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# **GOTHIC LYRICISM**

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A practice-led research thesis  
submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Research – LC  
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## **Dedication**

This work is for my family: Katherine my wife, Pamela and Paul my late parents,  
and David my brother.

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## Acknowledgements

My love to my wife, Katherine, always. Kath, thank you for helping me to get where I am, and for encouraging me towards where I still must go.

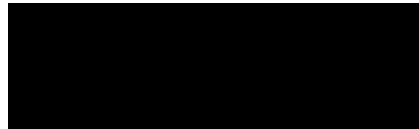
Additionally, many thanks, Kath, for your help with the editing of this thesis together with your translational suggestions in regard to this project's several isolated engagements in poetic French expression and interjection.

A special mention goes to Professor Anna Gibbs (my Academic Supervisor), Doctor Michelle Hamadache and Ronnith Morris – all for their faithful guidance and encouragement. In particular, I owe Ronnith much credit for her final stage professional editorial work.

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This thesis is my work. To my best understanding and confidence, the thesis has been produced entirely due to my own efforts of creativity with the exception of those instances where I have indicated otherwise. I declare with my signature that this body of research, or any portion herein, has not been submitted for a degree at Western Sydney University or in requirement of a degree or qualification at any other university or research institution.



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(Signature)

## **Reader Advice**

Peoples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestry please be advised that the writing which follows expresses some accounts and representations of the voices of people who have died.



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## Abstract

Considerable academic debate exists regarding the primacy of opposed tensions, which are commonly represented within Gothic literature (Hogle 2002, pp. 12-14). These paradoxical tensions support conservative values, and also work as a counterforce of representation driving towards revolutionary notions (Hogle 2002, p. 13). I have long been fascinated by Gothic literature's capacity, via lyrical prose and verse, to relate terrible happenings with beautiful language, imagery, and/or structural innovation. This is a practice-led research thesis with a two-part structure, employing a work of prose/poetry novella along with an exegetical dissertation. Via dissertational inquiry, focus is given to a history of *The Gothic*—its politico-cultural roots and effects in literature and architecture.

Much attention is given to a single binary of the Gothic genre, via the novella component. This dichotomy is the often-beautiful musicality of Gothic writing as it expresses ideas of debasement and death. Variations of this binary and its disjunctions between lyrical exquisiteness and expressions of horror are in high fidelity to life as it sometimes terrorises personhood. The 'beauty/horror' binaries of Gothicism echo somewhat the dislocation between the existential encounter of barbarism or death and the cognitive acceptance of these 'Gothic happenings' as relative truths. Each of the project's rhetorical components espouse against some academic concession that Gothic binaries, via representational imbalances of power sustain patriarchal establishments. In contrast, this thesis finds Gothicism and its historical representations, textual and architectural, largely egalitarian or potentially in favour of equalitarian revolution.



## Preface

For at least three decades now I have found myself fascinated by Gothic literature and its capacity, via both lyrical prose and various designs of verse, to mime terrible happenings with use of beautiful language, imagery, and/or novelty of form. Variations of this binary and its disjunctions between lyrical exquisiteness and expressions of horror, seem to me to be in true to life as it sometimes terrorises personhood.

The *beauty/horror* binaries of Gothicism echo somewhat the dislocation between the existential encounter of barbarism or death and the cognitive acceptance of these *Gothic happenings* as relative truths. However, as I have sat in audience to these Gothic pantomimes as pretty language dramatizes human horrors (or have sometimes met life's terrors existentially), the tropes of the genre remind me of the upper-gallery tickets that my cis-gender male status, along with my predominantly Anglo-Celtic appearance, have reserved for me *in the Boxes*. I wonder about those my *western-ness* makes "other" (Hogle 2002, p. 12), and stewards them to the Stalls or Standing Room spots; leaving me to lounge in white privilege with an opera glass to my eyes and a flute of Champagne in hand.

The capacity of Gothic literature to succeed in the literary expression of egalitarianism is the central concern of this project's discursive component, and meets with further introduction in the dissertation's "Thesis Statement". Here, I posit in contrast to a conventional item of wisdom which espouses: the binaries of power, salient within Gothic literature, necessarily denote power in an inegalitarian manner. This is despite the genre's capacity to denigrate or elevate one binary attendant in isolation to the violence of a second. Is it not possible, at least in a multitude of cases, for so-called opponents to act in equal veracity within a continuum? Could not a dichotomy's presentation of apparently opposed extremes allow a scale with which to assess a singular pole, or reconcile a particular position in-between two extremes? Finally, and possibly least auspiciously, could not a binary reveal simply *la folie à deux*?

In assigning my thesis its title, “Gothic Lyricism”, and writing in the spirit of my theme, I have extended my critical and literary powers to refine an understanding of the intersectionality of textuality and musicality as Gothic literature represents these two elements. In particular, it is the meta-textual and phonic juxtapositions of Gothic literature’s lyricism, the collisions and refractions of horror and beauty, which I have most explored in my hybrid, prose/prose poetry/verse novella “Swum”.

The novella “Swum” enacts a commentary according to the customs of Gothic literature, while favouring the more Dickensian traits of a social realist literary tradition. The novel engages many salient contemporary themes of Australian political and social discourse. Not the most among these are the concerns of three, one complete and two ongoing, Australian Royal Commissions into: one—institutional responses to child sex abuse; two—aged care quality and safety; and three—the violence against and neglect and exploitation of people with a disability

Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australian Government Royal Commissions 2019) has brought public attention, via news coverage, to actions and lapses of the former Cardinal George Pell. The media, including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) documented Mr Pell’s charge (Knight 2017) and his consequent conviction (ABC News 2019). Charges against the former Cardinal are presently pending appeal (ABC News 2019).

The second Commonwealth enquiry informing the novel’s thematic concerns is the Australian Government Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2019). An ABC investigative program, *Four Corners*, foreshadowed this enquiry in its episode, “Who Cares?” (ABC 2018). The broadcast’s Gothic topical focus, stirred amongst many additional apprehensions, great social anxiety for the Australian Government’s already “strained” (Cubit & Myer 2011, p.583) capacity to support the rights and dignity of an aging population. Together with the program’s righteous concern for the health and welfare of aged-care recipients, the broadcast brought to a public forum many issues in regard to aged-care workers’ rights and safety. Key amongst these: the mental and physical health needs of aged-care nurses.

Approximately eight years ago, I left the Aged-care Sector/Industry after working as an Assistant in Nursing (an AIN) for almost a decade. This period of anecdotal observation and experiential knowledge has been the primary informant of my novel’s Gothic sentiments. The machinations and staffing rationalisations of aged-

care facility management inform the work practices of residential aged-care nursing staff. The media testimonies of countless aged-care residents and workers speak to the sector's economic commodification of its residents and employees. These industrial economic rationalisations place sometimes 'horrible' and indeed Gothic strain on the bodies and minds of those for whom the sector is morally compelled to 'care' for i.e. nursing home residents. This failure in care amounts to institutional negligence and also places dehumanizing implications of Gothic proportions upon the sector's workers. An institution's purpose of "care" should, for moral integrity's and consistency's sake, extend to all people whom are either *housed* or employed under an organisation's economic and institutional mandates to shelter and protect.

A forceful engine of my research process during this project has been greatly fuelled by philosophies and knowledges borne of my experience as an AIN. These trappings of experience were retriggered by media coverage and were in turn allowed their fictive expression in my novel and reflexion via my exegetical dissertation. The concept of *reflexion* is a central process of the practice-led research paradigm and will be given further focus in due course.

To a lesser extent the novel resonates with public concerns given rise by the Royal Commission into Violence, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Australian Government Royal Commissions [RC] 2019). This enquiry has prompted community and journalist discourse, which questions the capacity of Australia's many and varied aged-care facilities to care for a large section of sometimes young or middle-aged Australians. "In some areas of Australia, residential aged care has been the only supported accommodation for younger people with disability who have high or complex care needs" (Australian Government Department of Social Services [DSS] 2019). "Just under one in five Australians (18.5% or 4.0 million persons) reported having a disability in 2009 (Australian Government Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2018)."

"Swum" is a short novel (or novella), which tells the story of Sia and Renae—the friendship and professional partnership of an elderly man and his much younger carer/companion. I have structured the novel as a narrative whole. However, I have allowed some strategic gaps in exposition and plot. In view of a representational rationale, I have used these rifts, together with the novel's hybridization. and the fracturing effects of formal and textual 'crossbreeding' so to mirror, in structure and

content, the results of fear and dementia as these pathologies of mind impact human memory and cognitive function.

The novel presents as five inter-connected chapters. Three of these (“I”, “III”, and “V”) consist of both prose, often lyrical, and also prose poetry which I have dispersed within these dominantly prosaic sections. Using whitespace, I have divided these three chapters into subsections with further use of Roman numerals.

Along with the novel’s three prose chapters, I have structured two chapters of verse libre (“II”, and “IV”). These chapters include instances of free verse with the exception of two enclosed artefacts of metred rhyming poetry. These dual sections of verse are to be read as a representation of Sia’s journal written in the notebook genre according to their descriptive title: “Sia’s songs”. Here I wish to pay small homage to John Berryman’s *The Dream Songs* (1969). I first read this book more than twenty years ago, in my mid-twenties. By my reckoning, Berryman’s epic poem, “Dream Songs”, with its elements of experimentalism, drama, comedy, and mastery of idiom, has long been a critical benchmark in the furthest reaches of verse’s capacities of emotional expression.

Along with Berryman’s body of work, I have long marvelled at the stream of conscience prose, lyricism, and Modernist conventions of Mary Shelley—most especially the brilliant musicality of *Frankenstein* (1818)—Virginia Woolf and, to a lesser degree, that of James Joyce. Throughout the writing of this project, my reading of fictive lyricism has been broad. However, my criticism has often centred on the ‘notoriously’ Gothic songwriters Nick Cave, *Nick Cave: The Complete Lyrics* (2001), and Leonard Cohen, *The Lyrics of Leonard Cohen* (2009). I have strived to emulate the works of these two writers who have most influenced my work.

I conclude this preface with some brief remarks upon my view of creative writing practiced-led research. With this project, I have deepened my understanding of the motion and importance of *reflexion*: the function of *conceptual reverberation* as this works within the duality of the practice-led research paradigm. This paradigm being: a dichotomously paired artefact of art (a creative writing text, a painting, dance performance, or otherwise) and an associated item of exegetical discourse.

In the watershed *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (2010), co-edited by Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett, Barrett denotes the inquisitional nature of art with the text’s introduction. “We propose that artistic practice be viewed

as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action (Barrett 2010, p. 1).” The discipline of Philosophy is a class of knowing which is concerned with the extraction of relative truths. It is clear in reference to this that art (in my case the artistry of fiction or ‘creative writing’) is an action of both knowledge and philosophy which work together in unison in the construction of truth. My artistic practice, and that of other artists in their varied fields, is a powerful research method. I have approached my research as a fiction writer with both cowardice and respect for the truisms a verbal palette sometimes allows.

Words are symbols, which exist in signification of material objects (the signified) along with the expression of immaterial concepts (the signified). Written words may be associated, randomly or otherwise, with human agency. A person may not necessarily have material access to, or mental command of the objects and conceptualizations, which a written vocabulary by its power symbolises. The word “parrot”, for example, may be placed in some proximity with the word “penguin” as this very sentence proves. However, these birds, in their material form, are unlikely, sans human intervention, to encounter each other existentially. On the whole, a penguin’s preference for the cold climates is likely to restrict the animal’s access to the warmer environments. Therefore, a parrot, in preference of warm climates, and a penguin are unlikely to encounter each other under most material circumstances.

Poets and linguists working with the concepts of semiotics, first theorised by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), have long held in consideration words’ capacity to place ideas and material objects in strange association via the *chain of (textual) signification*. There are many of *the signified* which may never otherwise be permitted to proximate each other if not for the scale and mobility allowed by their signifiers. Words empower writers to place the existential realities of words together in discord via the juxtaposition of their symbols. This may be done so in discovery of associations and knowledges which may never otherwise be allowed mediation if the proximities of objects and ideas were restricted by the material and/or intellectual universe.

In her chapter *The Magic is in Handling* (2010) Bolt writes in understanding of visual-art practitioner and collegial practice-led researcher David Hockey who “...demonstrates the double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflex practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory (p.

29).” Here Bolt reveals the equitable nature of iteration which functions within the *creative writing/dissertation* paradigm of practice-led research literary studies. As touched on previously, *reflexion*, sometimes called *iteration*, may be understood as a concurrent *bouncing* back and forth of conceptualisations between two or more processes or forums of expression.

By reflexion I often apply the philosophies I have come to know via my writing of fiction to the creation of academic text: this is so in the case of this very thesis. An example of such reflexion is: in gaining a grasp of the poetics of verse, I have learnt concise written expression together with a capable, though ever-developing, grasp of English grammar. These knowledges have in turn informed the syntactic brevity and grammatical precision of my discursive writing. Via reflexion the productivities of two arguably dichotomous poles (fictive art/critical literary rhetoric) work together in baring the hallmarks of an egalitarian, though binary partnership. The paired knowledges of any one binary which exhibit the capacities of both unity of purpose and those of discretionally delegated independence by nature, exist in synchrony. There is every possibility that binaries of egalitarian cooperation and independence broadly inhabit Gothic literature or, further, exist in definition of Gothicism.

## **Part I: Novel**

**SWUM**





—Max Dupain, “Sunbaker”, 1937

Y'all remember when the regime changed  
That no pleas, no calm seas, let the water rise  
So deep, so, so deep  
Oil slick upon the sleeper was an awful thing to realize  
If the two legs wanna wake the dead  
They gon' have to bring more fire, ya'll is closer to the earth  
So deep and ya'll was talking how to get up in their heads . . .

—Clipping, “The Deep”, 2017

**I**

**Sand**

# I

Renaë sat by the sea and closed his eyes in rehearsal of death. He sagged on an aluminium, art deco picnic chair. Its webbing was the colour of a vodka and orange, and its stitching sported a lime green twine. Cheers, big ears.

He'd be nix soon. O well. Maybe for him, the afterlife, his Hell if he had one, wouldn't be much worse than a big tease—him drinking an eternal screwdriver as the waves tortured his temper with their mood swings, his mind stranded to the status of the shore. Or maybe, maybe, in death he could do again what he'd had to do in life.

He'd been a swimmer once, not so much 'the sitter'. Back when his bibs and bobs didn't drag, for him to have brought a chair to the ocean would've seemed as stupid to him as someone setting up a Mahjong game in the entrance arch of the Minotaur's maze—the thought made him cough. He dribbled a little.

He heard a giggle. A kid? Or maybe the trill was Ariadne's laughter purifying the world with the curing power of her pristine chiton...goddess or mortal? A divinity of giving up? Or was she one of getting on?—Well, that was a bit of a brain fart wasn't it? And for a sec, he smelt something like the sizzle of a sparkler. But the beach had always begged him these breaches of thought, because of water's beginnings in birth he believed.

He paused his peruse of the pantheon and opened his eyes. The kafuffle had come from a child of course, not a fabled queen, skittling after the wake of a soccer ball. This was Terrigal, after all—not an ancient Grecian puzzle, with a bullcrap man in the middle, to be solved by a ball of golden logos. This wasn't something King Minos had made miles off, above, or below the Cretan shore, some thousands of years ago to befuddle Renaë at the minute. Bugger, why was he thinking this way? Who knew? But just today, he had his Sia.

Sia, his carer, lay beside him. A seal-black, single-piece swimsuit slicked her torso, and a Bananas in Pyjamas towel spread beneath her on the sand. Stirring, she lifted a hand, and slid a Newtown Jets cap from her hairline down to her brow. ‘Yaaark meeeeee. Yaaaaw,’ she said. As she stretched, the peak sheltered her yawns from the sun.

The sky came third to the lesbian glory of her breasts rising beneath her Speedos and the sunscreen flaring her legs. As she dozed, it felt good just to be subject to the woman’s kindnesses. At least for self-decency’s sake, he gave this seemliness a shot. To date, he reckoned he’d hidden from her, and to a lesser degree squashed for himself, the creaks and cries of his old man’s libido. But now, in the travesty of a continence pad dressed in beach togs, his penis was more beast than a dignitary of his body.

