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**“This is not a work of fiction”:
Examining Robin Hyde’s *Passport to Hell* as Creative
Nonfiction**

A thesis
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Abstract

In 1936, journalist Robin Hyde prepared the final copy of a biographical novel that blended fact and fiction in order to capture the experience of the disreputable World War I veteran James Douglas Stark. The careful intertwining of research and creativity in *Passport to Hell* is redolent of present-day creative nonfiction and therefore renders Hyde a pioneer of the genre. However, creative nonfiction was not academically acknowledged until years after Hyde's death, so her literary experimentation triggered a critical response from the public.

This thesis traces back the origins of creative nonfiction so as to illuminate the uncertainty which continues to permeate the genre. Academic guidelines of creative nonfiction are then used as a platform to analyse Hyde's employment of fictional techniques in order to illuminate the ingenuity of her creative writing. The criticism Hyde faced when publishing *Passport to Hell* is outlined alongside her insightful riposte which contributes to our understanding of creative nonfiction today.

The creative component of my thesis is comprised of the first three chapters of a novelisation of the life of Ettie Rout, a sexual health campaigner who challenged local and international governments in order to improve the lives of soldiers during World War I. My interaction with creative nonfiction confirmed that even today, many authors struggle to operate within the confines of a single genre due to the continued debate around the level of fiction deemed appropriate in creative nonfiction. However, the fluidity Hyde exercises in *Passport to Hell* inspired a sense of freedom in my treatment of Rout, and therefore emboldened my commitment to focus more heavily on the intimate portrayal of her character rather than confining my work to the boundaries of genre.

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Introduction

In 1936, Robin Hyde finished her final interview with James Douglas Stark, a bomber in the fifth reinforcement of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the First World War. Six weeks after she began, Hyde prepared the final copy of her manuscript based on his life both leading up to and including the war. *Passport to Hell* was published with the opening statement, “This is not a work of fiction” (Hyde, *Passport* 3). This line spoke of the awakening of a new genre, one that intertwined research and creativity, and which had not begun to publicly emerge until well after Hyde’s death. Creative nonfiction was yet to be developed and understood as it is today: a genre wherein fidelity to biographical fact is crafted with an artistic manipulation of narrative and language. These qualities are manifested in *Passport to Hell*, a biographical novel supplemented with fictional techniques that capture the soldier’s experience with an unrelenting precision and unforgiving imagination.

From her background in journalism and interest in the human condition, Hyde was struck by the story of a man whose dark skin and contempt for authority kept him revolving in and out of disciplinary action for the duration of his service overseas. Hyde used her experience in writing and her interviews with Stark to publish an intricate tale that blends fact and fiction in order to capture the emotion, trauma and experience of a New Zealand soldier in World War I. The initial categorisation of *Passport to Hell* as war writing or journalism delimited her work as neither genre allowed much room for authorial presence. But as of 1936, the public had yet to be introduced to this new blend of fact and fiction, so Hyde’s experimentation triggered a critical response that claimed the fictional elements were a discredit to the biographical nature of the book. Therefore, Hyde

may have avoided the incurred scandal if her innovative writing style had been considered through the lens of present-day creative nonfiction. For example, Phillip Gerard outlines in *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life*, that creative nonfiction takes advantage of such fictional devices as character, plot and dialogue; it contains a sense of reflection on the part of the author; it contains an apparent subject and a deeper subject, and long after the apparent subject ceases to be topical, the deeper subject and the art that expresses it remain vital; and it shows serious attention to the craft of writing (9-11). The employment of these features allowed Hyde to create an in-depth account of a soldier's experience; *Passport to Hell* not only recounts the physical movements of an army, but also portrays emotion and trauma in a way which strays from the journalistic style of the time and aligns more closely with creative nonfiction. However, this link to creative nonfiction formed the basis of what some labelled as factual manipulation; a common consequence of writing within a genre founded on ambiguity.

Lee Gutkind, the “godfather behind creative nonfiction” defines the genre as “true stories, well told”, claiming that “in some ways creative nonfiction is like jazz— it’s a rich mix of flavors, ideas, and techniques, some of which are newly invented and others as old as writing itself” (“What Is”). But like many scholars who have experience with the genre, Gutkind acknowledges that its title is less than suitable: “The word ‘creative’ refers to the use of literary craft... [however the term] has been criticized in this context because some people have maintained that being creative means that you pretend or exaggerate or make up facts and embellish details.” On the contrary, he maintains, “It is possible to be honest and

straightforward and brilliant and creative at the same time” (“What is”). As a further, Gerard states:

It’s always seemed odd to me that *nonfiction* is defined, not by what it *is*, but by what it is *not*, it is *not* fiction. But then again, it is also *not* poetry, or technical writing or libretto. It’s like defining classical music as *nonjazz*. Or sculpture as *nonpainting*... No other genre suffers under this metaphysical definition by negation. (3-4)

There continues to be debate around the principles and origins of the genre, but extensive research has only produced somewhat inconclusive results. The condition of misperception in the genre is also apparent in the negative reviews Hyde received, one of which questioned the veracity of the account and “rendered her work worthless as a record of truth” due to minor factual errors and misinterpretations (Smith, Introduction xviii). However, as D.I.B. Smith mentions in his introduction to *Passport to Hell*, what Hyde accomplished is similar to what John Galsworthy says of Mottram’s *The Spanish Farm*:

[It] is not precisely a novel, and is not altogether a chronicle... quite clearly the author did not mean it to be a novel, and fail; nor did he mean it to be a chronicle and fail. In other words, he was guided by mood and subject-matter into discovery of a new vehicle of expression— going straight ahead with a bold directness which guarantees originality. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xvi)

Hyde composed creative nonfiction at a time when it was unfashionable to produce a book through such an unfamiliar method, and when creative nonfiction in all its equivocality was yet to be named or recognised. But the exercise of her unique style and literary talents resulted in an unparalleled account of a New

Zealand soldier's war story. Hyde wrote *Passport to Hell* seven years prior to our earliest recorded occurrence of the term 'creative nonfiction'. Due to this, she was not able to gain full credit for her achievements as her novel was displaced into a category it did not belong, simply because the genre she wrote did not yet exist.

Even today, many authors struggle to operate within the confines of a single genre as there continues to be debate around the level of fiction deemed appropriate in creative nonfiction. Over time however, many scholars and writers have attempted to alleviate this tension by contributing to the elucidation of the relatively new writing style. Rather than try to pinpoint the date of the genre's emergence, or continue to classify authors into a specific, commercialised category, some find it important to note how and why this variegated genre developed in the first place. It can be posited that the development of creative nonfiction was influenced by the First World War, emerging as a by-product of the worldwide calamity that left millions disillusioned. Those directly impacted by the war could no longer relate in the same way and therefore sought alternative modes of expression and communication. A generation of journalists were jolted into considering unconventional methods to capture and recreate trauma so as to connect with a wider audience. This is exemplified in *Passport to Hell* as Hyde sought to use Stark's life as a framework to explore subjects that rendered much deeper moral implications. Hyde's experience in journalism did not dictate her writing in a way which limited her creativity, but instead informed the structure and lent experience to the crafting of the story. But journalism alone would not allow her to capture the emotional intensity of moments as told to her by Stark. Therefore, Hyde forged her own path by writing according to a sense of artistic expression, and in doing so, created a remarkable illustration of the life of a

soldier from within a style of writing that was unprecedented, or more so, unnamed, in either New Zealand or the Western world. Creative nonfiction would not be named until years after Hyde published *Passport to Hell*, and even then, scholars were challenged by how to define the framework of the ambiguous genre. In Chapter 1, I trace back the origins of creative nonfiction so as to illuminate the uncertainty which permeated the genre from its academic conception and which continues to characterise it today. This somewhat obscure history is used as a foreground from which I examine *Passport to Hell*, which was deprived of in-depth analysis and therefore ultimate success due to the author's experimentation with fact and fiction. In Chapter 2, I utilise academic guidelines of the genre as a platform to analyse Hyde's novel, assessing her use of such fictional techniques as voice, tone, and theme in order to illuminate the dexterity and ingenuity of her creative writing. In Chapter 3, I follow this close interaction with the text by outlining the critical reception Hyde faced when publishing *Passport to Hell*, as well as her insightful riposte. I conclude with the postulation that the criticism Hyde received is similar to what she would experience today, however, if considered from the platform of creative nonfiction, much greater attention would have been paid to the innovative writing style that positions her as a pioneer of the genre.

This reflection asserts *Passport to Hell* as more than just a war memoir that contributes to New Zealand national identity, but as a text which was groundbreaking in its expert blend of factual foundation and fictional techniques. Hyde's literary experimentation prompted my enthusiasm for and understanding of creative nonfiction, and also inspired my own personal embarkation into creative nonfiction biography. Therefore, the second portion of my thesis comprises of the

first three chapters of a novelisation of the life of Ettie Rout, a journalist and sexual health campaigner who challenged local and international governments in order to improve the lives of soldiers during World War I. The close parallels I discovered between the lives of these women are extraordinary in their similarities, and fuelled my desire to use the life and career of Robin Hyde as a lens through which to approach my own creative adaptation of Ettie Rout's life.

My interaction with creative nonfiction confirmed that even today, many authors encounter uncertainty due to the lack of definitive prescription surrounding the use of fiction. But Hyde's experience provides a new perspective into the way we craft narratives and the way we understand history, proving that our human desire to tell stories and our individual style may not always fall neatly into the genres that dictate the literary industry. Hyde's life and literary achievements demonstrate that the human experience is similar to art in that it is complex and profound, and there are more ways than one to capture essence and emotion and communicate them to the world.

Chapter 1: Creative Nonfiction

“A very queer sort of writing job.”¹

The Origins

Standing amongst the tall rows of books of all ranges, we stare with wonder at the kaleidoscope of colour covering the walls. With folded knees and fiddly fingers, we sit on the carpet and listen as the librarian explains the largest categorical divide in literature, summarised in a simple alliterative rule— ‘fiction-fake’. This first lesson is echoed throughout our development as readers and writers and students. However, this divide between what is fact and what is fiction is not as simple as a librarian or a publisher or even a reader might expect. Creative nonfiction hovers dangerously between the divide, challenging our perception of fact and fiction and the way each is presented. Creative nonfiction encompasses a large array of literature including works related to essays, travel, biography and journalism. As Lee Gutkind states, it promises a reader “factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner [with a goal to] make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy” (“What is”).

As a relatively new genre, only academically acknowledged within the last half-century, creative nonfiction has quickly become one of the fastest growing genres of the literary sphere: “The biggest publishers—HarperCollins, Random House, Norton, and others—are seeking creative nonfiction titles more vigorously than literary fiction and poetry” (Gutkind, “What is”). But although the genre was

¹ (qtd. in Smith, Introduction ix)

not closely studied until the 1970s², there were some who were exploring its boundaries well before the founders began considering its importance. In 1936, New Zealand journalist, poet and author Robin Hyde produced a riveting account of an ANZAC soldier in World War I. The book is constructed almost entirely of subject-led interviews and is supplemented with emotional detail assembled from Hyde's interpretations. Upon publishing, the book was deemed "the most important New Zealand war book yet published" by veteran John A. Lee, as it resonated with a generation whose lives had been marred by the very acts the novel discussed (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiii). However, *Passport to Hell* was subject to criticism due to the inaccuracy of some aspects of the story, mainly that of distances, dates, and spelling, most of which had come directly from Starkie himself. The controversy over Hyde's exactitude was built upon the foundation that the book was classed as nonfiction, and therefore operated outside of the dedicated boundaries of the genre. There is evidence however, that the writing style Hyde demonstrates in *Passport to Hell* is a rendition of creative nonfiction that predates the genre by almost twenty years.

Since being publicly received as a genre, creative nonfiction has experienced exponential growth in the literary sphere. The reason for its rapid progression lies not only in the fact that it was founded on the back of two world wars, but also due to its uncharacteristic combination of imagination and reality. Yet this title has stumped scholars for the decades in which it has been around. The definition of 'creative', as according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary involves being "managed so as to get around legal or conventional limits" and

² Lee Gutkind "taught a class with those words in its title at the University of Pittsburgh as early as 1973" (Moore).

“deceptively arranged so as to conceal or defraud.” The Oxford Dictionary cites creative as: “relating to or involving the use of the imagination or original ideas to create something.” These definitions are the foundation of our understanding, so while we may identify the term with being unique and unprecedented, this idea also invites the notion of manufacture or invention. Facts and statistics may be subject to manipulation, but by nature, they cannot be invented. So what does this mean for a creative nonfiction writer or reader? It means that this genre is not easily definable and therefore the current title lacks the exactitude required for more accurate interpretation. This is exactly what scholars such as Dinty W. Moore have pointed out. Moore has voiced his opinion through multiple conferences and online articles, one of which, *A Genre by Any Other Name*, discusses what his research revealed of the origins of the title:

I’ve probably spent roughly half my waking hours over the past twenty years trying, variously, to justify, replace, or explain the unsatisfying label... I’ve decided to track down the culprits who gave us *creative nonfiction*... Few seem willing to embrace the term, though by this point, almost everyone uses it. Alternatives have been trotted out, but none has taken hold... So *creative nonfiction* is here to stay, it seems, but how did we get here, and why does no one want to take credit for giving us this awkward term in the first place?

After much exploration, Moore traced the origins back to academic databases which revealed the original use of the title when, “In [a] 1969 *Survey of Contemporary Literature*, scholar, writer and professor David Madden uses [the] term ‘creative nonfiction’” (Moore).

However, further research revealed that the term had been used much earlier than Moore was aware. William Bradley read Moore's article and published a response in "Putting the 'Creative' in Nonfiction". With the help of Chris Doody, Bradley traces the specific term back to the Canadian Authors Association where, "the term *creative non-fiction* was introduced and adopted as a prize category at the January 16, 1943 meeting" (Bradley). This is currently the earliest known occurrence of the term being recorded, almost 30 years prior to what Moore believed and 7 years after Hyde published *Passport to Hell*. But even then, at Canada's Governor General's Literary Awards, there was confusion over the term. Bradley notes that:

The works considered 'creative' were largely works of autobiography or journalism... Indeed, the chairman of the board for the 1944 CAA Awards wrote a letter instructing the judges that nonfiction works written to be "entertaining" should be considered for the creative nonfiction prize. In a 1947 report from the board, that description was modified to explain that "lighter, more fanciful books" ought to be considered for the creative award. Almost from the beginning, then, people had trouble understanding and explaining this literary genre.

Bradley concludes with a message to inspire scholars interested in creative nonfiction:

Over the course of three decades or so, something was happening in North American literary culture. Something largely unprecedented and, at the time, unnamed... Surviving the global wars of the 20th century brought us all together, but the individuals among and within us wouldn't be completely silenced or assimilated... There was something in the air in the

middle of the twentieth century—something in our consciousness that woke up and demanded to express itself.

Creative nonfiction seems to have gained ground at a time when the western world was recovering from the devastation of World War I. The idea of humanity was being challenged by people whose way of life was disrupted by an event that would remain a silhouette for the rest of their lives. As scholars state in *Keep it Real*, “the memoir multiplied creates a million little connections, threading an otherwise fragmented postmodern world with the narrative of human meaning” (112). The Great War produced a mass of people who longed to communicate in such a way, to share their stories, to connect with others around the world who understood what it meant to witness an event that caused such devastation. The generation that survived the war no longer found comfort in the old, romantic art forms; they could no longer savour the classics as they once did. The survivors of the war sought a mode of expression that could capture trauma with an authenticity that was more faithful to the human experience. Hyde’s literary style was a direct response to this phenomenon; her concentration on the emotional turbulence of the individual brought the chaos of war into extremely close proximity thereby bridging the gap between the soldier and the public.

First Practitioners

Although the origins of creative nonfiction remain somewhat shrouded in mystery, there is no speculation as to the writers who contributed to the development of the genre. Lee Gutkind, one of its most notable founders, says of the expansion:

In the 1960s and 1970s, Talese, Wolfe and many others... shattered the sacrosanct bonds of feature writing by adapting fictional techniques. They captured subjects in scenes, used dialogue, embellished with intimate and substantial description, and included an inner point of view... thus adding the "creative" element to what was once an impersonal process. ("What's the Story #1")

During this time, authors were producing work on the fringe of a new genre, one that allowed a writer to blend their pragmatic journalistic experience with their desire to cultivate creativity outside of the boundaries of conventional literature. Scholars of *Keep it Real* describe the recognisable features of the transition:

[Writers] embraced a much more personal voice, no longer camouflaging the narrator's personality. They cultivated the subjective voice, believing that the writer's point of view had become an integral part of any story.

(50)

One author not only embraced this transformation, but was instrumental in the first serious discussions regarding its emergence. His lifetime echoes events congruous to Hyde, and is a superior example to be studied from within an academic context; a lifetime belonging to the unique and unquestionably interesting Truman Capote.

The vivacious, animated, and openly homosexual Truman Capote experienced his first taste of fame at age 23 when he gained a contract with Random House in 1948 for *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. This blend of autobiography and fiction was one of Capote's most successful works, of which he stated in 1973, "I was not aware, except for a few incidents and descriptions, of

its being in any serious degree autobiographical. Rereading it now, I find such self-deception unpardonable” (Capote, *Dogs* 4). Similar to the way in which Hyde developed the literary style of *Passport to Hell*, Capote was guided by an intuition to capture the essence of human nature, even if it meant disregarding the conventions of genre. Both emerged from an extensive literary background heavily occupied by journalism. *Passport to Hell* and *In Cold Blood* both represent moments in the authors’ careers when they depart from their accustomed genres and venture into what became an exploratory literary style. This fluidity marked Capote’s first successful encounter with creative nonfiction and established him as one of the most notable contributors to the genre.

Capote’s ground-breaking creative nonfiction novel, *In Cold Blood*, utilises a combination of journalistic and fictional techniques to tell the true story of two men who murdered a Kansas farming family. The international bestseller demonstrates that “Truman Capote's successful blending of fiction-writing and journalism not only broke new ground in the way real-life stories are told and inspired a series of similar works but it has also provided an example of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in such blending” (Newgaard 43). The book is comprised of facts, quotes and events which come directly from interviews with the community, and most notably, the death row criminals. However, similar to Hyde’s *Passport to Hell*, it was the exercise of creative qualities that secured the book’s success as an emotionally insightful commentary on society and humanity.

Over five years and through extensive involvement, Capote sought to understand and record the convicts’ minds and motives, which resulted in his close relationship with the two men up until their execution. Kashner notes the

level of intimacy between Capote and the men, particularly Perry Smith, as one of the factors which led to the author's slow decay and eventual death:

In some ways, the two men were alike: short, compactly built, artistic, the products of deprived early childhoods—it would have been easy for Truman to look into Perry Smith's black eyes and think he was looking at his darker twin. There was a psychological connection between the two of them. Perry's death took it out of him.

Capote's level of submersion in his research did not go unnoticed nor unrewarded. *In Cold Blood* became immediately renowned for the level of detail administered to characters, events and dialogue, all of which were produced in interviews where Capote refused to take notes, and instead would later recount a verbatim transcription of over 90% accuracy³. Although Hyde did not undertake the same level of research as Capote, this is comparable to Hyde's reliance on a first-hand source. She sought not to add yet another history book to the genre of war writing, but instead to capture the experience and perspective of a single soldier. An interesting parallel between the two authors also exists in their choice of subject. Hyde first discovered the tale of Stark when performing research on an Auckland prison and was immediately struck by the criminal history of the man. Capote encountered an article describing the murders and was immediately drawn to it. Both authors spent a great deal of time with social outcasts and during this time, struck upon a new mode of expression which became early versions of creative nonfiction. It can be argued that both authors were attracted to their

³ “Truman used to talk about how he never used a tape recorder or notes or anything doing that book,’ George Plimpton told the *New York Times* when Capote died in 1984. ‘But sometimes he said he had 96 percent total recall, and sometimes he said he had 94 percent total recall’” (Shafer).

respective subjects due to their identification of a commonality with the individual as well as a personal interest in how the complexities of human nature dictate interactions with society. The authors appeared to identify empathetically with their subjects, a result which can be attributed to their dedication to sourcing information from close personal interviews. However, an unfortunate parallel to Hyde lies in the fact that Capote's commitment to maintaining a consistent, trustworthy atmosphere in interviews also created a vantage point for critics to negate the factual elements of the book.

