Experiencing Narrative Poetry in the Verse-Novel

For Children and Young Adults

a verse-novel, Homing Poems, with accompanying exegesis

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults is a hybrid genre that tends to use free verse poetry that is sometimes devoid of figurative language or other rhetorical qualifies associated with poetry. As a result, many verse-novels have been criticised for consisting of chopped-up prose instead of poetry. This thesis challenges these critical positions by discussing how the notion of poetry is often delimited by traditionalist viewpoints, and by examining how contemporary culture and a recent paradigm shift in children's poetry may have fostered the verse-novel's evolution. Moreover, this study investigates how the narrative element of the verse-novel influences the shape and presentation of poetry, producing a reciprocal relationship between these two genres.

Chapter One situates my exegesis within a conglomerate of theories, including Rachel Blau DuPlessis' (1996) poetic study of "segmentivity," as well as Brian McHale's (2009) narratological theory of the contrapuntal correspondence between poetry and narrative. DuPlessis' theory, which argues that segmentivity defines poetry, is used to discuss the generative power of line-break, section-break, and page-break to create meaning in the verse-novel, and also to consider how the verse-novel could be regarded as poetry for its utilisation of segmentation. McHale's theory is employed to analyse how poetic and narrative segmentation engender a near-constant connection with each other in the verse-novel.

Drawing on these theoretical concepts, Chapter Two explores the emotional content of verse-novels, and the ability of language and segmentation to elicit affective responses in the reader. Chapter Three evaluates self-reflexive verse-novels that use

metapoetic devices to entice readers to actively think about the construction of the narrative poetic text, and to encourage readers to assume ideological positions that reading and writing poetry are pleasurable, worthwhile activities.

Chapter Four considers how the theoretical research of this thesis led to a creative practice, resulting in a young adult verse-novel that straddles the liminal space between poetry and narrative. The verse-novel, *Homing Poems,* appropriates Plato's *Republic* (1968) to comment on the marginalisation of poetry in a futuristic society.

References:

DuPlessis, RB 1996, 'Manifests,' *Diacritics,* vol. 26, no. 3/4, pp. 31-53.

McHale, B 2009, 'Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry,' *Narrative*, vol. 17, no. 1 pp. 11-30.

Plato 1968, *The Republic*, trans. A Bloom, Basic Books, New York.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATURE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled **"Experiencing Narrative Poetry in the Verse-Novel for Children and Young Adults"** has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: **5201200031(D)** on **17 February 2012**.

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INTRODUCTION

Validating the Verse-Novel: A New Hybrid Genre

[Poetry and narrative] seem like amiable things, willing to work with and alongside one another

(Ron Koertge cited in Alberts 2013b, n.p.).

The contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults, a mainstream genre that combines poetry and narrative, surged into the publishing scene in the United States and Australia in the 1990s, and has continued to proliferate. Over the course of my research, I have identified over two hundred and fifty verse-novels for children and young adults from the United States and over fifty from Australia. The genre has also emerged in Canada, the United Kingdom, and more recently in France, Sweden, and Finland. Verse-novels have garnered prestigious awards, and the genre at large has won praise from critics, writers, teachers, librarians, and child and young adult readers.

Despite its far reach, the verse-novel has received relatively little scholarly attention. Several distinguished literary critics have also discarded the genre, arguing that some verse-novels contain chopped-up prose instead of poetry. For instance, poet and critic Liz Rosenberg declared that the poetry in many verse-novels is "simply prose hacked into lines," and that the free verse used in many texts "would not pass muster as poetry in an undergraduate creative writing class" (2005, p.377). These kinds of criticisms stimulated my theoretical research on the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults. While some verse-novels are of better quality than others, these criticisms stem from traditionalist viewpoints that delimit the notion of poetry, making it seem like a rarefied concept. Critics like Rosenberg also seem to ignore the fact that verse-novels combine poetry with narrative, overlooking the influence that the narrative would have on the presentation of poetry.

The aim of this exegesis is to explore how poetry is presented in the verse-novel for children and young adults through the interactions between poetry and narrative. This study investigates the interplay between poetry and narrative not only to consider how poetry "works" in the verse-novel, but to understand the reader's experience of poetry in these contemporary texts. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the interconnections between poetry and narrative in a verse-novel often contributes to a reader's affective experience. If a verse-novel contains any self-reflexive references to the making of poetry, the reader will also be prompted to think more carefully about a verse-novel's poetic qualities, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. My verse-novel, *Homing Poems,* was influenced by my research on the connection of poetry and narrative, and this connection was used to develop a writing method that straddles the liminal space between poetry and narrative. Additionally, my verse-novel comments on the marginalisation of poetry in contemporary society through an appropriation of Plato's *Republic* (1968). Plato proposed that poetry should be banned from his ideal society, and in my story world, my teenage narrator, Teagan, is threatened with banishment from her city when she is caught writing poetry.

The "Verse-Novel": Terms, Meanings, and Misunderstandings

I would like to begin by explaining my use of the term "verse-novel," and to examine the connotations the term creates, as well as the critical interpretations that may derive from these connotations. In journalistic and theoretical literature, the verse-novel for children and young adults has been referred to as: "verse-novel," "novel-in-verse," "poetic novel," "novel-in-poetry," "novel-in-poems," and "verse

narrative." Despite the variance of terms, "verse-novel" is by far the most common, and the term that will be used throughout this exegesis. Having said that, "verse-novel" presents categorical difficulties and proffers multiple interpretations, which can complicate critical perceptions of the genre.

First of all, the term "verse-novel" functions as a generic label that can invite limited interpretations of itself. [1] While a significant number of verse-novels for children and young adults employ what Joy Alexander calls the verse-novel "house-style," consisting of non-rhyming free verse, short poems that extend between one and three pages, and the use of poem titles to denote the speaker or point towards a core theme (2005, pp.270), these characteristics are not all-inclusive. For instance, Helen Frost's *Keesha's House* (2003) uses poetic forms such as sestinas and sonnets instead of free verse, and Norma Fox Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) intermixes free verse poems with pantoums, tankas, list poems, and variety of fabricated forms. In place of one- to three-page poems, Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) consists of longer poetic sections that can stretch across twelve or more pages. Differences also exist in terms of poetic style, point-of-view, narrative content, and the number of narrators – all of which complicate the generic boundaries of the verse-novel "house-style."

Vikki Van Sickle suggests a more encompassing classification by organising the verse-novel for children and young adults into three subcategories (2006, n.p.). Her first subcategory, "poetic singular voice," includes verse-novels that involve a single homodiegetic narrator, and that "draw upon the technical aspects of poetry, such as personification, extended metaphor, imagery, and standard metrical patterns

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[1] I am specifically referring to the verse-novel for children and young adults, not the adult verse-novel, which this study treats as a separate subcategory of the verse-novel. Throughout this exegesis, I will refer to the verse-novel for children and young adults as a discrete "genre," yet it, too, is a subcategory of the greater verse-novel genre.

in order to transcend the literal and leave an emotional impression upon the reader"
(n.p.). Her second subcategory, "dramatic monologue," still incorporates a single
homodiegetic narrator, but focuses more on the representation of voice, and less on
poetic techniques such as metaphor (n.p.). Of course, a dramatic monologue can be
understood as a type of lyric poem. Meyer Howard Abrams describes the dramatic
monologue as a lyric poem that involves a single narrator who speaks at a critical
moment, as seen in poems such as Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1999,
p.70). However, Van Sickle does not discuss this subcategory of verse-novels as lyric
poetry (2006, n.p.). In fact, she asserts that verse-novels have "more in common with
dramatic monologue than poetry," appearing to treat monologue and poetry as
separate entities, which problematizes her argument (n.p.). Lastly, Van Sickle's
"multiple voice verse-novels" subcategory draws on "elements of both dramatic
monologue and poetic verse-novels," and is comprised of multiple first-person
narrators (n.p.).

Van Sickle's subcategories aptly demonstrate the diversity of the verse-novel
genre, reinforcing her argument that "critics and educators need to familiarize
themselves with the subtle differences between these subcategories and appreciate
how an individual verse novel works" (2006, n.p). Yet her classification risks
oversimplification. For instance, Van Sickle suggests that "multiple voice verse-
novels" are less emotionally tuned and read more like creative non-fiction (n.p.),
though Frost's *Keesha's House* (2003), David Levithan's *The Realm of Possibility*
(2004), and Ellen Hopkins' *Tilt* (2012) – which all involve multiple narrators – tap
deeply into the emotional lives of their fictional characters. An increasing number of

verse-novels also fall outside Van Sickle's subcategories, such as those that use third-person narration, or mix segments of prose with poetry.[2]

Some academics have also argued that the verse-novel contains other generic forms besides poetry and narrative. Academic Wendy Michaels (2005) contends that the verse-novel mixes dramatic monologue with poetry and narrative, an opinion shared by other theorists such as Mallan & McGillis (2003), Alexander (2005), Van Sickle (2006), and Cadden (2011b). Van Sickle also suggests that "multiple voice verse novels" incorporate "ethnotheatre" (2006, n.p.), a genre that uses "selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artefacts such as diaries, TV broadcasts, newspaper articles and court proceedings" to create a dramatic performance (Saldana 2005, p.2). In a similar vein, critic Christopher Pollnitz contends that verse-novels draw on radio drama and film to create "an exciting synthesis of narrative media" (2002, p.67). In "'From page to stage': a case study of transforming a verse novel," writer and academic Jeri Kroll discusses the experience of adapting her young adult verse-novel, *Vanishing Point,* to the stage, arguing that the verse-novel's hybrid nature enables it to be easily adapted to dramatic performance (2012, p.3).[3] My own research focuses on the interplay between poetry and narrative, and does not consider the incorporation of other genres. Yet the generic possibilities and performative qualities of the verse-novel make the term "verse-novel" appear increasingly restrictive.

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[2] In Van Sickle's defence, many verse-novels that fall outside her subcategories have been published after the release of her article, which was published in 2006. For instance, Robin Friedman's *Nothing*, which intermixes prose and poetry, was published in 2008. Meg Kearney's *The Girl in the Mirror*, which uses both poetry and journal entries in prose, was published in 2012. Jessica Davidson's *What Does Blue Feel Like?* and Matthew Schreuder's *Muscle* both use third-person narration, and these verse-novels were published in Australia in 2007.

[3] Kroll's *Vanishing Point* is currently unpublished in book form, although it has been adapted and performed as a stage play (Kroll 2012, p.2).

Despite these complications, the verse-novel "house-style" acts as a point of convergence – a meeting point – for the verse-novel for children and young adults. In addition to Alexander's (2005) characteristics, which include the use of short poems, free verse language, and orientating titles, another house-style trait is the use of first-person narration. Most verse-novels tend to involve immediacy, with narrative events being recounted by first-person narrators as they happen, or within a short space of time after they happened. Andrea Schwenke Wylie describes this kind of narration as "immediate-engaging-first-person narration," which she contrasts with "distant-engaging-first-person narration" that generates larger lapses of time between the narrative events and the first-person narration (1999, p.185, p.189).[4] Even if a verse-novel does not contain all house-style traits, it is rare to find one that does not exhibit some. In many ways, prevalence of these characteristics seems to suggest that the verse-novel operates as a unified genre. Yet as John Frow (2006) argues, genre itself is not a fixed or stable entity, but is open-ended as texts, as well as our interpretations of texts, evolve and change (p.3). Therefore, to call the verse-novel a unified genre does not take into regard the evolutionary potential of the verse-novel, as well as interpretative differences that may occur amongst readers. Throughout this exegesis, the terms "verse-novel" and "genre" will be used not as hermetic labels, but as porous expressions that permit seepage and filtration.

The term "verse-novel" engenders further difficulties based on the separate associations involved with the words "verse" and "novel." Verse is most often used as a synonym for poetry (Brogan 1993, p.1346), yet the term may still carry assumptions

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[4] While immediate-engaging-first-person narration is more common in the verse-novel genre, some verse-novels like Robert Cormier's *Frenchtown Summer* (1999) and Stephanie Hemphill's *You Own Sylvia: a verse portrait of Sylvia Plath* (2007) incorporate distant-engaging-first-person narration.

that it is a lesser form of poetry. Timothy Steele (1990) notes that a division has

existed between "poetry" and "verse" since ancient times, dating back to Plato's *The*

Republic (1968) and Aristotle's *Poetics* (1982). "Verse" was used to indicate

"composition that, though metrically proficient, lacks more fundamental properties of

poetic art" (Steele 1990, p.109). "Poetry," on the other hand, was viewed as writing

that possessed "essential aesthetic qualities absent from "verse"" (p.109). Historically,

"verse" tended to denote the metric composition of poetry, but the term has now come

to signify other forms of poetry, like free verse and projective verse. The

understanding of "verse" as technically proficient but poetically deficient has become

a rarefied notion, but it may be partly responsible for the criticism the verse-novel for

children and young adults has received. For instance, Nikki Grimes, the author of

many texts classed as "verse-novels," including *Dark Sons* (2005), *A Girl Named*

Mister (2010), and *Planet Middle School* (2011), said in an interview that she feels

> really uncomfortable with this label "verse novel" because that's not what I
>
> do. I much prefer that my work be called a "novel in poetry" because there are
>
> too many so-called verse novels you get fifty pages into without finding a
>
> single metaphor. What they're actually writing is broken prose. They think as
>
> long as it doesn't go all the way across the page, it's poetry (Grimes cited in
>
> Vardel & Oxley 2007, p.283).

While Grimes may only be trying to distinguish her work from verse-novels of lesser

quality, she highlights the distinction between "poetry" and "verse." She seems to

interpret "*verse*-novels" as texts that use the lineation of poetry, but do not exhibit

other characteristics of poetry. In other words, she suggests that verse-novels contain

a lesser form of poetry, or do not consist of poetry at all. She elevates her own work as "novels in *poetry*" based on her use of "elevated" techniques such as metaphor.

Even if one equates "poetry" and "verse," interpreting a "verse-novel" as a "poetry-novel," the term "verse-novel" still creates interpretative difficulties. After all, "poetry" is ineluctably difficult – if not impossible – to define. In "Defining 'Poetry'" (2003), Robert Pierce presents potential defining qualities of poetry, such as rhythm, imagery, beauty, playful language, and unity of language elements. He then demonstrates that these traits can characterise many different kinds of literary and artistic forms – not just poetry. Imagery, for example, which is considered by many to be the "very language of poetry," cannot define poetry because

> prose too uses imagery and hence that imagery is not a sufficient criterion: having imagery does not guarantee that a text is a poem. One might contend that the imagery in prose is less intense and less interwoven than in poetry, less organic, as we could phrase it. Indeed there is much to be said for that statement of the difference, but it has the consequence of leaving no sharp line between poetry and prose and so of suggesting that imagery is an important element of poetic effect but not a make-or-break defining characteristic (p.155).

Yet critics continue to define – or attempt to define – poetry by the very characteristics Pierce (2003) shows to be insufficient. For example, Peter Sieruta, former editor of *The Horn Book*, has suggested that verse-novels for children and young adults need to employ more than short lines to be considered poetry (2005,

p.225). In "Ten Things That Tick Me Off," Sieruta writes a parodic poem to comment on the overuse of lineation in the verse-novel:

> Arranging words
>
> prettily
>
> on a page
>
> does not necessarily
>
> turn prose
>
> into
>
> poetry (2005, p.225).

Other distinguished critics have also accused verse-novelists of chopping up prose and calling it poetry, including Apol & Certo (2011); Flynn, Hager & Thomas (2005); Heyman, Sorby, & Thomas (2009); and Rosenberg (2005). As noted above, Grimes (cited in Vardel & Oxley 2007) also suggested that many verse-novels consist of broken prose, and tend to be deficient of poetic techniques like metaphor. While it is true that some verse-novels for children and young adults are of lesser quality than others, these critics' judgements are based on traditionalist – and intangible – notions of poetry. Sieruta (2005) argues that poetry needs to consist of something more than short lines, but does not say what that something is. Grimes (cited in Vardel & Oxley 2007) conveys that poetry requires metaphoric language, but as Pierce (2003) has illustrated, other literary forms employ imagery-rich language. In fact, almost *all* writing draws on techniques such as imagery and figurative language.

As I will discuss in Chapter One, Rachel Blau DuPlessis proposes "segmentivity" as the defining trait of poetry, which she uses to distinguish poetry

from narrative and performance art (1996, p.51). Narrative and performance art may utilise segmentivity, but DuPlessis argues that narrative is better characterised by *narrativity*, and performance art by *performativity*, while *segmentivity* is the most constitutive in poetry (p.51). Poetry, DuPlessis suggests, has the "ability to articulate and make meaning by selecting, deploying and combining segments" as demonstrated by the genre's use of line-break, stanza-break, or page space (pp.51-52). From this perspective, the verse-novel for children and young adults could be considered poetry for the very reason that Sieruta (2005) and other critics have argued that it is not – through the use of line-break. Yet any analytical consideration of poetry in verse-novels that does not consider the influence of *narrative*, misses the mark. Although this exegesis examines poetry (or more specifically, *narrative poetry*), it approaches poetry through the hybrid nature of the verse-novel. This study does not treat poetry as a separate entity that can be extracted from the verse-novel and discussed on its own, but as an artefact that is influenced by the interplay between poetry and narrative.

I am unaware of any critical literature that questions the existence of narrative in the verse-novel for children or young adults, or denounces its label as a "novel." Nevertheless, it is valuable to consider the misconceptions that could stem from the word "novel." First of all, the novel has traditionally been associated with prose fiction (Forster 1963; Frye 1957). While it seems unlikely that a reader will mistake a verse-novel for a prose narrative, he or she may bring certain assumptions about novels to the reading process.[5] One assumption may hinge around a novel's narrative structure: many novels employ a conventional narrative structure involving a causal

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[5] Having said this, some readers may actually interpret Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) to be a prose narrative based on the way it presents text in prose-like blocks.

chain of events in which conflict rises to a climax and ends in resolution.[6] Some verse-novels do employ this kind of conventional narrative structure, including my own verse-novel, *Homing Poems*. Yet many verse-novels utilise a more cyclical structure, which would activate a different type of reading process. For instance, Sonya Sones' *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* (1999) focuses on the emotional journey of the teenage narrator Cookie before and after her sister suffers mental breakdown. The verse-novel does contain an underlying linear structure (Cookie's sister gets sick – the sister is hospitalised – Cookie has to cope with family and school issues on her own), but the majority of poems zigzag back and forth in time, exploring Cookie's feelings before and after the sister's hospitalisation.

According to Patty Campbell, this kind of narrative structure typifies the verse-novel for children and young adults (2004, p.615). "The verse novel is…like a wheel," Campbell writes, "with the hub a compelling emotional event, and the narration referring to this event like the spokes" (p.615). Furthermore, Kerry Mallan and Roderick McGillis argue that while verse-novels involve plot, they present it through a "collage-like composition" of poems that encourages the reader to "assemble the pieces of information into a coherent shape" (2003, n.p.). The word "novel," therefore, can be just as problematic as "verse" in the way it can create tensions between the critical assumptions embedded into the term "novel" and the unconventional narrative structure that many verse-novels present.

Based on these misinterpretations that can derive from "verse" and "novel," "verse-novel" will be presented as a hyphenated term, rather than writing it as "verse novel," as it is more commonly displayed. This hyphenation is intended to suggest the

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[6] There are, of course, other types of narrative structures, and many novelists choose to employ less traditional structures like cyclical or achronological structures.

verse-novel's hybrid identity, yet the term may continue to encounter difficulties based on conventional understandings of "verse" and "novel." As Clare Kinney suggests in *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, "we find it tempting to deal in tidy binary oppositions (poetry/prose, lyric/narrative), and the narrative poem can not always rest easily within these systems" (1992, p.8). These limitations are clearly illustrated in the physical dimensions of the library or bookstore. According to teacher-librarian Ed Sullivan, the categorisation of verse-novels continues to perplex librarians, making it difficult for them to decide whether to shelve verse-novels with poetry or fiction (2003, p.45). Sullivan ultimately contends that verse-novels should be placed in the fiction section, arguing that "these books are telling an invented story like any novel" (p.45), but for other teachers and librarians, a resolution may not yet have been found.

In spite of all these terminological complications, "verse-novel" has become a widespread, recognisable generic label. It is the expression used in magazine articles, education journals, and literary criticism. It is printed on the backs of books and used in marketing blurbs. "Verse-novel" is a term that child and young adult readers will come to identify with a certain type of experience. In this exegesis, the term "verse-novel" will refer to any novel-length work that uses poetry or poetic elements in a significant sense, or has been labelled as a "verse-novel" by writers, publishers, critics, librarians, teacher, or readers. I hesitate to use the phrase "novel-length work" since many verse novels appear much, *much* shorter than prose novels. For instance, Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) only spans 86 pages, yet it is labelled as "a novel" on the front cover, and many critics have discussed this text as a verse-novel (for example, see Alexander 2005; Mallan & McGillis 2003; Tarr 2008). The latter part of my classification – calling texts "verse-novels" if others have labelled them so – may seem unfair, especially if authors have voiced aversion to the verse-novel label.

Yet it is important to take into account how any text classified as a verse-novel has influenced the genre, and therefore contributed to the dialogue about the genre, regardless of authorial intentions. From this point onwards, the term "verse-novel" will be used to solely refer to the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults, unless otherwise specified.

Evolution of the Verse-Novel for Children and Young Adults

In order to understand the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults, it is necessary to consider the genre's evolution. The verse-novel has been periodically discussed as a continuation of a historical tradition of narrative poetry (Flynn, Hager & Thomas 2005; Turton 1999) such as the epic, ballad, long narrative poem, Victorian verse-novel, or contemporary adult verse-novel. The verse-novel for younger readers does share its hybrid identity with these literary forebears, all of which combine poetry with narrative. Additionally, Chapter One will explore how most narrative poems involve the same sustained interaction between poetic and narrative elements on a structural level, which creates another parallel between verse-novels and other types of narrative poetry. In spite of these similarities, this exegesis argues that the verse-novel for children and young adults was not directly influenced by historical forms of narrative poetry, most of which were written for adult readers. Instead, this study contends that the verse-novel emerged as a discrete genre that was influenced by changes in children's poetry, contemporary culture, and marketing trends.

Of course, other factors may have influenced individual verse-novelists. For instance, Australian verse-novelist Steven Herrick said in an interview with Jeri Kroll

that Dorothy Porter's adult verse-novel, *Monkey's Mask* (1994), influenced him to write his young adult verse-novel, *Love, Ghosts, & Nose Hair* (1996) (Herrick cited in Kroll 2001, p.25). Porter's verse-novels share many similarities with the verse-novel for children and young adults, employing short poems (each beginning on a new page) and free verse poetry. Therefore, the correlation between Herrick's and Porter's verse-novels is not surprising. However, in my own interview with Herrick (Alberts 2013b), he did not mention Porter as an influence, but said that he first wrote a verse-novel to develop his storytelling capacities. He also said that when doing school visits, children often asked him if he wrote stories, which also motivated him to begin writing verse-novels. The discrepancies between these two interviews with Herrick may suggest that writers may want to retain a certain mystique about their work. It also suggests that individual writer motivations do not necessarily provide the best theoretical reasoning for the emergence of the entire verse-novel genre.

Before I discuss the relationship between the verse-novel and recent developments in children's poetry, the inevitable difficulties that arise in any discussion of children's poetry needs to be acknowledged. As Morag Styles points out, there may be "no such thing as poetry for children" (1996, p.191). While many adult writers compose poems about children or childhood, "[a] great body of the so-called canon of children's verse was never intended for the young at all, but was verse which adults thought *suitable for children*" (p.191). Even when adult writers write poetry specifically for children, this poetry is still imbued with adult ideologies regarding children, childhood, and children's poetry. Alison Halliday argues that the notions of childhood and poetry are constructed in similar ways, and that the "conjunction of the two [concepts] reveals much about the creation of the ideology of both poetry and childhood" (1996, p.21). Actual children's poetry that is written by

children without adult influence, such as the playground poetry children create outside the school walls, has been almost entirely ignored by poetry anthologists and literary theorists (Thomas 2007). What will be referred to now is a body of literature that has either been written by adults *for* children, or written by adults *about* children and childhood, and has been classified as "children's poetry" by writers, theorists, publishers, and educators.

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, children's poetry tended to be "didactic and severe, expressed in fables…and hymns" (Styles 1996, p.191), corresponding with John Locke's (1988) conception of children as blank slates, onto which parents and educators must inscribe wisdom and righteousness. During this period, the only contrast from this type of poetry was the "rude, crude and dramatic verse" of chapbooks (Styles 1996, p.191). In the nineteenth century, children's poetry became more entertaining, with poets creating light-hearted poems about animals, as well as cradle songs and nonsense verse (p.191). While nineteenth century children's poetry was less didactic, children were often portrayed as small, pretty, and for the most part, obedient and civilised, underpinning adult ideologies about how children should appear and behave. Children's poetry from that time also featured idyllic rural settings like country estates, which presented an "idealised middle-class construct of childhood" (Styles 1998, p.xviii).

These representations deviated from the experiences of "flesh and blood children who are often large, noisy and boisterous" (Styles 1998, p.xviii). Noticeably absent from children's poetry were depictions of children from lower classes or minority races and cultures. When you compare these constructs of children as small, pretty, and obedient with "real children," the power imbalance between adult and child is evident. Children did not have a voice in literature, and adult writers silenced

them further through misrepresentation. Bill Ashcroft has compared the child with the colonised subject, arguing that "[c]olonial imperialism utilized the concept and implications of childhood to confirm a binarism between colonizer and colonized; a relationship which induced compliance to the cultural dominance of Europe" (2001, p.52). In this sense, early children's poetry embodied adult ideologies regarding childhood, but also imperialistic values of the western world.

Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, a "sea-change" occurred that pushed children's poetry

> into the city: the earlier gentle and often rural lyricism turned into something more earthy, harking back, perhaps, to the bawdiness of the chapbooks. This poetry is closer to the 'real world' as many children – not just middle-class children – may experience it. Gone, largely, are descriptions of neat nurseries, countryside idylls and sweet fancies. (…) Humour is widespread, but serious concerns are not neglected" (Styles 1996, p.191).

The main school of poetry that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s was what John Townsend coined "urchin verse" (1987, p.303). According to Townsend, this type of poetry showed "family life in the raw, with its backchat, fury and muddle, and instead of woods and meadows are disused railway lines, building sites and junkheaps" (p.303). In *From the Garden to the Street: Three Hundred Years of Poetry for Children* (1998), Styles suggests that urchin verse had tremendous appeal to children as it explored subjects that actually interested them.[7] Academic Alison Kelly confirms

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[7] Styles is one of the only academics to write on the subject urchin verse. Therefore, Styles' "Poetry for Children" (1996) and *From the Garden to the Street* (1998) are my main secondary sources on this subject. A notable exception is Thomas' *Poetry's*

this, describing how primary school children in Great Britain have voiced their preferences for urchin verse in place of "old" poems (2005, p.132).[8] Some urchin verse was silly and entertaining, featuring children who play tricks on their teachers, dogs who eat underwear, and cake-bingeing aunts. Other urchin verse delved into more serious issues, such as bullying, death, or divorce.

This shift in subject matter in children's poetry seems concomitant with a shift in language. Most urchin verse began to use free verse poetry, first-person narration, and vernacular. For the first time, poetry was being written in language that children actually used, essentially giving children a voice in literature. Of course, a power imbalance still exists between the adult writer and child reader, but urchin verse has aligned itself more accordingly with the actual lives of children. This shift indicated a change in attitude regarding childhood. Instead of constructing childhood as a civilised, controllable state, childhood was now viewed as something that should be enjoyed by both children and adults. In other words, urchin verse promoted childhood as a period when kids can be kids.

During the 1970s and 1980s, British poets such as Benjamin Zephaniah and Grace Nichols, who have their roots in formerly colonised Caribbean nations, also began to write "a new poetry for children that took account of black experience in Britain and gave a focus for writing about West Indian life, too" (Styles 1998, p.283).

Playground (2007), which discusses the work of American urchin poets, Theodore Roethke and John Ciardi. Additionally, Townsend briefly discusses urchin verse in *Written for Children* (1987). Urchin poetry has also been touched upon in various papers (Lockwood 1999; Kelly 2005; Sloan 2001), but I am unaware of any full-length studies. Very little theory has been written on children's poetry in general (Hunt 1992), which is probably why such a small amount has been written on urchin verse. Most of my research on urchin verse has relied on the primary texts themselves.
[8] Kelly does not specify what these children mean by "old" poetry, but they may have been referring to the work of Robert Frost or Carl Sandberg, which is often taught in schools (Thomas 2007).

Zephaniah and Nichols often wrote children's poetry in the creole "english" from their ancestral Caribbean countries (for example, see Nichols 1990; 2013; Zephaniah 1995; 1997a; 1997b). Not only did this contribute to the diversity of children's voices in poetry, but this appropriation of the English language allowed these poets to "write back" against the imperial powers that dominated the West Indies for centuries (Ashcroft 1989).

According to Styles, Michael Rosen's *Mind Your Own Business* (1974) was the first major publication of urchin verse in the United Kingdom. In the following excerpt, a child's frustrations at home are humorously explored in free verse packed with vernacular: [9]

> We were making scrambled eggs yesterday
>
> and mum told my brother not to use a fork
>
> as it's a non-stick frying pan,
>
> and he said: I know I know I know
>
> I was the one who put you on to these
>
> non-stick frying pans you know.
>
> Today he told me that he was the one
>
> who put mum on to non-stick frying pans.
>
> Everyone interrupts in this house, he says
>
> and he sits in the corner making sheep noises (p.77).

Besides Rosen, Styles discusses the work of Allan Ahlberg, Jackie Kay, and Adrian Mitchell, who are all British poets. Joseph T. Thomas argues that Styles' bias towards

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[9] Ironically, Rosen originally wrote this collection for adults, but sold it as children's poetry when the adult market would not take it (Saguisag 2007, pp.7-8).

British poets reflects "the trends set by the majority of journal articles on the subject of children's poetry" that tend to explore "the rich British…traditions to the neglect of the poetry produced in the United States" (2007, p.106). Styles does acknowledge her disregard of American poets (but not her disregard of poets from other English-speaking countries), and provides a list of American writers whose work would be considered urchin verse. This discussion, however, is limited to one brief paragraph at the end of her chapter on urchin verse.

Despite the shortage of scholarly literature on urchin verse from other English-speaking countries, this type of poetry did emerge – and become quite popular – in the United States, Canada, and Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, even if it was not labelled as urchin verse.[10] Thomas actually argues that American poets, John Ciardi and Theodore Roethke, had been writing urchin verse since the late 1950s and early 1960s (2007). The work of Ciardi and Roethke did not idealise children, and they used humour and playful language to appeal to young readers. However, American children's poetry texts such as Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974); Nikki Giovanni's *Vacation Time: Poetry for Children* (1980); Jack Prelutsky's *The New Kid on the Block* (1984); and Charlotte Zolotow's *Snippets: A Gathering of Poems, Pictures, and Possibilities* (1993) coincide more with the urchin verse that developed in the United Kingdom in terms of subject matter and language use.

For instance, Prelutsky's children's poetry book, *Rolling Harvey Down the Hill* (1980), explores the "real lives" of five young boys who play together on the street outside their apartments, conforming with the urchin verse characteristic of

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[10] This statement is based on my research of children's poetry at the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany in 2012. While it is possible that children's poetry experienced a similar shift in English-speaking countries besides the United States, Canada, and Australia, these were the only countries that appeared to publish urchin verse. I was not able to research children's poetry in non-English speaking countries due to language limitations.

alignment with the actual lives of children. Prelutsky uses rhyming quatrains instead of free verse, which is atypical of urchin verse, but the author's poetry still utilizes vernacular.

> I swiped my grandma's cigarettes,
>
> I didn't dare to tell her,
>
> then Lumpy, Tony, Will and me
>
> snuck down into the cellar.
>
> We slipped inside the storage room
>
> and bolted shut the latch.
>
> I gave us each a cigarette
>
> and Tony struck the match.
>
> We lit them up together
>
> and boldly took a puff.
>
> We found out very quickly
>
> that one would be enough (p.10).

Australian children's poetry has never been specifically discussed as urchin verse, yet texts such as Jenny Boult's *About Auntie Rose* (1988), Colon Thiele's *Poems in my Luggage* (1989), and Steven Herrick's *Water Bombs* (1992) also exhibit characteristics of the urchin verse. For instance, a poem called "the magic world" in

Boult's *About Auntie Rose* uses free verse poetry packed with vernacular to capture the authentic voice of a child nagging her mother to go to the playground.[11]

> take me to the playground, mum.
>
> there's nothing to do here
>
> the sandpit's run out of sand
>
> there are leaves in the wading pool
>
> dad's pruned the tree into a stump
>
> there's no one to play with except the dog
>
> & she's sleeping. i'm bored here, mum.
>
> i don't want to play with my dolls
>
> grandma's not answering her phone
>
> take me to the playground mum.
>
> please. oh please. please?
>
> take me to the playground. please mum (p.12).

The parallels between urchin verse and verse-novels are manifold. Both use free verse that is sometimes devoid of figurative language, and also contain considerable amounts of vernacular. Because of this, both have received criticism for not being poetry. In fact, the criticism urchin verse has received is remarkably similar to the criticism directed towards verse-novels. Poetry critic Neil Philip argued that urchin verse is "less recognisably 'poetry' in the English tradition," (cited in Chambers 1989, p.96) and Nancy Chambers demoted urchin verse to "populist

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[11] The poem's title is presented in lowercase in the original text.

poetry" as opposed to what she considered the more revered notion of "heritage poetry" (1989, p.94). The term "populist poetry" may not seem like a criticism to everyone. In fact, some poets may even agree that their poetry *is* populist because their work concerns the lives of everyday people. However, Philip's and Chambers' criticisms seems reminiscent of the power opposition between the "proper" Standard English of the British Empire, and local dialects of colonised nations. When British colonizers invaded foreign lands, they used the English language and education as a way to assert power over native people. "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated," Ashcroft argues, "and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (1989, p.7). Therefore, relegating urchin verse as "populist poetry" is not only hierarchical, but could be interpreted as an attempt at political control within the realms of poetry criticism.

Another significant similarity between urchin verse and verse-novels is the exploration of "real issues" that concern young readers. Like urchin verse, verse-novels often delve into the emotional lives of children and young adults, tackling subjects such as drug abuse, mental health, and teenage pregnancy. Of course, elements of realism also emerged in young adult fiction in the 1960s, when prose novels like S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) and Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender* (1967) "ushered in an era of realistic fiction that engaged – in its themes, characters, and settings – the authentic lives of American children" (Cart 2005). However, it could be argued that this shift to realism in young adult fiction shaped the entire young adult genre as it stands today, making its connection to the verse-novel more oblique.

The verse-novel's relationship with urchin verse feels more direct, based on the ways both genres have explored realistic issues using free verse poetry.[12] Additionally, many urchin verse texts, such as Jack Prelutsky's *Rolling Harvey Down the Hill* (1980); Jean Little's *Hey World, Here I Am!* (1986); and Jackie Kay's *Two's Company* (1992), utilised first-person child narrators, developing these characters over a series of narrative poems. While these texts do not involve causal plots (therefore disqualifying them as "novels" in the traditional sense), the development of realistic child narrators who speak through poetry generates another similarity with the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults.

The link between urchin verse and verse-novels is especially evident as some children's poets writing in the 1980s and 1990s went on to create verse-novels. Australian poet Steven Herrick has not been directly linked to the urchin verse movement in scholarly literature, but Herrick's children's poetry collection, *Water Bombs* (1992), contains the characteristics of urchin verse, exploring true-to-life subject matters, using free verse and vernacular language. Four years later, Herrick published *Love, Ghosts, & Nose Hair* (1996), the first young adult verse-novel in Australia.

