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The Exegesis and the Gentle Reader/Writer

1. Introduction

Address to the Gentle Audience

> 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.
>
> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book II, Chapter 1
> *Shewing what Kind of a History this is; what it is like, and what it is not like*
> (88)

A funny - as in strange - thing happened on my way to writing the address for this symposium. I noticed the schizophrenic nature of the undertaking. Not only was I was going to be talking about creative higher degree theses that demonstrated a kind of split personality, but I, too, had multiple personalties, which is probably the reason I was invited to speak to you. I am a writer, an academic, a teacher, a supervisor, an examiner, and also President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs.

Should the psychological disjunction I perceived be reflected in a multiphasic discourse, I wondered? I had a variety of models from which to choose. Over the years I had been to countless conferences and listened to as many keynote addresses. They have varied from the dense, provocative, controversial talk to the relaxed, "I'm only the fresh-faced colleague next door and you could be where I am, too," talk.

The subject itself, hybrid theses, with a creative product and a critical component, can be uneasy bedfellows, as I wrote in an article on the subject (Kroll 1999).(1) They often blend tones and styles in an eclectic melange; their voices can be serious, petulant, ironic. Candidates are aware that since they are creating a new type of discourse that addresses a complex audience they have to consider - in a way no straight academic MA or PhD does - how they position themselves as narrators. This self-consciousness can result in the invention of a persona that invites readers into the work in a manner reminiscent of some eighteenth-century writers, among them Henry Fielding and Jonathan Swift.

The variety of terms employed to describe the academic part of the thesis reveals the slippery nature of the beast as well. Ironically, it is not the creative product that usually changes its name; after all, a novel is a novel is a novel, whether you call

it realist or symbolic or metafictive.(2) But the accompanying "Other," although most commonly called an exegesis, has also been called a critical essay, dissertation, annotation or documentation. Why the confusion?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "exegesis" derives from Greek words meaning "to interpret, guide and lead" (921). Originally it was applied to commentaries that explained Scripture and then, by extension, it also came to mean "An explanatory note, a gloss" or "An expository discourse" (921). All of these meanings cluster around what the creative exegesis tries to do for its readers, but in true postmodern fashion our way of understanding the identities of creator, supervisor and expert reader have radically altered. For example, the creator of the thesis is also its reader, the supervisor is also a participant in the construction of the thesis and so becomes a quasi-creator and the examiner is at once reader and mentor, for her comments might in fact determine final revisions. I won't even nudge the idea yet of whether we can in fact talk about a "creator" or "author" until later. I will summarise here by saying what I hope the rest of my talk will prove - that the exegesis is at once a polyphonic discourse and also a protest that demands that the author once more be heard. The PhD thesis as a whole is therefore a site that encompasses a range of contesting voices.

But to return to my recent problem about how I should structure this address in order to chart a pathway - even if it zigzagged - through the slippages of meaning and identity. Should I try to mirror the myriad ways an exegesis can be presented or should I take the conservative route, I asked myself? I could simply talk to you for thirty minutes, outlining the main issues involved in creative theses. I could give a short incisive critical address but then follow with a poetry reading - poems about the nature of creativity perhaps. I could concoct a satiric Swiftian address - not to the Gentle Reader - but to the Gentle Audience - create a well-meaning, obtuse persona for myself and let you, the clever academic-artists, puzzle out the meanings.

On the other hand, I could read you a short story composed specifically for this occasion about a lazy supervisor who did not keep up with developments in the field and, as a consequence, provided poor support for her paranoid postgraduates. No doubt, in this story she will be found in her office, marinating in a pool of her own blood, her throat having been slashed with a wickedly pared paper clip, the label, PhD, smeared onto her forehead. Should I leave you to figure out whodunit?