Similar to the ramifications of Hyde's bold opening statement, "This is not a work of fiction", Newgaard claims, "If [Capote] had not claimed to being 'immaculately factual', perhaps his novel would not be as susceptible to criticism on ethical grounds" (Hyde, *Passport* 3; 41). Philip K. Tompkins is one critic who questioned the veracity of *In Cold Blood* and so followed Capote's path to Kansas in order to validate the account:

Capote has, in short, achieved a work of art. He has told exceedingly well a tale of high terror in his own way. But, despite the brilliance of his self-publicizing efforts, he has made both a tactical and a moral error that will hurt him in the short run. By insisting that "every word" of his book is true he has made himself vulnerable to those readers who are prepared to examine seriously such a sweeping claim. (125)

Despite the level of praise, financial prosperity, and even an admission by the leading investigator that, "Out of the thousands of facts he worked with, [Capote] reported practically all of them accurately", Capote was still subject to criticism from those who doubted the intimacy of the detail provided (Newgaard 41). Nevertheless, Jack Olsen, the "Master of True Crime", said of Capote:

I recognized it as a work of art, but I know fakery when I see it... Capote completely fabricated quotes and whole scenes... The book made something like \$6 million in 1960s money, and nobody wanted to discuss anything wrong with a money-maker like that in the publishing business. (Olsen; qtd. in Hood)

Capote retorted that Olsen was jealous of his success, to which Olsen responded:

I was jealous – all that money? I'd been assigned the Clutter case by Harper & Row until we found out that Capote and his cousin [*sic*], Harper Lee, had been already on the case in Dodge City for six months... That book did two things. It made true crime an interesting, successful, commercial genre, but it also began the process of tearing it down. I blew the whistle in my own weak way. I'd only published a couple of books at that time – but since it was such a superbly written book, nobody wanted to hear about it. (qtd. in Hood)

Despite the intervention of multiple veterans who corroborated her account, Hyde was also exposed to similar disparagement which clouded the success of her work. From within a similar context then, Capote not only skirted the boundaries of and helped to develop creative nonfiction, but crime writing as well. But at the time, Capote's alleged manipulation disrupted the book's otherwise positive reception. Furthermore, both of his critics followed up with interviewees and found that some accounts did not match what Capote included in his book. The origins of this manipulation may lie in Capote's interviewees who may have misremembered information at a later date, such as was the case with Hyde and Stark, or the same could have rescinded their account due to a

dissatisfaction with how they were perceived. Or to further expand the discussion, the argument of the limitations of objectivity which proliferates throughout historical fiction, journalism and creative nonfiction could be as Newgaard states, “people perceive things differently and as a result any piece of writing may only represent that writer's understanding of his or her subject” (41).

Regardless of the source of the discrepancies, some felt his reputation was damaged by the mere accusation of fraudulence; a danger that many creative nonfiction writers face today. However, Newgaard examines the novel from both a journalistic and fictional point of view and goes on to comment on the positive effects of blending literary techniques, observing that:

Capote's factual discrepancies, use of narrative structure to create suspense, selective use of sources and information, and personal identification with and sympathy for Smith preclude *In Cold Blood* from exemplifying the integrity of journalistic writing. However, fiction writing confirmed the impact of *In Cold Blood* by demonstrating that techniques heretofore only used in fiction, such as characterization, plot, dialogue, and narrative structure could be effectively used to recount a real-life event...The very techniques which discredit the novel's journalistic integrity strengthen its power as fiction. (38)

So, when examined from a journalistic eye, Capote fails to maintain the level of accuracy he initially claims. But when viewed from a position aligned within creative nonfiction, Capote excels in his ability to present a true story that enraptures audiences through expert use of character, dialogue, and scene. Not only this, but, “the fact that Capote was able to do this with a story whose end was

already known demonstrates the power that fiction-writing techniques provide in relating real life events.” Newgaard also makes the following argument:

Lynn Z. Bloom in "Living to Tell the Tale: The Complicated Ethics of Creative Nonfiction" equates the motives of creative nonfiction writers as being the same as any writer writing something important: "to get at the truth; to make sense of things that don't make sense; to set the record straight; to tell a good story". These motives seem to fall in line with Capote's goal in writing *In Cold Blood* and when we examine what Bloom considers to be the only ethical standard for writers of creative nonfiction, to present "their understanding of both the literal and the larger Truth", Capote's discrepancies in fact and character portrayal diminish in significance. (35; 39)

Newgaard even suggests that the factual inaccuracies contribute to the overall success of the book, claiming, “the instances where discrepancies occur, the dialogue and scenes he seems to have created, and his sympathetic portrayal of Smith seem to be efforts to convey Capote's understanding of the larger ‘truth’ of the story” (40). This is comparable to Hyde’s motivations and her, “emerging trajectory of self-discovery, increasingly ‘writing from the perspective of the committed outsider looking in’” (Edmond-Paul, “Dark Torch” 20). Newgaard maintains an objective balance when considering Capote’s work from both a journalistic and fictional position, but his analysis can also be used to fortify the discussion surrounding both Hyde’s novel and other works of creative nonfiction which have come under criticism for their flexible treatment of genre. Both Hyde and Capote created magnificent literary works that contributed greatly to the public consciousness surrounding a controversial and traumatic event. They both

used journalism as a basis for their novels, and they both enhanced their accounts with literary or creative qualities. However, due to the lack of development of creative nonfiction as a genre at the time, they were both criticised for blending techniques between two opposing genres.

The questioning of the authenticity of creative nonfiction is so prominent that it can almost be named as one of the genre's defining features. And while an author may rejoice in their ability to disguise the joints between fact and fiction so seamlessly, such criticism can negatively affect an author's reputation for credibility. Whether or not any signs of intentional manipulation are verified, an author may become subject to a level of slander that can shroud the publication of a book, and in the nature of creative nonfiction, a book that has most likely been heavily researched at length and in detail.

Capote's experience with criticism echoes that of authors such as Hyde who in essence, tell stories of the human experience. They use all the colour of language and emotion as is only relatable by a human voice to cast a complete kaleidoscopic picture of a single event or subject. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many works are subject to investigation upon publication. Hilary Mantel made a comment on her work in historical fiction, but what she states can also be true for critics of creative nonfiction: "What really disconcerts commentators, I suspect... they feel their own lack of education may be exposed; they panic, because they don't know which bits are true." In creative nonfiction, critics cannot depend on the guaranteed veracity of content which is the luxury of historical literature. Nevertheless, Antony Beevor states, "More novels than ever before are set in the past. This is largely because the essence of human drama is moral dilemma" (Dyer et al.). But Capote and Hyde's experiences are a testament to the

difficulties of recording with accuracy and objectivity the human experience. Perhaps creative nonfiction lacks the critical attention attributed to other genres because of the obscurity of emotional content, especially when paired with factual events. This intricacy of the human experience is touched upon by a collection of scholars in *Keep It Real*:

Truth is precarious, unstable, and elusive, and this, as Goodman, Demos and the others show, is the real drama of the past. The search for truth, the battle for whose truth matters and what truth gets codified into official histories, textbooks, and monuments, is the stuff of stories—tense, suspenseful stories—the stuff of both creative nonfiction and narrative history. (78)

Creative nonfiction writers are not only concerned with the journalistic style of listing facts in the form of the five W's— who, what, when, where and why— but with constructing a compelling, detailed narrative that secures a long-lasting emotional impression. Kerry Hudson states, “at the heart of most narratives, fiction or fact, there is human complexity and us readers trying to understand our own stories through the telling of others” (Dyer et al.). *In Cold Blood* and *Passport to Hell* exemplify this as the respective authors felt such strong connections to their subjects that they were compelled to craft a fully immersive narrative in order to invoke similar feelings in a broad audience. Hyde and Capote's success developed from their dedication to fact and ability to transmit with precision the sensation of the human experience. Both suffered heavy criticism due to their exploratory writing styles, and therefore continue to have their work analysed today, but whereas Capote is now revered as an early

creative nonfiction author, Hyde has yet to be fully acknowledged as an early practitioner.

Scholarly Contributions

The detailed retelling of human stories has been around for centuries, but creative nonfiction's development as an academically accredited genre has been slow, despite its exponential growth and popularity. In *'Based on a true story': the fine line between fact and fiction*, Beevor claims, "There is a more market-driven attempt to satisfy the modern desire in a fast-moving world to learn and be entertained at the same time. In any case, we seem to be experiencing a need for authenticity, even in works of fiction" (Dyer et al.). Creative nonfiction is in high demand by readers who are not easily satiated by passionate romances or startling horrors, but seek an element of education in their literature, something they can apply to the real world and use as a reference point for the way they communicate with the people around them. Root's discussion in *The Nonfictionist's Guide: On Reading and Writing Creative Nonfiction* confirms this: "While any piece of writing is an interpretation of events and thoughts, nonfiction is the genre in which one strives for the most direct and most accurate preservation of experience" (10). As the technological age is accused of fostering more superficial modes of entertainment like reality TV and "mainstream" media, readers are seeking out true stories more than ever. Even creative nonfiction that covers a horrific event like Capote's *In Cold Blood* can promise a reader some sort of hope in its glimpse into the minds of those involved. Creative nonfiction's focus on humanity disregards demographic and cultural barriers by providing an immersive

perspective of an event or person which may not be easily elucidated in any other medium.

Prolific writers that have contributed to this assessment of the genre include Lee Gutkind, Dinty W. Moore, Philip Gerard and John McPhee, who have each accomplished an expansive array of literary and academic achievements through writing, speaking and teaching. One of the most important contributions these scholars have made to the genre includes their continuing influence on the foundations of creative nonfiction. However, the mysticism surrounding creative nonfiction's origins also seems to spread to its core composition. Many authors, scholars and academics have varying opinions on the features and classifications of creative nonfiction, especially in reference to the degree of fictionalisation utilised by an author.

Articles such as Moore's *A Genre by Any Other Name* and the plethora of literature produced by Gutkind strengthen the genre by exploring the large questions it provokes. Gutkind has produced a multitude of books and articles which discuss the features of creative nonfiction and the boundaries which were previously unwritten. His book *You Can't Make this Stuff Up* is a self-explanatory summarisation of his thoughts on blending the border between fact and fiction.

Aminatta Forna in "Based on a true story': the fine line between fact and fiction" explores the concepts of fact and fiction:

Each time a writer begins a book they make a contract with the reader. If the book is a work of fiction the contract is pretty vague, essentially saying: "Commit your time and patience to me and I will tell you a story"... A contract for a work of nonfiction is a more precise affair. The writer says, I am telling you, and to the best of my ability, what I believe

to be true. This is a contract that should not be broken lightly... Break the contract and readers no longer know who to trust. (Dyer et al.)

This observation extends beyond fiction into the realm of biography, memoir and, in fact, can be applied to any facet of literature. However, creative nonfiction requires much closer attention to the detail of what is fact and what is fabrication. For some, the only element of creativity must lie solely within the author's styling of the story, rather than the events, characters or dialogue.

Gutkind provides his stern stance on textual structure:

Writers can become too enamored with the creative part of the term, paying precious little homage to the nonfiction part.... There must be a delicate balance between style and substance... Creative nonfiction writers must always work as hard as necessary to be true to the facts. (qtd. in Gerard 175)

Hyde suffered under the uncertainty of the genre even before it evolved into the heated debate of today. The level of creativity she employed in *Passport to Hell* was criticised as a weakness rather than being an innovative quality we can currently appreciate. However, Hyde's text would still be subject to the indistinct interpretations which make up the conventions of the genre.

Although not a publication specific to nonfiction, Naomi Jacobs in *The Character of Truth: Historical Figures in Contemporary Fiction* offers an insight which echoes the values of creative nonfiction: "Fiction as an imaginative art must remain subordinate to the historical art of biography, and a fiction writer treating an openly historical subject was obligated to the same accuracy, objectivity, and completeness that were the biographer's goal" (26). This argument not only holds true in historical fiction, but also speaks to the level of

accuracy required when crafting any story involving real-life events or subjects. Before exercising creative license, an author must approach their subject from a perspective cultivated of and dedicated to pragmatism and respect. Rather than adopting a view of subjectivity, a writer must be assiduous in their effort to examine the subject from a comprehensive stance so as not to taint the findings with bias. A creative nonfiction writer takes on the role of the historian in order to create an honest and extensive account of a single subject. For example, although it may be tempting for an author to weave in a deeper theme or meaning within their story, it is important that any underlying motif must be achieved organically, and as a secondary feature that does not move the plot away from the natural flow of events. Jacobs states the author:

May be as imaginative as he pleases... in the way in which he brings together his materials, *but he must not imagine the materials*. Justice to a subject is thought best served by careful objectivity, and so biographers repress or at least restrain the frank partisanship, even passion, that they often develop after years of living with a subject. (26)

This may come as common sense to some who have learned or studied writing, but in practice, abiding by such a stature may be much harder to achieve, as evidenced by Capote's experience with the murderers of *In Cold Blood* and Hyde's relationship with Stark of *Passport to Hell*. Hyde developed an incredibly close relationship with Stark, one which bolstered her understanding and was instrumental in her portrayal of him in the book. Neither author could have achieved such a comprehensive exhibition of the characters without first forming such a close relationship. But observations such as Jacobs' are important to a student or reader's understanding of and engagement with creative nonfiction.

Just as an awareness of history can intensify one's appreciation of an artwork, understanding the structure, features and origins of this sort of writing can increase our appreciation of a creative nonfiction work. Only when we develop a broader knowledge of the genre and how it came to be can we then understand why the works of Wolfe, Mailer and Capote have had such an influence on the literary world, and why a work such as Hyde's is a ground-breaking example of creative nonfiction.

Poised on the opposing side of the argument of fact and fiction are the scholars who believe there is truth, even a greater truth, in fiction. Scholars in *Keep it Real* offer their own understanding of an author's claim to fictionalise:

Imagination, you may have been told, is the one place a non-fiction writer should never tread, but that advice is bad advice. The use of imagination is not what lands creative nonfiction writers in trouble; it is the *misuse* of information. Certainly, we are—or should be—limited to only what is true when writing nonfiction, but what we imagine about something, someone, or some event is true in itself. It is true that we imagined it. (150)

This idea of interpretation is similar to what Jacobs offers, citing several writers and scholars who argue against pursuing the single strand that is fact, and instead claim that a story can benefit from fictionalisation as a multidimensional approach because “exact representations are always fakes” (qtd. in Jacobs xvii). This idea introduces the concept of subjectivity, and the ongoing debate on whether history can actually be given the divine status of truth, when in fact, it is just an interpretation from a specific viewpoint. In *Dealing with History in Fiction*, Hilary Mantel states, “History is always changing behind us, and the past changes a little every time we retell it.” Therefore, to forego the idea of fact and

fiction for a moment and consider history, in any form, as a reproduction, it is possible to be more sympathetic to the idea that from history, to fiction, to nonfiction, all are considered to be an interpretation and therefore located along a spectrum of manipulation.

Considering *Passport to Hell* from such an angle elevates Hyde's work to one of historical significance and also introduces a distinctive implication to our ideas of scholarship. Rather than learning our history from textbooks which strive for objectivity, giving greater credence to accounts such as Hyde's contributes a more distinctive and applicable type of knowledge to our personal education as well as our national conscience. Viewing a topic such as war through the narrow lens of a single perspective contributes a level of detail to our comprehension which is not achievable to this extent in any other medium. This can be viewed as one of the catalysts for the development of literary journalism, and is supported by the UVM Writing Center:

While journalism is about being completely objective, literary journalism says that people can't be objective because they already have their own subjective views about the world. Therefore, by taking the "objectiveness" out of the journalistic process, the writer is being more truthful. ("Creative Non-Fiction")

This is also reinforced by the words of Ursule Molinaro's Cassandra: "as 'I've come as close to the truth as the facts would let me... facts oppress the truth, which can breathe freely only in poetry and art'" (qtd. in Jacobs xvii). Similarly, James Forrester states, "Too much attention to factual detail is undoubtedly an impediment to literary art." This perception posits that fictionalisation provides a writer with a liberation from fact and therefore a freedom to supplement the text

with insightful, interpretive content, an observation Hyde would have undoubtedly agreed with in the context of *Passport to Hell*.

Following this concept, a writer may be able to create a much larger picture of a subject, and in the case of a historical or current figure or event, one which may have only been understood in terms of statistics. To complement this, Jacobs asserts that:

Factual accuracy, it is argued, produces only a shallow realism like that of the figures in a wax museum, which, though accurate to every measurement and every mole, are too rigid and static either to convince or to inform. (xvii)

Facts, according to this statement, only encompass a fragment of a story, but where creative nonfiction authors thrive is making the facts come alive enough to create a more comprehensive and captivating account. The writer can therefore provide an educated, but interpretive depiction of a subject that previously lacked the emotional coverage required to foster a sustainable connection with an audience.

Although this argument would likely cause concern for historians, it is founded in the belief that facts, especially those of a historical figure or event, are essentially a culmination of media coverage and public opinion, therefore, the residual image is one that has been crafted rather than attained organically. Such individuals believe that as long as a thorough investigation has been completed, a writer is able to claim accuracy while using fictional techniques as they are doing so from a fully informed position. Additionally, a writer who feels connected to their subject through fact should be given license to fictionalise as it can be said they are guided by an intuition that is only achieved through extended inquiry.

However, the discussion of intuition and creativity is abstract and therefore lacks the capacity to be applied to instruction, making any possible parameters difficult to enforce.

As the craft of writing is a very personal, individual undertaking, many writers will simply follow their instincts on fictionalisation, such as “[Tom] Wolfe [who] justified such hypothetical characterisation on the grounds that he felt he was ‘doing it accurately’” (Jacobs xvi). But this is a relatively vulnerable position for an author to occupy, for an editor may offer advice, but it is ultimately up to the author to not only make the decision on fictionalisation, but to also face any repercussions from taking liberties with a subject. Some authors use a subject’s lack of detail as motivation to create a comprehensive narrative, employing fiction as not only a supplement to the text, but as a vehicle to exercise a more uninhibited level of creativity. Norman Mailer offered an explanation for his book *The Armies of the Night* by saying he was completing history at “precisely the point where... the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historical inquiry” (255). This journeying through the indistinct boundaries of creative nonfiction seems to characterise the genre even today, challenging authors with the precarious task of establishing their own approach to the conventions of fact and fiction. Root provides his own interaction with the genre, stating his realisation that:

Nonfiction is not simply a conforming art—it’s also an experimental art...

It may have to follow a familiar, conventional structure, but alternatively it may have to become a completely unique literary form, alone in its own subgenre. Creative nonfiction, in particular, abounds in experimental forms. I’ve also come to believe that our definitions need to be determined

by our practices rather than insisting on the reverse—that our definitions determine our practices. (8)

It can be posited that Hyde would have been sympathetic to this standpoint, because even after disparagement of her work, she maintained confidence in her literary dissimilitude.

Years before such discussions took place, Hyde was crafting a narrative which skirted the boundaries of each of these topics, providing modern scholars with a real-life example of an author who accepted risks, was subject to criticism, but still gained success, well before the genre in which she wrote had even been named.

Chapter 2: Craft

“It is a nightmare, but I think it is a book.”⁴

Introduction

In her 1936 nonfiction novel *Passport to Hell*, Hyde exhibits a range of literary qualities that operate outside the confines of standard journalism. The novel reads much more like present-day creative nonfiction due to the exercise of such techniques as the development of character, plot, scenes, and the careful consideration of such elements as point of view, voice and tone. While genres such as journalism and history strive to maintain objectivity through formal structures which remove traces of authorial presence, creative works rely on such features to communicate with the audience. While Hyde’s experience in journalism enabled her to carefully capture and arrange the details of Starkie’s life, it was her lifelong passion for poetry that provided the tools to articulate emotions that existed beneath the fundamental facts.

As a young girl, Hyde had a reputation for having a delicate, but quick mind, a description that “matches the portrait of an imaginative and intelligent but over-sensitive child that Hyde later drew of Eliza in [*The*] *Godwits* [*Fly*].” Her writing was often occupied with “fanciful and imaginative subjects such as moon and stars, fairies and elves”, or semi-autobiographical accounts that demonstrate the acute sense of emotional perception she exhibited from an early age (Challis and Rawlinson 137; 12). Her early poetry can be seen as a precursor to “the complexities of Hyde’s novels, where verisimilitude interconnects with fantasy, and textual modernism often expressed a nineteenth-century sensibility focusing

⁴ (qtd. in Smith, Introduction ix)

on notions of ‘beauty’” (Murray 172). Hyde felt strongly about “the mental injuries sustained by children in situations of family conflict—and this also became a theme in a number of her novels” (Challis and Rawlinson 137). The unrelenting compassion that characterised Robin Hyde as a child translated into a lifetime of mental and physical afflictions. Two unplanned pregnancies and the death of a child impacted not only her mental welfare, but also her career and social status. Being forced to hide a child from her family while living in poverty was a great strain on her psychology and only upon her entrance into a mental hospital did she show signs of positive improvement. Hyde’s emotional cognisance was not only important to her personal understanding and development, but is evident throughout *Passport to Hell*, and particularly pronounced in her treatment of character and scene, and forms the foundation of the narrative voice. Having written about the challenges of her own life, Hyde pays close attention to the relationships in young Stark’s life and throughout the text reflects on how they influenced his development.

Hyde underlines her descriptions with emotional detail and imagery which present Stark as a complex individual whose early life was instrumental in developing the attitudes he exhibits, and consequently, the events he experiences as an adult. The extent of this detail would have been nearly impossible to capture within journalistic writing, but flourishes within an environment of creativity that allows for such levels of supposition. Hyde enriches the text with elements that contribute vastly to its literary merit, for example, often using Stark’s interactions with his environment and other characters to convey details of his emotional temperament and personality. Therefore, despite being conceived within fact, *Passport to Hell* can be viewed as a creative nonfiction novel augmented by the

personal knowledge of an author who supplemented her writing with a comprehension of emotional turbulence. This level of conceptual depth would be considered ill-suited to 'pure' nonfiction and therefore more appropriately categorises Hyde's novel as creative nonfiction, even though it was produced and published well before the genre existed.

Robin Hyde was the descendant of two generations of soldiers. From her grandfather and her father, she was exposed to a military mind-set that inspired her deep interest in the welfare of veterans and the experience of war. Additionally, her father's strong political and social views grew in her a passion for social justice that was evident in her literary works. This passionate outlook paired with her emotional perception contributed to "how finely tuned Hyde was to poetic meanings and emotional resonance across cultures, [and affirms] that Hyde deserves sophisticated readers who can appreciate her abilities—something she has not always had" (Edmond-Paul, "Dark Torch" 24).

