Deterrence Vivarium: A Collection of Stories and Exegesis

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Thesis submitted for the degree of

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Volume 1: Creative Component

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Volume 2: Exegesis

1. Introduction

From its inception to completion, this project has enabled me to see a shift not only in the development and approach to my writing, but it has also given me a clearer understanding of my role as a writer. I began writing stories only a few years prior to undertaking this program and to be honest had little understanding of the process I used for their construction. I enjoyed reading other writers and would have ideas myself for possible stories, yet there was often a terrifying sense of the unknown that prevented me from putting stories onto the page. It was only when I had made a decision to write that I began to think and read in a more conscious manner with regard to the construction of stories. I tried reading more systematically, in particular short stories. I was going to the library with lists of 'good' short stories, as declared by writers who I enjoyed, and began seeking out stories I thought were more 'interesting' and lesser known. I was trying to understand and piece together the elements of style and construction that made them 'good.' I was also writing a few hours each day, yet it was still hard to see myself as a writer because all this activity seemed disconnected. There was no audience, other than the occasional obliging friend. More importantly, I knew of no other writers with whom to connect with, seek advice or discuss my work.

In response, I enrolled in a short course, in part for the content, the insights into the building blocks of the craft that were on offer, but also to begin entering into a dialogue and conversation about writing. Broader discussions were shaped around dialogues about certain groups of writers and texts, but there were also specific pieces of writing by each student that offered more focused conversations. Placing a story before others and engaging in a conversation about the text was extremely productive, firstly through other students' readings, criticisms and insights offered, but also in having to explicate my motivations, the aims and the detail of a story's meaning. In a workshop environment, where participants provide writing for feedback, there is an affirmation of the openness of

texts which has been central to the redefinition of both the author, the reader and the production of meaning through the emergence and development of poststructuralism. Roland Barthes refers to the multiplicity of 're-writings' through the process of reading in his influential essay "The Death of the Author":

> there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author … but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed … all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination (6).

This inextricable relationship between reading and writing, and its significance in the development of writers through Creative Writing programs, is outlined by Marcelle Freiman in her essay "Writing/Reading: Renegotiating Criticism." In response to the 'openness' of texts and the reconfiguring of the roles of 'reader' and 'writer' which poststructuralist theory demands, she argues that:

> teaching writing is also about teaching reading. Rather than claiming to teach students to write 'publishable' writing (after all, published by whom?), we are teaching them about writing/reading and how language functions in its 'worldly' contexts.

That is, through my participation in workshops I came to understand that in order to write, I needed to be involved in a dialogue as 'reader' with other 'readers', and to not only pay heed to the 'destination' that I imagined for my writing. In practical terms, disagreement becomes fertile ground with the need to justify choices and omissions in the construction of a story. The discrepancy between readers becomes an essential part of the writing process. I would explain from where I believed the story's ideas, images and characters had emerged, however my reading was never definitive, instead productively involved in a dialogue, and it is such a relationship that I have tried to construct during the research and writing of this thesis, between my role as both a reader and a writer, or writer as reader.

I was also faced with another sense of the unknown in writing an exegesis for the first time. My response was to begin engaging with debates around the form, content, assessment and creation of the exegesis, which began with the establishment of Creative Writing programs in Australian universities. In my reading there was comfort in seeing some of my initial anxieties reflected, both in choosing to place my writing within an academic context, seeking to have it assessed and to connect it to a larger body of work, yet also to begin to talk about my own work in a more rigorous manner. In particular, I was drawn to two papers written in the late 90s at a time when Creative Writing was emerging as a discipline and growing in student numbers (Krauth), and which explored some of these anxieties. Kevin Brophy in his essay "Some Things About Creative Writing: Three Stories" sees a nakedness in firstly claiming to be a writer and implying exposure as part of the role of the writer. This exposure is central to connecting to a reader or audience, as we can only feel or become conscious of our nakedness under the gaze of another. Yet, the exposure is twofold in the construction of an exegesis, as Jeri Kroll in her essay "Uneasy Bedfellows: Assessing the Creative Thesis and Its Exegesis" states, "There is an element of threat in being asked to put down in writing … what we require of students as non-negotiable statements, perhaps as artists we like to leave something for our audience to intuit." I see the threat here as the fear of offering a definitive account, or the anxiety of the authorial voice closing down dialogue between the reader, and the writer, as well as between texts. However, in framing both the creative and the exegetical works as engaging in an ongoing and productive conversation, the exposure and the anxiety surrounding the exegetical process, for me, dissipates.

