autobiographies were too graphic in nature to serve as models for the intended Kramer biography.

In writing the fictitious Kramer biography, other known examples of biographies were looked at. Certain elements were accepted whilst others were discarded.

The first consideration was that David Kramer would not agree to an authorised biography. This meant that certain information would not be forthcoming, but it also meant that there would now be a freedom to depict this life and career with some *carte blanche*, within the boundaries of decency and law. Whilst the lack of data was hampering, the author now had the luxury of writing within a fictive framework. A decision had to be made as to what was to be included and what not, in order to give a *life* to the reader that would be a fair shadow of the real David Kramer. Ironically, sometimes

the very straying away from real data, when using the process of fictionalisation, made it easier to create a version of Kramer which the author felt was a fair indication of the man.

As for presenting a real person's life with a certain amount of fancy, Eggar's at times subjective text, *Shania Twain – the biography*, was a useful starting point. Eggar (2005:161) writes of Shania Twain:

She is the wolf, and the wolf is her. Her very soul manifested in animal form.

This highly romanticised, narrative text verges on the poetic. Of course, Eggar may choose to write what he wants, in a style of his choice. It is, after all, a very subjective process. Pelser (2001:20) writes about the subjective nature of biographies:

‘Between the biographer and his subject,’ writes Edel [author's translation] (1957:7), ‘there is established from the outset a significant relationship [...] It is a relationship deeply intimate and highly subjective.’

Eggar's passage is an interesting one, as it is completely removed from what one expects from a nonfiction description, delving deeply into Wolff's *saturation reporting*, perhaps even beyond. Here it would seem that the biographer wishes to display not an event, such as a live concert, or even an abstract characteristic of Shania Twain, but rather her soul. Whilst this places the author on unsteady ground, it also gives him *carte blanche* – if he were to declare something (extremely) negative about Twain, her libel suit might well be unsuccessful, as he is surely allowed an opinion. If she, in his opinion, were a psychotic

monster, then he should be able to express his opinion without repercussion, as his opinion is not a fact which can be proven correct or incorrect, hence not libellous.

Whilst consciously often straying away from the purely factual, and creating a subjective text, such as the Shania Twain biography, the author was careful not to ignore reality. The fictive passages had to, of course, still be in tune with reality – names and dates of album releases had to be true to life, for example. Furthermore, a conscious decision was made at the start of the project to avoid the murky waters of a warts-and-all exposé, or, on the other hand, a text which attempted to make an icon out of Kramer.

4.3 Biography versus Propaganda

An example of a warts-and-all text was *Mötley Crüe – The Dirt*. This text was rejected, as it was felt that this biography strays too far into the area of presenting a cartoon rock ‘n’ roll bad boy image of the group, and becomes implausible. The rock group, Mötley Crüe, (2001) write their collective memoirs and the reader might at times wonder whether the truth is being presented, or whether the text is guilty of myth-making (2001:62):

Vince Neil: ‘We’d scrounge up enough money to buy an egg burrito from Noggles. Then we’d bite the end off and stick our dicks into the warm meat to cover up the smell of pussy so that our girlfriends didn’t know we were fucking anything stupid or drunk enough to get into Tommy’s van.’

This bragging is seen again and again throughout the text (2001:90):

Vince Neil: ‘Circling above hundreds of thousands of kids in a helicopter [...] with a bottle of Jack in my left hand, a bag of pills in my right hand, and a blond head bobbing up and down in my lap [...]

However, alongside this rather dubious passage, the book offers passages which seem so sensitive and potentially extremely private, that the reader might be tempted to believe everything offered as being true throughout the text. (2001:87)

Tom Zutaut, speaking about his time spent with Nikki Sixx, Mötley Crüe guitarist: ‘As time passed, however, the house kept getting creepier. I’d drop in and see *The Necronomicon*, a black-magic spell book, lying on the table. Nikki was getting heavily into satanic stuff and wanted to call the record *Shout with the Devil*. [...] ‘I’m kind of freaked out,’ Lita said. ‘Weird things are happening in the apartment.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked, looking around at the freshly painted pentagrams and Gothic paintings that Nikki had on the walls and floor.’

Mötley Crüe – The Dirt also makes use of photographs in its myth-making exercise (2001:97):



This photograph of Tommy Lee is a good example of the book not telling a neutral, clean truth anymore. The authors are now more interested in the not-so-subtle hijacking of the text in order to shape the reader's opinion and emotions. Whilst the narrative is riddled with biased recollections, the reader accepts this, because to a large extent this is what the reader expected and in fact desired from this book, *Mötley Crüe – The Dirt*. The book goes one step further away from classic nonfiction by using images as a propaganda tool, as seen in the above photograph.

Whilst the photograph is more than likely true, not altered or “Photoshopped” in any manner, it is quite a loaded image, and one may refer to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) to understand the implicit value of this image. This photograph was possibly

selected for the work as it glamorises the group, presenting a decadence which would make the group rock stars in the clichéd sense: sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll.

Berger (1972:131) writes:

The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour. [...] It is important here not to confuse publicity with the pleasure or benefits to be enjoyed from the things it advertises. Publicity is effective precisely because it feeds upon the real. Clothes, food, cars, cosmetics, baths, sunshine are real things to be enjoyed in themselves. Publicity begins by working on a natural appetite for pleasure. But it cannot offer the real object of pleasure and there is no convincing substitute for a pleasure in that pleasure's own terms. The more convincingly publicity conveys the pleasure of bathing in a warm, distant sea, the more the spectator-buyer will become aware that he is hundreds of miles away from that sea and the more remote the chance of bathing in it will seem to him. This is why publicity can never really afford to be about the product or opportunity it is proposing to the buyer who is not yet enjoying it. Publicity is never a celebration of a pleasure-in-itself. Publicity is always about the future buyer. It offers him an image of himself made glamorous by the product or opportunity it is trying to sell. The image then makes him envious of himself as he might be. Yet what makes this self-which-he-might-be enviable? The envy of other. Publicity is about social relations, not objects. Its promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour. [...] Being envied is a solitary form of reassurance. It depends precisely upon not sharing your experience with those who envy you. You are observed with interest but you do not observe with interest – if you do, you will become less enviable. In this respect the envied are like bureaucrats; the more impersonal they are, the greater the illusion (for themselves and for others) of their power. The power of the glamorous resides in their supposed happiness [...] it is this which explains the absent, unfocused look of so many glamour images. They look out *over* the looks of envy which sustain them.

This perhaps explains in part why the subject of the auto- and biographies mentioned in this thesis have been depicted as larger-than-life, an important part of the deviation from

nonfiction to creative nonfiction. It seems that there is an unavoidable icon-making in the very act of writing a biography, in that putting someone's life into the printed word implies that this life is worth writing about, that there should be a record of this life. Further, even when a biography is slanted against the subject, this negativity seems to have some star-making value. It makes the reader lose his/her sense of empathy with the subject, as the subject seems to be reduced to merely a picture, ink on paper, and not at all a human being.

The importance of this above-mentioned passage is that Berger mentions the notion of things being "perceived differently," as perception plays a part in the thesis's argument, because before the thesis can criticise a nonfiction for not being pure nonfiction, it must firstly establish just what nonfiction is, and, as Berger argues, our perception is often clouded. When Gertrude Stein claims that "rose is a rose is a rose", this is not quite right. (Stein wrote the sentence "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" as part of the poem "Sacred Emily", which appeared in the 1922 book *Geography and Plays*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_is_a_rose_is_a_rose_is_a_rose]) Using the Berger model, there are other things which come into play when we see or consider this rose. Our perception is constantly being clouded by the sum of our experiences. On an implicit level a rose could mean romance to one person but betrayal to another (the thorn which draws blood). So by the same token it would be dangerous to make a Stein-like declaration, that nonfiction is nonfiction is nonfiction. Just as the image of a rose has varying values to those who see it, so too do the words and sentences of non-fictive works have different values - different levels of *truth*.

Text and images can be slippery and carry implicit values far more potent than the explicit, and so too can film. Imagine a television commercial: we see an attractive young woman smiling at us. The voice-over speaks only six words: “Korean Air; now you’re really flying.” The image we see has nothing to do with travelling, flying, or Korean Air, other than that the woman looks Asian and the clothes she is wearing could be a uniform. But what is important is that the image is attractive. Now the viewer of the advertisement associates pleasure, desire, with the airline company called Korean Air.

Thus the image of Tommy Lee is not merely a depiction of him – it is the mood, the ambiance, which the group wishes to present. And yet, how to explain to a being from another planet that the picture is of a man, yes, but actually it’s (albeit somewhat contrived) *about* not giving a damn? A picture, as the saying goes, speaks a thousand words, and this picture is perhaps more of an advertising job for the group than an instrument to give information – it is the information beyond the frame of the photograph which is the more potent.

Once it was decided to present the life of Kramer, it was felt that it would be best to tell the story of his life using the technique of creative nonfiction: that is, telling the truth as though it was a story – a vivid narrative, rather than a mere list of facts.

4.4 Examples of conjecturing in the Kramer biography:

It must be made clear that the following is not an exercise in Critical Discourse Analysis (cf Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak [2007]), but rather it is a close reading with regard to where subjunctive markers such as *could*, *perhaps*, and so on, are used. These markers change sentences from the indicative mode (John is walking) or imperative mode (John, walk!) to the subjunctive (John might walk), where John's walking is now a possibility, not hard fact. When these subjunctive markers are used, the text moves from the domain of the factual to uncertainty, and the result of this technique is important to this thesis.

