

Making Noises:

Contextualising the Politics of Rorty's Neopragmatism
to Assess its Sustainability

by
Euan Mitchell

VOLUME

1

The Novel



A Creative Thesis in Two Volumes

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

School of Communication, Culture and Languages

Faculty of Arts

Victoria University

Melbourne, Australia

March 2005

Making Noises

Dedication

To a young prisoner whose talent soared over the walls

Due to copyright arrangements with the publisher of *Making Noises*, the text of the novel (Volume 1) is not available as part of the digital version of this thesis.

The novel was published in November 2006 by OverDog Press (Melbourne, Australia).

The ISBN is: 9780975797921.

In place of the novel, an introduction to the storyline is provided here.

Making Noises is a fictionalised account of federal and state government involvement with the popular music industry in Australia during the 1990s. The story is told from the point of view of a newcomer, Marty, to a music industry organisation funded by the federal government called the 'Oz Rock Foundation'. This organisation is run by a former federal politician, Perce 'Perk' Harrigan, who maintains close links with his political colleagues still in government. When Marty discovers a young Aboriginal prisoner, Billy, with exceptional musical talents, Perce Harrigan seizes this opportunity to help launch the Oz Rock Foundation in the 'Year of the Indigenous Person'. This venture, however, has unexpected consequences for all concerned.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of this creative thesis is to contribute an original perspective on theoretical debate likely to influence reforms to so-called liberal democracy during the 21st century.

Volume 2, the exegesis, employs a narrative framework to explain: how my engagement with bodies of theory fed into the creation of the novel “Making Noises”; and how a perspective emerged from this process to offer a new window onto contemporary theoretical debate concerning democracy.

Although the context of the novel is Australian, the theoretical approach central to its creation is a postmodern¹ philosophy, debated on a global scale, known as neopragmatism.² The principal proponent of pragmatism³ is Richard Rorty⁴,

¹ *The Macquarie Dictionary*'s first spelling preference is ‘postmodern’ although Rorty’s is ‘post-modern’.

² Neopragmatism’s origins and its specific theses are detailed in Chapter 4 of this exegesis.

³ Other notable philosophers associated with the re-emergence of pragmatism include Willard v. O. Quine and Hilary Putnam.

⁴ Richard McKay Rorty, born 1931, educated at the University of Chicago and Yale, formerly Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, Emeritus Professor of Humanities at the University of Virginia and currently Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University. US critic and author Harold Bloom describes Rorty as “the most interesting philosopher in the world today” (Brandom 91).

whose views are variously regarded as anti-essentialist, anti-realist, anti-metaphysical, anti-dualist and anti-foundational, because he argues against the Platonic⁵ philosophical tradition of “truth as the accurate representation of a natural order” (*Truth, Politics and Post-modernism*’ 13). My preference, however, is to refer to Rorty’s work as ‘post-essentialist’. I do so in order to suggest a positive rather than a negative emphasis in his work.

In the latter part of the 20th century, essentialist conceptions of the nature of truth, objectivity, knowledge, ethics, social organisation, history and identity have been challenged by both postmodern and post-structuralist approaches to theoretical analysis.⁶ As a consequence, a number of the epistemological assumptions underpinning and shaping the development of Western civilisation and its institutions have been challenged.

For instance, the predominant system of government in the West is democracy⁷ and its origins can be seen to reside in the essentialist traditions of ancient Greece. Rorty contends that these traditions, based on ‘Reason’, provided useful ladders for the development of democratic discourse, however, they should now be discarded in favour of a post-essentialist approach:

...although the idea of a central and universal human component called “reason,” a faculty which is the source of our moral obligations, was very useful in creating modern democratic societies, it can now be dispensed with – and *should* be dispensed with, in order to help bring the liberal utopia of

⁵ This tradition could also have been described as Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian (despite the idealist/materialist differences between Plato/Aristotle) or as the Greek-Christian tradition.

⁶ Major postmodern and post-structural theorists include: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard.

⁷ The definition of what constitutes democracy in the West is contentious and is discussed at length in Chapter 7. Hence, I initially refer to liberal democracy as “so-called”.

Chapter 3 into existence. I have been urging that the democracies are now in a position to throw away some of the ladders used in their own construction.

(Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity 194)

Recent newspaper headlines trumpet the argument that democracy needs to change in order to survive, for example: “Is this the end of democracy?” (Rorty); “The corruption of democracy” (Fitzgerald); “Why we need a better version of democracy” (Pell); and “‘Empty’ democracy must change” (Zwartz). Increasing cynicism about the democratic system (Hudson) has been fuelled by revelations such as the fabrication of evidence of “weapons of mass destruction” as a pretext for the US and allies to invade Iraq in 2003.

The secular aspirations of democracy can no longer be assumed, for example: President George W. Bush’s connections with America’s Christian right; certain political parties in Europe advocating Christian democracy⁸; the feasibility of ‘Islamic democracy’; and in Australia the balance of national power came very close to being held by a right-wing Christian party⁹ in the 2004 federal election. The word ‘democracy’ has been used by totalitarian leaders to describe governments in Zimbabwe, Serbia and even North Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea).

The question that drove most of the research for my thesis was: If liberal democracy were to be reformed along the post-essentialist lines argued by neopragmatism, then would this version of democracy be sustainable in the face of cynicism from its own citizens as well as challenges from fundamentalism and totalitarianism?

⁸ For example, the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) has numerous members in the European parliament.

⁹ This new Australian political party is known as Family First.

Although neopragmatism is a term the vast majority of politicians in liberal democracies are unlikely to have heard of, they are likely to be familiar with issues the philosophy engages with, such as: the increasingly sophisticated methods for constructing ‘truth’; the limitations of deferring to populism; the difficulties of separating public and private interests; the erosion of civil liberties; and the adjudication of community values in pluralistic societies.

Rorty’s views on these issues and how my analysis of his work fed into the creation of the novel “Making Noises” are explained in this exegesis. Despite Rorty’s influence, the novel is *not* an uncritical endorsement of his arguments, rather it is designed to assess specific examples of problems with his theories in practice while still recognising their value.

These problems are primarily concerned with the political implications of Rorty’s views although they are best understood in light of his whole work. The debate surrounding Rorty’s post-essentialism instigated the themes that guided the creation of my novel. The themes were linked to fictional contexts informed by the history of government experimentation with the Australian music industry.

These links are clarified in later sections of the exegesis, but at this point it is worth noting why the word ‘contextualising’ is prominent in the title of this thesis. In the absence of conclusive proof in favour of essentialist or post-essentialist positions, contextualising arguments is perhaps the most constructive way of assessing the merits of each. Rorty is certainly in favour of this approach:

So I do not know how to give anything like a conclusive argument for the view which my critics call ‘relativism’ and which I prefer to call ‘antifoundationalism’ or ‘antidualism’. It is certainly not enough for my side to

appeal to Darwin and ask our opponents how they can avoid an appeal to the supernatural... I suspect that all that either side can do is to restate its case over and over again, in context after context. (*Philosophy and Social Hope*, xxxii)

It may at first seem ironic that the contexts depicted in the novel conceal from the reader my engagement with Rorty's philosophy of neopragmatism. This exegesis, however, affords me the opportunity to reveal that process and also to explain another influential theoretical engagement that *was* discerned, at least in part, by two of the ten 'test' readers whom I commissioned to assess the first draft of the novel.

This other theoretical engagement involved research into the genre of so-called political novels, which both complemented and contrasted with the influence of Rorty. Within this genre, I studied a tradition of American novels that contextualises themes related to 'natural rights' as the foundation of liberal democracy. Arguably, the most influential novel in this tradition is Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

Two of the test readers for "Making Noises" commented that the relationship between the protagonist and the young Aboriginal prisoner Billy is like an inversion of the central relationship in *Huckleberry Finn*. Instead of Twain's 'white' boy and 'black' man escaping into a 'state of nature', "Making Noises" features the context of a 'white' man and 'black' boy working together in a jail. I noticed this inversion while first drafting scenes between Billy and the protagonist, which prompted me to investigate the philosophical background of Twain's classic. This led to research within the genre of the political novel that further influenced the development of my characters and involved substantial reworking of my proposed storyline.

The theoretical engagements gradually shaped and refined the concept for my novel, however, its settings and characters are drawn from a combination of

personal experience, historical research and imagination. The personal experience was my full-time employment, for more than four years, in a political experiment by the Hawke-Keating government with the music industry (outlined in section 3.1). The historical research was centred on Marcus Breen's 1996 doctoral thesis "The Popular Music Industry in Australia: A Study of Policy Reform and Retreat, 1982-1996", and his subsequent book *Rock Dogs: Politics and the Australian Music Industry* (1999). The events and personalities involved in this political experiment have been imaginatively rearranged and reinvented with the aim of presenting a more revealing perspective on the merits of direct government involvement with the music industry than has been achieved thus far.

After summarising my methodology in Chapter 2 and outlining the creative process in Chapter 3, in Chapter 4 I have condensed all of Rorty's books into nine succinct theses, then explained how these were converted into themes for the novel.

Chapter 5 expands on the historical context of the political experiment which is interpreted by "Making Noises", before Chapter 6 explains the novel's links with the genre of political fiction dealing with the notion of 'natural rights' as a basis for democracy (including the influence of *Huckleberry Finn*). Chapter 7 introduces important existing research into the sustainability of democracy and links it to questions raised by the novel and the theory discussed in this exegesis. Chapter 8 synthesises an overall perspective on the sustainability of a neopragmatic version of liberal democracy in light of the political experiment that is central to the novel.

It is intended that this exegesis be read *after* the novel, not as a preface, because events from all stages of the story, including the climax and resolution, are referred to throughout.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Models Employed

The methodology employed to create this thesis was drawn from three research models:

- reflective/journal model
- research question model
- historical/genre model.

A balanced combination of these models was considered appropriate for this particular thesis because the research progressed in four stages that required a blending of investigative approaches. Explanations of the ways in which the three models were applied at each stage are detailed within the relevant chapters of this exegesis (cross-references are included in the summaries following in sections 2.2–2.5).

The processes of drafting, writing, rewriting and editing the novel may also be

regarded as methods of research in themselves. For the purposes of describing my methodology, I have treated these stages of writing as outcomes from the four research stages so as to minimise the impression they are practices separated from theory. In this vein, research can be seen as a continuum of conscious and unconscious preparation which may result in the creation of original solutions to narrative problems.

My treatment of research and writing as an integrated process led to the development of a personal method of practising writing that is transferable to other narrative projects. I developed the method by experimenting with different strategies for synthesising research into a narrative, as explained in section 3.5.

2.2 First Stage Methodology

The initial stage of research prior to my enrolment as a Doctor of Philosophy student – as well as during the first few months of my literature review – was largely guided by reflection on my past experience working for a government-funded music association, in conjunction with informal research questions concerning the types of plots, characters and conflicts portrayed in political fiction. I recorded my insights into a notebook on an ad hoc basis then, following enrolment, they became part of a weekly journal.

The pre-enrolment research led to my hypothesis that the dialectic driving most of the drama and humour in political fiction is the dilemma of “ethical principles versus political pragmatism”. This hypothesis initiated the specialised research into neopragmatism at stage two. The outcome from this first stage was the draft concept for a political novel. For more details, see sections 3.1 and 3.2.

2.3 Second Stage Methodology

During the second stage, I employed the more traditional research question model, supplemented by reflective entries in my weekly journal. I viewed the historical events of the Hawke-Keating political experiment with the music industry through the theoretical framework of neopragmatism in order to develop a central research question. After defining this question, regarding the sustainability of a neopragmatic democracy, I developed five subsidiary questions which later acted as themes for the novel. The research outcomes of this stage were twofold. Firstly, I wrote the opening chapters which were designed to set up the novel. Secondly, the concept for the novel was redrafted with a more detailed storyline and more interesting group of main characters. For further explanation, see sections 3.3–3.5, 4.6, 4.7.

2.4 Third Stage Methodology

The third stage of research delved into the history of a particular lineage from the genre of American political novels that deals with issues concerning ‘natural rights’ and the sustainability of democracy. The history of the themes and stories in this genre, dating back to the late 18th century, therefore linked into my central research question from stage two.

The writing of the novel was delayed for several months due to the impact of this genre research. The result was the creation of an unexpected turn of events towards the end of the novel which re-shaped the entire storyline and clarified how I intended to develop the main characters’ relationships. I then had sufficient confidence to re-commence the writing in earnest, with the eventual outcome of stage three being the completion of the entire first draft of the novel. For more details, see sections 3.4, 3.5, 6.3, 6.4.

2.5 Fourth Stage Methodology

The fourth stage of research involved further critical self-reflection, this time across three years of journals in order to appreciate how significantly the thesis had changed from its initial proposal to its final draft. These reflections were not only useful for completing and editing a second draft of the novel, they were also the basis for follow-up research questions into cultural identity as well as the writing of this exegesis.

The writing of the novel's second draft was also guided by reflective comments from my two supervisors as well as 10 'test' readers whom I commissioned from the intended audience demographic. This specific feedback was supplemented by general techniques that I gleaned from several texts on rewriting and editing the first drafts of novels. For further details, see sections 3.6, 3.7, 6.5.

3. OUTLINE OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

3.1 Origins of the Concept

The concept for “Making Noises” originated during my employment from 1993 to 1997 as an educational writer and researcher for the Australian Contemporary Music Development Company Limited, generally known as Ausmusic.

Ausmusic was established in 1988 through an initiative by the federal Labor government of, then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke to encourage increased exports of Australian music. The company’s head office was in Melbourne with a network of offices in every state and territory in Australia, employing approximately 20 full-time staff in total. Other state- and territory-based ‘music industry associations’ were established in the latter part of the 1980s such as the Victorian Rock Foundation and New South Wales Music Industry Association (*Ausmusic News*). A detailed history of government involvement with the Australian music industry from 1982 to 1998 has been documented by Marcus Breen and is discussed at length in Chapter 5

of this thesis. For now, an outline of Ausmusic's function and my role as an employee is sufficient to explain the origins of the concept for the novel.

Ausmusic was listed as a not-for-profit incorporated association with the Australian Securities Commission¹⁰, but received the vast majority of its funding from the federal government and was classified as a semi-government body in regard to taxation exemption. Ausmusic was known as a 'music industry association' because its primary role was to co-ordinate and articulate the music industry's needs to the federal government with a view to legislative and financial assistance (*Ausmusic: The State of Play*).

Ausmusic's role also included the development of training programs in rock music for young people wishing to enter the industry. My position with the company involved researching and writing music education resource materials for use by secondary school students, TAFE colleges and youth groups. The materials included student workbooks, training videos, teacher manuals, software and (eventually) a nationally accredited curriculum in rock music. These resources were produced with input from established rock music practitioners such as the bands Midnight Oil, Yothu Yindi, Hunters & Collectors, The Hoodoo Gurus; as well as individual musicians such as Jenny Morris, Sean Kelly, Lindy Morrison and Archie Roach.

After my initial drafts, the teaching materials were generally 'tested' at Turana Juvenile Justice Centre. This was a teenage boys' prison in Melbourne where Ausmusic had already established ad hoc music-training programs prior to my employment in January 1993.

¹⁰ The ACN (Australian Company Number) for Ausmusic was 008 640 962. The Australian Securities Commission is now known as the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

The experience of training the inmates at Turana made a significant impact on me. The music workshops re-ignited my own memories of troubled teenaged years. Understandably, the inmates had difficulty seeing me as anything but the 31-year-old teacher they found in front of them. I wanted to tell them about my past, but I risked sounding like another ‘old’ person waffling on about ‘their day’.

This frustration led me to write my first novel *Feral Tracks*. The novel was motivated by a desire to convince the inmates I was not much different from them, but had learned a few things they might find entertaining as well as useful in rebuilding their lives. The story was a partly fictionalised account of how I had run away from home at sixteen with four dollars and ended up hitchhiking around Australia. The centrepiece of the novel was set in a cattle station in the remote Kimberley region of north-western Australia.

I began writing *Feral Tracks* in April 1995, expecting it would take six months to finish. The novel, however, was only half completed when my involvement with the prison ended after being retrenched from Ausmusic in February 1997. The retrenchment of all Ausmusic staff, except the general manager and her assistant, as well as the break-up of the national network, was a consequence of a 100 per cent funding cut by the federal Coalition government elected in March 1996. It was not until November 1998, after 12 months working as a senior editor for a multinational educational publisher, that I eventually self-published *Feral Tracks* following its rejection by 25 publishers and literary agents.

When *Feral Tracks* started outselling many other young adult books from the major publishers in Australia, an independent publisher in Auckland licensed the novel for the New Zealand market in 1999. During the same year, an independent

Melbourne film company purchased an option to develop the screenplay of the novel. In 1999 and 2000, Western Australian secondary school students voted *Feral Tracks* onto the short-list for their statewide young adult book award.

An ironic consequence was that four publishing companies became interested in me writing a book on how to self-publish. In June 2000, Hardie-Grant Books, an independent Australian company, published my second book *Self-publishing Made Simple*. It wasn't until August 2000, after finishing the first draft of the *Feral Tracks* screenplay, that I had time to write another novel.

While still at Ausmusic, I had toyed with the concept of writing a story about the politics of federal, state and territory music industry associations. My underlying motivation was to encourage those aged approximately 18 to 40, loosely referred to as 'Generation X', to become more politically active. This did not necessarily mean becoming active in party politics, it could involve making a difference in their community even if they could not foresee an immediate return. From my own experience, reinforced by public opinion surveys, I believed growing apathy and cynicism towards political processes and community participation was an increasing concern for the overall health of democracy.

In August 2000, I began research for my second novel, "Making Noises", with an investigation into the way political characters and situations are portrayed in fiction. It involved reviewing novels, articles, plays, films and TV series featuring the machinations of politicians, such as: *Yes Minister*, *Primary Colors*, *The Prince* and *Julius Caesar*. This early research would later lead to a formal literature review.

3.2 Drafting the Proposal

As a result of reviewing what I regarded, in early 2001, to be the genre of political fiction, I drafted an outline for a novel that exposed the operations and foibles of music industry associations. The storyline revolved around the rise and fall of a composite character, an ex-politician nicknamed ‘Perk’, and his ‘Oz Rock Foundation’ – a composite of music industry associations from around Australia.

This early research also brought with it an inkling that, if I were to write convincingly in this genre, my research would need to extend into political science, philosophy and history. A broader understanding of how some of the great thinkers in history had approached the complexities of political decision-making would likely improve the quality of my proposed novel.

The first important hypothesis I developed was that political fiction, both drama and comedy, was driven by a dialectic between ethical principles and political pragmatism. This hypothesis arose during my reading of the complete collections of *Yes Minister* and *Yes Prime Minister* stories. The dilemmas portrayed in these stories could almost always be reduced to a conflict between ethically ‘right’ decisions and their practical consequences. For example, a government move to ban the sponsorship of sporting events by cigarette manufacturers would be compromised by the prospect of finding more funds for old-age pensions since fewer people would die of smoking-related illnesses. I summed up the core issue of such dramatic and comedic dilemmas as “principle versus pragmatism”.

When I looked up ‘pragmatism’ in an encyclopedia, I discovered there was much more to the word than its everyday use as a synonym for ‘practical’. There had been

a formal school of philosophy known as ‘pragmatism’ based in America from the late 19th century up until approximately World War II. I had initially thought that pragmatism was a branch of utilitarianism, but soon began to discover significant differences between the two philosophies.¹¹ During the early 1980s, in certain American academic circles, pragmatism was revived as neopragmatism, as will be explained in Chapter 4.

I further investigated the hypothesis of “principle versus pragmatism” by analysing a range of political dramas and comedies from Australia, the USA and UK¹² to see what types of conflict were central to each story. The desire for power and authority may have motivated the main characters in all these works, however, all struggled against, or used to their advantage, some type of compromise between ethical principles and pragmatic consequences.

By the second half of 2001, I realised how much research would be required if I were to write a political novel of the standard to which I aspired. It would likely take a few years of research and writing in a systematic and scholarly way to complete the project. So I drafted a synopsis of my proposed political novel as part of a scholarship application to undertake a Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing at Victoria University. In December 2001, I was fortunate enough to be selected.