A hackle crouched in its lair. The organ pined, and in the barrens of his beach kit, an animal’s urge opened its maul and howled a little *o*. Then despairing and disgraced, the old bastard gushed himself in a torrent of piddle.

He shifted in his seat. Behind the pair of sunbathers, a Northfolk Island pine shaded them with battle pikes and blades. On the side away from Sia, like a barrow full of sighs, his wheelchair waited. Lately he’d become prone to fainting spells—TIAs his doctor called them. At rare moments his thumbs would twiddle all by themselves without him asking. Pill rolling, he’d heard it called.

Parkinson’s—his brand robbed him of a steady gait and, more and more of late, the disease made his hands shake. Despite the whinges of physios everywhere, he’d resisted the use of a walking frame. His speech stalled at times too but, thank the gods, if he were ever to genuflect to anything of power it would likely be the Kraken, he still had most of his mind.

He glanced from his wheelchair to an oxygen cylinder which was fitted to a trolley. Wheels. Nowadays, half my things have wheels. Funny, as soon as they decide you’re gonna cark it any second, they stick their bloody circles to half the stuff

you own. He touched the tank. Even your air. Shifting his shoulders, he gandered between the swimming flags to the sea. A gull played silly buggers with a kelp berry. Not the water though. They can't screw their bloody axels to the waves.

A boy in a fluro-yellow rashie, the kid who'd been kicking the ball, sprinted past. His steps sprayed Sia's lower half and caught Renae's face with sand. Luckily, none of it landed on Sia anyplace terminal. Just a pinch got in his mouth. He raspberried.

Sia scratched an armpit, took off her cap, and rolled over so her nose scrunched into the towel.

'Son,' he said, at funeral-bell volume. 'You! In the budgie suit. Renae's arm made a hither-to-me gesture. 'Come here for a sec, Son. Just want to have a quiet word with you, Matey.'

The boy halted, walked towards Renae, and stared across the man's shoulder as if a gull were perched there. The child's thumb hid in his mouth, although Renae thought the kid could've been twelve—a tuft of hair the colour of a crow roosted upside down beneath the boy's armpit.

'Look, Little Mate, don't be scared. I just want to talk with you for a moment, if it's alright?' He waited for the kid to nod or something. Nothing followed but the boy's suckling, so Renae went on. 'You can't fly around on the dry stuff like that when there's people around. You could do in someone's seeing, their sight, you see? Do some real damage son. Matey, on the topic of eyes, look me in mine if you can boy—it's good for young men to do that.' He could've crossed a line then. Who was an old something to tell a young thing what to see?

The boy's expression changed, reminding Renae of a Kewpie doll, but his gaze remained fixed on the man's shoulder. The child still seemed privy to an invisible seagull; Renae'd always been a bit partial to currawongs, himself.

A big bloke, about Renae's age, with a Union Jack neck tattoo came from the surf and stood with his hands on his hips between Renae and the boy. 'What ya saying to me lad, mate?' he asked. 'He's me firstborn, and he's a good soul. 'Though, I know he can be a bit surly at times. You best not of said anything disorderly, though, or we might have to have a quick chinwag ourselves, mate—old bloke or not, you look up to a good punch on. We're cut from the same mustard us. Blind Freddy could see that.'

Renae shook his head. 'Nothing's the bother here, champ. He kicked sand in my face, and some on Sia there. On her...that's all—when he was running to you, I think. I can't fault his enthusiasm, his *gas* so to speak. And no real harm done except a bit of grit on my tongue—that's all. Almost dried me up for a moment or two but, as you said, we're old you see. Sometimes, we ancients care for our fists more than speech. But the best of us are honour bound to set aside our tongues to speak in the wet places like this, the beach ...wartimes too, if we're unlucky.'

The man moved to be beside his child, and tried to pat the boy's head, but the lad slipped away. 'Say sorry to the man, please Tobes. He's right. You shouldn't be running full burner up here when there's others around, lad. They might see you for what we are. You say sorry, son. For me?'

The boy's face fought the youth's thumb in effort, but it stayed voiceless. His cheeks quivered, and his attention remained on the mystery bird.

Renae stood and made the two odd metres to the other man without the ill effect of his disease. Offering his hand, he said, 'Not to worry, mate. Name's Renae. Yours?'

They shook. 'Lionel, mate. Lionel, or 'Lino' sometimes, to the Aussie taste. Pleased to meet you.'

'Bugger me, Renae,' Lino said, 'Glad we didn't need that little word. Blimey. Reckon you'd 've given me a run for me money, ex-British Special Forces and all. You're a bloomin' big lad. That chair of yours makes you smaller.'

‘Nah, no need for that, Lino mate. None at all.’ He scratched his earhole, and fought an urge to grab the bull by its horns. But the boy wasn’t his to pasture so, instead of gripping Lino’s defences, he went for a quick pat of ‘the bull’s’ rump. ‘Listen Lino, I hope I’m not out of order here but, I was wondering, have you ever had your boy looked over for gluten or dairy problems? I know those sorts of things can sometimes stop kids from getting their words out.’

Lino’s face turned into that of a sad Staffie dog. ‘No, you’re good mate. I have, and it is—a botherance. No, that’s not the word. A...’

‘I know what you mean,’ Renae said. ‘My second son had that too, by the way. Grew out of it after a while, though. Anyway, too many of us have bloody intolerances nowadays, aye? Different from us two back when we were tiddly aye, Lino?’ He rolled his eyes and the men had a go at laughing together, but they stopped before they really got going. About a decade ago, on sand like this, they might’ve fought together against, or with (the heavens help them), the alabaster blood of a Cronullan horde. ‘Anyway,’ Renae said.

Lino wiped his brow. ‘You mentioned a boy—your second boy, you said. Have anything to do with your kids nowadays, Renae. They drop in on you at all? Like the old days?’

‘No mate...Not much anyway. Seems to me that ‘little ducks,’ so to speak, ’re more likely to come back from the hills ‘n’ far away when it’s their mum that’s doing the quacking. Know what I mean, mate?’

‘Yeah, I think so,’ Lino said. Sort of, old bean. I don’t...’

‘Mum’s dead. Years ago. One duckling did for a little while, I s’pose. Come back, I mean. He’s the pill amongst the boys, that one. Bit of a dickhead really, Lino—if we’re being blunt. That’s just the way it goes. Sometimes, not always, it’s the dickhead ducks that come back for their dads. Most men go best without a dickhead duck quacking by our beds when we’re getting ready for dying.’

The quiet boy tugged the elastic of his dad's boardshorts, then flew to the breakers, spraying only his dad this time. A woman, probably his mum, caught him in her arms as the child chuckled with the water. Lino kissed his thumb.

'Righto, Lino,' Renae said. 'That's all we can do then, mate. And look here, even if we didn't sort the sand like civilized beings, all you'd have had to do is to give it a year or so mate. My Parkinson's is priming to kick my bucket for you.'

Lino began walking and then stopped to speak over his shoulder. 'I'm sorry, old son. That's a hard one.' He poked towards Sia, and winked. 'But by the looks of it you've gone and got yourself a quicker way to go if you want it old son. Aye?'

He swivelled back to face the surf. And the father jogged to the breakers and his family: a partner, a boy, and the warbles, caws, or twitters of an unseeable bird.



## II Untitled

Sia rolled from her front to her back, brushed her thighs, and raised her chin upwards towards Renae.

He pushed through old Parky and managed his carer a wink. ‘Hey,’ he said. ‘Ta...ta for this, Sia. For shouldering the sheer b-bloody hassle of hauling an old bloke in my state to the b-beach, I mean. Cheers very mush, mate.’

She elbowed the sand and jacked up her head with the heel of her hand, thudded his shoulder with a fist, and grinned. Just for the minute, he realised, he would be by himself with his...no. Just this, woman.

She clicked her tongue. ‘S all good, Ren’s bro. No wuckin’ flurries. Anyway, it’s not all on me. Daisy’ll be here in a tick or two—the new lass. Hope this one’s okay. Don’t know all that much about the chick. She’ll give us a hand with lunch and that. And after our nosh, we’ll all get to take a wee swim. How choice is that, mate? Cool bananas.

Besides, being here with you, my bro, ‘s heaps better ‘n’ being stuck in some hellhole hostel, feeling like a creepo ‘cos some matron wants ya to feed a fishfinger to an old dear who can’t feel her teeth. I won’t bloody do it, mate. End up telling them types of RNs to go forth and fornicate. Ah, listen to me will ya. Sorry to use you as a whinging post, bro. You know how hard it can get working with people, don’t you?’

He nodded. ‘I was, am a g...’

‘A teacher!’ Sorry. Of course. You know what people are like all too bloody well don’t you matey?’ She slapped her brow. ‘High school—English and Ancient History right? You’ve told me that heaps of times before. Take a squiz at me will ya?’

And they're worried you're pushing the borders of Dementia Town. It's just I always think of ya as some kinda super-swimmer. You know, because of ya grouse pecs 'n' that? You're ripped, Ren's brus!'

She was overacting—ockering it up too much. This was her dumbing down—a diminishing of her ego to the divinity of his. For how many men did she take from herself like this? Or was her self-subtraction his to tally alone?

He stared at his toes. 'I'm n-not up for any real swimming nowadays, as you know. Haven't for about ten years, really. But, anyway, sea dipping twice a day for hours on end doesn't take the edge off the bills. You still have to make money. Swimming's not much of a job, even at comp level. He frowned at his pinkie toe. Well, second thoughts, I may be a bit off there. In a way the s-surf does ease the finances a bit. When you're out bashing with the waves, the sea tricks you into thinking it's all you'll ever need—makes the shore seem only a matter a of madness. See what I mean? It's the K-Kraken's fault.'

She snorted. 'Who's fault, mate? The Crack Queen's? Guess you were more of the English teacher than a History one, aye Rens. Just jokes mate. I get what you're saying.'

His togs were of the vintage to have a pocket, and his hand palsied as he took a handkerchief from his swimmers and wiped his forehead—pissy. 'No, love. Never got on the old ice. S'pose you've heard some beachies do. Liked my grog a bit too much at times, though . . . and the odd Christmas choof-choof to get me through the carols and the crackers without killing the in-laws. Mark of the ages, I guess.

The Kraken's what I said—from an old Norwegian shanty about a giant squid. Funny, n-not sure why it came out of my mouth just then, love. That's the second time today my monster's been on my mind.'

'No worries, bro. Crazy stuff spurts out of my cakehole sometimes too.' She waved a fly from the corner of his eye for him, and let her touch slip down a tendon of

his neck, and left it there for a sec. His swimmers gave a tiny buck with the strength of a goldfish kissing a meniscus for food.

‘With the money business, though. You must’ve paid everything off in the end though, mate—with your teaching gig, I mean. You’re a lucky dude Rens. Heaps of peeps, like you...’

‘Like me?’ he asked. ‘Coffin stuffers, you mean?’ Was he casting on her waters without a licence? A body which other anglers had long ago overfished? He flushed the thought without looking as if he’d just taken a painful movement.

‘No, dickhead. These days lots of people, even workhorses like you, never own their own homes,’ she said. ‘You could be stuck somewhere a hell of a lot worse, Rens. Believe you me.’

‘Whenever I get sent to a spot like that fishfingers lark—some hole full of people who gave their guts for their families, but end up getting treated like a lunchbox full of turd burgers—I tell Suze at admin not to give me a shift anywhere near that bumhole place again. I just can’t live through those places, you know? Not without doing something I’d regret. So I pick up stumps and go, Rens. It’s alright for me to say, though. I, I can hardly sneak the resies out in my backpack. Poor things.’

Her whole body clenched and, in a moment, relaxed. ‘I do a bloody written complaint and all that beeswax, I guess—couldn’t live with myself if I did diddlyquat. Maybe that bureaucratic bullocks helps things. a little. If only by giving me a half chance of getting some sort of sleep come nighttime at Bogeyman hour.’

He looked down to comprehensively review a comma shaped scar on the biggest bulge of his left hand. The knuckle had once shattered an eye tooth. The fang belonged to the gob of a particularly cruel bastard. Renae caught him flogging the hell out of the cretin’s own dog.

The Labrador's cries launched a couple of rosellas from the arms of a telegraph pole's crucifix. But the creature bore the blows of its boss's Blundstone without growl or tooth. The dog's harness laid limp on the lawn.

'It's well time the bitch learned due far-kin respect,' the bugger said.

Before the beating, Renae had seen the force of the animal's lunge break its master's grasp on the harness. The afternoon made a sunshower. The drizzle gilded the instant, and mooshed a mouthful of poo on the nature strip.

It would've been unholy for the dog to pass the moment without giving it a lick.

'There's quality in the game too, matey,' Sia said. 'Like my Admin Suze—she's good peeps for sure. Damn decent nurse too. I worked with her once when she was moonlighting a little AIN work—wanted to take a trip to Fiji, Samoa maybe, for her annual leave. Maybe Tonga, I think. One of the 'nesian nations anyway. Yep, she's a good chickee poo that one—more than a bit of a hottie too. Not that looks matter too much to a person's make.

'I'm with you there, Sia', he said. 'But it's gold when someone has dibs on both good looks and quality internals. My old Holly was like that. Bless her boobs.'

She elbowed his ribs. 'Yep, Suze's got them too—pretty insides 's well 's a sexy bod. You know mate, I think she just might have a bit of a thing for me. I'll have to see about that soon I reckon.'

She shook her head. 'Second thoughts, mate—maybe not. Not mixing sex 'n' work's a pretty good rule of thumb, I reckon.'

Rule of dick too, Renae reminded himself.

I've been with my lot, *Caretakers*, for ten years now, and I've earned the sway to choose who I want to bust my guts for.

Renae slumped. 'I'm sorry Sia.'

She screwed up her nose. 'What? What're you saying sorry for? O. You dick for brains. I didn't mean you, ya knob.' She gave him a Nina Simone stare. He watched her arm move across to his and her fist disappear on his bicep then slide down

with the grain of his bristles to become the warmth of a woman. He held her hand then, with the tremors of his own. And he got a hardon.

Lesbian, ya nonce. She's gay. And even if she wasn't, you're an old bloke drenched in his Snuggies. And you've got something like twenty years on her, ya leech.

She took back her hand.

'Lately, more often than not it's the days off that break me, Rens,' Sia said. The days on, go on. Something moved past them, and she looked up.

Glancing sideways, he caught the afterglow of a woman wearing a lavender two-piece. Her suit set off her 3PO skin. And the flicker of her he saw next reminded him for some reason of Tinkerbell from Peter Pan. Sensing her distraction, he stayed his view.

Stooping to one side, she turned her back to them and, without turning, and with one arm behind her, she caught the grab of a toddler. With her free paw, the tacker teethered on the tyre of a Tonka toy, and Tinkerbell towed the infant towards the breakers.

Then feeling their inspections settle on her again, Tinkerbell turned, took off her sunnies, and smirked towards her baby. Returning her gaze to the high sand, she gave Sia a smile, but Renae felt his face redden in the force of her glare.

Sia sniffed. 'It's a funny thing, my brother. Most times, a proud, 'nesian, rainbow woman like myself can smile at a little girl 'til the cows can't moo. But when a man of your birthright does it, brus, you risk coming off as a perve.'

She clenched her fist to deliver him another friendly blow, but stopped short as he recoiled.

‘I am at that, Sia,’ he said. By most measures.’

From the concourse ramp, a woman in a white polo shirt with blue culottes stomped towards them. Her Barnaby Joyce hat defunded the sun. Stopping beside Renae, she offered the client her hand. ‘Pleasure to meet you Mr Percer. I’m Daisy your Carer. She glanced at Sia. You’re second Carer, I should say.’

Sia ticked the new woman a smile.

Renae gave over his hand, and Daisy held it so softly he may’ve been the bubble of a breaker. He clucked his cheek. ‘You’re right, sweetheart. Any second now, I’ll pop. Give it another minute, I’ll be painting the rocks with my claret.’ The handshake broke.

‘Sorry sir. What did you say? I’m not sure I gather you’re meaning.’

He snorted. ‘Don’t mind me, Daisy. Just me being sad . . . I’d like it better if you’d call me Renae, or ‘Rens’ is fine too if you’d like. We’re pretty casual here. Take a seat, my friend—beside Sia and the cheese and tomato sangers. He winked at Sia. ‘She doles them out when she thinks I’m rumbling too much. Sit down on the towel, Love. Bl’s foot’s free.’