(i) Guralnick – *Careless Love – The Unmaking of Elvis Presley*

Guralnick (1999:74) writes:

But it was his relationship with Juliet Prowse, his co-star and Frank Sinatra's unofficial fiancée, with which his growing entourage was most intrigued at this time. Elvis made a big point of withdrawing to his dressing room with her every day, and before long the guys started banging on the door and yelling that Frank was on his way. One day Sinatra actually did show up, but Elvis emerged unruffled and unmussed after first telling Red to go fuck himself when he heard the same tiresome message once again. They were intrigued by Elvis' stories of Juliet's athletic limberness, Lamar perhaps most of all. 'He said Juliet liked to grab her ankles and spread her legs real wide. But then [later] he said it about another girl, too. I said, 'I thought that was Juliet.' And he said, 'Well, a lot of 'em do different things like that.'

This paragraph uses the word *perhaps*, whereby the reader is told that Elvis's friend, Lamar, was perhaps the most intrigued by Elvis's stories of his relationship with Juliet Prowse, but this is not at all verified. In fact, apart from the text being rather cagey about presenting this information as hard fact, even the incident itself is in question, as when

confronted about this by the speaker, Elvis is rather vague, in a manner which implies that he himself was lying, or at best embellishing the truth. Furthermore, the passage has more the flavour of titillation rather than academic fact. This titillation was an important consideration whilst preparing for the writing of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, as there was a desire to satisfy the modern readers's needs. Ultimately, though, this type of titillation was rejected.

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography uses the word *perhaps* in the following manner (p.86):

The holidays were similar to past years, but perhaps a bit subdued as the boys ticked off the days that they had left before they had to report to the army.

(ii) Welch – *The Secret Life of Peter Gabriel*

It (now) seems is the phrase looked at in this example. When Welch speaks of Peter Gabriel's motivation, his text is guesswork, but it is presented as reliable truth (1998:79):

In retrospect it now seems as if Peter was deliberately trying to offer the last word in overkill with *The Lamb* [The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway – author's note], before retiring gracefully from the battlefield to seek pastures new.

The words *it seems* are useful words for the Kramer biography, as with this phrase responsibility for a statement can be shifted away from the author.

Chambers's (sic) Etymological English dictionary defines *seem(s)* as:

[...] to appear to be [...] the evidence shows [...] or suggests [...]

One could argue that *seems* and *appears* have the same meaning. Both words are very close to the truth, or at least a truth which the speaker/writer believes to be true. However, these two words still are allowed the leeway of not having to be 100% correct – if the statement is later proved to be incorrect, the speaker/writer can apologise with nothing more than a shrug – this was simply the way the situation appeared to him/her. To refer to a court of law again, any statement containing the phrase *it seems/seemed* will be rejected by the court. Even an expert would have to be more definite – it would either be yes or no, when giving his/her input. There would have to be a conclusion to the question raised by the court, and the words *it seems/seemed* don't bring finality.

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography uses the phrase *it seemed* in the following manner (p.96):

Something else that would have an effect on David was the virtually exclusive use of Afrikaans in the military and the realisation that when he spoke Afrikaans, it seemed as though he could become another person. It was ironic, because whilst he saw it as the language of the oppressor, it was also the tongue of the everyday-person, a 'real' person, and this language seemed to speak for those who were disenfranchised due to apartheid and/or poverty.

(iii) Smith - *Kylie – Confidential*

In the Kylie Minogue biography, *Kylie – Confidential*, Smith (2003:23) describes Kylie Minogue singing the Gerry Goffin/Carol King-written hit for Little Eva (incidentally also a hit for Grand Funk Railroad), “The Loco-Motion”, as follows:

The band knew how to play it, and Kylie knew all the words – a legacy, no doubt, of singing it a million times into her hairbrush [...]

This rather anecdotal text takes some liberty. How does Smith know that Kylie Minogue sang into her hairbrush as a teenage girl? However, this is presented as, if not pure fact, then at least as quite possibly the way it was. Smith inserts the words *no doubt* as a mechanism which bridges Smith’s imagination and the facts of nonfiction, that is, the *truth*. This innocuous phrase is slipped into nonfiction, and now blurs the line between opinion and fact.

The phrase *no doubt* is also a mechanism for Smith to enter a piece of creative nonfiction into the text, a signpost of sorts warning that this statement is from his imagination. He was not there and has no proof of something like this happening, but as a way of illustrating the personality and life of Kylie Minogue, the phrase is a useful tool, whereby a degree of fictionalisation can be brought to the text.

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography uses the phrase in the following way (p.63):

‘Jis,’ David greeted. ‘Waar gaan julle?’
‘Ons gaan skerpioene vang,’ replied André.
‘Skerpioene vang?!’ David gasped, shocked.

‘Ja. Kom saam.’

This was unbelievable. The Afrikaans boys were going to catch scorpions. David shuddered, no doubt remembering the time the boy next door had been stung. Yet, he had to see this.

4.6 The Emphasis of the Kramer Biography

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography focuses more on the early years of Kramer’s career. The second half, that is, the part of his life dedicated to writing and staging musicals, was obviously investigated, but the emphasis is on the (especially early) recordings Kramer made, and their impact on South African audiences. This is as a result of the author’s bias – it was the surprise and delight of Kramer’s success as a recording artist that motivated the author to write the biography in the first place. It was felt that the mutual experiences of the author and Kramer, the Worcester, “platteland” experiences, were mostly visible in the first few years of Kramer’s career, and the work coming from these years held more of a fascination for the author – the music, the look of Kramer, the references in his lyrics, et cetera. The biography consists of text as well as graphics: photographs, album covers, drawings Kramer did, and so on. The photographs are sometimes of Worcester: the high school, the swimming pool. The intent was to hopefully replicate the ambience of Worcester during the time of Kramer’s school days. Parts of this creative nonfiction text were absolute fiction, and at other times artistic license was taken. When the biography tells the tale of Kramer meeting the musician Mark Knopfler (Dire Straights) at university, this is a liberty, as the two were not students at Leeds University during the same period. However, it was irresistible, and it was decided to create a reality where the two actually did meet and discuss music – the prime reason for this was that it allowed the text to illuminate Kramer’s realisation that he was

still just a weak Bob Dylan imitator, and that, unlike musicians such as Mark Knopfler, he had yet to find his own voice, his own, distinctive style.

4.7 Conclusion

After consulting various examples, it was decided that the style for the biography would be easy-to-read. The text would not try to be garish or shocking. However, at times the text would try to show Kramer's mental state, his moodiness, what drives him as an artist. Next, the text would often move into the field of fiction, making the Kramer biography a creative nonfiction text. Lastly, the text would occasionally make use of inferring, to suggest information which is not hard fact.

5. FINDINGS – THE PROCESS OF WRITING THE KRAMER BIOGRAPHY AS A CREATIVE NONFICTION TEXT

5.1 Introduction

This chapter tracks the process of writing the Kramer biography, and explains the decision-making processes along the way.

Pelser (2001:28) identifies four main problems facing the biographer: ethics, authenticity, fame and empathy. Of these four points, it is perhaps a combination of ethics and authenticity which was problematic in early stages of the writing *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* because this biography is an at times fictitious account of Kramer's life, and as such the authenticity of events might be questioned, which in turn led to the author being concerned about the ethics of writing such a manuscript. If one part of a text, a reader might ask, is found to be untrue (fictive), then surely the entire text might run the risk of being dismissed as untrue?

With regard to the fame and empathy Pelser writes of, the nature of a larger-than-life persona, a life important, a life others might want to live vicariously through, applied to the author's intrigue of David Kramer. Kramer is perhaps not a great life, as, say, Gandhi or Mandela, but there was still *something* there which captivated the author. In his essay *Minor Lives* (1979:59), Geoffrey Wolff recounts how he wrote the life story of Harry Crosby, a rather second-rate poet, someone who vanished from public consciousness with

hardly a ripple after his suicide. Wolff says that this led the *New Republic* to judge his biography as *an elegant book*, but the reviewer found it a

[...] pointless one. Geoffrey Wolff [...] knows that Harry was not a poet and that his life was neither Art nor artful.

This criticism misses the point – for a biographer to desire to tell the story of a life, there has to be something about that life which inspires the biographer. In this case it could well be that the life in question was indeed artless and without Art. Perhaps, the biographer might have wondered, this was the reason for the subject to take his own life. And therein lay the intrigue. (One might wonder whether on a certain level the writer wishes to expose something of himself, via the subject he is illustrating.) Like Wolff's desire to visit the life of Crosby for no other reason than that he was interested in it, so it was with writing about the life and career of David Kramer.

Kramer's fame and impact was a relatively small one if compared to an Alexander or a Picasso. Therefore it was rather the empathy felt by the author which played a role in the biography being written. This empathy came from a shared background: growing up in the same town and having many similar experiences, and having the feeling that somehow Kramer was speaking for the author when his voice was on the radio. The author championed Kramer, for Kramer's sake, but also for his own sake. There was a need to believe that his man, and therefore his voice, was being heard.

5.2 Problems of Research

The first problem with finding data for the biography was that the subject, David Kramer, would not agree to collaborate. When the author called him, Kramer said that he wished to keep his private life private, and that this was not yet the time for a biography on his life and career. Thus the gathering of information was seriously stunted.

