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Writing murder: elements of Gothic horror in Matthew Milat's 'meat axe' poetry

Abstract**:**

Eighteen-year-old Matthew Stephen Milat, the grand-nephew of convicted serial-killer Ivan Milat, wrote a series of poems while in custody for the murder of seventeen-year-old David Auchterlonie in 2010 in the Belanglo State Forest, New South Wales; the same bushland in which Milat's great-uncle had killed seven backpackers throughout the 1990s. Matthew Milat's choice to narrate the aftermath of David Auchterlonie's murder in the genre of poetry quite literally draws this form of writing about death, specifically from the perspective of a real-life teen-killer, toward the macabre fringes of literary and popular culture. This examination of Milat's verse-writing – 'Your Last Day,' 'Cold Life,' and 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side' – situates an analysis of his poetry against the broader journalistic trend to write the nature of Milat's crime utilizing elements of both the Gothic family tradition and the monstrous. Shared blood-ties between great-uncle and grand-nephew provided a rich site in framing the perverse convergence of heredity and monstrosity within the teen-killer/serial-killer narrative. In the absence of Gothic literary tradition focussing attention on this form of poetry – by a teen-killer, by a teen-killer with blood ties to a convicted serial-killer – this examination of Matthew Milat's verse-writing also aims to offer a contribution to this scholarship while simultaneously tracing the contemporary emergence of the Gothic into new sites as an idiosyncratic form of writing murder by a real-life adolescent killer.

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Introduction

This examination of a specific form of creative writing – in this case poetry by a teen-killer and, moreover, by a teen-killer with blood ties to a convicted serial-killer – aims to offer an original contribution to defining the 'Gothic family tradition' by arguing that the twin tenets structuring this tradition include a generational curse, one that is passed from one generation to the next, and by extension, a curse that binds family members to an horrific yet inescapable past. Scholarly work exploring the 'Gothic family tradition' in contemporary Gothic studies appears quite disparate and indistinct. While a number of sources make reference to the 'Gothic family', few, if any, broadly define the concept of the 'Gothic family tradition'. Fewer still consider evidence of the tradition in poetry. Kadir, for instance, concentrates attention on the Gothic family romance and its eroto-maniacal characteristics in Latin American literatures (1986). Backus draws on Freud's concept of 'the neurotic's family romance' to offer a theorization tracing the genre origins and 'the emergence of a fully autonomous [Anglo-Irish] gothic family romance' (1999: 6). However, Andeweg and Zlosnik's edited volume *Gothic Kinship* offers a valuable contribution to understanding the Gothic family tradition as defining 'very diverse kinship ties, ranging from metaphorical to triangular, from queer to nuclear-patriarchal' (2014: 5). While Miles identifies 'family secrets' as a central theme of the Gothic generally (2012: 98), within this discussion of Matthew Milat's poetry and the Gothic family tradition, it is not so much family secrets as the past which emerges as a distinctive organising feature in this mapping of verse-writing and familial relations. The Gothic family tradition in this examination thus also concerns power struggles within the family nexus and how 'the past' is brought to bear on, and influences, those claims for control in the fashioning of identity.

Nowhere are these codes in an Australian 'Gothic family tradition' more apparent, nor perhaps more inverted, than in the story of Matthew Stephen Milat, grand-nephew to the most infamous Australian serial-killer in modern times: Ivan Robert Marko Milat (*b*. 1944). Between December 1989 and April 1992, seven backpackers aged between 19 and 22, hitch-hiking along the Hume Highway outside the national capital, Canberra, disappeared. Between September 1992 and November 1993 the mutilated remains of the missing were discovered in the vast bushland region on the southern outskirts of Sydney known as Belanglo State Forest. Ivan Milat was found guilty of the murders in July 1996 and is currently serving seven consecutive life sentences (Sharp 2014: 162). Fourteen years later, after the discovery of the murdered seventeen-year-old David Auchterlonie, newspaper headlines attributed to Matthew Milat the following quote, 'We're going to Belanglo and someone's going to die' (qtd. in Sutton 2015). Milat, together with accomplice Cohen Klein, murdered David Auchterlonie on the victim's birthday; 20 November 2010. Milat had struck the deceased with a double-edged axe twice; the first time in the torso, the second time in the head. The victim plead for his life throughout the 15-minute ordeal, which was recorded in its entirety by Klein on his mobile phone.

