The Role of the Real:

Authenticity in Fictional Travel Literature and the Contemporary Modus Operandi

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Written by:

August R. M. Pfänner

Supervised by:

Jens Kirk

Abstract

This thesis explores how fictional travel writing produces and conveys authenticity and the inherent capabilities of authenticity in social and cultural critique. The focus pertains to contemporary travel writing, ensuring a prevalent understanding of current tendencies and innovations. Qualitative Content Analysis and traditional textual analysis are employed to confirm the specific modes of authenticity, as shown in the three novels *The White Mary* (2008), *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016) and *Memorial* (2020). The analysis reveals that authenticity is conveyed following the specific narrative of the novels. This was found to be present in two separate entities of authenticity. Firstly, the thesis finds that authenticity can be presented as a literary device in which the author can convey and write authentic perspectives to conduct a plausible narrative. Secondly, the thesis finds that the novels also represent an external authenticity related to contextual elements, such as authorship, lingering zeitgeist, and culture.

To entrench the analysis in a contemporary perspective, the thesis aligns the functions of authenticity with those of New Sincerity, proposing an overlap of concepts. This creates an opportunity to study the current state of the genre and the future direction of literary travel writing. The accumulated findings of the analysis showcase that the genre has moved away from literary conventions placed within postmodernity, instead having moved towards a new literary modus operandi. This means that the state of the genre has shifted its general tendencies of conduct.

The proposed interpretative mode interplays with the defined structures of New Sincerity. This means that the novels analysed showcase a disposition in which their narratives tend to engage with interpersonal propositions between the author and the readership. Furthermore, the narratives contain a combination of experimental structures and well-established genre tropes.

The concord relegates a new function in fictional travel writing, related to New Sincerity. The research conducted in this thesis contributes to understanding the contemporary state of fictional travel writing and the integral role of authenticity. By illuminating the understanding of authenticity in fictional travel writing, the thesis lays the groundwork for further research into the intrinsic relationship between authenticity and Cultural Critique.

Keywords: Authenticity, New Sincerity, Literature, Travel writing, Cultural Critique, Content Analysis, Genre analysis

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1. Introduction

The motivation of the thesis is to cognise and clarify how authenticity is used when constructing narratives. Relative to the time of writing, a keen understanding of the authentic is more important than ever before. In a time in which the world is subject to social media, AI, and smartphones, which all have an interest in promoting the authentic. The ability to define what is authentic appears integral in navigating today's culture. The interest in understanding authenticity as a literary concept arises as a contrary digression to current impressions. Furthermore, the thesis acts as an explorative study into the current literary modus operandi of fictional travel writing, understanding a common habitus, relating to how authors structure story points such as plot, characterisation, and narration. When understanding these elements, one can assess the current state of the genre and the eventual role of authenticity. The reason why authenticity acts as the dominant interest is due to the concurrent structure between authenticity and fiction, in which a paradoxical concept exists. The role of authenticity and the attempt to metamorphose a sense of reality and probability into a fictional story structure are at the forefront of this thesis's interest. The thesis proposes a definition of the role of authenticity in fictional travel writing. To begin, this thesis aims to distinguish the synchronised historical narratives. This relates how authenticity is based on a sense of parallel zeitgeist, which is distinguishable when understanding the story's narrative. Therefore, the thesis relates the story's authenticity to the grander literary narratives. The three novels chosen are Kira Salak's *The White Mary* (2008), Dave Eggers' *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016) and Bryan Washington's *Memorial* (2020). These novels were chosen for their relatively recent publishing dates and their varied and unique approaches to conducting a narrative, in which authenticity acts as a main component in the plot structure. The goal of the thesis is to define authenticity in the genre of literary travel fiction clearly. To do so, the thesis applies structured methodologies such as *Content Analysis*, contextual and

comparative approaches, to propose a contemporary understanding of the current state of the genre. The aim of relating these methodologies to understand the function of authenticity is to more clearly define how and why authors aim to convey a sense of authenticity. Furthermore, when analysing the utility of authenticity, a specific mode of engagement has been chosen. This is a concept aptly named *New Sincerity*. This concept is utilised to understand how the current modus operandi operates and why authenticity is related to inherent concepts in travel writing. These concepts and methodologies are used to answer the following research questions:

1. How does fictional travel writing produce a sense of authenticity?
2. Does authenticity carry a contemporary influence, and is it related to social and cultural critique in travel writing?

To answer these questions, the thesis follows a hermeneutic analytical structure, in which selected theory is first chosen to understand current academic discourses. Tailed by a description of the chosen methodologies, and next a literature review. This is then followed by a segmented analysis of the three chosen novels. The analysis is subject to continual evaluation of the eventual findings; the evaluation also entails a discussion of contemporaneous elements, promoting a larger analysis and a shorter final discussion and evaluation of the findings. These observations are then re-accumulated in the conclusion, which serves the purpose of concluding the accumulated findings and reaffirming the answers to the research question.

2. Intention, Delimitation and Applied Reading

The purpose and goal have been defined; however, further delimitation is needed to determine the scope. The main subject, authenticity in travel writing, could be approached and interpreted from multiple angles. Other studies already pertain to the subject; the thesis will introduce and revise the findings from these studies as part of the literature review and collected theory.

While the other studies have had an inherent focus on authenticity, as well as the literary conventions of the genre, this thesis differs in its defined aim. The goal is to move the academic discussion towards a new perspective. The perspective relates to a new approach, using New Sincerity, formalised as an applied reading, to understand the current literary state of travel writing. The thesis is, therefore, also an explorative study, which seeks to establish and understand how the genre has moved forward from postmodernist conventions. To understand the if and how, the thesis intends to first regurgitate the current discussion and sentiment on existing understandings of authenticity and narrative. This is then reinforced by an analysis that resituates how contemporary travel novels create authenticity. The role of New Sincerity is to understand if a contemporary influx exists in the genre. To create a clearer scope on how New Sincerity could be linked to the travel writing genre, it is useful to establish a clear convention on what is contained within the movement and how it has established itself as a critical response to postmodernity.

2.1 The Capabilities of New Sincerity

In the chapter "The New Sincerity", written by Adam Kelly in 2016 in the book *Postmodern/Postwar and After: Rethinking American Literature*, it is established that New Sincerity is, in the simplest of terms, a contest to the ironic norm that exists in the postmodern strata. The movement works by deploying single-entendre principles, in which non-ironic values and a newfound sense of

responsibility are dominant functions (Kelly, p. 198). This determines that ¨New Sincerity works as a countermovement to postmodernity. The sentiment is expanded, and Kelly argues that New Sincerity is a more complex literary phenomenon, more than a countermovement to postmodernity. Emphasis is put on the concept of sincerity, to which Kelly distinguishes between a form he refers to as "old sincerity", acting as a deterrent to the measure of new sincerity. Kelly's distinction of old sincerity stems from the effort of Lionel Trilling in his 1974 book *Sincerity and Authenticity.* Kelly's distinction of sincerity is, as per Trilling, concluded during the surfacing of modernism and the quest for authenticity and the sense of self, sincerity rifled this fringe "… words are to be taken seriously, and crucial to their import is that truth to one's own self should be conceived of not as an *end*, but as a *means* of ensuring truth to others" (Kelly, p. 199). Instead, Adam Kelly offers a perspective on the new intricacy of sincerity. Kelly lends agency to the positions of David Foster Wallace, with the prevailing sentiment being a return to form, not alienating the audience. Instead, an opportunity arises in which the audience and author can feel less lonely (Kelly, p. 200). Finally, Kelly conceives that literary criticism struggles with New Sincerity as an oppositional force to the established conventions due to not understanding literature as a contingent relationship between author and audience, rather than an opportunity to reinterpret one's readings based on several factors.

Rather, these texts are ultimately defined by their undecidability and the affective response they invite and provoke in their readers, with questions of sincerity embedded, on a number of levels, into the reader's contingent experience of the text. (Kelly, p. 206).

The sentiment here is that although these texts are contingent on the relation between the audience and author, the texts are not easily pinned down or given a single, clear meaning. Instead, it creates an emotional response in readers and makes them consider their intertextual relationship. The idea of

sincerity, a feeling of honesty and authentic discourse, plays a role in how each reader experiences the text. Kelly's rendition of New Sincerity, as a response to the otherwise dominant spectre on the literary scene, is applied in the analysis of the thesis, both as an interpretative methodology and as a system of reading the novels. One of the positions that can be won from understanding Kelly's position is how an overlap between sincerity and authenticity exists. What can be said about this construct is that the role of authenticity, and how it is conceived, must be found based on the author's intent, if understanding Kelly's position on New Sincerity. Therefore, New Sincerity goes further than just working as a countermovement to postmodernity and irony, it is a way of literary communication between author and audience, in which sincerity is conveyed in a new light. Later in the analysis, in a subchapter of the analysis, *Sincerity or Authenticity: Emblematic Compositions,* the thesis details how the two terms, sincerity and authenticity, distinguish themselves from each other. For now, it can be said that authenticity primarily works as a literary tool, whereas New Sincerity relates to the contemporary mode of writing and understanding literary conventions.

 To further understand the literary position of New Sincerity, one must introduce Bran Nicol. In the book *After Typical Eggers: transnationalism and America in Dave Eggers's 'globally-minded' fiction,* written by Bran Nicol, she reports that postmodernism, as a cultural paradigm, which is marked as relating to contemporary culture, has been "fatally compromised", due to its relation to market globalisation, socio-aesthetic modernity, and the blanket paradigm nature. Furthermore, Nicol argues that evidence suggests a shift in the flavour of US novels has occurred, relating to the make-up of the contemporary novel, projecting both the new global conditions and a transnational approach (Nicol, pp. 301-302). Nicol's disposition, added with Kelly's interpretation of New Sincerity, incentivises a surmountable analysis, in which these approaches are to be further researched and positioned as the main force of the analysis; that is to say, the novels chosen for analytical observation

are read using the composition provided. This thesis proposes that new evocations have come to exist within the genre. This is one of the main motivations for using New Sincerity to understand the role of authenticity in the genre.

The question is then, how does insight into New Sincerity relate to the research question of the thesis, and how does it reflect a genre delimitation? The angle pertained within this thesis is one in which authenticity relates itself to narrative as a literary function. These authenticities of the stories are vital to understanding what form of contemporary tendencies exist within the genre. Subjecting these authenticities, in the light of New Sincerity, will aid in creating an up-to-date perspective. Moreover, an important distinction to make is that the thesis is firmly interested in stories that are rooted in fiction rather than actual travelogues, attempting to reflect factual descriptions of travel. The distinction is important because the genre encompasses both literary worlds. Further, it needs to be underlined that the stories chosen attempt to remain realistic within the limits of the real world; in other words, these stories are not fantastical, akin to the nature of tales of travel like *The Lord of the Rings*. Moreover, story worlds like *The Lord of the Rings* might evoke authenticity in their structure and narrative. Yet, part of the delimitation is the interest in fictional, yet plausible, travel literature. These fictional travel stories might carry features of transcendence and otherworldliness, but not as a predominant element of the story; they must remain plausible as real worlds, and the authenticity must exist as part of the plausibility. As part of the literature review, a study interested in the same topic is introduced, which shows how this kind of novel functions as an outlet to explore the function of narrative and authenticity as interlinked subjects. It is further noted that while conventional textual analysis serves as the main outlet of study, the analysis aims not to look at individual novels but rather to gain a wider understanding of the overall tendencies within the genre, by deploying textual

analysis, and eventual comparison. The methodology and approach to the analysis are more firmly established in the methodology chapter.

The thesis hypothesises a relation between narrative and authenticity to exist in the contemporary genre. To determine the validity of this hypothesis and eventually conduct an analysis concerning the research question, the ensuing chapter defines authenticity as a literary function, on a theoretical level, to understand how it relates to the contemporary modus operandi.

3. Literary Authenticity in Practice and Theory

The following chapter showcases how authenticity has been defined as an academic concept. This is done to understand the role of authenticity and why the concept carries agency within the genre of fictional travel writing. Furthermore, a distinction of authenticity is needed to provide the tools to define how authors convey authenticity in their writing.

Authenticity as a decisive terminology within the boundaries of the genre of travel writing is established by employing concepts and relevant theories on the matter. The thesis explores a wider definition of the term by storytelling standards while also focusing on a narrower genre-specific viewpoint on what authenticity entails within the confines of travel writing. The thesis aims to apply the collected theory in the analysis to portray various solutions to authenticity in travel narratives. Previously, the thesis situated authenticity with New Sincerity, engaging in the hypothetical discussion between Adam Kelly and Lionel Trilling on authenticity and sincerity. While this opened highlighted the concepts on the scale of literary movements, this chapter investigates authenticity and how it functions as an operator for cultural artefacts concerning media consumption.

3.1 Defining the Authentic

Laura Saxton published an article in the journal *Rethinking History* in which she provided her interpretation of the meaning of authenticity in productions of historical fiction. While this is not directly related to the genre of travel writing, her definitions of authenticity and accuracy overlap with those of the thesis.

Authenticity refers to the experience of consuming a historical text and the audience's impression of whether it captures the past, even if this is at odds with available evidence; a novel can be read as inauthentic even when it is strictly accurate, and vice versa.
(Saxton, p. 128).

What Laura is referring to in the citation, and a crucial aspect of authenticity, is the inherent perception in the experience, how the novel feels to read for the audience. As Saxton puts it, this is elevated above factual evidence and can be read and viewed as inauthentic, despite being accurate to events or settings. This establishes a clear sense of how authenticity practically feels for the audience. To further her argument on authenticity, Laura Saxton proposes that authenticity is based on factors such as culture, intertextuality, and subjectivity while firmly placing and relying on a societally perceived truth (Saxton, pp. 128-129). Inferring that authenticity in narratives, fictional or otherwise, is tied based on the value of how a society expects a truth on a subject. Saxton's proposed function of authenticity also defines how authenticity is perceived. However, it does not create a perspective on how authenticity functions as a literary device, nor how authenticity is facilitated in writing.

Authenticity in fictional travel writing is a somewhat limited field of research. This limits the boundaries of directly applicable theory. However, the thesis applies situational and contextual theory

related to the topic. The intention is that sufficiently covering theory borrowed from fields surrounding the topic eventually leads to a reasonable empirical proposition.

One such research article, which explores authentic travel stories, comes from Xavier Salet, written in 2021, "The search for the truest of authenticities: Online travel stories and their depiction of the authentic in the platform economy" proposes that authenticity is a strong agent in the competition of online non-fictional travel writing, a somewhat diluted market (Salet, p. 1). The article suggests that authenticity comes in two forms: objective authenticity and existential authenticity. Xavier Salet's disposition in his article deals extensively with the world of tourism and online-based travel writing. Objective authenticity inherently suggests a form of 'real' which is socially definable. However, as Salet puts it, the debate and finite position of *objective authenticity* displaces any real form of unbiased authenticity (Salet, pp. 2-3). Salet argues that opposition to this discrepancy between real and fake is existential authenticity. This is inherently related to a postmodern association, in which the valuation of authentic experiences is entirely individual, relying solely upon interpretational authenticity. In this, Salet finds both constructs co-existing in non-fictional travel writing. However, he also denotes a tendency within existential authenticity, suggesting that authenticity is a sociable and normative function, not an individual one (Salet, pp. 2-3). This is comparatively the same argument Laura Saxton proposed in her article on historical authenticity. Suggesting an overlap between genres and indicating a universality in authenticity.

What can be observed in this analysis is that existential and objective authenticity are often combined with competitive vigour. That is, Passion Passport's writers often construct stories in which both a personally felt sense of authenticity (existential) and a reference to a "real-fake" opposition (objective) are deployed together. (Salet, p. 9)

As shown in the example, Xavier Salet argues that authenticity is further divided into two distinct functions; he still retains that these functions co-exist in the form of travel writing he explored, in this case, travel writing posted on an online platform, trying to distinguish itself as non-fictional. The idea conveyed by Salet is that the two forms of authenticity are deployed together, in which the existential authenticity takes form due to an inherent objective authenticity, despite vague and detestable premises of true objectiveness.

Salet's interpretation of authenticity might ring true when compared to the world of fictional travel stories. Where Xavier Salet's existential authenticity in non-fictional travel writing serves as an extension of postmodernism (Salet, p.2), David LeHardy Sweet in his 2017 book *Avant-garde Orientalism: The Eastern 'Other' in Twentieth-Century Travel Narrative and Poetry* argues against the impression of travel writing being distinctly postmodern, but rather as a cultural observational method (Sweet, p. 269). On authenticity, Sweet relinquishes the subject entirely. David LeHardy Sweet claims that all forms of travel are inherently inauthentic due to the social value of travel as a societal symbol. Instead, Sweet argues that true authenticity is determined by the traveller/writer's ability to assess authenticity and inauthenticity in various cultural sites and objects (Sweet, p. 35). Moreover, Sweet retorts to his statements by proclaiming:

> The authentic travel experience becomes simply the fact of traveling, of seeing, and of responding to the signs one recognizes or chooses to lay claim to, many of them pertaining to the facilitating technologies of travel (for instance, telecommunications systems that allow one to remain virtually at home as one travels). (Sweet, p. 35-36)

The claim made by David LeHardy Sweet is considered a dismissal of proper, authentic recollections of travel. The argument conveyed in the statement is that travel is inherently inauthentic, particularly in a modern sense, due to the application of technology. However, said technologies have also ingrained themselves into the question of authenticity, either as a facilitator or through absence. This is an effect laying claim to the so-called 'signs' (markers of authenticity) that Sweet refers to. Comparing this to the likes of how Xavier Salet and Laura Saxton define authenticity, a dichotomy forms. On the one hand, Saxton and Salet argue that authenticity is the product of a societal determination, whereas David LeHardy Sweet opposes this sentiment and argue that true authenticity has never existed and what instead takes place are travellers selecting various markers and symbols which create an illusion of authenticity. In support of Sweet's determination on the topic of authentic travel accounts, one could point to Rune Graulund and Justin D. Edwards in their 2012 book *Mobility at Large: Globalization, Textuality and Innovative Travel Writing,* in which they explore the structure of the alternative and experimental side of travel writing narratives. In this book, they argue that travel narratives can omit elements, such as the chronological narrative structure and authenticity, as classical elements of the genre (Edwards & Graulund, p. 51). Ultimately, the effect of excluding authenticity from travel writing is based on the questionable presence of authenticity, which stems from the postmodern interpretation after the fact. However, this has not stopped consumers from desiring authenticity (Edwards & Graulund, p. 60). The two authors propose that authenticity still relates to the contemporary mode of writing travel writing:

But the author of innovative travel writing relies on the sophistication of the contemporary reader, who will not expect the text to be the truth that is conveyed in an exact mimetic representation of travel practice. (Edwards & Graulund, p. 61)

What Edwards and Graulund convey is that a contemporary audience is aware of the invocation that a story might feel true without being true, while also implying that stories which carry factuality might seem inauthentic. This form of the dichotomy between fact and fiction invokes the same sentiment as Laura Saxton's interpretation of authenticity (Saxton, p. 128). This provides credence to the sentiment of David LeHardy Sweet, who suggested that true authenticity does not exist in the world of travel writing, especially in the post-nineteenth-century era (Sweet 35-36). What then becomes the question is to understand what and how this form of authenticity shapes itself in a contemporary setting. On this, Edwards and Graulund propose that the elusiveness between text and travel remains due to the inherent pact made between writer and reader while also suggesting a metaphysics in the text (Edwards & Graulund, p. 62). In other words, the contemporary function of authenticity is to remain elevated above the physicality of travel; travel writing is firmly rooted in the consideration of the narrator, despite how the author forms the structure of the narrative at large. Following LeHardy Sweet, the 'authenticity' of travel writing is dependent on the will of the author and the determination of what constitutes the authentic. However, it should also be noted that these descriptions of authenticity fail to give exact determinations as to what accounts as genuine; rather, they are much more interested in the function of authenticity, not so much how authenticity in travel writing is identified. In terms of fictional travel writing, as is the interest of the thesis, it can be argued from these relevant portrayals and interpretations of authenticity that one is dealing with an undefined subject. Authenticity is highly interpretative, based on a set of distinctions formed by societal strata. How authenticity is defined requires a further reading of the current academic sentiment, as this relates to what a larger group deems popular, which is also inherent in the function of authenticity. This chapter concerns itself with defining what accounts as authenticity in the genre of fictional travel writing.