The options that were available for the author were interviews with friends and colleagues of Kramer (personally, telephonically, or by correspondence), information to be taken from the internet, as well as researching printed articles on Kramer's work. It would be discovered that there was virtually no information about the private Kramer. The available information was laid out before the author, and this was a key factor in the author deciding to write the biography with a subtext of the author's own autobiography – his memories of Worcester, his experiences growing up in South Africa, his interest in popular music, and so on.

Information was gathered rather tentatively at first, mostly through telephone calls and emails, as the author was living and working in South Korea at the start of the project. Friends and contacts of the author's from his Worcester days were the starting points, at first merely establishing a list of possible people to interview. From these initial steps came useful interviews with school friends of Kramer's, such as Raffaele Barocci and Oratio Gaigher. Here a problem was encountered, in that Oratio Gaigher at first wanted to speak off the record, as he was not flattering of Kramer. However, he later agreed that if his opinions were put in a way that wasn't harsh or offensive, then his name could be used. The author strongly suspects that he was allowed this interview in the first place

after he had given his credentials as a Worcester boy, and more specifically, in the fact that his father and Oratio's uncle, Primo Gaigher, were friends. Other people were contacted by telephone, such as Crispen Siddle, whose brother, James, had been a classmate of the author's.

With regard to email correspondence, David Smith, one of the original members of The Offbeats, was a tremendous source of information, about the band and the Worcester of his and David's days. (Kramer was six years ahead of the author at school, which at the time seemed a chasm.)

Personal interviews were held with Worcester people in general during field trips to the town, as well as in-depth interviews with interviewees such as David de Nobrega, who along with his father ran the Koffiehuis café at the time of Kramer's high school years. Dion Gaigher, Oratio Gaigher's nephew was also gracious enough to grant a personal interview at his home in Pretoria.

As for information about the music scene in general, and a few titbits on Kramer, ex-McCully's Workshop guitarist, Richard Black was also kind enough to talk to the author at some length about recording conditions at the time of Kramer's early recordings, as well as to the difficulties of breaking into the music business. Mr. Black now owns and runs Street Level recording studio and music production facilities in Cape Town. It was he who told the author that Kramer had met the musician Sting during a Juluka concert at the University of Cape Town's Jameson Hall, for instance. The first meeting was formal,

with the interview being recorded on a small portable tape recorder. The second meeting was more informal, not recorded, chatting about mutual interests in music, as well as McCully's Workshop, David Kramer, modern recording techniques (specifically using the computer as a recording and editing tool) and so on. This conversation had to be committed to memory. Both of these meetings were useful, as valuable information was gathered, which could be used to understand and visualise the world of David Kramer as he went about creating his career.

As far as media research goes, popular magazine articles were looked at, but in truth they didn't add anything of use to the research, anything new, which was not known by the author.

5.3 The Bilingual Nature of the Text

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography is written in English, but at times is presented in Afrikaans.

“Yes, I'm a vegetarian ...,” he began.

The bombardier stuck out a thick, muscular arm, grabbed the food from the boy's hand, and passed it over to the conscript next to him.

“Hierso,” he said, switching to his native Afrikaans. “Komplimente van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag. Sê dankie vir jou maatjie.”

The lad looked at the food in his hand, then at the senior officer, and finally at the unfortunate vegetarian next to him.

“I ...,” he stammered.

“Wat?” inquired the bombardier.

Everyone was staring, eyes like saucers in their heads. They knew trouble was coming.

“Nie goed genoeg vir jou nie?”

“Nee ...”

“Nee, *Bombardier*, jou klein kak!”

“Nee, Bombardier ..,” came the weak echo.

The bombardier bent forward, his face an inch away from the young conscript’s. His face flushed red as he worked himself into a rage.

“Ek moet op my moeë voete staan terwyl jy op jou fokken gat sit?!” he bellowed. “Staan op!”

The recruit jumped to his feet, his eyes huge, his face white. In both hands was a tub of rice stew. The bombardier turned and glared at all present in the compartment.

“Julle almal, staan op! *Donners!*”

There was a rustle as everyone jumped to their feet. They weren’t sure what to do with the food, so they held the cardboard bowls in front of them.

“Die President het spesiaal gevra dat julle hierdie gesonde kos kry, omdat hy julle lief het, omdat hy bekommerd oor jul gesondheid is. Hierdie heerlike dis is in die President se woonhuis voorberei, deur sy liefdevolle vrou. Maar wat maak julle? Julle trek jul neuse op vir hierdie wonderlike maal!”

He turned and faced each boy, his hands on his hips. Then his voice dropped to a whisper.

“Julle is verraaiers,” he stated as though the realisation had just come to him, taking a step back in shock and disgust.

In the above passage, it is the last line which indicates what a large part of the reasoning was to present the text in both English and Afrikaans, to illustrate the divide in South Africa, not only between black and white, but also English and Afrikaans (read: liberal and conservative/traitor and loyal). Here the English-speaking conscripts are told, albeit jokingly, that they are traitors and the reader can assume that there was some of the bombardier’s real opinion of English-speaking people in those words.

It was also hoped that the use of these two languages would show that whilst South African society can be very fractured at times (there are eleven official languages in South Africa), often these divides are crossed by everyday South Africans. The following excerpt illustrates, where English-speaking and Afrikaans boys play together in the veld

with no animosity (to raise the English/Afrikaans issue in a not-so-one-dimensional, more realistic manner):

David looked over his shoulder and saw André du Toit and Marcelle Steyn. Both boys were on their bicycles, and like David and Donny, they were also barefoot.

“Jis,” David greeted. “Waar gaan julle?”

“Ons gaan skerpioene vang,” replied André.

“Skerpioene vang?!” David gasped, shocked.

“Ja. Kom saam.”

This was unbelievable. The Afrikaans boys were going to catch scorpions. David shuddered, no doubt remembering the time the boy next door had been stung. Yet, he had to see this. The nest finders went back to their bicycles, picked them up, and rode over to André and Marcelle.

Afrikaans is also found, of course, in the lyrics of David Kramer, and seem to be a vital part of his artistic and cultural make-up. It was felt that the biography had to address this, even though some readers might not understand Afrikaans. Of course, this mirrors Kramer’s decision to at times sing in Afrikaans, or a mixture of English and Afrikaans, thereby potentially excluding a significant part of his audience. It was felt that to ignore Afrikaans would be to ignore the times that Kramer grew up in and became successful as a musician – this language was very much part of the social and political background of the day. Nowadays, with the ANC government, English is far more predominant, and previously exclusively Afrikaans-speaking universities, for example, are having to at least be bilingual, if not converting to becoming English-medium in their classes offered.

Afrikaans was seen by many as the language of the oppressor, but ironically it was (and is) also the home-language of many black people, and many times Kramer’s lyrics seem

to speak of and for those people, if on a rather superficial, insipid manner. Of course, his early political songs are always in English, which is rather a pity.

5.4 Fictionalisation

The following excerpt from *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* illustrates the fictional, the creative nonfiction, of the text:

There were the obligatory things to do and see in London, and David felt compelled to go through the list. Piccadilly Circus – done. Trafalgar Square – done. But this was the best one so far: his visit to the offices of the New Musical Express. He had bought this newspaper every Wednesday at the CNA, and now here he was, standing on the pavement in front of the building. He took a deep breath and stepped forward, pushing the doors open and entering the building. He took the elevator up to the third floor. The doors opened and David stepped out, and there it was, bustling and noisy, the offices of the New Musical Express. Above the entrance were the big red letters David knew so well: NME.

‘May I help you?’ a voice asked.

David turned and saw a tall young man in his early twenties in what can only be described as groovy threads, man. The velvet bell-bottom pants were so wide that it seemed as though he was wearing a skirt. David realised that the man wasn’t really that tall; it was the 3-inch soles of his platform shoes that made him seem so tall.

‘I, er, I’m just visiting,’ David mumbled. ‘I always get the NME back home ...’

The man took David’s accent in.

‘Where you from, then?’

‘South Africa.’

‘South Africa?’

David watched the by now familiar expression on the face opposite him: South Africa, apartheid, white guy, racist. But this time David wasn’t dismissed automatically. There was a strain of interest: this guy reads the NME. Wonder what makes him tick.

Another man strode up to them, also attired in groovy threads. But unlike his colleague, he wore sandals, man. With his long hair and beard he looked a lot like Jesus.

‘Have you finished with the Floyd layout, Andy?’ he asked.

‘Of course,’ the man in the three-inch platforms replied. ‘Simon’s in the darkroom developing the prints. Then all I have to do is drop the pics in.’

‘Bring it to my office when he’s done,’ the older man ordered, far more severely than Jesus would have done, and strode off in a wave of hair that reached his jeans.

‘Fuck!’ Andy swore under his breath. ‘The Floyd layout ...’

‘I thought you finished it?’ David inquired.

‘First rule of journalism, my son, is: always lie.’

David chuckled.

Andy eyed the camera David had slung over his shoulder.

‘You could well be my saviour,’ he muttered. ‘What’s your name, my lad?’

‘David Kramer.’

‘Wrong. Your name is Simon Bough, photographer. Come with me.’

David followed Andy down a passage.

‘I’m Andy Gophin,’ Andy introduced himself. ‘And I forgot to arrange with Simon for today’s shoot.’

‘You’re in deep shit,’ David pointed out.

‘Not at all. Simon is right here, behind me, and he’s going to take brilliant pics.’

David had read many of Andy’s articles. And here David was, talking to Andy Gophin! No-one is going to believe this story. They entered a tiny office which was cluttered with a desk, filing cabinets, piles of paper, and the members of Pink Floyd. David felt faint.

