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Kings, clowns and trumps: Creative-exegetical irony in the creative writing HDR thesis

Abstract:
Bahktin argues that the novel subsumes elements of the medieval carnival, including the rehearsal and collapse of competing social discourses to generate new meaning. Williams' performative exegesis (2016) and Krauth and Nash's creative-exegetical (2019) are academic forms of the creativecritical genre that simultaneously perform exegetical and creative work. Historically within the academy, academic texts like exegeses are perceived as not only distinct from creative writing, but also better for creating and communicating research findings. However, by applying Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalised novel, performative exegeses and creative-exegetical texts can be seen to generate hybrid, ironic utterances that collapse this epistemological hierarchy and undermine the perceived distinctions between creative and academic exegetical writing. These utterances can be categorised into three kinds of creative-exegetical irony: king-clown utterances, where creative text does academic exegetical work; clown-king utterances, where "academic" exegetical text does creative work; and trump utterances, which are indistinguishably both creative and academic. Such utterances are a defining feature of the creativecritical genre's capacity for innovation in form and meaning, particularly within creative writing higher degree by research (HDR) theses.

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Introduction

For many creative writing higher degree by research (HDR) students, complementary exegetical work must be produced to justify their creative work as scholarly. This requirement is the product of an epistemological hierarchy present in Western history and culture and the modern university. This hierarchy posits creative ways of writing and knowing as less credible and valuable than traditional academic ways of writing and knowing. While many students adopt traditional academic codes and conventions to write their exegeses, other students experiment with the form by using creative writing codes and conventions to produce creativecritical works like performative exegeses and creative-exegetical texts. The performative exegesis and the creative-exegetical produce double-voiced, hybrid, ironic utterances whose form and function can be understood by applying Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalised novel. Bakhtin believes the carnivalised novel produces hybrid languages through the dissolution of social hierarchies. Performative exegeses and creative-exegetical texts dissolve the social hierarchy that privileges "academic" methods of inquiry and communication and devalues creative methods of inquiry and communication [1]. This dissolution is performed using what I call "creative-exegetical irony". From a close reading of three creative writing HDR theses, including Johnston's *The Deconstruction of Professor Thrub* (2013), my own *Boundary Street* (2023), and De Groot's *Unbinding the Butterfly: A Fictocritical Biography Contemporising Amalie Dietrich, a Nineteenth-Century Collector of Nature* (2017), I identify three kinds of creative-exegetical irony: "king-clown utterances", ostensibly creative text performing academic exegetical work; "clown-king utterances", ostensibly "academic" exegetical text performing creative work; and "trump utterances", which are indistinguishably creative, academic and exegetical in form and function. Each kind of utterance undermines the social hierarchy that values "academic" epistemologies over creative epistemologies.

Many before me have noted creativecritical exegeses produce hybridity, especially in creative writing HDR theses (for some recent examples, see Krauth & Nash, 2019; or the 2017 *TEXT* special issue 44, *The Exegesis Now*). It has also been noted that Bakhtin's work might be applied to understand creativecritical text (for example, Hancox 2010; Magee, 2020). However, there has been less written about what forms hybridity in creativecritical exegeses might take at the sentence level, how it might function to produce knowledge in unique ways, and how it relates to the "academic" and creative epistemologies that produce it (for some examples, see Krauth & Nash, 2019). Similarly, Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalised novel has not been applied in close reading of creativecritical exegeses within creative writing HDR theses. This paper adds to previous scholarship by providing this close reading and draws from that reading recommendations for writers and examiners of creative writing HDR theses.

Creativecritical exegeses in creative writing HDR theses: The performative exegesis and the creative-exegetical

For many students, the creative writing HDR is a bifurcated project. In Australian, New Zealand, United States, Canadian, United Kingdom and Hong Kong universities, students may be required to submit two works: a creative artefact and a related critical exegesis (Brien et al., 2017; Williams, 2023). Exegeses are believed to demonstrate the scholarship of creative work

(Krauth & Nash, 2019). They show a student can engage in the critical writing and thinking required for a higher degree (Krauth, 2018), and they make explicit research findings that may be performed, symbolic and/or implicit in the creative work (Alberts et al., 2017). They may situate creative work in social, cultural, historical, literary and/or intellectual contexts (Alberts et al., 2017; Krauth & Nash, 2019; Williams, 2023), and can argue for the innovation and significance of creative text to meet definitions of research outlined by governing bodies like the Australian Research Council or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Webb & Brien, 2008; Williams, 2023). All this facilitates the evaluation of creative work so that degrees can be awarded (Forbes, 2014). The purpose of the exegesis, therefore, is to justify creative practice as research.