What has been covered so far is the notion of authenticity as a mode of creating legitimacy in writing, with emphasis on who or what commands the role of the authentic. To push this sentiment further and compile what functions the concept of authenticity has within the genre of travel writing, it is equally important to understand how authenticity functions as a narratological element. To understand how story narratives are structured around authenticity in travel writing. To do so, the thesis provides a chapter on the functionality of travel narratives, which is followed by an elucidation on how authenticity is utilised in the narrative.

3.2 The 'Fictional' and Travel Writing Narratives

Part of analysing a narrative is to contextualise the story to the world in which it was created. This provides a sense of understanding of how the narrative evolution has taken form. A further distinction is needed; the narrative of interest to the thesis distinguishes itself from the broader scope of non-fictional travel writing narrative. Examples of this include travelogues, literary accounts, and self-declared autobiographical novels. The thesis is instead interested in the narrative, which offers fictional components used to create a story. The subchapter investigates the fictional travel narrative to later define the role of authenticity in the narrative of a travel story.

Percy G. Adams attempted to encapsulate the travel narrative in his 1983 work *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel.* Adams defines the narrative not as an autobiographical behaviour but rather as an engagement with the physical locus, centring on the active engagement with a foreign geography (Adams, pp. 162-163). From the sentiment, it can be established that a travel narrative, according to Adams, must contain an element of actual travel, which centres on the physical locations described in a narrative. Furthermore, Adams describes in the chapter "Structure: The Hero and His Journey" how the journey structure acts as a basic format, real or allegorical, for most fictional literature. This entails a compositional alignment, with most "romance" structures, which are inherent

to the travel genre (Adams, pp. 148-149). Debbie Lisle has also worked with this form of narrative within the travel writing genre in the chapter "Between Fact and Fiction: The Generic Boundaries of Travel Writing" in her 2009 book *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing.* The chapter explores the subject of travel writing narratives. Lisle determines that travel narratives commonly follow the romantic conventions of writing, which include a typical chronology of a beginning, middle and end. This is the base structure of most travel writing (Lisle, p. 38). On a basic level, this is contained in most forms of travel narratives. In the former subchapter, a study on innovative and experimental travel writing narratives had been introduced, written by Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund in *Mobility at Large: Globalization, Textuality and Innovative Travel Writing*. Their interpretation of the travel narrative: "Historically, the genre of travel writing has offered writers the possibility of narrative experimentation and textual innovation." (Edwards & Graulund, p. 5). Edwards and Graulund propose with this is that the genre of travel writing facilitates a relationship between the increasing fluidity of globalisation and its relationship to power and control while simultaneously working on the mind of the individual; A reflection on self-conscious (Edwards & Graulund, p. 6) The almost paradoxical nature of displaying grand globalisation, and an aligned focus on the experiential psyche of the narrator, has despite what Edwards and Graulund propose, has historically not always been a part of the travel narrative. William C. Spengemann specifies in his 1977 book *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction 1789-1900* that the genre saw an initial shift from focusing on the traveller's home country to instead having a locus on the traveller themselves. a further shift happened in the genre, indicating a larger receptiveness of the experiences described by the traveller, opening the wider planes of the traveller's experiential centre of their narrative. At the same time, earlier accounts before this, fictional or non-fictional, had a honed intention of showcasing accomplishment and virtue (Spengemann, pp. 38-39). Spengemann broadly defines the evolution of the travel writing narrative over a few hundred years in a couple of sentences.

While this might be convoluting the finer points of discussion, it composes a simple understanding on how the contemporary role of the narrative has shifted to align itself with the contextual history of a given period while simultaneously promoting a prolific interest in the role of the narrator, and their personal experiences during travel, from an American perspective. This further promotes the idea that narratives in the genre are not static, but instead follow a form of the societal zeitgeist or, at the very least, a regional tendency, lending further agency to answer the thesis question.

However, it should be noted that William C. Spengemann had a focus on encapsulating what sort of tendencies in the travel narrative had shaped itself within an American context. This means that it is precarious to generalise based on his research. Further insight into the travel narrative and evolution of the genre is required to understand these 'tendencies' defined by Spengemann, and their relationship to the authentic. Creating a more concise understanding of these literary trends provides the opportunity to subjugate the analytical material in the contemporary perspective and the New Sincerity. The following section provides a focus on the narrative trends in the genre.

One such work is *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity,* written by Stacy Burton in 2014. Burton explores the evolution of the genre against significant moments in Western history, which agented decisive attributions such as world wars, the end of colonialism and empires, which were pivotal for the anglophone travel genre. Burton proclaims that besides poetry, the travel genre carries the most personal tale due to the inherent interpersonal relationship between the audience and the voice of the narrator, which often is an extension of the traveller. Further, this suggests that travelling is not adequate alone in shaping a travel narrative; you also must include and promote the time and space connected to the narrative, which unfolds within these boundaries (Burton, p. 26). While simultaneously inherent to the travel narrative, the story lies in the hands of a literate European with

an 'obligation' to represent the time and space with authority. This was the evolution of the historical basis in which travel writing had come to exist, and by the twentieth century, this was the norm of the genre (Burton, p. 27). According to Stacy Burton, this form of established Anglophone narrative comes to an end when the world enters a new stage of globalisation following the First World War. The genre begins to question its foundations; this is due to the war's global effect and the early dismantling of colonialism. Instead, the genre adapts modernist conventions, and in doing so, the modernists transform the individual protagonist into a narrator. In other words, the genre sheds its goal of being an objective account of a foreign land to instead move towards the narrator becoming a character (Burton, p. 30-31). If one compares this sentiment given by Burton on the evolution of the travel narrative to the likes of the statements made by William C. Spengemann, it becomes clear that their thoughts on the matter align to a certain degree. Spengemann's 'narrators move towards the experiential centre' (Spengemann, pp. 38-39) and Stacy Burton's thought process on the introduction of modernism in the genre overlap in that they both underline that a shift happened in which the narrator began to encapsulate a more commanding role in the narrative.

On the further development of the modernist travel narrative, Burton highlights the immediate disassembly of the 'rigid conventions' of pre-modernist travel writing. Instead, these conventions are replaced by displaying subjective impressions to convey meaningful shared knowledge. These stories are then imported to the audience by the narrator's experiences and practices (Burton, p. 31). With the sentiment given by Spengemann and Burton, it has become evident that modernism saw the introduction of the narrator as the essential character; what is less evident is the further development within the mainstream conventions of the genre. On this, Stacy Burton also highlights the later effect postmodernism has on the genre. One of the reasons why the modernist approach to travel writing was so influenced by subjective and personal consciousness was due to the increased globalism. As

mentioned, with the global scale of the conflicts and wars impressed upon the twentieth century, along with it came an increased globalism in the consumers of the literature; they knew the world before reading about it in a piece of travel literature. Further, the notion of travel writing was, for the late modernists and early postmodernists, an attempt at a means of narration, which did justice to cultural hybrids existing in that period (Burton, pp. 49-50). On the introduction of postmodernist elements into the world of travel writing, Stacy Burton identifies a few key features. Predominantly, she argues that the genre still relies heavily on the conventions introduced with the modernist wave of writing. However, she also recognises a wider variability in the shape of the narrative, pushing the boundaries towards more experimental styles of narrative (Burton, p. 78). Burton's prime example of a postmodernist rendition of travel writing stems from Pico Iyer's novel *Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-So-Far-East* (1988). On Iver's style of writing, Stacy Burton explains that the novel distorts and fractures both geography and temporality, which displaces any sense of traditional narrative, instead deeply focusing on the discrepancies and changes in the mind of the narrator (Burton, p.79) This push of traditional boundaries in the narrative, was similarly explored by the likes of Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund. The interesting takeaway from both Stacy Burton, Edwards and Graulund is that they all contest it as being somewhat unconventional, or at the very least, an experimental form of writing within the genre (Edwards & Graulund, p. 5). This promotes the concept that, as with what Burton proposes, modernist conventions are still very common within the narrative of travel writing. This is inherently due to the structure and temporal attributes of the conventions placed within this approach.

When the thesis analyses the selected novels, an important aspect of the reading is the inherent conduct in which these stories propose and utilise the narrative conventions which have been showcased in this chapter so far. The nature of the genre promotes an ability to read these stories in

a certain light, with a distinct focus. One of these approaches has been lightly touched upon in the chapter on authenticity. David LeHardy Sweet's readings of travel writing originate from the book *Avant-garde Orientalism: The Eastern 'Other' in Twentieth-Century Travel Narrative and Poetry* (2017). Sweet's 'avant-garde orientalism' as a concept derives from two earlier definitions, namely Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Edward Said established and defined the cultural and political landscapes between Eastern and Western cultures. A component used in LeHardy Sweet's concept is Raymond Williams' definition of the avant-garde; As an exchange of metropolitan alienation for culture and social displacement, which promises pre-modern plenitude: paradise, innocence, and utopia, yet carries a distinctly postmodern experience: vacation, package tours, and other modern (Sweet, p. 12). This then becomes an approach of extending Western modernism to the East, not interchanging with the culture but cementing the Western traveller, establishing a monoculture in the world of travel writing. Furthermore, Sweet explores contemporary critique of postcolonialism and avant-gardists, which forms the opinion that they exist as extensions of capitalism, as symbols of creative disruption of the established art form (Sweet, pp. 13-16). However, Sweet argues that avant-gardism should not be viewed in a materialist premise but as a radical interpretive mode of cultural observation (Sweet, p. 269). Sweet even suggests an interpretation of how this mode of cultural observation serves as a form of modern cultural and artistic expression. "In effect, the art of the Avant-garde serves either as a critique of modern means of rationality or as a mockery" (Sweet, p.57), something that is initially rejected by the dominant culture but later accepted (Sweet, p. 57). This is how narrative structures could be determined based on the function of David LeHardy Sweet; his approach to understanding travel writing narratives is not based on the chronological foundation which Stacy Burton introduced, but rather Sweet's approaches to travel writing in a much more contemporary understanding. The reading of travel narrative then bases itself on the function of current trends rather than as a relic of a former past. Sweet's approach to understanding travel writing

narratives works as a distinct approach, one in which he refrains from postmodernist and consumer-based critiques of contemporary travel writing. His refrain from entertaining this aspect of critique promotes a structured approach to reading the stories. One in which culture and art forms become hallmark aspects of consideration. One could critique David LeHardy Sweet for his blindfolded approach to understanding travel stories due to severing critical aspects of the contemporary critique, which is included in travel stories. However, these functions are like the thesis's applied reading of New Sincerity, in that they focus on the inherent messaging which exists in the narrative, relating to a wider cultural critique. This is why Sweet's theory is relevant, in order to answer the thesis question.

Moving on from the narrative structures of travel writing, it is time to gather insight into how a travel narrative inherently works following authenticity. The interrelatedness of the two concepts has a linked history within the genre, and the following chapter explores how they are connected. Further, the chapter sets out to establish why these concepts are of value to the travel writing genre.

3.3 Between Narrative and Authenticity

To reiterate, the thesis has explored both authenticity and the narrative structures contained within the genre. What these chapters conveyed is that the boundaries of the genre are not as strictly defined. Tendencies and norms exist in the confines, as Edwards and Graulund argued, the genre also contains plenty of 'experimental' narratives (Edwards & Graulund, p. 5). The thesis is interested in exploring the wider connection between the narrative structures of these stories and how they relate to authenticity. This chapter explores the interval between narrative and authenticity. This later facilitates an opportunity to understand how these two elements of travel stories are linked to one another and how, and if, narrative structure produces the ability for authenticity to arise within a story, and the eventual role of authenticity, in a contemporary perspective.

To understand how these concepts are linked with one another, it is important to establish the distinction which sets them apart as well. What is meant by this is best portrayed by returning to Debbie Lisle's *Between Fact and Fiction: The Generic Boundaries of Travel Writing.*

Debbie Lisle argues that the travel narrative is also characterised by deviation or norm departure, usually on account of the narrator. This deviation must exist as an opposition to the narrator, which proposes an alienation in which a room is created for opposing perspectives (Lisle, p. 40). Moreover, Lisle, in this chapter, predominantly establishes how fact and fiction function as elements of travel writing. Lisle argues that travel writing must contain fictionalised components, or imagined truths, to function as a story; this is how she argues they distinguish themselves from travel guidebooks (Lisle, p. 30). The inherent element of fact or fiction is what arises between these elements, which is why it functions on a structural level of narrative. Furthermore, Debbie Lisle's proposition on how fact and fiction are vital elements within travel narratives also lends itself to the question of authenticity. The truth is what is at stake when deciphering the authenticity of a text. Not inherent nor proper truth, but an established decision of truth, evaluated by the reader of the text in question, such as proposed by Laura Saxton (Saxton, p. 128-129). This does not oppose the imagined truth formed by Debbie Lisle, and they are inherently interwoven. As Lisle puts it, this is what creates a story narrative in the genre of travel writing. These two elements might seem to be similar in concept, yet they are also distinctly different from one another. However, while one inherently lends itself to the questionable accuracy of a text, authenticity is decisively different. As proposed by Laura Saxton, the distinction is made between the two. This does not mean that the concepts do not exist within the same folds.

Authenticity is subjective and is shaped by many factors, such as intertextuality, consistency with other representations, appropriate periodisation, and use of generic tropes. Scholars

are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge that popular culture, as an example, can shape our reading as much, if not more so, than historical knowledge (Saxton, p. 141).

While it is important to remember that Saxton works within the confines of historical fiction and the evident overlap between constructing a narrative based on accuracy and authenticity, some of these elements overlap with the genre of travel writing. The article produced by Saxton carries with it a sentiment on how narrative and authenticity work together as a tied entity. Narrative and authenticity, while based on different circumstances, create a whole function (Saxton, p. 137). However, as illustrated by Saxton, authenticity is a wider definition which co-exists in an external world surrounding media production or literature.

The interest produced forms around the actual practice in which authenticity shapes itself to facilitate or create a narrative, or whether it is the other way around, regarding travel writing. Does the narrative help facilitate authenticity? The question is broadened when, because the narrative structure of the genre is not static but rather experimental, how then does this form of authenticity unfold itself? Does it vary based on the narrative? This question is important due to the attitudes explored in the chapter on authenticity. In it, it was established that authenticity is based on an inherent societal evaluation but also an evaluation which stems from the author, or in this case, the traveller. The question then becomes whether various forms of authenticity exist and how they are conveyed based on the various forms of narrative which exist in the genre. Stacy Burton has a chapter on the relationship between authenticity and travel writing. In *The Allure of Authenticity,* Burton establishes a few key components of what accounts as authentic over inauthenticity. It comprises a story of the loss of culture, and once an experience has been deemed inauthentic, the new authentic experiences acquire new value due to their nostalgic patina. Conversely, travellers also search for active participation and

observation in the authentic (Burton, p. 163). This form of authentic travel stems from Erik Cohen[1]'s phenomenological analysis of touristic experience, which Stacy Burton uses to highlight travel narratives that have an inherent interest in seeking the authentic experience in travel. Burton explains that the last three modes of Cohen's phenomenology are used interchangeably in narratives which are attentive towards authenticity. Furthermore, these narratives are contained within the narrator's intention of rising above the established conditions of the narrator's society by obtaining the know-how to discern the authentic from the inauthentic. Instead, the experience grants the traveller a form of ''epistemic authority'' (Burton, p. 164). While this gives an inclination as to the type of traveller existing within these stories concerned with authenticity, it has not provided a clear intention. Burton mentions that the character wants to rise above the conventions or norms within the established society, exchanging the norms for the capacity to discern true authenticity and revelatory abilities. Instead, Burton offers insight into how these travel narratives serve authenticity for the sake of authenticity. In other words, these stories sacrifice elusiveness and make every experience concretely real for the sake of 'performing the real' (Burton, p. 165). The theoretical convention produces an awareness as to how authenticity and narrative are connected in the genre of travel writing. It should be established that Burton is relating to a particular type of authentic narrative. Burton explains that the specific element with which she is working is narratives in which the main purpose is to portray and engage the authentic. This opposes the thesis's conventions and attentions, which are to understand how authors of travel stories can create a sense of authenticity, not how narratives that search for authenticity are created. This distinction might seem arbitrary, but it is made due to how Stacy Burton distinguishes authenticity in narratives. Burton proposes that authentic narratives are a distinct genre within the broader contextual understanding of travel writing (Burton, pp. 164-165).