Jane Messer in her essay "Practicing Interdisciplinarity" recognizes that not only does practice-led research, such as creative writing, often inherently blur and merge disciplinary boundaries, but further notes that such research practices need to be placed within the development of interdisciplinary practices in the humanities more broadly. She states:

While long present in universities, the coalescence of practice into what we know as practice-led research, arose as part of broader movements of education reform, critique and disciplinary upheavals.

More specifically, in relation to the role of research in the construction of the exegesis Tess Brady in her paper "A Question of Genre: De-mystifying the Exegesis" encourages greater fluidity between the boundaries of the creative and the exegetical process. She describes her PhD research as follows, "I was combining in my *process* both the creative and the academic." In my writing, although I am not necessarily explicitly or directly building upon theoretical insights, I am always aware and critically evaluating my writing. I may trick myself into believing my creative writing is somehow separated and segmented from the theoretical, that it stems from my imagination, however my drafts and notebooks contradict this. They show me that all of my reading and thinking, both fictional and theoretical, is never far from the surface.

Brady uses a metaphor of a 'bowerbird', attempting to show greater scope and fluidity in the research process, needing "to acquire a working rather than specialist knowledge, not in one area but in a range of areas and disciplines … like a bowerbird that picks out the blue things and leaves all the other colours." Brady is writing from the perspective of historically researched fiction, yet if I am writing fiction that emerges from the imagination and experience than the 'archive' must expand even further, and the lines of inquiry potentially becoming even more idiosyncratic. I agree that the process of research is bowerbird-like, and therefore, the aim of this exegesis is to map and document the important elements to the writing process—the scratching around and collecting that this process has involved—yet, the exegesis is not only a document that shows the uniqueness and worth of the process itself, it is also important in making this process manifest, the exegesis as artifact. In other words, I have found that there is value and importance not only in the process, but also in its articulation.

In order to finalise the aims of this exegesis I will return to the words of Jeri Kroll in a later article on the role of researcher as both writer and reader in the exegesis. She states, "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" ("The Exegesis"). This 'protest' of the authorial voice, I see not as acrimonious or in conflict to the reader—ideal and less ideal readers—but, as an attempt to contribute to the possible, continued and multiple readings which I see as the true test of my writing.

The accompanying exegesis aims to offer an understanding of intent, motivations, influences and possible interpretations to complement and build upon the reading of the eight stories contained in the creative component. Simply put, I aim to follow Kroll's broad conception of an exegesis as a "sophisticated and knowledgable talk about the artform in general and also about one of its manifestations in particular" ("The Exegesis"). In another sense, I see this as providing a map and a way through the dialogic and intertextual relationships that inform my writing. Like all maps, it gives the reader a layout of the surrounds, but there is no prescription to your movement or destination.

2. The Forming of an Idea

The completion of the creative work proved difficult from the early stages due to its ambitious beginnings, in which I plotted and planned a novel length work around an idea of a man who is drawn into an underground experimental network of cosmetic surgeons. I believed I had a certain and clear idea of the work's endpoint, yet I admit in the initial stages was deaf to the inherent uncertainty of the process to get there, and its importance in determining such an endpoint.

The idea for the novel was originally inspired by reading contemporary British writers Stewart Home—in particular his fictions, or self-described 'anti-novels': *Tainted Love, 69 Things to do With a Dead Princess, Memphis Underground* and *Blood Rites of*

the Bourgeoisie, and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder.* At the time, I traced back these writers'

own interests in 20th century avant-garde art movements from Dada to Situationism, and in

particular their interest in the manifesto. Although both writers had major divergences in

their approaches to writing, both had utilized manifestos as interceptions within art.

Stewart Home had constructed his own brand of 'neoism', documenting his participation

with the Association of Autonomous Astronauts and other assorted 'art agitators' in

Neoism, Plagiarism and Praxis and *The Neoist Manifestos.* Tom McCarthy, as he

explained in his interview with Mark Thwaite, co-created and became involved in the

activities of *The International Necronautical Society,* after his novel *Remainder* faced

difficulties in getting published ("Tom Mccarthy"). The *INS's* activities directly engaged

with, as he states, his interest in "the art manifesto as a literary form" ("Interview with

Tom Mccarthy").