If typical academic postgraduates do not have a thesis topic when they begin - simply an area of research - than what of creative arts postgraduates? They have a vocation, a practice - writing, visual arts, theatre, architecture - and possibly already an audience for their work. But what is the relationship of that practice to another audience, the academic world that will judge them and ultimately be responsible for validating what that practice - reinterpreted and situated in a research context - signifies by conferring a higher degree? Here is where the plethora of personalities really becomes confusing. Who is addressing whom in the thesis and in which part? When is the artist theorising and when creating? Is she speaking on paper to supervisor, examiner, university community, artistic community, or all at once? Is there ever a clear distinction?

The creative higher degree thesis in Australia, certainly in creative writing, has been developing on an ad hoc basis since the last decade of the twentieth century (Krauth 2001; Dawson 2001). Universities have wanted to accept postgraduate students, in many cases before the administration has figured out how to assess them. Some institutions stipulate a length for each part of the thesis and some weight them differently. This variation can bewilder examiners, who often are not provided with clear guidelines about what to do with that bipartite bundle they receive in the mail (Krauth 2001).

This happened to me when I received for examination my first creative arts PhD in 1997. I had to call the university to ask for enlightenment about exactly how they wanted me to approach the picture book - already published - and exegesis. I have had further experience since examining other MAs, MCAs and PhDs so I have devised my own modus operandi. But another examiner might proceed quite differently. Do they read the creative product first and then the exegesis or do they reverse the order? Since the parts are usually (although not always) separately bound, an examiner could leaf back and forth and certainly might revisit the creative work during a reading of the exegesis. This ability to revisit in depth distinguishes creative writing from some of the other artforms.

The protean creative arts thesis is therefore both an exciting challenge and a quandary for candidate, supervisor and examiner. Some things are certain at an early stage, however. The candidate knows that she will be forced to be self-reflexive, talking to herself about her work and what it signifies within her artistic culture and in the culture at large. She will need to pose questions. The academic community will, in most cases, be the first audience. So one can say that the exegesis is sophisticated and knowledgeable talk about the artform in general and also about one of its manifestations in particular. It might be part theory, part aesthetics, part confession, part apologia. After reading all the abstracts I can say that many of the papers you will hear today survey the various forms the exegesis can take.

Without suggesting that I or the collective minds at this symposium can give anyone specific guidelines about how to construct the ideal creative arts thesis, I think we can be clear about the origins of the exegetical impulse and therefore see a way in which artistic and critical voices might cooperate and conflict in a postmodern era. Understanding the problems will help us to demonstrate how we as artist-scholars are making original contributions to knowledge.

2. A Tradition of Individual Talents

> The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.
>
> T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (30)

One of the first and most important points we can make about the exegesis is that the impulse for a writer or artist to explain their work and set it in a cultural context is not new at all. They are part of a noble history of "the writer as critic . . . which certainly does not only include writers who function in an educational milieu" (Kroll 1999). In the past century there has also been a lucrative tradition of publishers collecting those out-of-copyright analyses, musings, forewords, afterwords, essays, interviews, conversations, letters and notes and either publishing them as stand-alone books or attaching them to new annotated editions of novels or poems (Krauth 2002). The past made portable as pocketbooks of the classics are prime examples of the latter.

The form and tone of these authorial pronouncements - of writers talking to their peers and readers - are to date more varied than the exegeses I have seen. They range from the highly theoretical to the off-the-cuff comment; from the letter to the apologia; from some of T. S. Eliot's arbitrary notes to *The Waste Land* to Henry James's formal prefaces about the nature of fiction. We would want to include in this eclectic list sources such as interviews, radio and TV profiles, even

panels at Writers' Festivals. As a matter of course, late twentieth-century scholars have consulted both formal and informal, high and low culture materials to enhance their research. I have certainly taken notes at festivals and used comments made by writers in my research. "In Conversation" sessions are staged informal interviews - Parkinson for the literati - where writers reveal their personalities as well as their methodologies.

Aspiring authors, whether PhD students or not, crowd festivals as well, not so much to be thrilled by proximity to their idols, but to absorb somehow the key to the books they admire. They want to know the source of original ideas, what pitfalls were encountered during the creative process, what the literary lions thought they were doing and how they now feel about their productions. And, of course, they idealistically hope to be able to collect enough bits and pieces the way a magpie might, spearing a hint about structure here, a witty metaphor there, which they can take away and use to construct something of their own. Most of these issues find their way into all of the creative writing exegeses I have read.

