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Tell Me a Story

Nicholas Kyriacos
University of Wollongong

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Kyriacos, Nicholas, Tell Me a Story, PhD thesis, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, 2005.
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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.

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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.

I thank my supervisors. The first, Clem Gorman, gave me the freedom, positive reinforcement and encouragement to 'free' the book inside me. Clem never flagged in his belief in the worth of my writing; the second, Alan Wearne, brought a rigorous attention to detail to an early draft. I am grateful to both Clem and Alan.

I thank Lyn Tranter and Nikki Davies, of the Australian Literary Management, for their enthusiastic encouragement. Their suggestions brought about some important changes to my novel. Their initial positive response to my novel was very heartening.

I thank my friends, Dr Michael G. Michael and Dr Katina Michael for their constant support. Neither ever lost faith in the value of my writing. Katina's computer software guidance and Michael's ready ear to listen to my ideas and then offer suggestions were always appreciated.

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*

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.
- _____. 1997, 'At the pier', *Kosmos*. Short Story.
- _____. 1997, 'The man who smiled', *Independence*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Winter, p. 17. Poem.
- _____. 1997, 'Gone fishing', *Chronicle*, Vol. 3, No. 4, July/August, pp. 14-17. Short Story.
- _____. 1996, '*Captain Dimitrios*', *Independence*, Vol. 21, No. 2, October, pp. 21-22. Extract.
- _____. 1997, '*Captain Dimitrios*: an extract', *Chronicle*, Vol. 2, No. 3, May/June, pp. 24-25. Extract.
- _____. 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*.