3.3 The Formal Literature Review

The formal literature review began in early February 2002. The first book I chose was Rorty’s controversial *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. By the end of the first page, I knew I was in trouble. Rorty’s style of writing was complex, I had not heard

¹¹ These differences are explained in section 4.1.

¹² I sampled political fiction from Latin America, Africa, Asia and former Eastern Bloc countries, but did not relate to the works in a way that felt close to the experiences I wanted to write about.

of the analytic philosophers he referred to, and had no understanding of their theories. He also referred to philosophers dating back to ancient Greece. Up until then I had consulted only secondary sources about Rorty's work. Attempting to read a primary text exposed the shortcomings of my studies in the history and philosophy of science in the final year of my arts degree nearly two decades earlier.

There was no way to avoid reading Rorty's texts because the secondary sources were sometimes contradictory, and at times left me wondering whether the writers were talking about the same philosopher. In order to grasp the historical background to Rorty's primary texts, it was necessary to study the major names and schools of thought across the history of Western philosophy. I complemented this strategy by researching the development of critical theory in the latter half of the 20th century.

During the literature review I surveyed all of Rorty's 13 books, but it was not until the fifth month that I felt I was genuinely able to comprehend the central elements of his writings. My research also located Rorty's personal website at Stanford University. This led to an e-mail dialogue with Rorty over the three years of my research and writing.

During the seven months of the initial literature review, I also read widely across the genre of political fiction under the guidance of my supervisors. The works were primarily Australian, American and British. All were written for a general adult readership, not specifically for the 18- to 40-year-old audience that I was targeting. So I supplemented this part of the review by reading several novels which were primarily aimed at 'Generation X' (*not* young adult) even though their contents would generally not be regarded as political fiction.¹³

¹³ Examples included *About a Boy* (Hornby), *Perfect Skin* (Earls), and novels by Ben Elton.

During the final three months of the literature review, I drafted the first four chapters of the novel. Aside from establishing a set-up for the story, this drafting process included meta-cognitive reflections on specific ways to adapt my narratorial style from *Feral Tracks* (aimed at a young adult readership) to a more mature audience – these changes are summarised in section 6.5. The first drafts of the opening chapters were later rewritten almost beyond recognition, but these were the necessary first steps in finding the narratorial voice for the novel.

3.4 Main Research

Once my candidature was granted in September 2002, I began systematically reading through all of Rorty's books and, importantly, three books of criticism of his work, including the lengthy anthology of critiques *Rorty and His Critics* (2000). This took until May 2003 to complete.

During the latter part of 2002, I continued to draft chapters of the novel while I researched Rorty. By January 2003, I had written up to and including the scene where the protagonist holds a music workshop for the first time in the Maninga Youth Correctional Centre (now page 52 of the novel). I included a character called Billy, a fifteen-year-old Aboriginal prisoner. My supervisor helped me find “the book within the book” with one perspicacious question: “Why doesn't the boss of the Oz Rock Foundation make Billy a star?”

The possibilities that emerged from this suggestion caused me to radically alter the novel I was intending to write. My initial storyline depicted the rise and fall of the Oz Rock Foundation with the primary focus on the political machinations of its boss, Perce ‘Perk’ Harrigan. This original thread, however, now became the enabling framework for what I felt was the more dramatic story of Billy's rise to

stardom, his return to jail and eventual demise.

The new storyline also opened up a whole range of possibilities for engaging with the theory I was reading. Central to Rorty's work was the concept of the public-private split. I started to speculate on what would happen if Billy were to write a song for private purposes which ended up becoming a public commodity. The whole focus of the novel changed so dramatically that my supervisor agreed it was not worth continuing with the writing until most of the research was finished.

After reading all of Rorty's books, my focus shifted to studying the history of government involvement with the Australian Music Industry. Breen's work provided most of the 'big picture' political history that I was not privy to since he was involved with Ausmusic at a board level while he was a director, and at one stage, chairman of the Victorian Rock Foundation. The two organisations shared the same premises in South Melbourne.

The final stage of the research, before re-commencing the writing, involved studying theory about the genre of political fiction such as Speare's *The Political Novel: Its Development in England and in America* and Howe's *Politics and the Novel*. During this stage of research, I happened across a book that made a substantial impact on the way I restructured my storyline, it was Catherine Zuckert's *Natural Right and the American Imagination: Political Philosophy in Novel Form*.

Zuckert focuses on a tradition of American novels that contextualises themes related to so-called 'natural rights' as the *foundation* of American democracy. The novels she analyses focus on the problems, benefits and sustainability of democracy while connecting these concerns with each novelist's view of a human nature. None

of these novels, however, was

influenced by anti-foundational or post-essentialist philosophy such as Rorty's – in which 'natural rights' are no longer considered necessary to underpin liberal democracy and the notion of an essential human nature is regarded as redundant. Chapter 6 details the influence this genre research had on restructuring my novel's plot and character development, but its most important impact on my storyline should be mentioned here.

At first, I had wanted the character Billy to have a near-death experience, such as the assault in jail, after which he would be rushed to hospital where he was to recover. With new-found clarity from the experience, he would decide to quit his 'rock star' lifestyle and aspirations then return to his community as a music teacher. I was, however, concerned this was letting my target readers off too lightly from the politics of racial reconciliation. Zuckert's analysis of *Billy Budd* inspired a different fate for my Billy – whose funeral scene is intended to prevent the ending from being too neat or 'feel-good', while not wanting to completely abandon the genre expectations of a romantic reconciliation and offering of hope.

By the end of August 2003, the vast majority of research was finished and my weekly journals contained the framework for the new novel.

3.5 Writing the Novel

The writing of the novel re-commenced on September 1, 2003 and the first draft was completed just over 10 months later on July 7, 2004. During this period I experimented with different methods of drafting, re-drafting, editing and rewriting until I had a method which made the process quicker and the writing more focused.

The method for creating the first draft involved writing in six steps or 'layers'.

First, the storyline was rewritten with the inversion of *Huckleberry Finn* in mind as well as the tradition of political novels that Zuckert had analysed. The storyline was also shaped through issues raised by the research question and its five subsidiary questions regarding neopragmatism and democracy (see section 4.6).

The second step used the subsidiary questions as themes to link to plot and character objectives before beginning to draft each chapter. The third step involved brainstorming to develop detailed scenarios around these thematically linked objectives. The fourth step relied on spontaneous and improvisatory writing to flesh out the scenarios. The fifth step was an editing and rewriting stage, before a sixth and final step of proofreading for typographical errors.

Therefore, the first draft was really a product of six steps or 'layers' of writing. In addition, I used the above process to rewrite my 14,000-word attempt at the opening chapters from 2002, which resulted in the pruning of 8,000 words.

3.6 Further Research

The second draft was guided by supervisory responses to the first draft as well as feedback from 10 readers' reports that I commissioned from interested parties, 18 to 45 years of age. Aside from literal mistakes and rewriting various sentences for clarity, there were two notable changes made: a physical description of the protagonist was added (page 7); and an extra scene between Ingrid and Marty was created (pages 281–83) with the aim of revealing more about Ingrid's past and why she might fall for Marty in the end.

I read *A Passion for Narrative* (Hodgins), *Story* (McKee) and *On Writing* (King) before commencing the first draft, so when I revisited these books at the second draft stage it

was mostly a matter of confirming that I had followed their advice (or at least the parts with which I agreed). The second draft was completed in November 2004.

3.7 Writing the Exegesis

The “process writing” technique detailed in White and Arndt’s *Process Writing*, and recommended by Victoria University’s Postgraduate Research Unit, was used to help synthesise the wide-ranging research into this exegesis. Even though the writing of the exegesis started on day one of enrolment, with my journal entries and book notes, the final write-up did not commence until July 2004 under the guidance of my two supervisors. After some substantial revisions, the exegesis was completed in late March 2005

4. PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

4.1 Origins of Neopragmatism

As the name suggests, *neopragmatism* is a revival and refinement of an earlier school of philosophy known as (classical) pragmatism. To understand why the word ‘pragmatism’ was appropriated by a group of philosophers, as well as pragmatism’s other meanings, it is worthwhile sketching the etymology of the word.

The words ‘pragmatic’ (noun) and ‘pragmatical’ (adjective) first entered the English language in the 16th century, originating from the Greek word *pragma* meaning “an act, a matter of business” (R. Williams 240–41). Accordingly, ‘pragmatic’ initially meant a state decree or a person skilled at business. By the 17th century, ‘pragmatical’ was being used in two new senses: practical and dogmatic. The ‘practical’ sense of the word persists in current usage with the adjective ‘pragmatic’, but during the 19th century ‘pragmatical’ began to be used in connection with political figures who were *not* dogmatic – with the connotation of being shrewd or unprincipled.

'Pragmatism' was first used in connection with a type of philosophy in the 1870s when American philosopher, scientist and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) thought it an appropriate name for his new method of logic. Peirce's method emerged from his lifelong study of signs¹⁴ which he called "semeiotic" (Cobley and Jansz 21). The logic of pragmatism emphasised "the practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have" (Hamlyn 285). Put another way, the first version of pragmatism contended that theories and ideas cannot be judged in isolation from their consequences in practical experience.

The American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910) turned Peirce's method into a general system of philosophy. In James's controversial book *Pragmatism* (1907) he stated: "Truth *happens* to be an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events" (Audi 446–48). In other words, James had extended Peirce's work from clarifying the relationship between theory and practical consequence into a pragmatic conception of the nature of truth itself.

In doing this, James controversially challenged a conception of truth that had been foundational for more than two millennia to Western philosophy, often known as the correspondence theory of truth. Ancient Greek philosophers developed the correspondence theory of truth in which "a belief (statement, sentence or proposition, etc.) is true provided there exists a fact corresponding to it" (Audi 930). The correspondence theory is not contentious at the level of trivial statements like "dolphins live in salt water" or "dogs can bark", but the theory becomes controversial when attempting to answer larger questions such as: "What is justice?", "What is reality?" or "What is the nature of truth?"

¹⁴ Peirce's first paper on signs "On a New List of Categories" was delivered in 1867, almost 40 years before Ferdinand de Saussure's course in general linguistics at the University of Geneva (1906-11).

James's pragmatic conception of truth was commonly summed up as: "If it is useful then it is true". Bertrand Russell was among many critics of this philosophical position when he wrote:

With James's definition, it might happen that 'A exists' is true although in fact A does not exist. I have always found that the hypothesis of Santa Claus 'works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word'¹⁵; therefore 'Santa Claus exists' is true, although Santa Claus does not exist. (772)

In addition to such criticisms, Peirce tried to dissociate himself from James by renaming his method 'pragmatism', saying this term was "ugly enough to be safe from kidnapers" (Weate 59). James conceded that one idea might be useful to one person although not to another, but continued to attack the metaphysical assumptions of his opponents who supported the traditional correspondence theory of truth.

It is worthwhile at this point to note the significant differences between pragmatism and utilitarianism, since these two terms are sometimes mistakenly used as synonyms. Although James readily acknowledged the influence of John Stuart Mill and utilitarianism (Hamlyn 285), pragmatism had a much broader focus.

Firstly, utilitarianism was defined as a moral theory (Audi 942) that, unlike pragmatism, did not extend to challenging the correspondence theory of truth that was foundational to Western philosophy.

¹⁵ Russell is here quoting James's own defence of religion on pragmatic grounds: "If the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true" (771). On the following page Russell concludes: "This simply omits as unimportant the question whether God really is in His heaven; if He is a useful hypothesis, that is enough... No wonder the Pope condemned the pragmatic defence of religion".

Secondly, pragmatism did not revolve around the utilitarian's "greatest happiness principle (also called the principle of utility): always act so as to produce the greatest happiness" (942). The utilitarians believed that "an action is morally right if and only if it produces at least as much good (utility) for all people affected by the action as any alternative action the person could do instead" (942). Russell describes the utilitarian's main aim as harmonising public and private interests with a view to maximising the people's pleasure over pain (740-41).

A third difference, which came to the fore in later developments of pragmatism, was the splitting of public and private interests¹⁶ as opposed to the utilitarian's desire to harmonise them.

Despite his critics, James also found supporters for his philosophy of pragmatism. The third and last great figure to pioneer pragmatism was the American philosopher, education theorist and social critic John Dewey (1859–1952) who extended James's work into a version of pragmatism called 'instrumentalism'. Dewey's use of this word was quite distinct from that of early utilitarians who often believed something had 'instrumental' value if it brought about utility or intrinsic value which they defined as pleasure and the absence of pain (Audi 942). Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism emerged from his view that "concepts are instruments for dealing with our experienced world" (229–31).¹⁷ In other words, ideas are instruments for actions in the world we actually experience, not sets of facts to be somewhat passively recorded in the tradition of the correspondence theory where the human capacity for reason is regarded as aloof from nature (Weate 59–60).

¹⁶ The public-private split is explained in sections 4.4 and 4.5, then discussed at length in Chapter 7.

¹⁷ Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism has a more general meaning than the more common meaning of instrumentalism which is a type of anti-realistic view of scientific theories whose popularity peaked in the era of positivism (Audi 438).

Dewey was strongly influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution¹⁸ and regarded the human mind as a problem-solving tool for continually adapting to change, not as a 'mirror of nature' that reflects or corresponds to reality. Dewey coined the term "warranted assertability" as a more accurate description for his notion of truth (Audi 230). This term suggested an ongoing dynamic between what humans could reasonably assert to be of use in meeting the changing demands of their environments. An important implication of Dewey's version of pragmatism is that human knowing is a constructive conceptual activity because it inevitably shapes our behaviour in the future.

Dewey believed traditional (Platonic) philosophical dualisms such as appearance/reality, man/nature¹⁹, made/found and mind/body had outlived their usefulness. To help overcome these dualisms, he advocated the application of scientific method beyond the traditional sciences in order to encourage critical thinking in all areas of education. This was crucial to his way of preparing people to cope with future uncertainties – hoping good citizens would continually reform democratic institutions so they could better respond to people's changing needs.

Dewey was a firm believer in democracy and his innovations in educational methods were aimed at improving society as a whole by raising the quality of education available to all. However, his influence was waning before World War II as Anglo-American philosophy departments embraced the advent of analytic and linguistic philosophy, as explained in the following section.

¹⁸ Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was published in the year John Dewey was born.

¹⁹ This traditional philosophical dualism was expressed with male assumptions, instead of 'human'.

4.2 Rorty's Early Philosophy

For the first half of Rorty's career he was not a pragmatist but a leading figure in linguistic philosophy – a branch of analytic philosophy which had essentialist underpinnings. In 1967 Rorty edited a landmark anthology titled *The Linguistic Turn* which contained essays by eminent philosophers about developments from the 1930s to the 1960s in linguistic philosophy. In his introduction, Rorty defined linguistic philosophy as: “the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use” (3). This anthology is now regarded as one of the defining works in linguistic philosophy for a generation of philosophers (*Encarta*).

The actual phrase ‘the linguistic turn’ was used to indicate that linguistic philosophy was a variation or development from the umbrella term ‘analytic philosophy’. The tradition of analytic philosophy dates back to ancient Greece when close analysis of concepts was used to solve philosophical problems. In the early to mid 20th century, linguistic philosophers turned their attention to the language in which conceptual problems were expressed. Their efforts included the development of artificial languages in an effort to eliminate the ambiguities of ordinary language.

Rorty was himself an esteemed linguistic philosopher, but was well aware of criticisms levelled against his viewpoint:

This view is considered by many of its proponents to be the most important philosophical discovery of our time, and, indeed, of the ages. By its opponents, it is interpreted as a sign of the sickness of our souls, a revolt

against reason itself, and a self-deceptive attempt (in Russell's²⁰ phrase) to procure by theft what one has failed to gain by honest toil. (*Linguistic Turn* 3)

Perhaps Rorty includes such scathing condemnation out of intellectual open-mindedness, but he also seems to sense the limits of the epistemological enterprise itself. This conceptual self-reflexivity is furthered towards the end of his introduction, where he gestures towards the wider implications for linguistic philosophy in accepting the notion of the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge.

The most important thing that has happened in philosophy in the last thirty years is not the linguistic turn itself, but rather the beginning of a thoroughgoing rethinking of certain epistemological difficulties which have troubled philosophers since Plato and Aristotle... If the traditional "spectatorial" account of knowledge is overthrown the account of knowledge which replaces it will lead to reformulations everywhere else in philosophy, particularly in metaphilosophy. Specifically the contrast between "science" and "philosophy"...may come to seem artificial and pointless. If this happens most of the essays in this volume will be obsolete, because the vocabulary they are written in will be obsolete. (39)

The spectatorial account to which Rorty refers is the essentialist tradition of acquiring knowledge through a process where the mind is regarded as a type of "immaterial eye"²¹ in which a natural order can be mirrored.²² Given these doubts, it

²⁰ The aforementioned Bertrand Russell, the logical positivist philosopher.

²¹ This expression is from footnote 75 on page 39 of the Introduction to *The Linguistic Turn*.

²² "In Aristotle's conception intellect is not a mirror inspected by an inner eye. It is both mirror and eye in one" (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* 45).

is perhaps not surprising that Rorty targeted the “immaterial eye” metaphor underpinning the essentialist tradition when he published his first (solo) book in 1979, fittingly titled *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

4.3 Overview of Rorty’s Neopragmatism

In *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* Rorty abandoned the quest for an absolute foundation to knowledge which had largely characterised Western philosophy since the ancient Greeks.²³ Rorty hoped his argument “frees us from the notion of human knowledge as an assemblage of representations in a Mirror of Nature, and thus reinforces the claim...that we can do without the notion of our Glassy Essence” (126).

To achieve his aims, Rorty used two main lines of argument: firstly, he found an original way to deconstruct Cartesian mind-body dualism; secondly, he used one of Immanuel Kant’s principal conceptual tools to undermine Kant’s own justification of knowledge as accurate representation. These two lines of argument are crucial to understanding the debate between essentialist and non-essentialists, and why Rorty abandoned the correspondence theory for a pragmatic conception of truth. Therefore, I will provide a brief summary of each strategy.

Rorty’s initial line of argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* has been called “the first genuinely new response to the traditional mind-body problem that anyone had seen in a long time” (Brandom 157). Rorty lists nine features which, as he puts it, “philosophers have at one time or another taken as marks of the mental” (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* 35). His first target, at the top of this list, is a

²³ Despite notable exceptions such as Friederich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose anti-Platonism Rorty draws from at times, despite Nietzsche’s anti-democratic beliefs.

defining criterion of Cartesian mind-body dualism known as ‘privileged access’. That is, the mind’s “ability to know itself incorrigibly”. According to Descartes: “nothing is easier for the mind to know than itself” (62). Put simply, each person has better access to her or his own mind than anyone else.

Rorty argues that the Cartesian mind-body duality hinges on a twofold claim:

- (1) it is sufficient for being a mental state that the thing in question be incorrigibly knowable by its possessor, and (2) we do not literally attribute any non-physical states (e.g. beliefs) to beings which fail to have some such incorrigibly knowable states. (81)

In order to problematise the Cartesian notion that incorrigibility is the defining feature of having a ‘mind’, Rorty proposes a planet of humanlike creatures called Antipodeans who have invented “cerebroscopes” (77) that allow them to pinpoint which parts of their neural system are being stimulated. For example, instead of feeling pain the Antipodeans “loathed having their C-fibers stimulated” (74). The cerebroscope actually enables better access to a person’s thoughts and feelings than the person herself. In Cartesian terms the Antipodeans do not have minds, although they have brains like ours. This is Rorty’s way of saying that having a ‘mind’ with thoughts and feelings, as distinct from a body, is not a ‘common sense’ given but part of a historically constructed vocabulary.