The above-mentioned passage illustrates the at times novel-like presentation of the Kramer biography. However, other factors had to be decided upon. From the outset of writing a biography such as *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* it was important to decide where the author would be positioned with regards to the narrative, as well as to the principal character, i.e., David Kramer. The text was largely written by a person who grew up in the same town as Kramer, with much the same experiences as Kramer. These shared experiences became the source of information for the text, along with research and interviews. At other times the words written were pure fiction, not based on any real experience. (The author has never been to Leeds, for example.) It was the result of the author describing the reality in his mind, the *movie unwinding in his head*. This resulted in something of a tightrope act. A text which presents itself as nonfiction/truth was

presented, when in fact it often crosses over into fiction: pure imagination. This fictionalising of the Kramer story was necessary, though, in order to illuminate the essence of Kramer's life and career. Benton (2009:48) concurs:

[...] it [biomythography – author's note] reminds us also of the fact that the painstaking, historical documentation of life writing is, by its nature, incomplete and can never hope to capture the elusive 'life' without the aid of narrative imagination (Runyan, 1984:77; Denzin, 1989:25).

Pelser (2001:10) adds these remarks:

[...] a biography is usually written as a complete version of a person's life which should also be illuminated against a background of a historic timeline. Sometimes reference is made to a 'scientific biography' (if the work is based virtually exclusively on indisputable historical information). If that is not the case, a 'romanticised biography' is rather spoken of. An interesting variation of the last-mentioned is the unauthorised biography (and sometimes even almost fictitious) versions of famous people so different such as the millionaire Howard Hughes and Princess Diana. The term 'psychological biography' refers to a type of biography wherein much stress is placed on the subject's psychological development; an approach which is especially popular in the writing of literary biographies. [Author's translation]

In the above quotation, Pelser uses the term *romanticised biography*. This was a useful term, in that it was by now becoming clear that there were more options than simply either fiction or nonfiction. Roberts (2002:57) adds these terms:

[...] the objective biography, the scholarly historical, the artistic-scholarly, narrative biography and the fictional biography. There is a kind of continuum from fact collection to character construction as dialogue and settings become closer to fiction (narrative biography) and, eventually, to where writing becomes

close to the historical novel with little reference to detailed research (fictional biography).

It could be argued that all biographies have an element of fiction, that it is the nature of the genre not to be written in a totally factual manner. Roberts says (2002:57):

Obviously [...] no biography can be completely ‘factual’ and we can also add that biographies tend to use a mix of these approaches as fact, interpretation and construction take place.

The biography is, after all, not a telephone directory – there is some story-telling taking place.

Weber (1980:1) submits even more terms for this strain of writing:

[...] art-journalism, nonfiction novel, essay-fiction, factual fiction [...]. The most widely used term has been the most confusing of all: New Journalism.

As far as the creative nonfiction of this study, it should be seen as a text *based* on a life, rather than *recounting* the life. Weber (1980:2) points out that some writers

[...] consider their nonfiction primarily journalistic rather than at once journalistic and literary.

As a creative nonfiction text, *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* certainly wishes to be both journalistic as well as literary. It is possible for such a text to exist,

because, as Weber (1980:5) points out, in the 1960s and 1970s there was quite a shift in (American) reading habits, moving towards nonfiction, as well as to nonfiction films and television documentaries. What might Weber make of the current fascination with reality television, one wonders? He mentions (1980:5) that after World War II there was a shift away from fiction towards nonfiction in magazines, because an editor of *True* magazine remarked that readers liked the articles more when they knew them to be true. He goes on to say that this type of article was seen to be useful by the readers.

During the writing of the Kramer biography the author shared Wolfe's hope, as quoted by Weber, (1980:18) that

[...] it just might be possible to write journalism that would [...] read like a novel.

Taraborrelli's *Madonna – An Intimate Biography* (2001:113) has the aforementioned texture, that it “read(s) like a novel”:

‘Oh my God, look at me!’ Madonna said, dancing around the room in her Gucci flip-flops, magazine in hand. ‘I am on the cover of *Time* magazine! Can you believe it? Just look! Can you imagine it?’ Earlier in her career, she had said, ‘I won't be happy until I'm as famous as God.’ Maybe now she was beginning to feel that she was on her way to that goal.

Truly awed by Madonna's appearance on the cover of one of the most respected magazines in the world, the incredulous assistant said, ‘No, I just can't believe it.’

Suddenly, Madonna stopped dancing. Whipping around to face the employee, she said, ‘What do you mean, you can't believe it? Why shouldn't I be on the cover of *Time*?’

‘I didn't mean ...’ the secretary began to stumble over her words. ‘What I meant was ... I'm sorry.’

‘Oh, stop your grovelling,’ Madonna said, exasperated.

Another example of a biography crossing over into fictionalisation is Cross (2001:352)

writing about the suicide of Kurt Cobain:

When he put the pen down, he had filled all but two inches of the page. It had taken three cigarettes to draft the note. The words hadn’t come easy, and there were misspellings and half-completed sentences. He didn’t have the time to rewrite this letter twenty times like he had many other letters in his journals: It was getting brighter outside and he needed to act before the rest of the world woke. He signed it ‘peace, love, empathy. Kurt Cobain,’ printing his name rather than using a signature. He underlined ‘empathy’ twice; he had used this one word five times. He wrote one more line – ‘Frances and Courtney, I’ll be at your altar’ – and stuck the paper and pen into his left coat pocket. On the stereo Stipe [the singer of R.E.M – author’s note] was singing about the ‘Man on the Moon.’ Kurt had always loved Andy Kaufman – his friends used to crack up back in junior high in Montesano when Kurt would do his Latka imitation from ‘Taxi.’

He rose from the bed and entered the closet, where he removed a board from the wall. In this secret cubbyhole sat a beige nylon gun case, a box of shotgun shells, and a Tom Moore cigar box. He replaced the board, put the shells in his pocket, grabbed the cigar box, and cradled the heavy shotgun over his left forearm. In a hallway closet, he grabbed two towels; he didn’t need these, but someone would. Empathy. He quietly walked down the nineteen steps of the wide staircase. He was within a few feet of Cali’s room and he didn’t want anyone catching sight of him. He had thought this all through, mapped it out with the same forethought he put into his album covers and videos. There would be blood, lots of blood, and a mess, which he didn’t want in his house. Mostly, he didn’t want to haunt this home, to leave his daughter with the kind of nightmares he had suffered.’

These two above-mentioned examples show what Tom Wolfe called *saturation reporting*.

Weber (1980:19) describes *saturation reporting* as

[...] reporting that went to the bottom depths of the material and sought out not only what was said and done but what was thought and felt, reporting that got inside the character and scene the way novelists did [...]

There seems to be an element of art in saturation reporting, in that the text is no longer pure, dry data. Wiesenthal (2008:1) describes her writing process of her Lowther biography, *The Half-Lives of Pat Lowther*. In her article Wiesenthal relates the word *artifact* to her approach during the writing. She makes the case that an artifact is a thing which has been made: an artificial thing.

[...] the term artifact is also useful in relation to the genre of non-fiction [sic] – specifically, in relation to the epistemological ambiguity that all nonfiction writing trades in, as the forging of some form of experience into truth, or even fact-based prose. It is, clearly, in this epistemological ambiguity – in its exploitation or acknowledgement – that ethics also enters the picture. For if the line between outright artifice and the slippery nature of nonfictional ‘truth’ is any clearer for biographers than it is for, say, memoirists or poets, it nevertheless remains true that the biographical subject, or ‘I,’ too, is fortified on the one hand by ‘art’ and on the other ‘fact,’ just like the letter ‘i’ literally encased in the middle of the word ‘art-i-fact.’

The important idea in this quotation is the notion that a text which attempts to describe the life of a subject may be based on fact, and/or on *art*, as Wiesenthal calls it. This indeed applies to *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*.

It was felt that a (sometimes) fictionalisation of Kramer’s life and career would be an easier method in giving an insight into the man and his work, to reveal, as Pachter quotes Edel (1979:4): “the essence of a life”. Pachter goes on to mention the difficulties facing the prospective biographer, under which one can hear whispered warnings of the ethics involved, as the biographer is sometimes seen as an enemy (1979:4):

But the biographer's achievement is hard won. Inundated by thousands of documents and impressions [...] or starved for the lack of them; embraced by the subject, his family, friends, and disciples, or waylaid by them at every turn, the biographer must somehow deliver a convincing life.

Regarding the fictionalisation of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, Root (2003:245) has this to say:

Because my students ask me what nonfiction is (they never ask about fiction or poetry), I have created the following definition: Nonfiction is the expression of, reflection upon, and/or interpretation of observed, perceived, or recollected experience. The definition has this advantage: I can catalog [sic] every work I think of as nonfiction in the parameters of the definition. Another advantage is that, while some would claim that it could also apply to fiction, poetry, and drama, in order to distinguish those forms from nonfiction they would have to add qualifiers to the nonfiction definition (for example, 'through the means of invented characters, situations and events' in the case of fiction). This is of course my point: that the other three are not necessarily about 'observed, perceived, or recollected experience,' although they may well be, and when they are they present experience in ways that alter or camouflage or transform actuality.