After reading a number of manifestos from the 20th Century, including Tristan

Tzara's "Dadaist Manifesto", "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" by the Russian Futurists,

"The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" by Marinetti and "The Situationist Manifesto"

by Guy De Bord of The Situationist International, I started compiling lists of my own

fictional societies and eventually wrote a manifesto for the *Society of Experimental*

Elective Plastic Surgeons or *SEEPS*. I imagined a group that drew upon the extreme nature

of surgery, particularly if it is an act turned upon the self, contrasted to the broader

conformity and prosaic determinants with which the bodies under elective surgery are

subjected. Rather than the 'utopian' project engaged in the form of the manifesto, it was

more a satirical reading of the 'utopian'; misread as being found in the individual, in

particular the surface of the individual, rather than a looking outward to a broader sense of

the social. I wrote a manifesto for *SEEPS* in 2009. It was the first piece of fiction—less

than 300 words—that I had completed and it was published in a single-issue small art and

culture magazine in Melbourne called "Chalk" in 2010. Needless to say, at the time of

writing the original manifesto, I still hadn't quite conceived of myself as a writer, yet the

ideas and intent in the manifesto seemed unexplored and stayed with me. A year after, I began writing short stories and eventually found myself wanting to attempt a project that was larger in scope and found myself drawn to some of the ideas connected to the *SEEPS* manifesto. It was my desire to explore these ideas further that led to this current project.

In fact, it was not cosmetic surgery *per se* that I was interested in, but looking at it as a broader metaphor that draws out the pressure that exists between the construction and perception of self and broader societal forces and power. Cosmetic surgery is an area of investigation for feminist scholars across a diverse set of fields, including philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, psychology (Heyes 3), as well as contemporary art (O'Bryan 15). This research has built comment, critique and debate centred around the autonomy of the subject and the complex social forces which are in interplay through a rapidly changing and developing medical field (Heyes 5). For example, this can be seen in the spectacle of Orlan's work, such as her "Carnal Art Manifesto," or more specifically *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* beginning in 1990 which makes manifest not a critique of the technology which enables the reconfiguring of the body, but the standards which pervade its use. She writes in her "Carnal Art Manifesto*"* that *"*Carnal Art is not against aesthetic surgery, but it is opposed to the standards that it conveys which are inscribed in women's flesh in particular, but also men's" (Orlan).

Kathryn Morgan in her 1991essay "Women and the Knife" already sees the "*normalization* of elective cosmetic surgery" (28), and although statistics, particularly with regard to Australia are not clear due to insufficient gathering of data as the Australasian Foundation for Plastic Surgery claims (AFPS), it has been estimated to be a growing industry of at least $1 billion dollars annually by 2011 (Yard). It is clear that there has also been a steady and continual growth globally of procedures (ISAPS). Most importantly, Morgan in her essay is pointing towards not necessarily the volume or 'commonness' of procedures, but the way in which these procedures are woven into the normalizing of patriarchal and hegemonic structures, and lead to what she terms "three paradoxes of

choice" (35). Morgan firstly sees the idea of "choice" read as a choice for conformity, instead of uniqueness or idiosyncrasy (35-36), secondly, choice confined under the pressure of an idealised normative corporeal femininity within patriarchal parameters (36 - 38), and finally choices determined under "the pressure to achieve perfection through technology" and the subsequent 'pathologizing' of imperfection (38-41). Here the paradoxical logic of choice is made evident through the extremity of electing procedures which involve painful, distressing, and at times harmful effects. However, choices around aesthetic surgery shouldn't be seen as an outlier of contemporary culture. Instead, such paradox is unfortunately central to the logic of modern life. These machinations and structures of power marginalise and leave some more vulnerable in our society than others, and therefore, such paradox pervades our collective existence.

I was only beginning to see myself as a writer and trying to find a voice at this point of the project. I hoped my writing would to some extent move against expectation and utilise modes that were informed by the ideas I wished to explore, and at this point I didn't necessarily want to limit my approach, yet the subject of cosmetic surgery provided complications. Even though I could see the richness of narrative possibilities, it was an area for which I had little experience. In particular, as my writing utilised humor and satire, I needed to ensure that it refrained from a dismissiveness of other people's experiences or choices. Instead, I needed to write not so much about the 'subject', more to use this growing cultural phenomena to explore my own understanding and relationship to the subject of 'agency'.

3. Finding Form

In my writing I seek to work against the expectation that writing is about drawing out a rich psychological depth of character and a relatable world and that a writer's role is to 'document' the world around them, in short my own expectations of reading and writing strain against the broad conception that storytelling is by default 'realist'. I am skeptical of

such expectations mainly due to my own reading habits. As I have already noted my interest in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder,* it seems appropriate to quote the often-discussed article by Zadie Smith "Two Paths For the Novel". She states that the critics of 'lyrical realism' "note the (often unexamined) credos upon which Realism is built: the transcendent importance of form, the incantatory power of language to reveal truth, the essential fullness and continuity of the self" (74). Realism in this sense is shackled to, as Smith cites Robbe-Grillet in a more combative tone, "the destitution of the old myths of 'depth'" (74). Yet, despite such a claimed destitution, realism is persistent and still a dominant mode for fiction, at least in the context of Australia.