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[1] Erik Cohen: *A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience* from 1975 establishes five types of travellers, the first two are like each other: recreational and diversionary. The third establishes an experiential tourist, seeking an authentic experience, and the fourth and fifth types are experimental, and lastly existential, although he deems his research "highly speculative" (Cohen, pp. 182-197)

This aims to completely emulate the feeling of authentic connections with the site of travel. The aim of the thesis is not to distinctly work this subgenre but rather to understand how travel writing produces a sense of authenticity in the body of writing instead of the specific subgenre that Burton speaks of.

So far, the natural relationship between narrative and authenticity has been highlighted, and it has been underlined that they still act as two independent functions in the fictional travel writing story. Burton highlights that there are stories in which the narrative does become a search for authenticity. A prerequisite for that subgenre would be a travel writing narrative in which authenticity is not the main area of focus, but rather a narratological and literary instrument, used to produce a larger scope or effect. The following section highlights an incentive for understanding the relation between narrative and authenticity for the forthcoming analysis.

In her 1984 book, *ON LONGING: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection,* Susan Stewart also contemplates the role of the real. Stewart explains that while narrative offers a transcendence, it lacks authenticity due to narrative offering a perspective on *others*[2]. She argues that the printed word is inherently inauthentic due to the lack of 'lived experience' and the loss of the authorial voice's authenticity (Stewart, p. 22). Stewart raises a response which carries with it a contradictory evocation; She argues that immediate lived experience is more "real", therefore being authentic, this, according to Stewart, cannot be transferred to a mediated experience, such as with travel writing. Instead, she proposes nostalgia as an inherent effect (Stewart, p.23). Like the sentiment proposed by David LeHardy Sweet, who suggested that authenticity is inherently absent

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[2] Susan Stewart refers to the philosophical concept of "the Other", as an opposition to the "self" and individual identity (Bullock & Trombley, p. 620)

from writing (Sweet, p.35). While Sweet and Stewart reach the same conclusion on the subject, they use different arguments as to why. Sweet proposes that all travel writing is inherently inauthentic due to travel being a social symbol (Sweet, p.35). Stewart argues the concept is incapable of existence due to the retroactive nature of writing about travel as a reminiscence. What Stewart proposes instead is nostalgia, but the nature of her deductions of the narrative function of authenticity seems to stem from the author's memory and thus becomes a replication, which would rely on accurate descriptions of events, not basing itself on fiction. From this, some issues arise, issues regarding the notion that autobiographical novels must contain a narrative to function as a story. This is backed by the arguments of Debbie Lisle on fact versus fiction, in which she argued that narratives must contain both elements of truth and falsity to properly function as a travel story and narrative (Lisle, p. 30). Although Susan Stewart's arguments on the absence of authenticity in a narrative are based on valid arguments, a takeaway which can be made is that the relationship between authenticity and narrative is, at best, a loosely defined one, to which scholars still actively debate their inherent relationship. Concerning the thesis, this creates an incentive to continually analyse authenticity with narrative, to determine which interpretation the thesis is most closely aligned with, based on the analytical component.

The following chapter highlights a dissertation, which is closely linked to the established intent of this thesis, with a different perspective and aim of study and chosen material. Further, the chapter is also a literature review of the material, which is later explored in the analysis.

4. Comparable Studies and Literature Reviews

This chapter investigates a study and the surrounding literature regarding the analytical material of the analysis. The intention is to showcase the findings of the different studies. Mandating a course of

action which deviates from the existing literature on the subject. This chapter, therefore, distinguishes itself from the theoretical framework which has already been covered. While some of the academic works have already been covered in the theory chapter, the intention of showcasing them is different. This chapter has a partitioned focus on the conclusive findings existing in the various published works. Followed by a more traditional literature review, in which the relevant academic discussion surrounding the novels *The White Mary* (2008)*, Heroes of the Frontier (2016)* and *Memorial* (2020)*.

4.1 Related Academic Studies

In 2022, Ana Calvete wrote her dissertation, *Conceptions of Authenticity in Contemporary Travel Writing*. The dissertation wanted to define how contemporary travel story writers either reinforced or redefined the authentic (Calvete, pp. 21-22). Calvete's approach to understanding how authenticity is reflected in the works of contemporary travel writing is limited to two sections, splitting her dissertation into two major sections. Firstly, she defines how authenticity is reflected in the light of the natural world and how authors find the authentic experience as an extension of nature. This is then further fuelled by investigations into postmodern extrapolations on some of the novels in which she works within the dissertation. Calvete explores a postmodern aesthetic to further understand the inherent link between the recollective authenticity and personal interpretations of contemporary authors (Calvete, pp 55-56). The second part of the dissertation deals with what Ana Calvete calls a study of authenticity in the travelogues of semioticians. What Calvete purports in the second part of her dissertation is that up until this point in her dissertation, she has worked with travel stories which were focusing on narratives set in nature. This gave an insight into how authenticity functioned in this setting, yet it did not provide an insight into stories marked by 'consumer culture', marked by artistic practices and foreign cultures (Calvete, p. 197). This part of the dissertation's objective is then

to convey how signs and objects can indicate authenticity. This, she deems, is the opposite of the first part of her dissertation. Ana Calvete's focus on the semioticist kind of travel writing is, as she argues:

> We can therefore better understand where the abstract impressions conveyed by their travel texts come from, and why these texts have seldom been studied as travel literature: it is because they are, in fact, semi-theoretical essays. Instead of describing the United States and Japan, they discuss semiotic issues by superimposing them upon these two countries. (Calvete p. 200)

What Calvete promotes here is that she intends to look at texts which are not classically considered part of the travel writing sphere of the genre. She works with stories that are inherently interested in signs as markers of authenticity, once again understanding how the authors deem something as being explicitly or implicitly authentic. This approach, like the analytical approach in the thesis, subjugates dissimilar novels within the generic position of 'travel writing' to understand various functions of authenticity. Dissimilar to Calvete's approach, this thesis relies on strictly fictional narratives. The dissertation further relates how nature and authenticity are linked to one another. Calvete writes that elements such as technology, responsible tourism, poverty, historical ruins, and civilisation are seen as obstacles to achieving the authentic experience nature has to offer (Calvete, p. 191). Further, Calvete defines that the purest form of authentic experience one could have with nature is found when one is contemplative and epiphanic towards nature instead of being rejective of civilisation and denying human embeddedness in nature (Calvete, p. 191). One of the direct ways in which Ana Calvete finds that authors promote the concept of authenticity concerning nature is "My investigation of the travellers' spiritual epiphanies has led me to conclude that a sense of immediacy was key to their conception of authenticity." (Calvete, p. 192). Other such approaches include physical exhaustion during travel in nature and meditative elements, which lend themselves to some

constituent of self-consciousness. Furthermore, the archetype of a wild man can sometimes convey authenticity. This includes some level of self-sufficiency. However, the goal of immersing with nature, as Calvete concludes, is to appear non-anthropocentric, becoming one with the scenery and immersing with nature is, often, by the writers, the aim of the novel (Calvete, pp. 191-192). Calvete sees this as a nostalgic engagement, yearning to return to a concept of pre-civilisation, which these writers aspire towards. Calvete further introduced an element of postmodernism in her reflection, which she interprets as the authors meeting certain criteria for authenticity in a postmodernist context. These elements include self-reflectivity, a feeling of an open-ended conclusion, unconventional plot patterns, acknowledgement of the inherent limits of the literary medium and finally, metanarratives in an otherwise linear story (Calvete, pp. 193-194). Furthermore, Calvete argues that a critique which has taken hold in the general academic discussion[3] is that contemporary writers are not able to question a truth which goes against their own perceived truth on travel.

She condemns the impulse of these writers to "re-territorialise" foreign countries – in other words, their attempts to reframe small resistances and subsume them under the control of their fantasies (Calvete, p. 194).

Calvete argues against this critique that the authors whom she has analysed can go against the grain on this matter. She argues that they question their authority and their impression of travel based on the experiences they endure in nature and while travelling (Calvete, p. 194). In doing so, Calvete legitimises her research with the context that writers who engage with the natural world avoid the pitfalls related to a postmodernist approach in fictional travel writing. However, another interesting

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[3] Ana Calvete bases this discussion on the work of Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing.* *(Lisle, p. 195)*

takeaway from her preliminary conclusion is that the postmodernist and contemporary authors fail in their quest to question the established colonial effects in place. Relating this to the topic is vital to understanding how the New Sincerity has changed the conventional methods of established authenticity in travel writing.

Moving onto the second part of Calvete's dissertation, she focuses on stories written by semiotic writers, which contrasts with her focalised interest in travel stories contained in nature. In this part of her study, the dissertation concerns authenticity in hyperreal spaces carrying a symbolic reference, such as museums and theme parks (Calvete, p.233). The second part of the dissertation concludes that these places are often viewed as inauthentic depictions, much removed from their original intention because of nudging and transfixed interpretations of the cultural objects (Calvete, p. 234). However, Calvete concludes that her work is based on writers limited in their timeframe. These authors wrote in a setting before smartphones and other technological tools, such as virtual reality, were a part of the plane of 'hyperreality', which produced a conclusion with a suboptimal effect (Calvete, p. 274). Relating this to the thesis, it is noteworthy how Calvete analysed novels produced by pre-modern contexts, to relate it to a modern context. The thesis appropriates this, by analysing modern examples of travel writing. However, Calvete has a valid insight, on the current literary modus operandi:

In this diptych, as in the travelogues I studied, there is no fatigue but a commitment to reasserting the meaningfulness of the experience, without forfeiting the postmodern critical outlook. (Calvete, p. 285)

A poetic interpretation of an otherwise valid conclusion, these stories do still contain authentic content, which must be further assessed and devised. It is prominent that Calvete believes these stories are still maintained within the era of a postmodernist orientation. While she might be correct in her analysis of her texts, she also argued that she had chosen texts not rooted in a contemporary setting. Calvete's dissertation is an asset to understanding how authenticity is conveyed in travel writing, but the literature analysed by the dissertation produced a 'look back' into the state of the genre. The thesis here promotes a look into the future of the state of the genre and the role of authenticity.

4.2 Literature Review

The White Mary, written by Kira Salak in 2008, does not have a wide academic reach as of the time of writing. A handful of review articles have been written on the novel, all released around the time of publication. Most of the articles only provide a summary of the content of the novel, and true to the form of review, an evaluation of the novel. These reviews provide valuable insight into how the novels were received, providing academic discussion surrounding the credibility of the authenticity portrayed. One such article compares the narrative to that of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) (Kirkus reviews). Providing a further reach of the novel's wider contextual existence and inspiration as a travel writing novel. This is later used to analyse the corpus of the novel, to identify concurrent plot devices and related authenticity.

The following novel subject for analysis is *Heroes of the Frontier,* written by Dave Eggers in 2016. Author Dave Eggers is also known for *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.* Distinguished as an entry into the post-postmodernist literary scene, Eggers believes that irony is an appalling cultural phenomenon that removes any form of authenticity and sincerity. The counter to this comes in the form of a literary bond between the reader and author based on trust (Altes, p. 123). The novel, subject for analysis, is *Heroes of the Frontier.* The novel offers a road travel story, bound for Alaska.

The dominant academic discussion surrounding the novel pertains to the distinction of the genre the novel belongs to (Pignagnoli, p. 57). In the topic of this subject, Virginia Pignagnoli wrote in 2017:

> Heroes of the Frontier employs generic elements typical of travel writing, such as the tourist gaze, the quest for authenticity and the presence of utopian expectations linked with the idea of discovery. It is from their encounter with categories typical of other genres, such as the fantastic, that Eggers is able to overturn their familiar dynamics and convey the narrative's social criticism. (Pignagnoli, p. 69).

Virginia Pignagnoli's work exists as the most prevailing work which has been conducted on Eggers' novel *Heroes of the Frontier.* However, as an asset to understanding the current state of the literary fictional travel genre, the novel remains unexplored. The connection between the Eggers' approach to New Sincerity and *Heroes of the Frontier* proves the novel to be vital to understanding how new conventions within the genre are conducted. Furthermore, one reviewer notes how the novel conducts a narrative subversion, which struggles with writing nature as it realistically exists, without subverting the narrative positioned within the story (Martin). On the narrative itself, the review highlights a moral position:

> The idea of owing more to luck than courage, however, contradicts one of the basic themes of Heroes of the Frontier — that through acting bravely and persevering, you and those around you (in Josie's case, Paul and Ana) can become the "heroes" of the title. (Martin)

The highlighted review further conducts a critique of Eggers' position on nature as an unrealistic portrayal, but simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty in writing conflict and narrative in the

setting, without sacrificing some realism. While the reviewer does not directly label this as an inauthentic approach, they do remark on how Eggers gets Alaska and Wilderness wrong (Martin). This position is interesting regarding the perceived authenticity. The analysis has an emphasis on how New Sincerity and authenticity are different terminologies, used in unison to convey a single message.

The final book, subject for analysis, is *Memorial,* written by Bryan Washington in 2020. This novel is the latest publication that the thesis analyses and discusses concerning the contemporary modus operandi. The story follows a plot in which the point of view changes between Benson and Mike. Benson stays at their home in Houston, with Mike's Japanese mother, while Mike travels to Osaka, Japan, to confront his estranged dying father. The travel which takes place in the novel is therefore related to Mike's time in Osaka. However, the cultural position of Benson and Mike's mother carries with it a vital clash, which is also worthy of exploration. The academic discussion surrounding the novel is often related to the queer themes which the novel contains. An example of this is the subchapter "Care, Context, and Redefining Family Heirlooms in Bryan Washington's Memorial" by Derek Ettensohn, in the book *Queer Kinship and Comparative Literature.* Ettensohn writes, "Bryan Washington's Memorial emphasizes the fraught nature of kinship and how it can be reaffirmed and expanded through care." (Ettensohn, p. 154). Ettensohn's discourse surrounding Washington's novel is based on the exploration of kinship across cultures and race. Further, as Ettensohn explains, kinship is formed by action, while also relating to the memories and contexts that take hold from the actions taken. This evocation of action then becomes a placeholder for the eventual contexts which are formed from it, which can eventually form new and stronger relationships (Ettensohn, pp. 154-157). Furthermore, reviews have been conducted on the novel. The Guardian's review said, "Memorial reveals our incredible openness to believe, excuse, or empathise with whoever we feel closest to at a given moment." (Williams, I.). The citation regards how the novel constructs empathy based on the

point of view the reader currently follows. This is further explored in the analysis of *Memorial* as it relates to the established connection between the author and audience.

As highlighted from the literature review, the limited number of academic studies on these novels highlights how the thesis interest, contemporary approaches to authenticity, has yet to concern itself with post-postmodernism and the realm of New Sincerity. Ana Calvete's *Conceptions of Authenticity in Contemporary Travel Writing* conducted a surmountable analysis of a wide range of novels, on either nature or semiotics, she concludes that contemporary travel writing contains a postmodernist critical outlook (Calvete, p. 285). This notion, as well as her approach, retaining to stories within nature or the use of semiotics, means that the approach within this thesis organises a different approach regarding the nature of understanding authenticity in the current state of the genre. Furthermore, the novels chosen are relatively undefined in the ongoing discussion, which makes them perfect candidates for a proper evaluation of their contemporary value to the understanding of the current state of the fictional travel writing genre.

5. Structure and Methodology

The thesis has covered relevant theory and literature that have touched upon aspects of narrative and authenticity, amongst similar topics that all relate to the research question. To be able to process the findings and produce insight into the contemporary state of authenticity, suitable resolution is necessary. The forthcoming chapter defines the selected methodologies, later used in the analysis to systematically analyse the components of authenticity which are evident in contemporary fictional travel novels.

5.1 Accumulation Methodology

The culminative method of the analysis is specified as qualitative textual analysis, named Content Analysis. This intention is to culminate enough content of analysis, to define a social and cultural effect, in understanding the contemporary parameters of the travel writing genre and its relation to the quest for authenticity. To achieve this goal, the use of a qualitative method, in which a specific 'reading' of the novels is chosen. This reading applies the prescriptive elements of New Sincerity, which were highlighted in the chapter *Scope, Delimitation and Applied Reading.* To reiterate the most central aspects of the literary movement, Adam Kelly proclaims that the words written on the page are to be taken seriously, as opposed to being read as irony, which was a dominant method in postmodernist writing (Kelly, p. 199). The argument is that instead of proposing a critical reading and deconstruction, the reading follows the conventions established by the author. To continually gather analytical material, Content analysis and ordinary literary analysis are adopted, with an amalgamation of New Sincerity methodologies.

To further understand this in the context of literary analysis, a more precise method of textual analysis is needed. To aid with this, Klaus Krippendorf writes on the topic in his work *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* from 2019, that a typical definition of content analysis, is an analysis of the latent content of a 'communicated material', employing classification, tabulation and evaluation of key symbols and themes to determine the meaning and probable effect. Further, Krippendorf argues that Content Analysis is "empirically grounded, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent" (Krippendorf, p. 10). Further, he suggests that contemporary content analysis surpasses traditional conventions and notions of symbolism, content, and intention. Krippendorf seems to suggest this as a development in the collective approach to understanding and using communication, and how cultural significance is applied to various bodies of media. The

content of this shift is mostly located in the shaping of communication, inherently based on a mass media message, in which the individual authors are replaced by 'institutional constructs' (Krippendorf, p. 11-13). The inherently larger contexts of content analysis have led contemporary content analysis in a new direction of collective efforts and amassing larger plots of information to distinctly profile significance in analysis (Krippendorf, pp. 13-14). The notion Krippendorf is alluding to here is the outlining of content analysis, in which multiple authors apply the same methods and ask similar questions, to amass a certain amount of knowledge to answer larger contextual questions, based on current media consumption habits. This is the finalised aim of the thesis: to understand the function of authenticity and its contemporary importance by amassing enough analytical content to produce a summarisation.