It has this disadvantage: the term it's defining isn't separate enough from the familiar blanket term 'non-fiction' [sic] for someone who doesn't think of the same works I think of to be able to apply it. 'How does this definition apply to a VCR manual?' I hear someone ask. 'To a biological field survey? To a dictionary?' My term needs a qualifier or, alternatively, needs to be replaced by a word that will only call to mind my definition and no competing definitions. I search for that qualifier, that alternate term, every time I talk about nonfiction, but I never have any difficulty knowing what I'm naming when I use the term 'nonfiction.'

It would appear that Root means that nonfiction is reality. Also, he sees a difference between fiction, poetry and drama, as though they have different levels of fiction about them. This could well be. Certain texts might lean more towards fiction than nonfiction, and vice versa. Yet, whilst being a bit of both, they are at the end of the day neither. What

are they then? At first this was the conundrum of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, until it was decided that it could be a bit of both, that is, creative nonfiction.

It would be wrong to lump a memoir such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996) together with the biography *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, as *Angela's Ashes* never strays (one assumes) from fact, whereas the Kramer biography at times is pure fiction. Regarding the notion of fact/truth in nonfiction, Currie (1985:388) says the following:

The case of the apparently fictional autobiography presents another kind of difficulty. It is not that the community may intervene to revoke the work's fictional status; intuitively the work never was fiction at all. Is it because the story is true? No; merely being true would not be enough for us to say that the work was not fiction. Someone may write an historical novel, staying with the known facts and inventing incidents only where historical knowledge is lacking. Suppose it then turns out that these events described in the novel exactly correspond to what actually happened. I want to say that the work is fiction, even though it is entirely true.

It may be thought that the trouble arises because the author is engaging in a kind of deception; encouraging the audience, by indirect means, to assume that what he is saying is true.

This passage leads to another question that had to be answered before the writing of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*: that of ethics.

5.5 Ethics

The very act of noting in a public forum the life of another will repeatedly bring one back to the ethics involved in such an exercise. Pachter (1979:5) asks:

What right has the biographer to pursue his subject to the privatemost corners of his life?

Kramer would not agree to a collaboration, but he did concede that the author could write the unauthorised biography. Of course, he had little choice in the matter, which was one of the agonising points for the author, this invasion of privacy. Pelser (2001:21) writes, regarding ethics in writing a biography:

What right does a biographer have, for example, to enter the terrain of someone else's activities and privacy, or on which grounds can he justify it? [Author's translation] [...] 'The idea of a biographer as a pursuing hound - James Joyce's 'biografiend' - has been present from the start. Dr. Arbuthnot, writing in the eighteenth century of the innumerable biographical pamphlets produced by the 'unspeakable' Edmund Curll, gloomily remarked that biography had 'added a new Terror to Death'. Henry James in his famous story about Shelley's love-letters, *The Aspern Papers*, characterized the young American researcher as a 'publishing scoundrel'. The biographer as [sic] appeared in a similar role in recent novels by William Golding and A.S. Byatt. Ian Hamilton has vividly dramatised the case in his study of J.D. Salinger, where the novelist resorts to laws to defend his privacy. The long saga of Ted Hughes' battles against Sylvia Plath's biographers puts the question in its most anguished, immediate form, while Diane Wood Middlebrook's biography of Anne Sexton (1991) presses it into new areas of intimate exposure, by using the tape-recordings of some 300 psychotherapy sessions undertaken by Sexton towards the end of her life before committing suicide. All these should give us pause for reflection.

Pelser (2001:30) goes on to mention in chapter three of his dissertation that Kannemeyer points out four problematic areas for the biographer. Firstly, insufficient information or the lack of needed permission to obtain information. Secondly, biographies about writers vary tremendously; before the 18th century the emphasis was more on the legendary than the factual. Only towards the end of the 18th century was there a greater accent on

correspondence, diaries, autobiographical writings, interviews and other documents. There are thus two poles: the Victorian ideal to erect a monument in honour of the subject, or the 20th century leaning to reveal everything and to reduce the subject to a case study. Thirdly, biography writing is not a detached, cool science. There needs to be a certain relationship between the biographer and the subject. There should be an emotional involvement which will lead to a thorough text being researched and written. In the last place, Kannemeyer argues that biography writing is difficult and dangerous. How can a biographer create a satisfying and convincing image of a person, even in a thorough work?

In Pelser's article Kannemeyer mentions a particular problem *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* faced: the difficulty in locating information regarding the subject. Even though a biography such as *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* is sometimes fictive, it can not ignore the facts of Kramer's life. It still needs to be anchored in fact: dates, events, and such. However, this data was not always forthcoming, and at these times the author was forced to move into a fictitious version. Would this be ethical? A useful example referred to was Taraborrelli (2001:57):

Despite the uncertainty of the group's name [Emanon – 'no name' spelled backwards – author's note], Madonna's self-confidence and outlook for its future remained unshakable. However, for someone who was not a known performer, she had already developed the ego of a major – and, in some ways, difficult – star. Bray continues, 'She wanted to call the band 'Madonna.' Well, I thought that was just too much.'

'But it makes a lot of sense,' Madonna told Steve Bray during lunch at Howard Johnson's in Times Square. 'See, there's this group called Patti LaBelle and the Blue Belles. And when they reinvented themselves, they called themselves Labelle, after the leader of the group.'

Bray digested this piece of information. ‘So what are you saying?’ he asked her. ‘That you’re the leader of this band?’

Another ethical concern was the actual nature of biography, whether it would be in order to publicly dissect a real person, especially a living person. Holmes (1995:15) says the following:

(Biography) has always had the doubtful status of a maverick or mongrel art [...]

Holmes continues a few lines later:

Let me propose a simple myth of its genesis, a sort of Origin of the Species. The problematic, delightful, and disputed nature of biography derives from its original forebears, who one secret, sultry morning formed an Unholy Alliance. Fiction married Fact, without benefit of clergy. Or as I prefer to say, Invention formed a love-match with Truth. These are the Adam and Eve of our subject. The result was a brilliant, bastard form – Biography – which has been causing trouble ever since.

This line of thought is pertinent to the writing of *Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, as whilst the author was concerned by the tampering with Kramer’s privacy, he was further troubled by (at times) fictionalising Kramer’s life and career. On the one hand fictionalising can be useful to the text to give a “feeling” of the personality and/or his work, but the risk is that the text might be seen as taking too many liberties. Holmes’s mention of the balance/conflict of Invention and Truth is useful in that it acknowledges that this situation exists. Therefore it was felt to be in order to write a fictional biography – after all, others have done it.

Apart from the author's wish to respect the privacy of David Kramer, there is also the very real question of libel. (Holmes, 1995:16) writes:

The biography that Andrew Morton writes (*Diana: Her True Story* – author's note) is influenced less by John Milton than by Barbara Cartland. But the traditions of gossip, or aristocratic scandal, of piquant anecdote, also runs deep in the form and arguably goes back to John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*. It is useless to pretend it does not exist. Morton has been much mocked, both for his success and for his novelettish style. But consider the skill – which includes the circumvention of libel – with which he presents this peculiar modern image of domestic suspicion and jealousy. 'Diana has long been concerned about the influence of the Highgrove Set on her husband. When she is at their Gloucestershire retreat she routinely presses the 'last number redial' on his portable telephone. Invariably she is connected to Middlewich House, the Parker-Bowles' home.'

Continuing the conundrum of what the biographer should pen, if anything at all, Thwaite (1995:203) says:

A great deal has been said and written about the problems of the 'true representation of a fellow human being', of the impossibility of really understanding someone else's life (How intimately can we know the self of another person? as Richard Ellmann put it) and about the practical problems of finding out, of filling in the gaps, about the problems of copyright and invasion of privacy, about the unreliability of witness, spoken and written, and the constant rewriting of history by everyone, main characters and bit players alike. [...] There is simply – and most complicatedly – the problem of trying to get it right, to tell a good story, to provide a compelling narrative that neither distorts nor compromises.

Pachter's claim (1979:10) is problematic in that it desires the biographer to cast the first stone, as though the biographer is flawless:

A modern biographer may or may not choose to reveal the intimate, the amorous details of a life, but he must, if he is good at what he does, probe beneath its public, polished self. The doubts and vulnerabilities, the meannesses, ambitions, and private satisfactions that are hidden within a social responsibility yield him his greatest insights.

For the author, the above instructions were perhaps the hardest to follow, but in the end this is what he attempted, so as to be true to his reader.

For some there is a satisfaction to be had in writing an exposé or a revealing, illuminating article, but for the author there was no pleasure in barging in uninvited into the private areas of his subject in *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*. However, after some consideration it was felt that half a biography was not good enough, and the text was made to include some of Kramer’s feelings and motivations, the good and the bad.

5.6 Influences

Another factor which shaped the writing of the Kramer biography was the influence of other biographies the author had read. In his MA dissertation Pelsler (2001:15) makes the hypothesis that

as a result of the limited biography-tradition in South Africa it is constantly necessary to fall back on especially English and American models in order to define standards. [Author’s translation]

This was indeed true for *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*.

Regarding the fictionalising of Kramer, *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* heeded Kaplan's (1978:2) thoughts on biography, that it

[...] makes sense, it is believable, it is a good story. The writer starts off with a number of givens – birth and death, education, ambition, conflict, milieu, work, relationship, accident. He shapes them into a book that has the autonomous vitality of any work of the imagination and at the same time is 'true to life' and true to history. In many respects biography is a feat of illusionism, sleight-of-hand, levitation; basic decisions and interpretations that appear to be the result of cautious deliberation are often made instantaneously in, and part of, the act of writing [...]