For me personally, I am not averse to either reading realist modes, or utilising its traits in my own writing; however, I knew that as I developed as a writer, my writing would draw from a broader set of influences and traditions in fiction, which I had in turn been drawn to through my own reading habits.

Wayne Macauley, whose writing I enjoy and see as a strong influence. In particular, the disturbing oddness of his short stories which disrupt the seamless 'realist' expectations within the narrative, as well as the naturalised ideologies that knit together the Australian everyday which his narratives both explore and upturn, as seen in his collection *Other Stories.* His novels although more satirical in intent and sustained in their approach, also unravel both the narrative and the social world they depict. *Blueprints for a Barbed-wire Canoe,* through the first person recount of the central character Bram, depicts a housing estate which fails due to a promised freeway connection that is never built. Some residents refuse to take the government's buy back of land and remain, attempting to live a life disconnected from the conveniences of urban Australian life. The disconnection and disintegration of the physical space and infrastructure of the estate works in hand with a distancing and disruption of the neo-liberal and capitalist ideologies from which the disparate community has formed. The residents buy into the estate, and hence the ideology of private home ownership, yet they are eventually abandoned, both by the state and the

private companies which seek to profit from the development of the land with no regard for the lives of the 'citizens' or 'consumers' who reside within.

Macauley's *The Cook* is a dark satire which exposes the thinly veiled divisions of class and wealth in contemporary Australian society. In particular, the cultural capital bought and sold which makes manifest and reproduces these divisions. The novel follows a juvenile offender being rehabilitated through a star chef's innovative cooking school. The head chef offers his new trainees the advice:

> By subjugating ourselves we become strong. And to what do we subjugate ourselves? To public taste. To whim. To folly. To whatever looks and smells new. We bow to the fickle and frivolous we are servants of all that is decadent excessive unnecessary. (42)

It depicts a world in which excess and greed are not only revered values, but shape the cultural output of that society, in this narrative particularly the excesses of 'fine dining'. It is also, and importantly to the story, a culture built upon the labour and exploitation of others, as well as unsustainable debt and credit for which the risks and costs are most often borne by workers and suppliers.

The first person perspective of Zac, the trainee and juvenile offender who narrates the story, is written with a sense of immediacy in an almost spoken register, built through a lack of punctuation. This voice is integral to establishing the markers of class which heighten the underlying incongruity and establish the threat and humour of the narration. Yet, it is Macauley's ability to straddle both the construction of a 'relatable world'—to directly engage with the social conditions that structure a 'real'—and to play with form which was of interest in terms of my own writing.

Macauley states in an interview with regard to his novel *The Cook*:

> … with high literary modernism now nearly a hundred years old and post-modernism already looking a bit fat and middle-aged, to write a two hundred-odd page novel of unpunctuated sentences in the interests of

> capturing the rise and fall of a character's thoughts is, let's be honest,
>
> actually a bit of a conservative thing to do. ("Explaining Bees")

This wry and self-effacing retort by Macauley in an interview with Ryan O'Neill, refutes the attempt in this instance to be drawn into taking a stance on one side of this constructed dichotomy of realism against non-realist modes. In order to tease out a supposedly contradictory stance, O'Neill then uses Macauley's own words from a previous Melbourne Writer's Festival forum where he spoke against the perceived dominance of 'classical' short stories published in Australia, which Macauley described as "for the most part, stylistically and structurally conservative social realism" ("Where Do I Come From?"). Through such a contradiction, Macauley demonstrates that although it is tempting to characterise form as either conservative or progressive, such conceptualisation often works in an oversimplified, linear and binary fashion that ignores the shifts, changes and complexity over time of the varied contexts and relationships between texts.