Evidence for the prosecution: Matthew Milat's 'meat axe' poetry

Matthew Stephen Milat wrote a small series of poems – 'Your Last Day', 'Cold Life', and 'Killer Looks And On Evil side' – whilst in custody some nine months after the offence. According to Dale's article for *Daily Telegraph* on 22 May 2012, entitled 'Killer Matthew Milat's Meat Axe Poetry', Milat had reportedly placed the poems in an envelope addressed to his mother with the request that she store them somewhere safe. However, the envelope was intercepted by Juvenile Justice and the poems were subsequently passed on to the police (SCNSW 2012). The poems represented key evidence in Matthew Milat's trial and the subsequent media interest provided a vehicle for the works' wider distribution. Dale's article included a transcription of Milat's poem 'Cold Life', while Bibby's report for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 22 May 2012, included quotes from the poem but not a complete version. The poems, coupled with the mobile phone recording of the murder, constituted the primary evidence against both Milat and co-accused, Cohen Klein (SCNSW 2012).

According to Bibby's report entitled 'Court Hears of Milat Relative's Chilling Kill', Matthew Milat, together with Cohen Klein, lured David Auchterlonie to Belanglo State Forest under the promise of drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis. They were also joined by another teenager, Chase Day, who was not charged, given the evidence that he pleaded with Klein to intervene in Milat's verbal and physical attack against Auchterlonie. Ten of the 15-minute assault on Auchterlonie featured Milat repeatedly stating (to the victim), 'you move, I chop your head off' (SCNSW 2012). The audio-visual footage was taken some time after dark within Belanglo State Forest. The recording of David Auchterlonie's murder included an image of the victim sitting in the front seat of Milat's car and the initial section of the audio recording also contained some general discussion between Milat and Klein. Klein was recorded as saying, quietly: 'Yeah, go it,' and when asked by Milat, 'Can you feel the adrenaline?', Klein replied, 'Yeah' (SCNSW 2012, at [11]). The audio recording only ceases after the sound of the axe striking Auchterlonie. Court documents reveal that Klein's role in the killing was to keep Chase Day 'in the car, at bay, and to record the killing which he knew was going to occur' (High Court of Australia 2014).

Acting Justice Jane Mathews concluded that 'the case fell into the worst category of cases of murder' (Supreme Court of NSW 2014: 1), and that the crime itself was 'deliberate and premeditated' (Supreme Court of NSW 2014: 1). Her Honour's concession that the murder was in fact planned, in and of itself, went some considerable way in supporting three crucial findings; 'that the motive for the killing was "for his [Matthew Milat's] own personal enjoyment" … that at least one of the poems had "all the hallmarks of a gloated reminiscence of the deliberate tormenting and killing of the deceased"' and that the poems were deemed highly 'relevant alongside the inhibition of Milat in telling others about what he had done in the immediate aftermath' (Court of Criminal Appeal, Supreme Court of NSW 2013, at [105]). Milat received a sentence of 43 years imprisonment with a minimum of 30 years. Klein was sentenced to 32 years imprisonment with a minimum of 22 years, although, after a successful appeal in 2014, this was reduced to 27 years with a minimum of 20 years (Supreme Court of NSW 2014: 2).

In Matthew Milat's positioning as a teen-killer in a distortion of the Gothic family paradigm, the patriarchal site of guilt and betrayal in the Milat family is not a 'primal' male parent – not Matthew Milat's father – but his uncle, and more specifically, his great-uncle on his matriarchal side. So while this lineage connecting antagonists inverts the traditional Gothic family structure, viewing Matthew Milat's role through the lens of the contemporary Gothic – that is, via an interest in 'the continuing importance of the Gothic mode in contemporary culture and how that mode is constantly evolving into new forms and manifestations' (Piatti-Farnell and Mercer 2014) – is not all that dissimilar to that of a firstborn son. Matthew Milat is subjected to an inheritance in the form of a horror-inducing legacy of which he is fated to re-perpetuate. The operations of a curse as ancestral, family legacy can be seen in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) (Edwards 2016: 169). In the same way, Ivan Milat's role, when viewed through the lens of the contemporary Gothic is not all that dissimilar to a 'monstrous' parent, giving 'metaphorical birth to the monstrous-child' (Balmain 2007: 137).