5.7 Make-believe

When speaking of how the reader perceives the text, Currie (1985:386) says that

[...] the author of fiction invites the receiver to engage in a kind of make-believe.

Currie continues this train of thought (1985:387):

[...] the author intends that the reader will read the work *as* fiction because he perceives the work to *be* fiction; that is, because he realises it to be the work of a certain intention.

It seems then, that readers *know* that fiction is artificial, and readily accept this.

An important facet of any text is its relationship with its reader. There should be an honest intention of the part of the writer that what is being written is plausible. This is especially true of nonfiction works. Then the reader will gladly partake in make-believe.

With a work such as *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* which is neither absolute fiction nor nonfiction, the creator of such a text should be sensitive to the relationship of trust between him and his reader.

A text needs the participation of a reader to make it come alive. It is the reader who decides whether the text is believable, and perhaps this believability supersedes the question of whether the text is fiction or nonfiction.

Currie (1985:390) says the following with regard to make-believe:

There are things we are called upon to make-believe in a work of fiction that are neither stated nor conversationally implicated by the text itself. If Holmes leaves London and arrives in Edinburgh without his mode of transport being described we are clearly called upon to make-believe that he travelled there by some conventional means of transport available in the late nineteenth century, presumably by railway. [...] The question is, how do we mesh the idea of a proposition being true in a fiction with our account of make-believe? Must the reader make-believe all and only those propositions true in the fiction? It will certainly not generally be the case that the author intends the reader to make-believe all and only all the propositions true in the fiction. It is probably true in the Sherlock Holmes stories that Holmes, for all his amazing powers, is a human being in the biological sense. [...] We merely have to understand that fiction involves a two-levelled structure of make-believe. To be fiction the text must be such that what it contains is intended by its author to be make-believed. But in picking up the invitation, the reader also picks up an obligation (ideally) to make-believe certain things not explicitly stated in (or conversationally implicated by) the text.

Let us note also that works of fiction may contain sentences which are nonfiction. The author of fiction may make statements which he does not intend the reader to make-believe, but rather to believe.

This was true for *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*. When the text declared that there is a mountain range close to Worcester called the Brandwacht Mountains, this

is indeed so. The information detailed concerning David Kramer, his date of birth, his songs, are also fact. The reader believes this to be true, and therefore acceptable from an entertainment point of view. However, the reader will not be able to gauge how much is fact when, for example, the event of Kramer going to university is sketched. The author may well know what is fact derived from research and what is drawn from the author's imagination, but the reader will not be privy to this knowledge. In a novel, especially a science-fiction novel, the reader might well go into make-believe mode, but with a text such as a biography which the reader assumes to be truth, the make-believe participation of the reader is clouded. Right at the beginning of the Kramer text the reader is informed that it is a fictional biography, but the reader will assume the text to be true, as it is based on a real person.

Currie (1985:391) uses the useful word *assert(ing)* when speaking of a text which is factual. This can be used to describe a passage which the author presents as fact, agreed upon by himself and his prospective reader. The characters and events in a novel are from the author's imagination, but they are presented as though they were the truth. Like a good liar who almost believes his own lie. This is done so that the reader's participation will be that he/she will believe the text, that it will be plausible.

Gerard (1996:4) has the following to say about the reader's involvement with the text:

The novel is a way of creating a mythic truth from your own personal mythos. And the contract with the reader is that the reader is sharing your myth, and that's powerful simply because we're a storytelling species. We like stories. The

nonfiction act is similar to that, except that it satisfies our hunger for the real and our need to make sense, make order, out of chaos.

Regarding the texture of some nonfiction texts, Kannemeyer (1995:6) is of the opinion that the biographer's

[...] task is also to tell a riveting story and to move his reader. As well as the artisan there is also something of the artist in the biographer [...]. [Author's translation]

The biography, it seems, should not simply be a list of data, but it should take some license in order to illuminate the subject, the context against which and from which the subject should be measured. Circumstantial evidence may be brought to the text in order to more completely tell the story of the life being described.

5.8 Approach to the Biographical Subject

Geoffrey Wolff (1979:57) explains why he decided on writing his biography of Harry Cosby. He begins by quoting the line spoken to him by Crosby's mother, words which he at the time found rather 'scatterbrained':

It's interesting – things that are interesting interest me.

Later he expands (1979:59):

Why Harry Cosby? It's interesting – things that are interesting interest me. [Wolff playfully repeats the words used by his subject's mother – author.] It seemed to me in 1971 when I began work on my biography of Crosby that any story that had stuck to my memory fifteen years was trying to tell me something.

Wolff is explaining why he chose to write a biography of the relatively unknown Harry Cosby. It was largely because, as he uses the seemingly clumsy explanation, he found Cosby's life interesting. He is referring to Colby's mother's statement when he interviewed her about her son: that she was interested in things which interested her. This silly statement was actually attractive to Wolff, as he saw some depth in it, something of the everyday person. To Wolff it resonated with the "empty" Colby life (with its limited literary success) and suicide, and it interested him.

On the other hand, Pachter (1979:9) warns:

Balance can also be upset, conversely, when the biographer loses himself in his subject. To identify too closely with a life, to collapse into adulation, is to give up the distance that allows a writer to become something more than the agent for a reputation.

Right from the outset, the decision to write about Kramer was based on a personal bias on the author's part. Pelsner (2004:20) writes:

'Between the biographer and his subject,' writes Edel (1957:7), 'there is established from the outset a significant relationship [...] It is a relationship deeply intimate and highly subjective.' [Author's translation]

Regarding the aforementioned either hero-worship or desire to break down a subject, Kannemeyer (1995:4) notes that

Humphrey Carpenter's declaration that 'biographies are likely to be either acts of worship or acts of destruction' is apparently an exaggeration. [Author's translation]

There is some truth to Carpenter's statement, though. Recent biographies on subjects such as Michael Jackson, for example, have veered either to the far left or to the far right. There has always been a bias, with Jackson depicted either as a musical genius to be admired, or a pervert. With the writing of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* the author hoped to remain in the middle.

Whilst writing the Kramer biography, the author had to shelve his own agendas and try to be neutral towards the subject of the biography. (Even though it will be clear to any reader that the author is a fan of Kramer.) Guralnick (1999:xi) addresses the matter of reserving judgement towards the subject being written about (in his case, Elvis Presley):

This is a story of fame. It is a story of celebrity and its consequences. It is, I think, a tragedy, and no more the occasion for retrospective moral judgment than any other biographical canvas should be. 'Suspending moral judgment is not the immorality of the novel,' Milan Kundera wrote in what could be taken as a challenge thrown down to history and biography, too. This suspension of judgment is the storyteller's *morality*, 'the morality that stands against the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and everyone; of judging before, and in the absence of, understanding.' It is not that moral judgment is illegitimate; it is simply that it has no place in describing a life.

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography narrates the story of David Kramer, but the text does not try to expose the *real* David Kramer, as revealed by possible clues in his work. In this regard the text agrees with the Elisabeth Eybers notion, as put forth by Pelsner (2004:2):

[...] during a radio talk in 1949 Elisabeth Eybers was of the opinion that it is a senseless activity to try to glean an autobiographical meaning from a poem. In 1963 during a talk she said that it is ‘misleading to try to reconstruct the details of a poet’s life from his poetry. [Author’s translation]’

Whilst *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* is a sometimes fictitious account of Kramer’s life, it does try to honour the facts of the life it’s attempting to describe. The author was aware that this fictitious version of Kramer’s life and career might not be accepted by some, being criticised for not remaining true to fact. In this regard, Rompalske has this review of Bradford’s *Elizabeth: A Biography of Britain’s Queen* (1997:1):

Ever since Princess Diana teamed up with Andrew Morton to tell her story, bookstores have been flooded with profiles of the current royal family. The quality of these biographies varies, from a well-respected effort by Charles’ official biographer, Jonathan Dimbleby, to sensational “banned in Britain!” revelations from the Wales’ disgruntled ex-housekeeper. Possibly the best of the lot is Sarah Bradford’s *Elizabeth* [sic], a sweeping account of the life and times of one of England’s longest-reigning monarchs, Queen Elizabeth II.

Though her tone is respectful, the author has presented a thorough, evenhanded portrait of the current queen.

It would seem that an important criterion of a *good* biography is that it be thorough. This might lead certain critics to argue that a fictionalising of a life cannot be thorough, as it is drawn only from the author's imagination, and not at all based on research. Even though this fictitious aspect joins the dots between the data available, possibly giving insight into the subject's psyche and personality, it might be disregarded by some.

Nadel (1984:176) claims that

Biography is essentially a demythologizing form.

This is true of the Kramer biography, not in the sense of revealing the subject's flaws, but rather to supply more than simply a résumé of the musician's career. The writer was aware that as a contemporary biographer, he too, had limitations, even an ugliness to his intent. Pachter (1979:12) has this opinion:

What was suppressed before in the interest of ethical or historical coherence became therefore, by the early twentieth century, the very rough-edged core of biography. [...] Life-writing, in the aftermath of Victorianism, took on some of the aspects of *exposé*. It was a period of antiheroism, of the destruction of the public myth. At his least pleasant, the new biographer was a smug practitioner of oneupmanship, who bled a life dry of its vitality and authority.

Addressing the role the biographer plays, Roberts (2002:173) is of the opinion:

The biographical researcher, as any other human subject, has experiences set and interpreted within biographical and other forms of time – as researchers we interpret our own lives as we interpret the lives of others and in research our own

biographical experience and feelings are involved. This emotional contact should not be seen as merely a hindrance in research but as (inescapably) part of the research relationship which should be expanded upon through the reflexive monitoring of our own self-involvement.

