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A spiral bridge

Abstract
Commencing tertiary students in writing and communications programs often struggle to absorb literary and cultural theory as it is presented in existing texts. Finding alternate strategies for presenting such material might prove productive. One possible alternate strategy evolved from the preparation of the theoretical component of my PhD thesis, during which I realised that I was telling a story not only about the object of analysis (the creative artefact), but also about the very selection and synthesis of theory for my epistemological apparatus. Forming the view that the discursive and experiential composition of a writing subject is central not only to literary practice but also to critical and theoretical practice, I recognised this as one of the defining attributes of a fictocritical approach, which validates exploration, construction and application of literary theory by using the textual strategies, traditions and conventions of literature itself, so that theory might 'don the clothing' of literature and 'walk about in it', much as an actor does to understand and interpret a character for an audience. Thus writing literary and cultural theory into a narrative might prove useful for commencing tertiary students, who are likely to be familiar with literary strategies and conventions.
Keywords: allegory; fictocriticism; literary and cultural theory; teaching literature and writing; creative artefact and exegesis.

It has been my experience, both as a mature-age university student and subsequently as a tutor in writing and creative communication, that the acquisition and absorption by commencing university students of literary theory, so central to an adequate understanding and command of writing and communication (and, I believe, a vital component of effective and critical citizenship), is a process as often impeded as facilitated by the way in which it is written about. Much writing about theory in this area is characterised by density, self-referentiality, and a complex and often neologistic vocabulary. Perhaps, in the humanities at least, only philosophy is less penetrable for the reader coming to it for the first time, and it is no coincidence that literary theory is substantially rooted in this discipline.

The ability to read and understand texts on literary theory depends very much on the patience, application and textual competence of the student, and of course on the considerable expenditure of skill and time of the tutor or lecturer. In the current higher education environment, it appears that neither of these can be fully relied upon.

One reason for this belief is the observation that students are no longer accustomed to, and few have been trained in, reading and digesting long and/or complex written texts. McInnis and James, for instance, observed that many students who were dissatisfied with their experience of tertiary education in the first year 'had difficulty … comprehending the material they were asked to read (43 per cent compared to 24 per cent)' (1999: 3), although it must be noted that their respondents were not confined or specific to literary or cultural studies disciplines.

While this appears to be principally a result of technological developments and their cultural consequences - where most communication occurs electronically and is broken up into multiple exchanges of short duration, most often presented audio-visually rather than in writing - it may also be influenced by contemporary primary and secondary curriculum design and delivery that incorporates attitudes towards language which are arguably an over-reaction against the prescriptive determinism to which earlier generations were subject. This has resulted in what has been criticised (in my view, sometimes fairly, sometimes not) as an excessively postmodern, 'anything goes' approach to written language.

A second reason is that the current structure of teaching in universities, with its over-reliance (to the point of exploitation) on sessional teaching staff, makes it more difficult for tutors and lecturers to allocate sufficient time to explain and discuss the relevant theory in the necessary detail. Tutors' variable academic backgrounds may lead to a corresponding variety in their degree of expertise and understanding in the field; and the limits imposed on their time, paid hourly out of tight budgets for closely prescribed activities, often require that they either shortchange their students or themselves. Although most - honourably, but to their disadvantage - choose the latter, the danger is that despite their best efforts they wind up doing both. They must, therefore, substantially leave students to answer their own questions about theory and how to interpret the dense, technical, insider-language of its texts - which, considering the point made above about the lack of student capacity and motivation for independent reading of 'difficult' academic texts, becomes less likely.

Although I suspect that, in common with most disciplines, a certain degree of discursive 'gate-keeping' occurs, I do not mean to imply that the level of technicality, density, complexity and sophistication of literary theory texts is unnecessary or gratuitous: complex disciplines inevitably involve complex ideas, which in turn require specialised language for their precise and economical expression. However, to gain access to such complexity, it is necessary to follow a stage-by-stage process, in the same way that one must first discover what a dog is, and then what a name is, before one can identify a specific dog with a specific name. This uncomplicated idea is recognised in Jerome Bruner's model of the 'spiral', where all new knowledge must be based on knowledge already acquired, and each stage of knowledge acquisition depends on all of its previous stages and the sequence in which they have occurred (Bruner 1960: 13, 52-54).