From her position in journalism, Hyde wrote many articles that discussed current events of the time as well as social issues that intrigued her personally, such as, "the poor and marginalised, their injustices and loss of dignity. Yet often she was forced to suppress this anger, to write instead of balls, cocktail parties and fashion" ("Hyde, Robin"). Gender imbalance was typical in the journalism industry, as "social columns or women's pages were the main outlet available to women journalists during the period" (Hyde, *Journalese*). This discrimination was also pervasive throughout the entire literary industry of the time:

The writers and academics we now regard as the leaders in the development of New Zealand literary nationalism were to Hyde, in the terms of her 1938 essay 'The Singers of Loneliness', a type of literary

'gang'. It was the members of this gang that played a significant role in ensuring Hyde's extended stay on the margins of the decade's writing.

(Millar 79)

Ettie Rout, the subject of my nonfiction novel which forms the creative component of this thesis, also experienced the weight of these restrictions during her career in journalism, so the transition for both women into authorship of full-length texts can be regarded as a pursuit of literary freedom.

Despite her years' dedication to the formal craft of journalism, Hyde's *Passport to Hell* not only displays her experimentation with various modes of writing, but shows a shift in style due to her utilisation of fictional techniques in order to capture the substance of Stark's story. In full-length texts, Rout found an unrestricted literary outlet for the communication of her sexual and scientific knowledge, just as Hyde seems to have fully embraced the novel as a means of expression. The blending of fact and fiction seems to have initiated an evolution in Hyde's publications which, up until that point, had been based heavily around journalism. Rather than being discouraged by the negative criticism she faced in her first novel, Hyde continued to explore the boundaries of fact and fiction in her subsequent books. Following *Passport to Hell*, Hyde wrote a further four novels "in a decade that [in comparison with notable authors of the time] she dominated in terms of both productivity and inventiveness" (Millar 80).

The literary exploration which began in *Passport to Hell* continued in her 1936 novel *Check to Your King* which, "display[s] the interweaving of fact and existing documents with Hyde's own imagination... The factual base results in the novel's occupation of the marginal ground between fact and fiction that is typified by the war memoir" (Murray 173). Hyde's fluid treatment of genre then

led to her first fully fictional book, *Wednesday's Children*, and subsequently, *The Godwits Fly*, an intensely emotional and semi-autobiographical account. In her 1938 novel *Nor the Years Condemn*, Hyde relied more heavily on fictional techniques to continue the life story of Stark and express the failing of New Zealand society to appropriately accommodate returned servicemen. This rapid succession and extreme fluctuation that marked Hyde's literary career reflected a literary style that was unhindered by the convention of the time. But this confident experimentation did little to gain her the appropriate reputation among the male-dominated literary sphere of 1930s New Zealand: "The marginal position accredited to her in relation to the period's tradition has not only obscured the difference between her work and that of her contemporaries, it has also masked the similarities." Murray continues this argument by stating, "What was often seen by her contemporaries as a mixture of confusing and contradictory positions emerges as a nuanced recognition of the inherent fluidity of social and cultural issues specific to New Zealand's version of settler modernity in the 1930s" (Murray 170-171). As a support to this, rather than viewing Hyde's exploration of multiple genres as an unsettled attempt to settle into a single writing style, Jacqueline D. Matthews and Gillian Boddy elevate her achievements with the consideration that, "A complex intertextuality connects all Hyde's work—journalism, poetry, biographical and autobiographical fiction" (Hyde et al., *Disputed Ground* 139). But despite Hyde's impressive range of work, during her lifetime she was still denied appropriate esteem due to the standards of the time:

The sheer range of Hyde's work—journalism, historical novels, her early neo-Georgian poetry, the later experimental novels—confused her contemporaries because of its lack of stability, its refusal to proceed in any

linear fashion towards a definitive style of writing. Her conception of New Zealand appears so at odds with many of the male writers of the decade that the criticism of the period often ignores her altogether or attempts to renegotiate her work within a paradigm fundamentally designed on the normative qualities of local social realism. (Murray 167)

Therefore, the lack of appropriate recognition was not just isolated to Hyde's production of *Passport to Hell*, but due to the social and literary atmosphere of the time, was present throughout the expanse of her career as a writer. As later mentioned in her confrontation with critics, Hyde maintained a positive conviction in her choices as an author. Hyde discovered a topic which required flexibility in order to properly portray and the result of her nonconformity is as Calder states, "*Passport to Hell* is as much a psychological case study of Starkie as a novel of his war experience, as much an analysis of the social patterning behind Starkie's manifest contradictions as a biography of them" ("Violence," 67). Murray's view that Hyde, "discovered a 'human interest' story through which she could also express her own liberal humanism" is confirmed by Hyde's statement as to how Stark inspired her transition into book writing:

With it all he's something of a visionary and—in physical courage— unquestionably heroic—I wrote the book because it's an illustration of Walt Whitman's line—"There is to me something profoundly affecting in large masses of men following the lead of those who do not believe in man". (173; qtd. in Smith, Introduction x)

Character

One of the most discernible features that differentiates a novel from nonfiction is the development of character, because where nonfiction primarily operates to inform, the novel seeks to capture the essence of human intricacies. Whereas purely historical accounts may only include the fundamental specifics of a person's life, creative writing uses character development as a principal method to establish a connection between the text and the audience. *Passport to Hell* is informative and biographic in that it details the military prowess and criminal record of Stark, but it also builds at every instance, a profound and complex portrait of its principal character. The level of detail included goes far beyond what would be expected in nonfiction to the point of superfluity, but in doing so, Hyde makes available an otherwise inaccessible and disparate perspective. Learning of Stark's upbringing gives weight to his later actions and provides us with a sympathetic foreground from which to judge his circumstances. The inclusion of his early experiences also highlights Hyde's main goal; to aid in the audience's connection with a man consistently marginalised, both as a soldier and an individual.

Hyde sought to present the New Zealand soldier in a more comprehensive view, one which strays from the common image of a man of British descent who in his unflinching courage, answers the call of Mother Britain. Hyde instead sought to delve into the mind of a man far from the status quo of New Zealand's typified soldier, and in doing so, captures the way a person's experience of the war is influenced by their individual personality and background. Doing this allows the audience, who may have a very filtered understanding of the war, to identify more closely with soldiers and events. *Passport to Hell* can be considered a close

representation of the way many individuals experienced the war: through the eyes of a single soldier. Although the New Zealand public would have had equal access to the news which trickled in from Britain, the information which leaves the greatest impression is often what we relate to personally. Through the communication of letters, packages, and stories shared at home, it is likely that mothers, wives, and families who remained in New Zealand would have experienced war vicariously through the perspective of the soldier closest to them. This is also due to the fact that the comprehensiveness and accuracy of published material was often questioned because journalism was so heavily controlled:

Within months of the declaration of war, [Kitchener] introduced blanket press censorship, the most severe by any British commander yet. In the first year of the war, all press accreditation was refused... [The Press Bureau's] mantra was simple: "Do nothing. Say nothing. Keep off the front pages." (Nicholson)

These restrictions were also touched upon by Stark who claimed, "In the mornings you always read in the newspapers that the raid was unsuccessful. I never knew about a successful air-raid in England yet—not from the newspapers. All men are liars—but they aren't all such liars as those newspaper fellows" (Hyde, *Passport* 257). Journalism was altered to suit the motivations of political leaders both in New Zealand and abroad, but the geographic isolation of New Zealand meant information passed through additional filters of censorship as well as physical barriers before reaching the public. Therefore, it is not unsound to suggest that what the New Zealand public experienced of the war, so very far from the action itself, was but a filtered, rose-tinted version of events that was printed almost purely as propaganda rather than news. It can be posited that Hyde,

among other authors who sought to tell their versions of the war, were presenting accounts which had been yet unheard and contrasted sharply with the material that was officially in circulation. Despite having been published just before World War II, information such as Hyde's never dates, so still makes a valuable and unique contribution to New Zealand's national narrative.

Making use of fictional techniques not only caused Hyde to sacrifice a degree of factuality in her novel, but also exposed her professional career and personal reputation to criticism. Her coverage of a 'degenerate' may not seem to be bold in today's terms of social issues and awareness, but within the conservative climate of 1930s New Zealand, when racial tension was abundant and support for returned servicemen was not, a book written by a woman about a man of mixed race who spent a considerable portion of his life in custody truly tested the boundaries of convention. Therefore, it was of great consequence for Hyde to utilise character development as this, along with other fictional techniques, gave her the tools to present Stark in a way which was more likely to appeal to a broad audience. Hyde's intimacy in tracing Stark's early years and the extraordinary circumstances he faced creates a foundation of compassion from which we can understand the political and cultural conventions a soldier faced in New Zealand in World War I.

Plot and Scenes

Gutkind states that creative nonfiction "moves... it is action-oriented. Most good creative nonfiction is constructed in scenes" (qtd. in Gerard, *Researching* 9). As a feature that is almost exclusive to creative writing, action-oriented scenes are used to develop a sense of plot and progression. Where a

nonfiction author may include facts of geography and environment only when necessary, Hyde utilises both to reflect the emotional development of the main character. For example, rather than providing an overview of his early wanderings in a listing style, the reader is treated to images of his environment and an underlying suggestion of how it connects to Stark. In one specific case we are treated to a recounting of his killing and eating a rabbit:

There was only one companion when Starkie awoke in a still fog-wrapped morning – and he, with his handsome white tail and natty whiskers, was none the better for the presence of a member of the Delawares. Starkie froze stiller than the unwary rabbit, and wriggled towards him through the fern. Hands locked about the stroller’s white scruff. He killed the rabbit, skinned it with a penknife, and looked round for firing. He had no matches, and what his forefathers might have known of the art of twirling fire-sticks was a blank to him. He ate the rabbit raw, shivering a little, but finding the taste of its blood less repulsive than he would have expected. Now he was terribly thirsty, and sucked the long grass-stems, curling their dew-beads on the inside of his tongue. (Hyde, *Passport* 30)

In this example, Hyde uses the scene to not only relay details of Stark’s heritage, but also as a moment of development for the young boy. This is a further to Hyde’s comment on the proud upbringing provided by his parents, who, being of Spanish and Native American descent, settled into New Zealand society unsatisfied “with the good-humoured tolerance bestowed by the white New Zealander on his Maori brother.” She notes his parents: “Wylde Stark, his straight-backed, pale-faced wife at his elbow, stalked through psychological fences like some mahogany Moses” (Hyde, *Passport* 16). In addressing his

lineage so early on in the text, Hyde draws the reader's attention to one of the focal points of this story which is the injustice Stark faced due to his race. However, in the abovementioned scene where Stark kills the rabbit, she mentions his lineage as a way to provide him with a power of survival and a sense of strength which exists due to his ancestry. This is echoed throughout the text as we see Stark develop into a young man with a uniqueness that can be attributed at least in part to his lineage. Additionally, Hyde uses this scene to show Stark's first act of killing, and coincidentally or not, the rabbit indicated is described as "handsome" and "white". Without dedicating too much analysis to Hyde's selection of colour for the rabbit, it can be hypothesised that she was positioning Stark on a racial spectrum that would affect his interactions for the rest of his life. Although not his first act of violence, the killing of the rabbit can signify Stark's first experience of death and therefore his entrance into a new stage of his life. In this scene, we are shown a young boy who derives his knowledge from a distinctive heritage, whose circumstances force him into a mode of survival, and who is positioned early in childhood at an opposition to his European peers. This is an example of how Hyde demonstrates her ability to imbue each sentence with a vast amount of information, but with a style and skill that seems effortless for the reader. This can be viewed as one of the perceptible techniques of Hyde's writing style – a brilliant use of stylistic features paired with a meticulous concentration on word selection.

Another example of where Hyde not only utilises scene to further the plot, but doubles its value to convey a reflection on Stark's character is in the physical description of his surroundings:

At first the fog, blotting out the gaunt town, the black line of its railway-cranes standing grim and dark against the sky, was a comfort to him. Law and vengeance suffered a blurring of outline. He lay in the grass, looking down on that unreal and fog-hidden town, until its lights began to prick through the veil. Their prying frightened him once again, so he dragged himself to his feet and started off over the hills which heap up brown and bare on the miles between Lyttelton and the city of Christchurch, which has drained the port of population and money, leaving Lyttelton a disconsolate hill-slope of blackened houses, inhabited only by officials who can afford to live nowhere else. (Hyde, *Passport* 30)

Rather than merely describing the backdrop of Lyttelton, Hyde uses the geography and climate to manifest the emotions of a young boy who has found himself far from home. She uses a touch of anthropomorphism to describe the threatening element of the town, but also injects the text with early ideas of Stark's understanding of the world. Referencing "law and vengeance" as features of a location shows how Stark connects with and operates within his environment. The mere dotting of lights on the town convey to him rather than a sense of security, a sense of danger. We see from his many travels that due to his growing criminal record, Stark finds fewer and fewer places that offer a sense of safety or belonging to him, even his hometown: "Although he had been born in this town, a door seemed to have closed between him and the intimacies of his childhood" (Hyde, *Passport* 11). His wandering through the Lyttelton hills is the first of many moments where he lives physically stranded on the outskirts of society; a sentiment which is also paralleled in his mentality. We come to understand that at the age of 12, Stark already believes himself to exist in isolation from a world

which will never understand him. This perspective will remain a permanent fixture of his personality and guide many of the events in his life.

Hyde enriches the text with a concentration on the emotional experience by using a synchronisation of scene and character to express Stark's physical and psychological condition. The simultaneous communication of surface-level and thematic meaning casts Hyde as an intuitive and intelligent writer whose text requires attentive evaluation beyond the considerations of genre.

Voice

An immediately recognisable aspect of *Passport to Hell* is Hyde's treatment of narrative voice. Gerard asserts that voice, "Carries itself gracefully and falls rhythmically on the ear," while Lisa Bain claims, "Editors have a phrase for wonderful writing... 'They say it *sings*... Good writing has a lyricism and a rhythm to it, it's very hard to put into words.'" The voice of a piece can therefore be described as "What the reader hears in his mind's ear, the strong sense that the words of the story are coming from another living, human personality with a unique perspective on events" (Gerard, *Researching* 11). Voice can be considered the personality of the speaker as it is unique, unchanging and generates a discernible atmosphere in the text. Deconstructing voice allows an audience to not only envisage who the speaker is and how they contribute to the piece, but also consider the impact of filtering the text through this perspective.

The question of subjectivity is constantly debated across genres of both fiction and nonfiction, and voice is one literary feature that endangers objectivity. In an article discussing journalism and novels, *The Line Between Fact and Fiction*, Roy Peter Clark offers that, "There are no facts, only points of view, only

'takes' on reality, influenced by our personal histories, our cultures, our race and gender, our social class." Therefore, it can be viewed as impossible to completely eliminate bias as voice is the product of an individual's experience, perspective, and interests. Gerard states, "Voice is precisely what conventional journalists (and historians) try to keep out of their stories, because voice is the opposite of impersonal objectivity" (*Researching* 134). Hyde's experience with journalism means she would have fully understood the implications of having a strong sense of voice guiding the text. Where journalism and nonfiction forbids such interruption on the part of the author, creative works encourage the careful execution of voice as a way to further the depth of a story, an opportunity which Hyde seems to have fully embraced. Murray believes, "The result is that the third-person narration, mainly from the point of view of Starkie, occasionally shifts into the first-person, to intensify passages, and both mingle with sections where Hyde removes herself from character to relay authorial direction and description" (173). A coinciding argument is made by Lopate, who offers an opinion which coincides very closely with Hyde's manipulation of narrative voice:

The trick, it seems to me, is to establish a double perspective that will allow the reader to participate vicariously in the experience as it was lived (the child's confusions and misapprehensions, say), while benefiting from the sophisticated wisdom of the author's adult self.

One of the areas where this voice is utilised is in the establishment of setting. The narrator often begins a scene with a geographic location, but then supplements the description with a metaphysical consideration of the culture or atmospheric qualities. The narrator 'speaks' in a style which involves setting up a scene, threading through additional details such as ancestral facts or stereotypical

and cultural particulars, and then presenting the events through the perspective of Stark. Hyde not only uses the narrator to provide the bulk of both fore- and background information, but to comment on many of the proceedings, merging Stark's experiences with a sense of reflection. Consequently, Hyde reduces the amount of "he thought" and "he said" and rather supplements events from a view which provides understanding and explanation.

Hyde crafts the story from the perspective of a relatively omniscient third-person narrator. However, a distinct feature of the narrative style is the way Hyde navigates a broad range of proximity to the characters and events, travelling instantly and seamlessly between a perceptive overview and a striking immediacy. Many of these moments are visible in the shifts between third-person and second-person point of view, a tool often used to incorporate the narrator's interpretation in the text. Murray explains the result of this transference:

There is a sense of the narrator as a personality, not a disembodied authority, one who sympathetically or emphatically moves in and out of the mind and feelings of Starkie, with a second-person 'you could see' sort of construction running together Starkie's impressions with the narrator's imagined ones. (173)

Passport to Hell begins with a chapter titled "Introduction to Starkie", in which we are directly addressed by Hyde in a way which exemplifies this fluctuation in point of view:

The residential area begins—little dingy houses squeezing and shouldering together, eaves touching, verandahs joining, board-fences broken down for firewood between the patches of scrubby garden where nothing ever grows. There might meet you at the gate... the heir to the house of Stark,

one year old and a rich cream-chocolate colour, may stagger out on his fat legs and regard you with such a sleepy smile that you will feel an astonishing desire to pick him up. (9)

Hyde spends this chapter building Stark's physical environment as it was when she met him, a dilapidated area that "remained the sort of place where husbands with impunity and gusto thrash their wives—and vice versa—" (Hyde, *Passport* 7). The close attention paid to the details of his living quarters provides a snapshot into life after war for many returned servicemen. Hyde opens with her own voice by listing the polluted features of such an unprincipled location, but upon entering Stark's residence, immediately shifts to the second-person. Directly confronting the reader by placing them in the scene allows Hyde to create an air of sympathy, one which focusses on the more positive, relatable aspects of Stark's life: his children. In this way, Hyde establishes an image of contrast, one which sympathises with the many who are limited to a life of poverty, but not limited in the kindness they continue to provide for each other.

Another example of a shift in point of view is when young Stark finds himself wandering; the city is described physically, but is also accompanied by a sense of meditation:

And that isn't all of Wellington... If you can once be perfectly alone with the hills and sea of Wellington, you have something they can't take away from you, no matter where and why they lock you up. (Hyde, *Passport* 83)

Hyde's seamless transference between points of view provides the audience with a multidimensional approach to core concepts such as Stark's connection to nature and the unremitting hostility he faces. The use of second-person draws the reader in, accomplishing Hyde's goal of bridging the gap

between the text and the audience. It also creates an affinity between society and the soldier by evoking the thought that the reader could face the same difficult circumstances as Stark. The use of “you” brings the threat to the audience. We are no longer observers of someone else’s misfortune, but are suddenly confronted by the risk of our own personal loss or grievance. In this way, Hyde strives to eliminate any pre-existing prejudice and begins to coax the reader into a position of support for Stark, all within a description of setting.

This manipulation of setting and concentration on thematic significance demonstrates Hyde’s fluid approach to genre and is seen throughout the text. Within the same passage describing Wellington, Hyde unabashedly explores concepts of culture and stereotype:

The Chinese babies are adorable, pink flushing up through the amber of their skins, their tiny mothers handling them with a delicacy and reserve which the white mother of the slums never knows. You don’t see a Chinese woman suckle her baby in public. There is a savour of life in the streets there, life secretive, vivid, tainted with the rotting sweetness of stored fruits, curious with the odour of ginger. (*Passport* 83)

Rather than simply stating the physical details of an area and demarcating the boundaries between races, Hyde provides a level of depth into the life and atmosphere of a community, even though the main character does not explore the particular area. Hyde’s approach to scenery is unique in that she places a heavy proportion of significance on the emotional value of physical features, as is also evident in the description of Christchurch:

The city of Christchurch has only one ambition. It likes to be thought more English than the English. Its pioneers were almost exclusively church

settlers, and brought with them English seedling trees, English architecture, English tradition. The results, as applied to the originally flat and dreary expanse where Christchurch was built, are extremely charming and extremely insincere... Hagley Park sweeps brown and green over many acres, there is a sad little stream, only deep enough to drown an occasional stray cat and float the canoes of picnickers... If you want to be beloved among the citizens, you produce the more English than the English cliché, you can rest assured they will never suspect that the overdoing of such a thing is an atrocity. (*Passport* 47)

Hyde employs a shrewd voice in relaying a subjective impression of Christchurch. The passage is teeming with sardonic wit that borders on scathing in its assessment of the city. Hyde provides a very unconventional opinion, establishing early on in the text what the audience can expect from the narrative voice. This sarcastic and humorous tone is pervasive throughout the text, and in this case, creates a very different portrayal of a location with which the New Zealand audience would already be familiar. This is an excellent example of how Hyde adds savour to the text by approaching events, locations and characters with a provocative subjectivity that was uncommon in nonfiction during the time.

