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Writing into the dark

Abstract
The contrasting practices of planning or 'pantsing' are regular topics of discussion within fiction writing circles. In a field where each writer's practice can differ so greatly, these approaches to writing offer a rare opportunity for categorisation and insight. Australian novelist Valerie Parv states that 'pantsers' are known as such 'from flying by the seat of their pants, because they like to discover the story as they write. Their opposite, plotters, prefer to work out every twist and character development before starting' (Parv 2014). I knew little of these choices when I began writing my debut novel Carousel *(2015). The decision to 'pants', for me, was subconscious, driven by anxiety, naivety and an obsession with daily word counts. What I discovered, both during the writing of* Carousel*, and the subsequent research for my PhD, was a process steeped in popularity, complexity and risk. This paper considers the definition, methodology and application of 'pantsing', and the reverberations of this practice within both* Carousel *and sequel* Beyond Carousel *(2016). 'Pantsing' not only emerges as a viable writing strategy, but a practice eliciting valuable creative outcomes.*
Keywords: writing practice, pantsing, Blanchot

Theoretical and practical concerns of 'pantsing'

Many successful authors choose to write their manuscripts without having undertaken any planning. These writers appear to embrace a high level of uncertainty within the writing process, effectively working into the dark. This method is colloquially known as 'pantsing', or writing by the seat of one's pants. For the 'pantser', development documents such as scene cards, plot outlines and character breakdowns – those synonymous with the contrasting practice of planning – are eschewed in favour of plunging immediately into writing the sentences and paragraphs of the first draft manuscript.

These processes are defined and analysed within various creative writing manuals. In *Writing Your Way: Creating a Writing Practice That Works For You* (2012), Don Fry categorises writers as either planners or plungers. 'Planners create a plan and follow it; Plungers discover what they want to say by typing (Fry 2012: 27). For Elizabeth Bains in *The Creative Writing Handbook* (2000) the categorisation is less pronounced, yet basic distinctions still exist in relation to planning. 'Planning a novel can be a very individual matter. Some novelists do far more preparation than others, and the preparation can take on different forms' (Bains 2000: 153). Bains also suggests that the choice of practice may be determined by the choice of material: 'Some novels

are simply a question of organising a story you already know very well. Others are a matter of exploration, and you will be writing to find out where the story leads' (153).

The 'pantsing' method has been explored by writers and theorists such as Margaret Atwood, Annie Dillard, Maurice Blanchot, Stephen King and Katherine Heyman. Whilst these discussions highlight the individuality of a writer's practice, they also identify some overriding characteristics.

Discussions on 'pantsing' are often focused on the initial stages of the writing process. In *Negotiating with the Dead* (2003) Atwood asks several authors to describe how it feels to initiate a new work:

> One said it was like walking into a labyrinth, without knowing what monster might be inside; another said it was like groping through a tunnel; another said it was like being in a cave – she could see daylight through the opening, but she herself was in darkness. Another said it was like being under water, in a lake or ocean. Another said it was like being in a completely dark room, feeling her way: she had to rearrange the furniture in the dark, and when it was all arranged a light would come on. Another said it was like wading through a deep river, at dawn or twilight. (Atwood 2003: xxii)

For each of these authors, the process of writing seems to be strongly associated with uncertainty. This uncertainty manifests in darkness and disorientation, where the way forward into the work ranges from vague and murky, to completely hidden. There is also a suggestion that uncertainty is not a block or flaw, but rather a central part of the writer's creative process. For Atwood, 'writing has to do with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it, and with luck, to illuminate it, and to bring something back out into the light' (2003: xxii). The notion that this illumination takes place during the writing process appears to be a defining aspect of the 'pantsing' methodology. Dillard expresses something akin to this in *The Writing Life* (1990) where she compares the process of writing a novel to that of climbing a ladder skyward; the writer's view is obstructed until they reach the top and can see over roof or clouds. Heyman reiterates this notion that uncertainty can be an integral part of the writer's process via what she terms 'creative unknowing'. Heyman states that '[i]n order to fully engage with the act of creation that fiction requires, it is necessary first to be utterly lost' (Heyman 2013: 63).