Thus it is necessary to provide introductory texts, and many are currently available. One thing that these texts have in common is that they are all presented as academic texts, written in academic prose. Certainly such texts are less technical, less complex, less arcane, than the central theoretical texts, and they provide explanations of terms as a basis for further reading and understanding of the ideas. But they are still written using the same generic conventions, registers, textual strategies, vocabularies and rules.

In one way, of course, this is a positive: they are an introduction not only to the theory, but also to the genre of academic writing in this area. In my experience, however, a significant proportion of commencing students in the discipline do not take readily to such texts, finding them dry and unappealing. For such students, being introduced to the ideas and some of the terminology before being introduced to the genre may provide a sort of generic 'bridge' to deeper reading and understanding of the concepts and their applications.

Before returning to this line of argument, it is necessary to make a couple of observations about literary theory. First, literary theory can be situated as a component of cultural theory, which in turn can be situated within the widest[1] field of enquiry and knowledge construction: philosophy. Second, its prime purpose is, obviously enough, to construct knowledge of and insights into its object: literature. Thus a subject-object relationship exists between literary theory and literature, as it does between any body of theory and its object.

Many ideas and concepts applied in the study and practice of literature apply also to - indeed are derived from - cultural theory, as well as other fields of philosophy. I include here the practice of literature because interpretive operations constitute an influence on literary reception - reading, comprehension, consequent aesthetic, intellectual and cultural effects - and must also, therefore, have an influence on how authors might approach the construction of their texts to achieve the effects they desire. Literature, after all, serves a wide range of functions, only one of which is expression of the experience of an individual authorial consciousness. Literature is also analysis, comment, rhetoric, contemplation, pedagogy, speculation, political action, experiment and/or entertainment, to name but a few. One thing it must always be, however - subject to a broad definition of the term as the process of transferring meaning between one consciousness and another - is communication. For Volosinov, '*Any utterance*, no matter how weighty and complete in and of itself, *is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication*' (1973: 95; emphasis in original). A work of literature, certainly 'weighty and complete in and of itself', is no less a moment of communication than any other utterance. As such, its design is never random or accidental (though some of its effects certainly may be): it is always constructed deliberately to achieve its desired effects. Developments in interpretation and ways of reading, therefore, are significant to the author's practice, upon which they will exercise an influence.

The subject-object relationship between theoretical and literary texts is maintained throughout extant introductions to theory. While such introductions may quote literary extracts as examples upon which to perform analyses, none of which I am aware adopt or adapt any of the strategies of their object genre to construct or communicate their ideas to the reader. I find this curious, particularly since students are unlikely to be interested in literary theory unless they are already interested in literature.

If one accepts this premise, the notion arises without undue prompting that perhaps theory might productively operate using some of the textual strategies and genre conventions of literature itself. It is logical that it does so. Its object is literature. It analyses, interprets, situates and constructs a range of knowledges around and of literature. In that process, it must necessarily interact with and respond to the attributes of literature. In this enterprise, to don the clothing of literature and walk about in it, just as an actor does - must do - to understand, interpret and portray a character, and to communicate that understanding and interpretation to an audience, surely promises new insights into the operations of both critical and literary texts.

Further, the translation of the ideas of theory into a register from which narratives can be constructed, including their expression in simpler, more common language and their ordering into sequences that transform their logical relations into simulacra of chronological and even sociocultural relations, itself constitutes a 'reworking', an operation of 'reconstruction' of the ideas themselves which might be expected to lead to both a deeper and a wider understanding of the ideas. Translation scholars have long acknowledged that translation is really transformation and reconstruction, and that unproblematic, transparent one-to-one relationships between elements of symbolic systems do not exist.

Many of these arguments occurred to me during the evolution of my PhD thesis (Robins 2007), which incorporated a novel for children and an exegesis that explored issues surrounding my representations of Indigenous Australian cultures and people in the novel.[2] In constructing a theoretical 'toolbox' with which to explore the source of my representations, I found that I was in fact telling a story not only about the object of analysis - my representational practice - but also about the construction of my epistemological apparatus: about the theory itself and my particular synthesis of it. It was a story with which to think about another story. I told myself this story in order to understand more clearly - and perhaps, due to my greater comfort and familiarity with narrative conventions, techniques and strategies, more naturally and intuitively - what I had done in constructing the representations contained in the novel.

