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***Writing the exegesis: A space of becoming***

Abstract:

The exegesis, as an accompanying component of critical work in creative writing, has sparked many insightful discussions. In this article, I provide a brief overview of the evolutionary nature of the exegesis in Australia and outline important features which a successful exegesis may incorporate. I will then analyse four distinct relationships that play an integral part in the knowledge production of writing an exegesis. I argue that each relationship – exegesis + creative; exegesis + supervisor; exegesis + examiner; exegesis + self – unfolds within specific methods and processes. By analysing the method of storying ideas, I highlight how the exegesis demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge, not only as a final product but as a dynamic space of becoming through the bringing together of different knowledges the writer-researcher has gained from these relationships.

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## A process of becoming

The exegesis, as an accompanying component of critical work in creative writing, has sparked many insightful discussions internationally and certainly in Australian higher education institutions. In this article, I will mainly focus on discussing the understanding of the exegesis in an Australian academic context. Similar to any literary genre or act of writing, the exegesis has undergone a radical metamorphosis over the last three decades in Australia. Tracking the evolution of the exegesis to its original purpose in the 1990s, Nigel Krauth (2011) explains that “the expectation was that an exegesis should be a sort of critical journal, a reflective account of processes undertaken while creating the accompanying work” (p. 1). This form of scholarly inquiry rapidly evolved, with Krauth himself and others – such as Watkins and Krauth (2016), Sempert et al. (2017) and Rendle-Short (2014) – as strong proponents for the radical shift, leading to innovative and challenging practices, which as a result, have also altered the way examiners read and understand this form of text. The exegesis was no longer presented as a parallel text (Kroll, 2004a) accompanying the creative work that offered a self-reflective narrative on the construction of the creative component (Brady, 2000). The idea of the exegesis began to include innovative forms with layers of complexity that might confuse some PhD candidates, but also allowed others to take advantage of the freedom the exegesis offered (Perry, 1998).

These shifts in understanding the exegesis have led to an ongoing debate which examines the form, content and function of the exegesis (Brien et al., 2017; Fletcher & Mann, 2004; Krauth, 2011; Kroll, 2004b), particularly investigating the close relationship between the exegetical and creative texts. However, the lack of a clear methodology has portrayed the exegesis as a mystifying (Brady, 2000) and sometimes feared (Cosgrove & Scrivenor, 2017) component to a creative writing PhD thesis, and the uncertainty surrounding the exegesis does not only reflect students’ experiences. Articles written by creative writing scholars also imply that an unclear methodological approach may lead to misunderstandings or different expectations of what an exegesis does or is (Kroll & Webb, 2012). The articles I have considered for this research inquiry, mostly authored by Australian scholars, all conclude – with varying degrees of certainty and various viewpoints on methodological approaches – that the exegesis is an inquiry into the research process a doctoral candidate undertakes as part of writing a creative work as an original contribution to knowledge. The form of this inquiry, the content and function are surrounded by much scholarly debate. As a result of clarification attempts over the last three decades, various terms have been used to refer to the exegesis. Paul Dawson (1999) sees the exegesis as an insurance policy “in case the artistic process was not rigorous enough” (p. 6) and therefore the candidate has the opportunity to “speak twice” (Krauth, 2002, p. 12) – once through the creative component, and a second time by crafting an argument and research question through traditional academic research. Hence, Krauth (2011) describes the exegesis as “having a close umbilical relationship” (p. 1) to the creative work. In interviews conducted with examiners, Jenner (2017) notes that some examiners referred to the exegesis as a “foreign body” (p. 13), implying that some exegeses can be unsatisfactory and lack a strong connection to the creative work. Therefore, the creative freedom that emerges from the lack of a defined exegetical methodology might not always be beneficial for PhD candidates. Furthermore, Jeri

Kroll (2004b) has referred to the exegesis as “the beast” (p. 1), with Donna Lee Brien et al. (2017) describing the nature of this beast as “changing and changeable” (p. 14), alluding to the evolutionary nature of the exegesis born out of the mystery surrounding it as a text. Gaylene Perry and Kevin Brophy (2001) have used an “eat your peas” analogy to describe the necessary but possibly involuntary nature of writing an exegesis as part of a creative writing PhD, which I could very much relate to in the early stages of my candidature. Andrew Taylor (1999), in an article that explores creative writing and the academic system, draws indirect comparisons to the exegesis as breathing life into the creative work (or vice versa) by using the phrase “Ghost and the Machine” (p. 1). Taylor’s metaphor – in which the ghost represents the discipline (creative writing) and the machine the institution (universities) – questions the complex synergy of creative writing and academic research that suggests that one needs the other (and vice versa) to make an original contribution to knowledge. Kroll (1999) describes the relationship between the exegesis and the creative work as “uneasy bedfellows” (p. 5), again acknowledging the confusion of the exegesis being a work in process and a finished product at the same time, yet providing a critical reflection on the creative work.