Nigel Krauth has an excellent discussion called "The Preface as Exegesis" in *TEXT* (April 2002) that surveys this complex literary reservoir and then focuses on Vladimir Nabokov and Edgar Allan Poe. Among many significant points that Krauth makes, he connects those authors' attempts to explain and justify their work to their wish to say something about the nature of poetry and fiction in their time - that is, their expositions also have "the potential for advances in the culture's criticism/reading in general" (13).

Looking briefly at two pre-eminent figures of the eighteenth century - Jonathan Swift and Henry Fielding - is instructive, because not only did that era mark the rise of the novel as well as capitalism, both of which have helped to shape the contemporary world, but the rise of English literature as a discipline as well. These men did not invent the idea of addressing their readers, but they began to incorporate their comments into their work in ways that shed light on how the practice of writers talking to readers in different modes has developed in modern and postmodern literature.

Jonathan Swift created authorial personae in a number of satiric works who were quite upfront about their mission. One such announces on the title page of "A Tale of a Tub" that it is "Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind" (Swift 241). This hybrid work, and much else of Swift's, can be seen as ancestors of metafictive, postmodern play. "A Tale of a Tub" includes prolegomena (a list of other treatises composed, apologia, dedication, etc) designed to impress naïve readers of the narrator's significance and canny readers of the author's - that is of Swift's - wit. Although most postgraduates are not as confident as Swift's flaky persona, they certainly aspire in their theses to make original contributions to knowledge that will advance their artforms, if not improve all humanity.

Some students have already incorporated their exegeses into the creative works themselves and so follow a tradition laid down in the eighteenth century by Henry Fielding. Although the narrator of *Tom Jones* is not a purely fictional construct as most of Swift's, he is nevertheless a construct of sorts: Fielding speaking as Author to his public. One could imagine a twenty-first century novelist, completing her PhD, interspersing formal essays before the beginning of each section as Fielding prefaces each Book in *Tom Jones*. For example, Chapter 1 of Book 1 is entitled "The Introduction to the Work, or Bill of Fare to the Feast," (Fielding 51), where Fielding elaborates the metaphor of the author as entertainer/publican who has a responsibility to let those who enter his house know what they can expect before they pay their money.

Fielding's prefatory essays canvass a range of literary controversies of his day, including the relationship between reader and text and the role of the critic as intermediary between text, author and reader. Some of the exegeses I have seen perform similar functions; they survey the main points of debate in their area, aim to orient readers and explain their particular theoretical position. Some have incorporated exegeses as a chapter of a novel or an appendix, including a diary of the creative process. Some have been subversive and refused to orient readers. Tess Brady explains her approach where her "model turns its back on the safety of description and definition. And while it might engage with aspects of literature surveys, research methodology and findings, it does so in an open-ended manner, picking and choosing and embracing incompleteness" (Brady 2000).

In the modern era, which has grappled with the competing demands of originality and impersonality, T. S. Eliot has been a critical voice directing aspiring writers to the past so that they can construct an original future, but here "being new" is intimately and inextricably bound up with cultural knowledge. Those who want to create something lasting must study their forbears he advises in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Eliot 23-24). This is paramount if writers want to learn what needs to be done before trying to do it. As Throsby has suggested, "'behind every work of art is a hypothesis about the reality perceived by the artist'" (Strand 35), and the exegesis clarifies that hypothesis. So scientific and artistic research is similar:

> . . . expressing oneself relevantly requires a mastery of technique and material and a cultivated awareness of what, in the light of previous accomplishments, can and should be tried. Creativity is never just doing something different. It is doing something different that is significant at that precise point in the cultural tradition. (Dye 100)

The exegesis records that "cultivated awareness" and makes a case for why the creative product is significant to the intellectual and artistic community. This thrust would appeal to a university's mission to preserve knowledge and culture as well as to foster intellectual exchange.