Daisy stood up straight and wove the fingers of her hands together at her waist. ‘I appreciate the offer to sit Mr Percer, but I’ll stand just for the moment. I’d prefer you call me Daisy, sir, rather than love. I’m a Care professional in training to become a Registered Nurse. I appreciate your generation are of a different ilk to my own, but you’d do well to mind not to call me ‘sweetheart’ again, sir. Here, in my work place, I find the use of language like ‘love’ and ‘sweetheart’ to be both offensive and disempowering.’

Sia titched. ‘You’re work place, lovey?’ she asked, and nodded to a Surf Lifesaver. ‘My thoughts were we’re having a nice day at the beach, myself. Where’d you reckon we are, Darls? Hospital?’

‘I, I’m v-very, very sorry, Daisshey,’ Renae said. He felt something starting to sink in his head and he smelt himself fizz like a sparkler again. I won’t say anything like that to you ever again.’

Daisy scowled. She squinted at him and, crouching, she pushed her nose towards his crotch. And sniffed.

Daisy turned sideways towards Sia. ‘His pad’s sodden. Mr Percer needs to be changed straight away. I could smell his urine from five meters away—even above the surf. She gave his crotch a pat. Actually, he smells so strongly I suspect we may be dealing with a UTI. This will certainly call for documentation at the end of the shift, Sia.’

‘No shit,’ Sia said.

Again, it was as if his grey matter were firing a flare and a lifebuoy in his brain were submerging.

Renae saw Sia rage and leant to put his palm on her shoulder. She rose beneath his palm and stood beside him and the oxygen tank. ‘You steady on, Li’l Missy. You’re treading a bloody thin line right now, Hon. You’re lucky we are at the beach, Sista. Or right now you’d be feeling me sniff your crotch with the hard part of me shin. How freakin’ dare you smell Rens like he’s a piece of pawpaw? And then touch him down there without a condom on your finger or a goodnight kiss.’

Daisy met Sia’s glare with her own then looked down to an analogue Timex pinned to the pocket of her agency shirt.

He stood. ‘D-daisy, love. Shit—shorry. Just D-daisy, I mean. Sia and I, we gabbed about this in the morning—about m-my wee, I mean. I know I smell strong. It’s my medsh, Daisshey. We decided it’d be better for everyone if inshtead of the sheds, we jusht all have a bit of a shwim together in the arvo. It’s a bloody bear garden,

Daise. H-heaving my chair through the sand to the shushowers. Let's just leave that bushiness to the ending.'

'It's Daisy, sir. Not . . .'

'Shift sis,' Sia said.

He staggered forward, then Sia caught his fall by sandwiching his upper body with the flat of one hand on his breastbone and the press of her other to his lower back. Glancing to confirm the brakes were locked and the chair sat stably, she cushioned his fall to the wheelchair. 'He's having a fucking TIA, love. Pass me the oxygen mask.'



### **III**

#### **Sia's songs**

## **Never the incontinence of sunlight and flight**

Wendy was such as the smell that comes from a vase that has forgotten its sunflowers. She couldn't remember the sun's or the stalks' stake in her waters. Before time when Wendy had begun again, she'd turned seventy-five.

Sometimes, she sank . . . stank, so she sniffed, surfaced, and flipper tried and then forgot why.

She came to be in this whoosh pong as Van Gogh's favourites died at her from the sill.

Nowadays, sunshine and starlight sagged her skin without suggestion.

She sensed, in another stint, inside a never not, these goggle growls and goober gurgles might've ignited her savagery or sweetness.

At the moment, Wendy darls' insides waxed and waded as if her bottom bubbles were the English Channel, and her mindlessness ebbed without true tide but with tosh and some bosh.

And every handclap capsized her summer swoops.

## Joan's warhorse

Chef, the war stead, and Joan the go-getter, the forget-me-not picker, aren't on speaking terms today. When she'd saddled him, the chestnut Clydesdale had chewed the peacock feather pluming from her helmet and, as her visor would've had to pop open, he'd lavished her nose with licks. 'Homph,' he said. Homphy, homph. Humf.

Horse tongues and the Ghost's are happy and hot.

But these temperatures and torts forever frown the foreheads of sinners.

She whispers to the mount every day,

'My foreverness and face aren't for kisses, *mon ami*.'

To date, she's alluded the pass-me-the-incense passions of altar boys

and the may-I-shoulder-the-burden-of-your-lance coercions of a banner bearer.

By force of the Ghost, the losing of herself,

and the sorting of her battle nag, she's *la femme du jour* of war.

The prick sometimes sways his head and blow-fishes his cheeks at the bridle

and the bit on the canter. He's a beast. And, *oui*, saddling him

this morning had been her fire starter.

'Saint Catherine of Alexandria forgive me,' she'd prayed. 'But, sometimes,

I could knacker his bollocks for gravy.' Though it was these things *de la folie*,

of the finite, she knew, which gave her horse his strength

on the charge. She'd weaponised his balls.

Now, the nag diverted, whinnied,

wheeled, and stamped out a witch's fire.

'*Oui, mon Chef. Fire-feeding avec mon corps is only for later*'.

## Crocodile's psalm

'O, to die nigh,' she prays.

'I have savoured their fear for their flesh, and my nonchalance for their swords.

I ate the arm of a man for folly, amen.'

She's sleepy and sad for the salt of her soliloquys.

'To have noshed on watch and to have swum across the endlessness of its face.

And now, O now to perish without telling.

To have counted the centuries with the circuits of time and its limbs inside,

to lose number the infinity of numerals,

the machinations of cog and sprocket,

the seizing of springs, and, now...to unwind.'

But the croc knows beneath her leather the thrum of forever,

and the passage of all predestination.

Beneath the armour of her scales, she bares Evolution unhinged.

She is Tick Tock—toxic to hooks, books, sea captains, mermaids,

and paedophiles, to girls, boys, and Salvation.

'Hear me, O Heaven; forgive me my sins,' prays the crocodile.

'For I have unheard every horror.'

She has floated in ship's wake, passive to head-jobs helped to pirates' beards by sabre,

watched without jaw the struggle of headdress,

the churn of mermaid fin to the pokes

and chokes of *The Rodger's* crew, to the urges of sea-captain

bristled from waist and buckle.

The reptile once left unheeded the night terrors of a little boy

slumbering in sunset and rise pinking,

crowing and clapping in his sleep his faith for fairies

at comet, gunshot, firing squad, and sun.

'Till now, the crocodile has waited below

plank for that which might fall from starboard and trade wind,

for the legs of green tights, a-dangle from mainsail and crow's nest,  
for the splashes of Wendys and watchchains.

'Till now, Tick Tock has worshipped all time with blood.

But she's tired of late, un-bleeding  
and weary of every winding.

This her prayer churns the harbour and creases all Earth,  
but Heaven and Neverland do fuck all.

## Untitled

The staghorn sulked. Above in the Y of a black wattle tree, a butcherbird dropped the cottage plant the snake meat in its stool.

**IV**  
**Maze**



—Ben Quilty, *Trooper M*, “After Afghanistan”, 2012

Let me die a youngman’s death  
not a free from sin tiptoe in  
candle wax and waning death  
not a curtains borne by angels  
what a nice way to go death

—Roger McGough, “Let Me Die a Youngman’s Death”, 1967



About three months following the ‘Terrigal Incident’, Renae thrashed in the rip of a dream—a cyclone of strokes and salt froth buried him in an infinity of water pressures. Then a tangle—a scatter of kisses in myriad, the limbs of giant squid, a kraken cuddling him with suction cupped calmness. But then churning the blue, the bellow of a bull, and all suction became a biting: a multitude of mauls sucking at the salt of his survival.

Renae woke and swung a punch at the dark. Even in the gloom, he sensed the blow hadn’t met with the air of home, but he had to take it as a mercy his arm had the oomph to swing at all. His fist lay dead beside him without tremor. He’d long learnt, however, that any act of kindness his body paid his mind had the shelf life of a shucked oyster. Very soon the drag of his disease would tow his kicks, strokes, reaches, and cries shoreward again towards their mooring place of death. Parkinson’s is a tug boat.

He pushed aside the pillows and listened to the covers. If he were home, he’d be able to hear the waves breaking through the sheets—nothing. No, he wasn’t in his hardwood bed by his room’s bay window. No, not lying beneath the head’s bluebottle knobs and seahorse carvings. Shame, it would’ve soothed him to curl a hand below the mattress and chill his fingertips on one of the support’s cast iron horizontals. But in the lack of any certainty, his two-bedroom, weatherboard house in Avoca might’ve been simply a siren’s sigh. Or perhaps the ‘shore fancy’ of a convict sailor taking his final step from the plank.

He remembered, then, that he was in some kind of hospice; Sia had said so on her last visit. To make up for the shortness of her stay, she left him a polished periwinkle shell. Knick knacks—the chattels of crossed purposes. Sia’s mother needed Sia back to deal with the washing. She was getting worse, Sia said. Worse at seeing to herself. Harder on Sia, Renae reckoned.

After she’d left, he’d tried to commit his new dwelling’s name to mind, but a nurse had chosen the moment to catheterize him and the sting had made him forget any feel for place beyond its pain.

He had a little pill roll. When his thumbs had stopped circling, he palmed the bedding between the fork of his thighs and confirmed the tube and the urine bag had since been removed. Stretching each arm outwards, he tremored upwards to the rail restraints, then gave both lengths of metal a rattle. Exhausted, his hands flopped, surrendering themselves to their cage and the renewed wrench of his disease. With the slap of impact, he jolted and it returned to him too that there were many things in this place which were making him frightened. He didn't know his fears' beginnings because Sia had been with him when he'd first felt scared, he'd been brave. Valour remembers only doubt.

He heard the tinkle of a trolley pause in the hallway, as his eyes turned to meet the sound, he saw two forms like cloven hooves beneath the door. Heart shaped shadows cast across the doormat of fluorescent light. There was a knock, and the door screeched an arc on the concrete as it opened. Something tapped near the frame. There was a click and, against the glare, a man shifted in. For a moment Renae saw that the form had horns made of rainbow, but this had to be a trick of his meds or most likely his eyes' response to the brightness.

The visitor's thick shoulders slumped, his breaths huffed and, piled against his chest, he had scooped a set of bath towels. He squawked a high-backed chair from the corner of the room with a foot, and turned his back on Renae as he slopped the shower linen to the seat's pink-and-grey-galah coloured upholstery. He spoke into the suite's corner. 'You've wet the bed, Mr Percer, I can see that from here. I taste your salinity too, sir.'

Ticking that the other man was a nurse, Renae went to investigate his underpants, but brushed instead the hem of his hospital gown. He was very wet. Gawd. He hadn't felt that bad before. He shifted, and stroked the bedclothes beneath his bum cheeks, and satisfied himself that he'd piddled a puddle which'd seeped through to the mattress liner. Before, when his punch had brought him back from a death dive, he'd assumed the small amount of moisture on his thighs had been sweat.

Recently he'd discovered hospice life less complex if he didn't speak to staff unless absolutely required. Presently, rather than voice his thoughts, he shrugged at the nurse and tried to seem a little regretful, but he was offering him a gesture. Renae felt the pinch of an indignity of course but he was, shitfully, a stroke patient—in this stage of undoing, it was just his lot to piddle his bed. Besides, he'd long held: a high ego was the single privilege of those with eternally white undies. And who of humanity could boast that? Just some poor prick with a dose of bleach in his undies.

It would seem so my friend, Renae thought. Luckily for me I've got a nice young buck like you here to look after me. He'd been showered by another man only once before in his life (back when he was in his sixties, after a knee op). The male nurse who attended him then was gentle, strong, and kind: a human being like a good god. Renae told himself there was no reason at all his present nurse shouldn't be made of the same salt.

The nurse turned from the corner and faced Renae, then walked to the adjacent angle on the door side of the suite. He kicked the brakes of a wheelchair, and pinched the blue tag on its handle. 'Blast!' he said. 'I despise this one. It's like getting stuck with the last shopping trolley on the rank. That Casey always nicks the only decent one this floor has to offer before I can get within hide or hair of it.'

Renae nodded. Mmmm, that Case. What a rotter.

He jerked the wheelchair over to the bed and stopped about a yard short of the right bedrail. Stepping sideways, he bent over and whipped the pillows from the ground. Without looking, with both hands, he flicked the pillows backwards over his head towards Renae. The horseshoe hit Renae's forehead and bounced downwards to his waist; the standard bounded from the patient's chest and landed on the floor to the other side of the bed.

A continence pad dropped to the ground beside where the pillows had been. The nurse scooped the laces of his shoe beneath the pad and kicked it towards a yellow bin: the wad slipped down the container's swivel lid. Then drooped inside the can as

if it were a leech so engorged it could no longer latch its host's belly. A swipe of liquid the colour of sunshine arced the floor.

‘Somehow, your pillows and pads always end up on the ground, sir. Why do you think that happens, I wonder? If you don't wish to use them you need only tell me, Mr Percer. You're simply assigning me more work by tossing your chattels to the earth as if they were a Frisbee.’

Renae reasoned that Frisbees worked to best performance when thrown to the air, but he gave his helper the benefit of any doubt. He empathised: it's not just the old buggers like me, then, the bastards get with their bloody circles—their wheelie things.

The nurse pulled a red release lever with one hand and slammed the bedrail down with his other. Next, he put the wheelchair so its wheels paralleled the long side of the mattress: the handgrips faced the door. Toggling the controller, he raised the upper half of the bed to the feeding position. Renae slid downwards and revealed the top few inches of a washable mattress.

‘I'd pay you to mind I act beyond the call of duty quite frequently in your case, sir—that's in the manner I demand upon myself to bare the weight of your excessive frame,’ the nurse said. ‘You've no moral foundation whatsoever to put upon me to remedy your slovenliness, your simple piggishness, Mr Percer. He snorted, and scraped a shoe on the floor.

‘Sadly, this ward lacks a dedicated mechanical lifter. The only viable manner to gain a suitable machine is to waste ten minutes of my time in the fool's errand of running a maze of corridors to get downstairs and sign one off from Obesity. As I say, you're by no measure a small man, Mr Percer. To my pound, that's the primary reason you're so susceptible to stroke in the first place. You should mind that fact at your leisure, sir. Cognitive Therapy have assured all nursing staff that you're still capable of intelligent thought, nonetheless.’

With no further words, the nurse pushed his face so his nose touched Renae's. His mouth fouled Renae's with a grotty bouquet garni: mint chewing gum, paspalum, coffee, and an undertone of something like bacon bits.

A bronze medallion slinked out from below the neckline of the nurse's scrubs top and grazed Renae's lips. It was as if the trinket mastered a kiss.

'My Saint, sir,' the nurse said. 'Saint Isidore: The Patron Saint of Farmers. Appropriate for an Aged-Care EN like me, you think? I believe that with my calling as a nurse (a Gerio-Specific Nurse-practitioner to be precise), I am in truth a pastor, if you will. And mind me, Mr Percer, I choose 'pastor' in fidelity with the word's original spirit: meaning, in fact, 'to farm'.

Do you see now? Nursing homes, hospices, hostels, whatever they're called, aren't all that very different from stables or holding pens. Organisations such as this one, the facility you find yourself within now I mean to say, are quite simply dying stalls for human stock.'

The nurse snatched an army-style, segmented plate (which'd been to go crusty) from a bedtable beneath the wall-mounted television. 'This bowl of yours doesn't look all that different from an animal feeder, perhaps a manger if you will, sir.

'Once, when I was a mere calf, I gored a guineapig to death with my fingernail: just for the thrill of it. Just for folly, my good man. Ah, the vigour of a yearling may only be matched by the mad's. I shared morsels of the rodent's corpse with a currawong I'd befriended. The bird and I ate together from my sister's baby bowl. This very plate of yours being almost a mirror to my sister's utensil.'

He crashed the crockery back to the bedtable. 'In any case, Mr Percer, I can tell by your face that you're beginning to understand where you and I stand with each other. Or should I say lie? As you decline, I will dine on your destitution. Your failing is the foodstuff of my survival and my transcendence.'

The nurse put his hands on his hips. ‘You must realise by now, Mr Percer, you are by no means special. Ah, don’t look so surprised. Your divinity gives you no pardon. Anyway, in the end, people, even gods, are only animals. The only notable distinction is, on the whole, people have the power of speech. But all beasts, not excluding people, have souls. Particularly in the case of a salient marine mammal such as yourself, Mr Percer.