Even though the exegesis forms an important, albeit mandatory, element of creative arts research higher degree theses in Australia (Brien et al., 2017), the process of writing an exegesis needs further discussion in order to understand it as an individual text, rather than a text that only exists in connection with another (the creative) component. The act of writing the exegesis not only tends to confuse students – there seems to be undeniable uncertainty about it as an independent work amongst scholars too. The exegesis described as an insurance policy or safety net, as a beast that students and researchers wrestle with, or even as a restless sleeping companion, suggests this inquiry can be tense and dreadful at times. Furthermore, the implications in the metaphors academics use for describing the exegesis – as medicine necessary to advance knowledge (Perry & Brophy, 2001), as a kind of spiritual animation behind the process of conducting research (Taylor, 1999, 2000), as a foreign body (Kroll, 1999) and as being attached to an arterial duct (Krauth, 2011) – emphasise the exegesis as a dynamic process that welcomes movement (of ideas) and its urge for transformation. The openness and flexibility – rather than the lack of clarity – the writing process of the exegesis offers is a significant aspect that deserves further exploration.

While the exegesis performs an important function in reporting on the contribution to knowledge in the creative practice-based research higher degree (Brien et al., 2017, p. 3), it remains unclear how new information and discoveries are extracted from the exegesis, especially when the exegetical component is presented as a “protean journey” (Brien et al., 2017, p. 14) rather than a “static reiteration of what has already been said” (Perry, 1998, p. 3). Paul Williams’s (2016) acknowledgement of the complex evolution of the exegesis from preface to subsequent rationalisation and beyond may provide a start for this investigation: “The exegesis is ... part of the creative mechanism of the thesis, an integrated performance of its methodology, legitimating creative discourse as a mode of intellectual inquiry” (p. 11).

This form of inquiry, just like our understanding of the exegesis, has transformed: from a solitary journey which the PhD student undertakes over the course of three to four years, to a

more collaborative and active experience. Various influences – such as discussions with supervisors, preparing the work to be read by examiners, achieving milestones, attending conferences, joining academic groups and developing new knowledge along the way – are perceived as stops on this journey, made in order to reflect on and improve the work. Hence, the exegesis is more than just a fixed number of words on pages presented to the examiner: it is a construct made from a variety of dynamic relationships which have developed over time: exegesis + creative; exegesis + supervisor; exegesis + examiner; exegesis + self. It might be said, of course, that this construct does not suggest a formula that can be applied to all exegetical works, which will always vary in form, focus and structure. Furthermore, there is no particular hierarchy between these relationships, as they influence each other and the researcher in different ways and at different stages of the research process. However, the above order of exegetical relationships demonstrates how I have thought about them after submitting my thesis.

### **Exegetical relationships: Becoming through reading and writing**

An original contribution to knowledge can be demonstrated in multiple ways. Craig Batty and Allyson Holbrook (2017) analyse the term “original contribution to knowledge” and offer a few ideas that constitute new knowledge:

- ☐ “Using original processes and approaches” (p.10)
- ☐ “Creating new syntheses” (p.11)
- ☐ “Exploring new implications, for either practitioners, policy makers, or theory and theorists” (p.11)
- ☐ “Revisiting a current issue or debate” (p.11)
- ☐ “Replicating or reproducing earlier work [differently]” (p.12)
- ☐ “Presenting research in a novel way” (p. 12)

