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The potential of the exegesis and the challenge of symbiosis

Abstract:

The three contributors to this article believe that a symbiotic relationship between creative and critical aspects of a project function most effectively. Research for the exegesis – whether conventional or experimental – can enhance the creative work's possibilities, raising more pertinent research questions or refining those already identified. In addition, the thesis as a coherent entity has the potential of making an original contribution to knowledge through the connection of the exegesis and creative work. The case study dissertations demonstrate this point of view, occupying two positions on Krauth's 'radical trajectory continuum' (2011). The first graduate, a filmmaker and academic, chose a conventional exegesis-novel split, as the subject itself, reverse adaptation of a film script to literary young adult novel, is an emerging research discipline. The second candidate chose a braided essay format (Krauth's 'plaited' structure) that reflects the research she undertook into theory of the Uncanny and the consequent destabilisation and fragmentation it encourages. The supervisor as fellow traveller of these doctoral journeys drew on her experience in order to help them to select the most effective thesis structure and to realise the potential of symbiosis. They discovered that in each case the resultant symbiosis did not silence their individual voices but enhanced their individuality.

Biographical notes:

Katrina Finlayson will be awarded her PhD in Creative Writing by Flinders University in November 2017. She mostly writes creative nonfiction, with a focus on themes of travel, identity and home, and her creative publications include 'Dorothea Tanning and Me on the Threshold of a Stranger City' in *Axon: Creative Explorations* (2015) and 'The Wizards of Oz' in *Meanjin* (2008). She has also published papers on doctoral pedagogy and the student-supervisor relationship. Her creative writing Honours thesis was awarded both the Ann Flaxman and Richard Conyers Flinders University prizes for creative and academic excellence.

Jeri Kroll is Emeritus Professor of English and Creative Writing at Flinders University, South Australia. Recent books are *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems* (2013) and a verse novel, *Vanishing Point*, shortlisted for the 2015 Queensland Literary Awards. A George Washington University adaptation was a winner in the 47th Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (2013)

and '*Old and New, Tried and Untried': Creativity and Research in the 21st Century University* (2016) are recent critical books. Forthcoming with Graeme Harper is *Revising Creative Writing.* She is studying for a Doctorate of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. Some of this research has therefore been conducted with the support of the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Annabelle Murphy is a filmmaker and film academic. She teaches at the University of Melbourne where she is Screenwriting Programs Convenor at the Victorian College of the Arts, School of Film and Television. Murphy's films have screened on the ABC and SBS, as well as internationally on BBC's Channel 4 and Canal+ (France). Her work has also screened at many prominent international film festivals such as Montreal, Palm Springs, LAShorts, Oberhausen, New York Shorts, Sydney and Melbourne. It has won several awards including Best Short Film at Frameline IFF (San Francisco). Her work has been twice nominated for AFI Awards. Murphy was awarded her PhD from Flinders University in September 2016.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Symbiosis – Plaited exegesis – Braided essay – Reverse adaptation – The uncanny

> I have heard of a dramatic writer who used to say, he would rather write a play than a prologue; in like manner, I think, I can with less pains write one of the books of this history, than the prefatory chapter to each of them. (Henry Fielding *Tom Jones* Book XVI, chapter 1 *Of Prologues* 1749, 1996: 739)

Introduction

Since the creative writing doctorate made its entrance on the academic stage in 1993 (Krauth 2011: 5, Kroll 2013), and after a few hesitant performances found itself accepted and even applauded at Australian universities, it has increased in popularity. By 2011, Nigel Krauth notes, the creative thesis had morphed into what at first appear to be diverse forms, but which he distils into three – parallel, plaited and outlaw. Under those rubrics many permutations exist, but two generally fit the work of Annabelle Murphy and Katrina Finlayson, both of whom recently graduated and who co-authored this article with their supervisor, Jeri Kroll. While playing with a possible title for this article, we thought about whether the destination or the journey dominated each writer's respective approaches. The journey itself helps candidates not only to refine (or in fact to find) their research questions but also to negotiate their way to the right exegesis for them. Along the way, both candidates could be described as explorers, gathering primary data in their respective research fields and pioneering new ways of conceptualising how the exegesis could best serve the project as a whole, which would ultimately make a significant contribution to knowledge. We all felt that contributing separate sections about our evolving understanding of the exegesis would reveal the myriad pathways available to postgraduates.

