# Maestro (revised 2008)

**by Peter Goldsworthy**

Teaching notes originally prepared by Michele Lonsdale. Additional material by Julie McCarthy.

## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An introduction to <em>Maestro</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ways into the text</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Running sheet</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Perspective on the text</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Issues and themes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Language and style</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Close study</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Further activities</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Key quotes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Text response topics</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Guided text responses</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


VATE 2008 Purchasers may copy *Inside Stories* for classroom use
Section 1. An introduction to *Maestro*

*Maestro* is Peter Goldsworthy's first novel and explores in prose form some of the earlier preoccupations to be found in his poetry. Like his youthful protagonist, Paul Crabbe, Goldsworthy lived in South Australia before moving to Darwin where he spent his teenage years. Like Paul's father in *Maestro*, Goldsworthy himself became a general practitioner, specialising for a time in the field of alcohol-related diseases. His observations of Eduard Keller, the maestro of the story and an alcoholic, are acute and candid.

The story is told in the first person, the narrator's voice representing Paul Crabbe as a middle-aged man. In general, the point of view is consistently that of the younger Paul, although occasionally the adult voice breaks through in the commentary, particularly at the conclusion of the story when Paul attempts to sum up his life and to articulate what Keller and his own childhood years have meant to him.

Goldsworthy has a crisp, clean narrative style and an economy of words that makes *Maestro* accessible to students. The writing alternates between perceptive and gently humorous commentary on the foibles of the characters, including the younger Paul, and the brutal aphorisms of Keller which undercut and deflate human pretensions and subvert social niceties. There are several poignant moments in the story, most notably associated with Keller's past as it is revealed gradually in the story.

The book is centrally concerned with such themes as alienation, personal growth and identity, cultural differences, the potential of music for life affirmation and/or for corruption, the concepts of guilt, betrayal and expiation.

The backdrop against which the story is set is crucial in explaining the shifting moods of the characters and, for some, their rootlessness. Beginning in the late 1960s, the story eventually goes back in time to the Nazi years in Europe, never confronting the Holocaust horror fully or directly, but suggesting its ramifications obliquely through the impact on the lives of the Keller family.

Music is fundamental to *Maestro*. It is more than a theme; it forms the *raison d'être* for the key characters. Bubbling alongside the driving beat of Rough Stuff's rock 'n' roll music, and the drama and passion of Rachmaninoff and Wagner, are the lively strains of the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas Paul's parents favour. The music preferred by each of the characters provides insights into their personality, needs and aspirations.

*Maestro* is a bittersweet book. Even when Goldsworthy invites us to smile at Paul's adolescent traumas, for example, there is still the sting that comes with being able to empathise with such embarrassing or clumsy moments in his life. Similarly, when Goldsworthy employs the filtering lens of another time and another country, and Paul's halting, gently unfolding discovery about the truth of Keller's life, to touch on the Holocaust in a way that is bearable, the strategy only serves to reinforce – by its omissions – the haunting, terrible sub-narrative of Keller's past.
Section 2. Ways into the text

Research

Either individually or in small groups, students could conduct preliminary research into particular aspects of World War II such as the Nazi treatment of Jews, Auschwitz, Eichmann, Hitler’s artistic pretensions.

Alternatively, students could research the lives of some of the musicians and composers mentioned in the book, particularly Wagner, Liszt and Rachmaninoff, but also Chopin, Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and Czerny. Students could find out about Gilbert and Sullivan and why their works have remained popular. The pop groups of the 1960s could be followed up: the Beatles, the Doors, the Rolling Stones - what did they offer that was different from other types of popular music? How do you account for their influence and popularity?

Students could find out about the Romantic movement. Who were the Romantics? What beliefs did they have in common? Why were they called this? How did the music of the Romantic musicians and composers differ from what had been produced earlier?

Music

Students could listen to excerpts from Liszt, Wagner or Rachmaninoff. How do these works compare with, say, a piece composed by Bach or Mozart? Some initial exposure to Wagner might be useful in trying to understand the Nazi appropriation of his themes and music and Keller’s subsequent disillusionment.

Students could listen to excerpts from the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas. They could look at the lyrics and discuss the kind of audience to which such music might appeal.

Students could consider the lyrics of some of the 1950s and 1960s music such as ‘Hound Dog’ or songs by Jimi Hendrix. How do these differ from the Gilbert and Sullivan pieces? And from Wagner’s music dramas?

Students could compare the feelings aroused by classical music, light operas and musicals and contemporary pop music. What feelings are evoked, for example, by listening to the music of Liszt, or to the stanzas of The Pirates of Penzance?

- Is music neutral, its effect depending on a listener’s mood, and the use to which it is put by individuals or nations, or is music itself the carrier of emotion?
- Is there such a thing as music that is evil or dangerous?
- Students could consider those incidents in which the murderous actions of young people have been blamed on a certain kind of music. Is there truth to this view of music’s potential?

Students could discuss the different audiences these different forms of music are likely to attract and why.

- What constitutes ‘good’ music?
- Is music that endures, such as the work of a classical composer, the best kind of music?
- What function does music have in a society?
- What significance does it have for different groups? For individuals? How is it used by different groups?
Inside Stories

Maestro (revised 2008)

• Why are national anthems played at venues such as the Olympic Games? What is the function of a national anthem? Do students identify with the Australian one? Would Waltzing Matilda be an acceptable alternative for our national anthem?

Visual texts

In addition to the more commonly known texts about life in Nazi Germany (such as The Diary of Anne Frank), there are other texts that could be used. Picture book versions of life in Nazi Germany and in concentration camps are potentially rich sources for discussion. Students could discuss the different images of life that are conveyed in each of these representations. Extracts from the texts could be used for comparative purposes. For example:

• Margaret Wild & Julie Vivas, Let the Celebrations Begin, Omnibus Books, Norwood, SA, 1991
  A group of Polish women in Belsen make stuffed toys from scraps of their own clothing to give to the children when they are liberated by the Allied soldiers. The distinctive illustrations and jaunty narrative voice take the edge off a potentially bleak story.

  A young girl, Rose Blanche, discovers the terrible secret of the concentration camps when she follows a lorry deep into the forest and finds starving, hollow-eyed prisoners. She risks her own life smuggling scraps of food through the appalling winter.

  A concise and accessible picture book version of Anne Frank's life story, including her stay in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

  A gruelling account of life as a concentration camp inmate and survivor. The comic-book format belies the horror of the tale; the Maus books are harrowing and provocative. Aimed at a more adult audience, this representation of what it was like to be a Jew living in Nazi Germany in the early 1940s could not be further removed from the Vivas and Wild book. It provides insight into the kind of torment that an individual like Keller might have suffered during his incarceration.

Poetry

• Peter Goldsworthy, Readings From Ecclesiastes, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1982.
  Peter Goldsworthy's poetry provides a useful way into the text. Students could discuss his main preoccupations, his poetic style, what is distinctive about his writing and why it has attracted such acclaim and interest. After reading Maestro, students could go back to his poetry and discuss which poems seem to prefigure some of the preoccupations that surface in Maestro.

• Lily Brett, The Auschwitz Poems, Scribe, Brunswick, 1986
  Lily Brett's stark, minimalist poetry conveys matter-of-factly something of what it was like to be Jewish during the Holocaust period. The distinctive and deliberately simple form and tone of the Auschwitz poems and the deceptive ordinariness of the subject matter make them both very accessible to students and at the same time almost unbearable to read.
Personal experience

Students could write about and discuss their own experiences in relation to some of the themes that surface in *Maestro*.

For example, what is it like
• to be an outsider?
• to have a crush on someone?
• to move to a new town or school?
• to be gifted at something?
• to be a teenager living with parents who have high hopes for their children?
• to feel guilty about something they have done or not done?
• to want to follow in the footsteps of someone they respect?
• to attend a concert?
Section 3. Running sheet

The novel is not divided into chapters. Instead Goldsworthy writes short remembered segments of experience separated by a diamond within lines symbol, but all belonging to one setting, either time or place, or both. A commentary by the adult Paul upon the actions and attitudes of his younger self as well as the developing relationship with Keller are woven through the recreation of events in each segment.

A useful task for students would be to explain the narrative purpose of the increasing length but decreasing number of segments and to identify the narrative climax in each major division. Also they should be able to explain the purpose of the changing tone of the writing in the last three divisions.