The resulting exegetical text was a multi-genre narrative comprising four 'strands': an allegorical fiction; autobiographical interludes; academic endnotes; and commentary in footnotes. This narrative seeks to tell a story whose characters and events represent a set of ideas that form part of literary theory.

Since completion of the thesis and award of my PhD, a passage from the report of one of my examiners has reverberated in my mind:

> Of particular interest in this exegesis is the way the candidate builds a narrative of theory from a beginning, from the bottom up, and continues with the thickening of the theory plot, showing how concepts work towards other concepts, how they are linked and dependent on each other, how the understanding of one leads to the unfolding of others, and so forth. I feel this is a marvellous insight, *and something of great value for young learners of contemporary theory.* (emphasis added)

This led me to consider the possibility of a text that would introduce student readers - from, say, late secondary through commencing tertiary - to certain fundamental elements of literary theory through the narrative-based, multi-genre approach I had used in the exegesis. With this in mind, I have started to develop the exegesis into such a text (current working title *Travelling the spiral*).

Clearly, the whole field cannot be encapsulated in any one text, conventional or otherwise, and my proposed text does not pretend to such a goal. Instead, the ideas it represents are those that I gathered for my own particular theoretical 'toolbox' for the purposes stated above. The theoretical bias is predominantly poststructuralist; the ideas of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and Bakhtin are most prominent here.

A literary self: its history and construction

The base topic of the proposed text is how a writing and reading subject is constructed. This is explored by looking at the history of the construction of my literary, meaning-making self. As the function for which I originally synthesised this theoretical approach was the interrogation of my representational practices as a writer of fiction, my subjectivity as a writer - and its sources in my subjectivity as a reader - provide a logical arena within which to conduct that investigation. Textual representations are selected and organised by a writing subject, whose discursive makeup conditions those representations. Thus the representations I as a writing subject produce are the consequence not of any attribute or characteristic of their objects, but rather of my construction of and response to those attributes or characteristics as conditioned by the conceptual and discursive composition of my own subjectivity. My subjectivity as a writer clearly rests on and is a subset of my overall subjectivity as an encultured human being, and hence subjectivity itself must be a focus of investigation.

Of course the investigation of the formation of a writing subjectivity is not the sole intention: clearly, the text is also intended to be very much about how a theorising subject is formed. Its central thesis, however, is that both subjectivities can - indeed, should and usually do - co-exist in a single consciousness.

Any discussion of subjectivity is, for me, also a discussion of consciousness and of representation. The three mutually define each other in a tripartite phenomenon that is the most, possibly even the only, universal human experience. Although the phenomenon may be universal however, each manifestation of it - each specific conscious, representing subject - is uniquely conditioned through encultured experience.

Each subject organises representations into coherent narratives through which they understand their experience of, and form their relationship with, their world. The discourses and genres into which these narratives - these stories - are organised condition that relationship and experience, and thereby the subject's constitution. In this process, the subject is both consumer and (re)producer of stories, with each role cumulatively conditioning the other.

In literate cultures, stories are (or at least were until relatively recently) most commonly written, making reading central to subject formation. Stories with similar functions and sets of characteristics that fit them for those functions are associated into genres. But genres do not coexist as discrete units within the subject; they collide, interact, accommodate, oppose and resist, harmonise and clash; and when they do, they rupture and interpenetrate, combine and reformulate, and each new formulation both consumes and exceeds its components. This rupture and interpenetration violates the borders, the laws that define each genre, that say 'do' or 'do not' (Derrida 1980: 56), and the resulting reformulation is of those laws of 'do' and 'do not'. Over time, these productive, evolutionary collisions accumulate into a polyphonic narrative weave that produces the speaking, writing, representing subject.

Richard E Miller implicitly recognises this process when he proposes a type of writing he calls 'institutional autobiography':

> The course of any given individual life cuts through or around a set of institutions charged with responsibility for nurturing both a sense of self and a sense of connection between self and society … By linking the institutional with the autobiographic,

> my goal is not to draw attention away from our individual differences, but rather to show that we all internalize institutional influences in ways that are both idiosyncratic and historically situated, open-ended and overdetermined, liberating and confining. We all go to school, bringing both our minds and our embodied histories: what happens there is both utterly predictable and utterly mysterious, the circumscribed movement of a statistical norm and the free flight of aberrant data. (Miller 2005: 26)

The 'autobiography' Miller describes here is a narrative that tracks, within a conscious subject, these discursive and generic collisions and their effects. He recognises that discourses of the personal and what he terms the 'institutional' influence each other, an influence that risks elision if discursive boundaries are reified, creating a 'blind spot' to its effects on the subject's self-construction.

