

University of Alberta

*Where the Truth Lies: Making Sense of Documentary Fiction*

by

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## Abstract

In this thesis project, I examine documentary fiction as a problematic hybrid genre. I show that some theories fail to recognize that documentary fictions do not present convincing hybridized realities to their readers, and employ Lynn Crosbie's *Paul's Case* as an example. I engage with Barbara Foley's efforts to situate the genre of documentary fiction, along with Dorrit Cohn's ideas about the "signposts of fictionality," to show why and how documentary fiction is a distinct literary genre. I then turn to an analysis of why documentary fictions cannot be treated as "just" fictions, as their reliance on real-world facts alters the manner in which they are read. Ultimately, by examining Crosbie's novel, its reception by both critical and general readers, and by comparing it to historiographic works on the same topic, I show that documentary fictions can only be read as incomplete or unsuccessful hybrids.

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## Where the Truth Lies: Making Sense of Documentary Fiction

What exactly is documentary fiction? The simple answer, or at least the one which comes to mind first, is that documentary fiction combines factual historical details with an invented narrative. Similar to its precursor, historical fiction, documentary fiction is a hybrid genre, with its own rules and conventions. The parents of the genre are historiography and fiction, as these two influences play a major role in the formation of documentary fictions. Often, readers of literary documentary fiction are presented with problems which cannot be answered simply by saying that works of this type combine fact and fiction. In the following pages I highlight some of these issues, and whenever possible I suggest solutions, or else show why they may never be resolved.

We live in a world where authors, critics, scientists, philosophers, and historians, among others, are constantly rearranging, redefining, and erasing borders and boundary lines between different realms. It is no great surprise, then, that sometimes they create artefacts which challenge the very boundaries they discuss. Some artists and critics even take it upon themselves to look at those dividing lines in order to expose them as either problematic and/or completely unnecessary. While we may admit that some boundaries are arbitrary or irrelevant, or too indistinct to define at all, others are quite important to how people live and interact in the world. Moral and ethical boundaries, the differences between good and bad, and right and wrong, serve as guidelines for behaviour. Legal, economic, political, social, geographic boundaries shape our daily lives. Thus, some boundaries, especially those related to hybrids, simply cannot be ignored.

To understand what documentary fiction is, one must first understand how to make sense of the genre. As a genre which straddles the fact/fiction border, documentary

fiction relies upon the ideas of boundaries and hybridity. Much of the time, readers do not have trouble distinguishing between fact and fiction — for the most part, that boundary is quite obvious. It is generally accepted that facts tell the truth, they relate something real about the world. Moreover, facts and truths can be verified in the real world: the scientific method relies on this very premise. On the other hand, fictions do not relate truths, but rather they *lie*, they tell a creative or imaginative story, rather than relating truth. Fictions are not subject to the same sort of verification and justification as facts are, simply because they usually originate in an inventive human mind. However, when fact and fiction are drawn together in documentary fiction and employed by an author to create a literary artefact, problems arise which challenge that obvious distinction between the two. Are documentary narratives invented, or are they real? What does it mean when we recognize that they are both of those, and more?

The hybridized realities which are presented in individual documentary novels may pose certain challenges to the reader. In *Globalization and Culture*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse remarks that the “importance of hybridity is that it problematizes boundaries” and later comments that “[b]oundaries themselves are tricky. Thus, the *meanings* of boundaries are by no means constant” (86, 109, author’s emphasis). While he is referring to hybridity across race, culture, politics and other realms, the argument is just as applicable to documentary fiction. The problem with reading works of this genre is that the blurring of the fact/fiction boundary puts readers into a position where they must oscillate between two distinct realms. How do readers navigate this boundary when actually reading? I argue that they must recognize that in documentary novels, the combination of fact and fiction cannot be taken together, that readers simply cannot

accept the hybridized realities presented in such novels.

It is widely accepted that works of fiction are influenced by facts from the real world. Theories of possible worlds and fictional worlds accept this *de rigueur*, for a work with no connections to the real world whatsoever would be unintelligible, as the reader would be unable to recognize it or relate to it on any level. In fictions, the degree to which facts influence the creation of the work is fluid: while some fictions relate to the real world in minor details only, other works bring in facts as a matter of course. Historical fictions often draw upon the past for their subject matter, but much of the narrative also comes from the author's imagination. A well-known example of this is Tolstoy's historical novel *War and Peace*, in which the war between the armies of Napoleon's French empire and Russia serves as the setting for Tolstoy's study of family life and society. In this case, the factual accounts of the war serve as a backdrop in front of which members of the fictional family live their lives. In the novel real-world figures are transformed into characters, but the main protagonists are fictional creations, invented by Tolstoy, and it is their story that is the focus of the narrative.

When documentary novels use real-world facts and people as the focus of their narratives, the blurring of the fact/fiction boundary is most obvious. Documentary fictions employ both fiction-crafting and history-writing tools, and usually the real-world facts and truths cease to operate as mere backdrops and settings, instead becoming the driving force of the novel. As Rosie DiManno writes, "It is common for authors to retrieve a specific event from the dust bin of the past and fictionalize the contents in order to propel the narrative" (B1). This new version of the past may force the reader to wonder whether the events being described are real or fictional. However, in most cases the

reader is able to make the distinction between fact and fiction, forcing the separation of these two realms. Hence, because of this imperfect mix of truth and invention, the documentary novel cannot be read as a successful hybrid.

While I argue that documentary fictions are incomplete hybrids, I also recognize that some of their constituent parts may be successful in combining fact and fiction. In such cases, the reader can no longer see the difference between fact and fiction, and so he or she must treat the respective passage as a complete hybrid. Nederveen Pieterse writes that “[h]ybridization as a perspective belongs to the fluid end of relations between cultures: the mixing of cultures and not their separateness is emphasized” (80). Hypothetically speaking, for these complete hybrids, the reader simply cannot distinguish between fact and invention, or else need not make that distinction.

However, in most cases the hybrid reality given in documentary fictions cannot be treated as complete or ideal. This is in part due to the genre itself, and in part because of how theorists discuss the genre. Nederveen Pieterse notes that “hybridity concerns the mixture of phenomena that are held to be different, separate,” and further argues that “[h]ybridity functions [. . .] as part of a power relationship between center and margin, hegemony and minority, and indicates a blurring, destabilization or subversion of that hierarchical relationship” (72). While we admit that the hybrid presents something new, something that is neither *just* fact nor *just* fiction, theories of documentary fiction always discuss works of the genre in terms of those constituent parts, fact and fiction. While the abovementioned destabilisation and blurring can be found in documentary fictions, they leave the reader wondering about the power dynamic at work between the factual and fictive elements: which is centre, fact or invention? This binary dominates the discourse

about documentary fictions, despite the fact that these novels are supposed to subvert that binary. Contained within the documentary fiction is the idea that, since some of the parts are fictional, they are not fact, while conversely, the factual sections are not fiction. The documentary novel is both fact and fiction, while simultaneously neither of those. It is a hybrid, but a hybrid that lacks cohesion. The elements do not stick together.

When referring to historical and documentary novels, some theorists tend to treat those works as ideal hybrids. Also, those same theorists require that the reader read a documentary novel as a single, united work, with all of its parts taken together. Unfortunately, this is a major shortcoming in the theory: as I will attempt to show in the following pages, the theory of documentary fiction is divorced from the practice, for while the theory asks that these novels be read as complete hybrids, it is very difficult to actually read them as such. This is because such works, when actually read, do not meet the hybrid ideal which the theory assumes is possible.

In the following discussion I rely primarily upon *Paul's Case: The Kingston Letters*, by Lynn Crosbie, to make my case for the problems of documentary fiction. Comprising a series of letters narrated from various perspectives and directed toward the convicted serial murderer Paul Bernardo, this novel serves as an excellent example for the purposes of this study. My analysis of *Paul's Case* also includes a discussion of the historiographic literary works about Bernardo, his partner Karla Homolka, and their crimes: Nick Pron's *Lethal Marriage: The Uncensored Truth behind the Crimes of Paul Bernard and Karla Homolka*; *Deadly Innocence: The True Story of Paul Bernardo, Karla Homolka, and the Schoolgirl Murders*, by Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns; and Stephen Williams's *Invisible Darkness: The Horrifying Case of Paul Bernardo and*

*Karla Homolka*.<sup>1</sup> Along with the various newspaper and television reports published at the time, these three true-crime accounts document the events explored by Crosbie in *Paul's Case*. Each of the three examines the crimes through a different lens, and I draw upon them to highlight the differences (and occasional similarities) between historiography and Crosbie's documentary novel.<sup>2</sup>

To establish my argument, I give a comprehensive introduction to documentary fiction and the study of the genre in Chapter One. Largely based on the theory of Barbara Foley in her work *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, I use this section to situate documentary fiction as a genre, as well as to give the reader a better sense of what documentary fiction is and how it operates, with specific reference to the author-reader contract. I complement this with a study of Dorrit Cohn's discussion of historiography versus fiction, as given in *The Distinction of Fiction*, where she makes a convincing argument for marking a clear distinction between the different forms of writing. I explore her ideas about the "signposts of fictionality" in detail, as they provide some context for my own argument about the combination and separation of fact and fiction in documentary novels. I end this chapter with a much-needed examination of the New Journalism, a genre closely linked to documentary fiction.

In Chapter Two, I continue this theoretical discussion by considering Cohn's argument that historical novels (and, by extension, documentary novels) must be read

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<sup>1</sup> The reader will note that *Invisible Darkness* was originally published with a slightly different title, *Invisible Darkness: The Strange Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka* (1996). It is also worth mentioning that Williams has released another work, *Karla: A Pact with the Devil* (2003), an investigation of Karla Homolka and her psychology.

<sup>2</sup> For clarification, there exists a fourth true-crime account. However, as it was self-published and is very rare, I was unable to obtain a copy, and so I have not included it for discussion in this thesis. The work, *A Marriage Made for Murder*, was authored by Brian O'Neill and published in 1995 (O'Neill Enterprises, ISBN 0969977913).

solely as fictions. I feel that refuting this point of view is necessary if we are to come to understand documentary novels. I rely on ideas from Foley to support my argument, and further emphasize my perspective by drawing upon ideas about the historical novel from Alessandro Manzoni's *On the Historical Novel*. Having established documentary fiction as a genre unto itself, I move into an analysis of my primary text, Crosbie's *Paul's Case*. I use this work to highlight major elements of documentary fiction, and the problems faced by readers of this genre. Here I offer a detailed analysis of how the fact/fiction boundary works in light of the author-reader contract which is at work in the text. Ultimately, I conclude that *Paul's Case* is an unsuccessful hybrid, and ask about how we make sense of works of this genre with this in mind. I also highlight the three primary true-crime works to establish that the novel, and documentary fiction as a genre, cannot be treated as "just a fiction," as Cohn would argue.

I continue the discussion of *Paul's Case* in Chapter Three, within a larger context. Moving outside the novel and away from strict textual analysis, I take into consideration the reception of *Paul's Case* by critics and general readers. Primarily, I show that the critical and public reaction to Crosbie's novel was quite different from that toward the true-crime works, despite the fact that all of these literary artefacts discuss the same subject matter. With the inclusion of extratextual sources such as newspaper reports and interviews, I hypothesize that the reason *Paul's Case* received negative criticism is precisely because of that mix of fact and fiction inherent to the documentary fiction genre. This recognizes that the novel, similar to the nonfiction texts, *does* resonate in the real world: *Paul's Case*, in some way, tells the truth. However, that truth is mediated and altered — hybridized — and as such, readers face some difficulties. If documentary

novels do present a hybridized truth, how do we make sense of that truth, and where does it lie?

Ultimately, I aim to show that while documentary novels are hybrids, they are incomplete and unsuccessful hybrids. I wish to highlight the shortcomings of both the genre and the theory of that genre. In the final pages of this project, I point to some of the ancillary issues that authors and theorists of documentary fiction tend to avoid or ignore altogether. I offer further insights into why documentary fictions are not just fictions, and that they must be read carefully and respectfully. And while I do not have answers to some of these pressing questions, I suggest directions for further research and possibilities for resolving those problems. It is my hope that by indicating that there are larger considerations that must be taken into account, the reader will realise that making sense of documentary fiction is both possible and necessary.

Finally, I will note to the reader that this thesis is in no way an exploration of, or an attempt to shed further light on, the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, the killers, or the victims. While I cannot belittle the importance of these events for my project, or the seriousness of the subject matter, the reader will find very few details about these things herein. Aside from my discussion of their treatment in Crosbie's work or the true-crime texts, as relevant to an examination of documentary fiction, I do not discuss the crimes at all. Nor should this project be considered a commentary upon the nonfiction works, in terms of their validity, accuracy, or worth. When I express opinions about those accounts, I do so in the interest of forming thoughts and arguments about the project at hand, relating them specifically to documentary fiction and explorations of the fact/fiction divide. These pages involve an examination of documentary fiction, for which *Paul's*

*Case* is used as an example.

That being said, those readers looking for more information about the victims, the crimes, and the criminals, should turn toward the nonfiction texts mentioned above or toward the various newspaper articles and other media reports which were released at the time of the crimes and during the trials of Bernardo and Homolka. Given the nature of my research, I have come to be quite familiar with the crimes and extant literature. However, I recognize that some readers may be unaware of Bernardo, Homolka, and their crimes. As such, I am providing a brief introduction/timeline below, for those who wish to learn some of the details of the case. While by no means exhaustive, the summary will give the uninformed reader a basic idea of what actually occurred, thus allowing for a better understanding of my analysis of *Paul's Case* and the true-crime works. Those already familiar with the case may skip ahead to the first chapter, for the précis contains little information that may be considered secret or revelatory in any way.

### **The Bernardo/Homolka Crimes**

During the early 1990s, Southern Ontario was shocked by crimes committed by a pair of sexual predators, Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. Aside from a large number of serial rapes perpetrated by Bernardo (many of them committed with Homolka's knowledge), the notorious pair were involved in the deaths of three young women. Their first victim, 16-year-old Tammy Lyn Homolka, Karla's sister, died on Christmas Eve of 1990. Knowing that her then-fiancé Bernardo was interested in Tammy, Karla offered her little sister as a "Christmas present" to Paul. Heavily influenced by alcohol, and further subdued by veterinary anaesthetics administered by Karla, Tammy passed out and later asphyxiated on her own vomit. Her death was eventually ruled accidental.

Their second victim, fourteen-year-old Burlington, Ontario, highschool student Leslie Mahaffy, was abducted in June of 1991. The police had no clue about her whereabouts until two weeks after her disappearance, when her body was discovered in a lake close to St. Catharines, Ontario. Her corpse had been dismembered, the pieces encased in cement and then dumped in Lake Gibson.

In April of 1992 another schoolgirl disappeared, fifteen-year-old Kristen French, from a church parking lot in St. Catharines. A tip from someone who had caught a glimpse of the abduction started a massive search across Southern Ontario for a beige Chevy Camaro, believed to be the vehicle used for the abduction. However, this information was erroneous, leading the police on a wild goose chase rather than to the killers. Two weeks after the disappearance of French, her body was found in a roadside ditch in Burlington, Ontario, her long hair completely shorn off.

In 1993, nearly ten months after the disappearance of French, the perpetrators were finally arrested. After turning herself in, Karla Homolka confessed to the parts she and Bernardo had played in the abductions, rapes and murders of the girls. Convincing the Crown of her role as simply another of Paul's victims, Homolka successfully secured a plea-bargain deal, arranged by her lawyer with Crown prosecutors. The terms of the deal stated that in return for her testimony against Bernardo, she would receive a twelve-year sentence for her role in the crimes. Homolka accepted the deal, and went to prison during July of 1993. Her original appeal for parole was denied in 1997, and she made no further attempt to shorten her prison stay. In July of 2005, Homolka was released, having served all twelve years of her sentence, and it is believed that she is currently living in a Montréal suburb.

In September of 1995, Paul Bernardo was charged and convicted of several crimes: committing an indecency to a human body (for the dismemberment of Leslie Mahaffy), and two counts each of abduction, forced confinement, sexual assault, and first-degree murder. DNA testing later revealed that Bernardo was the perpetrator of a number of vicious serial rapes in Scarborough, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto. Also known as “The Scarborough Rapist,” Bernardo has since been declared a Dangerous Offender by the Crown. His sentence is life imprisonment with no eligibility for parole for a minimum of twenty-five years; however, given his Dangerous Offender status, it is unlikely he will ever be released. Serving his sentence at the maximum security Kingston Penitentiary, in Kingston, Ontario, Bernardo is in constant segregation from the other inmates, to ensure that none of the other prisoners has a chance to kill him.

The autopsies of both Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French revealed that they had each been sexually abused by their assailants. This evidence was later confirmed by the now infamous videotapes that Bernardo and Homolka had filmed. These videos became the core of the prosecution’s case against Bernardo (along with Homolka’s testimony), and showed many of the various abuses suffered by the two victims at the hands of their captors. They also shed some light on what had happened the night Tammy Homolka died. While they did not show the murders themselves, the video recordings made the case against Bernardo much easier. It may be relevant to note that it is widely believed that Karla Homolka would not have been able to secure her plea-bargain deal if these tapes had surfaced sooner than they did. Unfortunately, they were not found during the police search of the Bernardo/Homolka residence, and were then taken from the house by Bernardo’s lawyer, who kept them secret for a time, in the interests of protecting his

client. It is also worth noting that the videos have since been destroyed (by court-order), and they were never made available to the public.

## Chapter One

### On Genre and Theory: Situating Documentary Fiction

I find that I must begin the discussion of documentary fiction with an introduction of the author-reader contract, which dictates how a work is to be read: as fiction, as nonfiction, or as some combination of the two. The contract tells the reader how to read, indicating which frame of mind the reader should be in when approaching a given work. While we *can* read nonfictional works fictionally, and fictional works nonfictionally, doing so would be an odd way of reading. Instead, we usually come to the text knowing how it is to be read. If we do not have this knowledge beforehand, it becomes apparent when we actually begin to read. In most cases, the author-reader contract will inform the reader about which approach to the text is appropriate. In her study of documentary fiction, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, Barbara Foley notes that despite theoretical claims that the fact/fiction border does not exist at all, many authors continue “to invoke discursive contracts that [are] decidedly fictional or nonfictional” (14), which places the reader in a position of reading the work in relation to that contract. The (mimetic) author-reader contract leads to the manner in which the text is to be read, “wherein writer and reader share an agreement about the conditions under which texts can be composed and comprehended” (40). That is, a work is to be read as a fiction if there is a fiction-reading (and fiction-writing) contract in place.

While Foley’s argument refers specifically to documentary fiction as a genre, similar contracts exist in many other types of discourse, including other genres of fiction and historiographical nonfiction works. The historian’s text is to be read primarily as

nonfictional, and the reader is to read the work as a description of and commentary upon past real-world events. With documentary fiction (and also historical fiction), the author-reader contract asks the reader to read the text as a hybrid work, a melding of fictional story with factual re-telling of the events that act as the foundation of the text.

The author-reader contract is closely tied to the conventions of the genre to which the work belongs. In most cases, it is these generic conventions themselves that give clues to the reader about the contract involved. However, it is not solely in the conventions themselves that one locates the fictional or non-fictional status of the work. The mimetic contract “entails a social contract; the textual features that signal its different conventions indicate that the fictional contract is being invoked, but they do not in themselves constitute the essence of fictional discourse” (Foley 51). That is, while the text may employ familiar conventions which point to the fictional or nonfictional nature of the text, it is not only these features which make the work fictional. A reader may be able to recognize, given the presence of fourteen lines and a Shakespearean rhyming-scheme, that he or she is reading one of the Bard’s sonnets. These generic (and structural) elements ask the reader to read the poem as a sonnet, rather than as an epic, but they do not reveal anything about the fictional or nonfictional status of the work. Ultimately, it is by looking at the author-reader contract that we can determine that status.

Still, we cannot ignore conventions altogether, for they may signal whether we should read a work as fiction or nonfiction. While we might have the desire to consider only what the work “says,” such a reading will not tell us much about the fictional or factual nature of the text unless we are aware of the very conventions that went into the production of that text. This places a heavy burden on the reader, for his or her *approach*

to the text will ultimately decide how it is read. For the mimetic contract to function, the author must assume that the reader has competence to understand the particulars of the text, and that the knowledge that makes up this competence includes knowing the generic conventions that went into the crafting of the text (40). Each genre has its own specific conventions that inform the creation of a text, and these elements can often be found in the narratives themselves.