A similar example of Hyde taking liberties with the emotional atmosphere of a setting is in her description of Egypt:

But Egypt stood bowing behind him, tall, white-robed, wearing a quaint hat and a silky smile. 'Half a piastre, me show.' Of course it was a lie. Egypt never showed anybody anything except sorcery and things that couldn't happen.... The conjurer, if you dared turn back to look at him, might have grown taller than those white buildings you couldn't see, and

the black tassel on his tarbush might curl into a wreath of evil-smelling smoke. (*Passport* 91)

Hyde seems to breathe life into the objects, scenes and places we encounter throughout the story, a skill which could only be estimated as achieved through years of practicing poetry. In a move that contrasts the structures of nonfiction, Hyde fabricates creatures as cultural representations who lie in wait to prey on the foreign soldiers and their naivety. Not only does she employ an expert hand at metaphor and personification to portray a particular meaning, but Hyde also builds upon literary features until they become unforgettable, living, breathing characters in the story. In using such elaborate metaphors to convey the atmosphere of physical scenery, Hyde furnishes a picture that encompasses much more than what we expect from nonfiction and leaves a lasting impression of these places. Hyde has an experienced eye for emotion; an incredible feat considering she was solely reliant on second-hand information provided by Stark.

Another example of this narrative style appears in a description of London:

You could imagine London's face uplifted, that grim, blackened old face which has seen so many hard centuries; and into London's stone eyes, into London's stone tresses, into London's stern-lipped stone mouth, floating and falling the rosy cloud of the confetti. (Hyde, *Passport* 275)

Although London would have been one of the more familiar territories due to New Zealand's ties to the British Empire, Hyde presents the city in a unique and memorable way, using metaphor to bring emotional detail to the forefront of the description. By focussing solely on the ambience of these locations during the war, Hyde skilfully captures the atmosphere of each city. She does not focus on

the physical changes the locations undergo when occupied by military forces, but presents each city as an entity whose personality traits are amplified under such circumstances. While Egypt retaliates at the challenge of foreigners by gaining power and wickedness, London appears to remain resilient and austere in the face of invasion. Hyde presents London as a being of ancient wisdom, a wisdom only gained by the constant cycle of centuries gone by. This description can also be reflective of the culture of England, known to be more conservative than the New Zealand colony and have a more undeviating structure of tradition. Hyde indicates that the exposure to so many tumultuous years have impacted the spirit of the city, a parallel which can be drawn to the New Zealand soldiers who are permanently changed by their experiences, and replace their naive enthusiasm with hardened sentience.

Another example of Hyde's employment of voice is evident in her treatment of different cultures. In this example, Hyde highlights the cultural variance between New Zealanders: "The young men used to a clay soil and the smell of cows didn't believe in the muscle or physical courage of the young men used to scrubby patches of garden and a smell of malt" (*Passport* 47). Hyde speaks of the assorted lifestyles of New Zealanders, capturing the essence of each using our olfactory senses. Rather than mention economic or educational backgrounds, or any other distinctions between the men from different regions, she paints a picture of their lifestyles with small but evocative details.

Not only does Hyde use this style to discuss New Zealanders, but also provides descriptions of the many participants of the war: "Big gangs of Prussian prisoners, men from places where life has something of a white savour of newly chopped forest pine" (*Passport* 145). From excerpts such as these, it is obvious

that Hyde's humanitarian interests guided her writing and laid the foundation for the thematic undertones that are evident throughout the text. Using vivid imagery to convey the picturesque scenes of these lands presents the men as individuals instead of just soldiers. Rather than concentrating on their war crimes, Hyde uses the physical features of the enemy homelands as identifiers and therefore, breaks down the barrier between enemies, focussing instead on humanity. Not only can we analyse the text for its thematic undertones, but also for its poetic and literary value. Using such elaborate description as "newly chopped forest pine" and connotative words such as "savour" marks Hyde as a writer talented in expressing emotion. Hyde executed extreme precision in her writing; she had such a gift for words that her style exhibits an exactness that pairs perfectly with the emotional content, eliminating any risk of lingering too long or delving too deep into abstract material. Hyde's ability to express information through the use of visceral detail is an established feature of poetry and therefore would have a closer affinity to fiction than to nonfiction.

This fastidiousness also contributes to voice as it establishes a quick pace that presents all information as fact, leaving little time for the audience to ponder their own interpretation of events. The audience is swept up in Hyde's retelling of events, which transitions immediately between scenes, possibly reflecting the experience of war: a succession of memories that stream into continuousness, with a rapidity broken only by a few events of the greatest traumatic impact.

It is unsurprising then, that *Passport to Hell* was named "the most important New Zealand war book yet published" by a veteran, as the emotional language captures and recreates the atmosphere of war (Smith, Introduction xxii). She doesn't merely set up scenes or offer descriptions as is common in nonfiction,

but through the narrator and her unique construction of voice, Hyde creates elaborate moving pictures of the circumstances of World War I.

Hyde's ability to bring scenes to life through the manipulation of voice is also evident as a supplement to plot; in some areas, entire scenes are created from single physical details. In the following passage, Stark has stumbled upon a flooded wine cellar and discovered the body of a New Zealand soldier. A clever use of personification and another transition into second-person allows Hyde to concentrate on the metaphorical implications of such a scene:

You can hear the song of bubbles by putting your ear to the cask—a little hissing, fizzing song that says: "Let me get inside your veins, soldier; I'll soon brighten things up".... Because the wine is old and sleepy and deadly, like a cobra. It waited for him till it was beginning to get deep. Then: "You son of a bitch," it says, "I'll teach you to come wading in here with your muddy boots and your pants not even rolled up! Do you think I was put to sleep for the likes of you?" He began to get stupid, and the air was a soft, dainty reek, hundreds of years old and wicked. (*Passport* 234)

Hyde demonstrates an elegance in leading the novel with literary features, ones which are reflective of her poetic style and emotional understanding. She builds a dramatic metaphor that shows the power struggle between the soldier and the cultures he encounters. The narrator speaks mournfully through the eyes of the wine, a powerful and prestigious being that has attained wisdom and prudence and uses it against the intrusion of the kiwi soldier. This excerpt also alludes to the fact that many of the lands the soldiers visited had sustained cultures, architecture and populations that were older than New Zealand's written history. Highlighting this allows her to place emphasis on the physical intrusion of soldiers upon areas

that had remained relatively unchanged until World War I when they were reached by destruction and devastation. Not only does this capture the mood of the kiwi soldier who witnessed the destruction of so many of these small, ancient towns, but it also communicates the ultimate sacrifice of war and how, regardless of the good intentions of the invading forces, much of the environment seemed to naturally rebel against the presence of soldiers.

Hyde's ability to capture the emotional electricity of a scene also extends to other aspects of her writing style. Where she explains atmospheric qualities through the voice of the narrator, Hyde also adds personal commentary to description, enriching the text with tonal qualities. In a passage describing the conditions of a prison, the narrator provides additional information: "These men and their Ring, almost as old in their meaning as the circle that is the symbol of infinity, are the stone that the builders of society have rejected" (Hyde, *Passport* 63). Hyde demonstrates her eye for detail when divulging additional information which may not be necessary to the plot, but contributes emotional and thematic weight to even minor parts of the text. Introducing the concept of the ancient ring shows that the narrator considers the age of the practice to perpetually extend back in time. What can be suggested of this line is that, just as Stark seems to never be able to escape his misdeeds, a criminal will always be damned to a cycle of perennial punishment.

The thematic implications of this line correspond with Hyde's sympathetic view of Stark; that regardless of the events in his life, there was never a hope of him exiting the recurring pattern of crime and punishment, part of which was due to his race. This is also supported by "the stone that the builders of society have rejected" (Hyde, *Passport* 63). Not only is this a clever metaphor for the hierarchy

of modern civilisation, but it also provides the audience with an image of a society divided. The narrator has inserted their own conviction by declaring there is such a disaffection, and in doing so, encourages the audience to identify with one side or the other. In a time during major political and racial transformation in conservative New Zealand, it was an audacious move to announce to an audience not only that there is a portion of the population who have been permanently rejected, but that these rejects may have been wronged due to social injustice. The narrator seems to enjoy interjecting small references such as these in order to extend the overall meaning of the text, encouraging the audience to establish their own position on somewhat sensitive topics. Introducing the concept of predestination in social justice allows the audience to take a much broader view of the delicate subject of condemned criminals.

Categorising Stark as one of these rejected “stones” promotes the idea that his criminality is a consequence of his race and circumstances. Even long after the war, Stark never achieved a comfortable level of success in either his domestic, emotional or financial wellbeing, some of which Hyde explores in the sequel *Nor the Years Condemn*. So, although this small quote may swim in a novel of great depth, it is reasonable to claim that Hyde had every intention of interlacing her interests in social justice with Stark’s experience, and therefore used his life as a platform to introduce such concepts to the New Zealand public.

Dialogue

Another facet of Hyde’s writing style which places her book in the category of creative nonfiction is dialogue. Where history may include fragments of an important speech and journalism may employ quotes from eyewitnesses,

fiction and creative nonfiction use direct, conversational dialogue in order to demonstrate character relationships and further the plot. Creative nonfiction allows the use of dialogue, but under the strict instruction that it must have actually occurred. Some see dialogue as too difficult to confirm, and therefore use creative ways to side-step this rule, such as including indicators that the dialogue is a suggestion rather than the true occurrence. For example, leading a quote with the statement that a person *would usually say* provides information on a character's personality, but still adheres to the guideline that every detail must be either true or if not, disclosed.

Hyde had an uncommon advantage in that her subject was not only living, but was willing to relay the story of his life, providing her with a wealth of first-hand information derived directly from interviews. The influence of Stark's mental recollection and his subjective perspective will be later discussed in detail. However, for the sake of constructing a first-hand account, the interviews provided Hyde with all the material she required and also allowed her the ability to incorporate dialogue into her narrative.

Where much of creative nonfiction can be restricted from using dialogue due to private conversations being almost impossible to evince, Hyde's material was almost entirely supplied by a direct witness. And although the text does not include extensive dialogue, the feature does appear in areas which make the plot more momentous and the syntax more striking.

One such example occurs when Stark is gravely injured during a one-on-one battle with a sniper, where he receives multiple bullet wounds to the chest and the doctor says, "Curtains, Starkie," to signify his impending death. This line interrupts a long chapter of very little dialogue, with action directed solely by

scenes and a narrator (Hyde, *Passport* 240). Ending the climactic scene with these few short words not only enhances the emotional weight of the events by suggesting that Stark is dying, but also introduces a thematic element which is shadowed throughout the book. The dialogue can be viewed as an interaction between Stark and his opposition, or in the words of the text, “the phantom of a face he had always bitterly disliked, though he could hardly have said why” (Hyde, *Passport* 201). Although the doctor may not specifically be working as an opposing force, the doctor is part of the framework of wartime and therefore falls into the category of someone who does not understand Stark. The doctor’s voice saying goodbye can be viewed as all of his enemies and obstacles speaking up at once; not the wartime enemies of New Zealand, but the people he has encountered throughout the years who have been enactors of his punishment, the ‘Villains.’ Captured in a physical moment is what Hyde has been hinting at throughout the text— that Stark has come up against countless obstacles and continued to thrive. It seems in this moment that by surviving, Stark is rebelling once and for all against those who have brought punishment upon him. As viewed in other aspects of Hyde’s literary style, she seems hesitant to waste words, as the novel has a fast-paced, clipped speed which hurriedly makes its way onto the page. This is also true of her use of dialogue. Hyde doesn’t use dialogue simply to further the plot or to portray character, but uses it in ways and at times when it has the most prominent impact. Due to the restricted use of dialogue throughout the text, in moments like Stark’s injuring, the dialogue works to create unforgettable impressions of events which may have fallen short under any other literary device. Rather than explaining in medical terminology, or providing insight into Stark’s

thoughts, the simple words from the doctor summarise every perceivable emotion and also link it thematically to the opposition Stark has faced his whole life.

The use of dialogue during moments of trauma is also evident in Stark's interaction with other soldiers. During a physically demanding battle in which Stark is injured, he begins to run back and forth between No Man's Land and safety, retrieving the wounded. The section is filled with emotional detail, but is interrupted by the last words of several dying men, such as "I'm done", "I want to roll on the grass", and "Tell Mum" (Hyde, *Passport* 169). Stark runs frantically across the battlefield trying to return them to safety, but each man dies before he reaches the trenches. The disintegration of dialogue into a few simple words and short phrases reflects the trauma suffered by wounded soldiers. Stark's physical cycling between the battlefield and the trenches also shows the perpetuity of death that governs such situations. His progress is only ever slowed by the death of another comrade, the last words acting as a brief vignette of the humanity of those lost. Stark's ability to communicate is also impacted when he suffers a severe injury, "I'm— If I die" (Hyde, *Passport* 241). The lack of a proper sentence structure due to the interruption of a pause reflects the physical impact of trauma on a soldier. Reducing the communication to such a staggered rush of a few words strips away superfluity in order to preserve the essence of the human voice in all its bare and raw emotion. The use of dialogue in such powerful moments helps not only to anchor the text in the present, but to intensify the events Stark experienced and communicate the emotional suffering caused by war.

Another unique use of dialogue is in a chapter which describes Stark's experience in London:

Can't come in here, my man; you're drunk you are. Say, Captain, I've an appointment here with the General, he *told* me to come here; if you don't let me in he'll wreck this show, see? Stunned, is he, Captain? Well, Stark, still fighting, I see. Yes, General, still fighting. Well, remember you're not in the trenches now... Better than the Villains, the General is... Russell Square; bed and breakfast, five shillings. Beg pardon ma'am, can I get a bath right away?... Ever heard of Lance-Corporal Bacon, you little runt?... Let that man alone, he's dangerous. Knock on the door. All clear ahead... Three hours. Iron lips moving in a stiff sort of smile... You've done your bit here. I want to go back to the trenches. I want to see my mates.

Disability... Breathe in... yes, that chest of yours hurts doesn't it? (Hyde, *Passport* 252-253)

Just this passage alone contains seven different speakers, but this style of dialogue continues for the next 12 pages in a blurry accumulation of Stark's post-injury experience. The absence of speech marks and the lack of detail to identify the speakers creates a confusing mass of voices which seem to flow in and out of a shell-shocked stream of consciousness. The point of view constantly switches before eventually resorting back to third person, but up until that point, the reader is swept up in a muddle of disorienting speech which swiftly moves from one character to the next. The voices aren't given names or details, and some exist only as a single line of dialogue within the entirety of the section. Stark's voice fades in and out of the dialogue which appears as a disarrayed monologue transitioning from the retrospective into a direct communication from the main

character himself. This area of the text also ricochets us through a multitude of examples of interaction between Stark and the abundance of people he encounters, highlighting the more mundane, or more so, less discussed, aspects of a soldier's experience which are the everyday moments that occur outside of the battlefield. The conglomeration of voices swirl together as a representation of the aftermath of war and the psychological struggle induced by trauma. The reader is required to sift through the long series of indefinable dialogue in order to determine who the speaker is, where Stark is physically located and the space in the plotline the dialogue occupies. Hyde uses this mass of information to represent the way soldiers progress day after day through the war, an experience which can become so shrouded that it is difficult to accurately recall, even for the person who experienced it. These interactions also act as a rapid summary of a single soldier's experience, capturing in one pressurised succession the intensity of psychological upset.

Such a careful execution of dialogue may have been calculated, or it may have been a natural part of Hyde's writing process that developed from journalism and poetry, both of which have naturally limited use of dialogue. But in all examples, Hyde demonstrates how from within the feature of dialogue she communicates much larger themes that contribute to the depth of the book. Hyde's skilful manipulation of such literary techniques substantiates how *Passport to Hell* warrants analysis from a stance that gives consideration to its creative elements.

In a similar strain, the dialogue and narrative voice are permeated with a distinct concentration on dialect. They are not just interspersed with idiom, but almost completely sustained by colloquialisms which are unique to New Zealand

speech. The blend of poetry with a relaxed use of language differs greatly from nonfiction which typically maintains a formal, impassive tone. Where these accounts utilise objectivity to emphasise the numerical and logistical details of war as a whole, Hyde uses a casual voice to capture the intimate and unrestrained feelings of the individual soldier. *Passport to Hell* provides us with not only one soldier's unique account, but also what can be imagined as the attitudes of the wider infantry during the time. At points, the voice can be imagined as a physical manifestation of the average kiwi soldier, a young working-class man who was confronted with the idea of fighting a war for a "Motherland" that was far removed from his day to day life, both in physical distance and cultural convention.

For some moments in the text, kiwi slang may come in the form of colloquialisms, such as "Jackie was about knee-high to a duck... and behaved as sober as a married man with twins" (Hyde, *Passport* 159). These sayings are casually executed metaphors in a somewhat dry style; common traits of a sense of humour characteristic to New Zealanders. Another example of New Zealand dialect occurs when Stark is involved in an altercation on a boat during his early years:

On the sea a ship's captain is king. Ship's captains are funny birds; some of them sour as mildewed mustard pickle, others with clipped speech, frosty blue eyes and nerve enough to tell the King of Hell what he could do with himself sooner than pass over a refugee. (Hyde, *Passport* 214)

Hyde uses unique descriptions to capture the essence of the personalities of various ship captains and although this contributes to our imagining of such characters as well as our understanding of the 'flexibility' of maritime law, it is

the speaking style which is most interesting. ‘Sour as mildewed mustard pickle’, ‘nerve enough’, and ‘tell the King of Hell what he could with himself’, are all excellent examples of the unconcerned speaking style typical of the rugged, salt-of-the-earth New Zealand labourer.

Hyde also utilises voice as a platform to encourage familiarity with the audience. The dialect suggests that the speaker has an affinity with the brazen and recalcitrant main character. In this way, Hyde provides us with another perspective from which to view Starkie; a voice which in many ways reflects the attitudes of not only the main character, but many New Zealand soldiers. Creating a parallel between the main character and the speaker provides Hyde with a platform of commonality to present Stark’s experiences.

Areas in the text that exhibit such recognisable linguistic associations contribute to the informal and uninhibited treatment of the subject of war. This style allows the text to impact a much broader audience, and it can be posited that Hyde sought to do so due to her humanitarian interests as she would have wished to create a book that appealed to all. Hyde chose to avoid detached, clinical terms and instead capture the essence, the personality and the atmosphere of people and events. She accomplishes this not only through her intrepid treatment of the subject, but also in her targeted use of diction which is easily relatable and recognisable to the wider New Zealand audience. Hyde’s choice of narrative voice and her extended use of idiom seems to reflect Stark’s personality and therefore create an empathic perspective from which to view his tale.

Another significant effect of Hyde’s exploitation of the New Zealand dialect is the conveyance of the attitudes of the typical kiwi soldier. World War I was a time of momentous change for the colony of New Zealand; the entrance

into the world theatre and the creation of the ANZAC forces resulted in a massive transformation in New Zealand's national identity. It can be argued that one of the results of the war was the emergence, or strengthening of the rivalry between New Zealand and Australia, a friendly competitiveness which is still evident today.

Hyde touches on this in a description of the soldiers' views: "The New Zealanders reckoned the Australians good gamblers, good soldiers, good pals, and superlatively good liars" (*Passport* 131). This understanding of the kiwi soldier's mentality also extends to other allied troops:

All the way the Tommies thieved as the New Zealanders had never suspected that any man could have the initiative, the perseverance, the agility, and the barefacedness to thieve.

The Canadians, with their shadowy hatchet-faces and steady swinging arms, take life in the tunnels better than the New Zealanders, but everyone knows they're bloody amphibians and keep beaver-tails stowed away in the seats of their breeches. (Hyde, *Passport* 146; 194)

Hyde captures not only the experience of the soldiers, but also the playful attitudes they shared towards each other. Although somewhat insulting, the observations carry a humorous tone which represents the raillery between the allied troops.

From a single source years after the event, Hyde managed to craft a story which illustrates precise details of the era, the locations and the attitudes experienced by World War I soldiers. This all-encompassing depiction of the New Zealand soldier validates *Passport to Hell* as an important point of reference for New Zealand culture during World War I.

Additionally, World War I also became the birthing ground for the typified soldier who never exhibited physical, emotional, or moral vulnerability but acted only in bravery. However, this cliché disregards the emotional and physical trauma that veterans were left to battle themselves⁵. Hyde sought to tell a tale much deeper than the surface image of the New Zealand soldier; her experience with emotional trauma paired with an adeptness in poetic expression fuelled the use of dialect to express the emotional undertones experienced by kiwi soldiers. The light-hearted speaking style of the New Zealand soldier creates a pronounced contrast when paired with deeply afflicting emotional content:

Here and there one had found shade enough to escape some part of the disfigurement caused by the pitiless sun; and on these faces such a story was written as nobody on earth will ever dare to tell until the graves give up their dead. (Hyde, *Passport* 110)

Poetic language reproduces the internal experience while the use of idiom emphasises the vulnerability of men during war. In many cases, this use of idiom contributes to the humour that is characteristic of much of the text: “One thing to be said for the Colonel. Whatever he gives you, there’s an awful lot of it—rum, trouble, or hell” (Hyde, *Passport* 238). The following example displays not only a defiance of authority, but also a hint towards the dynamic between colonial soldiers and the British-based command: “[Captain Hewitt] told Starkie his job

⁵ "The country just wanted to get back to normality, to put the war behind them. The men who came home were basically told, 'You've done your bit, just get on with it'... Faced with indifference, and an expectation that they would simply pick up the lives they had left behind, it was no surprise, says Professor Harper, that some soldiers stumbled and fell" ("Johnny Enzed").

was to fight for King and Country and not with his fellowmen... So he told Captain Hewitt what he could do with the King and the other members of the British Royal Family” (Hyde, *Passport* 161). In other areas, Hyde uses blatant sarcasm to capture the cavalier attitude of New Zealand soldiers, or more specifically, Stark, towards punishment which was actually very serious in nature: “Just straps that pegged a man’s body tight against the stone wall, his arms spread-eagled with the palms turned out, until he decided to be a good boy” (Hyde, *Passport* 165). All of these examples have in common their nonchalant attitude towards authority and total disregard for the stern and uncompromising nature of the military establishment.

