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(Re)Meeting Ms. Logos: problems of privilege in and through creative writing pedagogies

Abstract:

This article considers the violences of identity-based privilege in university teaching. Pedagogical practice bears both possibilities for undoing privilege and risks for re-perpetuating it – even when the educator intends otherwise, for privilege is often invisible, and educators may not always recognise its operations in their classrooms. Creative writing research can usefully make invisible privileges visible, which creates scope for questioning privilege and realising (making real) more livable ways of being. Following previous creative writing-based research into privilege and/or marginalisation (Kon-yu 2010; Bellette 2013; Williams 2013; Gandolfo 2016b), this article engages knowledge-generation practices of writing and self re-reading: I present and discuss *Meeting Ms. Logos*, a narrative penned five years ago, about teaching offshore in Singapore for an Australian university. At the time, the piece disturbed me, so I shelved it. But now, heeding privilege scholar Peggy McIntosh's call for academics to 'map our experiences' of both privilege and marginalisation (2012: 197, 203-4), I re-confront Ms. Logos in order to avoid becoming Ms. Logos. This process is one I share because the exchange of narratives about coming-to-awareness of privilege 'allows us to know ourselves better, know others better, and recognise the matrices of power we are all in' (McIntosh 2012: 203).

Biographical Notes:

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Introduction: confronting privilege in and through creative writing pedagogies

This article explores problems of identity-based privilege[1] via discussion of *Meeting Ms. Logos*, a creative work penned during my first university appointment at an Australian university in Singapore in 2012. As part of a process of re-reading this manuscript five years later, I develop reflections to inform my ongoing pedagogical practices, and suggest some implications for the field of creative writing broadly. Running throughout both the narrative of *Meeting Ms. Logos* and this article is a question Michel Foucault asked in his 1972 foreword to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

> How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior? (1972 [2009]: xiii)

The word 'fascism' is emotive, perhaps seemingly overblown, yet utterly relevant to the circumstances this article considers. After all, fascism is not, as common usages would often have it, synonymous with national socialism, Hitler's Germany, or white supremacy (Paxton 2004: 9). It is 'a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity' (Paxton 2004: 218). Fascism is based in authoritarianism, nationalism, paramilitarism and use of violence to enforce social order (Mann 2004: 13). All these factors were present in the official governing of Singapore in 2012.[2] Hence the relevance of fascism as a danger pertinent to considering privilege and power relations in Singaporean education.

Furthermore, fascism doesn't always manifest on official governmental levels. Authoritarian and domineering tendencies can also arise in everyday interactions, regardless of official politics. Deleuze and Guattari (1980 [1987]: 10) called these everyday manifestations 'microfascisms' and used the metaphor 'couchgrass' to illustrate how microfascisms can, if allowed to spread their runners, rapidly crystalise as fascism proper. In the contemporary Australian context – including but exceeding pedagogical contexts – I perceive microfascist elements present in the form of unjust and hierarchical power relations, silencing and other modes of violence woven in and through identity politics. As creative writer and researcher Enza Gandolfo observes:

> some groups (women, black people, the working class, people from particular ethnic groups, gay people) are marginalized and oppressed… we don't have to look too far in Australia to see that identity is political. (2016)

Filipa Bellette similarly describes how Australian culture maintains 'the assumption that white ways of thinking, seeing and being are "normal" and are the benchmark for all other racially marked ways of being', which bears damaging implications for native title, reconciliation and immigration, among other issues (2013). It is in these insidious and mostly invisible ways that privilege may inflict violences upon those who do not occupy the privileged position – *and also those who do*, for in line with the principle that no person can be truly free until all are free, privilege corrupts and dehumanises the privileged, too, as the narrative of *Meeting Ms. Logos* illustrates. This is one reason why I refer to privilege's violences in the plural: because these violences are not singular or unilateral but multiple, multidirectional and complex. The pluralisation also recognises multiple manifestations of violence including but exceeding physical, psychological, social and epistemic violences – the epistemic indicating denial of a certain cultural group's knowledges and/or knowledge systems,

for instance in the case of colonial invaders who stamp out the language and education systems of colonised peoples (Reynolds 1989). This is one reason why I also pluralise knowledges; another is in line with the broadly Foucauldian principles this paper engages.

