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Exegetical thinking: a methodology and two expositions

Abstract:

This article presents a methodology for the exegesis which has been generated through supervisory practice and experience and writer-researchers' practices of producing PhD theses in creative writing research, with two exemplary, first person descriptions by HDR candidates of their PhD research journeys so far. The proposal here focuses on the creative and cognitive practices brought into play in carrying out each PhD project, asserting that 'exegetical thinking' is enmeshed in both creative writing and research processes in a growing 'spiral' of complexity and innovation as connections are made between the thesis components in producing original research.

Biographical notes:

Elizabeth Claire Alberts has a PhD in creative writing (Macquarie 2015), and taught creative writing at Macquarie University for seven years. Her creative and journalistic work has been widely published, appearing in journals such as *Overland*, *Island Magazine*, *Axon*, *TEXT*, *Great Ocean Quarterly*, *Audubon*, *Alternatives Journal*, and *Earth Island Journal*. She is a contributing writer to Stories of the Great Turning and the co-author of a children's book. She currently works as a staff writer for *The Dodo.*

Willo Drummond is a PhD candidate and tutor in creative writing at Macquarie University and a member of the executive committee of the *Australasian Association of Writing Programs*. A poetry reader for *Overland Literary Journal*, her writing is published or forthcoming in *TEXT*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Meniscus*, *Australian Poetry Anthology 2015*, *Bukker Tillibul*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Writing from Below* and the U.S. based little magazine *Yellowfield*. Willo's PhD research, commenced mid-2015, considers extended mind perspectives on artistic cognition, with a focus on the early notebook practices of mid-Twentieth Century American poet Denise Levertov.

Marcelle Freiman is Associate Professor in English and Creative Writing at Macquarie University and, as past Chair of AAWP, a member of the AAWP Advisory Board. Her current research interests include: creative writing and cognition; ekphrasis; diaspora literatures, and poetry. She has published articles in *TEXT*, in *New Writing: The International Journal of Creative Writing* and contributed chapters to *Creative Writing: Theory Beyond Practice* (eds Brady and Krauth) and *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet* (eds Cousins and Howarth). Her poetry publications are *Monkey's Wedding*

(1995) and *White Lines (Vertical)* (2010) and she has published numerous poems in literary journals including *Antipodes*, *Cordite*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Meanjin*, *Meniscus*, *Southerly*, *Transnational Literature* and *Westerly*.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Exegesis – Cognition – Creativity – Poetry – Verse-novel

Introduction

The PhD research, creative work and supervision discussed in this article are positioned within the disciplines of Creative Writing and Literary Studies within the English Department at Macquarie University. Each of these projects has presented very different research questions to the two HDR candidates, and each has turned, in their inquiries, to disciplinary and sub-disciplinary areas of literature studies, theory and cognitive research, as well as extensively to their own creative thinking. The strength of the PhD thesis in Creative Writing in producing not only original and innovative creative work, but also innovative research connected to creative work, expands these projects to required levels of doctoral research that contributes across the disciplines. This paper presents a methodology of 'exegetical thinking', which is generated through research, creative practice and supervision, to propose the extent to which creative work and exegesis are effectively bound together in these thesis projects.

Since the 2004 *TEXT* Special Issue No. 3 'Illuminating the Exegesis', there has been much in the way of development and expansion in the professionalisation of Higher Degree Research in Creative Writing, as outlined by Krauth (2011). Krauth's article on the 'radical trajectory of the creative writing doctorate in Australia' examines the current state of the exegesis as a narrative in its own right, arguing that although the creative works produced tend to be less innovative, the exegeses that accompany them have been more adventurous, with projects presenting their exegetical components in different ways, some more separate from the form of the creative work than others. While the frames of published creative writing are formed by the more conservative demands of the publishing market, exegetical work is more innovative, as Krauth (2011) points out, and the exegesis as a form lends itself to more risk-taking. One could argue that this is because it is considered for publication as academic research, where innovative thinking is often valued.