Hyde understood and intimated the sentiments of the common soldier in all his complexities. The sarcastic treatment of severe discipline, the blatant disregard and contempt for authority, and the complex relationship between colonial forces and “Mother England” may not have existed in the minds of every servicemen, but they were certainly elements of Stark’s experience and therefore render a much more expansive illustration of World War I.

Tone

Passport to Hell explores the experience of World War I soldiers, using tone to emphasise such concepts as the chaotic battlefield, the horrific injuries sustained and the resulting grief. As is typical of her writing, Hyde does not merely explain in the common vernacular of war, describing enemy movements and battle tactics. Instead, she imbues the text with a tone that relays the intensity of the theatre of war. Using visceral description and metaphor, Hyde brings the experience close to the reader by focussing on the psychological experience of the

individual soldier who is witness to the physical action: "...a party of Turks blown sixty or seventy feet into the air above their fortified hill, grotesque little marionette figures violently jerked skyward by the unseen hands of death" (Hyde, *Passport* 112). When discussing physical battle, Hyde was intent on establishing a grim and horrifying tone, one that accurately represented the chaos of war. Not only does she achieve this goal, but she does so with language that isn't typical of a description of battle or war. The casual narrative voice creates the opportunity to utilise such peculiar metaphors and in doing so, Hyde cements in the minds of readers an explicit and unsettling impression of war. By applying this metaphor to enemy soldiers, Hyde also displays her impartial view of the devastation as a whole, rather than magnifying only what a single side suffers. The puppet metaphor is also used later on in the text to the same effect: "In imagination one saw clear against the sky several little figures of men, jerked high on their invisible wires against the curtains of this ghastly puppet show" (Hyde, *Passport* 197). What is especially distinct about these excerpts is Hyde's careful use of diction to convey a tone of horror and desperation. Using the words 'grotesque', 'violently', 'jerked' and 'ghastly' in conjunction with the idea of puppets creates a disturbingly clear image of the wounds the soldiers sustained. The idea of puppets also implies there is a puppet master, as made apparent by the 'unseen hands of death.' The images therefore convey the helplessness of soldiers in combat not against a specific enemy, but more so, an overwhelming being of power, interpreted in this instance as the entire machine of war. Due to her poetic background, Hyde is able to illustrate events and images with a precision that depicts physical movements and emotional atmosphere and as a consequence,

does not shield her audience from the gritty details, but instead embraces and exploits them.

The unconventional descriptive style also communicates a tone of revulsion in the discussion of injuries suffered by soldiers: “The wounded, unable to find a refuge, had died many deaths, hit again and again on the floor that was an evil porridge of blood and mud” (Hyde, *Passport* 186). The abstract description ‘died many deaths’ contributes to a tone of chaos and turmoil, but where Hyde truly excels is in her use of visceral, physical language. The ‘evil porridge of mud and blood,’ has a nauseating quality that contributes to the revolting tone Hyde employs in her coverage of war wounds. This repulsive specificity is also evident in another example: “The Gallipoli sun had caused each body to swell enormously—until the great threatening carcasses were three times the size of a man, and their skins had the bursting blackness of grapes” (Hyde, *Passport* 109). Many authors who lack the first-hand experience of being participants in the subject matter may resist explicit detail so as not to make their work vulnerable. As a contrast, Hyde directly confronts the subject matter and the result is a spectacularly comprehensive and arresting depiction that refuses to shy away from even the most revolting particulars. Although nonfiction texts may employ the use of tone, they would typically be marked by a formal, almost detached voice that does not allow for the same striking imagery or specificity as seen in Hyde’s work.

Utilising a broad array of language is typically only possible in a creative work as diction is more unrestricted, and therefore offers the opportunity to forge a more personal, subjective connection with the audience. Emotional language can also be seen as an indication of bias, as descriptions may emerge from a single

individual's experience, rather than the consensus of a broad group of subjects. Hyde demonstrates an adeptness in language play, and the moments of great intensity appear to be where she unleashes a scope of palpable vocabulary with little to no restraint.

This is apparent in Hyde's treatment of emotional upset, where she establishes a different tone, one of grief and mournful reminiscence: "And No Man's Land found its voice—a voice that rose from a long groan into a sobbing, intermittent shriek; a mindless, sightless voice that howled on and on" (*Passport* 167). In just this line, the audience is able to perceive the entire experience of a soldier at Gallipoli. The battles on Gallipoli consisted of a constant back and forth between the warring sides. The men got a taste of the trench warfare which was to welcome them at the Western Front, the experience of which is markedly different from the open battlefield. Retrieving bodies can often prove difficult during battle and many of the dead were left to lay where they perished. The emotional consequence of being within such an area is captured by Hyde's attribution of a discernible voice to No Man's Land. The slow escalation from a pained groan into an uncontrollable sobbing speaks to how the conditions increased in intensity over the Gallipoli campaign, and the fact that the voice continues to howl can be a remark on the failure of the invasion and the interminable sorrow which marked the national consciousness for subsequent generations.

In another area of the text, but productive of a similar result, Hyde uses the idea of a voice to contribute to the tone of mourning:

O, listening dead upon the hillsides of Gallipoli and in the deep gullies of the little bitter-tasting bushes!—it is the voice of your country that is

bidding you farewell. They are going now, with that music on their lips, to slay and to be slain, in other fields. (*Passport* 136)

Hyde pairs meticulous description of physical battle with a vehement regard for the psychological impact of the war. Tone-indicative words such as ‘bitter’ and ‘farewell’ contribute to a scene of profound anguish: the final abandonment of a territory and the lives it claimed by the few soldiers that remain. The inclusion of the physical attributes of the area such as ‘gullies’ and ‘bushes’ is a reflection of the lasting impact the battlefield made on the men and vice versa. The loss is therefore not only communicated in the emotions of the soldiers, but is manifested in the environment through the voice of No Man’s Land and the “voice of your country” (Hyde, *Passport* 136). Hyde’s establishment of a mournful tone to convey emotional turmoil exceeds the objectives of a historical account and generates an impassioned connection with the audience. The generous attention paid to building a sense of tone is an example of how Hyde operated outside of the boundaries of nonfiction and instead followed an intuition that helped create an unequalled account of events during World War I.

Theme

Another aspect of Hyde’s writing which moves it from the category of nonfiction to creative nonfiction is the inclusion of theme. Gerard states in his five principles of creative nonfiction that one aspect of creative nonfiction is the indication of an apparent subject and a deeper subject. Where the apparent subject may be considered Stark’s life story, the deeper subject exists in the thematic evidence Hyde includes to communicate her attitudes towards the war.

Hyde often relies on figurative language to approach emotional content, a practise she also applies to thematic inferences throughout the text. Hyde sought to create an accurate representation of the individual soldier's experience, therefore she exhibited little inhibition in discussing the sensitive topics of physical and emotional trauma. One of the themes evident in *Passport to Hell* is the suffering endured by soldiers, the depiction of which is very much in contrast with the stereotype of kiwi masculinity. Just as World War I brought about the emergence of a new national identity in New Zealand, it also gave birth to the typified kiwi soldier, one known to be infallible in his physical, emotional and moral strength. Hyde's goal was to present an authentic, individual experience and this meant the vulnerability of soldiers could not be ignored. At a time when there was little to no support for veterans in regard to psychological conditions such as depression and PTSD, Hyde dared to discuss the emotional impact of serving in the war. This is also supported by her publishing of the sequel *Nor the Years Condemn*, which explores the difficulties Stark faced when assimilating back into society after the war, as well as *Dragon Rampant*, which saw Hyde travel as the first female journalist to China during Japanese occupation. Both texts exhibit her perspective on the effects of war and her exploration of the larger concepts of death, poverty and humanity as they related to international politics and individual understanding in the 1930s.

During war, soldiers often undergo intense trauma resulting in permanent mental and physical changes. Events marked with emotional intensity are often difficult to articulate, and for soldiers returning to the morally conservative New Zealand of 1918, there may have existed additional pressures which exacerbated the feeling of isolation. For example, an indicator of the impact of conservative

New Zealand society on soldiers is inherent in the controversial treatment of venereal disease which placed many returned servicemen in quarantine on their arrival.⁶ Paired with difficult emotional trauma is the general regard of men as the more reserved, unemotional sex which can inhibit their opportunity to communicate freely. Through the story of Stark, Hyde breaches the boundaries of this convention and directly confronts many of the feelings that exist just beneath the surface of the uniform. Stark speaks of the transformation he has undergone since fighting in the war: “I’m only the shell of a man, with bits of lead sticking in me, and a wheezy chest” (Hyde, *Passport* 260). Although he sustained life-threatening wounds that seriously impacted his physical abilities, the fact that he is ‘the shell of a man’ can be regarded as the more permanent damage. Hyde uses Stark’s admission as an example of how the adversity of war can leave a soldier altered in identity and devoid of feeling.

Hyde encapsulates some of this hardship as a physical representation evident in the soldiers’ eyes: “Presently they would come to; you would notice nothing unusual about them except in quiet moments, when the thick, glaucous glaze swam over the pupils of their eyes again.” Not only do we glimpse the physical appearance of emotional damage, but we learn that such side effects can be imperceptible. The enemy soldiers are also seen to exhibit this veiled suffering: “Every man’s eyes had the dreadful and quiet patience of the dreamer who has drifted almost across the black, forgetful river” (*Passport* 172; 199). This excerpt is markedly more poetic as it manifests death as a physical journey, and by using

⁶ “The quarantine station was converted into a specialised military hospital in WW1. Soldiers recruited in NZ, and some NZ soldiers returned from overseas, were treated for VD, mainly gonorrhoea” (“Quarantine Island”).

words evocative of serenity such as ‘quiet’, ‘patience’, and ‘forgetful’, presents death as an alluring solution to suffering.

Hyde continues to build on the theme of suffering in imagery evoking the nostalgic comforts of home, which the soldier is irrevocably divided from: “That dreadful homesickness, when the whole of life is one unending procession of laborious little pictures— pictures of cottages and firelight and women and public-houses, pictures of the irretrievably lost” (*Passport* 208). Similar to the serialised structure of the novel, Hyde presents Stark’s memories as a flashing collage of moments, each a small snapshot of a more carefree point in time. This suggests that the change undergone by soldiers creates an impassable distance between their current emotional state and their positive memories. Supporting this is the evolution of the soldier’s perspective of home, not the physical location, but more so the sentimental qualities which represent life before war: “You have your mates, girl or boy. In time they forget you, or die, or are changed before your eyes, so that going to them isn’t going home anymore” (Hyde, *Passport* 279). The fact that Stark now views this positive state as unattainable speaks to the hopelessness that results from suffering. Hyde therefore presents the climax of suffering as a shift in mentality when a soldier realises the sacrifice of war, not only as a nation, but as an individual. This can be seen as an example of Gerard’s identifier of creative nonfiction in that, “the writer recognises larger trends, deeper truths about the way human beings behave. The particular event offers an epiphany, a way of getting at the deeper subject” (*Researching* 9). Through the theme of suffering, Hyde suggests that regardless of the side a person fights on or their goal in that war, all participants will experience the permanent effects of personal anguish.

Coming from a family of veterans⁷, Hyde understood the sacrifices, the loss and the suffering which came with warfare, so rather than create a patriotic account which tells of the victories of her country, she crafted a story that delves into the mind of the individual soldier and makes comment on the psychological experience. Hyde's interest in humanitarian affairs and strong attitudes towards social justice guided her desire to express these intimate details, but also contributed to her outlook on the war as a whole; she uses Stark's story as a vehicle to interject these views as larger themes. This is evidence of Hyde predating the guidelines set out for creative nonfiction: "The piece reflects not only whatever immediate research was necessary to get the facts straight on the page, but also the more profound 'research' of a lifetime" (Gerard, *Researching* 10).

Although *Passport to Hell* is based almost entirely on Stark's account, the subjective presence of Hyde can be seen throughout the text and particularly in the discussion of theme, such as indiscriminate death. The following quote includes not only Stark's commentary, but on another level operates as a platform for Hyde's reflection:

Bomber or officer, you got your bullet in the long run, and whether it was Blighty or the rats was a matter of luck... Some of the boys wanted to be

⁷ "[Hyde's] family history reveals a complex engagement in imperial projects—war, communications, and colonial administration—that characterised a significant part of the movement of population to New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her father, George Edward was born in Agra, where *his* father (originally from Yorkshire) had a successful career in the Indian Civil Service. At eighteen years old [George] joined an Anglo-Indian corps to fight in the Boer War" (Edmond-Paul, "Robin Hyde").

bombers because it was one way of winning the V.C., but most of them got wooden crosses instead. (Hyde, *Passport* 160)

The discussion of the ambitions of soldiers corresponds with the idea of the brave, courageous hero, similar to the 'Johnny Enzed' figure which became the stereotype for New Zealand troops. And while it is common to regard soldiers as only that, the idea of glory is diminished by the emphasis on the realities of war and the fate of most men. By contrasting the naïve ambitions of soldiers with their doomed fates, Hyde conveys the theme of indiscriminate death with an air of utter hopelessness and despondency, making a link to the idea of soldiers contributing very little to the ultimate goal due to the fact that war can have no positive outcomes for the people who fight in it. This is also apparent in Stark's nonchalant attitude towards discipline and the military regime: "So the Red Tabs said they haven't any discipline; but when it comes to dying they're as good as the rest" (Hyde, *Passport* 233). Despite his heroic actions on multiple occasions, Stark does not subscribe to the notions of honour and glory, but operates almost instinctively on the battlefield, as seen in the quote, "The boy who lived went back over No Man's Land" (Hyde, *Passport* 169). Stark is not a 'brave boy' or even a 'stupid boy', but the mere fact that he is alive is the only thing dictating his actions. Stark displays a relentlessness on the battlefield, but his disregard for discipline and the idea of glory make him an excellent example of the theme of indiscriminate death because he acts purely out of survival. Stark understands the forces he is up against and yet repeatedly steps onto the battlefield with the knowledge that it could be his last time. This dispassionate attitude does not come from a place of arrogance, but can be seen to mirror Hyde's attitudes of war as well; an attitude which is stripped of the typical embellishments it is normally

prescribed and instead viewed as a literal matter of life and death, where, as thematically suggested, death almost always wins.

This ulterior battle between humans' desire to conquer and Death's unrivalled power is mentioned later: "It was Death who captured this wood, no other King or Kaiser was supreme there for any length of time" (Hyde, *Passport* 189). Hyde's portrayal of Death as an all-powerful being suggests that in waging war, humans can only experience temporary and hollow victories due to them being at the ultimate mercy of Death. Although one side may eventually win the war, it can be argued that the amount of loss experienced by both sides has a more direct influence on society than the transient moments of triumph. This is supported by Stark who claims, "Even now I can't help wondering at times—why, why, why? What did we get out of it, anyhow? It wasn't even a good show" (Hyde, *Passport* 144). This seems to summarise not only Stark's attitudes towards the war but also Hyde's. The themes Hyde projects throughout the book place higher consideration on the emotional prosperity of individuals, the quality of which is sacrificed during war time.

Hyde discovered a man who had fought bravely for his country, saved dozens of lives and yet died with financial troubles and no success in assimilating to life after war. She attributes this in part to his race and his personality, but considering the themes discussed previously, this struggle can also be contributed to the deleterious effects of war.

One of Gerard's comments on creative nonfiction is that it "contains a sense of *reflection* on the part of the author. The underlying subject has been percolating through the writer's imagination for some time, waiting for the right outlet, it is *finished* thought" (Gerard, *Researching* 10). Interlacing her novel with

thematic meaning is one of the many reasons Hyde's *Passport to Hell* should be examined as creative nonfiction rather than just nonfiction. Themes are the product of a subjective, authorial presence as they cannot thrive in an environment of pure fact and statistic. By carefully interlacing the text with her own commentary, Hyde proves that she was working within the modern boundaries of creative nonfiction. Hyde demonstrates that the use of poetry and other creative literary features were necessary in crafting a book that told the story of a soldier's life in all its intimate detail. Being able to capture and express the human experience in all its complexities requires not only skill, but a platform that allows for the cultivation of larger themes. Creative nonfiction was yet to be founded, but Hyde, like several other writers who came after her, was led by the essence of the work rather than the structure of genre. In doing so, Hyde unleashed on the New Zealand public a literary work which simultaneously told a true story, encompassed broad themes, captured the essence of life as a soldier and broke the boundaries of genre.

Chapter 3: Critical Reception

“I am not a historian, and don’t want to be one.”⁸

Introduction

“Why did Robin Hyde write *Passport to Hell*?” asked D.I.B Smith in the introduction to *Passport to Hell*.

Initially no doubt from her sense of the need for social justice. Her journalism shows her defending the Maori at Orakei, returned servicemen, discharged prisoners, prison reform, indeed all those pushed aside, oppressed, wounded or ignored by society, and Starkie provides a perfect focus for these interests. (xxvii)

Hyde had many reasons to write *Passport to Hell*, but the single reason she chose to write it in the way she did was due to her focus on the individual experience. However, the close perspective she assumed on a single character seemed to be an all-consuming task which limited the attention paid to the historicity of the book. What Hyde accomplished in the six weeks it took her to write the book was a stunningly intimate account of what it meant to be a mixed-race New Zealander serving in World War I. But in some areas, Hyde lacked the critical attention to details relating to military movements, geographical particulars and in a few instances, spelling. One of the only major factual contentions involved the portrayal of a schoolmaster who punished Stark as a child, the severity of which was exaggerated.

⁸ (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiv)

Upon confirming this, Hyde corrected the error and issued a statement:

Starkie himself informed me—though in a perfectly humorous way... I accepted this and recounted it in good faith, but on Mr McNeil's statement that the occurrence never took place, had the paragraph removed from the 'serialized' version of my book, have written to the publishers to have it deleted from future editions, and finally will be glad if you will give publicity to this correction. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xvii)

Hyde exhibited no reluctance in admitting the faults of her book, however, she was confident in her standpoint of what she aimed to achieve with the novel. So, when John A. Tait wrote multiple letters to the Southland Times criticising her lack of research⁹ and therefore her failure to produce an accurate account, Hyde responded:

It is perfectly obvious that there may be minor (mostly very minor) inaccuracies of spelling or detail in a book written by an author who has never had opportunities to visit the scenes recorded, and whose material was gathered from a soldier (sixteen years old when he left this country) who never kept a diary... though I found him very far from unintelligent, his spelling does not seem to have been all it might. However, I don't think the fact that the soldier's spelling was here and there substituted for

⁹ Tait claimed, "A few minutes in a reference library would have corrected her ideas (and spelling) of Avenal, Waihopai, the time when Invercargill went 'dry' and 'the battle of the Wasr'... that 'the battle of the Wasr' was fought before the Fifth Reinforcement (not 'Regiment' by the way) left New Zealand; that 'Y' Beach was separated from Anzac Cove by nine or ten miles of the Peninsula from which New Zealand and other allied troops were rigidly excluded by the Turks" (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xviii).

the schoolmaster's is likely to trouble many people. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxi)

Tait also emphasised Hyde's dependence on Stark to produce an accurate recollection of events, stating in one instance:

A few inquiries would have revealed to her the fact that two at least of the schoolmasters referred to in chapter one are still living in Invercargill, and would no doubt have been pleased to correct her picture of the boyhood of her hero. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xviii)

Hyde, once again, felt justified in the actions she took as an author:

It is true that I could have written to Starkie's schoolmasters in order to 'correct' my view of his character, though this is the first time I have ever heard that an author is supposed to take this course. I could have also written to every policeman, warder, prison superintendent, sergeant-major, military police official, and innocent if officious bystander with whom Starkie came into conflict. But I didn't, and I would never be likely to do so. My object in writing the book was not to portray the outside world looking at Starkie, but to portray Starkie looking at the outside world. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiii)

The final line of her retort speaks to the contention which has an established presence in modern day creative nonfiction. The process of writing is an individual task, an undertaking which can be deeply emotional, especially when capturing the lives of real people. An author must exhibit a level of diplomacy in the treatment of subject, an expectation which can impact the natural progression of a story. For creative nonfiction writers, a psychological stalemate can occur when they are confronted by an impasse between fact and fiction and

are therefore required to emphasise one or the other in relating a scene or character. But Hyde had a very clear notion of her objective in writing the book, and her response clearly demonstrates her disregard for conventional treatment of fact and fiction in favour of following her intuition and accomplishing her primary goal.

Another of Tait's noted corrections involves factual consistencies, but in contrast to other areas of criticism regarding minor details, he was actually proved wrong by a respondent to the letter. Tait claimed:

'The battle of the Wasr' as described took place during the Easter of 1915 while 'Starkie' with the Fifth Reinforcements was still in camp in New Zealand. Men who were actually there have told me that the description of that event is remarkably accurate but the point is that Starkie was not there. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xix)

To the question of Stark's presence at the Battle of the Wazza, Hyde stated, "Starkie was unquestionably at what the soldiers called 'the battle of the Wazza', Mr John Tait 'the battle of the Wasr', and some other authorities 'the battle of the Wazir.'" A man named Tano Fama supported Hyde by writing to the paper clarifying that there were in fact two battles of the Wazza, "and the second one was in the early days after the arrival of the 5th Reinforcements" therefore proving Stark's presence (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxi; xxiii).