His approach also recognises that the consciousness is a vessel that contains and frames contradictory impulses and influences and it is the collisions of these that provide the combination of cohesion and imbalance that produces meaningful action in an individual consciousness. Miller's picture of competing discursive forces resonates both with Bakhtin's notion of the action of monologic institutional discourses on heteroglossic discourses of personal inclination, desire and sociocultural interaction at the level of the individual to force upon them a dialectic which will serve its interests (in Ashcroft & Salter 1994: 72-74) and with Lyotard's *grand* and *petit récits*, or the large-scale and small-scale narratives of which the overall story of an individual consciousness is constituted (cited Pope 2002: 132).

The discourses of literary theory

Literary theory is an institutional discourse, as are most of the discourses on which it draws: philosophy, psychology and linguistics, for instance. However, the range of discourses and experiences that contribute to its object, literature, is much wider, incorporating more personal, and a wider variety of institutional, discourses. There appears, therefore, to be a mismatch between subject genre and object genre in terms of the range of their discursive repertoires. What effect might this have on the stories that theory can tell about literature and how it can tell them? Does it expand their range, or limit it?

Another difference between theory and its object is that, in the attempt to create knowledge about literature, the critical writing subject is de-emphasised in favour of the theory used to analyse the literary text. The illusion thus created is of a disembodied - hence objective, hence ontologically reliable - knowledge (that is, a 'truth') about its object. In pursuit of a dialectic that aims to achieve consensus with the reader about that knowledge, the critical writing subject attempts to naturalise and thus reify its representations by effacing its own role in their production. In the literary text, however, subjectivity is central; the fictional writing subject pursues a dialogue with reading subjects through the text to construct a range of divergent and contingent knowledges, or 'truths'. Indeed, literary 'truth' is largely predicated on how convincing the subjectivities and their experiences marshalled in the text appear to the subjectivity of the reader. Terms like 'authenticity'[3] are often used to measure this kind of literary 'truth effect'.

One critical aspect of these relationships is power. The critical writing subject holds significant power over its object/s: the text and its contents. This includes

(its Barthesian demise notwithstanding) the literary writing subject or 'author', and all of that subject's products within (and sometimes outside) the text. This power relationship resembles that between the traditional 'objective' anthropological researcher and his or her object group (confusingly, of course, often referred to as a 'subject' group); a relationship that, for very good reasons, has fallen out of favour in that discipline. Reformulation of the relationship between critical and literary writing subject and their resources is akin to the shift in ethnographic research from an illusory anthropological 'objectivity' to approaches that incorporate acknowledgement of the presence and cultural positioning of the researching subject and its influence on all aspects of the research. In a very real way, such a reformulation offers the critical writing subject (and hence its readers) the opportunity to become 'participant/ observers' of literature, theory, and the relationship between them.

It may be argued that studying human cultures is not the same as studying literature; that texts and the ideas from which they are built are qualitatively different from people in interaction; and to an extent this is so. But if literature is not a component, a product and, most crucially, a process of human culture, what is it? And what of theory? Is that not also a component and product of human culture? When we study them, we study human things, examples of, products of, and insights into the way humans are; indeed, of what, in specific cultural contexts, humanity is and might be. We participate in processes of meaning construction, negotiation and exchange that are the essence of the process of culture.

Reformulating the way critical theory operates relative to its object also appears to offer a range of possibilities for creating new knowledges, new genres and new power relationships, at least on the level of the symbolic order (Sharpe 2005).[4] A writer/ scholar from a colonised culture - perhaps Indigenous Australian, Indian, African or Native American - might find that such an approach offers a possible point of departure for interrogations of colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial literature and theory, opening up ways to tell a range of stories about both those objects and the interrogations into them and creating possibilities for the evolution of new subjects, new objects and new relationships between them.[5]

Another difference between theory and literature is effect. In theory, the predominant effect pursued is intellectual; in literature - as art - it is aesthetic. Theory, therefore, seeks an intellectual effect (idea) from studying an object with an aesthetic effect (sensation). Clearly, these are not discrete, mutually exclusive effects; literature routinely incorporates both. But how often is that the case with theory?