Delia Falconer in her paper *The Challenge of the Post-postmodern* also puts forward a similar idea that form is not ahistorical and is always attached to a changing social and political context, arguing for the teaching of post-modern texts in Creative Writing programs 'historically.' Falconer explains:

> Teaching historically requires both conveying the continuing presence and
>
> use of postmodern techniques under new historical conditions while at the
>
> same time helping students to grasp the past affective power and uses of its
>
> earlier formations. (5)

Therefore, what I wish to point to in both these examples is that although it is easy to set up a schism between realist and non-realist modes of storytelling, that in fact the landscape of Australian fiction, focusing primarily on the short story and the novel, changes over time to which such dualities become redundant, and there is also a complex and diverse ecology of forms readily available to writers, as long as they are willing to look for them. With the emergence of the change in 'historical conditions' that Falconer

points to—the fact of globalisation, networked technologies, and shifts in the publishing and purchase of books—there is the possibility of greater access and exposure to a variety of styles, voices and literatures for readers and writers. In the Australian context, the small press *Spineless Wonders* is publishing less traditional forms from prose poems to microfictions. *Seizure* is also utilising online platforms to publish new writing, as well as more traditional literary journals, such as *Meanjin, Kill Your Darlings, Lifted Brow, Island* and *Overland* combining multimedia platforms and online content alongside their printed magazines. Pertinently, Phillip Edmonds asks towards the end of his study of Australian literary magazines, *Tilting at the Windmills,* whether such shifts will be sustainable, and whether the pressures of the marketplace and government priorities in terms of funding will diminish the diversity of literary magazines in the future, whatever form they may take (278)? However, there there will still be a continued responsibility for writers, not just publishers, to contend with the diversity of forms available to them and also to engage beyond the Australian context.

This is not to say that understanding this context isn't important, particularly in terms of where the tensions between 'realist' and 'non-realist' modes have emerged, as these arguments offer a frame which has been used for viewing Australian writing for some time. Patrick White identifies in his essay *The Prodigal Son* "the dreary, dun-coloured" (15) realism that he sets against the modernist sensibility and practice, which White wished would supersede the former, even though there was already well established 'modernist' practice across multiple art forms prior to his essay's publication in 1958. As Michael Wilding writes in his survey "The Modern Australian Short Story":

> By the 1950s, modernism as a literary mode was firmly established. But the realist tradition that it had confronted showed no signs of surrendering the field. Realism was not superseded by modernism; rather, modernism and realism have coexisted in literary practice throughout the century. (112)

What I hope to draw out here, and drawing upon my experience as I began to construct the stories for my creative piece and to build an understanding of my own practice, is that there are an innumerable set of formal options open at the initial construction of a piece. Looking at the benefits or privilege of my 'historical' position, I have been exposed and have available to me a variety of forms. I draw upon the stories I have read and the stories that surround me. There is pressure of influence and expectation that asserts itself, however coming to writing as a varied reader, I see instead an almost inexhaustible set of formal options with each story demanding it own consideration of style, voice and form.

Of course there needs to be a consideration of the expectations of the reader, and although as Andrew McCann points out in his essay "How to Fuck a Tuscan Garden: A Note on Literary Pessimism", that in spite of what he describes as a 'homogenizing' "middle-class and middle-brow tone of Australian literature", there is a possibility of "more varied forms of writing", if there are reading communities with interests invested in cultural production outside the prevailing norms (24). Therefore, in understanding that storytelling is a communicative act, it is important to conceive of a reader that belongs to a "diverse reading publics capable of sustaining varied modes of literary expression" (23) and to engage in a conversation as a reader with other readers. My own desire to be challenged and engaged by stories is then the driving impetus in utilising an aesthetic that doesn't concede to the limitations and assumptions of an 'undifferentiated' reading public.

Humour is also important to my writing. A laugh is a visceral reaction that connects directly to the reader. However, satire is a form to which I am sometimes drawn and other times repelled. Highet in his study *The Anatomy of Satire,* primarily concerned with classical and English literary texts, sees as essential to the satirist's motive both contempt and scorn (22), and its purpose twofold, firstly an optimistic attempt to reform and secondly a pessimistic need to punish (237). Kernan in his survey of the genre goes even further and combines these aims by stating that the satirist's purpose is to wage a losing

battle, "to cleanse society of its impurities, [and] to heal it of its sicknesses ... " (178). In these summary of aims, satire appears as a mode of writing built on 'contempt', 'punishment' and 'purgation' which can only place the writer outside, or even worse, above the world that their writing should engage with; it is a position I see as untenable for my own writing.

In contrast, Bakhtin through his study of Rabelais looks at the influence of folk culture and humour on the satirical and comic tradition, moving beyond the negative purpose of distancing a writer from their object of mockery and placing themselves above it. In opposition to this depiction of the satirist, the laughter of the 'carnival' is instead "directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They too are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed" (*Rabelais 12*). Therefore, when I write I try to be conscious of neither condescending, nor placing myself above the reader. The use of humour and flawed characters used throughout my stories stems from my own flaws and failures, as well as from the failures of the world to which I participate and belong.