Yet an interesting, although largely unreported albeit-related fact, was that Matthew elected to adopt the surname 'Milat' at the age of fourteen. This point too has probative value in an examination of his crime using the lens of the Gothic family tradition, in that 'Milat' was the maiden name of his biological mother Deborah (later 'Meuleman') (Bovson 2014). Her son, Matthew Milat, likely haunted for years by his great-uncle's 'curse', is thus not only a victim of that 'curse' but fulfils the ancestral imperative of the Gothic family tradition by himself visiting that curse upon the family. In this reading, the operations of the curse recalls the American Gothic tradition, 'wherein the 'burden of the past,' like the ancestral curse, concerns misfortunes and evil befalling one as a result of another's past actions' (Edwards 2016: 169). The twist in the ancestral legacy of Matthew Milat, however, is that the eighteen-year old reportedly welcomed that curse and apparently sought to actively embody its operations. Adopting the name 'Milat', for instance, provided grounds for suggesting, as some commentators did (Bovson 2014; Dick 2015), that the taking-up of the name was a simultaneously conscious, albeit metaphorical, taking-up of his great-uncle's psychopathy as an infamous killer. In this way, Matthew Milat represented a monstrous rebirth destined both to perpetuate and reinvent Ivan Milat's past into the future, but failing, conceivably, 'to perpetuate their family lines but actually turn those lines back on themselves' (Heiland 2004: 100).

Gothic elements in true-crime journalism: the case of Matthew Stephen Milat

Bovson's claim, 'It is a troubling sign when a child changes his name to that of a serial killer, and even worse when the criminal is a member of the family' (2014), typifies the broader journalistic trend to write the nature of Milat's crime utilizing elements of the Gothic family tradition. This perverse kinship tie provided a 'recognizable literary breeding ground', to quote Simpson (2000: 26), in framing the convergence of familial blood-ties within the teen-killer/serial-killer narrative. By-lines such Biddy's 'Once more a member of the Milat clan visits horror on a family' (2012), characterized a Gothic family sentiment that fundamentally underpinned the story of the eighteen-year-old's acts with the bloody taint of his great-uncle's horrific legacy.

Central to that legacy was Matthew Milat's choice of location for the killing and its associated symbolic recognition in the Australian collective consciousness as a truly Gothic site of horror. In his report for *News.Com* on 22 October 2015, Koubaridis contended 'The pine forest, 140km south west of Sydney, has long been known as Australia's killing fields. We have Ivan Milat to thank for that … But the nightmare of Belanglo didn't end there. Because Milat isn't the only murderer who is fond of the forest' (2015). Koubaridis suggested of Matthew Milat that, 'like a moth to a flame, another killer has been drawn to Belanglo' (2015).

The landscape trope is fundamental to Australian Gothic traditions in what Gelder terms the 'occulted Australian bush' (2015: 382), 'a way of expressing the landscape's capacity for generating darker colonial sensibilities amongst settlers, such as melancholy, anxiety, and dread' (384). In an interview with Nine Network's *Inside Story*, Chase Day claimed he asked Milat why go to Belanglo, to which he apparently replied; '"Oh, I just want to check out these plaques, this plaque where Ivan dumped all the bodies"' (Shorten 2015). The symbolic power of the word 'Belanglo' came to occupy in the public mind 'a horrible place to die – so lonely and so cold', a place so dark that even daylight 'brings no comfort at all' (Brown 2012).