You’ve surely come to know it by now, sir, the possession of a soul by no means excludes suffering. To the contrary, adversity to the heart facilitates the animal spirit. You see, beings like myself are of life’s most essential circuitry. Greats such as me, together grunt the wheels of being, as Tennyson might put it, against the gravity of ground.’

Renae blanched and his whole body palsied. He would’ve liked to talk now, but he’d become a creature of this farm.

Without warning, he felt the nurse’s hands grope behind his waistline, trace his spine and loop his shoulders. The grip had the agency of an electric fence, and its force hoiked Renae upwards, then pivoted him on his rump so that he sat on the side of the bed. His bare feet touched a trickle of his own urine.

The nurse steadied Renae in a sitting position. And pinched the patient’s armpits with two Ls made with the thumb and forefingers of the nurse’s hands. ‘Right, Mr Percer,’ he said, your Care Plan says that you respond quite well to basic commands. That’s well and good. I’m going to lift you to your feet. Once I’ve brought you up, sir, I will thank you kindly to use the gumption of your own two feet to stand up straight, and bare your weight like the good, old workhorse, let’s say seahorse, you are. I’ll remind you too, sir, to mind that you’re by no means the only patient in need of my attendance tonight.

When you’re steady, I’m going to swing you around ninety degrees and guide your bottom to the wheelchair.’

The nurse thrust himself between Renae's legs and parted them with his knees. As Renae gaped upwards, he saw the nurse's skull again reflect the light from the ceiling's fluorescent tube. The glow flared to reveal the forward cast horns of a Spanish Fighting Bull then, as Renae's eyes withdraw to the ground, the monster's shoes morphed into the clefted hooves of a bull—The Minotaur of Crete, Renae thought.

'Shhhtop! Pleashe. The fl . . .' Renae said. But before he could finish speaking, the monster heaved him upwards. For a moment Renae dangled, then the tips of his toenails skittered the floor, and his heels bumped down to smear the splash of urine. Both his feet lost all purchase, and his bum knee Judassed him with a spasm.

Flailing backwards, he banged his tailbone on the edge of the mesh mattress support. A pain buzzed up his spine, and he landed with his shoulders and upper back on the bed. The fall's force slid the bed sideways against the nature of its wheels, and Sia's seashell fell from the bedside cabinet to the long sheet.

He caught the periwinkle and clutched it to his chest. An energy charged his heart with a jolt and conducted tendrils of heat through his bloodstream to the extremities of his hands and feet. He stood to become the Theseus of his swimming dreams. And with a battle cry he roared the name 'Kraken'. But in that moment he felt The Minitour's snorts on his forehead as its embrace whacked them together to the floor.

**V**

**Sia's Songs – Continued**



## **Flannel flowers**

**After *Daffodils*, William Wordsworth, 1802**

I fled lively as a fart  
That trumpets 'cross sea decks and down the corridors of colonoscopy clinics,  
Then without warning I spotted a moment of art—  
A small orgy of feral flannel flowers  
Next to a sewage grid, beneath the wreck of a Commodore;  
Swivelling and headbanging on the gale by the car's door,

Finite as the fumes that rise  
And asphyxiate from a corpse,  
The flowers squirmed with the muddle of their eyes  
Turned away from a dead girl dressed in a *Dora the Explorer* top.  
Ten, or eleven flowers saw I with a look  
And this vision with upchuck I shook.

Sugar ants ate beneath the deluge of my gush, but they  
Lost to the flannels' who-gives-a-shit eyes staring behind the car's side mirror.  
A poet could only be gay  
To have seen such horror.

And sometimes when in the shower I collapse  
With the craps at homelessness, death, or a dickhead,  
Or my anger with Trump Tweets I tax—  
These things find fruit in the poetry of the aforesaid—  
My faith with abhorrence cowers  
At the selfishness of flannel flowers.

**The whale and the crocodile – a nonsense song, not for children**

**After *The Owl and the Pussycat*, Edward Lear, 1871**

The Whale and the Crocodile went to space  
In a diabolical black balloon.  
They took a dagger with something madder—  
A heroin hit on the moon.  
The Croc made pause with a mind for pain,  
And spoke with an eye for the sun.  
'O dastardly Dick, O Dicky old sot,  
You're a hopeless prick with a gun, by gum.  
You're useless as shit with a gun,  
Boy chum;  
Yep, you're as stupid as piss with a gun.'

Said the Whale to his Croc, 'You two-bob whore,  
You do bugger all; you've no flare with rifle or knife.  
O do get stonkered! Just go get stuffed!  
It's the stars' set sizzle my life.'  
But they floated away 'till the airship came down  
To a place where the Spacemonster wanked.  
And there in a crater, the whale said, 'Later,'  
And blow holed despair at his wife,  
His wife,  
His wife,  
He blasted his blues at his wife.

Said the Croc, getting giggly, to the Spacemonster fiddly, 'Would ya shoot him for  
diddlysquat?  
Or would ya prefer to shoot my Whale for a root?'  
Said the brute, 'I will.'  
So the beast culled the whale with a rake of its paw.

And the leviathan loosened her legs, then her bill,  
And after the deed, the pair had mead  
Which they drunk through a plonkable straw,  
And claw in claw, in the acme of space,  
They boogied by gloom of their doom,  
Of doom,  
Of doom,  
They death-jigged by glow of their doom.

**Saint Mary of Magdalene –  
in defiance or difference to His former Eminence Cardinal George Pell**

She knows temptation too. Just ask her—The Saint of Sucker, Blessed Mary of Magdalene. A vision foretold her fancy, once: suckling vino from the Christ's toes, swallowing, heeding the pricks and parables of His heel spurs and when His feelings got firmer, His Carpenter's hands kneading her from the ferocity of His Fisherman's shoulders.

O her buttocks, her thighs, her heaving.  
'Ooooh, aaah, glory be to Him!' she says to the ceiling thatch,  
then stables herself, and repents to a locust. Forgive her.  
She's soiled in mind, but yet not in this deed (thank Christ).

Bugger, her boobs and her brains ache.  
All this thinking with a Bastard to feed, wet-nursing  
The Messiah before He comes of *Bar mitzvah*.  
So, before His, His...(she signs The Crux)  
so, in the years approaching, she may kiss His tootsies again on His birthdays  
and chastise herself during the droughts of her Lenten promise.  
She gazes at nothing and tweaks her cleavage.  
She'll have to wait 'till His Harrowing, she thinks. She shudders.

Excommunicate her *Shishka* heart, but Ave Maria's hormones never knew *schwanz*  
during pregnancy. No, not one. Nothing at all. Never 'till death does she part.  
Saint Maggie's heart says help, but her hips keep a-swinging.  
'Spank me and send me sinning to Purgatory,' she says. 'But not 'till after.'

Christ has bestowed her fate upon her Himself, she knows,  
but her sins're not getting any thinner. Some nights, there's a vigour to her thrusts  
that gives scatter to the rats which chew the edges and archway of the whore's house.  
The vermin aren't to know of the salvation

which's flowed from her prayer-hole on the other darknesses  
upon which she's simply yearned for yonder Faller from David's Star . . .  
she gives it to Her (she'd better)—from Ave Marie's (sacrosanct) thighs also.

Presently, she petitions His scream—a Baby God's tantrum.

But bless Him! He must've wiped His Own botty once when she was dying  
on an orgasm so hot and heartless, she cackled, and once when her monthly bloom  
was saying hi to a Pharisee who said He was going to be a shit shepherd.

And then the lawyer got her one and only goat

before the animal had time to nibble His halo or raid her radishes.

'Amen.

Hallelujah! And hand me that little pot of myrrh will You, Precious Child?

And that palm-woven wipe, if You'd please Cherub?' she asks.

He's thundered his swaddle it seems.

Then right before her, she sees Him thrash from His rags and walk on His waters.

But this time, not wiping, the Baby just stink-eyes her,

gurgles a burp, and pumps a fist to her face.

'Hark!,' the herald angels sing.

## Vincent of the coal dust

The shaft sent Vincent and his Bible verse to the day's coal seam;  
the intern prayed for the favour of the Lutheran God and protection from the  
darkness of the Devil and the Gothic destitution of Lucifer's pit. *Mon Dieu, ma  
Divinité,*  
may the darkness of this dust tether me in love to the work at hand without grimness  
or the griminess of my temper—for in the night-time of earth within this coal mine, I  
am to be Your sun source.

May I please you with my compassion, and may I make Theo proud, for he deserves  
as much for his funding and all his fancy. He is my little brother, but his wallet and  
the reach of his compassion are bigger than my own.

And dear Father, curtail my curt longing for the yellows of absinthe, lemon trees,  
sunflowers and the browned thighs of landladies (but not real lovers).

But it was the pony's snort that stabled Vincent. A beast of the dinginess, never to  
long for the sunshine tones of absinthe. For the animal has never worked in other stalls  
than the coal's curses.

The ring of mattock, like the palette of sounds mixed by the street and its walkers for  
Vincent, has met the pony's pause, but has always been the source of its whippings.

## **The bite of a bad memory**

It's coming from back in the beast's boondocks, this remembering which feels me.  
I can't recall the monster's name, its birthday. Don't know if I may lay  
claim to this country of murder and unmeaning  
or if I'm simply trespassing upon a haunt.

With every gasp of an old friend's fading, fangs dig deeper through the hide  
of the 'bunyip's' past. At night, I thumb the flesh of my forehead as if to make sure  
the monstrosity hasn't made claim to my mind without my knowledge.

**VI**  
**Vortexes**



## A

The night hid a darkness that might live on in a conch, or perhaps a periwinkle, to kill me one day in the sun. Outside my second-storey bedroom, a gust grabbed a branch of the monkey puzzle tree and tickled the lead lighting with bristles. A streetlight beamed through the coloured glass and cast one of the cupboard doors with a ship's wheel. I heard a clitter, then a thrump, and a silhouette popped to the wardrobe's helm as if to skipper my weariness further from sleep.

An ochre pussycat sat on the brownstone outside the sill, chomping the wind and giving me her eyes. In a state between a dream and dillydally, I took the animal's insight with a hand in my mind and orbited the ellipses around each other's infinity. The source of the feline's stare became a set of dragon balls—a sliding in eights of two forevers.

I felt no distraction though—no time scratching time witching of sound—nothing to save my thoughts from the buggery of being alive and feeling so much death at the same time.

I'd worked through my last four shifts without an hour's sleep in between. And I'd lost all distinction of the days. Time became a piling of my worries. At nights the minutes moaned. And the only moments of mitigation came from my hushes into the internet: a derangement framed by Candy Crush Saga, the deadtime of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and #MeToo which flatlined the rape and abuse of Hollywood and workaday women into a lineage of unutterable regularity.

It was; I was, would be; Thursday soon.

I set my phone to blast me off at four. If the night took me somewhere else for a few hours, I'd need to wake with enough time to let me arrive ready for handover and the five o'clock start to my morning shift.

There came the clang of a cowbell—Mum's call for my help. The heavens help me. I'd give it a moment before I went. Maybe she was just dreaming me along with all that noise. But then a jab at the ceiling with a bloody broomstick or something. Most likely she'd woken in wetness or, as was usually the case, she wanted me to hold her or help her swallow something stronger than her fist to silence the caterwauls of her pain. The bell again. This time three great church-tower peels jangling my bowels and my guts with a conscience I knew I'd never be able to pass. Okay, it's time now, my mummy. What were the words to that hymn we'd sometimes sung in assembly at school masses? *With Your body, You give blood. We come to Your table?* Something like that. Some platitude about the supremacy of sacrifice and service. Save me, Something. Sometimes I believe.

I took to the stairwell. The noises of her need continued, bribing me by my years, making me little again for seconds on end. Then lurching me forwards into an old maidenhood (already many times voided) for a forever yet, or never, to arrive.

Whenever I'd been down sick as a child, that same toll had delivered to my tongue, by my mother's hand, the half-hearted tickle of flat lemonade, or the yellow-gumboots smell of a clean vomit bucket, then the lanolin smear of her cold touch to my temperature.

I was hers now—in her bedroom, at her disposal. It wasn't that she'd wet her linen as I'd dreaded. Just that she felt cold. My mistake. The temperature had sunk several degrees since eight-thirty when I'd put her to bed and had taken myself upstairs. I dialled on the oil heater, went to the cane chest at the foot of the bed, and covered Mum's mermaid-shaped swell in the quilt with the very same flannel flower, patchwork throw rug she'd made me for my 'sleepy times' back in kindy. Ah, this reversal of the ages—like cutting wax from a candle's base and lighting the new end with the pangs of an unreachd promise.

‘Darling, can I have your hands?’ she asked. ‘Mine aren’t really mine anymore. I’d be much better off to have yours.’

‘Sure,’ I said. I sat to her side, kissed the salty skin between her eyebrows, and began to rub her knuckles and palms with a smear from a pot of lavender oil I took from her bedside table. ‘You can pinch my nose too, if you’d like any more of my parts. Most day shifts, of a morning, I’d be best not having me snoz. Pew, bloody eee.’

She nodded at her bedclothes. ‘I know what you mean,’ she said. ‘Smells like cat’s wee under my blankets most mornings too. You know this don’t you. You’re the one who has ta change my bedding, ya poor, old saussie.’

I moved the massage from the veins of her hands to her wrists. And sensed the beginnings of the old interchange—her touch becoming lighter and sleepy, mine getting sore, prickly, heavy.

After a minute, I put her fingers down and tweaked one of her pinkies. ‘This little piggy went to market, and this little piggy went . . .’

‘To a nursing home. Hell in a doggy bag,’ she said. And trembled upwards to stroke my cheekbone. Her finger scented a claw of my crow’s foot with lavender. ‘Piss off now, sweetness,’ she said. I’m good to go now. Leave me now, precious, to die by meself again.’

I got up from the bed and went towards the doorway.

‘Sia,’ she said.

I turned sideways with my hand on the waratah of the ceramic doorhandle.

‘Will you take me to the beach sometime soon please love?’ We haven’t gone in for a dip together in ages. I always feel better about you and me in the sea.’

‘Sure Mummy,’ I said.

‘Thank you, Sia. You’re a decent girl really, you know? Even though you’re a...O, you know what. You’re always in my prayers, darling. I’ll never leave you to, to your savagery. I won’t leave you to be a barbarian, babe. She shook her head.

I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that should I? Don’t mind me—I’m just old. My pain makes me forget myself sometimes.’

‘You want a top up,’ I asked. ‘You could probably get away with a couple more Panamax, if you need ‘em.’

‘No, I’m all good, Darls. You best go back to bed. You have to start early tomorrow, don’t you?’

I smiled, slammed the door, then made it down the hallway. I hoped the cat still had my back when I got back to my room. I took to the staircase—my elevation and my descension, my cancelation.

Tomorrow would free me for a swim only at four in the afternoon. I’m an AIN. I run to the call of poo and wee before I feel the sun or stroke the ocean, come to the cry of the carnal before seeing the spiritual. AINs triage every baseness above communion with the benign conditions of the brilliant or sublime . . . I might’ve been born to wipe botties.

When I was very young, Mum let me stay up late one Saturday night to watch a Peter Pan movie—the version with Mia Farrow as Peter and Briony McRoberts playing Wendy. The film twinkled tweeness and sang about fairies and boys flittering about for forever—good for some, no good for me. I thought Mia played okay as a boy so long as she stayed speechless, and kept smiling, or just sat bloody still. Wendy didn’t do much for me either.

To my five-year-old understanding of what it was to be a girl, Wendy's pussyfooting to Pan made her a ning-nong. The flying boy should've just left Wendy's window alone, kept his shadow in the dresser, and become a man so he could play with the fairies whenever he wanted. I thought Wendy would be better to fold for, if card games were her go, a coach driver, or a blacksmith or something. I wanted Wendy and I to work hard for our livings, do something of cost to our airspaces, something to make us deserve our bedtimes. I was a grave kid.

Ground work gives dignity, I think. Please let this be real, or I've been digging every workday for something more breathless than gold . . . So, I placed my bets on the sheepdog, Nanna (or 'Nuh-na' as Kaye's Mr Darling spoke the dog's name). The animal worked as the children's nanny. I imagined that someone, a bloke most likely (but that didn't bother me), had to be hiding inside her fur, making her mind and managing her movements. But despite the puppetry, I felt the dog had my sense of always, a feel for ever. I wanted to belong down with the sheepdog's guts. I sighed to something see-through then, and then I sent the prayer to something solid, a being more ceramic.