Virginia Euwer Wolff's award-winning *Make Lemonade* (1993) is considered by many to be the first young adult verse-novel in the United States, although Brenda Seabrooke's verse-novel, *Judy Scuppernong* (1990), came out three years earlier. Wolff and Seabrooke did not publish children's poetry collections prior to the release

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[12] Despite the proliferation of urchin verse in the United Kingdom, very few original verse-novels for children and young adults have emerged there. In fact, I am only aware of a few: Sarah Crossan's *The Weight of Water* (2012); Andrew Fusek Peters & Polly Peters' *Crash: Too Young, Too Fast, Love and Death, It Happens* (2005); Hugh Montgomery's *The Voyage of the Arctic Tern* (2000); and Roger Stevens' *The Journal of Danny Chancer (Poet)* (2002). Having said that, verse-novels from other Anglophone countries have frequently been republished in the UK.

of their verse-novels, but American writer Mel Glenn's poetry collections, such as *Class Dismissed: High School Poems* (1982); *Back to Class* (1988); and *My Friend's Got This Problem, Mr. Candler* (1991), exhibit the features of urchin verse. After publishing several of these poetry collections, Glenn went on to write young adult verse-novels, including *The Taking of Room 114: A Hostage Drama in Poems* (1997); *Foreign Exchange* (1999); and *Split Image* (2000). Paul B. Janeczko also wrote young adult poetry collections, such as *Brickyard Summer* (1989) and *Stardust Otel* (1993), before writing a young adult verse-novel, *Worlds Afire* (2004).

The shift towards realistic subject matters in urchin verse and verse-novels occurred at a time of development and change in contemporary society. Joy Alexander argues that the "digital revolution" we are living through has created a new order in which "visual and aural imaginations are both active," placing greater emphasis on voice and orality in reading (2005, p.270). She suggests that the verse-novel emerged because it is an "appropriate vehicle" for orality. For instance, she notes that the use of free verse "accentuates the oral dimension," allowing the writer to "shape the rhythm, position the line-break…to add emphasis, vary the pace through the line-length, or borrow and exploit poetic devices such as repetition, caesura and enjambment" (pp.270-271). Alexander does not elucidate the visual possibilities of the verse-novel, but the textual layout does more than convey orality. Lineation, line-groupings, and other spatial arrangements of free verse poetry entice the eye, encouraging the reader to find meaning beyond the aural function of the text (Berry 1989).

In the age of electronic media, poetry has become increasingly visual and oral, which Dana Gioia discusses in *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of the Print Culture* (2004). This is not to say that poetry is no longer being printed – it certainly

is. Yet according to Gioia, the tradition of literary poetry is mainly supported by the university and other literary establishments (p.7). As a result, literary poetry is often viewed as a "moribund art" that would not survive without the support of these establishments (p.30). At the same time, Gioia argues that poetry is experiencing a "wide-scale and unexpected reemergence [sic] (p.7)" Literay poetry may have a limited audience, but poetry has become a populist pursuit, manifesting in rap, cowboy poetry, poetry slams, and performance poetry (p.7). Gioia also contends that all forms of poetry (including traditional literary poetry) have become increasingly performative, oral, and visual, with a greater emphasis being placed on live performance, video and audio recordings, and radio broadcasts (p.20).

The verse-novel has remained in book form (unless you count the audio-book versions), but the oral and visual qualities of the verse-novel reflect the changes Gioia discusses. The genre's characteristic use of short lines and white space may have also developed because reading habits have changed. According to Gioia, "the average American now spends about twenty-four minutes a day reading" (p.3). Wolff has actually said that she wanted "white space around the words" of her young adult verse-novels so that her verse-novels would be more accessible to teenage mothers, like her fictional character Jolly in *Make Lemonade* (1994), who had to drop out of school to raise her two young children (cited in Colburn 2002, p.56). Commentators of the verse-novel have also praised the form for its ability to lure in reluctant readers (Angel 2004; Campbell 2004; Tarr 2008).

Lastly, marketing trends may have contributed to the evolution of the verse-novel. Of course, individual motivations of writers would have played – and continue to play – a significant role in the development of the genre. Yet the success of verse-novels such as Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (1997), which won the prestigious

Newbery Medal, may have pushed the verse-novel into the literary spotlight, encouraging an increasing number of authors to write in this genre. Besides Hesse's *Out of the Dust*, many other verse-novels have won notable awards. For instance, Herrick's *The Simple Gift* (2000) won a NSW Premier's Literary Award; Frost's *Keesha's House* (2003) won a Michael L. Printz award; Wolff's *True Believer* (2002) won a Printz award and a National Book Award; and Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) won a Newbery Honor and a National Book Award for Young People's Literature.[13]

Since Wolff's *Make Lemonade* (1994) was published in the United States, and Steven Herrick's *Love, Ghosts, & Nose Hair* (1996) was published in Australia, numerous verse-novels have also emerged in Canada, including Alma Fullerton's *Walking on Glass* (2007); Wendy Phillips' *Fishtailing* (2010); and Cathy Ostlere's *Karma* (2011). Fewer verse-novels have appeared in England, but Sarah Crossan's *Weight of Water* (2012); Hugh Montgomery's *The Voyage of the Arctic Tern* (2000); Andrew Fusek Peters & Polly Peters' *Crash* (2005); and Roger Stevens' *The Journal of Danny Chancer (Poet)* (2002) are notable exceptions. In France, actor and writer Sébastien Joanniez has published several verse-novels for children and young adults, including *Treizième Avenir* (2006); *Noir Grand* (2012); and *Vampires, cartable et poésie* (2013). In Scandinavia, Hilde Hagerup's young adult verse-novel, *Jeg Elsker Deg* (2009) was published in Finland, and Aase Berg's *Människoätande Människor I Märsta* (2009) and Gunnar Ardelius' *Jag behover dig mer an jag alskar dig och jag alskar dig sa himla mycket* (2007) were published in Sweden.[14]

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[13] This is by no means an exhaustive list. Many other verse-novels have won awards, including additional texts written by Herrick, Frost and Wolff.
[14] Ardelius' verse-novel has also been translated into English as *I Love You More Than I Need You and I Love You To Bits* (2008).

Several genres related to the verse-novel for children and young adults also emerged around the same time, reinforcing the popularity of the verse form with writers and readers. For instance, several verse-memoirs for children and young adults have been published, including Ann Turner's *Learning to Swim* (2000); Eireann Corrigan's *You Remind Me of You* (2002); Miriam Stone's *At the End of Words* (2003); Kathi Appelt's *My Father's Summers* (2004); and Samantha Schutz's *I Don't Want to be Crazy* (2006). While these verse-memoirs are technically non-fiction, they tend to be discussed alongside verse-novels for children and young adults (for instance, see Angel 2004; Hollindale 2004; Groenke & Scherff 2010). Not surprisingly, many of these verse-memoirists went on to write verse-novels. Turner, for instance, wrote a children's verse-novel, *Hard Hit* (2006); Corrigan wrote a young adult verse-novel, *Splintering* (2004); Appelt wrote *Kissing Tennessee: and Other Stories from the Stardust Dance* (2004) for young adult readers; and Schultz authored a young adult verse-novel, *You Are Not Here* (2010).

Contemporary picture books that use free verse poetry have also gained popularity in recent years. For example, Karen Hesse's *The Cats in Krasinski Square* (2004); Linda Lowery's *Laurie Tells* (2008); and Linda Glaser's *Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty* (2010) all utilise free verse like their verse-novel counterparts. Shorter stories-in-verse (published in book form) have also appeared alongside the verse-novel, including Vera B. Williams' *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart* (2001) and Angela Johnson's *Running Back to Ludie* (2001). Some readers might argue that Williams' and Johnson's texts are actually verse-novels. However, these stories seem too short to be novels, but too long to be considered picture books. For instance, *Running Back to Ludie* (2001) only spans 49 pages, including illustrations. Young adult stories-in-verse have also appeared in short story collections

(for example, see Amnesty International UK 2009; Levithan 2007; Levithan 2008; McCafferty 2004).

Literature Review

Despite its proliferation and mainstream success, the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults has received relatively little scholarly attention. The newness of the form could be partly responsible for this, yet Catherine Addison (2009) points out that "[v]ery little has been written about verse novels" – Victorian or contemporary, adult or young adult – "at any stage of their history" (p.540). A plausible explanation for the shortage of academic studies on the verse-novel could be the theoretical challenges of discussing a hybrid form. Based on the limited descriptive categories that situate "poetry" and "narrative" as binary opposites (Kinney 1992, p.8), it can be somewhat difficult to place verse-novels within theoretical frameworks. Brian McHale (2009) notes that while narrative poems have been discussed in narrative theory since ancient times, narrative theorists have tended to treat narrative poems as "de facto prose fictions" (p.11). A notable example of this tendency is Mikhail Bakhtin's (1994) treatment of Alexander Pushkin's verse-novel, *Eugene Onegin* (2004), as an exemplary text in his discussion of novelistic discourse. Bakhtin (1994) argues that "heteroglossia," or the inclusion of multiple voices, is a feature exclusive to the novel (p.324, p.329, p.332). While Bakhtin does acknowledge that *Eugene Onegin* consists of poetry, he suggests that the verse-novel's heteroglossic tendencies transform the text into novelistic prose through a process of "prosification" (p.329). Bakhtin also calls *Eugene Onegin* (2004) an "encyclopedia

of…styles and languages" that generates the "authentically novelistic style of this work" (p.329), seeming to overlook the verse-novel's poetic identity.

Theoretical literature may be scarce, but the verse-novel for children and young adults has garnered plenty of attention in magazines, journals, and mainstream publications aimed at teachers, librarians, and other readers interested in children's and young adult literature.[15] While the content of these journalistic articles varies, most tend to provide a general survey of the genre and review notable examples, but they tend not to embark on theoretical discussion (Angel 2004; Botelho, Young & Nappi 2009; Campbell 2004; Hollindale 2004; Isaacs 2003; Letcher 2010; Michaels 2003b; O'Neal 2004; Schneider 2009; Shahan 2009; Sullivan 2003; Tarr 2008; Turton 1999; Vanneman 2010).[16] Articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals have also explored the verse-novel through survey and review, and these have included some theoretical debate. For instance, Alexander (2005) briefly discusses the verse-novel's oral qualities, and Christopher Pollnitz (2002) discusses how verse-novels may draw on radio drama and film. Kate Deller-Evans' (2011) survey of Australian young adult verse-novels considers themes of hardship and climatic extremes. Other articles and book chapters discuss the verse-novel as a boundary-breaking trend in the general context of young adult literature (see Cadden 2011a; Crowe 2002; Ward, Young & Day 2012). The verse-novel has also been examined as a poetic trend in articles and book chapters that survey contemporary children's poetry (see Apol & Certo 2011; Bach & Bickmore 2010; Brown & Miskin 2001; Flynn, Hager & Thomas 2005; Heyman, Sorby & Thomas 2009; Sorby, Thomas & Flynn 2008).

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[15] I am referring to journalistic articles that examine the verse-novel genre at large – not reviews of individual texts.

[16] These articles originate from the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Based on my limited knowledge of other languages, I have not been able to research whether verse-novels are being discussed in magazines, journals, or theoretical publications in France, Sweden, or other non-Anglophone countries.

The most theoretically developed work on the verse-novel for children and young adults are the academic essays and conference papers of Michaels (2003a; 2005); Alison Halliday (1999; 2003); Mallan & McGillis (2003); and Van Sickle (2006). These studies are important milestones in the study of the verse-novel, yet they represent a meagre scholarly response to a prolific genre, but these essays and papers also possess limitations. For instance, the length of Michaels' (2005) discussion is restricted by the structural confines of the conference paper, and Halliday's work (1999; 2003) focuses more on children's poetry rather than exclusively on the verse-novel. To the best of my knowledge, no full-length study on the verse-novel for children and young adults has emerged to date.[17]

All of these studies originate from Australia, with the exception of Van Sickle's (2006) essay, which comes from the United States. The Australian origins of these studies do not delimit their relevance to verse-novels from other English-speaking countries. As discussed in my section on the evolution of the genre, children's poetry in many Anglophone countries experienced the same "sea-change" (Styles 1996, p.191) in the 1980s and 1990s that led to the emergence of urchin verse, and subsequently the verse-novel. As Mallan and McGillis argue, "no literary form can be totally monocultural…given the influence of Western literary traditions on the production, distribution and reception of texts" (2003, n.p.).

The most significant differences between Australian verse-novels and those from other Anglophone countries are found in their cultural and geographical features. Australian verse-novels often contain Australian characters, take place at familiar Australian settings, involve local colloquialisms, and refer to endemic flora

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[17] While I am not aware of any full-length studies on the verse-novel for children and young adult, Linda Weste's creative writing PhD exegesis, "Productive interplay: poetic and narrative strategies in the late twentieth and early-twenty-first century verse novel" (2012) examines the adult verse-novel in detail.

and fauna. Verse-novels from the United States, on the other hand, often "take on more obviously multicultural and historical themes" (Mallan & McGillis 2003), which may be representative of the larger and even more diverse population in the United States, as well the country's longer post-colonial history. It is worth noting, however, that Australia also has a diverse population and a considerable post-colonial history, and that some Australian young adult verse-novels do explore these experiences. For instance, Lorraine Marwood's *Ratwhiskers and Me* (2008) takes place in the Victorian goldfields in the 1800s, and is narrated by a young girl who befriends the Chinese community in order to survive the harsh conditions. While exceptions exist, American verse-novels do seem to tackle more multicultural and historical themes (for example, see Hemphill 2010; Herrera 1999; Lai 2011; Thompson 2011; Wong 2005), which is probably indicative of the larger population in the United States, as Mallan and McGillis (2003) have suggested. Despite these differences, most verse-novels from the United States and Australia share the same hybrid identity, displaying similar structural features. Therefore, any theoretical discussion focusing on the form of the verse-novel will have relevance to most contemporary verse-novels for children and young adults, regardless of a text's originating country.

Since Van Sickle's (2006) paper on verse-novel subcategories has already been examined in my section on terminology, I will focus my attention here on the others. Michaels explores the verse-novel in a newspaper article (2003b) and in a scholarly essay on themes of home and homelessness in Herrick's verse-novels (2003a). In her conference paper, "Paradigm shift and evolutionary adaptation," Michaels contends that the verse-novel is an "adapting, mutating and hybridising narrative form" with roots in the long tradition of narrative verse as well as

collections of children's poetry with loose narrative threads (2005, p.6). Focusing specifically on the young adult verse-novels of Steven Herrick, Michaels argues that the verse-novel merges the monologue with narrative verse, and adapts the *bildungsroman* to create a truly hybrid form. Michaels makes some valuable statements regarding the segmentation of "verse fragments" and the white space between poems, arguing that this fragmentation increases narrative momentum, intensifies emotion, and creates "drama in a similar way to the drama of the turning page in picture books or the frequent scene shifts in cinematic and televisual media" (p.7). Yet Michaels spends the majority of her paper exemplifying Herrick's use of monologue, including the lyric monologue, narrative monologue, and dramatic monologue. My own research does not explicitly investigate the intersection of a third genre with narrative and poetry, but Michaels' study demonstrates the verse-novel's hybrid nature, which my own research substantiates through its exploration of the intersection of poetry and narrative in the verse-novel.

Halliday (1999; 2003) takes a different approach, examining the verse-novel through the lens of children's poetry. In "Poetry in Australia: A Modern Dilemma," Halliday argues that children's poetry holds an "embattled position," but remains in children's lives through the modern form of the verse-novel (2003, p.220). Like Michaels (2003a; 2003b; 2005), Halliday focuses her study on the verse-novels of Herrick. Halliday argues that Herrick's texts contain "ambiguities and conundrums implicit in the many ways that poetry may, and should, connect with the lives of children," which she refers to as "dilemmas" (2003, p.219). While much of Halliday's research does not apply to my own study, her investigation of the uncertainties of form in children's poetry has proven to be quite useful.

Halliday considers the verse-novel to be a collection of separate lyric poems, albeit with paratextual cues that encourage linear reading. She argues that the introduction of narrative into children's poetry (manifested in the verse-novel) constitutes a "dilemma between the complex and momentary nature of the lyric and the longer narrative forms where events and people coincide" (2003, p.222-223). Halliday suggests that this integration of lyric and narrative complicates reading positions because most readers will bring separate assumptions about lyric and narrative to their reading practices (p.223). My research does not specifically consider the lyrical qualities of the verse-novel, yet Halliday's discussion of the complicated relationship between lyric and narrative may provide information about the process of reading both poetry and narrative in the verse-novel. A reader may have certain assumptions about poetry and certain assumptions about narrative, but when he or she encounters both genres, these assumptions may not be easily reconciled. For instance, a reader accustomed to poetry may expect to find metaphors in every poem, but may be disappointed by the relative lack of figurative language in the verse-novel. Or the reader might expect to read the poems in a verse-novel in an achronological order, similarly to the way one would read a traditional poetry collection.

Even more helpful to my research is Halliday's discussion of intratextuality. In "Place in Poetry; Poetry in its Place," Halliday discusses how "place" in verse-novels serves a realistic function (denoting a physical setting), but also contains metaphorical meanings based on the connections and associations that resonate with each mention of place (1999). Halliday notes that intertextuality plays a significant role in creating the metaphoric meanings of place, yet argues that the *intratextual* links between and across poems produce multilayered, complex webs of meaning, and encourage active forms of reading (1999, pp.225-226). My own research draws on

this concept of intratextuality to consider how narrative and poetic segments interact and create meaning within each poem, as well as between and across poems.

The central concerns in Mallan and McGillis' essay, "Textual Aporias: Exploring the Perplexities of Form and Absence in Australian Verse Novels" (2003), dovetails with Halliday's (2003) paper on dilemmas in children's poetry. Like Halliday, Mallan and McGillis explore quandaries in the verse-novel, but instead of treating these quandaries as "dilemmas" (which implies a difficult situation that requires a choice), Mallan and McGillis regard them as "aporias." Aporia is an old Greek word meaning an impasse, difficult state, or puzzlement. The term became well known in deconstructive theory when Jacques Derrida (1993) used it to discuss the ambiguous concept of death. Derrida argued that death is not just a border that needs to be crossed, but it is also a borderless, unstable notion. In other words, it is a border, but not a border – a tension that creates a conundrum. In *Acts of Literature*, Derrida described aporia as a "barred passage" (1992, p.399), a phrase that reinforces the concept's equivocal nature.

This inclusiveness of equivocation is a feature of deconstructive theory. In *On Deconstruction*, Jonathan Culler explains how deconstructive theory breaks down the hierarchal opposition between binaries, depriving both concepts of metaphysical privilege (1982, p.23, p.94-96). For instance, *parole* (speech) tends to be viewed as the dominant term when it is paired with *langue* (language); speech acts are often thought to determine language. Yet deconstructive theory reveals that every speech act "is itself already determined and made possible by prior structures," which means that every "utterance is already inscribed in the structure of the language" (p.95). Therefore, neither parole nor language can be treated as the originating concept. "A scrupulous theory must shift back and forth between…*parole* and *langue*," Culler

writes, "which never lead to a synthesis. Each perspective shows the error of the other in an irresolvable alternation or aporia" (p.96). This "irresolvable alternation" between binaries creates a rift. When teaching aporia to college students, Diane Krumney describes it as the "moment in a text that seems to require but refuses logical interpretation or that insists on more than one" (2008, p.22). When a text creates this sense of unsolvability, it "opens up a gap, a rift in the text that can never be sealed because it continues to host meaning making" (p.23).

Mallan and McGillis use this concept of aporia to discuss verse-novels for children and young adults, which they call "impossible books" (2003, n.p.). The authors locate numerous aporia in young adult verse-novels based on the tensions between opposing concepts. For instance, they discuss how poetry is often interpreted as a more elevated, more rhetorical form of writing that uses devices such as chiasmus, anaphora, alliteration, and assonance. Prose, on the other hand, may be interpreted as a less embellished form of writing. While there may be noticeable differences between poetry and prose, Mallan and McGillis point out that prose can use the same rhetorical devices as poetry, which breaks down the division between poetry and verse, generating aporia.

In another instance, Mallan and McGillis argue that aporia manifests in the tensions between dialogism and monologism in Libby Hathorn's *Volcano Boy* (2001). A fiery "volcano boy" named Alexander narrates this young adult verse-novel, which takes the form of Alexander's poetry journal. Following the deaths of his sister and mother, Alexander is forced to move to Papua New Guinea with his puritanical uncle. *Volcano Boy* contains a multitude of surface voices: Alexander; the editor who published the journal after Alexander's presumed death; the person who found the journal and wrote a letter to the editor; the voices in the quotations that fill the

margins, which come from the Bible, Shakespeare, and writers like Dorothea McKellar; and the authorial voice of Hathorn. *Volcano Boy* also incorporates the voices of the uncle, the uncle's friends, and various Papua New Guinean people. On one hand, Hathorn's verse-novel achieves a level of dialogism, "elud[ing] a single meaning or single point of view" (Mallan & McGillis 2003, n.p.), coinciding with Bakhtin's (1994) notion that the novel is characterised by heteroglossia. On the other hand, the voices from the quotations all originate from the Western world, which collapses any attempt at cultural pluralism. "[I]nstead of an open marketplace of voices, a heteroglossia," Mallan and McGillis write, "there remains a hierarchy of voice" (2003, n.p.). In this sense, *Volcano Boy* remains culturally *monologic* through the exclusion of voices outside of the Western World.

Interconnected with Mallan and McGillis' exploration of aporia is the consideration of the gap. They use the term "gap" throughout their essay, and their use of this term not only applies to the aporetic spaces between binary concepts, but to the textual and physical gaps that appear in the poetic narrative. In traditional narratives, gaps open up when the discourse provides limited information, making the reader question: who, what, where, why? (Abbott 2008, pp.90-92). Verse-novels magnify these gaps with the segmentation of line-break, section-break and page-break, making the verse-novel like a particularly "gappy" genre. Mallan and McGillis (2003) suggest that reading orientates itself in these gaps as readers "actively work to bridge the gaps into a meaningful shape" (n.p.), which shares similarities with Wolfgang Iser's contention that gaps in texts "give the reader a chance to build his own bridges" (1989, p.9). Because of the prevalence of gaps in verse-novels, this genre requires an active form of reading. To borrow Roland Barthes' words, a verse-

novel can be understood as a "writerly" text, based on the way it demands an active

reader who is "no longer a consumer, but a producer of a text" (1974, p.4).

Literature on the Adult Verse-Novel and Verse-Novelist Interviews

Even though this study does not consider the adult verse-novel, it is important

to review some key theoretical papers on the contemporary adult verse-novel which

have some pertinence to my research. Patrick D. Murphy's article, "The Verse-novel:

A Modern American Poetic Genre" (1989), which is a modified form of his

dissertation, "The Verse-novel: Dialogic Studies of a Modern Poetic Genre" (1986),

discusses the verse-novel as a "new type of American long poem" that evolved from

modern poetry's movement towards "the rhythms and diction of daily speech" (1989,

p.60). Since language in the modern long poem "frequently varies its prosody to

imitate more closely the nuances, rhythms, and idioms of daily speech," Murphy

asserts that it has become more like the contemporary novel (p.60). As previously

mentioned, Bakhtin (1994) argues that the novel is characterised by "heteroglossia" or

"dialogism," meaning that it involves the polyphonic presentation of multiple voices

and multiple points of view (p.324, p.329, p.332). On the other hand, Bakhtin

contends that poetry is "single-voiced" or "monologic" based on its limitations of a

single authorial voice (p.330). Based on the polyphonic tendencies found in modern

poetry, Murphy postulates that dialogism "increasingly applies to poetry," and

specifically to the verse-novel (1989, p.60). Yet what Murphy describes as a "verse-

novel" differs greatly from the verse-novel for children and young adults, and even

from most contemporary adult verse-novels. Murphy classifies modernist long poems

like Eliot's *The Waste Land* (2006)*,* Williams' *Paterson* (1948), and Ezra Pound's

The Cantos (1970) as verse-novels, which Lars Ole Sauerberg (2004) and Brian McHale (2000) argue are actually fragmentary, experimental, and devoid of narrative. Nonetheless, Murphy's interpretation of dialogism in the long modernist poem can be applied to the verse-novel for children and young adults, which also involves multiple voices and points-of-view. This dialogism in verse-novels does not just confirm the existence of dialogic qualities in poetry, but reinforces the verse-novel's dualistic (and pluralistic) nature.

Lars Ole Sauerberg's "Repositioning Narrative: The Late Twentieth-Century Verse-novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo" (2004) is less relevant to my study, but he makes some important points about actual readers that can be applied to my research. Sauerberg examines four contemporary adult verse-novels that employ metrical verse, and contain arcane references to literary history that some readers may struggle to recognise. However, he argues that the reactions of general readers to these four verse-novels may not actually be conditioned by literary history, but "by what they are used to as readers of contemporary fiction, perhaps even more generally by narrative…informing both novel and film, and by reference to the lyrics of popular music" (2004, p.440). Because of the diversity of artistic and communication modes found in contemporary society, Sauerberg suggests that readers may not find the verse-novel so strange to read. Even though verse-novels for children and young adults tend not to be written in free verse and do not contain arcane references, young readers would be conditioned by similar artistic and communication modes as adult readers, and they, too, may not find the verse-novel format unusual in any way.

In "Strange Bedfellows or Compatible Partners: the Problem of Genre in the Twenty First Century Verse Novel" (2010), Kroll argues that verse-novels are

"interstitial," a term Heinz Insu Fenkl (2003) used to describe texts that defy genre classification and exist in a "constant state of coming-into-being at the threshold of the reader's consciousness" (n.p.). Kroll postulates that the verse-novel is interstitial by the way it "creates and then lives within a permanent liminal space that keeps alive the tensions between poetry and narrative" (2010, p.7). She suggests that all verse-novels embody this collaboration between narrative and poetry, but only "innovative" verse-novels that slip between multiple genres and categorisations are "interstitial."

Kroll generates her concept of the interstitial verse-novel from Bakhtin's notion of literary language as stratified and heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1994, p.272). "Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language,*" Bakhtin writes; "With each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it" (p.295). Kroll builds on Bakhtin's idea, arguing that "just as individuals select an appropriate mode of expression depending on a circumstance, so writers select a genre to suit their purposes" (2010, p.6). For example, Kroll marks Dorothy Porter's adult verse-novel, *Monkey's Mask* (1994), as interstitial because of the way it is "at once a collection of poems, a variation on the hard-boiled detective novel, a crime thriller and an anti-romance of sexual passion (lesbian and straight)" (2010, p.5). Kroll argues that Porter chose to write in poetry and crime as both these genres share certain intensities, and suit the text's subject matter (p.5).

While most verse-novels for children and young adults do not seem to fit Kroll's concept of "innovative" (2010), they should still be conceived as "interstitial" by the way they resist classification respectively as "poetry" or "narrative," and inhabit a space between these genres to create a hybrid form. Kroll argues that the interstitial nature of the verse-novel challenges the writer "to question the

collaboration of poetry and narrative" (p.2), a point she supports by discussing her own process of writing a young adult verse-novel (pp.7-8). This argument corroborates my own challenges in writing the young adult verse-novel, *Homing Poems* in this thesis, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. Kroll also discusses the verse-novel in "'From page to stage': a case study of transforming a verse novel" (2102), arguing that "the verse novel's hybrid identity makes it suitable for adaptation to the stage" (p.4).

Finally, I will briefly review published literature that investigates the verse-novel writing process. Besides Kroll's (2010) conference paper, I am unaware of any other study that discusses the challenges of writing both poetry and narrative within a theoretical context. The writing process has been discussed in various author interviews, though most do not focus exclusively on the author's writing practice, but investigate other aspects of a writer's life, such as the author's background and personal motivations to write certain texts (for example, *Book Nook with Vick Mickunas* 2008; Colburn 2002; Kroll 2001; Lesesne 2002; Shahan 2009; Sutton 2001; Vardell & Oxley 2007; Vardell 2010). One of the most comprehensive interviews on the verse-novel writing process is Kelly Milner Halls' published dialogue with Sharon Creech, Lorie Ann Grover, Hope Anita Smith, Virginia Euwer Wolff, and Sonya Sones, which appeared in the *2005 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market* (2005, pp. 92-98). Halls interviews these writers about the difference between writing a verse-novel and writing a prose novel, whether or not they outlined before writing their verse-novels, and if they followed any "rules" when writing in this genre. However, Halls does not question these authors about the difficulties and demands of writing both poetry and narrative.

To fill this lacuna, I conducted my own interviews with Tanya Lee Stone (2012); Sonya Sones (2012); Ron Koertge (cited in Alberts 2013b); Steven Herrick (cited in Alberts 2013b); Helen Frost (cited in Alberts 2013b); Meg Kearney (2013); and Sharon Creech (2013).[18] Several of my interview questions investigated how these verse-novelists collaborated poetry with narrative, and how they dealt with the demands of writing in this interstitial form.[19] These interviews informed my theoretical understanding of the collaboration of poetry and narrative in the verse-novel, and they also stimulated my creative process, helping me find a way to deal with the dualistic demands of my own verse-novel, *Homing Poems*.

Theoretical Approach

This exegesis provides a necessary theoretical study on the interplay between poetry and narrative in the verse-novel for children and young adults, providing a new paradigm through which to read and analyse verse-novels. While the studies of Michaels (2003a; 2005), Halliday (1999; 2003), Mallan and McGillis (2003) all consider the hybrid nature of the verse-novel for children and young adults, none of them have exclusively focused on the interaction between poetry and narrative. This study will illustrate the importance of thinking about the connection between poetry and narrative in the verse-novel in both theory and practice, and suggest how this awareness can be used to challenge criticisms of the genre. This exegesis will also explore how the interplay between poetry and narrative often interlinks with the emotional trajectory of the narrative discourse, encouraging affective responses in the

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[18] My interviews with Helen Frost, Ron Koertge, and Steven Herrick were published in an article, "Writing the Young Adult Verse Novel: An Interview with Three Authors" (Alberts 2013b).

[19] For a full copy of my interview questions, please see Appendix I.

reader, and creating emotional experiences of the narrative poetic structure. This study will then examine verse-novels that use self-reflexivity to urge the reader to actively think about the construction of poetry. Self-reflexive techniques are surprisingly common in verse-novels, but they have not been thoroughly discussed in scholarly research. Self-reflexive strategies in verse-novels may integrate with the structural interplay between poetry and narrative, engaging readers on a cognitive and affective level. Lastly, I will consider how my theoretical research influenced my creative work, prompting me to produce a verse-novel that is conscious of the interconnection between poetry and narrative.

A conglomerate of theories will be used in this exegesis, yet the foundation of this study is based in narrative theory. This approach may seem surprising since my research does not solely focus on the narratological aspects of the verse-novel. Yet recent studies in narrative theory have provided frameworks for analysing narrative poetry by investigating how poetry and narrative interconnect through counterpoint (see Hühn 2002; 2004; 2005; Hühn & Kiefer 2005; Kinney 1992; Levy 1988; McHale 2009; 2010a; 2010b). These studies emerged in a time of innovation and change in narrative theory. Classical narrative theory (which was based in Russian Formalism) tended to focus on the analysis of prose narratives, but over the past several decades a "narrative turn" (Kreiswirth 2005) has taken place that pushed narrative theory away from the theoretical confines of the novel, diffusing it across disciplinary boundaries (Herman 2009, pp.23-24). The past decade, in particular, "has seen an exponential growth of cross-disciplinary research and teaching activity centering around narrative" (p.24). Narrative theory is now used to discuss storytelling techniques in a range of literary forms and media, as well as in fields such as law, education, health, psychology, and cognitive theory (p.23).

To say that narrative theorists have only begun to discuss narrative poetry in the last few decades is, of course, a travesty. As Brian McHale points out, narrative theorists "have been thinking deeply about poetic narratives since ancient times" (2009, p.11). Yet McHale argues that contemporary narrative theory has almost completely ignored poetry. "In many classic contemporary monographs on narrative theory," McHale writes, "in specialist journals…at scholarly meetings such as the annual conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, poetry is conspicuous by its near absence" (p.11). Furthermore, McHale notes that when narrative poetry has been discussed, it has often been treated like "de facto prose fictions" (p.11). Therefore, it is better to say that narrative poetry has recently been *re*-introduced in narrative theory, and discussed with more awareness of its poetic qualities as well as its narrative qualities.

Several narratological studies have emerged in recent decades that investigate the entwined relationship between narrative and poetry in narrative poems. Clare Kinney's *Strategies of Poetic Narrative* examines the "tangled relationship" between poetic form and narrative content in classic English poetic narratives (1992, p.6), such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1984), Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1981), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1973). For instance, in her discussion of *The Faerie Queene*, Kinney notes how the Spenserian stanzas (ABABBCBCC) create a "displaced couplet" (p.7) in the fourth and fifth lines that "lays the foundation for the second (BCBC) quatrain which complicates, augments or re-examines the narrative content of the first four lines and thus produces a structural matrix exploiting both repetition…and difference" (p.70). Building up on her discussion of the interlaced relationship between narrative and poetic form, Kinney discusses how instances of intertextuality and self-consciousness contribute to the

design and shape of the narrative poems, which somewhat aligns itself with my own argument that self-reflexivity in verse-novels for children and young adults shapes the reader's experience of the narrative poetry. In *Chinese Narrative Poetry: The Late Han Through T'ang Dynasties* (1988), Dore J. Levy discusses the relationship between poetic form and narrative content in Chinese narrative poetry. Yet Levy explains that the concepts of "narrative" and "lyric" have very different meanings in Chinese, and that Chinese narrative poetry requires a unique mode of analysis that cannot be easily applied to Western poetry.

Peter Hühn has developed an entire research program dedicated to the study of narratological elements in poetry, and has written several papers on the subject (for example, see Hühn 2002; 2004; 2005; Hühn & Kiefer 2005; Hühn & Sommer 2013). Yet Hühn has focused his research on "lyric poetry," specifically because it is often considered to be a non-narrative form of poetry (2005, p.148). "So far, only narrative (and epic) poetry has been subjected to narratological analysis," he writes. "[My research] deliberately goes beyond such attempts by suggesting the fruitfulness of applying narratological categories especially to non-narrative verse, to lyric poetry in the narrow sense of the term" (p.148). Even though Hühn suggests that lyrics are non-narrative, he argues that lyric poems feature sequences of "mental and psychological happenings perceived through the consciousness of single speakers and articulated from their position," and that these "happenings" can be interpreted as narratological elements (Hühn & Sommer 2013, n.p.).

Hühn's research is certainly valuable to the arenas of contemporary narrative theory and poetry criticism, but I chose not to use his work because of the way he treats each (lyric) poem as an individual narrative entity. If Hühn's theory had been applied to my own study, I would have to analyse each poem within a verse-novel as

a discrete narrative event, whereas I intend to discuss an entire verse-novel as a narrative poem. McHale (2009) also argues that Hühn's notion of the lyric (that is, a text that features mental and psychological happenings) is not necessarily limited to poetry, but could be applied to other types of texts (p. 13). McHale's contention seems to support my decision not to apply Hühn's research to my own work. After all, my exegesis is not examining the lyricality in the verse-novel for children and young adults, but the interaction between poetry and narrative.

While Kinney's (1992) work will be utilized in this exegesis, this study will draw most heavily on Brian McHale's theory of contrapuntal analysis in narrative poetry (McHale 2009; 2010a; 2010b). Using Rachel Blau DuPlessis' contention that poetry is defined by "segmentivity" (1996, p.51), McHale argues that narrative, too, can be segmented, and that poetic segmentation would inevitably entangle itself with narrative segmentation in narrative poetry (2009, p.17). Significantly, McHale argues that "segmentation *must always* contribute meaningfully…to the structure of the poetic narrative" (p.18), implying that the interaction between poetic and narrative elements should remain as a constant force throughout a narrative poem. In the next chapter, I will unpack and expand upon McHale's theories, and will discuss how McHale's work can be used to think about verse-novels for children and young adult as "narrative poetry," despite the genre often being criticised for consisting of chopped-up prose. Based on McHale's contention that a constant interaction exists – or should exist – between poetic and narrative elements, I argue that one cannot consider "poetry" in a verse novel without considering the influence of "narrative." In other words, poetry and narrative are intrinsically interlinked, and the narrative elements would greatly influence the shape of the poetic structure, and vice versa.