Miller's 'institutional autobiography' places the subject at the nexus of subject- and object-oriented discourses, recognising that the one vessel holds, and is thus produced by, all of its internalised narratives and experiences, and any text that subject produces will reflect their totality. Therefore the discursive and experiential composition of a writing subject is central to any examination of that subject's representational practices, whether literary or critical and theoretical. One critical approach that adopts this acknowledgement as one of its defining attributes is fictocriticism.

The fictocritical merging of subject and object

Though allied to other critical strategies evolving elsewhere,[6] fictocriticism has developed principally in Australia. Anna Gibbs provides some background:

> In literary studies, the collapse of the discourse/metadiscourse distinction meant the collapse of 'critical distance' … This distance was that between the literary text as an object of study, and those discourses in which the study was carried out, whether commentary, interpretation, or theory. (Gibbs 2005)

Subject/object relationships exist at all levels of representation, including genre. The collapse of critical distance to which Gibbs refers leads to a robust renegotiation of the relationship between theoretical subject and literary object, catalysed by the view that the metadiscourse of theory is no less subjective (and perhaps no less 'creative') than that of literature.

Gibbs continues: 'Perhaps most pernicious, the rhetorical strategies and techniques of fiction were found to be at work in avowedly objective assessments of literary value'. This means that 'theory can be read as fiction …', which means that it should surely also be able to be written as fiction, '… and it can be played with, play being, of course, a serious business'; a business of which mimicry is a core strategy. As Gibbs suggests:

> writing may be driven as much by the body as by thought: it partakes not simply of ideas, but of sensory and affective knowledges which are not secondary to thought … but which are active in deciding not only the forms ideas will take, but also in discovering or inventing ideas themselves. One way we make use of these extended cognitive capacities is by mimicry. (Gibbs 2005)

She interprets Roger Caillois' view of mimicry as 'something excessive which … dissociates consciousness from the body so that the subject merges with itssurroundings' (Gibbs 2005). This merging effect constitutes a collapse of difference between organism and environment akin to 'the collapse of critical distance that gives rise to fictocriticism' (Gibbs 2005). The fictocritical strategy allows one genre to mimic - merge with - others, renegotiating the position of the resultant text within its symbolic environment. As Gibbs points out, mimicry never results in an exact copy of the original; there are always differences and, as in the replication of DNA, the differences are often productive. Gibbs suggests that Laleen Jayamanne (2001), for example:

> attempts a kind of writing about film which mimes the original 'in a new modality', so that the 'double that emerges is not a copy or imitation of the object, but a mimetic double of it'. This implies that an excess or difference is produced which contributes something new to the work discussed.

This type of criticism traces its object, attempting in some way to 'become' it. It resembles an actor's process of 'becoming' a character by tracking and attempting to occupy the coordinates of the character's unique subject position. This productive act of mimicry is an act of play, a series of heuristic experiments through which the subject position is reproduced.

To press the analogy further, each actor (writer, subject) may select a different theoretical structure to determine their strategy and interpret their experience. Such choices impose specific constraints on the range of possibilities within which mimicry can occur, and hence its result. Similarly, the selection and organisation of generic attributes by the fictocritical writer precondition the possibilities for the resulting text, and the knowledges it can produce. Analysis through 'objective' critical strategies can produce certain knowledges about the literary object, while a very different range might be produced by actualising a

different coalescence of internalised narratives in the writing subject, even when fundamentally the same theories are used.

