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TELL ME A STORY

A novel and exegesis in fulfilment of the

requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

NICHOLAS KYRIACOS

BA (UNSW), Grad Dip in Education (Sydney Teachers College),
Grad Dip in Administrative Leadership (UNE), MedAdmin (UNE)

Faculty of Creative Arts

2005

Certification

I, Nicholas Kyriacos, declare that this novel and exegesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Nicholas Kyriacos

24 January, 2005

Dedication

Dedicated to my wife, Krystall,
and my children, Dimitri, Maria and Yannis:
the bookends of my life.

Table of Contents

Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
List of Publications & Awards	x
TELL ME A STORY	**11**
SECTION 1	**12**
And He Sure As Hell Wasn't Telling	12
What The Hell's Got Into Major Bob?	15
Major Bob Shows Johnnie How To Make His Bed	18
Johnnie Meets His Uncle	21
The Hill Run Man	22
Tell Us A Story, Bob	29
Jimmy Tells Johnnie-oh A Thing Or Two	32
Onya, Nanna	34
Yaya Zoe Ain't A Bad Old Thing	35
April, 2000 - Greek Easter	38
Old Tom's Sanctuary	39
The Appeal - Friday, 3rd November, 2000 Courtroom 21A, Lawcourt Building	41
Zoe Knocks The Stuffing Out Of All Of Them	45
SECTION 2	**50**
Zoe Poulos (nee Zantakis) Shows Off Her Hair	50
George's Do-Drop-In Hot Dog Stand	53
Mayte, Yer - A - Goner	54
Zoe Meets Her Husband	55
SECTION 3	**57**
Ghhhaaarn the Rabbitohs!	57
Victor Batrouney's Lie	59
Johnnie Butler Finds His Voice	64
SECTION 4	**69**
Shino Sonkurai - 1941	69
Bob Ryan Turning Into His Old Man	71
I Need You, Mate	72
Why, Leo, Why, Mate?	72
Happy Birthday, Bobby Ryan!	74
SECTION 5	**76**
Zoe Poulos And Bob Ryan Settle In	76
Talk To Me, Mate	84
If It Can't Be Father Robert, Then …	86
Major Bob Visits Shamla	86
Bob Ryan, Sheriff of Redfern	87
Konstantine Tsakiris Purchases The Kookaburra Cafe	90
The Sleeping Years	92
Souths' Judgement Day	92

Table of Contents Cont.

SECTION 6 **95**
Johnnie Butler Meets Bob Ryan 95
My God, My God, It's Him 99
My God, My God, It's Them 101
Put Yer Cards On The Table, Bob 103

SECTION 7 **111**
The Butler Stories
Shirley Arrives in Sydney - 1955 111
What'll We Do If The White Man He Comes? 112
The White Man Comes 115
Jimmy Butler Is Stolen 117
La Perouse: 1955 - 1965 119
Mary Butler: 1965 - 1999 123

SECTION 8 **131**
A Crook Time For The Bunnies 131
The Old Man Takes Johnnie's Breath Away 133
Old Tom Plays His Tape 136
Jimmy Butler Comes To La Pa 138

SECTION 9 **144**
No-one Asks Jimmy What He Thinks 144
Jimmy Screws Up 148
I Fair Dinkum Luvya, Rosie 151

SECTION 10 158
Johnnie And His Rabbits 158

SECTION 11 166
Ernie The Attorney Comes Home 166
Oh Susan, What Have You Done? 169
Victor Hits The Phones 170
Off To Lebanon 175
A Fucken Gutless Wog 181

SECTION 12 **184**
Johnnie Butler Meets His Brother 184
Spending Time With Billy 195
The Rabbitohs Are A-Goner And Johnnie Loses His Marbles 197
Tuesday, 19th October, 1999 205

SECTION 13 **208**
Billy Butler's Story 208
Am I Black Or White, Sista?
Billy Arrives In Melbourne, 1977 211
Centennial Park - About 6 am, 15th October, 1999
Billy Sets Off For Redfern 213
Melbourne, 1977 - 1981
Billy Reckons He's A Bad Boy 214

Table of Contents Cont.