At some point in the process, however, a decision has to be made. Murphy chose the parallel or conventional format, mapping out the fledgling area of 'reverse adaptation,' while Finlayson chose the plaited exegesis, braiding theoretical and creative threads to form a unified artefact. Nevertheless, we realised that in both cases the nexus between the creative and critical content was influenced if not defined by the concept of symbiosis. The case study doctorates discussed in this article, therefore, demonstrate two ways in which their creators have tackled the challenge of symbiosis. The co-authors have come to the conclusion that a creative thesis in whatever form is born from a desire to question a practitioners' relationships to their materials and craft and to expand possibilities not only for themselves but also for peers in the wider culture. Ensuring that there is a symbiotic relationship between creative and critical work facilitates those goals.

The supervisor and symbiosis: Jeri Kroll

Examining some of the first practice-led Honours and postgraduate theses in the 1990s, I used the insights that I gained about their benefits and pitfalls to help establish the Honours and doctoral creative writing programs at Flinders University. Nigel Krauth comments that in the earliest days of creative higher degrees, the 'reflective text' (Krauth 2011: 8) or journal model predominated, privileging the artist and the work. I found that to be true to some extent; many followed the plentiful antecedents in the

prefaces, forewords, afterwords, diaries and indeed within creative artefacts themselves of literary figures, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James, which offered justification for this analytical treatment (Krauth 2002, Kroll 2004). As someone with a conventional PhD in literature, I could say that I grew up as a creative arts researcher with the exegesis, which as it matured revealed its complexity and potential.[1] Nevertheless, I did recognise from my previous training that the concept of self-reflexivity went back much further in literary history. Among many examples, I remembered eighteenth-century writer Henry Fielding. In *Tom Jones*[2], Fielding presents himself in the character of a self-conscious author, who points out to readers that his work exists within a literary milieu that is in one sense beyond his control. Given that he is at the mercy of critics and readers, he decides to underline his originality creating the prefatory chapters that introduce each book in his picaresque novel. This is his tongue-in-cheek defence: 'For all which I shall not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever: for as I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein' (Fielding 1749, 1996: 88).

In the twenty-first century, writers who undertake higher degrees cannot, alas, subscribe to this defence, because they must please supervisors and examiners, if they do not seek to please anyone else. The conventional approach of the exegesis as a scholarly study of comparative texts (including situating the project within historical and cultural contexts) as well as a critical reflection on the creative work as a knowledge contribution was most favoured in this newly born degree, as it offered security in an environment where colleagues might be sceptical of the program's rigour and where finding sympathetic and qualified examiners posed challenges to supervisors. At this early stage, too, stakeholders found a useful way of expressing the synergy or relationship between creative and critical thesis elements was to talk about the symbiosis between them.

The word 'symbiosis' has a biological and a non-biological meaning. Both illuminate what occurs within a creative thesis: 'the living together in more or less intimate association or close union of two dissimilar organisms … *especially*: mutualism' and 'a cooperative relationship (as between two persons or groups)' (Merriam-Webster 2017). The word symbiosis crops up in Australian and UK university guidelines about the creative thesis and foregrounds a number of attributes governing the two elements: intimacy, union, co-existence, cooperation and, as well, the notion of dissimilarity. All of these can manifest in either a conventional or an integrated thesis, displaying varying emphases depending on the structure. Flinders University guidelines (2017) are replicated by other universities in general, although the vocabulary might differ.[3]

> Students can make a case that part of the original contribution to knowledge of the PhD comes from the relationship between the two parts of the thesis. Alternatively, students can integrate the creative and critical portions of the thesis into a coherent whole and present it bound as one work. (2017: 2)