The requirement to submit critical text to justify creative work as scholarly is informed by an epistemological hierarchy with a long tradition in the academy and Western culture. This hierarchy posits "academic" research methods and outcomes, like those seen in the sciences and humanities, as more credible and valuable than knowledge produced by creative practice like creative writing (Beudel, 2022; Williams 2022). A distinction between "academic" and creative practice has been drawn in Western literature for over two millennia. Aristotle separates and explores each in two treatises, *Rhetoric* (on "academic" practice) and *Poetics* (on creative practice) (Krauth & Nash, 2019). This distinction is reiterated by Aristotle's teacher Plato in *The Republic,* wherein knowledge produced by poetry is devalued (Cowan, 2020) [2]. The Enlightenment of 17th and 18th century Europe argues for the scientific method as the most credible way to produce knowledge and frames creative work as mere aesthetic practice (Webb & Brien, 2008). In the 18th century, Anglophone Romantic writers reason or imagine reason and imagination to be different faculties (for example, Blake 2017; Shelley, 1891). The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* published in 1989, defines "creative": "specifically of literature and art … exhibiting imagination as well as intellect, and thus differentiated from the merely critical, 'academic' … So creative writing" (sense 1b; Bennett & Royle, 2004). Recurrent in Western thought is the argument that knowledge produced through creative practice is different and/or less credible than knowledge produced through research activities situated higher in the epistemological hierarchy.

The 21st century university inherits this epistemological hierarchy and organises scholarly and bureaucratic practices around it. It is argued that research associated with creative practice may not align with the norms of "academic" practice (Milech & Schilo, 2004). Some believe creative work on its own cannot contribute new knowledge (Krauth et al., 2010; Thin et al., 2020). There is resistance to accepting creative writing as research by academics, administrators and creative writers themselves (Cowan, 2020; Krauth, 2011; Williams, 2023). For many creative writing HDR students, exegetical work is required to translate creative work into "research-speak" (Williams, 2016, p. 1). Exegeses become what Brady calls a "ticket to satisfy the gatekeepers admitting entrance to the academy's conservative research club" (2000, p. 5). Creative work without complementary work informed by methods of research and writing from higher in the epistemological hierarchy may not be seen as research.

This epistemological hierarchy influences the form of creative writing HDR exegeses. The privileging of knowledge produced by "academic" practice over creative practice means exegeses often resemble traditional academic texts. Creative writing HDR exegeses can look like scientific papers, with a literature review, methodology, data and data analysis (Krauth, 2018; Williams, 2016). Exegeses also adopt the appearance of essays commonly seen in the humanities (Krauth, 2011; Williams, 2016). They may use the languages of the sciences and humanities, speaking to research "gaps", "questions" or "problems" (Williams, 2016). The use of such language and generic codes and conventions frames creative work as "academic". Linguists like Humboldt (1963), Whorf (1956) and Hyland (2009) argue language produces knowledge; therefore, the use of "academic" codes and conventions may help produce "academic" knowledge. An exegesis employing "academic" language may be a more persuasive "ticket" for the academy's gatekeepers and evaluators. Despite this, there is an emergent tradition of experimentation with the exegetical form within creative writing HDRs, and much of this experimentation strays from "academic" codes and conventions (Krauth, 2018). Some of this experimentation is motivated by frustration with the requirement to submit an exegesis with creative work. Many academics and students argue creative writing should qualify as academic research on its own and the research value of creative writing can be evident to a skilled evaluator (Cowan, 2020; Krauth & Nash, 2019; Magee, 2020; Williams, 2022). Unsurprisingly, many experimental exegeses borrow codes and conventions from creative writing to become creativecritical texts. This not only draws on skills already available to creative writing students but may also be an attempt to prove the research value of creative practice. Many creative writing HDR students challenge the epistemological hierarchy that devalues their primary research activity by writing creativecritically.

Two forms of experimental creativecritical exegeses are described by Krauth and Nash (2019) and Williams (2016): the "creative-exegetical" and the "performative exegesis" (respectively). The creative-exegetical genre includes texts where creative and exegetical practice is indistinguishable: creative and exegetical thinking and writing occur concurrently, and the text analyses itself. Krauth and Nash trace a history of such works in the Western canon back to the writing of Plato. The performative exegesis adopts literary codes and conventions like voice, dialogue, character, setting, symbolism and plot to communicate research. Williams builds on the work of Haseman (2006) who describes "performative research" as research that communicates findings using symbolism. More importantly, performative research, and the performative exegesis specifically, does not merely communicate research findings, but "performs" the research it reports. Haseman and Williams use the term "performative" as it is used by Austin (1975) to describe "performative utterances": speech acts that do not merely describe but "perform" what they describe (such as, for example, bequeathments in wills, which not only describe but actually transfer ownership; or declarations of war, which not only describe but actually begin warfare). Creative-exegetical texts as described by Krauth and Nash are also performative: the text performs its own analysis. The performative exegesis and the creative-exegetical blend creative and "academic" practice to produce creativecritical texts that create knowledge using performative utterances.

One way to understand how performative utterances function in performative exegeses and creative-exegetical text is through the application of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalised novel and its use of irony. Bakhtin's understanding of irony in particular demonstrates how performative utterances in creativecritical exegeses undermine the distinction between "academic" exegetical practice and creative practice to generate new form and meaning.