Before I proceed, I would also like to briefly explain my approach of the verse-novel genre based on my choices of primary texts. Throughout this exegesis, I will generally refer to the verse-novel for children and young adults, and will cite a myriad of texts within this genre. However, my study focuses on four primary texts: Tanya Lee Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006); Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009); Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001); and Norma Fox Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005). All four primary texts originate from the United States, however, I did not intend for this study to be geographically focused. These verse-novels were chosen simply because they were the most instructive examples of my argument. As discussed in my literature review, Australian and American verse-novels appear to differ mainly in terms of cultural references, so my study will be relevant to most contemporary verse-novels for children and young adults, regardless of their provenance.

I have also chosen to discuss both the children's verse-novel *and* the young adult verse-novel, despite the fact that children's and young adult literature are often understood as two separate genres. After all, the children's verse-novel evolved simultaneously with the young adult verse-novel, and both share many of the same structural elements. My decision was also influenced by the fact that the verse-novel for children and young adult tends to be treated as a unified genre in literary theory. For instance, in "The Verse-novel: A New Genre" (2005), Joy Alexander discusses young adult verse-novels like Virginia Euwer Wolff's *True Believer* (2002) and Libby Hathorn's *Volcano Boy* (2001), alongside children's verse-novels such as Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (1999) and Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001), placing them

under the same generic label. Of course, the integration of children's and young adult verse-novels may be indicative of the historical trend not to distinguish young adult literature from the wider concept of children's literature (Hunt 1996). While this trend is slowly changing, and more studies focusing solely on young adult literature have emerged, many theorists continue to treat young adult literature as a subgenre of children's literature.

My own study will discuss some differences between children's and young adult verse-novel (and between younger and older readers), but it is possible that my research may leave other distinctions unnoticed and open to further discussion. However, the aim of this exegesis is not to exclusively examine the age-specific qualities of these verse-novels, or the reading experiences of certain age groups. Instead it will focus on the structural interplay between poetic and narrative elements in verse-novels, and how these interconnections may engage readers on affective and cognitive levels. Children's and young adult verse-novels share many of the same attributes, so they will engage readers in comparable ways.

CHAPTER ONE

The Connection of Poetry and Narrative

Gaps are bound to open up…[they] give the reader a chance to build his own bridges

(Wolfgang Iser 1989, p.9).

Brian McHale's theory of contrapuntal analysis between poetic and narrative segmentations is particularly apposite to this exegesis on verse-novels for children and young adults (2009; 2010a; 2010b). The study of counterpoint in poetry is certainly not new. In fact, counterpoint has been used to describe the interplay between poetic elements since the early nineteenth century (White 2012). McHale's theory emerged at a time of "narrative turn" in contemporary narrative theory (Kreiswirth 2005), when narrative theory began to be used in cross-disciplinary research. McHale is not the only one to investigate the relationship between poetry and narrative in poetic narratives. Other theorists such as Levy (1988), Kinney (1992), and Hühn (2002; 2004; 2005) have also investigated the contrapuntal relationship between narrative and poetry. However, McHale's theory diverges from the others in his articulation of a *constant* interaction between narrative and poetic elements (2009; 2010a; 2010b). Furthermore, he argues that it is the poetic and narrative "gap" or "segment" that engages in this sustained interplay. Because the gap plays an integral role in meaning-making in the verse-novel for children and young adults, McHale's theory has specific relevance to this investigation.

The verse-novel contains many types of poetic and narrative gaps. Arguably, the most conspicuous gaps are the white spaces that are produced by line-break, section-break, or page-break. As Angela Leighton suggests, these kinds of gaps are the first things we notice in a poem; we use the eye to see "how long it is, how short

the lines are, how it straggles on the page or sits compactly in stanzas" (cited in Simecek 2012, n.p.). After we notice it with the eye, we then use the ear, "performing the spaces as pauses as we read," and using these experiences to create meaning (n.p.). Of course, all poetry employs the gap to produce meaning – not just verse-novels. Yet the gap is often the most prominent (and sometimes, the only) poetic device used in the verse-novel for children and young adults. This certainly could be debated, as other poetic devices may appear to take prominence in some texts. For instance, repetition, rhyme, and imagery could be interpreted as more salient features than line-break and page-break in Frost's *Keesha's House* (2003), which uses sestinas and sonnets in lieu of free verse. Yet most verse-novels that contain Alexander's "house-style" characteristics (2005, p.270) use line-break, section-break, and page-break in significant ways. This exegesis will investigate how the poetic segmentation creates affective and cognitive experiences of narrative poetry through its interplay with narrative segmentation. Therefore, McHale's model of counterpoint between poetry and narrative segmentation will provide the foundation for my textual analysis (2009; 2010a; 2010b).

McHale's theory will also be used to consider how verse-novels function as narrative poetry. As discussed in the Introduction, the verse-novel genre has often been accused of consisting of chopped-up prose instead of poetry. Yet McHale's argument of a *constant* (or near constant) interaction between narrative and poetry seems to suggest that the two genres cannot be separated. The narrative gaps that open up in a verse-novel will interconnect with poetic segmentation such as line-breaks and section-breaks, reinforcing narrative meaning, or creating chords of dissonance in the verse-novel. McHale's theory will be used to argue that the verse-novel should be

considered "narrative poetry" based on its capacity to interlink poetry and narrative through segmentation.

Defining Poetry by "Segmentivity" and Line-Break

Lines are what distinguish poetry from all other art forms, and therefore they intrinsically mean something. They help us see what makes a poem a poem (Alberto Ríos 2011, p.209).

Before I discuss McHale in detail, I would like to consider some important critical developments regarding the poetic line, which can be used to appraise verse-novels as poetry based on the genre's use of lineation and white space. McHale's theory of counterpoint draws on poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis' argument that poetry is defined by "segmentivity" (DuPlessis 1996, p.51). McHale uses DuPlessis to construct his model of contrapuntal analysis, which can essentially be applied to any type of narrative poem. Different poems will use different poetic devices, but segmentivity, according to DuPlessis, occurs in all poems. Besides providing a theoretical foundation for McHale's contrapuntal theory, DuPlessis' concept of segmentivity offers a way of approaching verse-novels *as* poetry, based on the simple fact that the verse-novel segments language through line-break and section-break.

DuPlessis generates her notion of segmentivity as a way to distinguish poetry from other genres (1996, p.51). *Narrativity*, she argues, characterises narrative, and *performativity* defines performance. While both narrative and performance involve gaps or periodicities, DuPlessis suggests that the gap is "more systematic and more constitutive in poetry," by its use of the line-break, stanza-break, and page space to create meaning (p.51).[20] "*Segmentivity*," DuPlessis argues, "the ability to articulate

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[20] In "Manifests" (1996), DuPlessis presents her discussion of segmentivity in a one-page section entitled "Codicil on the Definition of Poetry" (p.51). This discussion –

and make meaning by selecting, deploying, and combining segments—is the underlying characteristic of poetry as a genre" (p.51). The prose poem poses a possible counterexample to DuPlessis' definition, but she contends that it still uses the line by deliberating overriding it (1999, p.297). Hadara Bar-Nadav argues that the page margin defines line-break in prose poems, and that poets working in this form "write both *through and against* the margin, even as it is arbitrarily assigned" (2011, p.45).[21] Taking this into account, segmentivity could define all types of poetry – even prose poetry.

> Poetry is the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines and whose meanings are created by occurring in bounded units precisely chosen, units operating in relation to chosen pause or silence. Thus a fusion of reading, observing, and listening techniques are required to decode it (DuPlessis 1996, p.51).

As the eye observes the white space, and the ear hears it, the mind works to create meaning. Yet, as Leighton argues, meaning it not embedded in the poem, but is "something that is being constructed as we search for it" (cited in Simecek 2012, n.p.). Leighton's suggestion is reminiscent to literary theorist Stanley Fish's claim that "[i]nterpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (1980, p.327). Fish argues that it is not the individual reader who creates meaning, but the reader's participation

which only comprises of about 700 words – reappeared in "The Blazes of Poetry: Remarks on Segmentivity and Seriality With Special Reference to Blaser and Oppen" (1999) and in one chapter of *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work* (2006). I am primarily citing from "Manifests" (1996) because this is where the codicil appears in its most complete form. The latter texts present reworded or shorted versions of the codicil.
[21] Bar-Nadav's italics.

in an interpretive community that constitutes a set of interpretive strategies. Meaning may not be fixed in the poem, but the white space that follows each line-break or section-break creates a physical place on the page – as well as a place in the mind – for meaning-making to occur.

According to DuPlessis, the "bounded units" that make up a poem "can be made in varying sizes and with a varying semantic goal" (1996, p.51). Whatever words a line may contain, or however many words a line contains, it is always terminated by white space. DuPlessis has also called this white space a "line-blaze" that "keeps you on the trail of the verse," or the "flashpoint to mark every line end" (1999, p.290). It is the line-blaze, DuPlessis argues, "in which and through which segmentivity occurs" (p.290). White space is arguably the verse-novel's most noticeable feature, so the word "blaze" is a fitting term to describe the white space in this type of text. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the poetic segmentation (in coordination with the narrative segmentation) often corresponds with moments of emotional intensity, encouraging affective responses in the reader. Therefore, the "line-blaze" not only delineates the visual flash of white, but can refer to the blaze of emotional fervency that frequently occurs in these places.

DuPlessis formulates her concept of segmentivity from the work of Objectivist poet George Oppen, who mentored DuPlessis for many years. In an interview in *Contemporary Literature*, DuPlessis discusses how her own poetry has been shaped by "Oppen's commitment to exactness, sincerity, and social and existential focus, along with [his] brilliant and challenging use of segmentivity" (DuPlessis & Heuving 2004, p.413). In *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work* (2006), DuPlessis suggests that Oppen's use of segmentation in his poetry was an artistic response to tragedies like the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. Theodor Adorno famously

pronounced that to write poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric – a statement that placed post-war culture in a difficult position (1992, p.87). Adorno also argued that politics have "migrated into" all art, and that artists had to work with this understanding and its ramifications (p.93). In this "Adorno-esque" sense, DuPlessis contends that Oppen "exposes and explores the riven and fraught nature of subjectivity in a state of political and existential arousal that cannot (yet) be satisfied" (2006, pp.187-188).

While DuPlessis' theory of segmentivity is deeply rooted in Oppen's existential poetics, her attention to segmentation is of great importance to contemporary poetic criticism. In the early 1980s, a number of essays and symposiums emerged on the poetic line, emphasising the theoretical importance of the line in poetry.[22] Denise Levertov's seminal essay, "On the Function of Line" (1979), postulates that line-break is the most important poetic tool, used to control rhythm and melody, and to create nuances of meaning. The following year, *The Field Guide to Contemporary Poetry* (1980), edited by Stuart Freibert and David P. Young, presented a collection of essays from eight poets, offering differing opinions regarding lineation. For example, John Haines, Louis Simpson, and Shirley Kaufman argue that instinct or natural impulse influences the poet's use of the line, while Donald Hall, Sandra McPherson, and William Matthews compared the poem to a dance, suggesting that the line determined its rhythm. McPherson's essay, however, is the only one that edges towards DuPlessis' (1996; 1999; 2006) theory. McPherson

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[22] This statement does not intend to disregard earlier critical texts that examined the line in poetry. For instance, Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" (1997) (originally published in 1950), revolutionised poetry criticism by suggesting that the line should move away from organised meter and rhythm, to be powered only by the poet's breath and heartbeat. However, I have chosen to only discuss works from the 1980s onwards because it was at this time that the poetic line moved to the forefront of academic discussion, culminating in numerous essays and symposiums that exclusively dealt with the line.

argues that the line is a "unit," and that lineation contributes "to the tension of the work" (p.63). Yet even McPherson does not place the same significance on poetic line that DuPlessis does a decade and a half later.

The same year as *The Field Guide* symposium, *Epoch* published "A Symposium on the Theory and Practice of the Line in Contemporary Poetry" (1980), which included essays from twenty-nine poets. The editors, Rory Holscher and Robert Schultz, noted that many of the contributors discussed "the rhythmic and structural basis of the line;" the symbiosis of aural and visual elements in the poetic line; the effects of syntactical play across line-breaks; and the nature of the poetic form (1980, pp.162-170). Some contributors suggested that lineation plays a predominant role in the creation of poetry. For instance, D. J. Enright proposed that lineation is an indication of rhythm, tone, and emotional force, and therefore "the *meaning* of the poetry" (p.186). Robert Kelly proclaimed that "line is the core of poetry" (p.193), while Joseph Langland wrote that poetry has always been defined by measure and that "line might very well be its chief measure" (p.198). However, most of the other contributing poets appear to view lineation as supplementary to other poetic techniques. In fact, contributors like Christopher Bursk lamented the symposium's focus on the "technical" element of lineation instead of the emotional feelings behind poems (p.176).

Another important text that came out at this time was Charles O. Hartman's *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980). While the individual essays in the *Epoch* and *Field Guide* symposiums are mostly based on practice-led research, Hartman (although a practicing poet himself) examines the line from a more theoretical perspective. He argues that lineation is the main prosodic device in free verse poetry. Prosody, according to Hartman, is the "poet's method of controlling the reader's

temporal experience of the poem" (p.14). He defines poetry as "the language of an act of attention" (pp.13). Lineation not only "promotes the attention which is necessary to prosody" in free verse poetry, but it functions as an essential characteristic of poetry by creating that attention (p.52). Although Hartman treats lineation as a prosodic device that demands attention through rhythm and sound (ignoring the line's visual capacities), his argument suggests that lineation is what generates poetry. Using Hartman's theory, verse-novels could be interpreted as poetry (not chopped-up prose) based on the way lineation captures the reader's attention, demanding that the language be read – and experienced – *as* poetry.

Other notable texts from the 1980s include the "Free Verse Issue" of *The Ohio Review* (1982), which provides a collection of essays on the line, and *The Line in Postmodern Poetry* (1988), which presents nine critical papers that explore the effect of postmodernism on the poetic line, as well as a mini-anthology of short essays from poets associated with the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement. In a short essay in the anthology section, poet Lyn Hejinian states that she thinks "about the line more than about any other formal element in her writing" (1988, p.191). The line, she argues, is "the standard (however variable) of meaning in the poem, the primary unit of observation, and the measure of felt thought" (p.191). While Heijinian does not discuss white space in the production of meaning, she places significant emphasis on the line-break in a similar way as DuPlessis (1996; 1999; 2006). "In this sense," Heijinian writes, "syntax and movement are more important to me than vocabulary" (1988; p.192).

From the late 1980s to the 2000s, few critical developments emerged regarding the line. A notable exception is James Longenbach's *The Art of the Poetic Line* (2008), which argues that line-break in poetry primarily performs a sonic

function. Of course, DuPlessis (1996; 1999; 2006) began writing about segmentivity in poetry in the late 1990s, but as McHale points out, she remained relatively "undiscovered by academic poetry scholarship" until recently (2009, p.14). Then, a few years later, *A Broken Thing: Poets on the Line* (2011), edited by Emily Rosko and Anton Vander Zee, reignited theoretical discussion on the poetic line with over seventy new essays written by practicing poets. Although the book contains numerous opinions (based largely on individual poetic practices), Zee suggests that many essays in this collection reflect the line's fundamental position in contemporary poetry. "More than ever," Zee writes, "the line *is poetry*, the radical against which even alternate and emerging poetic forms that foreground the visual or the auditory, the page or the screen, can be distinguished and understood" (p.6).[23]

Zee also notes that "[m]any contributors to *A Broken Thing* share DuPlessis' commitment to ideas of form in both theory and practice" (2011, p.21). For instance, poets like Bruce Bond, Thomas Lux, Joanie Mackowski, Alberto Ríos, and Robert Wrigley all argue that the line defines poetry, and that line-break is the most important poetic tool. Jenny Mueller suggests that the line in free verse poetry remains innovative because of its ability to engage with line-break and the white space of the page (pp.170-172), which correlates with DuPlessis' contention that poetry is articulated in "gapped lines" that produce meaning through "pause or silence" (1996, p.51). "Within such silences," Mueller writes, "poems may take revolutionary turns, searches, and strange propulsions" (Rosko and Zee 2011, p.171).

I would also like to note that young adult verse-novelist Meg Kearney, who wrote *The Secret of Me* (2005) and *The Girl in the Mirror* (2012a), has emphasised the importance of line-break in her writing process. "The line break is the only tool

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[23] Zee's italics.

the poet has in her toolbox that the prose writer does not have," she writes, "it is the "anti-prose" mechanism that doesn't allow the line to reach the edge of the page" (2012b, n.p.).[24] Kearney also argues that the line-break "sends the reader back into the poem itself," urging the reader to decipher multiple meanings, and to experience the music and rhythm of the poem (n.p.).

Do these essays and articles constitute a gradual shift in thinking that promotes the line as the characteristic feature of poetry? Zee warns against this, arguing that one cannot treat the line's "many pasts and multiplying presents as so many instances of poetic thought or signposts of a historical moment" (Rosko and Zee 2011, p.13). Instead, he suggests, "one must be open to the ways that lines continue to hold us and claim us in some curious way that cannot, and should not, be exorcized or explained away" (p.13). Nevertheless, it is still significant that so many critics and poets have argued that segmentation and line-break distinguish poetry. DuPlessis (1996; 1999; 2006) and other writers have offered ways to consider the verse-novel as poetry based on its use of lineation, even if the verse-novel does not involve other poetic devices. Yet, as argued in the Introduction, one must also consider the narrative aspect of verse-novels. Therefore, McHale's theory of contrapuntal analysis between poetic and narrative segmentation offers a more precise way to consider how verse-novels function as *narrative poetry* (2009; 2010a; 2010b). Before I elaborate on McHale, I must first consider another poetry critic whose work he draws on to formulate his argument – John Shoptaw (1995).

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[24] This information comes from Kearney's teacher's guide to *The Girl in the Mirror* (2012b), which is available on her personal website. Kearney also included this quoted material in my email interview with her (2013).

Measures of Resistance

McHale (2009) uses John Shoptaw's essay, "The Music of Construction: Measure and Polyphony in Ashbery and Bernstein," to provide a more precise vocabulary for DuPlessis' concept of segmentivity. Shoptaw's choice of word is "measure," a term traditionally used to define a metrical unit such as a poetic foot or line. Shoptaw redefines a poem's measure as the "smallest unit of resistance to meaning" (1995, p.212). The word "resistance" insinuates that a poem's measure has a deconstructive quality, which seems to conflict with DuPlessis' "constructive" description of poetry consisting of "*bounded* units precisely chosen," and her concept that segmentivity creates meaning by "selecting, deploying, and *combining* segments" (DuPlessis 1996, p.51).[25] However, Shoptaw also speaks in terms of construction. Although he notes that a poetic measure "calls attention to itself and either delays or disrupts the argument of movement or progressive development of a text," Shoptaw argues this delay or disruption *constructs* the meaning of the poem (1995, p.212). McHale (2009) likens Shoptaw's definition of measure to DuPlessis' concept of segmentivity, describing how the reader plays a pivotal role in the construction of meaning:

> It is where meaning-making is interrupted or *stalls out*, where the text breaks off and a gap (even if only an infinitesimal one) opens up, that the reader's meaning-making apparatus must *gear up* to bridge the gap and heal the breech. A gap is a provocation to meaning-making; we intervene to make meaning where ready-made meaning fails (McHale 2009, p.16).

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[25] My italics.

Paradoxically, Shoptaw (1995) focuses on the work of Charles Bernstein and John Ashbery, whose postmodern poetry often seems to have little "meaning" in a straightforward sense. Shoptaw argues that the ways in which experimental poems misrepresent ordinary and poetic language is what causes a reader to pause and actively attempt to construct meaning. "Even if a poem makes little or no sense in the usual sense of the word," Shoptaw writes, "it always makes music" (p.212). Drawing on Ashbery's and Bernstein's references to music in their poetry, Shoptaw discusses a poem's "music" in terms of structure and measurement.[26] This is another similarity between Shoptaw and Duplessis; both incorporate music in their discussions of poetic segmentation. While DuPlessis speaks of poetic segments combining to create "scales" or "chords" (1996, p.51), Shoptaw bases his system of poetic measurement on the idea that music is a "measured argument" (1995, p.213). If a poem's overall meaning is not apparent, Shoptaw implies that the poetry's music creates its own form of "meaning" – a "music of meaning" – that can be measured and analysed (p.211).[27]

Shoptaw claims that poems can be analysed by the following measures: characters, words, lines, sentences, and sections. McHale builds on Shoptaw's argument, pointing out that poetry can also be measured by stanzas or metrical feet (2009, p.16). In a poem from Bernstein's first chapbook, *Disfrutes* (2005), Shoptaw

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[26] Shoptaw refers to Ashbery's description of music as "carrying an argument through successfully to the finish, though the terms of this argument remain unknown quantities" (Ashbery cited in Leary & Kelly 1965, p.523). Shoptaw also references Ashbery's interview from *The New York Quarterly*, in which Ashbery discusses music as a "moving climate" (Ashbery cited in Packard 1974, p.114). Additionally, Shoptaw refers to Bernstein's essay, "Thought's Measure," where Berstein describes poetry as "the *unit* of ordering" (2001, p.75), as well as "Semblance" in which Bernstein talks about music in terms of measurement and shape (2001, pp.34-39).
[27] The phrase, "music of meaning," derives from Bernstein's "Semblance" (2001, p.37).

discusses how the measure of a word unit resists – and therefore constructs – the music of meaning (1995, p.226):

> she
>
> shells
>
> smells
>
> by the by (Bernstein 2005, p.19).

Shoptaw argues that reading the poems in *Disfrutes* is "a matter not of figuring out what they mean, since none of them "makes sense," but recognising their music of construction" (1995, p.226). The words "she" and the rhyming words "shells" and "smells" bring to mind the well-known tongue twister: "She sells seashells by the seashore." But the words in Bernstein's poem thwart our expectations of reading the tongue twister in its correct form. The words also do not make sense – how can she shell smells? The phrase "by the by" resists meaning and diverts from the original phrase from the tongue twister "by the seashore." Despite the lack of coherent meaning, Shoptaw's mode of poetic measurement provides a vocabulary to discuss the structure of a poem's "music."

Shoptaw classifies Bernstein's poem as word-measure, but notes that the poem is *countermeasured* by line and sentence measure (pp.225-226). Although the poem does not make sense, the words form a kind of sentence, fragmented by the physical segmentation of the line breaks. Shoptaw states that word-measured poems require "the pull of larger measures for definition" (p.225). In fact, Shoptaw argues that all poems are both measured and countermeasured (p.213). A poem can be line-measured and counter-measured by the phrase and/or sentence. Or a poem may be sentence-

measured and countermeasured by the word. One kind of measure might appear more salient than the other measure, but measures overlap and weave together.

Character-measured or word-measured poems tend to be experimental, as Shoptaw (1995) demonstrates in his analyses of Ashbery's and Bernstein's poetry. Since most verse-novels tend to emulate the vernacular of adolescent or child characters, consisting of more straightforward and unambiguous language, the majority of verse-novels are not characterised by word-measure or character-measure, or even phrase-measure. Yet some exceptions apply. Sharon Darrow's young adult verse-novel, *Trash* (2006) includes several poems that are typified by word-measure or phrase-measure as the narration drifts into a stream-of-consciousness style of writing. The following excerpt, narrated by the teenage protagonist Sissy, oscillates between phrase-measure and word-measure as Sissy speaks about drawing on her skin:

doodles & scrolls & squiggles

squirrels & toads & pencils

ink black   red   turquoise

(borrowed pen in math class)

skin   palm   fingertips

circle my wrist with green

leaves   red roses (p.28).

The first two lines are phrase-measured, reinforced by the use of the ampersand. Without the ampersand, the words "doodles," "scrolls," and "squiggles" would exist individually, which would push the line into word-measure. Since most of the other

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poems in *Trash* consist of sentences, readers might expect to read the remainder of the sentence in the second line. But this expectation is foiled when the phrase "doodles & scrolls & squiggles" does not form a sentence, but is punctuated by a line-break and the start of a separate new phrase. These two phrase-measured lines could be interpreted as *countermeasured* by the line as well as the sentence. In the third line, the ampersands disappear, and the words "ink black," "red" and "turquoise" stand apart. Most readers would see the connection between these words, each describing a colour; they would have learned what to expect from the prior ampersands. Therefore, the grouping of these words "make sense." It is the lack of the ampersand and the spacing between these words that also thwarts our expectations of reading a phrase. One could designate this line as being word-measured, and countermeasured by the phrase and line. The remainder of the excerpt, as well as the rest of the poem, swings between phrase-measure and word-measure, countermeasured by sentence, phrase, and line. Not only does the reader need to consider the connections between the words, ampersands and phrases; he or she would also need to think about the linkage between these phrases and the rest of the poem, as well as the poem's relationship within the narrative discourse.

Despite these kinds of exceptions, as illustrated in *Trash* (2006), the majority of verse-novels tend to be characterised by line-measure. Line-measured verse-novels chop the narrative discourse into sentences, phrases, and words into lines that need to be reassembled into syntactical and narrative units. The readers may not have to measure the poetry by character or word, but they are still creating meaning in the "blazes" of white space that follow each line-break. Some verse-novels, however, are also typified by section-measure. For instance, Liz Rosenberg's *17* (2002) consists of short prose poems that act like paragraphs. Although Bar-Nadav argues that prose

poems still involve line-break (2011, p.45), most readers will only measure meaning in *17* in the strips of white space between each prose poem, and also between each titled section of prose poetry. Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) functions in a similar way to *17*, although the text in *The Death of Jayson Porter* does break into line-measure in some parts. While section-measured verse-novels exist, line-measured verse-novels are by far the most common. An excerpt from Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) exemplifies this technique:

How can I feel

so completely

connected

to someone

I practically just met? (p.23).

The sentence by itself makes sense and does not contain any words or clauses that resist meaning. What does provide a level of resistance is the line-break. Instead of existing as a complete component on the horizontal axis of a single line, the sentence is broken into five units. The white space accentuating each line break creates a pause, urging the reader to construct meaning in the gaps of space. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the poetic segmentation of *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* interacts with the emotional content of the narrative to encourage affective responses in the reader. In this excerpt, the line-break depicts the emotional intensity of the narrator's question, and encourages the reader to experience the speaker's excitement and uncertainty in the large blocks of white space in the right side of the page. The line-break also counters the idea of Josie feeling "connected" to her boyfriend by

severing the sentence into five lines.

It is Shoptaw's (1995) concept of line-measure and section-measure that most closely aligns itself with DuPlessis' notion of segmentivity. DuPlessis argues that meaning is created in poetry through "bounded units" and their negotiation of the "gap" (1996, p.51). Although DuPlessis indicates that these "bounded units" can come in "varying sizes" (ranging from one word to many words, or even just characters) and can be made with "a varying semantic goal," her argument focuses on the construction of meaning that hinges on the physical white space surrounding the text (p.51). The meaning-making that occurs in the white space between lines and sections will play a significant role in my textual analysis in the following chapters, as I consider how poetic and narrative segments collaborate to create affective and cognitive experiences of narrative poetry. Shoptaw's theory of poetic measurement adds value to this study as it provides a more comprehensive vocabulary for the diverse ways a poem can be segmented. It also illustrates that gaps can open up in many places – not just at the line-break or section-break. After all, the verse-novel not only involves poetic segmentation, but it is also comprised of narrative gaps, producing a dynamic countermeasure between poetry and narrative.

"Countermeasuring" Poetry and Narrative

McHale (2009) uses Shoptaw's concept of measure and countermeasure to formulate his theory of contrapuntal analysis. "If poetry is measured and countermeasured," McHale reasons, "so, too, is narrative" (p.17). He suggests that segmentivity is not a dominant feature in narrative (p.17), yet it *can* be in verse-novels based on the way the narrative discourse is divided into short poems. As

Kearney (2012b) argues, readers of verse-novels have to use their imaginations to fill in "what might happen in between poems," whereas in a conventional novel, the "reader might have to follow a protagonist from his kitchen table to his coat rack, then to his foyer and troublesome door knob to the front stoop…then down the walk to the driveway, where he stands searching his pockets for his keys" (n.p.). Verse-novels are also more "gappy" than other narratives through their use of line-break and section-break. McHale lists multiple other ways narrative can be segmented:

> On the level of story, the "flow" of events is segmented into sequences of various scales—"moves," sub-plots, episodes—and ultimately into discrete events. On the level of discourse, narration is segmented into multiple, shifting voices—quoted, paraphrased, and ventriloquised, juxtaposed on the same plane or inset one within the other—while "point of view" is segmented by constant micro-shifts of focalization. Time in narrative is segmented; so is space; so is consciousness. Gaps abound, of all kinds, on all levels (2009, p.17).

Of course, narrative can be segmented in other ways, too. As Abbott argues, "narratives by their nature are riddled with gaps," providing limited or ambiguous information that makes the reader question: who, what, where, why? (2008, p.90-92). In a similar vein, Wolfgang Iser talks about "spots of indeterminacy" that occur throughout a narrative text, urging the reader to fill in the gaps (1978, p.170). Meir Sternberg (1985) argues that a reader's gap-filling process may range

from simple linkages of elements, which the reader performs automatically, to

intricate networks that are figured out consciously, laboriously, hesitantly, and

with constant modifications in the light of additional information disclosed in

later stages of the reading (p.186).

The majority of verse-novels do not contain overly complex storylines, and readers

may be able to fill in gaps unconsciously, or as Sternberg (1985) suggests,

"automatically" (p.186). However, the "gappy" nature of the verse-novel would still

demand an active reading process, urging readers to fill in the narrative gaps that open

up with line-breaks, section-breaks, and the gaps between poems.

McHale suggests that in narrative poetry, "narrative's own segmentation

interacts with the segmentation "indigenous" to poetry to produce complex interplays

among segments of different scales and kinds" (2009, p.17). These "complex

interplays" are multi-faceted: poetic segments (or gaps) can be measured and

countermeasured; narrative gaps can be measured and countermeasured; and the

poetic and narrative units can also be countermeasured against each other (p.17).

Despite these multiple points of connection, the interplay between poetry and

narrative provides the foundation for this exegesis, as it considers how poetry and

narrative structurally connect in verse-novels, and how the reader can be engaged

through the deployment of poetic and narrative gaps.

McHale's theory of countermeasurement suggests that an intricate relationship

exists between poetic and narrative units. Other narrative theorists have suggested the

same. For instance, Kinney argues that "a text that is at once narrative and poem may

bring into being a two-way dialogue between what it recounts and the manner of its

telling that results in a more tangled relationship between content and form" (1992,

p.4). Hühn also explores the linked relationship between narrative and poetry in his analysis of narrative elements in lyric poetry (Hühn 2002; 2004; 2005; Hühn & Kiefer 2005). Yet McHale argues that Hühn treats the relationship between narrative and poetic units as optional when it should be constant:

> Hühn faithfully implements in his practice his theoretical principle that poetic segmentation may *optionally* supplement—corroborate or counterpoint—the narrative structure of lyric poems; whereas I want to argue, in the light of DuPlessis' hypothesis of poetry as segmentivity and Shoptaw's analysis of countermeasurement, that segmentation *must always* contribute meaningfully (for better or worse) to the structure of poetic narrative (McHale 2009, p.17-18).

In other words, McHale is suggesting that narrative will inevitably entangle itself with the poetic segmentation. Because poetic and narrative segmentations intertwine in this way, it becomes impossible to separate poetry from narrative, and narrative from poetry. Therefore, one cannot think about poetry in verse-novels without considering the aspect of narrative. In order to discuss poetry in verse-novels, it is essential to understand how poetic segmentivity interacts with – and even depends upon – narrative segmentivity.

Notably, verse-novelists such as Ron Koertge, Helen Frost, and Sharon Creech have all indicated that synthesis occurs between poetry and narrative in their creative processes. Koertge, for example, describes poetry and narrative as "amiable things, willing to work with and alongside one another" (cited in Alberts 2013b, n.p.). Frost similarly suggests that poetry and narrative "support and strengthen the other" (cited

in Alberts 2013b, n.p.). Creech states that "part of the appeal of writing the verse-novel is that the two forms – poetry and narrative – mesh so seamlessly" (2013, n.p.). These comments give the impression that there is something about the nature of poetry and narrative that allows these genres to integrate so well. In light of McHale's theory (2009), it could be argued that the gaps, periodicities, and segmentations intrinsic to both genres encourage this fusion.

Nevertheless, the process of writing a verse-novel still poses many challenges. Narrative and poetry may *not* always "mesh so seamlessly" (Creech 2013, n.p.), or even have a clear connection, as I have experienced in my own writing process, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. Sonya Sones says that she actually favours narrative over poetry when writing verse-novels, and that she writes "poems" that are "less like poems and more like connective tissue" to move the narrative forward and create segues between more "poetic" poems (2012, n.p.). Therefore, McHale's (2009) postulation of a *constant* connection between narrative and poetry seems to express an ideal relationship that is not always possible. Having said this, McHale's theory does not necessarily suggest that poetic and narrative segments will interconnect through perfect coincidence; instead his theory advocates various levels of contrapuntal *interference* between poetry and narrative. Even so, McHale's model could pose the risk of "over-interpretation" of the relationship between narrative and poetry in verse-novels, especially in poems that may only be, in Sones' words, "connective tissue" (2012, n.p.). Therefore, my textual analysis will not attempt to (over)interpret every possible connection between poetry and narrative, but will focus on the interactions that contribute the most meaningfully to the reader's affective or cognitive experiences of narrative poetry.

Thinking about Verse-Novels as Narrative Poetry

As discussed in the Introduction, verse-novels for children and young adults have often been criticised for not consisting of poetry. While the verse-novel could be interpreted as poetry based simply on its use of lineation, McHale's theory can be extrapolated to consider how verse-novels work as narrative poetry, even if they are devoid of other poetic devices. McHale has argued that "segmentation *must always* contribute meaningfully…to the structure of poetic narrative (2009, p.17-18), which implies that poetry and narrative are involved in an inextricable union. This relationship does not involve perfect integration, but narrative and poetry segmentations will still mingle, dance, and ineluctably become tangled up with each other. In other words, there should be some kind of discernable relationship between poetry and narrative segmentation in narrative poetry.

McHale does not present a definition of "narrative poetry" in his essays on counterpoint, but his theory implicitly suggests that "narrative poetry" is structurally different from "non-narrative poetry." Admittedly, "non-narrative poetry" is not easy to define. As McHale writes in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* "so many poems of all genres and traditions possess a narrative aspect or dimension" (2005, p.356). The concept of non-narrative poetry has been historically associated with the lyric (Jackson 2012), yet Hühn has demonstrated that lyric poetry does contain narratological elements (Hühn 2002; 2004; 2005; Hühn & Kiefer 2005). Despite these interpretative difficulties, I postulate that "narrative poetry" can be defined as poetry in which narrative elements interconnect with poetic elements to a significant extent. "Non-narrative poetry," on the other hand, could be defined as

poetry that does not contain perceivable narrative elements, or does not demonstrate a significant relationship between narrative and poetry elements.

While poetry and narrative may connect in other ways beyond segmentation, McHale's theory provides a convincing argument for the interconnection between the two genres. DuPlessis argues that segmentation not only defines poetry, but opens up interstitial spaces through which meaning is created (1996; 1998; 2006). Likewise in narrative, the reader generates meaning in the innumerable gaps that open up in the narrative discourse (Abbott 2008; Iser 1974; Iser 1978; Iser 1989; Sternberg 1985). For this reason, poetic and narrative "gaps" seem like natural places for the two genres to interconnect, and to contribute to the overall meaning of the poetic narrative.