The component metaphors of this forest as symbolically horrifying in the collective Australian consciousness, together with its significance as a site memorializing actual victims of a convicted serial-killer effectively appropriated identifiably Gothic motifs. Resonating perhaps most powerfully in the story's context – an isolated stretch of bushland cast in darkness – is the visitation of the scope of Ivan Milat's notoriety upon the representational currency of his grand-nephew's agency as a cold-blooded teen-killer. 'IT is the most infamous stretch of ground in Australia, the notorious Belanglo Forest', claimed Sutton in her article for *Daily Mail Australia* on 5 February 2015 (capitalisation in original), '[it] still strikes fear in those who know the gruesome truth of what Backpacker Killer Ivan Milat did there, but it was a source of inspiration to his grandnephew'. Dale's report for the *Daily Telegraph* on 8 June 2012, claimed the court heard Milat himself relied on the rhetorical power of his forebear to enforce the horror of Auchterlonie's murder; 'Do you know what my family is known for? I killed somebody last night,' he reportedly claimed the day after the killing (Morello 2011).

The resonance in his statement of the Gothic family symmetry formalized a two-fold narrative practice. First, it connected the teenager's crime with that of his great-uncle's legacy through direct kinship ties. Second, it facilitated ascribing to his poetry a significance that both fortified the rhetorical heredity of that horror, while ostensibly offering readers insight into the mind of convicted adolescent killer. Forensic psychiatrist David Greenberg contended that, Matthew Milat's poems 'Cold Life' and 'Your Last Day' indicated that the teenager 'sees himself as a cold-blooded killer' (Scheikowski 2012, SCNSW 2012, at [58]). 'His poetry exposes a mind fascinated by the bloodshed and horror which is synonymous with his family name,' claimed Dale in her earlier report for the *Daily Telegraph* on 22 May 2012. The same account ran under a title which described Milat's verse as 'meat axe poetry', a term which simultaneously capitalized on the symbolic power of the murder weapon – reportedly 'a mediaeval-style double-edged axe' (Shears 2012) – as much as categorized his poetry as narrative-cum-glorifications of the murder itself. Milat had composed these so-called 'meat axe'

poems from the point of being first detained in custody, 22 November 2010, the date of his arrest (SCNSW 2012, at [35], [57], [67], [68]).

Elements of Gothic horror in Matthew Milat's 'meat axe poetry'

Juridical responses to Milat's poetry appeared to accept that the poems dealt with psychological terrors, the stuff of nightmares and frightening Gothic-like dreamscapes realised as fact. Scheikowski's article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 25 May 2012, claimed that Acting Justice Jane Mathews had reportedly commented that 'apart from some of the chilling nature of some of his poems, his poetry is remarkably good'. This claim appears to establish the view that the poems were not without some degree of literary merit. Thematically, the topical interest of the poems reportedly staged in verse the scenes of Gothic horror graphically documented in Klein's audio-visual mobile phone recording of the murder. That the prevalent themes of both 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side' and 'Your Last Day' corresponded with the actual facts of David Auchterloine's murder attached particular narrative value to these texts as 'recounting the events leading up to the killing of the deceased' (SCNSW 2012, at [47]) which, were deemed highly relevant to determining the issue of premeditation (SCNSW 2012). Acting Justice Jane Mathews described 'Your Last Day' as 'particularly chilling' (SCNSW 2012, at [47]), and the term 'chilling' is characteristically used in various journalistic accounts to qualify the affective nature of Milat's poems (Shears 2012). While her Honour did not normally quote passages from the poems during her sentencing remarks following Milat's initial trial in June 2012, she made an exception for 'Your Last Day'. Her interpretation of the poems partly formed the basis of her final conclusion; determining that, 'beyond reasonable doubt, that the killing of the deceased was, on the part of Milat, deliberate and premeditated' (CCA, SCNSW 2013, at [15], [16]).