This list of ideas, as Batty and Holbrook point out, should foster a dialogue between supervisors and candidates in order to demonstrate what kind of new knowledge is being contributed, and clarify where it can be found and how it has been arrived at (p. 13). Williams (2016) strengthens this discussion by describing the nature of how creative writing presents new knowledge as “tentatively, suggestively, and subjectively, metaphorically, through the voice of fictive characters and an evasive author” (p. 14). He mentions the idea that in writing an exegesis, the creative writer is “disguised” and takes on the persona of the “exegetical narrator” (p. 11). In other words, the writer becomes researcher and the researcher becomes writer, and therefore in the writing of a creative PhD knowledge is in a constant state of being advanced. The knowledge contribution to the field of creative writing is deduced from various relationships that aid in the process of becoming. The relationship between the exegesis and the creative work requires a different method of inquiry and different processes than the knowledge that derives from the relationship between exegesis and examiner (reader). Furthermore, the connection between exegesis and supervisor and exegesis and the writer’s sense of self, again demands different techniques to advance knowledge. The exegesis, and by extension the writer of the exegesis, excavates knowledge from each literary relationship which helps make certain

discoveries. Thereby, the exegesis acts as a space of becoming where the writer-researcher can engage with the effects of these relationships.

### **Exegesis + creative**

The relationship between the exegesis and the creative component seems to be at the centre of most academic discussions about the exegesis. Each creative writing thesis that consists of a creative and an exegetical component offers new insights into this complex connection as conventional forms are being challenged, structures experimented with and new methods of inquiry emerge (Thin et al., 2020). Elizabeth Claire Alberts et al. (2017) describe the relationship between the exegetical component and the creative work as documenting a multifaceted thinking process that, as Alberts recalls, “circled and cycled between exegetical research and creative practice, where research influenced practice, and practice influenced research” (p. 9). Tess Brady (2010) agrees with this notion of reiterative thinking and claims that both parts not only inform the other, but “both become the other” (p. 25). A PhD graduate from England shares the same experience about his writing process: “I could actually monitor how my brain changed to accommodate this new study, and have subsequently looked at my creative work and found a substantive change – and improvement – caused by having to think in new ways” (Harper, 2012, p. 257).

In my experience of writing the exegesis, I made similar discoveries. I was writing my creative component and my exegesis gradually together and I started to notice how my research and my creative practice were forming an interwoven bond, a self-perpetuating cycle of research that informed my creative work – creative work that hungered for more research, advanced research that eventually became the creative and the creative sifting through the research. Brady (2000) confirms this process to be a common result and experienced a similar effect which she explains as “the academic and the creative slid into one another, nestled side by side so that one fed on the other, one became the other” (p. 3). My experience of writing the exegesis echoes the symbiotic effect Brady (2000, 2010), Brien (2004) and Kroll (2004a, 2004b) describe. The exegesis forms an important aspect of crafting the creative component and vice versa. However, surveys and studies conducted by Gaylene Perry (1998), Brien (2004) and Nigel Krauth and Peter Nash (2019) have also voiced disparities regarding a working relationship between the exegesis and the creative work. For example, Perry (1998, 2000) discusses the mandatory nature of the exegesis and notes that this process demands a different kind of research and writing practice, as compared to the practice we rely on in the production of the creative component. This “dualism”, as Brady calls it (2000, p. 6), sometimes causes a significant gap, even twenty years later, in the relationship between the two components, rather than a sense of connection and becoming one another. Moreover, it is striking that when the exegesis is discussed, the focus lies on various processes (Berry & Batty, 2016) that identify with dynamics and the interconnectedness of theory and creativity, always in relation to the creative, rarely shining the light on the exegesis as an independent artefact. However, when the function of the exegesis or its ability to establish a relevant correlation between two different ontologies is critiqued, the centre of the critique no longer refers to processes and specific meaning-making elements of the exegesis, but rather evaluates the exegesis as an independent

complete work of research that has a specific function: making the contribution to knowledge presented in the creative work visible.

A valuable process that I experimented with in the editing phase of my exegesis was the concept of storying ideas and knowledge in the form of a personal narrative about the practice of my research. I framed each exegetical chapter of my thesis with personal creative non-fiction narratives based on my fieldwork notes. On one hand, these short narratives highlighted my motivation behind pursuing this project; on the other hand, these stories have guided me from personal interests and ideas to more universal research avenues I could not access in any other way except through the telling and writing of stories. These stories presented an alternative way to approach research in which I spiral through personal emotions and eventually widen the spiral in order to enter a space where I can discuss specific issues relevant to my thesis, such as ethical considerations behind my project, the fieldwork I conducted and the processes of writing the creative component.