Foley argues that we can find clues to the fictional or nonfictional status through authorial intentions. She writes: “we [must] see the fictional work as a contract *designed by an intending author* who invites his or her reader to adopt certain paradigms for understanding reality” (43, my emphasis). However, there exists a recognizable deficiency in her position: the reliance on authorial intentions. The intentional fallacy argues that we cannot necessarily know all intentions that inform the writing of a work, and that even if (some of) those intentions are known, there is no reason to believe that they have been successfully transmitted from the author’s mind to the text and on to the reader. While the author may intend that his or her work present a certain reality or perspective, there is no way to ensure it is easily found, understood, and accepted by the reader.

Foley does try to support her position by noting that intentionalism is not always problematic. Making the argument that “writers obviously do not issue generic contracts in social vacuums, and readers do not inhabit the Garden of Eden” (60), Foley notes that some intentions are successfully transmitted from the work to the reader, because it is impossible for a reader to approach a text innocently. While not explicitly mentioning the *informed reader*, it is clear that this is the direction toward which Foley is pointing. The

intentional fallacy, though, does not distinguish between informed and uninformed readers. This is because even an informed reader can misunderstand or simply fail to recognize altogether the intentions transmitted by the author into the work.

Secondly, and perhaps more important, an author cannot assume that all readers will be informed ones. And there is no way to measure the degree to which a reader must be informed in order to reach the level of comprehension needed to pick up on the author's intentions. What is more, even informed readers may not possess *all relevant knowledge* about a given situation. Foley's reliance on authorial intentions to make a case for the mimetic contracts undermines her argument from the beginning, and this defect cannot be fixed drawing solely upon informed readers.

It is possible to set aside authorial intentions in favour of generic conventions. Works of fiction are usually understood as fictions when one reads; most readers do not struggle with the question of whether a work is actually invented. Much the same can be said about nonfictional texts, which are usually recognizable within their respective realms. It is interesting, though, that with the rise of postmodernism, the status of fiction itself has been thrust into the spotlight. Postmodernism has concerned itself with challenging borders and ideas which had been relatively clear until its arrival: notions such as Hayden White's emplotment and a new questioning of the veracity of historical facts and truths have undone some of the traditional boundaries. In *The Distinction of Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn recognizes this, stating that "the most pervasive and prominently problematic application of the word *fiction* in recent decades has been to narrative discourse in general — historical, journalistic, and autobiographical — as well as to imaginative discourse. This inclusive denotation has been forcefully, even militantly

advocated by numerous voices” (8). Cohn adds that the force behind this new application “is nothing less than the contemporary critique of the entire intellectual foundation of traditional historical practice — of the entire practice that is based on belief in the factuality of past events” (8). This reorganisation or eradication of traditional borderlines has considerable application to documentary fiction, and as such will be explored below.

The very line which, in the past, separated fiction from nonfiction has been challenged, and some would argue, even dissolved. This is in part due to the rise in status and popularity of hybrid novels such as historical fictions. However, the major culprit is postmodernism, which has actively sought to efface the border altogether. The very fact that postmodernism often conflates fact and fiction has eliminated the need for scholars to examine hybrids such as the historical novel, and documentary fiction, at all (Braz 16). In the realm of historiography, or history-writing (usually viewed as a nonfictional genre), a direct challenge to fiction-makers and their craft has been issued. This challenge, at least in part, is the result of *emplotment*, a term first used by Hayden White in his *Metahistory*. White sees emplotment as the ordering of events serially and temporally, for the purpose of telling a story and giving that story meaning (8). In a history text, the historical events being discussed are given a temporal order, and then causally linked. For White, “every history, even the most ‘synchronic’ or ‘structural’ of them, will be emplotted in some way” (9). This creates a mediated narrative, bestowing meaning where there was none, in that these separate and distinct events have been woven together to form a true or real-world story.

Emplotment also poses a challenge to its originating realm of study, history. If all events are tied together and linked in narrative form by the historian, this calls into

question the validity of past historical facts. White writes that sometimes

the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories” that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between “history” and “fiction” resides in the fact that the historian “finds” his stories, whereas the fiction writer “invents” his. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations. (6-7)

The point here is that in fictions, the events which form the plot are, for the most part, created by the author, while the sources for the historians “found” stories are from history. However, White argues that by emplotting separate events in to a single narrative, the historian creates a story that is, in part, invented. Hence, historical “facts” and “truths” are mediated and altered by the historiographer in order to form that historical narrative.

White sees a difference between modern historiographers and their nineteenth-century counterparts. In the past, historians would approach historical documents without preconceptions or explanations in mind, they would “let the explanation emerge naturally from the [historical] documents themselves, and then [ . . . ] figure its meaning in story form.” (141). In a chronicle, the historical “event is simply ‘there’ as an element of a series; it does not ‘function’ as a story element” (7). In contrast, modern historians and their emplotted works are preconfigured. Emplotted historiographies are given an explanatory effect, rather than having the facts tell the tale, “[t]he historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole

set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, end” (7). Historical events have no intrinsic meanings themselves, but through emplotment these events are given levels of meanings that may not suit them. It is because of this process that the facts and truths given in historiographies must sometimes be questioned.

If we are to challenge and question the very facts that make up a historical narrative, if we must question the “truth” behind those “facts” and key elements (the plot events) that form the narrative, then effectively all writings become fictional, or at the very least have a fictional resonance to them. While the direct effect of emplotment on fiction is minimal, the side-effects are quite damaging. For, if *all* story-telling narratives have a fictional level, then fiction as a genre is subsumed by the overwhelming influx of nonfictional texts which are, because of emplotment, to be treated as fictions. Thus fiction as a genre expands exponentially in order to incorporate new material which would seem to belong to the realm of historiography. This problem offers up two conclusions: the first is to accept that emplotment has indeed destroyed the boundary between factual and fictional texts. However, this by necessity leads us to the further conclusion that if there is no border, then all works are now treated as fictions, and thus there is no way of reading reality. While discussing Linda Hutcheon and the postmodern argument that we can know history only by reading its texts, Albert Braz ponders “how one is supposed to navigate one’s way from a textualized past to the real one, given that these are ontologically distinct realms” (16). Are we to simply accept that there is no longer any separation between nonfictional and fictional writing, no way to read the past, to learn something new about the world, except through experience? To do so would be

to admit defeat, not only for the realm of fiction, but for historiography as well. Even a remembered past may be emplotted, by the passage of time and human error, if nothing else. The alternate option is to attempt to rescue one or both of the realms from emplotment and the postmodern determination to collapse the border. This second option is more viable, and thus I choose to explore it further.

In *The Distinction of Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn attempts to resuscitate fiction and re-establish it as a genre unto itself. She favours a separation between fiction and nonfiction (historiography), and argues that with some insight and careful reading, the distinction between the two is quite apparent. While her argument is made throughout her text, my primary emphasis is centred on chapter seven, wherein Cohn lays out three “signposts of fictionality.” Here, Cohn

identifies three signposts that allow one to delimit fictional narrative from historiography: adherence to a bi-level story/discourse model that assumes emancipation from the enforcement of a referential data base; employment of narrative situations that open to inside views of the characters’ minds; and articulation of narrative voices that can be detached from their authorial origin. (viii)

Cohn employs each of these signposts to mark clear differences between fiction-writing and historiography, enforcing the much-needed separation between the two realms.

The first signpost can be understood as a challenge to White’s idea of emplotment. As can be seen in the above passage, Cohn reminds us that fictions have two levels, those of *story* and *discourse*. This bifurcation, however, does not work as well in the realm of history or other nonfictional types of discourse. She argues, quite correctly,

that historiography needs a third level, that of *reference*, in order to be complete.

Historiographies need to make references to the real world if they are to be taken as serious works of critical discourse. Cohn reminds us that

history is committed to verifiable documentation and that this commitment is suspended in fiction has survived even the most radical dismantling of the history/fiction distinction. In historiography the notion of referentiality [. . .] can, and indeed must, continue to inform the work of practitioners who have become aware of the problematics of narrative construction.

(112-113)

While histories *must* include references to the real world, such is not the case with fictions. It can also be said that fictions can, and often do, specifically refer to the real world, but doing so is not a necessary condition of fiction-making.

Historiography's commitment to verifiable documentation is an important part of the difference between fiction-writing and critical discourse. Whenever a work of history describes past events, the description of those events is subject to judgement and validation — did that battle really happen? And did it really happen as the historian has described it? These judgements come from the author, the reader, and also from the very documentary proof given to support the claims made (*Distinction of Fiction* 114). In fictions, even those which do make real-world references, there is no need to validate the events described, simply because they are *fictional* events, because there is no historical chronicle or documentation to refer to for verification. Furthermore, in some cases, the “novelist's relation to his sources is free, remains tacit, or, when mentioned, is assumed to be spurious; its true origination may (and often does) remain forever unknown —

sometimes to the writer himself' (114-15). The events he or she writes of did not happen, except inside the minds of the authors.

Returning to the problem of emplotment and the overlap of the realms of historiography and fiction, Cohn notes that only histories can be emplotted. Putting aside the discussion of emplotment and its effect on histories, one must recall that emplotment takes place at the story level, the serial ordering of (historical) events drawn together to form a narrative comprehensible to the reader. Fiction, however, cannot be emplotted, for "its serial moments do not refer to, and can therefore not be selected from, an ontologically independent and temporally prior data base of disordered, meaningless happenings that it restructures into order and meaning" (114). That is, it is precisely because fictions are nonreferential (or need not be referential) and their plot elements are not real, fictions cannot be emplotted. This is quite similar to Braz's point, made earlier, about the ontological separation which exists between the realm of lived history and that of recorded history. One cannot move directly between the two. Likewise, it is impossible to move from the realm of a fictional world into the real world. Emplotment, or the lack thereof, leads us to the beginning stages of separating fiction-writing from historiography. Cohn's first signpost of fictionality has shown us one possible option for separating fiction and historiography. If these two realms are distinguishable from one another by the presence or absence of emplotment, then we have found one major generic convention by which we can determine fictionality. This allows us to discard Foley's intentionalism and its inherent problems in favour of a viable theory of fiction-making.

Cohn identifies psycho-narration as the second signpost for distinguishing between fictional and historiographic works. Psycho-narration, simply put, is narration

from inside the minds of characters. This is in itself not all that extraordinary, for it has been a staple of fictional writing for many years, usually recognizable by the presence of an omniscient narrator who tells the reader the thoughts and emotions of one or many of his or her characters. However, the separation between fiction and historiography is obvious when Cohn reminds us that “the minds of imaginary figures can be known in ways that those of real persons can not” (118). Consider some of the arguments originally set forth by Cohn in her previous work, *Transparent Minds*, where she defines psycho-narration as “the narrator’s discourse about a character’s consciousness” (14). She argues that psycho-narration takes into account “the narrator’s superior knowledge of the character’s inner life and his superior ability to present it and assess it” (29). Furthermore, not “only can it order and explain a character’s conscious thoughts better than the character himself, it can also effectively articulate a psychic life that remains un verbalized, penumbral, or obscure” (46). This interior access to the minds of others is simply not available to ordinary individuals in the real world. I cannot know what the person sitting across from me is thinking, and he or she cannot know my thoughts or feelings. The transparent mind is reserved for fiction alone.

As Cohn notes, this is both a narratological tool for fiction writing and a further separation of historiography from fictionality. Psycho-narration is something that is impossible in historiography, for the historian can represent the past “only through the eyes of the (forever backward-looking) historian-narrator” (*Distinction of Fiction* 119), but never from the perspective of a person on the immediate scene as the historical events unfold. At least, not insofar as the historian would like to be taken seriously by peers and readers. The only way to introduce the thoughts and emotions of real people in histories

(or biographies, for that matter) is through inferences about what that real person might have thought or felt (118), or through recourse to documentation, such as a journal, autobiography or memoir in which the real-world figure explicitly recorded his or her inner-mind. When the historian does choose to include such documentation, it too is subject to validation and justification, just as is the “truth” of his or her claims about past historical events.

In fiction this is simply not the case. Psycho-narration is an oft-used narrative tool, allowing authors to represent the inner-workings of their characters’ minds in any manner that they choose. Similar to the idea that fictions cannot be emplotted because the described events do not (necessarily) refer to the real world, instances of psycho-narration in fictions are not subject to validation simply because they are fictional, and need not be based in reality. With regard to historical fictions, Cohn argues that

as the [subject] *matter* comes closest to narrative history, the *manner* [of writing] becomes mistakably and distinctively fictional. Typically, this occurs in one of two ways: either the historical figure is itself the focalizing subject, the central consciousness through which the events are experienced [. . .]; or else the historical figure is the focalized object, observed by another character, who may be himself either historical or invented [. . .]. In neither case are historical novels presented as (or as though they were) history, as one is so often told in discussions of this genre. (121)

That is, even when historical fictions and documentary novels present very close representations of real-world figures and events, the presence of psycho-narration

reminds us that it is a work of fiction that is being read, and that no justification of the scenes described is necessary.

As an argument for the fictionality of a given text, the presence of psycho-narration is quite strong. However, it is not infallible, for psycho-narration is not a necessary requirement for fiction-writing. It is quite possible to create a fictional work that lacks psycho-narration altogether. However, if a work of realism or historical fiction lacked psycho-narration, it “would be a generic anomaly; for unless it announced its fictional status para- or peritextually, nothing would prevent such a work from passing for a historical text” (120). As a specific example of this, Cohn cites Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Marbot*, which she discusses at length in chapter five of *The Distinction of Fiction*. Briefly, Cohn describes *Marbot* as a fictional biography, noting that there was no Marbot in the real-world, yet Hildesheimer wrote his work as if there had been. The author avoided use of psycho-narration altogether, yet had Marbot interact with real-world persons and included documentation which all pointed toward the real world. Though *Marbot* is a fictional work, fully created by the author’s mind, the lack of any paratextual markers to indicate that *Marbot* was a fiction may have led some readers to read *Marbot* as a biography of a real person.

I have one further point to add about the lack of psycho-narration in a work of historical fiction, and what that might mean for fiction-writing. We must consider what this might do to the “quality” of the novel, not stylistically, but as a creative and interesting work. As Cohn questions, what would happen to fiction and our reading of characters if

authors had treated them in the same manner Hildesheimer treats Marbot

— the lives, say, of Stephen Dedalus, Raskolnikov, Isabel Archer, Emma Bovary, Aschenbach[?] Without episodes packed with their gestures and words, without moments of lonely self-communion minutely tracing spiritual and emotional conflicts, these characters would no doubt never have come to life or become engraved in our reading memories. (84)

In short, though psycho-narration may not be necessary for the creation of fiction, surely we must accept that it has great value as a narrative tool, and argue that fiction is much more intriguing and enjoyable due in part to the transparent minds of its characters.

Despite the attempts by poststructuralist theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes to erase the author from the literary equation altogether, most readers still recognize that some role must be reserved for the author in relation to his or her work. While quite aware of the ideas surrounding the death of the author, Cohn notes that the author *must* be recognized, whether as historiographer or fiction-writer. It is through the position of the author that we may understand Cohn's third signpost, and thus the third convention of fiction which serves to separate that realm from historiography.

A previous discussion by Gérard Genette forms the foundation for Cohn's argument. Genette wrote of *homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic* works and the position of the author in relation to his or her text. Based on Genette's definition of *diegesis* as "the universe in which the story takes place" (123),<sup>3</sup> we can then understand the two terms in the following ways. For homodiegesis, the text in question should be read as univocal, and the author and narrator are essentially one and the same. Cohn asks us to consider the fact that though historians and biographers may write about distant lands, events, and

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<sup>3</sup> This being Cohn's definition of the term based on her reading of Genette.

people, the historiographer inhabits the *same* world he or she describes (122). While there might be a slight degree of separation between the ‘then’ of the subject-matter and the ‘now’ of the recording of those events, the two worlds are essentially inseparable, and, in principle, the described events are verifiable. The need for referentiality, along with the fact that historiography must avoid the major conventions of fiction if the history is to have critical weight, lead the reader to conclude that the author and narrator are to be identified with one another. And while this may occur in fiction as well, Cohn argues that it is much less likely.

Heterodiegetic texts are multi-voiced, and the separation between the authorial voice and those of the narrators and characters is recognizable. Cohn argues that the voice of the heterodiegetic narrator “is by definition otherworldly, by nature unnatural or artificial, or, as we might say, ‘artificial’” (123). This is because the world inhabited by the author and the world that his or her fictional narrator and characters inhabit are quite distinct, no matter how close the resemblance is to the real world of the author. If the author and narrator inhabit different worlds, then it must follow that they are not the same individual. The notion that the gap between author and narrator in fiction can be filled with an “implied narrator” or some other entity is of little consequence for this discussion, for a separation between author and narrator would still exist even if the gap were filled.

In fiction, the separation of author and narrator leads us to the possibility of narrative voices that do not originate with the author, and thus the third signpost of fictionality. The narrator becomes a being unto itself, and story-telling is attributed to that narrator, who is “a vocal source one cannot help but conceive in more or less

anthropomorphic terms” (127). This same narrator, Cohn says,

assumes an at least equally fantastic conceit: a “somebody” who is capable of looking through the skulls (or with the eyes) of other human beings. It is precisely because this “somebody” assumes optical and cognitive powers unavailable to a real person that we feel the need to dissociate the statements of a fictional text from its real authorial source. (127)

The presence of psycho-narration plays a role here, for as the above passage indicates, it is one of the methods by which we are able to recognize the narrator as distinct from the author.

The distinction between author and narrator opens a further realm for exploration. In fiction there exists the possibility that the narrator is an unreliable one. It is usually assumed that the more unreliable that narrator is, the greater the separation between narrator and author, for that narrator is more likely to present points of view that set apart from those of the author. Cohn remarks that from her reading of Felix Martínez-Bonati, the reader can separate between mimetic sentences “which create the image of the fictive world — its events, characters, and objects” and are objective, while subjective and “opaque” nonmimetic sentences “create nothing more nor less than the image of the narrator’s mind” (129). When expressed by an unreliable narrator, the former are to be read as truths (in the fiction), while the latter are read with the figural grain of salt.

With the separation of author and narrator in fiction explained, along with the multi-voicedness of fictional texts versus the univocality of historiography, it becomes apparent that Cohn’s third signpost serves as a convention of fiction-making. Based on these three signposts of fictionality, we can see a clear separation between fiction and

historiography. Cohn has attempted, and in my opinion has achieved, a resurrection of fiction from the postmodern challenge and emplotment. By viewing her signposts of fictionality as conventions by which we can recognize fiction, we can thus separate fiction from other forms of writing, particularly nonfictional modes of discourse. We are also better equipped to recognize when genre boundaries are being crossed. Though we cannot yet specifically define the fact/fiction borderline, Cohn's signposts have enabled us to redraw it. I rely upon these markers that separate fictionality from historiography that to make my argument about documentary fiction and the fact/fiction boundary, and its relation to the author-reader contract.

Other features of the text may also influence our understanding of the author-reader contract. Consider the conditions surrounding a text's publication. Is the work published as a fiction, a hybrid historical novel, or a work of critical discussion? Some works are published with a small note on the cover reading "a novel" or "fiction." Lynn Crosbie's *Paul's Case*, the documentary novel I discuss in detail later, has "critical fiction" on the cover. Such extratextual clues can be further reinforced by paratextual or peritextual elements that constitute part of the work. Consider the near ubiquitous use in fictional novels of the disclaimer, usually printed on the page of publication data, which indicates that the work is a work of fiction, that all characters are invented, and any reflection of real-world individuals or events is purely accidental. Similar disclaimers often appear in films and video games as well, reminding the viewer that what has just been seen or played is fictional. Conversely, we may ask why works of historiography do not include similar disclaimers advertising the work as a truth-telling tome, containing only facts and no inventions whatsoever? Fiction is different — for some reason it must

be marked as such.

Post-publication commentary in which the author tells us what he or she planned for the work may also influence the author-reader contract. Commentaries can often tell us what an author's intentions were when creating a work. In some cases we may be given specific information directly from the author, instances where it is clear that the creator of the work, rather than a narrator, is speaking: pretexts, introductions, forewords and prologues, epilogues and afterwords, these may also give the reader insight to the author-reader contract. Cohn notes that sometimes "it is quite simply that [fictional] first-person novels and [nonfictional] autobiographies are, for the most part, look-alikes" (*Distinction of Fiction* 59). In such instances, the author usually includes some note, whether textually or as a title or subtitle. These generic subtitles

tend to play a decisive role in the reception of literary works. Their status is official, in the sense that the reader is meant to understand them as a kind of contractual agreement on the author's part. They signal the author's intention or decision concerning the generic nature of his work, with a view to determining a definite horizon of expectation. (93)

We can see here the impact simple additions, such as subtitles, may have on the understanding of the author-reader contract.