**Darwin, 1967**

| 3-7 | **Introduction to Keller, the first music lesson.** Initial meeting between Paul Crabbe and Eduard Keller. Goldsworthy sets up the pattern of authorial comment by the persona of the adult Paul, followed by a short incident, ending with another authorial comment. |
| 9-11 | **Flashback: The day the family arrived in Darwin.** Paul loved it from the start, whereas his parents were not so enthusiastic. Paul's father eventually assimilates but his mother remains an outsider. |
| 11-13 | **The second or third music lesson.** Paul is annoyed that he is not allowed to play anything. Keller's teaching methods are quite bizarre, describing the personalities of each finger and throwing Paul's music in the bin. This section introduces a key symbol of Keller's ‘textbook’. |
| 13-18 | **Paul calls Keller a Nazi.** Paul is getting increasingly frustrated with Keller's teaching, whereas his parents find the description of lessons amusing. Paul tells us about the qualities of his parents and speculates on what keeps their relationship alive. |
| 18-22 | **The mystery of Keller's past.** Paul tells his parents about Keller's 'musical ancestors' and they realise that he has a direct connection to Liszt. Their musical snobbery as well as their ability to follow up snippets of information that Keller reveals becomes apparent here. |
| 22-26 | **Introduction to Bennie Reid.** Paul and Bennie are thrown together because they are both isolates in Darwin. Paul likes the butterfly collecting but feels an overwhelming desire to be cruel to Bennie and does not admire his musical ability. |
| 27-30 | **Memories of the Friday Night Soirees.** Paul's parents gather fellow music lovers together for music performances. The members of the group are fascinated by Keller and speculate about why he is in Darwin. |
| 30-32 | **More music lessons.** Paul and Keller are still in conflict over Paul's musical future. |
| 32-35 | **Paul's sexual awakening.** Paul falls in love with Megan Murray. His interest in Megan is merely sexual. He runs foul of the Darwin High school bullies and is belted-up by Jimmy Papas, but continues to lust after Megan. |
| 35-39 | **Keller's family.** Paul plays the 'supine' without permission and realises that Keller had a wife and child. |
| 39-42 | **Gilbert and Sullivan performance.** Paul's parents are involved in the performance. Paul is impressed by father's Major General role. Keller refers to the Holocaust experience. |
| 43-46 | **Keller goes to dinner at Paul’s parents’ house** to celebrate Paul’s A+ result on the piano exam. Everyone praises Paul except for Keller. |
| 46-50 | **Another music lesson.** Paul’s father brings home horror stories from the hospital and Keller cynically warns Paul against ‘beauty’. A veiled reference to the way the Nazis used music in their propaganda. |

**Intermezzo**

| 53-58 | **The holiday in Adelaide.** Paul and his parents go to Adelaide. Paul visits the library to look up information on Keller and witnesses a couple having sex in the library stacks. |

**1968**

| 63-65 | **Paul must be prepared for the End of the World.** Rosie Zolla moves to Darwin and is attracted to Paul, joining him in the music room at lunchtimes. Paul tolerates her but does not like her. There are two references to the connection between Paul and Keller. When Paul helps Rosie with her music he speaks like Keller. Keller tells Paul that he sat in a wine garden and played Skat ‘while the world ended’. Keller offers to teach Paul to play Skat so he will be ‘prepared for the end of the world’. |
| 65-67 | **Keller’s scrapbook.** Paul sneaks a look at Keller’s scrapbook of clippings from the newspapers ‘a bleak human landscape located somewhere between Tragedy and Dumb stupidity’. Keller calls it his ‘LIBRETTO’ or ‘textbook’. Paul takes it home but when his father reads it he forbids Paul to read any more. |
| 67-73 | **The concert in the Botanical Gardens.** Paul’s parents organise a performance by the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra. Keller arrives very drunk and Paul’s parents invite him to sit with them. Rosie sits with Paul and during the performance they become aware of their mutual sexual attraction. Keller yells and disrupts the performance of a Wagner item and the reader remembers the information we have attained so far about his wife, Mathilde. |
| 73-75 | **The Tuesday after the concert in the gardens.** When Paul attends his next music lesson he hears Keller playing and singing *Tristan* a Wagner opera. ‘The music seemed nearer to lovemaking than to music.’ Paul wants to play the transcription of the piece for Rosie. |
| 75-79 | **Paul plays music with the bullies.** The bullies, Pappas, Mitchell and Lim have formed a band ‘Rough Stuff’. They try to throw Paul and Rosie out of the school music room, but Paul demonstrates his musical usefulness to them (they have no musical talent whatsoever). He is accepted into their band and friendship group eradicating the need to seek refuge at lunchtimes. |
| 79-82 | **Paul’s first sexual experience.** Paul makes love to Megan Murray who he finds limited as a partner. He then makes love to Rosie starting a lifelong passionate relationship. |
| 82-86 | **The betrayal of Bennie Reid.** Paul’s parents are preoccupied with a production of *The Gondoliers*. Paul is firmly entrenched in the bullies’ group and he casually betrays Bennie Reid to them, an act of which older Paul is deeply ashamed. Paul also interrogates Keller about why he never left Austria when the Nazis threatened the safety of his wife and child. |
| 86-92 | **The Northern Territory ‘Battle of the Sounds’.** Rough Stuff wins the Battle of the Sounds and the prize of a trip to Adelaide. They meet Rockin’ Rick Whiteley, a disreputable, corrupt DJ. |
### Adelaide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>Paul is going to Adelaide. Keller enters him in a piano competition. Keller goes with him as his accompanist.</td>
</tr>
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<td>100-103</td>
<td>Keller and Paul fly to Adelaide. Paul stays with his grandparents while Keller stays in a nearby motel. He practises the competition pieces, reads his newspapers and does not drink any alcohol during the stay.</td>
</tr>
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<td>104-107</td>
<td>The band drives down in Jimmy’s van. Reggie Lim has been left behind and Whiteley has replaced him on drums. They practise at Paul’s grandparents’ place. Paul struggles between two musical worlds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>The Rock Band and Piano Competitions. Even as they wait to go on stage, Paul realises that this will be the last time he plays with Rough Stuff. He has chosen Keller’s musical world. Keller stays at Paul’s grandparents’ house, and Paul sees the concentration camp tattoo on his arm. The piano competition happened but the novel does not describe it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>111-114</td>
<td>Keller goes to dinner at Paul’s house. Keller and Paul have returned to Darwin. Keller has started drinking again and Paul decides what to do after he leaves school. Paul affirms his connection with Darwin at the same time as he starts to realise that he will never be a concert pianist.</td>
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<td>114-119</td>
<td>The night before Paul leaves for the South. Paul visits Keller at the Swan to say goodbye. There will be no more ‘consultations’. Keller tells Paul all the facts about his past, but Paul can’t be bothered listening to him. He rushes off to see Rosie before she travels to Melbourne.</td>
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<td>123-126</td>
<td>The first nostalgic interlude. Paul fills in information about what happens to characters over the years immediately after he leaves Darwin. Paul’s parents move to Adelaide and become heavily involved in Gilbert and Sullivan. Paul’s music is not going well and he doesn’t visit Keller.</td>
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<tr>
<td>126-128</td>
<td>The second nostalgic interlude. Paul is performing overseas, still nursing his ambitions. Ironically, Keller survives Cyclone Tracey, the second event that destroys the world, by hiding under his piano. He goes to stay with Paul’s parents in Adelaide.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Vienna, 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>131-132</td>
<td>Paul searches for the real Keller. While travelling in Austria, Paul remembers the last conversation with Keller and begins to piece together the fragments of Keller’s life. He pretends to be writing a biography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132-140</td>
<td>Paul visits Henisch. Henisch tells Paul that Keller played for the Nazis in 1938 and what happened to Mathilde and Eric. He believes Keller is dead because he was imprisoned in Auschwitz. He gives Paul a recording of Keller’s concert for the Nazis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>143-149</td>
<td>Keller’s death. Paul sits with the dying Keller. The novel ends with a nostalgic yearning for the past.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page references Harper Perennial 2004
Section 4. Perspective on the text

This novel is essentially a rites of passage story covering Paul's life from the time he is a 15-year-old talented musician to his adulthood when he is a disappointed professor of music but not the concert pianist that his parents wanted him to be. The novel explores the relationship between Keller and Paul and this is traced through a series of parallel life experiences. The narrative voice is the adult Paul and the narrative tone is predominantly tinged with his disappointment at his failed ambition and his negative view of his younger self.

Readers may develop a different point of view to adult Paul at key points in the narrative, judging Paul's behaviour far less harshly that he does, identifying the development of a person who is capable of making the right moral choices. On the other hand, readers may be more appalled at Paul's treatment of Megan Murray, and the violence and bullying rife in the Darwin High School yard. Readers do not know Bennie well enough to be upset by his betrayal at the hands of Paul and may view his stance against the bullies as futile anyway.

A reader’s musical affiliations may be one avenue of sympathy or condemnation of characters and attitudes in the novel. A reader may be surprised that Paul does not know who Chuck Berry is or has not heard *Hound Dog* and find him even more arrogant and out of touch with people of his own age than Goldsworthy intends. Those who are unfamiliar with classical music and Gilbert and Sullivan operas will form their own impression of Paul’s parents and view their motives and behaviour accordingly. Very few readers will miss Keller’s strong hints about his past and most will be shocked at Paul’s insensitivity towards Keller at points in the story.