Identifiably distinctively Gothic motifs do characterize the thematic and somatic interests of his poems. The setting of Milat's poems, both in terms of their literary contexts – a 'blood stained street' ('Cold Life'), an 'approaching storm' ('Killer Looks And On Evil Side'), a bush 'track' ('Your Last Day') – as much as the context of their creation, prison, thematically extend these narratives beyond the characteristically Gothic realms of phantasm and into the literal environment of real-life. Thus, to identify Gothic violence in Milat's poetry is to thematically examine 'more urgent claims about how the Gothic relates to a reality that consists not merely of discourse but of life and death' (Cooper 2010: 8). Violence and suggestion represent both the principal frames and boundaries in which all somatic, experiential, and observational events in the poems take place. Violence, for instance, underpins the narrative view-point of 'Your Last Day' (death) while suggestion asserts a governing control determining the limits of its subject's agency (life);

> Click-clack
> hear that,
> stopping in the, middle of the track,
> Are you Getting Nervous in the back,
> Should be C--t your getting wAcked,

talk s here, talk s there,
No-one'z really gunna care,
but talk s with every breath,
You just signed away your health,
I can see you start to sweat,
Wanderin what your gunna get,
hopin 4-1 in the head,
C--t ILL Put it in Your Leg,
tell me, ARE YA HAVIN FUN,
get up C--t, And start to run,
how fAr are ya gunna get,
Your Match C--t you have just Met,
stumblin all OVA the place,
Hear the crunch of leaves and feet,
feel your heart, skip a beat,
Are ya gunna get away,
No hope kid this is your day,
The day that you wont be found,
Six feet under Neath the ground.

The extremes of violence are, however, suggested and repeatedly implied in name only. No identifiably violent incident actually takes place in 'Your Last Day.' Rather, promises of violence are uttered by a single speaker, which may or may not be a literal figure; may or may not be Milat. Ambiguity makes it difficult to attribute these assertions of implied violence to a single speaker, but ambiguity also maps the extremes between, on the one hand, the poetry's accorded value as evidence of Milat's psyche and, on the other, its value as purely speculative or otherwise. Phrases such as 'your [sic] getting wAcked,' 'C--t ILL Put it in Your Leg,' and 'Are ya gunna get away,/No hope kid this is your day,/The day that you wont be found,/Six feet under Neath the ground' do not in fact state any event as having actually taken place. 'Are ya gunna get away' ('Are you going to get away') is a simple future tense statement, as is 'ILL Put it in Your Leg' ('I will put it in your leg'). The mood of verbs indicate the viewpoint or attitude influencing the verb's expression. The imperative mood is clear in the commanding nature of the verbs and the main predicate implied. Put another way, 'C--t I will put it in your leg' appears to suggest a complete predicate, but 'will' only expresses an implied undertaking that may or may not eventuate. A complete predicate on the other hand would be, for instance, 'C--t I ~~will~~ put it in your leg.' The omission of 'will' would shift the apparent agency of the antagonist away from future simple tense to past tense, with the implication being the threat's enactment. That one particular word, 'C--t', is continuously redacted in journalistic accounts and court documents (SCNSW 2012, at [47]), seemingly implies that the term itself denotes a long-standing dangerousness in its obscenity, which, to quote Botting's observation of the cultural reaction to profanity in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), 'itself embodied a kind of horror' (2014, 69). It is worth noting, however, that the word is not redacted in court transcripts of victim and witness statements as parts of speech.

Cold life

Lifeless corpse, Motionless and drained,
Another street has been blood stained,
heart and soul I do not own,
and there is no place I can call home,
What sort of life do I lead,
the kind that keeps me on the streets,
Kill for cash, Is what I do,
call me up I'll work for you,
I am not fazed by blood or screams,
Nothing I do will haunt my dreams,
Maybe they might scare you,
Coldblooded killer, that's me, Not you.