Interestingly, in historiographic works, peri- and paratextual markers are also present, but they function in a different manner. Rather than give clues about the author-reader contract, such markers serve to validate the critical nature of the text. It is through the use of footnotes and appendices that historiographers are able to provide the information which supports the analysis presented in their texts. While the inclusion of

evidence does not enact the author-reader contract itself, we can conclude that it is reasonable for the reader to *expect* such evidence to be given.

When footnotes and appendices appear in fictions, more often than not they point to an explanation that furthers the fictional narrative. However, there is no strict rule saying that such evidence cannot appear in fictions. Cohn notes that on occasion some authors of historical fictions have “felt moved to include a referential apparatus, usually in the form of an afterword explaining the extent to which they have followed (or, more often, the reason they have decided *not* to follow) archival source materials” (115). In such cases, what are we to make of the extratextual information provided by footnotes, information that the author felt compelled to include? Fictions need not make reference to the real world, but when they do, how is the reading of that text affected? On one hand, we can assume that the author simply chose to include such information as an explanatory note, and that there is no real effect on the story itself. However, we may also conclude that an extratextual reference has been made because it is *needed*, in that the information it gives is crucial to the narrative. We must question how the author-reader contract is influenced, and ultimately whether, if at all, this alters the fictional status of the work. For, as I argue in the next chapter, if documentary novels must rely on real-world references in order to create the stories, then they cannot be said to be entirely fictional.

Some of these clues announce the status of the work immediately, and the author-reader contract can be easily negotiated based on that information. Others clues work in tandem with one another, or are only available after reading some of the text. In the case of both authorial commentaries and conditions of publication, one has to step outside of

the text altogether to find clues about the mimetic contract. Along with these, Cohn's signposts of fictionality give us concrete conventions of fiction-making by which we may further come to terms with the contract. However, while these things serve to tell the reader about the author-reader contract involved with most fictions, in the case of documentary fiction, they often complicate an already tenuous understanding of that contract, and thus cause confusion about reading along the fact/fiction border.

The documentary novel can be most easily understood as a derivative of the historical novel. Its parent genre, historical fiction, has existed for many years, and can be found in multiple forms. The common features that documentary fiction and historical fiction share are easily recognizable: both are hybrids, straddling the fact/fiction border and drawing upon the real world to inform their stories. In most cases, both focus on specific individuals, rather than past events. Yet there is also a great deal separating the two. Historical novels typically detail the stories of invented protagonists set against real-world historical events. Also, historical novels are just that, *historical*, meaning that the events described are in the past. In 1996, author Margaret Atwood gave a lecture in Ottawa entitled *In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction*. Primarily discussing her own historical novel *Alias Grace*, Atwood asks "When is the past old enough to be considered historic?" (21). She answers her own query by arguing that what is historic, in relation to the historical novel, is something which occurred "before the time at which the novel-writer came to consciousness" (21), and this seems an acceptable definition. By comparison, documentary fictions work quite differently in that while the real-world backdrop against which they are set are in the temporal past, and they document events from recent times, events occurring *during* the conscious lifespan

of the author. Furthermore, documentary fictions usually take fictional representations of real-world figures, rather than wholly invented characters, as their protagonists.

Through their similarities and differences, historical novels and documentary novels have working author-reader contracts which indicate what reading mode is to be adopted by the reader. More importantly, the challenge posed to the reader about how to read these hybridized works is a question that must be considered further. Concerning both genres, it is important that we define the author-reader contract, and critically question that contract to see what it says about how we are to read a given work. The same is true in other realms, such as film and television. Mockumentaries and their television counterparts, so-called “reality” television shows, offer the viewer a scripted, often almost fully contrived (and drastically edited) situation, and the viewer watches as the real people involved deal with that situation. Sometimes the characters are paid actors, and at other times real people as they live their lives. Such visual media can pose the same questions as textual narratives, asking viewers to take a step back and consider the nature of what is being seen, and how they are to understand what they see, just as readers have to ask how they are expected to approach a certain reading.

As mentioned above, the documentary novel can be understood as a subgenre of the historical novel, one which presents a recent set of events and often takes on fictional representations of real-world people as its characters. In *Telling the Truth*, Foley describes the documentary novel as a work which “purports to represent reality by means of agreed-upon conventions of fictionality, while grafting onto its fictive pact some kind of additional claim to empirical validation” (25). That is, the documentary novel tells a fictionalized version of a real-world story, and brings in evidence of the real world it

represents in order to complete the illusion of a real tale dressed as fiction.

The twentieth-century saw the rise of the modernist documentary novel. In this type of work, Foley sees the textual relation between the real world and that presented in the novel as an “analogous configuration,” as “a process of mediation, through which the universal aspects of the referent are replicated in the individual features of the mimetic text” (65). Fictional characters and events are no longer seen as reflections of real-world figures and occurrences, but as abstract representatives of those things. The inclusion of documentary evidence reinforces this configuration. Also, documentary novels take on a greater critical dimension by parading their “status as interpretation but call[] into question the very necessity of offering determinate judgements of a concretely historical referent” (185). Again, these novels present abstract representations rather than direct reflections, but ask whether the abstractions themselves are valid. The generic contract “requires that the reader participate in a *deconcretization* of the text’s historical referent. The modernist documentary novel is as preoccupied with telling the truth as were its forebears, but it questions whether this truth has much to do with ‘the facts’” (186). This new position of questioning its own validity, in Foley’s mind, caused a split of the historical novel into two sub-genres: the metahistorical documentary novel and the pseudofactual novel.

The pseudofactual novel, or fictional autobiography, has little to add to my discussion of documentary fiction. It “represents an artist-hero who assumes the status of a real person inhabiting an invented situation” (Foley 25). As in Cohn’s fictional biographies, the protagonist is invented by the author, but the work is written in such a way that it would appear that the character is real. In these works the documentary

materials “serve not to validate a posteriori the assertions of the text’s narrative voice but to authenticate its sincerity” and this information is invoked “not because [authors] pretend to be writing history or biography but because they wish to assure us that they tell the truth. This truth is not a ‘factual’ truth, and they do not intend to fool us into thinking that it is” (133, 111). In this case, the truths being told are true *in the fiction*, but not truths in the real world. The primary value of works of this type seems to be entertainment, rather than an epistemological and/or ontological evaluation of the real world.

The second type, the metahistorical novel, is quite important for our discovery of how modern documentary fiction came about. The metahistorical novel continually questions “the facts” which it presents, such that “[d]ocumentation serves either to highlight the epistemological problem of historical inquiry or to affirm a truth transcending the realm of the concrete altogether: it no longer reinforces the self-evidence of the text’s representation of a particular moment in the historical dialectic” (Foley 186). The metahistorical documentary novel moves toward a critical assessment of *what is known* about that reality. Is the historical record accurate and reliable? Or, is it within the realm of reasonable possibility that an author’s fictional version has the potential to be closer to what actually happened than what is written in the historical record? The metahistorical documentary novel “brings in documentary ‘facts’ only to question their ontological status rather than to assume a priori their value as registers as truth” (200) and further, “to highlight the provisional nature of historical knowledge” (230). We can here again see a conflation of the fact/fiction border. No longer are these hybrid novels simply retelling stories: they are now posing direct challenges to what is known about the real

world. They are not fictional abstractions or representations of past historical events and people, but critical assessments of the knowledge-base about those events and figures, and may even force a re-evaluation of that base. Such novels include an author-reader contract which asks the reader to question elements of the real world, and such queries may have the potential to affect that world.

Foley also describes a third type of the modern documentary novel, the Afro-American documentary novel. Similar to some historical novels, this form offers a re-evaluation of social situations, though mediated through a specific lens. The Afro-American documentary novel discusses racial issues, and “its documentary effect derives from the presentation of facts that subvert commonplace constructions of reality” (25-26). It challenges the truth-value of facts used to support the status quo: the Afro-American documentary novel aims to undermine the bourgeois hegemony that surrounds its creation. As such, it includes documentary evidence “to probe certain assumptions — about race, history, social order — that the reader might hold to be self-evident” (234). The specificity of the questioning and the goal of subverting facts related to race and race-relations establishes the Afro-American documentary novel as its own form of documentary novel.

Of these three types, the most important for my argument is certainly the metahistorical documentary novel. Its metahistorical examination calls into question the very idea of truth — is it possible to discuss the recent past truthfully? The very documentary nature of the genre challenges the reader to reassess what he or she knows about the real world. This leads the reader toward the fact/fiction borderline, forcing a new understanding about how we read and make sense of documentary fictions and the

genre itself.

In *That Art of Difference: 'Documentary-Collage' and English-Canadian Writing*, Manina Jones highlights a form of literature similar to the documentary novel. Noting that documentary evidence often appears in Canadian literature, Jones examines that use in poetry, prose, and drama. Her term “documentary-collage” describes the process of using documents in literature because “its central gesture is citation, and the term ‘collage’ draws from the visual arts the sense of fragmentation and radical recontextualization [Jones] want[s] to indicate in that activity” (14). The documentary-collage refers specifically to literary works which incorporate their documents *directly* in the text. Sometimes treated as found-poems or similar works, this new usage offers (at least) two perspectives to the reader: first, he or she is given the opportunity to consider the work as a piece of the historical record, as an actual document. Secondly, the reader may take a subjective approach to the work, incorporating the document into the reading and treating it as a poem, a fiction, or whatever the reader chooses. Also, “the documentary-collage may provoke a ‘truth-testing’ challenge to the authority and autonomy of the documents it cites, and consequently the belief systems and institutions they represent” (16). When this occurs, we can see that in some cases the documentary-collage functions in much the same manner as the metahistorical documentary novel, challenging the very facts that the document seems to authorize.

Along with the rise of the modern documentary novel we must consider another form of writing which came to light during the twentieth-century. Works of New Journalism also blend fact and fiction to tell their tales, and found a great deal of success through authors such as Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, and Norman Mailer. There is little

doubt that *The Executioner's Song* and *In Cold Blood* have had an effect on more recent documentary novels. Properly viewed as a form of the fictional (auto)biographic novel, works of New Journalism “appropriat[e] fictional devices (including even stream-of-consciousness techniques) to tell about the inner life of real persons” (Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction* 94). As will be seen below, the New Journalism relies on conventions which had been previously reserved for fiction.

Wolfe, possibly the best-known and most consistent of the New Journalists, has said much on the matter. His first publication using this new reporting technique is often quoted as a primary example. Titled “There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm) . . . . .,” the article first appeared in *Esquire* magazine in 1963. Wolfe later describes his essay:

Its virtue was precisely in showing me the possibility of there being something “new” in journalism [. . .]. It was the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space . . . to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally. (37)

New Journalists began to incorporate the techniques previously reserved for fiction-making genres to write their reports. For example, we can consider stream-of-consciousness writing and Cohn’s ideas about psycho-narration and the transparent mind to be nearly one and the same. Rather than offering descriptions from the point of view of an objective journalist, Wolfe began to relate details to the reader by climbing “into the

eye sockets, as it were, of the people in the story” (43). This new writing style met with varying degrees of success, and Wolfe found that the new mode of reporting that he and his contemporaries employed was breaking down boundaries.

Wolfe also finds that the New Journalist techniques brought creativity to the journalism genre, a genre that had for too long focussed on simply “the facts.” Says Wolfe: “[w]e were moving beyond the conventional limits of journalism, but not merely in terms of technique. The kind of reporting we were doing struck us as far more ambitious, too. It was more intense, more detailed” (43, 45). He and his fellow New Journalists wanted to tell the story and give “the subjective or emotional life of the characters,” and that “only through the most searching forms of reporting was it possible, in non-fiction, to use whole scenes, extended dialogue, point-of-view, and interior monologue. Eventually I, and others, would be accused of “entering people’s minds” . . . But exactly! I figured that was one more doorbell a reporter had to push” (45). But Wolfe says nothing about who is supposed to answer the door.

New Journalism requires a reporting aspect, and the author needs to delve into the story and its background. It is, first and foremost, journalism. The gathering of information on the scene, where and when the events being reported happened, from the very people that were involved, these are things that documentary novels need not do. It was of this side of New Journalism that most literary types, Wolfe believed, were simply unaware (37). And it is this aspect which helps to separate the genres of New Journalism and documentary fiction, marking them as distinct forms of writing.

As more authors began to employ the techniques of the New Journalism, room had to be made in both the historiographical and literary (fiction-making) realms. Cohn

notes that New Journalist authors often used subtitles such as “True Life Novel” or “Nonfiction Novel” to describe their works (and indirectly address their readers), and this use of oxymoronic subtitles “makes it clear that they were largely written and read for their transgressive shock value” (*Distinction of Fiction* 29, also see 94). Presumably terms such as “nonfiction novel” are not intended to be separated into their component parts. Yet, if left obscure and undefined, what value do they hold?

While there is no doubt that the New Journalism and the modern documentary novel are related, they still exist as separate genres. New Journalists may also attempt to blend fact and fiction, but their hybrids operate in a different manner, and the success of those hybrids is an open question. With regard to the New Journalism, Foley argues that some readers “have stated that the credibility of the narrative collapsed for them when they discovered that certain details had been invented or significantly changed to enhance the thematic patterning of the text” (Foley 15). The destabilization of facts and truths through a fictional/factual writing style, in the minds of some readers, does not support the idea that reality is “unknowable,” but rather causes some readers to feel *deceived* by what they have read (15). And, if the reader feels deceived when reading, the author-reader contract ceases to function, for the reader can no longer trust the author. Rather than artfully blending fact and fiction, the New Journalist attempts to eradicate the line separating the two realms altogether, forcing the reader into a similar situation as that caused by postmodernism and emplotment.

As a critical response to Wolfe’s discussion of New Journalism, Michael J. Arlen’s “Notes on the New Journalism” is suspicious of Wolfe and the New Journalist attempts to modify boundaries. While Arlen accepts that New Journalism may present

avariéd world-view, he also notes that this position has serious problems. If the journalist “is to tell it as a *real* story, an account of an event that actually happened, I think that there is a very deep requirement on the part of the reader (usually not expressed, or not expressed at the time) that the objects in the account be real objects” (46). Arlen’s argument is that as a form of journalism, New Journalism *must* be honest with the reader. But all too often the New Journalist side-steps this requirement by “[giving] up the task of telling us of the actual arrangement of the objects, or at any rate of trying to find out, get close to it, in favor of the journalist’s *own* imposed ordering of these objects” (46). If the author/journalist is allowed to interpret the facts to varying degrees, and his or her editor fails to enforce reality, New Journalism can explode the fact/fiction boundary. Even setting fictionality aside, it would seem that the particular type of historiography given in works of New Journalism relies heavily on emplotment to form narratives.

The New Journalists wield a great deal of power over their works, infusing their words with objective details and subjective summaries. Above all, Arlen found the real failure of New Journalism to be “the New Journalist’s determination and insistence that we shall see life largely on *his* terms. [. . .] there is something troubling and askew in the arrogance — and perhaps especially in the personal unease — that so often seems to compel the New Journalist to present us our reality embedded in his own ego” (47). He explains that the characters in New Journalism are real people, “*nobody’s* creatures, certainly not a journalist’s creatures — real people whose real lives exist on either side of the journalist’s column of print. The New Journalist is in the end, I think, less a journalist than an impresario” (47). I might add, one who is always free to writes himself or herself into the text. It seems that in New Journalistic accounts, there is no real separation

between author and narrator. Even when the journalist enters the characters' minds, and writes from varying perspectives, it is ultimately the real world that is being discussed. Whereas in fiction the presence of a fictional world allows us to complete the separation between writer and narrator, the very fact that New Journalism is reporting about the real world forces the reader to associate author with narrator. Or at the very least, that is the expectation brought by the reader as part of the tenuous author-reader contract in New Journalism.

Returning to the documentary novel, some New Journalists see the genre as a failure. During his interview with George Plimpton, Truman Capote remarks that the documentary novel is "a popular and interesting but impure genre, which allows all the latitude of the fiction writer, but usually contains neither the persuasiveness of fact nor the poetic altitude fiction is capable of reaching. The author lets his imagination run wild over the facts!" (50). I find it fascinating that Capote is so suspicious of documentary fiction writers, who are expected to use the very tools of their genre, particularly invention and imagination. Simultaneously, he has no problem with journalists, whose realm is supposed to be *nonfictional*, using those very same tools to report "facts." To be fair, Capote does comment that the New Journalism and figures such as Wolfe do not have "the proper fictional technical equipment. It's useless for a writer whose talent is essentially journalistic to attempt creative reportage, because it simply won't work" (50). He sees a marked distinction between the attempts made by the New Journalists to write nonfiction novels, and his own. Nevertheless, his work, *In Cold Blood*, is considered to be a paradigmatic example of New Journalistic writing, through his manipulation of factual information with fiction-making techniques to tell a story about the real world.

### **From Theory to Analysis**

By understanding all of these elements, the reader may begin to make sense of the documentary fiction. The importance of the historical development of documentary fiction serves to situate the genre, and introduce the ideas necessary for my discussion of these works. In the next chapter, I argue that documentary fiction is a genre unto itself, and must be treated as such. While distinct from works of both historiography and fiction, there is no doubt that documentary novels draw upon these two realms. I will use Crosbie's *Paul's Case* as an example to show that novels of this genre are incomplete hybrids, and that their presentation of hybrid realities forces readers to constantly effect the very separation between fact and fiction that the theory claims should not be done.

## Chapter Two

Lynn Crosbie's *Paul's Case*: Writing and Reading a Hybrid Reality

In her exploration of the fictionality of literature, Cohn maintains that the historical novel is to be treated as a fiction, and not as a work of hybrid design. While examining *War and Peace*, she goes so far as to deny its status as a hybrid novel altogether (*Distinction of Fiction* 153). For Cohn and some of her fellow narratologists, works of historical fiction should always be read first and foremost as fictional, and not as historical commentaries using the conventions of fiction. Though history does play a role in these works, historical fiction “allows for the conjunction — in the same time and place, when and where they experience the same event — of figures that stem from different ontological realms” (153).<sup>4</sup> That is, in fictions the purely fictional characters may interact with historical characters who are based on real-world historical figures. Furthermore, the fictional elements of *War and Peace* are often quite visible, such as when Tolstoy is able to present an unknown side of Napoleon by employing psycho-narration to give the reader access to the Frenchman’s thoughts. As Cohn writes, “[c]learly, when it comes to presenting the inner life of historical figures, the historian’s and novelist’s narrative domains are most sharply and most noticeably contrasted” (154). She sees no attempt on the part of the historical novelist to act as a historiographer, to give historical information: historical fact serves as a backdrop only, and fiction takes centre stage.

If we accept this argument, we arrive at an easy solution for the reader and any confusion surrounding the author-reader contract that might arise when reading a

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<sup>4</sup> Cohn gives an example from *War and Peace*, citing the appearance of fictional Pierre Bezúkhov and Napoleon Bonaparte, a real person (153).

documentary novel. Cohn's theory applies just as easily to documentary novels, meaning they should not be read as hybrids — they are just fictions. Indeed, in documentary novels the mix of factual elements with a fictional narrative may create a good story, but we must leave it at that. In the case of the historical novel, the result is a “total de-realization of historical events” such that they lose their historical reality (157). Anything transferred from the real world into the work becomes part of the fictional world — in such works, the real world simply ceases to exist. One might say that history is subsumed by fiction, at least as far as historical and documentary fictions are concerned.

On the other hand, it is difficult to maintain a fiction-first-and-foremost ideology when we take into account certain components of documentary fiction. Specifically, the genre itself admits to a necessary reliance on the historical record. While the historical novel may discuss historical figures, its primary characters are fictional creations. In contrast, documentary fictions usually tell the stories of real people, and the fictional lives they are given have been written as representations of the lives the real-world individuals actually lived. We must admit that, as a documentary novel, Crosbie's *Paul's Case* simply would not exist were it not for the existence of the criminals Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, and their crimes. Certainly a similar novel *could have* been written, perhaps even by Crosbie, but it would not be the same novel. There is a high probability that this hypothetical *Paul's Case* would not have the social and emotional resonance of the real novel, and would be read much differently if the crimes had not happened.

We cannot deny the hybrid status of historical and documentary novels, or the fact that they meld fact and fiction. However, we may assess the failure or success of the hybrid reality they present. Cohn admits that the manner in which a reader reacts to the

derealisation given in a historical novel “is conditioned by the degree to which the historical material concerned touches on his or her values and sensitivities” (159). While the changes made when facts are blended with fiction may produce no results, it is equally possible and even likely that the alterations may resonate, either positively or negatively, with the reader. The resonance felt by the reader occurs in part because of his or her knowledge of the events being fictionalized.