Content analysts now face larger contexts. The shift in interest from small collections of printed messages to systems and then to electronic texts and images circulating in the environment of content analysts is tied less to the nature of textual data than to the increasingly complex worlds that produce and are sustained by these data (Krippendorf, p. 13).

The content analysis is used to create a larger probable effect, and it relies on analysis, which has a key focus on a specific element, in the case of this thesis, that focus is the function of contemporary novels and authenticity, read as a New Sincerity novel. However, elements of classical textual analysis also shape the form of content analysis; to ascertain this knowledge, a classic analysis of the narrative and its elements occurs as the start of each new novel. The relative methodology is based on the selection of three novels; these are used to create a final Content Analysis, a final comparative amalgamation of the data, producing a viable conclusion to the current state of authenticity and the contemporary modus operandi. However, to do so, the thesis follows a traditional textual analysis, in

which the structured narrative must be explored pre-emptively; this creates an opportunity for understanding authenticity with content analysis.

5.2 Specified Methodologies

Accordingly, when the narrative analysis is conducted, a specified method used to understand authenticity is by contextualisation, one of the thesis's key terms: *contextual authenticity*. The contextualisation that takes place relates to the book's origins, both in time, place, and authorial background. Furthermore, the contextualisation might relate the situation to important events given the theme and scope of the book. This is done to produce further insight into how and if these books construct a sense of authenticity based on the real world. On the concept of contextualisation in *Context in Literary and Cultural Studies,* 2019, Jakob Ladegaard and Jakob Gaardbo Nielsen acknowledge that contextual readings of various cultural artefacts might encase themselves in a variety of different contextual readings. However, one should also be aware of symptomatic or 'suspicious readings', but not to the degree of withdrawing from doing contextual readings (Ladegaard & Nielsen, p. 1-3). The book concerns itself with systematically categorising the various approaches to contextualisation, which could be used to recognise connections between the cultural artefact and the world in which it exists. One of these approaches to contextualization is described in their chapter "Cosmopolitanism and the historical/contextual paradigm". Bruce Robbins describes how modern world literature has taken on a new form of contextual reading.

The new world literature, which has shifted away from the field's old centre in Europe and therefore also away from its old origin in classical Greece, has done so in large part because of its sensitivity to its own historical context, which is of course postcolonial and highly suspicious of Eurocentrism (Robbins, p. 18)

Robbins furthers this argument by declaring that the contexts in which literature now follows are an upscaled version of historical contextualization, which also relies on a historical narrative. That is to say, the most prominent feature of contextual analysis relies on reading a form of shared collective narrative, which surrounds the book in the time of creation. Robbins engages with the ongoing debate on whether critical readings of literature should engage with producing insight in newer contexts, to which he finds the answer in understanding the historical narrative which surrounds the cultural artefact (Robbins, pp. 19-21). As an approach to analysis in the thesis, based on the sentiment given by Bruce Robbins, it is evident to understand the books are understood pin the surrounding historical narrative. Robbin's approach to contextualisation provides a way for the thesis can relate larger historical and literary narratives, such as the emphasis on colonialism, modernism, and postmodernism, to understand what place the novel has in this scope.

While contextualization is a vital tool in understanding how authors convey authenticity, more such approaches exist. One such approach lies in the narrative structure of travel writing, and a way in which one might understand the normative approaches to narrative could be illustrated with a comparison of novels. The comparative approach to textual analysis raises insight into the shared similarities and dissimilarities between the chosen novels. This produces an effect of understanding the narrative from the perspective of one another. While the novels are separated into three different entities of the analysis section, they share an overlap in their chosen form; they are fictional travel narratives, with American authors. Interlinking and comparing the novels on these parameters enables and ensures that they do share similarities on a surface level. On the comparative approach, Hartmut von Sass explains in *A Philosophy of Comparisons: The Practice and the Limits of Ethics* from 2022, that reasonable comparisons should follow the format of: Clarifying and conditioning the subjects of comparison, followed by a comparison of more elaborate elements, to highlight how these

components are comparable. After which you contextualise the comparison, and finally discuss the reasonability of the comparison (von Sass, p. 18). Further, von Sass teaches that primordial understandings of comparison could end with three possible results: better, worse, or equal. He argues that this is an insufficient approach to comparison, instead, comparison should entail context to provide meaningful analysis, while also conceding that these subjects exist in a defined space (von Sass, p.19). This relates to how the thesis applies comparison. By functioning as a way in which the chosen novels contextualise with each other. The use of comparison further carries agency, as a means of not comparing the 'level' of authenticity, but how and when authors deploy their authenticity. This means that the comparison is not used to measure how authentic a novel is, but rather to understand if authors deploy similar tactics in their pursuit of authenticity and writing modus, that is, engaging with their audience.

A final technique that can decipher authenticity is cultural critique. Cultural critique within travel writing novels is evident as placeholders for a larger theme and moral of the narrative. Critique in an academic context is defined in Raymond Williams' *Keywords,* in which he relates the word to an authoritative judgement, but also as a means of distinguishing inadequacies and responsibilities in the established system or product (Williams, R. pp. 84-85). Williams' approach highlights the *critique,* culture concerns itself with an established culture or counter-cultural element. The book *What is Cultural Criticism?* a compilation of the discussions between Francis Mulhern and Stefan Collini, is based on understanding cultural criticism and the critic's role.

..its informing aspiration has been to contest the status of the kind of 'culture' laid claim to by the older tradition. He emphasized that 'popular creativity' is 'the very principle of Cultural

Studies', and points to the pitfalls of treating some selection of such activities as a locus of value. (Mulhern & Collini, p. 34)

The argument's angle is that cultural critique does not negotiate the status or rank of the selected cultural element. However, it does seek to associate itself with the dominant and popular culture. This is understood as a cultural critique relating itself to the contemporary impulse on the cultural scene, which is also why it keeps itself relevant in the analysis. While the Cultural Critique remains a method within the humanities, it shares the methodology with the anthropology field of study, this creates an overlap in methodology; Sherry B. Ortner, an anthropologist writes in her 2005 research article "Subjectivity and Cultural Critique", how "…a critical reading of the contemporary world involves understanding not just its new political, economic, and social formations, but its new culture..." (Ortner, p. 60) Understanding Ortner's premise and applying it as a method, postures Cultural Critique as an actor which can instigate how authenticity relates to a higher echelon of the cultural zeitgeist, in which the literary component of contemporary novels mutually resides. In this way, cultural critique is a prerequisite for a wider analysis of the genre's content.

The analytical structure is based on a textual analysis of narrative to establish authenticity, which is then analysed in a cultural and literary context, employing the established findings. A definite structure in which all analytical findings are to be processed does take place. Moreover, the various findings are processed in the most relevant methods so as not to inflate the analysis unnecessarily. That is to say, the various methods highlighted in this chapter are to be used as they make sense in the natural flow of the analysis. Some textual examples might be processed in some of the highlighted forms, without being processed in the others. However, it is vital to foster all these various methods as fixtures of evaluation, due to the ambition of understanding a wide variety of authenticities and

sincerities in the genre of travel writing. Having these methodologies at the disposal ensures a varied approach in which the conveyors of the authentic are appropriately assumed in their correct context. While the methodological steps are structured based on the novel's content, the arc of analysis follows the same structure: Narrative analysis, written and contextual authenticity, followed by an evaluation of the novel's position in the fictional writing genre.

6. Foreword to the Analysis

The three novels, which were chosen as topics of study, are analysed in sequential order, as per their original publishing dates. This is done to keep track of the eventual literary development, towards answering if authenticity influences the contemporary modus operandi, and if New Sincerest elements exist in these literary conventions. While the three chosen novels are separated by author, narrative, themes, and intent, they do share the similarity of being fictional narratives relating a story which uses physical travel as a main plot element. This means that they are eligible for comparison and similar methodologies. The main purpose of the analysis is to understand how authors deploy and perceive authenticity, which is done by deploying textual analysis on selected elements of each novel. Which is then processed by the compound methodologies to determine the eventual significance of authenticity in contemporary travel writing, and the further effect of the authentic, regarding cultural critique. The main aim of the analysis is to understand the role of authenticity, relating it to contemporary travel writing. However, as previously mentioned, another crucial aspect and purpose of the analysis is to determine if New Sincerity notions influence contemporary narratives. Therefore, authenticity and narrative are closely tied together and are to be analysed synchronously; however, to do so, the narrative elements must first be established and analysed without a pertained focus on authenticity, and later a joint assessment occurs. Separating these aspects provides room for both understanding narrative, authenticity and eventually the role of New Sincerity.

The discussion is embedded into each of the three main analytical constructions about the novels. A continual discussion is entrenched in the three analytical segments, as pertained to the broader literary scope and cultural context of the novels, finally amalgamated in the assessment. The model of analysis adopts the classic hermeneutic loop, in which narrative acts as the data, authenticity as the analysis, and finally, New Sincerity influence on the novel's literary conventions acts as the discussion. This is done continually to amass as much content of analysis, to produce a contemporary assessment on the current state of the genre, and the role of authenticity. The final assessment of the process contains a comparison between the novels, relating to the discoveries of the analysis, regarding how the novels convey authenticity, and if New Sincerity provides importance to authenticity, and if they overlap.

7. Literary Analysis and Narrative: *The White Mary*

To distinguish the existing characteristics of authenticity, interwoven in the novel by Kira Salak, addressing how Salak deploys attributes of the genre and narrative of the travel writing genre. The following chapter produces a traditional textual analysis. The eventual findings are then related to authenticity, employing the methodologies introduced. Lastly, a discussion will occur on the literary conventions the authenticity entails, related to the method of Cultural Critique and the application to reading of New Sincerity, as well as the catered theory.

7.1 Plot and Structure

The White Mary is an adventure novel in which the protagonist, journalist Marika Vecera, explores her admiration for fellow journalist Robert Lewis, balancing a concurrent love plot with psychologist Sebastian Gilman. This eventually leads to a journey deep into the Papua New Guinean jungle. The story mirrors established plots within the genre, especially Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This

subchapter establishes the defining characteristics of the plot to later determine the authentic position. Marika goes to Papua New Guinea to figure out what happened to her idol, Robert Lewis. Her journey up the river is guided by a local witch doctor, Tobo, and they finally arrive at Walwasi village, where Lewis resides. He does not return home, instead, he stays behind.

To understand the fundamental narrative in Salak's *The White Mary*, one must understand the relevant plot points, which are integral to the development of the narrative. The structure of the plot is intermixed with various locations and time frames. Following a unilinear approach to plot structure, in which the first five chapters exchange location as well as time. The basic structure in the plot is a take on the hero's journey, as an established plot structure in travel writing (Adams, pp. 148-149). On the first page of the novel, Salak launches the novel's journey: finding Robert Lewis. "Does Robert Lewis know she has given up everything to find him? More to the point, would he care? She ought to go home. Go back. Call this for what it is: a failure." (Salak, p. 7). As previously mentioned, the plot launches a side-plot, which revolves around the love interest with Sebastian Gilman. The plot is two-fold in this sense, and the story unfolds in two chronologies, until they eventually catch up in the second act. These chronologies are structured as home/away positions; her time home is told in the past tense, whereas her time in Congo and Papua New Guinea is presented in the present tense. The disposition between these plot structures is further unfolded in the chapter division. Each chapter, in the first part of the novel named *Part 1: Marika,* positions itself here. Whereas *Part 2: Lewis,* persists in the present tense, only subsided for a few instances in which the plot and narrator focalise the view of Robert Lewis. The structure of the plot mirrors an experimental narrative, in which the plot contains achronological perspectives, leading towards a postmodernist approach. Authenticity is here proposed as an element which relates to both the classic hero, but also a, then modern approach

to plot structuring. However, to ascertain this observation, one must define how narration acts within this line of thought.

7.2 Narration

Regarding the narration of the novel, the most dominant effect is that the novel chooses a third-person narration to convey and focalise various voices in the story. Predominantly, the narration focalises on the main protagonist, Marika Vecera, however, it also retains focalisation for other characters. This is exemplified by the focalisation given to the character of Robert Lewis as seen when Marika is sick in Lewis' hut. The focalisation seamlessly switches from Marika to Lewis to further characterise each of them, as it lends perspective to the condition of Marika (Salak, p. 323). This is done to indicate a sequential element. Promoting an unconventional narration and plot structure, highlights the contemporary position of the novel, as it omits a chronological narrative. Positioning this towards authenticity, it should be highlighted how contemporary narratives had a basis for excluding conventional positions of authenticity (Edwards and Graulund, pp. 51-60). This relation points to an effect which, so far, has showcased how *The White Mary,* regarding its literary content, is a novel, still related to instigating experimental narration and plot structures, in which, like the work of Calvete, authenticity arises in the spiritual journeys and through a sense of immediacy (Calvete, p. 192). The relationship of narration insinuates how focalisation acts as a transporter of authenticity. However, to define this apparent relationship between focalisation and authenticity, the characterisation requires attention to understand how the essential authenticity is related.

7.3 Characterisation

The novel relies on characterisation to engage with the narrative of a hero's journey. This is exemplified when Marika reflects on the differences in character between Robert Lewis and Sebastian

Gilman, which refers to the love plot which exists, while also she invokes a sense of reflection on her capabilities (Salak, pp. 213-215). From this example, it needs to be noted how Salak conforms to the previously established prospects proposed by William C. Spengemann on the experiential psyche of the protagonist on the reflective element introduced by the modernists in the genre of travel writing, as fundamental characterisation in travel novels (Spengemann, pp. 38-39). The travel and events that transpire are highlighted in a reflective light, considerably endorsing a continual change transpiring. Marika is deeply engulfed in her appreciation of Robert Lewis while also balancing a love life with her partner Sebastian Gilman (Salak, p. 80). Marika initially believes that Robert Lewis has perished. However, she ends up on the journey in search of him because she receives hints of him being alive (Salak, p. 26). The contrast and dichromatic idiosyncrasy reflect a thematic approach to narrative in the story. Contrasts are seen all over the novel, between Marika and Robert Lewis, the civilised world and the jungle, and the relationship between brutality and intimacy. The commitment to finding Robert Lewis is what anchors the story and acts as a mirror to the opposing weights of the protagonist. Further, Kira Salak interweaves Marika's search for Robert Lewis as a way of processing the protagonist's traumatic experiences on the African continent. An example of when Marika is hiding out in Robert Lewis' cave, on the run from the Walwasi village tribe, she describes her past experiences of war and horror, as flowing over her, during this moment of panic, during a moment of embrace with Robert Lewis. (Salak, p. 386). Once again, the moment of embrace and comfort challenges the traumatic experience Marika has endured. This perception signifies the reflective hero's journey, in which they relate to events as they happen, as well as being changed by them. The end of the journey, endured by Marika, is marked by her phoning home to her now ex-boyfriend Sebastian Gilman, which seems a symbolic return to her past, to what matters most to the protagonist, before the journey out into the unknown (Salak, pp. 411-414). This form of characterisation relies on the protagonist as a central element. However, her position is inherent to the focalisation of the outside

voices, central to her position. The following chapter advances the narration, as *The White Mary* extends its characterisation through focalising the narrative, and lending agency to various points of view, providing an authentic link in the narrative structure between focalisation and characterisation.

8. Engagement with the Authentic in *The White Mary*

Following the textual analysis of *The White Mary,* in which authenticity was only promoted as existing in the undefined borders between plot, narration and characterisation. The forthcoming analysis introduces a greater perspective on how authenticity manifests itself in the wider narrative. This leads to a subdivision in which authenticity is explored in the light of two methodologies: context and literary analysis, as per Krippendorff's Content Analysis, which will eventually produce enough evidence to suggest a larger scope of the state of genre.

8.1 The Authentic Narrative

The following subchapter produces a sense of how the narrative is constructed based on these established contents. An example of *The White Mary'*s employment of classical narrative elements of the genre is found in the meeting and treatment of the other, *The White Mary* does so by actively engaging with the traditional precursors of the modernists; the travel that Marika experiences is treated as a journey into the unknown.

Even back in the United States, she hadn't been able to find any good maps of PNG's interior. It's a place that, as far as the Western world is concerned, doesn't seem to exist. Which satisfies Marika. PNG keeps its secrets. (Salak, p. 208)

In this, Kira Salak shapes together two different narrative traditions. The narrative comprises a modernist approach, which is seen in the plot, the locations, and the characters, while simultaneously experimenting with following a non-linear structure, as seen in the textual analysis. This is like the proposed concords by Rune Graulund and Justin D. Edwards, who argued that contemporary travel novels can omit authenticity and traditional chronology (Edwards & Graulund, pp. 51-60). How *The White Mary* compositions the narrative structure is seen in the narration, and shift herein, which begins in media res and the eventual flashbacks, such as Lewis' recollection of the torture he endured in East Timor (Salak, pp. 370-376). While contriving a plot structure, which is deviational from traditional chronology, although retaining classic elements of engagements with the other, *The White Mary* acts as an outlier, not nestled within either modernity or postmodernity; instead, the novel acts as a hybrid, conjoining engagements with both literary conventions. By this position, it is evident to analyse how *The White Mary* produces an effect of authenticity. According to Graulund and Edwards, as well as Susan Stewart's theory on the printed word lacking authenticity (Stewart, p.22), *The White Mary* should decisively lack authenticity. Simultaneously, as argued here, the novel engrosses an overlap in literary conventions, which creates an opportunity for a new form of insight which needs to be addressed. The upcoming subchapter provides an analysis of how *The White Mary* constructs its authenticity, both written as well as contextually, followed by a discussion of the novel's literary conventions, decisively confirming the position.

8.2 The Written Authenticity

Up until this point, the analysis has explored how the narrative in *The White Mary* is structured. The following subchapter of the analysis illustrates how authenticity is conveyed in Salak's *The White Mary,* while also interpreting the function of authenticity in the novel. To begin with, the thesis argues that the authenticity which Salak constructs in the novel can be subdivided into categories of authenticity, by how the authenticity is created and delivered. This is derived from the various

definitions of authenticity that were highlighted in the theoretical chapter, while also being dependent on the novel's approach to authenticity. Finally, when these categories have been sufficiently highlighted, it becomes viable to discuss the role of authenticity in a contemporary and literary light.