Rorty, in a later book, succinctly redescribes beliefs and desires (thoughts and feelings) as:

- ‘sentential attitudes’—that is to say, dispositions on the part of organisms, or of computers, to assert or deny certain sentences. To attribute beliefs and

desires to nonusers of language (such as dogs, infants, and thermostats) is, for us pragmatists, to speak metaphorically. (Niznik and Sanders 39)

The conclusion to be gleaned from Rorty's first line of argument is that if Cartesian vocabulary which is based on mind-body duality became obsolete, and consequently the mind was no longer assumed to be a mirror aloof from nature, then humans can still regard themselves as rational and intelligent, indeed sapient. Naturalising the human mind – treating it as part of nature not a transcendental faculty – was not new, but Rorty's unique reasoning can be regarded as an independent formulation of this position. It aligned Rorty with, among others, James and Dewey, and his emphasis on historically constructed vocabularies brought a new refinement to the pragmatist's case.

The second major line of argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* challenges Immanuel Kant's attempt to put philosophy "on the secure path of a science" (137). Kant insisted that the cause of a belief should be distinguished from its justification.

It is one thing, he (Kant) says to Locke, to exhibit the grounds for our ideas or beliefs by saying where they come from, that is, what matter-of-factual processes in fact give rise to them. It is quite another to exhibit grounds for those beliefs by saying what reasons justify them. (Brandom 160)

Putting this another way, a claim could be justified yet not true.

This led Kant to replace John Locke's empiricism with an *a priori* approach to "the science of man" or, as Rorty paraphrases, Kant developed: "the mythical subject of transcendental psychology,' 'epistemology' as a discipline came of age"

(*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* 138). By grounding his philosophy in a transcendental ideal, Kant was determined to use his notion of ‘pure reason’ to resolve Plato’s reality-appearance dualism for all time. In Kant’s words:

It is only, then, in the ideal of the supreme *original* good, that pure reason can find the ground of the practically necessary connection of both elements of the highest *derivative* good, and accordingly of an intelligible, that is, *moral* world. Now since we are necessitated by reason to conceive ourselves as belonging to such a world, while the senses present to us nothing but a world of phenomena, we must assume the former as a consequence of our conduct in the world of sense...and therefore as future in relation to us. Thus God and a future life are two hypotheses which, according to the principles of pure reason, are inseparable from the obligation which this reason imposes upon us. (455)

Kant was hoping his ‘pure reason’ could go beyond sensory appearances to the foundation of knowledge, but this endeavour relied on the Cartesian notion of privileged access. Therefore, (Kantian) attempts to speak about the nature of reality ‘in itself’, or as things *really* are, assume that knowledge and justification have privileged relations to the objects of human propositions. Such attempts aim “to get behind reasons to causes, beyond argument to compulsion from the object known...(and) to reach that point is to reach the foundation of knowledge” (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* 159).

Rorty exposes Kant’s assumption of Cartesian privileged access in a section titled “Kant’s Confusion of Predication with Synthesis”, in which he concludes:

The claim that knowledge of necessary truths about made (‘constituted’)

objects is more intelligible than about found objects depends on the Cartesian assumption that we have privileged access to the activity of making. But on the interpretation of Kant just given, there is no such access to our constituting activities.²⁴ (155)

Rorty claims that a belief can only justify a belief, not define its cause or absolute truth. Therefore, in his way of thinking “we will see no need to end the potentially infinite regress of propositions-brought-forward-in-defense-of-other-propositions” (159). The corollary is that human vocabularies are self-justifying but not foundational in the sense of providing eternal guarantees.

The historicity and context-dependence of knowledge is perhaps most apparent when paradigm shifts in science occur, such as those described by Thomas Kuhn.²⁵ Paradigm shifts within the discipline of physics, for example, highlight the distinction between truth and justification. In 1905, Einstein’s Special *Theory* of Relativity (my italics) mathematically justified the claim that Newton’s so-called *Laws* of Motion did not apply to extremely fast moving objects like sub-atomic particles. Einstein’s theories paved the way for the unprecedented ability to split and fuse atoms. His theories ‘worked’ or were proven to that extent.

Up until Einstein, Newton’s theories were thought to be more than merely *justified*, they were regarded as scientific *laws* applicable to all times and places, that is, transcendental. Generations of scientists were convinced of the absolute truth of Newton’s Laws. Einstein’s theories displaced those of Newton as the basis for

²⁴ Rorty is referring to Kant’s use of the Platonic dualism between ‘made’ and ‘found’ truths. It is perhaps worth noting another dualism of Kant’s that Rorty discusses – the morality-prudence distinction (Niznik and Sanders 31). In a less refined and less elaborate way, the aforementioned principle-pragmatism hypothesis that drove my early research has certain similarities, namely ethics versus practicalities.

²⁵ Thomas Kuhn’s definitive work is *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, see the final section of this exegesis, Works Consulted, for publication details.

scientific truth. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, scientists are questioning whether Einstein erred with his assumption that the speed of light has always been constant (*Wired News*). This may be the start of another paradigm shift.

Rorty maintains, however, humans cannot *quantify* exactly how much closer to absolute Truth a paradigm shift brings us. He regularly uses ‘Truth’ (with a capital) to distinguish between describing everyday truths as opposed to a Platonic or Realist notion of ‘absolute’ Truth as a ‘thing in itself’.

For the so-called ‘post-modernists’, the adjective ‘true’ is a perfectly useful tool, but the use of the noun ‘Truth’ as the name of an object of desire is a relic of an earlier time: the time in which we believed there was a natural order to be grasped. (*Truth, Politics and Post-modernism* 23)

Despite arguing that our distance from an ideal of Truth is indefinable, Rorty does *not* side with theorists such as Foucault who distrust meta-narratives of *progress*.

Foucauldians typically have the same suspicions about narratives of progress as they do about the Enlightenment political project. Both suspicions are unjustified. My own view of narratives of progress is that of Thomas Kuhn: there is no such thing as asymptotic approach to the Truth, but there is progress nevertheless – progress detectable by retrospection. Scientific progress is made when theories which solved certain problems are replaced by theories which solve both those problems and certain other problems, which the earlier theories were unable to solve. On Kuhn’s view, Einstein got no

closer to the way reality is ‘in itself’ than did Newton, but there is an obvious sense in which he progressed beyond Newton.²⁶ (40)

Rorty’s views on progress, however, do *not* imply a belief in teleology. He claims there is no natural terminus for intellectual advancement despite progress in science. “Science may well converge to agreement on how the world should be described in order to facilitate better technological control, but this description will not be of Nature as it is in itself, but of Nature subjected to the Baconian demand for better tools with which to improve man’s estate” (41). Similarly, he argues, a convergence of all nations to a unified set of democratic institutions would not reflect an intrinsic moral reality.

The implications of the challenges laid down in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, to Platonic and Cartesian assumptions about Truth, led Rorty to reinterpret the pragmatist theses of Dewey and James in his 1982 book *Consequences of Pragmatism*. In 1989 Rorty consolidated his own version of neopragmatism in *Contingency Irony and Solidarity*. On my reading of his work, Rorty’s books in the 1990s were increasingly elaborate defences of the theses he proposed in the 1980s (see section 4.4). I describe the major criticisms of neopragmatism in section 4.5 and revisit them in Chapter 7.

For now, I conclude this section with Rorty’s own summary of the differences between the earlier (classical) pragmatism and those of neopragmatism:

As I see the history of pragmatism, there are two great differences between the classical pragmatists and neopragmatists. The first...is the difference between talking about ‘experience’, as James and Dewey did, and talking about

²⁶ I have omitted the paragraph following this quote, regarding the Enlightenment and political progress, in which Rorty applies the same logic to argue Foucault was wrong to suggest that drawing and quartering criminals is equally as cruel as turning them over to psychiatric social workers.

language... The second is the difference between assuming that there is something called ‘the scientific method’, whose employment increases the likelihood of one’s beliefs being true, and tacitly abandoning this assumption.

(Philosophy and Social Hope 35)

4.4 Rorty’s Specific Theses

A comprehensive definition of neopragmatism is not confined to a single person’s point of view.²⁷ Likewise, not all philosophers or theorists who regard themselves as neopragmatists will agree upon a single set of theses as defining their views.

Since my research concentrates on Richard Rorty’s version of neopragmatism, I have, for purely expository purposes, condensed his philosophy into nine succinct theses.²⁸ They are phrased in a way that points to the opposing argument, for example, “truth is made *not* found”, but major criticisms are discussed in section 4.5. With the exception of the term ‘liberal ironist’ in the eighth thesis, Rorty is *not* the first to make any of these arguments. It is the way Rorty combines these arguments with an extraordinary depth and breadth of critical analysis that has led to his prominence in philosophy (and so frustrated his opponents).

1. **Human inquiry can achieve solidarity but not absolute objectivity**²⁹: Rorty argues that absolute objectivity is not achievable, instead human inquiry can aim

²⁷ Rorty claims that Hilary Putnam is the leading neopragmatist (*Philosophy and Social Hope* xxvii). But having read his criticisms of Rorty and the response (Brandom 81–90), I venture to say Rorty’s claim is false modesty.

²⁸ The nine theses are informed by a similar set of eight theses contained in James Conant’s essay “Freedom, Cruelty and Truth: Rorty versus Orwell” (Brandom 268–342), although the nine theses are expressed in my own words and in a less pejorative way. In his response to Conant’s critique, Rorty does not dispute the substance of the eight theses

²⁹ Objectivity in the Platonic or Realist sense of absolute Truth, as discussed in section 4.3, not the everyday descriptive sense of objectivity that non-philosophers typically use (such as the many people who would regard their own existence as a self-evident objective fact).

at achieving ever-widening circles of agreement. Rorty uses the word ‘solidarity’ to mean agreement or consensus with one’s community. Therefore the traditional distinction between opinion and fact can be redescribed, respectively, as matters on which it is relatively difficult to gain agreement, compared to matters on which it is relatively easy to gain agreement.

2. **Truth is made not found:** Rorty argues that the notion of truth is a human construct which cannot exist in isolation from the human activity of language making. In other words, descriptions of so-called truths about the world or claims to truth must be formulated as sentences, therefore where there are no sentences there is no truth.
3. **Words are tools not mirrors:** Rorty argues that vocabularies and descriptions of the world should be evaluated according to how well they (as tools) help us ‘cope’ in the world, not how well they represent (mirror) the world. The adequacy of a vocabulary can only be evaluated relative to its purpose, just as tools are evaluated according to how well they meet human needs and interests. A value-free description of the world is not possible because any vocabulary employed will, in some way, refer to human purposes or interests.
4. **Moral beliefs are relative to a community’s norms not a function of transcendental standards:** Rorty argues that a past or present moral belief can only be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ according to a community’s agreed-upon current norms, not according to some contentious notion of a transcendental non-human (Divine) authority. Where a community finds it too hard to adjudicate on a moral claim or practice, it should participate in an ongoing ‘conversation’ or exchange of views aimed at achieving consensus.

5. **Historical accounts are constructed and are not absolutely objective:**

Rorty argues that although there may be a certain number of facts relating to a historical event that all historians can agree upon, the understanding of a history will be coloured by the values and interests of both past and present historians. Therefore each generation may record and read history with some variation. The process of *redescribing* history may lead to new and valuable insights that have been previously overlooked or silenced.

6. **Public and private pursuits should be separated not synthesised³⁰:**

Rorty argues that individuals should be free to follow their own projects of self-creation such as believing in a particular religion, developing idiosyncratic vocabularies and fostering autonomy. Private pursuits should not, however, interfere with public institutions and practices such as debating government decisions, seeking social justice and fostering human solidarity. This is contrary to the belief of fulfilment of (private) self through (public) service to others in the community, such as advocated by Christianity.³¹

7. **A commitment to liberalism is a commitment to one's community not a**

function of ahistorical forces: Rorty argues that liberalism offers one of many possible human vocabularies, but it is not the inevitable outcome or teleological destination for the evolution of human societies. In other words, fascism or fundamentalism could overthrow liberal democracy and its pluralism in the long

³⁰ This thesis has particularly important and contentious political implications which is why I have made it central to my novel, as will be explained across the chapters following.

³¹ The synthesis of public and private has Platonic origins, according to Rorty's statement in the opening paragraph of his Introduction to *Contingency Irony and Solidarity* (xiii).

term. Rorty defines a liberal as someone who thinks “cruelty is the worst thing we can do”³², although he offers no non-circular justification for this belief.

8. **A person can be fully committed to a belief despite recognising its contingency:** Rorty argues that a person may be prepared to die for a belief (for example, a commitment to democracy) while recognising the irony that the belief is not based on unshakeable foundations. He labels such people ‘ironists’ and describes himself as a ‘liberal ironist’. Although Rorty is committed to his liberal ironist vocabulary he remains open-minded to learning from alternative vocabularies, particularly through the medium of literature.
9. **Truth will emerge from “free and open encounter”:** Rorty appropriates this expression from John Milton’s 1644 treatise *Areopagitica* (which advocated freedom of the press).³³ Likewise, Rorty argues that public debate in so-called liberal democracy can rely on free speech and a free media to ensure that truth emerges to expose falsehood.

4.5 Major Criticisms of Rorty

Rorty has many critics from both the left and right of politics. The right disapprove of his atheism and ‘relativism’, whereas the left regard him as a ‘bourgeois liberal reformer’ who disparages political radicals. The most common specific criticism of Rorty’s philosophical arguments is that he refutes the existence of truth yet oxymoronically presents this statement as truth. This is a serious criticism which Rorty responds to in four stages.

³² Rorty acknowledges this as Judith Shklar’s definition of cruelty (*Contingency Irony and Solidarity* 74).

³³ “Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple, who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?” (Milton 35).

The first stage of his response is to make the distinction between the adjective ‘truth’ and the noun ‘Truth’ (with a capital) as section 4.3 explains. This enables Rorty to reply to critics who claim he argues there is no such thing as truth in the following way.

“There is no truth.” What could this mean? Why should anybody say it? Actually, almost nobody (except Wallace Stevens) does say it. But philosophers like me are often said to say it...since most people think that truth is correspondence to the way reality “really is,” they think of us as denying the existence of truth. (*Truth and Progress* 1)

The second stage of Rorty’s response is to reassure critics that abandoning the correspondence theory of truth will *not* alter everyday use of words such as ‘truth’ and ‘fact’.³⁴ Rather, a pragmatic conception of truth will offer a different philosophical “gloss” to the Platonic-Realist tradition.

I do not think I have ever written anything suggesting that I wish to alter ordinary ways of using “know,” “objective,” “fact,” and “reason”... I have urged that we continue to speak with the vulgar while offering a philosophical gloss on this speech which is different from that offered by the Realist tradition. (44)

The third stage of Rorty’s response is to acknowledge the self-contradictory position he would be in *if* he were to argue there is no such thing as absolute Truth yet present his statement as an absolute Truth.

³⁴ Here, it is worth recapitulating a point made earlier. The correspondence theory is *not* contentious at the level of trivial statements like “dolphins live in salt water” or “dogs can bark”, but the theory becomes controversial when attempting to answer larger questions such as: “What is justice?”, “What is reality?” or “What is the nature of truth?”

If we say it is an objective fact that truth is subjective, we are in danger of contradicting ourselves. If we say that we invented it, we seem to be being merely whimsical. Why should anybody take our inventions seriously? If truths are merely convenient fictions, what about the truth of the claim that that is what they are? Is that too a convenient fiction? Convenient for what? For whom? (Niznik and Sanders 33)

The fourth stage presents Rorty's solution to this risk of self-contradiction, but it requires a difficult leap of understanding because it involves challenging a historically constructed vocabulary based on the correspondence theory of truth that is generally regarded as 'common sense'. He argues that a pragmatic conception of truth should replace the correspondence theory – whose central dualism is the Platonic appearance-reality distinction – with a distinction between what is *more* useful and what is *less* useful for humans to believe as they develop conceptual and concrete tools with which to 'cope' with their changing environments.

We (pragmatists) hope to replace the reality-appearance distinction with the distinction between the more useful and less useful. So we say that the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology...was a useful one for our ancestors' purposes, but we have different purposes, which will be better served by employing a different vocabulary. Our ancestors have climbed up a ladder which we are now in a position to throw away...because we have different problems to solve than those which perplexed our ancestors. (37)

Critics often say this fourth response shows that Rorty fails in his ‘duty’ to offer a satisfactory alternative theory of truth that can show humans the nature of truth as it *really* is. This charge, however, assumes the vocabulary of correspondence in which it is believed there is a way humans can penetrate beyond sensory appearances to some sort of intrinsic reality that objects have in themselves. They refuse to shift to a pragmatic vocabulary because they believe it will mean descending into a ‘relativism’ where things can mean whatever you want them to mean, and everything is as good as everything else.

‘Relativism’ signifies the second major criticism of Rorty’s work. Some critics label Rorty a postmodern relativist whose philosophy aims to drag Western civilisation into a nihilistic future. The following excerpt is indicative of such charges, and is from an article whose chief target is Rorty.

Postmodernists...scoff at everything we hold dear, replacing truth, reason, objectivity, knowledge and scientific method with fashion, rhetoric, power, subjectivity and relativism – thereby summoning our history and politics, literature and art, indeed Western civilisation itself, to its doom.³⁵ (Blackburn)

Rorty’s response to this charge is typically in three stages. The first is to reassure his opponents that abandoning certain Platonic dualisms does not mean abandoning useful everyday binary oppositions such as high/low, stop/go, public/private, black/white, and so on.

Philosophers as diverse as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, Donald Davidson and Jacques Derrida, Hilary Putnam and Bruno Latour, John

³⁵ The article by Professor Simon Blackburn, Dean of Philosophy at Cambridge University, was accompanied by a graphic in which the image of a chicken carcass passes through an optic lens and is transformed into a pear. When I protested to the editor that this graphic was grossly misleading, he conceded it was, but claimed it was justifiable as a way to “provoke debate”.

Dewey and Michel Foucault, are antidualists. This does not mean they are against binary oppositions; it is not clear thought is possible without using such oppositions. It means rather that they are trying to shake off the influences of the peculiarly metaphysical dualisms which the Western philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks. (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 47)

The second stage of Rorty's response aims to address critics who believe his advocacy of abandoning the dualism of absolute-relative is a way of side-stepping the issue. Again, these critics assume their Platonic-based vocabulary is the only 'true' way of speaking rather than one which is historically based on the accurate representation of a natural order.

Rorty's insistence to "treat beliefs not as representations but as habits of actions, and words not as representations but as tools" (xxv) can be explained by an analogy with a carpenter's tools. If a carpenter develops a new tool for a job, she does not ask if this tool brings her closer to the 'truth' or an 'ideal' representation of a particular tool. Her concern is how useful this particular tool is in helping her 'cope' or adapt in meeting the needs of her environment. Science, after all, gains acceptance through practical success, and a scientist is also unlikely to be concerned with the question of how much closer an invention brings them to an accurate representation of absolute truth.

The third stage of addressing the criticism of relativism is to extinguish fears that an individual or group can conjure any fantasy at whim, claim it as a useful 'tool' for them, and therefore argue for its truth – an echo of the 'Santa Claus' criticism in section 4.1. This is where Rorty's advocacy of the public-private split comes into

effect. During a philosophical debate in Europe, an opponent says he finds it useful to imagine a “big green giraffe” just behind Rorty, therefore it must be true according to neopragmatism (Niznik and Sanders 111). Rorty’s reply reinforces his distinction between idiosyncratic private beliefs and intersubjective public arguments (thesis 6 in section 4.4).

Now about giraffes: I want to urge that if you have the distinction between the idiosyncratic and the intersubjective, or the relatively idiosyncratic and the relatively intersubjective, that is the only distinction you need to take care of real versus imaginary giraffes. You do not need a further distinction between the made and the found or the subjective and the objective. You do not need a distinction between reality and appearance, or between inside and outside, but only one between what you can get a reasonable consensus about and what you cannot. (114-15)

The third major criticism against Rorty centres on that of the public-private split. Rorty concedes it is difficult in practice to separate the public interest from those of private individuals. For instance, I e-mailed Rorty about the recent debate over banning students from wearing religious symbols in French public schools. I expected him to support the ban as a clear-cut example of how the government (public) and religious (private) interests should be split in order to preserve the secularism of France’s liberal democracy. This, however, was his reply: “I don’t have any strong feelings one way or the other on that issue. I think I would have to live in France and talk with the people affected before I made up my mind” (“Re: Public/Private Split in France”). I believe his response is consistent with his thesis

(4) that any adjudication of morality should be relative to a community's norms, not fixed by so-called transcendental standards.