Given her claim that historical novels are fictions only, I find Cohn’s admission that the complete derealisation may affect the reading to be suspicious. If the historical fiction is just a fiction, it would seem improbable that knowledge of real-world historical facts could alter one’s reading. Her perspective seems particularly strange considering Cohn’s admission that her original views regarding *The English Patient* changed when she learned new biographical information about the real-world individual on whom Michael Ondaatje based his protagonist (159). If knowledge of the real world can affect how a reader reads, then we cannot say that the facts in the historical novel are subsumed by the fiction. Quite the opposite is true: the facts become an integral part of the narrative, and must be considered alongside the fictional elements. In documentary novels too, the fiction does not override the facts — as can be seen in the following chapter, Crosbie’s *Paul’s Case* is a perfect example of a work in which the fictionalization of a factual story did resonate with readers, a lot of them. If real-world facts have the potential to alter our reading and reaction to works which rely in part on those facts, then the inclusions of historiographical truths does more than just flesh out the story or support the analogous configuration: these truths have meanings, resonance, and force. As such, they cannot be glossed over by the presence of fiction, and we must

examine what this means for documentary fiction.

The problems associated with reading a documentary novel manifest themselves in a number of ways. The terms of the author-reader contract for a documentary novel are easy to understand, but impossible to meet, and this is why works of this genre may cause difficulties for the reader. The root of the problem is the genre itself, specifically the hybrid nature of the documentary novel and its reliance on the real world. As a hybrid, the work attempts to combine the factual and fictive elements together to form a single narrative. I argue that in doing so, the documentary novel, through the author-reader contract, places antithetical demands on the reader. First, the author-reader contract requires that the reader of the text be an informed reader. While he or she is not expected to be omniscient, the informed reader should have some background knowledge about the events being discussed. The contract also requires that the text be read as a whole, such that the reader does not isolate specific words or phrases from the work in order to judge them as fictional or factual. By isolating those phrases, the reader is violating the author-reader contract. Foley writes that

[i]t is the configuration of the text as a whole, not the presence of isolable elements, that signals to the reader the author's fictive or nonfictional intentions. Even when these elements are documentary particulars presumably making an unmediated reference to historical actuality (Scott's historical footnotes [in *Waverley*], for example), they are subordinated to the terms of a generic contract that guides the reader's comprehension of the text as a whole. (60)

The hybrid documentary novel must be read in such a way that the factual elements and

the fictional read together as one. As the passage from Foley suggests, this is true even when the facts are transparent and unmediated, transferred directly from historiography to the documentary work.

Meanwhile, an informed reader possessing background information about the subject matter being discussed in the novel is capable of reading the text and isolating many of those very fictional or factual elements which the contract states should not be isolated. For example, the passages of psycho-narration in *Paul's Case* are fictional, and stand out as such when they are juxtaposed with real details about the crimes. It is my argument that because the reader is informed, and thus capable of making those distinctions, he or she does not read the text as a hybrid because the reader *cannot* read the text as such. This is because, when it comes to reading sentences or passages in the specific work being discussed, the reader may easily recognize which elements have been invented. The informed reader is prejudiced to read in a certain manner, one which causes the very separation the author-reader contract says should not be done.

In the theory surrounding the documentary novel (along with the historical novel), it appears as though the two main requirements invoked by the author-reader contract pose no problem. However, we can see that these two demands simply cannot work together when a real reader is reading. Given the inseparability of the elements which form a hybrid such as the documentary novel, it is odd that the theory even asks for an informed reader. Consider the fact that when reading, knowledge of the past historical facts and details which inform the documentary aspects of the novel allows the informed reader to make the very separation between fact and fiction that the theory says should not be done. Furthermore, by having knowledge of the conventions of fiction, such as the

signposts of fictionality discussed in the previous chapter, the informed reader is further able to isolate the fictive elements of the text. Why is it that the theory requires an informed reader, when the very knowledge the reader must possess allows for the breaking of the author-reader contract?

Finally, when it comes to intentions and the (social) contract which exists between author and reader, one must remember that documentary novels do more than just tell stories: they attempt to reshape how we tell the truth, to alter the ways in which we think about historical fact. The documentary novel, especially the metahistorical documentary novel, calls for a reading that is simultaneously factual and fictive. However, for an exploration of what is known, for a critique and analysis of the historiographical “truths” presented in the novel, the reader must be able to enact the very separation and isolation that the theory disallows. Practical application of the theory is impossible with the recognition that one cannot read and analyse the documentary novel for its metahistorical implications without breaking the unity of the work.

As the documentary novel is situated as a subgenre of the historical novel, it may be useful to take a step backward and look at the parent genre as well. When dealing with the historical novel, much the same scenario arises: according to the theory a hybrid reading is possible, yet those same antithetical demands are also placed on the reader of the historical novel. The reader is asked to read the work as a whole, yet because of his or her informedness that reading is prejudiced, resulting in a failure to accept the hybrid reality that is represented in the historical novel. This problem has been recognized in the past, by one of the original masters of the historical novel, Alessandro Manzoni. An essayist and an author, his novel *I promessi sposi*, or *The Betrothed*, was considered on

par with Walter Scott's historical fictions. Manzoni's case is interesting, however, when one reads his *On the Historical Novel*, which includes his theory about and eventual rejection of the historical novel as a working genre. This work highlights the same problem for the historical novel as shown with the documentary novel.

Manzoni writes of two groups of critics who make separate demands on the historical novelist: those in favour of a clear separation of fact from fiction, and others, who argue that the separation is already much too apparent. To the first group Manzoni replies that writing to maintain the separation is impossible, as the very nature of the genre and the form of the historical novel require that fact and invention be blended together. The hybrid historical novel must include both historical fact and the verisimilar. Discussing the historical novelist, Manzoni writes "[a]fter all, you want him to give you, not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way, you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history" (67-68). For critics to ask that there be a clear separation of fact from invention is to ask the novelist to strip the skeleton of its flesh, or else leave it bare.

The second group of critics asks that the historical novelist write in such a way that fact and invention be inseparable, that the work be a concrete unity. Manzoni replies to this group by arguing that they are asking the impossible, for there is no such unity to be achieved. Fact and invention are different and distinct, and the author and the reader must be able to differentiate between real (historical) beliefs and poetic (invented) beliefs. When reading a historical novel, Manzoni argues, "the reader knows well enough that he will find there [. . .] things that occurred and things that have been invented, two different objects of two different, fully contrary, sets of belief" (70). The reader of the historical

novel should know that the work has both factual and fictional elements, and will recognize and isolate them from the text when reading.

When reading *On the Historical Novel* it becomes clear that Manzoni is pointing to the same problem between theory and practice as related to the historical novel that I have highlighted for the documentary novel. Furthermore, he argues that the two sets of critics are simultaneously correct and incorrect in their critiques and assumptions:

both are wrong in wanting both effects from the historical novel, when the first effect [clear separation of fact and fiction] is incompatible with its form, which is narrative, and the second [a unified narrative] is incomparable with its materials, which are heterogeneous. Both critics demand things that are reasonable, even indispensable; but they demand them where they cannot be had. (72)

The root of this problem, Manzoni states, can be located easily: the requirements of the historical fiction genre itself are at fault:

the historical novel is a work in which the necessary turns out to be impossible, and in which two essential conditions cannot be reconciled, or even one fulfilled. It inevitably calls for a combination that is contrary to its subject matter and a division contrary to its form. Though we know it is a work in which history and fable must figure, we cannot determine or even estimate their proper measure or relation. In short, it is a work impossible to achieve satisfactorily, because its premises are inherently contradictory. (72)

As a hybrid, the historical novel is unsuccessful because it cannot resolve the differences

between the distinct realms of fiction and historiography. Similar to a genetic defect passed from parent to child, the problems of the hybrid historical novel are also exhibited in documentary novels, and thus they suffer the same fate as their forebears.

This is not to say that the conclusions reached for both genres are closed to interpretation. For example, Manzoni anticipates a possible critique, asking the reader to consider whether it is viable to compare historical fiction to history proper. Inevitably, he argues, such a comparison must be accepted: “[s]ince the historical novel finds one of its sources in the peculiarly historical, it should, to this extent, be compared to history” (76). Conversely, if historical fictions cannot be compared to history, what can they be compared to? Manzoni’s argument reminds the reader that historical fictions do reference the actual, historical world, and that such fictions need these real-world references to form their narratives. The same applies to documentary fiction, the only difference being the greater temporal distance between author and subject matter for historical novels than for documentary novels.

There exists a problem with this discussion, however. I have stated above that it is the genre of the documentary novel that raises issues for the author-reader contract, and which ultimately causes problems for the reader. One might ask why it is that the *genre* is the culprit, i.e., why not blame the theorists and the shortcomings of their theories? As already noted, there is a disconnect between what appears to be a sound theory, and practical application of that theory. Perhaps it is the theorists who have gone astray? In response, I argue that we must first recognize that the genre is at least partly to blame. In order to create a theory of the documentary novel, the theorist must first have an example of a documentary novel to theorize about. A theory which came first would be

hypothetical only, for without a concrete work to use for comparison, such a theory could not be tested. Second, and more important, the genre itself is based on a faulty premise: it assumes that a working combination of fact and invention is achievable. Manzoni concluded that the historical novel is a “species of a false genre which includes all compositions that try to mix history and invention” (81). It is the genre which fails from the outset precisely because it attempts to do what cannot be done; by trying to combine two ontologically distinct realms, the hybrid reality is immediately suspect.

However, this does not absolve the theorists of all responsibility about the disconnect between theory and practice. Documentary novels, along with the very notions of genre, are still human inventions, and they too must be recognized as part of the problem. Nederveen Pieterse writes that when we talk about hybrids, we must be aware that hybridity

is meaningless *without* the prior assumption of difference, purity, fixed boundaries. Meaningless not in the sense that it would be inaccurate or untrue as a description, but that without an existing regard for boundaries it would not be a point worth making. Without reference to a prior pathos of purity and boundaries, of hierarchies and gradient of difference, the point of hybridity would be moot. (94)

This being the case, we cannot talk about documentary fiction as a hybrid without first recognizing the separateness of the realms of fact and fiction. At the very least, we must recognize that much of the discourse about fiction and historiography, such as Cohn’s, understands them to be ontologically distinct. Simultaneously, while arguments such as those presented by Foley recognize the hybridity of documentary and historical fictions,

they discuss them in a manner which assumes those works are *successful* hybrids, or fail to mark the distinction between ideal and unsuccessful hybrids. So while the genre is confusing in itself, the disconnect is also a result of theorists failing to tailor their theories to fit the varying degrees of hybridity.

Bringing this discussion back to the author-reader contract, and the ultimate confusion the documentary novel may cause, it is best to work by example: in this instance, *Paul's Case: The Kingston Letters*, by Lynn Crosbie. The reader must approach the novel knowing that it is an exploration of the in-betweens and unknowns of the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, and as a documentary fiction the novel hybridizes fact and fiction into a concrete whole. The author's preface to her novel reveals this contract, albeit in guarded terms:

This is a critical enterprise, an exploration of the crimes of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka as a work of historical fiction. Works of imaginative investigation, these "letters" are not intended as truth claims. They are, however, designed to explore and invent a series of conjectures, to tell the truth, in Emily Dickinson's words, *slant*.

References to persons living and dead are purely fictional, and designed as imaginative and analytical responses to extant portraits of these individuals. (viii)

First, the language of this disclaimer reveals the method and creation of *Paul's Case*: "historical fiction"; "imaginative" and not "truth claims"; "purely fictional" references — according to Crosbie, the novel may be read as a fiction. Yet these must be contrasted with terms such as "critical enterprise," "to tell the truth," and "analytical responses,"

which reveal that the novel may also be read as factual. When the disclaimer is read in its entirety, and these elements and the novel taken en masse, the reader can begin to know the author-reader contract at work in *Paul's Case*.

Theoretically, the author-reader contract demands an informed reader, one with knowledge of the background information about the events and people described. As I have argued above, this reader is able to read and isolate many of the fictional and factual elements in a given work. According to Foley, “[t]he writer assumes that the reader will possess the ‘competence’ to know how to understand each particular, and that the ‘tacit knowledge’ undergirding this competence is the knowledge of generic conventions shared by writer and reader alike” (40). This says that the reader of *Paul's Case* must look at the novel as a hybrid work belonging to the documentary fiction genre, and thus be directed by the tenets of that genre. The work must be read as a hybrid unity, without isolating passages of the narrative and marking them as factual or fictive. Finally, the reader must know something about the historiographic events and people which the novel references and which inform *Paul's Case* throughout. The reader must be informed.

As an example of a metahistorical documentary novel, we cannot read *Paul's Case* as a simple narrative. Instead we must read it for what it says about the nature of documented truth and what it says about the people and the crimes which inform its subject matter. Crosbie's preface reveals that her work is set as “a critical enterprise, an exploration,” thus leaving the reader with little doubt that this too is part of the author-reader contract which is at work in *Paul's Case*. While the novel does explore the ideas involved in creating a hybrid mix of truth and invention, its ultimate goal is a reinterpretation of the facts; in doing so the novel *says something* about the crimes.

In this particular case, the author-reader contract may also be informed by the paratextual and extratextual documents available to the reader: interviews with and commentary by Crosbie herself all reveal the same methodology at work. While the spectre of intentionalism raises its head here, we must remember that the author-reader contract is not defined by authorial intentions, only influenced by them. If, as is quite often the case, the intentions and the conventions of the genre which define the author-reader contract fail to meet, it is always the genre which takes precedence.

While intentions cannot serve as a means for finding the author-reader contract at work in *Paul's Case*, we can admit that they have some measure of utility. Though I earlier chastised Foley for employing intentions in *Telling the Truth*, she recognizes that in some cases authorial intentions must be taken into account with a broader context in mind. Following the theory of Robert Weimann, Foley argues that in lieu of “intentions” we could turn toward a different, though still loaded, term such as “genesis.” This word, while still describing the basic conditions informing the creation of a work, “encompasses not merely the subjective wills of authors as individuals but the ‘total context of which the individual ‘generative intention’ is only a factor’” (Foley quoting Weimann, 61). The genesis of *Paul's Case* takes into account the possibility that Crosbie may have had specific intentions for the work, and even if she failed to transmit them into the novel, those intentions still influenced her writing. Thus we can say that the author-reader contract of *Paul's Case* is influenced (but not defined) by the intentions, or genesis, that went into the creation of the work.

Generally speaking, the author-reader contract of *Paul's Case* is easily recognizable. Unfortunately, due to the very nature of the hybrid genre, it is impossible

for the reader to commit herself to the terms of that contract. First, in order to provide the following analysis of the work, I am forced to immediately break the unity that should be left unbroken. In providing specific passages from Crosbie's novel in order to make my argument, I will by necessity have to isolate those passages from the remainder of *Paul's Case*. When taken as excerpts, the passages will lack the proper context needed to fully understand them, so the reader should always bear in mind that the passages I cite have been dissociated from the greater novel. Furthermore, while I may consciously try to maintain the hybrid illusion and keep to the terms of the author-reader contract, my knowledge of the facts of the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, along with what I know about the crafting of the novel, my awareness of the rules of the genre and the conventions of fiction laid out by Cohn, all of these variables must be factored into my reading and analysis. I am a prejudiced reader. That being said, I must also note that like the informed reader discussed in the theory, I am not omniscient. There are gaps in my knowledge and experience, and such omissions may also affect my reading of Crosbie's novel.

### **Making Sense of *Paul's Case***

Many of the fictional elements of *Paul's Case* are easily recognizable, even for an uninformed reader lacking the background knowledge about the facts the text discusses. Returning to Cohn's signposts, we must first consider the idea of emplotment. Is Crosbie's novel emplotted? Postmodern in style and structure, the novel does not present the events it discusses in a chronological manner (beginning-middle-end), as most historiographical works do. This is not to say that there is no beginning of the story in *Paul's Case*, for obviously the Bernardo/Homolka crimes are the beginning: one need look no further than the photo of Bernardo on the cover to recognize this.

We might argue that given its quasi-historiographical status, *Paul's Case* may have some level of emplotment. The fact that the story elements of this narrative are taken from the (recent) historical past, and infused with meanings that do not necessarily belong to them, the novel may be emplotted after all. Some of the facts in the novel can be verified and justified by turning to outside sources. This question of emplotment depends on where we situate the novel itself: if *Paul's Case* is just a fiction, as Cohn would argue, then it be said to be plotted, but not emplotted. If the novel is a work of historiography, then it can be said to be emplotted. However, as a work of documentary fiction, *Paul's Case* draws upon both historiography *and* fiction, so what do we say about it? In this case, it seems that Cohn's first signpost cannot reveal much about the status of the work, simply because it defies being situated in one of those distinct realms.

Moving on, we can find numerous examples of Cohn's other signposts of fictionality in *Paul's Case*. For instance, the presence of psycho-narration is ubiquitous. Many of the fifty-two letters in the novel make use of internal narration, rendering the minds of the characters transparent for the reader. Turning to the third signpost, which states that fictions exhibit a clear separation between author and narrator, we find that Crosbie's novel certainly uses this narratological technique. An example of Bakhtin's polyglossia, the novel contains a number of different narrators: an avenger, a prison guard, the lifeless bodies of Kristen French and Tammy Homolka, the voices of Leslie Mahaffy and her parents, Karla Homolka, just to mention a few. It would seem that there is a concrete separation between author and narrator(s) in *Paul's Case*.

Against the evidence of this third signpost one might argue that perhaps this is the same voice speaking throughout, rather than separate narrators. One could claim that it is

indeed Crosbie speaking, and that Crosbie and the omniscient narrator are one. In response, I argue that this simply cannot be the case. Crosbie is the author of the text, but should not be mistaken to be the narrator as well. *Paul's Case* is most definitely a heterodiegetic novel, as the fiction is located in a fictional world quite distinct from our own, real, world. If sections and letters in the novel are not narrated by the individuals they discuss, then we must find their source to be an omniscient individual narrator capable of entering the minds of others, rendering their thoughts transparent, and appropriating the voices of whom the letters speak. A real-world author can write this way, but he or she is not able to actually enter the minds of individuals in the real-world. Because of the ontological distance between the real world and the fictional world of Crosbie's novel, we must admit that there is a recognizable disconnect between author and narrator where *Paul's Case* is concerned. Crosbie is the author of the text, its originator, and an inhabitant of the real world. The narrator is something, someone different, and exists only in the world of fiction. From this we can deduce that the novel must be treated, at least in part, as a fiction.

As readers, we are put in the unfortunate position of having to constantly shift our reading from one perspective to another, and each of these perspectives influences our understanding of the terms of the author-reader contract. As an informed reader, I can recognize that Crosbie is not the narrator, and can recognize that some of the things the characters say and do in each letter are part of the fictional elements which inform the novel. If the theory about documentary novels is to be believed, in most cases, no matter how closely those novels reference the real world, these inclusions are part of the hybrid world presented in the novel and must remain there.

Setting aside Cohn's signposts of fictionality, many of the fictional elements of the novel are quite easily recognizable. There are a number of instances from various letters which come across as fictional, and it is hard to take them as anything but invention. Letter thirty-eight, "The Avenger," is an example of fiction-making at work. In this letter, undercover vigilante Emma Peel is dispatched to see Karla Homolka in prison, to humiliate and torture her. The letter is laden with references to popular culture and *haute couture*, and the vigilante appears to enjoy her work: "[r]eferring to a page torn from the book [Karla] kept on her bedside table, I slice off her vagina" and later says "[w]hen she moans, I light a Silk Cut and burn I CRY into her chest. And stuff her snatch into her mouth. Lick that, darling" (131). For the most part, readers should recognize that this scenario is one of the more fictional elements of *Paul's Case*. Homolka has recently been released from prison and has appeared in the media, yet she exhibits no outward signs of the supposed abuse heaped upon her by the fictional avenger. No details about this situation have been released into the real world. Taken as a complete passage, the events described in the letter are almost certainly fictitious, a fantasy of inflicting humiliation, pain and misery on an individual whom the author may feel is deserving of such treatment. It is in sections such as this that the fictional elements of *Paul's Case* are apparent.

Even so, the clues given in this letter still reveal the real-world individuals the narrator refers to. The reader finds "Vain and highly intelligent: **proceed with caution**" and the following passage begins "I looked at the autopsy photograph of her sister. A child with rumpled hair, her eyes closed. A livid chemical burn covering half of her face and mouth. Someone capable of unspeakable rage has smothered her" (130)

While a specific individual is not named, the context of the letter tells us who the target is. The chemical burn refers to the disfigured face of Tammy Homolka, and thus we can conclude that it is Karla that the vigilante is seeking. Homolka herself is both vain and quite intelligent, as documented in journalist Stephen Williams's *Invisible Darkness* and *Karla: A Pact with the Devil*. The letters of *Paul's Case* are fictional, yes, but their entire existence depends on and constantly references the real-world people which they discuss. Homolka still lives and breathes, while the avenger only lives in the fictional world of Crosbie's novel. Even in the sections which are obviously fictional, the reader cannot avoid drawing connections to the real world upon which *Paul's Case* relies.