It may be the case that although we would like to see ever-more innovation in the creative work of our early career researchers, there are further strategic and practical constraints on what they are asked to do – such as the contexts of academic examining, discipline frameworks, and the drive to publication. Given the increasing demands of the academic job market and the necessity to encourage PhD candidates to position themselves for subsequent employment, as academics (in which case they must define the discipline areas in which they see professional identity) or in other fields, they must satisfy the requirements of doctoral level creative writing and research for a PhD or DCA degree. The component of *research* is of substantial significance for their future academic development, and numerous examples of this PhD research published in *TEXT* and other journals are indicative of developments in creative research now progressed well beyond the self-reflective reading of a writer's own process, which the well-conceived HDR thesis has also, by now, outgrown. Indeed, the lack of definition for the exegesis (beyond university requirements of word lengths and weighing) is no bad thing: it is the responsibility of each thesis project to integrate its exegetical work into the thesis in the ways that work for the project. The freedom to do this generates risk-taking and often significant innovation – which, as this paper argues, is driven by the 'exegetical thinking' demanded by the requirements of the project.

Conceptually, a thesis project need not consist merely of what is suggested by thesis guidelines as a 'creative work with accompanying exegesis'; it should be conceived and presented as one whole project. Its mode of presentation will be determined by, and reflective of, the needs of its conceptual framing and creative and research processes: plaited or interspersed as in a fictocritical response, or quite separate, as a related scholarly investigation into aspects of the thesis research question. The thesis and the researcher might be best served by producing two separately publishable parts, with the whole work showing a high level of conceptual and research integration. The extent of this integration may not always be *overtly* visible in the creative artefact, where it is embedded in cognitive and textual *traces* – or, as Willo Drummond suggests, where 'the roots [are] made evident', and in Elizabeth Claire Alberts's complete rewriting of her verse-novel – as well as in processes informing all parts of the thesis. Ideally, the passion of the project is driven equally, though at different times and intensities, by a doctoral level of scholarly research and the capacity to produce creative work in a way that each component generates creative productivity in writing and research throughout the project, such as in the theses exemplified in this paper.

Each thesis project and exegesis is *innovative* – its innovation is framed by an original project in which creative writing and research generate questions, which are explored through research, through the enactment or 'performance' of the creative work, and in the creative thinking that occurs throughout. Questions presented by research and creative work are then alternately addressed in processing the different parts of the thesis, forging productive linkages and often becoming quite tangled together. Keeping exegesis and creative work 'alive' and in process alongside each other encourages a productive dialogism between them as well as a great deal of creativity and radical re-thinking, as in the two PhDs shown here, one completed, the other currently in-progress. Productive outcomes are generated when questions raised in the creative work and vice versa lead to developments in *both* parts of the work, thus enabling the theses to develop in increasingly sophisticated and original ways in an upward spiral of innovation and development. This reflects the various models proposed to frame processes linking creative practice, research and methodology – such as the 'iterative cyclic web' (Smith and Dean 2009), the 'rhizomatic system' (Kroll 2013), the 'bowerbird' practice (Brady 2000), and others in recent research on creative writing methodology (Sempert et al 2017; Kroll and Harper 2013; Smith and Dean 2009; Webb and Brien 2010).

Creative cognition and exegetical thinking

These existing models all reflect the *creative thinking* practiced throughout. This is evident in research on 'creative cognition' (Ward, Smith and Finke 1999), which recognises the types of often-messy, highly generative and conceptually expansive processes which are involved in the cognitive activities of creative research. Ward et al's research is based on the heuristic 'Geneplore model of creative functioning' (191), which asserts that creative cognition, a mode of self-learning, includes 'candidate ideas' as 'preinventive structures'. These are 'not complete plans for some new product', rather they present:

> an untested proposal or even a mere germ of an idea, but they hold some promise of yielding outcomes bearing the crucial birthmarks of creativity: originality and appropriateness. The Geneplore model assumes that, in most cases, one would alternate between generative and exploratory processes, refining the structures according to the demands or constraints of the particular task. (191)

The research, which examines the components of creative cognition using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, includes the recognition that insights, even late in the process, can lead to further 'preinventive structures of exploration and interpretation' (193), focusing or expanding concepts that are then rejected or developed, and so on, so that the rhizomic and reiterative process of creative cognition continues through various stages of intensity. This is not necessarily an initial generative process, but one that is revisited throughout, reflecting the various creative research models already suggested here. In accordance with the Geneplore model too, and importantly for our argument, are the demands and *constraints* of the task that foster creative cognition. These constraints are shown to encourage creative thought as they limit the field within which exploratory, preinventive and generative structures may occur, thus enabling creativity – for example, conventions of research, and constraints of narrative and poetic language and form. This is particularly significant in view of requirements of the HDR thesis project as a *research degree*: creative cognition thus contributes to the 'exegetical thinking' throughout the thesis – and is enforced by the *value of the constraints* of the task – to generate reflection, conceptualisation, and the extension of concepts to new ideas.