At the risk of stating the obvious, there has to be some motivation for wanting to write, be involved with, a life. It might be the fascination with fame, or on a deeper level, wondering how Fate intervened in a life. Or, as in the case with *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, it was the delight of having someone one identified with on a certain level achieving success, being able to ‘get out of the town one couldn’t wait to leave’. Perhaps there is something of the Bruce Springsteen mythology to be found in the joy of Kramer’s success: then one can get in a car and drive away, to some place that’s better. Even if it isn’t better, at least it’s away. Maybe the author’s part in the writing of the biography was that he shared Kramer’s (perceived) small-town mentality, believing that all and everything passed one by, like the N1 highway that skirts past Worcester as it makes its way from Cape Town to Johannesburg. Hence the following passage from *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*:

One time, it was dead quiet. John and David set out to investigate. They walked up the edge of the plateau where their father had parked the car and gazed out over Worcester which lay sleeping below them. From up here the boys could see the grey ribbon of a road far below. Then a vehicle came along the highway, a small speck in the distance, too far away for them to hear it.

‘Look, there’s a road,’ David told John. ‘With a car.’

‘That’s the N1,’ John informed his younger brother. ‘It goes all the way to Johannesburg.’

‘To Johannesburg?!’ David gasped.

‘Where they get the gold.’

David stared wide-eyed at the road far below, at the car moving along it. Johannesburg! David could not get enough of this road and the idea that it went as

far away as Johannesburg. That was, it was, something he didn't have words for, but it was something wonderful.

In creating a subjective reality, the author may use techniques such as manipulating the actual font of the text for dramatic effect. Weber gives this example of saturation reporting when he describes Wolfe's writing in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. (1980:99):

The level of stream of consciousness varies considerably throughout the book. Often it involves nothing more than slipping into the idiom of the Pranksters or the acid world. The section [...] is called 'The Fugitive' and creates Kesey's growing paranoia in Mexico about the police closing in on him. It opens with a burst of typographical effects:

Haul ass, Kesey. Move. Scram. *Split flee high vanish disintegrate.*
Like *run*.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrev. Revrevrevrevrevrevrevrev or are we gonna have a late Mexican re-run of the scene on the rooftop in San Francisco and sit here with the motor spinning and watch with fascination while the cops climb up once again to *come git you-*

THEY JUST OPENED THE DOOR DOWN BELOW, ROTO ROOTER, SO YOU HAVE MAYBE 45 SECONDS ASSUMING THEY BE SLOW AND SNEAKY AND SURE ABOUT IT .

Roberts reminds that this type of illuminating writing has to be done conscientiously, to present a scene as fairly and unbiased as possible (2002:172):

The researcher will continue to have multiple roles, as academic, adviser, advocate which bring the tensions that are inherent in biographical and other research. But many would go further and say there is an overriding commitment – not merely not to do harm, which is extremely important, but also to a 'democratic community' in which all voices are heard and taken into account.

Whilst one expects Wolfe to give a true reflection as possible of Kesey's personality and motivations for his actions, Wolfe should not want to raise him on to a pedestal, nor present him as a scoundrel – that will be for the reader to decide.

5.9 Intertextuality

Kristeva (1980) put forth the notion that any text, film, song, et cetera, is almost never a totally new idea, but rather based on previous ideas, that it speaks to previous works, and should be seen as a link in a chain – nothing is ever sucked out of the void. Furthermore, intertextuality can be taken a step further, in that the piece, such as a film, for example, will make (sometimes rather obvious) references to a previous film, historical event, speech, song, and so on. Kristeva herself, to a large extent, uses the intertextual model in her 1980 work *Desire in Language* when she refers to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (p.64), for example, when she writes of him and his work:

Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure.

This is a useful example of how a preceding text influences those that follow it. Also useful is Kristeva's mention (p.65) of Bakhtin's notion of the "literary word" which should be seen as an "intersection of textual surfaces" rather than a fixed point. This meeting place of current and past work, is a way of understanding how two works interact with one another. In fact, the same can be said of a person, in that he/she is the sum total of his/her past experiences.

Kristeva relies heavily on the ideas of Bakhtin: she mentions (p.66) his theory that

Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.

The concept of intertextuality is important for the biography of this study: *David Kramer, an unauthorised biography*, as intertextuality is a method by which the text can be drawn back from creative nonfiction into a reality the reader will accept as true, therefore believing the creative nonfiction passages to be true as well, because the things used, photographs, pop charts, et cetera, are real. Furthermore, intertextuality places the biography in a certain timeframe, as well as the nuances of that time. It is therefore worthwhile spending some more time discussing it.

Cuddon (1998:424) describes intertextuality as

[...] a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. Her contention was that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is made up of a mosaic of quotations, and that any text is the ‘absorption and transformation of another’. She challenges traditional notions of literary influence, saying that intertextuality denotes a transposition of one or several sign systems into another or others. But this is not connected with the study of sources. ‘Transposition’ is a Freudian term, and Kristeva is pointing not merely to the way texts echo each other but to the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another – so that meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meaning from another kind of discourse. It is a kind of ‘new articulation’.

Roberts (2002:78) says this of intertextuality:

The issue of ‘intertextuality’ raises questions surrounding ‘representation’. The idea of intertextuality derives from a poststructuralist view of texts as composed of references to other texts or transforming other texts and, from a postmodern perspective, a view that meanings relate to other meanings in some endless signification. Dentith points out that the term, deriving from Kristeva’s particular appropriation of Bakhtin during the 1960s, means two things. First, that particular writing uses other forms of writing and draws on and ‘reflects’ or ‘redirects’ the discourse present in society. Second, there is a radical review of subjectivity – involving the erosion of subjectivity as subjects are seen as sites where multiple texts are interrelated.

In a broader sense, intertextuality does not have to concern itself only with written texts, but can include the links between film, news events, and so on. This is especially so for the intertextuality of *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography*, where the text refers to pop songs of the day, pictures, photographs, or events of the day such as rugby tours, at cetera, to “place” the story being told in a time frame. Intertextuality is used mostly as a tool to put things into context. The biography makes use of, as Rajan (1991:63) says:

[...] transposition as the intersection of different material as well as textual surfaces [...]

Pachter (1979:11) has this to say about biography intertwining with history:

Ralph Waldo Emerson pronounced of his era: ‘There is properly no history: only biography.’

Canalón and Spacagna (1994:106) use the example of the film *Bicycle Thieves* as having an intertextual relationship with the novel of the same name it is based on, how someone who has read the novel will view the film, and vice versa. But intertextuality does not only have to have such a direct, one-dimensional relationship to the piece it is speaking to/about. Some intertextual pieces are a written text shadowing another written text, but can also be, for example, song lyrics mentioning the title of a well-known film. (“Breakfast at Tiffany’s” by Deep Blue Something. [1995]) In order to place Kramer in a time and cultural background, the text often used such intertextual references, such as historical events, popular events of the day, songs which were being played on the radio, and so on. An example of an author making references to other art forms or events is Guralnick (1999:84) in his Elvis Presley biography:

Wild in the Country started shooting on location in Napa, California, on November 9. Taken from J. R. Salamanca’s well-regarded first novel, *The Lost Country*, the script had been written by prizewinning playwright Clifford Odets (*Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing!*); the director, Philip Dunne, was the author of such notable screenplays as *How Green Was My Valley* and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*; and the older woman, one of three principal love interests in the story, was to be played by the distinguished French actress Simone Signoret. [Italics author’s]

Here follows an excerpt from *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* as an example of intertextuality in the biography:

At the time, the Worcester teenagers were playing 7-singles at parties, black vinyl records which were seven inches in diameter. The pop hits for 1969 were:

- Suspicious Minds - Elvis Presley
- Don't forget to Remember - The Bee Gees
- You can Cry if you want to - The Troggs
- My Sentimental Friend - Herman's Hermits
- Crimson and Clover - Tommy James and the Shondells
- Cry to Me – The Staccatos
- Time is Tight - Booker T and The MGs
- Sugar Sugar - The Archies
- Saved by the Bell - Robin Gibb
- Jesamine - The Casuals

A big hit of 1969 was Peter Sarstedt's 'Where Do You Go To My Lovely?', and it was one of the songs you *had* to be able to play if you had a guitar.

'Okay, check you,' the friend said in the typical Worcester colloquialism.
'Check you,' David replied.

Some texts, paintings, films, pieces of music, et cetera, go to the extreme of, if not stealing, then at least borrowing ideas from previous works. Sometimes this is obvious, as in a homage, and more of a compliment than a theft. The Kramer biography does not borrow from other works – it only refers to lyrics, pop charts, and so on, to recreate the period of the time, or to give further insight to the mood of the time. There is a fine line between intertextuality and plagiarism, even in the form of a homage, though. Regarding this, Hutcheon says the following regarding texts “borrowing” from one another (1988:124):

Traditionally, stories were stolen, as Chaucer stole his; or they were felt to be the common property of a culture or community. [...] These notable happenings, imagined or real, lay outside language the way history itself is supposed to, in a condition of pure occurrence.

This leads to the point of referencing: care had to be taken in the thesis to credit references, in order not to inadvertently be guilty of plagiarism by using someone else's thoughts without acknowledgement.

Hutcheon looks at intertextuality from a postmodernist point of view, and points out the intertextual relationship between texts and history (1985:124). She goes on to mention parody, which for her is an element of historiographic metafiction, as an example of intertextuality (1998:127).