As I am an informed reader, what I know aids me in finding facts and truths in *Paul's Case* that are also true in the real world. Furthermore, in some cases I am able to find things that might not be as apparent to a reader less informed than myself. Given that there are limits to my knowledge, it is also possible that a reader more informed than I might find additional facts and truths that I fail to recognize. Later, by moving to extratextual sources, such as the true-crime accounts, interviews with Crosbie, and similar documents, I may find further corroborative evidence for what I already know to be true. This does admit that on occasion knowledge I acquire *after* reading the novel may affect my understanding and analysis of the text. However, I would argue that when reading a metahistorical documentary fiction, I am required to find further information about the topic being discussed. Whether it is textual or extratextual, I should gather that information so that I may commit myself to the metahistorical analysis about the nature of known historical truths, particularly those truths which are discussed in the novel. By taking into account these different levels of knowledge the reader may make sense of the

documentary fiction *Paul's Case*.

As I am an informed reader with a high level of background knowledge about the crimes and *Paul's Case*, Crosbie's documentary novel resonates within my ontological realm. While it is important to mark an ontological distinction between real and fictional worlds, and the truths of those worlds, documentary novels attempt to create an overlap of the two, by hybridizing fiction with a *known historical world*. As such, the world presented in that documentary fiction is not wholly fictional. Thus, we must admit that some or all of the truths presented the documentary novel are not restricted to the novel's hybridized reality, and therefore they must have a level of historical or real-world truth to them.

Though many of the factual and fictive passages are easily recognized, *Paul's Case* has the potential to trouble many readers, including those less informed and less prejudiced. This is especially true when one actually attempts a hybrid reading and an examination of the hybridized sections. Those passages which are heavily laden with elements of invention and fictional markers, but which also aim to tell the truth, sometimes come close to the hybrid ideal. Other sections of the novel, to a greater or lesser extent, serve to highlight the specific problem that I am arguing for: the novel may cause problems for the reader (and the author-reader contract) because of its hybridity. As I will show with the following examples, on occasion passages and letters in *Paul's Case* do come very close to the fact/fiction borderline. However, I argue that they never successfully straddle that border, and as such the novel is an unsuccessful hybrid.

We can find a near-successful synthesis of fact and fiction in letter four, "The Drugs that Killed Tammy." This passage is narrated from the first-person perspective of

Tammy Homolka, and we can see in this an instance of psycho-narration, as Tammy's thoughts are accessible to the reader. The passage is both touching, as it attempts to give a human face to the long-dead teen, and chilling, as the narration quickly reveals that it is not a live Tammy who is narrating, but a dead one, who is telling her tale from the grave. At one point the narrator recalls "I have watched the flesh fall from my bones lately, an analogue. As decay descends the pure white emerges: Paul's labour with the chamois; the unsteady movement of the handkerchief, soaked in halothane" (40). Later in the letter:

They will uncover me inch by inch.

The skeletonized body that rose to accuse him. I offered myself to this tenderness, the postmortem sweetness of combs, cotton, and light.

They dispatched me very quickly.

[ . . . ]

Thinking of me, barely alive, I wonder, of the dark swarm of the night crawlers, denuding me. (40-41)

Typically, psycho-narration ends when a character dies, and first-person narration past that point rarely appears in fiction — we do not see Goethe's Werther telling his tale after his death, but rather a shift in perspective to a character who speaks on his behalf. In this passage from Crosbie's novel, however, not only do we see an instance of psycho-narration, but the character who is speaking is dead. In this case, the presence of psycho-narration should signal to the reader that this passage is fictional, and even more so when we consider that the narrator is dead. Furthermore, we can question who is really speaking here — is the reader to assume that this is how the young girl spoke? The voice given to Tammy in these passages is hardly that of a typical teenage girl, and so the

reader must question the validity of the voice she has been given.

At the same time, this passage and the letter as a whole reveal and reflect a number of real-world details that are known to have occurred. Tammy Lyn Homolka, Karla's youngest sister, died just before Christmas of 1990 from asphyxiation after vomiting due to a combination of drugs and alcohol pressed upon her by the criminals. The exhumation of Tammy's body occurred on 20 July 1993, when investigators hoped that a second autopsy would provide evidence that would further implicate Bernardo and/or Homolka in the death of the young girl. However, the autopsy failed to reveal any conclusive evidence, and the body of Tammy Homolka was soon returned to the grave.

While the letter and the passage quoted above appear fictional at first glance, they are infused with facts from the real-world: Tammy was a real person, and she did die in part due to halothane and alcohol; also, her body was exhumed so that there could be a second autopsy. When approached by a less-informed reader than myself, such things may not be so easily recognized. However, the sufficiently informed reader should realize that many of the details related in this letter reflect the real world, and may easily separate those facts from the invented parts of the novel. While this hybridization comes close to an ideal fusion of fact with fiction, a full blend is impossible.

A similar effect is produced in letter twenty-one, entitled "Kristen." Also given from a first-person perspective (psycho-narration appears again), this letter tells of Kristen French's imprisonment at the Bernardo/Homolka home and the different abuses she suffers. One can read about her feelings of shame and anger, of fear, about her own worries that her parents must be concerned about their missing daughter. Part of this letter reads "I can't find you. / I am sleeping in a bed of branches by a creek. / I have no hair

left or clothes” (94). An uninformed reading of this quoted section may simply reveal that a naked and hairless Kristen is sleeping in the open. However, my informed reading reveals that this passage is also being narrated posthumously. I know the circumstances surrounding French’s death, and thus I am aware that her body was found in a ditch, naked, and her long hair had been shorn from her head. These events are mirrored in Williams’s *Invisible Darkness*, when the author describes the discovery of French’s body “in a ditch along Sideroad One” in Burlington, Ontario: “[t]he body was naked but intact; there was some kind of knife wound on the shoulder and her hair had been hacked off” (314). Here the hybrid fails precisely because I have a good idea about what really happened, and thus I know that the events discussed in this passage reflect the truth of the matter. I can also turn to the nonfiction account to find the facts of the crime. This makes it difficult to accept the quasi-fictional version presented by *Paul’s Case*.

Both of these letters include psycho-narration and, if one accepts the argument Cohn presents about her second signpost of fictionality, these letters should be read solely as fictions. Not only do these passages show the inner minds of their characters, but those individuals doing the narrating are dead. As the reader can see, two things which are impossible in the real world, transparent minds and posthumous speech, become tools for fiction-crafting in *Paul’s Case*. Even if the reader is able to take a step back and consider the possibility that the unnamed letter-writer in Crosbie’s novel is the one who is narrating, rather than Kristen or Tammy or one of the other characters, we must admit that as readers we are given access to an area that is inaccessible in the real world. There is overwhelming evidence pointing the reader in the direction of a fiction-reading author-reader contract. While these passages reflect reality and often directly relate details that

are known to be true of the crimes, the analogous configuration of the novel allows for this direct transfer of detail. In this case the analogy really is undisguised, as in these particular passages there is very little abstraction or mediation of what is being (re)presented, and a great deal of mirroring, albeit a slightly distorted mirror. The real-world facts are clearly there, but they are highlighted with a fictional light.

Though it may seem an extreme example, letter eight, “Pornography,” might just be the closest *Paul’s Case* comes to successfully hybridizing fact and fiction. The letter-within-a-letter bears the title “Man of My Dreams” and appears to be a letter written to a pornographic magazine by a female guard at a maximum-security Canadian penitentiary. It is a vivid, often lewd description of the guard and her sexual encounter with a segregated inmate named Paul — no last name given. Relying heavily on the context in which it is presented in order to make its point, the suggestion is that it is Paul Bernardo being discussed, and that the prison is the Kingston Penitentiary. The narrator writes

I wanted to tell you about this one experience I had with a guy in segregation. He’s pretty notorious, and I recognized him immediately. I’d always wondered if I would. Paul’s locked up most of the time, so I figured his dick must be aching to fire off, and I wanted to be the one to see each creamy spasm. (*Paul’s Case* 54)

The letter then continues with a description of the various sex acts the guard and Paul perform, all recorded by a video surveillance camera. At one point the narrator refers to Paul as a “little-girl killer” and expresses disappointment at the fact that he never climaxes, “since I thought he was into kinky loving” (55). Both of these phrases could be used to describe the real Bernardo.

This letter does reflect reality, though not to a great extent. The real Bernardo is in prison, and his cell is monitored twenty-four hours a day by a surveillance camera, meaning that the event could be watched and recorded, as the narrator suggests. While I have no concrete proof about whether this did or did not occur, given the fact that Bernardo is in a maximum security prison for multiple murders and is constantly segregated from the other prisoners, it is highly unlikely that this event occurred in real life, let alone as it is described in *Paul's Case*. It is more probable that the "Pornography" letter is fictional, but that is speculation only. In this instance, I must admit that I am not well-informed enough to prove or disprove the events described in the "Pornography" letter.

Interestingly, Crosbie does include a bibliographical entry for this passage, marking it as potentially true.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the letter appears the entry "*My husband can never know, but I'm not going to let Paul get away from me this time.*" These words are separated from the rest of the text by one or two lines, and they appear in italics as well (55). The letter is signed "— Lynette, Kingston," and like the "Paul" of the letter, there is no last name given. In the notes and bibliography included at the end of the novel, an entry is given for this letter showing that certain passages from the letter come from a letter directed to *Lusty Letters* written by someone named Lynette and entitled "Like Never Before." So it would seem that the "Pornography" letter, or at least parts of it, is real. Is this letter fictional, or a real document? One could make arguments for both sides. Perhaps a real Lynette exists, one who is a prison guard at the Kingston Penitentiary, had sex with Bernardo, and wrote the lusty letter that appears in *Paul's Case*. As stated

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<sup>5</sup> I discuss the bibliography included in *Paul's Case* later.

above, there is no concrete evidence to the contrary.

The notes and bibliographic entry may act as corroborative evidence to confirm the existence of a real-world Lynette. However, it is just as plausible that this is a case where Crosbie has used a found document and altered it to meet her own ends. The possibility that this letter is fictional could also serve to explain why the letter is so vivid, and why it has a similar intimation of revenge to it as was seen in “The Avenger,” discussed above. It would seem, then, that this letter comes very near to the ideal hybridization of fact and fiction that is sought, if an informed reader such as I really cannot tell the difference.

If the hybrid is nearly successful here, to what effect? Even if we admit that “Pornography” combines truth with fiction seamlessly, we must consider whether Crosbie has truly challenged the facts and highlighted the unknowns and in-betweens of the crimes. Ultimately, I must argue that she has not. This letter may pose a metahistorical challenge to the truth by revealing that there are some things that may not be known, but “Pornography” itself reveals very few unknowns about the crimes or criminals. Whether the guard/Bernardo sexual scenario actually occurred is an open question, but whatever the case, its happening postdates the crimes and trials. There is every reason to believe that Bernardo will spend the rest of his life in prison, and as such everything after his trial becomes secondary to the case.

The events described in “Pornography” have missed the climax, and are situated only in the denouement of the Bernardo story. While this letter may be titillating for some and viewed as an excellent act of revenge by others, the fact that “Pornography” deals with unknowns that may have happened after the fact means that this letter is of little

consequence for examining what actually occurred. Furthermore, we must remember that this is also a single instance of a complete hybrid, one isolated from of the novel. While “Pornography” may be a successful hybrid, this does not mean that we can immediately say the same of *Paul’s Case* as a whole.

### **Nonfiction**

Documentary fictions may make use of real-world elements to inform their hybridized narratives. However, I argue that that when such details are transplanted from the real world to the fictional world without any attempt to disguise them, this further reduces the possibility of a complete hybrid reading. Due in part to this mirroring effect, rather than a specific distortion, the facts can easily be separated from the invented segments of the novel. Imagine a *Paul’s Case* without Bernardo’s photo on the cover, with pseudonyms taking the place of the names of the real people, and situated in a locale different from the geographical sites named in Crosbie’s work. Such a novel might be read differently simply because it would not be immediately apparent that Bernardo and his victims were the subjects of the narrative. That might offer the reader a more believable fiction, or at least a more acceptable hybrid reality, allowing for further opportunity to create a story about the crimes.

Crosbie’s novel is more than just a fiction: by drawing upon so many real-world details and truths without altering them, the novel moves toward fact and a discussion of the ontological world which we inhabit. This is in part why *Paul’s Case* serves as such an excellent example for illustrating the problems faced by readers and the problematic nature of the documentary fiction genre. While the novel attempts to present a hybrid reality, the fact that the work draws so much of its material from the real world allows the

reader to break the unity. The terms of the author-reader contract cannot be maintained.

The journalistic true-crime accounts offered by Nick Pron, Stephen Williams, and Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns offer the reader many of the same details and scenarios as those represented in *Paul's Case*. However, in the true-crime works the details about the night Tammy Homolka died, French's imprisonment and the discovery of Mahaffy's body are reported as journalism. When these details are relayed in the true-crime works, they are not mediated through a hybridized or quasi-fictional lens. Though we must take emplotment into account, for the most part the details in the historiographical works are to be read as truths.

On occasion, Crosbie herself draws upon the true-crime to inform her own work, such as the inclusion of an excerpt from Pron's *Lethal Marriage* at the beginning of "The Drugs that Killed Tammy" which hints at Tammy's teen-crush on Bernardo. While both *Paul's Case* and the nonfiction accounts reveal similar or identical details, those in the true-crime works do not make any avert attempt to alter the truths. Those facts may be a brutal, in-your-face reality, but the reader knows that what he or she is reading is the truth. Or, at the very least, the reader approaches the work with the expectation of reading a mostly factual nonfiction account. For the most part the terms of the author-reader contract for the true-crime works are clear and straightforward: the works are factual, so they should be read as such. Thus the reader is expecting to read the facts about the crimes, despite the horrific descriptions included in the historiographies.

In the quasi-fictional version offered by Crosbie, there is always room for invention, for exploration and extrapolation, and the possibility of this mediation must be taken into account when reading. Her hybrid novel presents a point of view that says "this

*could* be true” or “this *might* be what happened” about a certain individual or situation. At times Crosbie’s reliance on the true-crime works can be seen in *Paul’s Case*, as many passages in the novel may be contrasted with their counterparts in the true-crime literature. It should be noted that in virtually all cases the true-crime works do give a more complete and detailed presentation and analysis of the known truths about the crimes when compared to the novel.

The true-crime texts often go into extensive detail, and in contrast one might expect the documentary fiction to be less detailed. As such, the novel leaves it to the reader to fill in the blanks, to examine those unknowns that Crosbie was highlighting. However, it is curious that at times Crosbie’s novel is so specific and detail-oriented that it becomes difficult to think of her words as fictional, or even as a hybridized version of the truth. This is especially true when the novel itself draws directly upon the journalistic reports, which detailed and examined the crimes without any attempt to hybridize them.

Taken as a whole, Crosbie’s novel may still raise specific questions about the unknowns of the crimes and questions about the nature of historical truth. Yet, since many of the truths are so easily recognizable, their use detracts from the hybridized reality of the novel. As an informed reader I do not wonder if French’s body was found in a ditch with no hair — I know it is true, and I do not question the veracity of that truth, despite Crosbie’s attempt to have me do so. While this might seem an extreme example, there are numerous details and facts, both great and small, told in *Paul’s Case* that are unmediated and easy to identify as real-world truths.

Interestingly, *Paul’s Case* does not rely solely on the combination of invention with details of the crimes and trials to form its narrative. Scattered throughout the novel

are a number of quotations from some of the documents that helped shape public knowledge of the case: excerpts from newspaper and media reports, passages from the true-crime works, as well as quotes from Bernardo and Homolka themselves. The second section of letter nine, “The Scarborough Rapist,” includes a passage from *The Toronto Sun* which discusses Bernardo’s interest in writing rap lyrics (58). A number of other examples can be found throughout the novel.

In letter twenty-four, “The Grand Illusion,” the narrator calls upon all three of the major true-crime works. At issue in this letter is the video evidence brought in at Bernardo’s trial versus the illusions wrought by Bernardo and Homolka about their respective roles in the crimes and what the videos actually revealed about those events. Part of the letter reads “[w]hat distinguishes this trial is the videotape evidence, an unprecedented assault on the Not Guilty plea” (100), and the reader is reminded that the videos heavily influenced the direction of Bernardo’s trial. The letter also notes that the true-crime works were informed by the video evidence: “It is film that governs the crime-literature: each extant book or article about the trial deploys *cinematic* as opposed to *literary* strategies” and that “[t]error is achieved in this literature through careful editing” (100, author’s emphasis). Beside these two sections the narrator has juxtaposed directly quoted or paraphrased excerpts from *Deadly Innocence* by Burnside and Cairns, which are followed later by a section from Pron’s *Lethal Marriage*.

While this letter may be considered a commentary on the nature of the video evidence and its influence on the true-crime works, “The Grand Illusion” serves to reinforce a similar reliance for the novel. Not only does Crosbie’s work rely on the fact that the crimes happened, but many parts of her narrative find their base in the

nonfictional, journalistic accounts written by others. The novel either reflects the author's/narrator's knowledge of the real-world facts, or else reflects the true-crime works, which are themselves set up as examinations of real-world facts.

What purpose do these excerpts and passages serve? For me as a reader they are not effectively synthesized into the greater schemata of the fact/fiction illusion, as each stands alone, can be easily recognized, and in turn can be found in their original sources.<sup>6</sup> While this may suggest that a great deal of information be gathered prior to reading *Paul's Case*, that does not seem to pose a problem for the idea of informed readers, with the added proviso that even well-informed readers are not omniscient. Yet the excerpts mentioned above, along with the newspaper articles and television media footage, all present a challenge: if I can find these exact passages in the news archives, am I really able to assume an attitude of fiction-reading when I read them in the documentary novel?

Furthermore, Crosbie herself recognizes her own dependence on the journalism offered by the true-crime works. Taking paratextual information into account, she acknowledges Pron, Burnside and Cairns, and Williams, "whose work greatly assisted my own research and trial-observations" (185). In the same section Crosbie claims to be "indebted to" many of the journalists and news outlets in the Toronto area for their coverage of the trial. While writing *Paul's Case*, she culled information from many reporters and their articles, and she cites those sources among the other bibliographic entries given at the end of the novel.

*Paul's Case* is situated in a recent past, one which came after the author became

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the passage from *Invisible Darkness* can be found on page 290; from *Deadly Innocence* on page 449; while *Lethal Marriage* is not quoted directly, the relevant section can be found between pages 269 and 280. Crosbie's novel does not include the respective page references for the passages given above.

conscious. As such, Crosbie has foreknowledge of the crimes and trials, having lived through them herself, and probably knows how they played out. Given the above evidence, we can only assume that this knowledge and experience went into the production of *Paul's Case*. As well, since the problems of the documentary novel and the author-reader contract deal with reading, it makes sense to take into account the consciousness lifespan of that reader. This is especially true when we remember that the reader, according to the theory, should be informed.

As an informed reader, I have also benefited from the fact that the Bernardo/Homolka crimes and trials occurred within my conscious lifespan. I can remember the names of Bernardo and Homolka in the news, and those of their victims, the police task force assigned to the case, the search for the beige Camaro, the fact that it was all taking place nearby — these things are in my memory. Taking this information and experience into account, I must admit that I am more informed than some, perhaps more informed than most. Given the time that has passed, my own recollections may be somewhat flawed, but there is no denying that the crimes happened, and that I was aware of them at the time. As such, I bring a unique level of informedness to my reading of *Paul's Case*.

Earlier I used the term prejudice to describe the informed reader and the fact that he or she may read the hybrid a certain way precisely because of what is previously known. While prejudice is a loaded term, fraught with negative connotations, if we look beyond those connotations and take the term at face-value, it does not pose any difficulties. We might be able to question whether a reader is informed enough, but this would be a subjective and difficult to determine measure in its own right. Can we

condemn a reader for being *too* informed? Doing so would place the failure of the hybrid on the shoulders of the reader, at least in part. Yet since every reader is different, and thus each will approach the novel with a different level of informedness, we cannot isolate the amount of knowledge the reader has about the events described in the novel as the fulcrum upon which the success or failure of the hybrid balances. I argue that we must always return to the theory and the genre to find the root of the problems faced by the documentary novel.

Were the theories to turn away from the requirement of an informed reader, this might resolve the problems of the unsuccessful hybridity in documentary novels. As illustrated above, the antithetical demands made by the hybrid's author-reader contract cause problems for the reader, along with the informed reader and the knowledge he or she brings to the reading. The failure of the hybrid reality comes about in part because the reader is easily able to recognize the factual elements of the documentary novel, and isolate them from the invention. If, however, the theory were to discard the call for an informed reader, some of the problems would disappear. The very lack of prejudice and previous knowledge would allow an uninformed reader to read the work "properly," to treat it as a unity. This would leave the hybrid intact, and thus that reader would be better able to accept the hybrid reality presented in the work.