Similar ideas can be found in the writing theory of Blanchot. In *The Space of Literature* (1989), Blanchot identifies the allure of impossibility that exists within a potential work, describing the writer's experience in negotiating this impossibility as 'purely nocturnal, it is the very experience of night' (Blanchot 1989: 163). Kathryn Owler states: 'For Blanchot, writing requires an inspired leap into the unknown. This leap involves an initial movement that aims to bring presence to absence and order to disorder' (Owler 2015: 2). Achieving these aims is a matter of negotiating a stage of writing Blanchot terms 'the other night' (1989: 163). Blanchot's 'other night' is characterised by darkness and uncertainty, yet is also something he considers to be both inevitable and essential.

Relevant to 'pantsing', Blanchot speaks of this negotiation occurring during the writing process, rather than in preparation for this. Prior to the 'other night' is a stage Blanchot terms the 'first night' (1989). Owler describes this as a preparatory stage, however, not in the sense that the writer is planning, rather that they are yet to negotiate the total unknown of the 'other night'. For

Blanchot, the 'first night' is very much concerned with writing – 'Here language completes and fulfils itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as meaning' (Blanchot 1989: 163) – as it acts as a necessary precursor to the defining stage to follow. Why writing requires a venture into the darkness and uncertainty of the 'other night' is something Blanchot relates to the notions of abandonment and discovery. He speaks of the writer needing to expose themselves to a lack of understanding and clarity about the work, whilst within it, in order to emerge with these things, or, in his words, to 'reconcile the irreconcilable' (1989: 185). For Blanchot, remaining outside of the darkness would be 'to lose forever the possibility of emerging from it' (1989: 164).

Negotiating a way out of the situations described by Blanchot, Atwood and others, inevitably requires a process of discovery. This is the notion that a writer working in darkness must effectively discover their narrative and characters as they write. Stephen King uses the analogy of stories being like fossils for the writer to dig up. This comparison parallels Atwood's illumination of the dark and Dillard's view from the top of the ladder. As well as a mechanism to progress through a manuscript, this process of discovery can imbue the work with many things. Writers such as King and Gillian Flynn speak of an air of the unexpected. Flynn reveals that an unplanned approach to *Gone Girl* (2012) resulted in plot twists that worked because they surprised herself (Flynn as cited in Carpenter 2014). King alludes to the possibility of arriving at narrative destinations that may not have otherwise surfaced: 'In some instances, the outcome is what I visualized. In most, however, it's something I never expected. For a suspense novelist, this is a great thing' (King 2002: 161). Whatever the outcome, there is a consistent acknowledgement among these writers that uncertainty, even disorientation, is something that can benefit both process and outcome.

Many successful writers choose to adopt a version of the 'pantsing' process outlined above. There are popular contemporary writers such as King, Flynn and Cormac McCarthy, alongside historical figures such as Hemingway. The diversity of these writers suggests that 'pantsing' is not subject to factors such as genre, length, narrative complexity or time of publication. There is a suggestion by some, such as Valarie Parv, that the recent proliferation of 'pantsers' may be connected to a wider shift within online writing communities towards rapid-fire writing processes, fuelled by global speedwriting movements such as Nanowrimo (2014). Whatever the case, 'pantsing' should be considered an established and informed creative approach.

None of this should discount the prevalence of the planned approached to writing. Equally impressive lists can be made of writers who choose to plan before writing – think JK Rowling, Sylvia Plath, Joseph Heller and Justin Cronin. Also worth acknowledging is that a writer's process is rarely as simple as these labels imply. Many successful 'planners' allow themselves significant flexibility within the writing process. Cronin undertook a detailed planning process prior to writing his *Passage* trilogy (VanDerWerff 2012), but also admits to occasionally straying from plans (Hardie 2012), and reiterates the importance of the writer's 'unconscious mind' (Charney 2012). A writer's process may also alter from novel to novel, as suggested by Bains. King, though a self-described 'pantser', admits to plotting a small number of his novels.