The mimesis, the cloaking, referred to above may, therefore, involve and incorporate subjectivities in a way that inherently affects practice, reflection, analysis and the ethical dimensions of all of those things. In the proposed text, for instance, the grandfather explains to the boy some of the power of representation:

> The trail was easy to follow. Not only did it glow in the dark, but it still hummed when he stepped on it, and in a few minutes he was in the middle of the forest saying 'Hi, Grandpa.'
> 'Have you ever seen Crocodile Dundee?'
> 'Yeah. Why?'
> 'There's a scene where Linda Kozlowski goes to take David Gulpilil's photo and he says she can't, and she puts on that gormless expression and says something like "Why? Because it'll capture your soul?" and he says "No, you've left the lens cap on". Remember that?'
> 'Yeah.'
> 'Well, they were poking fun at a clichéd story about some Indigenous cultures holding such a belief; a belief that had connotations of "primitiveness" and "superstition" attached to it. But you could argue that such a belief recognises a relationship of power between representer and represented. Representation renders the thing represented vulnerable to the operations of any consciousness within which it's held.'
> 'So representing's a pretty powerful thing to do.'
> 'Oh yeah. They're inseparable. Power's built into the structure of representation through the relationship between subject and object. Relationships of symbolic, and therefore also material, power are always involved.'
> 'So my representing Aboriginal people gives me power over them.'
> 'Yes.'
> 'But I don't want power over them! That's not why I did the story!'
> 'We can't avoid power, lad. We're always negotiating it. That's why you've got to be aware.' (Robins 2007: 55-6)

Another relevant concept, discussed by Astrid Lorange in a recent paper on the essay, is Joan Retallack's notion of *poethics*, which Retallack defines as 'what we make of events as we use language in the present, how we continuously create an ethos of the way in which events are understood' (cited Lorange 2009). Poetry, says Lorange, is 'a continued process of making and transforming the world, of enacting an ethos'. She goes on to quote Retallack's description of her goal as an essayist to 'enact, not just write about, a poethics'. Lorange applies these related notions - *poethics* and its enactment - to her discussion of the essay form, but I believe they can also be productively applied to literary theory and criticism. Similarly to the process of mimicry discussed above, theory about literature, notions of 'the literary' and that which is thereby dealt with, described, understood and constructed, can be explored, understood and applied by enacting it - poetically, literarily - through the very textual strategies, traditions and conventions through which its object enacts itself.

If the critical text itself is framed as a fiction, it mimics - merges with - all of these subject/object relationships; and creates more. Further, if other genres -

critical academic writing; autobiography/autoethnography; self-reflexive commentary - are included, the conversation becomes richer and more complex in terms of scope and the subject/object relationships that arise.

For Gibbs, the fictocritical approach is literally 'writing as research' that 'must be constantly invented anew in the face of the singular problems that arise in the course of engagement with what is researched' (Gibbs 2005). Fictocritical writers, then, must find their own way. It is a writing that seeks not to tell the story of 'what happened', but to tell a story *as part of what is happening*. Telling a story 'is an experience in itself, and not merely a way of talking about experience, though it is that as well' (Godzich 1984: xviii).

Fictocritical work most often manifests in a single text that is both subject and object. In the proposed text this is so, but is enacted through a complex chain of subject/ object relationships. The ultimate object is the fictional writing subject, who becomes the primary object for the critical writing subject, who gathers the necessary theoretical resources for the task. But when he does so with and for the fictional writing subject, the analysis becomes a dialogue between them that is also a dialogue between genres; a productive interaction that produces different, more complex subject/object relationships, implicitly recognising that each object is also a subject, each subject also an object. Further, as discussed above, the theoretical writing subject also finds his self-construction the object of investigation, discussion and analysis, till one is justified in wondering exactly who is analysing whom, is analysing what.

Rather than rehearsing a set of textual conventions to reproduce a set of relationships between textual genres, a fictocritical approach offers the possibility to intervene in particular conventions to 'bring about a certain change in a certain set of narrative relations' (Gibbs 2005): between theory and fiction, and between subjectivity and representation.

Ropes and weaves, spirals and places

In the proposed text, a variety of narrative voices stands in a variety of relationships to each other, weaving different genres into a whole that calls to mind variously Wittgenstein's metaphor of the rope (1969: 87), the sense of 'text' as 'weave', and Bakhtin's polyphony (Bakhtin 1984: 16, 18-20).

As outlined above, the principal 'strand' is an allegorical narrative describing the gathering of a range of theoretical tools for the analysis of representational practice in a piece of literary fiction. Another strand of anecdotal, autobiographical and autoethnographic interludes is interspersed throughout the text, distinguished by a different font. A third strand consists of endnotes in the genre of critical academic writing, incorporating citations, quotes, paraphrases and theoretical comments. The fourth strand provides commentary in occasional footnotes that may be rhetorical, meditative, speculative or ludic. The reader is invited to engage with the allegorical narrative and the interspersed autobiographical tales, and to delve as necessary into the theoretical underpinnings and meditations in the endnotes and footnotes.