Although Tait did provide many clarifications to facts in Hyde's novel such as dates and distances, his reading of her novel was based on nonfiction, and therefore focussed solely on its factuality. As creative nonfiction had yet to be established as a genre, the creative qualities of Hyde's novel would have been

considered a unique supplement to a war story, rather than the framework that secured her success. Therefore, Tait concluded:

I do not doubt that much of the narrative is substantially true but it contains so much intrinsic evidence of the author's failure to check the facts that the whole story stands suspect. It is in this sense that the book is worthless as a record of truth. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xix)

Despite the questioning of the veracity of *Passport to Hell*, Hyde achieved success from the publishing of the book and was supported by the positive reviews from members of the public, including veterans of World War I. Writing in the Otago Daily Times, The Hon. Downie Stewart, who for part of the war years was attached to the same battalion as Starkie, says that for this period, "the authenticity of the book is such that nobody could cavil at it", and later that "it is hard to believe the author was not at the front." He therefore concluded "that for the period of his knowledge of the events they are told with such substantial accuracy that any minor corrections of fact would not alter the main tenor of the story" (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiv).

Another such reviewer, John A. Lee, demonstrated his understanding of the vulnerabilities of the book, but measured Hyde's success outside of the margins of genre: "Your 'Passport to Hell' which was so amazingly correct psychologically if the graphic side was out of joint occasionally; and, of course, to get the experience true and vital rather than the mere geography was the greater achievement." Hyde also defended herself by contributing to the record of the book's public reception:

It is curious, that if my book is, as Mr Tait says, 'worthless as a record of fact', the most favourable reviews and comments should have come from

returned soldiers... The Imperial War Museum, in writing to thank me for a copy of 'Passport to Hell', which was sent on request, refers to the book as one of the most interesting New Zealand war records in its possession... anyone who cares to look up the reviews will find that I have in no way exaggerated. Nor do I wish to advertise my own work, but Mr Tait's suggestion that because of a few trivial errors, Starkie's record and my book are practically a work of the imagination, is so unfair and untrue that it cannot be left unanswered. (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiv; xxiii)

Regardless of the criticism *Passport to Hell* was subject to and the vulnerability her reputation suffered, Hyde maintained that she was vindicated in her authorial choices; a conflict which reflects the circumstances many creative nonfiction writers face today. Errors in accuracy are discreditable in both nonfiction and creative nonfiction, as both have a duty to administer to historical truth in every possibility, and where that possibility does not exist, the information is to not be included. Creative nonfiction, although different in its inclusion of literary techniques normally attributed to prose, still claims to be faithful to real-life events. If *Passport to Hell* was released today as creative nonfiction, there is no doubt that Hyde would be subject to the same criticism due to these factual errors and oversights. However, there are several important factors to consider before ascribing critical judgement to Hyde's success as an author: All of her information was derived from first-hand interviews with Starkie almost 20 years after the events; she was conscious of Stark's financial concerns and so wrote the book within 6 weeks; she maintained confidence in her goal to "write from the inner centre of what people think, hope and feel" (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiii).

The Interview

If there is one purpose of this thesis, it is to present Hyde's writing style as one focussed on the human element. And basing an entire book on one man's experience, as physically described by that man, must bring to light the question of reliability and subjectivity. Hyde did not stray from authorial presence nor did she speckle a historical record with moments of bias. Hyde crafted an entire book based on interviews conducted with a single subject and she did not perform extensive research outside of these interviews, as she was intent on relating an intimate first-hand account. Hyde did this not to limit her work or to risk her reputation as an author, but used Stark's experience to comment on the social and political conditions of New Zealand culture during World War I.

The gathering of material from first-hand interviews is an incredible resource for an author, whether writing fiction or non-fiction. But in the case of creative nonfiction, it can mean the difference between merely scratching the surface of an event and being given the opportunity to supplement the text with vivid emotional detail. For Hyde, it meant she had only to consult a single source for all of her findings and enquiries, and due to the trusting relationship they developed over that time period, she was given all of the details of Stark's life.

However, the interviews also opened up her material to vulnerability as she did not undertake ample research to verify Stark's account, nor did she alter his account. D.I.B. Smith states that:

A glance through the notes to this edition will reveal that Tait's general observations on Starkie's inventions, distortions, and slips of memory, are not inaccurate. Hyde followed Stark closely, expanding from time to time from the merest of hints but making very few changes. (Introduction xxiv)

Using an interview style to conduct research is a high-yielding source as it allows an author to engage with the subject, ask specific questions, and be provided with a level of detail which does not exist in any other medium. However, it also means that the author only approaches content from one angle, a subjective one based entirely on the interviewee's own perspective of events and people. Not only that, but we must consider the flaws of the human mind in being able to recollect precise information, especially after a certain time period has passed. Most people would only be able to paraphrase a set of events or dialogue, and the entire basis of what they can recall would be based on what *they* felt was important and what was noteworthy to *them*. A single person's memory would not be able to accurately represent all persons who were in attendance or even all aspects of an event. However, as previously mentioned, Hyde acknowledges this weakness by stating that it was her intention to provide a one-sided account, an individual history. So regardless of the shortcomings encountered by using interviews as a sole channel for information, Hyde clearly notes that it was premeditated for the novel to be tempered by this single frame of reference.

It is also important to note that the majority of the discrepancies in the book were actually supplied by Stark, not Hyde. Due to information being relayed long after the events occurred, Stark's memory failed in some areas, and in others personal bias or embellishment could be a factor; as D.I.B. Smith notes in his introduction to *Passport to Hell*, "after all he had been polishing these accounts of his encounters for some eighteen years prior to meeting Hyde" (xiv). But this brings to light the question that since Hyde is the author, she is responsible for the information contained in the book. Tait is correct in his criticism that "the verity of the story could have been easily checked at many points", however Hyde did

not seek to write a story focussed around the distances between beaches or the time the first bullet flew (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xvii). Hyde discovered the remarkable story of a man with “no socks, no fingers on the left hand—the thumb of which was brilliantly tattooed with the legend ‘Here’s the Orphan’—and an unconquerable smile.” She was immediately inspired by the story of Stark, whose “queer racial heritage... has taken him into desperate places: prisons, battles, affairs. With it all he’s something of a visionary and—in physical courage— unquestionably heroic” (*Passport 5*; qtd. in Smith, Introduction x). Hyde obviously sensed that the inimitable life of Stark could not be comprehensively captured through journalism alone, but would require an attention to emotional depth. This creative intuition allowed Hyde to generate an early version of creative nonfiction, one which was published years before the term creative would be applied to the nonfiction field.

As an audience, we cannot ignore the factual discrepancies of a text, but we must also evaluate her literary achievements as a whole. One can even go so far as to distinguish the errors not as a failing on her part, but as the result of an author’s commitment to adhere so closely to subject interviews. Hyde’s experience can be used as a point of reference for the history of creative nonfiction due to the fact that her work infringed upon the boundaries of genre, risked her reputation as an author, but ultimately led to her successful contribution to the New Zealand national narrative.

Rushed Publishing

Another factor which contributed to the way Hyde structured her story was due to Stark’s circumstances. When she encountered Stark, he had recently lost

his wife and was in dire financial need. From a man who travelled the world during war, saving dozens of lives and taking even more, Stark had not adapted well to civilian life and was in debt, the latter which Hyde sought to alleviate through publishing *Passport to Hell*. Over the course of the interviews, Hyde and Stark developed a close relationship, which resulted in the rejection of his marriage proposal, at the advice of her mentor. But this close relationship also provided Hyde with all the materials necessary to complete the novel. Hyde recognised the literary complexities of the undertaking, claiming that she was “going to complete a very queer sort of writing job which I’ve undertaken and which may be a book or a nightmare when I’ve finished. It will take me about three months to finish the job” (qtd. in Smith, Introduction ix). However, within one month she announced her completion. Therefore, it is not unbelievable to come across small details of error in a quickly assembled account based solely on the verbal communication of a veteran long after he served. Some creative nonfiction authors spend years dedicated to research, such as Truman Capote who spent over 3 years gathering material for *In Cold Blood*. But Hyde’s data was encompassed in a single source, a source who was forthcoming with information due to his financial difficulties and his personal relationship with Hyde. Her consideration for the social welfare of returned servicemen provided Hyde with the motivation to quickly complete the manuscript. This urgency is not detected as fallibility in the text, but is representative of Hyde’s prowess as a writer. Within a few short weeks, Hyde crafted a chronicle that depicts the remarkable life of a New Zealand soldier and continues to enlighten audiences even today.

Conclusion

“It is the individual moving behind queer, unreasonable actions which produce a good deal of the fun of this old world.”¹⁰

With the knowledge we have of the history of creative nonfiction, we can now analyse Hyde’s work as a ground-breaking advancement in the literary sphere. Only upon a close analysis can we fully appreciate Hyde’s adeptness in crafting a nonfiction novel that embraces fictional features with such proficiency. The literary features are not just a supplement to the text, but act as the thematic framework of *Passport to Hell*, transforming it from a war history into an intimate, multidimensional account of pronounced complexity. Utilising her poetic background allowed Hyde to convincingly reproduce the emotional intensity of serving in war and set the precedent for the idiosyncratic writing style that permeated her later work. The lyrical prose which characterises *Passport to Hell* becomes an established feature of *Dragon Rampant*, a text also marked by Hyde’s insightful treatment of war.

Hyde’s success is not just defined by her mere application of fictional techniques to a nonfiction text, but in her distinctive manipulation of such features as voice, dialogue and theme. Hyde’s decision to begin a literary exploration outside of her usual field sparked a revolution in not only her writing, but in the development of creative nonfiction as well. Although *Passport to Hell* marked her first experience blending fact and fiction, Hyde managed to generate an arresting account that was guided solely by her intuition as a writer. Despite her background in journalism, Hyde did not undertake additional research for the

¹⁰ (qtd. in Smith, Introduction xxiv)

nonfiction novel, but sought to tell the story from one individual's perspective. In her departure from conventional style, Hyde developed an individual flair marked by literary dexterity that truly skirted the boundaries and causes the reconsideration of our understanding of genre.

The delineation of genre may be appropriate for categorising texts in large quantities, but for some authors, these categories only seem to enact limitations upon their work. This was certainly true of Hyde, as it wasn't until many years after her death that her work re-emerged and was appointed as being the success that it is today. *Passport to Hell* provides us with an example of how our interpretation of genre is just that— an interpretation. Creativity by nature cannot exist while confined or controlled, therefore, it is important that we approach a work of literature, or any artwork for that matter, with a flexibility that encourages and examines originality. In doing so, we may reduce the chance of a text such as Hyde's from eluding the critical attention it deserves. Performing a close analysis of *Passport to Hell* reveals Hyde's artistic manipulation of literary features and confirms her ground-breaking achievements as an early practitioner of creative nonfiction. And despite the negative criticism that emerged due to Hyde's treatment of fact and fiction, she has created a striking account that should be valued as an important contribution to the national narrative of New Zealand history.

The study of Robin Hyde has also closely coincided with my study of another New Zealander I stumbled across during my academic career. A swift and absent-minded perusal of a website introduced me to a woman who would go on to influence my entire understanding of both New Zealand history and the Great War. The incredible life of sexual hygiene campaigner and journalist Ettie Rout

sat dormant in my mind until years later, when a Master of English provided me with the perfect vehicle to engage with this truly remarkable woman. It was in this seemingly inconsequential sequence of events that my enrapture with Rout also led me to the discovery of the notably similar Hyde. The simultaneous examination of the lives of these two women inspired the first three chapters of *En Route*, my biographical novel which is informed by Hyde's own interaction with creative nonfiction.

As I began learning of their lives and their work, I was struck by an immediate sense of longing to contribute to our modern understanding of these people. The more I discovered about each woman, the more I began to understand how significant the parallels were between them. They were both social outcasts: Rout, due to her incredibly unpopular ideas concerning sex, marriage, and almost every other topic considered taboo in New Zealand; and Hyde, due to two concealed pregnancies and mental health issues which dictated much of her young life. They were both female journalists who faced adversity in their field due to the fact that they lived at a time when the industry was male-dominated and many women did not enter the workforce at all. Their experience in journalism resulted in the publication of numerous books, many of which were considered to challenge what was appropriate either within a genre or for the subject matter. They both lived with painful and recurring physical ailments which affected their everyday lives and greatly impacted on their enjoyment of life. They both sought international adventure and chased the war almost right into the battlefield— Rout to Egypt and France, and Hyde to China— in order to achieve their goals, consequently setting the precedent for New Zealand women's active participation in international conflict. They also suffered tragic fates at their own hands, having

lost a physical and mental battle after years of dedicating time, effort and money to influence and improve the treatment of New Zealand soldiers. For a scholar such as myself, stumbling across such peculiar and remarkable women who contributed so much to our modern understanding of history and literature is a coincidence that provided one of the greatest opportunities of my academic career.

The parallels between the lives of these women is unmistakable, and not only that, but bringing to light in a modern context the work they achieved is an extraordinary opportunity and one which consumed me from the outset. For both women's ultimate success was denied due to the social standards of their respective time periods. Although both are relatively documented, it is my opinion that neither have been given the appropriate recognition for their contributions to New Zealand history. Hyde and Rout's similar interests in social justice, especially pertaining to New Zealand soldiers, guided their lives and their work and led to accomplishments that confirmed their reputations for generations to come. However, both the authors' radical ideas on society and literature and how these interacted together hindered their ability to attain success during their lifetimes. It is only now, in a more progressive period, that we can fully appreciate the contributions and the sacrifices made in their lives to achieve such work.

The study of Hyde's writing not only informed my personal knowledge of World War I as well as the history and development of creative nonfiction, but it also impacted the creative side of my thesis. I was inspired by her unique and often eccentric management of literary features and in many ways used her risky handling of genre to guide my own writing. Hyde's bold exploration of genre is encouraging for a writer in any field, but was particularly inspirational due to the subject matter of my proposed creative work. One particularly striking aspect of

Hyde's writing is her use of narrative voice to convey intimate details of the main character. The harmony Hyde creates in a single passage that simultaneously involves setting, character and narrative dictation brings a swiftness to the text which is characteristic of her writing style. Although I may not have reflected this fast pace in my own creative writing, I have definitely gained knowledge from the adept control displayed by Hyde in imparting detail through the narrative voice.

The fluidity Hyde exercises in *Passport to Hell* provided me with a sense of freedom in my own treatment of Rout, one which approaches her from a lens that values the influence of her life and personality on her unique and unprecedented accomplishments. Because Rout was severely ostracised in her lifetime, I sought to present her in a light which revels in her unique perspective and sense of humour. I may not have the benefit of a first-hand interview with Rout as Hyde did with Stark, but I had access to many first-hand materials in the form of letters between Rout and her peers. The close examination of such materials built a sense of who Rout was, both as a figure in New Zealand history and as an individual. My subsequent exercise of this intuitive understanding was emboldened by Hyde's experience and her confidence in, and commitment to, telling Stark's story from his intimate perspective. What Hyde sacrificed in the interlacing of fact and fiction is also what secured the success of *Passport to Hell* as a relatable in-depth account. It can be posited that had she not followed her intuition as a writer and instead concentrated on adhering to the guidelines of genre, Hyde would not have been able to craft such an intimate account. Therefore, the creative section of my thesis is based on the true events as they occurred, but is supplemented with fictional aspects which act to convey to the reader the unique character of Ettie Rout. Rather than maintaining a strict focus on

the genre my work would fall into, I retained an open-minded approach that sought to bring Rout to life rather than trying to define her character from within the boundaries of nonfiction.

The genre of creative nonfiction continues to suffer from a level of uncertainty years after it was first recognised. The obscurity caused by the intermingling between fact and fiction has been approached by scholars since the time of the genre's emergence, but there has yet to be a standardisation which would offer clarity for both readers and authors. I believe this comes down to the nature of artistic creation and therefore, any attempt at streamlining the genre would only restrict an author's process. Applying limits by which an author must abide may not be an appropriate solution, but perhaps maintaining a level of communication of the veracity of certain texts may help elucidate the boundaries of fact for the wider audience. However, this solution also poses a problem; just as Hyde stated that she didn't believe it necessary to go to extreme lengths to confirm details of Stark's story, it can be suggested that authors shouldn't be required to divulge the origins of their work, as this almost diminishes the creative side of the work. One of the reasons creativity can be so appreciated is because each author or artist uses a set of tools to divulge a certain amount of information, and where an author leaves room for inquiry is precisely the point where a reader approaches the text with an analytical eye. Just like an author being required to explain every occurrence of symbolism, necessitating the corroboration of fact and fiction within a text seems excessive and may actually belittle the creativity employed in its creation. Although there may not seem to exist a single solution to alleviate the tension ubiquitous in the genre, the continued analysis and development of our understanding may provide further insight as to how readers

and critics can approach indistinct texts. The reassessment of *Passport to Hell* is just one instance where further examination can contribute to our appreciation of both an author and our understanding of the genre as a whole. Despite the apparent lack of an all-encompassing resolution for the tension which proliferates the genre, continued academic analysis will improve our comprehension and establish a more consistent perspective on creative nonfiction, possibly decreasing the critical hazards authors such as Hyde face when embarking on literary exploration.

Hyde was a talented writer unfortunately plagued by a lifetime of mental disturbance and physical ailment. However, in her young life she managed to create numerous works which blended an educated account of historical events with an astute exhibition of emotional turbulence. This combination marks the sole reason *Passport to Hell* should be reconsidered as creative nonfiction, and therefore documented as one of the precedents to the genre as we recognise it today. As the genre of creative nonfiction is still developing, Hyde's experience demonstrates the importance of continuing scholarly interaction with texts generated both now and in the past. Revisiting the works of such authors allows us to gain renewed insight into the artistry and ingenuity of our literary ancestors as well as the malleable properties of our present-day genres. Although Hyde never lived to experience the full effects of her success, our re-evaluation of *Passport to Hell* as creative nonfiction legitimises her efforts and ascribes the full weight of her contribution to both New Zealand history and the literary world.

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En Route

Chapter 1

Ettie hops out of the gharrie at the south end of Haret el Wasser. A few sandy steps lead her into a sea of green hats bobbing up and down in a khaki current. Men in long white shirts and short, round hats speckle the mass of soldiers with their dark skin. The sun has just begun to touch the west desert hills as she fills her lungs with hot Egyptian air.

She looks down the street and sees buildings on both sides shrouded in a yellow haze of cigarette smoke wafting in and out of the light of wrought iron lampposts. As she walks down the street, Ettie becomes more drowned in noise. Men with dark eyes standing at crowded tables shout about the fine quality of their wares. Soldiers furiously clap at the frantic beating of wings after a sorcerer uses what can only be described as black magic to reattach the bloody head of a bird. None of the noise ceases as Ettie walks past in her soldier's coat; women don't purse their lips from behind window shades in the place where small iron fences are replaced by the billowing of coloured cotton shades. Ettie looks at some of the still-broken window frames that were jerked out of place and the shards of dirty glass smashed as tables, pianos and eunuchs were thrown from the second storey. But she can't see all the signs of the battle; no broken shards of wooden barrels or gharry wheels, no stranded piano keys or dark puddle stains from the fire hoses that were cut that night. There is no mattress fluff caught on an exposed nail or gathered in corners where the wind current keeps turning. Muddy footprints from the 2,500 Anzac-issue leather boots are no longer hardened into the soiled earth, and the blood from the three people killed and few dozen injured no longer leaves its drops in the dirt. The only evidence of the Good Friday riot—

that every mother denied her boy's part in— lies in a few burnt buildings that were never repaired.

Like every New Zealander who felt shame when they cracked open the newspaper that April morning, Ettie knows the story; urine-laced alcohol thrown on doorframes, hanging photos and low couches. A metal match safe with a Rising Sun Badge drawn from a cotton pocket and emptied on the ground, flames catch a colourful rug and advance up plaster walls.

Despite the scraps from the battle, the city seems to have laughed in the face of resistance, hardly pausing to turn over one more handle of beer. Operations didn't stop for long, soldiers continue to be lured to the Wazza; but the memory of the throbbing city is scratched from homebound letters and buried on the battlefield.

In the alleys, the scent of offal mixes with a-thousand-man-musk. The sandy khamsin wind sticks 5 o'clock shadow to clean-shaven men. Everywhere she looks, Ettie is greeted by the flesh of arms, legs, bellies and breasts. Prostitutes saunter in every curve of the street, leaning against buildings, wandering alongside men. Boisterous laughter erupts from all sides as soldiers in cafes, pubs, dance halls and brothels shout, clap, and argue. The pluck of pianos ricochets along the road, as if bouncers keep throwing notes out the windows, only to continue their brawl in the street.

Ettie pulls out her notepad, quickly jotting down shop names in a list, with scribbled arrows pointing at prices. She glances up, and as if a genie from a lamp, a woman with a black silky mane appears next to her. The woman's black eyes scan over her slouch hat and green greatcoat. In an accent that suspends every 's',

the woman says, “Do not bother with these places, I will take to you to *real* pleasure.”

George emerges from the crowd, breast heaving as he stoops with his hands on his knees. “Alright, I believe, we have seen enough here,” he puffs against the noise of the city.

Ettie turns and aims her notepad at him. “Now George, I didn’t come here to buy a postcard. If the soldiers go there, I want to go there.” She looks down the street, where lines of khaki stretch between buildings, through narrow alleys and almost merge with shops next door.

George meets the dusky eyes of the woman peering down at him and quickly stands up. “Ettie, I agreed to this as you appeared to have a certain degree of experience when it came to... soldiers’ behaviours.” He dusts off his shirt and stiffens his shoulders, but his eyes dart around as if chasing a fly. “However, I do not intend on leading anybody, a lady at that, into the very places which have caused such— such horror!” He glances at the bare bronze legs of a woman gliding past and his cheeks flush.