So, in essence, 'pantsing' describes a writer purposefully initiating a work without knowing its destination, nor many of its defining characteristics, and embracing this uncertainty throughout the writing process. Perhaps a distinction should be made between *writing* into the dark, and *creating* into the dark. The latter is a broad description that, for the writer, may include various

processes such as creating outlines, charts and breakdowns – all of which may be undertaken in uncertainty. 'Pantsing' involves specifically writing the sentences and paragraphs of a manuscript, whilst still uncertain about many characteristics of the work.

Writing *Carousel* into the dark

An analysis of my own processes in writing the novel *Carousel* offers a tangible insight into the application of a 'pantsing' approach. *Carousel* was my debut novel, published in 2015, having formed part of a Creative Writing PhD at Edith Cowan University. The story centres on four young-adult characters, narrator Nox, Canadian twins and musicians Taylor and Lizzy, and teenager Rocky, who are trapped in a large shopping complex that has sheltered them from an undisclosed apocalyptic event. Additional survivors emerge during the narrative, but the focus is on how these initial four characters adapt to living in the centre, and, eventually, how they come to escape.

I did not undertake any planning prior to beginning *Carousel*. Before I started writing I knew almost nothing of what the manuscript might come to include. I had an idea, or perhaps a premise, whereby a young-adult character, most likely male, would somehow be trapped inside Westfield Carousel – a real-life centre in Perth – with two famous musicians. All backstory, character traits, narrative arcs and sub-plots were created during the writing process.

It may be useful to elaborate upon this premise or starting point further. *Carousel* begins with Nox meeting Taylor and Lizzy inside the centre, just prior to the apocalyptic event. They explore the building and find it open, yet abandoned. They attempt to leave, trying multiple exits, but find each of them locked. Eventually they give up and wait for somebody to arrive and let them out. From here the narrative jumps forward seven months to depict the trio, along with Rocky, living in the centre, still unable to escape and with no idea of what has happened in the outside world.

A valid question that may be asked of the 'pantsing' approach is: how do you move forward from a starting point or premise. How do you know what to write next? Whilst the 'planner' may be faced with the same question relating to the next sentence or paragraph, for the 'pantser' it often exists in relation to large factors such as scene, chapter and narrative. For me, the answer to this came by responding to questions. The premise for *Carousel* was imbued with a series of these: What are the characters doing in the centre? How had they arrived there? Is there anybody else inside? Why won't any of the doors open? And, reverberating on a larger scale through both *Carousel*, and sequel *Beyond Carousel*, what has happened in the world outside of the centre? I didn't have clear answers to any of these questions upon initiating the manuscript. However, what my uncertainty provided (along with a healthy dose of stress and anxiety), was an impetus, a way of moving forward with the writing through the need to find the answers to these questions. Via writing, I was illuminating the dark.

In the early chapters these questions drive the dialogue between the characters. They probe each other for information about their circumstances, discovering that they all arrived at the centre the same way, none are very familiar with the building, and that nobody has a mobile phone network or internet access.

> Taylor looked at me. 'How long have you been here for?' she asked.
>
> 'Not long. I stopped at Dymocks to look at some books,

> then came down the corridor and saw you guys,' I trailed off.
>
> 'Right,' said Taylor and sipped on her coffee.
>
> 'What about you?' I asked.
>
> Taylor and Lizzy shared another look.
>
> 'Maybe twenty minutes before you. We were in the chocolate store looking at gift baskets. Picked one out but there was nobody at the counter. So we sat out on the couch and waited for them to come back,' said Taylor.
>
> 'That was when we saw you looking for luggage,' said Lizzy.
>
> I smiled a little and so did Lizzy. Taylor shook her head and looked around.
>
> Something was bothering me.
>
> 'Why Carousel?' I asked.
>
> 'What do you mean?' asked Taylor.
>
> 'For the chocolates? Why did you come here?' I asked.
>
> 'We're still jetlagged. Woke up early looking for something to do. This weird cab driver dropped us here and said there would be good shopping,' answered Lizzy.
>
> 'You believed him?' I asked.
>
> 'He was oddly convincing?' said Lizzy.
>
> She and Taylor glanced at each other as if to confirm this.
>
> 'Weird,' I said, to myself.
>
> 'What?' asked Taylor.
>
> 'I came by taxi too,' I said. (Ritchie 2015: 15-16)

Questions also drive the characters' actions. They explore the centre to find out if they are alone. They try several of the doors – including fire doors that should not be locked. They enter prohibited areas such as shop counters to see if security will arrive with an explanation.