Recent work in the field of creative writing has emphasised the potentials creative writing pedagogies bear for pursuing social justice. For instance, Hannah Gerrard argues for 'teaching writing as public work' (2013), and Nigel Krauth for writing and teaching that 'reflect[s] new understandings and ambitions, especially those of individuals caught up in bigger social, moral and political change' (2016: 19). These moves are in line with the historic and contemporary theories of radical educators including Paulo Freire (1968 [2000]) and Henry Giroux (2011). However, engaging pedagogy towards social change involves risks. As Feinauer Whiting and Maile Cutri (2015) note, relations of privilege and marginalisation are not only *inherent in* pedagogical settings, but if unchecked may *re-manifest through* them. Privilege – often problematically invisible to the privileged (Bellette 2013) – poses particular challenges for the would-be radical educator, liable to become blinkered by their own experiences of and/or relationships to privilege.

Privilege is thus perilous, but creative writing offers hope, because it can 'make the reader [including the writer as self-reader] see what was not visible beforehand' (Gandolfo 2014). Creative writing's capacities for tackling privilege are evident in Bellette's work on 'interrogating whiteness' through fictional narratives (2013) and Paul Williams's engagement of memoir to explore possibilities of and for becoming 'the colonizer-who-refuses' (2013).[3] In line with Bellette (2013) and Williams (2013), this article engages with my process of writing and reading of *Meeting Ms. Logos* to 'expose and deconstruct' privilege (Bellette 2013). However, this article's pedagogical focus distinguishes it from Bellette's (2013) and Williams's (2013) works. In the next section, I offer background to *Meeting Ms. Logos* and my analysis of this 'sample of one' (McIntosh 2012: 203). Then I present *Meeting Ms. Logos* itself, followed by the re-reading, via which I generate reflections to inform both my own practice and ongoing work in the field of Creative Writing broadly.

Background to *Meeting Ms. Logos*

Meeting Ms. Logos was penned five years ago, in Singapore, where I was teaching a Creative Writing intensive for an Australian university. It was both my first time in Singapore and my first ever university teaching appointment. Overeager to meet expectations, and insecure about my limited experience, I found myself acting in ways that horrified me. *Meeting Ms. Logos* funnels that horror into a hyperbolically grotesque autofiction[4] about how a non-malicious person may inadvertently become complicit in systems that marginalise and enslave. At the time of writing, *Meeting Ms. Logos* disturbed me so much I shelved it, striving to forget the abominable truths recognisable through this fictionalisation of my lived experiences.

Yet it now feels imperative to confront Ms. Logos, in line with Peggy McIntosh's call for academics across the disciplines to practice accountability in recognising the role privilege plays in knowledge-creation (2012: 195). McIntosh recommends that academics 'map' personal experiences of both privilege and marginalisation so as to recognise how privilege operates, and how we as educators may help redress its violences (197). McIntosh particularly encourages 'the sample of one', that is, 'singular, autobiographical testimony' (2012: 203-204). I take seriously McIntosh's argument that '[e]ach of us contains some of the data in order to know ourselves' and

'[l]istening to others' testimonies allows us to know ourselves better, know others better, and recognize the matrices of power we are all in' (2012: 203).[5]

Meeting Ms. Logos

> i was playing with myself.
>
> we were playing house,
>
> pretending we could hide inside
>
> the past and future to avoid our present self
>
> Richard Hell, *Destiny Street*

1. Ms. Logos Checks In

At the hotel check in, trouble already:

'I'm sorry, Miss, but I can't find your booking.'

'Surname Logos: L – O – G – O – S,' I plead for the millionth time.

'I'm sorry, Miss, the only booking for a Logos was made by an Australian university, for one of their lecturers...'

'That's me!'

I present my staff ID card. The receptionist examines it, squinting. Her face flushes. Her tone changes. She is deeply sorry for what she calls a 'system error' as she informs me of my room number, then presents the keycard, directions, and a drink voucher for my troubles.

Refusing the bellboy she has summoned, I lug my rucksack to the elevator. Inside is mirrored, forcing me face to face with the glaring reasons why check-in proved such a tirade: a bedraggled Aussie backpacker, shorts and T shirt wrinkled, hair greasy, pack stained with memories of train toilets and hostel dorms. On her feet, flip flops. In her eyes, panic.

I don't belong in this place – I shouldn't even be in this country – I'm a fake – I'm a fraud – It's obvious – Anyone can tell – I'm gonna blow it – Gonna blow it for sure – I've got no clue what I'm doing – Why oh why did I ever say yes?