In the United Kingdom, the umbrella organisation that governs creative writing as a discipline from primary to research levels is the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). They make this statement about creative and critical parts: 'The

process of acquiring knowledge in the discipline of Creative Writing … highlights an active interrelation between the two' ('Defining Principles, 1.4': 13). They extend the concept of interrelation by noting that it can inhere in a conventional dual thesis or in a braided or integrated dissertation ('Notes about UK degrees': 14). A survey through Australian university templates available online reveals a range of terms, including symbiosis and interface (for example, see WSU 2017), which conceptualises how creative and critical writing can relate: as married partners, as siblings, as strange bedfellows[4], as adversaries, *inter alia*. Whatever the relationship, it must work towards producing new knowledge.[5] Posing or searching for functional research questions to guide study also suggests the type of exegetical work that will suit a project and determine the nature of the symbiosis between creative and critical material. In Katrina Finlayson's case, more questions arose during the course of her research that have only been partially resolved, given that being a contemporary writer in a mercurial world for her mandates instability and fragmentation, which the plaited structure of the thesis demonstrates. Annabelle Murphy's questions, on the other hand, did not alter significantly and neither did her conventional approach. The answers she provides in her study are not final or definitive, but rather reveal the artistic and critical potential for the field of 'reverse adaptation'.

As this article suggests, in the final analysis, each writer needs to find their own path. Reading a well-written exegesis as part of a unified artefact or indeed as inseparable from the whole should yield aesthetic as well as critical rewards, similar to what occurs when reading a poem or a picture book comprising visual and verbal narratives. Readers experience each journey as singular and either accept that the form is appropriate to the material without question or realise that formal experimentation inheres in the work's meaning. In addition, each dissertation exists, as I once wrote, as a 'polyphonic discourse' (Kroll 2004) that in its execution demonstrates its value to a range of creative and critical audiences. As the two thesis authors show in the following sections, choosing a particular exegetical form allows them to speak to those audiences in the most effective way.

The screenwriter and the novelist: Annabelle Murphy

On embarking upon my PhD candidature, I had a clear vision of the direction my research might take. I wanted to write a publishable 'reverse' adaptation of my unproduced feature screenplay, *Reasons to be Cheerful*, transforming my script into a novel. I also wanted to interrogate, from a creative and professional point of view, this under-explored process. My script, then entitled *Reasons to be Cheerful*, had been funded through two drafts by the Australian Film Commission. However, while it had received praise, it seemed unlikely to be actually made into a film due to high production costs. I had been working for some time as a professional filmmaker (writer/director) and film academic, but had written relatively little extended narrative prose, so the creative part of this project alone would be a challenge.

Like Eddington's 'Arrow of Time'[6], screen adaptation was then, and to a large extent still is, thought of as moving invariably in *one direction*, from past to present or from book to screen. Until recently it was implicit that 'film adaptation' *was* book to screen.

Indeed, that practice was so popular a form of art that DVD libraries everywhere were filled with 'adaptations,' some so venerable that there was an Academy Award for them. In addition, they were considered worthy of scholarship, ensuring that film and literature sections of academic libraries were replete with discourse on 'film adaptation'. Of course, all these moved in this one direction – from book to film.

But what about the reverse? Where were the literary books that had been adapted from film? Where was the academic discourse surrounding it? It quickly became apparent that there was functionally nothing available, a fact I documented in my exegesis. This absence, both of scholarly research and creative examples of reverse adaptation (if one excluded novelisations and other popular forms)[7], became one of the defining characteristics of my research. The question became, thus: upon *what* could I found my doctoral research? As mine was a practice-led PhD, the first answer lay in undertaking an analysis of my own creative process, which took, at its core, the experiences of a professional *screen*writer accustomed to working within the rigid stylistic constraints and structural discourse of screenwriting dogma. From the point of view of a professional filmmaker, I was able to interrogate the joys and difficulties of adapting from script to prose, including challenges relating to particular craft elements, such as voice, person, point of view, character-action description and tense. This creative process, culminating in a young adult novel entitled *The Art of Detachment*, exploring the love-hate relationship between two champion schoolgirl rowers, was at the heart of my investigation.