> Carousel had exits all over the place. Aside from the front, we found a series of side exits, and a large glass exit to a car park at the back. All of these were locked. The back entrance offered a pretty big view but mostly just of the car park, and a small patch of hills east of the city. Taylor and Lizzy stayed there for a while, looking out at the view as you do in a new place, even when it's like stuff you've seen before.
>
> The strangest thing we found was that all of the emergency fire doors were locked as well. Those doors with a small lever on the face that you just push to open. I didn't think they were ever locked from the inside. (Ritchie 2015: 17-18)

In all of these early passages, the process of negotiating uncertainty, both my own and that of the characters, was driving my progress on the page. At this stage on the manuscript, I was still navigating Blanchot's 'first night'. The questions I was addressing were important, and gave the work a sense of velocity, but I was yet to face the larger questions and total darkness that would signal a shift into the 'other night'.

For King, 'pantsing' is closely tied to character. He speaks about relinquishing control to his characters, not demanding that they do as he plans, rather encouraging them to 'do things their way' (2002: 161). Thus, for King, 'pantsing' is a mechanism that allows his characters to direct the narrative via the decisions they make. Whilst this relinquishing of power from writer to character is perhaps more symbolic than literal, King's methodology did prove useful within *Carousel*. I regularly relied on a character's motivation to

determine what path the narrative would take. Early on, the motivations of Nox, Taylor and Lizzy are to obtain information about their situation – thus the actions listed above. As the story progresses, and these motivations become more specific, they continue to direct the narrative. Taylor's desire to check every door in the centre leads to the discovery of a car park and vehicle. Nox's motivation to finish his short story leads to the discovery of Rocky's key. I didn't feel like I was relinquishing control to the characters in these instances, rather placing myself in a mirrored position of uncertainty and allowing their motivations to guide me forward.

There is also an interesting dynamic between writer and reader in this situation. Nicola Alter discusses the connection between writer and reader in relation to reader-response theory, suggesting that knowing what is going to happen next removes the writer from 'the unknowing and alien perspective of the reader' (Alter 2011). In choosing not to know what was going to happen next, and relying on character motivation for this, I was inadvertently aligning myself with the perspective of the characters, but also the readers. The importance, or benefits, of the writer maintaining a connection to the reader's experience is a separate discussion. However, the parallels between the writer discovering the work as they write, and the reader discovering the work as they read, are clear. In turn, Alter's observation suggests that it may be problematic for the planner to relate to the uncertainty experienced by their readers.

My writing process remained consistent as I continued through the manuscript. Of course, I became more knowledgeable about the world and characters as I progressed, but the sensation of not knowing what lay ahead, nor seeking to establish this, was constant throughout. There were several major narrative events, such as the introduction of a fifth character, that I did not know would occur until I came to write them. This scene is noteworthy as it marked a transition into Blanchot's 'other night.' Here I was engulfed by an uncertainty more acute than I had experienced previously. The arrival of this fifth character reiterated the larger question of what had happened in the world outside of the centre. Blanchot speaks of the writer being 'cast out' or 'excluded' (1989: 53) by the work during the 'other night'. Without an answer to this question, this was certainly my experience. It felt impossible to continue onwards without reconciling this aspect of the manuscript. It is difficult to articulate specifically how I arrived at an answer to this question, except that it involved an ongoing exploration of the darkness surrounding the work. Blanchot describes this type of exploration in the following way:

> And he can only wander astray around this separation; at the very most he can press himself hard against the surface beyond which he distinguishes nothing but an empty torment, unreal and eternal, until the moment when, through an inexplicable maneuver, through some distraction or through the sheer excessiveness of his patience, he finds himself suddenly inside the circle, joins himself there, and reconciles himself to its secret law. (1989: 54)