The creative component started with a specific idea in mind, a broad concept and a desire to use the novel as a form to flesh out the ideas I had, yet this expanded and contracted at various stages to become a series of microfictions, short stories and a novella. Underlying each of the stories is the central purpose of showing people as compassionate, thoughtful and at times fragile. I find instead that it is the structures—political, market-driven, institutional, and social—which people participate in and construct each day that are often brutal, repressive, inhuman, cruel and indifferent. The aim or purpose of my writing is then not to mock or vilify individuals and their experience through my writing, but instead to position myself as writer amongst the absurdity and at times cruelty of life to which we all belong and live in hope of change.

My choice of the title *Deterrence Vivarium* and the story to which it belongs represents this tendency in my writing. The story itself insists on an initial reading of an

allegory regarding the current political and social context that surrounds offshore detention of asylum seekers in Australia. It uses the horrifically absurd logic of offshore detention, a system purposefully constructed to act as a beacon of cruelty to repel from Australia those most in need. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, the allegory complicates; the person trapped in the cage-like structure of the *deterrence vivarium* is in fact a manifestation of the person's self. There is an implication of the destruction of self in the cruel actions against others, no matter how removed from the process. Further still, there is the implication of the onlooker and the extent of complicity through the gaze*,* firstly through the characters in the story and their indifference to the plight of the imprisoned self, but also extending out to the writer and the reader. The story begins almost as farce with the police assisting the intruder back over the garden wall, combined with the strangeness of characters' reactions which draw the reader into an incongruent humour. Yet, as the narrative progresses the humour gives way to a darker reality, that if funny, also exposes a cruelty that we live amongst. The indifference of the characters, although in one sense damning, is built upon a naivety and ignorance—an unquestioning faith in a system which is clearly cruel and absurd. In turn, this naivety leads in part to their own demise. The aim of the story is not to simply condemn, but to explore the ways in which one can be lead to and imprisoned in such a position.

The stories of *Deterrence Vivarium* as a collection, although attempt to engage in their social and political contexts, would be misrepresented as a polemic whose sole purpose was social critique. For me, at the centre of each story there is also a need to push the boundaries of what I understand of the world, and hopefully in a small way shift the readers' perception of the world to which they belong.

A collection of stories that I find compelling and represents the will to create and this other purpose, reconfiguring my understanding of the world as I see it, is *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz. For me the story "Birds" directly engages and represents this purpose in my own writing. It takes the image of the father, our expectation is of the

bourgeois patriarch, insisting on 'sense', 'order' and 'responsibility', yet what we are given is a father who cares not for these things. He experiments with unexplored registers of being. The young son as narrator talks of his "sinful and unnatural turn" (Schulz 20), that begins with "the hatching out of birds' eggs" (21). The father rather than reinforcing and implementing the strictures of society, tries to read the symbolic in every crack and mousehole in the world around him, and to encourage his family to do likewise. He abdicates authority to his daughter Adela and experiments with "unexplored regions of existence" (20). He begins to descend into and succumb to a birdlike madness. He attracts an array of birds, nesting and breeding them in the sanctuary of his attic. They become his 'creative act', but an act which becomes both uncontainable and incompatible with his family and the world he inhabitants. He becomes a bird, allows another form of existence to take him over. His hands become like his condor's talons and he shares its chamber pot. His daughter, Adela, brings to him salvation by opening the windows, letting the birds go. The father attempts to escape with them, but in spite of his flapping cannot rise into the sky with these creatures.

Although there are a number of ways that the story could be read, I see it as pointing towards a basic provocation to create, to write and to tell stories. When I write, I understand a tension that sets the imperative to explore other 'registers of being', something that in other contexts might be described perhaps as a small madness, yet it is also necessary to release the birds and clean up the attic of such obsessiveness, and to bring the creative act back to the world itself. The father and the daughter in this story are the tension that sets forth an unwieldy and chaotic purpose, yet are able to draw back and maintain the will to write, a drawing back to a sense and order. The writing in my stories is not content with the seamless rendering of the 'real', and tries to bleed into other worlds, yet I try to bring writing back to a communicative act and save it from slipping into a potential solipsism, or perhaps madness, that would render a bridge of understanding unassailable.

4. Initial Drafting

This collection of stories emerged from an attempt to write a novel. The final piece of the collection, "By Numbers" is a novella length story which became the incarnation of this attempt. Therefore, I see it as a productive place from which to begin to understand the other stories, as each story in the collection was written almost as a way of working through the problems, the gaps, and the blocks that I encountered during the completion of the novella.