Concurrent to this process, I attempted to find writers who had trod the same path before me – and to interview them. This was a lonely search, with the two vaguely suitable people I initially approached failing to answer my request for interview. Luckily, a couple of years into my candidature, Graeme Simsion published *The Rosie Project* (2013) and my prayers were answered. Simsion made headlines as the 'poster boy' for reverse adaptation. His novel, adapted from his own unproduced film script, became a global bestseller. Creatively, this was precisely the path I was attempting to tread (although I could only dream of Simsion's arrival destination). My interview with Simsion, accompanied by an interview with filmmaker-turned-children's-author Tilney Cotton (who published *Little Chef, Big Curse* in the same year), interrogated both the creative experience and professional conditions of the 'reverse adapter.' I synthesised this information and incorporated it into my exegesis as a key component of my investigation; it became a small first repository of primary data on reverse adaptation. My contextualised interview with Simsion about his reverse adaptation was also published in *The Journal of Screenwriting* (Murphy 2016).

My second challenge was *how* to base my doctoral research on scholarship where none existed. I had to, as Harper and Kroll advise, 'develop a high degree of adaptability' (2008: 8) and excavate around the topic from proximate areas such as, firstly, book to screen adaptation studies. The journals *Adaptation* and *Literature Film Quarterly* were important sources for this, as were key works of Robert Stam, a cultural and film theorist. Discourse surrounding transmedia adaptation and convergence culture was also significant; for example, *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* was a useful resource. In addition, I scoured contemporary professional and popular writing discourse as found in prominent industry websites (*The Black List*,

Good Reads and the *NoveList* websites, among others) as well as other sources, such as important 'how to' texts, in particular Robert McKee's *Story* (1997). Concomitantly, I undertook some primary statistical analysis, examining the recent upsurge in reboots, sequels and other forms of screen 'adaptation'. In particular, I undertook a statistical analysis comparing the likelihood of 'publication' (that is, reaching an audience) for both a novelist and a screenwriter, using primary data gleaned from sources such as *Thorpe-Bowker* and *Box Office Mojo* websites. Cobbled together, this patchwork of professional and scholarly knowledge, primary data and discourse was able to provide a foundation robust enough to support my investigation and assertions.

Nigel Krauth tells us that: 'There are many sites in the creative writing doctorate where experimentation can occur' (2011: 59). In my doctoral research this experimentation lay firmly within the form and nature of the creative process itself, and less in the 'how' of the exegesis. The novelty of my research was inherent within my topic. My best endeavours had uncovered virtually no scholarly research into what I felt would become an increasingly recognised creative phenomenon. Thus, in the first instance, I felt I needed to begin the process of uncovering, synthesising and presenting data in the scholarly arena. I was satisfied with a traditional, chapter-based form of exegesis through which to do this.

Unlike many a doctoral researcher, upon embarking on this journey I felt quite clear about the path I wanted to tread. I wanted to write my adapted novel, and write about writing it. My issue was that, while the *path* was clear enough, the wider map was missing. With my supervisor, Professor Jeri Kroll, as a guiding light, I had to build my map, finding the pieces as I went along, charting tributaries, following the rise and fall of the topography, enduring many a swamp and discovering new lands. I also went in search of other explorers treading this same path – eventually coming upon my Dr Livingstones (Simsion and Tilney), who were able to help me chart the landscape. In undertaking this doctoral thesis, I felt a little like a pioneer, blazing trails through unexplored terrain. Hopefully, my discoveries will make the trip just a little easier for future travellers.

Theoretical journeys into the self: Katrina Finlayson

My doctoral thesis exegesis was influenced by my earliest understanding of the idea of a creative writing exegesis but was ultimately shaped by my research-led practice process. My initial exposure to what constitutes a creative thesis occurred in my Honours year, when I wrote a creative nonfiction narrative around the loss of a childhood home in the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. The exegesis provided a critical discussion around memory, trauma, and bushfires in Australia. I explored how people write about bushfires, both during the moment of crisis and in reflection after the fact, the way that trauma affects memory, and the way conflicting versions of the same story often exist as a result. The creative component included multiple conflicting narratives about my family's experience. The exegesis anchored the creative components; it situated my individual story within a broader context and justified the existence of the contradictions within the creative narrative. I took my understanding of this creative-exegesis synergy into the doctoral research process and my research proposal

anticipated a neat separation between creative and critical components. I proclaimed that I would write a novel and use the exegesis to situate the novel within a broader context of creative writing as research.