Ettie nods to the woman and looks again at George. “You wanted to see if General Maxwell was doing anything about the problem— well, I didn’t see any of this in his report. Come along, we must continue.” She is already following the guide when she glances over her shoulder at George. “And I won’t tell anyone at the YMCA if your lap happens to catch a spare skirt.”

His sour look is lost in the cheering and back-slapping of the crowd around him. Finally he surrenders and shuffles to catch up. “Well... as a... as a gentleman, I am obliged to accompany you for... fear of your safety.”

“Now that’s the spirit!” Ettie booms into the night.

The shimmering candlelight coming from cafes and dance halls begins to fade as the group approaches a darker area of the Wazza. Ettie no longer sees restaurants decorated with thick red carpet hung on the walls, but buildings left almost bare except for a few tables. Lines begin to grow outside alabaster buildings, where entire squadrons of men wait patiently to take their turn as a silhouette in the window. Everywhere she steps, Ettie cannot help but kick a piece of rubbish, a brown glass bottle, a greasy napkin or a crumpled photograph of a doe-eyed girl that couldn't bear to watch from his breast pocket.

On cream stone balconies, women as young as 12 wave their scarves and their bodies at the men below. The women have learned the soldiers' paydays; today, the New Zealanders received their pay packets, so the air is full of "Come on NZ, let me show you the inside of Egypt!" and "Is it true what Australians say about being the biggest soldiers?"

The night air bursts with the hot breath of liberation and wild 'yahoos' of a freedom that has never before been tasted. Soldiers that come are stripped of pay packets, uniforms and old-world convention. But where men are hypnotised by coloured scarves floating over twisted abdomens and gold-bangled arms, Ettie only sees the poorly made, grease-stained mesh that is constantly re-dyed to look like silk. Instead of being entranced by big smiles and breasts, Ettie is distracted by the drowsy eyes and saggy skin that speak of an age well beyond the women's actual years. Dead eyes peer from dark skin and dark makeup, making even the most plain and modest woman look mysterious. For most of the women she encounters, Ettie can only think of what a hot water scrub and a good sleep would do for them.

The guide however, seems to be well kept and less spent. Ettie tries not to stare at the purple mark hardly visible beneath the woman's side-parted hair. Tracing from behind her ear down her cheekbone, there is just enough powder to disguise the scar in the shadows. Before Ettie gets the chance to offer a home remedy, the woman pulls her through a line of men towards a door guarded by a massive dark-skinned eunuch.

Ettie moves slowly through the mass, shoulders squared, notepad marking the crowd, jotting down notes of condition, clothing, behaviour, nationality. She steps into a circle of men where a soldier is being cheered on to finish his drink. From beneath his rumpled hat, he chokes when he catches her eye, losing half of his beer to the ground. The men turn to see Ettie, elbows bent, holding her notepad. Some snap their bodies to attention or remove their hats, one tries to lean over her notes, while the drinking man struggles to stand tall as the beer moves up and down his throat in a stifled cough.

She lowers her notepad down and claps one man on the back. "Don't let me interrupt your fun, boys! I'm just here to see what all the racket is about."

What she struggles to see from within the crowd is now completely illuminated inside the small lounge area in the front room. The right wall is bare and beige except for three framed nude photos of women all in a similar pose; legs sprawled on a velvet couch, hips aimed straight at the camera, and the plastered smile of a woman thinking of something far away from the poorly lit room she shares with the photographer.

Red, blue and orange patterned rugs slink up the left wall to take their dusty place across from the photos. A few small tables are scattered on the cement floor of the room, each with two or three men sitting beneath double the amount

of women. Ettie cranes her neck to see a woman draped over a soldier like a sash, her soft olive arms feeling the pulse in his neck rise when she adjusts slightly in his lap. The woman lifts a foggy glass to his lips, and he empties it into his mouth. She whispers a foreign word into his ear and then tilts her head back to laugh into the night. The soldier's eyes have not left hers except to meet his mate's across the table, in which a small exchange occurs and both men rise to follow the dancing scarves upstairs.

Ettie looks around the room to see that this is the same at most of the tables, up against the walls, crowding at the bar. Her step is the only one that doesn't falter as she moves towards the stairs. Opposite the bar on the other side of the room is a wooden staircase with worn railings draped in worn women. Ettie scribbles on her notepad that as she ascends the stairs, the prices begin to drop. Just like the Farmers Drapery back in Christchurch, the best-looking materials are kept in front by the window. By the time she reaches the top of the staircase, the price is two shillings and George is lagging behind, trying not to make eye contact with the women and tripping up the stairs.

Chapter 2

Climbing the red brick steps, Godfrey carries his brown leather bag up to the large wooden doors and looks through the textured glass. He walks up to the front desk where a slender man with sharp eyebrows, shiny hair and an oil-black bow tie is flipping through small yellow name cards.

“Good afternoon monsieur. Welcome to the New Hotel, will you be needing a room for the evening?”

Godfrey clears his throat. “Good afternoon. No, thank you, I am here for a meeting with one of your tenants, a Miss Ettie Rout.”

The concierge looks him up and down. “Ah, Miss Rout, another one, of course. Follow me monsieur.”

Godfrey shifts his bag from one hand to another and then follows, looking down the halls of the hotel at thin plants in plain pots and black Eiffel tower art on the walls. Around the next corner is a wooden bench seating three soldiers. The one in the middle hunches forward with elbows on spread knees, fingers crumpling and re-crumpling a handkerchief while the other two lean against the wall. Two more sit on the ground next to them, legs splayed out in the hallway with perfectly polished brown boots. Godfrey stops in the middle of the hall, but then shuffles to the side a few steps from the soldiers.

The tall soldier on the end of the bench nudges the one in the middle with a shoulder. “I’m telling you John, you’ll be alright. It’s no blighty, a short arm inspection, a bit of cream and you’ll be away.”

“But you don’t know if any of that stuff actually works. If it did, why don’t we get it from the captain? I never should have gone out, I should have stayed at camp.”

“Of course they work! The second time I was in here, mine was so swollen a cat couldn’t scratch it. Well I could have kissed her after I did that rinse she gave me. Sticky stuff, but by the next day I wasn’t walking like a cowboy anymore.”

A soldier on the floor with a nose that would let him smoke in the shower interrupts. “Yeah, the lady just about knows him by name. If he had his trousers down, she could probably pick him out of a crowd.”

The soldiers all laugh, except for John who is now holding his head in his hands. The soldier next to him slaps him on the back. “Oh a bit of itching is no big fuss, and you’ll be back out with us in no time.”

“No I won’t go back there now, not ever again. They all said France was better, but you can hardly tell which ladies are... working.”

Godfrey stares at the wall ahead of him, shifting his eyes to his hands and then back up at the wall. All the men start speaking,

“We could all tell that yours was, that tabby must have been as old as me nana!”

“You would have needed to help her on!”

“Her eyesight was probably so bad that you could stiff her and she be none the wiser.”

The soldier on the floor closest to Godfrey stops playing with his laces and elbows the man next to him. “Stiffing her is what got him here in the first place.”

The men all laugh, except for John who sits with his eyes on the ground.

“I think she saw innocent young John here and came out of retirement just to get her kicks again. One last lay before she lay down forever.”

The corridor is now filled with laughter; Godfrey shifts slightly to the left when one soldier laughs so hard that he lays down, smacking the ground. Godfrey only glances for a second when the man winces as leans back up, flinching and grabbing his inner thigh with both hands. Godfrey shifts his weight, straightens his back and tidies the buttons on his shirt.

The door Godfrey has spent most of his time staring at finally opens. A young blonde soldier steps out, lifts his hat to the men and walks away quickly down the hall. A man emerges moments later, another soldier by the looks, but wearing a kilt. "John Wilkins."

John jumps at his name and almost trips over his feet. One of the men on the floor says, "Take care of him Scotty! This one's a virgin!" Looking one last time at the other men, John drags himself through the door.

The men continue their chatter in the hall, but Godfrey begins to wonder if he has come to the right place. After a few minutes, he turns to the soldier nearest him. "Excuse me, is this where I go to see Ms Rout? I'm afraid I may have been misled."

The soldier lifts his head with an ever-present smile, "You're definitely in the right place, we all see Ettie after Scotty. She's always got plenty of anything you need, advice or sheaths, or advice about sheaths."

He turns to look at the others, who smile and nod. "We've already seen him, we're just waiting for her, she's a busy lady that one."

The door opens again and a pale-faced and slightly sweaty John walks out, clutching a brown paper bag tightly in his clammy hands. He keeps his eyes on the floor as he says, "See you fellas" and is down the hallway.

In another moment, Scotty is out again. He looks at the men on the bench and on the floor, but then his eyes rest on Godfrey. “Come on in young fella, you look new here.”

Godfrey walks forward, steps over one of the soldier’s boots and enters the room. It seems to be a standard hotel room, except for the medical bed which lies in the centre and the counter covered in boxes and gloves and paperwork.

The man in the kilt gestures with a rough hand for him to have a seat. “Now tell me what you’ve got, itching, leaking, burning, and for how long?”

Godfrey shifts on the table, looking at the man’s scruff of light brown hair. “Umm, excuse me, I’m— I’m not experiencing any— any of those.”

Scotty’s hand quickly scribbles and ticks boxes as he goes. He looks up from the clipboard. “Oh I see, is it the old foreskin then? Swollen, or stuck to the shaft? Can be painful that one, but you’ve come to the right place.”

“My— uh— I don’t have—” Godfrey begins to glance around the room, at the charts on the walls and out the window.

“No need to be shy, if you just drop your chat-bags, I can have a look myself. If everyone wore a kilt, all I’d need is a fan in here to get my work done.” He laughs and sits down on a small metal stool. “Don’t worry, I’ve seen thousands of these and will have you sorted out shortly.” Godfrey shuffles backwards on the bed, unable to stammer out something about the glove Scotty begins to pull on.

Scotty grabs the bed on each side of Godfrey and pulls himself and the stool forward. The brown leather creaks as Godfrey shifts uncomfortably on the bed, looking at the ceiling, the walls, the window. The words stutter out of his

mouth. “You— you don’t understand. Are you— are you a doctor? I’m— I’m just here to see Ms Rout—”

Without glancing up from the clipboard, Scotty quickly responds. “No, I’m a warrant officer, although you wouldn’t guess it from what I do here.” He raises his hand and twiddles his fingers. “You can see Ettie shortly, but you’ll need an examination first, or to at least tell me your symptoms.”

Godfrey feels heat prickling his cheeks, rising up to his forehead. “No— I— I don’t have any symptoms—”

“Ah, I see.” He looks up at Godfrey. “It’s not uncommon, some go without symptoms.” He stands to grab a few loose sheets of paper showing diagrams of genitalia; Godfrey quickly looks away from the crude black and white drawings. “But it’s good that you came here to be sure, now when did you engage with the woman?”

Godfrey jumps from the table, knocking over the stool. “I didn’t—! I haven’t *engaged* with any woman! Now I think there’s a mistake—”

Scotty calmly picks up the stool. “Looking for preventatives then? Of course you can’t get these from your commander, but we’ve got plenty of kits here, 10,000 to be exact, probably a lot less after that group out in the hall there.” He lifts his head slightly and smiles at Godfrey.

Godfrey squares his shoulders and clutches his bag in both hands. “Now you look here. I don’t need a *kit*. I’m a man of good value.” He moves towards the door. “I won’t find myself needing any of what— what you have to offer.”

Scotty leans against the counter and crosses his arms. “Ah, I’ve heard that many a time, and the ones who say that seem to get it the worst. Just the other day we found out that the one soldier who refused our help on religious grounds is

currently being treated for guess what— gonorrhoea.” He grabs a small wooden box of items and before Godfrey can protest, is describing the contents. Assorted bottles, packets and capsules all look well worn, along with their small paper instructions. “First is the potassium permanganate from Sir Archdall Reid. This is best used straight after exposure, as it kills any of the miss’s microbes, along with this calomel ointment that’s much better than the nargol they used to use. You can apply it before the woman and you can do it all yourself, no need to go to the ablution rooms.”

Godfrey is breathing fast as his grip tightens around the leather handles of his bag. He drops the bag to one hand and grabs the door handle with the other. “I came here to interview Miss Ettie Rout. I have not, nor will I *ever* engage in what you are suggesting. Now *please* either direct me to her or I shall leave promptly.”

Scotty drops the box on the counter and crosses his arms, still holding a bottle of purple crystals. “Ah, you’re here on different business, you should have said so! I can take you through to her now.”

Godfrey crinkles his brow, staring at Scotty. But then he relaxes his shoulders and wipes the front of his shirt with a clammy palm.

Scotty grabs a paper bag from the counter, pushing it towards Godfrey. “But, you can still take one of the kits, you never know when you might need it.”

Godfrey stares at him, then slowly says, “No... *thank you.*”

Godfrey slows his stride to match the leisurely pace of Scotty’s swinging kilt. Just around a corner from the seated soldiers, they stop a few doors down where Scotty gives two swift knocks then opens the door. “Here we are, and in the

case you find yourself with a bit of an appetite, go here.” Scotty pulls a stack of pink cards from his pocket and gives the top one to Godfrey. “I can even take you over to Madame Yvonne’s with some of the soldiers. Ettie’s made sure that all the women are guaranteed clean, one of the only places in the city.”

Godfrey stays silent but slowly takes the card, and once Scotty is back out the door, crumples it and drops it in a wastebasket next to the door. Inside the room is a large desk with two small wooden chairs in front. Just as Godfrey takes a step towards the desk, a door on the left-hand side of the room bursts open and Ettie paces through. She quickly stops, looks at Godfrey, then the clock, brushes her dark-blond hair off of her forehead and says, “I’ll be just a moment!” and she is out through another door on the other side of the room. He lowers himself into one of the chairs that face a large black typewriter and a huge collection of newspapers, folders, envelopes and scraps of paper. The four walls are the same. There are a few pieces of reprinted art, sunsets, rivers, the city at dusk. All stationery copies sold to tourists who want to take home the luminescence of Paris. Ettie’s have been removed. They are now a corner collection of dusty squares stacked below a window.

The faded squares have been covered in a yellow collage of maps, brochures, photographs, handwritten letters and some diagrams that matched the ones Godfrey was just subjected to. There is hardly any of the cream walls exposed, except around the large open windows at the back of the room. They let in the sounds of the Gare Du Nord across the street where passengers pour in and out of big steamers, just as Godfrey did twenty— now thirty— minutes ago.

He’s pondered over everything in the small room twice. He looks behind into the hall but the muted voices are coming from another room. All of a sudden

Ettie bursts through the door again. Godfrey stands. Her large black book thumps onto the table. She goes to shake his hand, but first has to drop a few crumpled papers into the wastebasket.

“Afternoon Godfrey, I hope Baptiste wasn’t too terrible in leading you up here.”

“Baptiste? I thought his name was Scotty?”

“Oh did Scotty bring you up? Baptiste must have taken you for a soldier.” She looks him up and down. “Although I can’t see how.”

“Well he certainly took me for someone who is subject to moral deficiencies.” He raises his eyebrows and glances around the room. “The only thing I received from the meeting is that I now see first-hand some of the *work* you are promoting here in France.”

Ettie pulls out her chair, and sits down heavily in it, releasing a large breath of air. “Fantastic isn’t it? And I hope Scotty let you fill your pockets, or maybe that little briefcase you have there. It’s more than you would have received from Baptiste, I’ve caught him trying to have a word with the soldiers, lessons on morality. I think he’s the only 60-year-old virgin I’ve ever met.”

Godfrey doesn’t meet her eyes. He looks down at the desk, his shoes, and then touches his bag on the floor as if checking it is still there. Ettie is relaxed but upright; her rigid posture makes it look as if her large shoulders rest on a massive throne. She leans forward in her chair and drops her elbows on the desk.

“Now Mr Turner, you’re a long way from home. There must be something quite fascinating here to bring you all the way from our beautiful little country.”

He leans to touch his bag again, squishing his side against the arm and coming back up with a pencil and what looks like a brand new leather-bound

notebook. “Why, yes, as you may know I was doing some reporting on the war from Christchurch, but I found the best way to learn about it was to go to it, so here you find me.”

“Ah, but Godfrey, you found me, remember? And did you not chase the story right into the battlefield? Surely you would learn more about trenches from within them than from behind a desk?”

Godfrey’s arms flex into his sides, his grip on his pencil becoming tighter. “Yes, I imagine you are correct but there is enough coverage on the movements of the soldiers, which is why I now find myself here, with you.”

“Well then Godfrey, what would you like to know?”

He shifts slightly in his chair. “As you must know—” Just then a soldier comes in through the door behind Godfrey. He turns in his seat, craning his neck to look at the man filling the door frame.

“Ah, sorry Miss Rout, I didn’t realise you had anyone in here.”

She leans back in her chair, placing her hands on the desk. “That’s quite alright Thomas, what do you need?”

The tall, skinny soldier looks down at Godfrey, who shifts his legs and looks once again at the desk.

“I— I just wanted to say thank you before heading out. I don’t think I could have gone another night without sleep and the train ride didn’t offer much rest.”

She lifts up from her chair and walks up to Thomas, resting her hand on the back of Godfrey’s seat. “That’s alright Thomas, it’s no trouble at all. Anytime you come through to Paris, I’ll be on the platform. And if I’m not, Scotty will be.” She puts a hand on his shoulder, which is almost at height with her own.

“Someone’s got to meet you boys and set you up before you’re unleashed on the city.”

“Well thank you again.” He reaches into the pocket of his coat. “You’ve got to let me give you some money for the room, I don’t mind Miss.”

Thomas glances down at Godfrey who quickly looks away.

“No, don’t you dare. It wouldn’t be fair to charge you for the whole night when you didn’t even get in until two A.M. So I’ll hear no such thing. The only thing you can do for me— don’t forget that you signed your pledge in my book. Use the kit, go to Yvonne’s and if you see any soldiers, send them my way.”

He moves towards the door. “Yes Miss Rout, I will, and— thank you again.”

“Not a problem Thomas.” She looks down over Godfrey’s shoulder to see the only word written perfectly at the top of the yellow page, *Interview*. “Now, I am about to be *interviewed*.” Godfrey half-shuts the book and tries to glance sideways over his shoulder. “But please stop by at the end of your leave and I’ll have a train ticket ready for you. Don’t leave it to your superiors, they’ll have you travelling with the cargo, sleeping with the suitcases if you’re lucky.”

Thomas bumps lightly into the door when he grabs the handle to shut it behind him. “Yes— yes Miss Rout, of course, thank you.”

Ettie walks back to her seat and places her hands on top of the desk. “My apologies, Godfrey. Thomas there came straight from the front. He slept for over 24 hours and probably doesn’t even realise that it’s Wednesday.” She sits down and stretches her legs out beneath the table.

Godfrey slides his hands over the page of his already smooth notebook. “No— that’s— that’s alright. Do you supply the soldiers with rooms as well as— medical services?”

“Yes, I’ve got this whole floor rented out for when soldiers come in on leave.” She waves her hand in the air. “They come in at all hours of the night and before I was here, they would go straight into town, with no food or board or any sense of direction in the whole city. I’ve tried to get the officials to organise something for when they arrive, but of course nobody is interested. They only intervene when soldiers go back without their senses, pay packets or even the trousers they left with. Now, what was it you were saying?”

Godfrey clears his throat and straightens himself in the creaky chair. “Yes, well, your— your work has caused quite a scandal back in New Zealand. I would just like to know to what extent the stories are true.”

Ettie adjusts herself in her chair, making her back straight along the curved wooden back. “Alright, Godfrey. To put this quickly, I would bet you my right arm that all of the stories whispered in the corners of cafes have some strand of truth in them.” She leans forward slightly. “However, whether or not you are able to find that strand of truth, whatever it may be, I would have no say.” She waves her hand again, gesturing in dismissal. “If I were you, I would catch a ride home on the *Marama* and go straight to the horse’s mouth.”

Godfrey gets a glint in his eye, and his body remains stiff. “That is precisely why I have come to you.” He pauses. “You are the horse... ma’am.”

“Ha ha! Very well then... I imagine they are mostly true. *Except* of course for the proclamations that are passed down from *official* channels.” She taps the desk with an impatient pencil; Godfrey blinks every time he hears the soft ‘tah’ of

wood on paper. “These are known to beat so steadily around the bush that you forget you were even looking for berries. *Or* anything shouted out with the name of the Lord in humbly decorated auditoriums next to a table of teacakes. *Or* from the wowsers who cannot even glance at their husbands without having to pray first!” Godfrey had stopped writing long ago and taken up examining his pencil. “Apart from that, well I imagine it all must be true.”

She slaps the pencil on the desk and Godfrey immediately looks up to meet the challenge of her eyes. “Rather than talking about the good people of New Zealand, I’d like to talk about you Miss Rout.”

“Should we start with my childhood? Or perhaps my conception?” Ettie’s eyes are bright and unblinking as they meet his.

“Well, as I explained in my letter, seeing as what you do currently is of great interest to the New Zealand public, I was thinking we could start with how you got started in... this line of work.”

“Ah, you would like to know how a small-town New Zealand woman came to be passing out rubber sheaths on the streets of Paris?” She flicks the edge of a piece of paper. “Although this is a very new concept for the women’s leagues back home, my knowledge of the subject stretches back much further than my involvement here. In fact, back in Christchurch when ladies only had to worry about getting their borrowed dishes back instead of their borrowed husbands, I was writing about things that would have made them spill their cups of tea.”