The final four lines of 'Cold Life' represented for many the most telling portraiture of both Matthew Milat's psychopathy and his culpability as an actual teen-murderer. Forensic psychiatrist Professor Greenberg had argued that the poems generally 'indicated a type of thinking at that time where he glorifies the offence' (*News.Com* 2012) and that 'Cold Life' particularly illustrated Milat's interest in the victim's terror and depicted 'a sense almost of enjoyment in the act' (Scheikowski 2012). Just as violence and suggestion frame the apparent somatic, experiential, and observational events taking place in Milat's poems, so too did violence and suggestion mediate their popular consumption within popular and juridical culture. This pattern in the reception of the poems might be best understood via a distinctly Gothic understanding of bodies and, in particular, the body's approximation to pain. Unlike the bodies of Gothic fiction – imagined bodies wounded, dying, or dead – no amount of speculation could distance the actual corporeal body of David Auchterloine from the horror of the documented violence visited upon him. Take, for instance, the ways in which Gothic tropes of the tortured body – spectacle, pain, invasion (Bruhm 1994) – intersect with the incursion of mortality into existence in Milat's poem 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side'.

Killer looks
and on
Evil Side
Clouds roll in over light blue skyes
Like darkness in a killer's eyes,
A second is all it takes,
Eyes think like a poisnous snakes!
from grey to black the shades change,
with rays of light flowing through so strange,
Then grumble, almost as if to warn,
the perils of the approaching storm,
Shelter you will need to seek,
So terrified you can hardly speak,
footsteps in puddles seem to Near,
Then you start to givin to fear,
Then a flash, what do you do

Take a dash, safety in 2's
look for a friend so you feel safe,
trust them or your life they might take,
Are you safe? you'll never know,
but one day you might come to blows,
An evil side you will see
A side in you, a side in me.

Given the poem's thematic interest purportedly personified the teen-killer as subject – as antagonist – the coherence of 'Killer looks and on evil side' in terms of death, bodies, and pain emerges in the author's engagement, unintentional or otherwise, with characteristic elements of the Gothic: violence, death, the macabre, psychological terror, torture, and murder (Bruhm 1998; Reyes 2014). Here, David Punter (2014) provides important insights into Gothic poetry that have resonance with respect to Milat's verse-writing given his poetry's subject matter and emotive elements. Indications that 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side' deals with 'a close relation with physical mutability and decay' – 'darkness in a killer's eyes,' 'Eyes think like a poisnous [sic] snakes,' 'the perils of the approaching storm' – accords with a component feature of Gothic poetry as identified by Punter (2014: 212). For Punter, Gothic poetry is characterized by 'a close relation with physical mutability and decay' (212), is 'clearly in touch with the bodily, the physical' (212), and 'of the soul (the phantomatic, the unseen, the fleeting) but it is also of the body (the horror, the blood, the distortion of the frame)' (212). Other literary characteristics include 'doubt and repetition' (217) and an interest in 'dark materials, material and spiritual' (217).

Evidence of the poem's reception also shows that its title, 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side' was taken at face value as Milat identifying himself ('Killer'), just as the 'you' subjectivity was taken at face value as referring to his victim, David Auchterloine. By extension, juridical understandings of these subjectivities, identifying them, and situating their relation to death (either as murderer or victim) and their proximity to pain (either the inflictor or the inflicted) also effectively influenced court proceedings. This point is germane to an examination of Milat's writing of the murder in terms of mapping the intersections between the topical concerns of a teen-killer's poetry and the Gothic concern with corporality and physical pain. The Crown successfully argued its case that the topical concerns of 'Your Last Day,' 'Cold Life,' and 'Killer Looks And On Evil Side,' *did*, in and of themselves, necessarily centre on the literal killing of a teenager which *had* ultimately materialized. That these poems involved the 'intrusion of death into life,' as well as involved the '*immediacy* of such an intrusion, as well as something of an exploration of the complex guilts which assail us when in the presence, or present absence, of death' accords with another characteristic feature of Gothic poetry as identified by Punter (2014: 217). In this sense, Milat's poetry may perhaps be best understood as the attempt to 'cope with the omnipresence of the wound' to quote Punter, 'the interruption of the deathly into the apparently perfect body' (220). Acting Justice Jane Matthews seemingly articulated that disturbance of the deathly and the bodily in her contention that 'Your Last Day' particularly included 'all the hallmarks of a gloated reminiscence of the deliberate tormenting and killing of the deceased' (SCNSW 2012, at [58]; Pearlman 2012).