The 'exegetical thinking' based on creative cognition, proposed in this paper, also draws on the concept of 'cognitive blends' developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002: 279-308). These are creative, cognitive 'multiple blends' resulting in the conceptual integration of often unexpected and unlike concepts and ideas that generate new blends, compressed and unrelated to their origins, and which form the human capacity for creative thinking. The theory points to three main themes of cognitive thinking across multiple domains: *identity* – the capacity to recognise sameness and equivalence, and oppositions); *integration* – 'finding identities and oppositions is part of a much more complicated of process of conceptual integration, which has elaborate structural and dynamic properties and operational constraints', and typically 'goes unnoticed'; and *imagination* – 'Identity and integration cannot account for meaning and its development without the third *I* of the human mind – imagination. Even in the absence of external stimulus, the brain can run imaginative simulations' (2002: 6). These modes of thinking, in particular the role of imagination, essential for the construction of new, extended, increasingly sophisticated ideas, occur as cognitive functioning within a very broad spectrum of activities, many of which are creative and most of which occur outside consciousness. As blends become more complex (as 'counterfactual blends'), they develop what Fauconnier and Turner call the 'multiple-scope creativity' (2002: 299-308), which constitutes innovative creative thinking. This paper argues that the greater the constraints of the project (thesis consisting of exegesis and creative work rather than research only), the more heightened is the creative cognition interpolated by it. In the higher order, metacognitive (more conscious functions) of exegetical thinking, the component of the doctoral research interwoven with creative cognitive function enacted through skills in research and writing is repeatedly, and differently, engaged throughout as new ideas and structures are reiteratively presented. These call upon higher order functions of metacognition, synthesis and conceptual extension, which are then further generated and augmented or refined, returning to and revisiting existing discipline knowledge bases throughout the trajectory of the thesis' development.

The application of this concept of *exegetical thinking* to a consideration of 'the exegesis now' acknowledges the small amount of research done on the specific (mainly reflective) thinking processes of the exegesis. Bourke and Nielsen (2004) refer to journaling practice as a way into the topic, making the distinction between First Order and Second Order Journal Work, the first being the 'anecdotal type' of journaling, and the latter being of most relevance as it 'constitutes meta-writing. It is writing *about* writing, writing that is self-conscious, evaluative, critical. It is journal work that asks questions about process, product, praxis and practice' (2004). This journaling is later referred to by Eugen Bacon, who writes: 'the second order journal … amalgamates, informs, positions, supports and complements the artefact', so that '[e]xegesis is a knowing, is a refinement of Bourke and Nielsen's second order journal' (2014). Bacon proposes a 'Third Order Journaling' practice in which cognitive complexity is significant – yet 'exegetical thinking' goes somewhat further in terms of Higher Order thinking. It highlights the intensity of creative thought and extends this kind of thinking more broadly, engaging re-iteratively and rhizomically to produce creative outcomes in creative *and* research work, as illustrated here by PhD researchers who outline (and indeed explore further) their processes of exegetical thinking. It is significant that both researchers radically alter their ideas about the constitution of the exegesis.

Exegesis and novel: a separation of parts – Elizabeth Claire Alberts

When I began working on my PhD in creative writing, I had very little critical research experience, so the prospect of writing a 40,000- to 50,000-word exegesis (as per the expectation of my university), in addition to writing a full-length creative text, was nothing short of intimidating. In fact, I didn't even have a clear understanding of what an exegesis was. Early on, I'd turned to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines 'exegesis' as 'a critical explanation or interpretation of a text' (also cited by Willo Drummond, below). This made it sound like the exegesis would only be an analysis my own creative writing process, yet my supervisor, Marcelle Freiman, had already told me that this was not what I was supposed to do. While my exegesis could be informed by my creative writing process, and could draw upon theories of creative thinking and practice, I came to understand the exegesis as something more akin to the dissertation; in other words, a thesis, a disquisition, the research portion of my project.