The setting firmly establishes the dominant values of Australian people in the late 1960s. The south, represented by Adelaide, is initially the city of childhood delights. When Paul and his parents go to Adelaide (Intermezzo), Paul characterises the city by ‘The Zoo, the Beach, the Glenelg Tram, the Show’ (p. 53). But by the time Paul returns it has come to represent middle class Australia, a landscape of suburban mediocrity with its ‘cream brick Dream Houses’. It is ‘a temperate zone of grandparents and Churches’ (p. 100). The attitudes of this place are expressed through the portrayal of Paul's grandmother. She is fascinated with her ‘Continental gentleman’ at the same time as she champions everything Adelaide when discussing music. She does not hear the nuances in Keller’s responses but Paul does, indicating that his attitudes to music and values are derived from Keller, rather than middle Australia. When he leaves Rough Stuff he also rejects the seedy world of rock music represented by Rick Whiteley who also comes from Adelaide. Towards the end of the novel Paul leaves Australia searching for musical truth and trying to fulfil his lost ambition in Europe.

Paul loves Darwin but senses an unreality about it. He describes the vivid colours ‘an unnatural greenness as if the leaves were made of plastic’ and ‘the bright rainbow colours’ of the parrots. He calls it a ‘cartoon world’ where everything ‘grew larger than life’ (p. 10). The descriptions of Darwin by people other than Paul are not flattering in the novel. Father calls it the ‘arsehole of the earth’ (p. 17) and the ‘terminus’ (p. 17). He points out that the only place you can run to after Darwin is the Swan Hotel. The Swan is depicted in religious imagery as a ‘monastery’ (p. 48) where drinking is a Mass. Drunkenness is something sacred which unites people. Paul is more familiar with Keller's room in the hotel and for him it is the universe. He describes the two pianos as ‘a planet and its smaller moon’ (p. 11). Darwin High School is an extremely rough place isolated on the top of a hill, dominated by bullies and is described using images of a prison yard (p. 34), and a detention centre (p. 33). It is a place of institutionalised violence where Paul is beaten up for talking to a girl ‘owned’ by a gang member and needs to seek refuge in the music room at lunch
times. Even though he despises the bullies and never accepts their musical values or morals he joins their group and for a short time fits in with his peers.

The music of choice in Darwin is country and western. In the dry months ‘a sound track of country and western music filled the air-plangent ballads of love, jealousy, murder and jail’ (p. 48). Not only Rick Whiteley is a musical outsider here. Paul’s parents with their ‘Friday Night Soirees’ (p. 28) and their passion for Gilbert and Sullivan (p. 38) are at musical odds with most of the people. This emphasises their English values, which is also shown by their food ‘grills and cold climate vegetables’ (p. 68) and in grandmother’s ‘still life’ English breakfast (p. 101). The descriptions of the people at the Soirees establish them as pedantic musical snobs, anxious to prove that they are educated and cultured, for example the ‘organist’ who corrects Paul’s pronunciation of Mascagni (p. 29). Their ‘major Coup’ (p. 68) is securing a performance by the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra. This attitude is passed on to Paul who has a crippling lack of knowledge of popular music and takes ‘pride in knowing when a piece of music had finished’ when he attends the concert in the gardens (p. 71). The adults tend to be patronising towards Keller, because he is European and a famous musician. This is seen in the dinner parties at Paul’s parents’ house.

But the main narrative thrust is the story of Paul’s life and personal growth. He moves from stage to stage of his life by accepting and rejecting values and makes a series of moral choices which his world offers him. The constant in his world apart from his parents is Keller. He has no friends; Bennie Reid is forced on him and they never really get on. All he has at the start is his musical ability and his father’s assurance that ‘You are going to be better than me’ (p. 8). He does not want to continue with lessons from Keller but his father will not let him stop. Goldsworthy concentrates most of the narrative detail on events in the years 1967 and 1968 and the reason could be that all of Paul’s major choices are made by the time he leaves for university. Also by this time his fate as a man and a musician is set and he cannot change what he will become. The section after this, 1974, is a brief overview of what has happened to characters in the intervening years. The centrepiece of Vienna 1975 is Henisch’s account and the final section 1977 relates the death of Keller.

Paul describes himself as a ‘fence sitter’ and he shows this to be true. If he is satellite to Keller, as a child he has the same relationship to his parents. He has taken bit parts in their Gilbert and Sullivan musicals (p. 41) and does not participate in the dinnertime banter except to cut it short (p. 9). He is not included in his father’s conversations about the ‘horror stories’ (p. 47) from the hospital but he eavesdrops, just as he accidentally spies on the couple making love in the library stacks in Intermezzo. When he falls in love with Megan Murray and meets Rosie Zollo, he experiences his sexual awakening and learns the difference between a relationship and physical lust. He understands the meaning of passion when he witnesses Keller playing Tristan. He chooses Rosie, long-term commitment and passion rather than Megan, beautiful but empty and selfish.

He joins Rough Stuff and enjoys a respite from bullying and a certain degree of control over the talent less and unintelligent bullies. He samples their world and lifestyle but finds it unsatisfying and ‘was determined to keep my two musical worlds apart’ (p. 107). He makes a conscious decision to leave the world of rock music, where he has never fitted in and chooses Keller’s world. He did not even wait for the result of the competition to be announced because Keller’s world offered ‘far more promise for me than this world of squalid foolish dreams’ (p. 109). However along with that is the obligation to pursue his dream (or is it his parent’s dream? ‘They want me to study at the Conservatorium’ p. 113) of becoming a concert pianist.

Keller has tried to help him face reality that he is talented ‘but a concert pianist is one in a million’ (p.113). Unfortunately during his time with Keller there is much evidence to show us that Paul is not good enough. It is at this point in the novel that Paul should have made the decision to drop
the goal of being a concert pianist and choose another future life path. Adult Paul, from the vantage point of ‘mid-life, my backside stuck fast to a minor chair in a minor music school’ (p. 148) knows this. He says ‘I should have taken a greater part in that discussion; made a more forceful stand’ (p. 114). He was content to let others make the decisions that in ‘no way seemed important, or pressing, or irreversible-yet’ (p. 114). Paul should have made a decision that would have prevented the feelings of regret for lost opportunities. Instead, he took up the glorious ambition again and spent two years travelling Europe getting ‘Honourable mentions’ and ‘Third places’ before he realised the truth of Keller’s advice.

One of the interesting symbols in the novel is Bennie’s butterflies. The butterflies represent the natural beauty of the world and Paul and Bennie are both interested in capturing and expressing beauty. Bennie pins and preserves the butterflies and Paul strives for perfection in music. The written memoir is Goldsworthy’s way of preserving the beauty of those teenaged years and much of the tone of sadness and regret in the later sections is because this time slipped away so fast and the truth of it is so hard to pin down in writing. He struggles to render Keller’s accent (p. 3) and worries that his writing is forming the past into ‘neat lines’. However, the memoir does not become ‘brittle butterfly husks and the broken powdery wings of moths’ like Paul’s attempts at butterfly preservation. Through the story of Paul and Keller, Goldsworthy immerses readers in a world which is truthful, beautiful and painful at the same time, and most of all does not flinch from confronting large human issues.
Section 5. Characters

Major Characters

Paul: the protagonist
Goldsworthy uses the structure of the memoir to allow him to be selective about the details of Paul’s life that he includes. The narrative voice in the novel is adult Paul and his comments on his younger self are woven through the story. His comments guide reader response to younger Paul, and an interesting exercise is to examine the experiences and ask students whether it is possible to disagree with the judgements of adult Paul and to what extent.

The relationship with Keller remains that of a teacher and his pupil for most of the novel even though Paul tells us that he grew to love and depend on him. It is difficult to see that progression through the events that Goldsworthy chooses to include. The dominant image of their relationship is the two pianos in Keller’s room, ‘a planet and its smaller moon’ (p. 4). Keller constantly challenges his attitudes and work ethic in ways that infuriate (p. 12) and confuse him. He spends a lot of time in the early part of the novel thinking of Keller as a Nazi and when he becomes aware of the tragic fate of his wife, starts to demand why Keller stayed in Vienna. He displays a great deal of insensitivity in this respect.

But he loves music and is not averse to becoming a concert pianist. Even when he tries to spoil his parents’ verbal sparring, he could not stay angry with them when they played Mozart (p. 9). He himself admits that he was ‘irredeemably smug’ (p. 25) at school and he relates incidents where the pride and arrogance of his younger self prevents his progress. He has an inflated sense of his own talent and how could he believe otherwise when his parents have promoted it in him all his life? Keller sets him The Children’s Bach as an exercise and he tells his parents that he ‘has been re-enrolled in kindergarten’. He keeps complaining even when his father plays the pieces again. He is ‘too proud’ to play it and does not realise that ‘Bach is never easy’ (p. 26). When he talks about his father’s performance as the Major General he is almost jealous. He says that he was ‘half filled with love and half filled with envy. I knew that I too wanted the spotlight – centre stage – up front’ (p. 49). He is also critical of Bennie’s violin playing (p. 26) and this is coupled with an overwhelming desire to be cruel to him (p. 27).

Paul is dedicated to winning. When he gained an A+ in the exam he expected Keller to praise him. Keller didn’t. Keller warns him against winning. ‘No one wins by much’ and ‘we never lose. We only learn.’ (p. 109) When Paul enters the competition in Adelaide, Keller distinguishes making music ‘for ourselves’ and winning. ‘We win the race and we keep our self respect.’ (p. 97) In the later sections most of Paul’s misery and sense of failure comes from his lack of success in the competitions. One wonders whether one of the reasons why he decided to leave Rough Stuff was that he knew they would not win. However, he ultimately makes the right moral choice to leave the band of his own accord. He calls Keller ‘maestro’ after he dies acknowledging what a great person and mentor he was.