That statement – both in the context of law and its wider implications – itself illustrates how, in the Barthesian sense, the reception of Milat's poetry never occurred in isolation. Imbuing the poems with the historiographical background motivating their creation effectively transformed what might be construed as purely imaginative narratives of speculative killing into those interpreted as the literal chronicling of a real-life murder. In fact, in this particular case, attributing to the author the antagonist subjectivity capitalized on the symbolic power of the name 'Milat' to trap the teen-author in a constant cycle of rhetorical resuscitation; an enduring state of return. Perhaps by virtue of his construction as a monstrous child borne of a Gothic family tradition, the consumption of his poetry was not an activity of displacement, but fundamentally prefaced on an intertextual 'biography-based' reading forever attributed to Milat himself as 'a specific origin' (Barthes 1968: 142).

Conclusion

The case of Matthew Milat's 'meat axe' poetry illustrates the movement into contemporary print culture of an element of Gothic rhetoric inextricably linked to Milat's representation as a teen-killer; one 'in which acts of evil have such metaphysical weight that they transform both victim and perpetrator utterly' (Crawford 2013: 169). Viewed from the Gothic family tradition, the eighteen-year-old not only successfully resurrected the infamy of his grand-uncle – the return of the repressed past – but fortified a contemporary reinvention of that return in the form of a self-made monstrous child. This rebirth, that is, the self-making of the monstrous teen-killer, is apparently articulated by Milat himself in his poem 'Cold Life'; 'Coldblooded killer, that's me, Not you'. In this sense, it is possible to read Milat's verse as the making, replicating, and performance of the self as monstrous. His writing, if not Gothic, then certainly Gothic-like, consists of, much like the Gothic itself, 'a series of … devices, codes, figurations, for the expression of the fragmented subject' (Miles 1993: 3).That his verse-writing seemingly glorified a real-life murder chained his mediated construction to an enduring rhetorical cycle in which the monstrosity of the teen-killer is continually, and self-referentially, recreated and re-identified. Perhaps Milat's poems suggest he believed 'the only way to repair the wounds of the past … [was] to regenerate the past and present, the child and the adult' (Balmain 2014: 409), via a series of texts through which the fragmented self might be unified.

If, as Spooner argues, the Gothic 'has become an idealized space for textual disruption; yet again, it is the means through which we reify our own enlightenment' (2006: 25), the story about, as much as the poetry by, Matthew Milat substantiates that to fully engage with this fusion between popular media and the narrative ephemera of a real-life killing, an examination must necessarily move beyond Gothic's traditional allegorical constructs. If, as forensic psychiatrist Professor David Greenberg had contended, Milat 'has a tendency to externalise the reasons for his offending' (Bibby 2012), then perhaps the reception of the poems themselves were part of a much broader societal propensity for externalisation. Milat represented a Gothic 'violent externalisation' (Punter 1998: 239) of the extent to which families not only 'constitute a training ground for violence', but 'fail to instil non-violent values in their children'

(Chappel, Grabosky and Strang 1991: 293). What is Shorten's assertion – 'When the nephew of notorious serial killer Ivan Milat executed his deliberate and premeditated murder of David Auchterlonie, he wanted proof that he was as bad as his infamous uncle' (2015) – after all, if not as much a commentary on the making of the monstrously violent child as on the personification of that monstrosity via the Gothic family motif?

Justice Mathews had particularized 'Your Last Day' in her deliberations given, she concluded, '[i]t is impossible to see this as the work of a man who had intended only to injure the deceased, but who succumbed to anger at the last moment and ended up killing him' (at [58]). He is, thus, condemned in part by the writings of his own hand. Being condemned in this way perfectly extends the metaphor of the Gothic family plot itself. His poems were suddenly 'the work of a man'. It is through this prematurely achieved status of adulthood that the 'teen-killer' secures his place in ensuring the existence of the Gothic family paradigm as much as solidifying the imperatives of law and social order against which his 'work' will be judged. This proclivity effectively highlights just how completely, yet incommensurately, this teen-killer's poetry was both reinscribed within existing juridical power structures and their value recognized according to the cultural imperatives about crime and justice that define them.

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