The penultimate scene that finally depicts the characters escaping the centre had a less straightforward relationship to the 'pantsing' process. Referring to his novel *Letters from the Inside* (1992), John Marsden admits to not knowing what the ending would be until reaching the halfway point of the narrative (Marsden 2000). Whilst this may be in contrast to the process of a planner such as Cronin, who does not write anything, including his epic *Passage* trilogy, until he knows how it ends (VanDerWerff 2012), it does raise the question of whether the writer is still 'pantsing' once this discovery is made. Like Marsden, I had a sense of the conclusion to my manuscript from somewhere around the

midway point. However, although I knew that the characters would eventually escape the centre, I remained uncertain as to how this would happen, and exactly what they would find outside, until I came to write these scenes. This meant that on several occasions, such as when Nox inadvertently opens a garage door, or when somebody knocks on the outside of the front entrance, I genuinely considered, as did the characters and, I assume, the readers, whether these were to be the moments of escape.

Several readers and reviewers of *Carousel* have commented positively on the narrative tension within the work. Without a doubt there are many factors implicated in creating tension within prose; genre and narrative structure come to mind right away. What I would suggest here is that tension can also result from a writer negotiating uncertainty. I assume that if I'm uncertain as to whether Nox will exit through the garage door, so too will the reader be. Making a decision on the direction of scenes such as this, whilst writing, asks the writer to consider many things – motivation, backstory, emotional reaction – in determining the outcome. What 'pantsing' does not appear to facilitate is the construction of one scene with the conscious intention of scaffolding another. The writer has to deal with that which is immediate, and the writing can gain an urgency and tension as a result.

It is also interesting to consider how research is implicated in the planning or 'pantsing' approaches. Research appears a central part of the pre-writing process for several planners. For Cronin and Elizabeth George, research is particularly important in relation to setting. George reveals that she 'would never write about a place [she hadn't] been to' (George quoted in Pohl 2007), while Cronin admitted that he 'travelled every mile of the geography' (Patrick 2010) depicted in *The Passage*. Whether such research is exclusive to planners, or might somehow inhibit the 'pantsing' process, is questionable. First of all, it requires the research process to be defined and homogenised. What, for one writer, might involve detailed analysis of material relating to place, time, clothing and events, for another might be a cursory drive through a town or brief discussion with somebody in a relevant profession. Some would even question the boundaries of research, suggesting that this process is constant and ongoing, part of the curiosity necessary to all writers. Second, it questions how strongly an element such as narrative is defined by research. Again, using the example of setting, faithful and evocative representations of place are hallmarks of work by several 'pantsers' such as Hemingway and McCarthy in novels such as *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and *All the Pretty Horses* (1992).

As mentioned, setting was one of the few details I began with in *Carousel*. I knew that the characters would be trapped inside Westfield Carousel, a shopping complex in the eastern suburbs of Perth. While I had visited this centre on several occasions, I had a limited knowledge of its specific stores, layout and exits. I faced a decision as to whether I should initiate a research process, both online and in person, in order to maintain fidelity within *Carousel*, or whether it would be more beneficial to work without this information. I chose the latter in the hope of maintaining some freedom in my depiction of an existing centre. The Westfield Carousel complex had several characteristics that interested me creatively: the name Carousel, its reputation for crime, its location in the outer suburbs of Perth, the history of once being the state's largest shopping complex. For these reasons, I chose not to set the narrative in a generic or fictionalised centre, rather one that already existed. However, without knowing what lay ahead in the narrative, I also wanted to avoid the pressure of providing an exact replication. This suggests that research can bring with it an unwanted expectation for the writer. But, given the examples mentioned above, perhaps this fear is unfounded.

The repercussions of a 'pantsing' practice

As a strategy for writing, the 'pantsing' practice can be seen to have several benefits. For many of the writers I have mentioned, 'pantsing' offers a way to remain engaged and excited by the work for the duration of the writing process. This can be a challenge for the novelist, and something that may be linked to notions of discovery. While there are still things to discover about a work, or, as Atwood might say, darkness to illuminate (2003), these writers are compelled to write onwards. Conversely, too much knowledge in areas such as plot and character is considered by many 'pantsers' as an obstacle to progress; McCarthy states that fully plotting his novels 'would be death' (McCarthy cited in Helm 2007). This was certainly my experience during *Carousel*. Finding answers to the questions I have mentioned previously enabled me to stay invested in the work and make consistent progress until the first draft manuscript was complete.