At least, that's what I'd be thinking if I were a lowly PhD student roped in at the last minute for a lecturing gig in Singapore after the senior staffer who was meant to do it got sick without warning and no one else could change their plans...

...which, by the way, I am.

In my room: two huge beds, writing desk, balcony and a *big white spa bath*.

Never in my life have I stayed in a room with a spa bath. It smells expensive, like the soaps and powders all sitting, waiting to be sampled. Has there been a mix up after all?

My bag is still on my back when the phone rings.

'Good evening Ms. Logos – we just want to ensure that you are happy with your room?'

Am I happy? The possibility anybody might be otherwise propels me into stunned hysteria. Happy is understatement. I am ecstatic, elated, soaring. Yet before this gush

of sentiments can reach my lips, my ears register an even voice calmly informing the 'we' that, 'Yes, everything is quite as I hoped, thank you.'

As my hand places the phone down, my head replays the name the 'we' just called me: *Ms. Logos.*

Not *Miss*, like in the lobby. How much two letters can matter, I think while the big white bath slowly fills. Off shiny tiles, whispers of this new thought keep bouncing: *Ms. Logos, Ms. Logos, Ms. Logos…*

2. Through the Mirror: Making Up Ms. Logos

Ms. Logos, I am still thinking the next morning. But now with panic: Ms. Logos, whom the university has flown all the way from Australia to share her expertise. That's who the students are expecting. How will they react when, instead, they get me?

Gazing in the mirror at freckles and scars – reminders of sun and other misadventures – it seems that me is not an option. My class expects Ms. Logos. I must give her to them, by whatever means possible. Like a false deity, I will carve her, construct her...

First, the hair: I pin it tight atop my head then spray, like at some household pest, until no movement remains. Next target: face. I bury the freckles in cream and powder. For the lips, the eyes I select bold shades, but not too colourful. Ms. Logos is no victim of frivolity. I darken her eyebrows, to increase the impact when she raises them. It gives her a 1980s power-suit edge, a masculinity that is all woman.

Ms. Logos dons a black skirt, stockings and shoes which click clack to announce her presence wherever she goes. Despite humid weather, Ms. Logos chooses a long-sleeved shirt and black suit jacket. For she expects air-conditioning, can afford to take taxis.

In the lobby, porters scramble to open doors for Ms. Logos. As a former aged care attendant, I feel awkward, used to opening the doors, shoveling the shit. But Ms. Logos just breezes along, smiling as if she were born into this.

3. In the Classroom: What Would Ms. Logos Do?

My first lecture is due to start, but less than half the class have arrived.

I begin anyway. It seems like what Ms. Logos would do.

Singapore is such a disciplined society, everyone at home told me. Singaporeans surely expect a lecturer to enforce rules. I pounce on anyone who talks or touches their phone, for I'm eager to prove, Ms. Logos means business. I can't allow anyone to suspect that I am not really Ms. Logos, or that back home, Ms. Logos is just another student who wears flip flops and chews gum.

By day three, my class is punctual. The mere approach of Ms. Logos in her click-clack shoes silences chatter. I have fooled them. Ms. Logos has fooled them. They believe in her – in me, as her.

4. Getting Fluid with Ms. Logos

Out of work hours, I flirt with Ms. Logos, with being her. I soak in her big white tub, don her thick white robe, drink the room service latte for which she squanders seven dollars, despite endless free sachets of instant.

I'm intrigued and appalled by Ms. Logos, by how well we get along despite everything – me and Ms. Logos, who can sip her seven dollar latte without one thought for rainforests or workers' rights. Ms. Logos, who looks so sleek in her sweatshop business-wear. Ms. Logos, colonial throwback, prancing about as though she really believes that talent and hard work got her where she is. Ms. Logos, who knows, beneath the helmet hair, beneath the powder, it's actually a matter of right place, right time, right passport, right colour, right birth.

5. Ms. Logos Can't Go On:

In classes, I am struggling to prompt interaction. My students neither ask nor answer questions.

'Stereotypes!' Ms. Logos pontificates. 'They're everywhere. Surely someone can give me an example...'

Silence.

But Ms. Logos has the solution, has a way to make them talk...

'Well, it's technically break time, but nobody can go until I've had at least one example of a stereotype...'

A young man slowly half raises his hand.