## B

The cat bunted the glass and clawed the seal of the sash. I pushed off my covers, walked to the window, and gave the tabby an opening. She burred my fingers with her tongue then leapt in cabriole to the foot of my bed. ‘Miaow,’ she said as if she were my ballet teacher and I were to mirror my matron’s poise.

‘I’m too tired for grace,’ I said and dumped myself on the doona beside Madame Visitor.

She dismounted the bed and landed beside my sheepskin slippers. After a good, bloody sniffing, she set for the ripest, and shoved her neck through its ankle so her face nested in its toe.

‘Not so artful now are we now pussy-wussy,’ I said. ‘But yeah, my ginger friend, I get you all too friggin’ well with this hiding from the darkness...but it’s lightless in their too, Kitty.’ The sole of my Ugg looked at me as if it were condemned, and the night were a hangman.

The pussycat unmasked herself, and flippered the slipper to its side with a swat. Then impaled the toe with the claws of her forepaws, and raked the slipper’s underbelly in a frenzy of her hindlegs.

‘Yep, save us Sweetheart,’ I said. ‘Scrape away the uselessness of my every sorry footstep and give every friggin’ claw the kindness to kill in defiance of shit.’ I was waxing way too hard, tonight—I do that sometimes when I’m wired.

She galloped and bounded to be beside me on the bed again.

I tweaked the roots of her ears with my thumb and forefinger. And stared at a salmon spot on her skull.

‘Mee-wow, meee,’ she said then inserted her tail tip into one of my nostrils. I bit her forehead and began her another prayer;

‘Dear Cat,’

Ever since the day I took Renae to Terrigal and his stroke dragged us both to our different bodies of grief, I’ve been paddling against a whirlpool. My work, which is my vocation, really, has become a vortex—or a rockpool maybe. Maybe a shallow thing I have to stop myself from diving into just to stop my head from aching.

Things might be harder because of the two Royal Commissions coming together, Madame Pussy. One into my game: to stop the fucking abuse. And to settle the best staff to resident ratio, is suppose. Some sum to let us AINs to our work without our fists or tongues taking our twenty-one-buck-per-hour poverty out on our clients or each other.

And this other dive—a delve into Catholic clerical abuse, Pell and all, to see how many men in black or white party-frocks have pushed their peckers to the high-notes of choirboys and altar-servers. My late brother, Geoff, had been an altar boy. I know he took the strap, on his back, more than once. I heard, recently, he’d taken the bells and smells up the Milo periscope so to speak. Shit. Save him, pussycat. Save us all.

But, Dear Furball, even before these enquiries, I’d felt my fading. As I said, I’ve always taken my work as an AIN to be sort of my vocation, a kind of clergy-hood, I guess. Something of the cloth—or the rag, maybe. I don’t know. Things have been pulling at my panties for a while now, pussy.

The cat nodded, then gave me her cottonwool tummy.

Some of the ‘Holy Ordinances’, the sacraments I s’pose, expected of AINs are: Feed Me—for *this is my body and my blood which I am giving up for you*. Shower Me and Shave Me—you baptise me with council water for I can no longer wee in the sea. Wank Me—for *Thou art Blessed among woman and, besides, you remind me so much of my late wife, Marie. I like to think of you, Sia dear, as the Blessed Virgin my Marie was for me—before our wedding night that is*.

*Sweetheart, that wet washer you gave me in the shower this morning was a miracle, Sia: an epiphany, and my vision into the nature of your womb . . . You have her hands—tits too—God bless her soul.*

And (the unpaid-overtime-inducing and Work Cover denying) Holy Rite of Die with Me—*don’t let me go tonight without having you here with me, my darling girl. I’m so especially proud of my only child, my big boy Christopher (he’s a civil engineer you know). But he’s away somewhere in China building a big city. His job’s much too important for him to be here in golly-Gosford with his silly old mum. You’ll wait with me tonight, and hold me while I disappear won’t you sweetheart? I know. We’ll have a game or two of Scrabble. Please sweetheart, don’t go home. Hold me.*

Pussy, help me, in the greenest years of my walk in the frock, or ‘the slacks’ more to form, one facility made its AINs perform the Holy Rite of Dress My Corpse in a Nighty for Familial Display, which I followed with the little documented Rites of Toe Tag Me then Body Bag Me for the Undertaker. Things are better these days, I suppose. I understand a progressive wing of the Righteous Order of AINs has in its Divine wisdom demarcated the lesser sacraments to be administered by cleaning ladies and aged-care-facility dish pigs: pious people who might want to pick up some ‘time and a quarter’ on a Sunday to put towards a skiing trip to Thredbo, or to waste on an antibiotics prescription after a sicky and a visit to the GP for a medical certificate.

As AINs we practice the rites of our faith to the dementing, deathly, dying, dubious, dotty, and dangerous, while conscious that these things might one day call upon ourselves during our own endings. My mum has Multiple Sclerosis. My hands ache. My hips are sore most night. Even right now, pussy. Shift from my lap for a



sec or two, will you? And my fingertips and toenails tingle sometimes first thing in the morning.

Lately, since that incident on the beach with Rens, I've wet myself a teensy, wee bit on the odd times I haven't been able to fit in a trip to the toot. You know? During my Monday twelve-hour-day-night shift. And last night, following my afternoon shift, I dropped my keys on the way to car. I never let anything fall. I'm going to die with cat up my nose.

I know, Dear Puss-Cat. Don't mind my whinging. Most of my bothers are probably part and parcel of good, hard work and, more than likely, just my meeting with my mid-forties. But could these every-day demons point to my possession? I haven't dominion over The Demon MS (or over any other devil of degeneration for that matter). We AINs lack a Rite of Exorcism, you see? Some words left idle back in the glinty passages of our religious texts. Mostly, we have to make do with binders full of Manual Handling Policy & Procedure which, my puss, most managements make sure to file in the least practical shelves beneath the venerable RN's desk. Then flash-quizz us on the more obscure passages, come a freakin' ACAT review.

Dear Kitty, we lot do like our scriptures, though. Most of us know to quote *The Parable of The Chelmsford Scream*: a vision from The Profit 60 Minutes—not to be confused with *The Parable of the Kerosene Bath: due to Scabies Infestation* (Cheltenham, Sydney, circa 1981). That along with 1960s folklore wherein radical psychiatrists zapped the Huntington's affected with useless (in their cases) Electro Shock Therapy. Or the well corroborated (TAFE taught but authorless) fairy tale of the fallen angels, turned demons, who stripped a gaggle of the incontinent en masse. Then wheeled the poor souls in all their nakedness on shower-chairs down the corridors of an unspeakable nursing home. Faeces and urine trailed from their arses, cunts, and penises—as if shit and piss were Hansel's breadcrumbs, pussy, and the toilet cum bathroom were the Wicked Witch's gingerbread house. Finally, these abhorrent, or perhaps just scripturally conservative, so called nurses lined their victims faithful together in ranks within a single bathroom. Then, presumably, after defiling the shower water by power of their Lord Lucifer, hosed the residents in rows. Yep, help

me pussy, as if the ‘nurses’ were backpackers watering potato farrows down at my Aunty Gloria’s farm.

Those poor, lost residents—they must’ve shrieked as if Jesus and Lucifer were playing Tug o’ war with Cupid—ripping the bub’s flight feathers with a death grip each on the sex god’s wings.

Yes, my fluffy friend: there’d ’ve been a fire truck full of screaming and gnashing. And a fish truck full of deaf ears too, I’d beat—when it comes to upper management, their hearing’s always the same—shit, unless someone drops two bucks.

O help me, please, Pussy. How can anyone know these things without falling.

## C

The cat did a three-point turn on my lap. And paused so her tail stood like a furry pole in my face—it occurred to me then, that if the flames of Hell were to flare this instant, a tiny firefighter might slide down the column of fur to hide in the cat’s bottom. She turned to face me again, and bunted me with one of her cheeks. A whisker stabbed my eye, and I sneezed.

My phone tooted—*Daisy*. In the days after Rens’ stroke, after everything had settled down a tad, Daisy and I had a good talk. She told me she was sorry for suggesting I would ever neglect ‘a client’. And after a good sniff and a bit of stare on my part, we settled on a truce and agreed to stay in touch. A rare occurrence indeed, by my measures. Mostly, I think, she wanted to be kept in the loop about Rens’ recovery—or if that proved impossible, Rens’ general well-being. Patient confidentiality was of issue here, I realised. But because she’d been on the beach back when it all went down, and she’d broken out of her shell with concern for Rens, I’d decided to stretch the rules a little and let her into the grey. It turned out, anyway, we often crossed paths working through the batch of places *Caretakers* cycled us through during our separate fortnightly rosters. It just so happened that one of our shared workplaces was Renae’s new ‘home’: a hospice which was really just the rundown ward of an ancient Central Coast private hospital.

Yep, I thought, she’s alright, that one. I suppose at first, we’d been frightened we’d have to deal with a war of purposes. But it’s clear to me now, at least, that that’s just not the reality.

We even had a bit of a chuckle together the other day. About the state of my polo top after I’d given a particularly ‘draining’ shower. It must’ve been thirty degrees that afternoon, but my resie kept on telling me she was cold. The steam made me see-

through in the shower but, outside the cubicle, everyone knew all about me. Daise said that I could keep her cardigan until I dried off. We're about the same build, us.

Pretty similar, you see Pussy my love? It's just that at work, we're like two distinct ropes of the same length and weave. We use ourselves for the same things. But I suppose because I've been working for a bit longer than Daisy (twenty-five years at least), when I throw myself to someone, I might give slack in a situation where Daisy feels better pulling herself tight. She might be right, I suppose. As the saying goes: give someone too much rope and they'll... Tonight, my darling, I agree. It's just a little too tempting.

Anyway, Renae's Care Plan says that in the event that he needs to go to a live-in health facility, he's requested that I keep on working for him. But my role is to switch from being his Carer, to be more that of an overseer or a Health Liaison person. Basically, because he's having lots of trouble talking lately and he's living in a (shitty) hospice now, he just needs someone to help him deal with his bevy of health providers. But, sadly because of the hit his stroke took from his wallet, presently, his finances only really allow me to visit him with my work hat on once a week. Screw that I say. I bloody see him as often as I can because he's my mate, Rens.

My phone brilled again. I swiped. 'Hey Daise, I said. What makes you call up at, hang on, at two in the morning on this shit-stained night?' I put my arm out to pat the pussycat, but there was nothing furry to touch anymore.

'Sia, it's not too good I'm afraid. Mr Percer, Renae I mean, he's had a fall.'

I patted the doona where Ginge had been. She'd left me a few of her hairs. 'Crap,' I said. Shit. What happened?'

I'm working upstairs from Renae tonight Sia, in IC, and my RN, Wendy, told me that Renae had come to grief downstairs. Wendy said that he was being attended for a shower, when he became resistive and lashed out with his fists. There's no way

that happened—not Mr Percer. The duty nurse, an old-school EN fellow, a Mr Toro, was forced to restrain him, and it would seem they fell together to the floor.

Renae's alright though, Sia—I went down and saw him. He's shaken up and a little bruised, but he's a long way from being dead yet. He's doing well again on his Warfarin. And though his bruising is quite severe, he's very strong. He's a low risk for bed sores and he's likely to heal very quickly. But I'm afraid I do have to tell you, Sia. They've decided to give him a chemical restraint.

They gave him his first jab just a minute ago. Told me they have the authority because of his size and the risk he puts on staff.

I fought them for you Sia. Well, for my sake too, and for Renae mostly. I know you pair of beach fiends get along like two frogs on a lily pad. I'm livid, Sia. They say they've got good grounds to restrain him on the basis of his persistent episodes of violence. Which bloody persistence? Blast it! No, not blast. That doesn't quite float the Titanic here, does it? Fuck! Fuck this fucking place. And fuck its fucking face! I'm not sure I can do this job anymore, Sia. I'm sorry.

I thumped the cat's ghost on the doona. 'Daisy Darls, you've done your best. You just wait 'till you've got as many years under your belt as me, love. Give it another decade or so, and I guarantee you, the job isn't the only thing you'll want to tell to go get fucked. This sort of shittery happens all the time. But you mind me now, Darls. There not going to get away with screwing our Rens like this.'

She sighed. 'Sia, I know this already . . . dear. I was an AIN for fifteen years. I only started my Bachelor of Clinical Nursing Studies last year. I'm older than you are, my friend. Did you not know that? I'm forty-eight.'

What was that I was reckoning about two lengths of rope? Sheeshus.

We wished each other a 'shit night', hung up, and then got on with the rest of our lives—or tried. I decided upon having a single stubbie. I'd make sure it was just the one, though. I'd hit the 'beetle juice' just a bit too hard on my three nights off

earlier in the fortnight's rotation. A hangover would kill me right now. Tomorrow, I'd be letting Admin Suze down by taking the first shift I'd had off since I'd come down with the shingles five or so years ago.

## D

First thing, I saw to my mummy. Her bed linen was a wetland so I paddled through my duties like any good waterbird. After, as I walked the gravel drive, the cat trilled. Beneath the whiteness of my Yaris, she drank the last drams of darkness.

‘Bin night’, last night. The rubbish truck had begun wrenching through its rounds. For no reason I knew, I zapped the rig with my car keys—nothing—so I bleeped my driver’s door.

Nuzzling my sandal’s straps, the cat mooshed the nail of my big toe. Then lost her passion with a sneeze, to solve the monkey puzzle in a fizz of orange twining. I squinted through the sunlight to see the sentinel settle into a length of ochre. I put on my sunnies. Frizzing her coat from beside the curtain lace, she blinked down at me from on high.

The gears of the garbo’s lifter strained to raise the recycling bin as if its motor were the motions of an old fella’s bowels. In a moment, the engine’s relief browned the morning with a shatter so crass, even the Spacemonster would’ve clammed its paws to its ears.

Ten minutes later, my Yaris rounded the last of the foothills. I pulled down the windscreen’s visor, and the Gosford horizon halved the sun with the Hawkesbury.

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I signed, got a *Visitor’s* security card from reception, and buzzed into *High Risk*. They’d moved him again.

The first door of the corridor stood open. A woman sat on the edge of her stripped mattress, cradling a wad in her arms. Rocking and murmuring, she bent for a kiss of the bundle. And lifting her face, she smiled.

A bead of poo studded her lower lip. ‘Would you like a little hold dear?’ she asked. ‘My beautiful Baby Bumkin?’

The baby was just the lady’s contingency pad.

Her tongue slicked her lips. Then creaking to her bare feet, she took the few steps to the doorway and reached upwards to pass me her glory. A stream the colour of an under-ripe banana flowed from her front slapping the floor and spotting my sandals.

The grey strands of her vagina poked through the pink dampness of her baby-doll nighty. Strangely, the tuft took me back to Rens’ better days—before here, when he’d been able to walk, even run a little, without me. We’d crouched together over an urchin’s tentacles—its streamers had tweaked just above a rockpool’s wash.

‘No sweetness,’ I said. ‘I’d be better to wash my hands first. Don’t you think, my darling? Better to be safe than your baby sorry, eh, my love?’

She furrowed her forehead then nodded. ‘Yes, dear,’ she said. ‘That’s better for my bubba . . . and everyone else too. Isn’t it dear?’

I left the new mother to her ending.

‘Hi mate,’ I said. ‘How’s your noggin, old sport? Same size as usual, I s’pose. They reckon it’s your back that’s taken all the heat, old mate.’ I patted the blanket where his knee cap bulged and kissed his nose the way Mum sometimes pecked mine when I was sick. And I tried not to chuck. ‘You gonna give us a hi?’ I asked. I could smell ketosis on his breath and coming from his bones. Saw it too—the pair of sharp triangles mining the skin below his clavicle.



I was staring. He lay so silent; it was as if he were sorry for something he'd done to wrong me; as if a guilt hid behind his stillness or he'd buried a sin in one of the triangles beneath his collarbone.

Crouching to straighten his bedding, I wretched again at the bitterness of skin and, with my reading glasses on, I saw someone had done a 'rush job' of shaving him. A few spikes of grey marred his chin and cheekbones. With a swipe of my finger, I took a puff of shaving cream from a tendon of his neck. He gazed sideways at the seashell I'd given him. Funny, the thing seemed somehow glossier this morning.