In addition to establishing 'pantsing' as a viable writing strategy, it is also worth considering the valuable creative outcomes that may be elicited by a 'pantsing' process. I have touched on the possible connection between the uncertainty that comes with 'pantsing' and the narrative tension found within *Carousel*, but perhaps a more revealing discussion would be to consider the discoveries that may be triggered whilst the writer negotiates Blanchot's 'other night'.

In *On Writing* (2002), King speaks of an instance where 'pantsing' led his manuscript for *The Stand* (1978) in a direction so problematic that the only way he could continue was 'by blowing approximately half its major characters to smithereens' (2002: 205). The problem facing King was complexity. *The Stand* follows multiple characters in various locations during the outbreak of a deadly global pandemic. Having written about these characters for more than 500 pages, suddenly King could no longer find a way forward with the narrative. 'I had run out too many plotlines, and they were in danger of becoming snarled' (2002: 203). King had reached Blanchot's 'other night' and could no longer see a way forward. 'The writer becomes drawn into and immersed in the confusion of a darkness which murmurs to them and can render them inarticulate. At this point in writing, there is no certainty or sense of clarity or coherence' (Owler 2015: 4).

The paralysis experienced by King in this instance was significant (weeks of writing nothing, consideration of abandonment), but not permanent. Eventually he landed at a solution in the form of explosions that resulted in the death of several major characters. This dramatic narrative event offered King both a resumption of clarity, and an unexpected way forward with the writing. In negotiating his way through the 'other night', King was able to discover several things about the work. He realised that one of his problems was that the post-apocalyptic world was coming full circle without his intention. The surviving population were beginning to expand, develop and start 'up the same old technological deathtrip' (King 2012: 205) that triggered the initial apocalypse. Upon realising that this wasn't the story he wanted to tell, King utilised the explosions as a way to simplify his narrative, but also to clarify the direction in which his characters were headed. In addition to this, King was also able to discover and consolidate the manuscript's overriding theme of 'violence as a solution' (2012: 205) during this process, retaining this as a focus during the subsequent draft. The function of theme is something King is quite adamant about. He states that '[g]ood fiction always begins with story and progresses to theme; it almost never begins with theme and progresses to story' (2012: 208-

209). Blanchot's 'other night' found King in a difficult and challenging scenario, but it also enabled him to progress organically from story to theme. Again, none of this is to suggest that a planning process could not have also resulted in a narrative event such as King's explosions. Nor that the planner doesn't undertake the story first-theme second approach advocated by King. Rather, that navigating Blanchot's 'other night' can produce more than just a way forward with the writing. The discoveries made can become defining characteristics of the work.

I had several parallel experiences when writing *Carousel*. The arrival of the fifth character that marked my transition into the 'other night' provides a useful example. As well as raising questions regarding the outside world, this arrival brought forward significant questions related to the main characters. Up until this point I had established a story logic where the four characters had been sheltered in the centre in order to protect them from an apocalyptic event. The same mystical entity that had sheltered these characters, was also keeping them from leaving the centre. Doors, windows and roofs were impenetrable, regardless of their efforts. The arrival of the fifth character Rachel, a former employee of the centre, seemed to disrupt this logic. Not only was Rachel surviving in the outside world, but she was able to enter and exit the centre at will. Whilst I was pleased with the drama her arrival brought to the manuscript, her inclusion threatened the fabric of the work. Rather than delete this plot event and step backwards and out of Blanchot's 'other night', I stayed within the darkness until I was able to discover a solution.