At the beginning of the doctoral research process, workshops, meetings and coffee conversations with my thesis supervisors as well as other postgraduates further shaped my working concept of the exegesis. I already understood that the exegesis should present a critical discussion situating the creative components within a wider existing and ongoing academic conversation; that the exegesis discussion should connect my individual thesis both to the discipline of creative writing and to theory specifically relevant to my research project (in my case, this included theory of the Uncanny, and theory of travel writing and other life writing modes). However, I also came to see that the exegesis structure could reflect the way I envisage the relationship between creative writing research and practice, as two linked hands of the same body, or two aspects of a discipline, inextricably intertwined.

The exegesis was shaped early on by my research focus. In my intent to explore how the psychoanalytical theory of the Uncanny might be useful for contemporary creative writers, I started from a broad research question and took an explorer approach, experimenting with creative pieces written in response to a close engagement with the Uncanny through the critical writing of Sigmund Freud (1919), Nicholas Royle (2003), Hélène Cixous (1976) and Martin Heidegger (1953), among others. Whereas I had originally proposed to write a single fictional work accompanied by a separate exegesis, my experimentation soon broke the notional boundaries I had constructed for the creative component. This meant that the exegesis, too, needed to shift in form. As my candidature progressed, it became more evident that my proposed novel-plus-parallel-exegesis thesis structure simply would not fit the content produced by my research process.

Ultimately, my creative practice resulted in a novella-length fictional work plus a collection of six creative nonfiction travel essays. Meanwhile, my critical research had developed into a collection of writings spanning a number of related but disparate areas. I discovered I was in the process of following three distinct strands of creative writing exploration within the thesis. Rather than bend the creative research process artificially in order to fit the fledgling critical outputs and a preconceived exegesis form, I needed to find an alternative that represented the symbiotic relationship between the creative and critical ideas that emerged.

Throughout this process, my doctoral supervisor, Jeri Kroll, provided support and guidance but also encouraged me to creatively explore my options for the final thesis form. This gave my thought processes both stability and freedom to find the most suitable vehicle; if I had panicked at this stage, I would most likely have stayed with the traditional novel-plus-exegesis form. The more conventional parallel form felt less risky to me, due to my previous work with this type of exegesis at an Honours level, as well as the number of postgraduates I had met who told me they were using that approach. I continued to feel I was taking a greater risk even in the later stages of thesis writing, despite the increasingly obvious poor fit between the more traditional exegesis form and my creative doctoral research.

About two thirds of the way through my candidature, after a book launch one evening, I happened to head out for a drink with some colleagues who were bubbling with conversation inspired by a life writing conference they had attended earlier that day. The conversation veered into ideas about creative nonfiction writing forms. I mentioned my research process, and how I was writing what I was calling 'mash-up' travel essays, combining personal accounts of travel with writing on the ghosts and history of each place, threaded through with critical theory on creative writing and the Uncanny. For example, in one essay, I weave together an account of my meanderings and musings in summertime New York, in which I converse, in my mind, with the ghost of Dorothea Tanning about her work and experience as a woman surrealist artist (Tanning 1944, 1986), with an exploration of Julia Kristeva's ideas about the isolating experience of being an uncanny stranger (1991), mashed up with ideas on creativity from theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2014), Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (2006), as well as Nigel *McLoughlin* (2001). In another essay, I recount a visit to a New Orleans cemetery and a chance encounter with another traveller, integrating conflicting representations of the memory of a voodoo queen; I mash these elements into ideas sourced from Hélène Cixous (1993), Sigmund Freud (1919), Robert Rowland Smith (2010) and Dominique Hecq (2015), about the desires and difficulties inherent in working with spaces of death and creative writing. To my creative writing colleagues that evening, I expressed concern, about my challenges in juggling the jumble of ideas that consistently emerged when producing these pieces. One colleague suggested I look at the lyric essay as a form that could potentially provide a suitable framework.

