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Exegetical essentials: a framing structure and template for a comprehensive exegesis in the creative arts

Abstract:

For over two decades, the number of candidates undertaking, and completing, research higher degrees in the discipline of creative arts has continued to grow, yet the anxiety associated with the exegesis, or critical component, to the award has not dissipated. This article reports the views of a small number of research higher degree candidates and their supervisor in response to questions posed by the *TEXT* 'Exegesis now' call for papers. In this sample, the exegesis was perceived as a necessary and useful component to the award by all respondents, who are completing diverse creative projects. However, respondents also express some anxiety and uncertainty over what is required in the exegesis in terms of formal, structural and compositional elements. Discussion of the views expressed by respondents identifies common challenges and proposes a number of strategies that may provide greater certainty and alleviate some of the anxiety for candidates and their supervisors. It includes a template for a comprehensive exegesis and two ways the exegesis can be structured to form a rigorous frame around, and supportive complement to the creative work.

Biographical notes:

Donna Lee Brien, PhD, is Professor of Creative Industries at Central Queensland University, Australia. Donna has an MA and PhD by creative writing and exegesis, and has been supervising research higher degrees since 1999. With a research focus on specialist genres of non-fiction writing, including memoir and food writing, Donna has published over 300 scholarly books, book chapters and journal articles. Forthcoming books include *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice* with Quinn Eades (UWAP), *Forgotten Lives: Recovering Lost Histories Through Fact and Fiction* with Dallas Baker and Nike Sulway (Cambridge Scholars), and the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Food* with Lorna Piatti-Farnell. Donna is the new co-editor of the *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, and on the editorial board of *TEXT: The Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*.

Alison Owens is an adjunct Associate Professor of Education at Central Queensland University. With an EdD, Alison has taught university courses in English, education, communications and social research methods for over twenty years. She has published widely and been the recipient of multiple internal and external research grants on the

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Gail Pittaway is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media Arts, at the Waikato Institute of Technology, in Hamilton, New Zealand. Her research interests include creative writing (poetry, short story and script writing) and the teaching of writing. She has edited two books and has had stories broadcast on National Radio, New Zealand. Gail is the theatre critic for the Waikato Times and contributes regular live book reviews for the Nine to Noon program on Radio New Zealand, National. She is a member of the New Zealand Communication Association, Tertiary Writing Network and New Zealand Society of Authors, and has been an executive member of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs since 2004. She is currently undertaking a PhD at Central Queensland University.

Irene Waters has had work published in an anthology, *Eavesdropping* (2012), and in *Idiom23* literary magazine (2013, 2014). Irene has recently completed her Masters of Arts degree examining the sequel memoir at Central Queensland University. She has completed a memoir, 'Nightmare in Paradise' and its sequel 'After the Nightmare'.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Creative practice-led research – Creative arts – Exegesis – Research higher degree

Introduction

The research higher degree in creative arts – whether Masters, PhD or other doctorate – has been undertaken by growing numbers of practicing and/or aspiring artists in university contexts in Australia since the 1990s (Krauth 2000, Webb and Brien 2007, Boyd 2010, Sempert et al. 2017). During this period, much has been written about the emerging issues related to completing a higher degree incorporating original, creative work within the scholarly academy. The dual form of the creative arts research higher degree thesis as creative work plus explication is commonly known in Australia. The creative work is usually a work of art, such as a novel or work of long-form non-fiction, series of paintings, or a musical or dramatic composition or performance that is accompanied by an exegesis, as the essay or dissertation component of such a thesis. Over the period of its delivery in Australia, the exegesis has been the subject of particular attention, discussion and debate (see, for instance, Fletcher and Mann 2004). Reflecting on how well the creative arts research higher degree aligns with the norms and expectations of university research and scholarship has often been at the core of such discussions and, as the exegesis has been the most academically recognisable element of the creative arts thesis, it has attracted considerable notice and generated significant concern and anxiety (see, for example, Perry 1998, Brady 2000, Krauth 2002, Bourke and Neilsen 2004).