The public-private split is the most significant political implication of Rorty's neopragmatism. I could accept Rorty's responses to the first two major criticisms of his work, as listed above; however, I do not offer a neat set of responses to address the difficulties of defining exactly what is considered private and public in each culture. Rather, I present the two significant effects this criticism had on the creation of my novel.

1. The Oz Rock Foundation is a company with a public role that is torn between the private interests of its shareholders (the executive director and members of the music industry) and the public interest of the government that supplies the majority of its funding.
2. Billy (the teenage prisoner) creates a song as a vehicle for private therapy, but it is later converted into a public commodity with consequences reaching beyond his lifetime. In the process, Billy's political voice is silenced by a misrepresentation that is justified on commercial grounds.

A fourth criticism, that is directly related to my guiding research question, regarding the sustainability of a neopragmatic democracy, is whether Rorty's hope for an even more secular public system (than, say, US democracy currently offers) will "produce enough of a civic community to protect democratic society against collapse?" (Niznik and Sanders 84). Rorty's response to this question is:

I think the answer is only if there is enough money around. That is, if there is economic expansion and the hope of further equality of opportunity of

members of the society, then I think a civic community does not need the churches and it can get along with the poets and the scientists... I suspect the churches are going to stage a comeback as the money decreases. I shall regret both the shortage of money and the return of the churches. (84)

Rorty has not elaborated elsewhere in his books on the relations between economics and political systems. When I e-mailed him on the matter he replied: “I have been persuaded of the connection between money and democracy by such books as Fareed Zakaria’s *The Future of Freedom*” (“Re: Sustaining a Neopragmatic Democracy”). These matters and Zakaria’s book will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

The fifth and final major criticism of Rorty, that I discuss here, stems from his ethnocentric hope in “free and open encounter” within the spaces of “bourgeois democracies” as *the* guide to truth – what is more useful or less useful towards making a better society (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 119). I am not alone in having doubts about the possibility of genuinely free and open encounters in this age of, among other things, sophisticated electronic public-relations ‘spin’. As a result, this criticism has instigated one of my novelistic themes, as section 4.6 reveals. Rorty recognises the failings of democracy in practice, but insists that democracy at its best is open, tolerant, inclusive and pluralistic. Liberal democratic “ideals may be local and culture-bound, and nevertheless be the best hope of the species” (*Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* 208). This proposition can also be illuminated in the context of the ongoing debate about educational standards between those on the right and the left of the political spectrum.

To paraphrase Rorty, the conservatives on the right argue that inculcating Platonic ‘reason’ and overcoming the sins of passion will lead students to the truth that will set them free. The left, however, argues that the conservative’s ‘fundamental truths’, or what Foucault calls the ‘discourse of power’, betray students by “stifling healthy animal instincts” (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 114-16). The left’s inverted Platonism argues that if freedom is allowed then this enables a person’s ‘true’ self to emerge.

Rorty rejects the right’s Platonism and the left’s inverted Platonism. He wants to replace the traditional quest for knowledge of *things-in-themselves* with the hope for “greater human happiness” (xiii). Rorty’s alternative aim is consistent with his rejection of the label ‘relativist’ in favour of ‘anti-essentialist’ or ‘anti-dualist’ or ‘anti-foundationalist’. He does not believe liberal democracies need to refer to foundational notions such as ‘natural rights’ in order for their citizens to get along with each other and work out a better future for themselves.

Rorty’s hope that the democratic process can be the guide to truth, which he acknowledges he has borrowed from Dewey, is also criticised as utopian “fuzziness” for not giving a criterion of growth (120). Rorty defers to Dewey’s response to this charge, in a way that rounds out this section on major criticisms.

Dewey rightly saw that any such criterion would cut the future down to the size of the present. Asking for such a criterion is like asking a dinosaur to specify what would make for a good mammal or asking a fourth-century Athenian to propose forms of life for the citizens of a twentieth-century industrial democracy... Hope – the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past – is the condition of growth. (120)

4.6 The Novel's Critical Themes

The opening sections of this chapter are intended as preparation for explaining the themes that shaped my novel, not as rehearsals of esoteric knowledge. As stated in the introduction, my guiding research question was: If liberal democracy were to be reformed along the post-essentialist lines argued by neopragmatism, then would this version of democracy be sustainable in the face of cynicism from its own citizens as well as challenges from totalitarianism and fundamentalism? In brief: Is neopragmatism sustainable?

I related this question to the issues raised by the nine theses listed in section 4.4, took into account the criticisms listed in section 4.5, then condensed my responses into five subsidiary questions that I believed could best be dramatised. The five subsidiary questions therefore acted as themes that shaped the novel. They are:

1. In whose interest is truth? (In response to theses 1, 2, 3).
2. Can redescribing history help make a better future? (In response to theses 4, 5, 7, 8).
3. Can the public and private actually be split in practice? (In response to theses 6, 7, 8, 9).
4. Does the constant renegotiation of morals genuinely offer more hope? (In response to theses 4, 5, 7, 8).
5. Can truth really emerge from “free and open encounter” in a world of ‘spin’?³⁶ (In response to theses 6, 9).

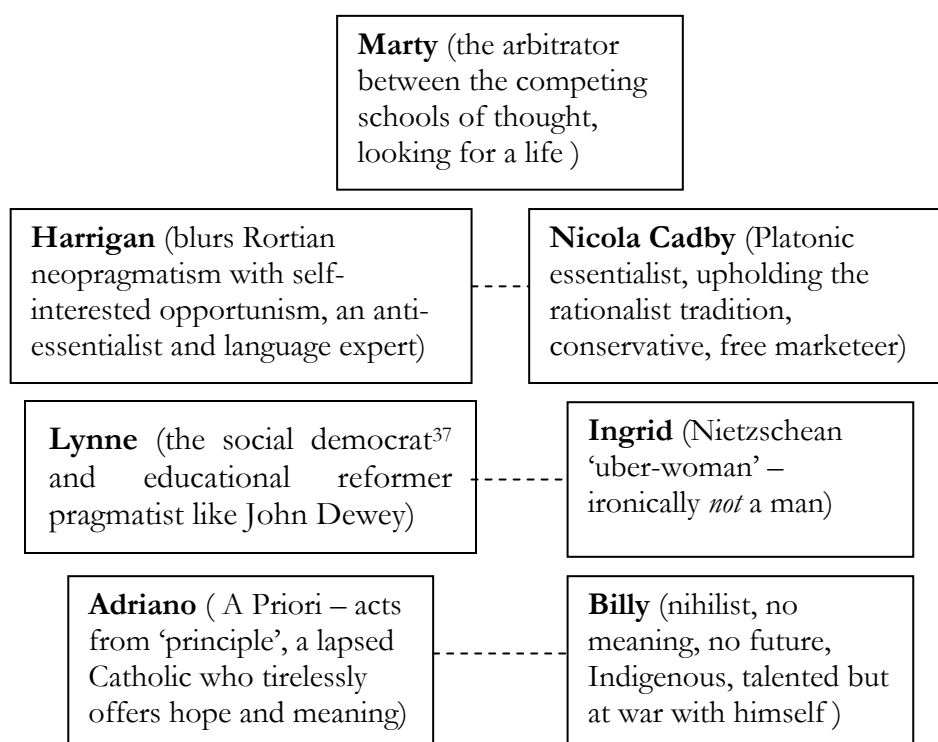
Having already explained neopragmatism and its major criticisms, I believe my themes require little explanation in themselves. What will require further

³⁶ I have used the term ‘spin’ to refer to assertions that are not true but are made to sound or appear true, particularly through the media.

explanation is the way they have been applied to create contexts in the novel. In the next section I will explain how my research into neopragmatism shaped the creation of the novel's main characters and key contexts.

4.7 The Characters and their Contrasting Philosophies

When I was nearing the end of my research into neopragmatism I drew a diagram, like the one following, into an exercise book in which I was taking notes. It was a diagram outlining the seven main characters and their roles in the theoretical interplay throughout the novel. The protagonist Martin (Marty) was labelled as the arbitrator and below him were three pairings of characters.



The schools of philosophy that informed the creation of the major characters in the novel.

³⁷ Rorty describes his main philosophical influence, John Dewey, as a “fervent social democrat” (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 18), but declares himself a liberal democrat. Rorty sees no significant practical differences in their politics: “I can’t see any interesting difference between my views and Dewey’s about the practice of democracy, except that he had more faith in the possibility of ‘participatory’ or ‘deliberative’ democracy than I do” (“Re: Dewey and Yourself”).

Reflecting on these intentions after writing the novel, I believe the main characters have been portrayed reasonably closely to broad characteristics of the schools of philosophy with which they are meant to align. The theoretical contrasts and conflicts informed the dramatic conflicts even though I did not mention any philosophers by name – nevertheless, one test reader understood the A(driano) Priori ‘joke’. It is tempting to say the theoretical contrasts were *foundational* or *underpinned* the dramatic conflicts, but this would be distinctly un-Rortian.

Admittedly, the character of Harrigan is a somewhat pejorative exaggeration of neopragmatic beliefs in the way he conveniently blurs his own self-interest with the community’s interests. It seemed obvious to me his opponent had to be a conservative essentialist as embodied by his political rival Nicola Cadby.

Harrigan and Lynne (Rorty and Dewey) were plausible co-operators of the Oz Rock Foundation despite Harrigan’s refusal to admit Lynne to the board of directors. Lynne’s attention to educational reforms enabled her to continue the company’s work in the community after government funding ceased. But once the funding stopped, Harrigan’s large salary and expenses were not sustainable. This outcome was influenced by Rorty’s claim that neopragmatism is sustainable as long as there is enough money about – a partial answer to my central research question which I will return to in detail in Chapter 7.

Portraying Ingrid as a Nietzschean ‘uber-woman’³⁸ and making her Harrigan’s assistant was my way of underlining the similarities between Rorty and Nietzsche even though the latter was not an advocate of democracy. Rorty sees a philosophical similarity between his views and “Nietzsche’s narrative of the West’s gradual

³⁸ Nietzsche’s misogyny prevented him from believing women could be ‘super’, hence the irony of Ingrid.

liberation from Platonism” (*Truth, Politics and Post-modernism*’ 20), but rejects Nietzsche’s anti-democratic political conclusions.

Ingrid and Lynne are both employed by Harrigan despite their obvious political differences, although they are united by their humanism – neither is in any way religious. There are suggestions of Ingrid’s iconoclastic feelings in her actions such as nailing stuffed koalas to beams inside the Hordern Pavilion.

By contrast, Adriano Priori’s hope is derived from his religious past, although this was not made explicit in the novel. He still has hope despite his years of experience in a correctional system that suffers from budget cuts and the shortcomings of the mental health system. The hope that sustains Adriano is the counterbalance to Billy’s nihilism which stems from the tragedy of witnessing rednecks murder his mother. Billy’s relatively short time in jail, however, almost makes him seem an innocent when weighed up against the numerous personal tragedies that Adriano has to manage, year in year out. When Billy eventually does find hope within himself, a random act of violence ironically ends his life.

Marty is the ‘every person’ who negotiates his journey through this unusual world of characters in order to answer the novel’s overall dramatic question as to whether he can successfully re-start his life in Sydney. He is forced by circumstances to adjudicate on each character’s view, and these judgments all evolve as Marty learns ways of working successfully with them despite their differences.

The development of these character relationships, having generated them from contrasting currents of philosophy, enabled me to develop the storyline in more detail and draft the set-up for the novel. This research actually helped make the writing process easier for me in the third stage despite the complexities of the

theory in the second stage. Other outcomes of theoretical engagement in regard to development of the storyline and characters are detailed in Chapters 5 and 6, before further discussion of linking themes to contexts continues in Chapter 7.

5. HISTORICAL RESEARCH

5.1 Redescribing History through Fiction

My research into the history of government involvement in the Australian music industry was necessary to help make the novel more plausible and significant. The approach I chose, however, turned on the seemingly paradoxical notion that fiction may, at times, be better able to re-tell or redescribe ‘history’ than non-fiction. Through a combination of careful research and imagination, the verisimilitude of fiction can sometimes provide readers with a more succinct, engaging and insightful appreciation of past events than a non-fictional description of so-called historical facts.

For my novel, I have used historical research to provide a semblance of reality. My preference for the genre of realism may seem especially ironic given that my theoretical research is informed by anti-Realist philosophy.³⁹ But, on the contrary, those who agree with Rorty’s views on absolute truth are left with what might be called context-dependent or *apparent* truths, a notion not dissimilar to verisimilitude

³⁹ The novel makes no claim to be an unqualified example of realism despite its “semblance of reality” and “my *preference* for the genre of realism”, because realism is an “exceptionally elastic critical term, often ambivalent and equivocal” (Cuddon, 552).

in fiction. Furthermore, in the absence of conclusive proof of absolute physical or moral realities, Rorty argues that literature and poetry have more important roles to play than science and technology in helping people decide how best to lead their lives. This is the reasoning behind his claims such as: the novels of Charles Dickens “were a more powerful impetus to social reform than the collected works of all the British social theorists of his day” (*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* 147).

Critical readers might argue that I am trying to push a line that ‘apparent truth’ is an acceptable substitute for ‘truth’. This would support their misconceptions that postmodernists believe that “anything goes” or “everything is as good as everything else” or “truth can be whatever you want it to be”. In their eyes, my efforts would merely be a revisionist’s attempt to rewrite the one true version of history to suit whatever political agenda I wanted to push. On the contrary, I freely admit to the blurring of so-called fact and imagination in my novel, I do *not* pretend it is a history in the non-fictional sense. But I have tried to create a story that is better able to give readers a sense of the merits and failings of government involvement with the Australian music industry than an array of media articles or Breen’s non-fictional documentation of key events and personalities in *Rock Dogs*.

Although I very much admire Breen’s work and am indebted for its ‘big picture’ account of high-level political decisions and music industry conflicts from 1982 to 1998 (that I was mostly not privileged to in my role at Ausmusic), I understood why a reviewer described *Rock Dogs* as “the most boring book on Australian music ever” (*In Music and Media Ezine Archive*). In Breen’s defence, his intent was to inform first, entertain second; but a novel that does not primarily entertain is even less likely to be read, and therefore not have any chance to inform, regardless of its historical worthiness.

Critics of those who redescribe history in novel form may have preferred it if I had documented the assistance that government associations gave to Yothu Yindi, Archie Roach and many other Indigenous acts. Such anecdotes may have some general appeal but they do not constitute a suitable story design for a novel. Perhaps I should have revealed to readers that Ausmusic's head office was in Melbourne and housed an Aboriginal music corporation called Songlines. That would certainly improve the historical accuracy of my account but, unfortunately, this fact could turn off some readers who believe Indigenous people are given too much government funding for meeting basic living needs, let alone artistic development. According to a Newspoll taken in 2000 for the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation:

Australia is a nation divided, confused and living in denial, with half the community believing Aborigines are not disadvantaged and most considering they receive too much government help and are not entitled to "special rights" (including native title). Despite accepting that Aborigines were harshly treated in the past, almost half the population agrees that Aborigines have themselves to blame for their plight and almost 60 per cent oppose a formal apology. (Gordon)

The results of this survey saddened but did not surprise me. My first-hand experiences of inter-racial relations in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland confirmed racist brutality towards Aboriginal people is not a phenomenon of the past. Overt political confrontation against discriminatory attitudes has its value, but developing a personal relationship with an Aboriginal character through the realm of the imagination also has value. In my view, writing a

novel that emphasises our common humanity is a better starting point for reconciliation than arguing over government funding arrangements.

As I discovered in my research, Rorty describes novelistic intentions such as mine as working in the direction of “greater human solidarity” (*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* 192). In section 4.4, I use the word ‘solidarity’ as an alternative description to ‘objectivity’ when it comes to establishing what people can or can not agree upon. Rorty also extends his use of the word ‘solidarity’ to the notion of people around the world developing a greater sense of common humanity, despite his disavowal of the notion of a deeper noumenal self or essence. The word ‘solidarity’ also has a left-wing connotation which likely rings alarm bells with conservative thinkers, even those who supported the role of the Polish trade union ‘Solidarity’ in helping bring an end to the Soviet Bloc. Nevertheless, I find Rorty’s definition of solidarity sits comfortably with my own novelistic intentions:

The view I am offering says that there is such a thing as moral progress, and that this progress is indeed in the direction of greater human solidarity. But that solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation – the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of “us”. (192)

My novelistic accounts of Billy’s and Nan’s pain and humiliation, mitigated by joys and successes, are primarily intended to offer a sense of solidarity between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in this manner. The exposé of the associated politics was a second priority.

Inventing a character called Billy was my way of condensing and dramatically embodying the engagement of music industry associations with fledgling musicians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Whether or not there was someone called Billy who was assisted to the top of the music charts by an Oz Rock Foundation is not important. I argue that what the story reveals about race relations and politics in late 20th-century Australia is of broader relevance to readers than the question of whether or not the events actually happened or the personalities existed.

5.2 Historical Overview of Music Industry Associations

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was motivated to cultivate more friendly media interests and improve its youth vote. The Labor Party's National Committee of Inquiry in March 1979 recommended: "Establishing additional media outlets sympathetic to the ALP" (Breen 27). In 1980 the Youth Policy Committee of the Victorian Branch of the ALP made proposals to increase the number of younger people involved in the party because its membership was ageing.

These initiatives signalled a new approach that was resisted by some of the class-based elements within the ALP. Breen notes: "Realisation that the party should reflect the changing nature of society was antipathetic to many, who operated from a class-based perspective which made it difficult to admit middle class and educated members and their interests to the ALP" (25).

This more inclusive and pluralistic approach to ALP membership relied on a liberal consensus "where tolerance, even promotion of difference, is acknowledged as the basis for a healthy society" (23). This mechanism of liberal consensus was:

“differentiated from liberalism by the fact that the government willingly supports and, where requested, subsidises such activities” (23).

In the lead-up to the Victorian election in 1982, Labor’s youth policy initiatives “erupted out of nowhere” (29). Breen describes their elevation to youth policy status as a “pragmatic process” (29).

After the ALP won government in Victoria in April 1982, it moved to reformulate comprehensively its youth, sport and recreation policies. Attempts were made to link youth policy with popular music, but this meant working against the ALP’s obsession of using sport to address youth interests, for example:

In December 1983, State Secretary of the Victorian ALP, Peter Batchelor, put 12 national sport and recreation policy proposals to Federal Labor. Eleven of them were about sport, as opposed to alternative or youth recreation. The only non-sport initiative was for funds to build ‘family leisure centres’. (32)

A key player who emerged at the national level in the youth-music nexus was Labor Party maverick Pete Steedman who lost his lower house seat in the 1984 federal election. In 1985 Steedman began working with Graham Stephen, an arts administrator and event manager. Their efforts led to publicly funded music events beginning with Rock the Royals on 4 November 1985 when the band INXS performed at Melbourne’s Concert Hall for Princess Diana and Prince Charles. This extraordinary concert was later broadcast on TV and is considered by Breen, I think rightly, as the flashpoint for a: “cultural policy whirlwind that brought global corporations, politicians, bureaucrats, musicians and the public together to make Australian music” (xiii).

In the wake of Rock the Royals, the Victorian Labor government sponsored further successful popular music events such as Rock the Docks and Rocking the Rails (16). The federal Labor government followed the Victorian lead with a national series of concerts from December 1986 to January 1987 called Australian Made which featured some of the nation's top rock music acts. The major sponsor of Australian Made was a community awareness organisation known as Street Beat which boasted then Prime Minister Bob Hawke as its patron (17).

Also in 1986, Linda Carroll and Andrew Funston were working on youth and music initiatives for the Victorian Department of Youth Affairs. Their efforts led to the successful development of a community music program known as The Push, launched in 1987. The Push was an innovative program in which young people were assisted in making their own music and staging their own music events (17).⁴⁰

Steedman and Stephen, however, were more interested in working directly with the big players in the music industry and managed to secure \$400,000 in funding from the Bicentennial Authority. Breen describes this funding as the seeds for a state-based popular music association which became known in 1988 as the Victorian Rock Foundation (VRF). Stephen became a board member of the VRF, but Steedman went on to become the Executive Director of the Australian Contemporary Music Development Company Limited, known as Ausmusic.