Sue Joseph uses a similar approach in her book *Behind the Text: Candid Conversations with Australian Creative Nonfiction Writers* (2016), where she describes her storied interviews with 11 Australian non-fiction authors as a form of “meta-narrative” (p. x). In the introduction of her book, Joseph points out that the interviews felt to her like a “personal journey to each writer” (p. x) as she travelled around Australia in order to interview specific writers. While the choice to transform these interviews into non-fiction narratives presented knowledge in a new, candid way, a sacrifice was made according to Joseph, who points out that “the text itself is not overtly scholarly, although it was gathered through scholarly research processes” (p. x). Similarly, the storying of my ideas and concepts formed a bridge from personal inquiry to rigorous scholarly thinking. In other words, the stories at the beginning and end of each chapter provided me with a starting point and reminded me to add more analytical depth to my research in the editing stage. Reflecting on the evolutionary nature of the exegesis, in subsequent drafts I decided to link my theoretical research to a personal narrative that stands beside the creative component of my thesis, and this gave me impetus. Through storying my thoughts, I combined the critical and the creative in order to engage with my ideas. I converted my concepts about the exegesis into a more personal narrative that guides the reader, and me, through the research journey.

The structure of the exegesis can incorporate theoretical or confessional elements as well as descriptive or analytic features, depending on the creative project the exegesis accompanies (Kroll, 2004a). In one of my first drafts, I included a section on the fieldwork I completed prior to my PhD. This fieldwork was a four-week-long trip through Indonesia and my field notes and journal entries were initially memory fragments that were intended to inform my creative work. However, these personal reflections became the narrative trajectory of my exegesis. As Jerome Bruner (2004) notes, “life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ‘events’ of a life” (p. 694). By using a revised version of my fieldwork notes and journal insights as a narrative frame that not only guides the reader through my research but also navigated me through developing my argument, I was able to form my research questions, focus the scope of my research and

build a connection with the creative component and the exegetical process. Once I had started experimenting with the structure of my exegesis, I recognised that the observations I had made during my fieldwork were more than just a template for my creative work. My personal records of my journey became a hybrid form of creative journaling and theoretical inquiry that shaped my research.

When the exegesis is discussed in scholarly terms, the main focus is often directed towards the relationship between the creative and the theory, implying that the exegesis only exists if there is a creative work that requires further explaining and justification in theoretical terms. While this is how my exegesis started out – with a focus on what others had said about the theory of writing – it became its own form, something that can exist independently as it not only speaks to the creation of the creative work directly but also makes visible the various layers of the writing processes that generate new knowledge. Framing the chapters of my exegesis with creative non-fiction stories about my research ideas highlights the often invisible drafting process of any writing. These short non-fiction narrative insertions represent the thinking process that occurs before the writing actually happens (Colyar, 2009, p. 431). In other words, the scholarly discussions in my exegesis function as a response to my personal inquiry prior to this project – an act of sense-making through reflection and research. While the aim of this process is to contribute new knowledge to the field of creative writing by highlighting the innovation of the creative work, the exegesis not only generates this knowledge but also highlights the process behind this acquisition, which is “represented after the fact in a tidy scholarly form” (Cawood Green & Williams, 2018, p. 8). The exegesis as a space of becoming is therefore indeed about theory – the developing theory of creative writing practice.

### **Exegesis + supervisor**

An integral part of any writing project is the editing and rewriting stage. To me, this phase of the writing process has mostly been imperceptible because I tend to focus too much on the end product and only begin writing once I have organised my notes and feel confident enough about my sources and the outline I created for each chapter. Laurel Richardson (1994) writes in defence of delaying one’s writing progress and notes that while writing is an active process of discovery, we often think of it as the end stage of thinking:

I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it. I was taught, however, as perhaps you were, too, not to write until my points were organized and outlined. (p. 517)

Working on my exegesis with my supervisors – thinking, reflecting, experiencing emotional exchanges in our regular meetings, writing and rewriting my notes and early drafts – has shown me that often what I write down is not what I ultimately want to say, but I can only get closer to what I attempt to say by writing more. Even so, by the time I had committed actual words to the project, the thoughts I previously wanted to express were no longer relevant, and more interesting and challenging topics emerged.