Bakhtin's carnivalised novel and irony

Bakhtin believes the medieval carnival collapsed social hierarchies and produced hybrid languages. The medieval carnival was a public celebration occurring before Lent that included feasting, theatrical performances and costumes. For Bakhtin (1984b), a defining feature of the medieval carnival is the interrogation and dissolution of social hierarchies. The carnival parodied the official Christian rituals occurring alongside it, mocking the authority of the ecclesiastical and feudal hierarchies that produced these rituals. The most recognisable image of the medieval carnival is the ritual crowning of a clown as king, a symbolic inversion of the social hierarchy that mocked and undermined the monarch. However, this ritual crowning was followed by ritual dethronement, where the clown was publicly stripped of their king costume, mocked, and beaten. The carnival did not merely turn the world upside down but collapsed all hierarchies. Even the clown-king was not exempt from the carnival's logic of descent. Beyond the symbolic, the carnival also practically dissolved hierarchies by altering social expressions and activities. Costumes and masks obfuscated identity and removed from clothing those signifiers that might flag a person's social status. Furthermore, carnival was perhaps the only time when people of different socioeconomic classes interacted in open ways in public spaces. This is important to Bakhtin given his interest in linguistic, textual and discursive forms. Different classes are their own "speech communities": each class has its own system of values, beliefs, knowledges, epistemologies and discourses created and expressed through languages particular to each class (Eckhert 2000). Bakhtin (1984a) argues that when people of different classes interacted during carnival, it was necessary for them to create new, hybrid languages to communicate, which lead to new, hybrid understandings of the world. The medieval carnival, then, was a space where social divisions were suspended to create new linguistic forms and meanings.

For his doctoral degree, Bakhtin (1984b) analyses Renaissance writer Rabelais' pentalogy *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* (c. 1542–1564) to argue that the codes and conventions of the medieval carnival are subsumed into the novel. Bakhtin believes the novel is informed by the medieval carnival to become a space where social hierarchies and competing discourses are rehearsed and collapsed to produce new meaning (Bakhtin, 1984b, 1981). Bakhtin (1981) views characters in novels and their authors as inseparable from their social contexts, which shape and are shaped by languages and their speakers. When characters speak, they express "socio-ideological conceptual system[s] of real social groups" (1981, p. 411). That is, social attitudes, values, beliefs, epistemologies, knowledges, discourses and languages speak. However, a character's words do not come to us directly. They are constructed by the author, who is also constructing the character via the reported speech. Character narration or dialogue contains not only the words and social discourse of the character but also the words and social

discourse of the author. These two discourses may interact to produce new meanings. For example, an author may disagree with their character, and the way the dialogue is constructed may make this evident. The character's speech then becomes a double-voiced utterance that is ironic or parodic, containing both the character's and the author's competing discourses (1984a). These discourses challenge each other and undermine the absolute authority of either. Each discourse is opened to interrogation which invites the reader to generate additional meaning as they evaluate the discourses of character and author. In addition to this example, Bakhtin (1981) describes all double-voiced utterances communicating multiple socio-ideological conceptual systems as "hybrid". These ironic, double-voiced, hybrid utterances are a code and convention of the medieval carnival that Bakhtin recognises in the novel.

Creative-exegetical irony

The term "discourse community" is used to describe some social groups and their socio-ideological conceptual systems, including those of creative writers and academics. Swales (1990) describes a discourse community as a group of individuals with similar interests and goals who communicate using particular textual and linguistic codes and conventions. The academy in its entirety may be described as a discourse community (Rodin & Steinberg, 2003), and so may individual disciplines (Hyland, 2009). When creative writers participate in academia, they straddle at least two discourse communities: that of "academic" and artistic practice. Rendle-Short (2020) uses the term "artist-researchers" to describe the double identity of creative arts students and academics; Webb (2012) uses the term "artist-academic". Webb draws on the work of Bourdieu to explain the socio-ideological conceptual systems and discourse communities of artistic and "academic" practice, describing the academy and the arts as two "fields", spaces with particular rules and values in which agents compete for capital. Webb also applies the Bourdieuan "habitus" to explain how the codes, conventions and discourses of fields are internalised by the agents who participate in them. As Bourdieu (as cited in Webb, 2012, p. 10) notes: "fields are present in the form of persons". Webb outlines the "apparent antimonies" of art and the academy (p. 14). Arts communities are concerned with aesthetic value, resisting social norms and "the ineffable rather than the sayable" (p. 8). "Academic" communities value intellectual rigour, conformity to scholarly conventions and transparent methods and findings. Each field has different histories, rules, rewards, audiences, gatekeepers and discourses. As artist-academics, creative writing HDR students participate in two fields, speak two languages, operate from and within two discourse communities and produce discourses that sometimes conflict.