While both narrative and non-narrative poetry would consist of poetic segments that can be measured and countermeasured, McHale's (2009) theory suggests that narrative poetry involves an *extra* segmentary level – that of the narrative segment. Poetic segmentation interacts with, and even hinges on, narrative segmentation, which creates a *bi-genre interdependent segmental structure* distinct from non-narrative poetry. In other words, narrative poetry involves poetic and narrative elements, and these genres interconnect – and depend upon each other – through the gap or segment. This basic principle of interaction would hypothetically remain the same in all narrative poems, although this needs to be investigated in future research. Nevertheless, verse-novels share a structural similarity with other poetic narratives that involve this interplay. What differs within each narrative poem is the use of language, narrative content, and the use of rhetorical devices. The verse-novel has been criticised for not being poetry based on its use of vernacular language

and the absence of other poetic devices like metaphor. Yet it is important to note that verse-novels still function as "narrative poetry" on a structural level.

I would like to note that when I discuss the "experience of narrative poetry" from this point onwards, I am specifically referring to the reader's affective and cognitive involvement in the interaction between poetic and narrative segmentations in verse-novels for children and young adults.

Passive Lineation

While many verse-novels sustain an intricate relationship between narrative and poetry, it is important to note that some texts contain what I call *passive lineation.* In these verse-novels, nearly every line breaks with syntax, coinciding with the breath. As poet Paisley Rekdal argues, breaking a line "according to breath/syntax or consistent rhythm creates monotony, and may even obscure a poem's meaning" (2011, p.199).[28] Besides generating tedium and obfuscating meaning, passive lineation does not consistently engage with the narrative segmentation. I do not want to argue that verse-novels that use passive lineation do not function as narrative poetry. After all, it is possible to find some connections between poetic and narrative segmentation, and poetry and narrative may interconnect on other levels. However, most verse-novels that involve passive lineation do not draw the reader into the interaction between genres through segmentation. In other words, they do not allow readers to become involved in the experience of narrative poetry.

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[28] While this exegesis (and this particular section) is focused on lineation's ability to construct "meaning," poetic lineation has many other functions. For instance, it can help create rhythmic and melodic effects in a poem, and can even act as a form of punctuation (Levertov 1979, p.31, p.33).

The following passage from Susan Taylor Brown's *Hugging the Rock* (2006) illustrates passive lineation:

When I ask her why she's leaving

she finds lots of ways

to not answer me.

She yanks photos from the albums

and dumps out her purse on the kitchen table

then puts everything back in it again.

She unloads the dishwasher

just like any other day (p.8).

It is possible to find some connections between poetic and narrative segmentations in this passage. For instance, the poetic lineation could be viewed as supporting the narrative gaps in the space between the two characters and physical movement in the scene. The verbs, "yanks," "dumps," "puts" and "unloads" at the beginnings of each line, create an aural rhythm, supporting Alexander's (2005) contention that verse-novels activate a reader's aural imagination. The use of white space also provides a place for the reader to pause, reflect and *feel*, yet the connection between narrative and poetic segments is not very strong, and does not involve the reader in the interplay between poetry and narrative. In this passage from *Hugging the Rock* (2006), and in majority of the remaining text, the lines break with natural syntactical pauses and stops, disconnecting poetic lineation from narrative gaps.

While poetic and narrative segments collaborate differently in every text, verse-novels that engage the reader in the production of narrative poetry tend to construct a dynamic relationship between syntax and line break. For instance, in "Lies in the Locker Room" from Norma Fox Mazer's young adult verse-novel, *What I Believe* (2005), line-breaks support the gaps in narrational reliability as the protagonist admits to telling lies to her friend, Bethani. The language is quite emotional, which would encourage an affective response from the reader.

I pulled on my jeans and lied to Bethani that selling our house

and moving to the city was just a goofy idea that my parents

came up with for no reason at all, and putting on my socks

I lied that they were *like that*, which I said rolling my eyes

as if they were sort of crazy and impulsive,

then buttoning my shirt, I lied that they probably wouldn't

go through with it, and while I pulled my hair into a ponytail

I lied that even if they did

I didn't care

no I didn't

not one

little bit (p.20).

Nearly every line breaks against the syntactical flow of this very long sentence, creating blazes of space in the right margin for the reader to reflect on the emotional intensity of the language and the narrator's admitted lack of reliability. The last five lines are especially short, producing large portions of white space beside and below

the text. Because these line-breaks support the gaps in narrational reliability, this poem involves the reader in an affective experience of the interplay between poetry and narrative. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, *What I Believe* (2005) also involves self-reflexive references to the making of poetry, which encourages the reader to think about the poems in this verse-novel as constructed entities.

While verse-novels that involve a dynamic relationship between poetry and narrative tend to break lines against syntax, it is important to note that these texts may still contain excerpts of passive lineation. For instance, Tanya Lee Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), which will be analyse in Chapter Two, uses passive lineation when the narrator "has it together" or during scenes of composure. These sections act as points of contrast with other scenes when the narrator is "losing control," in which lines break against syntax, creating tensions and congruities with the narrative segmentation. Therefore, passages need to be compared to the remainder of a text to fully understand the relationship between narrative and poetic elements. In other words, the sections of passive lineation create intratextual relationships with the narrative gaps in the context of the larger work.

Narrative Poetry in the Gutter

Not only do verse-novels correspond line-breaks and section-breaks with narrative gaps, page-breaks also correlate with narrative gaps. The role of the page-break has been extensively studied in the creation of inferential meaning in children's picture books (Bader 1976; Matulka 2008; Sipe 2008; Sipe & Brightman 2009). As Lawrence R. Sipe and Anne E. Brightman argue, page-breaks in picture books "suggest clearly identifiable gaps for all readers to puzzle over and interpret" (2009,

p.74). Besides sharing meaning-making capacities with the children's picture book, the page-break in the verse-novel constructs meaning in a similar way as the "gutter" space in comics, which McHale argues can function as poetic segmentation (2010b, p.32).

In "Narrativity and Segmentivity, or Poetry in the Gutter" (2010b), McHale extends his theory of countermeasure between poetic and narrative segments, demonstrating how his model of contrapuntal analysis can be used to analyse hybrid texts like Martin Rowson's *The Waste Land* (1990), a graphic novel adaptation of T. S. Eliot's modernist poem. McHale's choice of text is intriguing. Although Eliot's *The Waste Land* is considered a poem, it is not always considered a narrative poem. In fact, McHale himself has argued that Eliot's *The Waste Land* is devoid of any kind of surface narrative (2000, p.252). Furthermore, Rowson disregards any narrative cues Eliot's poem offers, narrativising *The Waste Land* "against the grain" by ""translating" it into the genre-code of hardboiled detective fiction and film," and creating a "triangulating" effect across three different media – poetry, comics, and movies (McHale 2010b, p.36).[29] Most verse-novels do not involve this complex level of adaptation and palimpsest, but McHale's discussion of poetic segmentivity in this graphic adaptation of *The Waste Land* supports the idea that poetry should not be confined to narrow definitions or interpretations. Having said this, poetry should not be a label given to *anything* that segments or fragments. "Poetic segmentation," however, can be viewed as a technique that manifests in other art forms. For instance, Sean O'Sullivan argues that serialised television drama is a "poetic enterprise" based on the way it segments like poetry (2010, p.59).

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[29] In Eliot's annotations regarding *The Waste Land* (2006), he suggests that the mythological character of Tiresias should act as a kind of protagonist to pull the reader through the poem's experiences.

McHale (2010b) discusses the segmentivity of Rowson's text in two ways. First he considers the original segmentivity of Eliot's poem, which McHale describes as section-measured, explaining how Eliot's groupings and blocks of lines produce "discontinuity between sections," generating relationships between the sections that create the poem's meaning (2010b, p.37). Secondly, McHale considers the segmentivity of the "gutter" in Rowson's graphic novel adaptation. According to McHale, the "gutter," the term used for the space between panels in comic art, provokes meaning-making the same way that white space creates meaning in poetry (p.32). It is possible that McHale first drew this comparison between poetic segmentivity and the "gutter" from DuPlessis' essay, "The Blazes of Poetry" (1999). DuPlessis likens each line of the poem to a "mini-square" or panel, and compares the white space that surrounds each line (the right margin as well as the left) to the "gutter" in comic art (1999, p.289). "The gutter is the reader's domain," McHale writes, "it is here that we perform acts of "closure" that allow narrative to jump the gap between one panel and the next" (2010b, p.32).

In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud describes the act of "closure" that occurs between panels as the "phenomenon of *observing the parts* but *perceiving the whole*" (1993, p.63):[30]

No matter how *dissimilar* one image may be to another, there is a kind of...*alchemy* at work in the space between panels which can help us find *meaning* or *resonance* in even the most *jarring* of combinations. Such transitions may not make "sense" in any traditional way, but still a relationship of *some* sort will inevitably develop (McCloud 1993, p.73).

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[30] Italics used in original text.

McCloud acknowledges that "closure" can occur *within* panels as well, but it is perhaps in the gutter where the most audacious meaning-making takes place. "There's something *strange* and *wonderful* that happens in the *blank ribbon of page*," McCloud writes. "Comics ask the mind to work as a sort of *in-betweener* – filling in the gaps between panels as an *animator* might" (p.88). He goes on to describe the reader as a "*trapeze artist*," being released "into the open air of the *imagination*…then *caught* by the outstretched arms of the *ever-present next panel!*" (p.90). The information within each panel assists the reader's meaning-making process, yet it is up to the reader to "complete" the overall meaning by imagining what has happened between the panels. David E. Low calls the spaces between comic panels "gutterances," suggesting that "the gutter figuratively *speaks* to the reader, demanding to be filled in, and that the reader, in filling in, speaks right back to the gutter" (2012, p.372). Low also argues that comic texts should be used in the classroom to teach students "a wide range of literacies and for taking an agential role in meaning making" (p.371). In this sense, it is possible too see how the gutter space plays a valuable role in the construction of meaning.

Besides acting as a striking comparison to the white space surrounding the lines of a poem (and to the gaps in narrative), the concept of the "gutter" is highly relevant to my research on the verse-novel for children and young adults. As Joy Alexander argues, "house-style" verse-novels contain poems that tend not to extend for more than half a page to three pages in length (2005, p.270).[31] Each poem begins on a separate page accompanied by a title, making every poem feel like a new

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[31] While this is a "typical characteristic" of the verse-novel genre, it does not characterise all verse-novels. Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009)*,* for instance, does not begin each poem on a new page. In my own verse-novel, *Homing Poems* for this thesis, I also did not begin each poem on a new page.

chapter. A large amount of white space often succeeds the end of the poem. In some verse-novels, such as Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2005), each new poem appears several centimetres below the top of the page, creating a strip of space preceding each poem.[32]

In Appendix II, I have included an excerpt from *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* to demonstrate the range of space that can exist between poems. After the words "I'm sure it will be / fine," a large stretch of white space dominates more than half of the lower left hand page (p.35). Across the bookbinding to the right side, the top half of this next page also consists of white space, punctuated only by the title words, "Hot Water." The words of the new poem, "My parents back out of the driveway," begin about halfway down the right page (p.35). The white space succeeding (and sometimes preceding) each poem, combined with the inner margins of space created by the book's binding (coincidentally, also called the "gutter" in bookbinding terms) creates a significant gap akin to the gutter in comics.

McHale argues that "the *principle* of segmentivity organises *both* poetic texts and "sequential visual art" (McCloud's definition of comics), noting how akin comics are to poetry (2010b, p.44). Yet McHale asserts that "the *kinds* of segmentivity differ" between poetry and comics (p.44). In his analysis of Rowson's *The Waste Land*, McHale countermeasures the poetic segmentation of Eliot's original text with the segmentivity of the gutter space in the comic adaptation, treating them as separate entities. In verse-novels, a difference also exists between the spacing between poetic sections and the "gutter" between poems. The space between poetic sections or stanzas is physically smaller than the gutter space; it feels more like a small skip, or an unconscious intake of breath. Conversely, the space between two poems in a verse-

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[32] I would not consider this particular characteristic to be included in the verse-novel's "house-style." In most verse-novels, poems begin closer to the top of the page.

novel (that is, if it is the type of verse-novel that begins each poem on a new page) feels more physical. The eye must traverse across a larger amount of blank space as the reader swings across the gutter of the bookbinding, or physically flips the page.

Besides this physical difference, the gutter between poems distinguishes itself from the space between poetic segments by the way it interacts with narrative gaps. Like the gutter between comic panels, the gutter between poems is often where the most "intrepid meaning-making occurs" (McCloud 1993, p.88). In verse-novels, some of the biggest gaps in time, shifts in physical space, or changes in perspective or mood occur in the gutter space between poems. In verse-novels with multiple narrators, the gutter often marks a switch in focalization. The same way a reader needs to fill in the gap between comic panels, the reader must use his or her imagination to consider what happened between the poems that resulted in a change of time, space, perspective, or focalisation.

Despite these differences, both the spacing between poetic segments and the "gutter" both function as poetic segmentation – albeit different kinds. While McHale (2010b) treats them separately, countermeasuring them against each other as the primary focus of his analysis, he ultimately acknowledges their similitude:

> One surprising finding of this analysis is that comics appear to be more akin to poetry, even to prestigious avant-garde poetry, than we might have supposed. Comics, too, like poetry, are measured and countermeasured; they sound chords of segments. And comics, also like poetry, elicit meaning in the place where meaning stalls out – in between, in the gutter (p.46).

In other words, the "gutter" in comics works in an almost homologous way to the segmentation in poetry. It is also worth noting that both poetic gaps and gutter gaps are physical and can be visually discerned. This differs from narrative segmentivity which tends to be more embedded within the text. That said, narrative gaps may coincide with poetic gaps such as line-breaks or stanza-breaks, creating a physical manifestation of that narrative gap. Although the spacing between poetic segments and the "gutter" can be countermeasured in the verse-novels, the primary focus of my analysis will be on the interaction of narrative and poetic segments. The spacing *within* poems and the "gutter" space *between* poems will be treated as two kinds of poetic segmentation that work together to support and counter narrative segments to contribute to a reader's experience. That said, I will still differentiate between these two kinds of poetic segmentivities, referring to the white page space between poems as the "gutter" to distinguish it from line-breaks.

I will only reference the space between two *separate* poems in a verse-novel as a "gutter." A gutter-like space does open up within poems when the reader must flip the page or traverse across the bookbinding to finish the poem. However, this will not consider this an intentional kind of segmentivity. The gutter-like space of a page flip within the same poem has more to do with the constraints of typesetting and bookbinding than with meaning-making within the a narrative discourse.

The gutter space that follows this paragraph in this chapter of my exegesis functions in a similar way to the gutter space between poems in a verse-novel. You – the reader – will need to bridge the gap between chapters, forming a connection between this discussion of gutter spaces, and the ensuing discussion of affective responses to the language and segmentation in verse-novels. Already, you may be

trying to fill the gaps, thinking about how gutters open up spaces for readers to

connect with the emotional content of a verse-novel.

CHAPTER TWO

Affective Experiences of Narrative Poetry in Verse-Novels

Everyone with lungs breathes the space in and out as everyone

with lungs breathes the space between the hands in and out

(Juliana Spahr 2005, p.4)

In many verse-novels for children and young adults, the gaps that open up between poetry and narrative are affect-driven, contributing to the emotional intensity of the narrative discourse. When Josie, one of the teenage narrators in Tanya Lee Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), admits that she is not as confident about her first day of high school as she initially said she was, her words break into short asyntactic lines: "What if / I don't / fit in / at / all?" (p.4). In Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), sixteen-year-old Jayson's narration fragments when his mother beats him for an unjustified reason: "No matter what she says / or / how she hits / I know / she loves me" (p.14). As discussed in the previous chapter, these gaps can activate a reader's involvement, creating places for him or her to "build his own bridges" (Iser 1989, p.9). A reader might ask, why is Josie cracking her "cool-as-a-cucumber exterior" all of a sudden (Stone 2006, p.8)? Why does Jayson believe his mother loves him, despite what she's doing to him? The reader searches for – and creates – meaning in the stretches of white page. However, the reading process does not only entail cognitive reasoning and conceptualisation; it also involves the transmission of *affect* which informs the cognitive process but is not necessarily conscious.

As Eric Shouse explains, affect is "a prepersonal intensity" or "a moment of unformed and unstructured potential" that occurs in the body (2005, n.p.). Emotion, on the other hand, can be understood as a social phenomenon in which a person

consciously projects or displays a particular feeling (Shouse 2005, n.p.). Affect leads to – and *intensifies* – an emotional experience, but affect and emotion are not the same thing, and these two terms should not be equated. When I discuss how a text may encourage a reader to become affectively involved with a verse-novel, I am describing how his or her body unconsciously reacts to the sounds, rhythms, and meanings of language, and also to the white gaps of space that open up on a page. Through the corporeal experience of affect, the reader is able to emotionally connect to a text.

Segmentation is not the only aspect that generates emotion in this genre. The narrative content of most verse-novels focuses on highly emotional events in the lives of young characters. In Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), three girls deal with heartbreak after the same bad boy dumps them. In Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), Jayson struggles to live with his abusive mother, and tries to commit suicide after the accidental death of his best friend, Trax. Some verse-novels employ what Campbell describes as a wheel-like structure, "with the hub a compelling emotional event, and the narration referring to this event like the spokes" (2010, p.52). Pamela Porter's *The Crazy Man* (2005) is one verse-novel that features this kind of structure, with all of the narration stemming from twelve-year-old Emaline's tragic accident, which leaves her disabled. As mentioned in the Introduction, most verse-novels also use "immediate-engaging-first-person narration" that draws the reader into the subjective experience of the narrating character (Wylie 1999). Therefore, readers can become emotionally involved with verse-novels through the communication of narrative events and the expression of language. Yet, I also argue that readers will connect most significantly with the emotional content and language of a verse-novel through the encounter of poetic and narrative segmentation.

This chapter will specifically consider verse-novels that involve a productive relationship between poetry and narrative. When poetic and narrative segmentations dynamically interconnect throughout a verse-novel, the reader is pulled into an experience of narrative poetry. These verse-novels do not necessarily encourage the reader to think about the text as an artefact of narrative poetry, but the reader will encounter the workings of narrative poetry through an affective, bodily engagement with the text. As Juliana Spahr writes in her untitled poem, "[e]veryone with lungs breathes the space" – the space, I suggest, that opens up between narrative and poetry – "in and out as everyone / with lungs breathes the space between the hands in and out" (2005, p.4).[33] What I am suggesting is that the spaces that open up between narrative and poetry provide places for the reader to "breathe in" and physically experience the emotional aspects of the text. In these verse-novels, readers will *feel* narrative poetry, even if they do not consciously think about a text's formal qualities.

Affective Responses to Language and Segmentation

> you know a single sentence
> could make you smile
> or
> break
> your heart   (Ellen Hopkins 2012, p.105)

In order to discuss the possibilities of affective response in verse-novels, it is necessary to understand how emotion is transmitted through creative writing. In "Writing as Thinking" (2008), cognitive researchers Keith Oatley and Maja Djikic suggest that writing is a type of modular thinking process that occurs 'on paper'. Not

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[33] Spahr's poem appears to be untitled, but it is presented in a section called "Poem Written after September 11, 2001" in her collection, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005).

only does paper allow writers to externalise their thoughts, but the paper also acts as a "secondary conversation partner" that enables writers to convey their thoughts to readers (p.11). Emotion, Oatley and Djikic argue, plays a primary role in the creative writing process. "[S]ince the earliest narrative writings," they state, "emotion has been salient: the sadness of Gilgamesh, the anger of Achilles, the shame of Adam and Eve" (p.11). But how is emotion channelled from a writer's mind to the paper, and then conveyed to the reader?

Oatley and Djikic refer to the work of Keith M. Opdahl, who develops a theory of an emotion code (2002, p.60).[34] According to Oatley and Djikic, the emotion code is central to creative writing, acting as "the engine of both character and plot," and directing a reader's emotional response (2008, p.11). Drawing on the notion that emotion comprises of two parts – propositional and non-propositional (Oatley and Johnson-Laird 1987) – Oatley and Djikic argue that the emotion code not only "mediate[s] readily between verbal and intuitive aspects of mental models," but is also "capable of carrying the personal core of the story" (2008, p.11). They suggest that the emotional essence of a story is held in the writer's mind as a kind of "simulation," or what William Faulkner called a "dream" (cited in Cowley 1977, p.129).[35] This "dream-simulation" includes characters, their plans, actions, and thoughts. According to this idea,

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[34] Opdahl actually refers to this code as the "affective code" (2002, p.60), but Oatley and Djikic renamed it the "emotion code" (2006, p.11). I have chosen to use Oatley and Djikic's term as Opdahl seems to refer to emotion more than affect. As stated above, emotion is a projection of display of a feeling, while affect is "a prepersonal intensity" or a "moment of unformed and unstructured potential" that occurs in the body (Shouse 2005, n.p.).

[35] This "dream" reference comes from Faulkner's interview in *The Paris Review*, in which he said: "Sometimes technique charges in and takes command of the dream before the writer himself can get his hands on it…the finished work is simply a matter of fitting bricks neatly together" (cited from Cowley 1977, p.129).

the discourse structure of the text in the language layer must be able to start up

and sustain the simulation in the intuitive model-forming layer; the text's

suggestion structure [sic] of style, tropes, and literary sentences must be able

to cue in the reader associations and memories that help bring alive the text as

a kind of dream (Oatley & Djikic 2008, p.15).

The effectiveness of these cues to "start up and sustain" the story world relies on their ability to emotionally stimulate the reader (2008, p.15). Of course, writers cannot be sure what kind of emotional effect a piece of writing will have on readers, and many different interpretations are possible. But writers can influence certain readings through the deployment of emotional cues. "[A] writer who is reading a draft," Oatley and Djikic suggest, "is trying to improve the cue structure so the story does come emotionally alive" (2008, p.15). In other words, a writer is thinking about these emotional cues – and improving them – as she or he reads and writes. If the work becomes emotionally alive for a writer, then it is possible that the story will engage readers in a similar way.

Oatley and Djikic's theory is useful in explaining how the *narrative* elements in verse-novels may appeal to a reader's emotions. As Oatley and Djikic suggested, representations of characters and events, and the application of language can trigger the dream-simulation in readers' minds (2008, p.15). I would further state that narrative gaps play a significant role in the dream-simulation in narrative writing, but most particularly in verse-novels for children and young adults. The previous chapter discussed how narrative gaps can activate a reader's thought process, making him or her ask questions such as who, what, where and why. In *Descartes' Error* (1994), neuroscientist Antonio Damasio argues that emotion is inextricably linked to

reasoning and decision-making, which means that every time a reader works to bridge a gap in a narrative, emotion would influence his or her thinking process. "Feelings are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image," Damasio writes, "and just as dependent on cerebral-cortex processing as any other image" (p.159). However, Damasio does argue for a slight difference between cognitions and feelings. He suggests that "[f]eelings let us *mind the body*, attentively, as during an emotional state, or faintly, as during a background state" (p.159). In other words, feelings are not confined to our minds, but are experiences that take place in our physical bodies.

While Oatley and Djikic's (2008) theory is based in cognitive psychology, literary researchers such as Marcelle Freiman (2009) and Anna Gibbs (2006) have used affect theory to discuss emotion in creative writing, connecting the experience of emotion with the body. The development of affect theory in the field of psychology is attributed to Silvan Tomkins, who, according to Virginia Demos, was "the first theorist to argue that affects are primary motivators" (1995, p.19).[36] Prior to Tomkins, most formulations of affect in psychology tended to treat affect as drive derivatives, or as products of cognitive interpretations (Demos 1995, p.18). Tomkins separated affect from drive and cognition, arguing, as reported by Demos, "that affect constitutes one of the five basic systems of human functioning (along with homeostatic, drive, cognitive, and motor systems)" (Demos 1995, p.18-19). Affect can occur independently of drives and cognitions, but it also functions interdependently or dependently with other systems (p.18-19). Tomkins has described affect as

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[36] While Tomkins developed affect theory in the field of psychology, Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are well known for their work on affect in philosophy (see Deleuze & Guattari 1988).

a loosely matched mechanism evolved to play a number of parts in continually

changing assemblies of mechanisms. It is in some respects like a letter of an

alphabet in a language, changing in significance as it is assembled with

varying other letters to form different words, sentences, paragraphs (1995,

p.51).

That is to say, affect performs multiple functions through its ability to co-assemble

with other mechanisms. When affect does this, it creates what Tomkins calls an

"analogue amplifier," creating a sense of urgency in the person experiencing the

affect (1995, p.54). Affect amplification is what makes things matter, and makes us

care about things, and through amplification "anything can matter" (p.54). Affect can

lend power to memory, perception, thoughts, actions, and drives. "Not only may

affects be widely and variously invested," Tomkins writes, "they may also be invested

in other affects, combine with other affects, intensify or modulate them, and suppress

and reduce them" (p.56). When affects combine with other affects, they create what

Tomkins calls "affect complexes" (p.61), which can account for the experience of

mixed emotions.

Tomkins argues that there are nine affects: interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear,

anger, distress, shame, contempt, and disgust (p.58). Each of these affects, Tomkins

suggests, comprise of "discernable distinct *sets* of facial, vocal, respiratory, skin, and

muscle responses" (p.58). These correlated responses combine "to produce an

analogue of the particular gradient or intensity of stimulation impinging on the

organism" (Demos 1995, p.19). What differentiates each affect from another is the

density of neural firing, which increases or decreases stimulation. For instance, a

startle response is created by any stimulus that involves an immediate onset and a

steep increase in neural firing, such as a sudden loud noise. Anger or distress is activated by a sustained increase of a neural firing, as in the continuation of that loud noise. Enjoyment occurs with a decrease of a neural firing (Tomkins 1995, p.46).

Affective arousal is what makes us care about things and experience feelings and emotions, but as previously stated, affect is *not* the same thing as emotions or feelings. As Eric Shouse explains, feelings are personal and biographical, "a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled" (2005, n.p.). Emotion, on the other hand, is a social projection of a feeling. While feelings tend to be genuine to the person experiencing them, a display of emotions can actually be feigned (2005, n.p.). Affect is more of an abstract concept, described by Shouse as "a non-conscious experience of intensity," or "the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience" (2005). Tomkins explains that affects "are aroused easily by factors over which the individual has little control," and that restraining affective responses is very difficult to do (1995, p.54). In infants, affect is innate, and their emotions are direct expressions of affect. When a newborn cries, he or she is innately responding to a stimulus, projecting distress (Tomkins 1995, p.45). In adults, however, affect can be both innate and learned. For instance, an adult who cries over the death of a loved one would *know* what he or she is crying about (p.45). As Shouse elucidates, "[f]or the infant affect *is* emotion, for the adult affect is what makes feelings *feel*" (2005).[37]

In "Keeping Interest Alive: Emotion and the Affects in Creative Writing" (2009), Freiman argues that the creative writing process not only involves cognitive and conceptualisation processes, but also involves the experience of affect, which is

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[37] My italics.

inseparable from cognition. Freiman refers to the work of Oatley and Djikic, supporting their notion of "emotional cues" and "dream-simulations." Yet Oatley and Djikic's theory seems to suggest that the transmission of emotion in creative writing is mainly a conscious, cognitive process. Creative writers may be conscious of their emotional responses and choices, yet Freiman points out that "[m]uch writing is non-conscious, messy, unstructured and wayward, rather than ordered, stratified or clearly coded" (p.3). Freiman also suggests that "[e]ven before such [emotional] choices are being made in various writing drafts, feeling is likely to have been contingent in the *very conception* of the writing project, prior to any 'expressive' drafting" (2009, p.3). Emotional responses, Freiman argues,

> can be conscious and non-conscious: they indicate a range of intensities of feeling from pre-linguistic affective responses to sustained, learned feeling responses in the body that become part of how we experience ourselves in the world. These responses might act as an impetus for writing; they create images in the mind; drive entire projects; inform voice, give life to characters; and as proposed by cognitive theorists, they enable readers to discover and to re-create for themselves, emotional and intellectual experiences in response to their reading (p.4).

For Freiman, as well as Gibbs, it is language that enables the transmission of affect and emotion in creative writing. In "Writing and Danger: the Intercorporeality of Affect" (2006), Gibbs argues that "[l]anguage…is not (simply) a cognitive medium, but an affective, and therefore, corporeal one" (p.158). Language, Gibbs writes, "acts directly on the body to move us to laughter, to tears or to action, to

seduce us, impassion us, enrage us, or to absorb and enchant us so we lose ourselves in reverie" (2006, p.159). In Ellen Hopkins' young adult verse-novel, *Tilt* (2012), one of the teenage narrators says that "a single sentence / could make you smile / or / break / your heart" (p.105). Indeed, much of the language in *Tilt*, as well as the language in many other verse-novels, will make readers smile, laugh, cringe, scream, or burn with anger, compelling them to flip the page.

In his introduction to Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988), Brian Massumi explains how the term "affect" (or the French *l'affect* as used by Deleuze and Guattari) refers to the ability to affect and be affected: "It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (p.xvi). Massumi describes "affection" (*l'affection* to Deleuze and Guattari) as the state of "encounter between the affected body and the second, affecting, body" (p.xvi). While affect is most easily transmitted through the communication between two physical bodies (for instance, through facial expressions, posture, respiratory changes and vocalisations), written language can act as a medium to transfer the experience of affect.

As per the title of her paper, Gibbs (2006) discusses the *intercorporeality* of language, or the transfer of affect from one body to another. In accordance with Massumi, Gibbs argues that

> to read…is to lend one's body to the words of another, to be – albeit temporarily – possessed by alien affects and to lend ourselves at risk of being transformed by them. And to write may be to lend ourselves to the affects of

characters – imaginative or historical, or to those periods, or landscapes. (…) Reading and writing are acts of capture and transport" (2006, p.159).

Jaime Adoff, the author of *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), illustrates how affect can function intercorporeally, transferring affective intensity from writer to character to reader. In an interview with journalist Vick Mickunas (2008), Adoff recounts how a teacher-librarian once told him that she felt like he was torturing his protagonist in *The Death of Jayson Porter.* Furthermore, the teacher-librarian implied that *she* felt tortured when reading about the constant abuse, intimidation, and unhappiness the protagonist faces. "If you're reading it and you feel that way," Adoff said, "imagine if you're the writer!" (*Book Nook with Vick Mickunas* 2008). Adoff went on to explain how he embodied his protagonist's torture when writing *The Death of Jayson Porter*:

> My wife would say, you know, you've got to take a break. It took a toll on me – physically, emotionally. I'd come out [of my study] looking like a wreck, because you…become your character. I became Jayson. (…) And I am torturing him. It's like torturing myself. It's horrifying to some extent, but I had to be true to what I knew the situation was (*Book Nook with Vick Mickunas* 2008).

When the teacher-librarian felt tortured when reading *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), this distress was not a direct transfer from Adoff's body to the teacher-librarian's. Writing can transmit affect, yet Freiman stresses that "language *itself* does not equate with affect; rather it may be regarded as an extraordinarily flexible, malleable, symbolic tool for the expression *of* affect" (2009, p.5-6). In other words, it

is language's ability to *express* or convey affect that allows readers to experience the emotional content of a text.

Writing may have the ability to activate certain affective responses in readers, but Gibbs also points out that the process of writing "acts on us without ever being able to fully ensure that it produces precisely the intended effect" (2006, p.159). "Writing doesn't always know what it wants to say," Gibbs argues, "and in a sense it requires a reader to find out" (p.159). At the same time, writers can "rule out certain readings," and strive towards particular interpretations (p.159). Shouse states that "the transmission of affect does not mean that one person's feelings become another's" (2005). Instead he notes that affect is about "the way that bodies affect one another" through the expression of intensity (2005). In other words, a reader does not take on the writer's feelings, and may not even take on a character's feelings. What is transferred is *intensity*. Through intensity, a reader may experience the emotional content of the text. Most likely, the reader will also bring in his or her own personal feelings into the reading experience, which would enable an infinite number of emotional responses to a text.

All language can work affectively, so much so that Freiman suggests "it is not possible to distinguish when language is *not* affect driven" (2009, p.5). Yet Freiman argues that language use in genres like poetry tends to be more "overtly affective," enabling "a range of proprioceptive responses in the body in response to sound, rhythm, pace and patterning" (p.5).[38] Proprioception is the

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[38] Freiman also suggests that imaginative prose texts, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987); erotic prose; horror fiction; and crime fiction, tend to use language that is more affect-driven (2009, p.5). Gibbs argues that creative non-fiction and fictocriticism also use more affective language, "demand[ing] a more visceral involvement than most theoretical genres of writing" (p.159).

continuous but unconscious sensory flow from the movable parts of our body (muscles, tendons, joints), by which their position and tone and motion are continually monitored and adjusted, but in a way which is hidden from us because it is automatic and unconscious (Sacks 1984, p.43).

In *A Leg to Stand On* (1984), Oliver Sacks describes how an elderly woman, who had lost feeling and movement in her leg for three years, found herself involuntarily tapping her foot to music (p.170-171). As Shouse explains, "[a]ffect adds intensity, or a sense of urgency to proprioception which is why music…could move this woman's leg when will alone could not" (2005). This instance demonstrates the way affect can operate on our bodies, often without our conscious awareness.

In good quality verse-novels, language can elicit strong affective (and proprioceptive) responses through the use of sensory description, rhythm, and repetition. Poetic segmentation – such as line-breaks and section-breaks – also plays an integral role in the creation of the sounds, rhythms, and patterns that would trigger these proprioceptive responses. In verse-novels, line-breaks can shape the pace and rhythm of language, and place visual and aural emphasis on certain words. In this sense, poetic segmentation plays an essential role in the elicitation of affective responses, seemingly independent of the narrative segmentation. Yet, as I argued in Chapter One, poetic and narrative segmentation in verse-novels ineluctably intermix, which means that most affective responses would result from the interconnection of poetic and narrative segmentation.

The narrative gaps that open up in verse-novels may encourage the reader to ask questions, activating the reader's decision-making processes, which Damasio (1994) believes always involves emotion. Moreover, many of these narrative gaps

tend to be related to the emotional content of the narrative discourse. For instance, in Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), Josie reveals her hidden emotions and makes the reader question her overstated confidence when she asks, "What if / I don't / fit in / at / all?" (p.4.). The asyntactic line-breaks reinforce the narrative gap that opens up when Josie divulges her fallibility. Not only does this passage demonstrate an active relationship between poetry and narrative, but it also draws the reader into an affective experience. If the reader allows herself to be transported into the narrative, "lending" her body to Josie, the reader may experience the narrator's uncertainty and doubt. The line-breaks create an aural rhythm that may shorten the breath or speed up the heart. The gaps of white space beside each line, and also below the poem, will provide places for the reader to strengthen their emotional connection to the text. Through the interconnection between narrative and poetic segmentation, the reader's affective involvement with the emotional content and language of the text becomes heightened. Because poetry and narrative link in this excerpt through counterpoint, the reader has become engaged in what I call an *affective experience of the narrative poetry*.

Experiencing Adolescent Emotion in Young Adult Verse-Novels

You don't have to suffer to be a poet; adolescence is enough suffering for anyone

(John Ciardi cited in Atwell 1998, p.51)

While most verse-novels for young adults *and* for children are characterised by emotional content, this chapter focuses on two young adult verse-novels: Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), and will take into regard the adolescent reader's affective response to segmentation and language. The boundaries between children's and young adult

literature have been historically difficult to define. Young adult literature has generally been defined as any text for readers between the ages of 12 and 20 (Donelson & Nilsen 1997, p.6), yet Cat Yampbell points out that "liberals and conservatives continue to battle over the age appropriateness of subjects such as relationships, sex, drugs, and death" (2005, p.350). In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Fiction* (2000), Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that the "chief characteristic that distinguishe[s] adolescent literature from children's literature is the issue of how social power is deployed during the course of the narrative" (p.2). In children's literature, most of the action centres around a child protagonist learning about his or her sense of security in an immediate environment, such as the family unit or home, which "affirms the child's sense of Self and her or his personal power" (p.2-3). In young adult novels, on the other hand, Trites suggests that

> protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them who they are. They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church; government; social constructions of sexuality, gender, race, class; and cultural mores surrounding death (p.3).