In 1987 Steedman had submitted a proposal to federal Cabinet which outlined the formation of a national popular music association aimed at assisting music exports, facilitating popular music initiatives and providing music industry training programs. Breen credits this achievement solely to Steedman, not Stephen:

⁴⁰ Since the 1996 federal election, The Push has continued to operate in a diminished capacity.

The blueprint for Ausmusic came from Steedman's remorseless commitment to his plan for a national popular music coordinating institution, which he effectively promoted. His impeccable contacts within Federal Labor as well as his close association as a consultant to Minister Dawkins made his task easier.

(46)

Neal Blewett, also a federal minister, confirmed this cosy relationship with (later Treasurer) Dawkins when he noted "an amusing letter from Steedman to Dawkins calling Ausmusic Dawkins' 'little honey chile'" (Blewett 170).

Steedman's Cabinet submission made use of recommendations from the McLeay Report (released in September 1986) into the funding priorities of the Music Board of, the nation's main arts funding body, the Australia Council. The McLeay Report aimed to democratise the funding of music projects by giving money to popular music instead of exclusively subsidising elite art music. This shift was signalled by statements such as:

The Committee believes that contemporary music, the vast bulk of which is commercial and popular, is an important art-form. We argue that significant public benefit could accrue from the selective assistance to popular contemporary music. Much of this assistance equates to the types of government infrastructure support readily available to more established industries rather than to conventional arts subsidies. (101)

Among the McLeay's Report's 30 recommendations was the proposal for a levy on blank audio tapes to compensate songwriters for lost revenue due to domestic

taping (Recommendation 24). This was to be the basis of Ausmusic's funding and led to the announcement of the company's formation in a press release by Minister Dawkins on 27 June 1988 (146). Prime Minister Bob Hawke officially opened Ausmusic on 12 May 1989 (156).

Australian Music Day was declared as the fourth Saturday each November, a day on which to celebrate Australia's home-grown music talent. In 1990 the Victorian Government gave Ausmusic a \$300,000 grant to ensure the head office did not move to Sydney(156).⁴¹ Ausmusic's head office was housed together with the Victorian Rock Foundation in a former primary school in South Melbourne.

Ausmusic quickly established offices in every state and territory, usually in cooperation with their respective departments for the arts or education.

Also in 1990, Coca-Cola Bottlers made a large donation to Ausmusic for a national video link-up of Australia's top popular music acts performing live from venues in every state on Australian Music Day. Breen claims the donation was: "\$1.5 million in cash (and close to \$3 million in extras, such as an advertising campaign featuring Kylie Minogue)" (157). Breen was a chairman of the Victorian Rock Foundation⁴² and had access to figures that I did not, however, the framed and oversized cheque ceremoniously presented by the Coca-Cola Bottlers to Ausmusic was still hanging above my desk when I joined Ausmusic in January 1993. The amount was \$500,000. Despite this difference, Breen and I agree that Ausmusic recouped \$750,000 from Australian Music Day 1990. Having established the

⁴¹ My novel locates the Oz Rock Foundation in Sydney because of the potential for humour as a Melburnian's 'fresh eyes' adjust to the city, and in fitting with a common perception of Sydney as Australia's 'head office'.

⁴² The VRF ceased trading in 1995, after government funding cuts, and was liquidated in 1996.

association of its US brand with Australian popular music, Coca-Cola Bottlers did not continue as major sponsors of Australian Music Day in subsequent years.

After the blank tape levy was defeated in the High Court by the Australian Tape Manufacturers Association in 1993 by a 4-3 decision, Ausmusic had to turn to newly elected Prime Minister Paul Keating for support – and received it to the tune of at least \$1.2 million dollars a year, until 30 June 1996 (157-58). After the election of the Coalition government in March 1996, Steedman's salary details were leaked to the media by the Department of Communications and the Arts. The resulting publicity carried headlines like: "Pete Steedman, the Sultan of Rock" and "The Perks of Pete" (Daly). The following quote sums up the situation which forced Steedman to resign the following week:

Pete Steedman, the *enfant terrible* of left-wing politics, is bouncing around his Melbourne office, expletives-not-deleted, angrily denouncing the latest outrage. He is suffering, perhaps, the greatest ignominy – allegations that he is living the high life on a top salary from a largely taxpayer-funded private company. Worse, there is widespread criticism because the company is using money from a separate \$750,000 fund, meant for young musicians, to pay for salaries and administration. The rumours in a sometimes-vicious music industry have painted a picture of a socialist Steedman turned capitalist, with all the five-star perks of high office. (Daly)

Although Steedman was forced out by bad publicity at the end of August 1996, he appointed his replacement, a recently sacked Radio Triple M boss, after most of the board of directors had resigned – much to the chagrin of Ausmusic's long-standing

general manager, Sue Gillard (who is not mentioned in Breen's history). During late 1996 and early 1997, the new Executive Director and Gillard retrenched the five-person 'Music Industry Skills' team of which I was the director.

The team had produced the world's first nationally accredited⁴³ rock music curriculum, sold student workbooks and training videos (produced with the generous cooperation of many celebrated musicians, band managers and audio technicians) to most secondary schools and almost all TAFE colleges in Australia. In 1995, at Parliament House in Sydney, the NSW Government had launched the Music Industry Skills curriculum as part of the TAFE NSW mainstream curriculum. This generated an unprecedented volume of sales. Although a team effort, this extraordinary success in NSW was, from what I observed, mostly due to Steedman's negotiating talents and political skills. The training materials also generated export revenue as overseas countries followed Ausmusic's lead, including the USA, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore. Breen acknowledges: "Ausmusic realised some of its potential by producing educational curricula within the terms of the national popular music agenda" (*Rock Dogs* xvi).

Later in 1997, Gillard became Managing Director of Ausmusic after it was sold for a token amount to a private Canadian-based company. At the time of writing Ausmusic has continued to survive on its sale of educational materials, with Gillard at the helm.

It is also probably worth noting the historical background to the debate which is dramatised in the novel surrounding the parallel importation of music. Although the Labor Government had initiated the move to allow parallel importation of recorded

⁴³ Accredited through the Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE).

music with its 1990 Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) report *Inquiry Into the Prices of Sound Recordings* (175), it was not implemented until 1998, ironically by the Coalition Government. In the eight years between, Steedman had shown he was not a government mouthpiece by publicly opposing the government's moves to introduce parallel importation of music. The global music corporations also opposed the PSA's recommendations to introduce parallel imports because it threatened their dominance and control of the marketplace. Although Steedman appeared to be siding with global corporate – not local consumer – interests, his fear was that parallel imports would mean reduced investment in local music production. He believed his stand was in the best interests of sustaining a local music industry as it tried to compete in a global marketplace.

Debate over the consequences of allowing parallel importation of music into Australia from 1998 has been muddied by the impact of a simultaneous worldwide increase in music piracy over the Internet and easier consumer access to CD burners (Needham).

5.3 Was it an Experiment in Neopragmatic Democracy?

There is *no* claim made in this creative thesis that the Hawke-Keating government's involvement in the Australian music industry was conducted as a deliberate or conscious experiment in a neopragmatic version of liberal democracy. Breen's research, however, confirms my own understanding that Ausmusic was established for the politically pragmatic reason of broadening the appeal of the Labor government to youth and other potential supporters.

In retrospect, a neopragmatic perspective can be applied to argue that establishing Ausmusic and similar organisations was a *more useful* way of winning

votes for Labor at future elections, rather than a deterministic consequence of the Party's foundational principles. This conflates two of the original senses of 'pragmatical' that were mentioned in section 4.1 – 'practical' and 'shrewd'.

While it may seem unfair to infer the philosophy of neopragmatism can be used to justify a particular political party's self-interest, it is this very confusion or blurring which may threaten the sustainability of a neopragmatic democracy. Hence, my first theme: In whose interest is truth? The 'Kantian' "ahistorical distinction" between morality and prudence may turn out to be a *more useful* dualism to retain than Rorty suggests (*Objectivity Relativism, and Truth* 197).

Another crucial dualism that is brought into focus, by applying a Rortian perspective to government experimentation with the music industry, is the distinction between what is public and what is private. Unlike the several other dualisms that Rorty wants to dispense with, the dualism of public and private is pivotal to his philosophy.

Indeed, this distinction is also pivotal to the functioning of the Oz Rock Foundation which has divided loyalties between public and private spheres – the interests of its shareholders and the discretion of its government funders. Oz Rock is not a one-off case. At the time of writing, for example, Australia's dominant telecommunications company, Telstra, is divided between government and private shareholders' interests.

The Oz Rock Foundation also demonstrates its capacity to take a private "project of self-creation"⁴⁴ (Billy's song) and turn it into a public commodity which

⁴⁴ This expression, or similar, is regularly used by Rorty to describe an individual's endeavours towards "what private perfection – a self-created, autonomous, human life – can be like" (*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* xiv).

has significant financial, legal and political consequences. The process involves de-politicising the song by a process of misrepresentation on the part of the video director who justifies his portrayal on commercial grounds – a *useful* tool for ‘coping’ in his environment. A minority political voice is effectively silenced. It would seem that the ‘relic’ of Platonic accuracy in representation, the mirror of nature, also seems to have it *uses* despite Rorty’s deconstructions.

Another irony that adds depth to viewing the Oz Rock experiment from a Rortian perspective is that the Labor government’s funding of the company ran counter to its economic philosophy of liberalism. This became something of a trademark contradiction as Prime Ministers Hawke and then Keating increasingly embraced free market reforms while generously subsidising artistic, social and infrastructure developments. That said, Rorty’s hope that democracy can deliver a more egalitarian future is certainly in line with Oz Rock’s aim to democratise the long-standing privileging of government arts subsidies by redistributing funding from the elite arts to the popular arts.

If the perspective I have outlined fails to convince a sceptical reader that the Oz Rock Foundation can be considered a viable example of neopragmatism’s ‘liberal democratic’ politics in action, then I contend that, at the very least, the experiment raises many of the same issues that apply to debates concerning the merits of neopragmatism. Other readers may even say we already live in a neopragmatic democracy, proving it is viable, the question then remains as to its sustainability. These issues will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

5.4 History and Indigenous Issues

When I began drafting the novel, there was no intention to include or exclude an Indigenous character or characters. At the end of my initial efforts to write the first draft, I wrote a scene in which the protagonist held a music-related workshop in a boys' prison. The figure of Billy, the teenage Aboriginal singer and guitarist, was inspired by a similar boy whom I met while holding a workshop at Turana juvenile prison in 1993.

After reading this draft, my principal supervisor suggested the Oz Rock boss, Perce Harrigan, could make Billy a rock star. This enabled me to find “the book within the book”. The year 1993 happened to be the Year of the Indigenous Person, and the scenarios that came to mind of an ex-politician manipulating a young Aboriginal for financial reasons were more compelling and complex for me than if his pawn were non-indigenous.

It was not until several months after redrafting the storyline on this basis that a colleague raised the sensitivities of writing about the ‘Other’ in novels. While I understood her point, my sense of Indigenous people as Other had been diminished over the years by working in two unrelated jobs in which some of my co-workers were Aboriginal. Firstly, working in a Kimberley cattle station and, secondly, sharing office space at Ausmusic with the Aboriginal music corporation Songlines.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, I realised my portrayal of an Aboriginal person was likely to come under scrutiny in case it appropriated Indigenous cultural material, was offensive,

⁴⁵ Ausmusic incorporated a number of Aboriginal teaching modules from Songlines into its nationally accredited Music Industry Skills curriculum such as: Contemporary Aboriginal Music, Koori Cultural Identity, Pre-invasion History and Post-invasion History.

patronising or stereotypical.⁴⁶ At the same time I was aware that if I were to exclude Indigenous characters I might be criticised for helping to perpetuate Indigenous invisibility. If I had chosen this latter option, and re-made Billy as non-indigenous, I would have felt as though such absence would be in some ways echoing the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

After writing the novel, I reflected on the various issues and debates incorporated into the story. The issue of Indigenous cultural identity stood out in a way I had not expected. As a result, I read a recent Victoria University doctoral thesis on cultural identity (Gow) which led me to briefly study the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Although these theorists' arguments support anti-foundationalist (post-essentialist) views⁴⁷, I found other scholarly writings on Australian Indigenous issues⁴⁸ were better able to help me appreciate the minefield of cultural sensitivities into which I was venturing with the hope that honourable intentions would redeem my portrayal of Indigenous characters.

To briefly recapitulate the thread of the novel that has particular relevance to Indigenous cultural identity: Marty tells Billy he does not have to write a song that overtly refers to his Aboriginality. Later, Billy reveals he has misconstrued this as a suggestion to conceal his Aboriginality. To Marty's dismay, the music video director interprets Billy's song as a teen romance 'gone wrong' because the violent and racist

⁴⁶ I was also aware that portraying certain events from my personal experience could lead to charges of stereotyping, and that claiming they *really* occurred would be a weak defence. For example, one morning at Ausmusic, some Songlines colleagues, with my agreement, levered open a boarded-up fireplace in my office in order to light a fire then cook some witchetty grubs they had found beneath gum trees in the grounds of our building. Portraying such an event in fiction could beggar belief and be seen as stereotyping. Testifying that I ate one of the witchetty grubs myself would be a weak defence against what might be perceived as pandering to prejudices.

⁴⁷ In summary, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the Oedipus complex is *not* a universal phenomenon and operates "as the primary means of ideological repression in a capitalist society". By their account, psychoanalysis acts "as a policing agent for capitalism" (Young 167-68).

⁴⁸ Cowlshaw and Morris, Grossman compilation, Muecke, Reynolds.

circumstances that inspired the song are not explicit in the lyrics. Billy is too overwhelmed by the whole rock-star process to worry about the final representation on television. Marty appeals to the video's director that a romantic interpretation will deprive the song of its hard-hitting 'rock n roll' edge and turn it into cabaret. The director dismisses Marty's objections as commercially unrealistic: "dead mothers don't sell".⁴⁹

To complicate matters, the authorship of the song is publicly credited to Billy, although without Marty's coaxing, rewriting and arranging, the song was likely to have gone nowhere even with the assistance of Harrigan. Marty did not insist on a songwriting credit because at the time he did not imagine this private vehicle of therapy would become a public commodity. It is a decision that embitters Marty when the song reaches the top of the music charts.

Marty maintains a version of his original position when reading the media reports of Billy's success as an 'Aboriginal musician'. Marty questions why the reports do not refer to him simply as a 'musician'. I think of this argument as reminiscent of those in the 1970s about 'women doctors', even though it could be contended that the use of 'Aboriginal musician' in a context of glamour and success may have a more positive impact than 'musician'.

After reading works by critics of contemporary Australian Indigenous issues, the major concern I have about the portrayal of Billy is that it might fall into a stereotype described by Michael Dodson as: "the lost soul estranged from her true nature" (Grossman 37). Never mind Rortian views on what constitutes a 'true nature', my reply is that I try to portray a genuine relationship between Marty and

⁴⁹ Page 154 of the novel.

Billy despite their cultural differences. This is in keeping with Dodson's plea for a "genuine *relationship*" between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (37). He places the emphasis on 'relationship', as opposed to defining Aboriginality by how it compares or relates to the dominant culture.

I agree with this aim, but a comparison of cultures is almost unavoidable in an urban environment. Therefore, I see the main concern as ensuring such comparisons do not portray the non-indigenous culture as superior to the Indigenous. I like to think that before Billy is stabbed, he shows he can rise above the failings of a non-indigenous cultural system.

The key here is empathy. Billy is not a paragon of excellence, but readers may come to consider how they themselves would have fared in Billy's shoes. On page 52 of the novel, the protagonist, Marty considers that, but for a bit of luck, he himself might have been incarcerated. A character without weaknesses is in danger of becoming one-dimensional and implausible. Furthermore, the story is written from the point of view of a non-indigenous protagonist, therefore I have not presumed to offer the reader Billy or Nan's direct thoughts as an omniscient narrator would.

Regardless of possible criticism of my stance on these issues, it is very much within a Rortian view to create a space within a liberal democracy for these issues simply to be raised. I do *not* contend the novel fills absences or deficiencies in the number of Indigenous voices being heard, but I believe it can support efforts to advocate reconciliation with Indigenous Australians despite the current conservative political climate and populist cynicism which at times seems determined to de-rail and bury the process.

During the writing of this creative thesis, two events occurred which reinforced my belief that it is worthwhile negotiating the risks and sensitivities of writing about Indigenous Australians in the hope for better racial relations.

The so-called 'Redfern Riots' on 15-16 February 2004 were described by Australia's only Aboriginal currently in parliament, Aden Ridgeway, as "the worst race riot in Australian history". He claimed the riots which followed the death of 17-year-old Thomas 'TJ' Hickey were:

...an extreme expression of the mistrust between Aboriginal youth and the Police Service set against a backdrop of poverty, a lack of jobs and limited education. This combined with a general sense of hopelessness that any young person there might have greater life opportunities beyond Redfern, Waterloo or surrounds. (Ridgeway)

The 'Palm Island riots' on 26 November 2004, followed the announcement of a police autopsy on Cameron Doomadgee who had died while in police custody. Palm Island elders claimed deaths in custody had actually risen since the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were released in April 1991. In response, the Federal government conceded that "progress in reducing Aboriginal deaths in custody had been slow" (Shaw).

Offering a novel into this climate of frustration and fear, exacerbated by the abolition of ATSIC in 2004⁵⁰, is to walk into a historical battlefield that I would have been foolish to ignore during my research. Keith Windschuttle's 2002 book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* re-ignited the so-called 'History Wars' over

⁵⁰ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was abolished by the Coalition government from 1 July 2004. It was a body with elected representatives established in 1990 that enabled Indigenous Australians to formally be involved in government decisions which affected their lives.

whether the arrival of non-indigenous people to Australia was destructive and genocidal or benign and civilising. Don Watson, the historian and Keating biographer, derided Australia's 'History Wars' as "an insidious bit of intellectual slumming, which the media and academia are not intellectually or morally equipped to resist or even understand" (Legge).

While viewing and attending several of these debates, one element kept proving to be a stumbling block for untrained historians: the role of imagination in documenting history. On the face of it, this notion of using imagination appears to suggest historians can replace facts and figures with fantasy. Instead, historians are able to use the facts and figures as a springboard into a more imaginative and deeper appreciation of what it was like to be involved in historical events – and not just from the perspective of the 'winning' side.

To develop my own understanding of how imagination can be used to credibly bring history to life and reveal new insights, my research turned to the ways in which political novels, the genre of my interest, used imagination in their treatment of history.

6. GENRE RESEARCH

6.1 Defining the 'Political' Novel

Before I could appreciate the ways in which political novelists have used history as a springboard into their fiction and literary non-fiction, I had to grapple with the definition of a 'political' novel. This issue led me straight back to the public/private split advocated by Rorty, and in particular how this split could be used to silence women's voices if so-called feminist issues were relegated to the private domain (Cran). Indeed, this split could also be used to silence Indigenous voices or any voices of the 'Other' so they are absent in our national/global conversations.

Extending this line of thinking into my novel, I decided to show how Billy's private song/story of rednecks murdering his mother was effectively silenced by the music video director on its way to becoming a public commodity. The commodification of this 'private' agony creates an ongoing royalty stream through the financial-legal institutions of the music industry that eventually pay Nan what amounts to a private superannuation.

This storyline was designed to show how difficult it is *in practice* to distinguish between public and private concerns. It led me to conclude that there is no single, universal set of criteria or agreement that categorically defines a novel as ‘political’.

In broad terms, any novel could be categorised as ‘political’ or having a political dimension if it portrays power relations that involve struggle or conflict. If there is little or no conflict in a relationship then it is highly unlikely to be suitable material for an extended written narrative because conflict is central to the notion of drama itself, both serious and comic.