Moore Park, Sydney, Friday, 15th October, About 7am
The Dreaming Butlers 220
Billy On The Move 221
Mary Butler Arrives Home, About 7.45am 225
Billy Finds His Little Angel 226
Redfern, About 8.30am
Billy Meets His Mum 233

SECTION 14 237
They All Come Home 237
Biding Time 242
Billy's Dreaming Tree 244
Cathy Freeman Bolts In 248
Finn's Decision 251
But He Sure Knew How To Tell A Tale 253
Johnnie Butler Plants a Tree 255
A Funeral And A Rally 258

EXEGESIS

Chapter 1: Introduction 264
1.1 Telling Stories 264
1.2 Overcoming Inhibitions 265

Chapter 2: Do I Have Anything Worthwhile To Say? 267
2.1 The Conscious and Subconscious in the Act of Writing 267
2.2 Touching the Hearts of Writer and Reader 268
2.3 The Ordinary and the Extraordinary 269

Chapter 3: Themes 272
3.1 Introductory Thoughts 272
3.2 Belonging to Place and Time 274
3.2.1 The Butler Family: their relationship to the theme of our need to belong 275
3.2.1.1 Shirley Butler 275
3.2.1.2 Mary Butler 276
3.2.1.3 Jimmy Butler 277
3.2.1.4 Billy Butler 277
3.2.1.5 Johnnie Butler 279
3.2.2 Zoe Poulos: finding a home in Redfern 281
3.2.3 Victor Batrouney: trying to make amends of the past by rediscovering his roots 282
3.2.4 George Poulos: his misguided attempt at finding a home 284
3.2.5 Kookaburra Kon: trying to find acceptance in the acquisition of wealth 285
3.2.6 South Sydney Rugby League Football Club: an institution giving its members a sense of belonging 285
3.2.7 Negative Aspects of Small Communities 286
3.2.8 Positive Aspects of Small Communities 287
3.3 The Past As Truth: How the Past can Explain the Present 287
3.3.1 A Personal View of the Past Impacting Upon the Present 287

Table of Contents Cont.

3.3.2 Alterations in my Novel 289
3.3.3 Various Characters Confront their Past 290
3.4 Story Telling: Its Role in Communicating the Past 293
3.4.1 The Need to Tell Stories 294
3.4.2 The Truth is Eventually Revealed 296
3.4.3 Many Ways to Tell a Story 298
3.4.4 The Relationship between Stories and Place 299
3.4.5 The Untold Stories 299

Chapter 4: Characterisation 300
4.1 Creating Believable Characters 300
4.2 Bob Ryan: the Smart-arsed Prick 303
4.3 Johnnie Butler Yearns for Knowledge of his Past 306
4.3.1 Johnnie's Growing Attachments 306
4.3.2 Johnnie's Growth 307
4.4 Jimmy Butler Overcomes the Traumas of his Past 310
4.5 Shirley Butler Retreats into Silence 312
4.6 Mary Butler's Unsuccessful Attempt to Create a New Life 313
4.7 Billy Butler's Enforced Separation 314
4.8 Old Tom, Harbinger of Truth 315
4.9 Victor Batrouney Longs for a Lost Past 317
4.10 Konstantine Tsakiris Trying to Find Meaning in the Acquisition of Wealth 319
4.11 Yaya Zoe and George Poulos: a Home for One, a Place to Flee for the Other 320
4.12 Ned 'The Neck' Rivers 322
4.13 Characters' Secrets and The Unknown 323
4.14 This Author's Attitude to his Characters 326

Chapter 5: Style & Structure Evolve 327
5.1 Style 327
5.1.1 Relevance to the Contemporary 327
5.1.2 Using the Vernacular 328
5.1.3 The Intrusion of the Unexpected 328
5.1.4 Controlling the Emotive Element of One's Work 329
5.1.5 Writing Simply and Clearly 331
5.1.6 Writing for an Audience 331
5.2 Structure 332

Chapter 6: Australian Setting, Language and Dialogue 334
6.1 A Balanced Portrayal of Aboriginals and Whites 334
6.2 Australian Setting 337

Chapter 7: Conclusion 341

BIBLIOGRAPHY 347

Abstract

Tell Me A Story (*TMAS*) is comprised of an exploration into the lives of a number of people who live in the Sydney suburb of Redfern in the late twentieth century. Both the suburb and the seven major characters are intended to be seen as a microcosm of contemporary Australian life: the characters vary in age, ethnicity, sex and educational background.

The life of each was initially intended to show the relevance of place, institutions and story-telling to our need of belonging. With each subsequent redraft, the importance of our past became more prominent: its impact on our present reality became, in time, the major concern of *TMAS*.

The hybridised structure and form of my novel draw on the stories these characters tell each other as well as the narrated stories of their own lives, seen in flashbacks. Such tales interweave, addressing such fundamental questions as what, how and why we develop a connectedness to people, place and time. Such a multi-layered exploration of the characters' memories, whether they inhabit a real or imagined landscape, is seen in the fragmented narrative of their lives, combining to show the influence of the past on the present. This is shown most powerfully in the lives of the Aboriginal characters. In documenting their past lives against the reality of their contemporary world, an intricate weaving of what was and what is, is explored.