Once again we may consider the example from Cohn about Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, when she writes that after learning further details about the protagonist of the novel, her "initial admiration [. . .] dropped down a few notches" (*Distinction of Fiction* 159). While this is an example of her opinion shifting toward the negative, in another anecdote Cohn notes that her "high estimation" of J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of*

*Petersburg*, a fictional novel which follows the author Dostoevsky as he mourns his dead stepson, was not altered when she learned that in reality the stepson outlived the real Dostoevsky by many years (159). Again, a certain level of uninformedness was brought to the reading: Cohn did not know that the real stepson lived longer than Dostoevsky when she first approached the novel. It is worth highlighting the fact that in this second case Cohn's lack of knowledge did not alter her opinion of the novel.

It is important to note that Cohn is discussing her admiration or estimation of the respective novels, not her *reading* of them. Cohn writes “though distortions of known facts in a historical novel may only occasionally detract from our value judgement, we do tend to approach this genre differently from other novelistic genres” (159). Nevertheless, these examples from Cohn reveal that it is possible for an uninformed reader, or a less-informed one, to find something of value in a work of historical or documentary fiction. I would note, however, that while an uninformed reader might treat the work as a hybrid, his or her uninformedness would eliminate the possibility of a metahistorical reading of the sort called for by Foley. If this were to happen, there would still be a partial failure of the author-reader contract, for the reader would be unable to make the connections between what is known to be true and what the author is drawing attention to, namely the unknown or untold truths. An uninformed reader would not be able to read the text for the metahistorical analysis it contains.

### **Lynn Loves Paul**

While further evidence of the resonance *Paul's Case* has in the real world will be provided in the following chapter, there is one specific letter in the novel that must be examined here. Letter fourteen, “The Journalist & the Murderer,” provides another

textual example of why the novel cannot be classified as just a fiction, and one in which the hybrid does more than just explore the unknowns. Here the narrator singles out a specific real-world individual for the subject: *Toronto Sun* journalist Christie Blatchford. The letter is preceded by two excerpts from newspaper reports, the first from one of Blatchford's reports in *The Toronto Sun* and the second from an article in *The Globe in Mail* stating that Blatchford was interested in writing her own book on the Bernardo/Homolka crimes and that she “*is the journalist Paul [Bernardo] hates the most*” (77).<sup>7</sup> “The Journalist & the Murderer” has been the subject of some controversy because, on the second page, separated from the rest of the text and printed in a different font, the reader finds the phrase “Christie loves Paul” (78). While this seems innocuous, one must remember that given the context of *Paul's Case*, the reader immediately realizes that it can be read as declaration of Blatchford's love for Bernardo. The reader must refer to the paratextual notes to learn that Crosbie cites the source of the offending phrase as graffiti found in Montréal's Jello Bar (179).

If the novel were simply fictitious, this would not pose a problem. Even as a hybridized representation, there really should not be an issue here, as the author of the hybrid is allowed to mix some invention into the narrative. However, sometimes this mixture of fact and invention travels beyond the world of the novel and has force in the real world. Foley argues that we must recognize the propositional force of fictional and documentary fictional utterances. By specifically referring to real events and people, a documentary fiction is empowered “to tell a particularly compelling truth” (Foley 43) and

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<sup>7</sup> These excerpts are themselves further examples of Crosbie drawing on real-world journalism to help craft her own work.

reference” (46). While reviewing Crosbie’s novel, *Toronto Star* book critic Philip Marchand comments that despite the preface/disclaimer at the beginning of *Paul’s Case*, the reader cannot pretend that the insinuation is fictional, cannot pretend that it “is not a blow, in some way, to the real Blatchford’s reputation.” While there are good arguments for fictionalizing real-world individuals, Marchand writes that Crosbie’s use of Blatchford and others in her novel is a “violation of decorum” (J19).

The real Christie Blatchford recognized that this letter was specifically referring to her, and she was quite offended at the very suggestion that she might harbour feelings for the criminal. Believing that the novel was defamatory in some way, Blatchford launched a lawsuit against Crosbie and the publisher of *Paul’s Case*. In his article “A book for the burning,” Gregory Boyd Bell wrote that a lawyer retained by *The Toronto Sun* dispatched letters to Crosbie and to the owner of Insomniac Press, claiming the novel defamed Blatchford. According to Bell’s report, the letter requested that the section of the novel in question be specifically labelled as fictional. Bell also noted that previous to the letters from the lawyer, publisher Mike O’Connor had sent copies of the novel to many of the journalists who had been responsible for covering Bernardo’s trial, and soon after he received a phone call from Blatchford, who was “yelling and cussing” at O’Connor (Bell). The case of Blatchford/the *Sun* against Crosbie/Insomniac Press was eventually dropped, though not before Blatchford’s displeasure was made known. In this sense, Blatchford simply could not accept the hybrid reality presented in “The Journalist & The Murderer.”

Speaking of the dropped case in an interview with Eva Tihanyi, Crosbie talked about her reasons for including Blatchford in the novel. Commenting on Blatchford’s

coverage of Bernardo's trial, Crosbie says: "What I wanted to discuss was literally what she wrote. And when she began to say things like, 'I wonder what hand he masturbates with,' I thought: That's a strange thing to say [. . .]. It seems that by no volition of her own, they have a bizarre relationship" ("Shapeshifter" 3). In *Paul's Case*, the narrator makes specific reference to this part of Blatchford's writing in "The Journalist & the Murderer." The reader finds that "[s]he wondered in print which hand you used to masturbate (*do you touch yourself in a sinister way?*); described your odd duskiness, grace, and almost girlish beauty" (*Paul's Case* 78, author's emphasis). While such passages are again left to the reader to interpret, given the context of the letter and the fact that it is included in *Paul's Case*, there is little doubt that this section of the novel suggests Blatchford had feelings for Bernardo. Though an attempt at hybridizing fact and invention, the letter creates a fictional narrative, as evidenced by the reaction of Blatchford and the lawyers from *The Toronto Sun*. However, Blatchford's reaction was and is indicative of the larger problem. This letter, like most of *Paul's Case*, can be read as factual or as fictional, but not both. When left to the reader to decide, there exists the strong possibility that he or she will misread the hybrid: readers may treat it as either truth or invention, not as a conflation of the two. As such, the narrative of *Paul's Case* has the potential to affect how readers understand the real Blatchford, and how they understand the novel and its representation of the real world that it mirrors.

As discussed above, in *Paul's Case* the reader can find quoted and excerpted passages from the true-crime works, and the journalism surrounding the crimes and trials of Bernardo and Homolka, and a number of other real-world sources. These elements affect how one makes sense of the novel because such things constantly shift the

fact/fiction border, which in turn alters the terms of the author-reader contract.

Crosbie's work is further complicated by her inclusion of other elements, such as the postcards, images and "found" items that form part of the work. These things also have the potential to affect how one reads *Paul's Case*. For example, the entire second letter, "Blond Van in a Beige Camaro," consists of a chapbook which was circulating in Toronto, and is credited to an author and illustrator that are not Crosbie. It is strange that though Crosbie supposedly did not write or illustrate the chapbook, it comprises eight pages of her novel. The third section of letter nine, "The Scarborough Rapist," consists of a photo Crosbie found of a larger number of Barbie heads with numbered tags around their necks (60). In her *Taddle Creek Magazine* interview with Kerri Huffman, Crosbie comments on this powerful image, saying "I don't think that to Bernardo these women were anything more than ciphers. That's why it's called 'Bernardo remembers the Scarborough Rapes.' I'm sure that's how he remembers them" ("Lynn's Case"). The interviewer does not ask why Crosbie believes this.

In letter thirty-two, "Found Poem (2)," the reader finds excerpts from one of Homolka's own writings, a self-improvement list written in 1987 (116). Even the title of the documentary fiction, *Paul's Case*, takes its name from the work of another writer: in this case, a short story of the same name by Willa Cather ("Shapeshifter" 3). While their meanings are sometimes clear, more often these 'found' sections are left unexplained and ambiguous. In order to make sense of these elements the reader is left to his or her own (often insufficient) devices to navigate the mercurial terms of the author-reader contract.

Near the end of the final letter, "The Rest is Silence," a black line is drawn across the page. Above the line appears "I'm a liar Paul; I have lied to you all along. Some of

this is true. I could draw a line.” Below that line appear the words, “Everything above this line is true. Everything above this line is false” (165). Again, this is left to the reader to interpret. Does the line refer to just the words on that page? Or only to that letter? Or, more likely, does it refer to what is contained in the entire novel? This is followed by a reference to Frank Davey’s *Karla’s Web*, in which the narrator remarks that looking at Davey’s book “makes me wish that I could draw thick black lines through all of my letters, leaving one phrase: *I’m sorry —*” (165).<sup>8</sup> Is this the narrator speaking? Or has the work shifted to the real world, is this now Crosbie showing that she is author *and* narrator? Crosbie kept a photo of Bernardo above her writing desk while crafting *Paul’s Case*, and this same photo adorns the cover of her novel. Near the end of this last letter we can read, “I am taking this face down now, from where it has been stuck since last August. Staring, right in front of me. Next to pictures of my grandmother, my mother, my father reading me a story” (165). Perhaps we must say that the author and the narrator are not so far apart after all. If that is true, then Crosbie’s novel moves even closer to the ontological realm we inhabit.

*Paul’s Case* also includes a large body of paratextual information that cannot be ignored. At the end of the work is a legend/appendix which, curiously, lists the names of the principal characters in the story. Bernardo and Homolka and their crimes are described briefly (one paragraph for each killer), as are their victims: Tammy Lyn, Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French, and the Jane Doe rape victims. Also described are the “Law, Police and Geography” related to the crimes and trials of the criminals (167-69). If *Paul’s*

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<sup>8</sup> Davey’s work, an examination of the publication ban that surrounded Homolka’s plea-bargain and trial, was published with many passages that were redacted in order to comply with that ban. Later editions were released with the blacked-out sections included as separate notes.

*Case* were just a fiction, such an appendix would be unnecessary. According to Foley's argument in *Telling the Truth*, the hybrid documentary novel calls upon real-world references and includes real-world facts to question their ontological status, not to serve as proof for the representation presented in the work (200). So it seems strange that Crosbie's novel contains this legend which serves as a key to the text, and obviously references the real-world to provide the reader with specific information about how to make sense of the narrative. The appendix serves as a proof, of a sort, showing that the crimes and criminals and victims are all real.

Following the appendix is another paratextual source, something not usually found in fictions: a bibliography. Here the reader can find the sources for the many quotations which appear in Crosbie's novel. Burnside and Cairns, Pron, Williams, Blatchford, these authors and many prominent others from the realms of literature, philosophy, art and music, sociology and psychology can be found on this list, all because quotations or passages from their works can be found in *Paul's Case*. While we might applaud Crosbie for properly documenting her sources, the sheer amount of quotation in her novel also forces the reader to question its hybrid status. Though Crosbie is the primary author of the novel, the individuals listed in the bibliography also played a role in writing the text. Similar to the chapbook which makes up chapter two, the sheer volume of quotation and citation in *Paul's Case* begs another question: who is the real author of *Paul's Case*? Crosbie must be given priority, but should we argue that those individuals listed in the bibliography deserve some credit as well? Does the multi-authorship of *Paul's Case* add to its hybridity? If the answer is yes, does that change how the reader reads? These are questions which must be left alone.

In some sections of the novel the quotations from these extratextual sources are worked directly into the narrative. Sometimes the quoted text is marked by a different style or font, such as the use of italics. This was seen above when discussing Lynette's role in the "Pornography" letter. A sentence in "The Drugs that Killed Tammy" reads, "Ariel, the cat, prowls the edge of the bed, murmuring — *in a cowslip's bell I lie*" (39, Crosbie's emphasis). According to the notes given at the end of the novel after the bibliography, the phrase printed in italics comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In this case, it is somewhat clear that the quoted section is not Crosbie's work. Often, though, the quoted passage is not distinctly marked at all (by italics or otherwise): letter eighteen ends "[i]mprisoned in these very bars, you never shall be free, nor ever chaste, except you ravish me" (86). By examining the notes at the end of the novel the reader learns that the second half of this sentence, "nor ever chaste, except you ravish me," comes from John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14," and Crosbie has just worked it into her own story (180). In such cases, it is very unclear whether it is the letter-writing narrator, Crosbie, or one of the extratextual sources who should be regarded as the true author of certain passages in *Paul's Case*.

### **Moving Outside the Text**

Like other documentary novels, when it comes to creating a successful hybrid, ultimately *Paul's Case* fails. While Crosbie's work is often true to the conventions of the genre, more often than not the use of and reliance on real-world references pose too much of a challenge to the reader. This failure is in part due to the impossible demands made by both the documentary novel and historical fiction, as illustrated in the earlier discussion of Manzoni's *On the Historical Novel*. In many instances *Paul's Case* itself exhibits these

shortcomings, but when we move outside of the text we find that there is clear evidence that the hybrid, in Manzoni's words, is a "species of false genre." When it comes to documentary fiction, there is no true, successful hybrid, because fact and invention cannot be combined in such a way that the fusion of these two realms forms a united narrative which is accepted by the reader. In the following section I argue that ultimately the response to the novel indicates that, try as we might, we cannot treat *Paul's Case* as just a fiction, as Cohn would have us do. Nor can we read the novel as a successful hybrid, despite Crosbie's ambition that her novel be regarded as such.

Where does the failure of the hybrid reality leave the reader? The truths contained in documentary fictions cannot be ignored, so we must make sense of them in a larger context. I take this into consideration by showing that *Paul's Case* has real-world resonance, that in some way it tells the truth. The trouble for readers is in making sense of that truth, given the fact that the fictional elements of the novel still play a role. These problems are ignored by the theory about documentary fiction, and must be illustrated.

### Chapter Three

#### Documenting the Real World: Fiction, Historiography, and the Failure of the Hybrid

PEN International is a lobbyist group dedicated to the freedom of speech, and its members campaign on behalf of poets, essayists, and novelists who are persecuted because of their writings. In late April of 1999 in Toronto, the Canadian chapter of PEN held a benefit and awareness campaign, aiming to raise funds and inform people about freedom of expression and the plight of authors across the world who are persecuted because of their literary work. Unfortunately, the event was overshadowed by controversy surrounding the reading of one particular novel, Crosbie's *Paul's Case*. Writing for *The Globe and Mail*, Doug Saunders tells how, before the fundraiser began, some PEN benefit organizers had tried to cancel the reading from Crosbie's novel, but when other authors threatened to cancel their own performances, the event remained on the schedule (C1).

When it came time for the reading itself, performed by actor Liisa Repo-Martel rather than Crosbie, many audience members were not pleased. Some people left the performance in disgust, while others begged the reader to stop. According to Saunders, some individuals claimed they were so offended that they would not attend another PEN benefit (C1). The reading from *Paul's Case* was unappreciated and offensive to many: "people didn't walk out on Crosbie's book because it was minor — most of PEN's entertainment could be described this way — but because they didn't approve of it," Saunders writes (C1). The controversy over the novel became an issue of censorship, and people argued that *Paul's Case* should not have been included as part of the PEN benefit at all.

Those gathered, presumably all PEN supporters (they were, after all, attending a PEN benefit), were “an audience of very-liberal urbanites” and “a crowd of intelligent, artistic people who want to help writers,” and were “not puritans or innocents” (Saunders C1). One would expect such a group to be fully open to edgy, dangerous, or otherwise transgressive literature, all terms which could be used to describe Crosbie’s novel. There is some obvious irony in the situation: PEN is an organization dedicated to freedom of speech, and is purportedly interested in liberating the voices, if not the individuals themselves, of those who create controversial literature. Yet the reaction of many of the audience members, as well as the attempt to remove the reading from the schedule, became an informal censoring of *Paul’s Case*. Pointing to this irony in his study *Censorship in Canadian Literature*, Mark Cohen notes that the focus of the PEN controversy was not specifically *Paul’s Case*, but rather that the novel served as the locus for a larger debate on censorship (159). What was it about the novel that brought audience members, normally supporters of the freedom of literary expression, to want to censor a work of literature? Saunders argues that perhaps it was the simple fact that the people and events described in the novel were emotionally and geographically too local, too close to home, too “sacrosanct and untouchable” to be turned into literature (C1).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Bernardo’s crimes were perpetrated in Southern Ontario: the serial rapes in Scarborough, Toronto, and the Bernardo/Homolka home was a two-hour drive away. Such proximity certainly could have caused some of the uneasiness, or perhaps all of it.

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen writes that the reading might simply have been of different, potentially less offensive sections than those which were originally chosen. Given the fact that the passages were dissociated from the rest of Crosbie’s novel, the “Pornography” letter should not have been read because it would not add “to our understanding of the Bernardo crimes, neither enlarging on the events that took place nor exploring the motivations of the criminals or the feelings of the victims” (164). I made this same point in the previous chapter. He then suggests that it is possible that passage was chosen solely for shock value, chosen precisely because it had the potential to offend.

However, Saunders continues by arguing that “[true] supporters of free speech [. . .] must support most staunchly those works that they most detest. The principles are meaningless if they apply only to forms of expression you find agreeable” (C1). It is clear that the very material that does shock, that does offend, should be included at PEN events and other venues arguing for the freedom of expression.

Crosbie herself may be open to the idea that the reading hit too close to home for some. In an interview with Natalee Caple, she responds to a question about the PEN controversy, saying that at the time she “felt that it was warranted from an emotional perspective” but that it “was unwarranted from an artistic or critical perspective, and, in some cases, startling,” adding that PEN should be ashamed for initially trying to censor the reading (“Interview with the Author” 119). While this interview allows Crosbie a great deal of hindsight, it is obvious that she feels that the controversy surrounding *Paul’s Case*, both at the PEN benefit and the novel’s general reception, was warranted precisely because her work possessed the power to emotionally affect readers. The novel was and continues to be controversial, but *Paul’s Case* should not be subject to censorship simply because it may have an emotional impact or because it may offend some readers.

Writing for *Maclean’s*, Charles Gordon adopts a different approach to the PEN audience’s response to the reading. He agrees with Saunders’s analysis about Crosbie’s right to publish, but Gordon challenges all free-speech advocates and authors by arguing that “those who defend freedom of expression have an obligation to promote quality of expression as well. Defending bad books may be necessary, but let’s not, in the process, kid ourselves that they are good books” (13). Gordon’s argument centres around the subject matter of the work in question, whether music, film, pornographic magazine or

novel. Does the material add to society? More importantly, who is to decide whether the as-yet-unwritten novel is worth writing based solely on the subject matter that it may discuss? Gordon asked these questions, and provides some answers, noting that the

publishers and studios and those who create the products they market cannot pretend that what they put out has no impact. Those who defend freedom of expression should also demand the production of works that are worthy of being defended. The line is not an easy one to draw, nor should the power to draw it be concentrated in a few hands. All artists should have it, and use it. (13)

Gordon wants artists to censor themselves, wants the individual creator to decide if a work is worth creating *before* creating it or releasing it on the general public. I ask in return, can we rely on authors and artists to censor themselves, given the fact that they are not usually considered to be objective judges about their own creative works?

Whether *Paul's Case* should be a locus for a censorship debate is an open question, and not one for discussion in this project. However, as will be seen below, based on examples such as the controversy surrounding the PEN fundraiser and the general reception of Crosbie's novel, it serves as an excellent example for the central issues I raise in this thesis. The reactions to the novel, at the PEN event and in published reviews, lead us to further consider *Paul's Case* as a documentary fiction in which the hybridized reality causes problems for the author-reader contract. The reception of Crosbie's fictionalized version of the Bernardo/Homolka crimes stands in stark contrast to the reception of the true-crime accounts published previous to *Paul's Case*, accounts which did not suffer the same degree of negative criticism. While the emotional impact of

the novel may be partly responsible for the bad press, this is not enough to support the negative critics. Instead, I propose that it was the fact Crosbie used hybridity to tell the story that sparked the controversy surrounding *Paul's Case*.

### **Reception**

Bernardo's and Homolka's crimes are well-known in Canada. At the time, they even received international attention, as they were given media coverage in the United States and in Western Europe. As mentioned earlier, in Canada alone three major true-crime books have been released: Nick Pron's *Lethal Marriage* (1995), Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns's *Deadly Innocence* (1995), and Stephen Williams's *Invisible Darkness* (1996). Each of these works sets out to retell the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, examining the building relationship between Bernardo and Homolka, and how Bernardo later progressed from serial rapes to, with Homolka's aid, murder. They also take into account the trials of the criminals, and include much extraneous but related information about the crimes. All ask important questions about the crimes, while occasionally one or another of the works prods deeper into certain aspects, looking for answers.