List the details that show Paul to be a good pianist but which also allude to the fact that he will never be a concert pianist.

How important do you think Paul’s relationship with Bennie Reid is to understanding Paul’s character?

Choose a moment when Paul acts or decides something important. List adult Paul’s judgements. Explain whether you agree with him or not and support your answer from the text.
Keller
Keller, the ‘maestro’ of the title, is also a construct of the memories of adult Paul. Readers will notice a change in the way he is portrayed as the relationship between him and young Paul becomes closer. However even though we are told that he grew to ‘love the man and to depend on him’ it is not until after Keller dies that we see this.

He is introduced to us in a fragmented manner (p. 3, 5) because Paul does not know what kind of person he is. When Paul links his accent with stereotypical Nazis from a war movie, (p. 13, 18, 29) he seems a cartoonish unreal person. As the novel progresses and the reader understands more of Keller’s story we realise the irony of Paul’s first impressions.

His teaching methods are bizarre and we wonder why Paul’s parents persevere with the piano lessons. This is never explained. He often infuriates Paul for example when he will not let him play the piano, when he throws Paul’s music in the bin (p. 12), and confronts him with cryptic comments such as ‘Is water at 50 degrees half boiling?’ (p. 31). When Paul gets an A+ on his music exam, Keller labels the result ‘an excellent forgery’ technically perfect but with something missing (p. 46). Here and throughout their relationship Keller tries to tell Paul gently that he will never be a concert pianist. ‘Better a small hurt now’ and Paul completes the sentence with ‘than a wasted life’ (p. 115).

By the end of Darwin 1967 many fragmentary clues about Keller’s past, and why the relationship with Paul is important to him have been given to the reader. His wife Mathilde and son Eric (for whom he had ‘great plans’ p. 116) were both murdered by the Nazis (p. 56). He himself was imprisoned in Auschwitz, which Paul finds out when Keller stays with his grandparents in Adelaide. He makes several references to this experience, for example when he says ‘Work makes free, smiling grimly as if at some private joke’ (p. 42). Paul does not pick it up but the reader is meant to. Keller tells Paul’s mother ‘Nothing could make me homesick’ (p. 45). He tells Paul later on that Vienna was ‘the Experimental laboratory for the End of the World’. On the night before Paul leaves for the South, he tells him the story of his betrayal of Mathilde and Eric. Even though Paul is not interested he persists in telling the story. ‘I do not tell you this for me, but for you.’ (p. 119) He seems to commit himself to saving Paul from making the mistakes that he made. He cynically teaches Paul to play cards. ‘You must be prepared for the end of the world.’ (p. 64) He tries to teach him from his ‘textbook’ or ‘LIBRETTO’ of the ‘bleak landscape, somewhere between tragedy and Dumb Stupidity’ (p. 66). Paul’s father will not let Paul read the textbook and Keller says, ‘If only at your age I’d had such textbooks’. We do not hear Keller’s thoughts when Paul joins the bullies taking refuge in music almost as he did during the war. Ironically, Keller survives two events that could qualify to be called the end of the world. The first one is the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust. The second event is Cyclone Tracey and he used music in both cases to save himself.

There are several scenes that add depth and poignancy to Keller’s character. When Paul attends a ‘consultation’ after the concert in the Botanical Gardens, he finds Keller singing and playing the music from Wagner’s Tristan. He realises that it seemed ‘nearer to lovemaking than music’. This scene is meant to trigger a series of memories of information about his past that Keller has cryptically let slip and research done by Paul’s parents whilst in Adelaide (p. 56). Keller is still grieving for his dead wife by playing and singing the opera that she, perhaps sang. [Teachers should cover the story of Tristan and Isolde with their students, because this also reflects directly on the relationship between Keller and Mathilde.] The other scene is Paul’s visit to Henisch, where he finds out the missing facts about Mathilde’s murder and Keller’s incarceration in Auschwitz. The reader finds out the real reason why Keller chopped off his little finger. It was the result of a deliberate moral choice - never to play for the Nazis again, rather than overwhelming grief for the betrayal of his wife and child.
• Compare the information Keller tells Paul before he goes south with Henisch’s narrative. What is the same? What information is new?
• Read the Henisch scene aloud in two ways. Firstly, that Henisch really believes Keller died in 1944. Secondly, that he knows Keller survived. Compare the interpretations.
• Plot Keller’s relationship with Paul. At what point do you see Paul becoming more to Keller than a student of music?
• List the ways in which Keller tries to tell Paul that he will not be a concert pianist.

Minor characters

Paul’s parents
Paul’s parents are outsiders in the world of Darwin, coming from Adelaide and returning there once Paul leaves for university. Despite Father’s embracing of Darwin as a home ‘we Territorians’ he never really fits in. Mother has hated living there from the start (p. 10).

When adult Paul remembers them, he notes that ‘the list of their differences is inexhaustible’ but realises that what held them together apart from the piano was the ‘sticky, sweet glue of sex’ (p. 16). They were also both ambitious for their son and believed that they had a concert pianist on their hands. Paul was happy to go along with this.

Father made the decision that Paul should learn music from Keller and would not let him give up the lessons even though Keller’s behaviour became the source of family jokes; ‘Played anything yet?’ (p. 18). No one knows why they hired Keller, but they become increasingly fascinated with him especially when they hear about his direct connection to Liszt (p. 20). Father even goes to the next lesson after that. When they go to Adelaide (Intermezzo) Paul’s mother, a librarian, researches Keller’s life and finds out about Mathilde’s fate. Their role is to give the reader information that Paul is not interested in but what we need to gain insight into Keller.

Father, who is a doctor, loves telling the ‘horror stories’ of the bizarre cases from the hospital (pp. 47-48) and loves reading Keller’s ‘textbook’. They both love classical music and play very well. Paul notes that ‘medicine was his (father’s) job, music was his life’ (p. 39). They set up the Friday Night Soirees (p. 28) and bring the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra to play in Darwin. Goldsworthy is suggesting that they are musical snobs, because they are most heavily associated in the novel with Gilbert and Sullivan (pp. 39-42 etc.).

They represent the values of Australians and our inability to understand the devastation the Nazis caused in Europe during the war in several places in the novel, especially in the conversations with Keller when he goes to Dinner at their house (p. 44).
  • To what extent are Paul’s parents depicted as being too obsessed with their own concerns?
  • Research the stories of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas mentioned in the novel. What is the significance of the ideas and social values to Paul’s parents and their lives in Darwin?
  • To what extent are Paul’s values the same or different to his parents?

Megan Murray and Rosie Zollo
Megan represents the dangers of beauty and feminine sensuality. She also is the female side of the ugly Darwin High School ‘lexicon of Boyfriends and Steadies’ because she ‘belongs’ to Scotty (p. 33). Lust for Megan makes Paul a man in two ways. She sparks his sexual awakening and his first wet dreams and the fight with Jimmy Pappas. When he joins the band he makes love to Megan and finds her a selfish, unsatisfactory sexual partner. Megan’s incompleteness is symbolised in the descriptions of her smile as ‘a wide keyboard of white, perfect teeth’ (p. 32). A complete keyboard needs the black notes too. Her sexual selfishness is condemned more than her promiscuity.
Rosie is attracted to Paul as soon as she moves to Darwin, but Paul rejects her because she seems too ‘desperate’ (p. 63). She ‘creeps’ into the music room, another refugee from the ‘Prison yard’. At the concert in the gardens Rosie and Paul realise that they love one another (p. 70). Rosie is most closely associated with Mathilde and therefore the passion that Keller felt for her, by Paul’s wish to get hold of Liszt’s transposition of Tristan and ‘play it one lunchtime for Rosie’ (p. 75).

After his disappointment with Megan, he makes love to Rosie and they form a lifelong commitment to each other, eventually marrying. Rosie is not as subservient as Megan, because she goes to Melbourne to study medicine and lives without Paul for two years while he goes to Europe. Megan on the other hand is satisfied with viewing herself as a sex object (p. 33).

Like Megan, Rosie effectively disappears out of the novel. The narrative function of these characters is to offer Paul sexual choices.

The bullies: Jimmy Pappas, Scotty Mitchell and Reggie Lim
We are introduced to the bullies via the fight with Jimmy Papas ‘school tough’ (p. 33). He is homophobic, ‘his face set in a fixed sneer’ (p. 33) and violent. He belts Paul up because he was interested in Megan Murray.

The bullies enter the story again by trying to throw Paul and Rosie out of the music room because they have formed a band, which is eventually christened Rough Stuff, a pointed comment on the music they create. Paul describes them as ‘three young delinquents wanting to make a million bucks, make a very loud noise, or some mix of the two’ (p. 77). He never has any respect for them and hates the music they make ‘music to shit by’ but association with the bullies (he denies to Bennie that they are his friends p. 85) provided him with ‘permanent protection in the school yard and a safe conduct pass into even the darkest corners of the Covered Area’ (p. 79). Paul offers them musical knowledge which they accept. They stop bullying him because Paul is now useful to them.