Hutcheon writes (1988:126):

The theoretical exploration of the 'vast dialogue' (Calinescu 1980, 169) between and among literatures and histories that is postmodernism has, in part, been made possible by Julia Kristeva's (1969) reworking of the Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia – the multiple voicings of a text. Out of these ideas, she developed a more strictly formalist theory of the irreducible plurality of texts within and behind any given text, thereby deflecting the critical focus away from the notion of the subject (the author) to the idea of textual productivity.

Here the importance of the author is brought into question; when was the author's idea really conceived? Foucault continues the train of thought (1988:127):

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

Umberto Eco has this to say on writing his novel *The Name of the Rose* (1988:128):

I discovered what writers have always known (and have told us again and again): books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told.

Therefore the way texts are preceded and inspired by others is a rather complex matter, especially if one considers intertextuality where the influence jumps to a totally different format, for example, a well-known political event is later referred to in a song. An example of this crossing over is when the pop group Frankie Goes To Hollywood took their name from a newspaper headline which read: “Frankie goes to Hollywood!”, the Frankie in question being Frank Sinatra.

In the Kramer biography many intertextual references are made. Sometimes song titles are offered, sometimes photographs of Kramer in his hometown. At other times Kramer’s drawings are used in the text, and at another time a reference is made to Enid Blyton’s Adventure series, as well as her Secret Seven and Famous Five books. Each of these intertextual signs has a different value; the songs might place the written passage in a certain time period, whereas the Enid Blyton book titles will give insight to the young David’s mindframe.

5.10 Biography Writing

Nadel (1984:151) asks the pertinent question:

Is there a theory of biography, a systemized set of principles regarding the form and composition of the genre? Given the multiplicity of lives and variety of styles of biographical expression this seems an impossibility. However, a theory of biography based on language, narration and myth provides a possible model. More specifically, I believe that an analysis of the function of tropes, the forms of narrative, and the nature of myth in biography can establish a foundation for a theory that emphasizes its generic properties. Shaping this approach is the principle that the literary form of biography derives not from observing a set of rules, nor from the documentation of a life but from the literary act of composition and the dependence of the biographer on language to express a life-story. What gives biography its impact is not the point of view of the biographer, as Strachey emphasized, nor the ‘inner myth’ of the subject, as Leon Edel stresses, but the linguistic expression, narrative technique and mythical elements employed by the author to tell his story.

Nadel speaks only of a *possible model*, which leaves the exact nature of biography still rather slippery. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as it gives a biographer leeway to create a text which he or she finds meaningful, even if the biography is gossipy in feel.

Holmes (1995:16) points out, text such as Morton’s *Diana: Her True Story* will be

[...] influenced less by John Milton than by Barbara Cartland. But the traditions of gossip, or aristocratic scandal, of piquant anecdote, also runs deep in the form and arguably goes back to John Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*. It is useless to pretend it does not exist.

This means then that the biography would have been different had a different biographer written it. Morton brought his own personality and agenda to the story of Diana, and that, to a large extent, is what makes his biography what it is.

Regarding Nadel's statement that the biographer's view is not important: he makes what at first seems a contradiction when he goes on to describe Edel's notion of an ideal biographer, one who (1984:153)

[...] writes a story of the progress of a life; he must allow himself to feel its failures, its obstacles overcome, its human ambiguities, its fallibilities, and the drama of personality and temperament. If he's a good biographer, he knows how to select and use significant detail. He can't allow himself to be too much the critic, lest his critiques of the work impede the march of the story. A critical biographer is a contradiction in terms [...] The beauty of what a biographer does resides in his insights: we discern the complexities of being, without pretending that life's riddles have been answered.

The difference seems to be that the biography is not a platform for the biographer's *views and opinions*, but that there is place for his *insights*. There is a subtle difference here, but an important one: when the reader has finished reading the biography, he/she should know far less about the writer than about the subject. The author should be invisible, nondescript, using only literary technique in which to illuminate the subject of the biography.

Nadel (1984:29) mentions *narrative technique* such as tropes (metaphor, metonymy, irony, oxymoron, hyperbole, litotes, antithesis, etc) as ways of telling the story. Nadel's statement reminds us that, at the end of the day, one is dealing with a work of literature which is joined to other forms of literature by the techniques it uses to create itself. He adds the following definition (1984:30):

Biography [...] begins to become more than a recital of facts, more than a description of an individual's minute doings, more than a study of achievement, when we allow ourselves to glimpse the myths within and behind the individual, the inner myth we all create in order to live, the myth that tells us we have some being, some selfhood, some goal, something to strive for beyond the fulfilments of food or sex or creature comforts.

It seems as though the reader of biographies wishes to be privy to the inner myth of the person he or she is intrigued by.

As an aside, with regard to the myth Nadel mentions, Pachter (1979:3) adds:

'Is it not curious,' remarked André Maurois in the historic series of lectures on 'Aspects of Biography' [...] how the metaphor of the portrait painter crops up as soon as one begins to talk of the biographer.'

There should be a balance in trying to reveal the *inner myth* and to portray the subject factually. Pachter (1979:5) writes:

If we learn, for example, that George Washington had large feet – and he had, the marvel of his age – we are not edified, but we are warmed to the presence of a living being; we are less worshipful and more intrigued. The idealizing biography, like the standard boardroom portrait and other totems of respectability, begs to be ignored. Unwilling to genuflect before his subject, the biographer pulls him back into his humanity. Boswell, reports the literary historian Richard Altrick, when asked by Dr. Samuel Johnson's friend, Hannah More, to soften his portrayal of the 'asperities [...] (of) our virtuous and most revered departed friend,' replied that 'he would not cut off his claws, nor make a tiger a cat, to please anybody.'

Returning to the matter of how, with which literary tool, the biographer can portray his subject, Pachter quotes Plutarch (1979:12):

Sometimes [...] an expression or a jest informs us better than their characteristics and inclinations, than the most famous sieges [...]

This thesis would concur. Sometimes one can give more insight, more facets to a personality or a situation by presenting the text more obliquely – a direct listing of the situation or person is rather one-dimensional.

5.11 Conclusion

Biography writing, then, whilst being a specific genre, can have many variations. For example, one biographer might add elements of fiction to his or her text (Taraborrelli's *Once Upon A Time – Behind the Fairy Tale of Princess Grace and Prince Rainier* [2003], for example). Yet another might recreate a person's life by mixing interviews with the subject with interviews of friends and acquaintances (Kelly's *Sean Penn – his life and times* [2004], for example). The list of possible differences is endless, yet there is one characteristic all biographies have in common: they have to remain faithful to reality, to the actual events of the subject's life, such as dates of birth, graduation from school, and so on.

This thesis stated that it is not adequate to label a text either *fiction* or *nonfiction*, as some texts lie somewhere between, and should rather be thought of as *creative nonfiction*. This led to this chapter's discussion of the fictional elements in the Kramer biography, and it argued that it is an accepted form of presenting a life, because sometimes there is not enough information available, or simply, it is easier to describe the life by using fiction

than merely making a list of the subject's achievements. This in turn led to the question of ethics: whether a subject might find such a biography offensive. The thesis made no final decision – it was felt that each text should be looked at individually for its merits, or lack thereof.

Other elements of biography writing such as influences on the author were looked at, as well as the author's approach to the subject – was he going to glorify Kramer or make him a villain?

Also considered was the part of the reader, the process of make-believe, accepting the written word as a plausible reality.

This chapter briefly looked at how intertextuality was used to give insight to the times in which Kramer grew up in.

Finally, and most importantly, this thesis investigated biography writing, and agreed with Nadel (1984:151) who claimed that it was impossible to pin biography down with one, easy definition.

6. CONCLUSION

David Kramer – an unauthorised biography proves that a traditionally nonfictive piece such as a biography can at times be written as fiction, yet be accepted by the reader.

There are a few pertinent aspects to making such a biography, the most important being that it was written as a piece of creative nonfiction. Secondly, the text at times used intertextuality.

As far as the creative nonfiction aspect to the biography goes, in *David Kramer – an unauthorised biography* a reader will accept the creative nonfiction passages as being true, as true as a piece of nonfiction. This is because the reader is presented with many true facts, such as the singer's name, amount of records sold, details of his career, and so on. Also, with the tool of intertextuality, "real" things such as photographs, song lyrics, et cetera, are presented to the reader, who might then more readily accept the sum of the biography to be factual. Now, the reader might well feel that the idea of creative nonfiction is less of a contradiction in terms.

Another vital aspect to the biography of this study was the bilingual nature of the text. The first reason for this was that Kramer often wrote Afrikaans lyrics, or at least a mixture of English and Afrikaans. The biography itself is also bilingual to illustrate the divisions in the South Africa at the time of Kramer's career written about, between

English and Afrikaans, black and white, liberal and conservative. This was used to recreate the cultural background Kramer and his audience found themselves in. For example, when Kramer does his compulsory military service, many of the passages are written in Afrikaans, to show that the military was predominantly Afrikaans-speaking. This is to remind the reader that the government of the time were Afrikaans-speaking, and at the time Afrikaans was often seen as the language of the oppressor. There should now be an added dimension when listening to the Afrikaans or English/Afrikaans lyrics of a Kramer song. Kramer did, after all, have a political side to his career.

This biography then, as well as other texts such as newspaper editorials, advertisements, and so on, seems to be able to exist in a world which is both fiction and nonfiction.

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