Julia Colyar (2009) argues that the act of writing about what we know constantly reshapes our knowledge. My exegesis, and the method of storying my ideas as memory fragments, developed through the intimate correspondence with my supervisors that sparked processes of rethinking and rewriting the knowledge I had gained through independent research. The “candidate-supervisor relationship develops over time (Kroll, 2004a, p.1), and by extension, the relationship between exegesis and supervisors also evolves gradually and becomes a witness of the student’s progress and knowledge development. “Though text presents a permanent trace of ideas and signs”, Colyar (2009) explains, “our interpretations of that trace are inexhaustibly complex” (p. 434). My exegesis captures some of these invisible traces of gathering knowledge and transforming ideas into inquiries for deeper knowledge. For me, it is not a final version of knowledge, but rather a fluid engagement with various processes and methods that led me closer to making new discoveries.

“Exegetical writing”, as much as the relationship between writer and supervisors, “orientates the writer, the written and the read” (Krauth, 2002, p. 12) and presents a unique correspondence that shapes the dialogue between exegesis and creative work. This correspondence, as an intrinsic element of the writing process, keeps the relationship between exegesis and creative work “alive” (Alberts et al., 2017, p. 4) and reflects the (re)writing and (re)thinking stages the student achieves through the interactions with supervisors. The dynamic nature of an exegesis is heavily influenced by the relationship between the exegesis and the student’s supervisors, because supervisors are the first critical readers who guide the student through the writing process and keep adjusting the line between old and new discoveries the student makes. However, while examiners, as I argue below, become one with the thesis by filling gaps with their own knowledge and feedback, supervisors help shape the exegesis in a way to leave space for examiners to be able to insert their knowledge and themselves, to become one with the text and extract knowledge from the subtle but inevitable incompleteness of knowledge involved.

My supervisors encouraged me to be innovative and to experiment with writing but also reminded me to keep my scope limited and to focus on a specific research question. We had discussions on what to include and what to cut out, and I was often encouraged to read other theses, present my work at conferences and to take long walks on the beach to process information and ponder my research questions. While this may seem like sound advice and attempts to establish a healthy, caring, well-balanced supervisory practice, it also demonstrates that the exegesis + supervisor relationship acknowledges that “knowledge will only become evident after the work has left us” (Cowan, 2011, p. 10). The knowledge that creative writing PhD students grapple with in their theses is produced retrospectively and stays in flux. The supervisor is aware that what is written on the page represents a current understanding of issues and will change with their own reading, the student’s (re)reading, and finally with the examiner’s act of reading and providing feedback. The relationship between the exegesis and the supervisor is as dynamic as the exegesis itself – or perhaps this relationship, when transcribed through the exegesis, captures the dynamic correspondence that shapes the exegesis as a space for becoming.



## Exegesis + examiner

For the writer, the exegesis is a constant work in progress, ever evolving. For the examiner, who reads and examines the exegesis against the university's particular criteria, the exegesis needs to fulfil one specific role: demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge by explaining the relationship between itself and the creative work. Eventually, it is the examiner who determines the purpose of the exegesis by examining various exegetical aspects through different lenses. In an article discussing the role of the creative writing PhD examiner, Kroll (2004a) points out that the exegesis is written for a very specific audience (the examiner) and therefore urges students to constantly keep in mind to whom they are addressing their thesis. Nike Bourke and Philip Neilson (2004) underline Kroll's notion that the exegesis only exists to satisfy the examiner when they mention "the relative 'usefulness' of the work for [more general] readers" (p. 2) and make other purposes of the exegesis seem like by-products the reader might not have access to. As a result of illuminating this relational aspect of the exegesis, Kroll (2004a) categorises five different examiner identities based on different levels of evaluation:

1. the academic subject matter itself – the examiner as scholar
2. the creative product itself – the examiner as arts reviewer
3. the creative arts thesis as hybrid – the examiner as critic of the whole as a literary or cultural statement
4. the creative arts thesis as original contribution to knowledge or culture – the examiner as judge or accreditor
5. the creative arts thesis as work-in-progress – the examiner as mentor or quasi-creator. (p.3)

Kroll's (2004a) analysis of how the reader (examiner) engages with the exegesis emphasises that the exegetical text cannot be read as a complete work, or an accompanying or parallel text, but rather as a reflective, dynamic and fluid text that discusses processes and methods through which new knowledge is produced and continues to be produced for writer and reader. Furthermore, considering the distinct identities of the examiner Kroll (2004a) describes, it appears that the contribution to knowledge in the exegesis does not present itself as the result of a complete text because the examiner has to read the creative writing thesis with (the above) five differing ontological perspectives – each offering unique pathways of processing information. Thus, the original contribution to knowledge is created by the reader's five different interpretations of the student's work that merge with the exegesis. Hence, the exegesis acts as a space of becoming, where reader and writer have an opportunity to engage in the knowledge production process.