Rachel's ability to enter and exit the centre suggested that she was somehow different to the other four characters. I still had yet to determine why the characters had been selected to be sheltered in the centre, but Rachel's appearance provided the impetus for this. I decided that their seclusion in the centre was connected to their status as artists, and that Rachel's ability to enter and exit the centre was a result of her not being an artist. Whilst this raised several additional questions, it also marked a significant development in confirming the core of the manuscript. I discovered that the characters' artistic pursuits weren't just part of their backstory, rather the reason behind their captivity in the centre. I was a writing about a selection of artists who were being intentionally sheltered from an apocalyptic event. Regarding character, Heyman states that 'we understand the why of the call – why this character and not another – once we have pursued it' (Heyman 2013: 63). This notion that the reason for the creation or inclusion of something may only become apparent much later in the writing appears to be a key aspect of the 'pantsing' methodology. Blanchot's theory, as evidenced by King's experiences in writing *The Stand*, goes a step further to suggest that becoming lost can also be integral in consolidating the central elements of a work.

In *Carousel*, the most difficult scene to reconcile involved the characters witnessing a plane flying over the centre. I arrived at this narrative event quite abruptly during the writing process: 'We were still picking away at the meal when the sky deepened to navy and a triple-seven jet flew over' (Ritchie 2015: 203). This sentence is followed by a description of the jet and the stunned reaction of the characters. The scene felt interesting and dramatic, however I was unsure how it sat within the overall narrative. When I reached the end of the manuscript, I was still unsure. The plane sighting hadn't triggered or foreshadowed any future events, and didn't have a strong logic in the story world. It raised unanswered questions such as: Who is aboard? Why is it from Canada? Why does it fly across now, so many months after their arrival? Why aren't there other planes? Unlike the arrival of Rachel, the plane sighting didn't elicit any creative discoveries, nor consolidate any key aspects of the work. Overall, there seemed to be a compelling argument to cut this scene from

subsequent drafts. However something – perhaps creative instinct – kept me from doing so, and the presence of the plane remained a mystery to the characters and readers in the published novel.

Were it not for the presence of a sequel to *Carousel*, *Beyond Carousel* (2016), I may have considered the creation and retention of the plane sighting as an example of the risks inherent with 'pantsing'. However, this event became a driving force in the narrative of *Beyond Carousel*. A major motivation for the characters in *Beyond Carousel* is to reach the airport to find out about this plane and see if it may offer a way to escape the city. I found this a useful platform when initiating the manuscript for the sequel. Again, there were questions requiring answers, darkness that needed illumination. I utilised this to define the characters' motivations, then allowed these motivations to determine their actions wherever possible. Here is an early passage that finds Taylor looking out over the abandoned cityscape:

> Her gaze would often end looking north. Past the houses and the factories. Through the bushland and the roaming Bull. To the dormant grey of the airport.
>
> Less than a year ago we had seen an Air Canada plane coming in to land there. Its link to Taylor and Lizzy still felt tangible and strong. All of us wanted to survive whatever was happening. Maybe even escape it somehow. But more than that – we wanted to know what it was. (Ritchie 2016: 12-13)

The eventual scenes at the airport, which included the explanation of the plane sighted during *Carousel*, became an integral part of the sequel. They enabled me to consolidate the internal journey and motivations of Nox – at the same time reiterating the thematic focus on acceptance and identity running through both novels. The plane sighting in *Carousel* also came to foreshadow a pivotal scene in the climax of *Beyond Carousel*. This suggests that Heyman's notion of the writer not knowing the why of the call until they pursue it (2013), may be just as relevant to issues of narrative, as it is to character, and that this may not only be applicable within a singular work, but potentially across a whole series.

From a practical standpoint, 'pantsing' can offer the writer a useful way of progressing through a manuscript to completion. In my case, the uncertainty of initiating a manuscript without much more than a premise created an evolving series of questions to respond to. Answering these questions kept me engaged with the work and ensured that my progress on the page, at least for a time, was strong. However, perhaps it is the less tangible effects of 'pantsing' that are the most defining. The possibility that some creative discoveries may have only occurred as a result of the writer searching in darkness. The notion that the reason for the creation of something may only become apparent much later (even within a sequel) in the writing. The idea that reaching full understanding of a work may only come from being lost within it. Again, Blanchot may have articulated these possibilities more succinctly in saying that 'one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already' (1989: 176).

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