Kira Salak and her novel *The White Mary* extrapolate a wide variety of authenticities, which can be seen in various themes or 'modes' as they are referred to in this thesis. These modes are extracted from the written word, which means they are intentional authenticities, produced by Kira Salak herself, as a means of grasping the genre. This is best exemplified by going over one of the modes which she utilised to write and express authenticity. One such mode is authenticity by characterisation. Salak describes her character, Marika, as containing a level of experience and 'worldliness', not as a Mary Sue, but as a character who contains the know-how of travel and a specific cultural and linguistic knowledge. Examples of this include her knowledge of the customs of Papua New Guinea (Salak, p. 19), her practical understanding of not getting sunburnt when she lacks sunscreen (Salak, p. 208), and her 'worldly' habits which she has picked up along her travels in Asia and Africa, such as a particular form of bowing dominant throughout the 'Far East' (Salak, p. 14). Character authenticity also exists around the protagonist of the story, such as making her guide Tobo, fully encased and separate from the culture of Marika. Tobo, as a character, exists as an antithesis to the relationship between Marika and Sebastian Gilman; instead, with Tobo, Marika engages with the other, as a form of separate authenticity that she adheres to with Sebastian. An example of this is when Marika is given Tobo's mourning necklace, as insurance for Tobo's word on getting Marika to Walwasi and Robert Lewis (Salak, p. 66) The necklace is once again brought up at the very end of the novel, in which it has taken on new meaning; Instead of being the manifestation of promise, it becomes a sign of goodwill across cultures (Salak, p. 419). How this arch of the necklace carries a form of written authenticity is related to cultural acceptance through action. This becomes a symbol

of the differences between Marika and Tobo, and the evident change thereof. This is a form of character authenticity in which they both experience a change in attitude despite a cultural divide. Tobo, in *The White Mary,* represents the other; he is the window into the world and culture of Papua New Guinea, such as when he shares insight into the customs of the country (Salak, p. 19). Consequently, creating a positive relationship between these two characters encourages the reader to accommodate this, suggesting an authentic bond between the Western and Eastern cultures. Further, as previously established, the novel is highly self-reflective, something which is scattered throughout the novel, and in which the ending carries the final moral sincerity.

Marika understands something now, and it feels like such a shock, such a blow, that she has to kneel down to catch her breath. It is this: no matter what tragedies in her life, no matter what horrors in the world no matter, even, that Lewis is never coming back—she must choose happiness for herself. She must. Or else the pain was all for nothing. (Salak, p. 415)

In this example, Marika acknowledges how the journey has failed, but she does not allow herself to reside in this train of thought. Instead, she chooses to move onward from her obsession, choosing happiness for herself, despite the horrors and tragedies which she has endured. Salak, in this sentiment, proposes an authenticity by character reflection. The journey and the development of character act as an authentic engagement with the psyche. This is once again based on the character that the readers follow and actively engage with. Therefore, all the emotion is tied to the eventual moral and sincere revelation she concludes. In the narrative analysis of *The White Mary,* it was explored how the novel shifted between past and present tense. The function could differentiate between how the novel relegates authenticity, dividing the temporal aspect of narration, by exploring the outset in which Salak relays authenticity. Salak divides the third-person narration into past and

present, and focalising various voices, Salak presents the audience with a constructed authenticity, based on the perception of narration, as well as a feeling of proposed urgency. Contrasting these timeframes, an evocation of authenticity arises, as per Calvete's proposition on urgency as authenticity (Calvete, p. 198), which further engages with the novel's focalisation. Focalising various voices provides agency to the character's authenticity. These various characters extrapolate authenticity from the consensus and reception of each other.

The authenticity Salak produces here is related to Xavier Salet's distinction of authenticity in travel writing. Salet worked with non-fictional travel writing, yet his hypothesis and analytical work function within this connotation. Salet proposed a division of authenticities. Splitting authenticity between existential and objective authenticity. The authenticity interpolated by Salak is existential in form. This is linked to the author's conventions of authenticity, which are separated from the shared understanding of authenticity. Existential authenticity is what is directly written on the page, the authenticity that the author tries to get across to the reader as their own perceived form of candid truthfulness. There are other ways in which Salak tries to convey existential authenticity, such as when she describes violence and intimacy. Reducing authenticity to these denominators focuses on the inherent approaches and viewpoints of the novel. For Salak, authenticity is inherently bound to the conventional themes of love and violence, deployed consistently throughout the novel. This was shown in the transition from chapter four to chapter five, from a description of intimacy between Sebastian and Marika to the horrors Marika experiences in the Congo in chapter five. Other examples of this include the sexual encounter Marika shares with Robert Lewis in his hut. This encounter jumps off the basis of Lewis' trauma due to torture, which he endured in East Timor, and ultimately caused erectile dysfunction (Salak, pp. 378-379). This form of intimacy, mirrored with the experience of Marika, becomes an authenticity through violence. One in which Marika and Lewis bond over using

intimacy. In this way, Salak produces an interlinking concerning the concepts to relate a level of travel, which only the most experienced travellers and adventurers in her story can relate to. Intimacy and violence structure the authenticity of the novel, while simultaneously ensuring that the plot moves forward. These markers of action are what ultimately ensure Marika's self-reflective nature.

Kira Salak's *The White Mary* comprises authenticity in several ways; intimacy, brutality, and character experience have so far been covered as integral authenticities in the novel. While these are some of the most evident forms of authenticity, they do not distinctly define themselves as a form of authenticity specifically related to the travel genre. This section covers how authenticity is reflected in the travel and culture covered in the novel. While exploring how the narrative functions in *The White Mary,* it was established that the novel treats the destinations besides Boston as an element of the unknown, places of exoticism in which exposition and travel experience slowly are revealed to the reader by the narrator and, by this extension, the thoughts and action of Marika. In doing so, Kira Salak creates a hierarchy of travel authenticity. This is related to the sentiment of David LeHardy Sweet. Sweet argued that true authenticity is devoid of the genre of travel writing. Instead, authenticity was evaluated based on cultural sites and objects. Further, he argued that the authentic travel experience was simply the facilitation of travel and the amenities and technologies which comforted the travel experience. Which then entrusted the authentic experience to the traveller, who chooses what defines authenticity (Sweet, p. 35-36). If the interpretation of how authenticity is conveyed, it is argued that the travel which exists in *The White Mary* extrapolates a deep authenticity from being devoid of common amenities and technology. Examples of this include Marika getting to Robert Lewis in Walwasi Village, desperately wanting a radio, satellite phone, or any medicines, to which none are available, this is treated with humour from Lewis, instead of acknowledgement of desperation, remarking that there are no continental breakfasts in the jungle (Salak, p. 274-276).

Another example is when Marika travels to Papua New Guinea. Marika enjoys the fact that GPS maps are incomplete and, therefore, unknown to the established world (Salak, p. 208). While these extrapolations are not linked to authenticity by cultural sites, they go against the grain of thought contested by David LeHardy Sweet. These authenticities exist inherently due to a feeling of restraint and hardship. Contrary to Sweet's thought that the mere act of travel is an authenticity. However, in defence of Sweet's argument, the thesis highlights how *The White Mary* follows older and more traditional literary tropes of fictional travel writing. Contemporary for the time of publication and narrative, the overarching plot, display of merit and themes are closely linked to an older literary convention within the genre. This is supported by how the novel treats the locations of travel. The novel engages with hardship and the unknown by providing a hero's journey to retrieve what was lost. Simultaneously, this is also where the novel places ultimate authenticity. The journey ends when Marika realises that she is not able to restore Robert Lewis' previous pathological patterns and bring him back 'home'. Marika's talks and interactions with Lewis become her traumatic salvation "... since her One Talk, Lewis, sent her demons away." (Salak, p. 400). The unburdening is the ultimate sincerity in the novel. This functions by undergoing a journey in which the protagonist travels far across her home to unburden herself from the traumas she endured from another engagement with travel. The cyclical nature and the choice of travel respond to Sweet's argument on the choice of authentic travel engagement. Ultimately, it defines how the novel constructs written authenticity, by repositioning previously known and well-defined tropes, and situating them with the woman protagonist, creating a familiar story, yet containing deviation regarding moral, the ending and the central characters. The following chapter takes a closer inspection at the authenticity, which is not directly inscribed in the novel, instead existing in a contextual and external form.

8.3 The Contextual Authenticity

The thesis has so far explored how she wants to convey authenticity as an interwoven and written element in her novel. This subchapter of analysis focuses on the contextual aspects of authenticity. These authenticates are relational, meaning that they are not evident on the page, but rather, they exist through an exposition of features around the novel. The features are linked to autobiographical and contextual understandings of the narratological compositions. One such way is to introduce and understand Kira Salak as an author. Salak is, like Marika, a traveller. Exploring her website page, www.kirasalak.com, establishes that Salak has travelled and reported on the civil war and genocide in Eastern Congo in 2003, as well as having travelled to Papua New Guinea in 1995[4]. The sentiment brought forward here is that *The White Mary* carries with it an experience and a feel for the places it describes, due to the author having been to these places, while remaining a work of fiction, not becoming an autobiography. This relates to Debbie Lisle's sentiment of elements of fact versus fiction. Returning to her argument, Lisle argued that travel narratives must contain fictionalised components and imagined truths to be elevated above the travel guidebook (Lisle, p. 30). The argument made by Lisle concerns stories which are in an otherwise seemingly 'real' world, with contained dramatic elements, to appease the conventions of the travel narrative. The argument then becomes that Salak utilises this approach, and in doing so, emulates authenticity in her writing. Due to her knowledge of these places, and the eventual horrors realised in the civil war of the Congo. Balancing her writing between the fictional and the real promotes Salak's novel as conventional fictional travel writing, bolstering her authenticity and authority on the subject. Marika and Salak even share a resemblance in their choice of career. This promotes further authenticity in the perceived

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[4] "Kira Salak won the PEN Award for journalism for her reporting on the war in Congo, and she has appeared five times in *Best American Travel Writing*. A National Geographic Emerging Explorer and contributing editor for *National Geographic Adventure* magazine, she was the first woman to traverse Papua New Guinea and the first person to kayak solo 600 miles to Timbuktu." (Salak, www.kirasalak.com)

world of Marika, a world which resembles the author of the character. While the narration is a third-person point of view, it predominantly relates to the emotions of Marika and her perceived reality.

She lay down on his sofa, hugging her legs against her. Seb hesitated, then offered her a pillow. As she took it, she noticed that it had his smell on it. Seb's unique, musky scent, which was part cologne, part something intangible. She had always loved the smell of him. It gave her chills. (Salak, p. 121).

Relating the author to the protagonist further creates a sense of authenticity. Drawing on the same sense as having travelled to the locations Salak describes in her novel, she further promotes a sense of reality by comprehending and envisioning the experience and the lived emotions of the protagonist. Salak does so by relating her career as well as her gender. On gendered authenticity, Ana Calvete argues:

Physical achievements, near-death experiences and fearlessness in the face of danger are traits that critics and the media continue to use as standards to assess the merit of travellers today, regardless of their gender. (Calvete, p. 136)

Calvete argues that traditional conventions in the genre cross any form of gender in this regard. This relates to Salak's *The White Mary*, in which Marika is positioned as an experienced character with the required know-how to survive in dangerous environments, such as carrying secret compartments in which she pockets money for eventual bribery (Salak, p. 106). While Calvete argues that the eventual merit, which is displayed in travel novels, does not reflect gender, it does pertain to a certain influence of the narrative and the eventual sincerity of the writing. What is meant by this is that, in

the case of *The White Mary,* gender does reveal itself to be a vital element in the plot structure, as well as a reflective element of the protagonist, Marika. In the novel, during a talk, a member of the audience asks Marika if she finds it hard to be a woman in her field. Marika says no, and it might even be an advantage in foreign cultures, as some do not expect much from women, and sometimes they even want to help or protect women (Salak, p. 33). Later, when Marika arrives in Walwasi village, Papua New Guinea, she is sentenced to stay in a "mary house"[5], a building for women to stay in while they menstruate, due to locals believing the blood from menstruating is dangerous. Marika retorts and feels this is a prison based on her gender as someone able to procreate (Salak, p. 350). The dichotomy between these two functions of being a woman traveller reveals an authenticity only evident due to a gendered perspective. This relates to Salak writing about what she knows and her experiences with these cultures, as well as travel in general. Furthermore, it also reveals that while the elements of danger and merit, such as Calvete described, might not carry a prospect of gender, the structure around the plot, and eventually the voice and narrative of the novel, does indeed carry a formed gendered aspect, which eventually leads to authenticities which rely on the gender of the author.

The consensus around the arguments which have been produced is that authenticities exist in a two-folded intersection. The proposed form of this is that authenticity is conveyed by internal dynamics produced by the written word in the novel. Relying on what the page describes as authentic encounters. Further, another form of authenticity exists in the contextual method. This arrangement derives another form of authenticity, one which is based on perceiving the presence of the novel, both in content as well as context. Further analysing the role of the author and the implementation of their

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[5] Mary/meri woman in Pidgin (Salak, p. 15), this also refers to the title of the novel *The White Mary,* literally translated to "the white woman".

conceptual authenticity. The following subchapter provides insight into the literary position of *The White Mary*. This is done to highlight how and what effect authenticity has in a grander scope.

8.4 Discussing the Literary Implications of The White Mary

With the unfolding of the narrative structure, as well as how the novel conveys authenticity, the time has come to distinguish how these elements affect the story and how they relate to the established narrative tropes, which were explored in the theoretical chapter of the thesis. Ana Calvete argued that postmodernist travel writing carried self-reflection, a sense of an open ending, unconventional plot patterns, and an acknowledgement of the inherent limits of the literary medium. (Calvete, p. 193-194). *The White Mary* engages and checks off some of these boxes, some of which include the novel being highly self-reflective, it has flashbacks and a temporal element in the narration; However, it does not include an open ending, instead it ends on a sweet note, in which Marika and Seb end up together. This promotes some of the conventions made by Calvete, but also disregards others.

What it does instead is, as William C. Spengemann argued, the narrative of traditional travel narratives functions as a display of merit and virtue (Spengemann, pp. 38-39), which is evident in the novel. *The White Mary* carries elements of both literary conventions while also actively engaging and portraying authenticity, as has been established. The question is, how does one define *The White Mary*; is the story a revival of the modernist approach or a post-postmodernist narrative?

To answer this, first, the thesis argues that the authenticity displayed in *The White Mary* engages with the forms aligned and conveyed by Calvete and Burton and the modernists. The lack of irony and unconventional storytelling methods suggests that it should instead be viewed as an engagement with the cliché. Not to promote a mocking effect, neither of the cultures displayed nor of the characters, but rather as a sincere engagement with an otherwise, in an academic context, outdated format.

Understanding *The White Mary,* in the context of both its time and its innovative novel, requires an engagement with understanding the tonal shift which this story marks. In the sequence on authenticity in *The White Mary*, it was argued that authenticity, indeed, was present in the novel, which means it cannot be a postmodernist product, nor could it be a product of modernism, due to the format and structure of the novel—instead, a contemporary hybrid, which discards irony for engagement, thrill, and self-reflection. *The White Mary* does not have an interest in the alienation of the reader but trades it for exoticism and othering as a means of commitment to the reader. Going back to the previous example of the overlap between chapter 4 and chapter 5, which goes from a description of intercourse to a gruesome account of the current affairs in the civil war of the Congo (Salak, pp. 83-86). This form of content could be viewed as a revision of the modernist approach. Although to be counted as such, it should also engage with travel in a more exploitative approach to travel. However, it stands to reason that how the novel constructs a narrative is closely tied to the traditional adventure novel, akin to Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. Other modern renditions of this include Jason Heaton's adventure fiction novel *Depth Charge* (2021). Which employs similar engagements with the standardisation provided by conventional narrative structures, containing an eventual goal or mission, which drives forward the plot. Furthermore, the novels are similar in their regard to author, the writer for *Depth Charge* is written by a self-described adventurer, which provides for a similar contextual authenticity, offered from real-world experience and know-how to the locations (Heaton, p. 255). Comparatively, the novels engage with a location in which the author has some distinct knowledge of; in the case of *Depth Charge,* Sri Lanka serves as the main backdrop for the fictional tale of adventure. In the case of *The White Mary*, it is Eastern Congo and Papua New Guinea.

While *The White Mary* does approach foreign cultures as an engagement with the unknown instead of a globalised monoculture, this does not match the previous renditions of travel narratives in this

aspect. While the book is related to a Western audience and refers to the locations in which Marika travels, as unknown frontiers.

> He gestures to the cave ceiling, to the painted stars. "Look at that. This place hasn't changed for a thousand years. It's the last true frontier." His eyes scan the pictographs. "This is one of the only places left where no one knows anything about the rest of the world." (Salak, p. 390).

The west-centric approach is evident in stereotypical employment. The statement comes from Robert Lewis when he decided not to return to the US. Marika opposes this standpoint and is indifferent towards his resentment towards the West (Salak, pp. 390-392). The takeaway is that while *The White Mary* entertains traditional tropes within the genre, it does so to correlate with the cliché while simultaneously providing authentic descriptions and accounts, while remaining entirely fictional. Similarly, as was provided by the review, the narrative of *The White Mary* is constructed similarly to *Heart of Darkness* (1899), written by Joseph Conrad (Kirkus Reviews). Similarly, Robert Lewis, the character, is positioned like the role of Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*, and ultimately, neither Kurtz nor Lewis returns to 'civilisation', in the case of Kurtz, he dies (Conrad, pp. 112-113). The similarity proposes an evidentiality, which is that the narrative is repurposed to provide the audience with an engaging story that reflects the genre, but not irony. According to Adam Kelly, *The White Mary* must be viewed and positioned as an engagement and referral to his concept of 'old sincerity' "as a *means* of ensuring truth to others" (Kelly, p. 199). By providing a novel, which makes use of many of the conventional narrative tropes, a revision of the concepts takes place as well; The novelty and function reside not only as a reapproach to conventional tropes but as a genre variation. Repurposing the sincerity to create a new form of sincerity, which draws on the established tropes and conventions, not barring an ironic distance, but an active appreciation for the history of the genre. However, given

the time of publishing, 2008, and the fact that it stands as a singular novel. It stands to reason that more novels must be covered to ascertain if this is a new standard within the genre or if it acts as an experimental stylistic approach to writing travel fiction. The following novel, *Heroes of the Frontier* by Dave Eggers, follows the same procedure as *The White Mary.* Dissecting and showcasing narrative, followed by an analysis of the employment of authenticity. Lastly, a discussion of how it relates to the contemporary writing tropes, as well as an evaluation of the novel's relationship with its audience. However, as it was previously related in *Structure and Methodology,* variations as to the applied analytical approaches will occur, due to the nature of how narrative analysis is conducted, and the eventual relation and positioning of the novel in a larger scope of genre conventions. Regarding the analysis of how *Heroes of* the Frontier produces authenticity, it follows the same resolution: a division into written and contextual authenticity, which is then rendered in a larger viewpoint, placing the role of authenticity. This is done to ultimately accumulate enough content as evidence, as per Krippendorf's content analysis, in which a comparison of the findings ensues.