Perhaps one of the reasons for comparing the exegesis to "uneasy bedfellows" (Kroll, 1999, p. 5) is the fact that the exegesis encompasses various complex processes that were indeed part of the creation of the text but also influence the reading experience. My narrative frame of storied journal excerpts (a form of the pre-writing thinking process) in combination with

scholarly research created an echo of complex evolutionary development of thought steadily and graphically visible and available throughout as a record of the journey, from jottings and notes to full discursive formulations (Emig, 1977, p. 127).

On the one hand, this structure created a narrative that helped me as a writer to navigate and situate my research, and to form a deeper understanding of the autobiographical narrative I was forming in the creative part – a travel memoir. On the other hand, storying my research also created a challenge of how to present the knowledge that emerged from my research. As Colyar (2009) notes, writers' thinking processes are often exposed in their written texts (p. 430) and the contribution to knowledge presented in the exegesis therefore includes both the research journey and the findings presented in the submitted version of the text. So "the authorial reflection", as Michael Cawood Green (2018) refers to the process of "discovering and giving meaning" to the research data, develops "as a lived and equal part of the dynamic and fluid process of the act of writing" (p. 6). The original contribution to knowledge, then, emerges from the discourse between personal reflection and research. Considering that the knowledge contribution in the exegesis consists of the writing process itself and the "final" version of the text, a certain mode of reading will be necessary to extract meaning from the exegesis.

Writing experimentally requires reading differently too. Krauth (2018) suggests that the implicit contribution to knowledge presented in a creative writing PhD thesis depends on the examiner's willingness to be open-minded and ready to immerse themselves in the text. He argues that "examiners will seek out the discoveries they make in the spaces between accepted old-school research and newly creative genres" (p. 9). A storied text, such as the one I have constructed in my exegesis, can offer the examiner this space to make independent discoveries. The exegetical discussions, presented as a storied framework, form a collage, or as Krauth (2018) describes the act of collaging, "the bringing of disparate elements together" (p. 4). He further explicates that:

Collage places previously separated modes, genres and statements together, and allows them to strike sparks off one another. But collage is not haphazard; it has an overall picture in mind; it involves aesthetic and intellectual manipulation proceeding towards an overall statement. (p. 5)

The combination of disparate modes Krauth discusses here refers to the exegesis as the theoretical mode of a creative writing PhD and the creative work as the other mode. He examines the knowledge that is produced when candidates synthesise traditional qualitative research and creative writing practices. What I am seeking to understand, however, goes a step beyond the relationship between exegesis and the creative writing component. It is integral to consider that the writing process itself is shaping the exegesis and the creative work, rather than the exegesis itself once it is "completed" or submitted as a final version. The mosaic I have created in my exegesis is a combination of theoretical research and excerpts from my revised personal travel journal. Together, these very different modes of exploration – ethnographical and scholarly – provide valuable insight not only into the contribution to knowledge of the creative work, but also highlight the integral part of the exegetical writing

process where writer and reader make new discoveries. According to Krauth (2018), “new discoveries and meanings ... emerge from the gaps between old discoveries and meanings” (p. 5). Thus, the collage invites readers to deduce new knowledge based on the intricate structure of the assembled exegesis.

The act of reading differently engages the examiner in a lively reading process in which the exegesis sends the reader to the creative work, which in return sends the reader back to the exegesis (Kroll, 1999). This back-and-forth thinking and reading process is where the examiner opens up to the implicit contribution to knowledge that is revealed by the various research processes the student experienced. The fluid nature of these processes provides the examiner with important insight into the past and present of the text they’re reading, but also allows them to alter the future of the text by making constructive suggestions about the student’s work. Consequently, the examiner-exegesis relationship plays a vital role in the contribution to knowledge as the interpretation of knowledge “in creative research is often locatable only within the artist” (Bacon, 2017, p. 91). Through the act of “being read by others” (Cawood Green & Williams, 2018, p. 5), the contribution of knowledge is now produced externally, in the reader’s mind, allowing for numerous new discoveries to be made. While knowledge can never be complete, the examiner’s feedback can provide the doctoral candidate with more information to process the known in retrospective and build upon their knowledge.