Yet, I was not just writing a dissertation like English Literature PhD candidates were. As a creative writing candidate, I had the creative text to compose as well, and I knew I had to forge some kind of relationship between the exegesis and creative text. Even so, I initially viewed these as discrete entities. I planned on writing each component independently, and even set up separate work spaces in my home office: the computer desk with the straight-backed chair is where I'd write my exegesis; and the blue sofa chair with the ottoman, which were set up by the sliding glass door that led onto the porch, is where I'd write creatively. Each component, I believed, would require different modes of cognition, research, writing, and physiological engagement with the work.

This envisioned 'separateness' of the exegesis and creative work seemed, at least to me, to be reinforced by the requirements of the English Department at my university. Though the department never specified that these parts should be disjointed (in fact, my advisor continuously encouraged me to build a connection between parts), it did place a particularly strong emphasis on the theoretical component, which needed to encompass roughly fifty percent of my project. When I referred to theses of past creative writing PhD candidates (for instance, Dubosarsky 2007, Pan 2007), their work appeared to consist of what I describe as half an English Literature thesis, in addition to the creative text. There were clear connections between the two parts, but each component could stand on its own. With this in mind, I visualized the exegesis as a separate artefact, or perhaps what Nigel Krauth may have called a 'parallel text', which he describes as 'an essay providing conceptual or historical framework – a mini-dissertation of the style familiar as submission for disciplines such as Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, History, Sociology or Philosophy' (2011).

Despite this perceived disconnection between exegesis and creative work, I commenced work on both sections, shifting between computer desk and sofa chair, hoping a link would surface like my footprints that appeared on the carpet. My thesis (Alberts 2015) focused on the verse-novel for children and young adults, a contemporary, mainstream genre that emerged concurrently in Australia and the U. in the 1990s. There was a paucity of theoretical literature on the genre, but plenty of journalistic articles existed, many of which criticized the verse-novel for merely chopping prose into short lines and calling it free verse poetry (for instance, see Apol and Certo 2011, Flynn, Hager and Thomas 2005, Heyman, Sorby and Thomas 2009, Siertua 2005, Rosenberg 2005). Yet I believed these criticisms to be overly simplistic – they seemed to overlook the influence of narrative on the shape and presentation of poetry in verse-novels; as well as the trend of contemporary poetry for children and young adults to utilise simple, spare free verse poetry, which the verse-novel appeared to emulate. I decided that my exegesis (the research component) would discuss ways verse-novels could 'work' as poetry, while also taking into regard the ways verse-novels engaged readers on emotional and affective levels. For my creative component, I started writing a young adult verse novel about an angst-ridden, poetry-writing teenage girl struggling to find her identity as a poet in a futurist world in which poetry is banned. My supervisor helpfully suggested a bridging chapter in my exegesis where I could reflect upon my creative process, and produce a discernable link between parts. However, in the early stages of my project, I couldn't fully imagine what this link would look like, and the relationship between my exegesis and creative text remained, for quite a long time, undefined and opaque.

Thinking exegetically: moving from separation to connection

During the first couple of years of my candidature, I immersed myself in theoretical research, turning to poetry criticism, narrative theory, children's and young adult literature theory, as well as less obvious theories, such as affect theory and comic book theory. I formed a tentative connection between the exegetical and creative parts by trying to write a verse-novel that critics of the genre would (hopefully) not call prose chopped up into funny lines. I did this – or tried to do this – by writing a verse-novel in different poetic forms, including sestinas, sonnets and abecedarian poems. This method, as innovative as I believed it could be, eventually became my undoing: by paying such close attention to the design and crafting of each poem, I lost sight of the narrative, and eventually found that I could no longer make the narrative 'work' with the poems I had created. I became stuck, and no matter how hard I tried to work through my creative issues, I could not find a way forward. At this point, I had spent over two years working on my verse-novel manuscript, and this roadblock felt like a disaster. Revision felt impossible, but starting over felt even more impossible.

As distressful as this issue was for me, it led me to make an important realisation about the pivotal role narrative played in the verse-novel. On a theoretical level, I was already considering the influence narrative held over the shape and presentation of poetry in the verse-novel, using Brian McHale's theory of contrapuntal correspondence between narrative and poetry segments to discuss the relationship between poetry and narrative in the verse-novel (2009). McHale drew upon Rachel Duplessis's concept that segmentivity is the 'underlying characteristic of poetry as a genre' (1996: 51). Duplessis writes: 'Poetry is the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines and whose meanings are created by occurring in bounded units precisely chosen, units operating in relation to chosen pause or silence' (51). McHale argues that narrative could also be defined as segmentivity: 'Though segmentivity is not dominant in narrative, by definition, nevertheless, narrative is segmented into multiple, shifting voices … [t]ime in narrative is segmented; so is space; so is consciousness' (2009: 17).