Despite over two decades of successful completions of research higher degrees in the creative arts in the Australian university, the form and significance of the exegesis remains contested. This analysis and discussion does not set out to question the value of the exegesis, which exists alongside the creative work to comprise and report on the contribution to knowledge in the creative practice-based research higher degree. The following, instead, seeks to assess and report on the views of a small number of current creative arts researchers – creative writing higher degree candidates and supervisors[1] from one institution – in relation to the exegesis, providing both information for this study and a basis for further investigation. While the context for this discussion is Australian, it has broad relevance in at least the UK, USA, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Canada where the creative art plus exegesis thesis is produced.

Background and context

The investigation conducted for this paper was prompted by a call for papers issued by leading creative writing publication, *TEXT* journal, in order to explore the question of current thinking around the exegesis and, specifically, what the exegesis is *now* in terms of form, content and purpose, rather than looking at the exegesis from a historical perspective. This is a response to earlier work – including the *TEXT* Special Issue of 2004, 'Illuminating the Exegesis' – which sought to

> define what the exegesis in creative writing was then; institutional, supervisor and candidate expectations and understandings of the form; and [which] drew on a range of supervisors who, at the time, were still grappling with the notion of undertaking research about, for or through creative writing. (Batty and Brien 2017)

In their introduction to that 2004 *TEXT* special issue, issue editors Julie Fletcher and Allan Mann acknowledged that while Australian universities had successfully incorporated the then relatively new creative arts PhD thesis into their research policies and definitions, some uncertainty remained around these degrees, and the exegesis was the most significant of these worries. They described this as a lack of confidence among both academic staff and students: with this 'uncertainty … most evident among ... candidates and their supervisors, manifesting, in particular, as a lack of clarity regarding the nature, role and expectations of the exegesis component of this thesis model' (2004).

These authors also reviewed a wide range of university course descriptions of Master of Arts programs and found significant distinctions in the required word length as well as the relative weighting between the creative component and the research/critical component. In a comprehensive study of examination of doctoral level degrees in the creative arts almost a decade later, Jen Webb, Donna Lee Brien (one of the authors of this study) and Sandra Burr found similar disparity across the sector with variety in almost every aspect of doctoral programs in the creative arts from the entry requirements to the form of the thesis submitted for examination (2013, see also Brien, Burr and Webb 2013). Such inconsistencies across the sector have contributed to uncertainty and, in some cases, considerable anxiety for candidates, supervisors, examiners and administrators of the creative arts research higher degree (Carey, Webb and Brien 2008). This adds to the general angst felt by many research higher degree candidates, and which is reflected in the titles of practical guides purporting to assist in allaying this worry as, for example in *How to Survive Your PhD* (Karp 2009) and *Surviving Your Stupid, Stupid Decision to Go to Grad School* (Ruben 2010).

This research also responds to Nigel Krauth's positioning of the 'radical trajectory of the creative writing doctorate in Australia', in which he draws on his experiences of supervising and examining theses to argue that while creative works have remained relatively stable in form since the 1990s, the exegesis has 'metamorphosed' (2011).[2] A number of writers have elaborated on this argument (Ings 2009, Bacon 2014, Baker et al. 2015, Sempert et al. 2017), challenging the forms then acceptable and expanding the boundaries of what the exegesis may be. Ings, for example, provides examples of how graphic artist research higher degree candidates are applying 'lyrical' graphic style strategies to the exegesis (2009). Scrivener and Ings describe experimental exegeses as potentially 'a carefully constructed kind of storytelling with a particular audience in mind' (2009: 3), documents that are 'not just written, [but] also designed and directed' (2). Other creative writing candidates are developing new iterations of the exegesis, proposing that their creative and critical texts 'can work together, on the same page, methodology and output becoming one' (Sempert et al. 2017: 16). While experimentation in exegetical form is increasingly prevalent, radical experimentation is not evident in all, or even most, recent creative arts theses.