9. Literary Analysis and Narrative: *Heroes of the Frontier*

Heroes of the Frontier, written by Dave Eggers in 2016, inspires an analytical and critical reading. This is due to the literary position of Dave Eggers, positioned as a post-postmodernist writer, engaging with modes of sincerity (Altes, p. 123). Like *The White Mary,* the novel is initially analysed using textual analysis to position the authenticity surrounding the narrative composition. In doing so, the intent is to outline the most defining features of authenticity, which are then processed in a contextual and comparative approach to understand the contemporary elements of the fictional travel novel and the cultural function of authenticity. Recalling the scope of the thesis, these qualitative investigations of the novels serve the purpose of accumulating evidence to position the current trends and literary projections within the genre.

9.1 Plot and Structure

Eggers' novel comprises an episodic composition of the plot, meaning that the structure relates to smaller, self-contained stories within the wider frame of the story, a road novel set in the Alaskan frontier. In which a mother, Josie, and her two children, Ana and Paul, travel around the state in an old and dilapidated RV, ironically named the 'Chateau'. The stories provide a plot in which these characters, Josie, Ana and Paul, act as the focalised outset, to create a cast of characters and events set in this space. The plot acts as a road novel and a travel narrative, which is established in the beginning. "Alaska was at once the same country but another country, was almost Russia, was almost oblivion…" (Eggers, p. 4). The novel's plot is an escape from the life Josie had lived in Ohio, and her children's father, Carl. Josie does not know much about Alaska, except for her estranged 'stepsister' Sam, who lives in Homer. This is when the reader meets Josie and her children at the very beginning of their journey into the perceived wilderness of Alaska. The novel, as highlighted by Pignagnoli, "Heroes of the Frontier employs generic elements typical of travel writing, such as the tourist gaze, the quest for authenticity and the presence of utopian expectations linked with the idea of discovery" (Pignagnoli, p. 69). This contemplation relates to the plot structure of the novel, which is based on a generic appeasement and eventual interlinking with the unknown. Countering this to Ana Calvete, who also wrote on wilderness travelogues.

In the travelogues under study, the quest structure is disrupted by Matthiessen, who never attains his goal (seeing the leopard), by Thubron, who must eventually re-evaluate his initial objective (locating the core of Siberia and its new faith), and by Tesson, who allegedly looks for peace and claims to have found it, but whose parodic tone may make his readers doubt this claim. (Calvete, p. 177).

In the novels which she analysed and assessed regarding plot and journey, she examines how the journey gains new directions and aims, and the eventual effect it has on the characters involved in the journey. This is regarded as a distinctly postmodern approach, which she refers to as 'deficient quests', seen as a direct opposition to the imperial travel stories, which reached the goal of the aim, providing a fulfilling plot (Calvete, pp. 176-178). Positioning this against the plot of *Heroes of the Frontier*, it is evident how the novel comprises a plot, which does carry a reflective, yet also fulfilling, end to the story. The plot ends on a decisively positive note.

> Josie found herself smiling, knowing they had done what they could with what they had, and they had found joy and purpose in every footstep. They had made hysterical music and they had faced formidable obstacles in this world and had laughed and had triumphed... (Eggers, p. 384).

The ending Eggers constructs is one in which the intention of the original journey is fulfilled, separating itself from Calvete's postmodernist conventions of refitting the original intention of the journey's aim. The journey acts as an escape from Josie's former life in Ohio, an escape filled with episodic escapades, some of which are reflected in the textual example. While the journey does experience peril, both physical and mental, and change towards deposition and outlook in the characters, it is still, fundamentally, an escape from her past guilt, job, and ex-partner. These positions are constantly chasing Josie throughout the plot, exemplified by her feelings of guilt towards the death of Jeremy, the dead soldier, which continually haunts her (Eggers, pp. 264 and 353). However, there are also very real, physical escapes distributed throughout the novel, such as Josie escaping from Sam, due to an affair after being run off the road by a truck, which leaves her hospitalised, and the hospital phones Carl, her ex-partner. This prompts Josie to hit the road. (Eggers, pp. 156-163). This escape pattern is consistent in the plot, lending to the episodic structure, further, it also reveals

how even though the novel promotes an experiential and reflective journey of the characters, the predominant escape plot acts as a constant backdrop for the events which transpire in the novel. Throughout the novel, Josie also comes to realise, that her fears, are not always correct, such as when she realises Carl is not pursuing or following her, instead it is a power company serving her (Eggers, pp. 360-361) The plot allows a narrative in which escape, confrontation and reflection are combined into an ultimately successful journey, Josie positions and reflects on this rhythm in the following passage:

That only having left could she and her children achieve something like sublimity, that without movement there is no struggle, and without struggle there is no purpose, and without purpose there is nothing at all (Eggers, p. 363)

A journey which succeeds in its original intent, highlighting how it distinguishes itself from Calvete's postmodern journey/plot structure. This deviation from postmodern tropes promotes the conceptual plot structure, which is evident in the novel. This relates to the way authenticity is utilised to create a message for the audience. However, before this argument can be explored, the thesis must introduce the narratological elements to define the full narrative and its relation to authenticity.

9.2 Narration

The basic structure of the narration is in third person; however, the story contains a limited perspective and only really highlights Josie's perspective and focalisation. This is highlighted in the exposition between Josie and the surrounding characters, as the narration positions Josie's viewpoint as the only factual account of her thoughts and emotions; the other characters' emotions and thoughts are channelled through Josie's reflection. "Cooper would not understand this. You're onto something, he might say. Or would he say that? She was probably not onto something." (Eggers, p. 352). This

mirrors a stream-of-consciousness narration, which lends itself as a narration which carries an earnest yet also subjective quality of the accounts in the novel. Moreover, it yields a sequential element, in which the narration highlights the actions as they happen, and as Josie observes them, which lends to humorous accounts and descriptions, such as when Josie is in the RV, and observes a man with a leaf-blower, the narration goes on a humorous rant detailing how a man with a leaf-blower, which she observes as jetpack, intends to "murder all quiet" and "destroy the aural plane" (Eggers, p. 143)

The narration and focalisation in the story deliver a centred perspective, in which the reader experiences the world through the eyes of Josie. This is a deviation from the approach in *The White Mary,* where the narration was also in third person, yet the focalisation was more diverse, manifesting itself in various characters such as Tobo; in this novel, it manifests itself towards Josie's disposition, promoting an authentic account of observation, viewing the world as Josie perceives it. These are two variables regarding narration and authenticity. In *Heroes of the* Frontier, authenticity arises as the reader is bonded to Josie. *The White Mary* is more experimental in this regard. This is both evidence of varied authenticities as well as contemporary literary engagements. Furthermore, the humour and sincerity relating to Josie's perspective are a different approach to the authenticity, which is subject to the larger analytical chapter, dealing with authenticity. Before this, it is vital to understand the novel's characterisation, as it also pertains to Josie and the narrative's ability to convey the authentic.

9.3 Characterisation

While the novel carries a focalisation on Josie, it positions a great plethora of different characters, positioned as part of the Alaskan plane. However, the main group consists of Paul, Ana, and Josie, who are the inhabitants of the RV, 'Chateau'. The various characters consistently carry a symbolic function, recurring in the mindset of Josie. Carl, her former husband, is characterised as the domestic trap and the unsavoury aspects of masculinity. This is best exemplified in one of the earlier descriptions of their domestic livelihood. "Carl shat all the time, too. You could count his daily shits

but why would you?" (Eggers, p. 15). Carl embodies Josie's disgruntled disposition towards domesticity and symbolically allows for an escape from the mundanity and troubles. This is seen as an escape from the contemporary middle-class; Eggers promotes a critical characterisation of this class by employing humour. On the opposing side lies the Alaskan wilderness, which is characterised by diverse character scenery and nature descriptions. This contrast, and the already highlighted escape into the wilderness, is situated as the core of the narrative. To understand how the wilderness is characterised, it is important to note how Eggers writes and incorporates nature as its characterisation. Nature acts as an emulation of Josie's psyche and characterisation, a mirror which constantly changes throughout the journey, to reflect the current state of her emotions. Exemplified by two approaches to understanding Josie's emotions and disposition towards nature against the domestic world.

If a human were ascending a mountain, and on that ascent there were storms and avalanches and bolts of lightning from angry skies, then she could accept drama, participate in drama. But suburban drama was so tiresome, so absurd on its face, that she could no longer be around anyone who thought it real or worthwhile (Eggers, p. 6)

This premise Josie conjures is then symbolically realised in the novel when a storm with lightning rushes in over a mountain ridge, which Josie and the children are hiking on, commencing a sudden escape from the incoming storm, in which lightning almost strikes them, and injuries occur, until they find a log cabin, filled with supplies and food (Eggers, pp. 369-383). When they get to the cabin, Josie acknowledges the act as a triumph in which the children and she have found a new happiness. In the case of Paul, this physically manifests in the description of his eyes, which throughout the novel are described as 'ice-priest' eyes; now having found "new and untroubled happiness" (Eggers, p. 384). This characterisation positions the characters as fulfilling their eventual goals and desires,

based on the same original intent. However, the novel also slowly reveals how some of the worst fears carried by Josie are not entirely as they seem, such as when she realises Carl is not suing her, nor how a life in Alaska, characterised by her stepsister Sam and her initially unburned and beautiful life, could be a life for Josie. This is then destroyed when Josie discovers Sam's adultery, and she decides to leave Sam and skip town (Eggers, pp. 146-151). These forms of realisation highlight how, while Josie tries to escape her past, new issues arise in new contexts, leading her and the children to the final confrontation with nature, in which they find a moment of bliss. This form of confrontation demonstrates how nature and the Alaskan character gallery act as a mirror into the psyche of Josie. Nature is, therefore, able to determine the effectual characterisation which Josie inhabits. Further, it incites multiple approaches to understanding how characterisation also promotes core narrative functions.

The sentiments which have been highlighted comprise how the narrative entails a travel story. One in which Alaska acts as a foreign entity for Josie and her children to get lost in; the episodic nature of the narration promotes a classic American road novel, drawing inspiration from similar novels, such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Hearkening into a classic condensation of an American literary tradition, following the structures of humourist author Mark Twain, with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), in which the journey acts as the central structure of the narrative, containing critical perspectives on societal issues. Like *The White Mary*, which repurposed literary conventions and plot structures from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Heroes of the Frontier* utilises and resituates conventional themes and plot structures to promote contemporary commentaries on the social and economic situation in the USA. These functions, which consist of the basic narrative structure, have promoted how the novel constructs and searches for authenticity. The following chapter analyses *Heroes of the Frontier*'s deployment of authenticity based on this narrative structure

and some of the selected base components of the novel, highlighted in the given analysis. Furthermore, this subchapter has sparked an incentive to understand the place of the novel in a cultural context. Like *The White Mary,* Eggers' novel resituates other travel narratives to place itself in the same genre and cultural sphere.

10. Engagement with the Authentic in *Heroes of the Frontier*

With the narrative components thoroughly covered through textual analysis and comparison, the analysis now applies the methodologies of contextualisation and cultural critique. This is also the chapter which more directly underscores and analyses the authentic properties of *Heroes of the Frontier*. However, the following subchapter contains a further delegation, in which the thesis separates and compares New Sincerity with authenticity. The reason is due to the nature of *Heroes of the Frontier*, which employs authenticity to appropriate the utilities of New Sincerity. This is followed by an ordinary analytical structure relating to the authenticity of the novel.

10.1 Sincerity or Authenticity: Emblematic Compositions

The following analysis differentiates and correlates the overlaps between sincerity and authenticity, utilising the already established conventions of each main term. Incorporating and using *Heroes of the Frontier* as an example of a novel that differentiates and contains each component. The purpose of establishing and distinguishing how these terms differentiate refers to the overarching argument constructed in this analysis. In short, authenticity acts as an inherent goal in writing within the scope of the travel writing genre, whereas sincerity is ordered according to the given literary function and zeitgeist. These elements are both deployed in the novel *Heroes of the Frontier,* which produces a unique effect within the genre limits. Their shared overlap is subject to analysis in the following

subchapters. To facilitate this analysis, this subchapter covers and differentiates authenticity and sincerity.

To determine the two elements, sincerity and authenticity, and their inherent positions in the novel, it is noted how these topics are assumed based on Bruce Robbins' method of historical context (Robbins, pp. 18-21). In the chapter *Scope, Delimitation and Applied Reading,* Adam Kelly distinguished his interpretation of modern sincerity from the works of Lionel Trilling *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1973), remarking how New Sincerity represented a contingent of modernism, in which words were to be taken seriously, and ensured a means of replicating truth to the audience (Kelly, p. 199). Upon further inspection of Lionel Trilling's work, it is shown that he separates sincerity and authenticity from each other. In doing so, he posits how sincerity in his time of writing acts as a former shell of its original intent and functions as an unadorned conclusion of attempt, instead of requiring active engagement and critique. Sincerity operates by anachronistic obligations, and is therefore portioned by irony, producing an oppositional effect of insincerity (Trilling, p. 6). This highlights how sincerity has become a more superficial notion, Instead, he lends support to authenticity as a dominant concurrent effect on literature during his time of writing:

The word 'authenticity' comes so readily to the tongue these days and in so many connections that it may very well resist such efforts of definition as I shall later make, but I think that for the present I can rely on its suggesting a more strenuous moral experience than 'sincerity' does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life. (Trilling, p. 11)

With Lionel Trilling's original contributions to the separation between the aspects, it is time to extrapolate how each element functions in the novel *Heroes of the Frontier*. Dave Eggers' position as a New Sincerest writer, and oppositional force to the 'fatally compromised' postmodernity (Nicol, pp.301-302), urges a contemporary reading and analysis of the novel, and its relation to sincerity. With the symposium produced by Trilling in the 70's, and the sentiments later added by Bran Nicol and Adam Kelly, it can be positioned that sincerity and authenticity are entirely different concepts, in which the goals of implementation are different from one another. Considering *Heroes of the Frontier*, it is evident how both elements co-exist as emblematic compositions in the novel. This is an example of a fictional travel story, which principally acknowledges the quest for authenticity, employing sincerity. To showcase this, the terms of analysis are established now. Understanding the novel's position only comes to fruition if the readers accept the terms put in place by the author, as Adam Kelly conditioned in his sentiment on New Sincerity (Kelly, p. 206). This is because a reading requires active commitment, instead of relying on critical literary techniques. In its place, these critique elements come from within the novel, coming from inside out, instead of outside in. Accepting the premise of authenticity and sincerity being postured for the reader, to create critique and irony, produces the ability to analyse the moral sentiment of the novel. The following analytical subchapters highlight how such 'markers of authenticity' are deployed to convey the novel's inherent sincerity and dispositions towards the reader, cultural contexts, and current archetypical arrangements.

10.2 Authenticity in Language and Humour

Heroes of the Frontier conveys sincerity as a means of establishing authenticity through humour and the language given in the novel. Dave Eggers creates a natural world in which the interactions between the cast are extrapolated by both humour as well as other essential elements of emotion.

Lending an effect of a realistic and sincere conversation. This conversational form of writing is positioned further by the third-person narration, which situates itself and limits itself to Josie, promoting an effect of first-person narration, as it can predominantly understand her disposition towards the situation. This is exemplified by Josie's involvement and sexual encounter with the war veteran Jim, in which the encounter and post-sex conversation entail both sadness and humour, which produces a sincere depiction of a sexual connection. The following analysis goes into detail with pages 261-266, with an applied focus on the narration and conversational tone. This is done to condense and exemplify how sincerity is used to cultivate written internal authenticity. Leading the beginning of chapter XVI, it begins like many others, with Josie driving the Chateau, reminiscing on what had occurred between her and Jim. This leads into sex, as well as the conversation she has with him. "What kind of person takes it from behind in a trailer park, with her children sleeping mere feet away?" (Eggers, p. 261). The question refers to Josie's shortcomings as a mother and serves as the entry to the following story of Jim and Josie's interaction. The children have been put to sleep, and Jim and Josie converse briefly before Jim "began to rub his hardness against Josie's waist" (Eggers, p. 262). This interaction is exposed against Josie's earlier interactions at a wedding; the thought process goes into the propriety of the people at the wedding, against what Jim and Josie are up to, at the given moment, to which Josie exclaims.

But not Josie. Josie, at that moment, thought it was wonderful. Wonderful that this strange man, in his late fifties, was rubbing his hard penis against her, in the Chateau, in Bumblefuck, Alaska. She found it wonderfully spontaneous and alluring, and even had a momentary conflation, imagining it was burly Smokey the Bear, not Jim, behind her. (Eggers, p. 263)

The humorous correlation between the mascot of the American wilderness and Jim creates an image of Josie, figuratively having a sexual encounter with the Alaskan wilderness; referring to their current location as 'Bumblefuck', underlines how far lost Josie have come from her life in Ohio. In the context of a travel narrative, this is an engagement with the other. As established, Alaska is treated by the novel as "another country" (Eggers, p. 4). Creating a sensation of figuratively having a sexual encounter with the wilderness situates a level of sincerity, encapsulated by the humour and narration of the situation, to promote a verifiable element of authenticity. The sincerity arises in humour and absurdity to engage with an established function of authenticity in travel novels. Like *The White Mary, Heroes of the Frontier* also engages with the other, to create a sense of authenticity in the travel. In the case of Eggers' novel, the other is Jim, and his personification and representation of the Alaskan people and the Wilderness. This is further indicated by Paul capturing his mother and Jim in the act. This leads Josie and Jim to stop, instead drinking and talking about past sorrows, in Josie's case, Jeremy, the dead soldier whose death she feels responsible for. This conversation bears a tone of social critique, borne by the themes and arguments given.