Taking this idea a step further, McHale suggests that in narrative poetry, 'narrative's own segmentation interacts with the segmentation "indigenous" to poetry to produce complex interplays among segments of different scales and kinds,' and also that 'segmentation must always contribute meaningfully … to the structure of poetic narrative' (17, 18). To me, this seemed to imply that poetry and narrative are involved in an inextricable union, and I used McHale's theory to argue that poetry and narrative segmentations in the young adult verse-novel mingled, danced and became ineluctably tangled up with each other. You could not separate one from the other.

While I had not been actively thinking about 'segmentivity' in my creative writing process, my exegetical research led me to realise that I had not formed an active connection between poetry and narrative in my young adult-verse-novel manuscript, and this could have been the root of my problem. Instead, I had favored poetry, which resulted in an unbalanced and unsuccessful verse-novel. Now I needed to rethink everything – tear my verse-novel apart to (re)form a stronger and more bounded relationship between poetry and narrative.

Connecting exegesis and creative writing

Finally, I had begun to understand how my theoretical research – my exegesis – would inform my creative work. While McHale's theory offered a theoretical basis for my exegesis, the act of writing a verse-novel manuscript helped me think exegetically as a creative writer, and allowed me to use my practical experience to bolster the theoretical concept that narrative and poetry cannot be separated in the process of writing a verse-novel. My exegetical research also began to inform my creative writing. Drawing on McHale's theory of contrapuntal connection between poetry and narrative segmentations (2009), I decided to pay closer attention to poetic line-breaks, section-breaks and page-breaks while writing my young adult verse-novel, and to see how these 'gaps' could form an active connection with the narrative. For instance, when the first-person narrator in my verse-novel felt worried or frightened (which opened up a kind of gap in the narrative), I would break the poetic text into short, asyntactic lines. Now, instead of trying to write a verse-novel in different poetic forms, I wrote a new verse-novel in free verse poetry, using poetic segmentation as the place of interconnection between poetry and narrative. My second attempt to write a verse-novel was much more successful.

Looking back at my process, it seems as if I was involved in a kind of complex, reiterative thinking process that circled and cycled between exegetical research and creative practice, where research influenced practice, and practice influenced research. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Smith and Dean refer to this process as an 'iterative cyclic web' (2009) – a process that produces an intricate pattern of thinking, allowing the mind to cycle through processes, reiterate ideas, or crisscross in numerous directions. The exegesis and creative texts, as well as the thinking and writing processes involved in their creation, had eventually become inextricable, each informing and explicating the other, and driving the creativity of the project to a new level. As this fusion occurred, I stopped using my computer desk exclusively for my exegetical work, and stopped using the sofa chair and ottoman strictly for creative writing. Instead, I found myself balancing on two legs of my straight-backed chair, while leaning on my ottoman, writing poems in the margins of my exegesis.

Points of illumination – Willo Drummond

The *OED* defines 'exegesis' as: 'An explanation or interpretation of a text … a critical discourse or commentary'. Though this is the generally accepted term for the critical half of my thesis, and though I use this word myself when discussing my research, I've never actually felt it to be particularly appropriate to what it is I'm doing for my PhD. Especially given the model at my university, where the emphasis in on a 'complementary' or 'stand-alone' piece of innovative critical research; I've never felt that the role of this part of my project was to 'explicate' my poetry.