This strategy is partly inspired by Ellen Cushman's evocation of the image of a 'hall of mirrors' in which the principal narrative, endnotes and footnotes are sets of mirrors reflecting different aspects of the topic (1996: 8). Such devices, although not standard for this discipline, serve a range of textual and structural functions.

The two structural principles upon which the allegorical narrative is woven are the association of knowledge with place, and the model of the spiral. In most cultures, certain places are associated with certain knowledges: the academy, for instance, or the church. This association of knowledge with place is implicit in the Aristotelian rhetorical concept of *topoi*: 'places' where rhetorical resources may be found or placed (Cockcroft & Cockcroft 2005: 82). In many Indigenous cultures, however, this association is not figurative, but literal. In Australian Indigenous cultures, for instance, stories and the knowledges they contain belong to particular sites. Site and story are different aspects of the same phenomenon (Muecke 1997: 69-70), so that material phenomena and their meanings are indistinguishable from each other. Hence, knowledge is not only tropological, but also topological, having not only an archaeology, a la Foucault (1989), but also a topology and a topography.

Archaeology and topology combine via the allegorical narrative's second structural principle, the spiral.[7] A three-dimensional spatial metaphor, the spiral is both topographical and archaeological; its movement has width and depth (indicating space) as well as height (indicating time, and in particular the layering implicit in the notion of archaeology).

In the allegorical narrative, these two structural principles guide the paths of two characters, a boy and his grandfather (each representing aspects of the author's subjectivity), who undertake a journey in search of tools with which to analyse the boy's representational practices in a story he has written. Their journey follows a spiral trajectory that cycles through three principal sites, where knowledges are 'found'. With each turn of the spiral, the three sites of knowledge are visited in a two dimensional, 'horizontal' movement, and at each visit more of the knowledge that belongs to each place accrues 'vertically'. The three sites correspond approximately to knowledges around consciousness, representation and culture, respectively.

The metaphorical relationship between conceptual and material phenomena that characterises allegory manifests here through the physical characteristics of each site and the experience of the boy.[8] Concepts present as material phenomena, such as rocks or fire, or as inner representations - visions, thoughts and dreams:

> A log floated close to the boy. He grasped it and it rocked, setting up a ripple that spread across the water. At one spot the ripple seemed to halt, break and reverse, sending another ripple back. He swam his log towards the spot and found another log. He heaved himself astride the two and they rolled, generating more ripples, which spread out and struck other logs. These also sent back ripples, which grew into waves, and he could read their patterns, telling him where more logs were, and the boy went to them and soon had built a raft. Gradually, log by log, his raft became a boat, until he sat smiling in its cockpit with a tiller under his arm.
> A warm breath filled its mainsail, and in it was the old man's voice. 'Now you've built a self, sign by sign. You have meanings formed into a structure that you call "me", and meanings that tell that structure where it is and where it might be going; signposts, reading "this way to you". They've come through the big Other, from the symbolic order, and your response to it. And look. You've found your way.' (Robins 2007: 40-41)

Allegory, fictocriticism and children's literature

I stated above that the proposed text is intended primarily for students in the last year of secondary and the first year or two of tertiary education in writing and communication programs, and of course literature in particular. I also expressed the view that students would be unlikely to undertake the study of literary theory if they were not first interested in literature itself. Such an interest rarely has its beginnings as late as adolescence. A student with a literary bent has almost invariably experienced and enjoyed stories and reading from an early age. This means that they will be familiar not just with the conventions, genres and textual strategies of literature generally, but specifically with those of children's literature. This leads me to believe that some of the strategies commonly employed in literature for the young may be suitable for an introduction to literary theory for young adults, and allegory is certainly one of the more prominent of these.