They represent ‘cruelty fuelled by no emotion at all’, (p. 76) in other words mindless brutality for its own sake. Reggie Lim is described as a ‘follower not a leader’ (p. 77) and when they win the rigged band competition in Darwin, he is kicked out of the band and replaced by Rockin’ Rick Whiteley.

In fact given the deviant sexual nature of Rick Whiteley, the reader might be inclined to see the bullies as victims of Whiteley’s and therefore feel some sympathy for their naivety and vulnerability. Paul travels to Adelaide with the band but decides to leave it even before they have played. He makes a clear musical and moral choice at that point.

Adult Paul is ashamed of betraying Bennie but never of associating with the bullies. He even tried to look them up when he went to Darwin in 1977.

• In what ways does the novel link the bullies at Darwin High School with the Nazis?
• In what ways does the novel present the bullies differently after Paul joins the band?
• Which one is the worst character of the three? Support your view with evidence form the text?

Rockin’ Rick Whiteley
Whiteley brings rock and roll and the ‘foreign sounds of Jimi Hendrix and the Stones and the Doors’ (p. 88) from Adelaide to a predominantly country and western Northern Territory. This causes an uproar and a flood of ‘Hate Mail’ (p. 87). This would be mildly amusing if it was not implied in the text that Whiteley is a sexual deviant. We are told about rumours that he ‘fled north
for various unspeakable reasons’ (p. 87). He wanders around in his jocks and tells the boys dirty stories (p. 89). He wants to know if they have ever been Boy Scouts. By the time they travel to Adelaide for their prize he has joined the band. The physical disintegration noted by Paul when Whiteley arrives represents his moral state. After the competition he takes the boys to ‘some health club in the city, men only’ (p. 109). As Keller says, ‘It is hard to see evil in your own home’. 

- How does the character of Whiteley encourage the reader to have some sympathy for the bullies?
- How does this affect your view of their relationship with Paul?

**Plot devices**

**Bennie Reid**
He provides an alternative means of dealing with bullies which is more painful but more honourable. His purpose is to be betrayed by Paul and to judge his behaviour. His words echo the judgement of adult Paul (p. 85). Paul did not like Bennie Reid very much and readers are not given enough details to engender much sympathy for him either.

- Do you think Bennie is heroic or pathetic? Explain why.
- How does your judgement reflect on the character of Paul?
- Explain how his hobby of preserving butterflies works as a symbol in the novel.
- Read Bennie’s conversation with Paul on pages 84-85. Do you agree with Bennie’s criticism? Does Goldsworthy? Support your answer with details from the text.

**Henisch**
He exists in the novel as device only to tell Paul the rest of Keller’s story.
Section 6. Issues and themes

Betrayal

In the face of a growing Nazi menace, Keller was complacent and naive enough to believe his fame could protect his family. He had performed privately for Adolf Hitler. His wife was a Wagnerian specialist at a time when Nazism derived inspiration for its nationalistic imperatives from Wagner's musical recuperation of Germanic medieval folk mythology. 'We always hope for the best', Keller tells Paul, justifying his passivity.

Keller himself was betrayed by the very people he had trusted – ‘I was assured [...] Jewish members of German families would not be harmed.’ – and the knowledge weighs heavily, bringing bitterness and self-loathing. ‘You must understand,’ he said. ‘I knew these people. These murderers. I had signed their concert programmes.’ (p. 118).

When his son and wife are killed by the very Nazi regime he had entertained, he is a shattered man. Keller's subsequent attempts to punish himself by appropriating a Jewish identity, mutilating his hand, fleeing to another country and renouncing the music he had once loved so passionately all failed to ease the burden of guilt. In the end he is a sad figure, dying of alcoholic poisoning to the soulless strains of muzak.

Paul, too, can be said to have betrayed others at crucial times. In the case of his friend Bennie, Paul's betrayal consists of nothing more than inadvertently 'dobbing' him in to a bully and denying their friendship. More seriously, in the case of Keller, Paul turns away at a critical moment in Keller's life. When the Maestro suddenly begins to tell Paul about his life in Vienna, Paul is too impatient to listen, distracted by thoughts of a semi-naked Rosie waiting below. In retrospect he repents the missed opportunity to demonstrate understanding. In not staying to listen, Paul has effectively denied Keller an opportunity to ease the guilt and pain he has carried for so long:

Only now can I recognise the scene for what it was: a confessional, a privilege that I, through selfishness and sensual addiction, failed to accept. [...] I should have stayed, listened, poured out his schnapps, lubricated his tongue (pp. 117-8).

The scene is moving for it is not only Keller whom Paul has let down but himself. The relationship between the two has changed: the pupil is now impatient to be gone, to embark on his own career, forgetting perhaps what he owes to his teacher, while Keller has become more dependent on his pupil, seeing in him a kind of surrogate son.

Alienation

It is clear from the beginning that Keller does not fit in to the casual, vibrant world of Darwin. By his formal dress, his cosmopolitan manners and lifestyle he has set himself apart from Darwin's laid back culture. He drinks schnapps rather than beer and aborts small talk (for example when he eats breakfast with Paul's grandmother p. 101, 103). He subverts the conventions that allow others to relate to one another in public settings when he disrupts the concert in the gardens by clapping in the wrong places and yelling out during the performance (pp. 71-2). He lives as an outsider willingly to atone for the times in the past when he participated in the glittering but dangerous Viennese social life (pp. 64-65).

Paul is an outsider in Darwin when the book opens. He is 'skinny, unathletic, irredeemably smug’ (p. 23) and is scared to travel on the bus because he is bullied and seeks refuge in the music
room at lunchtimes for the same reason. In a world which moves to a ‘soundtrack of country and western’ Paul’s classical music taste cements him as an outsider. His parents with their ‘Friday Night Soirees’ and Gilbert and Sullivan performances are also alienated from the society of Darwin and are marginalised even in Adelaide. They mounted a charade of being ‘Territorians’ for a while but gave up in the end and returned to Adelaide.

The outsider is vulnerable in any society because there is more pressure upon their moral integrity. Keller played for the Nazis and betrayed his wife and child; Paul joined the bullies and betrayed Bennie Reid and himself. Bennie is another isolate, who is not even liked by Paul.

Settings are described in images of isolation. Darwin High is set high on a promontory at the top of Bullocky Hill (p. 24). The Swan is described as a monastery. Darwin itself is ‘three hundred miles from the next school and two thousand miles from the nearest university’ (p. 24).

In the end a key idea is that people choose isolation within a society rather than capitulate to unhealthy or unchosen beliefs. When Paul travels to Adelaide for the competition he realises that Keller does not have to drink and that he did not need to teach piano for the money.

**Music**

Music is not so much a ‘theme’ as an ever-present thread in the rich tapestry of the novel. It is a central preoccupation in the lives of the main characters in *Maestro*. Paul’s parents are enriched, even defined, by their interest in Friday night soirees and Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Music is ‘their true career’, Paul suggests (p. 16). The simple harmonies and tongue-in-cheek lyrics of Gilbert and Sullivan provide an important source of entertainment as well as a vehicle for social interaction in both Adelaide and Darwin.

Music is Keller’s means of survival, both materially through his teaching and spiritually through the emotional and intellectual nourishment it provides. In exile, he dismisses the passionate excesses of Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Wagner, seeking refuge in the technical safety of Mozart, Bach and Scarlatti, ‘as if seeking some kind of ultimate discipline, some perfect control to set against the treacheries of emotion.’ (p. 50). Beware of beauty, he warns Paul on several occasions; beauty is synonymous with ‘lyric flashiness’, insincerity and lies. Once he has denied his roots in the impassioned music of the Romantics, however, he becomes something of a lost soul.

Paul’s life, too, is shaped by his love of music. The novel charts a shift in his attitudes. As he matures, he adopts a more sensual response to music, responding emotionally rather than intellectually to what he hears and sees. The final, brief section of the novel shows his struggles and subsequent agonies of self-doubt as he tries to establish himself as a first rate concert pianist.

Even the minor characters are defined in part by their musical ability and interests. The musical talent of Bennie is one source of the friendship that initially develops between himself and Paul until Paul tires of his friend’s ‘fiddle scraping’ and his victim status. Rosie and Paul are initially brought together by their obvious musical talents. Even Megan suddenly finds Paul attractive once he has become Rough Stuff’s musical director. Rockin’ Rick Whitely, an ageing, seedy DJ with an antipathy to country and western music, signals the changing face of popular music in the 1960s with the emergence of such icons as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Doors, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

**The Holocaust**

One of the strengths of *Maestro* is that Goldsworthy has so effectively pointed to the menace of Nazism without letting its horrors overwhelm the novel. Keller’s reluctant, succinct statements
allow us merely a glimpse into his private hell. His story, he explains to Paul, has not been told before because it is, quite literally, ‘unspeakable’. It is this obliqueness, the gaps or absences in the narrative – what Keller does not say – that gives Maestro much of its impact.