Maybe some of this sense of grubbiness could have been put down to the funk common to any facility of this type which happened to be older than two or more decades. I sniffed again. But I couldn't help but think someone had made some effort to hide Renae's pungency beneath an overdose of deodorant.

He smiled at my scowl as if to sort me. I tried to settle my petals, and reminded myself of the failures which the stresses my own workload placed upon my mind. I'd known many shifts when understaffing had reduced me to giving bed baths and 'mouth toilets' when full showers were far and away the real order of the day.

Yeah, okay, Sia. Maybe understaffing goes some way to explaining Ren's sorry state. But even without my years of experience, I reckoned, no, I 'd stake my tits on it (I frickin' knew), I could've done a better job caring for Rens while wearing a Sponge Bob Square Pants suit than his current state spoke of. Righto. Steady on old girly, you know only too well that aged care is a circus driven by calfskin wallets. For all I could tell, some poor Trainee EN had drawn the short straw from the roster's cheap-arse fist and'd been made to cover this whole wing by their own sorry self. Yeah maybe. Someone left to sweep the elephant's dung while the ringmaster cast the bareback rider in a mound of dirty sheets down in the laundry.

Bugger, I was grinding my teeth. I needed a word with that Toro bloke. I swore then that If I ever matched that man's smell with Renae's stench, I'd tear that so-called nurse a new place to smuggle Lemon Sherbies.

With some effort I killed my spot flare, and we all agreed not to blow-up in front of Rens. Then, another thought. Just now, I noticed a note of semen rising from beneath the deodorant.

For a few consummate men in their seventies I'd cared for, I'd come to understand that, for them, testosterone is a bit like a freeloading tenant that can no longer afford to pay its landlord in kind, but gives out in its rise to war. Hang on. Just hold your horseys, Sia. Had Renae been in a proper bust up? I'd probably never know.

I was standing over him with fists, but he didn't seem to see them. Then I pinched my knees together—I needed *the Ladies'*. I'd be better to drop in at *the Bitches'* today, I thought, and bash a wall or something. I'd a good mind to make a mess, to miss, and, just for a change, make a deposit for someone other than Yours truly to cope with. But that would be mean.

'Back in a tick, Darls,' I said.

On the way, I decided that I was going to give my mate a proper bed bath. I would've liked to have given the man a full shower and shave, but I couldn't lift him by myself and I saw no sign of a hoist or a mechanical lifter.

I helped myself to a store cupboard, filled a green tub with hot soapy water, put it on a trolley, and arranged the shower linen beside the basin. No joy finding any shaving gear, but I got my hands on some toothpaste, a packaged brush, and some minted mouth swabs. I found a few cotton buds too. Filling a stainless-steel kidney dish with lukewarm water, I put it beside the bath basin. As I pushed the whole kit and caboodle to Rens' room, I grabbed a dirty linen skip on the way. And left the equipment in the corridor outside the suite's door.

I knocked, waited a moment, then came in. As I took a seat beside my friend, he clucked his tongue, and stroked his forehead. His hand trembled—his thoughts pained us both.

‘I’d like to give you a proper bath, Rens, but I can’t find the rotten machine to help you stand. Instead, though, I’d like to give you a bed bath if that’s okay. Not a patch on the beach, I know. But it’s the best I can manage for you now. I’m happy to make seagull sounds for you if want, though, mate.’

He clicked his tongue again.

I smiled. ‘That’s a yes,’ I said, and stood to get the materials from the corridor. As I rose, his hand palsied again and lifted a little as if it were trying to point to something. I sat down again, but he only sighed.

I pushed my trolley in, and he turned his attention to a picture of a sea turtle that was hanging at the foot of his bed. I joined his gaze. There was an ocean too in the picture. I pointed to its blue and then swam the air in a free-style stroke for him. I felt stupid and stopped. He coughed a smile, and I turned my interest back to the picture.

The photo showed a sea turtle flippering sand. She’s laying eggs, I thought. Banging up a bunch of scallywags. Behind the mother, the northern Australian water caught the sky with a Photoshopped unreality. Just an average photo, though. Something shot by someone relying on something other than skill to boost a poor idea of composition. Aren’t we all though? Despite this, I fought against a craze to pull the picture down and shatter the hyper-perfect water over my head. Then I got to work.

I pulled in the skip, shut the door, and closed the curtains. Then I dropped a bedrail, toggled the controller to raise the bed to a sitting position, and then eased Rens’ head off the pillows so I could rearrange them in support of his neck. His breathing stopped for a moment and I was scared for his spine, but he soothed my fears with a grin.

With one hand, I slipped behind his neck and tugged the loose knot of his gown. And with my free fingers, I caught the corner of a long towel from my trolley then held it away from my body to let the linen fall from its folds.

‘So Rens, I’ve been meaning to ask you mate, what’re your thoughts on them male waxheads nowadays? You know, them ones which think they’re Merman or something.’

Fixing his eyes with mine, I swapped the towel for his gown with a flop so, in that second, the linen covered his body from his throat downwards with the exception of his arms. I dashed through the gap in the curtains and kicked the skip’s foot lever to get rid of the dirty gown, and flashed back.

‘I was having a wee read of the paper the other Sunday, *The Newcastle Herald*, I think, and they reckon some of them waxheads’re haranguing the girls. You know? Surrounding them in the surf and banging in on them with their boards. I reckon you’d sort the buggers for us, Rens. Teach those boys a thing or two about how to be a man, aye, mate?’

The little white comma on his knuckle twitched beside the towel.

I dunked a washer, squeezed it, and washed his face. The flannel came back with spots of beard so, not to contaminate the water, I put the face washer on a piece of paper towelling beside the basin.

For the next minutes, I chatted to him as I washed his body, lifting the towel as I moved towards his toes but leaving his groin for last.

Finally, I finished his toes and took a clean cloth to manage his privates. Looking up to his face again, I took the wet washer to his groin. He was hard. And he sobbed. I let the towel fall back down and screwed up my face so as not to giggle.

‘Rens. Rens, my mate. It’s okay, Sweetie. This happens to us, well to me anyway, all the time. It’s par for the course in this line of work. Don’t stress yourself, Darls. I’ll just step outside for a moment and leave you alone. No worries, Sweetheart. Don’t stress.’ There was a loud knock and the rubber soles of a stranger’s shoes squeaked with sure steps. ‘Mr Percer, Sir. I have come to issue your medications.

What's going on in there? I hope you're not out of bed again, Sir. If that's the case Mr Percer, this will have most dire consequences for us all of us: following last evening's fall, you are to remain strictly in bed.'

I pinched the curtains together to keep Rens his privacy.

'You're not alone in there,' the voice said. 'I worry for the poor unfortunate with you.'

'I'm a bit fucken worried about you too mate,' I said. Piss off Dickhead. Was it you who gave him his bath last night—or didn't? I should say. Much better for you if it wasn't, ya prick. Believe you me.'

There was a shifting then. The room's air fluxed and rushed. Renae felt something of his resurgence. Still clutching, Sia billowed the curtains as she clubbed his shoulder with one of her 'little' punches. A blue tinge tinted his toes and the tone rose towards his face to flow through his fingernails. Next, the sound of the sea washed through his shoulders, and his breaths began thrumming as if he were to seize the foam of a tsunami.

'Fucking hell! He's having another stroke, Mate,' Sia said. 'Make yourself a wee bit fricken useful, pet, and run for the RN. Quick-sticks, Dickhead. Go! Go for gold, ya flippin' nonce!' She hit the buzzer. 'Another bell to burn me by my years,' she said to nothing.

In the next few moments his vibrations began to be so rapid, they actually blurred him. And through the filthy light, it seemed his skin were rippling into fish scales. In the next second, the slits of gills started to cleave his Atlantan chest.

As she watched, leathery hands broke her pinch on the curtains, and she whipped herself in a semicircle to catch the force of the other nurse's fist with her neck. She staggered, but kept her footing stayed her in the end.

It was Renae's time to watch then, as the Minotaur's bulk snorted a pair of brimstone plumes to the ceiling and bore the points of its rainbow horns glaring down on Sia.

'I will have you first, sea woman,' said the Minotaur. 'Then fill my face on the flesh of the merman. You will be of both me, and of my maze. Each of you. Ever circling, and ever dying. Never leaving, and always knowing.' He charged in a kind of gallop, and with the clash of his head to her chest Sia bounced towards Renae's firm nakedness. Then slipped from his torso to his bedclothes. Doing so, she kicked the trolley, and the bath water and all its soapy fleet submerged the friends in a slop of towels, face washers, and whiskers.

With this Renae started shuddering again. His arm was in streaks and barbs of blue transition, and he stretched to the bedside table and scraped for the periwinkle with the scales of his finger pads. Like a god, he gave back to Sia the very power she'd given him. 'Do something for me, aye? Give him what he deserves. Sort him, him like the sea farer you are, my friend. I'm off to see if the if the sky's up for a wee skinny dip. Ta-ta Sia.'

A breeze that may've come from the ocean played through the farmyard as Sia stared down the nostrils of her opponent.

## **Part II: Dissertation**

## ***Introduction and thesis statement***

Jerrold E. Hogle, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002), prefaces his compilation with an essay, "The Gothic in Western Culture". Frequently critics argue the primacy of either one of two opposed tensions commonly represented within Gothic literature (Hogle pp. 12-14). These tensions tend to be thematic and support a conservative political stance and a counterforce of thematical representation, which drives towards the notion of revolution (Hogle p.13). The tensions occur because, due to narrative juxtaposition, the Anglocentric, male, and conservative paradigms of Western imperialism may resound as bastions of strength and integrity in contrast to those cultural affiliations made "other" (Hogle p. 9). With "othering" comes what may be called "us-ing" (a patriarchal inclusion of those of similar social standing i.e. cultural nepotism). Power imbalances may even render minority racial groups abject or degenerate in contrast to Western cultural prominences (Hogle p. 12).

The Gothic mode regularly employs the pairing of a plethora of, often faintly detectable, dichotomous themes. These binaries can include adulthood and childhood, or representations of cis-gender orientation that are placed in conflict with non-binary gender statuses (Hogle p. 11). On the whole, Hogle's chapter posits that the Gothic genre's regular representation of tensions such as these may make *other* the many binary poles which enjoy less public representation as they fade in competition with their salient counterparts. Gothic literature's binarization of narrative themes can highlight, and at worst perpetuate, the many disjunctions of power.

Further narrowing the definition and nature of the Gothic genre Hogle writes: '...The Gothic mode...fashions means of othering them... (those in deviation from social norms) so that standard, adult, middle-class, identities (conservative social paradigms) can seem to stand out clearly against them. This remains the 'Gothic gambit (p. 12, parentheses added).' In a twenty-first century context, at worst, Gothic



literature's excessive use of binaries can exacerbate the zeitgeist, polarise political allegiances, by further tribalizing its readers into alliances of either 'leftist extremism' or fascist right-wing inclinations.

This research posits a mediation of discourses, which assert a dualism between Gothic literature's exclusive promotion of either a conservative or a progressive political stance. The thesis espouses, in several cases, the 'binaries of the Gothic' do not elevate either one of two particular political values as these are expressed within a dichotomy. Rather, it argues that very often the Gothic genre, via binary constructions, allows its authors and readers a multitude of continuums with which to form narratives and schema that can be egalitarian in nature. Therefore, the genre's potentially politically-balanced nature may be a thematically congruous framework in which writers are well poised to create narratives in pursuit of social justice. For these purposes, this work examines a number of academic journal articles along with a selection of fictional works which align within the Gothic literary tradition.

An embedded concern of this research project is to consider a ubiquitous dichotomy: the often-beautiful textual musicality which counterpoints the Gothic genre's embrace of dark subject matter. Via dissertational enquiry, the facility of these binaries (being of lyrical beauty in representation of depravity) to express the ethic of equitability will be scrutinised. To this end discussion will focus with some emphasis upon Richard Flanagan's *Death of a river guide* (1994), and to a lesser degree, George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four* (1949). Reference will be given also to a small portion of appropriate biographical information (regarding Gothic authors) within the public domain.

So as to inform these purposes the history of the Gothic, its social, political, and cultural, and architectural influences and the circumstances which have informed the contemporary notion of Gothicism will be discussed.

*Chapter I: Gothic impacts*

In his benchmark criticism *The Gothic Revival: An Essay on the History of Taste* (1928) Kenneth Clark disparages the stigma that the Gothic artifices of Europe have since their inception occupied a unique architectural categorization. He notes, “For centuries the Gothic style had no name; it was the only way of building (Clarke p. 3)”. Before critics gave Gothic architecture its verbal/textual distinction, the Gothic style had been without a name. However, the architectural status quo emanated values of convention, the establishment, and of conservatism. “As soon as soon as it was named [Gothic] it was a separate style.....When the word became widely used we may say that Gothic had become something artificial and peculiar (Clark p. 3 Ellipsis added)”.

In approximately 1750 (Hogle p. xvii) Walpole commenced the refurbishment of Strawberry Hill in favour of the Gothic style’s popular revival. Clark suggests that on the event that its title was inaugurated (circa 1750), Gothic architecture simultaneously became, according to Clark’s critique, strange, anti-establishment, made other, and distinct from the cultural norm. The reallocation of Gothic architectural structures, via linguistic resignification (renaming), from the realm of social acceptance to a position of relative exclusion, resonates with the popular ‘re labelling’ (via dramatic narrative) and subsequent ostracism of one particular social practice.

The episode “The Implant” (Season 4) of the popular television sitcom series *Seinfeld* (1989-1997) exists as a prime example of the impact of ‘negative linguistic re-signification’. Following a social practice’s reception of a new, though derisive, descriptor, ‘a negative re-signification’, this particular outcome (as stimulated by a narrative theme of a *Seinfeld* episode) met with the broad social shunning of a previously normative social practice.

A social taboo around the practice of “double-dipping” came to popular salience only following the 1993 airing of the *Seinfeld* episode “The Implant”. By most measures evidentiary support of this instance is purely anecdotal—a personal observation—though even as such the concept of ‘linguistic re-denotation’ bares discussion in the present context. The case in point centres upon a primary antagonist/protagonist of *Seinfeld*’s, George. Within the scene, George “dips” a chip into a bowl of sauce, bites the crisp, and then re-immerses this food item into the same bowl of sauce. This incident takes place during a wake. Timmy, a character-extra to both the scene and the *Seinfeld* series, observes George’s act of “double-dipping” and

rises from his seat declaring: “That’s like putting your whole mouth right in the dip! From now on, when you take a chip – just take one dip and end it (Dickson, [Timmy], two-thirds from top).”

The wake’s atmosphere resonates with the Timmy character’s dark phrasing: “end it” (a euphemism for suicide). This in turn amplifies the scene’s adhesion to the tropes of Black Comedy. These being: the comedic extension and satirical parody of cultural taboos i.e. death, sexual perversions, etc. Here it is probable that the association of communal food consumption (admittedly piggish in George’s case) and death, incriminates via binary association the practice of “double-dipping” so to connote the practice with notions of barbarism.

In contrast to *Seinfeld’s* construct of barbarisation, double-dipping, many cultures (e.g. the Mediterranean regions together with the South Pacific Islands) can be observed to adhere to the mass community consumption of food, i.e. feasting, as an effective manner of extending social inclusion. Community feasts may occur with extensive use of hands, and without the use of Western “civilization’s” cutlery, crockery, or serving utensils. Moreover, countless Western societies must be thought to extend “the breaking of bread” (with communal use of hands), and the shared drinking from a common cup in the nature of an inclusive community, clan, tribal, or familial ritual. The central scriptural text of Christianity (cited by some as the “capstone of civility”), *The Holy Bible*, evidences the resulting ‘fellowship’ and micro-societal galvanization which may be achieved via the intimate sharing of food. The biblical passages in description of this communal culinary societal galvanization are sometimes titled, though not always, *The Last Supper* (*The Holy Bible*, Matt 26: 26-35).