Trites' approach can be used as a way to distinguish children's verse-novels from young adult verse-novels. For instance, Maria Testa's children's verse-novel, *Almost Forever* (2007), focuses on a six-year-old girl's adjustment to her father leaving to serve in the U.S. army for one year. The young narrator feels like one year will be "forever" without her dad, but she finds security in everyday life with her mother, and the narrative ends with the father's safe return. Another children's verse-

novel, Eileen Spinelli's *Where I Live* (2007), is about a young girl named Diana, who has to move after her father loses his job. Diana hates the idea of leaving her yellow house, her school, and her best friend Rose, but she finds a way to cope by writing poetry, which gives her personal power and endorses her sense of self.

On the other hand, Adoff's young adult verse-novel, *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), is about a bi-racial teenager named Jayson who has to navigate his way through the institutional forces of family and school, as well as the social constructions of race. His alcoholic mother verbally and physically abuses him, and Jayson is powerless against her for most of the narrative. The reader eventually learns that Jayson's mother, Lizzie, is not actually his mother, and that Lizzie stole Jayson from his real mother, Trina, when Jayson was an infant. However, this still does not entirely explain why Lizzie abuses Jayson; most readers will conclude that Lizzie is mentally unbalanced, and that her alcohol addiction fuels her violence. Jayson also has to deal with his hard-talking, discriminatory boss, and neighbourhood "gangsta" kids who want to bash him for going to a mostly white private high school that Trina (known to Jayson as his mother's friend) pays for.

In Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* (2006), sexuality is the power dynamic that the three female narrators – Josie, Nicolette and Aviva – need to negotiate. As Trites points out, many young adult novels present teenage sexuality as something that is powerful, but also needs to be repressed (2000, p.88). In a similar vein to Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975), which Trites names as a classic text portraying teenage sexuality (2000, p.88), *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) appears to communicate liberal notions of teenage sex; Josie, Nicolette and Aviva appear quite

comfortable agreeing to or denying sex.[39] At the same time, all three girls get dumped

by the same bad boy (who remains unnamed in the verse-novel), which associates sex

with danger, and reinforces Michel Foucault's (1987) notion that human sexuality

exists in a power/repression dynamic in Western culture.

Adolescent emotional life has been linked to various social dynamics, and for

this reason, characters in young adult verse-novels are usually shown to have different

emotional experiences than characters in children's verse-novels. For many

generations, adolescence has been considered what G. Stanley Hall (2004) described

as a period of storm and stress, with adolescents more likely to have conflicts with

their parents, experience mood disruptions, and participate in risky behaviour.[40] Many

young adult verse-novels do portray teenaged characters that display these sorts of

behaviours, reinforcing Hall's representation of adolescence. For example, Ellen

Hopkins' *Crank* (2004) is about a quiet, studious girl named Kristina who completely

changes when she visits her estranged, drug-addicted father. Kristina starts calling

herself Bree and gets hooked on methamphetamines, and when she returns home,

Kristina starts fighting with her mother as she tries to hide her new drug addiction.

In "Adolescent Storm and Stress Reconsidered" (1999), Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

discusses how Hall's theory still holds much relevance today, with contemporary

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[39] Stone actually incorporates Blume's *Forever* (1975) in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*. After Josie (the first female narrator), gets hurt by this bad boy, she takes out Blume's book from the library and writes a warning about him in the blank end pages. Josie then passes the book around school, inviting other girls to contribute their stories about the same boy. This gesture seems to align Stone's text with Blume's *Forever*. Although the representation of sexuality and language in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* seems to be more contemporary (and presumably, more liberated), both texts present conflicting messages about teenage sexuality, suggesting that it is both liberating and repressed.

[40] This concept originates from Hall's two-volume text, *Adolescence: Its psychology and relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education* (2004), originally published in 1904.

research supporting the theory that adolescence is a time of emotional turmoil. Having said this, Arnett argues that individual differences must be taken into account, and that not all teenagers experience storm and stress. Pierre R. Dasen (2000) also contends that adolescence acquires different forms in different cultures, with fewer instances of storm and stress in more traditional cultures, which indicates that the notion of adolescence may be culturally and socially produced.

Social dynamics are not the only influencing factor for adolescent emotion. Some researchers propose that cognitive and hormonal changes also play a significant role in the development of adolescent emotional life (Rosenblum & Lewis 2005). For instance, it has been suggested that children develop abstract thought in adolescence, which could impinge on their emotional experiences (Fischer & Ayoub 1994). With the initiation of abstraction, emotion could hypothetically be triggered by abstract ideas, or by past and future events, which can result in teenagers being more introspective and ruminative (Rosenblum & Lewis 2005). Having said this, other theorists have argued that teenagers do *not* necessarily cogitate differently than children of other ages, and that very young children are more capable of abstract thought than previously thought (Nelson 2009). While it remains uncertain whether teenagers develop the ability for abstract thought during adolescence, most researchers agree that hormones cause a myriad of physiological changes, including stronger experiences of positive and negative affect – negative affect in particular (Brooks-Gunn, Graber, & Paikoff 1994). Social changes that often occur during adolescence, such as school transitions, family disruptions, and the initiation of dating and sex, can also create a "pile-up" of experiences that adolescents may struggle to cope with (Rosenblum & Lewis 2005).

If characters in young adult verse-novels are shown to undergo the intense emotions of adolescence, readers may experience stronger emotional responses to these young adult verse-novels than to children's verse-novels. Of course, the experience of a specific affect – that is, the non-conscious experience of intensity – would remain the same in all texts. As Tomkins explains, "[t]he excitement of sexuality is the same excitement as to poetry or mathematics' beauty, or the possibility of good food" (1995, p.53). What is different between these experiences is what the affect co-assembles with. For instance, affect may amplify the primary drive of sex, or the cognitive appreciation of mathematics. Affect's ability to co-assemble, creating what Tomkins calls "analog amplifers," is what makes us experience sex and math differently, even though the affect remains the same (p.53). Therefore, a reader's experience of affect in verse-novels could be identical to the experience of reading an article about an environmental disaster in a newspaper. If the verse-novel activates distress, it is the same distress that the reader might feel when reading the news article. What varies from one reading experience to another are the types of affects being triggered; the frequency of the affective triggers; and the reader's cognitions, drives, and personal feelings that these affects are being co-assembled with. In verse-novels, it is language and segmentation that will elicit various affective intensities, and these intensities will co-assemble with a reader's thoughts, drives, and feelings to produce "analog amplifiers" (p.53).

It is important to note that most adolescent readers will experience verse-novels differently from adult readers, based on the hormonal, social, and possible cognitive changes that adolescents undergo. As mentioned above, hormones may create more intense experiences of positive and negative affect, and social changes like the initiation of dating and sex may intensify an adolescent's emotional life

(Rosenblum & Lewis 2005). These differences may enable teen readers to become more emotionally involved with verse-novels, and be more prone to textual activations of affective responses such as excitement, joy, distress, or shame. Teenagers may also have gone through – or be going through – similar experiences as the fictional characters, which may enable them to connect more closely with the emotional experiences represented in young adult verse-novels. Furthermore, I argue that teen readers are more likely to emotionally connect with the poetic and narrative segmentation, which stimulates affective experiences of narrative poetry.

Broken Things: Poetic Segmentation[41]

Before I examine how Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) creates affective experiences of narrative poetry, it is important to discuss how these verse-novels deploy poetic segmentation. Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) exemplifies Joy Alexander's "house-style," exhibiting features like non-rhyming free verse, poems that span between one and three pages (although some poems span up to six pages), and titles beginning each poem to orientate the reader (2005, p.270). For much of the text, lines break against syntax, countermeasuring lines against sentences or phrases. The following excerpt, narrated by the character Nicolette, illustrates asyntactic line-breaks.

Who's got the power now?

Is it still me?

---

[41] The title of this section derives from *A Broken Thing: Poets on the Line* (2011), edited by Emily Rosko and Anton Vander Zee.

My chest feels warm

almost

burning.

It's me,

losing

control (Stone 2006, p.103).

As poet Paisley Rekdal suggests, lines that break against syntax "can help the reader gain information about a poem that isn't—and maybe can't be—expressed in words itself" (2011, p.199). In this instance, the line-breaks emphasise Nicolette's loss of control, perhaps before Nicolette realises herself. This "loss of control" creates a gap in the emotional content of the narrative, which interacts with the poetic segmentation, and involves the reader in the emotional content of the verse-novel.

Most of the poems in Stone's verse-novel (2006) incorporate asyntactic line-breaks, but some sections appear to be passively lineated. The author may not have had a compelling reason to break some lines with syntax, but many sections of passive lineation act as important points of contrast to the asynactic lines, often occurring when Josie, Nicolette, and Aviva speak reliably or display control. Having said this, some sections of passive lineation – and even some sections of asyntactic line-break – do not appear to contain deeper meaning in the narrative discourse. In my interview with Stone (2012), she did not mention any tension between poetry and narrative in her writing process, but I would suggest that some parts are broken into lines (syntactically or asyntactically) simply because the rest of the text is broken into

lines. In other words, Stone may have used lineation merely to create uniformity. The gutter spaces between poems, however, seem to act as deliberate types of poetic segmentation in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl.* As discussed in the last chapter, the gaps between poems often signify shifts in time, space, perspective, or mood.

While the poetic segmentivity in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) shares similarities with many other verse-novels, including Tracie Vaughn Zimmer's *Reaching for the Sun* (2007); Lisa Schroeder's *I Heart You, You Haunt Me* (2008); and Kimberly Marcus' *Exposed* (2011), Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) utilises poetic segmentation in a very different way. The novel begins with a short-lined poem, but for much of the remaining text, language is presented in prose-like blocks – or short prose poems – as shown in the following excerpt:

> She walks towards me like she's on a mission. As she gets
>
> close, I start getting that feeling again. The one that tells me
>
> Mom is not doing too well this morning. The one that
>
> is warning me to be careful.

> "It's just water, it's not gonna hurt nothin'." I know as
>
> soon as the words leave my mouth, I shouldn't have said
>
> them. Not on *this* morning (p.43)[42]

Adoff may not have considered the significance of every line-break, but most of the lines do seem to be intentionally broken. In regular prose novels, the words are often

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[42] I have chosen to break these lines as they are in the original text. Although they appear to be "lineated," the lines are actually presented as prose blocks, with the text stretching all the way into the right margin. To view this page, and other sample pages from *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2008), see Appendix III.

typeset so that they are flush against the right margin. In *The Death of Jayson Porter*, however, the words are *not* level with the margin, which seems to indicate that Adoff created intentional line-breaks instead of allowing typesetting to determine the line endings. Moreover, the prose blocks often fragment into smaller lines in *The Death of Jayson Porter*, reinforcing the purposefulness of each break:

> I guess I need to see him. Wanted to see him. Even
>
> though it's never good for me
>
> to see him (p.56).

If one interprets each line-break (or most of the line-breaks) as intentional in *The Death of Jayson Porter*, the fact that most lines fracture against syntax becomes significant. Asyntactic line-breaks tend to connect more significantly with the narrative gaps to generate multiple meanings, contributing to the experience of narrative poetry for the reader. In other sections of *The Death of Jayson Porter*, the text splinters into even smaller lines, looking more like "traditional" poetry:

> I'm alone.
>
> Always been that way.
>
> Always will be.
>
> So.
>
> I keep walkin'
>
> as far as I can from
>
> the Dorian Houses
>
> from

Dad and his dope (p.61).

Some critics have suggested that when the text fractures into short lines in *The Death of Jayson Porter*, it transforms into blank verse (Chipman 2008; Goldsmith 2008). The last two excerpts (and many other parts) do take on the rhythm of iambic pentameter, but other lineated sections do not use this same rhythm, and Adoff does not follow the traditional ten-syllable line rule that usually defines blank verse. Additionally, as Anthony Hecht explains, blank verse "can slip so imperceptibly into the rhythms of ordinary prose and casual speech" (2002, p.48). Adoff, therefore, may have unintentionally written these sections in blank verse in an effort to replicate colloquial speech patterns. I would actually suggest that the author has written in free verse, although Adoff himself calls his writing form a "hybrid prose-poetry style" (*Book Nook with Vick Mickunas* 2008). In *Names Will Never Hurt Me* (2004), Adoff uses a similar prose-poetry style, but his other young adult verse-novel, *Jimi & Me* (2005), deploys lineation in a similar way to Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006).

I also note that *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) has a striking resemblance to Laurie Halse Anderson's young adult prose novel, *Speak* (1999), which somewhat problematises the identification of Adoff's text as a verse-novel. Both novels present language in short prose blocks, with gaps of white space between each paragraph.[43] However, Anderson's *Speak* does not fragment language into short lines (although there are a couple exceptions), and the text is level with the right margin, which is probably why Anderson's novel is not considered a verse-novel. Yet both *The Death*

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[43] I hesitate to use the word "paragraph" in reference to *The Death of Jayson Porter* because many of these "prose blocks" only consist of one line, or a few sentences. Yet "paragraph" seems to be the best choice of word as these prose blocks are presented as distinct sections of writing.

of Jayson Porter and *Speak* use poetic segmentation as a technique, inviting the reader to construct meaning in the gaps of space between paragraphs. Adoff's text, however, uses poetic segmentivity in a more substantial way through the deliberate lineation of language, the gaps of space between paragraphs or prose blocks, and through section-breaks and chapter-breaks. This is probably why many readers, critics, teachers, and librarians do consider *The Death of Jayson Porter* to be a verse-novel despite its prose-like appearance (for example, see Prendergast 2012; Chaudhri & Teale 2013). *The Death of Jayson Porter* also shares similarities with verse-novels like Terra Elan McVoy's *After the Kiss* (2010), which alternates between short-lined poems and longer-lined prose poems, as well as Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2007), which mainly presents language in prose-like blocks, but with intentional line-breaks.

The blazes of space between each "prose-block" or paragraphic section in *The Death of Jayson Porter* (which can range from one to thirty-four lines) plays an important role in the interaction with the narrative segmentation. Unlike other verse-novels, Adoff's text does not begin each poem on a new page; instead the narrative is divided into forty-nine chapters. Within each chapter, some lines are presented in bold, pinning emphasis on particular words, and separating the text into sections. These boldfaced lines create another level of poetic segmentation, foregrounding a division between poetic sections within each chapter. For instance, boldfaced phrases create three discrete sections on a page in Chapter Twelve:

Nobody's home.

Again.

Man, Trax ain't *never* home anymore. He has *got*

to leave that girl alone.

Like a magnet.

I get drawn to him. I know he could use a good plate of

food, but what am I gonna find when I get there? I never

know what shape he'll be in.

I'll holla at him real quick to see if he's home. "Hey, Pops, Mom

gave me a nice plate for ya, not sure if you're home. I'll stop

by anyway. You got my cell if you want to hit me back."

Me and Dad

"Good thing you caught me, I was just about to step

out." Dad looks like he just threw himself together. Like

he was probably stoned, or about to get stoned (p.139).

 Each boldfaced line coincides with a shift in time or place, connecting the poetry

segmentation with these narrative changes. First Jayson is knocking on Trax's door;

then he's walking to his father's place; then Jayson's arrived at his father's house. As

the narrative builds in intensity, the chapters shorten in length, and when Jayson

attempts to commit suicide by leaping over his apartment building rail, several

chapters present one word, or just a few words on each page. For instance, Chapter

Eighteen only contains the boldfaced word "**black**," which is typed in a vertical line,

one letter below another (2009, p.174). Following Chapter Twenty-Three, there are

six completely black pages, which act as a poetic "blackout" of space that coincides with Jayson's loss of consciousness (pp.180-185).

The Segmentation of Unreliable Narration

A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) include many different types of narrative gaps that interact with the poetic segmentation. For instance, there are shifts in time, plot, setting, and dialogue, and these shifts often correspond with line-breaks, section-breaks, or gutter spaces. In *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*, gaps emerge when the narrative veers between the points of view of the three first-person narrators – Josie, Nicolette and Aviva. The most significant type of narrative gap, however, is the textual inconsistencies that materialise in the first-person narration in both verse-novels. When Josie (the first narrator in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*) says, "I never do / anything / I don't want to do" (2006, p.7), but then finds herself going to a party she does not like, and letting her bad boy date take things faster than she is comfortable with, the reader would notice the discrepancies between her words and actions, supported by an asyntactic line-break that separates "do" and "anything."

When Nicolette (the second narrator), ignores Josie's warning about this same boy, and pursues him anyway, the reader might cringe, knowing Nicolette is making a mistake based on her limited knowledge. In *The Death of Jayson Porter*, the protagonist Jayson admits to feeling good when he leans against his apartment block rail and contemplates suicide: "I smile to myself. Why am I smiling? I feel guilty for /

what I want to do, but I know it will end this pain I / feel (p.38).[44] Jayson's erratic

behaviour (reinforced by lines that break against syntax) would compel most readers

question his mental stability, and might make them feel uncomfortable, especially as

suicide largely remains a social taboo in Western culture, even amongst adolescents

(Crook 2003, pp.49, 85). In narratological terms, these textual inconsistencies can be

understood as instances of *unreliable narration*, which creates an effect by

"redirecting the reader's attention from the level of story to the discourse level

occupied by the speaker, and in foregrounding peculiarities of the narrator's

psychology" (Nünning 2005b, p.496).

The concept of unreliable narration originates from Wayne C. Booth's *The

Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983), in which Booth writes: "I have called a narrator *reliable*

when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say,

the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (p.158-159).[45] Booth

indicates that unreliable narration is a form of irony, allowing the reader to gauge the

distance between the narrator's words, viewpoints, and actions and those of the

implied author. He describes irony as a "secret communion" between the implied

author and reader (p.304):

> All of the great uses of unreliable narration depend for their success on far
>
> more subtle effects than merely flattering the reader or making him work.
>
> Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a

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[44] I have used virgules to illustrate the line-breaks, even though this section has been presented in a prose-like block in the original text.

[45] Booth also coined the term "implied author" (or "second self"), which Booth describes as the "implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as a stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails" (1983, p.151). He contrasts the "implied author" (which is a virtual or imaginary author) from the real flesh-and-blood author (p.151).

sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do

not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as

for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the

necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least a part of

their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded (Booth 1983, p.304).

The unreliable narrator, Booth suggests, is the "butt of the ironic point," with the

implied author and reader "secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back" (p.304).

While the reader must take an interpretive role to understand the irony (which Booth

suggests can be a pleasurable activity), his model implies that unreliable narration is a

"text-immanent issue" that relies on the distance between the implied author and

narrator, which are both intratextual entities (Olson 2003, p.96). Booth's theory also

seems to suggest that the reader and author would need to share certain values and

judgements, so that the reader is able to recognise when the narrator diverges from the

implied author's norms.

For decades, hardly anyone challenged Booth's rhetorical approach to

unreliable narration, with most narratologists echoing Booth's original definition

(Nünning 2005a). Yet literary theorist Ansgar Nünning (1997; 1998; 1999) has

argued for a more cognitive approach to unreliable narration that focuses on the

reader's active interpretive role. Nünning contends that the implied author is an "ill-

defined and elusive notion" that cannot be relied upon to determine a narrator's

reliability (1999, p.53). Instead, Nünning suggests that the unreliable narrator is a

"projection by the *reader* who tries to resolve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies

by attributing them to the narrator's 'unreliability'" (p.54).[46] In other words, it is the

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[46] My italics.

reader who ascribes the notion of unreliable narration, based on the interpretation of

textual clues. Like Booth, Nünning suggests that unreliable narration is a form of

irony, but he argues that it

> results from the discrepancy between the intentions and value system of the
>
> narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader. For the reader, either
>
> the internal lack of harmony between the statements of the narrator or
>
> contradictions between the narrator's perspective and his own concept of
>
> normality suggest that the narrator's reliability may be suspect (Nünning 1999,
>
> p.58).

In short, Nünning argues that the concept of unreliable narration is marked by textual

inconsistencies *and* determined by the reader's interpretations of these

inconsistencies. According to Nünning, these textual signals may include:

- a narrator's explicit contradictions;
- inconsistencies between a narrator's statements and actions;
- discrepancies between a narrator's description of him/herself and other characters' descriptions of him or her;
- allusions to a character's limited knowledge or faulty memory, or a narrator's admitted lack of knowledge;
- contradictions between a narrator's account of events and her exclamations and interpretations of the same, and differences between story and discourse;
- other characters' corrective verbal remarks and body signals;

- an accumulation of remarks relating to the self (often beginning with "I"), denoting expressiveness and subjectivity;

- syntactical indications of high emotional involvement, including self-interpretations, exclamations, repetitions, and ellipses;

- lexical indications of a character's attitude, such as the use of expressive nouns, adjectives, and adverbs;

- the use of multiple focalisers to highlight different interpretations of the same events (Nünning 1997; Nünning 1998; Olson 2003).[47]

The reader, Nünning argues, notes these textual inconsistencies, and then uses a method of "naturalisation" to relate them to various frames of reference (1999, p.67). Jonathan Culler has described "naturalisation" as the process of bringing a text "into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural or legible" (1975, p.138). Nünning suggests that the these "discourse[s] or models" may include a reader's general world knowledge and individual perspective of norms, values and judgements; social, cultural, and moral norms relevant at the time of a text's publication; theories of psychological soundness and standard human behaviour; and literary and generic conventions (Nünning 1999, pp.67-68).

Nünning's (1998; 1999; 2005a; 2005b) model is particularly useful as it takes into regard "the epistemological uncertainty of our age…recognis[ing] that every reading is limited and situational, and every reader is potentially unreliable" (Olson

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[47] This list has been paraphrased from Nünning's ""But why *will* you say that I am mad?" On the Theory, History and Signals of Unreliable Narration in British Fiction" (1997), and also from Olson's "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" (2003), in which Olson presents a list of Nünning's textual signals that she translated from his German monograph, *Unreliable Narration: Studien zur Theorie und Praxis unglabwürdigen Erzählens in der englischsprachigen Erzählliteratur* (1998). My list is not inclusive of all of Nünning's signals of unreliable narration; I have only presented the signals most relevant to my analyses of *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* and *The Death of Jayson Porter*.

2003, p.98). In other words, Nünning clarifies that every reader will interpret a text differently, based on his or her personal experience and/or agreed upon cultural, social, or moral norms. Some readers, for instance, might have misgivings about Jayson's suicidal feelings in *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), and decide that the narrator is unreliable. But if readers have entertained suicidal thoughts themselves, or have found themselves in a similar situation as Jayson, they may experience an intense emotional connection with the narrative, but not think about Jayson being unreliable. Nünning's theory also allows for the consideration of possible differences between an adolescent's and an adult's interpretation of a text. Most teenagers today, who belong to the "Millennial Generation," are more accustomed to technology and globalisation, which might shape their thinking, values and beliefs (Bahr & Pendergast 2007).[48] In this sense, millennial adolescents may be more attuned to nuances in narration based on the fact that they have had more access to information, and have encountered a wider range of people through technological accessibility. However, this theory would need to be investigated in future research.

Nünning's work also illuminates the ways unreliable narration is connected to emotion and affect. Many of Nünning's signals of unreliability relate to a character's high emotional involvement, and unreliable narration may contain exclamations, self-interruptions, or expressive adverbs and adjectives that could encourage affective responses in the reader. For instance, when Josie's date drapes his arm around her in a possessive manner, Josie uses affect-driven language to describe her unusual response: "[it] should have immediately brought out my / I-can-take-care-of-myself attitude, / but instead stirs this / way-foreign tingly / "Oh my God, he really likes me" rush / *(Lame! Did I just actually think that?)*" (Stone 2006, pp.10-11). The use of

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[48] The "Millennial Generation" accounts for people born between 1982 and 2002 (Howe & Strauss 2000, p.4)

compound adjectives, excessive adverbs, and exclamations like "Oh my God" may activate an affective response of excitement in the reader, highlighting the fact that Josie is acting "out of character." Furthermore, narrators who have invested his or her emotions into a situation are more likely to speak, think, or act unreliably. Later in Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), Aviva gets annoyed when Josie's ex-boyfriend does not call her all weekend. But when the alleged "bad boy" turns up at Aviva's front door, she hates herself for feeling excited: "But here he is. On my doorstep. Smiling. / Mr. I'm Too Sexy for My…" (p.164). Aviva ultimately agrees to go out with him, even though she knows he has not treated her respectfully, and her decision may suggest to the reader that she's acting in a questionable way.

While very little research has been done on the emotional functions of unreliable narration, Claudia Hillebrandt (2011) has argued that unreliability can generate a number of emotional effects in readers, including confusion, outrage, admiration, surprise, desire, or empathy. Effects like confusion are not typically considered to be emotions, yet Hillebrandt argues that they can be conceptualised as emotions, or at the very least, "emotionally coloured mental process[es]" (2011, p.20).[49] As suggested earlier in this chapter, emotion is inextricably connected to one's decision-making process (Damasio 1994). Therefore, a reader's emotional response to a text's language and narrative events would play a significant role in the detection of unreliable narration.

Nünning's work has contributed valuable insights regarding the interpretation of unreliable narration, yet Greta Olson argues that Nünning overstates his case, and

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[49] Hillebrandt notes a couple theorists who have examined the emotional functions of unreliable narration in texts (see Bläß 2005; Koebner 2005), but both texts are written in German, and (to the best of my knowledge) have not been translated into English.

that he seems to ignore the structural similarities between Booth's (1983) model and his own (2003, p.93). Olson notes a paradox in Nünning's argument:

> While reasoning that attributing unreliability results from text reception and is not a text-immanent phenomenon, Nünning nonetheless wishes to clear up the confusion surrounding unreliable narrators by enumerating specific textual markers that signal them. Nünning's list of textual signals is intended to demonstrate that the narrator appears unreliable to real historically- and culturally-embedded readers (versus Booth's postulated one). This is, however, problematic. For if detecting unreliability functions as a quality of individual reader response, how can stable textual signals exist to typify the phenomenon of unreliability? (p.97).

Olson suggests that both Nünning's and Booth's models consist of a nearly identical tripartite structure, and that Booth's implied author is essentially the same thing as Nünning's textual signals (Olson 2003, pp.98-99). Both models, Olson suggests, contains "(1) a personified narrator; (2) the implied author or the fictional world created by the totality of textual signals; and (3) the reader, who responds to and makes sense of (1) and (2)" (p.99).

James Phelan notes that Nünning's theory needs to take into account the author who created the textual signals of unreliable narration (2005, p.48). Phelan stresses the continuity between the implied author and the real author, redefining the former as a "streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text" (p.45). Based on Olson's

(2003) and Phelan's arguments (2005), Nünning has noted that an "implied author" (that is, the streamlined version of the real author) does need to be acknowledged, and Nünning (2005a) has now coalesced Booth's (1983) traditional rhetorical approach with his own cognitive reconceptualisation of unreliable narration (2005a). Yet Nünning rightly points out that his own "cognitive approach can nevertheless provide more finely nuanced tools for recognising an unreliable narrator" (2005a, p.104).[50]

In my analysis of *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), I will draw on Nünning's textual signals of unreliability (1997; 1998), which often act as tangible markers of narrative segmentivity that can be compared to the poetic segmentation. However, Booth's (1983) notion of the irony of unreliable narration also pertains to my work. While readers can interpret unreliability in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) through the detection of Nünning's textual signals (1997; 1998), the poetic segmentation often contains extra signals of unreliability that the reader may not always notice. In these instances, I suggest that the implied author is making the narrator the "butt of the ironic point," and creating "a sense of collusion against those [readers]…who do not get the point" (Booth 1983, p.304). For example, in the same excerpt from *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) discussed in Chapter One, the line-breaks signal the self-deception of Josie's words (which acts as a form of narrative unreliability), unbeknownst, it seems, to Josie:

How can I feel

so completely

connected

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[50] When Nünning speaks of "finely nuanced tools," he's referring to his list of textual signals of unreliability that I catalogued above.

to someone

I practically just met? (p.23).

Since Josie is the first narrator of this verse-novel, the reader may not perceive the extent of her naivety – at least not yet. But this becomes more evident when the boy Josie feels so "connected / to" abruptly dumps her (p.23), then goes on to break Nicolette's and Aviva's hearts. Some readers may notice the way the lines break against syntax, and discern the ironic difference between Josie's self-assured words and the fragmented lines; other readers, however, may not. For this reason, this signal of unreliability – as rendered by the poetic segmentation – appears to be embedded within the text, coinciding more with Booth's (1983) text-imminent approach to unreliable narration.

While on the subject of irony, it is important to note that young adult novels contain an extra form of irony based on the unequal relationship between the adult author and adolescent reader. Mike Cadden (2000) points out that "[n]ovels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent's voice are inherently ironic because the so-called adolescent's voice is never—and can never be—truly authentic" (p.146). Many verse-novels would be considered what Cadden calls "single-voiced" texts. "[W]hile imitative of a single young adult voice," Cadden writes, these texts "do not provide readers with enough tools to contest the perspectives or investigate alternate points of view" (p.147). For instance, Linda Oatman High's young adult verse-novel, *Planet Pregnancy* (2008), draws the reader into sixteen-year-old Sahara's pregnancy crisis through subjective first-person narration, but contains a subtle anti-abortion message, and does not offer another perspective to counter this viewpoint. This "top-down (or vertical) power relationship" can be problematic in

young adult fiction because it gives the adult writer the authority to impose his or her ideologies onto the young adult reader (Cadden 2000, p.146).

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's argument that it is the ironist's ethical responsibility "to guarantee the comprehension of irony (and the avoidance of misunderstanding)" (1994, p.120), Cadden argues that "by helping the reader recognise the limits of the young adult consciousness in the text, the author ethically trades the visibility of irony at one narrative level for the irony at another" (2000, p.146). In other words, texts that encourage the reader to interpret irony can somewhat counteract the ironic relationship that exists between adult author and adolescent reader. Bakhtin suggested that the most ethical form of narrative fiction is a "double-voiced discourse" that equally represents two voices and two ideological positions (1984, p.6). Cadden argues that first-person narratives can be double-voiced when a narrator is shown to be explicitly self-conscious, inconsistent, or vulnerable, which might make the reader question the narrator's reliability (2000, p.149). Cadden suggests several signals of "double-voicing," including self-questioning; evident miscalculations; loss of confidence; and displays of vulnerability or innocence (pp.149-151). While Nünning's (1997; 1998) signals are more comprehensive and precise, Cadden's (2000) list illustrates the way an adolescent narrator can be unreliable simply by exposing their vulnerabilities, as Jayson does in *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009). What makes a text "double-voiced," however, is the reader's detection of these inconsistencies, which would involve a more active reading process and the recognition of irony between two viewpoints.

In *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (1999), Robyn McCallum suggests that another way double-voicing can be achieved in first-person narratives is through multiple narrators, which "represent[s] a plurality of voices, consciousnesses

and discourses within narrative" (p.63). *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006)

generates double-voicing in this way because it utilises three first-person narrators. A

large number of other verse-novels also contain multiple first-person narrators,

including Ron Koertge's *The Brimstone Journals* (2001); Ellen Hopkins' *Impulse*

(2007)*;* and Stephanie Hemphill's *Wicked Girls: A Novel of the Salem Witch Trials*

(2010). I would also like to suggest that the verse-novel may generate more

opportunities for double-voicing and unreliable narration than most prose novels for

children and young adults. As discussed in Chapter One, the segmentation of the

narrative discourse into short poems (a typical feature of the genre) creates gaps in the

narrative. The gutter space between poems often marks a shift in mood or perspective,

which can highlight inconsistencies in the narration. These gaps do not always

indicate unreliability, but the verse-novel's characteristic "gappy" structure certainly

provides more opportunities for the display of unreliability.

Types of Unreliable Narrators

Thus far in this section, I have neglected to discuss an important concept of

unreliable narration – the different types of unreliable narrators. Narrators as

dissimilar as the psychotic, serial killer Patrick Bateman from Bret Easton Ellis'

American Psycho (1991), and the naïve but lovable Huckleberry Finn in Mark

Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2012), have been labelled as unreliable

(Riggan 1981). In *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and *The Death of*

Jayson Porter (2009), the narrators are also quite different. While all of these

narrators are likeable characters, Josie, Nicolette, and Aviva's boy-crazy mistakes feel

like a far cry from Jayson's suicidal proclivities. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that

unreliability can stem from three main sources: "the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (2002, p.103). She also suggests that unreliability can derive from mixed sources, as demonstrated in the narration of Rosa from William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (2013)*,* whose unreliability is based on her limited knowledge, as well as her personal involvement in the narrative (Rimmon-Kenan 2002 pp.103-104). These different sources of unreliability would, in turn, create different kinds of narrators. For instance, Greta Olson (2003) differentiates between an "untrustworthy narrator" and a "fallible narrator":[51]

> [F]allible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgements or perceptions or are biased. Fallible narrators' perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience, as in *Huckleberry Finn*; or, as in the case of Marlow from *Lord Jim*, their reports can seem insufficient because their sources of information are biased and incomplete (p.101).

Olson argues that the mistakes a fallible narrator makes are "*situationally motivated,*" influenced by "external circumstances" that "cause the narrator's misperceptions rather than inherent characteristics" (p.102). In other words, the errors a fallible narrator makes appear to be ones that he or she will outgrow in time. In some ways, the concept of a fallible narrator seems to apply to *all* young adult first-person

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[51] Olson derives her terminology from Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, in which Booth briefly mentions (but does not elaborate upon) the difference between a "fallible" or "unreliable" / "deceptive" narrator (1983, pp.158-159). Rimmon-Kenan and Olson are certainly not the only theorists to differentiate between various types of unreliable narrators. Also see: Nünning 1997; Nünning 1998; Nünning 1999; Riggan 1981; Fludernik 1999; Phelan & Martin 1999; Cohn 2000; Lanser 2001; Yacobi 2001.

narrators, or any character in a narrative of growth and change. Children's author

Madeline L'Engle explained that when she wrote – and read other peoples' writing –

she wanted the protagonists to be "thoroughly human, making mistakes, sometimes

doing terrible things through wrong choices, but ultimately stretching themselves

beyond their limitations" (1989, p.124). The difference between a fallible *protagonist*

and a fallible *narrator*, perhaps, is that a fallible narrator involves the reader in an

active interpretation of textual inconsistencies.

Olson suggest that an untrustworthy narrator (in contrast to a fallible narrator)

will strike the reader as "*dispositionally* unreliable" (2003, p.102). A untrustworthy

narrator's inconsistencies, Olson argues, "appear to be caused by ingrained

behavioural traits or some current self-interest" (p.102). However, Olson identifies

various levels of untrustworthiness, which allows for more subtle distinctions. The

narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell Tale Heart" (2009), for instance, illustrates

what Olson calls a "highly untrustworthy narrator," due to the narrator's obvious

mental instability and nervous disposition. On the other hand, Moll Flanders in Daniel

Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1973) appears

only "marginally unreliable," with the character being "alternately identified as the

eloquent speaker of London's poor or the object of Daniel Defoe's moral derision"

(Olson 2003, p.103).

In *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), Josie, Nicolette and Aviva are

positioned as fallible narrators, displaying unreliability based on their inexperience.