Paul's initial dislike of Keller leads him to refer disparagingly to his piano teacher as ‘a Nazi’, a careless expression that soon resolves into a conviction. Even Paul's parents are caught up in the mystery of Keller's past. Various ‘clues’ are littered through the novel. Keller himself, while reluctant to talk about his past, often utters statements whose bitterness seems to point to another meaning. Thus Vienna is said to be ‘the city of show’, of ‘veneer’, in which people played cards while the world was dying. ‘Nothing, dear lady, could make me homesick,’ he tells Paul's mother in response to her concern that her homemade sauerkraut might make him homesick.

It is not until the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra performs Wagner's Lohengrin in Darwin that Keller becomes openly agitated, shouting out in German and weeping. It becomes clear as he is forced to leave the concert that this is not the first time he has behaved in this way at a public venue, and the reader is again drawn in to the puzzle of what terrible things he has endured during the Nazi years.

For Paul, one of the most astonishing revelations about Keller's past is the discovery that he has deliberately disavowed composers whom he had once eagerly embraced. German nationalism, Nazism, anti-Semitism and Auschwitz have for him become inextricably linked to the grandiloquence and excesses of Romantic music.

History repeats itself and human nature does not change

The epigram links Austria and Australia, Keller and Paul. While it states there are differences, there are in fact many similarities. Keller played for the Nazis believing this would protect his wife and child. Paul joins Rough Stuff, using their friendship as a refuge from abuse rather than hiding in the music room as he had done previously. Even though the consequences are not as grim for Paul as they were for Keller, perhaps the epigram is meant to be read ironically. Students should explore other similarities between the personalities and choices of Paul and Keller. Also students should examine the attitudes of Australians towards the Holocaust and look for signs of misunderstanding and complacency. Goldsworthy uses the same technique of short capitalised tags to describe Darwin, Adelaide and Vienna.
Section 7. Language and style

General comments

- A fiction yet written in the style of a memoir. The experiences of young Paul in Darwin and Vienna are written by adult Paul, who becomes the narrative voice. His comments often begin and end each short episode and are also woven throughout the narrative. His comments routinely condemn the attitudes and behaviour of his younger self as well as guide the reader reaction to events and characters, for example after describing Keller and his first bizarre music lesson adult Paul says, ‘I find it hard to understand how much I came to love the man, to depend on him’ (p. 13).

At the start, the comments of adult Paul firmly establishes the memoir style and conveys a sense of immediacy for the reader, that the writing is being constructed almost at the same time as we read it. ‘Sitting here, setting down these first memories of Keller.’ (p.13)

The voice of adult Paul also comments on the conventions of writing itself. For example, ‘To describe the world is always to simplify its textures, to coarsen the weave: to lose the particular in the general. But as I sit here writing the events of my childhood seem to fall neatly into patterns.’ (p. 15)

- A Bildungsroman, a novelistic form which concentrates on the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth of the protagonist usually from childhood to maturity. (Wikipedia reference)

- The epigram. The epigram is meant to focus reader attention to the central idea of the narrative. The relationship between Paul and Keller indicates that the epigram is meant to be read ironically. There are in fact many similarities between Austria in the 1930s and Australia in the 1960s.

- The narrative is built like a piece of music. The narrative is episodic with different movements akin to an extended piece of music. Each short episode is ended by a diamond and line denoting a change of scene, time or central idea. This compliments the symbolism of music that runs through the novel and the use of musical analogy to represent relationships and the significance of events and themes.

Setting

- Vivid images: The Swan Hotel (p. 3), weather imagery to describe drinkers in the front bar, the religious imagery used to describe their drinking, Darwin (pp. 9-10, p. 46).
- Character’s opinions: Father’s opinion; ‘Darwin was the terminus. A town populated by men who had run as far as they could flee. From here there was only one further escape’ (p. 17). Paul’s mother’s clichéd references to Vienna (p. 45) and Keller’s cynical painful references (p. 45).
- Comparisons: Darwin is compared to a detention centre.
- The use of capitalised tags. This device renders the phrases into a definition rather than a description. Vienna is ‘The Ballroom of Europe’, ‘The Experimental laboratory for the End of the World’.

Characterisation: Major Characters

Paul

- Little physical description. Paul is more characterised by his attitudes to music, Keller, and Bennie Reid.
• The reader’s view of events and their meaning is directed by Paul’s point of view.
• The comments of adult Paul are woven throughout the novel and guide our attitude towards Paul.
• General juxtaposition of Paul’s life and Keller’s life. Love, music, and friendship with bullies. Connection with Keller is emphasised by Paul using his phrases and tones to establish power over other people.
• Juxtaposition of specific scenes that reflect upon the characters, concerns and attitudes. Paul betrays Bennie Reid then (pp. 85-6) asks Keller why he did not leave Vienna when the Nazis took over. Paul hears Keller playing and singing Tristan. This is followed by the bullies ordering ‘Lovebirds’ Paul and Rosie out of the music room.
• Capitalised tags represent his musical failure which ultimately defines him. ‘First Prize Instant Career’ (p. 126) ‘Honourable Mention’ (p. 127), ‘Also Rans’ (p. 128).

Keller

• The novelist begins with a detailed physical description (pp. 3-5) but only of bits of Keller: his face, his eyes, his accents, his hands, his suit. His face is compared to ‘crudely fired pottery’ (p. 69) and his white body to ‘putty or clay’ (p.110). This suggests that Keller is a man-made creation and is incomplete.
• Bizarre teaching practices: Not letting Paul play, his discussion of the roles of each finger and the elbows. Calling his lessons ‘consultations’, reported conversation about the lengths of piano keys and fingers (p. 19).
• His pithy sayings about playing music ‘Is water at 50 degrees half boiling?’ ‘Perhaps there is no perfection. Only levels of imperfection’ (p. 31).
• His connection to the Holocaust. Young Paul’s cruel characterisation of Keller as a Nazi. His cryptic references to the Holocaust (‘Work makes free’ he would often tell me, smiling grimly as if at some private joke p. 42). His grim cynical comments in reply to Paul’s mother’s conversation about the war (pp. 44-45).
• His textbook or LIBRETTO reflects his concerns.

Characterisation: Minor Characters
Paul’s parents: represent Australian attitudes and consciousness
• Little physical description (p. 15).
• Their differences emphasised more than their similarities by their arguments over music and other things. Metaphor of the lost valley where the men and women spoke a different tongue (p.15) their differing execution of music (p.16).
• The glue that held them together was sex and music (p.16).
• Mother’s speech habits (p.14) ‘When things got serious’. She refers to Paul’s band as his ‘ensemble’ which shows her lack of understanding about what Paul is involved in.
• Father’s assimilation into Darwin by his dress and speech (pp. 21-22).
• The humorous dinnertime conversation about Paul’s consultations.
• Their role is to follow-up snippets of information let out by Keller about his life and tell the readers (pp. 20-21 and pp. 38-39).
• Their musical snobbery emerges because they admire Keller more because of his association with Liszt and Wagner; however they are more associated with Gilbert and Sullivan, an example of light opera or operetta.
• Father plays the Major General from Pirates of Penzance (p. 42).
• Their insularity. They have never travelled. Mother’s favourite foreign city is Vienna (‘I only know it from photographs, of course’ p. 45).

Rosie
• Her unattractiveness and irritating voice (p. 63).
• The moment when Paul fell in love at the concert (p. 70).
• After this she is only mentioned in connection with sex and passion.
Megan
- Sensual physical description (p. 32).
- Her smile is described in musical terms (p. 32) but she is also incomplete sexually and morally. A piano needs the black notes as well as the white ones.

Bennie Reid
- He is very critical of Keller. Physical description of Bennie as middle aged the only description Paul can remember about him.
- His heroism in standing up to the bullies even if it meant getting hurt (pp. 26-27).
- His pastime of butterfly hunting.
- He is portrayed as the perpetual victim.

The bullies
- Isolated phrases hurled at Paul on the bus (p. 23).
- Physical description of Jimmy Papas (p. 33), his violence in behaviour and speech (p. 34). His panel van is stereotypically lecherous and hoonish (p. 83). Scotty’s hands (p. 79).
- At the start of the novel they are associated with mindless cruelty (p. 76), their brutality towards Bennie Reid is not described, leaving the reader to imagine it.
- Increasingly, adjectives describing the bullies and portrayal of the behaviour lead the reader to view them as dumb and untalented and even feel sympathy for them as they are exploited by Rick Whiteley.

Rick Whiteley
- Detailed physical description (p. 90 and p. 104).
- He is morally corrupt. He rigged the Battle of the Sounds.
- His sexual deviance is hinted at several times (p 87, 91) and his physical disintegration represents his moral disintegration.

Key Symbolism
The connection between music and passion is prominent throughout the novel.
Keller’s LIBRETTO.
Keller’s missing little finger.
Section 8. Close study

The scenes chosen demonstrate how Goldsworthy implies value conflicts, develops the relationship between Paul and Keller or shows Paul at a moment when he makes a choice. These are important scenes that either drive the plot forward or deepen our understanding of character and theme.

Passage 1: pp. 43-46

Keller accepts an invitation to dinner after Paul gets an A+ on the music exam. This passage demonstrates Paul’s arrogance and smugness as well as his parents’ patronising attitude towards Keller. Paul’s parents assumptions about Keller’s culture and background show the lack of understanding Australians had about the events of World War II and it is in this passage that Keller hints at his association with the Holocaust.