### **Exegesis + self**

The final relationship I will explore here is the relationship between the exegesis and the writer. For me, the exegesis acted as a space of becoming – becoming a writer, becoming a researcher, becoming an originator of knowledge – where I could make discoveries about my “self” through the research and creative writing I was practicing. The development of research skills and an experimental and innovative engagement with various writing and thinking processes that derive from distinct relational interactions, which led me to new discoveries, became a contribution to knowledge in and of itself. If the “traditional” exegesis explains the methodology and processes that have shaped the creative component to a creative writing thesis, what is the methodology and what are the processes that helped shape the exegesis?

In research about exegetical writings, there seems to be a discussion surrounding how the original contribution to knowledge is perceived. The research focus either lies on the exegesis that contextualises the student’s research and analyses findings and methods in order to create an insightful link between the creative work and the exegesis (Krauth, 2002; Kroll, 1999; Williams, 2016); or the research focus centres on what an exegesis needs to do in order to succeed, get approved by the university system, add unspecified rigour and innovation to the field of creative writing and defend itself in front of the examiner (Bourke & Neilson, 2004; Kroll, 2004a). Unquestionably, these are important factors that deserve the attention of scholars who illuminate the function of exegetical texts, but this division does not allow much space to address the personal aspects of writing an exegesis and how the doctoral student becomes a writer and researcher through this task. Eugen Bacon (2017) urges the creative writer to document the processes of the exegetical writing journey and Cawood Green and Tony

Williams (2018) also indicate that an illustration of “how writing happens” (p. 9), not in the exegesis but as the exegesis, forms part of the original contribution to knowledge in creative writing studies: “Scholarly practices tend to promote authority and deprecate chance and guesswork, but honest presentation of our hesitations, false starts and anxieties might produce a knowledge about writing which is more useful for other practitioners” (Cawood Green & Williams, 2018, p. 9).

The problem of elucidating the process of becoming a writer and researcher in a scholarly context is as convoluted as the following sentence: I know what story I want to tell, it is inside me, yet I wonder what to write about, go backwards and forwards, I create layers of the story, make lists of micro and macro elements, write a false beginning, read books and articles when I procrastinate, and eventually, I cut out some of the writing that led me closer to a completed draft because my story has evolved and taken a different creative direction. In the context of there being no methodology for creative writing in general (in spite of centuries of attempts to create such a thing), there seems to be a definite lack of creative writing methodology that provides insights and guidelines to organise, theorise and analyse the writing process of the exegesis.

The method of storying ideas provided me with a narrative frame that creates a correspondence between me as a writer and me as a researcher. This method functions as an exegesis within the exegesis, mainly explaining myself to myself and emphasising the deeper meaning of my writing and research journey to myself. Storying ideas principally mapped myself and my preliminary research with the goal to improve and understand my “self” (and “selves”) and the writing process better (Bacon, 2014). Through this structure, I was able to demonstrate research outcomes in the exegesis by creating a visible trace of the process of becoming: my narrativised research notes are a constant reminder of the knowledge I had when I started writing the exegesis and how that developed into other knowledge, and yet other knowledge again. As Bacon (2015) says, the exegesis is a “crucial component that is both a product and process” (p. 10).

Williams (2016) links the creation of knowledge to the student as an observer of the construction of text, rather than the creator, and notes that “an author is not quite the same person as the one who writes about being an author” (Williams, 2016, p. 14). An exegesis portrays the writer as being in a perpetual process of knowledge-seeking and knowledge-creating, which is reflected in the “analytical learning process” that plays an important role in various exegetical relations (Bourke & Nielsen, 2004, p. 2). By providing insight into her own writing process, Brady (2010) highlights the complex relationship between exegesis and self and the knowledge that is produced in that relationship:

Completing the novel I knew I was not the same person who began it, I had been on my own journey of discovery. My job, my housing, my personal domestic arrangements, even the city in which I lived had changed. I had moved across the continent from the plains to the mountains, from the Mediterranean climate to the sub-tropical. My fingers

that tapped at the keyboard were older, much more wrinkled now. And there was something inside of me which had changed as well. (Brady, 2010, p. 25).