My PhD, which is in-progress, considers cognitive approaches to creative writing practice, or 'creative writing thinking'. Work in the area of extended cognition since the late 1990s has argued for the constitutive role in cognition of material artefacts (Clark 1998, 2011, Clark and Chalmers 1998), and *practices* such as writing (Menary 2007a, 2007b, 2012a, 2012b). Notebooks and draft materials are not merely 'passive repositories' (Tweney and Ayala 2015: 423) for pre-existing ideas; they play a part in the very process of idea making, the 'thinking' that is writing itself (Freiman 2015a, 2015b, Menary 2007b, Sutton 2002). Does my 'exegesis' provide a critical discourse on creative writing practice; does it shed some light on these cognitive processes? I hope so! But there is less emphasis that it should explain my *poems* themselves. Rather, there seems to be a feedback loop created by the specific constraints of my project, and by my working across both creative and critical research practice resulting in the (often surprising) directions my argument takes. Let me explain: using both archival and practice-led work, my thesis examines the early notebooks of mid-Twentieth Century American poet Denise Levertov, and a particularly significant creative relationship she had with the letters of German-Language poet Rainer Maria Rilke. This research focus was initially driven by a practice-led set of questions which can be loosely summarised as: why was Levertov's poetry such a persistent presence in my own writing? It wasn't just that I 'liked' her poetry, the role of her work in my own practice seemed more significant than this. Levertov's poems were often particularly generative for me early in the writing process, and lines of hers would often float into my mind when composing what seemed to be an unrelated poem. It was as though Levertov's writing was somehow important to my very artistic cognition itself. As I began reading more of her writings on poetics, I discovered the early English translations of Rilke's letters seemed to bear a similar level of significance for Levertov's own writing practice. In fact, so important to the development of Levertov's poetics were Rilke's letters, that early in her career she created an idiosyncratic index to her edition of the 1946 *Selected Letters* (translated by R.F.C. Hull), which she returned to throughout her career, using the letters as a kind of cognitive scaffolding for her developing practices of artistic cognition.[1]

My research not only looks to Levertov's notebooks as a 'case study' for my thesis regarding the role of such influences in artistic cognition, it also involves developing a volume of poetry in dialogue with Rilke's letters, and Levertov's engagement with them in her notebooks and published poetry. The shape of this creative dimension of the project did not actually come into focus for me until I was some way into my research, when I managed to source a rare copy of Levertov's 'Rilke index'.[2] Until this time I had been working with published descriptions of the artefact only (Levertov 1981, Zlotkowski 1992). Once I saw the full scope of this 'index' however, the use of this annotated text as a creative constraint, and its possibilities for the poems to be written for this thesis and as a subject of my research, became apparent.

'Academic poetry'

Nigel Krauth discusses the distinct nature of the creative writing artefact born of the PhD: creative writing in an academic context is 'different from normal creative writing' (2008: 10) as it is subject to different kinds of scrutiny and bureaucratic pressure than in the broader literary domain. Krauth characterises the academic novel in particular as both displaced, and unnaturally spotlighted and dissected (10-11), possibly resulting in something no longer quite the same species it once knew itself to be. In the same chapter, he touches on the potential of the hybrid form or approach for the creative writing doctorate, citing the website of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (2005) as a promising example:

> Your PhD will be a type of dialogue between two discourses … In this instance, instead of the thesis being derived from the creative component, a poem or chapter or scene may arise directly from research and may indeed drive the academic writing on… exploring the established relationship between text and criticism in a new and dynamic manner. (cited by Krauth 2008: 12)

This Bakhtinian sounding approach comes close to the way I now see myself working. There is a dialogism inherent to both my creative practice *and* to the relationship between both parts of my thesis: research informing practice and practice informing research in an example of the already mentioned 'iterative cyclic web' of creative research (Smith and Dean 2009). This necessary dialogism within academic creative research forges an intimate relation between both parts of my project and, as I am increasingly coming to understand, each part is equally crucial to the research itself. Given the academic frame of their production (not to mention the number of footnotes being generated), the poems in my PhD project are an academic 'species' of poetry, it must be admitted. At the same time, they are simply poetry: poetry with the roots made evident. It is these roots, I am starting to see, that often have much to say about artistic cognition. They are a kind of cognitive-connective tissue, made visible.

Annie Dillard provides an astute description of what happens in the act of writing; in the practice of 'writing as thinking', we follow the points of light, the points of illumination: 'You write it all, discovering it at the end of the line of words. The line of words is a fiber optic, flexible as wire; it illuminates the path just before its fragile tip' (1990: 7, see also Crawford 2010: 257). In writing poetry in dialogue with the words of both Levertov and Rilke, I often find myself identifying connections, paths, threads I would otherwise have missed. In this way, it is the *making* which illuminates. And in as much as this making results in poems, the poems themselves can perhaps be seen as constellations of illumination for exegetical thinking.