Candidates who complete a research higher degree in creative arts do so for a number of reasons including the development of further capability in an artform and their interest in gaining experience in research and producing scholarly publications, as well as a desire to enhance their professional standing, and attain personal and intellectual growth. In the case of those with a scholarship, having funded writing time may be another reason. However, the significant dedication of time and effort required to

complete a research higher degree is (at least sometimes) also undertaken in the hope of improved or expanded career opportunities (Kroll and Brien 2006, Webb and Brien 2007, Masson 2016, Sempert et al. 2017). It is now well established in the literature that initial and ongoing employment success for graduates of creative and performing arts programs is particularly challenging (Throsby and Hollister 2003, Australia Council for the Arts 2010, Daniel and Daniel 2013). Career pathways in academia, including academic positions for artists, have been not only shrinking for over two decades (Dawson 1999, Clohesy 2015), but currently providing a high proportion of casual or contract work rather than permanent or continuing positions (Clohesy 2015). Although Mary Weaven has recently suggested that a doctorate in the creative arts is a useful form of scholarship for English and literacy schoolteachers (2015), how a research higher degree can contribute to career successes for creative writers and other artists remains an unresolved and troubling question. In the context of this discussion, the uncertain career benefits of completing an exegesis as part of the scholarly research process, does little to address the anxiety that remains about its form and purpose.

Research method

In response to this broad, cross-institutional situation, this article reports on one, small-scale, qualitative study. The lead author of this paper is a senior Australian academic with over two decades' experience in producing, supervising, examining, researching and critiquing research higher degrees and theses in the creative arts field, with most of this professional and research practice situated in the areas of creative and professional writing. She contributed to this project in the capacity of participant observer, enabling the contribution of her own views alongside the views of several of her candidates on the exegetical component of research higher degrees in the creative arts. As the research questions for this enquiry were externally authored, in terms of the *TEXT* call for papers discussed above[3], and as the research participants work remotely from each other, it was decided that written responses would be sought to these twelve open-ended questions. While such written responses may discourage the nonverbal data available in face-to-face interviews, as well as the options to ask informants for clarification or prompt for further information (Marshall and Rossman 2006, Opdenakker 2006, Alshenqeeti 2014), this method provided a means of gathering authentic and individual data from each of the respondents, data which was, moreover, not influenced by the group discussion of these questions.

Using this method, the thoughts and comments of three current research higher degree candidates in creative writing (two undertaking PhDs and one a MA) as well as their supervisor were able to be gathered. These were directly prompted by the series of twelve questions posed for the special issue (see note 1). The four participants submitted written responses which were analysed for key themes, as well as shared and/or divergent opinions. As two of these candidates are also supervisors, respondents have been de-identified as 'R1' 'R2', 'R3' and 'R4', with 'R' standing for respondent. These identifiers are only included for substantial quotes from a single respondent, but not for phrases or combined comments.

A further source of information that has been incorporated into the discussion of these results is Lynn Jenner's investigation into the creative writing PhD at the International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML) in New Zealand (2017), in which the comments of six interviewees (a blend of candidates, supervisors and examiners of creative arts doctorates at the IIML) are reported in detail. The interviews for Jenner's 2017 report were completed in 2014 and sought views on the nexus between the creative and critical components of a creative arts thesis. The close alignment between the focus of Jenner's study and the recent research reported in this paper encouraged some cross-analysis and triangulation of findings in order to enrich the discussion of results of this investigation.

Results: the exegesis in theory and practice

In terms of **'**What does the word "exegesis" mean to you?', all respondents in this study acknowledged that the exegesis has changed or diversified over the last decade, and that its definition varies somewhat between candidates, supervisors and institutions. One respondent described the exegesis as a 'reflective and critical text' accompanying a creative work, while another described it as a 'demonstrative' text illustrating the processes of primary and secondary research undertaken to 'realise a body of work'. Another respondent added to this demonstrative function that the exegesis should 'explain' how the creative work is 'unique and significant'. All these responses intimated a clear and indisputable link between the creative work and the exegesis. One candidate, indeed, described it as 'necessary'. Interestingly, the adjectives 'reflective', 'critical' and 'demonstrative' were used repeatedly in describing the exegesis, descriptions that resonate with those provided in a range of papers published in the *TEXT* Special Issue 'Illuminating the Exegesis' (Fletcher and Mann 2004). One respondent reported that her understanding of the exegesis changed quite dramatically during her candidacy, but it was never perceived as unnecessary.