Simply because an author may state their novel is *a*political, does not mean that it is, or the political and social dimensions of its writing are eliminated. Quite the contrary, such an intention can be construed as a political decision in the negative sense. Moreover, such claims may be viewed as a conservative strategy designed to neutralise, de-politicise and control debate which may exceed the text. Texts, however, cannot be insulated from wider social and political concerns and contexts. Nor can the interpretation of texts be so easily controlled. As Roland Barthes argues, readers create their own (political) meaning and interpretation (Barry 66). Such meanings often escape the bounds of authorial intention.

Words themselves carry values and meanings which have evolved through human usage. This evolution necessarily involves decisions, both conscious and unconscious, regarding the semantics of words and their patterns of formation. The selection and linking of words in a novel is political in the sense that the writing process involves making decisions regarding, at the very least, implicit value judgments. Such a definition assumes politics is not defined solely in relation to the affairs of government, and that political power exists beyond the boundaries of ‘the state’.

The paradox here is that to say all writing can be considered ‘political’ renders the notion of a political genre as superfluous. If anything can be political then, in effect, nothing is political.

By contrast, a narrow definition of what constitutes a political novel might be similar to the one proposed by Morris Edmund Speare in 1924 in his landmark treatise *The Political Novel*.

What is a Political Novel? It is a work of prose fiction which leans rather to ‘ideas’ than to ‘emotions’; which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation; and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or of the forces which constitute government. In this exposition the drawing room is frequently used as a medium for presenting the inside life of politics. (ix)

Writers such as Charles Dickens, whose works might be thought of as important motivating factors towards political change, are classified by Speare as ‘social writers’.

Dickens and Thackeray, and Henry James, as social writers, deal with men and women as men and women: the variety of common human emotions they may report is endless, and the more usual and familiar they are to us the better is it for those writers. But the political novelist, if he is to be true to his craft, must be dominated, more often than not, by *ideas* rather than by *emotions*. The people who play his leading parts are above the common average of intelligence. They are endowed not with common joys and common sorrows,

but are men and women sophisticated in their tastes, highly trained in the complex world of affairs and of diplomacy, dealing at first hand with problems of theology, of education, of economic barter and exchange, of philosophy. (23)

To try and mediate between narrow and broad definitions by defining political novels as those which are about politics or offer a political argument, is to sidestep the question of what politics is. Unfortunately, Irving Howe's *Politics and the Novel* exhibits such a sidestep.

By a political novel I mean a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting – though again a qualification is necessary, since the word 'dominant' is more than questionable. (17)

Michael Wilding in *Political Fictions* also points out that Howe assumes a novel is a realist novel, which Wilding labels a "bourgeois" assumption (3).

The Macquarie Dictionary begins its six definitions of politics with "the science or art of political government", followed by "the practice or profession of conducting political affairs". The other four meanings are variations on these themes. The closest Rorty comes to precisely defining politics is when he defines "the political problem" as: "the problem of creating social cooperation between human beings...how to get them to live in the same community with people who have a different image of the human ideal" (*Truth, Politics and Post-modernism* 21-2).

Literary theorist, Terry Eagleton, defines the political as "no more than the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations which this involves" (169).

These three sources have influenced my own proposed definition of politics: The relations within and between population networks that involve the struggle for power. Even though this definition of politics admits any struggle for power can be classified as ‘political’, when it is joined by the word ‘novel’ I expect the content to emphasise⁵¹ the way institutional practices affect human networks. Institutions, however – such as governments, churches, educational systems or political parties – do not have to be portrayed. The influences of institutions can be embodied in individuals within a private sphere such as Huckleberry Finn and Jim on their raft. The race relations at the centre of *Huckleberry Finn* were also at the centre of arguably the biggest political event in Mark Twain’s lifetime (1835-1910) – the American Civil War (1861-65). I regard Speare’s distinction between the social and political as spurious and do not accept his assessment that a novel like *Huckleberry Finn* is a social, not a political, novel, even if he were to quote Twain’s opening ‘disclaimer’:

NOTICE

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR,

Per G.G, Chief of Ordnance. (xix)

I argue that this notice is intended to ‘get under the guard’ of prospective readers who suspect Twain might want to lecture them about the need to improve race relations.

⁵¹ I concede this emphasis is in the eyes of the reader. For instance, I read Shane Maloney’s so-called crime novels only because I enjoy their political satire.

There is no chance of winning hearts and minds if a reader's preconceptions and prejudices prevent her or him opening the novel in the first place.

My discussion of what makes a novel 'political' may seem unnecessary since my novel would likely be classed as 'political', even by Speare's narrow definition, because it includes politicians and government processes. Nonetheless, before I explain in section 6.4 how I have consciously used an inversion of *Huckleberry Finn* to help shape "Making Noises", I want to clearly establish why I consider Twain's masterpiece to be a political novel, despite it appearing to be a (mere) 'social' novel.

I now to return to the topic mentioned at the opening of this chapter – the imaginative use of history by political novelists.

6.2 The Political Novel and the Historical Imagination

The book which convinced me of the legitimacy of using imagination when writing history was Lee Horsley's *Political Fiction and the Historical Imagination*. She sums up the argument at the crux of her book as such:

It is entirely possible to stress the subjective, imaginative elements involved in historical understanding without reducing historical narratives to nothing more than 'verbal fictions' – without losing the pressure towards responsible knowing. One of the objects of this study has been to explore some of the most traditional literary means of bringing alive, within the novel, everything which subjectively shapes or undermines a reliable grasp of historical reality, whilst at the same time retaining 'reasonable' standards. (254)

Horsley examines the way political fictions portray history such as Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, DH Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, Swift's *Modest Proposal*,

Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men*⁵², and Joseph Heller's *Good as Gold*.

Horsley's three main contentions in regard to these and similar books are:

1. Wholly objective historical knowledge is "an impossible goal" (2).
2. Stories that 'really' happened can be "artistically shaped to evoke much more than a bare account of the facts could do" (3).
3. There is a "middle way" between "reason and irrationalism" that enables literature to give readers a deeper appreciation of history (256).

To support her contentions, Horsley claims the political fictions she has featured in her book have used narratives as contexts in which to test history. "In creating fictions about the intellectual quest for political understanding, they use empirical narratives as *contexts* (my emphasis) within which they can test the robustness of imaginative constructions of historical reality" (254).

I argue that "Making Noises" fits within Horsley's "middle way" approach to history, because it is a political fiction that provides a context between "reason and irrationalism" in which to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a political experiment. I acknowledge that I have selected, shaped and embellished 'historical facts' to fit the demands of a novel-length narrative. My intention is to offer a more engaging, evocative and insightful account than provided by a factual historical description such as *Rock Dogs*. I have undertaken this project for the reason that Horsley argues is of prime importance in political fiction: to add to "ongoing political thought and action" (6). In addition, as I will explain in the following section, I discovered a 'sub-genre' of political novels that added to ongoing thought

⁵² Although Horsley analyses this novel, its content is generally classified as literary non-fiction.

and action concerning democracy which connected with Rorty's philosophical reflections.

6.3 The Sub-genre of 'American Democracy' Novels

There are some insightful books on the theory and practice of writing political fiction. Generally speaking, I could best identify with those discussing political situations in Australia, Britain and the USA, although I did find work by writers such as Isabel Allende also provided interesting insights – such as the use of magical realism in Latin American political fiction. A revelation I particularly enjoyed was that Winston Churchill, about a century ago, was writing political fiction that criticised corporate greed justified in the name of shareholder interests (Speare 311). *Mr Creve's Career* might find a receptive market if re-published today.

The book of theory that had the biggest influence on my novel was *Natural Right and the American Imagination: Political Philosophy in Novel Form* by Catherine Zuckert. She analyses a sub-genre of political novels which I have called 'American democracy' novels. The authors of these novels are: James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. The theme for her book is:

...the way in which the novelists' often differing theoretical reflections have led them nevertheless to agree on the need for a peculiarly democratic kind of literary political teaching... The works selected all depict a withdrawal from civil society as well as some kind of return. (ix-x)

Zuckert's work is interdisciplinary, between political science and literary studies, and focuses on the way the philosophical and political principles embodied in the

American Declaration of Independence have been explored in the novels of these so-called 'canonical' American authors.

Many commentators have pointed out a recurrent theme or motif in the American literature of the United States: the hero who withdraws from civil society to live in nature... I shall argue that American novelists have used this motif in reflecting on the "state of nature" philosophy on which this nation was explicitly founded. (1)

The novels that Zuckert analyses have in one way or another attempted to persuade Americans of a paradox that is summarised in the quote above the entrance to Harvard Law School: "The wise restraints that make men free".

In the first century or so after America's independence from Britain, the rule of democracy was not something fully accepted by all American citizens.⁵³ So-called freedom on the early American frontier could bring out the worst instincts in humans, as postulated by 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his 'state of nature' theory.⁵⁴ Hobbes proposed the 'social contract' in which individuals sacrifice some of their freedoms to a superior common power (government) in order to protect themselves from the brute instincts of others and themselves. Hobbes also argued that sovereignty resided in the government or monarch.

Hobbes' contemporary John Locke accepted the social contract, but he argued sovereignty resided in the people – who could legitimately overthrow any government or monarchy that did not properly discharge its duties to its citizens.

⁵³ I found this a little surprising since I was born in the latter half of the 20th century following the USA's major role in the defeat of fascism in World War II, and then witnessed its triumphalism over the disintegration of Soviet communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁵⁴ The "state of nature" according to Hobbes refers to how humans behave beyond the effective reach of common laws, such as in a frontier situation.

Locke's philosophy was most famously expressed through the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. The Declaration's first paragraph appeals to the "laws of nature and nature's God", then the second paragraph lists the "self-evident" truths:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (*Encarta*)

The philosophical-political justification of American democracy is therefore considered to lie in the self-evident 'natural rights' of humans not in the 'divine rights' of kings. The novelists that Zuckert analyses have tried to provide fuller explanations of, and investigations into, the ambiguous notion of 'natural rights' as the *foundation* of American democracy.

I emphasise 'foundation' vis-a-vis Rorty's 'anti-foundationalism'. The 'natural rights' of humans are important examples of the essentialist "ladders"⁵⁵ up which Rorty says democracy has climbed. Zuckert and all her canonical novelists have essentialist and foundationalist assumptions underpinning their visions of what humans are 'really' like. I believe, however, that setting these assumptions aside does

⁵⁵ See quote on pages 2-3 of this exegesis.

not necessarily make for a momentous shift in approaches to literature, but rather a different philosophical “gloss” as Rorty argues.⁵⁶

“Making Noises” is not concerned with whether humans are essentially good or bad. It does not attempt to push a particular angle on the ‘nature versus convention’ arguments that typically arise during debates about ‘natural rights’. That said, on page 106 of the novel, Marty and Harrigan do make a passing reference to the contingency of foundational principles. Their exchange makes clear that, only one year after the Australian High Court’s historic decision on Native Title, they consider it ‘common sense’ that *terra nullius* was a legal principle without foundation used to justify the dispossession of Australia’s Indigenous peoples.

This led me to the question of whether the fiction of *terra nullius* is so different to the rhetoric of the Declaration of American Independence – especially as Australia was being colonised during the same era as the American War of Independence. On the face of it, the two were poles apart because the Declaration argues “all men are created equal” but the doctrine of *terra nullius* does not recognise Indigenous Australians as having rights equal to those of the colonists. Yet, before the Declaration was announced⁵⁷, Thomas Jefferson was forced to delete a “long paragraph denouncing the slave trade and the whole institution of slavery as a ‘cruel war against human nature itself’” (*Encarta*).

In my view, this deletion helps to explain why Zuckert’s novelists were so concerned with the philosophical foundation of natural rights and why, over a

⁵⁶ See the quote on page 41 regarding this different philosophical “gloss”.

⁵⁷ The American Declaration of Independence had been passed by Congress on 2 July 1776, but in the debate that followed before it was announced on 4 July, Jefferson was forced to make changes.

hundred years after the Declaration, Twain targeted slavery's social, economic and religious justifications through *Huckleberry Finn*.

6.4 Making the Link into the Sub-genre

After reading Zuckert's analyses, I attempted to transpose Twain's concerns to a contemporary Australian environment in order to create a different window on to racism. I realised Marty and Billy were a type of role reversal of Huck and Jim, and my jail setting was an inversion of the "state of nature" on the raft. To reinforce the inversion I decided to have Billy declare that he felt freer in jail than outside, that is, he felt a perverse type of freedom in a form of bondage. This was not to suggest jail is a good thing for Aboriginal teenagers, it was to foreground the bewildering range of choices faced in a contemporary consumerist culture that is the product of so-called freedom in a populist political system. The jail was to be a metaphorical raft on a subterranean river of modern society and Billy clung to this raft out of a perverse sense of security.

My initial attempts to make the intertextual allusion explicit in my novel resulted in clumsy, didactic passages such as the following:

'You ever read *Huckleberry Finn*?' I asked.

'Heard of it,' Billy replied.

'Huck's a white kid who escapes his stuffed-up family and helps a black slave called Jim escape down a river on a raft.'

'Does the slave stay free?'

'Find out for yourself.'

'Well, fuck you, Marty.'

‘You want me to spoil the ending for you?’

‘Yeah, why not?’

‘Look the point is,’ I began, thinking I was starting to sound like Harrigan, ‘they realised enjoying nature on a raft wasn’t freedom.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because they were easy targets for thugs and crooks.’

‘A big bloody sheriff save em, I bet?’

‘Nuh,’ I said, ‘but they do ask for help from “the system” despite all its failings.’

‘You tryin to give me the rave that I can’t get by on my own?’

‘I’m trying to tell you the raft gave them relief from their abusive homes but not freedom.’

Billy looked thoughtful, pausing for a while before saying, ‘This jail, she’s like my raft.’

‘Inside’s your escape?’

‘Yeah.’

‘From stuff at home?’

‘Not jes that, it’s all those friggin things I hafta decide, you know?’

‘Decisions, options, freedom of choice?’ I said sarcastically.

‘Fucken *freedom*...’ Billy trailed off.

‘I agree, it’s more like the *demon* of choice.’

‘Easy enough for you.’

‘Easi-er, but being white doesn’t get you off.’

‘Sorry,’ Billy said with no sense of irony.

‘Don’t be,’ I insisted, then added, ‘it’s a pity Huck couldn’t hang around to watch freedom of choice spinning out of control.’

On reflection I thought this dialogue was dreadful and eventually replaced it with the exchange on pages 113-115. In the new passage, the point remains about Billy’s sense of freedom in jail, but the stilted dialogue to force the intertextual reference is dropped in favour of a sub-text that leads to the metaphorical and plot device of Billy’s leather jacket.

No doubt a passage such as the one above would have incurred more wrath from Twain than James Fenimore Cooper’s attempts to persuade Americans of the benefits of democracy. Cooper’s ‘Natty Bumpo’ tales on the American frontier were intended as didactic novels, but readers bought them for their adventure not their political message. Cooper then “stopped writing novels for a time and turned to a directly argumentative explication of the Declaration of Independence, in *The American Democrat*”(Zuckert 11).

In Twain’s *Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses*, cited by Zuckert (133), he tried to correct the return to nature depicted in Cooper’s novel *The Deerslayer*. Twain argued Cooper’s material was poorly organised and flawed by things such as “the inauthenticity and inconsistency” of dialogues. No wonder Twain was at pains to avoid an obviously didactic approach, as signposted by his “Notice”, quoted in section 6.1.

In a similar vein, I have intended the opening chapter of “Making Noises” to immediately dispel any suspicions that the story might attempt to persuade the reader of pro-reconciliation or other ‘serious’ views. The use of street language

(“door-bitch”), a dash of swearing, a slightly silly simile (“like an alarmed prairie dog”) and the vulgarity of the song title (“*Don’t Marry the Bush Pig, Brother*”) I hope lead the reader into thinking my intentions are *not* motivated by politics or philosophy, let alone a broadside at the particularly conservative social climate in Australia following the Coalition election victory in 1996.

In an early storyline for “Making Noises”, Billy was to have a narrow escape near the end after which he gains his freedom. Then, however, I read Zuckert quoting Ernest Hemingway:

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*... It’s the best book we’ve had... There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since...but if you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. (161)

Hemingway’s objections are not so much that Twain provides a happy ending where perhaps he should not have, he has philosophical problems with Twain’s view of social contract theory. “By showing not only that Huck withdrew from civil society in search of freedom but also that he had to return to secure it, Twain had dramatically ratified the arguments of the social contract theorists” (161). Zuckert says, however, that Hemingway:

...denied that human beings can remove or protect themselves from this deadly combat by promising to obey a government, which would then act to secure their rights. Nor did Hemingway think that humans can find solace and support in private...(because) natural feelings are essentially transitory. Any oath, commitment or contract based on such natural feelings will, therefore,

eventually find its source or foundation eroded; any institution, partnership, or compact based on perfectly natural desires and passions will inevitably become an empty, external, oppressive shell. There is no natural basis for any enduring form of human community – public or private. (162)

Zuckert claims Hemingway's views anticipate Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* "a few years later" (181). In Rorty's *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, he claims that (in brief summary) Heidegger's views in *Being and Time* were close to pragmatic but that later he became more of an essentialist philosopher with a fascist-sympathising "world view".

On my reading, Hemingway's views that natural rights have no ultimate foundation coincide with Rorty's views, despite Hemingway's essentialist language. Where they differ is that Rorty sloughs off essentialist language, advocates that hope is of greater human value than philosophy, and suggests the domains of the public and private should operate in different ways. It would seem *Huckleberry Finn's* message of hope when Jim finally gains his freedom sits well with Rorty.

Hemingway, however, had another argument that resonated with me: humans can not really value life until confronted by death when they "perceive the essential emptiness of all social and political opinions and institutions" (Zuckert 181-82). I make a subtle intertextual allusion to Hemingway's Nick Adams stories on page 114 when I say the teenage Marty was looking for a "reason to live" when he left home around Billy's age. This started me thinking that I should kill one of the characters even though I had not planned to in my original drafts.

It was while reading Zuckert's analysis of Melville's *Billy Budd* that I had the sensation of a 'bolt from the blue' when it crossed my mind to kill Billy in my novel. I would like to say my choice of 'Billy' for the character's name was a deliberate intertextual allusion but it was a coincidence. My decision to kill Billy stemmed from similarities with Billy Budd: both were charismatic 'black' figures; both were trying to survive in Western institutions (an Australian jail and a British naval ship); both were relative innocents in a hostile environment. I concluded that my Billy would also have to lose his life in unjust circumstances as did Billy Budd.

My Billy's death, however, did not embody Melville's arguments about the essential goodness of human nature despite civilisation (similar to Rousseau) and why people need legal protection (Zuckert 121). Billy in "Making Noises" is killed by a random act of violence in an institution which is meant to be securely supervised by officers of the law. I am not suggesting my novel invalidates Melville's arguments, but it does offer a different view that emphasises the brutal and arbitrary effects the law can have which are much less ceremonious than the trial and execution of Billy Budd. Even though my Billy's death does not fit the common image of deaths in custody by suicide or police brutality, the intention is to avoid stereotypical perceptions of causes while still addressing the issue.

I doubt whether a majority of *non*-indigenous Australians would see an Aboriginal prisoner who dies in police custody as an example of a tragic hero like Billy Budd. In addition, for any heroism or martyrdom that Indigenous Australians may read into a death in custody, there is likely a painful awareness that it might be just another senseless loss of life that makes little or no impression on the national conscience. In the realm of the imagination, though, a reader can develop empathy

with an Indigenous character whose death and funeral might evoke a solidarity that is difficult to achieve through the forum of politics.

In summary, the analyses presented by Zuckert on Twain, Hemingway and Melville, helped me invert, develop and contrast similar political and philosophical concerns from the sub-genre of American democracy novels and transpose them into the Australian domain. Even though “Making Noises” does not make essentialist assumptions, I see this point as a different philosophical “gloss” not a radical departure from the ongoing problem of how human beings can live together peacefully and fulfillingly. While Zuckert’s analyses of works by Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Faulkner were not as significant in the construction of my novel, the theme in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* regarding public-private hypocrisy will be raised during the discussion in Chapter 7.