- How does the passage show Keller’s behaviour as rude, and socially inappropriate?
- How does the behaviour of ‘winks, sign language, raised eyebrows, and discreetly rolled eyes’ betray their attitude towards Keller?
- In what ways does mother’s attempt to make Keller welcome with the menu and small talk actually reveal her naïveté? Is her behaviour meant to be read as insularity or insensitivity?
- What is Keller’s purpose in making references to the Holocaust? What does the reader understand that the dinner guests do not?
- Explain reader reaction to the ear-cleaning joke at the time and after reading Henisch’s account.
- Keller compares Paul’s exam performance to a forged painting. Explain why this is significant.

Passage 2: pp. 73-75

Paul arrives for his music lesson on the Tuesday after the concert in the gardens to hear Keller playing and singing Tristan. This passage explores the connection between music, lovemaking and passion, and connects the information we know already about the fate of Keller’s family. It also raises questions about what happened to Keller in the war because of the depth of his grief.

- In what ways does this passage link music and sexual passion?
- How does it link the passion Keller felt for Mathilde with Paul’s feelings for Rosie?
- How is the story of Tristan and Isolde significant?
- Goldsworthy describes what Paul heard as ‘a debate between two instruments, a voice and piano. Or perhaps, more accurately, between head and heart’. What do you think he means? What is the significance between linking ‘contempt and self hatred’ with the ‘abandon and rapture’ of the playing?
- What has Paul decided by the end of the passage? How will this guide his choices in the future?

Passage 3: pp. 91-92

This depicts the night of the Band competition that is rigged by Rick Whiteley. This scene shows Paul’s dissatisfaction with the result and foreshadows a major moral and lifestyle choice. The world of rock music is shown to be corrupt and dangerous as well as unsatisfying musically. The association with Rough Stuff gives Paul the opportunity to clarify values by which he will live.

- How does Goldsworthy build up the atmosphere of the night? What details show it to be a forgery?
- How does Goldsworthy show that Paul rejects the world and its music?
• What are the sources of Paul’s values? How do they provide the beliefs that will enable
Paul to leave the band?
• Rosie says ‘It’s all a joke but its fun’. What details in the passage support or resist her
view?
• Why is the newspaper headline ironic? What is the ‘paradox’ in the last line?

Passage 4: pp. 114-119

The night before Paul leaves for the South he visits Keller to say goodbye. The novel has hinted at
Keller’s grim past through the references to his time in Auschwitz, his obsession with his ‘textbook’
and the research completed by Paul’s parents. In this scene Keller confesses all the details of his
past about which Paul has been curious. Unfortunately Paul is anxious to attend a party with
Rosie and he cannot be bothered listening to Keller, something he regrets for the rest of his life.

• What are the images of finality in this passage? What do they foreshadow?
• How does the writer show that Keller sees Paul as an adult and an equal?
• How does the fact that this is the first time Keller has told Paul that he likes him
add to the pathos of the scene?
• List the verbs adult Paul uses to describe young Paul’s actions? Categorise them. How do
they add to the tone of the scene?
• What is it about Keller’s ‘childish schoolyard version’ of history that annoys Paul? Is his
reaction similar to the time he was asked to play The Children’s Bach? Has he learned
anything by this point in the book?
• What does adult Paul realise that young Paul did not? What is the dominant tone of his
comments? How does this realisation affect your judgement of young Paul?
• How does the intricate interweaving of the comments of adult Paul, the actions of young
Paul, Keller’s almost emotionless narrative and the tooting horn and references to the time
create the emotional mood in the scene?
• What aspects of Keller’s story do you think Paul actually heard? Show textual evidence to
support your view.
• The last two lines present the reader with new information. What is Keller suggesting to
us?
Section 9. Further activities

The book itself – characters, setting, central themes, writing style

• In small groups students could make a list of the decisive influences that have shaped Paul's life. They could then do the same for Keller. These could then be shared and prioritised in terms of most significant down to least significant.

• Goldsworthy has chosen to divide the narrative into sections according to locale and date. Students could go back through the novel and produce their own titles which give a better indication of what happens in each section.

• *Maestro* has at its heart a mystery which both the narrator and reader are intent on unravelling. Students could draw up a list of the 'clues' as these are gradually revealed about Keller's past. Is there a moment where they guess Keller's past before this is finally revealed by the author? How does Goldsworthy sustain the suspense of this mystery?

• Students could choose five examples of authorial intrusions in the story. What do these reveal about the character or situation the older Paul is describing? About Paul himself?

• Students could re-read the final passage, beginning with 'In my hotel room' (pp. 147-49). What has Paul learnt about himself? What is the final impression which students, as readers, are left with? How else could the novel have ended that would have been in keeping with its overall tone and direction?

• Students could rewrite the scene between Paul and Keller, on that last night before Paul leaves for Adelaide, from Keller's point of view. What differences would students need to take into account?

• Which part of the novel had the greatest impact on students? How do they account for this?

• *Maestro* has been described as a novel of 'bright sensuality'. What evidence is there in the book to support this impression?

• Students could discuss why they think Goldsworthy has chosen to call the novel *Maestro*. What is implied or suggested by this title? In calling him 'Maestro', are Darwinites using the term in the way that it might have been used in Europe? How does Paul's use of the term change during the novel and how can this be accounted for?

• If music for Paul's father was 'a species of time', and for Paul's mother, a source of fun, what does it represent for Keller and Paul?

• What do students think of this proposition: that *Maestro* is primarily about a young man coming to terms with his own mediocrity and an old man who has failed to come to terms with his own genius.

• As mentioned earlier, Peter Goldsworthy's poetry foreshadows some of the preoccupations to surface in *Maestro*. In particular, the following poems might provide students with further insights into the text:
  ‘Richard Strauss: Requiem For the Third Reich’
  ‘Music’
  ‘After the Ball’
  ‘Piano’
  ‘Piano Stool’
School days – relationships, growing up, rites of passage

- Why does Paul choose Rosie rather than Megan? Before answering, students could write down all the things they are told about each girl. In their experience, do the Rosies of the world usually win out over the Megans? Why is each girl attracted to Paul? Of the young male characters in the novel, who seems to be the more interesting and why? Discussion could centre around their own observations in comparison to Goldsworthy's literary representation of the two teenage girls.

- On a large sheet of paper, students could chart the relationship between Paul and his parents. Does it change during the course of the novel? If so, at what points and why? Students could discuss to what extent it seems a ‘typical’ parent/adolescent relationship and to what extent it seems peculiar to the Crabbes.

- What are the key moments that stand out for Paul in his recollections of secondary school? What moments are students likely to remember? Do these memories centre around individuals? Incidents? Why do these particular memories stand out?

- Students could compare Maestro’s representation of growing up with other books on the same theme, or with films such as Stand By Me and The Year My Voice Broke. Do there seem to be any common features in these rites-of-passage texts?

- If Maestro was made into a film, which aspects do you think a director might choose to highlight? To omit or play down? On what grounds?

The Holocaust – historical accuracy, guilt and expiation, human nature

‘Herr Keller let them take her?’
‘He was in Berlin at the time. His last performance for Hitler … He blamed himself entirely.’ […]
‘Do you blame him?’ (p. 136).

- Was Keller guilty of being an accessory to his wife and son’s murder? Of collaborating with the enemy? Students could conduct a trial in which Keller is charged with these crimes. Prepare a case for the defence as well as for the prosecution.

- Students could consider what options Keller had at that low point in his life when his family was taken away and killed. Why did he choose the options that he did?

- Students could visit the Holocaust Museum in Elsternwick to gain further insights into life during the Holocaust for Jewish people.

- Students could consider Goldsworthy’s handling of this period in human history. Would the novel have had more impact if the horrors of the Holocaust had been more directly evoked? If, for example, we were told more about the actual fate of Keller’s family and about what Keller himself had to endure in a concentration camp? Why do students think Goldsworthy has chosen not to do this?

- Students could write and discuss the question: Have there been moments in your life when you should have spoken up?

- ‘Every fish has its depth.’ Keller tells Paul. What does Keller mean by this and how is it relevant to Paul? To Keller himself?
• What is the difference between being extraordinarily talented and a ‘genius’? Is Keller a genius? What evidence is there from the novel to support your view? Why do you think so many musical geniuses have been troubled?

**Topics for creative responses**

1. Write a letter from Paul to Keller outlining what the pupil owes to his former piano teacher.

2. Imagine the conversation between Paul and Rosie after Paul has returned home from Keller's deathbed.

3. Imagine you are Keller being interviewed by a reporter. How do you explain your exile in Darwin?

4. Prepare an obituary for Keller for the *Darwin Times*.

5. Write an entry in Rosie's diary the morning after the concert by the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra.

6. Imagine you are Jimmy Papas telling a reporter about your memories of Paul Crabbe.

7. Write a conversation between Rosie and Megan after Paul has become a member of Rough Stuff.

Readers might have different reactions to Paul's explanation of why he never reached his ambition to become a concert pianist. Why is that? Is it because some readers are more involved in and more sympathetic to Paul's story than they are to Keller's?