It is important to consider not only the text alone as the contribution to knowledge, but also the writer's transformation and how the exegetical text was conceptualised throughout the research journey. This personal glimpse into Brady's development as a writer makes subtle observations that writing is "driven as much by the body as by thought" (Gibbs, 2005, p. 6). The writer's personal circumstances and growth with the research, according to Anna Gibbs (2005), are critical factors "in deciding not only the forms ideas will take, but also in discovering or inventing ideas themselves" (p. 6). The collaged form of my exegesis creates a space for the doctoral candidate to become a writer and researcher "in showing both the product and aspects of the process" (Krauth, 2011, p. 8) and the contribution to knowledge is demonstrated and embodied within the practice as process itself (Welsch, 2015). Just like my creative work, the exegesis is an inquiry that contributes original knowledge to the field of creative writing, not only in connection with the creative work, but also on its own.

When Nicola Boyd (2009) notes that "the exegesis will continue to be a place where boundaries are pushed" (p. 22), she makes an important observation on the kind of knowledge the exegesis contributes. Not only are the boundaries of the student's sense of self rearranged, but the boundaries of the form and understanding of the exegesis are broadened and knowledge is extracted from the exegesis in multiple, interactive modes. The contribution to knowledge becomes a reflection of the process of knowing, rather than a certain space of what we know. Colyar (2009) interprets this uncertainty as a reminder that "what we know now is not what we may know later, in another version or text" (p. 434), highlighting that even the contribution to knowledge is a process of becoming and never complete, even though the way we look at knowledge sometimes may suggest the opposite. As Alberts et al., (2017) point out, the exegesis often "generates risk-taking and often significant innovation" (p. 3) and the "retroactive" nature of knowledge as noted by Bacon (2014, 2015) implies that the unknown, the discoveries yet to be made, the things we know we do not know, and the things we do not know we do not know, are part of any contribution to knowledge we make in the present.

### **Becoming writer, researcher, self**

In an article concerning different research methods a novelist undertakes, Brady (2010) identifies reflective research, ethnographic research and scholarly research. Each research type allows the writer to make discoveries in different aspects of their research project so the writer then can form an argument and logical discussion that derives from these research methods. The uncertain nature of writing an exegesis, however, suggests that the exegetical text cannot make an original contribution to knowledge in the same way other scientific inquiries intend to. The exegesis is a very helpful exercise to explain the writing process and to discuss the creative project in scholarly terms, however, this in itself begs an inquiry into the writing and thinking process behind the exegesis. As Cawood Green and Williams (2018) point out, the act of writing itself produces knowledge:

It might be that some insights about the writing process only occur to us in retrospect. And we might well feel that the act of writing an article enables us to clarify what we think, and that getting rid of some of that inchoateness, and translating the non-verbal into the verbal, is exactly what writers are in the business of doing. (p. 8)

I have argued that the exegesis is a space of becoming or “reflective-infused practice”, as Cawood Green (2018, p. 7) describes the coming together of different processes and methods with which the writer engages. Colyar (2009) explains that the writing itself is “qualitative methodology” (p. 433) as writers explore ideas more critically through reflective writing, which supports the writing process of the creative work. More interestingly though, by examining the writing processes of the exegesis (alongside that of the creative work) and exploring the invisible, silent relationships of the exegesis – namely exegesis + creative, exegesis + supervisor, exegesis + examiner and exegesis + self – by applying a method of storying ideas, the exegetical text forms an original contribution to knowledge as much as the creative component, rather than justifying the contribution to knowledge solely through the creative work.

Critical work on the exegesis in Australia is extensive and spans over three decades, yet the topic remains worthy of further exploration. I hope my inquiry provides a foundation for further research that investigates new innovations in exegetical thinking and writing. As this article focuses on an Australian context and relies heavily on Australian sources, it would be interesting to expand this debate and draw comparisons of doctoral work conducted in Australia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and other countries with similar creative writing PhD programs. Furthermore, socio-critical responses to textual composition or a focus on exegetical post-structural responses might be future research avenues resulting from this article that I will consider in my attempt to explore my understanding of the exegesis further.

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