The initial drafts of "By Numbers" came to a halt early in the project. I had certain ideas for the piece that I was unable to make work to my satisfaction. The story came from a particular view of the world. I sought to explore the increasing fascination and dominance of the 'surface' in the world I live. I find Frederic Jameson's critique of 'late capitalism' in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* more pertinent than ever, and that we are saturated by surfaces and a depthlessness (12) brought on by the pervasiveness of 'neoliberal' economics, or locally known as 'economic rationalism'. Although it is not the only mode of being, it is the one favoured by the cultural logic of our society and increasingly dominating everyday existence. This is of course an area of exploration for many writers, most importantly for me, the work of J. G. Ballard, who takes these ideas to their 'dystopian' and 'apocalyptic' ends as seen in his earlier works, such as *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *High Rise* through to his later novels, such as *Millennium People,* where only the image of the world is left, where there are "laws without penalties, events without significance, a sun without shadows" (294). In my writing I am more interested in the dysfunction of this logic and its pervasiveness in the world around me, this is perhaps why I often prefer to write in a comic mode. However, like the novels mentioned, in the initial drafting of the work "By Numbers"*,* I was attempting to create a flattened world around the central character Callum Ryder, and wanted the setting, landscapes and the characters to reflect this depthlessness.

Of course this presents the technical difficulty of how to represent hollowed out landscapes and characters while keeping narrative interest. Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* was a possible example in which constant, long, shallow and repetitious descriptions of the hollow world surrounding the central protagonist attempt to engage the reader through their irony, as well as constant interruptions of extreme violence. Yet, such device would be insufficient for my central protagonist Callum Ryder who is the antithesis of Patrick Bateman. Callum is cast out from the world through his own choosing, rather than placing himself at the centre of it—as Patrick Bateman can be clearly seen to be the hollowed monstrous central manifestation of late capitalism. However, there is also a problem that is set forth by David Foster Wallace, who was an openly hostile critic of Brett Easton Ellis's writing, a sentiment reciprocated by Ellis with regards to Wallace's writing. He states in an interview with Larry McCaffery, "If readers simply believe the world is stupid and shallow and mean, then Ellis can write a mean shallow stupid novel that becomes a mordant deadpan commentary on the badness of everything" (*Conversations* 26).

Although, I don't agree with this assessment of Ellis's work, particularly in the social specificity of such works as *American Psycho* and *Glamorama* which are located in the detached excess of the 'winners' of the neoliberal experiment, there is clearly a potential trap for such representation.

Anna Kavan's *Ice* published in 1967 and emerging from a different context, time and location, is a novel that perfects the effect of this depthlessness, flattened landscapes and characters. The nameless narrator pursues a transparent woman made of glass through shifting and nameless oneiric landscapes. I re-read this book as I tried to build up a collection of connected narratives to the character of Misha. Although Kavan's novel once again is a dystopian fiction and experimental in style, I tried to utilise the idea of a shifting and formless identity that only solidifies through the perception of others. The character of Misha uses this as a way of escaping the demands of others perceptions. The writing in the

final draft changed in tone significantly, but the essence of the character still remains and its conceptual inspiration significant. The sections for Misha are narrated in the first person, yet from the beginning there is an uncertainty to the truthfulness of her narration and what it reveals about her character. There is constant slippage and play in the construction of her identity through the first person narration and undermines expectations of the reader.

The landscape was technically less burdensome. Firstly through omission, trying to avoid any specific references to locale. This I was able to draw on my experience of growing up in the suburbs of Melbourne under the behemoth of a shopping mall, surrounded by carparks, wholesale factory outlets and highways. It is a landscape I have seen consistently throughout urban areas across the globe. It has minimal variations, except perhaps the people who are granted access to populate these spaces.

However, as indicated earlier and in spite of my efforts, the writing came to a halt. It seemed I had come to a natural conclusion, yet I had only half a novel. There was also a problem that the draft seemed to be tonally separated into two parts. The first began in a comic mode with a lightness to the subject, then as the narrative continued dystopic figurations started to emerge, only with comic relief from a grotesque and exaggerated horror. The tone was at times too serious, even mirthless. The demands of the novel seemed too much weight for the narrative to sustain or bear.