'Australians,' his voice trembles. 'Australians are stereotyped as being laid back, when in fact Australians can be quite... well… not quite so laid back…'

Titters of muffled laughter ripple the surface of an otherwise still sea of faces. Then, quickly, they pull themselves back to silence, eyes wide as if expecting some hellish furor.

I realise they are frightened. They are actually frightened of Ms. Logos. They don't perceive how she – like those deadly Australian spiders – is far more frightened of them.

Stereotypes. The solution indeed. Australians are laid back, just like Singaporeans expect discipline.

Now I too am frightened of Ms. Logos – frightened that now I'll never get my students to see I'm not really her. She's a figment of all our imaginations, something I produced to fulfill my expectations of their expectations.

...Or is she?

In my few experiences of travel so far, I have recognised my own inability to every really see or understand the places I visit. But travelling helps me see and understand my home society, my self.

Even before I donned her suit, her stockings, her stare, I was always, in some way, Ms. Logos. I had her birthplace, her passport, her job. I share Ms. Logos's penchant for long baths, bathrobes and overpriced coffee. I also share her insecurities, her confusion.

I thought that it was me who made Ms. Logos – carved and painted her into being. Now I wonder, was it really Ms. Logos who made me – who is still making me?

She and I – we are so tangled, so scared of letting go.

Meeting Ms. Logos Again: Towards a critical self re-reading

In *Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing* (2015), Dominique Hecq notes the crucial role of *Nachträglichkeit* – Freudian's concept of 'deferred action' – in creative writing research. Simply put, 'most of the discoveries we make occur after the fact' (Hecq 2015: 183). Five years ago, I believed *Meeting Ms. Logos* was about the figure of Ms. Logos. In re-reading it now, I instead become acutely aware of the 'Miss' and 'I' figures. *Meeting Ms. Logos* now seems most crucially about the interactions between the three, all of whom strike me as fictional characters with unique subjective positions. By subjective positions, I mean Judith Butler's… (1987 [2000]; 1990; 1993; 1997) broadly Foucauldian early work on how human subjects come to be in and through various forms of discourse. Foucauldian discourse entails networked cultural practices, texts and artefacts that enable the definition of beings, objects and other phenomena, and of the relationships between these things, including power-relations (Foucault 1969 [2002]: 49). Human subjects are formed in discourse in ways that both limit and enable their subjective conceptions of the world and its (contestable) truths (Butler 1987 [2000]; 1990; 1993; 1997).

Australian Creative Writing academic Shady Cosgrove (2011: 1) has posited a theory of character based on Butlerian subject-formation. Informed by Cosgrove, I have elsewhere argued that character thus provides a useful research tool that, through writer-character interactions, can expand personal subjectivity and help us recognise issues we might otherwise overlook (Walker 2013: 7-8). I perceive this as a methodological engagement of, and with, what Cosgrove calls the 'radical uncertainty' (2011: 1) of character – or indeed, what Shane Strange dubs the 'radical subjectivity' (2012) of creative research broadly. This article's analysis of *Meeting Ms. Logos* engages Cosgrove's (2011) strong case for '[r]ewriting fictional characters' as an 'ethical enterprise, of interest to those concerned with issues of representation and political subversion' (Cosgrove 2011: 2). Character re-reading and analysis here operates as a method/ology for making research knowledges to inform collective understandings of identity politics and the possibilities for overcoming the violences privilege insidiously affects in and through pedagogical cultures today. The analysis proceeds in the rest of this paper in three phases of re-reading: first the Miss, second the 'I', and finally Ms. Logos. Then I consider implications for my own ongoing pedagogical practices, and for the field of Creative Writing broadly.

Re-Meeting the 'Miss'

The 'Miss' is the first character a reader meets in *Meeting Ms. Logos*. Initially, I intended the 'Miss' as a foil to Ms. Logos: the 'Miss' represents an innocence soon lost or indeed sacrificed. Her backpack represents freedom, including a problematic belief in her own freedom from privilege, as indicated by repeated references to her felt marginalities. These include marginalities of gender, evident in the first instance through her initial hailing via the diminutive gendered pronoun 'Miss' (the male equivalent of which – Master – is almost never used for boys or men of any age), and also marginalities of social class, indicated when the 'Miss' self-identifies as a 'lowly' student and 'a former aged care attendant… used to opening the doors, shoveling the shit'.