How funny! Coast to coast, most Americans would not be sure that war was still on, that we were still there, that men and women like Jeremy were fighting and dying, that Afghans were still fighting and dying, too. Wouldn't an Afghan, and countless future generations, find that very funny in some way? (Eggers, p. 266)

The apparent transition from a sexual encounter added to the ironic postulation, leading into a contemporary social and cultural critique, showcases how Eggers postures sincerity to create a critique of societal standards. This is embedded in and transmuted by authentic depictions. Returning to Trilling's exhibition of authenticity as a "more exigent conception of the self and of what being

true to it consists in" (Trilling, p. 11). This means that authenticity, at the time of Trilling, was a more valuable construct than sincerity. However, the argument here is that Eggers makes the two concepts instrumental towards each other. In *Heroes of the Frontier,* authenticity and sincerity are structured around the same language constructions to produce cultural critique, which is inherent to the novel. Argumentatively, authenticity intrinsically separates itself from sincerity, in the narrative plot structure; sincerity exists, as showcased in the analysis, in the narration and language. Combining these elements is what creates a foundation for cultural critique. Based on Adam Kelly's basis of sincere readings that require engagement and acceptance, skipping the critical and ironical separation between the reader and author (Kelly, p. 206).

10.3 Discussing the Cultural Critique and Authenticity in Heroes of the Frontier

To reiterate the current analytical component of *Heroes of the Frontier*, the novel has been shown to employ sincerity to interconnect an internal authenticity, which fundamentally reapproaches travel tropes and techniques, as part of the sincerest appeal. This creates an opportunity to create a contemporary cultural critique, exemplified by the analysis of chapter XVI. This further showcases how authenticity is a consistent appeal of fictional travel writing, as it has been highlighted to exist in both *The White Mary* and *Heroes of the Frontier*. Furthermore, both novels resituate older conventions of the genre. The aim and approach vary from the novels, but equal for both is their discard of postmodern irony. *The White Mary* swaps it for modernist ideals, whereas *Heroes of the Frontier* exchanges it for New Sincerity. While similar, the main difference lies in the language and plot structure. The former analysis of both novels has showcased how dissimilar the novels are in unfolding the story, yet they also meet each other on certain points, such as the protagonists succeeding in their reflective quest. Furthermore, both novels carry inspiration from earlier genre conventions, such as the episodic structure and road-like style of *Heroes of the Frontier* and *The*

White Mary, mirroring the journey of *Heart of Darkness.* While the novels are similar and dissimilar in a variety of aspects, the main component is their search for authenticity; in their narrative, it is evident how the story's primary goal is to provide an authentic and believable account. It is not relevant if they succeed in this search, but it is relevant to underline how vital this element is in the genre of fictional travel writing. Their quest for authenticity serves a twofold purpose; in the view of a New Sincerest, it commits to delivering an engaging story for the audience. However, as seen with *Heroes of the Frontier,* it also serves the purpose of providing a cultural and societal critique. The tool of delivery is the authentic feel of the novel. In this regard, authenticity is a necessary tool to deliver the message that Eggers intends to communicate to his readership.

11. Literary Analysis and Narrative: *Memorial*

Memorial, written by Bryan Washington, is the final novel that the thesis assesses as a travel narrative. However, while most of the story occurs in the protagonists' hometown of Houston, Texas, the other section covers Mike's travel to Osaka. On the surface, this section of the novel is what contains the physical travel. The narrative includes more ways you can decode the story as a travel account. This chapter of the thesis covers the elements of the narrative: how the narrative of *Memorial* constitutes a contemporary travel account, as well as illustrating the reason why the narrative is conducted in the way the novel constructs it, to facilitate how the narrative relates to authenticity.

11.1 Plot and Structure

As showcased with the previous analysis*,* fictional travel narratives employ the hero's journey, characterisation, and changes in narration to convey plot and narrative, which proposes a change in the protagonist's outlook or mindset, based on events which transpire throughout the journey. This was evident in both *The White Mary* as well as *Heroes of the Frontier.* On the other hand, *Memorial*

also contains a reflection and changed outlooks from the perspective of protagonists, but it does not act as a conventional hero's journey narrative, and in this, it deviates from the previously analysed novels. Instead, the plot structures itself around three main sections, in which the narrator and point of view change between Benson and Mike. The first section covers Benson. He is the first narrator with whom the audience gets to establish a connection. However, a disruption occurs when this POV changes to that of Mike, his partner, who travelled to Osaka. The couple's emotions and interactions are flipped and positioned to deter the audience's allegiance, pushing them in a different direction. This reflection is mirrored in their separate approaches to reminiscing about how their initial dating life had seemed to each of them. These interactions promote a varied approach to understanding why both protagonists have felt a sense of separation. (Washington, p.6 and p.125). Moreover, the plot structure offers a dislocated timeframe, like the approach highlighted in *The White Mary,* in which the story does not unfold in a strict chronological order. Furthermore, these insertions, or flashbacks, to earlier events in their relationship are integrated as part of the plot structure of the novel and are seen consistently throughout the unfolding of the plot, as backhanded inclinations as to why the characters think and act the way they do. An example of this is the intersection of Benson, discovering pornography on Mike's phone, with them arriving back at their apartment, with Mike's mother Mitsuko (Washington, p. 13). The plot unfolds as an eventual compromise and concord between the various strained relationships which are explored in the novel, related to familial estrangement, or love entanglements, covering a dominant position, and eventual acceptance; to which the relationship which centres the plot; Mike and Benson, ends with a departure, yet also distinctly positive direction for the future, in which Mike wants to return to Osaka, and Benson stays in Houston, however, Mitsuko assures them that they should stay in each other's lives (Washington, pp. 295-300). The uncertainty mirrors *Heroes of the Frontier's* ending, which ended with an uncertain but bright future for Josie and her children. In the future, Benson and Mike's futures are also uncertain, but throughout

the novel, they have gained a positive disposition towards their future and themselves. With *Heroes of the Frontier*, this was proposed as an engagement with New Sincerity, and thus, an encounter in which authenticity comprises a device to convey a new modus operandi. This applies here as well. Later, the analysis will examine how these functions are practised. The following subchapter analyses how the narration differs from the previously analysed novels, creating a variation.

11.2 Narration

On a basic level, the novel offers a first-person narration, in which the focalisation centres on the given narrational voice, which initially is positioned as Benson, then Mike and then back to Benson again. The notion of the varied offering, on insight into why the relationship has gone awry, becomes a way in which the narration can extrapolate further interjections of varied thought constituents. That is to say, the wider frame of the plot and story can unfold to a more varied degree, while also retaining a select form of reflection. A variation in the voice of the narrative is remarked by Edwards and Graulund as follows:

> Diverse narrative voices and shifts in register produce polyphonic travel histories that move from memory and personal impressions to historical accounts, tales and folklore, mythologies, literary texts, other travel narratives. (Edwards & Graulund, p.196).

Washington's change in narration offers a further shift in narrative, due to the backdrop and eventual travel account, which transpires during Mike's rendition of the story. While Mike's story cements the story as a travel narrative, it highlights how the story offers a travel narrative. How *Memorial* positions itself as a travel narrative is based on the same structure. While on a surface level, devoid of a hero's journey, it is contained within the structure. The change in POV, as well as the physical

change in location, accounts for an approach to the structure of home-away-home. Mike's accounts in Osaka, in the middle of the novel, are how the novel offers a travel narrative. Further, his section figures as the alienation of the audience, providing a clash or discomfort in the change of allegiance, which embodies the hero's journey in the outward section of the circle. Eventually, the story returns to Benson, where the story ends with Mitsuko's departure, returning to Japan, and Mike's return home (Washington, p. 303). Therefore, the argument is that the main narrative structure is, in fact, reminiscent of a hero's journey, proving the story to be a travel account, with a contemporary component intertwined in the composition. This is also where authenticity arises in the form of narration, through modernisation, and experimentation. Producing a 'polyphonic' travel narrative, by which authenticity is remedied by incorporating multiple voices, and the memoir-like structure. The nature of this contemporary approach resides in the story's thematic approach to kinship and the perspective of our actions (Ettensohn, p. 156). The following subchapter provides a characterisation, which produces insight into how Washington positions character and kinship, and the authentic pertinences apparent with this stratum.

11.3 Characterisation

While *Memorial* acts as a non-traditional rendition of a travel account, the narrative centres around people's connections to one another and the development of new ones. This thematic approach incentivises a further understanding of how travel narratives, in a broad scope, have handled plots relating to relationships and romance. In *The White Mary*, a triad of intimacy and affection had taken hold for the protagonist, Marika. In here, Marika struggled between her reality and the perceived idolisation of Robert Lewis; ultimately, her journey's path led her back to Sebastian (Salak, pp. 412-413). Kira Salak's construction of a relationship differs from Bryan Washington's approach. Washington constructs a relationship between Benson and Mike, in which the audience is actively

engaged in the 'conflict', encouraged to choose a side, due to a shift in narration. While the story structures itself around the relationship between Mike and Benson, it also pertains to a practice of reminiscence and personal context that forms their bond. For instance, this extends into the photos which Benson and Mike send to each other, while Mike is in Japan, living with his father Eiju, and Benson is in Houston with Mitsuko. These photos are contextually related to the following story of Benson and Mike's relationship, especially of times of distress, such as when Eiju and Mike have a physical bout, due to Mike's sexual orientation, and the time when Mike considered breaking up with Benson (Washington, pp. 176-177 and pp. 228-230). This contextual reflection between the protagonists and their relationship is mirrored in these photos. While they carry the same themes, they often carry dissonance or harmony based on the flow of the story behind it. That is to say, the photos embody the emotions at stake in their relationship, and therefore, they contain a key to understanding the narrative. Furthermore, the photos are taken in either Japan or Houston, promoting the physical as well as existential distance, which has taken hold of them. The attachment of photographs acts as a continual clarification of the space and distance which exists between the plot's protagonists, as well as an update on their well-being, given their current situation. The final photo attached in the novel is a singular photo, as opposed to the former examples of two photographs. Benson shares the following words on the attached photo:

> And there's a message from Mike: a series of photos. He must've taken them when I wasn't looking. The first one is of me and his mother. And then there's one of just me. And then there's one of our front porch. And then there's one of my butt, filtered and expanded. And there's one of Mike, smiling into the camera. But it's a real smile. And that's the one I know I'll remember. (Washington, p. 302).

The final photo series positions a couple of different elements of the narrative. Formally, it proceeds to illustrate how they have once again returned to the relationship, fuelled with new perspectives as well as a return to kinship and intimacy. Attaching a single photo, instead of the former two, promotes the idea that they have once again united. The cited quote also leaves the impression that the photos comprise the unification, as well as the introduction of new relationships. However, the description, along with the photo, also portrays how Washington works kinship and the foundations for new relationships into the novel. Aside from Mike's travel to Japan, there is Benson's initially strained living situation with Mitsuko, Mike's Japanese mother. Benson's interaction with Mitsuko serves as a cultural clash in the novel, as well as an interaction with the foreign. The argument as to how it can be seen when the two characters interact with one another, initially, Benson and Mitsuko clash, both based on language barriers, as well as a cultural divide, which causes a great deal of stress for Benson, which also seems to be caused by Mitsuko's inability to fully comprehend her son's homosexuality (Washington, p.22-26). One way in which the narrative appropriates the connection between its characters is through food, which also immediately begins to form a bond between Mitsuko and Benson. Initial signs play into this when Benson describes his appreciation of the omelette, which she cooks for him (Washington, p. 27). This eventually leads to a bonding over food and sharing of personal anecdotes and motives (Washington, p. 58). The food becomes the silent intimacy between the two, which promotes a relation, which has not yet fully matured. Authenticity as a written element arises here, as it relies on an apparent human condition and our disposition towards liking food. The novel frequently brings up food, in moments of bonding and distraught, positioning itself between kinship and the authentic condition of life. Examples include when Mitsuko suggest to Benson that he should rekindle with Mike, while eating an omelette (Washington, p.281) and when Benson returns from a wedding, to find Mitsuko distraught over her ex-husband's death (Washington, p. 113-114). The bonding between Mitsuko and Benson is cemented towards the end of the novel to when Mitsuko

talks about Benson, saying, "Well, says Mitsuko, pointing at me, you did all right with this one. He took care of me, she says." (Washington, p. 273). The narrative disposition, ingrained in the extension between Benson and Mitsuko, acts as a cultural extension, in which a bond across identity and culture is formed. Allowing for intimacy, explored through acts and food, proves how a travel narrative is integral to understanding the positioning of Bryan Washington's *Memorial.* Kinship and characterisation are, by this definition, the very core of the authentic portrayal, *Memorial* wishes to conduct.

While the structuring of the narrative has been conducted, it allows the thesis to explore how *Memorial* produces authenticity and sincerity, and to what effect. The narrative has showcased how the novel is inherently interested in the boundaries between culture, identity, and intimacy. These aspects are interesting in the light of an analysis of the respective authenticities, which encompass the novel. It is relevant to analyse how authenticity is portrayed in *Memorial* and establish if it draws on contemporary or earlier literary writing tropes in the genre.

12. Engagement with the Authentic in Memorial

As previously conducted and analysed with *Heroes of the Frontier* and *The White Mary,* Washington's *Memorial* is too subject for a written and contextual analysis of authenticity. The ongoing work ensures a fair evaluation, in which the novels all face similar treatment of their engagement with the authentic. Furthermore, producing a focus on both written as well as contextual authenticity facilitates an insight as to whether the author intends their portrayal of an authentic travel experience. Gaining this knowledge produces an insight into the wider ramifications of why authenticity is important regarding travel writing.

12.1 Bryan Washington's Kinship and Exposition: Core Authenticity

As highlighted from the narrative analysis, *Memorial* produces a story which represents a rekindling of old bonds, as well as new, unexpected bonds forming. The thematic approach in the novel minds a sincerity and authenticity in the relationship which the novel portrays. The relationship becomes a representation of the emotional authenticity expressed. This subchapter expands on how *Memorial* deals with the relationship, as an expression of sincerity, both residually as well as an egotistical manifestation.

To begin this exploration of Washington's amalgamation of relationships, it is important to underline that this includes both romantic relationships, as well as friendships, kinships, familial relations, and any other form of relation. Washington promotes the authentic relationship by focusing on how acts of love, such as making food, promote the notion of a bond forming. Throughout the novel, Benson underlines how Mike makes food for Benson, as well as Mitsuko and Benson, eventually promoting a bond between them by sharing their passion for good food, which further works by having much of the exposition for Benson's plotline be centred around Mitsuko making food for Benson, even when he uncertain of his relationship with Mike, or being emotionally involved with another person (Washington, pp. 82-83). The relationship works as a manifestation of an authentic interaction, inherently because Mitsuko and Benson are portrayed as opposites. The eventual and gradual evolution of their affection towards one another centres on the idea of an unlikely duo while constructing a plausible narrative. On the concept of plausible narratives in contemporary novels, Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund propose that a modern audience still desires an effect of authenticity in the travel narrative (Edwards & Graulund, p. 60). Washington constructs a plausible relationship in Mike and Benson by illustrating a two-fold going-over of how their respective unfaithfulness comes to be, and the eventual reconciliation, which they share. In this, he relies on the

modern audience to engage with the dichotomy, which forms itself around the narrative, and the perpetual shift in the readers' allegiance. How Bryan Washington forms and portrays authenticity, through understanding the inner variables of a relationship, relies on both the perspectives of the protagonists. The shift in locus exists as a grand shift between Mike and Benson. However, the narrative constantly brings up small anecdotes, which revolve around the reason why the relationship has gone awry, signified either by "…" or by the passing of a chapter, which can be viewed as the passing of days (Washington, pp. 95-102). Washington's use of a constant shift in temporal understanding, as well as the employment of multiple perspectives, not only signifies a change in the traditional travel narrative, but it also promotes a sense of authenticity, which relies on the audience. Employing the audience as a main evaluator of authenticity, composition by the novel itself, promotes the idea which Edwards and Graulund highlighted: A modern travel novel relies on the sophistication of the contemporary reader; in that they do not anticipate an exact representation of truth (Edwards & Graulund, p. 61). The authenticity of the relationship is not based on the eventual reality, or the truthful account, or practice; instead, it relies on the emotions which each party endure. Washington realises this and utilises this as an exercise in empathy.

Washington produces authenticity based on the subjective emotions of his protagonists, but he also constructs authenticity based on engagement with the oppositional structuring. The following analysis illustrates how Washington produces a travel novel, in which the focus does not pertain to travel, but rather the effect travel has on affected characters in the travel journey.