All three characters fall for the same "bad boy," not choosing to listen to – or not

recognising – the warning signs that he is "playing" them. The three girls may appear

to act on self-interest (as untrustworthy narrators do, according to Olson), pursuing

this bad boy against their own better judgements. However, their intentions never

appear amoral or deliberately deceitful. Jayson Porter (2009), on the other hand, displays a kind of unreliability that is not entirely attributable to fallibility. Jayson could also be considered fallible based on his age, and therefore, his supposed lack of life experience, yet he displays maturity beyond his years. Jayson also never acts unfairly or purposefully deceitful towards anyone, despite the unjustified treatment he receives from others. In fact, the adults in Jayson's life, including his abusive mother and his drug-addicted father, seem more unreliable than Jayson. Because of the extreme emotional and physical difficulties he faces, Jayson contemplates suicide on a regular basis, and often buries his pain deep inside himself. I propose that Jayson displays an "unreliability-to-self" or an "untrustworthiness-to-self." In some ways, his unreliability resembles Olson's description of an untrustworthy narrator due to his mental instability and self-interest. Yet the untrustworthy narrators Olson describes come across as morally or ethically untrustworthy, while Jayson appears psychologically and emotionally untrustworthy.[52]

In both *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), instances of unreliable narration create dynamic connections with the poetic segmentation. The poetic lines may break into short asyntactic lines alongside a signal of unreliability, reinforcing a character's high emotional involvement in a situation, and encouraging an affective response in the reader. On the other hand, the poetic segmentation may splinter the syntax, appearing to counter a signal of

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[52] I acknowledge that I could have drawn on James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin's (1999) taxonomy of unreliable narration to describe the narrators in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), although I have chosen to use my own language to describe the way these characters display unreliability. Phelan and Martin identify six types of unreliability: misreporting, misreading, misevaluating, underreporting, underreading, and underregarding (1999, p.95). Using this model, Josie, Nicolette, and Aviva could be viewed as "misreporting" events due to their lack of knowledge about the bad boy's true intentions, or "misreading" or "misevaluating" his behaviour. Jayson Porter could be interpreted as "underreporting" his true emotions.

unreliability, and also generating irony that some readers may (or may not) perceive. At the same time, *any* instance of line-break, whether it breaks with syntax or against it, seems to insinuate a sense of fragmentation – a brokenness – within the narrative discourse. I would also suggest that poetic segmentation often corresponds with displays of unreliability in other characters. For instance, when Jayson's mother beats him, the short line-breaks correspond with the mother's volatile, un-parent-like behaviour:

I beg and plead for her to stop,

but she won't,

she won't

stop.

She won't

stop

she won't

stop

she won't…(p.109).

Affectively Experiencing Narrative Poetry

If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry

(Emily Dickinson 1958, p.95)

A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl (2006) and *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) are both packed with emotion, encouraging affective responses through the deployment of language, narrative events, and poetic and narrative segmentation. As suggested earlier, many readers may not reflect on the fact that they are reading

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narrative poetry in these texts, choosing instead of get "carried away" with the story. Yet the dynamic interplay between poetic and narrative segmentations would involve readers in a non-conscious way, prompting their bodies to respond to the interlaced gaps that weave through the text. If an emotional response is strong enough, some readers may feel, as Emily Dickinson suggests, like the tops of their heads were taken off (1958, p.95). While poetic and narrative segmentation may not always connect meaningfully, the numerous connections between poetic and narrative segmentations would draw the reader into affective experiences, allowing them to physically *feel* the narrative poetry.

The first poem in Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), entitled "For the Record," immediately sets a defensive tone, which might prickle some readers' skin. "I'm not stuck up," Josie declares, "I'm confident. / There's a big difference" (p.1). These initial lines are end-stopped, but after a stanza-break, some lines begin to break against syntax:

If I was stuck up

I'd be one of those

"Oh look at me, I'm so pretty"

girls

instead of just appreciating the fact that

my cinnamon skin looks good year-round (p.1).

The isolation of the word "girls" in a separate line creates an irregular beat, and presents a visual streak of space, urging readers to pause and reflect on Josie's oversensitive statement. Since this is the first poem in the verse-novel, readers may

not perceive Josie as an unreliable narrator. Then again, they may wonder why she is speaking so defensively. If she is so confident, why does she need to set the record straight? In this excerpt, the asyntactic line-breaks (as well as the uneven line lengths) correspond with these subtle signals of Josie's wobbly composure. The separation of the word "girls" produces a feeling of vulnerability, foreshadowing the heartache Josie will eventually endure.

Later in the poem, Josie speaks with greater contempt:

I'm not so floundering in self-esteem issues

that I need

someone's arm to hang on or

someone's jersey number to cheer for

to be a legitimate person

like some people I know (p.2).

The line-break following the word "need" functions in a similar way to "girls" in the last excerpt. Even though Josie says she *does not* need these things, the visual and aural emphasis on "need" kindles a sense of longing, which conflicts with her *I-don't-need-anyone* attitude. The repetition of "someone's," as well as expressive words like "floundering" and "some people I know," amplifies the disdainful quality of her statement. Most of these lines fragment with syntax, which may not necessarily signify anything. Yet these syntactic line-breaks do seem to reinforce the sense that Josie is in control (or appears to be in control) at the moment, despite the narrational inconsistencies some readers may detect. These lines then act as points of contrast to the last stanza of the poem, which fracture into short, asyntactic lines:

As if high school boys

hold some kind of magical key

to who we

all

really

are (p.2).

Josie's words continue to exude confidence, but the sentence's disintegration into short, one-word lines tells a different story. The line-breaks syncopate the language, and generate a white belt of space, providing a place for the reader to consider the discrepancy between Josie's forthright words and the poetic segmentation.

The second poem in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*, "The Whole Truth," begins on the following page, creating the verse-novel's first gutter space. In this white expanse – stretching from the lower margin of the first poem, across the bookbinding, into the upper margin of the next page – a change occurs. Josie begins to contradict herself, and readers might feel their hearts pick up speed as they wonder why she spoke so contemptuously in the previous poem.

All that stuff I just said is absolutely

swear-to-God true,

but the rest of the truth

the whole truth

is

lately

I don't have as tight a grip

on my confidence

as usual.

I mean, this is *high school* (p.3).

The language in this excerpt has an emotional punch, with words like "absolutely," "swear-to-God," and "*high school*" likely to have an affective impact on the reader. The lines that repeat the word "truth" build up a rhythm before the pace slows down as the lines shorten, and Josie admits her confidence is ebbing. The fragmentation of the first sentence into asyntactic lines generates numerous gaps for the reader to think about the discrepancy between her last statement and this one, and Josie's admitted lack of truthfulness. The lines in the last three stanzas subsequently diminish in length, creating a visual image of Josie's shrinking self-esteem.

What if

what Kim and Caroline call

my natural look

is considered totally lame in high school?

What if

wanting to read

during lunch

makes me a

total geek?

What if

I don't

fit in

at

all? (p.4).

Many young adult readers would relate to Josie's concerns about her appearance and her worries about fitting into social circles in high school, with each gap of space helping the reader to establish an emotional connection with the narrator. While Josie's display of vulnerability may produce a sympathetic effect in the reader, Josie continues to contradict herself, and the poetic segmentation supports this conflict.

The next gutter creates a much larger void of space, and in this poetic gap, Josie changes her story again. "It's funny how one night can change / the way you look at certain things," she says in "Jigsaw," the third poem (p.5). This line builds a sense of excitement – and even surprise – as Josie describes how she quickly falls for a "studly senior" at a school dance (p.6), countering everything she said about not needing a high school boy to be a legitimate person (p.1).

I mean, I believe 100 percent

that high school boys don't hold any magical key

    or anything

but that's not the same as saying they're all bad.

Some of them aren't so bad.

Like, maybe,

this

one (p.5).

The indentation of the phrase "or anything" generates a pause, and makes Josie's statement about boys not holding magical keys sound less certain. The gap of white space that follows "anything" also provides a place for the reader to reflect on the inconsistencies in Josie's account. As the lines diminish in length, breaking against syntax, the language surges in excitement. Who is this boy, the reader might wonder, and what did he do to change Josie's mind about high school boys?

As the narrative progresses, the reader gets pulled through a string of events, and through a web of poetic and narrative gaps and pauses. After Josie meets "him," he (who remains unnamed through the narrative) takes Josie out on a hot-and-heavy date, and they quickly become an item. But when Josie becomes this boy's girlfriend, her sense of self begins to fracture. She lets him take her to a party she doesn't like; she ditches her friends, Kim and Caroline, to sit with him in the school cafeteria (even though she promised her friends she'd never do that); and she even lets him talk her into cutting class: "I hear a voice rise from deep inside," Josie says, "hurtle closer, faster / then slam into my ears, / "What are you *doing*? / This isn't you" (p.29). She also allows him to take their sexual relationship faster than she's comfortable with, even when he does "this / hot and cold / thing" (p.47). "Why does he act like such a jerk," she wonders, "every time it seems like we / get a little bit closer?" (p.48). When Josie nearly has sex with him, but then stops him at the last minute, he puts up an instant cold front, dumping her a few days later. Like the first three poems, the lines often fragment against syntax when Josie – or her boyfriend – speaks or acts inconsistently.

In the following two sections, narrated by Nicolette and Aviva, the poetic segmentation continues to connect with gaps in narrational reliability, drawing the reader into the emotional content of the narrative through a series of cues. Josie's account now acts as an important point of contrast with the other girls' experiences with "him," foregrounding further instances of unreliable narration, and complicating the reader's affective responses to the text. After witnessing how this so-called "bad boy" dumped Josie, most readers will wince when Nicolette and Aviva fall for him, too, even when the other girls convey confidence and delight. For instance, in the poem "Good Enough," narrated by Nicolette, readers will experience a mixed affective response:

> But there's this one guy
>
> at my school
>
> I think I'll check out.
>
> This girl named Josie is going around telling everyone
>
> he's no good.
>
> Wanted me to read all about him
>
> in the back of some old library book.[53]
>
> I tell you what, though,
>
> I think she's just a goody-goody.
>
> I have *seen* this guy and he looks pretty good to me.
>
> I mean REAL good (p.86).

---

[53] This is a reference to Josie's decision to write about him in the end covers of Blume's *Forever* (1975), then spread the word about the book at school. In the 2007 Random House edition of *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*, the page after the dedication page visually depicts some of the handwritten entries in *Forever*, displaying messages like "WHAT A PIG!" and "The jerk dumped me the morning after prom night last year" and "OMG! Me too!"

Nicolette's expressive phrases like "I have *seen* this guy" and "REAL good" could arouse interest, or evoke distress because the reader knows what Nicolette doesn't – that this boy *is not* any good. Most of these lines fragment with syntax, following natural speech rhythms, but the segregation of the phrase "he's no good" distorts Nicolette's intended meaning. She sneers at Josie for "going around telling everyone / he's no good," but the poetic segmentation reinforces Josie's warning, and hints that Nicolette is making a mistake (p.86). In a similar way, many readers will experience a mixed affective response to Aviva's statement in the poem, "Still" (p.149).

> It's not a normal, everyday
>
> occurrence
>
> when one of the hottest jocks at P.B.H.
>
> asks me out (p.149).

While Aviva's words express excitement about being asked out, the gaps that open up with the asyntactic line-breaks undermine her statement (p.149). The reader will know that it *is* a common occurrence for this boy to ask girls out (even if he has never asked Aviva), which might make the reader feel apprehensive. These mixed emotions – interest, surprise, excitement, contempt, distress – will keep the reader flipping the page, eager to find out what happens next.

In the majority of poems in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*, the language segments into short lines. Yet a few poems – and some sections of poems – appear more like prose-poetry, encouraging a different type of affective response to the

segmentation. For example, in the poem "Dog," run-on lines urge the reader to experience Nicolette's overflow of emotion after she gets dumped.

I don't even have a dog to curl up with, to drown my

tears into his shaggy fur. Not even a damn dog around to

help me get over the human dog-faced piece of crap I just

gave my whole heart and soul and body to. Mom says it's

hard enough to take care of ourselves, let alone have time

for any mangy mutt. But even a mangy mutt might help

me believe I've got some kind of friend in this world (p.136).[54]

The continuous lines give the impression that Nicolette is crying uncontrollably, and becoming overwhelmed with her emotions. The most striking form of poetic segmentation is the large gaps of white space that precede and follow this brief, seven-line poem, and carry on across the gutter to the next poem. In the beginning of her narrative section Nicolette had appeared bold and confident, so many readers will intensely experience Nicolette's grief and confusion in these large blocks of space. While typesetting most likely determined the line-ends, it is significant that each line breaks against syntax, which corresponds with Nicolette's shattered emotional state.

The first poem in *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009) utilises poetic segmentation in a similar way to most poems in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006), encouraging affective responses in the gaps of space that succeed each line-break. Following a paratextual page emblazoned with the boldfaced word "**after**," the

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[54] I have broken these lines as they appear in *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl*. Although the lines don't look very long, they actually stretch into the right margin like a prose-poem.

opening poem in *The Death of Jayson Porter* may quicken a reader's heartbeat as

Jayson describes the experience of leaping to his death.

I am a bullet

screaming to the ground.

The air rushing past me, so fast I can't breathe.

I am gasping.

The sound—like a 747 taking off in my eardrums.

Getting louder and louder.

The ground getting closer and closer.

This is supposed to get rid of my pain,

get rid of it forever.

This is my cure.

It

HURTS.

It wasn't supposed to hurt (2009, p.5).

The emotional intensity of this poem is amplified by rich sensory language; the reader

is encouraged to see the ground, hear the air rushing, and even to feel Jayson's lungs

gasping for breath. The poem's tempo is swift, but the line-breaks provide momentary

pauses, palpitating the rhythm of the language. At this point, the reader probably has

not considered Jayson's psychological unreliability, but the use of short lines suggest

that he is quickly losing control of himself – and his life. Most lines fragment with

syntax, but the line-break that separates "It" from "**HURTS**" visually and aurally

depicts Jayson's pain, encouraging readers to share his experience. The lines become

shorter as the poem continues, and Jayson's survival becomes more uncertain, ending just before he hits the ground:

I see a woman pushing a stroller—

a man jogging—

people

living—

life (p.6).

Another paratextual page follows this poem, marked with the word "**before**." The narrative has now shifted into analepsis, prompting readers to think about what may have happened to Jayson to make him leap off the side of a building. The paratextual page – as well as an additional blank page – generates a large span of white space for the reader to consider and reflect, and to also to catch her breath. When the reader flips the page to Chapter One, however, he or she might gulp for air again.

What I do?

"OWWWW."

"You know what you did."

"OWWWW."

"Now clean it up. I want it all cleaned before I get home.

Understand? And if there is one spot left, there's going to

be hell to pay."[55]

I flinch; expecting another. Recoiling from the attack.

Like a shotgun that's just been fired. Except I'm not the

gun. Mom is.

Mom. "Lizzie" to her drinking buddies (p.9).

The reader would quickly piece together that Jayson's mother, Lizzie, is beating her

son for an unjustified reason. While the poetic segmentation appears to mainly serve a

paragraphic function (denoting the shift in dialogue, perhaps), the lengths of white

space offer places for the reader to emotionally connect to Jayson's distress, and to

puzzle over why his mother treats him so badly. Most readers would probably

consider Lizzie to be unusually cruel, and would therefore distrust her character. The

gap between "Mom is" and "*Mom. "Lizzie" to her drinking buddies*" corresponds

with this signal of her untrustworthiness, suggesting a rift between normal parental

behaviour and Lizzie's behaviour (p.9).

This gap of space (and subsequent gaps throughout the verse-novel) may also

offer readers places to assess Lizzie's parenting with their own life experiences, and

to consider what constitutes ethical parenting. At this point in the verse-novel, readers

have not been offered an alternative view of parenting, so they will most likely rely

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[55] Similar to the excerpt I presented in the "Broken Things: Poetic Segmentation"
section of this chapter, I have broken these lines as they appear in the original text,
even though the lines actually run into the right margin. I will do this for all
subsequent extracts of *The Death of Jayson Porter*.

on their own moral compass to evaluate "right" and "wrong" parenting. Later in the text, however, Trina is introduced. Jayson knows Trina as his mother's friend, but she takes on a motherly role by writing Jayson letters, buying him birthday presents, and paying for his private school education. Compared to Lizzie, Trina's "parenting" appears much more ethical and moral, and readers may use this comparison to conclude that Lizzie's treatment of Jayson is amoral and inappropriate.

Later in the chapter, after Lizzie leaves with one of her drinking buddies, Jayson's behaviour might also make the reader feel uneasy. Even though his mother beats him, Jayson still gets out the cleaning supplies to scrub the carpet. He even reveals that he was not the one to stain it: "Last night, Mom and that black / dude were kickin' it. Dude spilled a whole plate of / spaghetti on the carpet. Now Mom says I did it" (p.13). Yet Jayson goes on to defend his mother, and the poetic segmentation provides spaces for the reader to consider his questionable reaction:

> Now it's just me and Mom. I know she doesn't want to
>
> be so mean to me, she just can't help it. Like she says,
>
> *"Sometimes I just have bad days."*

> Bad days, gettin' more and more, but I know things will
>
> get better. I know Mom will get better. I know she loves
>
> me.

> No matter what she says
>
> or
>
> how she hits

I know

she loves me (p.14).

The first section-break calls attention to the duplicity of the phrase "bad days" (p.14). Jayson tries to use his mother's excuse to vindicate her, but the reader may apprehend that Jayson's wrong about his mom. The repetition of the words "I know" and "she loves me" creates a pounding rhythm as Jayson tries to convince himself – and perhaps the reader – about Lizzie. But the reader will notice the feebleness in Jayson's words, especially as the last sentence fragments into short, sharp lines. While the parameters of the margin may have determined the line-breaks in the first two sections, the isolation of the word "me" in the second paragraph seems significant. Not only does it rupture the phrase "she loves / me," but it also expresses Jayson's vulnerability and aloneness.

Jayson's life certainly is not easy, and the reader might feel a constant sense of malaise as Jayson describes the squalor of his housing project apartment, recounts how he almost gets attacked by some "*hard*-lookin' kids" on the city bus (p.19), and gets reprimanded by his discriminatory boss. As previously discussed, Jayson does not intentionally lie to others, but he does come across as unreliable to himself when he flirts with the rail in the breezeway of his eighteenth floor apartment. The reader is introduced to the rail in Chapter Four, when the narrator is home alone "trying to keep out all the bad thoughts" (p.37).

I feel myself starting to slide. That familiar sinking feeling

in the pit of my stomach that tells me my outside game is

starting to crack. I feel real nervous, anxious, too. Like

somethin' bad's gonna happen any second (p.37).

Jayson's admitted lack of composure would make most readers feel nervous and anxious, too. The language begins to splinter into shorter sections – opening up gashes of white space – as Jayson opens his apartment door and steps out onto the breezeway.

I walk closer to it now. Closer to the rail.

Just three rungs. Just three pieces of metal.

That's all that separates us (p.38).

If the reader has formed an emotional connection with the protagonist, the language in this excerpt may be quite distressing when Jayson's intentions become evident. As mentioned earlier, suicide remains a social taboo in Western culture (Crook 2003, p.85), and this allusion to it may unsettle some readers. Later in the scene, the language breaks into shorter lines, suggesting that Jayson is losing control of his thoughts, and himself:

I lean against the rail
The warm cheap steel feels good
against my bare skin.
I push harder.
This is all that separates me… (2009, p.40).

Jayson does not jump over the rail in this scene, but after his best friend Trax dies in a meth lab explosion, Jayson does try to commit suicide by leaping from the seventh-floor. Amazingly, he survives, although he fractures his neck, making it difficult for him to talk or walk. Jayson now faces a physical challenge, but he eventually gains the confidence to stand up to Lizzie and to escape his abusive life.

In the last pages of *The Death of Jayson Porter,* Trina, who is eventually revealed as Jayson's real mother, drives her son away to a better life in Goner, West Virginia. Jayson tries to stay awake as long as he can, but he gives in to exhaustion: "I feel Trina put her foot on the gas, gunning it past / another eighteen-wheeler. My eyes shut again as I feel / my body drifting, slipping back into sleep…" (p.259). Readers may feel exhausted, too, especially if they fully "lent" their bodies to Jayson's character, affectively experiencing the narrative content, language, and segmentation of the text.

The verse-novels I will discuss in Chapter Three – Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) and Norma Fox Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) – are not as emotionally exhausting and ethically confronting as *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), but they will also elicit affective responses. *Love That Dog* and *What I Believe* also have the added element of overt self-reflexivity, which will engage readers on a different cognitive level, encouraging them to actively think about the construction of the narrative poetry, while affectively experiencing the narrative poetry. In this next chapter, my discussion of the interconnection between narrative and poetic segments will somewhat recede as I focus on self-reflexivity. Yet narrative and poetry will continue to interconnect in *Love That Dog* and *What I Believe*, and the self-reflexive

elements in these verse-novels may even encourage the reader to notice this entangled

relationship.

CHAPTER THREE

Experiences of Narrative Poetry in Self-Reflexive Verse-Novels

> You've just got to
>
> make
>
> short
>
> lines
>
> (Sharon Creech 2001, p.3).

Most – if not all – verse-novels will engage readers through affect-driven language and segmentation. Some verse-novels also have the added element of self-reflexivity that can prompt readers to consciously think about the texts as constructed artefacts. In self-reflexive verse-novels, a child or teenage narrator is often portrayed as a budding poet, and the reader is encouraged to imagine that she is reading the narrator's poetry notebook. For instance, in Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001), Jack writes poems in response to his teacher's poetry lessons in his journal. The text becomes particularly self-reflexive when Jack uses poetry to comment on its creation: "If that is a poem / about the red wheelbarrow / and the white chickens / then any words / can be a poem. / You've just got to / make / short / lines" (p.3). After reading this, many readers will actively think – or rethink – about this section of text as poetry because of its use of "short / lines" (p.3). Can any words be a poem, as long as it uses lineation? a reader might wonder. Are *all* the words in this verse-novel poetry because of the continued use of lineation?

Self-reflexive verse-novels such as Creech's *Love That Dog* could be interpreted as "metafiction," defined by Patricia Waugh as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984, p.2).

Nevertheless, most self-reflexive verse-novels encourage readers to consider the construction and presentation of *poetry*, rather than the construction of fiction. In this sense, these verse-novels could be more suitably described as "metapoetry," a term used to describe poetic works "that refer in some way to their existence as artistic constructs and those which include an evaluation or examination of poetry" (Mascia 2001, p.51). In short, metapoetry is the poetic version of metafiction.

Yet it is important to remember that a verse-novel is a hybrid blend of poetry *and* narrative, and that it may contain both metapoetic and metafictional techniques. It is equally important to note that a reader's cognitive engagement with the metapoetic structures in a verse-novel is actually an engagement with the workings of *narrative poetry*. Even if a reader does not consciously consider that he or she is thinking about narrative poetry, his or her line of thought will still be influenced by the interplay between poetic and narrative segmentations. Since verse-novels combine poetry and narrative, and can contain both metapoetic and metafictional devices, I have chosen to use the term "self-reflexive" or "self-reflexivity" to refer to any of these devices used to draw attention to any parts of the verse-novel as a constructed artefact.

This chapter will examine how Creech's children's verse-novel *Love That Dog* (2001) and Norma Fox Mazer's young adult verse-novel *What I Believe* (2005) may pull the reader into an experience of narrative poetry through the deployment of self-reflexive devices, as well as other techniques such as intertextuality and parody. I will also consider how a reader's cognitive experience is intrinsically related to the affective experience of narrative poetry in a verse-novel. As discussed in the Introduction, verse-novels for children and young adults have often been criticised for consisting of chopped-up prose instead of poetry. Self-reflexive verse-novels can engage readers into this critical discourse, encouraging them to actively think about –

and interrogate – whether verse-novels do indeed consist of poetry. In *Love That Dog* (2001), Jack continues to question what makes a poem as he writes: "It's not a poem. / Is it?" (p.17). While Creech's text does seem to substantiate that Jack *is* writing poetry, readers are still given the space to contemplate, question, and challenge the nature of narrative poetry throughout the verse-novel.

Self-Reflexivity in Verse-Novels

Every poem is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of the words

(Wallace Stevens 1957, p.174)

Self-reflexivity is a fairly common trait in verse-novels for children and young adults, albeit some verse-novels utilise it more overtly. The two verse-novels my textual analysis will focus on– Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) and Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) – both use self-reflexivity in pronounced ways. For instance, both verse-novels immediately suggest to the reader that the narrator is the author of the poems within. After establishing the narrator as poet, these texts continually activate the reader's thinking about poetry and poetry writing via narrational commentary. *Love That Dog* and *What I Believe* also connect intertextually with other poems or poetic forms, foregrounding the way the poems in these verse-novels have been constructed, and drawing readers into a wider discourse of poetry.

Additional verse-novels that overtly use self-reflexivity include Roger Stevens' *The Journal of Danny Chancer (Poet)* (2002); Ron Koertge's *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003); Jacqueline Woodson's *Locomotion* (2003); Linda Oatman High's *Sister Slam and the Poetic Motormouth Road Trip* (2004); Meg Kearney's *The Secret of Me* (2005); and Sally Murphy's *Pearl Verses the World* (2009). Other verse-

novels use self-reflexivity in less pronounced ways. For example, the teen narrator in Julie Williams' *Escaping Tornado Season* (2004), briefly mentions that her teacher praised her poetry towards the end of the narrative, which might prompt readers to retrospectively consider the verse-novel as a poetic artefact created by the narrator. Similarly, in Steven Herrick's *Love, Ghosts & Nose Hair* (1996), the narrator Jack mentions poetry writing a few times (although he does not comment on the technicality of writing poems), which would entice many readers to think of the text as Jack's poetry.[56]

Not all verse-novels for children and young adults incorporate self-reflexivity, but it certainly seems to be a common trend in long narrative poems. In *Strategies of Poetic Narrative* (1992), Clare Kinney discusses how classic English poetic narratives such as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1984), Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1981), and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1973) all contain levels of self-reflexivity, creating "pressures" that contribute to the structural frameworks of the poetic narratives (p.23). Kinney also suggests that the authors of classic English narratives may have included self-reflexive devices in order to "authenticate or authorize the creating self, the creating act, and the text created" (1992, p.23). In other words, self-reflexivity may help substantiate these narrative poems as legitimate artistic creations.

> It is this kind of self-consciousness – almost metafictionality – that generally
> characterises the division of sophisticated poetic fictions: a new section of
> narrative is frequently introduced by the invocation of a Muse, abstraction,
> patron; or else by a reference to a source or to the act of composition itself; or

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[56] The self-reflexive verse-novels I have mentioned here do not constitute an exhaustive list. Over the course of my research, I have identified over 50 verse-novels for children and young adults that involve some level of self-reflexivity, although I am certain I have overlooked many others.

else (and this is particularly common at the beginning of cantos of *The Faerie Queene*) by a moral pronouncement or gloss (Kinney 1992, p.12).

Kinney suggests that self-reflexivity in these classic poetic narratives may have emerged from each "author's anxiety about the possibility of reconciling the ideally authoritative and autonomous act of poetic making with the common understanding of fiction as a feigning that is at once derivative and…illusory" (p.25). As Kinney points out, poetry has historically been conceived as the true making or "vital creation" of the author, and not fictional in any way (p.24). In his *Defence of Poesy* (2004), Sir Philip Sidney stated that while "all other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive, as it were, their being from it, the poet only, only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter but maketh matter for a conceit" (p.30). Fiction, on the other hand, is considered an artificial construction, although some writers have attempted to mask (or half mask) the fictitious element of their narratives, as Daniel Defoe did with *Robinson Crusoe* (1988)*,* which he presented as Crusoe's "autobiography" (Kinney 1992, p.24). Kinney notes that Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton all used various techniques to deal with this tension between fiction and poetry, the most obvious being invocations to the "Muse":

When the maker, in asking for poetic inspiration, begs the Muse to unfold the material of his fiction (*say* what was the cause of Adam and Eve's transgression, says Milton; *show* me the "antique rolles" where my story is inscribed, says Spenser), he suggests to us that his poem already exists, although occupying a space inaccessible to us, and that he is the privileged

medium of its transmission. The poem is already a perfect – perhaps too

perfect – conceit which has to translate in order to make it intelligible; he must

recast the prior and transcendent construct in the fictive shape which it

requires in order to be brought down to earth (p.25).

Some contemporary poets may still refer to unconscious or unknown forces at

work in their writing processes (for example, see Hetherington 2012), but the concept

of the "Muse" as inspiration for poetry is now antiquated (Levy 2012). Furthermore,

the advent of post-structuralism and postmodernism into critical theory generated a

new way of thinking: poetry was no longer thought to be the "vital creation" of the

poet, but a fabrication. In *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1994),

Majorie Perloff commends modern and postmodern poetry for being a "*made thing*"

that is "contrived, constructed, chosen" (p.28). Perloff also argues that readers can

become actively involved in the construction of a poem: "At its best, such

construction empowers the audience by altering its perceptions of how things happen"

(p. 28). In short, Perloff suggests that the best poetry innovates a reader's thinking

about how a poem works, which is essentially what a metapoem does. Even though

metapoetry usually refers to poems that comment on their own existence, a poem can

still be metapoetic if it motivates readers to think about its construction. For instance,

concrete poetry has been interpreted as metapoetic because of the way it draws

attention to its own physical construction (Lang 1979).

The contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults differs in many

ways from the classic poetic narratives of Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton. Yet verse-

novels, like these older poetic narratives, may utilise self-reflexivity as a way to

authenticate themselves. Contemporary verse-novelists probably aren't trying to

reconcile the act of "true" poetry creation and illusory fiction making (as their predecessors did), but they may still deal with an "anxiety" that stems from the challenging interconnection between poetry and narrative. Of course, some verse-novelists have suggested that the relationship between poetry and narrative is not a difficult one. In my interview with Creech (2012), she said that "the two forms…mesh so seamlessly," and that she is "not thinking *consciously* about form or genre when [she] write[s] (n.p.)."[57] Similarly, Ron Koertge has described poetry and narrative as "amiable things, willing to work with and alongside one another" (cited in Alberts 2013b, n.p.).[58] Yet Koertge has also indicated that he does contemplate the relationship between the two genres: "I tend to have two things to think about…is the story moving along at a nice clip, and is what I'm writing actually poetry and not chopped-up prose?" (n.p.).

In my own process, I have also mindfully considered whether or not I was writing poetry or prose hacked into short lines, particularly in the early stages of my writing process. After reading literature that criticised verse-novels for not being poetry, I became overly concerned – and anxious – about creating poetry. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this anxiety initially prevented me from creating a coherent narrative. I cannot state with certainty why some authors used self-reflexive techniques in their verse-novels, but I theorise that the use of these techniques may have been a subconscious way to validate their verse-novels as poetry. By presenting a verse-novel as the "real" poetry journal of a child or teenage narrator, and

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[57] Creech's italics.

[58] Both Creech and Koertge have written verse-novels that involve self-reflexivity. These texts include Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) and *Hate That Cat* (2008), and Koertge's *Brimstone Journals* (2001), *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2006), and *Shakespeare Makes the Playoffs* (2010).

referencing the process of writing poetry within the discourse, writers can present their texts as poetry, even if some poems appear "un-poem-like."

Despite the prevalence of self-reflexivity in verse-novels for children and young adults, I am not aware of any theoretical study that fully discusses this trend in the genre. This is not surprising, since (as discussed in the Introduction) few studies on the contemporary verse-novel have emerged. Very little has also been written on self-reflexivity in the adult verse-novel or the long narrative poem, although Kinney's study (1992) is a notable exception. Linda Weste's thesis, "Productive Interplay: Poetic and Narrative Strategies in the Late Twentieth and Early-Twenty-First Century Verse Novel" (2012), also discusses metapoetic and metanarrative devices in the verse-novels of Anthony Burgess, Fred D'Aguiar, Brad Leithauser, David Mason, and Derek Walcott in one chapter. Others scholars have briefly mentioned self-reflexivity in their studies of verse-novels or long narrative poems, but have not elaborated on this technique (for instance, see Addison 2012; Mallan & McGillis 2003; Perris 2011).

Studies on self-reflexivity and metapoetic techniques in poetry do exist (for example, see Baker 1997; Marr 2007; Mascia 2001; Raab 1998), but most focus on poetic forms like sonnets or lyrics, and tend not to consider longer narrative poetic forms. Additionally, most metapoetic studies do not fully discuss the effect of self-reflexive techniques on the reading process. Metafiction, however, has been sufficiently discussed in literary theory. Since metafiction places readers in similar interpretative positions as metapoetic texts, these studies can be used to understand the readerly effects of self-reflexivity in verse-novels. Having said this, it must be reiterated that verse-novels contain more metapoetic devices than metafictional

devices, and most readers will become more engaged with experiences of narrative poetry through a verse-novel's references to the making of poetry.

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh notes that metafiction became prominent in literature from the 1960s onwards, but that "the *practice* is as old (if not older) than the novel itself" (p.5).[59] In *Narcissistic Narrative: the metafictional paradox*, Linda Hutcheon similarly argues that the novel "from its beginnings has always nurtured a self-love, a tendency towards self-obsession" (1980, p.10). While metafiction may indeed be a tendency in many novels, Waugh explains that metafiction also operates in opposition to realist techniques inherent in most novels:

> Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. (1984, p.6)

This process of "laying bare" the illusion of fiction creates an ontological gap that allows readers to question the relationship between fiction and reality. Readers assume more active roles, interpreting and deconstructing texts as they encounter metafictive techniques that urge them to consider a text as a constructed artefact. For this reason, metafiction has often been interpreted as a postmodern technique, especially since metafiction flourished during the cultural period of postmodernism

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[59] Although metafiction gained prominence in the 1960s, Waugh (1984) notes that the term "metafiction," was not coined until 1970, when American novelist and critic William H. Gass mentioned it in an essay (p.2).

(McCallum 1996, p.400). Metafictional and postmodernist texts often share similar features, such as the use of narrative fragmentations and disruptions; intertextuality; and the blurring or subversion of genre (McCallum 1996; Smith 2005). At the same time, Hutcheon (1980) argues that metafiction is not exclusively a postmodern feature, and existed well before the advent of postmodernism, and that metafiction continues to take many different forms today.

In children's and young adult literature theory, metafiction has received both praise and criticism. In "Metafictions and Experimental Work" (1996), Robyn McCallum notes that metafictional texts have often been criticised for being "too difficult for children" because of the way readers need to bridge the ontological gaps between the fictional world and the actual world in which we live (p.398). In his essay, "Metafiction and the Poetics of Children's Literature" (1990), Geoff Moss suggests that any resistance to metafictional texts may stem from the ideology that children's literature should not challenge readers into uncomfortable positions, but should allow them to enter comfortably into a story (p.50). Moss notes that the

> majority of the fiction aimed at the teenage market is "closed": it aims to deny the plurality of meaning and might be termed as "readerly" after Barthes. Such texts assume a form of innocence, especially about the medium of language, on behalf of the reader who is invited to accept, without question, an established relationship between signifier and signified. It is this assumed innocence of the reader which gives us a clue as to why this is the dominant form in children's literature (p.50).

The ideology of childhood innocence continues to permeate thought in western cultures (Robinson 2013), urging many adult writers to believe children and teenagers do not have the same reading abilities or aptitudes as adults, and should therefore not be given challenging reading material. In *The Case of Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose suggests that closed texts for children and young adults create "safe" relationships between adults and children (1984, p.9). If the child reader can be manipulated and controlled by the adult writer, then the adult's position of power is not compromised.

Two decades after the publication of Moss' essay, "Metafiction and the Poetics of Children's Literature" (1990), more "writerly" texts for children and young adults have emerged that challenge readers to assume more active reading positions.[60] Verse-novels, graphic novels, and transmedia texts – all of which can confront readers' assumptions regarding genre – have become increasingly popular in young adult literature (Ward, Young & Day 2012). In "Crossing Boundaries: Genre-Blurring in Books for Young Adults," Barbara A. Ward, Terrell A. Young, and Deanna Day use the term "transmedia" to refer to texts that "merge conventional print-bound text with a digital experience" (2012, p.168). For instance, Rick Riordan's *The Maze of Bones* (2008), the first book in the *39 Clues* series, requires readers to play video games (in addition to reading the printed text) to decipher puzzles embedded in the narrative.

Nonetheless, Moss' statement that the "majority of the fiction aimed at the teenage market is "closed"" (1990, p.50) continues to ring true. As Andrea Schwenke Wylie (1999) explains, most texts for children and young adults employ "immediate-engaging-first-person narration," which creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy,

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[60] The term "writerly" is from Roland Barthes, who used it to describe texts that create an active reader who is "no longer a consumer, but a producer of a text" (1974, p.4).

but makes it difficult for the reader challenge the dominant viewpoint of the text. Of course, first-person narration does not automatically mean a text will be closed. A text is only closed, or what Mike Cadden calls "single-voiced," if the reader is not provided with "enough tools to contest the perspectives or investigate alternative points of view" (2000, p.147).