However, the 'Miss' is neither innocent nor free. The modifier 'Aussie' leaps out as immediately problematic, particularly with 'freckles', 'sun' and 'misadventures', which together strongly suggest the cultural mythology of the white, physically-able, larrikin daredevil, young, cisgender Australian with sun-blonde hair and heteronormative yearnings. This mythology was depicted in mainstream Australian

films of the 1980s and is implicated in the maintenance of multiple intersecting modes of privilege and/as violence including but exceeding those of ableism, ageism, heterosexism, cis-privilege and white privilege (O'Reagan 1988). The 'Miss' of *Meeting Ms. Logos* is problematically implicated in all these modes of privilege in ways she neither recognises nor seeks to redress. That she is a backpacker can also indicate privilege: she has travelled, albeit on a budget. Similarly, being a 'lowly PhD student' is dependent upon her having completed previous tertiary studies – educational pathways not all can access. Again, the 'Miss' fails to acknowledge how her travel experiences and formal education privilege her; she also fails to comprehend how privileges and marginalities crucially 'intersect', meaning that 'all people have plural experiences within hierarchies' (McIntosh 2012: 198-9).

That the 'Miss' emphasises her own marginalities while failing to recognise her privileges is in line with McIntosh's interview-based research findings, which indicate that working class white people tend to focus on their socio-economic struggles in ways that impede recognition of white privilege (2012: 196). As McIntosh also points out, this situation is dangerous, because it potentiates a divestment of personal agency – or more bluntly, potentiates avoidance of responsibility for one's actions and the consequences thereof (196-7). Hence the 'Miss' now appears at least as dangerous as Ms. Logos. For the seeds of the latter's violences were long present, insidiously unknown: the 'Miss' was always-already Ms. Logos waiting to happen.

Re-Seeing the 'I'

That becoming Ms. Logos was always-already possible for the 'Miss' is reinforced by the 'I', a Cartesian separation of itself from a body – the hands, lips and ears of which seemingly move, speak and hear for themselves. This indicates imagined irresponsibility for the consequences of what the body says and does – consistent with the denial of responsibility the 'Miss' exhibits. However, while the 'Miss' fails to acknowledge her agency, the 'I' by contrast deludedly exaggerates its levels of control over the Ms. Logos persona it purportedly 'constructs'. Referring to Ms. Logos in third person distances her and her actions in ways that allow the 'I' to deny accountability and indeed desire – particularly the desire for power. This is most obvious in the fourth section's narcissistic masturbation scene in which the 'I', mimicking the poem 'Destiny Street' (Richard Hell and the Voidoids 1982) seduces / is seduced by Ms. Logos in her explicitly 'white' tub and bathrobe. Contrary to what Hecq explains is a dominant-but-oversimplified understanding of Lacan's mirror stage – 'the formation of the ego via a process of identification with its specular image' (Hecq 2015: 98) – the 'I' here asserts dis-identification with and distance from its mirrored self. This self-rejection is in-line with Hecq's explication of how the Lacanian mirror is also about 'aggressive tension between the subject and the image', for 'the ego is a fiction brought about by misrecognition or misunderstanding, at the site where the subject emerges and becomes alienated from itself' (Hecq 2015: 98).

Through refusal to identify with its reflection, the 'I' cites and reinstates broadly 'romanticist' conceptions of the 'self' as 'a fully bounded, idiosyncratic entity that pre-exists and remains fully detachable from o/Others and from its situation' (Walker 2015: 2) – conceptions that are problematic from a Lacanian view of subjecthood constructed in and through language (Hecq 2015: 98). These conceptions are also problematic from the Butlerian view, which – in addition to Foucauldian theory – draws on Lacan among other psychoanalytic theorists to posit that human subjects are formed with-and-in a 'discourse' that insidiously 'produces the effects that it names'

(Butler 1993: xii). In contrast to romanticist notions of selfhood, the Butlerian subject neither pre-exists nor can stand fully independent from the discourse of subjective construction. Discourse thus both enables and limits a subject's capacities for perception, including the perception of privilege, marginalisation and associated problems. From a Butlerian perspective, romanticist concepts of the self as bounded and pre-existing its circumstances are dangerous because such a view can falsely inflate one's imagined capacity to think and act uninhabited by cultural coercion – which ironically increases susceptibility to cultural coercion.