The communal sharing, and biting from, a “chocolate ration” or “water reserve” may be observed to be a narrative mainstay in the arguably Gothic genre of War Cinema. The Christmas 2014 Sainsbury Chocolate commercial alludes to a military aligned social history of chocolate and capitalises upon it (Sainsbury’s 2014). It is likely that War Cinema’s emphasis on national, or ‘universal’ (e.g. the WWI Christmas Truce), fraternity places an imperative on communal food consumption. This is despite the possibility of food contamination and consequent illness as alluded to in the *Seinfeld* episode. Likely, as facilitated by the genre themes of “War Cinema”, the Gothic threat of imminent death or destruction relative to possible bacterial or viral

contamination, elevates its binary ‘opponent’ to a place of high moral imperative. This moral transference may be thought of as a transmission of positive connotation, via Gothic impact, upon one binary attendant to another. That is the positive transference motion from the Gothicism of war to the social ritual of communal food consumption (and its dangers to health), despite the inherent horrors of global military conflict. In consistency with film’s War Genre, “The Implant” episode may with equal faculty, just as it connotated food with barbarism, have denoted “double-dipping” in accord with notions of generosity and camaraderie. Furthermore, as is true of War Cinema, the episode may have associated by binary a positive association of the ‘hearty’ consumption of food and the eventuality of physical death.

Gerald Gaylard in his article, “The Postcolonial Gothic: Time and Death in Southern African Literature” (2008), reveals the etymological beginnings of the word, Goth. The word “Goth” identified a Germanic clan of “barbarians” of the Third to Fifth Centuries CE (Gaylard p. 2). Those Gothes were the waring invaders of neighbouring nations and that of many regions beyond their national locale (Gaylard p. 2). As these ‘barbarians’ pillaged both Eastern and Western civilization and colonised the Mediterranean region (Italy, Spain, and France), the title ‘Goth’ became synonymous with brutality and barbarism (Gaylard p. 2).

‘Barbarian’ is the onomatopoeic ancient Greek term for the unintelligible ‘stammering’ of the foreign, strange and uncouth [an exclusionary racial and intellectual slur: potentially deployed as “hate speech”...This suggest[s] xenophobia [the enforcement of exclusion due to notions of racial superiority], that cultures [and individuals within that culture or subculture] have often defined themselves in hierarchical superiority to others (Gaylard 2008).

Potentially the insult, *barbarian* may be inflicted maliciously upon individuals who are of an *alien* ethnicity to those of any local culture. The slur may be weaponised too by an attacker in enforcement of values of superiority upon vulnerable individuals whom are trapped by unemployment. Additionally, the slur “barbarian”, which is surely an article of “hate speech” may be employed in a multitude of further circumstances. The slur’s impacts may include (though are not limited to): the further marginalisation of people who are affected by homelessness, affected by disability, physical deformity, are faithful to a supposedly “barbaric” faith, identify within the LGBTQI spectrum of gender alignments. It is probable, however, that gender diversity

is deemed less normative today than it was so in ancient times past: ancient Greece evidences this. The slur may have been extended, if it were borne in a contemporary context, to the newly immigrated and those who are regulated by their refugee status. It can be used about those who are awaiting Australian Commonwealth immigration assessment while residing in the sub-standard health conditions of off-shore processing encampments.

Perhaps those the *barbarian* slur impacted in the ancient ‘civilizations’ were affected in the same manner as those in contemporary mainstream Australian society can be by the epithet, *un-Australian*. This contemporary insult, if it were to emulate the violence (and crude poetics) of the barbarian smear, would be thrown with a ‘caveman’ gutturalness, and perhaps emphasised with a thud to the accuser’s forehead with the heel of the insulter’s own hand. However, the ancient Grecian precursor may have been a weapon of much greater social vindictiveness: it implied a depravity and an intellectual deficit which was intended to mark a lack of humanity, or a person’s nullified distinction from that of animality. Perhaps a contemporary Australian may better emulate the ‘barbarous’ intent of an ancient citizen-Greek with use of the, thankfully, largely extinct Australian slur *subbie*. An Australian feeling itself of comparative intellect to a subjective measure of the Australian-national normality, can in the spirit of its gothic intent weaponize the insult *subbie* to ostracize, i.e. make other, a compatriot whom is judged to be of subnormal (and subnational) intellectual capacity.

Insults of Gothicism or otherwise are usually presumed to operate in a hierarchy of dichotomous simplicity. Gaylard notes the *xenophobic* (2002 p. 2) intent of the particular binary in question. In the case of an ancient racial slur such as ‘filthy Goth’, the conjunction ‘and’ in ‘us and them’ excludes all diversity of choice to but two options per binary. The ‘and’ is made a ‘glue’ of isolation as it places one binary pole in restriction to a single other. All possible range of cultural/racial diversity is restricted to either ‘citizen’ or ‘foreigner’, ‘cretin’ or ‘one of intellect’.

Any disparagement which employs a xenophobic rationale may, however, impact the insult’s recipient, and those in their political milieu, with ‘nominal’ effectiveness. Xenophobia has been seen in the past to catalyse the *hate speech* of the Fascist right. Additionally, linguistic expressions of animosity have sometimes met with tolerance. These positions can be considered be binary in nature and be defined

by two questions—one moderate the other progressive—: are slurs of race a necessary evil in adherence to notions of political freedom and speech? Or are hateful racial insults felonious and deplorable abhorrence to be met by punitive law? It is true that in a plethora of cases the deployment of racial insult effectively galvanizes a community in defiance of its intent to exclude another or a cultural group: the social activist group Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the organisation’s inclusion of ‘white people’ demonstrates this. Examples of hate speech’s nominal cultural and critical reception are evident in a myriad of progressive, conservative, centralist, far right, political commentaries. These nominally opposed positions are published on social-media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, etc. This thesis will return to the apparently controvertible range of possible political alliances and responses which Gothicism ignites in due course.

Legal history indicates some legislative and cultural veracity in reversal of the more *barbaric* connotations of the descriptor, Gothic. The Gothes—one of the Gothes in particular: Visigoth Monarch King Chindasuinth—were crucial in the establishment of a societal code of conduct, a volume of law, which governed both the Romans and the Gothes in the region of, present day, south-eastern France.

*The Visigothic Code* (Scott ed. 1910) of the seventh century included the establishment of many women’s rights. These rights held for the legitimacy of a woman in the inheritance of familial property and finance (Scott pp. 120-130). Additionally, it upheld a woman’s right to self-representation in legal processes (Scott pp. 9-37) and the statutory capacity for a woman to instigate her own marriage (Scott pp. 75-113).

Despite some virtues of equalitarianism, “*The Code*” a benchmark body of legislation regulates many hallmarks of the patriarchal possession of womanhood and male entitlement. Amongst several other legislations which perpetuate this residual theme of entitlement, left to stand was a statute which requires a man (a husband) to be compensated for the suffering inflicted upon a woman. This being: a mandate which demands that a physician who wrongly *bleeds* a woman (a wife) without her husband’s approval, to financially remunerate the husband (Scott p. 854). Prima facie this statute stands strangely along the relative legal equality the document otherwise affords womanhood. Despite this inconsistency, however, the volume is still declared by many historians and legal scholars to exist as a benchmark in egalitarian legislation.

This is due to its equal affording of legal rights extended indiscriminately to those of Roman ethnicity and to those descended the Gothes' lineages.

Perhaps the volume's oxymoronic legislative conflict between 'equalitarian watersheds' and its simultaneous perpetuation of patriarchal institutions, and their resident ideologies, is best shown with this quote from the volume's preface: “

[The Visigothic Code is “radically” important] in the skilful adaption of...ecclesiastical supremacy [i.e. the moral primacy of Roman Catholicism]; in the care with which it preserves the distinctions of cast [i.e. upholds class divides, power imbalances, and class differences]; in the accuracy and conciseness of its maxims defining the principles of equity (Scott ed. vi).”

Scott acknowledges the motion of *caste* perpetuation beside “*The Code's*” stirrings of equalitarian revolution, apparently without allowing that the preservation of “caste” and “the principles of equity” exist in almost diametric opposition. Despite this Scott continues: “[The Visigoth Code]...is radically different from, and, in many respects superior to [the]...[other] legal enactments of ancient or mediaeval times.” Here Scott upholds the Visigothic Code's relative egalitarian superiority to any similar statutory system of its era.

Succeeding the ancient Greek usage of the Gothic barbarian slur and the esteemed and resounding cultural/legislative impact of *The Visigothic Code*, the next historical employment of gothic linguistic pejorative use came to rise within the Italian Renaissance. Historians in the Italian Renaissance bemoaned the emergence of the obstreperous angles and arches of the Medieval architectural tradition (i.e. that of *Gothic architecture*) which was then emerging in Rome and much of mainland Europe.

“In England, as in Italy, the pointed arch was early associated with the Goth[es]. For instance, Sir Henry Wotton in his *Elements of Architecture* (1624), says that this form, “both for the natural imbecility of the sharp angle its selfe, and likewise for their very Vncomelinessse [uncomeliness], ought to bee [archaic English] exiled from judicious eyes and left to their first inventors, *The Gothes...*”

Hogle asserts in his discussion on the polarizing nature of Gothic literature: “The Gothic is...continually about confrontations between the low and the high (2002 p. 9)”. Wotton's “judicious” condemnation of Gothic architectural forms, together with Hogle's assertion of Gothic literature's confronting of the “low and the high”, demonstrate a clear consistency between criticism of Gothic building structures and



that of Gothic literary texts. This is a congruence of opinions on taste and ethical positions which exist in critiques of both Gothic architecture and Gothic literary expression.

In Renaissance Italy, the somewhat *soaring* artifices of the infiltrating Gothic (*Gotico*) structures—although less pronounced than France’s Gothic Renaissance buildings—was at odds to the well-established *Classical* Italian structures. These classical mainstays were marked by columns, carvings, a generally rectangular design, together with an absence of extreme angles. *Extremism* and *the Gothic* are, by way of signification, semantic siblings. As established, *Gothic extremism* exhibits the capacity to cleave social allegiances, if unequally, into many splinters. The victor of the Italian historical skirmish of architectural movements against The Gothic is profoundly obvious. This integration of the Gothic, along with a cultural diversity of building aesthetic remains present within the cityscape of modern Rome.

Italian architects from the eleventh century onward modified—perhaps naturalised or *domesticated*—their notion of Gothic architecture. Designers achieved an assimilation via the mollification of the angles and arches which so define Gothic building structures. This *dulling down* of Gothic architecture achieved a sympathy with the classical sensibilities of the establishment: this concession to power is notable. Regardless, modern Rome is marked by an integration of building styles which in time, along with Gothicism, has drawn from global influences including the Arabesque and the Baroque.

Renaissance Italy’s appropriation and assimilation of Gothic/Medieval architectural influences have some critical application in the assessment of contemporary Australia’s socio-cultural constitution. A *dominant’s* modification of a foreign, though resident, cultural influence so to meet mainstream acceptance or *naturalisation* (a hierarchy of *the natural: us* as we oppose *the others*) can be observed presently in Australian politics. An Australian national resistance to *foreign* cultural influence is apparent within the Australian tabloid media. Signifying defiance are rhetorical media contrivances such as: “The Victorian African Gang Problem”, “Muslim Violence”, or “Muslim Terrorism” (rather than simply *terrorism* itself). These rhetorical labels exist as textual exemplars which mediate mainstream cultural resistance to the positive *naturalization* of cultural minority groups in Australia. These mediated constructions of Australian mainstream resistance to *a new other* resonate in

theme with the initially negative reception of Gothic influences of the architectural, the cultural, and the literary, throughout recorded history

To some degree the *non-white* ethnicity of many cultural groups has met mainstream cultural acceptance in the suburban ubiquitousness of Halal cuisine (in Sydney the prominence of kebab shops) and the strong presence of Muslim mosques in Sydney's Greater West. Together with this, shoppers will find several African markets in the communities of Sydney's Inner and Outer West. However, any act of nationalism which allows a majority, or a powerful faction, to forcefully modify or naturalize an immigrant cultural group via demonizing media rhetoric is toxic. This is true of *Australianisms* which have given rise to cultural slurs such as *un-Australian*.

A resistance to peoples and things thought Gothic informs the tendency of the far-right strain of Australian nationalism which is to bully and assail a microculture. This is to make this group the *same as us* (i.e. of Western moral constitution) or to enforce the notion of "put up or go home" i.e. to reject another's cultural tendencies in favour of one's own. This is the desire of some Australian nationals in possession of high social agency and who have the capacity to affect their cultural efficacy so as to impose a nominal notion of national normality.

These agents of Gothicism, or anti-Gothicism (this dichotomy and paradox is key) have historically imposed their preferences of taste upon those of a minority group. An exercise of British power and (perhaps simply *taste driven perception*) led to the genocide of some Indigenous people groups. The eighteenth-century British indictment upon Australia's existing human inhabitants of Terra Nullius (no people: just *subhuman savages*) clearly led to the most distractive acts of Gothicism in Australian history. These being acts of destruction upon Indigenous culture, environment, and architecture (i.e. Country: bush and forestry), etc.

Nobody wants to believe that they are of the Gothic. Probably, most think themselves to be if not a *normal* human being, at least a *civilized* one. This, perhaps, is the polarizing and nominal nature of the *Gothic binary* in sum: "I am not a barbarian, you are: or, those others are". History has shown via the culturally integrated development of Roman architecture and in some equalitarian statutes of *The Visigothic code*, that constructions and outcomes of egalitarianism exist well within the capacities of Gothicism. However, this chapter has shown too that, in many instances, it has taken several centuries to render the Gothic to this equity.



## ***Chapter II: Fundamentally lyrical***

**Preface note:** This chapter is intended to supplement in theme the thesis' lyrical fictive component ("Part I: novel") with discursion upon the musicality of Gothic literature and its consequent societal repercussions.

An article within the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, “Echoes between Van Diemen’s Land and Tasmania: Sound and the space of the island in Richard Flanagan’s *Death of a River Guide* and Carmel Bird’s *Cape Grimm*” (Cummins 2014) centres on the Australian Gothic. Cummins’ article places a critical focus on Carmel Bird’s *Cape Grimm* (2004), recipient of the Patrick White Award, along with Patrick Flanagan’s *Death of a River Guide* (1994): recipient of the Man Booker Prize.

Cummins’ research focusses upon the historical continuums of sound: the historical streams of musicality and lyricism as they are given rise by the comparative “encountering” and “listening” (Cummins, p. 257) of two Australian Gothic literary works; one novel (Bird’s) is set in the past and the other work (Flanagan’s) is largely set in the 1990s present. “The novels (together) contain two soundscapes: one detailing the hidden histories of violence and genocide (Gothic barbarisms) at the frontier meeting of Aboriginal people and colonists in the 1820s (Bird’s novel), and a second (Flanagan’s fictive work), set in a contemporary timeframe, that echoes these (Cummins 257, parentheses added).”

Cummins’ critical method requires its readers to understand a temporal passage of auditory genesis and reverberation which originated in nineteenth-century Tasmania i.e. Van Diemen’s Land. Cummins’ method understands a linear ‘soundstream’ to have originated from the land’s past, have reached, and to presently inform Tasmania’s cultural narratology with lyricism. In regard to the far-reaching capacities of critical and theoretical methodology, it is interesting, for a moment, to extend Cummins’ analytical rationale. Cummins’ forwards moving continuum may be stretched to allow the ‘backwards’ temporal passage of a ‘Gothic lyricism’. Via the appointment of this protracted critical lens we are afforded a multiplicity of continuous (opposed, coordinated etc.) passages of auditory representation. These motions may be thought to extend to and from the past and present in infinite variation and increment.

A rationale of *temporal interchange* may be thought to allow the retrospective passage of echoes. This would facilitate a presently audible lyricism, which has reverberated from historical origin, to oxymoronicly give genesis to the progenitive soundscapes of a musicalities’ past. In further explanation these (present) echoes will be taken to be the poetics, or Gothic soundscapes, of Flanagan’s novel. If Flanagan’s lyricism (the echoes of historical musicality) were to travel backwards to its Van Diemen’s Land origins, this critical rationale is consistent with a (Gothic) “revisionist”

(Cummins p. 257) construction of history. The extension affords a rehearing, a recompositing, of historical musicalities with an *ear* more attuned to the Gothic soundscapes which are axiomatic of a nominally imposed egalitarian twenty-first century present.