Creativecritical exegeses in creative writing HDR theses contain what I call "creative-exegetical irony". In such exegeses, students speak both "academic" and creative languages, producing double-voiced, hybrid utterances. Because these languages are embedded in and embody fields, socio-ideological conceptual systems or discourses that have been historically and culturally framed as antithetical, these hybrid utterances become ironic. From my close reading of three creative writing HDR theses, I identify three kinds of creative-exegetical irony. These include hybrid utterances that look like creative text, but also do academic exegetical work, which I refer to as "king-clown utterances"; utterances that look like "academic"

exegetical text but also do creative work, which I refer to as "clown-king utterances"; and utterances that look like and perform both academic exegetical and creative work, and are particularly characteristic of creativecritical exegeses, which I refer to as "trump utterances". These terms are influenced by Bahktin's analysis of the medieval carnival and its relation to the novel. Within the academy, creative writing is like the clown and "academic" writing is like the king. Traditional academic styles of writing and knowing are invested with authority and credibility like monarchs are. While part of the medieval court (that is, the academy), the clown is not granted the same authority but, like creative writing, is more aligned with popular forms of entertainment [3]. However, during the carnival of the creativecritical exegesis, creative writing (the clown) might be dressed in the king's costume to further academic arguments; or "academic" writing (the king) may be dressed in the clown's clothes to do creative work. If caught during a costume change, striptease or ritual dethronement, an utterance may be both king and clown, indistinguishably both creative and "academic" in form and function: a trump utterance. These ironic utterances undermine the authority of both languages, socio-ideological conceptual systems and discourses, creating a space where new meaning can be generated.

The three kinds of creative-exegetical irony produce different epistemological arguments in relation to both academic and creative discourse. Examples of the three kinds of creative-exegetical irony and analyses of them are included below. These examples are from three HDR creative writing theses that contain performative exegeses or creative-exegetical text: Johnston's *The Deconstruction of Professor Thrub* (2013), my own *Boundary Street* (2023), and De Groot's *Unbinding the Butterfly: A Fictocritical Biography Contemporising Amalie Dietrich, a Nineteenth-Century Collector of Nature* (2017).

King-clown utterances: Creative text doing academic exegetical work

"King-clown utterances" are hybrid, ironic utterances in creativecritical exegeses that employ codes and conventions typically associated with creative writing but also perform academic exegetical work. They use strategies like plot, character, dialogue and setting to perform academic arguments. I use the term "king-clown" because in this term, "clown" is the noun and "king" is the adjective. King-clown utterances are creative writing doing academic exegetical work; therefore, they are clowns in the costume of a king.

Johnston's *The Deconstruction of Professor Thrub* (2013) is a novel based on a creative writing HDR thesis. The thesis argues that the novel form creates and sustains the myth that individuals have absolute free will when their actions might be more accurately understood as determined by social, cultural, historical and/or biological forces. The creative component of the thesis follows characters navigating some of early 20th century Europe's significant historical events, including the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917–1921) and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). The exegesis tells the story of an unnamed creative writing HDR student's struggle to write the creative component of the thesis.

Given the argument of the thesis, Johnston's student protagonist produces pieces of experimental writing that try to portray plot events as the product of social, historical, cultural and/or biological forces rather than the choices of characters. Responding to a suggestion from his HDR supervisor, Professor Thrub, this includes writings that "desist from using personal pronouns or any other descriptions that imply originative action" (2013, p. 125). Some of these experimental writings describe a character, Elsie, encountering the Belfast Outdoor Relief Strike (1932). Elsie hears protestors singing Frank Silver and Irving Cohn's "Yes! We Have No Bananas" (1923) and, enraptured by the music, joins the protest [4]. One attempt to describe this scene absent personal pronouns and implied originative action is this (p. 130):