This making that is writing of course also involves reading. Astrid Lorange, whose published PhD thesis I read early in my candidature, stresses that for her (as for others before her), 'composition… include[s] reading and writing and the relationship between them' (2014: 32). Her monograph, *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* is, she says, 'an archive of a reader's relational engagement with the poetics of Gertrude Stein' (33). Lorange advocates a 'distant or ambient' (32) practice of reading, which, as a form of scholarship, allows more room for the intuitive, surprising links that can occur when we allow ourselves to drift laterally across a network of texts. It reminds me very much of Levertov's own notebooks, which trace her voracious reading habits, but follow loose threads of focus, many of which loop around what she called, borrowing from Ibsen, 'The Task of the Poet' (Levertov *Green Notebook* 1968). I see the poems in my thesis as constituting a similar kind of diffuse engagement with Rilke's letters and the traces of them evident in Levertov's notebooks and poetry. In her reading, Levertov read to respond. She read loosely, desirously, to engage and answer rather than to analyse (though she is determined and diligent in her pursuits). Similarly, engaging with the Levertov and Rilke material in my practice-led research allows me to approach these textual artefacts open to response and affect, to tangential moments of surprise, allowing myself to drift, rather than constantly grasp at reason. Rose Lucas claims that '[t]o drift is … to pay attention to different cues' (2006: 2) than those prioritised on 'the pathways of rational intention' (1). Working in this way with the words of Rilke and Levertov allows me, as a writer and as a researcher to follow unsuspected threads of creative answerability: mine, and Levertov's, rather than logic. It also allows me to work in a way that may come close to Levertov's own cognitive practices. In this sense the poems in my thesis become the very essence, the crux of the academic work itself, rather than artefacts to be 'explicated'. It is here, in this poetic practice that I seem to come closest to what I am trying to explore, and here that I often uncover what seem to me the greatest research insights into Levertov's relationship with Rilke, into my relationship with Levertov, and into what all of this has to do with artistic cognition and the cognitive practice of writing. Though we can never entirely access another's practice, or mind, we can draw inferences from the artefacts that remain as traces of their cognition, and in using our own writing practice to work with these materials, I believe we can come close to understanding something of what might have gone on, in a way that would not be possible otherwise.

A tangle of exegesis

I am writing a PhD thesis. It involves both 'traditional' and creative writing research methods, and it makes (or will make) its argument in prose and poetry and in the dialogic space between. As I have touched on briefly elsewhere (Drummond 2014, 2016), philosopher of the extended mind Andy Clark says of the cognitive practice of writing poetry, that it often seems as though it is the words on the page which come to 'determine the thoughts the poem comes to express' (1998: 208). He calls this the 'mangrove effect' of public language (207). Writing an exegesis, then, is much like writing a poem (stay with me here). As I engage with Levertov's Rilke, and with my own fragments, which spin like filament off my dialogue with these textual materials, like Dillard, I follow the points of light in my notebook, across drafts both 'critical' and 'creative'. Soon other words, other views, seem to gather, like debris to a mangrove seed building its own island, amassing cognitive traces, unfurling a line of thought. I witness this higher order, 'exegetical cognition' and a thesis begins to build its way to the shore. A floating island. A tangle of argument and poetry with the roots made evident. Upon arrival, someone, somewhere might name it: exegesis.

In conclusion

It is clear from these reflections on the PhD exegesis and its relationship to the creative writing, that the need to engage with and return to *research* and *creativity* incrementally is far more than a means of 'mapping' of one's own creative writing against other literary works in terms of craft and structure, or reflecting on one's own practice, although these might be included in the thesis.[3] Rather, as 'exegetical thinking', it aims to generate further knowledge and creative work on which to then re-build ideas, and also changes how we think of research, encouraging creative thinking there too. It includes, and can thrive on, working within the constraints of the task, producing original, innovative work as required by Higher Degree expectations, and it suggests the extent to which contributions of research in creative writing and the creative arts makes to thinking about research in the wider tertiary disciplines.

Endnotes

1. The concept of 'cognitive scaffolding' within the extended mind debate builds upon the social developmental framework of Lev Vygotsky (see Clark 1998; Sterelny 2010; Menary 2007a).
2. A private copy of the index was generously shared by Edward Zlotkowski.
3. A model still encountered when examining creative HDR theses.

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