TMAS argues not only that one must attempt to make sense of the present by coming to an understanding of the past, but also that our past manifests itself in ways we are not always conscious of, and concludes with the idea, as seen through the eyes of Johnnie Butler, that

> There's no straight line in time, as your teacher'd once told you, making a neat beginning, middle and unfolding future. You see the past returning repeatedly in great undulating circles, neverending swirls expanding constantly to encompass the story of your life and of those who've come before you, and of those not yet born.

Such an idea manifests an ongoing and deep personal interest. For this reason my exegesis begins with elements of my own life. The exegesis itself is a story of sorts, analysing my own journey through the many drafts of *TMAS*. It argues that the hybridised structure – involving first, second and third person narratives, diary entries, contemporary idiom and slang – is a suitable form through which to explore the pattern of experience of my Australian characters.

To give integrity to such lives, a wide range of sources was used. Research involved personal interviews, videos, CDs, newspapers and magazines, all of which complemented traditional scholarly research into the lives of the Redfern inhabitants of Greek, Lebanese, indigenous and Irish-Catholic ethnicity, whose ages range from nine to 99 years of age. In the extensive redrafting, the writing was as experimental as it was imaginative.

Acknowledgments

While we who write do so alone, no work of merit is accomplished alone. In our long and arduous endeavours, others accompany us, perhaps in memory, in their support or in the scope of their influence. One writes for many reasons, some known, some unknown. Certainly there is the inspiration of those writers who first placed the fire in one's spirit. These writers stand beside me as I work, looking over my shoulder to ensure the integrity and quality of my work. They carried me to places I had never thought the written word could take a reader. I thank Patrick White primarily. Those who stand behind him are numerous. Many years after I first read their works, their writing still inspires me: Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Eliot, Hamsun, Malouf, Shakespeare, Flaubert, Joyce and Winton.

I am grateful for the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) given to me by the University of Wollongong in 1999. The University extended my scholarship by six months. Such assistance allowed me to work part-time while I concentrated on my writing. The scholarship was of great assistance.

I thank also the trustees of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation Annual Programme of Research Grants for Foreign Scholars. The awarding of a scholarship allowed me to travel to Greece in 1999 to conduct my research.

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I thank my mother for her unflagging interest in my writing. Giving me two rooms to 'escape' to for the length of time it took to complete my work was of enormous benefit. Her keen and incisive interest in human affairs and her strength and independence have influenced my view of the world, if not many aspects of my book.

I thank my children, who have gone from being young teenagers to budding adults in the time it has taken me to complete my doctorate. To some extent they have grown up in the shadow of my ever-changing work. They have gone for long periods without their father. I have much making up to do.

Finally, I thank my wife, Krystall. She has heroically borne my frustrations, rages, disappointments and feelings of inadequacies over the last five years. How many times would I disappear in the early evening and not return until she and my children had long been asleep; how many weekends did she go without me; how many holidays together as a family did she forego. This book could not have been written without her. It stands as a monument of her support. Thank you, Krystall.

Agent's Acceptance of *Tell Me A Story*

Please see print copy

List of Publications

_____. 1999, *Captain Dimitrios*. RMIT University, Melbourne, pp. 1-113. Novel.

_____. 1999, 'After discussing an imaginary life with year 12 students', *Independence*, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 28. Poem.

_____. 1997, 'Gone fishing', *The Journal of the Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics*, October, pp. 109-114. Short Story.

_____. 1997, 'From *Captain Dimitrios*', *Southerly*, Vol. 57, No. 1, Autumn, pp. 155-159. Extract.

_____. 1997, 'The station', *Independence*. Vol. 22, No. 3, November, p. 25. Poem.

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_____. 1995, 'From *Captain Dimitrios*', *Southerly*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Spring, pp. 100-104. Extract.

_____. 1995, 'I'm supposed to know', *Southerly*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Summer, p. 108. Poem.

Prizes, Awards, Scholarships

1999, Alexander S. Onassis Foundation Research Grants for Foreign Scholars.

1999, Australian Postgraduate Award with stipend from the University of Wollongong.

1995, Extract from *Captain Dimitrios* awarded *Southerly's HM Butterley-F Earle Hooper Award*.

1994, *Captain Dimitrios* short-listed for the *National Book Council Award*.

1981, *Captain Dimitrios* (formerly titled *Captain Nikolaos*), short-listed for *The Australian-Vogel Award*.