The last example I want to discuss in this arbitrary literary tour is Australian writer Beverley Farmer's *A Body of Water* (1990), one of the most innovative contemporary variations of an author speaking about her practice to herself. It contains complete poems and stories as well as journal extracts, notebook entries and criticism to set the creative work in context. In the opening pages she sets down her methodology: "This new writing: I want it to be an interweaving of visual images - more open, loose and rich, and free of angst. And if I keep a notebook this time as I go, it will grow side by side with the stories, like the placenta and the baby in a womb" (Farmer 3).

Farmer's hybrid could be likened to a creative product, an exegesis, plus the research notes and student journal recording the thesis process all presented in one package. And of course no project would be complete without a hitch somewhere along the way. Ironically, Farmer's fecund concoction begins with the recording of a period of extended writer's block: "My forty-sixth birthday, and no end in sight to the long struggle to come to terms with this isolation, this sterility" (Farmer 2). *A Body of Water*, like an exegesis, allows the audience to listen to the author speaking to herself before, during and after the act of creation; it reveals the many voices she has; the many directions the creative work could take; and why it has taken this or that particular one.

You can see from this eclectic mix that the exegesis has a rich history, and being aware of that history can suggest strategies for current students. The problems we

face now, however - both theoretical and practical - stem from its use for a particular purpose - to be part of a thesis that will merit a higher degree. So now I would like to discuss how the exegesis as we know it - certainly in creative writing higher degrees - actually fits in with the ethos of the university.

3. The Exegesis Offers Sanctuary

> "I was not sure whether I was speaking as a writer out-of-place in a university or as a writer who had found the right kind of sanctuary in a university . . . "
>
> Kevin Brophy, "Some Things About Creative Writing: Three Stories." *TEXT*, vol 1, No 1 (April 1998)

"Sanctuary" is a rich and provocative term in this discussion, given the religious associations of "exegesis." Originally, those who were considered worthy of providing commentary, of creating the exegeses, had authority. They were the elect intermediaries between Holy Scripture and the laity. As supposedly objective interpreters, not creators with a stake in the outcome - after all, only God was the true creator - they analysed layers of meaning in both written texts and sermons. Authors in a university community, who are used to lecturing rather than sermonising, are now in the position of taking back some authority to speak for their artform as well as for themselves. But it hasn't been easy. Theory as much as a dubious administration in some quarters challenged that right.

In an essay entitled "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers," Roland Barthes offers this description of the relationship between the three:

> Over against the teacher, who is on the side of speech, let us call a *writer* every operator of language on the side of writing; between the two, the intellectual, the person who prints and publishes his speech. Between the language of the teacher and that of the intellectual there is hardly any incompatibility (they often co-exist in a single individual); but the writer stands apart, separate. (190)

In the contemporary academy, those three positions now often overlap. Writers have multiple voices; they are functioning split personalities. This co-existence of competing identities might not have been much of a problem, except that postmodern literary theory has called the whole idea of the "author" into question. In the process of creating, postgraduate authors have to wonder exactly what they can take credit for doing. Do they believe that their texts are "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 146)? What does it mean to be an author or an artist in the early twenty first century?

The Romantic tradition encouraged the notion of individuality, of subjectivity; the poet is *sui generis*, although imagination is still connected to divine inspiration. But for the layperson, an author is still "a person who writes a novel, poem, essay, etc. . . . ", the originator, beginner, or creator of anything" (*Macquarie* 112), and so basically we still take that author to be responsible for the novel, poem, script or play, however much they are also a vehicle through which the culture speaks.

In 'The Death of the Author' Barthes postulated that the authorial position was in fact the "space where our subject slips away" (142); readers would not receive their due credit for creating the work unless it was acknowledged that the author was no longer present. Although Barthes rejects the parent-child metaphor to describe the relationship between author and literary work, in a sense he implies that the work comes into its own only by supplanting the parent - the child killing

the parent - by establishing a relationship with readers that excludes authors. Yet readers as well as critics and theorists are determined by heredity and environment. Authors have always known that they are to some extent at the reader's mercy.