6.5 Finding the Novel’s Voice

While my research for “Making Noises” was largely carried out at an intellectual level of analysis, argument and comparison, a good deal of imagination had to be used in order to construct the storyline and the details of its series of contexts. The line-by-line writing of the novel involved a more personal and emotive process of trial and error in order to find the ‘voice’ for the novel.

The notion of a novel’s ‘voice’ can be contentious, however, I use it here mainly to refer to the personality of the narrator’s voice. Given the target audience and content of the story, I felt the two main contenders for an effective narratorial style were a generic third-person-omniscient point of view or a more idiosyncratic first-person narrator. The feedback on early drafts from supervisors and test readers

reached a consensus of what ‘worked best’ (a suitably pragmatic notion) for my material and my abilities. It was a first-person voice that varied between idiosyncratic humour and matter-of-fact descriptions during certain moments of more serious drama.

Before muddling through the process of trial and error to find the ‘voice’ suitable for the novel, I wrote down 15 changes that I wanted to make to the writing style and voice I had used for the young adult readership of *Feral Tracks*. Reflecting on these changes after writing my first draft of “Making Noises”, I condensed them into 10 summary points:

1. Use a wider vocabulary.
2. Increase the maximum length of sentences.
3. Develop a more tightly structured storyline.
4. Use higher stakes.
5. Include more contradictions in characters.
6. Include more obvious character arcs where appropriate.
7. Include more unexpected reactions by characters under pressure.
8. Examine more sophisticated issues.
9. Use weightier moral dilemmas.
10. Show a greater awareness of conventions in the genre.

As well as these criteria, my overall aim was to clearly relate the story to the reader, not try to impress with ‘clever’ language. I have largely been persuaded in this aim by George Orwell’s famous maxim: “Good prose is like a window pane”. For me, this not only meant keeping the writing style simple and direct, but also using conversational exchanges, rather than detailed narratorial explanations, to

demystify complex issues such as the parallel importation of compact discs, statutory problems with the implementation of a blank tape levy, and the exploitative terms of recording contracts.

Additionally, I tried to follow Orwell's advice on keeping expression fresh and lively instead of rehashing tired phrases or labouring metaphors. The prose that I thought best suited a general 18- to 40-year-old audience should read like a spontaneous first strike even though it is actually the product of numerous rewritings and much editing.

When it came to finding the 'voice' for the exegesis I was well aware of the general advice at academic symposiums and seminars to 'integrate' the voice of the novel and exegesis. At first, this advice seemed to imply that the voice had to be consistent across the two. Later on, I regarded the requirement to 'integrate' as suggesting the voice in the exegesis should *complement* the voice in the novel. After all, there are two distinct but allied purposes to each volume of this creative thesis – the story in my novel is designed to entertain a general audience; the exegesis is designed to present a formal explanation to a select group of specialists. I regard this complementarity as a type of partnership, not an antagonism, between the two modes of writing.

This is where I will leave the explanation of the research that informed the writing of this thesis. In the following chapter, the focus is on further critical assessment of the philosophical and political issues discussed so far, with the aim of developing arguments in support of the overall perspective which is presented in Chapter 8.

7. FURTHER DISCUSSION

7.1 Dramatising the Themes of the Novel

A writer who is concerned with addressing issues of social justice may apply a number of different strategies in order to engage and convince the reader of certain views. This does not prevent the reader from producing their own meanings from the text, including the possibility that their interpretation is contrary to or substantially different from the author's intentions.

One strategy for a writer concerned with social justice is to expose general readers to issues of inequity, disguised as entertainment, in the hope they will be persuaded to reach conclusions they would not otherwise have had the time, inclination or awareness to make. A story, however, may not be appreciated at the political or philosophical levels, only the individual level, and be interpreted in ways that the writer has not anticipated. That said, if a reader simply enjoys the adventures within a novel like *Huckleberry Finn*, failing to see slaves as more human,

and therefore not being persuaded in favour of emancipation, then I believe this would be an exception to the rule – with no harm done.

If a writer intends to dramatise a world-view in which she or he advocates for a less cruel and more equitable society, then the story's success will likely turn on how convincingly the salient issues are represented. This raises questions about the factors and issues that guide writers' representations of their points of view. For my novel, the guiding factors and issues were summed up in its five themes:

1. In whose interest is truth?
2. Can redescribing history help make a better future?
3. Can the public and private actually be split in practice?
4. Does the constant renegotiation of morals genuinely offer more hope?
5. Can truth really emerge from "free and open encounter" in a world of 'spin'?

While it is not for me to say whether or not these themes have been convincingly dramatised, I will explain how my engagement with each question has shaped the novel.

In whose interest is truth?

"Success makes right"⁵⁸ is the key expression in regard to this theme. It is immediately followed by the rejoinder "at least while it lasts". The context in which it is introduced is Marty's falling out with Billy after Billy's triumphant debut onto the music charts. Billy believes he now knows how things *really* work. Marty then broods over his frustration of trying to challenge Billy's drug-taking without it appearing like sour grapes. It is Billy's failure to follow up his first hit successfully, then his arrest for drugs two years later that vindicate Marty's position.

⁵⁸ Page 193 of the novel.

Likewise, Nicola Cadby's success at the federal election means her 'truths' eventually prevail. As Harrigan might say: Cadby got the numbers and that is all that matters in politics. There is no final arbitration on the debates they have had throughout the novel on issues such as parallel imports, government involvement with industry, the blank tape levy and so on. There is no appeal to overarching paradigms or epistemology to judge which knowledge is most accurate. The outcomes are the results of alleged "free and open encounter" in a liberal democracy and supposedly that is what matters.

On the one hand, the notion that "success makes right" supports Rorty's contention that the 'truthfulness' of knowledge, particularly science, can only be judged by its practical success. There is no "independent test for truth" (Niznik and Sanders 114), despite science providing humans with ever more powerful systems of prediction and control. On the other hand, the rejoinder "at least while it lasts" brings into focus the temporary nature of relying on the democratic process for assessing the validity of what the adjective 'true' is applied to.

This is why the novel highlights contexts in which so-called truth can be manufactured by those in power, distorted by self-interest, then reified by the media if it helps sales or ratings. This sort of behaviour is rife in the postmodern world, but it does not make it excusable or acceptable. In this exegesis I can explicitly state neopragmatism does not attempt to justify such dishonesty even though it rejects a conception of truth based on correspondence. The absence of an independent test for truth does not mean "truth can be anything you want it to be". I see this as a naive and pre-critical response to challenging the correspondence theory, which is why I avoided anyone in the novel blatantly saying: "If it's useful to me then it's true".

I accept Rorty's arguments regarding the indefinability of absolute truth, in the same sense that I cannot define infinity⁵⁹ even though I can represent its notion with a human construct (∞). Nevertheless, I think his logic needs to be qualified by saying that *aiming* for absolute truth is a useful motivator for human behaviour even if it is not ultimately achievable. For instance, every year scientists document more facts about the universe because they are interested in how the universe 'really' works. I also believe the *goal* or *ideal* of pursuing absolute moral or ethical truth is both desirable and worthy in a liberal democracy because it can guide the process of working towards more humane and equitable societies. Even from a neopragmatic perspective, I believe the ideal of absolute truth is still 'useful' for motivating human endeavour and progress.

Public life does not generally allow for subtleties such as Rorty's different philosophical "gloss". The public can too easily jump to the conclusion that "postmodern relativist" philosophies, such as neopragmatism, condone the construction of truth out of self-interest or whimsy. People may mistakenly conclude that, for example, a student could submit in a history exam that the Cambodian Holocaust under Pol Pot never happened, then somehow have this "constructed as truth" by neopragmatists if they thought it useful for the student to pass.

Rorty dismisses this type of misconception. He maintains that a pragmatic conception of truth offers a new "gloss" to philosophical and theoretical endeavour, but the consequences are *not* merely cosmetic. It is one thing to argue that science is not absolutely objective, but this does not adequately convey how other

⁵⁹ I can think of numbers so large that they have no formal names, but someone else can always add another number to them, and so on.

‘descriptions’⁶⁰ of the world, with pretensions of objectivity, are assumed to be privileged over others. The notion of ‘the winners’ writing history and privileging their descriptions over those of ‘the losers’ leads me into my next theme.

Can redescribing history help make a better future?

Terra nullius was the doctrine on which the British and Australian legal systems based their arguments that Indigenous ‘ownership’ of lands did not exist prior to colonisation (Nygh and Butt 426). This non-indigenous legal ‘description’ has been privileged over Indigenous ‘descriptions’ for more than two hundred years. The dominant legal system maintained that proof of ‘ownership’ required certain demarcations and improvements to the land, such as fences and buildings.

The ‘Mabo’ judgment by the High Court of Australia in 1992 exposed that *terra nullius* was a self-justifying legal fiction. The result was not simply a new “gloss”. In recognising Indigenous ownership of Murray Island, an Australian legal authority ruled for the first time that native title had survived settlement. The *Native Title Act* followed in 1993. In 1996 the High Court’s ‘Wik’ judgment clarified the conditions under which pastoral leases are held (Reynolds 205-06). Indigenous people were no longer invisible. The recognition of native title, and that pastoral leases do not necessarily extinguish it, means pastoralists and miners are legally compelled to negotiate in good faith with the traditional owners – in short – to treat Indigenous Australians as human beings, not ride roughshod over their rights or dignity.

Although the reference to *terra nullius* on page 106 of the novel is made in passing, this is intended to indicate how quickly its discrediting has become ‘common sense’. In the same scene, the characters concede the word ‘invasion’ is

⁶⁰ Rorty’s notion of ‘descriptions’ extends from the everyday sense to any description, account, representation, explanation or theory from any field of human endeavour.

still too controversial to describe the arrival of the British in Australia, but this begs the question of how much longer such a statement will remain contentious. Critics of 'historical revisionism' sometimes say redescrptions add nuances but do not change the main thrust of history itself. In response to this conservative logic, I question why it is so controversial to redescrbe 'settlement' as 'invasion'.

This type of questioning is what the redescription of history can challenge people to do: view history from the standpoints of those whose accounts have been obscured or forgotten by the privileging of some descriptions over others. Such challenges have political implications because they can lead to a series of discursive battles over the 'truth' of different descriptions.

Rorty argues a liberal democracy can create spaces for minorities to voice their claims or offer alternative descriptions to the mainstream. Understanding other people's points of view is not only a gesture of human solidarity, it gives a more complete description of history. Although I agree with Rorty on this point, I am at pains to point out how this 'democratic space' can be hijacked by populism and commercialism. In particular, the phrase in the novel "dead mothers don't sell" is the commercial justification used to effectively silence 'the truth' of Billy's song describing his mother's murder.

Some might argue this is consistent with Rorty's argument for a split between the public and private – namely, Billy can privately ascribe one set of truths to his song and another set to its public representation. I do not believe such separation is easy to achieve or necessarily desirable, which is why Billy's song is also a thematic device designed to highlight some of the difficulties of trying to separate the public from the private.

Can the public and private actually be split in practice?

In my view, Rorty's most important refinement to classical pragmatism and the most politically significant feature of neopragmatism is his emphasis on separating public argument from private projects of self-creation. His logic is an extension of the principle that within a secular system of government the individual's private religious beliefs should be separated from public argument. In other words, an issue which affects citizens of varying religious beliefs should not be settled by appeal to a particular set of religious beliefs. A democratic public debate should therefore be resolved on secular terms. At the private level, Rorty's pluralism advocates:

“the maximization of opportunities for individual variation, and group variation insofar as the latter facilitates the ability of individuals to recreate themselves” (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 237).

Rorty's proposed separation seems to be opposed to that of feminists who, in the 1960s and 70s, began to challenge what they perceived as an oppressive public-private split in society by arguing “the personal is political”. Putting this another way, they believed women's voices were not being heard or taken sufficiently seriously in the public sphere and were relegated to a private or domestic sphere of relatively little influence. This apparent conflict between neopragmatism and feminism can be addressed in four stages.

Firstly, Rorty supports the emergence of the ‘politics of difference’ or ‘politics of identity’ as a welcome development on narratives concerning the struggles between the poor and rich: “As I see it, the emergence of feminism, gay liberation, various sorts of ethnic separatism, aboriginal rights, and the like, simply add further concreteness to sketches of the good old egalitarian utopia” (235).

Secondly, Rorty defends his utopian speculation, based on his view of the liberalism common to Mill and Dewey, as having been supplemented – but not made redundant – by recent philosophical and theoretical developments: “Neither Foucault, Derrida, Nietzsche nor Lacan can make obsolete the old-fashioned utopian scenario, the one that leads to a global society of freedom and equal opportunity” (236). Rorty concedes that liberalism has its weaknesses, particularly its “blind spots” to various sufferings and humiliations. He believes, however, these weaknesses can be corrected when attention is focused on them. Despite Foucault’s distrust of utopian narratives, Rorty welcomes his work to expose and redress oppression, saying Foucault “helped us see why oppressed groups needed to develop new ways of talking, in order to produce a new kind of self-knowledge” (236).

It should be noted that the challenges which globalisation presents to traditional ways of formulating “state/civil society; public/private; legal/illegal; market/family; domination/emancipation; coercion/freedom” (Rose 1), are acknowledged by Rorty but he does not abandon his utopian hopes for the future. “We now have a global overclass which makes all the major economic decisions, and makes them in entire independence of the legislatures, and *a fortiori* of the will of the voters, of any given country” (*Philosophy and Social Hope* 233). Rorty looks to a revitalised United Nations, public leaders, academics and unionists concerned with social justice for “dealing with the warlords or...the conscienceless super-rich” (234).

Thirdly, it can be argued Rorty’s philosophy is more ‘feminine’ than ‘masculine’. Rorty cites Annette Baier as “one of the leading feminist philosophers of the present day” (75-76). Baier claims David Hume is the “woman’s moral philosopher”

because he placed sentiment, as opposed to ‘scientific’ reason, at the centre of his moral philosophy. Rorty quotes Baier as saying: “‘the villain is the rationalist, law-fixed tradition in moral philosophy’, a tradition which assumes that ‘behind every moral intuition lies a universal rule’” (76). Critics of Hume say that his philosophy fails to account for moral obligation, but Baier argues this notion can be replaced by “‘appropriate trust’” (76). Rorty places his trust in the democratic process to adjudicate on ethical issues, as did Dewey: “The core of Dewey’s thought was an insistence that nothing – not the Will of God, not the Intrinsic Nature of Reality, not the Moral Law – can take precedence over the result of agreement freely reached by members of a democratic community” (237).

Fourthly, it should now be clear that the apparent conflict between Rorty’s advocacy to split the private and public is *not* intended to claw back ground from feminism’s “the personal is political”. The split is intended to encourage a healthy pluralism even though in earlier contexts the split exposed some of the weaknesses of liberalism. Rorty conceives the split as an extension of the logic that separates church from state and does *not* try to invalidate feminism’s “the personal is political”. Rather, his notion runs counter to theologically based traditions of personal fulfilment through service to others such as that advocated by Platonism and Christianity.

The public-private split also runs against the public’s expectations that politicians and other public figures should conduct their personal lives with decorum. In the sub-genre of American democracy novels identified earlier, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* exposes the hypocrisy of a New England settlement. A Puritan minister, who has concealed his affair with a woman after her

husband is presumed dead, is forced to publicly acknowledge he is the father of their illegitimate child. Even though society has become much more permissive since the pioneer days of Puritan New England, the private sexual conduct of community leaders is still a matter of public concern.⁶¹ It is very difficult to imagine this attitude changing.

Rorty concedes that separating public from private interests can be messy and difficult, which is why throughout my novel I have emphasised the Oz Rock Foundation's status as a semi-private, semi-government organisation. This raises the question of whether its public role is beholden to private or government interests. The answer usually depends on whom Harrigan or Marty is talking to.

A semi-private semi-government organisation can be regarded as a 'special interest group' which lobbies the government for funding in the name of the public interest. Many political analysts now consider the growing number of special interest groups that lobby politicians in the USA as the cause of increasingly dysfunctional government. These are groups of professionals employed by private interests to ensure the government does not cut budget allocations to their particular sector or program, as well as to lobby for new subsidies and incentives. In his book *Demosclerosis*, Rauch describes the US government as "a giant frozen mass of ossified programs trapped in a perpetual cash crunch" (Zakaria 174).

The situation in Australia is not as bad, but it may be on the way. The Oz Rock Foundation offers the spectre of a special interest group mostly funded by the government which it is meant to, in part, be lobbying. If US special interest groups

⁶¹ For example, Cheryl Kernot's damaging affair with Gareth Evans or Bill Clinton's numerous affairs which almost led to his impeachment.

were able to swap their private funding for public funding then this model could introduce a whole new level of paralysis to democratic government.

The Oz Rock Foundation is meant to help generate friendly media, even glamour by association, for the Labor government while appearing at arm's length. Despite Harrigan finally exercising some independence when he criticises the government on its parallel importation policy, it is insufficient to save the Foundation from the newly elected Coalition government's axe.

Either government's underlying motive is obvious – winning more votes through populism. The promise of lower CD prices is understandably appealing to the majority of voters. The Labor government, however, also funds the supposedly 'peak' industry body Oz Rock which lobbies against such a move in the name of sustaining a local music-making industry, employing many thousands of workers, which fears a reversion to the 1950s when Australians were all but excluded from the recorded music market by foreign domination. Perhaps Oz Rock's stand is genuinely in the national interest, maybe it is not, however, this dilemma in the novel is intended to show how public debate – particularly if it is so complex it appears inconclusive – can be readily hijacked by populism.

Opinion polls incessantly monitor the popularity of governments and oppositions. Politicians anxiously wait on the public's responses to initiatives or programs that are considered newsworthy. On the face of it, this would seem to be how a healthy democracy should operate – governments gathering feedback from the public about their policies and performance. Whether this means governments should only make decisions which are popular is another matter.

James Madison, the principal author of the American Constitution, believed

America's version of democracy was quite different to those of ancient Greek city states which actually governed directly through popular assemblies. He considered America's legislature as a type of indirect democracy because the people elected representatives to write or pass bills on their behalf. "For Madison, America was better termed a republic, in which the citizenry delegates the task of governing to its representatives" (168).

This brings into question whether a representative should use her or his own judgment or simply follow opinion polls. The English politician and philosopher, Edmund Burke famously remarked: "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion" (168). In 1956, Senator John Kennedy published *Profiles in Courage* "in which he praised eight American statesmen for their principled embrace of unpopular positions" (168). In the long run, pandering to populism may be the very reason for the public's increasing disrespect and cynicism towards politicians. When Winston Churchill was once advised by a colleague to "keep his ear to the ground", he replied "the British nation will find it very hard to look up to leaders who are detected in this position" (167).

Privately funded special interest groups can stymie representative democracy by using populism against politicians who do not vote in favour of their special interest. Since the 1970s, the moves towards more open and accountable government in liberal democracies have exposed the voting of individual politicians to public scrutiny. In the past, the tradition had been to record a final count but not the vote of each member. In America "the purpose of these changes was to make Congress more open and responsive. And so it has become – to money, lobbyists, and special interests" (171).

All this is by way of saying that separating public and private interests in a democracy is no easy task and that popular opinion is not a reliable measure of what is genuinely in the national interest or common good. The notion of the ‘common good’ is further complicated in this era of globalism because it may not be synonymous with ‘national interest’.

Rorty’s *liberal* democratic emphasis on the freedom of the individual in the private sphere stands in contrast to his “hero” Dewey’s emphasis on the common good through his *social* democratic belief in ‘participatory’ democracy.⁶² Although Rorty plays down these differences in their common pursuit of an “egalitarian utopia”, a social democracy may be the better option for breaking monopolies or addressing restrictive commercial practices rather than relying too heavily on competition in the marketplace as a regulator. While Rorty’s pluralistic version of political liberalism should not be confused with the economic ‘neo-liberalism’ of conservatives, both have an emphasis on individualism.