Was Keller really a 'bad' teacher? Did he always know that Paul was never going to be that one in a million? Was it Keller's repression of Paul's emotional responses to music that lead to his failure? Paul says at the end that he had reached 'technical perfection, not musical perfection. 'Does Keller ever give Paul reason to hope that his ambition might be realised? He certainly gives him lots of warnings that he might not make it.
Section 10. Key quotes

• ‘We must be on our guard against beauty always. Never trust the beautiful.’
  ‘But beauty is what music is for.’ (p. 50)

Totalitarian regimes have a history of appropriating art for their own uses. (Students could research what happened to Prokofiev and Shostakovich under Stalin.) Wagner’s music was used by the Nazi regime to promote the ideas of the regime. It was used to promote nationalism, German mythology and anti-Semitism. No wonder Keller reacts so violently at the concert in the gardens.

Paul has romantic ideas about the beauty of the city of Vienna too, but Keller dismisses the city as veneer, that underneath the façade was violence and inhumanity and hypocrisy. Keller calls Paul’s playing a forgery, technically perfect but lacking integrity and spontaneous emotion. It seems that the music is there for Paul to show off, not for itself. Paul is using the music for his purposes, to satisfy his pride.

• ‘Someone had to know what had happened.’ (p. 147)

Paul has come to love Keller. Beside him at the hospice, Paul is overcome with sadness at the death of this lonely man in his lonely last moments. The muzak playing is almost more than he can bear. He wants to tell someone that ‘a Great Man had died, whatever the crimes he felt he had committed’ (p. 146) but there is no one to tell. Finally, ‘the futility of it all’ overcame him (p. 147). The circumstances of this once great concert pianist’s death are overwhelmingly sad. So too is the fact that Paul has left it so late to tell Keller of his respect and love.

• ‘In this sense Keller was bad for me, […] revealing perfection to me, and at the same time snatching it away. Teaching a self-criticism that would never allow me to forget my limits.’ (p. 148)

At the end of the novel, Paul is overcome with nostalgia and he looks back on his childhood for the ‘foolish innocent world of delusion and feeling and ridiculous dreams’. He knows he will never make it as a concert pianist; he knows his limits, but it is still hard to accept all the same. Nevertheless he has a wife and child whom he loves and at least he will not waste his life as Keller has done by making the mistake of pride and arrogance.

Was Keller really a ‘bad’ teacher? Did he always know that Paul was never going to be that one in a million? Was it Keller’s repression of Paul’s emotional responses to music that lead to his failure? Paul says at the end that he had reached ‘technical perfection, not musical perfection’.
Section 11. Text response topics

In the new Study Design it is important to note that there are differences between Outcome 1 in Unit 3 and Outcome 1 in Unit 4. Areas that the text response should focus on (as per criteria in the Study Design) are:

**Unit 3**
- An understanding of the ideas, characters and themes constructed by the author and presented in the selected text;
- The structures, features and conventions used by authors to construct meaning;
- Methods of analysing complex texts and the social, historical and/or cultural values embodied in texts;
- The ways in which the same text is open to different interpretations.

**Unit 4 (criteria for Exam)**
- An understanding of the ideas and themes constructed by the author and presented in the selected text;
- The structures, features and conventions used by authors to construct meaning in a range of literary texts;
- The ways in which authors express or imply a point of view and values;
- The ways in which readers' interpretations of texts differ and why.

**Topics**
1. Darwin was said to be ‘populated by men who had run as far as they could flee. From here there was only one further escape’. To what extent does this assessment apply to Keller?
2. Keller’s ‘textbook’ contains newspaper clippings about a ‘bleak human landscape’. How does *Maestro* show the reader why Keller says to Paul ‘If only at your age I’d had such textbooks’?
3. How does Goldsworthy support or condemn characters in *Maestro* according to their musical choices?
4. Through the stories of Paul and Keller, *Maestro* demonstrates that we are all accountable for the choices we make in life.
5. ‘Through her political scandals Austria has managed to draw the big world’s attention to herself and at last is no longer confused with Australia.’ *Maestro* demonstrates that there is really little difference between Austria in 1938 and Darwin in 1968. Discuss.
6. The lessons Paul learns about life are, in the end, more important than the music lessons. Do you agree?
7. The central message of *Maestro* is demonstrated by the many parallels between Paul and Keller’s lives. What do you think?
8. Keller says ‘It is more difficult to see evil in your own home’. To what extent does *Maestro* demonstrate that Keller is right?
9. ‘Every fish has its depth.’ Paul Crabbe’s life is made far more difficult than it should be because he does not realise his depth until he has grown up. Discuss.
10. Keller says, ‘The boy is too given to self satisfaction. The self-satisfied go no further’. Paul might be an arrogant and insensitive person but his memoir allows the reader to judge him less harshly than does his adult self. What do you think?
11. ‘You will learn each note by next week. Then I will teach you how to fit them together. I will teach you the music.’ The narrative style of Paul Crabbe’s memoir is fragmented and episodic, however by the end the reader understands the meaning of Paul’s experience. Discuss.

12. Throughout the memoir music is directly connected to human passions. Explain how this device works to tell the story in *Maestro*.

13. *Maestro* is a novel about the Holocaust, yet it is never mentioned. Goldsworthy relies on reader knowledge and established attitudes to get his point across. Discuss.


15. Keller is out of place in Darwin. So are Paul and his parents. Discuss.
Section 12. Guided text responses

‘Maestro demonstrates that successful relationships are founded on mutual respect.’ Discuss.

Contention: Respect is a key factor in a successful relationship however the novel shows that more factors are needed for the relationship to thrive. A relationship which lacks respect is bound to be unhappy for at least some of the parties involved.

The novel’s central relationship between Keller and Paul lacked respect on both sides at the start. Keller throws Paul’s music in the bin and will not let him play the piano at all. Keller abuses Paul who in turn calls him a Nazi. However we are told that Paul came to love and depend upon him. However it is difficult to see this until the end where Keller dies. When Paul finds out how Mathilde died he demands to know why Keller did not leave. When Keller explains, he can’t be bothered listening. Perhaps the relationship was based on a different need? Paul realised that Keller was a brilliant musician and wanted to play like him. He was dedicated to winning, so perhaps Keller was useful to him. He certainly tried to use his name to open doors to a career whilst he was in Europe. However, when Keller was dying, Paul finally showed respect to him as a musician and a person.

Paul's parents imbued him with a love of music but also imposed the desire for an impossible career upon him. Plenty of evidence to show that Paul was not good enough. Disappointment that they did not have a concert pianist on their hands. He felt he had let them down. Two years in Europe cemented the sense of failure that saddens his adult years and contributes to the cynical self-deprecating tone of the memoir. Parents locked him out of their conversations, bit parts in their musical operas, trotted out to perform at their soirees. Paul craved their praise and attention, so they did not display sufficient respect for Paul.

The novel does not show that Paul had any close friends from his peer group. The relationship with Bennie Reid was doomed because they did not like each other. Even before he betrayed Bennie to the bullies, he felt like being cruel to him. Bennie is a potentially interesting character. He played the violin (Paul was rude about this), collected butterflies and was a future naval officer. He joined the bullies but showed no respect for their music or them. It was a respite from their bullying. The connection with Keller is clear. Keller’s ‘friends’ arrested his wife while he played for them. Bullies accepted him because he was useful to them and when Whiteley began to manage them they did not care whether Paul stayed or not. Once the usefulness was over so was the relationship.

The successful sexual relationships in the novel display respect but also require common interests and deep passion to succeed. Paul identifies sex as the ‘sticky glue’ holding his parents’ relationship together. However, the novel shows a love of music, humour, communication and trust. Teenaged Paul falls in love with Megan but finds her an unsatisfying partner, whereas Rosie is passionate and loving. They make a lifelong commitment to each other before they leave for the South. Paul demonstrates that there is never anyone else. Even though the reader might identify Paul’s lack of respect for Rosie, allowing her to ‘fondle’ him in the music room, this is an example of their passion for one another and should not be interpreted negatively.

The artist should show respect for his art and society should show respect for the artist, however Maestro shows that this does not always happen. Society should not use art to promote a doctrine or decide who should live or die. (Nazi propaganda and the ‘first rate Jews’.) Artistic talent should not be used to gain power over others. (Paul and then Whiteley over the bullies, Paul over Rosie, Paul using Keller’s name to open doors in Europe.) Art should be about
the expression of passion and beauty not about winning and this is shown to be Paul’s failure. Keller understands the distinction between creating music for its own sake and to win a competition or impress people.

Finally, the narrative voice in the memoir is that of adult Paul and he chooses to reveal moments in his life which are shameful and filled with failure. Adult Paul does not admire his younger self and identifies many instances of behaviour that does not show respect for people or Art. If Keller’s last conversation with Paul is a confession so is Paul’s memoir and the tone is predominantly regretful. The significance of Bennie’s butterfly collecting is clear in this context. It is a symbol of Paul’s failure. His attempt to pin down beauty leads to dry husks on the floor. Paul ends up with little self-respect when he describes his career.