Research into the lyric essay soon led me to a type within that form, or perhaps what could be termed a subgenre: the braided essay. The basic idea of a braided essay is that several strands of writing are interwoven to form one entity (Miller and Paola 2012, Sinor 2014). The end result is an essay that creates greater meaning as a whole than in the sum of its parts. As I researched further, I realised that the braided essay form could provide the ideal structure for each of the mashed travel essays, but also for the overall thesis. My doctoral research explores ideas about fragmentation and destabilisation as writing tools. My research-led exegetical discussion advocates that writers create material that engages the reader as an active participant in making new meaning from gaps in the text (after Sinor 2014). The braided form can help writers achieve this. My thesis discusses the position of the writer, too, in relation to the text and proposes that writers seek out or create spaces between self and writing, and situate themselves in these in-between spaces. The braided essay seemed a good fit for this reflexive creative writing approach; fractures and distances are inherent to the braided form. Again, supervisor support was a crucial factor at this decisive point. Active and experienced as both supervisor and examiner for creative writing theses, she was familiar with a variety of forms the exegesis might take, and encouraged my exploration of the braided form.

As mentioned earlier in this discussion, in his 2011 *TEXT* article on the exegesis, 'Evolution of the exegesis: the radical trajectory of the creative writing doctorate in Australia', Nigel Krauth suggests that there are three relationships between exegesis and creative work commonly found in Australian creative writing theses: parallel, outlaw, and plaited exegeses. Krauth provides an example of a plaited exegesis from the work of one of his students, who submitted a thesis alternating chapters of a novel

with exegesis chapters. Krauth comments that the plaited texts 'worked off each other and created their own dialogue' (2011: 8), and this is exactly what I wanted my three thesis strands to do. He notes that the creative writing doctoral process requires the writer to be present in the text and this is facilitated by the plaited form: 'The plaited text, in showing both the product and exegesis insists on the writer's presence' (2001: 8). Through my research process of experimentation and reflection, I had independently arrived at the conclusion that I needed to submit a thesis containing a plaited exegesis, and my experience as researcher and thesis writer correlates with Krauth's research findings.

My final thesis submission braids together fiction, creative nonfiction, and critical discussion, creating one combined artefact while still fulfilling my university's guidelines for creative and exegesis proportions within the text. Throughout the doctoral writing process, and especially in the final stages, I worked on all three strands together, moving back and forth from one to the other and editing each in relation to the others. However, I maintained collections of separate documents, mapping the relationships along the way, even using physical editing aides including sticky notes, window panes, scissors and sticky tape, but only combining the threads in a final editing phase. My discussions with my co-authors Annabelle Murphy and Jeri Kroll, as we prepared this article, reminded me that creative writing doctoral research projects vary dramatically in nature and so of course there are other forms the exegesis can and should take, but our conversations also confirmed my belief that a braided thesis structure was the most suitable form to express my research. The plaited exegesis structure allowed me to construct a more intimate relationship between the parts than would otherwise have been possible, enabling me to combine a range of related yet disparate ideas into one integrated text. It supported my claims that a creative writing engagement with the Uncanny is by nature destabilizing, fragmented and uncomfortable. The thesis expresses its central arguments directly but also through new connections made possible by the fragmented yet interwoven form of the braided exegesis.

Conclusion

The graduate authors whose work is discussed above have discovered exegesis forms for themselves that roughly occupy two positions on Krauth's exegetical continuum – 'parallel' and 'plaited' (2011). Each project initiates a different aesthetic and critical conversation – the thesis as 'polyphonic discourse' (Kroll 2004) – where the creative and critical works speak to each other as well as to projected audiences. Both writers have succeeded too in manipulating the hybrid creative thesis as a whole. The graduate co-authors have commented on the relative importance of identifying the type of exegesis they needed. Murphy selected a parallel or conventional format and that gave her freedom to focus on the challenge of researching a new disciplinary area – reverse adaptation. Finlayson explained the heuristic process that eventually confirmed that preconceived ideas about the exegesis would not work for her. It led to her discovery of the braided essay form that now structures her thesis.