12.2 Backdrop Exposition: Memorial, A Travel Novel?

In the theory, it was highlighted how Percy G. Adams had argued that the crux of any travel narrative relied on the evident geographical shift, which had to occur, for one to define the narrative as inherently travel (Adams, pp. 162-163). While Washington's *Memorial,* does inherently contain a

removal from the given home of both protagonists, it only allows Mike to return to his father in Japan, while Benson stays in their Houston home with Mitsuko's mother. When exploring the narrative disposition of the novel, it was underlined how the novel constructs an elusive model of the hero's journey, in which the eventual shift to Mike's point of view causes a similarity to the 'outward' aspect of the hero's journey model. This raises the question of whether *Memorial* produces a proper travel narrative, due to the travel only transpiring for one of the protagonists, evidently, the character with the least amount of focalisation. To answer this, one should turn to Debbie Lisle's interpretation of how travel narratives are concerned with a form of norm deviation or departure (Lisle, p. 40). Mike's travel perspective is positioned against Benson's angles, creating ample ability to highlight opposing perspectives. A great deal of norm departure transpires for both characters, Benson with her living situation with Mike's mother Mitsuko, and Mike dealing with his father's passing, and inheriting his bar (Washington, pp. 246 and 258). This evidence, the geographical shift, the norm departure, and the convoluted approach to a hero's journey all refute the idea that the novel is not a travel narrative at its core. Conversely, the cultural clashes and the eventual travel serve only as a backdrop to a narrative in which the characters and their emotions are at the forefront. The core of the narrative is not travel. Instead, it functions as a narrative in which untimely travel causes an effect on the people around you. In this specific case, Mike's travel to Osaka causes a lot of negative implications for both himself as well as his relationships. Benson must deal with Mitsuko, who was left behind by her son. Furthermore, both Benson and Mike have had infidelity outside of their relationship. Eiju, Mike's father, has a physical altercation with Mike, following his realisation of his sexual orientation (Washington, pp. 13, 256, and 175). The intention of the narrative causes an opposition, in which the reflective sentiments are caused by travel, yet from a distinctly contrasting outset. Instead of a protagonist reaching a new alignment, because of a journey, in *Memorial,* the protagonists gain new associations and reflections, despite having an initial negative effect. This form of opposed

association positions *Memorial* as an anti-travel novel. The denominator is not to be seen as *Memorial* being anti-cultural; rather, it positions itself as a contemporary narrative, which opposes the traditional tropes of the genre, by constructing a new account of the effects of travel. In turn, forming and conveying authenticity, based on the temporality and relatability created from probability and innovation. Demonstrating why *Memorial* should not be viewed or analysed as a traditional travel narrative. The authenticity, which can be derived from this experience, comes from the characters affected by the travel, both positively and negatively. Therefore, authenticity is also in the light of *Memorial*, achieved by exploring the emotions which surround travel, instead of being directly affected by accomplished enlightenment, through a travel journey; instead, the enlightenment stems from the negative effects, and eventual processing of these elements, to achieve a new viewpoint. Furthermore, authenticity can be viewed considering Bruce Robbins' approach to contextual methodology. Robbins highlighted how contextual analysis can provide insight into the historical narrative surrounding a cultural artefact (Robbins, pp. 19-21). In this context, it is important to note how the novel emphasises kinship and relational emotions while depicting travel as a negative effect. The contextual analysis that can be established resides in the representation and cultural involvement that the novel provides. The following subchapter explores how Bryan Washington engages with culture and representation to establish authenticity.

12.3 Authenticity in Culture and Context

The following subchapter works within the confines of *Memorial'*s cultural placement. It is therefore an approach to what the thesis has referred to as contextual authenticity. Moreover, it also functions as an analysis of the contemporary value of the novel. The following analysis proposes a temporal aspect in understanding the nature of authenticity. An argument, which is further developed in the coming collective evaluation of the state of the genre, and its connection to authenticity.

Washington has referred to *Memorial as* a "gay slacker dramedy" (qtd. by Canfield). When Washington refers to his work in such a way, he undermines the residual value of the novel concerning authenticity and its cultural position. Importantly, the position should not be displaced by unjust interpretation. *Memorial* can best be defined by appropriating Laura Saxton's argument, in which she said authentic narratives do not have to be accurate or plausible, but rather they must feel authentic (Saxton, p. 128). Saxton's position on the matter works within the confines of *Memorial.* Washington creates a contextual authenticity by defining his novel, the undermining, which lends eventual agency to the novel's cultural position. The novel offers an authentic account of a broken homosexual relationship, plastered in humour as well as drama, thus fulfilling Washington's interpretation. The former subchapter, *Backdrop Exposition: Memorial, A Travel Novel?* dealt with the interwoven and convoluted travel narrative present in the novel, as a means of authentically displaying a contemporary rendition and basis for showcasing a multifaceted effect of travel. Similarly, Washington's exposition of Japan does not have to be accurate, but the characters placed in the situation must be authentic to the theme and plot of the novel. Concerning this reflection, it is vital to confer with Derek Ettensohn's reflections on *Memorial* and the contemporary queer novel, as was originally highlighted in the literature review. The work also reflects the cultural position of the novel; Ettensohn argues that a current contextual reading implies that social, economic, and political powers shape and alter perspectives on care and relationality. Novels such as *Memorial* emphasise commitments of kinship to oppose the current flow of change, addressed and viewed as a contemporary crisis (Ettensohn, pp. 162-163). The notion Ettensohn provides is that the cultural position of *Memorial* acts as a counter-novel to the current political and social viewpoints, on a global scale. Additionally, Ettensohn addresses the contemporary aspect of *Memorial*. This relates to Saxton's notion of authenticity. She argued that it did not matter if a portrayal was accurate, instead,

it mattered if the audience deemed a production authentic. Furthermore, she presented the idea of authenticity relying on intertextuality, culture, and subjectivity to establish societally perceived authenticity (Saxton, pp.128-129). The line on which the analysis and argument rely is the concentrated effort of providing a space in which the dominant streams and trends are dismissed or countered. The question then becomes whether authenticity arises from a notion of disapproval towards the cultural shift. Saxton argued that authenticity is decided by a societal conception, whereas Ettensohn accounts for *Memorial* as opposing these mainstream attentions. This divide is the crux of the inherent cultural critique. As Francis Mulhern argued, a critique positions itself to understand the current zeitgeist, instead of ordering the value of a cultural product (Mulhern & Collini, p. 34). The three degrees of understanding the cultural position of *Memorial* and the given authenticity, which resides within, are best defined as a 'temporal authenticity'. By understanding the novel's surrounding historical narrative, a disposition towards the current and contemporary functions acts as engagement with the authentic. In the case of *Memorial,* an authenticity arises from the deciphered stance of Ettensohn. The act of cultural critique can be applied to novels, as well as arise from within the novel, in which Bryan Washington produces a cultural critique by engaging with forms of kinship and positive conclusions to relationships. The temporal authenticity is caused by relating to the current societal position. Washington further engages with his audience by writing a narrative which instead produces two points of focalisation. The authentic is the diverse opinions and perspectives. Which forms a position in which the audience, as per Saxton, can deem the novel as authentic. In part due to the structure, as well as the way cultural stance is reflected in the narrative.

 With *Memorial,* the thesis further promotes a differentiation between the authentic and the sincere, as the work produces a clear distinction between elements of sincerity, contrasted to the authentic positions, which have already been covered in the thesis. The following subchapter defines how

Washington's *Memorial* Station is situated within the boundaries of New Sincerity and further, how it separates itself from the previous travel narratives covered. The following subchapter explores and analyses literary conventions, as well as relates the novel to the features of New Sincerity. Assisting the thesis to define the current trends regarding authenticity in the narrative of travel accounts.

12.4 Discussion of the Interpersonal Sincerity in Memorial

The analysis has displayed and investigated the narrative structure of *Memorial,* as well as the internal and external functions of authenticity in the novel. The determinations have found *Memorial* to produce a travel narrative, which counters the established conventions within the genre. By reframing the narrative structure and reappropriating a hero's journey, to disrupt the reader's internal alignments and biases. In doing so, Washington produces a novel that counters the current political and social positions, establishing authenticity by invoking the current cultural climate, in a temporal consideration. The result is thus a novel which invokes authenticity by engagement with culture and societal values regarding kinship and intimacy. By not directly taking a stance on the relationship, *Memorial* creates a space of inclusivity, diversity, and representation, in the form of an atypical travel narrative, in which travel does not have a dominant role, but is promoted to develop the plot and narrative. The effect of this position is a sincere engagement with the interpersonal. By allowing all perspectives to embed themselves in the audience, Washington creates a sincere account of the interpersonal relations. The considered narrative form is measured as a new contemporary approach to writing travel. The deafening absence of irony and repositioned romantic plot structure conjectures a removal, or decentralisation, from the postmodernist conventions in the travel narrative. Consulting Adam Kelly, it aligns with his modus operandi of New Sincerity, not establishing new conventions, but instead acting as a 'return to form', drawing agency from the connection between author and reader, by not actively trying to alienate the narrative (Kelly, p. 200). Furthermore, Kelly retorts that literary texts are not proposed from a single literary concept, instead, it is contingent on the emotional

response, and the novel proposes to create this relational bond between author and audience (Kelly, p. 206). Returning this to *Memorial,* it has been considered a monumental function, how the novel constructs empathy for the reader, regarding the relationship between Mike and Benson. It is therefore considered part of the new literary modus operandi within fictional travel writing. Washington's novel acts as an engagement with the cultural conflict, in which its stance on empathy and sincerity produces an authentic narrative.

Following this thesis's alignment of the concepts of narrative and authenticity, bound in concept within the fictional travel genre, the analysis of *Memorial* has further showcased this. The constructed authenticity, which has been highlighted in the novel, does not only rely on physical perils to "assess the merit of travellers today" (Calvete, p. 136), nor does it construct a function in which travel is used as a means of engagement with the 'experiential centre' (Spengemann, pp. 38-39). Instead, *Memorial* relies on an authentic narrative, in which the characters' actions and emotions are lent support and agency by exposition and constant re-evaluation. The narrative consequently functions as an engagement with the authentic and the sincere. The novel has a focalised interest in showcasing the characters' responses and emotions, to create a sincere account of relationships. By structuring the novel as a repurposed hero's journey, it simulates a travel narrative, in which the setting only acts as a setting to push the narrative in certain directions. It does not have a focalised interest in highlighting Osaka and the culture as a physical representation, instead, it offers Mitsuko, the acerbic mother, as a representation of humanised cultural exchange. In doing so, it emphasises how the travel does not rely on physical or locational markers of authenticity, forced by self-evaluated principles; instead, authenticity arises from the human exchanges which are presented in the novel, which in turn, creates an opportunity to extend the cultural critique within the story.

New Sincerity opposes the established methods of the postmodernist approach to travel writing authenticity, which so far, has been highlighted in the three selected novels of the thesis. Each analysis has amassed unique insight regarding the fictional travel writing narrative and how it conveys authenticity based on various factors. The following chapter evaluates and compares the three novels as a means of identifying similar and dissimilar attributes, with an inherent focus on their engagement with authentic functions, and how it relates to the contemporary modus operandi. This establishes a unified consensus on the state of authenticity as a product of the genre.

13. Accumulation and Assessment

This chapter accumulates and assesses the separate novels' shared contribution to understanding the function of authenticity, as well as collecting the knowledge on the overlaps that have occurred in their shared narrative and genre function. The intention is to conduct a critical approach to the analysis, as well as re-evaluate the interpretations which have occurred. In doing so, the thesis amasses a more justified and appropriate detailing of the novel's content. In terms, this is the amalgamation of Krippendorf's Content Analysis.

Considering the three covered novels, it is prominent how each of them distinctly fits into the overall genre definition. While the narrative and plot structure of the novels are widely different, the reason they have been lumped together is because of their connection to travel. The main element of positioning one or more characters outside of their defined home, in the case of *The White Mary* Marika in Papua New Guinea, *Heroes of the Frontier* with the family in Alaska, and for *Memorial,* Mike in Osaka, Japan. Their main theme and plots are widely different, and they each carry differing approaches to cultural critique and authenticity. However, that is a further element of their respective likeness, a search and conveyance of authenticity. In the case of Kira Salak's *The White Mary,*

authenticity is emphasised in what the thesis has referred to as 'character authenticity', emphasising how Marika Vecera, the protagonist, is knowledgeable and a seasoned traveller, mirroring the author to some extent. This form of authenticity conveys a female perspective on travel, in which the protagonist is shown to be able, equal to the men of similar novels. Furthermore, the narrative mirrors earlier travel novels, underlining how this is an engagement with the genre, as well as a female perspective, in which authenticity is used to communicate these principles. As for *Heroes of the Frontier*, authenticity is distinctly modified by the emergence of sincerity, which stems from the language and narration of the novel. This authenticity is used to construct a narrative in which the goals of the characters are achieved, without too much change in the original perspective of these characters; yes, they do experience reflective changes, but their ambitions remain the same. Josie succeeds in securing safety and happiness for her children while simultaneously escaping her past sorrows. The story at play here further incentivises an engagement with plot tropes, such as the road-novel structure. The final product and the authenticity are used to create a social critique, relating to national issues. Finally, Bryan Washington's *Memorial* also distinguishes itself by creating a narrative in which relationships are central. In this, authenticity arises from the relationships, structured by the novel's focalisation; not lending agency to either perspective of Benson or Mike, instead, relying on the reader to evaluate the relationship. This, like *Heroes of the Frontier*, also inherently contains a cultural critique of issues relating to race, sexuality and gender. It can be promoted, how each novel has deployed authenticity, as a means of situation themselves concerning the contemporary zeitgeist, relating the novels to social, political, and cultural issues. Furthermore, each novel contains an inherent focus on relationships and matters of love and attraction. Entailing another trope of the current state of the genre, love and affection are used as a marker of authenticity.

Situationally, it is argued that each novel has been analysed to collect data for a content analysis, as well as distinctly applying New Sincerity readings. This can indicate a 'forced' perspective. To this effect, it must be promoted how the similarities in the novels, as well as the cultural critique contained in the novels, are factually evident; the contemporary modus operandi, which the thesis's analysis has highlighted, is inherently linked to the investigations of previous studies. These studies have utilised other methodologies and arrived at the conclusion that the travel narrative was still firmly placed within a postmodern critical outlook (Calvete, p. 285), other studies, have highlighted how travel narratives, contained a modernist story structure, but dominated by a postmodern experimental style of narrative (Burton, p. 78). Their methods and chosen subjects of analysis propose that the current contemporary approach still contains a postmodern outlook. However, this thesis has deduced and discussed how authenticity interplays with the given conditions to produce a cultural critique. The manner of approach conducted by the novels, separate from the given conventions of postmodernity, due to the interconnectivity with modern ideals, is most like Stacy Burton's findings. Postmodern experimentation does take place in the novels, yet the ideals and contents within these novels are not linked to postmodern ideals. To account for Stacy Burton's disposition towards the state of travel writing literature. The analysis in the thesis agrees with Burton in that it is correct how travel narratives tend to repurpose modernist tropes. However, the contemporary novels, which the thesis analysed, carry messages and morals centring on hope, enlightenment, and new beginnings. Far removed from the original conventions and intentions of the tropes. These reasons provide a new inclination of the current state of fictional travel novels; The readings have relied on a New Sincerest perspective and content methodology. Providing a qualitative analysis. Further research on the subject could verify the findings of the thesis This form of analysis has provided insight and discussion on the relative state of the genre. Furthermore, it has offered a new method of approach and an inclination for further research; The chosen novels lend and reintroduce older genre tropes, to create new and

sincere messages, relating to contemporary culture and zeitgeist. In this affectation, an engagement with the new reconditions the old genre structures. This reconfirms the position of travel writing as an ever-evolving critical and self-reflective entity, but paradoxically, stagnant towards the condition of literature, providing authenticity based on elements such as probability, familiarity, and the human condition.

The existence of travel literature contains an inherent focalisation on creating authenticity, to convey a cultural critique; however, the order and approach are conditioned by the current fluctuation of style, relating to a broader societal standard. This sets the boundaries for current themes of critique, as well as how the wider public perceives authenticity. In this way, the literary conventions and capability of the genre have remained the same, but the order and structure follow new standards. The following chapter presents a conclusion of the conducted research. Reaching a unified consensus on the analytical components and results.

14. Conclusion

The thesis sought to remedy and define answers for the combined research question:

1. How does fictional travel writing produce a sense of authenticity?
2. Does authenticity carry a contemporary influence, and is it related to social and cultural critique in travel writing?

To answer this question, the thesis has presented an expanded body of theory, namely of subjects related to literary authenticity, expanding the perspectives on authenticity concerning narrative, the wider ramifications and situational positions of the travel writing genre concerning literary

movements as modernity and postmodernity, as well as expansion into wider academic discussions and concerns as to the position of authenticity and the travel writing genre. The thesis presented a dissertation by Ana Calvete, *Conceptions of Authenticity in Contemporary Travel Writing: From Siberian Nature to Hyperreal America* (2022)*.* As an instrument of comparison, discussion, and reflection, of the thesis's analysis of the novels *The White Mary* (2008), *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016) and *Memorial* (2020). The thesis and Calvete's dissertation diverged in their findings; she argued that authenticity still displayed elements of postmodernity in travel writing (Calvete, p. 285), by employing methodologies of Content Analysis, text analysis, contextualisation, and comparison, a divergence from the practices of postmodernity was discovered. The main body of discussion was provided in an ongoing form, laid into the subjugated analytical sections of the novel. This was done to provide comprehension between the analytical argument and the individual discussion.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how contemporary novels are positioned similarly to the conventions of New Sincerity. This has been highlighted by understanding the task and literary function of authenticity in fictional travel narratives. A function which unvaryingly acts according to the will of the author. The thesis maintains that authenticity comes in two distinct categories: Contextual authenticity, which pertains to external factors such as the author's lived experience, their position and description of their novel, and how the narrative interplays with the zeitgeist and contemporary social issues. The other form of authenticity settles into a written form, meaning authenticity which is inscribed into elements of the actual narrative, such as plot, characterisation, and narration. The two variables of authenticity, however, serve the same purpose of proposing a plausible story for the reader. Decidedly producing an answer to the first part of the thesis question. The second part of the question has also been provided with an answer. In the analysis of the novels, it was highlighted how the authenticity placed within often related itself to contemporary fashions,

both in terms of political issues and social issues, yet also related to the literary style and moral aesthetics. It was argued that the novel's subject for analysis, to varying degrees, provided literary conventions, which were firmly placed in the context of New Sincerity, as defined by Adam Kelly's chapter in *Postmodern/Postwar and After: Rethinking American Literature* (2016). These concepts and the role of authenticity were discussed following the concepts of Cultural Critique. Providing an answer to the last part of the research question, a contemporary influence does exist within the genre conventions, and it does contain wider ramifications related to social and cultural positions of critique. These positions of critique are produced by the novel's narrative and portrayal of authenticity. However, they rely on an audience which actively engages with the content of the novel, promoting the inherent effect of New Sincerity, in which engagements with content are contingent for the novels to carry a sincere effect (Kelly, p. 206). While the thesis has answered the research questions, it also proposes a need for further research. The established relationship between authenticity and Cultural Critique needs to be more thoroughly examined. The thesis has underlined how authors engage and produce a critical position of societal values, based on authenticity. However, this has simultaneously raised a requirement to understand how readers receive and assess the critique, reliant on the new conventions of New Sincerity, and the contingent relationship between the author and the reader. Further study into the relationship between author and reader is needed. In terms, providing supportive evidence on how authenticity interplays as a societal factor, and further demonstrating how authenticity in literature deliberates the contextual position concerning said societal factor.

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