Although there may still be no absolute agreement on what an exegesis is, there is consistent agreement about what it is not. All agree that the creative writing exegesis is not the explanatory text its use in biblical studies suggests, and certainly not in the sense of an explanation or explication of what the creative work means or the provision of commentary on its quality as an artefact. In some camps, the term 'exegesis' itself reportedly conjures up a derided notion of a 'show and tell' approach which adds little 'to the PhD or to the world' (Sup, in Jenner 2017: 19), and the term 'exegesis' is, indeed, eschewed for this reason in Jenner's institution in New Zealand (IIML) with 'critical text or critical component' the preferred descriptor. Various institutions in Australia also use varied terminologies. While one informant from the research conducted for this study used the word 'explanatory text' to describe the exegesis, she then clarified that that this actually provided much more than explanation, and was a narrative exposition that should address a number of key issues in relation to the research endeavor. These included 'why the creative work is important and how it is situated in relationship to other creative works' (R2). In this way, the exegesis can be seen as explanatory, but in a manner which 'explains the process of creative writing in relation to other textual and/or experiential data' (R2).

Answers to other questions elicited further commentary regarding the adaptability of the exegesis as a form, with respondents noting the varied genres of presentation possible in an exegesis, ranging from conventionally structured formats that closely followed traditional theses to more experimental forms. While one respondent described most of the exegeses she had read as following a 'fairly conventional format' (R3), another noted that exegeses were becoming more sophisticated, and were only 'very rarely veer[ing] into interpreting or judging the [creative] work produced' (R4). Another picked up on this point, commenting on the increasingly philosophical focus of exegeses, with an increasing number concerned with 'epistemological notions of what is "true" and aesthetic notions around what is "beautiful"' (R2). One respondent suggested that while the exegesis should remain presented as a written document, it could also incorporate 'visual components … interviews as links or digital files, diagrams, illustration or photographs' (R1). It was also commented by most respondents that too many exegeses had less than satisfactory methodology sections. These were labelled 'vague' and 'difficult to understand' (R3) or 'over elaborate' and 'confused' (R4).

Interestingly, when answering the question, 'How would you describe the exegesis to someone outside of the creative practice research field?', answers switched from clarifying the definition, structure and/or form of the exegesis, to the role of the exegesis in evidencing the rigour of the research undertaken in the degree. This included reference to the importance of the literature review in the exegesis in situating the research enquiry in the field, alongside the idea of presenting 'evidence of research' and 'theoretical material' to frame the creative work and situate it in a scholarly and creative context. Two respondents emphasised the dependence of the exegesis on the partnering creative text in this, with one respondent suggesting the exegesis could be described as 'a theorised framework within which the creative text can be understood as a synthesis of data, response, intention and artistry' (R2). Another posited the exegesis as 'a scholarly document which details the research journey [undertaken] in order to produce the creative artefact' (R3). This chimes with another's comment on the centrality of the exegesis in articulating (and thus proving) the knowledge claims of the creative work:

> Although creative work has now long been an acceptable component of Masters or Doctoral research (and is increasingly included in undergraduate and Honours projects in the creative arts), you cannot give every person who has written a novel or produced an exhibition of work a Masters or PhD. (R4)

When asked for ideas regarding recasting the form and purpose of an exegesis, 'If you could re-define what an exegesis might look like and/or function as, what would that be?', most respondents provided answers that showed an anxiety around introducing what could be understood as innovative forms of exegetical narratives, texts or forms. One stressed the importance of the conventional definition of an exegesis as a 'complementary text to accompany and explore the background, research and practices, which have generated the piece of original creative work or artefact' (R1). Two respondents also acknowledged that there were limitations to how adaptable or ductile an exegesis should be, as adding the necessity for innovation in its form, content or

presentation would provide a source of considerable, and additional, anxiety for candidates. The first stated:

> I would like a standardised set of best practice requirements/guidelines to exist across Australia for the exegesis. I do not think this is necessarily something that could not be transgressed, but a kind of 'minimum requirements' to ensure that all students receive guidance on what is required. (R4)

The second elaborated on this, stating that the

> Rigour of research and quality of evidence are important aspects of a PhD so it is difficult to imagine the exegesis becoming entirely lyrical, although creative methods of explaining and contextualising the artistic work would be appropriate and engaging. The risk in increasing the creativity in exegesis in my opinion would be in ending up with a circular argument where a creative text is explained and justified by another creative text. (R2)

Another respondent also emphasised that the exegesis should be engaging to the reader and, in order to facilitate this, proposed 'a personal narrative' (R3). Another said the text should be not only be clearly written and 'comprehensible to the intelligent reader', but 'useful' for that reader (R4).