The dangerous delusions of independent selfhood entail are evident in *Meeting Ms. Logos* when the 'I' imagines it can 'carve' and 'construct' the Ms. Logos others apparently expect. Notably, Butler explicitly rejected understandings of subjective formation as being like freely donning a costume or staging a performance (1993: 10). Constructing Ms. Logos, the 'I' fails to recognise that her own supposedly free decision to do this is a discursively-driven 'turn' in response to having been *called* Ms. Logos – or as Butler (1993: 121) drawing on Althusser (1971 [2008]) termed it, 'interpolated' into the role that the 'I' subjectively imagines Ms. Logos must play. Failing to recognise the interpolative nature of Ms. Logos's construction, and likewise failing to recognise the subjectively limited nature of her assumptions regarding 'what Ms. Logos would do', the 'I' misses opportunities for turning and responding to the call in *other* ways (Butler 1997: 95) – that is, of constructing Ms. Logos differently, perhaps more ethically.

Lessons of Ms. Logos

It is time to consider Ms. Logos as a (fictional) subject constructed with-and-in discourse. Affirming that privilege and power aren't conflatable (McIntosh 2012: 204), Ms. Logos's position is one of authority, yet little freedom. Like Hegel's 'Lord', she is deeply entangled in her own 'bondage' or enslavement as a figure bound to the role of enslaving others (Hegel 1807 [2003]: 104-111). That is to say, privilege enslaves and dehumanises the privileged too: nobody can be free until all are free. While Ms. Logos enjoys luxuries and commands respect, she exercises little choice in her actions: she is constantly doing what she believes others expect from her – even if her beliefs are in fact prolifically skewed, as becomes recognisable in the fifth section when Ms. Logos's students begin laughing. The laughter brings to light the absurdity of Ms. Logos, whose blinkered western-informed understanding of Singapore as 'a disciplined society' has led her to become a kind of fascist caricature: she believes her students want and expect this; in fact they seek anything but.

The students' laughter is pivotal, for it opens cracks in Ms. Logos's façade: she cannot go on, at least not in the same absurd fashion. Ms. Logos's insecurities surface through the 'I' figure's acknowledgement that Ms. Logos is more than imaginary or temporary – that the 'I' and Ms. Logos are wickedly 'tangled', frightened of 'letting go'. From my current vantage point, this indicates two crucial points about Ms. Logos. The first is that her privilege is anything but absolute. Much as the 'Miss' believes herself marginalised while failing to recognise her privileges, Ms. Logos amplifies her privileges in ways reflecting insecurities related to being a woman in western culture. Her fear of not being 'expert enough' may be seen as a classic instance of what is commonly known as 'impostor syndrome' – an inability to internalise success, commonly observed in female postgraduate students (Cope-Watson & Betts 2010). This again affirms McIntosh's point that 'all people have plural experiences within hierarchies' (2012: 198-9), indicating that in some cases at

least, tensions between intersecting privileges and marginalities may if unchecked encourage non-reflexive abuse of privilege.

The second point the students' laughter raises is Deleuze and Guattari's (1980 [1987]: 10) point about 'microfascisms' – those 'couchgrass' runners of everyday cultural interaction that can insidiously overrun societies whose officially-elected governments and governing systems would appear to be democratic – also works in reverse. Despite its official government's obsessive totalitarian and military tendencies, everyday Singapore is culturally teeming with micro-runners of free thought and resistance to hierarchical control – or so the spirit, humor and creativity of my students suggested to me. This signals both danger and hope. The danger is complacency: as Australians, living in a hypothetically democratic society, it may be tempting for us to overestimate our freedoms; we can benefit by remembering that even under democratic conditions, we remain always at risk of overlooking microfascisms and their violences. The flipside and the hope, however, is that possibilities of freedom exist even under restrictive conditions – for instance, homosexuality was officially illegal in Singapore in 2012 when I visited (Ross 2015: 3), yet in my wanderings I observed multiple gay bars and a seemingly thriving queer culture.

Further lessons of Ms. Logos relate to her name. Initially I chose 'Logos' to indicate the culturally (re)colonising role Ms. Logos plays, as a privileged white teacher in the (historically multiply-colonised) Singaporean space of complex racial and cultural diversities. That an Australian lecturer was flown in to teach a basic communication course that was in no way specific to Australian literature or expertise and for which a suitably skilled Singaporean local could easily have been employed itself devalues local knowledges and reinstates the force of the western 'logos' – a 'masculinist system of thought' characterised by its rigidly singular and unifying tendencies (Rees 1996 [2009]: 434). This is why Ms. Logos bears a 'masculinity that is all woman' – a paradox that speaks to the culturally and discursively constructed nature of gender and sex binaries that, though neither natural nor necessary, heinously limit, marginalise, silence and sometimes kill people who are intersex or transgender or otherwise beyond the narrow options binary thinking affords. It is worth here noting that binary gender, while a dominant myth through most contemporary western cultures, is not a model to which all cultures subscribe or have historically subscribed (Blackwood 2005; Driskill 2011). Hence re-citation of binary (cis)gender constitutes another of Ms. Logo's colonising acts.