Perhaps it is the continued dominance of closed or single-voiced texts in children's and young adult literature that has earned metafictional texts plenty of praise in literary theory (for example, see Mackey 1990; McCallum 1996; Moss 1985; Sanders 2009; Stephens 1991; 1992; 1993). In "The Critical Reader in Children's Metafiction," Joe Sutliff Sanders explains that many children's literature theorists applaud metafiction for its "subversive qualities," and its "ability to prod readers out of comfortable, "infantile" positions," making children and young adults more competent readers (2009, p.349). However, Sanders argues that the subversive qualities of children's metafiction are often overstated, and that many forms of children's metafiction "provide at best a muddled form of subversion" (p.349). Sanders focuses his paper on a specific type of children's metafiction – the kind that documents strong relationships between readers and books.

For instance, Sanders notes that Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) presents powerful bonds between readers and books. "Books open opportunities for the Spokane Indian protagonist," Sanders writes, "including the formation of one of the boy's few deep friendships with a white child" (p.351).[61] Metafictional texts such as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* present a safe authority in books, and "any discomfort inspired by metafiction

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[61] Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) involves various metafictional techniques, such as the incorporation of graphic illustrations, as well as references to the protagonist creating these illustrations in his diary.

is blunted by the solace and empowerment that come from relationships with books"
(p.351). This kind of metafiction, Sanders suggests,

> retains the potential to unsettle the reader and provoke the reader into an active
> role, but even as it prods, it provides a comfortable authority in whose wisdom
> the reader is told to rest. (…) In this mode [of metafiction], the relationship
> between reader and text is generally ennobling for the imagined reader; it is
> uncomplicated, benign relationship that implicitly argues that whatever else
> might need subverting, the reader-book bond is sacrosanct (2009, p.351).

This branch of metafiction also exists for adults, but Sanders argues that metafiction
involving readers and their books is "uniquely popular in children's literature"
(p.351). In addition to Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
(2007)*,* Sanders refers to other young adult novels such as Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs.
Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971); Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2006); and
China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007), which also exhibit compelling reader-book
relationships that may quell any discomfort inflicted by the metafictional elements
(p.351).

Similar to the reader-book relationships in children's metafiction, self-
reflexive verse-novels portray strong connections between writers (and readers) and
poetry. In some verse-novels, the narrators refer to actual poems or poetry books that
act as authorities for the writing of poetry. For instance, in Creech's *Love That Dog*
(2001), the narrator Jack refers to the various poems that his teacher reads in class,
such as William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow;" Robert Frost's "Stopping

by Woods on a Snowy Evening;" and Walter Dean Myers' "Love That Boy."[62] These poems represent what Joseph T. Thomas (2007) calls "official school poetry," which is a type of poetry "notable for its apparent teachability, its use of literary devices, and its use of, in the words of Livingston, the "tools of the craft"" (p.40).[63]

While the inclusion of these "official school poems" in *Love That Dog* (2001) produces an adult authority, Jack's teacher, Miss Stretchberry, "provides her student [Jack] with…a sanctioned space to parody works that are normally presented as verbal icons to be revered," which challenges the pedagogical purpose of these poems in a classroom environment (Thomas 2007, p.52). Thus, in his journal, Jack parodies these "revered" poems, imitating their words and rhythms, and making comic remarks about them: "What was up with / the snowy woods poem / you read today? // Why doesn't the person just / keep going if he's got / so many miles to go / before he sleeps?"[64] Even though Jack confronts the authority of these poems through parody and humorous comment, he develops a steadfast interest in writing poetry, and uses poetry as a safe outlet to eventually discuss the tragic death of his dog, Sky, who was hit by a car.

Other self-reflexive verse-novels do not directly refer to poems or poetry books, but may still present strong bonds between young writers and poetry, and these bonds are often reinforced by adult figures. For example, in Herrick's *Love, Ghosts &*

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[62] Creech incorporates these poems in the narrative discourse of *Love That Dog*, and also presents the poems (as well as numerous others) in the end pages of *Love That Dog* (2001) for the reader's reference.

[63] In *The Child as Poet: Myth of Reality* (1984), Livingston refers to rhythm, rhyme, assonance, and alliteration as essential "tools of the craft" that one should use to write "fine poetry" (p.256).

[64] Jack is responding to Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," in which Frost describes stopping a horse in the snowy woods on the "darkest evening of the year" (p.). Frost's poem ends with the following stanza: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, / But I have promise to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep" (cited in Creech 2001, n.p.).

Nose Hair (1996), the father talks to his son Jack about the value of writing poetry:

"So Jack, when I look back / the only thing that was worthwhile, / apart from having

you and Desiree / and falling in love with your Mum, / was writing poetry" (p.31).[65]

Jack does not directly state that his father's words influenced him, but many readers

will assume this, especially since Jack is shown to ardently write poetry himself in the

narrative discourse.

Sanders (2009) argues that children's metafiction that documents safe

relationships between readers and books encourages a different – and more useful –

type of critical reading than highly subversive metafictional texts. In subversive

metafiction, readers are encouraged to assume antagonistic reading positions,

engaging in a "one-off battle" with the dominant ideology (p.354). "[H]aving defeated

ideology," Sanders writes, "the reader now moves beyond it, a disavowal more

possible between enemies than between friends" (p.354). Metafictional texts with

friendly relationships between readers and books still allow readers to liberate

themselves from ideology, but "the child [reader] will not be required to refuse the

give-and-take of information touched by the hand of the status quo" (p.354).

> Information and ideology will not merely be communicated by the hegemonic
>
> text and discarded by the liberated reader; instead, it will be continually
>
> reevaluated. In this more sustainable relationship, new and better information
>
> may be gleaned from the text that is being questioned. Such a result is not
>
> possible with a text that has been defeated (Sanders 2009, pp.354-355).

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[65] Coincidentally, the first-person narrators in Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) and
Herrick's *Love, Ghosts & Nose Hair* (1996) are both named Jack.

Sanders' theory seems to suggest that metafictional texts that present strong reader-book relationships create sharper – and more critical – readers. Instead of undermining the dominant ideology and maintaining an antagonistic stance, readers are encouraged to continually rethink, reconsider, and re-evaluate the information they receive.

When verse-novels for children and young adults exhibit powerful relationships between writers and poetry, readers would be urged to assume similar critical reading positions. For instance, when Jack parodies Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" in Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001), the reader may question the authority of Frost's poem, and consider how Frost's poem – as well as Jack's poem – has been constructed. Any subversive interpretations, however, would be softened by the overarching message in *Love That Dog* that poetry is a positive, worthwhile pursuit. In other words, the reader will not abandon poetry just because Jack satirises poetry by Williams or Frost. Instead, the reader will maintain an interest in poetry because Jack continues to show interest in poetry.

Metapoetic and Metafictional Techniques in Self-Reflexive Verse-Novels

As stated above, verse-novels tend to involve more metapoetic techniques than metafictional techniques, and it is often through metapoetry that readers will consciously think about verse-novels as artefacts of narrative poetry. The most common metapoetic device is use of narrational references to the making of poetry. For instance, when Vicki, the teen narrator of Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005)*,* states in a poem that she is "cross-legged on a pillow, writing this on a paper plate," the reader

will be urged to think about the poem (and the rest of the verse-novel) as a constructed artefact (p.38).

Some narrational references to the making of poetry will urge readers to directly consider the association between narrative and poetic segmentations. When Jack says "[y]ou've just got to / make / short / lines" in Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001), readers may begin to contemplate the use of poetic lineation throughout the verse-novel, noticing where the line-breaks occur in the narrative (p.3). At times, Jack imitates the short lines and asyntactic line-breaks of Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," as well as other established poems.[66] However, the use of short, asyntactic line-breaks in *Love That Dog* is not solely imitative of other poems, but also seem to support the narrative content of the verse-novel. When Jack says "I don't have any pets / so I can't write about one / and especially / I can't write / a POEM / about one," the reader might wonder why Jack's being overly defensive, and observe how the line-breaks punctuate his emotional statement with gaps of white space (p.12).

Another common metapoetic technique in self-reflexive verse-novels is the use of intertextual references to established poems, which can foreground the way poetry in a verse-novel has been constructed from other poetic texts. This technique is less common than narrational references to the making of poetry, but verse-novels that involve intertextuality are worth noting because they can prompt readers to think about verse-novels within a wider tradition of poetry. Richard Flynn, Kelly Hager, and Joseph T. Thomas, the judges of the 2005 *Lion and Unicorn* children's poetry award, have actually criticised "the vast majority of teen novels-in-verse" for existing

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[66] After Miss Stretchberry shares Williams' poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow," with Jack's class, Jack is shown to write the following: "So much depends / upon / a blue car / spattered with mud / speeding down the road" (p. 4). Jack breaks his first two lines like Williams' poem, and Creech continues to use short lines throughout the verse-novel.

in "profound ignorance of what is excellent in "all other poems ever written"" (2005, p.430). "[W]hile [verse-novels] draw attention to the connections between the poems in their own individual collections," the judges write, "they do not enter into conversation with the tradition outside the narrow confines of that textual world" (p.430).

The judges' use of the phrase "all other poems ever written" derives from Robert Frost's recommendation that "[a] poem is best read in the light of all the other poems ever written" (1966, p.97). In other words, Frost suggests that all poems should maintain a connection with other poems, and that readers should think about these connections as they read. The judges' comment is also reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1975), in which Eliot argues that writing poetry requires an intertextual regard for other poets' work: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (p.23). While Frost (1966) and Eliot (1975) seem to indicate that an intertextual regard for others' work is necessary and beneficial, Harold Bloom argues in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) that the influence of other poets' work produces a sense of "anxiety" in the poet. Weaker poets, Bloom suggests, idealise their precursors, and allow others' work to fully influence their own poetry (p.5). Stronger poets cannot entirely escape the influence of their precursors, but their poetry is born out of a feverish anxiety that propels them to "misread" their precursors "so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (p.5).[67] Bloom's theory conveys that poetic influence does not necessarily follow a linear path, but may

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[67] When Bloom (1973) talks about "misreading," he is not necessarily referring to the process of incorrectly reading or interpreting a text, but a "corrective movement" in the writing process, "which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction of the new poem" (p.14).

progress via a more circuitous trajectory, as poets misread the poetry of others to create their own original work.

While I cannot accurately discuss the creative choices individual verse-novelists have made, the verse-novel's apparent departure from "all other poems ever written" (Frost 1966, p.97) could suggest that some verse-novelists have "misread" poetry of the past (Bloom 1973, p.5), and have adopted a new creative identity by utilising the verse-novel form. Of course, there are discernable connections between verse-novels themselves, and it is very likely that verse-novelists have allowed other verse-novels to directly influence their work. Yet some of the most innovative verse-novels, such as Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2009), seem to stray away from the influence of other verse-novels, stretching the boundaries of the verse-novel genre.

Even if the verse-novel deviates from other types of poetry, verse-novels that contain intertextual references to established poems would entice readers to discover links between the verse-novel and the historical tradition of poetry. One verse-novel that involves intertextual references to established poems is Meg Kearney's *The Secret of Me* (2005). The teen narrator Lizzie writes her own poetry, and sometimes refers to her favourite poems, such as Lucille Clifton's "Homage to My Hips;" Donald Hall's "Names of Horses;" and Anne Sexton's "Cinderella." Kearney includes these referenced poems in her endnotes to assist readers to draw parallels between Lizzie's poems and these other poems. For instance, readers might find similarities between Clifton's "Homage to My Hips" and Lizzie's "Self-Portrait" (p.8), which both describe and celebrate female bodies.[68] As mentioned above, Jack in Creech's

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[68] As the title of Clifton's poem suggests, "Homage to My Hips" honours the poet's hips: "these hips are big hips / they need space to / move around in. / they don't fit into little / petty places" (cited in Kearney 2005, p.123). Lizzie's poem, "Self-Portrait" uses figurative language to describe the narrator's face, eyes, legs, feet, toes, fingers, hair, ear, belly, and heart: "A tiny hill rises / like a surprise from / the upper

Love That Dog (2001) not only refers to poems by well known writers; he also parodies them, which might spur readers to challenge the authority of these established texts. Like Kearney (2005), Creech includes all referenced poems in the end pages of *Love That Dog* (2001), which would help readers establish intertextual connections.

Other verse-novels involve intertextuality through the utilisation of established forms, such as sestinas, sonnets, tankas, cinquains, or pantoums. While the use of poetic forms is not necessarily a metapoetic technique, it can be used as such if textual information draws attention to a poem's status as a form poem. This would invite readers to forge connections between the poems in a verse-novel and the recognised tradition of a poetic form, and to think about the poem as a "made thing." In *What I Believe* (2005), Mazer uses titles such as "Rug Love Sestina" (p.3); "Mom Cinquain" (p.9); and "Announcement, a Tanka" (p.14) to indicate the use of a sestina, cinquain, and tanka. These titles may prompt readers to scan the poems for patterns, or even to research a form's rules if they don't know them already.

Particularly engaged readers may even notice that Mazer often breaks the rules of poetic forms, which mildly subverts their authority. For instance, in "Rug Love Sestina," Mazer varies the end words, changing "stone" to "stunned" to "stain," even though a traditional sestina does not vary the end words from stanza to stanza (pp.3-5).[69] Mazer also does not employ iambic pentameter or decasyllabic metre, which English-language sestinas often use (Turco 2002). Mazer's rule-breaking may draw additional attention to the sestina's construction, and motivate readers to question the

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ridge of my / right ear. A pinky-shaped // scar points towards my / bellybutton, which reminds me / of a little dry well" (Kearney 2005, p.8).

[69] A sestina is a thirty-nine lined poem that is divided into six sestet stanzas and a final triple envoy. The six end words (sometimes called "teleutons") of the initial stanza are repeated in an order of *abcdef, faebdc, cfdabe, ecbfad, deacgb, bdfeca* in the following five stanzas, and the order of *be, dc, fa* in final envoy (Turco 2002).

poem's legitimacy as a sestina. At the same time, it is fairly common for poets to break the rules of poetic forms, as seen in form poem anthologies such as Mark Strand and Evan Boland's *The Making of a Poem* (2000) and Annie Finch and Katherine Varnes' *An Exaltation of Forms* (2002). Therefore, Mazer's rule-breaking may not seem that unusual, and many readers will overlook the author's alterations.

Nevertheless, this type of rule-breaking seems to exemplify the challenges of combining poetry and narrative, and that it allows the verse-novelist to more easily shape and mould narrative aspects. For instance, Helen Frost makes slight modifications to her sestinas and sonnets in *Keesha's House* (2003), and points this out in the endnotes of the verse-novel:[70]

> If you look carefully at my poems, you will find places where I have been playful with these rules and places where I have bent them or occasionally ignored them for the sake of allowing the poem to speak its mind. Always, the character who speaks the poem has the final say (p.113).

In my own process of writing a verse-novel in poetic forms, rule-breaking allowed me to nudge the narrative in specific directions, or (as Frost suggests) permit characters to speak more freely, which helped me negotiate writing both poetry and narrative.[71] I ultimately found the use of poetic forms too limiting, and rewrote my verse-novel in free verse, an experience I will discuss in Chapter Four. However, verse-novelists

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[70] While Frost has included endnotes with information about the rules of various poetic forms (and how she may have broken the rules), Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) does not incorporate any endnotes, leaving it up to the reader to discover the nonconformities in her form poems.

[71] I am referring to the first verse-novel I wrote for my PhD project, *The Notebook of Teagan Trace,* which I did not end up submitting. My second verse-novel, *Homing Poems,* uses free verse.

such as Mazer (2005) and Frost (2003) have all shown that poetic forms can be successfully employed in a verse-novel.

Metafictional devices are less common, but a handful of verse-novels employ strategies that would prompt readers to consider their fictionality. For instance, James Howe begins his young adult verse-novel, *Addie on the Inside* (2011), with a prefatory poem that sets up a direct communication between author and reader, immediately calling attention to the constructiveness of the fictional narrative:

The poems that follow

are written in the voice of

Addie on the inside.

But this poem is written

from me to you,

writer to reader.

I want to ask you:

Who do you see

when you think of me? (p.xi).

At the end of the three-page poem, Howe signs his full name, affirming his authority. Then, after the title page, the fictional narrative of the verse-novel begins, narrated by the protagonist Addie. Howe does not insert any other authorial intrusions into his text, but the opening poem distinguishes the real author from the fictional narrator. Addie's poems are also written in the same short-lined free verse as Howe's opening

poem, which draws a significant connection between these two parts, urging readers to become more aware of the verse-novel's fictionality.

Another verse-novel that contains a similar opening poem is Ann Clare LeZotte's *T4* (2008). The first-person narrator in LeZotte's verse-novel is a deaf teenager named Paula who is trying to escape Hitler's Tiergartenstraße 4 (T4) program that killed people with mental and physical disabilities. LeZotte herself is deaf, which she tells the reader in the opening poem: "I am Deaf, but I have heard / The beauty of song // And I wish to share it with / Young Readers" (p.1). Later in the opening poem, the author writes, "In *T4,* the facts / About history are true, and / My characters tells the story" (p.1). LeZotte's states that the verse-novel is based on historical truth, yet her use of this introductory poem would also reveal to the reader that the verse-novel is a fictional construction.[72]

The overall use of the verse-novel hybrid form could also be interpreted as a metafictional strategy, potentially making *all* verse-novels metafictional texts. In "Metafictions and Experimental Work" (1996), McCallum notes that typographic experimentation and overt genre mixing can function as metafictional techniques, drawing a reader's attention to the physicality of a text, and stimulating one's thinking about its fictional construction (p.406). Even though the contemporary verse-novel for children and young adults has become a well-established genre, prose continues to be the dominant and more accepted form for the novel. When reading a prose novel, readers may become fully immersed in the fictional world, without thinking about the novel's construction. In a verse-novel, however, the narrative discourse is fragmented into sections of lineated language, which punctuates the reading experience with gaps and spaces. Thus, some readers (especially those not accustomed to the verse-novel

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[72] Despite the exceptions of Howe's *Addie on the Inside* and LeZotte's *T4*, authorial intrusions are rare in verse-novels for children and young adults.

format) may find the verse-novel's textual presentation "unusual," and this may prompt them to contemplate the "constructedness" or artificial creation of the text. Nevertheless, some readers may be so familiar with the verse-novel that they do not consciously think – or overthink – about the way a verse-novel has been fictionally constructed using these techniques. Additionally, as Lars Ole Sauerberg points out, most readers are conditioned by film, popular music, and other contemporary artistic forms, and may not find the verse-novel form peculiar in any way (2004, p.440).

Ideologies of Poetry in Self-Reflexive Verse-Novels

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how self-reflexive verse-novels that present positive relationships between writers and poetry can activate readers' critical reading skills. Instead of defeating the dominant ideology in a "one-off battle," the reader will continually reassess, re-evaluate, and challenge the information presented to them, maintaining a "sustainable" relationship between reader and text (Sanders 2009, p.354). Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that adults have written these texts, and that young readers will be subjected to the dominant (adult) ideological perspectives. In fact, the "sustainable" relationship that Sanders describes would encourage the reader to be partially receptive to these ideologies. The child reader or teen reader's reception to these ideologies can influence the way they think about and experience narrative poetry.

As John Stephens explains in *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, ideology can never be separated from the discourses of children's literature, even if a text does not appear to visibly present an ideological perspective (1992, pp.1-2). The presence of ideological presuppositions, Stephens writes,

may be thought of as analogous to a geometrical shape in which one figure is

inscribed within another, as an octagon within a square, for example, in such a

way that the two figures merge at overlapping boundaries. Segments thus exist

in which the inner figure coincides with the outer and become invisible. (p.2).

Stephens suggests that the inscription of ideology in children's literature often aims to

"foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values

which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience" (p.3). For instance, Stephens

notes that Louise Lawrence's nuclear holocaust fantasy, *Children of the Dust* (1985),

presents itself as a "modern cautionary tale," encouraging readers to contemplate the

sociological and ecological effects of a post-disaster world (1992, p.3). Stephens also

argues that when a reader aligns himself or herself with a focalising character, it

makes the reader more "susceptible to the ideologies of the text, especially the

unarticulated or implicit ideologies" (p.68). Since verse-novels for children and young

adults often employ what Andrea Schwenke Wylie (1999) has termed "immediate-

engaging-first-person narration," many readers will connect with the protagonist's

subjective experience, and therefore become susceptible to a text's ideologies.

One of the most prevalent ideological messages in self-reflexive verse-novels

is the notion that reading and writing poetry are enjoyable, pleasurable activities for

children and young adults. In Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005), Vicki describes the

gratification she receives when she writes poetry: "writing is *fun* for me, so I write /

run-on rambling sentences like this one for *fun*, / and I write crazy things like sestinas

and pantoums and all kinds of poetry for *fun*" (p.2). In Creech's *Love That Dog*

(2001), Jack is initially reluctant to write poetry, but the more poetry his teacher reads

to his class, the more pleasure he seems to take from it: "That was so great / those poems you showed us / where the words make the shape / of the thing / that the poem / is about" (p.35). Vicki and Jack do not merely state their delight in poetry; they demonstrate it by filling their poetry journals with poem after poem. Jack even borrows his teacher's poetry book to read at home "without asking," which emphasises his enthusiasm: "I am sorry / I took the book home / without asking. / I only got / one spot on it. / That's why / the page is torn. / I tried to get / the spot / out" (p.42).

In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003), Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer suggest that pleasure is an important component to children's literary experiences. Many adults assume that children should read to learn and gain information, but Nodelman and Reimer point out that if children do not take pleasure from reading, they are unlikely to become committed readers. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Roland Barthes discusses two types of literary pleasure. The first, which he calls *plaisir*, can be understood as a "comfortable" reading practice that provides the pleasures of the familiar. The second type, *jouissance*, generates pleasure by liberating readers from the familiar, and presenting experiences of the strange and unfamiliar. *Jouissance* is also more associated with bodily pleasure, described by Barthes as the moment when the body "pursues its own ideas" separate from the reader's thoughts (p.17). Both types of literary pleasure will still engage the reader through affect (which occurs in the body), yet *jouissance* may stimulate the reader more "unconsciously" through proprioceptive response.

On the surface, children's literature seems to offer more experiences of *plaisir*, especially since children's texts "tend to follow familiar patterns in fairly straightforward ways and provide fairly straightforward meanings and messages,"

creating levels of reading comfort (Nodelman & Reimer 2003, p.24). Indeed,

children's literature does provide readers with many experiences of *plaisir*. For

instance, Nodelman and Reimer argue that readers encounter *plaisir* when texts

present a "mirror" that allows readers to identify with the fictional characters, or when

a reader's emotions are evoked, encouraging them to feel the same joy or pain a

character experiences (p.25).[73] At the same time, Nodelman and Reimer argue that

children's literature texts can also generate *jouissance*. For example, readers may

experience *jouissance* when they encounter "sounds and images in and for

themselves—as pure sensory activity outside and beyond the realm of shared

meanings and patterns" (p.25). The verse-novel, which is often comprised of aural

language and visual segmentation, may invite more experiences of *jouissance* than

other types of children's and young adult literature. Nodelman and Reimer also argue

that *jouissance* can occur when readers "see through" a text, giving readers the ability

to undermine or subvert the text's authority (p.25). In this sense, self-reflexive verse-

novels have the potential to activate experiences of both *jouissance* and *plaisir*.

Can children be taught to take pleasure in reading literature? Some theorists

believe they cannot, arguing that children only develop an appreciation for literature

through their own personal reading experiences (Huck 1979; Glazer 1986). Yet the

ideological position of Nodelman and Reimer (2003) is that pleasure in literature can

– and should be – taught to children. In fact, they suggest that it is the adult's

responsibility to "try to give children access to *all* the means by which they

themselves make sense of and take many different pleasures from their experiences of

literary texts" (p.31). Nodelman and Reimer also suggest that children will enjoy

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[73] In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003), Nodelman and Reimer list other
ways that children's literature texts can provide experiences of *plaisir* (pp.25-26). The
examples I have noted above do not constitute a complete list.

literature when adults equip them with interpretive strategies that allow children to converse with others about literature. While this technique does impose adult ideas on children, Nodelman and Reimer argue that the alternative is much more limiting for children:

> Young readers left uneducated about the strategies writers expect them to use in responding to texts may have a variety of fascinating responses but little engagement in the community of human beings they have been born into. They need adults to teach them the strategies that will actually make their reading a communicative act (p.33).

Some of the interpretative reading strategies Nodelman and Reimer propose include teaching children to fill in narrative gaps; form mental pictures through "concretisation;" and to search for themes (pp.54-67). In a separate chapter on poetry, Nodelman and Reimer suggest teaching children to respond to formal aspects of poetry, such as patterns, visual shapes, sounds, rhythms, and images – which may trigger their enjoyment of the genre (pp.251-273).

As mentioned above, the first-person narrators in Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) and Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) directly state their enjoyment of poetry, underpinning the adult ideology that poetry is a pleasurable pursuit. If readers relate to Vicki and Jack, and become involved with the language and segmentation of the narrative poetry through *affect*, they may experience a similar pleasure in poetry, allowing the adult ideology to infiltrate their thoughts. In addition to the transmission of affect (and ideology), the self-reflexive devices in these verse-novels may encourage readers to think about certain formal aspects of the narrative poetry, which

can also "teach" readers to take pleasure in poetry. For instance, in Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001), Jack's engagement with his teacher's poetry lessons may encourage readers to think about poetry's formal aspects. When Jack says, "I am sorry to say / I did not really understand / the tiger tiger burning bright poem / but at least it sounded good / in my ears" (p.8), then goes on to write his own poem with "tiger sounds" (p.8), the reader may come to appreciate (and take pleasure in) the sounds and rhythms of William Blake's poem "The Tiger," as well as the language of the verse-novel. These self-reflexive devices can draw the reader into a "conversation" with the text, giving the reader the ability to converse with others about the formal aspects of poetry, which may elevate his or her enjoyment.

Readers may be able to "converse" with *Love That Dog* (2001) on their own, yet the pedagogical potential of this verse-novel could be strengthened if a teacher utilised it in the classroom. For instance, teachers could provide further illumination on the formal aspects of the poems Jack engages with, developing and expanding upon any "lessons" inherent in the text. Teachers could also stimulate readerly pleasure by discussing Jack's humorous responses to the poems, and by providing further knowledge on interpretive strategies that children can use to examine a verse-novel. Scholastic, Creech's publisher, actually encourages the use of *Love That Dog* in the classroom by providing teachers with a free online discussion guide (Scholastic 2015). While I am not certain if Creech specifically wrote *Love That Dog* (2001) for use in the classroom, the pedagogical potential of this verse-novel may have strengthened sales and increased dissemination. The publishers of Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) have not published a similar discussion guide for this verse-novel, yet Mazer's text also has pedagogical value, and it can be utilised in comparable way as *Love That Dog* (2001).

Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) and Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) are not the only self-reflexive texts with instructive qualities. In general, metafiction has been praised for its instructional abilities. Robyn McCallum (1996) suggests that "[b]y involving readers in the production of textual meanings, metafictions can implicitly teach literary and cultural codes and conventions, as well as specific interpretative strategies, and hence empower readers to read more competently" (p.398). Similarly, Hutcheon suggests that metafiction enables readers to consciously engage with texts: "the activity of the reader is not one of being a consumer of stories, but rather one of learning and constructing a new sign-system, a new set of verbal relations" (1980, p.14). The ability of children's metafiction to instruct is somewhat paradoxical since children's metafiction is also praised for moving *away* from the didacticism that some theorists believe continues to permeate children's literature (Sanders 2009). In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003), Nodelman and Reimer argue that "children's literature wouldn't exist if adults didn't see children as inexperienced and in need of knowledge" (p.198). As a result, they suggest that "[c]hildren's literature is almost always didactic: its purpose is to instruct" (p.198). Metafictional texts, on the other hand, appear to give the reader the power and ability to subvert the adult authority of the text.

In light of this paradox, Virginie Douglas (2004) argues that contemporary children's metafiction exemplifies "a *new kind* of didacticism" that teaches child and young adult readers to "question…the storytelling process" and to "undermin[e]…the traditional adult/child bond in relation to narration" (p.84).[74] But what about metafictional texts that present strong bonds between readers and books that urge readers to place their trust in books? According to Sanders (2009), these texts are "at

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[74] My italics.

least didactic," if not "propagandistic" (p.352). Claudia Nelson (2006) suggests that children's metafictional texts with powerful reader-book relationships achieve

> a kind of double didacticism, one part furthering the same moral values that we associate with children's literature of a more traditional kind, the other part suggesting that questioning authority—including the authority of the didactic text—may be reading's most important lesson (p.233).

The "moral values" of these texts may be that "reading is fun," or that "reading is important." Not only would these metafictional texts indoctrinate young readers with these adult ideas about reading; they may also teach readers how to continually challenge the authority of a text. Similar to metafictional texts with strong reader-book bonds, self-reflexive verse-novels such as Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) and Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) involve double didacticism, imparting adult messages about the pleasures of reading and writing poetry, but also teaching readers interpretative strategies through the deployment of self-reflexive devices. In short, self-reflexive verse-novels are never free of adult ideology. Any adult message about poetry would inevitably influence a reader's experience of the narrative poetry in a verse-novel.

While Mazer and Creech have inscribed adult ideologies about the pleasures of poetry into their verse-novels, *What I Believe* and *Love That Dog* both contain adult characters who introduce poetry to the young narrators, and the incorporation of these adult figures may help readers recognise the ideological positions of the adult writers. For instance, in *What I Believe*, Vicki receives an email from her language arts teacher, Ariel Ainsworth, who asks Vicki if she is "working / on those sestinas

and pantoums we talked about?" and "tried a villanelle yet?" (p.21). Vicki's teacher only gets a brief mention in Mazer's verse-novel, but Jack's teacher, Miss Stretchberry, plays a prominent role in *Love That Dog*. Miss Stretchberry's voice is never directly heard, but Jack engages in an ongoing dialogue with her about poetry and writing: "I really really really / did NOT get / the pasture poem / you read today" (p.20). In some ways, these adult characters disempower Vicki and Jack, suggesting that the young characters only understand and write poetry because they have had the benefit of adult instruction. Yet Vicki and Jack exercise plenty of agency, writing beyond what the adult characters have suggested, and "writing against" established poems or poetic forms.

Another common (though more implicit) ideology in self-reflexive verse-novels is the idea that poetry does not need to be defined in rigid, traditional terms. While the narrators in *Love That Dog* and *What I Believe* use long-established poems or poetic forms as signposts for their own poetic compositions, Jack and Vicki often create work that conservative critics would not consider to be poetry. For instance, Jack's poetry is often devoid of figurative language or other poetic techniques, appearing more like broken prose. Vicki breaks the rules of poetic forms, and also presents poetry in non-poetic forms, such as memos, lists, dialogue scripts, or "run-on rambling sentences" in prose-like blocks (Mazer 2005, p.2). Some readers may question whether certain passages are indeed poetry, especially when the characters themselves doubt the legitimacy of their writing. "It's not a poem. / Is it?" (Creech 2001, p.17). When Jack asks this question, the reader might ask, too.

However, the underlying ideological message inscribed in these verse-novels is that Vicki and Jack are – for the most part – writing poetry. Vicki refers to her work as poetry, using titles like "Unrequited Love Poem" and "Sick Poem" to identify her

work (Mazer 2005, p.48, p.116). Jack begins to view his writing as poetry when Miss Stretchberry types up his work and displays it on the class board: "I guess it does / look like a poem / when you see it / typed up / like that" (Creech 2001, p.18). If readers relate to Vicki and Jack, and become affectively involved with the language and segmentation of the verse-novel, they may also come to view the narrators' work as poetry. Both verse-novels also present language in lineated arrangements, or use other poetic techniques such as alliteration, assonance, and repetition, which would encourage readers to think that they are reading poetry.[75]

Children and Adolescents Reading Self-Reflexive Verse-Novels

[C]hildren can accomplish theoretically impossible kinds of thinking at surprisingly early stages

(Nodelman & Reimer 2003, p.92).

I do not have the space in this exegesis to comprehensively discuss theories of cognition in relation to children and young adults, but I would like to briefly consider the cognitive abilities of children and teens reading self-reflexive verse-novels. In *The Language and Thought of the Child* (1959), Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget argued that children progressed through a series of identifiable stages as they matured and developed. During the "preoperational stage," which occurred between ages two and six, Piaget claimed that children were highly egocentric, unable to empathise with others or to understand a point of view other than their own. In the "concrete operational stage" that took place between ages six and eleven, children were thought to develop rational, adult-like cognition. However, Piaget argued that during this

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[75] All poems in *Love That Dog* are lineated, but some poems in *What I Believe* are not lineated, appearing more prose-like. However, these non-lineated, prose-like sections in *What I Believe* still employ other poetic techniques like imagery, repetition, and word play that would help the reader identify these sections as poetry.

phase children could only understand concepts in concrete terms. In the "formal operational stage" that occurred between ages twelve to fifteen, Piaget proposed that children could finally begin to think in abstractions, allowing them to develop a sophisticated system of thinking.

More recent theories have shed light on the limitations and inadequacies of Piaget's work, yet Piaget's theory continues to influence many developmental theories (Nodelman & Reimer 2003). For instance, Piaget's work formed the basis of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development (see Kohlberg 1981), which is still used in the fields of psychology, education, and sociology. Following Piaget's model, one could theorise that children between the ages of six and eleven might have more difficulties detecting – or even thinking about – self-reflexive devices in verse-novels, whereas children over twelve would be able to deal with self-reflexivity more easily, especially in verse-novels that incorporated more complex self-reflective structures.

Piaget's theory has also had an effect on the way publishers, literature specialists, and teachers have thought about literature for children. In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003), Nodelman and Reimer (2003) argue that

> faith in the existence of stages leads to labelling of books as appropriate for children of certain ages or accessible only to children of certain ages, and the conviction that each book is appropriate for only one specific level of development (pp.89-90).

For instance, on the back cover of *Love That Dog* (2001), the publisher has specified that Creech's verse-novel is appropriate for children between the ages of eight and

twelve, which somewhat coincides with Piaget's concrete operational stage. Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) is labelled as suitable for children aged ten and up, which would include older children in the concrete operational stage, but would mainly apply to children in the formal operational stage.[76] While neither verse-novel recommends a reading level that perfectly matches one of Piaget's stages, the fact that age is recommended at all reinforces the prevailing belief that children undergo discrete developmental periods.

Perhaps it is this same belief that has led literary theorists to assume that children will not comprehend a text's metafictional structures the same way adults will. In *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic* (1996), Maria Nikolajeva argues that metafictionality in children's and young adult literature exists in two separate artistic codes – an adult code and a child code (p.192). "Some of the metafictional structures in children's texts are obvious and belong to both codes," Nikolajeva writes, "while others may be hidden and addressed only to the adult co-reader" (p.192). By way of illustration, Nikolajeva discusses Viveca Sundvall's *En ettas dagbok* (1982), a diary novel narrated by a seven-year-old girl named Mimmi. In the beginning of the narrative, Mimmi finds a typewriter in the trash bin, and begins to type in her yellow notebook. "Now, some of you may wonder how I manage to put my yellow notebook in my typewriter," Mimmi says, "Go ahead and wonder" (cited

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[76] It is somewhat unusual that Mazer's text has been labelled for ages ten and up, two years younger than the customary "young adult reader." As mentioned in the previous chapter, young adult fiction tends to be aimed for readers between the ages of 12 and 20 (Donelson & Nilsen 1997, p.6). However, Mazer's verse-novel does not contain any inappropriate material, such as teen sex or drug references, which may have lowered the specified reading level. Additionally, the publisher may have thought that the verse-novel's format, with its short poems and large gaps of white space, makes the text more accessible to younger readers.

in Nikolajeva 1996, p.192).[77] Nikolajeva argues that adults would probably ponder the impossibility of putting a notebook into a typewriter, while most children will not think too much about it, accepting Mimmi's statement at face value (pp.192-193). In other words, Nikolajeva suggests that children will not invest much thought into this metafictional structure, which may preclude them from contemplating the conventions of writing and the constructiveness of fiction in this text (Nikolajeva 1996, p.193).