These respondents also shared a view of the future trajectory of the exegesis, with the descriptors 'protean', 'fluid', 'evolving' and 'experimental' offered in relation to future elaborations in terms of form. A number of respondents also noted that this was to be expected by the very fact that it has been, is, and will be creative writers and other artists who are generating these texts and it is to be expected that at least some are playing (or will play) creatively with the exegetical form. When asked for any further comments regarding this aspect of the exegesis, positive comments were tendered, with one applauding and advocating the continuing investigation of the exegesis and its potential (R1), and another finding this probing and experimentation was one of the aspects of the creative writing research higher degree which 'kept it interesting' (R4). In relation to the future, one respondent also warned of the danger of non-academic staff such as research administrators becoming more empowered in terms of defining and prescribing the 'requirements and parameters of the exegesis in creative arts doctorates' (R4). This was because she believed such 'requirements and parameters' should be decided by representatives of the academic disciplines involved.

In discussing 'What do you consider the relationship to be between a creative writing text and an exegetical text?', all respondents agreed that this was a close relationship, with common descriptors in this context including the exegesis as a 'parallel' 'reflective' and 'companion' text that is 'useful and comprehensible to the intelligent reader' (R4). One respondent suggested that the exegesis provides the 'life story of the creative work; where it came from, its heritage, lineage, gestation, birth' that 'ties the world of imagination to the world of lived experience' (R2). Another similarly described this relationship as personally charged; the exegesis inhabiting 'the area between the self and the creative work' (R3). All respondents also described this dual form of creative work and exegesis as useful in their particular fields of practice which included creative non-fiction, memoir, biography and historical fiction, all – interestingly in this context – with at least a base in fact and/or historical enquiry.

When asked 'Do you feel that your own research and/or research methodology has informed your understanding of the exegesis?', respondents all agreed that their own experiences in researching for a research higher degree in creative arts had promoted their referral to more diverse forms and sources of data than they had previously experienced or envisaged, and certainly 'beyond the conventional academic data' (R1) as one respondent noted, and this had affected their understanding of the exegesis. Another pointed to the 'unfolding relationship' between the researched data and the creative writing and agreed with another respondent that without the exegesis many such 'insights' would have 'remained hidden'. One respondent pointed out that some insights regarding the exegesis were achieved through 'resistance to what I was taught' (R4).

Extending this notion to considering the 'thingness' (Brown 2001) of the exegesis and its existence as a creative and/or research product object in its own right resulted in a range of related responses. One respondent expressed the belief that there was an increasing tendency for candidates to 'over-complicate' their exegesis and pointed out that what may be considered a 'traditional' exegesis incorporating an introduction, literature review, methodology, discussion/findings section, conclusion, reference list and bibliography – may be under-valued in discussions of radicalising the form, as an exegesis comprising these sections not only ensures all the requirements of a doctoral exegesis are included in the final thesis, but can also 'generate work that can be readily extracted for publication' (R4). In locating models of academic writing that informed their own writing for both the exegesis and related publications, there was wide agreement across these respondents that high quality academic publications including refereed journals and their articles, scholarly books (including research methodology texts), other theses and the work of supervisors were common resources in this context. The link between the exegesis and scholarly publication was also apparent in one comment by a respondent who recommended what she termed an 'exegesis by publication' in line with the type of approach which she had been encouraged to take:

> I believe an exegesis by publication is a great approach to the work as it encourages engagement with other academic writers, increases confidence and awareness and staggers the workload across the degree. I am lucky that my supervisor takes this approach. (R2)

Discussion: understanding and addressing anxieties

Unlike the 'eat your peas' analogy that Gaylene Perry and Kevin Brophy have previously mooted, which profiled candidate views of the exegesis as a compulsory, unwelcome but 'good for you' component in a creative practice research project (2001), respondents in this study did not question the necessity of a critical exegetical component in the creative arts thesis. This is in line with other recent writing about the exegesis in Australia. Perhaps earlier resistance by (at least Australian) creative writing researchers regarding accepting the necessity to produce this 'foreign body' (Jenner 2017: 13) in relation to their creative product has now waned, or has simply been exhausted by the stridency of the demands of the academy in regards to the structure of creative arts theses that seek to include creative work. Or, perhaps, the production of

the dual thesis over more than two decades has now become an accepted 'tradition' in itself, and the exegesis an accepted form which can be innovated around, but not rejected. It should be noted here that the one respondent in this study who described the exegesis in negative terms was referring to the amount of work involved, adding that as she was completing her first university-level research project, she had found it necessary to undertake a time-consuming study of 'the history of modern research' in order to understand where the practice-led research model fitted in, but did not question the validity of either doing this, or reporting on it in her exegesis. In contrast, other respondents in this study have all had previous experience in university research and publication.