Henry Fielding couched the relationship in these terms:

> Reader, it is impossible we should know what sort of person thou wilt be: for perhaps, thou may'st be as learned in human nature as Shakespear himself was, and, perhaps, thou may'st be no wiser than some of his editors. Now lest this latter should be the case, we think proper, before we go any farther together, to give thee a few wholesome admonitions; that thou may'st not as grossly misunderstand and misrepresent us, as some of the said editors have misunderstood and misrepresented their author.
>
> *Tom Jones*, Book X, Chapter 1, *Containing Instructions very necessary to be perused by modern Critics* (467)

In the twentieth century, authors have not only continued this tradition of prefaces and notes to forestall inappropriate readings, they have consciously played with the idea of their power to control reader response in texts that no longer fit neatly into traditional literary templates. For example, Samuel Beckett sprinkled a series of satiric footnotes throughout his second novel, Watt, written in the 1940s, addressing "the attentive reader" (Beckett 211); he even included "Addenda," which allowed him to close his complex text with the marvellous line, "no symbols where none intended" (255).

I see the exegesis therefore as a protest of sorts, the authorial voice once more demanding to be heard, to be part of the communication equation, if only to acknowledge the plethora of forces behind any creative production. (Krauth [2002] talks about the exegesis as a "pre-emptive strike" 6.) A number of critics have noted the links between Barthes and medieval conceptions of authorship, both of which suppressed the idea of individual genius.

Yet a postgraduate writing a thesis in a university context must be aware on two fronts of what he does; as a conscious artist he must choose words carefully - even if they are words that echo from the past; as an academic, he must do the same and be responsible for the quality of the argument. He must become an expert reader of his own work - a critic and examiner - in order to accomplish this. For Barthes, in theory texts might be "eternally written *here and now*" ('The Death of the Author', 145) in readers' minds, but not for writers as they create. There has to be a "before and after"; no writing workshop could exist without this concept. The creative PhD is therefore an ideal site for contesting voices where theory and practice clash.

The other way that the exegesis belongs in a university community ironically underscores its conservative bias, at least as far as higher degrees are concerned. Working out this idea back in 1998, I proposed that "the exegesis then functions as a kind of insurance policy in the academic context. It also acknowledges the special position of the writer as critic, which has a long history" (Kroll 1999). One could say, in fact, that the university that embraces creative higher degrees preserves the concept of the author to some extent in its old humanist incarnation, as well as admitting to the debate those who continue to deconstruct it.

Krauth (2002) extended this notion of the exegesis' appropriateness to include the idea of the university as cultural conservationist: "As canonically-inclined institutions [or culturally critical ones], universities are entirely happy with the idea of the exegesis. It speaks their language. In its current definitions, the

exegesis confirms the notion of the canonical as central to the culture and is therefore attractive to the concerns of universities" (3).

Obviously this ethos can be extended to those exegeses that are subversive or experimental, that argue against the grain, argue against the idea of the canon. This includes an exegesis that "celebrates the creative, privileging its discourse" (Brady 2000) over the academic. Debate is central to intellectual exchange. As a colleague of mine once said in a lecture he called "The exploding canon," "books last because of the quality of the arguments about them" (Associate Professor John Harwood). The canon can change. T. S. Eliot proposed, in fact, that every great work slightly altered the order and significance of those great works that came before (Eliot 23-24). Higher degree candidates fire shots, if not always on their own behalf, on behalf of those writers or theorists they admire and want to emulate.

The examination process itself demonstrates this atmosphere of orderly disputation. By reading reports, one can guess where the interests of individual examiners lie. They can be as generous or as testy as newspaper reviewers who basically are saying, "This is the book I would have written." Examiners might suggest that a candidate expand here, cut there, tinker with the margins, or they might suggest the kind of cosmetic surgery that would produce an entirely different look, another thesis entirely. What we have is a mini-debate, as if two critics were exchanging letters to the editor, and the candidate is at once the editor and the author of the piece under discussion. The purpose in a vibrant intellectual community is always, we hope, the advancement of knowledge.