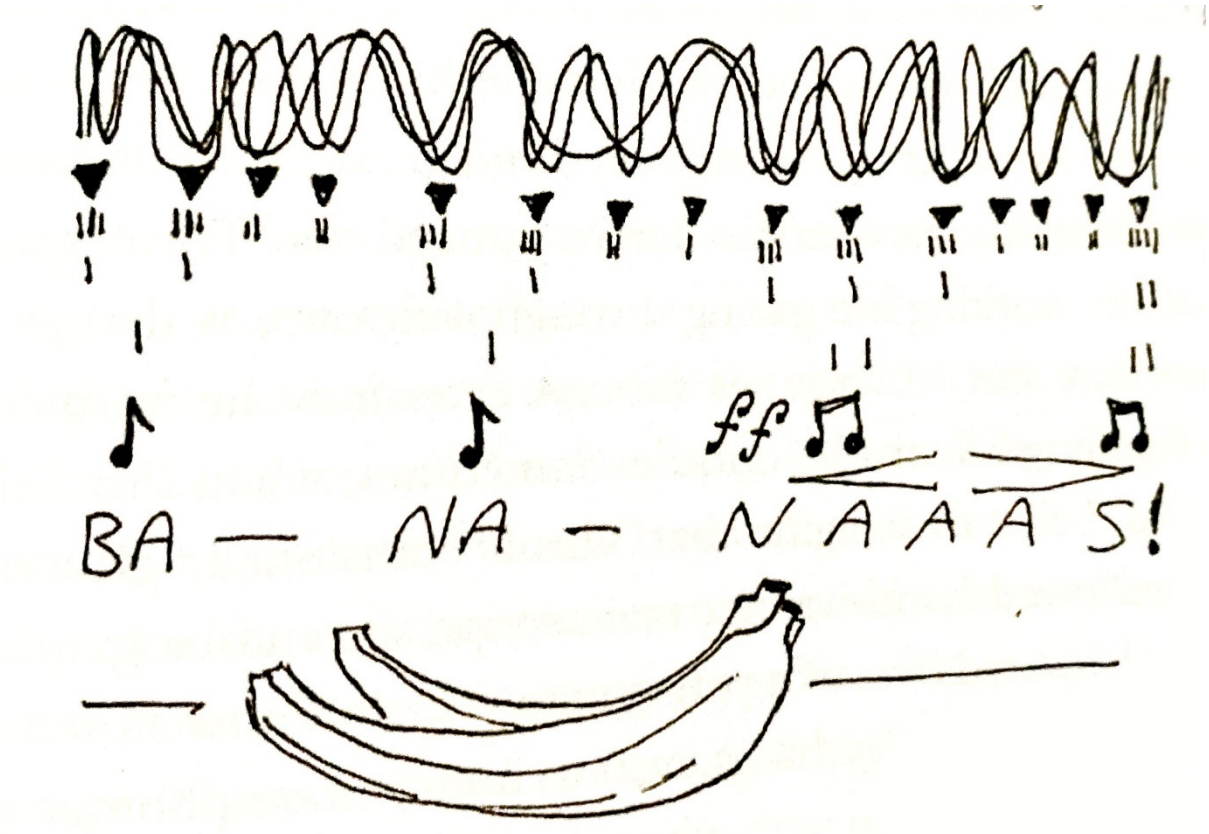

Figure 1: Belfast, October 1932. A hand-drawn illustration. DD Johnston.

Two bananas appear below the word 'BA-NA-NAAAS!' Above 'BA-NA-NAAAS!' appears musical notation for the sung word, including six semiquavers, a crescendo and decrescendo, and an instruction to sing fortissimo. Above the musical notation are three throws of short, vertical lines symbolising electrical activity in the brain. Above the vertical lines are several overlapping wavy lines symbolising sound waves. There is a row of downward pointing arrows between the wavy lines and vertical lines, perhaps showing the conversion of sound waves into neurological activity (2013, p. 127). Illustration used with permission of DD Johnston and Barbican Press.

This experimental text fails to meaningfully communicate Elsie's experience of the Belfast strike and makes little sense separated from earlier descriptions of the protest that do include personal pronouns and implied originative action. Johnston makes more obvious the limitations

of this experimental writing when its author is forced to explain it at a review of his HDR progress. The academics present respond by suggesting he may be struggling with stress or a medical issue and might avail himself of the university's student support services. Later, the entire exercise is assessed: "'Is that not the biggest pile of pseudo-intellectual, obscurantist, bourgeois shit ye ever heard?' We were in the Duke of York, discussing Thrub's prohibition on personal pronouns" (2013, p. 134). Efforts to write creative text without personal pronouns or implied originative action repeatedly fail in the novel.

While the excerpt above and others like it in the novel communicate plot events poorly, they do meaningfully communicate Johnston's conclusion that creative writing cannot completely discard the will and choices of characters and agents but must instead explore the tension between those characters/agents and the external forces compelling them. The excerpt demonstrates it is difficult to communicate meaning in creative writing without characters with some degree of agency. It performs experimentation, results, evidence and argument from which a meaningful conclusion can be drawn, and this conclusion is further explained in the novel using creative writing codes and conventions. The excerpt is informed by discourse from the arts in its experimentation with novel ways of generating meaning and it is informed by "academic" discourse when it performs the evidence and argument of the thesis. It is a king-clown utterance: ostensibly creative text ironically performing academic work. And it arguably has more success communicating knowledge as part of the academic argument than as part of the novel's narrative. It erodes the distinction between creative and "academic" text and collapses the epistemological hierarchy that frames creative text as being insufficient to perform and communicate academic research.

Johnston's argument that creative writing must explore the tension between agency and compelling external forces is reflected in the creativecritical form of the text. The novel is not wholly creative or "academic" practice but instead explores the tension between the two activities. The student protagonist struggles to balance agency and the compulsion of social, historical, cultural and biological forces for both his characters and himself. In particular, he struggles to balance his practice and identity as a creative writer and an "academic", compelled by the opposing social forces of the discourses and communities of "academic" and creative practice. His writing negotiates this balance by both resisting and conforming to the conventions of each discourse community. Where it resists convention, the protagonist and author might exercise agency, and where it conforms to convention, the protagonist and author might be compelled by social forces. Often, conforming to the conventions of one discourse community means resisting the other. The difficulty of negotiating this balance is expressed when the protagonist struggles to justify his creative work at the progress review, where creative practice, "academic" practice and university bureaucracy conflict. It is also demonstrated when Thrub's theoretically or "academically" informed directive to desist from personal pronouns and descriptions implying originative action fails in creative practice. Despite these difficulties, the final novel is a single, coherent text blending critical and creative practice. As a performative work, the novel's creativecritical form performs the content: the conclusion that agents must always negotiate the tension between free will and the compulsion of external forces.