Alongside the strong growth trend in enrolments in the research higher degree sector worldwide – 38 percent since 2000 (OECD 2014) – many higher degree candidates are employed in academic staff roles (*The Economist* 2010) with, therefore, pre-existing knowledge of the scholarly requirements pertaining to situating and justifying a study within a discipline. When the research higher degree candidate is primarily, or understands themselves primarily as, an arts practitioner rather than an academic, greater resistance or anxiety in relation to an exegesis may be expected. This view is supported by comments from Jenner's interviewees with one referring to 'a very painful' experience examining a thesis from a candidate with no first degree in the field, and others declaring the critical voice a lot 'harder to find' than the creative voice without a strong critical background. This is revealed in the remark: 'I think it's too much to do a big creative project and completely learn some critical discourse, whatever that discipline is' (2017: 28). On the other hand, previously cited comments from participants in this study who were practiced in academic research and publication reveal that the creative arts research higher degree experience led them pleasingly beyond the conventional 'academic' data.

The question of whether creative practice counts as research *ipso facto* also seems to be less of a current point of academic discussion than in the past, despite some sophisticated arguments in favour of this position by creative arts academics such as Tess Brady (2000), Nigel Krauth (2002) and others (see, for instance, Dunlop 1999). For Ross Gibson, 'the studio-savvy is no less a form of knowledge than some other, more critically distanced mode of knowing' (2010: 6), but he also acknowledges that 'the worldly value of scholarly research starts and finishes with how well and how widely any discovered batch of knowledge is communicated' (6), arguing, it seems, for something like an exegesis, but which is more widely read. The wide recognition that the exegesis is not a widely-read document outside of the academy emphasises, we believe, the critical importance for research higher degree candidates in the creative arts – supported by their supervisors – to publish from, and beyond, the exegesis in scholarly publications and other contexts. This practice may also go some way to promote greater career options for graduates from such degrees (Kroll and Brien 2006), and certainly so if they seek academic work. In addition, peer reviews of candidate publications can support the development of greater confidence and skills in critical writing and this can assist in alleviating the anxiety associated with the writing of the exegesis (Brien 2006) and its examination.

How the exegesis is shaped and formed remains open to choices between research *for* art, research *about* art and research *through* art (Gibson 2010, Webb 2012) but it is also defined according to three models now broadly recognised in the creative arts research higher degree field: the commentary model, the context model and the research question model (West 2016). As the research question model aligns with research higher degree approaches across most disciplines, it is reportedly developing into a preferred approach (Milech and Schilo 2004, Jenner 2017) because it enables the articulation of an original contribution to knowledge that is comprehensible across disciplines 'whether that knowledge is craft-based or not' (West 2016). In addition to these models, Jillian Hamilton and Luke Jaaniste propose a further connective model. Derived from their analysis of 59 creative arts theses, Hamilton and Jaaniste assert that there is a growing tendency for candidates to adopt the 'dual orientation' model (that is common in Australia), rather than a dichotomous or hybrid model where the creative text and critical text are disconnected and may even conflict, or compete, with each other (2010). In this connective model, the exegesis looks outwards to the established field of research, theories and discourses, as well as inwards to the methods, processes and outcomes of the creative practice (Hamilton and Jaaniste 2010, Ings 2009). This means that this model has much in common with the research question model, and could even, indeed, just be another name for this model. Indeed, given that so many universities are now requiring candidates to formulate a project around a central question or hypothesis, and disciplines remain interested in research around the creative work, a thesis that pursues a purposeful research question both in reviewing and evaluating the relevant external literature and the conventions of the discipline, and that also engages in analyzing and recounting the internal creative processes, challenges and outcomes, may be the most generalisable model that can guide candidates and supervisors of creative arts.