The most accessible and informative of these works is *Invisible Darkness*, as Williams obviously researched the case to a much greater extent than any of the other writers. Later, he came under legal pressure for many of the details published in his work and on a website, facts which revealed more about the crimes than anyone had published before, and this broke the publication ban placed over portions of the case. The Ontario government charged Williams for violating that ban, such that at one point he was being investigated for ninety-seven separate criminal offences.

Many people suspected that Williams was being prosecuted not because of the

details he had revealed, but rather because *Invisible Darkness* was quite critical of the police authorities involved in the investigation of the crimes. Also, in his work he often condemns the Ontario Attorney-General's office for making the plea-deal with Homolka before all the facts were known. Even PEN Canada reached this conclusion. According to Christopher Waddell, "[a]uthorities are using intimidation tactics designed to uncover the sources from which Mr. Williams drew critical and embarrassing details about the actions of police and the Crown Attorney's office, which he published in his books about the Homolka and Bernardo cases" (11). Williams and his partner, author Marsha Boulton, were targeted by police, their home raided, and documents and computers taken away. Williams even spent some time in jail for his alleged crimes.

Unfortunately for Williams, the prolonged court proceedings stretched his finances to the limit. PEN Canada came to view Williams as a persecuted author, and as such, gave Williams \$1650 to help cover his legal fees (11, 14). In *The Globe and Mail*, Kirk Makin, who also wrote the introduction to *Invisible Darkness*, reports that Williams later received \$5000 in support from Human Rights Watch to aid his legal battles, and quotes Williams himself saying, "My spirit is intact but my pocketbook is not [. . .]. My inclination is to fight to the death, but my common sense is telling me that could take another three to five or 10 years" (A5). After the resolution to the case against Williams, a PEN Canada media release stated that

PEN Canada is also convinced that the use of legal procedures and foot-dragging by the Crown and police was designed solely to create financial pressure on Mr. Williams so that he could no longer afford to defend himself against the many frivolous charges laid against him and, at the

same time, respond to separate civil proceedings against him. (“PEN Canada”)

While PEN Canada was pleased with the end to the case against Williams, the release argues that Canadians should be concerned about what the case meant for free speech in Canada, and be anxious about the fact that “legitimate authors” such as Williams and Boulton could suffer this type of abuse.

The censorship issue of Crosbie’s novel at the PEN fundraiser and Williams’s struggles with the law are distinct situations, but one cannot help but point out certain intriguing similarities. The involvement of PEN Canada in both cases is striking: on one hand, we have the controversy surrounding Crosbie and her novel, which explores the Bernardo/Homolka crimes; on the other, PEN’s support for Williams and his *Invisible Darkness*, a work also discussing the murders. The two texts are different, granted, but the subject matter of those works in question is quite similar. Yet PEN and its supporters saw fit to aid Williams, when a few years earlier that same organization had nearly censored Crosbie. Why these different reactions, when each works discusses the same material?

Both authors set up their works as critical discourses, given in different forms. *Invisible Darkness* is an examination, exploration, and exposition of the details of the Bernardo/Homolka crimes. *Paul’s Case* explores some of the unknowns of the crimes, attempts to discover what really happened, and questions the truth of the known “facts” about the case. The main difference between the two texts is their mode of presentation: Williams relies primarily on the conventions of nonfiction, historiography, and journalism — truth-telling. We can make a case for *Invisible Darkness*, along with the

other true-crime works, as being emplotted, something that cannot be as easily said of *Paul's Case*. However, Crosbie employs many of the conventions of fiction-making to craft her hybrid narrative: we can easily point to specific examples of psycho-narration and an unreliable narrator, mixed with instances of truth-telling.

One must question, then, why it is that people were not shocked and outraged about some of the descriptions in Williams's work? More specifically, why there was no public outcry like that incited by Crosbie's novel? Williams writes of the imprisonment and rape of both French and Mahaffy, often describing the horrific scenes from the infamous Bernardo videos, retelling in great detail the sufferings of the victims, yet he was not subject to censorship. At least not as censorship is usually administered: one editorial in *eye*, a Toronto weekly, condemned Williams's books as "poorly written in the extreme, full of uncontrolled prose, overblown and self-important" ("Williams' criminal dissent"). Interestingly, this same article argues that the harassment Williams suffered was itself a form of censorship

Admittedly, there was some negative press surrounding Williams's work, as there was with *Lethal Marriage* and *Deadly Innocence*. Yet all three nonfiction accounts achieved a great deal of success, both critically and commercially. Pron's *Lethal Marriage* spent twenty-six weeks on *The Globe and Mail*'s best-seller list, while *Deadly Innocence* was on the same list for twenty-seven. Obviously the works were being sold, so, presumably, people were reading them. Many critics offered cautious reviews of the nonfiction publications. Under the headline "Bernardo ends up a tedious read," *Globe and Mail* reviewer Maggie Siggins describes Pron's account as rather lackluster, and at times boring (C28). In that same article she refers to *Deadly Innocence* in much the same

way, though overall finding it to be a stronger work, and the research by Burnside and Cairns to be more in-depth and informative. What was it about the journalism that generated such interest and success for them? Siggins offers one possible answer: even after the media storm that came about because of the crimes and trials, “at the end of the ordeal there still remains some important, unanswered questions. How did Bernardo and Karla Homolka get to be the predators that they are, and what significance, if any, do these horrendous crimes have for our society?” (C28). Perhaps Siggins hoped that *Lethal Marriage* and *Deadly Innocence* would help readers to go behind the scenes and find the answers to those unanswered questions. It is this same quest that Williams and Crosbie set out on with their works.

Williams’s *Invisible Darkness* is the most in-depth and captivating of the three true-crime accounts, a fact much agreed upon by various critics. Crosbie, in an article defending her own work, describes *Invisible Darkness* as “by far the most subversive and intelligent of the Bernardo triptych” (“Lynn’s Case” D1). Though also cautious about Williams’s work, Siggins finds that *Invisible Darkness* reveals more about the crimes, and in particular about the police investigation, than the other nonfiction accounts. Even after the three books had been published, she wonders if there are still questions left unanswered, commenting that Williams’s work “adds little to our understanding of how such depravity could take root in our society” (“Shallow” C15). Again, it was this void that Crosbie intended to fill with *Paul’s Case*, to find the in-betweens and unknowns that the trials and true-crime accounts had been unable answer.

### **Journalism as Pornography**

Much of the controversy about the true-crime accounts related to their inclusion

of sections from the video recordings made by Bernardo and Homolka. Both Pron and Williams were suspected of having had access to the videos themselves, rather than video composites and transcripts most members of the press were given. Val Ross notes that when *Lethal Marriage* was released, Pron was accused of “callous exploitation” because his work includes excerpts from the transcripts of the videotapes (C1). It seems that the problem was with Pron, and later Williams, *publishing* some of the details that most journalists covering the trial could easily access.

The true value of Williams’s *Invisible Darkness* must be sought for not in his dissenting nature, his horrific descriptions and criticisms of the police, but rather in his attempt to seek out answers to what remained unknown, to say things that had been left unsaid. Under the headline “Don’t use Stephen Williams’ words against him,” Patrick Watson comments that any journalistic account about the crimes would be “stupid and irresponsible” if it failed to give “a convincing description of [the videos]” (A15). Interestingly, Ross notes that for *Deadly Innocence*, Burnside and Cairns chose to avoid descriptions of scenes from the videos, instead relying on information from Van Smirnis, a former Bernardo friend who agreed to talk with the authors, to give their work an edge (C6).

The use of the videos as part of the true-crime works also served as an impetus for characterizing the works as pornographic. The details related by both Pron and Williams are at times explicit and difficult to read. For example, Williams describes a scene from one of the videos: while Homolka records with the camera, “‘I’m fifteen years old and I love to suck dick,’” says victim French, while “looking at Karla as she has been told to do and bending her head and mouth over Paul’s less-than-erect penis” (*Invisible Darkness*

287). In *Lethal Marriage*, Pron describes a scene recorded by Bernardo in which both Mahaffy and Homolka perform oral sex on him:

Then Bernardo lay down on the bed and ordered both of them to give him oral sex while he continued to work the camera. “Yeah, you’re doing a great job,” he said, moaning with pleasure. “Now what I want you both to do is lick up the shaft and kiss the top of my dick.” He positioned Leslie’s head where he wanted it. “Here, start here,” he said. “Put your tongue on this side, and lick up.” (233)

In many cases the descriptions in both of these works are detailed enough that little is left to the readers’ imagination. The answers to questions about whether the works are pornographic, and whether they should be subject to censorship, depend largely on one’s perspective. Were Williams and Pron aiming to produce pornography when writing their accounts? We must admit that this is possible. However, the more likely scenario is that they were simply telling the truth, reporting the facts, being diligent journalists and historiographers.

The discussion of censorship and the possible pornographic nature of those works can be tied to certain points of view about the Bernardo trial itself and its treatment by the media. During the trial, the video evidence was used to make the Crown’s case against Bernardo. While the public and the reporters did not see the videos themselves (the jury did), the soundtrack was audible in the courtroom. A reporter at the Bernardo trial, Nicole Nolan, later describes the experience: “Sitting in the semi-darkness, listening to the soundtrack with about 200 other people feels suspiciously like being at the movies. More specifically, it feels like being at a porno movie. The sounds on the tape, after all, are

scripted and at least partially ‘acted’” (11). In her examination of the pornography debate surrounding the trial, Nolan questions whether the videos should be publicly available, since they were being used as evidence in a public trial. She comments on how media outlets published details from the audio track of the videos (based on the transcripts), and whether those outlets were reinforcing the quasi-pornographic nature of the recordings. While Nolan argues that the videos are indeed pornography, and child pornography at that, and therefore should not be made public, she is also willing to take into account the arguments by those who say that the videos, as evidence in a very public trial, should be available and the courts be more open.

Others dismissed the charges of pornography altogether: Kirk Makin tells Nolan “‘I mean this is not a goddamn movie theatre where people are paying 50 cents to come in and see child porn. It’s a fucking trial and there’s this big argument being made that it’s some kind of lewd depiction of child porn for lascivious purposes — get serious. It’s a trial’” (qtd. in Nolan 14). Although both sides of the pornography debate had their say, neither achieved a convincing win. For example, the details given by the media, based on information from the audio track, and published in newspapers and relayed to viewers of the evening news, could also be considered pornographic. Nolan spoke with to Pron (prior to the publication of *Lethal Marriage*), who blames the videos themselves as the cause:

“In this case there’s just so much detail because of the video [. . .]. If it was just Karla (testifying on the assaults) we wouldn’t have any of the detail but we’ve got the goddamn videos. I mean those videos just changed everything. They just changed everything dramatically because the rapes

are there and they're filmed and we hear them." (qtd. in Nolan 15)

Pron also questions the pornographic nature of the videos after hearing the soundtrack played in the courtroom: "'I'm sitting there typing away, just typing up dialogue as we get it out of the court and it's like, 'Holy shit, I feel like I'm writing pornography.' It feels like it'" (qtd. in Nolan 15). As mentioned earlier, the pornographic nature of the videos became a matter of individual perspective, which could change depending on who was hearing the tapes or reading the transcripts and news reports.

Media outlets were setting new standards, or at the very least breaking their old ones. Noting that oftentimes such details would be omitted from crime reporters' stories for regular cases when articles went to print, Burnside remarks that in *The Toronto Sun* the word "cunt" was printed in relation to the Bernardo trial: "'that's unbelievable [. . .] if [court reporters] filed those details on a normal court story? Not a chance that they'd get in. That stuff's edited out every day'" (qtd. in Nolan 15). The point is that, when it came to the Bernardo trial, special exceptions were made. Pornography or not, censorship or not, it became a question of what was really fit for print, and more importantly, what details should be available to the public, and what should remain veiled under the shroud of justice and decency.

Whose job was it to maintain that decency? Nolan writes that "freedom always entails responsibility" (16). Her suggestion, it seems, is that even when details were forthcoming, it is up to the reporter, and the media outlet for which that reporter works, to set the standards, whether acting in the best interests of an open court-system or a demanding public who want to ensure that justice is met. Pron tells Nolan that there were no easy answers to questions concerning publishing the details of the videos and whether

the media outlets were, in effect, participating in the distribution of pornography. As far as *Lethal Marriage* is concerned, Pron recognizes that he was contributing to a problem he himself found disgusting. And yet, he says, ““It’s just — I’m hoping somebody will make the decision for me”” (qtd. in Nolan 16). Ultimately, Pron wants to pass on the burden of deciding decency. His job, as he saw it, was to report the details, and leave it to the editors and readers to decide whether they were reading good journalism or pornography. When Pron’s point of view is contrasted to the perspective held by Charles Gordon, as discussed earlier, we can clearly see that censorship and the production of art are not easily separated into black and white, but encompass many grey issues.

***Paul’s Case* and (some of) the critics**

Whether the texts discussed above are exemplars of true-crime journalism and literary achievement, simple attempts to exploit public interest in the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, or disgusting pornography is not for discussion here. What is most important to realise is that all had varying degrees of success, were generally accepted by the critics, and generated significant sales. As such, the true-crime works by Burnside and Cairns, Pron, and Williams can be held in contrast to *Paul’s Case*, which suffered the wrath of both critics and readers.

This leads us back to difference between Williams’s truth-telling, nonfictional account, and Crosbie’s documentary novel *Paul’s Case*. Following its publication, both the work and Crosbie herself were subject to negative criticism. Some critics admonished Crosbie for writing on her chosen topic but gave some recognition for her attempt to create a piece of art. For example, Geoff Pevere remarks that “*Paul’s Case* is, I hope, neither the last nor the best word in cultural responses to the Bernardo case, but it is a

necessary first step in the process of moving the events from newsroom cubicles to the larger realm of culture” (“Culture Stoppers” 31). Pevere suggests that the novel is worthy of respect, despite the subject matter it discusses. Elsewhere, he comments that Crosbie’s novel is “a baldly subjective enterprise” and “the first attempt to approach the awesome, incomprehensible venality of the case armed with something other than just the facts” (“Bernardo” J3). Pevere finds value in Crosbie’s attempt to ask questions about what is not yet known, and in the fact that she chose to write her novel from an original perspective.

Others, however, were not so kind. Some critics attacked both the text and its author. Michael Coren, a conservative newspaper columnist and radio talk-show host, lampooned the novel, calling for it to be banned. According to Kerri Huffman in her preamble to the *Taddle Creek* interview with Crosbie, Coren even suggested that Crosbie should join Bernardo in jail (“Lynn’s Case”). Pevere also discusses this, writing that during the course of his radio show, Coren “invited listeners [. . .] to lace up their jackboots and join in the stomping” of Crosbie’s work (“Culture Stoppers” 31). In her article about the PEN controversy in *Now Magazine*, Susan G. Cole discusses Coren’s reaction with Crosbie, who confesses: “I did think the discourse around *Paul’s Case* was getting threatening. I remember [*The Toronto*] *Sun* columnist Michael Coren gave out the number and address of my publisher and said people should go to his house and tell him what they thought about it” (“Lynn Crosbie”). While controversy may breed publicity, it is doubtful that this is the kind of press that Crosbie was seeking, either for herself or for her novel.

Some of the negative criticism came about because Crosbie chose a close-up

photo of Bernardo to adorn the cover of her novel. In his review Kevin Connolly writes that previous to the release of *Paul's Case*,

Duthie's, a book chain in Western Canada, refused initially to order the book. Lichtman's [a Toronto bookstore] also declined, citing Bernardo's picture on the cover as the reason. When *Globe and Mail* reporter Liz Renzetti asked why they would refuse to carry a novel after they had carried non-fiction titles on the same subject, they too changed their minds. (Connolly)<sup>10</sup>

The mention of Renzetti's query in the above passage illustrates that some stores were in a situation where they had to admit that *Paul's Case* belonged on their shelves, or else risk appearing hypocritical by refusing to carry the novel, while stocking the true-crime literature. Some members of the general reading public did not want to see Crosbie's work available in stores, while other saw her work as an attempt to profit from Bernardo's notoriety. In his opinion letter to *eye* weekly, reader Chris Rolfe writes:

Not to seem like a censor in any way, but let's just clear up a few fuzzy areas about Lynn Crosbie's new fiction, *Paul's Case*.

Point 1: Because of Paul Bernardo, two young girls died horribly.

Point 2: Most would agree that no one should be able to profit monetarily from this.

Point 3: No matter how often Crosbie champions the families' bravery, condemns the press and perpetrators, and incorporates the style of fucking

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that in a letter to the editor published three weeks later, Wade Ivan, a member of the Literary Press Group of Canada, denies that Lichtman's had ever considered not ordering the book because of Bernardo's picture on the cover, and that Connolly's claim that Lichtman's changed its mind after being contacted by a *Globe and Mail* journalist was erroneous (Ivan).

T.S. Eliot, what's really going to sell this book? Could it be the ugly cover mug of Paul Bernardo and the "shocking, real-life" details that it represents.

Now go to Points 1 and 2, Ms. Crosbie. (Rolfe)

While this individual letter cannot be taken as an example of the moods of all *Paul's Case* readers, it certainly serves as an indication of some of the public response to the novel, both its cover and its content. It highlights a major shift in opinion about literature based on the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, moving away from the previous public attitude which resulted in best-selling true-crime accounts released by the journalists, despite the photos of Bernardo and Homolka adorning their covers.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the best-known example of bad press came from *Toronto Star* columnist Rosie DiManno, who condemns *Paul's Case* as "a clumsy obscenity" and "nothing more than a crude exercise in narcissism" (B1). She argues that it is not the role of the journalist<sup>12</sup> to try to interpret the Bernardo/Homolka crimes, instead suggesting that perhaps some day another Norman Mailer or Tom Wolfe will come along to explore those events in a nonfiction novel. DiManno then writes that if she ever comes face-to-face with Crosbie, "I will rake my fingernails across her face" (B1). What is the reader to assume when an established columnist working for a major newspaper resorts to threats of violence to inform her critical analysis of a cultural literary product? DiManno's article is less than a critique or literary review, as it reads more like journalistic mudslinging.

As for Crosbie's response, she took a great deal of the negative criticism in stride.

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<sup>11</sup> Pron's *Lethal Marriage* even has the exact same photo of Bernardo as that on *Paul's Case*, albeit a smaller version, as it does not comprise the entire cover.

<sup>12</sup> Which Crosbie, Williams, Pron, Burnside, and Cairns all are.

During her interview with Kerri Huffman, Crosbie comments on her treatment by DiManno: “I really believe — and I think she should of me — that she is entitled to her opinion [. . .]. Her opinion is, unfortunately, very ill informed” (“Lynn’s Case”). Calling her novel a work of “critical fiction,” Crosbie remarks that with *Paul’s Case* she simply wants to explore the events, to consider what happened from a “variety of perspectives,” primarily because she feels that despite the court trials of both Bernardo and Homolka, the real truth was never revealed. In Crosbie’s words:

“There is no genuine recording of fact. The version from Paul Bernardo will differ substantively than the version Karla Homolka has offered to us. So who is the truth teller? There is no one. Which led me to fiction. The only compelling truth claims could be offered by the girls who are dead, and they can’t offer them.” (“Lynn’s Case”)

No one can offer such information, and never will, unless one considers the speculative writing and interpretations of the videos included in the true-crime accounts by Burnside and Cairns, Pron, or Williams.

In her interview with A. H. Park, Crosbie comments that she chose “to trouble the idea of truth in the first place by conflating it with fiction, trouble also the rigidity of the genre. I found it bizarre how many people were disturbed by *Paul’s Case* because it was never clear what was invented, what was true” (14). It was precisely because of the unknown truths and the lack of clarity that came out of the Bernardo case that Crosbie was able to create her work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Paul’s Case* would not exist as a novel had Bernardo and Homolka not perpetrated their crimes: on some level, her novel requires the real world. These public and critical reactions also serve to

highlight why we must treat *Paul's Case* as more than just a fiction. When hybrid documentary novels resonate in the real world, such as the reactions of DiManno and Blatchford, their real-world references must be taken into account. In their reliance on the real world to form their hybrid narratives, documentary fictions cause problems for the reader as he or she navigates the fact/fiction boundary.

Aside from Bernardo's face on the cover, the hybrid version offered by Crosbie in her novel is the focus point of much of the criticism. The true-crime accounts did not suffer primarily because they were considered to be true representations. One may argue that some passages in the nonfiction works are embellished, that perhaps the authors had taken some liberty in their writing. For example, in *Lethal Marriage*, Pron occasionally moves from an objective reporting point of view toward subjective supposition.