Many creative texts outside of academia function similarly to Johnston's work, especially with regard to the excerpt above. Works of metafiction – texts that analyse themselves using literary codes and conventions or that perform their own production – can be characterised by king-clown utterances. Williams (2013) and Bennett and Royle (2004) suggest that, to some extent, all creative texts are about their own production and contain implicit instructions for how they should be read. This is perhaps why Williams (2022), Cowan (2020) and Krauth and Nash (2019) suggest that the research value of creative works can be self-evident to evaluators who know how to read them and that complementary critical work can become superfluous. King-clown utterances in creative writing HDR theses support this argument when they collapse the artificial distinction between creative and academic work and reveal that creative text can produce academic research. These utterances are ironic only in the context of a culture that regards creative and academic practice as separate. The king-clown utterances in Johnston's work demonstrate that when evaluators read creative work as if it is academic, creative writing can perform academic arguments.

Clown-king utterances: "Academic" exegetical text doing creative work

Less often considered than king-clown utterances in analyses of creativecritical texts, "clown-king utterances" are hybrid, ironic utterances in performative exegeses and creative-exegetical texts that employ codes and conventions typically associated with "academic" writing but also perform creative work. They use features like "academic" vocabulary and "academic" research methods and citations to primary and secondary sources, in order to develop a creative narrative. In the phrase "clown-king utterance", "king" is the noun and "clown" is the adjective because clown-king utterances are "academic" writing doing creative work; they are kings in the costume of a clown.

An example of a clown-king utterance can be found in the performative exegesis of my creative writing HDR thesis, *Boundary Street* (2023). The thesis argues that creative writing HDR theses with embedded, performative exegeses are postmodern fictions that may occasion ontological crises in readers. In this context, an "ontological crisis" is when a person doubts the material nature of their reality. The creative artefact of the thesis tells the story of a creative writing HDR student, Jane, who must write both a creative artefact and exegesis. She struggles with the exegetical component of her work, so her supervisor provides her with an example titled *Boundary Street*. This example exegesis is also the exegesis for the creative artefact in which Jane is the protagonist. The exegesis is presented within the creative artefact as Jane reads it. She eventually realises the exegesis is about her and that she is a character in another student's thesis.

Consider this excerpt where Jane is reading the literature review before she is interrupted by loud housemates:

> Creative practitioners have often resisted exegetical writing. Nelson (2004) calls the exegesis merely auxiliary to the creative work. We might see the exegesis as a parergon or parasite, clinging like a tick to the flesh of the fiction. Jenner's work (2016, p. 6)

> calls it a 'foreign body'. Williams (2016) says we might think of it as the creative work's doppelganger. In students, it inspires fear (Cosgrove & Scrivenor 2017), anxiety (Brien et al. 2017), anger, and despair; it intimidates and isolates; it makes them feel illegitimate (Webb, Williams & Collis 2017). Woods (2007, n.p.) describes the exegesis as a 'disturbing, unnerving performance' that
>
> 'Ooooooohhhmhhhhhmmm,' someone wails above the music. Evidently, Vicki and Lucy are fucking. (Noakes, 2023, p. 21)

As well as forming part of the literature review, these sentences foreshadow Jane's relationship with the exegesis she is reading. This exegesis will reveal the unsettling truth that she is a character in a creative work. For Jane, this exegesis is a "disturbing, unnerving performance" that makes her feel afraid, anxious, angry, desperate, intimidated, isolated and illegitimate. As a literature review, the text foregrounds an academic argument and helps explain the innovation and significance of the research. As a literary device, the foreshadowing develops the plot and character. Ostensibly "academic" text, this king-clown utterance is also, ironically, creative in function.

A common argument against accepting creative writing as research is that one convention of creative writing is the use of ambiguity to open the text to multiple readings. This complicates the evaluation of creative writing as research (Yoo, 2017). It is claimed "academic" writing instead narrows down possible readings and fixes meaning so research methods and findings can be communicated clearly (Maxwell, 2020; Yoo, 2017). This is informed by the "academic" principle of transparency in knowledge production (Webb, 2012). However, it has long been understood that meaning is fluid and dynamic even in the clearest statements (Bakhtin, 1984a; Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1997; Foucault, 1998). Even meanings produced by "academic" texts are contingent on shifting contexts and communities (Hyland, 2009). My "academic" text is not closed off to multiple readings and perhaps no "academic" text is. Bennett and Royle (2004) note that any non-literary text can be read as literary and vice versa, and multiple meanings can be generated. Magee (2014) argues that many "academic" texts, some celebrated and seminal, encourage a plurality of readings. King-clown utterances reveal that "academic" work, when read as creative work, proliferates meaning like creative texts do. When creative writing HDR theses contain king-clown utterances, they undermine the distinction between "academic" and creative writing and collapse the epistemological hierarchy that argues "academic" writing communicates research more clearly than creative writing.

Trump utterances: Text doing both creative and academic exegetical work

"Trump utterances" are hybrid, ironic utterances in creativecritical exegeses that seamlessly blend codes and conventions from creative and "academic" writing and perform creative and academic exegetical work simultaneously. Kings and clowns can be found in a deck of cards. There is a king card for each of the four suits (or costumes), and there may be one or more joker (or clown) cards. In card games, a "trump card" is elevated in value above all other cards and can be played against any other card to win a hand. When they simultaneously perform creative and academic exegetical work, trump utterances play against and undermine the

epistemological hierarchy that posits "academic" writing as having more research value than creative writing. One might also refer to the homonymous president of the United States who Taibbi (2017) describes as being simultaneously the head of a state and a clown.