Despite the developing consensus on the importance of an exegesis and the necessary elements and preferred research question-based approach, there remains what Nike Bourke and Philip Neilsen described in 2004 as an anxiety about 'the validity of the exegesis, its necessity, and its usefulness'. In 2008, Nicola Boyd rephrased this as 'an uneasiness with the relationship between the creative work and the exegesis'. Jeri Kroll has similarly referred to the dual texts as potentially 'uneasy bedfellows' (2004) and, a decade later, Jenner describes that the 'discussions among students [in 2014] seemed to me to have an anxious and repetitive quality' (2017: 5) – although this was, notably, not in Australia. These students reported on by Jenner, for instance, 'did not know, even broadly, where the fixed points were in the assessment of their PhD in relation to the critical component, and therefore could not gauge the likelihood that any particular decision would cause them to "fail"' (Jenner 2017: 3). This seems to suggest that the institution/s in question did not have clear guidelines for examination, or had guidelines but these were not being shared with candidates, or these were being circulated, but candidates and (possibly) their supervisors were not engaging with, or understanding, these guidelines.

Key and core requirements of the exegesis

In this context, we believe that identifying a series of key and core requirements of the exegesis is critically useful, although these obviously must be considered by candidates and supervisors in conjunction with the guidelines provided by those individuals' institution. In response, the lead author of this paper has identified three areas of central concern in terms of producing an exegesis in light of over two decades' experience in writing, analysing, teaching and examining these texts. These are: the importance of candidates and supervisors understanding the nature of research in the university context; the centrality of candidates recognising, and writing for, the audience of their exegeses; and, the usefulness of knowing common shortcomings and flaws of the exegesis.

The first of these – the importance of candidates understanding the notion of what research is in the university context – assists candidates in defining the role and purpose of both the thesis overall, and the exegesis, in terms of the Australian Research Council's (ARC) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) based definition of research as

> the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative. (2015)

This definition of research, the ARC continues, is

> consistent with a broad notion of research and experimental development (R&D) as comprising 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man [human-kind], culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications'. (ARC 2015)

This is as opposed to the colloquial and popular notion of research as finding out about something (Webb and Brien 2011), which often involves locating and understanding others' research, but which does not – in itself – result in academic research.

The second of these – candidates' recognition of, and writing for, the audience of their exegeses – brings to the fore that the first, and most important, audience for the thesis and the exegesis is, for better or worse, the thesis' examiners. This does not exclude, of course, the others including supervisors, peers and a vast array of other readers who may read the exegesis, or at least parts of it, during its production or after its examination. Peer reviewers and editors may read parts that are submitted for publication and, if successful, a much wider academic and other readership may engage with these parts of the exegesis. However, in terms of the production of the exegesis as a text, the primary intended readership is the panel of examiners, and this highly specialist readership is of foremost importance in researching, composing and formatting the exegesis. The examiner reads the exegesis to examine it, and conducts that examination against the institutional criteria and guidelines for examination (Webb, Brien and Burr 2013).

Despite these guidelines being written by each institution and, therefore necessarily differing, they all have certain aspects in common. All examiners are tasked with

assessing how well the creative researcher has designed, conducted and reported their research. This includes how clearly the researcher has posed his or her question/s or problem/s driving the investigation, how thoroughly he or she has understood the context for posing those question/s or problem/s, and how well he or she has conveyed the research findings and, in the process, outlined the contribution to knowledge made by the research thus reported, and its significance. As well as these components, it is also useful to recognise common flaws with the exegesis – in order to ensure these can be avoided. These flow from the above: not knowing the field to which the research contributes, a weak or ambiguous argument, making un-evidenced assertions, and not stating the contribution to knowledge that the thesis as a whole is making. Sloppy presentation is also a common flaw (Brien 2017).

In relation to these requirements, the lead author has developed a schema that shows the relationship between the required components of an exegesis, the related questions the candidate must ask themselves in order to build these components and the conventional structural elements of a thesis by which the answers may be presented. This is represented in Table 1, below.