The name 'Ms. Logos' now suggests additional meanings: 'logos' also implies signification and legibility in the sense of queer arguments for bringing marginalised lives into 'legibility' and thus 'legitimacy' (Halberstam 2011: 10). In *Meeting Ms. Logos* it is Ms. Logos – not the 'I', nor the 'Miss' – who 'knows' her privilege is all about 'right place, right time, right passport, right colour, right birth'. It was Ms. Logos who pushed and keeps pushing me to acknowledge my own privileges, to take responsibility for the choices I can make as a subject complexly both privileged and marginalised. 'Meeting' Ms. Logos was the first step towards un-becoming her – towards re-becoming someone less violent, more self-critical, engaged in continuing reflection on how to best resist violence and pursue social justice. This means recognising the freedoms I *can* exercise – even when faced with scenarios I did not create and do not like, but must work with, in, and, ideally, beyond. Ms. Logos was perhaps my precondition for realising that there are many modes of response to the

interpolative calls that summon writers, teachers and academics – which entails responsibility for how one re-turns when called and/as who one continues becoming.

Beyond Ms. Logos in My Pedagogical Practice(s)

The most crucial lesson of Ms. Logos, was and is how not to be(come) Ms. Logos. Through self re-reading, I have learned this lesson consciously, but in line with Hecq's point about 'deferred action' (2015: 183), it is now recognisable to me that many parts of the lesson were indeed learned through the mere writing (and forgetting) of Ms Logos. For as Hecq also emphasises, creative 'knowledge production' operates 'from within an experiential practice that mobilises intellectual, emotional and unconscious processes' (11). In this, 'melancholia' – 'dealing with loss' or mourning – can play a driving role (Hecq 2015: 182). From an early Butlerian perspective, melancholia also entails mourning for that which is unable to be mourned – some 'prohibited object' simultaneously othered yet 'internalised' in senses that un/knowably regulate identity (Butler 1990: 63). This is what I believe happened when I attempted to shelve and forget *Meeting Ms. Logos*: she stayed, unknown, and kept bothering me, driving my actions – which sounds ominous, but it had beneficial consequences. When I returned to Singapore to teach the same course again on later occasions, I behaved very differently.

One big change was that, to better understand my students, I immersed myself in Singaporean literature, then gained permission to replace the canonical western set texts with works by contemporary Singaporean writers, including some texts explicitly written in 'Singlish' – a playful re-making of English incorporating features from various other languages presently or historically used in Singapore. In class we discussed the cultural and political force of this kind of writing – in line with the extensive work by postcolonial scholars on 'writing back' in and to coloniser-languages (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989 [2003]; Thieme 2001). Some students began experimenting with similar techniques in their own work, often with outstanding results.

Another important change was my recognition that I could not enforce punctuality in the same ways I would in an Australian classroom: many of my students worked as flight attendants and came to class straight from work; if the flights they were working on were late, these students were late and could do nothing about it; others had city jobs, but struggled to get to class on time because they had to travel via overcrowded trains that were frequently too full to squeeze another human body, and for which they had to wait longer; others still were held up by family caring responsibilities. Given that these challenges affected more than half of the students I was teaching, I came to the perspective that in order to deliver student-driven learning, I had to change my strategy with regards to when and how key information was delivered. My routine became to spend the first half hour, or even hour, of our long after-work and weekend all-day tutorials chatting informally and/or offering small-group mentorship to the students who arrived on time. The essential (assessable) course content I left until the majority of students were present. Through the informal chats, I sought to find out more about my students' lives and learning needs. It gave them chances to raise their individual questions in a small group, without the shame and anxiety some students seem to experience around asking a question with the entire class present. It was a Freirean learning space (Freire 1968 [2000]), driven by students' self-identified learning needs as opposed to the agendas

enforced by me and/or my Australian tertiary institution – a space in which I too became a learner, growing through intercultural exchange.