There may be some truth to Nikolajeva's argument, yet her sharp division between an adult's level of understanding and a child's level of understanding is problematic based on its likely derivation from a Piagetian model of thinking. In recent decades, new research has cast serious doubts on Piaget's theory. As Charles Brainerd writes in *Recent Advances in Cognitive Developmental Research* (1983), "[e]mpirical and conceptual objections to…[Piaget's] theory have become so numerous that it can no longer be regarded as a positive force in mainstream cognitive-developmental research" (p.278). Some researchers disagree with Piaget's methodology and rationale, arguing that Piaget based his research on illogical experiments. In a redesigned version of Piaget's experiments, Helen Borke (1978) problematised Piaget's egocentricity argument, showing that young children were more capable of empathy than previously thought. Piaget had based his theory on experiments that asked children how a physical display would look from another point of view, which most participants seemed unable to do. Yet, as Borke explains, Piaget made an erroneous connection between the emotional and physical, assuming

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[77] Sundvall's *En ettas dagbok* (1982) was published in Swedish, and has not been translated and published in English. Nikolajeva, however, translated this passage, which is why I have cited it from her text, *Children's Literature Comes of Age* (1996). Nikolajeva refers to Sundvall's text by the English translation of its title, "The Diary of a First-Grader," although the text has never been published under this name (p.192).

that if children could not describe the physical display from another perspective, they could not understand other people's feelings (p.35).

In a more comprehensive experiment, Borke asked children questions about how other people might feel in certain situations, and she found that children as young as one-and-a-half were able to empathise with others (1978, p.38). As Nodelman and Reimer state, redesigned experiments like Borke's

> show that children can accomplish theoretically impossible kinds of thinking at surprisingly early stages. What was thought to be impossible has proven to be possible in the right circumstances, particularly when adults make the task relevant and phrase it in language or in circumstances that children can understand (2003, p.92).

Not only is Piaget's work methodologically questionable, it has been criticised for its ideological assumptions about childhood; its conflation of human physical and psychological development (which makes childhood a kind of "biological state"); and its culturally biased assumption that certain cognitive abilities denote intellectual accomplishment (Nodelman & Reimer 2003, pp.91-94).

Based on these numerous objections to Piaget's theory, it may be fallacious to assume that an eight-year-old would read *Love That Dog* (2001) any differently than a twelve-year-old, or that a seventeen-year-old would contemplate the self-reflexive structures in *What I Believe* (2005) more comprehensively than a ten-year-old would. As Nodelman and Reimer (2003) point out,

each child is his or her own person, an individual being whose values and abilities include specific and highly variable class positionings, gender expectations, and so on. When people make assumptions about the similarity of all six-year-olds, they lose sight of the immense significance in the process of literary response of individual differences and of the differences between various specific groups and communities (p.90).

With this in mind, I have chosen not to differentiate between the reading experiences of young children, teenagers, or even adults in my textual analyses of *Love That Dog* (2001) or *What I Believe* (2005). While it may be true that some readers will overlook or choose not to think about certain self-reflexive devices in these verse-novels, it may be presumptuous to assume that adults or teenagers will have a reading advantage over younger children.

Experiencing Narrative Poetry in Self-Reflexive Verse-Novels

The first page of Creech's *Love That Dog* (2001) is presented like the beginning of the narrator's journal. Jack's name appears in large letters, followed by the words, "Room 105 – Miss Stretchberry" (p.1). After a gap of space, Jack pens his first entry under the date, "September 13": "I don't want to / because boys / don't write poetry. // Girls do" (p.1). Not only will Jack's comment elicit a laugh from many readers, but it may also stimulate readers to think about whether Jack is already writing poetry. He is using short lines, right? And why is Jack acting so stubbornly? The large stretches of white page beside and below the printed text create spaces for the reader to ponder these questions.

Jack continues to resist poetry in his second journal entry: "I tried. / Can't do it. / Brain's empty" (p.2). Then, in the gutter space of the page break, Miss Stretchberry presumably shares Williams' poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow, which stimulates Jack to write the following response:

I don't understand

the poem about

the red wheelbarrow

and the white chickens

and why so much

depends upon

them (3).

It is likely that readers will be familiar with "The Red Wheelbarrow" as Williams' work is often used in schools to teach poetry to children (Certo 2004; Kazemek 1989; Koch 1990).[78] Even if readers are unfamiliar with Williams' work, they will probably detect that Jack is repeating parts of another poem.

According to Rhian Williams (2013), the poet Williams drew on Imagist techniques to write "The Red Wheelbarrow" (p.257). Ezra Pound, who instigated Imagism with the publication of his essay "A Retrospect," set out a series of Imagist tenets, the first being that poets should focus on the "[d]irect treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective" (1962, p.106). Williams' poem uses spare language, and it focuses on the material object of the red wheelbarrow to create a specific effect (Williams 2013, p.257), which corresponds with Pound's first tenet of Imagism. But

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[78] "The Red Wheelbarrow" is also included in the endnotes of *Love That Dog,* and some readers will first encounter the poem here.

in *Love That Dog* (2001)*,* Jack changes the order of Williams' words, making it seem as if the red wheelbarrow and white chickens have no connection. Like Jack, the reader may not understand the referenced poem (particularly if he or she is only relying on Jack's translation), so the blazes of white that follow the asyntactic (and syntactic) line-breaks would provide spaces for the reader to puzzle over this seemingly nonsensical combination of words.

So far in *Love That Dog*, several self-reflexive techniques have drawn attention to the verse-novel's construction: the presentation of the text as Jack's poetry journal; Jack's commentary about writing (or not being able to write); and the intertextual reference to Williams' "poem about / the red wheelbarrow" (p.3). However, the second stanza of Jack's "September 27" entry draws particular attention to the construction of poetry through a light-hearted comment about line-break:

> If that is a poem
>
> about the red wheelbarrow
>
> and the white chickens
>
> then any words
>
> can be a poem.
>
> You've just got to
>
> make
>
> short
>
> lines   (p.3)

The fragmentation of the last sentence into asyntactic, one-word lines slows down the pace, and creates white spaces for the reader to experience the humour of Jack's

comment, and also to contemplate what he says about poetry. Jack is not directly referring to the construction of his own writing, but most readers will make this connection, and begin to question if Jack is writing poetry himself since he has made "short / lines" in his journal entry (p.3). Even if readers do not readily accept that Jack's writing poetry, they would pay more attention to the use of lineation in the rest of the verse-novel.

In his next journal entry, dated "October 4," Jack continues to use short lines as he dialogues with Miss Stretchberry about a poem he wrote:

Do you promise

not to read it

out loud?

Do you promise

not to put it

on the board? (4).

Many readers will relate to Jack's reluctance to share his poem, particularly if they have ever felt hesitant about sharing their own creative work. The asyntactic line-breaks reinforce Jack's uncertainty, and produce a punching rhythm that might tighten a reader's chest. Readers may also cogitate about whether the passage qualifies as poetry since it uses "short / lines" (p.3). However, Jack does *not* seem to think of this excerpt as poetry, differentiating his "real" poem with italics and indentation:

Okay, here it is,

but I don't like it.

So much depends

upon

a blue car

splattered with mud

speeding down the road (p.4).

The first two lines of Jack's poem imitate Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" word for word, as well as line for line. The only difference is that Jack capitalised "So," while Williams' poem does not involve any capitalisation. It is quite natural for children to mimic other writers' work when learning to write poetry (Wilson 2007, p.444), so Creech's portrayal of this is realistic, and it reinforces mimicry as a suitable learning technique.

In the white page space and gutter space that follow Jack's poem, the reader may wonder about the significance of this "blue car / splattered with mud / speeding down the road" (p.4). It is implied that Miss Stretchberry wonders this, too, because in the next poem Jack exclaims, "What do you mean— / *Why does so much depend / upon / a blue car?* // You didn't say before / that I had to tell *why*. // The wheelbarrow guy didn't tell *why*" (p.5). Once again, the reader may grin at how absurd Jack makes Williams' poem sound. But Jack's right – Williams didn't tell *why*, and Jack follows suit, leaving the reader to wonder about the car.

The mystery of the blue car opens up a narrative gap in the verse-novel that interacts with the poetic segmentation. Lines often break against syntax when Jack refers to this car, foregrounding its enigma, and suggesting Jack's high emotional involvement: "I don't want to / write about that blue car" (p.7). Some readers may

untangle the mystery of the car early in the reading process, especially when Jack starts talking about his dog Sky. As the narrative progresses, Jack becomes more and more willing to discuss Sky, and he also becomes a prolific poetry writer. Towards the end of the 86-page verse-novel, Jack finally reveals that Sky was killed by the blue car: "I called him / "Sky! Sky!" / and he turned his / head / but it was too late / because the / *blue car blue car* / *splattered with mud* / hit Sky / *thud thud thud* / and kept on going" (p.71). Not only does this poem fill in the narrative gap about the blue car; it also demonstrates how poetry writing enables Jack to open up about a distressful memory.

Jack distinguishes his first blue car poem (*Why does so much depend / upon / a blue car?*) with italics and indentation (p.5), but the lines begin to blur between Jack's journal entries and the texts he presents as poetry when Miss Stretchberry types up several of his journal entries. In his "December 4" entry, Jack asks Miss Stretchberry, "Why do you want / to type up / what I wrote / about reading / the small poems? // It's not a poem. / Is it?" (p.17). Readers may contemplate Jack's question in the gutter space that follows. Then, in his 'December 13" entry, Jack makes up his mind: "I guess it does / look like a poem / when you see it / typed up / like that" (p.18). The idea of a poem being a poem when it *looks like* one keeps hold on Jack's attention, and will, therefore, keep hold on the reader's attention. For instance, in his "January 17" entry, he writes:

Maybe the wheelbarrow poet

was just

making a picture

with words

and

someone else—

like maybe his teacher—

typed it up

and then people thought

it was a poem

because

it looked like one

typed up like that (p.22).

Even though this study does not differentiate between adult- and child-readers in my

discussion, it is likely that adults will have a greater appreciation for Jack calling

Williams' "the wheelbarrow poet," and his reference to the poet's teacher (p.22). Yet

I believe that most readers – adults *and* children – will ponder Jack's notion about the

presentation of poetry. Jack seems to bring up a similar philosophical argument as

Stanley Fish (1980), who argued that readers will interpret a text as "poetry" if it is

presented as such. Fish illustrated his point when he asked a literature class to

interpret a list of surnames left on the blackboard, telling his students that it was a

religious poem (p.323). Once the students "recognised" the text as a poem, Fish

explains that "they began to look with poetry-seeing eyes…that saw everything in

relation to the properties they knew poems to possess," even though the text was not

actually poetry (p.326). In a like manner, Jack suggests that his classmates will

interpret the printed text on the wall as poetry because it has been presented as such.

Jack does not immediately call his work "poems," initially referring to them as

"what I wrote" (p.17, p.28, p.49). However, as Jack gains confidence in his ability to

write and express himself, he does begin to call his work as poetry. For instance, in his "March 1" journal entry, he mentions his "yellow dog poem" (p.38), and at the end of the narrative, he alludes to his poem about Sky as poetry (p.84). He also suggests that other kids in his class are writing poetry, even if they do not think so: "Was it like me / when I didn't think / my words / were / poems? // Maybe you will tell / the anonymous tree poet / that his or her tree poem / is really / a poem / really really / and a good poem, too" (pp.40-41). While *Love That Dog* seems to validate Jack's writing (and the others students' writing) as poetry, the self-reflexive structures in the verse-novel will allow readers to come to their own conclusions.

Similar to *Love That Dog* (2001), Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005) is also presented as the narrator's poetry journal. Instead of using entry dates, however, each poem is labelled with a title that often denotes the poem's form. For instance, the opening poem is entitled "Memo to Myself," indicating the poem's use of the memorandum. Of course, a memo is not typically considered a poetic form, and some readers may not identify this passage as poetry, even though it uses lineation. Yet the title's reference to the memo, as well as Vicki's self-address ("Memo *to Myself*"), would encourage readers to think of this piece as a made thing:

Try not to stumble over chairs or your feet or anyone else's feet.

Do not stare at Casey Ford.

Remember he is the hottest and nastiest boy in school.

Ask yourself why you keep forgetting that.

Remind yourself he told you your front teeth were way big.

Ask yourself why you keep forgetting *that*.

Do not talk about Dad to anyone.

Try to be nicer to Mom.

Try *very hard* to act normal (p.1).

Readers might smile at Vicki's list of self-critical reminders, particularly when Vicki

asks herself why she keeps forgetting certain things, which suggests that she often

does not follow her own instructions. Readers may also discern that Vicki is dealing

with a difficult problem by the way she reminds herself to "act normal" (p.1). Even

though all of the lines are end-stopped, the use of lineation generates gaps of white

space where the reader can think about Vicki's admitted lack of reliability. Readers

may wonder what Vicki means about not talking about her dad, and being nicer to her

mom, and these questions may continue to gnaw at the reader's mind as they turn the

page, and navigate across the gutter space.

In the next piece, "So What Do You Do for Fun, Marnet, Casey Ford Sneered,"

Vicki fails to follow her own advice about Casey, and readers might feel their cheeks

burn as Vicki fumbles through a conversation with the hottest boy in school. While

this poem does not use lineation, it still seems to engage with line-break by

deliberately overriding it.

and I got a bit flustered (he's *so* hot) and stupidly told him about

writing in my journal, my notebook, on the palm of my hand, on

napkins and scraps of paper, which got me one of those Vicki-

Marnet-you-are-strange-strange-*strange* looks, and now I'm

thinking if people are gonna look at me like that (and they are,

they have, they do, they will), why not just go for it and say

although I intend to be a lawyer, writing is *fun* for me, so I write

run-on rambling sentences like this one for *fun*, and I write crazy

things like sestinas and pantoums and all kinds of poetry for *fun* (p.2).[79]

Once again, readers may not think of this particular piece as a poem, especially as

Vicki identifies it as a run-on rambling sentence. Yet Vicki's numerous references to

writing will urge readers to keep thinking about the text as something constructed.

Vicki's line about writing "things like sestinas and pantoums and all kinds of poetry"

will also make readers more cognisant of the use of poetry in the rest of the verse-

novel (p.2). For instance, readers will notice how the next poem, "Rug Love Sestina,"

uses the sestina form (p.3). Readers may also begin to think about the narrator's other

compositions as poetry, especially as Vicki has generally referred to writing "all kinds

of poetry," leaving the parameters of poetry open to interpretation (p.2).

My own verse-novel, *Homing Poems*, also involves a level of self-reflexivity,

with the seventeen-year-old narrator, Teagan Vasco, portrayed as a poet in the

making. Yet in Teagan's world, which I have loosely based on Plato's *The Republic*

(1968), poetry is banned. When Teagan is caught writing poems, a governmental

psychiatrist diagnoses her with *eikasia* (defined in my verse-novel as "a disease of the

mind"), and she places Teagan on medication.[80] I wrote *Homing Poems* in free verse

poetry, which I personally found to be the best poetic form to fuse with the narrative

structure. Yet, as I will discuss in the next chapter, I found it exceedingly difficult to

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[79] I have broken these lines as they appear in the original text. Although the lines appear to be lineated, this piece is presented as a prose block, with the text stretching into the right margin. Only the first half of this poem is presented here.

[80] In *Plato's Individuals* (1999), Mary Margaret McCabe explains that Plato used the term *eikasia* to define "the state of mind in which we are unable to tell the difference between an image and reality," or the state in which "the audience is trapped in "imagination"" (p.73).

combine poetry and narrative during the early stages of my writing process, which

resulted in a lot of scrunched-up paper, and maybe even some grey hair.

CHAPTER FOUR

Writing the Young Adult Verse-Novel

…the unique combination of creative practice and research can sometimes result in

methodological distinctive approaches, as well as exhilarating findings and artworks

(Hazel Smith & Roger Dean 2009, p.5).

During the early stages of my candidature, the relationship between my creative

and theoretical components was tenuous at best. I remember finding it difficult to

write creatively in close proximity to working on my theoretical section, which

prompted me to isolate my creative practice from my research. Having said that, I had

read plenty of scholarly texts that asserted the importance of a reciprocal relationship

between the exegesis and creative work (for instance, see Atherton 2010; Haseman

2007; Milech & Schilo 2004). I had also taught undergraduate units that encouraged

students to produce creative texts based on theoretical concepts, so I understood the

value – as well as the generative power – of melding creativity and theory together.[81]

Nonetheless, I was unsure if I would be able to produce this kind of reciprocity in my

own project.

As Hazel Smith and Roger Dean explain out in *Practice-led Research,*

Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts, courses in English literature departments

have traditionally been more concerned with the study of literature, and less

concerned with the exploration of creative writing or the creative process (2009, p.2).

In the last few decades, however, the concept of "practice-led research" gained

ascendency (p.2), which practitioners have used to describe how their creative

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[81] I am mainly referring to the unit called ENGL304: Creative Writing 2: Concept &
Practice at Macquarie University, which I taught for several semesters. This unit
encourages students to respond to context-based and theoretical approaches in their
creative writing.

practice constitutes a form of research that can produce insights that contribute to generalised knowledge (p.5).[82] As Smith and Dean point out, practitioners working in the university environment often use terms such as "practice-led research" to

> explain, justify and promote their activities, and to argue – as forcefully as possible in an often unreceptive environment – that they are as important to the generation of knowledge as more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods (p.2).

The concept of practice-led research is a valuable one – not only can it help creative writers gain acceptance and support from other researchers, but it can also help practitioners find value in their own work, and open up ways for them to integrate their creative practice with other forms of research.

Perhaps this focus on practice-led research in creative writing discourse is what incited me to write my verse-novel before concentrating on my theoretical section, despite my supervisor encouraging me to do things the opposite way. Once I had written my verse-novel, I reasoned, I would be able to use the knowledge I gained through my process to further my theoretical research, and to forge a connection between the two components of my project. While my creative process did generate important insights that I used in my exegesis, it was not until I developed a reciprocal relationship between my research and creativity that I was able to bring my entire project to fruition.

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[82] Other terms include "practice-based research," "creative research," or "practice as research" share a similar meaning with "practice-led research" (Smith & Dean 2009, p.2).

Drafts, Cross-outs, and Scrunched up Paper

On plenty of days the writer can write three or four pages, and on plenty of other days he concludes that he must throw them away (Annie Dillard 1989, p.14).

One part of my research that did influence my creative writing was the numerous criticisms of the verse-novel genre for consisting of chopped-up prose instead of poetry (see Apol & Certo 2011; Flynn, Hager & Thomas 2005; Heyman, Sorby, & Thomas; Rosenberg 2005). As I mentioned in Chapter Three, these criticisms engendered a kind of anxiety in me, propelling me to try and make my verse-novel as "poetic" as possible in an attempt to avoid these kinds of critical remarks.

When I began writing my verse-novel, which I entitled *The Notebook of Teagan Trace* (Alberts 2012), I had a vague idea about the narrative structure: I knew the story would be about a teenaged girl named Teagan who wanted to be a poet in a futuristic world in which poetry had become obsolete. I also knew that Teagan's parents would own the last existing bookstore in the United States. But when the family bookstore faces bankruptcy, Teagan would find herself questioning the sensibility of pursuing a literary career. However, I did not fully plan my narrative, and quite naïvely, I chose not to write my poems in chronological order. Instead I directed my attention to the language and emotional arc of individual poems. I also focused on writing form poems, such as sestinas, acrostics, and abecedarian poems.[83] What I ended up with, however, was a patchy manuscript punctuated with "to-do" notes about how I would bridge the narrative gaps between poems. My supervisor also pointed out an obvious problem: the difficulties Teagan faced seemed like

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[83] To read a sampling of my poems from *The Notebook of Teagan Trace* (2012), the first verse-novel I wrote for my PhD project, please see Appendix IV.

contemporary problems – not futuristic ones. After all, independent bookstores as well as large chains have closed (Butler 2014; Milliot 2011; Rosenwald 2013; Syme 2011), and traditional poetry does not seem to have a large following outside of the academy (Gioia 2004; Jackson 2008). Despite my verse-novel's credibility problems, I resisted altering the plot, especially because that often meant I had to rewrite or omit a sestina or pantoum I had spent days – or even weeks – perfecting.

By the time I had written 26,000 words of *The Notebook of Teagan Trace*, I hit a major roadblock, and found that I could no longer make the narrative "work" with the poems I had created. Still, I tried to find a solution – outlining the rest of the narrative structure; changing the beginning; changing the middle; and developing my narrator into a more substantial character. The last thing I wanted to do was discard a manuscript I had worked on for years, especially as it was my ideological belief that any piece of writing can be improved with hard work and determination. But when I could not find a way to fix the narrative, I decided – reluctantly – to put *The Notebook of Teagan Trace* aside and concentrate on my exegesis.

Connecting Poetry and Narrative in my Writing

Smith and Dean (2009) suggest that creative practice and academic research are not separate processes, but interlace in what they call an "iterative cyclic web" (p.2). This iterative cyclic web produces an intricate pattern of thinking, allowing the mind to cycle through processes, reiterate ideas, or crisscross in numerous directions. When creative practice and research generate this kind of connection, allowing practice to lead to research, and research to lead to practice, Smith and Dean suggest

that distinctive methodological approaches may emerge, as well as exciting findings that result in innovative creative works (p.5).

Somewhere in this web-like process, I started thinking about how I had utilised segmentation in *The Notebook of Teagan Trace*, based on McHale's (2009; 2010a; 2010b) theory of contrapuntal analysis between poetic and narrative elements. While I had paid close attention to line-breaks in *The Notebook of Teagan Trace*, I realised that I had not rigorously connected the poetic segmentation to the narrative gaps. Did my verse-novel still qualify as narrative poetry, despite this lack of connection? As I discussed in Chapter One, I believe that poetry and narrative would conjoin in other ways beyond segmentation, although my exegetical research has not explored this. The frequency of "gaps" in both poetry *and* narrative discourse, however, makes segmentation a logical place for these two genres to interconnect. In my textual analysis of verse-novels such as Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* (2006) and Mazer's *What I Believe* (2005), I discovered that narrative gaps often correspond with line-breaks, section-breaks, and other kinds of poetic segmentation, and that these sites of encounter play a significant role in the formation of narrative meaning and the emotional experience of the text. Therefore, an absence of interaction between narrative and poetic segmentations in *The Notebook of Teagan Trace* began to feel problematic. I even wondered if this oversight was partly to blame for the challenges I had faced with my narrative discourse.

Based on my interviews with verse-novelists Sonya Sones (2012) and Steven Herrick (cited in Alberts 2013b), I also began to realise the importance of creating a strong narrative structure. Sones (2012) says that she actually favours narrative over poetry in her writing process, "because if the reader doesn't want to keep turning the pages, then no amount of perfectly written poems will matter." Herrick remarked that

he privileges character development over *both* poetry and narrative, yet characterisation is a narrative technique. Therefore, Herrick also seems to favour narrative (cited in Alberts 2013b). I did not necessarily want to neglect the poetic element of my verse-novel, yet I knew that I had to make the narrative more compelling to keep the reader flipping the pages, and to also sustain my own interest in writing it. But how to do this? I knew I still wanted to write about a poet who lives in a world in which poetry is marginalised, but I was not sure how to create a story world in which this scenario would be believable.

Then I happened on Pierre Destrée and Fritz-Gregor Hermann's *Plato and the Poets* (2011), a collection of essays regarding Plato's rejection of poetry from his ideal society. I had not previously studied Plato's *The Republic* (1968), but I became fascinated with his argument that poetry was useless to society, and that it threatened one's ability to reason (Destrée & Hermann 2011). Plato's grievance with poetry lasts throughout his entire career, appearing in early Platonic dialogues such as *Ion* through to later works like *Symposium, Phaedrus,* and *The Republic* (1999). In *Ion*, Plato presents dialogues between Socrates and a local rhapsode, framing poetry as a kind of divine "inspiration" that exists separately from reason. In *The Republic*, Plato launches into a more vicious attack on poetry, arguing that it is an imitative art that has no value in society. In a compelling section of *The Republic*, Plato declares that if a poet ever attempted to come to his ideal city, he would be escorted out:

> …if a man who is able by wisdom to become every sort of thing and to imitate
> all things should come to our city wishing to make a display of himself and his
> poems, we would fall on our knees before him as a man sacred, wonderful,
> and pleasing; but we would say that there is no such man among us in the city,

nor is it lawful for such a man to be born there. We would send him to another city, with myrrh poured over his head and crowned with wool (p.76).

These parts of *The Republic* (1968) captivated my imagination, and after reading sections of Plato's text, as well as related critical texts (Destrée & Hermann 2011; Murdoch 1997; Pappas 2013; Runciman 2010), I decided to take a leap of faith and start writing a new verse-novel. In this version, now entitled *Homing Poems,* my teenage narrator (still named Teagan) lives in a dystopian version of Plato's society where poetry is not only forbidden, but regarded as a crime of heresy. When Teagan is caught scribbling poems in her father's notebook, the Guardians (the autocratic rulers in Teagan's society) place her on medication and threaten her with banishment if she does not stop writing. Yet Teagan begins to rebel against the Guardians' poetry censure after she strikes up an unlikely friendship with a boy named Theo and his group of artistic friends.

A handful of Teagan's notebook poems are scattered throughout the text, but the overall use of the verse-novel format may generate irony in a similar way to Wayne Booth's (1983) notion of unreliable narration. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Booth argued that unreliable narration is a form of irony in which the implied author and reader partake in a "secret communion," colluding against the narrator (p.304). In *Homing Poems,* this kind of irony is especially apparent in sections in which Teagan discusses the need to stop writing poetry. For instance, when Teagan visits a dilapidated section of the polis wall, she has a realisation that she cannot continue writing poetry or seeing Theo and his friends if she wants to live in the polis:

Of course, I have to laugh

when that thought crosses my mind.

because I *know* I'm flirting with danger –

writing poems,

meeting Theo's artist friends,

not taking the pills Dr Antonious prescribed me.

But I will stop –

soon.

In fact, I've got to stop this

poetry madness

as soon as I graduate

in a few days' time (*Homing Poems* p.290 [this thesis]).

The poetic presentation of this section undermines Teagan's statement that she's going to stop writing poems. Some readers may even identify Teagan as an unreliable narrator based on the ironic difference between Teagan's words and the poetic segmentation of the narration.

I wanted to foster this kind of interactive relationship between the narrative content and poetic segmentation throughout my verse-novel, and I found that free verse poetry allowed me to do this more easily than the form poetry. I often thought about the connection between narrative and poetry on a local level, splintering the narration into short, asyntactic lines when Teagan felt nervous, afraid, or surprised. These fragmented passages opened up large portions of white space where the reader could experience the same emotions. The other benefit of working in free verse (as opposed to form poems like sestinas and acrostics) is that it allowed me to make adjustments to the narrative discourse without having to alter the entire composition

of poems, or to delete poems altogether. This time around, I wrote chronologically, but I still had to go back and revise narrative events on a regular basis.

My use of free verse poetry in *Homing Poems* corresponds with the verse-novel "house-style" (Alexander 2005, p.270). However, my verse-novel differentiates itself from the majority of texts in the verse-novel genre. In terms of presentation, I have not begun each poem on a separate page, but have inserted two blank lines between each poem. Even though these blank lines do not provide as much white space as a page-break, they still provide places for the reader to pause, reflect, and emotionally experience the language and narrative content. More significantly, my verse-novel takes on the characteristics of dystopian fiction. While dystopias are exceedingly common in young adult literature (Hintz & Ostry 2013, p.9), the majority of verse-novels tend to be based in realism. If published, *Homing Poems* will diversify the verse-novel canon, and contribute to creative writing research on the verse-novel genre. Having said this, it is my opinion that *Homing Poems* is not ready to be published, but would benefit from further rewriting. As Nigel Krauth argues, an PhD novel differs from a novel written in a normal creative setting because of its academic purpose:

> You don't have a private, lingering, developing affair with [the academic novel], you have a supervisor or a supervisory panel who butt in on the intimacy of your writing it. You don't simply send the manuscript off to a publisher once it's completed, you fill out official forms and submit it in triplicate. Importantly also, you don't write it for yourself and (hopefully) the thousands of others who will read it, you write it for your supervisors initially, and then, your examiners (p.10).

Accordingly, *Homing Poems* has been written first for the purpose of this PhD project, but will undergo a more rigorous rewriting process before being submitted to publishers. During my academically-framed creative process, I focused on the construction of narrative, and the correspondence between narrative and poetic parts. I found that the use of poetic language, line-breaks, and section-breaks intensified the portrayal of Teagan's rebellious journey in her authoritarian society. This correspondence between poetic and narrative elements in *Homing Poems* may amplify readers' affective experiences, drawing them into the emotional content of the narrative.

Conclusion

It is entirely possible that a critic will read my verse-novel, *Homing Poems,* which follows on from this exegesis, and conclude that I did not write poetry, but simply chopped prose into short lines. After all, like many other contemporary verse-novels for children and young adults, my verse-novel contains a minimal amount of figurative language and other formal techniques traditionally associated with poetry. However, I hope that my discussion of segmentivity as the defining characteristic of poetry, as well as my examination of the interwoven relationship between poetry and narrative, will encourage critical readers to interpret my verse-novel (as well as other texts in the genre) as a form of narrative poetry. I also hope that my use of McHale's theory of counterpoint as both an analytical tool *and* a creative writing technique has demonstrated that the interconnection between poetry and narrative is not just a theoretical concept, but an idea that can be applied in practice.

The verse-novel genre continues to grow, with an increasing amount of texts being published each year. On the other hand, theoretical literature on the verse-novel remains scant. It has been my aim to fill some gaps of knowledge with my exploration of the relationship between poetry and narrative; the affective experiences verse-novels may elicit; and the self-reflexive techniques that encourage readers to contemplate a verse-novel's construction. Yet more research needs to be conducted to generate a broader understanding of the genre. I believe that the interrelation between poetry and narrative could be investigated further, particularly in regards to how the two genres may connect beyond segmentation. It would also be worthwhile to further explore the pedagogical uses of self-reflexive techniques in the verse-novel, a discussion which my thesis has begun. Self-reflexivity can teach children and young adults to be sharper, more analytical readers. At the same time, it can also draw readers into the critical discourse about verse-novels, encouraging them to think about the dynamic ways that poetry and narrative wind round each other and interweave to create endless patterns and reading experiences.

Homing Poems

a young adult verse-novel

Elizabeth Claire Alberts

Parts I-III on pages 201-487 of the original thesis contains the verse-novel "Homing Poems" as an integral part of the thesis. However, this verse-novel has been omitted in this digital copy. The details of the suppressed article are as follows:

Homing Poems

a young adult verse-novel

by Elizabeth Claire Alberts

PART I

And it was at that age…poetry arrived

in search of me

(Pablo Neruda 2003, p.659).

PART II

…should [a poet] come to our city…we would say that there is no such man among us in the city, nor is it lawful for such a man to be born there

<div align="right">(Plato 1968, p.76).</div>

PART III

A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a home-sickness or a love-sickness

(Robert Frost 2007, p.84).

Interview Questions

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Chief Investigator: Dr Marcelle Freiman
Co-Investigator: Ms Elizabeth Claire Alberts

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Writing the Verse Novel for Children and Young Adults:
Challenges of Writing in an Interstitial Genre

Dear Writer,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in "Writing the Verse Novel for Children and Young Adults: Challenges of Writing in an Interstitial Genre." Please try to answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Although it would be preferable for you to answer all of the following questions, are you not obligated to answer every question or every part of each question. If you have written multiple verse novels, you may choose to answer some questions for each verse novel. If you are answering a question with a specific verse novel in mind, please name that verse novel.

When you have finished, please email your responses to
ElizabethClaire.Alberts@students.mq.edu.au.

A follow-up interview may be requested.

If you have any queries or concerns, feel free to contact me at any time at the email address listed above.

Thanks once again! I look forward to reading your responses.

Best regards,

Elizabeth Claire Alberts

Co-Investigator and Ph.D. Candidate

English Department, Macquarie University

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1. Please list your publications (and current writing projects, if applicable) that have been identified as "verse novels."

2. Would you identify these publications as "verse novels?" Why or why not?

3. What attracted and/or motivated you to write in the verse novel genre? What was the biggest influencing factor in your decision to write in the verse novel form?

4. Do you consider what you've written to be poetry? Why or why not? Please explain.

5. Please describe how your thinking and writing processes differ when writing poetry, prose narratives, and verse novels.

   a. If you have written poetry (not including verse novels), how would you describe your thinking and writing process when working in this genre?

   b. If you have written prose narratives, how would you describe your thinking and writing process when working in this genre?

   c. How would you describe your thinking and writing process when writing a verse novel? Does it differ from writing poetry (not including verse novels) and/or prose narratives?

6. When writing your verse novel(s), did you find yourself privileging one genre over the other (poetry over narrative, or narrative over poetry)? If so, please explain.

7. How did you negotiate writing both poetry and narrative? Did you face any challenges? What parts of your writing process did you find particularly successful?

8. Were there ever any instances where you felt you had to move the narrative forward but couldn't make a poem work? If so, how did you get through these sections? What about vice versa?

9. Did you plan your story structure before writing? Please explain.

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your writing and thinking process when writing a verse novel?

Appendix II on page 491 has been suppressed for copyright reasons. The details of the suppressed appendix are as follows:

Excerpt from Stone's A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl (2006), pp.34-35.

Appendix III on pages 492-493 has been suppressed for copyright reasons. The details of the suppressed appendix are as follows:

Excerpts from Adoff's The Death of Jayson Porter (2008), pp.42-47.

Appendix IV on pages 494-499 has been suppressed for copyright reasons. The details of the suppressed appendix are as follows:

Sample poems from The Notebook of Teagan Trace:

- Sample I: College Acrostic
- Sample II: Sticks and Stones: A Cinquain Sequence
- Sample III: Police Sestina
- Sample IV: My Father's Bookstore

APPENDIX V

GMail
by Google

Approved - 5201200031(D)

Faculty of Arts Research Office <artsro@mq.edu.au>   Fri, Feb 17, 2012 at 5:25 PM
To: Dr Marcelle Freiman <marcelle.freiman@mq.edu.au>
Cc: Faculty of Arts Research Office <artsro@mq.edu.au>, Mrs Claire Buchel
<elizabethclaire.alberts@students.mq.edu.au>

Dear Dr Freiman

Re: 'Writing the verse novel for children and young adults: challenges of
writing in an interstitial genre'

The above application was reviewed by the Faculty of Arts Human Research
Ethics Committee. Final Approval of the above application is granted,
effective 17th February 2012, and you may now commence your research.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Marcelle Freiman
Ms Elizabeth Buchel

Comment to researcher(s):

Overall, your application is very well-prepared and comprehensively
addresses the issues. We appreciate the time and care you have taken to
explain your research and prepare the I&C materials.

We note points 1 and 2 for your reference only: you do not need to forward
a revised version of these pages or copy of your research grant application.

1. Section 1.6. (a), p. 7
The proposed date of commencement is stated as 20/2/2012. Please note that
research may not proceed until final approval has been granted.

2. Section 5.8, p. 15
There is no deception indicated at 5.7 so these boxes should be left blank

3. Ensure the wording of communications with participants, including the
I&C form, is neutral rather than comment on the position of researcher to
their work. Please forward an updated I& C form and any other document of
communication for participants to ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1.   The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing
compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research
(2007).

2.   Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision
of annual reports. Your first progress report is due on (insert date one
year from today).

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a
Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been
discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

3.   If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew
approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final
Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit
on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in
an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are
continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4.   All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the
Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for
Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/forms

5.   Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse
effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the
continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6.   At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your
research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University.
This information is available at the following websites:

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external
funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the
Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of
this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will
not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds
will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has
received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of Final Approval to an external
organisation as evidence that you have Final Approval, please do not
hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of
final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mianna Lotz

Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee

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