De Groot's creative writing HDR thesis *Unbinding the Butterfly: A Fictocritical Biography Contemporising Amalie Dietrich, a Nineteenth-Century Collector of Nature* (2017) blends critical and creative writing to recreate the life of a Queensland natural historian. The cover page advises that the work's exegetical and creative components are integrated. In a letter to the examiner discussing the methodology of the thesis, De Groot constructs a conversation between herself/the character De Groot and her HDR supervisor:

> 'Fictocriticism allows your writing to move across disciplines,' the Prof. observed, weaving his fingers (a metaphor for fictocritical weaving?).
>
> …I again considered my Honours Thesis, which applied the "narrative and structural discontinuity" (Brewster 1996: 31) that can be utilised in fictocritical writing. 'My work will be non-linear and multi-structural,' I said. 'So Professor,' I was thinking aloud now, 'if it's the form of writing, if it's *fictocriticism* that really interests me, does it matter who or what I research?'
>
> 'Maybe not,' answered the Prof. 'Dietrich suits because of her multifaceted life … She was a naturalist, so your research can incorporate reports, scientific documents, specimens, letters, maps and illustrations.'
>
> 'Surely any scientist could provide those things,' I countered.
>
> 'Deborah,' the Prof. explained, 'Dietrich is not just "any scientist", you share commonalities. You are women, mothers, collectors, researchers, travellers. Amalie Dietrich is the perfect research choice, for *you*.'
>
> 'Mmm, you're right, Amalie Dietrich and I are alike in some ways,' I said. Maybe I could use that to my advantage. (p. 94)

I would like to draw attention to the first line of this excerpt, a trump utterance that is ironic in multiple ways. Firstly, it is both creative and critical in form and function. The utterance is creative text constructing conversation with lines of dialogue that develop plot and character. As implied in the excerpt, some creative writing in the thesis forms a memoir of De Groot's thesis writing, and this conversation is part of that text. The first line of the excerpt also has a critical function. The utterance and the conversation it sits within serve the academic purpose of describing and providing an argument for De Groot's methodology. Additionally, the utterance exegetes itself when it describes itself as a metaphor; when the professor weaves his fingers, it produces a metaphor for the structure of the thesis. The phrase "a metaphor for" in the parenthetical aside, however, reframes the metaphor as a simile; "a metaphor for" might be replaced with "like". Paradoxically, naming the metaphor "a metaphor" makes the professor's action a simile, and the described events are both metaphor and simile. This irony can be read as a metaphor for the irony of the statement as a trump utterance. The professor's action is both

a metaphor, a textual construct that substitutes another textual construct, and a simile, a textual construct separated from and connected to another textual construct by a preposition like "like". De Groot's thesis positions "academic" and creative writing and practice alongside each other in a process described as "weaving". However, in the process of this weaving, the separate-but-connected practices, texts or threads become substituted with a new kind of practice or text(ile): a hybrid, performative, creativecritical work. By placing creative and "academic" texts alongside each other like a simile pairs textual constructs, the paired constructs become a new, single construct, a creativecritical text, like a metaphor substitutes one construct for another. Interestingly, the way the parenthetical aside revises the metaphor (a single construct) into a simile (paired constructs) is contrary to the way the greater thesis revises creative and "academic" text and practice (paired constructs) into creativecritical work (a single construct). The trump utterance is then triply ironic. When the text exegetes itself, it is both metaphor and simile; it revises itself from a single textual construct into paired constructs when the greater thesis revises itself from paired constructs into a single construct; and it performs both creative and critical functions.

I would also like to draw attention to another trump utterance in the excerpt which is ironic in multiple ways: "My work will be … multi-structural". Like the first line of the excerpt, it is creative and "academic" in form and function, forming both a line of dialogue and describing the structure of the thesis. However, its form proposes a contrary argument to its content. It argues the thesis will contain multiple structures. The sentence itself, however, collapses critical and creative form and function into a single text. Like the diegetic naming of a metaphor creating a simile, when this utterance describes itself as multi-structural, it collapses those structures into a single, creativecritical form.

These stacked ironies, multiple and/or contrary readings, or semantic revisions or oscillations are characteristic of trump utterances. Trump utterances exegete themselves and perform their own production. They are self-reflexive; they always refer back to themselves. To read a trump utterance is to read it; then to read what it says about itself; then to re-read it in light of what it says about itself; then to re-read what it says about itself in light of what it says; and so forth. This movement between readings or meanings might be understood as the "costume change" a trump utterance undergoes as it shifts between academic function (the king's regalia) and creative function (the clown's costume). Nelson (2004, p. 2) argues that in creative writing HDR theses, creative text is "in constant rebirthing through the [exegetical] text that sits beside it". Here, there is constant rebirthing of creative text through the exegetical text that sits *inside* it. The exegetical text is also constantly rebirthed through the creative text. This constant rebirthing is characteristic of double-voiced, hybrid utterances. In such utterances, meaning is never "fully actualised" or "finished" (Bakhtin, 1981). When they perform their own production, trump utterances manifest knowledge production in process, communicating not only the conclusion of an academic argument but the experimentation, ambivalence, dead ends and restarts of research activity.