Since the creative PhD emphasises both innovation and argumentation it does in fact comply with the statutes of most universities. When I initially proposed that a PhD that comprises exegesis and creative product be allowed at Flinders University, the statutes are the first place I needed to look to mount an argument. The most important principles for a PhD are that the thesis will demonstrate "wide reading and the power to integrate information obtained from various sources into a unified whole" (statute 2); that it will demonstrate "a higher degree of independence of thought and approach" than a Masters; and finally that it make "a significant original contribution to knowledge" (statutes 3 and 4).

The exegesis can demonstrate extensive reading; it might investigate how the creative work has been affected by and measures up to past and contemporary theory and practice. The success of the creative product will show this understanding in action. In this sense, it functions as the outcome of the research, just as a new drug or a new variety of flower might form part of a scientific project. Eva Sallis has suggested that a particular type of fiction, "to a significant degree, expresses the outcome of a body of research . . ." and "is the culminating point of an investigation which could have been written up, at least in part, in academic prose" (Sallis 1999). "The innovative re-interpretation of established ideas" (statutes) will be confirmed by the exegesis, which focuses on how this process has been carried out in a unique literary work that exists in a particular contemporary context. Many universities that offer creative higher degrees stipulate a length for the exegesis only - usually about 20,000 words for the MA and 30,000 words for the PhD. The length of the creative work depends on the artform category. But there is not yet uniformity.

Finally, I want to examine briefly how the actual composing of this type of hybrid thesis produces a creative product that could not have been the same in a non-academic context. In other words, the exegesis is the critical factor. A number of recent postgraduates at various stages of their study have written in the AAWP journal *TEXT*, in the *Australian Author* and elsewhere of their experiences (Baranay, Brady, Ledgar, Perry, Padmore, et al). Some were still negotiating their

way and others had immediately adapted to this shifting epistemological environment. There were positive and negative comments, and differing work regimens. They variously focused on their university tenure as a kind of subsidised mentorship (Nicole Bourke, in Baranay 12); as a unique opportunity to undertake "directed reading and research" (Sue Wolfe in Baranay 13); as a contentious site where writers had to wrestle with the necessity for an exegesis (Perry 1998); as a place to extend their creative as well as intellectual range by inventing a "bowerbird" methodology (Brady); and as a time to unlock the "'unlimited possibilities of discourse'" (Padmore 2000).

There is no doubting, however, that being made to articulate your practice, to place it in a theoretical context and to periodically explain and defend your strategies to supervisors will alter what you accomplish. The product and exegesis usually develop side by side. To hark back to Beverley Farmer's plan for integrating her notebook with the new fiction she intends to write, "it will grow side by side with the stories, like the placenta and the baby in a womb" (3). Alternatively, parts might be composed turn and turn-about; or one might be written before or after the other. There is always, however, a kind of symbiosis. An exegesis should never be an afterthought, a looking back after the product is complete, or is about to be published, as a foreword or afterword might be.

At this late stage in my talk I won't open the Pandora's box of "what is research." I have written at length already about that subject (Kroll 2002). I will say that I don't believe that practice in and of itself constitutes research, although this does not mean that I think that the government should not fund straight practice as readily as it funds scholarship. I certainly do. But at some point in the process of research questions need to be asked, if not fully answered, and those findings communicated to the intellectual and artistic community. The principal supervisor must function as both literary and scholarly editor. She must help the candidate to avoid the pitfalls of over-researching. For example, in "A Short Person's Guide to Thesis Writing" (2001), Jenny Ledgar complains of such a pitfall; she finds one day that her novel's characters have begun to speak 'in theory' (3). The supervisor is also the person who ensures that the lines of communication remain intelligible. The exegesis is where these lines are charted.