My concern is that although an emphasis on individualism may open up spaces in liberal democracies for ‘Other’ voices to be heard in public argument, the homogenising influence of commercialism’s profit motive may hijack or diminish their impact in terms of social justice or related matters such as environmental sustainability. Cultural diversity may therefore become mere fodder for commodification into passing fashions. For example, Aboriginal music and traditional culture may be popular for a few years, but this may not make a lasting difference at the level of policy if a liberal democratic government – in the hope of

⁶² See the footnote on page 50 of this exegesis regarding the e-mail “Re: Dewey and Yourself”.

retaining power – compromises its commitments to social justice or the environment according to the vicissitudes of commercialism and popular perceptions.

Does the constant renegotiation of morals genuinely offer more hope?

Rorty maintains that morals cannot be determined, as Kant had hoped, on a basis that will hold for all times and places. Each community needs to determine its morals or ethics or standards in response to the evolution of public attitudes. I agree with this responsiveness to a degree, particularly in the face of unprecedented ethical dilemmas that new technologies, such as genetic or IVF research, present. I have doubts, however, that a pliable and open-ended postmodernist approach to morals and ethics is going to be an acceptable substitute for the types of dogmatic moral codes that religions provide.

Even though my personal views are agnostic, I recognise the valuable role religions play in forging a sense of community and encouraging civic participation through charitable works and social services. Religions deservedly receive bad press for their abuses of trust and care, but their work in areas of social justice in recent decades led me to portray the Anglican church in Redfern, where Billy's funeral is held, as tolerant and accepting of spiritual differences. The church is based on St. Saviour's in Redfern which operates a thriving community centre and active welfare program. The minister in the novel is portrayed as good-naturedly accepting the irony of *The Harder They Come* being performed inside his church even though its 'rebel' sentiments are directed against colonial institutions which include the Anglican church.

Earlier in the story, when Adriano introduces Marty to life in juvenile prisons, he

points out that the old “pecking order” of inmates has crumbled and now almost anything goes among an increasing number of mentally ill teenagers in the penal system who have lost a sense of connection between their actions and consequences. Again, this portrayal is based on experience and research. Although Adriano points the finger at drug use, it raises the question of why teenagers are increasingly using pharmacised drugs in the first place.

The Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell, would likely suggest this phenomenon stems from a lack of meaning and purpose in young lives. Pell’s solution is “democratic personalism”, but this seems a cack-handed attempt to replace what he considers to be morally “empty” democratic secularism with a version of democracy founded on a “transcendence (that) directs us to...our dependence on God”. Presumably, this would be a Catholic god, although Pell denies his version of democracy is a thinly veiled theocracy. Although I disagree with Pell’s proposal, I do agree that secular democracy can appear empty of guiding personal values and it “can be filled with darkness by political substitutes for religion”. Pell calls for a more imaginative democratic culture that “can re-discover hope, and re-establish freedom in truth and the common good”.

This sounds surprisingly similar to (atheist) Rorty’s calls for imaginative solutions to help re-invent democracy with the aim of promoting future hope, but their reasonings are poles apart. Rorty sees Platonic language founded in the authority of a superhuman power, and by implication the language of the Catholic Church, “has become an obstacle to our social hopes” (*Philosophy and Social Hope*, xii).

The rise of religious fundamentalism, both Islamic and Christian, in recent years

is another source of hope for many disillusioned with Western lifestyles. It raises the question of whether secularism can maintain enough of a sense of community, cooperation and civic duty upon which democracy relies. On this point, political theorist John Gray criticises Rorty's 'post-modern perspectivism' claiming it will:

result in...disenchantment in regard to the local practices of liberal cultures, even more than those of others, precisely because the universalist claims of liberal philosophy have become embedded in the public culture of liberal societies. In removing from liberal practice the support of any universal narrative, disenchantment leaves liberal practices as particular practical expedients or strands in specific cultural traditions. (Quoted in *Truth, Politics and Post-modernism*' 49)

Rorty answers Gray's criticism by quoting President Eisenhower: "America is firmly founded on religious belief, and I don't care what religion it is". Rorty then goes on to argue: "I hope that Christian believers, Enlightenment rationalists, and neo-Nietzscheans like myself⁶³ will prove as tolerant of each other's philosophical views as Eisenhower thought Americans should be of each other's religions" (49).

It remains to be seen, however, whether those people who are re-discovering religious moralities will continue to be as tolerant towards secularism as Rorty suggests public policy should be to those of differing religious beliefs. Perhaps, under the cover of sophisticated public relations strategies, the religious supporters of George W. Bush are already undermining secularism. This leads into my final theme.

⁶³ Rorty's belief in democracy is distinctly non-Nietzschean but he regards himself as neo-Nietzschean because of his application of atheism to philosophy.

Can truth really emerge from “free and open encounter” in a world of ‘spin’?

In the 17th century when John Milton asserted that truth would always win in a society that allowed “free and open encounter” through its press, he was unlikely to have envisaged how sophisticated the construction of truth in the media was to become.

Harrigan is a former journalist who has mastered the ‘spin’ of public relations and demonstrates his skills not only in media battles, but by his manipulation of Billy to the top of the music charts in the Year of the Indigenous Person. In doing so, he largely silences his critics and gains the political advantage and public credibility he craves to secure his large salary. Having achieved his goals, Harrigan abandons Billy to the vicissitudes of the music industry. This raises the possibility that if Harrigan had been genuinely concerned for Billy’s advancement, then he might have prevented Billy’s professional failure and subsequent death. He may also have prevented his loss of the seat of West Harbours and avoided the direct retribution of Nicola Cadby.

Playing the public relations game is portrayed as potentially being a matter of life and death. Cadby’s rise to power is largely due to her increasing skills at ‘spin’ even though her policies remain much the same throughout the novel. The media goes along with Harrigan while he is popular, then turns on him when the tide of public opinion runs against him. There is little balance in the media’s criticism of Oz Rock, it prefers to pander to whatever angle will sell more papers or increase ratings.

Rorty’s hope that a democracy can rely on free and open encounters to keep the system honest begins to look a little naive. ‘Spin’ can lead nations to war on false pretexts as the world saw in 2003 when fabricated evidence of “weapons of mass

destruction” was used as justification to invade Iraq. Despite revelations afterwards, it was too late to ‘unscramble the egg’.

In many ways this final theme ties in with my first theme: “In whose interest is truth?” The media and political battles that Harrigan fights, the video (mis)representation of Billy’s song and the notion of “success makes right” were all designed to explore the distortions of truth due to self-interest and commercialism in a world of free and open encounters.

7.2 Sustaining Liberal Democracy

The major contention of this and the following section is that Rorty’s different philosophical “gloss” makes little or no difference to the sustainability of liberal democracy, despite concerns about the public-private split.

‘Liberal democracy’ is itself an imprecise term. Arguments can be made to say there is no such thing as true democracy and, of course, nations vary in their approaches to democracy. For instance, Australia’s system of compulsory voting is an exception among democracies.⁶⁴ I acknowledge there are degrees of democracy – some nations can be considered more democratic than others. Notwithstanding these qualifications, I regard the following attempt to describe the institutions of liberal democracy as adequate for my purposes:

Today every single Western European nation has a limited constitutional government, an independent judiciary, multiparty elections, universal suffrage,

⁶⁴ There are other exceptions but the general rule is that voting is not compulsory in a democracy.

civilian control of the military and police, rights to free assembly and worship, a large middle class, and a developed consumer economy.⁶⁵ (Zakaria 68)

Many books have been written about the sustainability of liberal democracy in which the economic, political and social situations of nations are analysed with the hope of finding ways to improve approaches to government. Some more recent books include: *The Future of Freedom*, *Demosclerosis*, *The Democracy Advantage*, *The Betrayal of Democracy* and *Arrogant Capital*.

Rorty believes that a neopragmatic version of liberal democracy can be sustained “if there is enough money around”. Nowhere else in all his books does he elaborate on this claim, so, for the purposes of my thesis, I pressed him on this issue via e-mail. I asked Rorty whether he thought the United Nations could set up a democratic system in East Timor despite it being a poor country. He replied that books like *The Future of Freedom* have persuaded him of the connection between money and democracy, but conceded that in the case of East Timor he was not sufficiently aware of its situation to make an assessment.

In response, I carefully analysed the arguments outlined in *The Future of Freedom*, then compared them with other works which deal with the viability and sustainability of democracy. In summary, three main factors are considered crucial:

1. economics
2. public institutions
3. free speech.

⁶⁵ Quoting: Mark Lilla, ‘The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and Its Discontents’, *Daedalus* 123, no. 2 (Spring 1994).

Firstly, in economic terms, high per capita national income will increase the chances of a country sustaining its democracy. Zakaria offers the following supporting argument:

In 1959, the social scientist Seymour Martin Lipset made a simple and powerful point: ‘the more well-to-do a nation, the greater its chances to sustain democracy’... After forty years of research, with some caveats and qualifications, his fundamental point still holds. (69)

To back up his point, Zakaria quotes some compelling statistical evidence:

Of course some poor countries have become democracies. But when countries become democratic at low levels of development, their democracy usually dies. (There are exceptions such as India...). The most comprehensive statistical study of this problem, conducted by political scientists Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, looked at every country in the world between the years 1950 and 1990. It calculated that in a democratic country that has a per capita income of under \$1,500 (in today’s [US] dollars), the regime on average had a life expectancy of just eight years. With between \$1,500 and \$3,000 it survived on average for about eighteen years. Above \$6,000 it became highly resilient. The chance that a democratic regime would die in a country with an income about \$6,000 was 1 in 500... Thirty-two democratic regimes have existed at incomes of above roughly \$9,000 for a combined total of 736 years. Not one has died. By contrast, of the 69 democratic regimes that were poorer, 39 failed – a death rate of 56 percent. (69-70).

Zakaria's conclusion is that if a nation with a per capita GDP between \$3,000 and \$6,000 tries to become a democracy then it will very likely succeed. He then offers substantial historical evidence to support this conclusion, but does not try to simplify the sustainability of democracy to economic factors alone – otherwise the oil-rich Gulf States would be democracies instead of autocracies.

This leads into the second important factor regarding the sustainability of democracy. Countries that develop systematically from agricultural to industrial to higher-level economies create a bourgeoisie that can bargain with the state and maintain a level of independence which it secures in “modern political institutions, laws and bureaucracies” (75). Zakaria offers the following argument to support this claim:

When a government taxes people it has to provide benefits in return, beginning with services, accountability, and good governance but ending up with liberty and representation. This reciprocal bargain – between taxation and representation – is what gives governments legitimacy in the modern world... The Saudi royal family offers its subjects a different kind of bargain: ‘We don't ask much of you economically and we don't give much to you politically’. It is the inverse of the slogan of the American Revolution – no taxation, but no representation either. (75-76)

The third main factor affecting the sustainability of democracy is free speech. A country can be rich with well-functioning public institutions, but still not be a democracy. Zakaria looks at the example of Singapore (where per capita GDP is US\$26,500):

Singapore already has very strong strands of constitutional liberalism. It has a vigorous free economy, and rights of property, belief, travel, etc.,

are staunchly protected... But it has a limited free press, an even more limited political opposition, and no free elections... The younger generation of Singaporeans is less willing to accept a closed political system and the elders recognize that the system will open up... If not, change will happen suddenly and they (Lee Kuan Yew's successors) will likely lose power. (86)

All three sustainability factors come into play within the contexts offered by the novel "Making Noises", and my major concerns about them are discussed in the previous section, namely: special interest groups, populism and limits to free and open speech. In regard to the overall perspective I am developing in this thesis, I believe at this point I can reasonably make the following assertion: so-called liberal democracy has been shown to be viable and sustainable even if foundational notions such as 'natural rights' are ambiguous and have no absolute or conclusive basis.

I will now turn to what distinguishes a neopragmatic version of liberal democracy from a more conventional liberal democracy and discuss whether these differences affect its sustainability.

7.3 Sustaining Neopragmatic Liberal Democracy

A postmodernist philosopher like Rorty does *not* threaten the building blocks of Western civilisation as he is sometimes characterised as doing. Instead post-essentialist perspectives merely "nudge"⁶⁶ long-standing Platonic assumptions in a direction that enables a different philosophical approach to notions such as truth,

⁶⁶ Rorty, in a reply to one of my e-mails, uses "nudge" to describe the impact of his work.

justice, knowledge, objectivity and solidarity. These nudges can allow previously absent or silenced voices to be heard in our national and global conversations.

Rorty can be regarded as replacing foundationalism with his own ethnocentric liberalism. He argues that liberal democracy is the best political system humans have at this stage in history, and that “cruelty is the worst thing we can do”. While he is prepared to admit their contingency, both beliefs operate in a similar manner to the foundational principles in essentialist thinking. Rorty builds his philosophy around value judgments such as these, all the while deconstructing the value judgments on which the Platonic tradition is based. He wants his readers to agree that, although he is not claiming his value judgments are foundational, we should believe they are better or ‘more useful’ for working towards the utopian future he envisages.

It is not hard to conflate anti-foundational perspectives with the shortcomings of Western democracies. The scare-mongering of postmodernism as “anything goes” may seem at face value a fair description of contemporary Western nations, with the implications of “standards in decline” and political systems that flounder in a sea of populism without being grounded in ethical or moral principles. This impression might seem like a good reason to embrace simplistic answers that are readily available in religions and totalitarian ideologies, but to blame postmodernism for the ills of liberal democracy is too simple-minded and reductionist.

In this creative thesis, I have relied on the research of many others regarding the sustainability of liberal democracy. I have not attempted to ‘reinvent the wheel’ about which factors sustain this political system. Instead, I have attempted to point to certain aspects of the politics of neopragmatism which I perceive as causes for

concern. Of all the concerns I have attempted to dramatise, the main one I have difficulty with is the public-private split – and I believe Rorty does too.

As section 4.5 states, Rorty did not have a clear-cut position on banning students from wearing of religious symbols to French public schools. The ban has now been enacted in the name of secular liberal democracy even though it smacks of intolerance towards Muslims. Perhaps, in time, France's example will encourage its own government, and those of other nations, to legislate for further separation of the public from the private. If this separation continually erodes a sense of civic duty among its citizens, then the functioning of democratic institutions could be significantly impaired or at least no longer operate in ways that might currently be expected in an open and tolerant society.

Having raised my concerns about the public-private split, I think it fair to include Rorty's response to such concerns. The political theorist Slavoj Žižek criticises the public-private split, but then concedes a postmodernist approach would “require us...to assume this constitutive paradox of democracy... Far from indicating its fatal flaw, this split is the very source of the strength of democracy: democracy is able to take cognizance of the fact that its limit lies in itself: in its internal ‘antagonism’ (*Truth, Politics and Post-modernism* 51).

Rorty adds that Žižek's admission shows the supposed impossibility of a neopragmatic version of democracy is “just a theoretical impossibility – a problem for theorists but not for citizens” (51). Rorty argues that differences in philosophy or theory may make no difference to the way he and opponents such as Žižek vote at the practical level of the ballot box:

...we should relegate theory to the private realm, and not let it affect our sense of public responsibility. It is also a good reason for telling one story about political progress and a separate story about intellectual progress...a lot of the writers who are labelled 'post-modernist', and who talk a lot about impossibility, turn out to be good experimentalist social democrats when it comes to actual political activity. I suspect, for example, that Gray, Zizek, Derrida and I, if we found ourselves citizens of the same country, would all be voting for the same candidates, and supporting the same reforms. (51-2).

Whether the extension of the public-private split advocated by Rorty is merely a theoretical matter that has no bearing on the practical sustainability of liberal democracy remains to be seen. But perhaps the outcries from essentialists against anti- or post-essentialists may one day be regarded as similar to those in earlier centuries when humanism and science helped Western civilisation develop beyond the confines of religion and Aristotle.

7.4 The Merits of the Political Experiment

While this thesis has been guided by the question of whether a neopragmatic democracy is sustainable, it also adds to knowledge concerning the Australian government's direct involvement with private sector industry. Ausmusic is not the only example of this type of venture. While I was working at Ausmusic I used to take an interest in the activities of Ausmeat, an industry association which was set up to service the meat production sector.

Australia's 2004 Free Trade Agreement with the US should, in theory, spell the end of government-funded industry associations in Australia, but this is unlikely.

For example, also during 2004, the state government of Victoria established 'Vicmusic' along similar lines to that of Ausmusic but with a greater focus on grass-roots training as well as the modest salary of \$50,000 for the Executive Director and \$25,000 for an administrative support person.

The US might protest against this type of government involvement in industry, but I doubt the Free Trade Agreement will have much, if any, impact on the special interest groups set up by private industries and companies in Washington.

I believe there can be situations in which a government should assist the coordination of voices within an industry in order to develop a cohesive policy and legislation that serves the public interest. Such work should be conducted on a non-partisan basis and legislation may be required to force the industry to jointly fund a representative body. The body should not attempt to be all things to all players, but have a clearly defined role with achievable objectives that do not duplicate functions within the industry itself. In addition, the industry itself should also be required, through statutory requirements, to recognise and accept consensus decisions of the representative body as binding.

I envisage these types of representative bodies can make industries more competitive while delivering the socially desirable outcome of providing more employment and cultural opportunities for the community. In this sense, such organisations can help build a sense of the common good while still addressing the demands of global capitalism and its accompanying hyper-individualism.

8. OVERALL PERSPECTIVE

The overall perspective this creative thesis offers is that a neopragmatic version of liberal democracy *is* sustainable under economic, constitutional and civic conditions similar to those that currently sustain liberal democracies underpinned by essentialist notions of self-evident ‘natural rights’ or similar foundational principles.

The most important difference is neopragmatism’s emphasis on separating public argument from private projects of self-creation. In some ways, this can be seen as an extension of the logic that separates church from state, but it runs counter to theologically based traditions of personal fulfilment through service to others. Not only can it be very difficult to delineate public from private, the separation risks further erosion of a citizen’s sense of civic duty and service that helps make public institutions so important to a well-functioning democracy.

A related concern is that the open-ended pluralism of neopragmatism does not prescribe a moral code in the way that religions can. Neopragmatism offers freedom

but also an uncertainty which may prove socially divisive if moral development is treated predominantly as a private or publicly irrelevant issue.

Another important concern is that although neopragmatism is meant to open spaces within a liberal democracy for a diversity of voices to be heard, the public-private split could become a repressive force that silences dissenting or minority voices if hijacked or diminished by populism or commercialism. If this happens then the feminist slogan “the personal is political” may be reinvigorated by a number of movements.

Rorty argues that in a secular society people can look to poets and authors, instead of priests, for guidance on how to lead their lives because literature has the capacity to forge deep human compassion and solidarity. This substitution may not work, though, if fewer people have the time or desire to read literature in a world run by market forces, and those books or movies which do reach the public domain are determined solely by risk-averse profit-driven imperatives.

Breaking corporate strangleholds may require public subsidy, a notion that does not sit comfortably with economic liberalism. A *social* democracy – with arguably a greater emphasis on the common good than the individualism of a *liberal* democracy – is more likely to be willing to subsidise a private venture, despite the risks of commercial viability. The government in a social democracy may be more willing to intervene in the marketplace in the name of leading – not merely following – populist attitudes and tastes. By this I do not mean a notion of the common good is missing from a neopragmatic liberal democracy, but it could become an unintended casualty of the sometimes difficult and messy separation of public and private interests.

The fictionalised history presented in the novel, of a political experiment by the Hawke-Keating government with the Australian music industry, can help to shed light on problems associated with separating public and private interests. Although this experiment was not consciously conducted as a paradigm of neopragmatism, its workings raised issues the philosophy engages with concerning truth, ethics, social justice and roles of government.

I believe it is fair to say the experiment had both positive and negative outcomes for the community, despite partisan and media attempts to portray it as a failure. A reformed, non-partisan model for an organisation like the Oz Rock Foundation that is jointly funded by government and industry could deliver benefits for the Australian community if the organisation's clear priority were to be creating training programs that facilitate access to the local and global music industry.

Finally, I would like to recapitulate a point made in the introduction to this volume: the arguments for and against neopragmatism presented in the context of this thesis are *not* intended to be regarded as conclusive. If, however, the novel and exegesis that comprise "Making Noises" have contributed an original perspective to theoretical debate likely to influence reforms to so-called liberal democracy during the 21st century, then the aim of this creative thesis will have been realised.

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