Trump utterances also generate multiple readings by interrogating the authority and credibility of both "academic" and creative research activities. Moore (2012) and Barrett (2004) argue

authority and credibility in the creative arts are partially derived from obscuring the processes that produce artworks. Artists use ideas like "genius" and "inspiration" to hide processes of production, which valorises creative products and awards them cultural and economic capital. When trump utterances exegete themselves, however, they demystify the processes that produced them in a move that may reduce their authority or credibility in the context of creative arts discourse communities [5]. This might be regarded as a ritual dethronement: trump utterances strip themselves of mystification, and therefore of authority. Similarly, when trump utterances use creative writing codes and conventions to create research, they undermine the epistemological authority traditionally awarded to "academic" research methods and writing by demonstrating there are other credible ways to produce and communicate knowledge. This is another ritual dethronement. Trump utterances, therefore, adopt the medieval carnival's logic of descent by undermining the claims to authority made by both creative and "academic" writing and discourse communities. The epistemological hierarchy is collapsed to the lowest level and all knowledge is relativised. This is another way trump utterances open themselves to multiple and sometimes contrary readings. When the epistemologies of both creative and "academic" discourse are undermined, and neither can make an absolute claim to truth, the space awarded to the reader to generate meaning is widened and meanings proliferate.

Conclusion: Recommendations for creative writing HDR students and examiners

From this explanation and analysis of king-clown utterances, clown-king utterances and trump utterances in three creative writing HDR theses with creativecritical exegeses, some recommendations can be made concerning the production, content and form of creative writing HDR theses for creative writing HDR students and their examiners.

King-clown utterances demonstrate that creative writing codes and conventions can be used to create academic research. As performative utterances, they perform the research they report and can include experimentation, evidence, results, arguments and conclusions. Creative writing HDR students may be made aware that the privileging of "academic" ways of writing and knowing as better for performing and communicating research than ways of writing and knowing in the creative arts is the product of historical, cultural and social traditions. It is neither natural nor a given. Students may feel empowered to use creative writing codes and conventions to perform and share their research. Examiners of creative writing HDR theses may read creative work not only for literary accomplishment and innovation but also for the academic arguments they may perform.

Clown-king utterances demonstrate that the codes and conventions of traditional academic writing can be used as literary devices. The assumption that "academic" writing creates clear and fixed meanings where creative writing does not can be challenged. Like creative writing, "academic" writing can be parsed for multiple meanings. Creative writing HDR students might consider the ways traditional "academic" text can be used for creative effect and contribute to the development of character, dialogue, plot, theme, metaphor, simile or similar. Examiners might read "academic" text in creative writing HDR theses as not only complimenting or exegeting the creative work but as part of the creative work's repertoire of literary strategies.

When they seamlessly blend creative and critical text, trump utterances demonstrate that creative and academic exegetical work can be performed in the same text right down to the level of sentences and words. They challenge the idea that creative and "academic" text and practice are mutually exclusive. Because they perform the process of knowledge creation, they may generate multiple meanings. All research activity involves the creation of data surplus to conclusions and involves iterative processes of revision. As self-reflexive statements, trump utterances are constantly revising themselves. When they exegete themselves, they demystify the processes that created them, reducing their authority in the context of creative arts discourse communities; and when they use creative writing codes and conventions to create research, they undermine "academic" discourse communities' claims to superior knowledge production. Trump utterances relativise the truth claims of both creative and "academic" discourse to create space for additional meaning to be generated. Creative writing HDR students may be advised that no research activity can make an absolute and unproblematic claim to truth. They may recognise the capacity of creativecritical text to model and manifest both their research conclusions and processes as well as the fraught and ambiguous nature of all knowledge creation. Examiners might avoid reading academic "looking" text and creative "looking" text as separate-but-connected components of the same work, but instead re-read text for both its academic and creative functions. They may seek evidence of repeated, reinforced or emphasised evidence and conclusions that form the central argument of the thesis while also understanding that, in performing the research process, the thesis may also experiment with evidence that is surplus or contrary to the central argument. They may also read creativecritical exegeses with an understanding that neither "academic" nor creative discourse can claim to know better than the other.

Notes

[1] Quotation marks are placed around the word "academic" when it is used to describe research methods, outcomes and textual codes and conventions originating from fields other than the creative arts. Creative arts research is, of course, academic (no quotation marks).

[2] Interestingly, Plato's writing might be understood as poetic or creative today, given its use of setting, character, plot and dialogue to communicate research.

[3] As Webb (2010, p. 3) asks: "can creative practice really comprise research … or is it more about pleasure, a libidinal charge?"

[4] Johnston explains that the Belfast protest united both Catholic and Protestant workers; given the division and tension between the two social groups, protestors adopted the American novelty song as a politically and religiously neutral anthem that both groups knew and could sing. This is a real example of a hybrid utterance similar to those Bakhtin believes were produced during the medieval carnival. Two disparate social groups negotiated a hybrid language both could speak, with new meaning generated when the novelty song was repurposed as a protest song.

[5] This may be one reason why some creative writing HDR students express frustration with the exegetical component of their work.

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