Finally, the supervisor-candidate relationship itself is critical to the development of the creative thesis. The supervisor is mentor, editor and even an interviewer of sorts. For instance, an astute journalist might provoke a response - a new insight - that would not have existed in a writer's mind without the interaction. In an analogous way, a supervisor "interviews" the student about her work periodically, which keeps the self-reflexive process flowing. The entire "work" of the PhD comprises not only the labouring alone in the dim hours, but the conversations that the student has with the supervisor, her journal or writer's notebook that records processes, the research notes, as well as the actual edited exegesis and creative product. These are the kinds of resources, in fact, that scholars "research" when they are studying particular authors. The higher degree candidate "researches" herself in the fullest sense.

If PhD candidates did not have to write exegeses, or only minimal essays, as in some MA degrees, would it be worthwhile to decide to do so? Writers of poetry, fiction, plays, scripts and creative nonfiction, to name only the most common genres being attempted now, will continue to "research" widely if their topic demands it, and will always in some sense research themselves. In the Western tradition, writers have been self-reflexive in both serious and playful modes. Aware of their audience, they have used various strategies to forestall misinterpretations, guide, lead, apologise for their failings and entice readers to look for their next work. The exegetical compulsion - the wish to explain and justify - has not been restricted to the university or to a select few in the

postmodern era. Writers want to understand their place in the culture and in order to do this they must understand - as scientists must - what else is being done. That is one way of deciding what to do next with their particular talent.

Any postgraduate creative writer dreams of a successful - ie. publishable or performable - work. Whereas the academic portion of the thesis will primarily be evaluated by a specialist audience, one that "presents the illusion of objectivity" and "relies on the positioning of giver and receiver, of researcher and reader" (Sallis 1999), the creative portion eventually "has to mix with all other fiction" (Sallis 1999). In other words, if published or publicly viewed or performed, it will enter the marketplace and be subjected to another range of critical voices that enter the debate.

One mark of the success of a creative product, however, might be that the critical and popular audience will seek to know more about the origins of that product that has begun to influence contemporary culture. The exegesis as research and polyphonic discourse becomes "an adventure of the signifier, an excess of exchange" (Barthes, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers,"197), which perhaps sends readers back again to the creative piece in a loop that invites new ways of deconstructing the text.

4. Farewell to the Gentle Audience

> 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* (739)

I have posed far too many questions in this address and have probably not offered enough answers to satisfy anxious postgraduates craving certainty as they embark on their studies. The situation in certain respects has not changed that much since Fielding struggled in the eighteenth century with incorporating a critique of contemporary practice into a comic extended prose narrative. His sly authorial persona analyses and apologises before he offers up each installment of his story.

The proximity of the creative and critical is what makes an exegesis as well both daring and dangerous. The creative portion is available for scrutiny while candidates' theoretical arguments are fresh in the audience's mind. The danger arises because readers might think that, as challenging or provocative as the critical pronouncements have been, writers have not actually done what they say they have set out to do; or they have done no better than other work they have judged.

The twenty first century higher degree student must synthesise multiple discourses to create meaning in an entirely individual way. The necessity for that individuality is my defence for lack of definitiveness. While I humbly apologise in time-honoured fashion for not being able to offer a template for exactly how postgraduates can create this new entity, I submit that at least I have tried to clarify the challenges.

Notes

1.It is worth pointing out that the old two-tier system of higher education gave sanctuary to some artists without asking them to provide academic justification for their practice. In Australia creative writing developed in both colleges and universities before amalgamation, and so the experience is mixed. (see Kroll, Dawson, Krauth, Dibble, et al) Writers were teaching professional topics such as journalism of scriptwriting in colleges as well as more literary topics such as the craft of poetry or fiction in universities. The purpose behind those topics varied as well: to help students to earn a living by writing; to help them to express themselves effectively; to help them to understand their place in society; and to help them become better readers of literature. The acceptance of the exegesis in many universities as a natural adjunct of a higher degree that incorporates creative writing, has not, therefore, been as problematic as it might be for exegeses in other artforms. Return to paper.

2. This situation is in the process of changing, since at present students at various universities are working on new creative forms that incorporate hypertext, multimedia, etc. Return to paper.

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Debate

Jeri Kroll *The Role of the Examniner: Scholar, Reviewer, Critic, Judge, Mentor*

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