Exegesis requirements	**Candidate questions**	**Exegetical structure**
Statement of initial interest and motivation of researcher	Why was I attracted to this area of study? What motivated me to begin? What did I bring to this study/enquiry?	Background/ Preface
Question(s) to be investigated	What am I trying to find out? What is the problem/issue driving this enquiry? Why and to whom does this matter?	Introduction, including statement of research question
Context for this investigation	Where does my work fit into a field? What are the parameters of my literature review? What have others already done in this area? What gap in knowledge and/or practice is my research seeking to address?	Literature review
Framework for this investigation	What is my methodology for this project? Why is this approach suitable and is it achievable within time, budget and other available resources?	Methodology
Record of the experimentation undertaken	What did I do and how did this go?	Results
Findings/ scholarship generated	What has been learned by this investigation and how can I express this so others can use this knowledge?	Findings/ Discussion
Contribution to knowledge	In terms of the context for this project I identified above, what does this investigation contribute to the field? Why is this significant? What remains unresolved? What else could be fruitfully researched in the future?	Conclusion

Table 1. Exegesis format and contents (Brien 2017).

The creative work may be presented alongside this exegesis or, as is increasingly being successfully done, inserted between the Background and the Introduction, or between the Introduction and the Literature Review, in order to create one coherent text in which the creative work is framed by the exegetical elements. These possible structures are represented in Table 2, below, where the elements of the exegesis outlined above, are shaded in grey, below.

thesis structure 1
Background/Preface
Creative work
Introduction, including statement of research question
Literature review
Methodology
Results
Findings/Discussion
Conclusion

thesis structure 2
Background/Preface
Introduction, including statement of research question
Creative work
Literature review
Methodology
Results
Findings/Discussion
Conclusion

Table 2. Possible creative arts thesis formats, framing creative work with exegetical text (Brien 2017).

Conclusion

The creative arts exegesis is acknowledged as a changing and changeable beast, a 'protean journey', that is evolving (Hamilton and Jaaniste 2010, Bacon 2017) both as a form of writing in itself, and as a component of the creative arts thesis. Each exegesis also evolves as an individual artefact during a research candidature as wide reading and creative experimentation is undertaken, and issues and potential solutions emerge against the background of growing understanding of a field of practice. Perhaps this inherent mutability is why all participants in this research study found the exegesis a valuable component of each of their research projects. Most creative writing scholars stress that the intrinsic flexibility of the exegesis is a positive attribute. Ings, for instance, states that it not only 'must accompany diverse journeys through new territories of knowledge', but that its strength resides in its 'mutability and responsiveness to the needs of individual research projects' (2015: 1287). However, a persistent anxiety about this critical component of the creative arts research higher degree remains common among some candidates and supervisors. Solutions proposed to dissipate this anxiety as a result of this investigation are four-fold. These are: the provision of an understanding of the minimum requirements; having a clear research question that drives the study; maintaining both an outwards and inwards perspective to the enquiry and its reporting; and, pursuing scholarly publication from the exegesis during candidacy wherever possible. Such strategies can reduce the anxiety associated with the exegesis.

Endnotes

1. This group comprise one supervisor and three current candidates, two of whom are also supervisors of research higher degrees.
2. We would like to add that the range of genres and types of creative writing artefacts presented for examination as a component of a research higher degree thesis has, however, greatly expanded from novels, short stories and poetry to include a wide range of non-fiction and creative non-fiction works, with a significant proportion of thesis in, and including, life writing including memoir, autobiography and biography.
3. The questions listed in the call for papers were:

> What does the word 'exegesis' mean to you?; How would you describe the exegesis to someone outside of the creative practice research field?; Does the creative work plus exegesis form suit the research you are conducting? An indication of thesis genre/form could be included here; What have you noticed from reading other exegeses?; If you could re-define what an exegesis might look like and/or function as, what would that be?; What do you consider the relationship to be between a creative writing text and an exegetical text?; How might this relationship look on the page (or otherwise)? (We welcome graphic illustrations/representations here.); Do you feel that your own research / research methodology has informed your understanding of the exegesis?; How much are you thinking about the exegesis as an artefact; are you questioning it at all?; Where do you look for models of academic writing that inform your own writing?; and, What do you think is the future of the exegesis? (Batty and Brien 2017)

Despite the range and scope of these questions, the topic was also left open-ended with the inclusion of the final question: Anything else you would like to raise/consider/discuss? (Batty and Brien 2017).

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