Allegory is certainly one of a variety of 'narrative modes' and 'rhetorical strategies' available to a fictocritical approach (Gibbs 2005). In their definitions of allegory, both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Oxford companion to English literature* describe it as 'an extended metaphor' containing 'personifications of abstract qualities' (Brown 1993: 54; Drabble 2000: 18). In allegory, ideas become objects, characters, events and/or material phenomena. A single subjectivity separates, externalising and thereby objectifying internal dialogues. Implicit in allegory is the recognition that 'like the literary from which it had traditionally sought to distance itself, philosophy [is] a tropological discourse. That's to say that it [is] reliant on metaphor, and … metaphors have philosophical consequences' (Gibbs 2005).

Allegory has also been a popular textual strategy in children's literature for a very long time. Two obvious 20th century examples are CS Lewis' *Narnia* series, which are allegorical expressions of aspects of his Christian beliefs, and his more recent ideological opposition, Philip Pullman's *His dark materials* trilogy, which read as allegorical arguments for science, secular humanism and reason as liberatory forces.[9] Also relatively recently, Jostein Gaarder in his 1996 teen novel *Sophie's world* cloaks abstract ideas (quite thinly) within narrative elements like setting, plot and character. Indeed, the text I describe here could be accused of attempting a similar enterprise to *Sophie's world*, in that its purpose is explicitly didactic. Its approach, however, is significantly different, as is its subject matter and its intended audience. This is an academic text, albeit one that reads as a story.

Although stories for children are not generally seen as seriously literary in the same way as adult stories are, they are nevertheless still included in the general category of 'literature', defined by Milner as a culture's 'valued writing' (1996: 6). They incorporate a range of commonly experienced and understood concerns, themes, modes of expression and subject positions. Like any discourse, literature, including children's literature, is a coalescence of other discourses, and the nature of this coalescence mediates its content and structure at any given time. Discourses which construct social 'realities' are important elements of this coalescence, and this attribute of literature is a) a vital element of the understanding of literature and theories of literature, and b) one with which students of literary theory will already be fairly familiar, though probably not in the conscious, analytical way it is dealt with in literary theory. Indeed, my hope is that building a 'bridge' between literature and its theory from the strategies of the former and the ideas of the latter may facilitate students' transition from this implicit familiarity to the more explicit, conscious knowledge and insight involved in literary theory and criticism.

I have argued here that a multi-genre text on literary theory may be effective as an introduction to the field for late secondary and commencing tertiary students. The alteration in subject/object relationships and the creation of new relationships is likely to both engage students and create a new set of understandings of both literature and theory. A fictocritical text that mimics its object, using allegory as one of its strategies, recognises the complexity of the individual conscious subject who reads, writes and constructs knowledges around literature and literary theory, enabling that subject to approach ways of doing so that may not otherwise be realised.

To conclude, I would like to clarify that the text discussed here is not intended to constitute any sort of unified or definitive body of theory or a complete and/or integrated pedagogical approach. It is an introduction to some of the ideas, perspectives and practices of theory, and uses specific theorists and ideas as examples of that practice. Heuristic in nature, its aims are epistemological, not (at least not directly) ontological.

Notes

1. And, I would argue, the most fundamental, field. I consider the 'hard' sciences to be a branch of philosophy, and mourn the demise of their original rubric, 'natural philosophy'. return to text

2. For a discussion of some of those issues, see Robins (2008). return to text

3. With all the problematic consequences of this much abused term. return to text

4. Of course, given the power of the symbolic order, this transformation may reasonably be expected to extend to other, more 'real', arenas. return to text

5. Just as a writer, like me, from the colonising culture, can construct new knowledge about the effects of their own cultural construction on colonised cultures and on themselves. return to text

6. For example 'blurred genre' writing (Woods 2007), the 'paraliterary' (Dawson 2002: 141) and 'confessional criticism' (Dawson 2002: 145). return to text

7. This figure inheres in a variety of belief structures: some Indigenous Americans see time as a spiral (Jojola 2004); and educational psychologist Jerome Bruner has proposed the spiral as a model for how people learn (Bruner 1960: 13, 52-54). return to text

8. I take 'experience' to mean an effect of consciousness in the subject which is a consequence of a tripartite phenomenon involving perception of external phenomena, the operations of representation in the consciousness of the subject and the consequent processing of perceived phenomena through those operations. return to text

9. Pullman has vehemently criticised the conservative Christian attitudes implicitly and explicitly expressed in the *Narnia* series and characterised his trilogy as an argument against those attitudes. See, for example, Wood 2001. return to text

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