Within the mettle of a retrospective passage of Gothic musicality, perhaps via a ficto-critical framework by chance, exists the instillation of egalitarian principles upon a tainted authoritarian past. This is the lyrical virtuosity to recompose the soundscapes, the stolen voices, and to *notate* the lost screams of a barbaric, Gothic Tasmanian history. However, to play Devil's advocate, the retrospective passage and arrangements of a soundscape which exists in critical opposition to the values of equality may, with equanimity to democratic axiom, volumize the historical orchestrations of British imperialism.

By way of abstract Cummins articulates: "...Discussion is positioned in relation to discourses of sound (the aforementioned qualities of textual musicality and lyricism) in Australian gothic literature, haunting and theories of space (p. 257 parenthesis added.)" Here, as noted previously, Cummins foreshadows his article's concern with the often-Gothic echoes (p. 257), dark and contemporaneous repercussions of the West's barbarisms upon the space, and cultural heritage, of Indigenous Australia's Country and peoples. Additionally, Cummins acknowledges the pivotal effects of the textual representations of sound, particularly those of the Gothic, as this musicality, raucous, lyrical or otherwise, may conquer, inherit, or purchase, history, or place.

If the capacities of a soundscape to inflict the harsher sensibilities of *the Gothic* lay in any doubt, one must only consider the effects of demolition noise (or construction, for that matter) upon a home which neighbours a destruction or construction site. More forcefully, the impositions of a Gothic soundscape, the dying screams of murder or genocide victim perhaps, may impinge upon the liveability of a domicile's, a home's, Country's, or a country's, liveability. A tenant's right to liveability is evidenced by the "Full Disclosure" legal statute of ethical conveyancing practice. The mass encounter of Gothicism, the violence of its sometimes-horrific dins, the musicalities which stand in record and continuum of a barbarous past, may, behaving selectively, taint a solitary genealogical tree, *planting* a dark precedent to an

entire lineage of cultural or familial memory. This is represented within Flanagan's novel.

*Death of a River Guide* reveals the long-term historical outcomes of a Gothic Tasmanian, convict past. The novel voices in lament for the contemporaneous despair, lostness, moral decrepitude, and social estrangement which are given rise by the cultural memories (echoes), of a punitive, Australian Gothic, colonial past. This cultural capital of moral corruption, social shame, and expulsion bears comparison to the Judeo-Christian scriptural tenant of Original Sin. This being: a didact which convicts present day peoples for the irredeemable sins of their forbearers.

The scriptural source which *legislates* the Judeo/Christian precept of Original Sin is *The Book of Genesis of The Holy Bible*. *Genesis* records in literary allegory, or factual account by some's readings, with use of prose and verse—*The Bible's* textual dichotomy of prose and lyrical verse is often overlooked—a documentation of the first “sin” (or human action of evil estrangement with the divinity YHWH). This transgression being the disobedience committed against the Lord God (YHWH) by humanity's progenitors: Eve and Adam. Their dwelling, the Garden of Eden, came to them via YHWH's “Creation” (Gen 1-3:24) as a verdant agricultural land which required human tending i.e. “work” and “care” (Gen 2: 15). Eve and Adam carried out their “joyful” work without suffering and with pleasant, “good” toil and “rulership” of their land (Gen 1:27-28, 2:7-9;15). This mirrors some accounts of Indigenous Australia prior to nineteenth-century British interference. Herein, ‘The Garden’ the Snake (a character sans exposition: an intruder/barbarian) “tempts” Eve (Gen 3) to consume the fruit of a *criminalised* tree; and Eve in turn persuades Adam, to perform along with herself, Christendom's “original sin”.

“...God did say (Eve repeats to the Snake), ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’ (Gen 3: 3, parenthesis added).” NB although YHWH had ruled that the pair would “die” if they were to touch “the tree that is in the middle of the garden” (Gen 3: 3) no such execution found divine eventuation. Believers faithful have been known to extend this discrepancy between YHWH's word (the god's decree of punitive execution) and the divinity's later executorial stay, in support of their god's, God's, kindness. This assertion has some rational integrity. However, knowing of YHWH's subjectively fulfilled “Kingship” perhaps God's “Rule of law”, believers may, with consistency to

their divinity's kindness, incline a greater human subjectivity to scripturally determined precepts of orthodoxy. This would eventuate a less-literal reading and would work in accord with the biblical use of verse, i.e. sometimes hyperbolic/unfactual, and eventuate a more humanistic reading. It is doubtless, however, that any suggestion of humanistic influence in the interpretation of Holy Scripture would, perhaps fairly, amount to treachery/heresy for many of the Christian faithful.

The Judeo-Christian tenant of "Original Sin" found galvanisation within *Western civility* via the writings of third-and-fourth-century academic theologian St. Augustine of Hippo. This period occurred at least two centuries prior to the institution of the *Visigothic Code* (approx. 642-653), and at least nine centuries before the European Renaissance. Christina Richie in her 2018 article "The Augustinian Perspective on the Transmission of Original Sin and Assisted Reproductive Technologies" appearing in *The Journal of Religious Studies and Theology*, makes an orientational statement on the subject of 'genealogically transmitted sin' (in favour of a scriptural 'loophole') within her article's abstract. She writes, "St. Augustine of Hippo believed that original sin is transmitted through concupiscent intercourse (Richie, p. 79)".

Under strict definition the adjective "concupiscent" finds synonym in the term "lustful", meaning sexually charged or, in idiomatic parlance, "horny". However, more aligned to Christian scriptural orthodoxy, the term "concupiscent" is likely synonymous with the descriptors: "carnal", "corporeal", or "of the, human, flesh". Due to a Christian scriptural fundamentalism, Richie's argument, i.e. "un-concupiscent" sex (artificial insemination) being used in inoculation against 'genealogically transmitted sin', is likely to be met by those of Christian scriptural conservatism with ideological notions of *anti-vaccination*.

Some of the faithful, perhaps those of *extreme* belief', have asserted an earnestness that "God" is divine in his right to enact or null any promise or threat in accordance with his selective, and overwhelming authority. This stance, of course, is of right-wing polarization to a progressive or liberal pole of Christian scriptural interpretations. The Central Coast Anglican minister, and human rights activist, Father Rob Bower evidences the possibility of such a scripturally progressive stance. If the publicly binarizing nature of a media-salient and highly conservative scriptural reading exists in any doubt, one must only refer to recent media commentary. The public



position of the *fired* Wallabies rugby player Israel Falou (ABC News 2019) exists in evidence of the enormously divisive nature of a fundamentalist scriptural position.

The 1990's social discourse in motion towards a National Apology Day was an Australian social movement driven to the purpose of reconciliation and egalitarianism. It urged, in concession of impact, for *Westerners* to apologise for an unchangeable, corruption of the past. This thrust, a contemporaneous acknowledgement for historical wrong doings, is as previously noted, highly resonate of the Christian doctrine and narrative of Original Sin. In favour of national unity, equity, and reconciliation, the Sorry Campaign strived for the acknowledgement of the (Gothic) atrocities of Australia's past. Activists rallied for people of *white* ethnicity to say "sorry" to the contemporaneous Indigenous Australian population. In short, this apology was to be given by 'white' people to contemporaneous Indigenous Australians.

Binaries of Australian colonial history, which are in general those of the Gothic, leave little doubt as to why *the Sorry Campaign* met with such social division. Some of the several binaries of topic here are: civilized/Indigenous, settler/*Noble Savage*, sinful/sinless, barbarian/educated and, perhaps most simplistically and grotesquely, black/white. Perhaps the greatest hypocrisy double standard, of this era was this: the Australian prime minister of the 1990s, Mr John Howard, a self-defined Christian (likely subject to the doctrine of original sin) declined his support of the *Sorry Campaign*. This was due to the former Prime Minister's desire to lead the Australian zeitgeist away from which he described as a "Black armband view of national history". Notable too is the former Prime Minister's apparent obliviousness to the irony inherent in his use of the signifier "black" (that of a dichotomous pole) as the word resonates within the binary black/white.

"Counterpoint" may be understood as an act of binarization: perhaps, by some measures, the dichotomous opposing of subtleties. Lyricist, and baritone vocalist, Nick Cave illustrates the creation of his, often Gothic themed, songs in the 2014 biographical documentary *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard) where he states, "Do you want to know how to write a song? Song writing is about counterpoint. Counterpoint is the key—putting two dispirit images beside each other and seeing which way the sparks fly (Forsyth & Pollard, 11:09 min.)." Here the narrative collision of two "dispirit" (downhearted) characterizations generates a frictional, new energy

i.e. “sparks” of plot and theme. This is the union of two ‘vulnerabilities’ (subtleties of perception, perhaps), or possibly, more overtly, ‘depravities’ or ‘barbarities’. The meeting gives rise to a force which advantages, with equality, two “dispirit” states of characterization whose temper was relatively passionless prior to their narrative genesis and union. Arguably a passionate increase in temper is not necessarily a moral improvement. One can be a ‘passionate murderer’. However, the narrative presence of “sparks”, generally speaking, exists in improvement to that of characterized “dispiritedness”.

Cave continues, “Like letting a small child in the room with, I don’t know, a Mongolian psychopath or something. (Forsyth & Pollard, 11:11 min.)” This illustration is tempered to some degree by aspects of socio-cultural privilege. For the majority, however, the character construction of a small child serves as an audience reference point. Cave’s illustration of the creation of Gothic lyrical narrative rests, with opposed equilibrium from the Mongolian national, on the familiarity of a child. By and large, humanity’s experience of childhood is romanticised.

The empathy inducing, and somewhat *twee* characterisation of “dispirit” vulnerability, i.e. infancy, when placed in close proximity with the characterization of a “Mongolian psychopath”, renders the “psychotic” binary counterpart *othered*. However, many will testify that the screams and displays of neediness and selfishness, which are the inherent behaviour of many infants, may under several circumstances lead new parents to various degrees of psychosis themselves. Herein exists a nuance given rise by linguistic deconstruction: a subtlety, of binary driven counterpoint. The child’s “dispirit” purity is questionable and if this is so, in consequence, the Mongolian’s state of “psychosis” is made somewhat less barbaric.

“Then you send in a clown, say, on a tricycle and, again, you wait and watch. And if that doesn’t work—you shoot the clown (Forsyth & Pollard, 11:11.)” The addition of the tricycling-clown characterization would seem to render the null the Gothic binary driven partnership of the small child as it diametrically opposes the Mongolian psychopath. This may be the case. We may consider the clown a jester figure or a mediator of equilibrium, as *the third wheel* i.e. a disruption to the exclusivity of a previously dichotomous pair. Perhaps, however, the clown is a source of tension similar to the rope in a tug ‘o war which is stretched between the violence of two forces. The nuances of linguist deconstruction are endless.

By way of concluding this chapter, it is clear that the lyricism and musicality of the binaries within Gothic literature may be deconstructed in alignment to a multitude of political allegiances. These politically aligned binary readings may be of equalitarian position or otherwise. It is obvious too that readers of a *black or white* or of a *fundamentalist perception* (or morality), may not perceive any singular binary's multitudinous possible readings. This dissertation has maintained an embedded concern to access the strength with which the Gothic genre may supply a platform for narratives of social justice. Gothic literature's capacity for the narrative and lyrical expression of an egalitarian morality clearly exists. This is apparent with reference to Flanagan's *Death of a River guide*". However, discussion has shown too, it is a mistake to expect more *fundamentalist*, perhaps *black or white*, ethically aligned readers to perceive the lyricism of Gothic literature in light of any overarching thematic expression or intent of social justice.

### ***Chapter III: Final discussion and conclusion***

“*Gothic* has long been a term used to project modern concerns into a deliberately vague, even fictionalized past (Hogle, p.16)”. Gothic literature does not hold a monopoly on fictionalization of the past. At its blandest, the calculated fictionalization, i.e. *the misrepresentation*, of the past may be understood via the common term *artistic licence*. No single writer is exempt from the aesthetic decisions which may be perceived as those of artistic licence. In the design of fiction, the word *licence* denotes a competence of the fictive art and this entails the manipulation of textual representations of time and those of idiomatic subjectivity. The memoir genre for example, along with some conventions of the literary essay, accommodate and exploit the foibles of human memory. This is together with the use of a degree of factual hyperbole.

As established in the first chapter of the dissertation, Walpole helped to found the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival in both literature and architecture. Hogle says of Walpole that Gothic literature, “...has served (“to project”) by Walpole’s time.... a mythic past of Anglo-Saxon freedom free from oppression connected with the Magna Carta...(p. 16)’ By contemporary parlance, a writer’s purposeful mis-documentation of the past for political gain, revolution, or reform is often likened to the falsities of extreme media bias (either that of the right wing or that of a leftist inclination).

By twenty-first century idiom, any critical literature which has originated from either of the two political *hard-ends* is duly open to popular criticism via verbal response. This is to question the correlation of political ideology and that of notions of integral truth. This motion of critique often thereby attributes any degree of stylistic hyperbole or fictionalized perception of truth with a succession of derisive labels. The political left is not exempt in holding its own assortment of slurs in criticism of the right wing’s bias in perception of truth. However, with this noted, a selection of *the right’s* negative signifiers in condemnation of *the left* are: “lefty propaganda”, “fake news”, “snowflakes”, “global-warming fear mongers”, “outrage culture”, “of the echo chamber” etc. These terms are in expression of the political right’s understanding of the left’s sensibilities when faced with an opposed, conservative perception of truth.

Fictionalized Gothic expositional frameworks along with their inherent dichotomies of truth and their present/past present/future dichotomies of temporalism can be observed to allow writers powerful platforms upon which to project arguably ‘truthful’ visions of dystopic futures. At least two salient works of Gothic dystopian

literature have projected the contemporaneous anxieties of their times towards fictionalized futures. These being Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Within these two exemplar Gothic works, via the benefit of contemporary retrospect, predictive narratives which reside in these novels have correlated with eventualized empirical truths. Perhaps the existential actualization of these Gothic literary predictions may be thought of as their *hyper-truthful* realizations. These truths being, as of Orwell's work, the Australian Government's Gothic dystopian, and arguably fascist control of private medical records via The Commonwealth's web-services "MyGov" and "My Health Record". This can be likened to the *government intrusion* which bares narration within Orwell's work. Together with the eventualities of modern science's genetic modification of agricultural livestock and, potentially (if not presently), the modification of the human genome this is also in the nature of the *doppelganger monster* narrated within Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Benjamin Clarke with the article "George Orwell: politics, rhetoric and the public intellectual" (2008) writes: "His [Orwell's] famous plain style is not simply a reflection of his life, but a sophisticated mode of writing that enacts a model of socialism and political practice (2002 p.231)." Clarke develops a case to espouse that Orwell's unique method of fictive construction and prose originated from the author's engagement in free discussion with the broad public which extended beyond Orwell's own, literary/academic social position (2008, pp. 231-232). Clark holds that Orwell's narrative inspiration and prose style did not take recourse from the author's standing within the academe or another *elitist* category of social standing (2008 p. 232). He argues that Orwell's idiomatically resonate ('simple') prose style, and his socialist values came to rise from the writer's democratic rhetorical engagement in the culture and politics of his readers and the broader public (2008, pp. 231-232).

Clarke understands a binary as he notes the dichotomy (and synthesis in this unique case) between Orwell's political beliefs and the prose of his literary creations. The often-violent binary disjunction (metafictionally and metaphysically) between a creator and their creation is a resounding paradigm of Gothic literature. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (esteemed as one of the finest works of the Gothic genre) evidences this paradigm via the novel's narrated violent relational disjunction between

the story's central protagonist/antagonist Dr. Victor Frankenstein and his creation of the monster: a thematic mirror of Victor Frankenstein himself.

Clarke further expands upon the prose style of his subject writer: "It [Orwell's self-synthesising, politics/prose reflexive literary style] therefore contributes to politics in Bernard Crick's [a prominent theorist and proponent of democratic socialism] sense of a process founded upon the notion that "government is possible", indeed best conducted, amid the open canvassing of rival interests (2008, p.232.)". Here, with Crick's/Clarke's assertion, is an opportune *note* upon which to conclude the discursive portion, and indeed the entirety, of this thesis. It may be so that the best, honest, fair, egalitarian, most balanced political motion with which a writer of any genre, Gothic or otherwise, may strive to impact society is this: to employ a *self-synthesis*, a reflexion in the conduction of a literary expression and that of a morally aligned lifestyle. The great risk herein is this: within the realm of a representational democracy exists the real possibility that a writer may align with self-synthesis, in the manner of Orwell, the binary poles of creator and literary creation to a morality of hate.

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