Discussing Mahaffy, he writes that "there had never been any attacks in the area, and the 15-year-old *felt safe*" (203, my emphasis). Later, Pron describes French using this same subjective voice: "[h]er *mood was cheerful* that day, but then *it always was*" (320, my emphasis). Unless he had direct access to these individuals, it is impossible Pron knew how either Leslie or Kristen felt on the days of their murders, or at any other time. These examples are even missing the conjectural "must have" syntax typical to biographies which claim to know the inner minds of their subjects discussed by Cohn (*Distinction of Fiction* 27). While we can grant some measure of poetic license to Pron and the others, the role of the reporter is to relate the facts, not add unsupported information to the tale.

Perhaps we should consider these as examples of emplotment. While for the most part Pron's text may be treated as a truth-telling work, on occasion we can find clear indications that some of the facts are given additional structure and meaning in the

context of his journalistic report. In this sense, the true-crime accounts begin to move toward the realm of New Journalism. Simultaneously, it is important to note that the examples given above are not indicative of Pron's entire work, but isolated incidents scattered occasionally throughout the text.

If the true-crime works were embellished by their authors, they too are (at least in part) fictionalized versions of the events, Crosbie argues. In the *Taddle Creek* interview she says

“I would challenge anyone to sit through a reading of the Nick Pron book and sit through a reading of mine and actually say what sickened them more. If they chose to respect the ‘truth’ as they see it, I know I have to accept that. But I also have to challenge that, because I am sick to death of their truths about this case, and I want to challenge it, and I want to oppose it, and I want to create different areas of discourse.” (“Lynn’s *Case*”)

If the true-crime works are guilty of embellishment and emplotment, Crosbie figures that they should also suffer the sort of criticism she and her novel faced. Stephen Williams and his *Invisible Darkness* came under fire for the very fact that the historiography does exactly what critical discourse is supposed to do: tell the truth, and question that truth. In his case the fact that he was critiquing the police and Crown offices resulted in legal persecution. With Lynn Crosbie and *Paul’s Case*, again we see a scenario where an author came under fire because her writing did what it was supposed to do: create a documentary fiction tale, using all the conventions of that hybrid genre.

While discussing her novel, Crosbie tells Kevin Connolly that journalism is simply not equipped to really deal with the Bernardo case: “[nonfiction] consistently

fails to get past the superficial binaries of good and evil.” She then adds, “[i]t’s also become a fictional genre” (“Psycho killer”). Where journalism fails, it seems, documentary fiction succeeds. Journalism is supposed to report the facts and truths, and this leaves little or no room for embellishment and supposition. Many of the unknowns and in-betweens of the crimes are left unanswered in the journalistic accounts. In contrast, the very conventions of documentary fiction allow Crosbie to examine those unanswered questions, to play with the binaries of good and bad, right and wrong, and, most importantly for this project, to blur fact and fiction.

In her interview with Natalee Caple, Crosbie responds to a question about fiction-writing versus nonfiction writing, saying “I do like melding fiction and non-fiction together — *Paul’s Case* is an example of this hybrid. And it was this precise mix that agitated commentators, as though I had diluted or compromised something inexpressibly valuable” (115). In this case the facts and fictions informing her novel are supposed to speak for themselves. Comparing her treatment of Bernardo to another of her characters, Dorothy Stratten in *Dorothy L’Amour*, Crosbie says, “I use the facts as a basis for the stories, and try not to deviate from essential truths (Dorothy Stratten was a nice person; Paul Bernardo is evil). Authenticity of argument is important to me, characters demonstrating whatever thesis is at play” (119). Thus we see that despite the hybridized version it presents, *Paul’s Case* still must show Bernardo as a bad person, as a killer.

While it is possible that it was the subject matter of *Paul’s Case* that caused the uproar, is that enough to justify the negative criticism? The PEN fundraiser and the fact that the novel (may have) had a great deal of emotional impact was discussed earlier. As subject matter, it is important to consider Bernardo and Homolka as (notorious, rather

than celebrated) public figures, just as much as are prime ministers, presidents, or film celebrities. In an article about the PEN reading of *Paul's Case*, Cole comments on fictions which employ public figures: "It's curious how fiction writers get targeted in this way. No one tries to silence politicians when they invoke the name of Paul Bernardo for their own political gain. Coles adds that some Members of Parliament have "promoted legislation — and themselves — while fear-mongering about the evils of the next Bernardo" ("Lynn Crosbie"). As this passage suggests, no one objected when Bernardo's name was brought up to promote other measures, or used in part for personal (political) gain.<sup>13</sup> However, the fictionalized treatment of fact in Crosbie's novel was taboo, went too far, crossed some imaginary boundary — it was and is transgressive. Upon which realms does the novel transgress? Decency and the indecent? Moral and immoral (or perhaps amoral)? Is it a matter of good versus bad writing? Whatever the case, the fact remains that when Bernardo and Homolka are the subject matter of journalistic reportage, the outcry in favour of censorship is minimal or nonexistent. While taking emplotment into account, we recognize that for the most part the three journalistic works expose the truths of the crimes, that they tell the truth. However, with *Paul's Case* and its hybridized treatment of the Bernardo/Homolka events, Crosbie is seen as having done something that should not have been done.

Crosbie's own perspectives about her novel, the very fact that she set out to question the in-betweens and the unknowns of the Bernardo/Homolka case and trials, may serve to inform us about any inconsistencies which do occur in the true-crime

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps one exception may be made: the discussion about the pornographic nature of the court reporting during Bernardo's trial may indicate that objections were raised. However, I still argue that in such cases it is unlikely that the newspaper reporters or the nonfiction authors Pron and Williams had the ultimate aim of writing pornography.

accounts. Those equivocations and anomalies, while partially attributable to poor writing, may also originate in the very lack of information which Crosbie aims to highlight. Even now, years after the trials, the events are still remembered in part for what remains unknown. While some of those unknowns focus on how the crimes could happen at all, let alone be committed by a pair of individuals who seemed to epitomize the perfect next-door-neighbour ideal, other questioners desire to know what was actually on the videotapes recorded by Bernardo and Homolka: what else happened to the victims while they were being held captive? Others, like Williams, continue to ask questions about the police investigation and why it took so long to catch the criminals, and about the real role Homolka played in the crimes. The true-crime accounts offer partial answers to these uncertainties, but many of those answers are indefinite and based on speculation.

By conflating fact and fiction in her hybrid novel, Crosbie asks questions, often difficult ones. The beauty of her chosen genre is that she can propose possible answers to those issues, but readers cannot judge the value of the responses. Instead, *Paul's Case* enters into realms unattainable for the true-crime accounts. This is especially true given the many instances of psycho-narration that appear in the novel. The curse of the hybrid genre is also apparent in *Paul's Case*: the very fact that she has fictionalized real figures and events has led to a great deal of criticism. The reaction to *Paul's Case* is in part due to the use of conventions of fiction to document the real world and in part because some saw Crosbie as profiteering from the Bernardo/Homolka crimes. Despite her attempt to open a new realm of questioning and criticism with her novel, the documentary level of *Paul's Case* creates problems for some readers, problems which cannot be resolved simply by arguing that the work is just a fiction.

## The Failure of Documentary Fiction

In making sense of *Paul's Case* and works of documentary fiction in general, it is important to realize that there is no single answer to the issues raised. While works of this genre present a hybrid mix of fact and fiction, that presentation fails to communicate an acceptable reality to the reader. Theories of documentary fiction assume that a successful fusion of fact and fiction is possible, but as I have shown, in practice it is impossible, or very difficult, to create that ideal mix. In some instances, such as the "Pornography" letter in *Paul's Case*, certain passages may present a complete or near-complete hybrid, where the fact/fiction border is quite blurred, and the reader simply cannot distinguish between those two ontologically distinct realms. However, to keep to the terms of the author-reader contract we must always consider the entire documentary fiction; we must take the work as a unity. As such, a few successful passages scattered throughout the novel are not enough to guarantee the work the status of ideal or complete hybrid.

Documentary fictions truly do belong to a spurious and false genre, similar to the historical novels explored by Manzoni. However, the genre is not wholly responsible: theories and discussions of documentary fiction all-too-often fall into the trap of discussing documentary fiction in categorical terms, such as the assumption that fact and fiction may actually be fused successfully. When these theories fail to anticipate distinction between successful and incomplete hybrids, this too causes problems for making sense of documentary fictions. Where an author-reader contract assumes that a hybrid reading is possible, the contract fails to realise that it makes antithetical demands of the reader.

As well, the idea of an informed reader is problematic. How informed does the

informed reader have to be? Is there such a thing of being too informed? There is no clear mark or boundary indicating when one moves from being less-informed to being sufficiently informed. This means that we must recognize the undefined grey area where one may or may not be informed, an area which the theories do not adequately discuss or truly accept. When both the genre and the theories about the genre have trouble making sense of documentary fiction, it is no real surprise that readers, informed and less-informed alike, may have difficulties when reading novels such as *Paul's Case*.

Using Crosbie's novel as an example, I have highlighted some of the issues raised by documentary fictions. The problem of the hybrid is not that it straddles the fact/fiction borderline, but that it does so in a manner that corrupts the border. If all hybrids are impure, then documentary novels are doubly so, for they cannot even make sense of their own hybridity. Nederveen Pieterse writes that "[h]ybridity is to culture what deconstruction is to discourse: transcending binary categories. Another account of hybridity is 'in-betweeness.' Recognizing the *in-between* and the *interstices* means going beyond dualism, binary thinking, Aristotelian logic" (110, author's emphasis). The problem with documentary fiction is that it fails to transcend or move beyond the fact/fiction binary, precisely because for the most part those two realms are too easily recognized when reading.

We can see this unresolved dualism in *The Distinction of Fiction*, with Cohn's argument for a clear separation of fiction and historiography. This is especially true when she writes that *War and Peace*, a paradigmatic example of historical fiction, can only be read as a fiction. Foley's *Telling the Truth* reveals that the metahistorical documentary novel uses the combination of fact and fiction to call into question whether there are

actual historical “truths” to discuss. In *On the Historical Novel*, Manzoni recognizes that truth and invention cannot truly be joined in historical fiction, despite the fact that his own historical novel, *I promessi sposi*, seemingly brings them together. Threats of violence aside, when DiManno reviews *Paul’s Case*, she writes that “[n]one of this is real, of course, except for the names and the dates and the horrific details of the crimes, and some of the passages culled from newspaper accounts” (B1). As illustrated at length above, Crosbie’s *Paul’s Case* simply fails to convincingly bring fact and fiction together. In some way, all of these works discuss the hybrid by distinguishing between fact and fiction. Though situated on the fact/fiction border, the reader can only make sense of documentary novels by recognizing that these novels cannot and do not present successfully hybridized version of the events they discuss.

## Other Problems and Missing Solutions: Why Documentary Fiction Cannot Be Ignored

Making sense of documentary fiction can be a daunting task for readers, even at the best of times. This is especially true of *Paul's Case*, due to the extra cultural significance and emotional resonance of its subject matter. The brutality of the Bernardo/Homolka crimes has not been forgotten here in Canada, and will probably remain ingrained on the minds of Canadians for a while yet. As well, *Paul's Case* is not the final word on documentary fiction and its attempt to capture the Bernardo-Homolka crimes. A theatrical retelling by playwright Carol Bolt resulted in *Famous*, which was staged in Toronto during 1997. On television, popular crime series *Law & Order* loosely adapted the story of the crimes during their tenth season, resulting in the episode "Fools for Love." In the episode, Homolka is also sent to prison.

The biggest step of all, however, is to the silver screen. As yet unavailable in Canada (due to lack of a distributor), the film *Karla* raises the same sort of fist-shaking controversy as *Paul's Case*. Originally scheduled to be shown at the Montréal World Film Festival during the summer of 2005, it was pulled by festival organizers before it was shown. A CBC Arts news article quotes from a press statement released by festival organizers: "Following the debate raised by the announcement of a showing of *Karla* during the festival, as well as the discomfort expressed by a number of the sponsors concerning their clients, the management of the World Film Festival has decided to not present this film at the festival" ("Montreal film festival"). In his review of the film (after a private screening), Matthew Hays gives the film a balanced review, "neither a masterpiece nor a disaster," but recognizes that it may never be screened in Canadian theatres ("A First Look at *Karla*"). He reveals that while the Bernardo and Homolka

characters keep their names, victims Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy have been given pseudonyms. In that review, no reason is given for why this is. Perhaps it is to reinforce the fictional retelling? Or maybe it is done simply to make the film more “tasteful” for audience members familiar with the crimes?

To this point, I have focussed my discussion of documentary fiction on the problems of reading and making sense of those novels. In doing so, I have set aside some ancillary yet important issues which can no longer be ignored. I posit that in their explorations of truth and history, documentary and historical novelists challenge a number of other boundaries, which exist beyond the texts and their stories. *Paul’s Case* is just one example of a novel in which serious problems, if left unchecked, may have as-yet-unforeseen consequences.

In bringing real-world figures to life, giving them voices and appropriating their stories to craft novels, authors must recognize that they raise questions about the aesthetic practice of novel-writing. Jonathan Dee, in “The Reanimators: On the Art of Literary Graverobbing,” highlights this problem in a number of “psycho-historical” novels, his term for those works employing psycho-narration. Dee’s aesthetic concern is that, by writing the lives of real people, novelists have contributed to a degradation of the genre: “there is something fundamentally compromised about any novel whose characters [. . .] are known to us before we even open the book” (81) and that “[s]imply adopting or impersonating an already interesting real-life character [. . .] cannot be considered as substantial an achievement as creating a character who enters the reader’s consciousness as a total unknown” (84). Ultimately, Dee finds that psycho-historical novels threaten the nature of fiction and its unique “transcendently unreal power to apprehend, and mediate

on, the nature of our [human] existence” (84), and that these novels are a lesser form of writing than other, more creative, kinds of fiction. In effect, Dee is saying that by drawing upon pre-existing stories, rather than creating new ones, the documentary fiction author is not as good a craftsman as the author of non-hybrid fiction.

Dee also points toward a number of ethical concerns specifically related to the use of psycho-narration. Hybridized characters are given thoughts and emotions which their real-life counterparts may not have had. The problem in this is that, if readers do take the hybrid reality and read it in a factual manner, i.e., read the novel as a representation of the truth (such as the Blatchford incident), then the private sphere and personal autonomy are challenged. A real-world individual’s inner-life is no longer his or her own, and these novels represent a larger trend: our generation “has been witness to an enormous shift in the whole notion of what constitutes a private life” (82). This is especially true when psycho-narration is applied to characters who are already dead, in novels whose “imaginative capital is death” (81), such as *Paul’s Case*.

In “Privacy and the Ethics of Literature,” Guy Gavriel Kay argues that authors who appropriate real-world figures for their stories start “playing with real people” (52). Kay’s essay is itself a response and continuation of the argument made by Dee, though Kay is primarily focussed on the effect of these novels on society. He sees such works as detrimental to the private sphere, the area of our lives which belong to us alone. Noting that while no one actually owns the story of his or her own life (53), Kay argues that we must recognize that in our society, each individual has a private life which we must respect, rather than violate. Highlighting both the ethical and the legal, he asks:

If I write a novel which describes a luminary long dead as a degenerate

and drug addict, is it ethically on the other side of some great divide from doing the same thing with a present-day notable? There may be legal distinctions: a libel suit is possible for the living, but not the dead, but we must avoid formulating these issues in terms of what the law can and cannot do. Our personal and collective morality is surely not contiguous with what the law prescribes. (51)

He further notes that, relating to literature and to life, “[l]aws cannot define the limits and borders of ethical behaviour, and we are surely entitled to judge a work of art as brilliant *and* morally troublesome” (53). Ultimately, Kay argues for reassessment of the notion of authorial entitlement and the use of real people in fictions and hybrids, along with the recognition that we must still protect freedom of expression. Authors have to be allowed to write, but that does not mean that we give up the right to decide our individual identities.

Others have drawn attention to these and similar problems. In “Imaginary Gardens and Real Toads,” Felicia Ackerman points to other ethical issues surrounding novels similar to *Paul’s Case*. Should authors be free to write the lives of real people as they see fit? Ackerman answers that they should not, for it is obvious “that basing fiction on real people can harm them” (142). She then establishes a detailed argument about why real people may react to their supposed “fictional” treatment. Furthermore, Ackerman also notes that in some cases, harm may be done when the reader does *not* identify the fictional character with the real-world counterpart, such as when original thoughts and ideas of the real-world person are attributed to a fictional character (143). In such cases, if the reader does not recognize or know the originator of those ideas, he or she may think

that those ideas originate with the author of the documentary fiction. While Ackerman does not take legal ramifications into account, this example could be an argument for the protection of intellectual property.

Salman Rushdie's historical/documentary novel *Midnight's Children* contains a number of historical errors, some of which affect the narrative. In his essay "'Errata': Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*," Rushdie explains that while writing the novel, "whenever a conflict arose between literal and remembered truth, I would favour the remembered version" (24). Yet Rushdie also tells of how readers would write him letters documenting the errors, readers who wanted the novel "to be the history, even the guidebook, which it was never meant to be" (25). Were those readers simply pointing out the mistakes in Rushdie's novel? Or, is *Midnight's Children* an attempt at deception, with its inclusion of errors actually purposely written into the novel by Rushdie? The author argues: "[h]istory is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge" (25). Yet this does not explain why Rushdie faced legal pressure to change part of his novel. In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie suggests that Indira Gandhi played a role in the death of her husband. According to Catherine Cundy in her study of Rushdie's works, later editions of *Midnight's Children* were revised to comply with a libel suit filed against Rushdie (37). Apparently, Gandhi found her treatment in the novel to be unjust, as she did not like the intimation that she was to blame for her husband's heart attack.

It is clear that these problems must be taken into account if we are to truly make sense of documentary fictions. Even if authors do not have a legal obligation to protect

those they write about, surely we can say that they have a social/ethical obligation to consider those individuals. Nadine Gordimer may have done just that for her own work of documentary fiction, *Burger's Daughter*, a novel whose protagonist is the young daughter of an imprisoned political activist. Speaking about the real-world girl the character is based on, Gordimer admits knowing that the created persona of the girl's father "would be attributed to him" and further recognizes that "the complex family relations [Gordimer] had created would be attributed to her and her family. The ontological conflicts within unquestioned political faith imposed by parents upon children with the rigour of a religious one would be seen as their own conflicts" (9). This being the case, previous to publication of the novel, Gordimer sent a manuscript to the girl, along with a letter explaining that only the daughter could "know" her father as he was in real life, and recognizing that he was not the man presented in the novel (9-10). The question of accuracy "What if I got it wrong?" plagued Gordimer. She writes "[w]orst of all, for the novelist: would the girl's finding be that *I had understood nothing*; that the metamir had failed to discover what the silver-backed mirror of the apparent cannot reveal?" (9, author's emphasis). Though the girl's response to the manuscript was positive, as she did see a close reflection of her family in Gordimer's novel, what prompted the author to pass along that manuscript in the first place? Why did the author search for this *validation* of a novel she readily admits will transgress other boundaries? Though she may not want to admit it, it appears as though Gordimer wanted to make sure she got it right, not just for herself, but also *for the people involved*.

As I have repeatedly shown, making sense of documentary novels is not a simple matter. These works do contain facts and truths, albeit mediated ones, left by the author

for the reader to find. However, it is often the case that the author does not take into account how those truths may affect *the real world*, and affect the reader's understanding of that world. The author-reader contract is a social one, not made in the hybridized world of the fiction but in the real world in which author and reader live. So why is it that many authors argue that their works are just fictions, argue that they are not guilty of "playing with real people" or, as Gordimer calls it, of "predatory realism?" (13). Authors *must* be responsible for their works.

I am not calling for censorship of authors and their works. Nor am I arguing in favour of a ban on documentary and historical novels. Moreover, in agreement with Cohn, I find psycho-narration to be a valuable narratological tool, one which makes literary characters and works more interesting and accessible to me as a reader. Rather, I am suggesting that authors and their readers be aware of what is at stake. Those issues at hand, social, legal, aesthetic, and ethical, along with an author's position as originator, ideas about creative license, the (re)interpretation and sometimes alteration of documented "truths," all have roles in relation to documentary fiction. As such, it is necessary to submit this genre to further scrutiny and critical analysis in order to make sense of these issues, and to assess the potential problems they may raise. While I cannot hope to solve these problems here, I can and do recognize these issues and believe it to be my duty to point them out to others. As hybrid novels, documentary fictions are, in part, imaginative representations. Yet they are also truth-telling documents, and therefore must be understood and respected as such, by authors and readers alike.

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