Chapter 3

Her toes stretch out as far as they go, and she flexes her ankles up and down in front of the mirror. Her best feature. Like chiselled white stone on a Grecian statue, posed to hold the silence so everyone can admire. The wool socks scratch as they roll over the tops of her feet. It may not be Chinese silk, but it's enough to keep her toes dry and add comfort to the 4-times repaired lace-ups. These toes weren't made to tinkle beneath hoop skirts, or step gingerly down carpeted stairs. They grip leather soles, feet shove into pedals and thighs tell the bicycle to hold on as they tear through the town. If she tried to do that in a skirt that dusted her ankles, *well*, what the clucking hens on Victoria Street would say about her knickers. It would be a pink-faced, fan-waving proclamation featuring at least two of the following: "Lord", "indecent", and "oh the children".

Her hands glide over her thighs, smoothing out the dark trousers. She bends her body forward, then reaches down, folding her abdomen side to side. She grabs her white sweater off the chair and pauses for a moment in the old mirror. *I don't believe that God up above will meet me on my day of reckoning and say, in his bearded bellow, "Ettie! Where is your corset?" The only ticket of entrance I receive upon wearing the iron lung is into stuffy living rooms with equally stuffy ladies who take new information the way they take their tea: watered down and talked about for so long it gets cold.* The cream sweater from the physical culture class curves around her breasts and covers a soft, slim stomach. *If I wore what they wanted me to, I would be just like the rest of the women in this town: a low-paid domestic cleaner who only works to fill the void before her nether void is filled!* She wrestles her hair into place. *If I conformed, it would be easier. Mothers wouldn't 'tisk' their tight lips and fat men wouldn't speak slowly about 'more*

wholesome channels'. To hell with easier. She grabs her leather book bag. *They say trousers are for men Ha!* Her brown boots stomp out the door, getting darker as they flick up moisture from the path.

In one motion, Ettie straddles her bike and pushes past the gate. The long metal frame of the Thomas Boyd & Son bicycle picks up pace over the faded brick. It rained all night, but the sun is doing its best to burn through the clouds. The black tyres flick up a constant stream of droplets, aiming for her jersey but falling short near the seat. She glides along the sidewalk, boots pressed hard into the pedals as she drops down onto the dirt road. Her figure cuts through the rising mist, her bike and basket swirling the moisture into a current that tries to keep up but only whirls then slowly sinks to the ground. Her trousers scrunch up slightly when her legs take turns extending towards the ground; milky skin peeks out from above the tongue of her ankle boots.

Swerving around the large puddle that always collects on the corner of Lichfield and Manchester, Ettie veers back onto the road, the wind of her path rustling the skirts of Mrs Flanagan who carries a large wooden sign out onto the sidewalk. Mr Newport's dog barks from under the café table, then takes off from sitting, running alongside Ettie and chasing the tyres as she picks up speed down Sumner Street. Jacko stops as he always does to lick the milk bottles on Mrs Cashel's porch before he wags his tail goodbye.

She stops pedalling when she hears the printing press. The disjointed clack sounds like a chorus of metal birds chattering in a tree at first light. It may be an alarm for some, a disturbance to the guests next door at Warner's. But for Ettie, the constant turning of the metal spools is vigour and vitality and she gets a rush when she walks past the printers. In one movement, she is off the bike, and it

leans against the wall. Her arms are full as she climbs the stairs, goes through the door and drops the papers on Laracy's desk.

Mick stands. "Good morning Ettie. My, you're up early."

"Early as a sparrow fart, Mick."

He picks up the articles and sits back down in his worn wooden carver.

"Are these the articles for tomorrow?"

"No, these are for today, Tuesday and through to Sunday."

He flips through the pages, then looks up at her. "Ettie, I only required tomorrow's, but thank you, I'll pass these along to the printers. Anything new from the court?" He gestures to the papers she has tucked under one arm.

"No, unless you'd like to learn about septic tanks." She rests a hand on the back of the chair in front of his desk. "As it turns out, rubber sheaths are being smuggled in books and sold at barber shops." She leans over the chair. "The last one I discovered was named 'Votes for Women'. Well since nobody knows what to do with them after, those votes for women have to be shovelled out of the tanks by the thousands."

He lifts his glasses to his forehead and leans back in his chair, his short brown hair crowned by the photos and articles on the wall.

"Ha ha is that so? And you Miss, are the one reporting all of this? Oh, the shame," he says with a smile.

She leans off of the chair and walks towards a bookshelf that lines the wall. "Yes, and that's aside from the enquiries into civil service employees, medical conferences, and royal commissions on prisons and borstals." She drags her finger along the spines of the books. "Have you ever read this? If only old Dr Symes had, then maybe we wouldn't be curing masturbation with vasectomies.

Anyways, next week I'll be doing one on the mental hospital. All confidential of course."

"If only the people of this town knew what you knew."

"If the people in this town knew what I knew, my report on the mental hospital would be much longer." She turns towards the door.

"Well I imagine you'd like us to have a look at all these later on?" he asks.

She's halfway down the stairs when she shouts back, "I certainly will, tell Mr Thorn he should have that speech memorised by the time I'm back in at two."

"Yes, I'll tell him, thank you again."

Ettie's out the door and onto her bike. By the time Laracy goes to his window, she's half way down Gloucester Street and the fog is almost gone from his window.

The sun hits her back as she flies towards the studio. She leans to the left to veer into the road, coming up alongside a tram. People sitting on the top deck stare down as she swings the bike around the back, rushing past the massive Ballantyne's advertisement. She listens for the soft padding sound the skinny tyres always make when she goes over the metal tram tracks, the tiny pause in the rhythm of her ride. Up ahead she sees the sharp point of the Cathedral piercing the sky, the great windows and doors looming over the square, staring at her as she passes.

Around the corner, she swings her bike against the studio and walks through the front entrance. The doors are open and the fresh morning has cleared out the stuffiness of leather and must. Standing in the doorway, she watches as he poses in front of the class, the mirrors at his back and a small crowd sitting cross-

legged on the ground. She can tell by the cream jumpers that it's the physical culture class. She's wearing hers now even though she won't be back here today.

All eyes are on his chest, his arms, and his legs. She knows why they stare. They come for the exercise, but they stay for Fred. He breathes in deeply, filling his chest and holding. His arms slowly move from along his sides to tensed above his head. She's seen it so many times, but she always marvels; next he'll turn his hips slightly to the side and flex his thigh. She watches the muscles move beneath his taut skin. He's not a very tall man, but his broad shoulders and round chest have always made him look huge.

Fred slowly turns and sees Ettie in the mirror. His Irish brogue booms through the studio. "Aye we have a treat this morning! Ettie, one of my best students! It's a pleasure to be graced by you on this fine morning. Everyone please begin the breathing exercises and I'll be 'round shortly." And then as he approaches Ettie with his short, sharp steps, "You look as good as a Winshire morning, how do you do?"

Her mouth turns up in a small smile. "Good morning Fred, I'm well thank you, I just wanted to bring by the transcript from yesterday, and I've also finished a new advertisement that you'll see in tomorrow's paper." She hands him the papers and leans back against the wall.

"Ah, you're quick as a Baldoyle horse, you are, and stubborn as one too." He leans in close to her, his massive chest rising and falling as he speaks. "They have no idea who they're coming up against with us Ettie, we'll get them soon enough."

One of the women on the floor looks in her direction and then turns away.

He always smells the same; hardened leather and a soft, almost dewy musk that remains even after he showers. “I would hold onto that for now Fred, I don’t look for any practical or permanent results from this Christchurch Labour paper movement. It may not even eventuate; it will certainly fizzle out after a more or less brief and ignoble existence.”

“How could you say that after everything you’ve done for it!”

She steps off the wall, moving forward with a straight back and sturdy shoulders. “I say this because most of the folks who are behind the movement are addle-pated and white livered. There is much more hope for the Labour movement in Mr. Darcy’s new Union.” Her eyes scan across the small group of white sweaters trying to mimic Fred’s masculine movements. “Shearers and musterers and miners have much more pluck and grit and native wit for the most part than tinkers and tailors and other folks who take even their work sitting down.”

Fred raises his fists, shaking them in circles, catching his own eye in the mirror. “If only we could settle this in the ring then I’d be sure to have ‘em.” He punches the air with precision, like a snake recoiling after a strike.

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that, we don’t need another Waterfront. These are stuffy old Englishmen who haven’t been grabbed by the collar since their boarding school days.”

Ettie watches as his thick moustache turns down, ending sharply at the edges of his mouth. Most of the time it’s raised to the sky, doing nothing to stifle his uproarious laughter. But now it quivers slightly as a rare sign of agitation.

“If that’s not the sign of greedy England spreading their fingers across the seas, then paint me black and call me a kettle. What we need is a good ole rumble, get all the shearers to give those Anglos a haircut.”

She glances one more time around the room and meets the eyes of a woman pretending to stretch, then moves into the doorway. “Fred, you can be our secret weapon to rally the labourers, but for now we fight with words, it’s the only way to get better pay.” He follows closely behind her towards the door. “Now make sure you come by my office around two, all the boys will be there getting ready for Thursday.”

He leans his solid body against the doorframe, crossing thick, muscular forearms. “Yes ma’am, I wouldn’t miss it.”

Ettie takes a deep breath of the air which has just begun to dry under the morning sun. She races for Chancery Lane, but stops when she sees a homemade sign just outside of the town hall. She lays her bike down in the grass in front of the square hedges. From just outside the double doors, she can hear clapping and see endless rows of hats. Ostrich feathers, bouquets of lace and large discs penetrate the air space above the women. Some get a dusting on the cheek from a feather or a decorative strap and apologetic smiles are exchanged before returning their attention to the voice at the front of the room. Ettie relaxes against the back wall, listening to Lady Stout as she moves back and forth between the suffrage-coloured purple and white asters decorating the stage.

“...allows men to sow their wild oats before marriage. The Contagious Diseases Act institutionalises the double standard of morality and makes vice safe for men who suffer no consequences.” Her crinoline swings around the stage as her hems dust the floor. “Do you want your daughters to suffer? Or your

grandchildren? We as mothers and wives and women need to raise the men's moral standards to that of our own so they do not continue to live immorally. We don't need, nor do we want seats in Parliament, but we must use our women's votes to enforce the laws of the Lord and uphold the values of our country."

The hall fills with clapping, and Lady Stout waits for it to settle before continuing. "So now what we must organise is the next—"

"Pardon me Lady Stout," Ettie pushes her shoulders off the wall, "but may I impose?"

Lady Stout drops her hands to her sides. "And is this a personal admission or the opinion of the Lyttelton Times?"

"I've had various journalistic experiences at Women's Leagues such as this. I would sooner go to a circus and *pay* for my seat decently than attend any of your free-shows about public morality." A handkerchief rushes to a feeble mouth.

Without hesitation, Lady Stout lifts her chin and her brows and responds, "And yet here you are."

"I was simply pedalling past when I was confronted by the smell of sweet peas and propriety and I decided to offer my assistance." The quiet of the room is abruptly broken by a quick, short, almost simultaneous influx of air into corset-laced lungs.

Lady Stout rolls her eyes and then gestures to the crowd. "Miss Rout, surely you cannot believe we need the assistance of someone such as yourself in any matter to be discussed here."

The heels of Ettie's boots echo on the old wooden floorboards. "I felt that it was only in my duty to point out that you are correct in your observations of the faults of the Acts, however I feel your solution may lack direction."

Lady Stout puffs out a small amount of air. “And how is that?”

As Ettie takes a step forward between the two back benches, women on both sides crane their necks. “Firstly, it is slander on New Zealand men to say that they are any less concerned about the honour of womanhood than are the women themselves, nor is it correct to suggest that they need to be perpetually kept up to the scratch by the women or would otherwise lapse into carelessness and immorality.” A baby whimpers and is quickly silenced. “Secondly.” She steps forward again, looking at the wrinkles on the woman on the end of the row. “I offer my own solution: enforcing compulsory notification of infection, isolation of those infected and penalties for the wilful infection of others. These would do much more to reduce the spread of Gonorrhoea and Syphilis than barking at the men about the Bible which has done nothing to stop them so far.”

Lady Stout grips the podium and leans forward over the pink flower arrangement. “Ha! Ms Rout you sound like Sir John Findlay. You do remember how he was thrown out of the election?” Her voice begins to fill the room. “And what about the innocents? Doing what you suppose would condemn children who are infected at birth, women who catch it from unlawful husbands and people who are infected by cutlery!” She pauses, straightening up slightly. “Raising the moral quality of our men will help end future cases of these infections.”

Ettie steps forward again, interrupting the soft sounds of agreement ascending from the wooden pews. “You advocate the abolition of alcoholism by legal means and yet you proclaim that you can’t make people moral by Act of Parliament. You cannot treat victims as ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’. The only way to rid our society of these afflictions is to regulate our methods of treatment.” She brushes aside a large green hat-feather which hangs in the middle of the aisle.

“Right now we have Mrs Smith being misdiagnosed because the doctor doesn’t want to say that Mr Smith has it! And yet people wonder why there are high rates of one-child families and barren women.” She looks around to the young, pale women whose wide, layered skirts cover mismatched chairs along the edges of the room. “It has nothing to do with the selfishness of women, but the failing of our medical system due to its foundation in morality!” Hats swish and wood creaks as the seated crowd shifts their weight back and forth.

An old woman sitting near the front in a long, soft-pink dress and matching gloves rises as quickly as she can and turns towards Ettie. “How dare you bring up my poor Sophia and the many barren—”

Lady Stout cuts her off loudly. “Mrs Pemshire *please* have a seat and do not bother yourself with this *uncivilised* intrusion.”

The old woman turns her body towards Lady Stout, then gives a side glance and ‘hmpf’ back at Ettie, who stands directly in the middle of the room. Mrs Pemshire takes the hand of a young girl next to her and sits down heavily, taking up the small paper fan she left on the seat.

Ettie moves her arms out, grabbing the curled edges of the pews to each side of her. “The *civilised* woman is mentally often little better than a cross between the angel and the idiot.” She scans her eyes around the room. “And I see many here who could learn much more from life if they were allowed to expand their minds beyond your meagre teachings on morality.” Ettie uses the pews to spin on her heel, leaving the looks of disdain to hang limply in the air.

“*Our* opinions are based on something you appear to have no knowledge in *Miss Rout*, and that is the laws of Christianity. Although meagre they may be,

they guide the good people of this organisation, and I will not have you insult them, nor the book they come from.”

“Ah, but the Bible is not what I criticise. I am enormously thankful to my Bible and to Jesus himself for having supplied such permanently valuable weapons— weapons far more effective than any which I could myself produce because Jesus is one of the world’s greatest philosophers and geniuses where I am only a humble writer.” Ettie shrugs her shoulder and slowly moves towards the door.

Lady Stout looks from the crowd back to Ettie, and moves suddenly from behind the podium, her voice disturbing the dust on the windowsills. “Miss Rout, while you may find it perfectly viable to live your life with a blatant disregard for where *you* end up when it is over, *we* here at the Women’s Christian Temperance Union have a much greater aim to maintain the virtues of our families and our country.”

Ettie is almost to the sunlight of the door when she turns back towards Lady Stout who is patting her blonde curls. “Therein lies your issue Lady Stout, you will never make progress trying to battle a physiological issue with only ‘virtue’ as your weapon.” She lingers her hand on the last pew on her way out. “And as to where I end up when this is over, you need not be concerned, I will send you a postcard so you know which knickers to pack.”

Ettie walks out just in time to feel the gasps aimed at her back. A few young chuckles are already being met by rose-smelling ‘tisks’. She pushes the bike to a start and then swings a leg over the frame, taking off fast along the path. Small wisps of curly hair are drawn from her face and her cheeks begin to redden, but her breathing is deep and controlled. The path turns to brick beneath her as she

approaches a tall stone building of Chancery Lane. Her bike finds its usual place just up from the gutter and the handlebars turn slightly to rest. When she pulls open the heavy door to Number 5, she glances at the sign above. Next to Angus Donaldson's Type Writing Office and across from J.B. Neal Public Accountant hangs an iron and wood sign etched with the words:

Ettie A Rout
Journalist
Shorthand Typist

Her papers are all delivered, so she climbs the stairs empty handed.

When he first stood on the third floor of the Lyttelton Times newsroom, Godfrey never thought he would encounter her again, and he especially had no mind that it would be in Paris of all places.

Ettie is the only woman in the room, standing at the front of the large office addressing a group of men. Her black pants and white jumper blend in with the framed news clippings and photos hung on the wall. Journalists shake hands with King Dick, editors stand with arms crossed in front of a door with their name etched on it, brave journeymen who erected Lyttelton sit beside what was the only pub in town. From their places on the wall, they look past Ettie to the men who uncomfortably shift their weight when her ghost-blue eyes rest upon their own. Standing between two of the large half-round windows, Ettie fills the room with her voice while her arms draw invisible images in the air.

“... of all printed books the Bible is the best value for money. It's a library of books to slay a few modern Christians intellectually, because they are blocking

up my gangway with their chunks of fat-headedness. No, we need not worry about this, we just need to keep publishing the truth, for as journalists, that is all we can concern ourselves with.”

“They say she’s the first woman in all of New Zealand to wear trousers,” Jim whispers from the back of the room.

“But is she a woman? She must be nearly six feet!” Godfrey murmurs back.

“Excuse me, gentlemen.” The room falls silent as her gaze passes the crowd. Godfrey turns to the front of the room to look at Ettie. “How many years’ experience do you have in reporting?” she asks him.

Godfrey looks at Jim, but he looks away.

“Um, this year is my first, ma’am.”

“‘Uummm’ is the sound of a motor vehicle when preparing to stall. I suggest you rid your vernacular of any such speech dysfluencies before you attempt any reporting. Unless of course you are interviewing a mechanic.”

Some men stare at their feet trying to stifle a chuckle, but Jim and the more veteran members of the group let out deep-bellied laughs. Ettie’s eyes bore holes into a rigid Godfrey for several long seconds, but when he makes no sign of response, her arms are up again and she continues exactly where she left off.

A cool wind stirs the trees at Hagley Park and plays along the large stone buildings of Gloucester Street. Godfrey stares at a small knot in the wood next to his cup and rubs his leather shoe on the leg of the table.

“Oh, don’t be discouraged Godfrey, we all know her and what she’s like. There’s not many people who are in her good graces.”

Godfrey swirls the last of his tea in the bottom of his cup. “I can’t see what a woman would be doing in a newsroom. I came to become a reporter, not to be mocked by a woman who speaks like a farmer to his dogs.”

Jim releases a quiet laugh. “You can trust that no other woman would shoulder her way in here if she weren’t as skilled as Ettie. You’ve only seen one side of her, but all throughout the labour movement, her good spirits abounded.” He looks out the clean glass window, then back at Godfrey. “And sixteen and seventeen hour days were the rule. In fact, her capacity for work is really astonishing, I could hardly keep up. Sturdy old battler Mick Laracy agrees that she practically started the Maoriland Worker by herself.”

Godfrey leans back in his chair, raising a hand to get the attention of the waitress polishing glasses behind the counter. “Well she may be a good worker, but only because I imagine she lacks the skills to be a good wife. She has no suggestion of a figure and obviously a superb contempt for the follies of frills and lace.”

Jim’s blue eyes rest on his hands as he opens his left palm and rubs his thumb across his index finger. “I spoke to her about that once, just out of curiosity.” He looks up at Godfrey, who is still staring at the blue apron strings at the woman’s back. “And you know what she told me about corsets? That ‘whalebone cages make a woman turn her whole body like a lame animal, and that whoever designed the corset must have been a cantankerous old man who was worried that young ruffians could see his daughter’s virginity through her

skirt!” Jim suddenly leans back laughing, briefly touching his slick side-parted hair. “Boy, me and Laracy laughed that night.”

Godfrey stares blankly at Jim. “Well I don’t find it funny at all, she obviously makes every attempt to be nothing like a lady. She seems without emotion, a sexless person, male in mind and manner. A lonely figure with only cold cleverness as company.” He looks again at the waitress.

“Ah, but that’s where you’re wrong, Godfrey.” He flicks Godfrey’s arm with his fingers and leans forward. “She’s a creature who *embraces* the natural figure as God intended.” He raises both hands as if grabbing something, his eyes intent on his hands. “And anyhow she’s done so much work in this town that she knows people from every official office. How do you think she got away when the police raided her office for what they—”

“Say, do you know that woman’s name?” Godfrey interrupts.

Jim puts his hands down. “Yes, that’s Shirley, Old Robert’s youngest girl. Anyways, they raided her office for *unlawful* literature, can you believe it? When Ettie found out, she told them that by certain *underground* manoeuvres she wouldn’t be prosecuted. And she was right. She never told me how, but I imagine it was through her connection with the courts— the woman knows everyone.”

Godfrey stirs his spoon around his empty cup, clattering the metal against the porcelain sides. “You sound as—”

“Shirley!” Jim calls out to the waitress. She jumps up from her stool and quickly turns around. “Would you mind bringing us some more tea and one of those smiles I don’t tell Mrs. Thorn about?”

The young brunette jumps up and blushes, stumbling from behind the counter. “Oh of course Jim— I mean Mr. Thorn, straight away, the same as always?”

Jim looks back at Godfrey when he says, “Yes please Shirley, only because you make it so well.”

Godfrey looks impatient as the waitress starts clinking dishes behind the counter.

“What were you saying?” Jim asked.

Godfrey drops his spoon and looks at Jim. “I was saying, it sounds as though you fancy her.”

Jim leans forward. “Well if you knew a bit more about her, you might too. My son asked me about her and I told him, ‘but for the grace of God she would have been your mother.’”