A screenwriting professional and academic, Murphy had a creative destination in mind at the start of her candidature – to novelise her screenplay (and to publish it) by

understanding the differences between the genres of novel and script writing. She also wanted to explore the process as well as theory of reverse adaptation. A conventional exegesis with an already tested symbiotic relationship between the novel and critical portions of the thesis suited her and actually gave her confidence because of the emerging disciplinary nature of reverse adaptation. That conventional framework also dictated the familiar practice-led research rhythm whereby she focused on creative or critical work for extended periods. At journey's end, when Murphy looked back at her original research proposal, she realised that the initial questions she had posed had not altered much, but the answers she discovered had made an original contribution to knowledge.

Finlayson began with a road map of sorts and theoretical tools from her Honours year, yet she needed to discover a creative destination suitable to embody her critical insights. As an apprentice fiction and creative nonfiction writer, she has maintained the identity of explorer consistently, looking for exactly the right research questions to accomplish this. The braided essay has allowed her along the way to publish travel essays that confirmed her direction, and threw up additional questions that suggested new destinations about which to write. As with many doctoral candidates, she still has material suitable for publication from her thesis in the form of essay-length creative nonfiction. The symbiosis between the creative and critical material embodied her theoretical orientation, therefore, and also served to stimulate further creative outputs.

In sum, the co-authors of this article believe that a symbiotic relationship between creative and critical aspects of a project functioned most effectively for them as well as for the supervisor in offering pertinent advice. That symbiosis does not silence individual voices or constrain experimentation, a vital fact given that all three are writers who remain committed to improving their craft and to expanding their aesthetic practice. A symbiotic relationship between thesis parts raised or refined research questions that sharpened insights into creative and critical work. Moreover, the creative thesis as a coherent entity made an original contribution to knowledge through the connection of the parts themselves by complementing each other. To 'complement' encompasses these meanings: to 'supplement, augment, enhance, complete' (Google). The case study theses demonstrate not only reciprocity between creative and critical parts in conventional and plaited formats but also a fertile versatility that has enabled them to contribute to debates about creative higher degree research. As well, the graduands acquired and assimilated a high-level of current scholarship in their fields and individual art forms, both of which remain essential for anyone seeking a doctorate in creative writing.

Endnotes

1. For example, Kroll co-edited with Graeme Harper the 2008 book, *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy*, which contained some chapters by research students from Australia and the UK that illuminated their approach to the critical component of their theses.
2. Kroll initially discussed Fielding's novel in a keynote at the Ballarat symposium about the creative arts exegesis in 2003, which was published in *TEXT* in 2004.

3. Kroll has discussed research higher degree creative guidelines in detail in 'Originality and Research: Knowledge Production in Creative Higher Degrees' in Harper's *Creative Writing and Education* (2015).
4. *Strange bedfellows or perfect partners?* was the title of a 2010 Australasian Association of Writing Programs Conference focused on the exegesis (AAWP 2010). Early in the history of the creative exegesis, Kroll chose the term 'bedfellows' to explain the unstable relationship between creative and critical thesis components (Kroll 1999).
5. One of the indicative questions the editors of this special issue asked concerns how writers and academics explain what they are doing to those outside the discipline. In 2016 Kroll wrote a piece for NiTRO entitled 'The Creative Arts and New Knowledge – Do we aim for questions or answers?' She grappled with just that scenario, having been asked by a colleague in the social sciences what creative writing researchers do. She offered a range of creative arts research projects as examples, but focused on how pursuing this type of exploratory journey through two modalities depends upon both critical and creative work to create new knowledge; that is, the symbiosis between the two is critical.
6. Harvard Astrophysicist, Bob Doyle, tells us: "In 1927, Arthur Stanley Eddington coined the term 'Arrow of Time' in his book *The Nature of the Physical World*. He connected 'Time's Arrow' to the one-way direction of increasing entropy required by the second law of thermodynamics. This is now known as the *'thermodynamic arrow*' (Doyle nd: 3).
7. Novelisations, screen to text, have existed for almost as long as film itself, but they differ from what Murphy was investigating by their *intention* (and perhaps quality). Novelisations are primarily commercially driven and usually dependent upon their progenitor film for their success. In Murphy's case, the novel would be the first story mode to reach an audience, thus requiring that it stand alone creatively. She also aspired to literary merit.

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