The students' appreciation for the changes I made to my teaching method was indicated in positive official feedback, good retention, and the high standard of work submitted. Presently, I teach only in Australia, where student needs are different. Still, the lessons of Ms. Logos continue to inform my practice. I have learned how important it is to study literature culturally relevant to students' lives; to structure lesson planning in ways that place the students' temporal realities of work and other demands ahead of my own; and to recognise what students can teach me so as to shift away from hierarchical teacher-learner models towards more free-flowing experiences of pedagogical exchange. Furthermore, I understand the power of creative writing and self re-reading to help me and my students recognise our privileges – and crucially, recognise how we may exercise the choices we have with-and-in our discursive situations to promote more livable circumstances for all.

Concluding thoughts: the lessons of Ms. Logos for creative writing pedagogies

The previous section offered some examples of how meeting Ms. Logos informed and informs my pedagogical practices. However, I recognise limitations in that the findings the previous section presented apply specifically to my own scenario, and may not be transferrable to other contexts; indeed, the notion of any one-size-fits-all model of pedagogy seems to me deeply problematic. Additionally, the findings I have presented are not ones I would claim as new or in any way revolutionary. These limitations acknowledged, what I now wish to posit as this article's most useful finding for the field of Creative Writing is its demonstration of ways in which creative writing and re-reading processes can operate as method/ologies for challenging and opening up subjective limitations. Expanding such limitations supports the generation of new knowledges about our situations, including knowledges about insidious operations of privilege/marginalisation and the ways we may redress these. This has been shown through the ways in which this article's analysis of *Meeting Ms. Logos* helped me identify problems inherent in my own relationships to privilege, as well as strategies for redressing those problems: writing about my challenges in a creative way, and then analyzing what I had written genuinely changed me and my writing practices in ways that students indicated to be positive and beneficial to their learning.

By showing how creative writing can change a person's mind and practices, I hope this article can help further existing arguments for creative writing's capacities to undo silence and support social change (Kon-yu 2010; Gandolfo 2013; Williams 2013; Bellette 2013), which may also serve to support ongoing struggles to justify the value of Creative Writing's knowledge-contributions in university contexts (Krauth & Brien 2012). This bears two main implications for practice: one, it indicates the value of personal writing and reflection as an activity conducted by creative writing academics in order to strengthen the ethicality and broaden the scope of both teaching and research practices; and two, it indicates the value that personal writing and reflection can also bear for students, who may also be guided, through classroom writing exercises, to recognise and redress their own privilege issues. Overall, this signals the importance of writing, reflection, sharing and dialogue on issues arising in our classrooms as in our worlds. As writers and teachers, let's keep working together to recognise violence, to realise responsibility, and to continually reimagine other, wiser ways of being.

Endnotes

1. Informed by the field of privilege studies, I treat privilege as freedoms, options and benefits not available to those meanwhile marginalised as part of the system that makes privilege possible (McIntosh 2012; Case 2015; Feinauer Whiting & Maile Cutri 2015).

2. Examples of PAP fascism include the prohibition of homosexuality in Singapore, where homosexual acts are punishable by two year jail imprisonment (Ross 2015: 3); the maintenance of the death penalty as a sentence for drug trafficking and murder (Chan 2016: 179); enforced national service for young men (Lyons & Ford 2012); illegalisation of behaviours such as chewing gum and spitting; and the use of caning as punishment for offences (Abdoolcarim & Chowdhury 2015: 25).

3. The term 'colonizer-who-refuses' comes from Albert Memmi (1957 [2003]).

4. Credited to French writer and literary critic Serge Doubrovsky, 'autofiction involves supplying indicators which suggest that the text is an autobiography, whilst at the same time contraindicating these indicators by asserting its fictional status' and which bears formal features of fragmentation. In this way, 'autofiction reveals a kind of truth alongside its fictions of the self: through its fragmentary form, it reveals the contingent nature of truth… which, even when it concerns the identity of the writing self, is negotiated between self and other' (Boyle 2007: 18).

5. The argument McIntosh (2012) here evokes is one that connects with the very broad body of feminist, queer and postcolonial works about narrative as a form of research and knowledge-making. A full discussion of these diverse works and arguments is beyond the scope of this article. However, I note *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (1989) as one early example of the movement towards narrative as a means of making the personal political. Kon-yu's (2010; 2012) more contemporary work on the (un)silencing of women's lives is also of note.

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