I had come to an impasse, even if it was more to do with my perception, only seeing the draft's failings, rather than the potential of what the draft could become. My feeling was encapsulated perfectly by David Foster Wallace again, riffing on the writing of Brett Easton Ellis. He states:

> If what's always distinguished bad writing—flat characters, a narrative world that's cliched and not recognizably human, etc.—is also a description of today's world, then bad writing becomes an ingenious mimesis of a bad world. (*Conversations* 26)

At the end of the first draft, it seemed that the story was too long to carry only Callum's perspective, the setting, namely Callum's house and the clinic, was too limited in particular for a protagonist who seemed content to allow the world to act upon them, however at this stage I was not able to work out how to rebuild the draft. It seemed the dullest parts of the draft had either caught a light case of this mimesis, or worse were perhaps just bad writing. Of course, I needed to go through and extricate these parts of the text, but I was unsure how to replace them.

5. Other Directions and Productive Distractions

Thankfully, as I write I often overcome gaps and stalls by starting another piece. In the frustrations and the stalling of drafting "By Numbers", I had already begun and completed a number of shorter pieces. At this stage, I realised that the creative component could work as a set of stories. In this change of direction I thought it would make sense for the stories to cohere. I considered the option of utilising the structure of a 'linked collection' or 'short story cycle' as a way of bringing my stories into a more cohesive whole. Not in the vein of more recent Australian collections, such as the stories in *Shadowboxing* by Tony Birch which are linked by a neighbourhood, a central character and era, or in *Things We Didn't See Coming* by Steven Amsterdam, where once again the stories are linked by a central character, yet placed in a context of a threatened future, but more in the 'discontinuous narratives' of Frank Moorhouse from the late 60s and 1970s, or Helen Garner's *Cosmo Cosmolino* consisting of two short stories and a novella, in which the narratives share in part characters and context while shifting more radically in time and perspective.

As is common practice for many writers, I keep a notebook. Helen Garner in writing her fictions would divide her notebooks into characters. Grenville and Woolfe in documenting the process of the drafting of *The Children's Bach* in *Making Stories* describe each entry under a character as, "scraps of dialogue, lists, cryptic glances … sometimes a

moment captured in a phrase or sentence" (61). My notebooks are not as ordered, more akin to the observations and 'idea lists' that are broader in scope, as seen in Murray Bail's *Notebooks 1970 – 2003*. Yet more often my notes will also plot out a story, or outwardly articulate stylistic options that might give voice to the idea and the story. Commencing a story usually consists of a series of first attempts, sometimes no longer than a paragraph. The essential element that I am looking for is best defined as 'voice'. I am looking for a marrying of form and content that engages the reader.

Looking through my notes and writing, it seemed that there was no clear sense of setting, nor protagonists that joined these stories, yet in this process I realised that there was for me a clear set of ideas and focuses in these stories that sufficiently bound them. Unfortunately, I still found myself feeling like the addressee in David Foster Wallace's 'Octet', "You are, unfortunately, a fiction writer. You are attempting a cycle of very short belletristic pieces" (*Brief Interviews* 123). It is a metafictional story that after beginning some of the pieces it mentions, abandons its story cycle, breaking down into a series of notes, which reflected perfectly my position.

Looking further into various short story collections, and in particular looking towards an Australian context, I found Moya Costello's *Small Ecstasies* and revisited Wayne Macauley's *Other Stories*. These collections more than others spoke to me through their insight and style. They shifted between short story, anecdote, letters, satire and more; it seemed that the form and the voice of a story emerged from its intention or purpose. They focused on the reimagining or seeing through the fabric and the machinations of the everyday. These collections gave me confidence in my process and continued working on pieces discreetly and that it would be the ideas that the writing explored that would connect them.

The collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men,* from which the story 'Octet' is taken, helped to also give me a clearer sense of my own writing, its ideas and preoccupations. In particular, it was Zadie Smith's reading of Wallace's collection in her

essay "Brief Interviews of Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace"

which helped me to see similar connections in the stories that I was writing and, at least in

part, what they might be trying to say.

Smith's essay, written after Wallace's death as a reflection and panegyric of his

work, is a comprehensive analysis of *Brief Interviews*, but also offers broader insight into

Wallace's approach to writing. Smith argues that Wallace's writing follows two veins that

are highlighted in his reading of Wittgenstein. The first comes from the argument in

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and can be seen again in his interview with Larry

McCaffery. Wallace argues:

> The *Tractatus*'s picture theory of meaning presumes that the only possible
>
> relation between language and the world is denotative, referential … If you
>
> buy such a metaphysical schism … the individual person with her language
>
> is trapped in here, with the world out there, and never the twain shall meet.
>
> (*Conversations* 44)

This for Wallace was a solipsistic loneliness that he believed was intolerable to

Wittgenstein and saw his later *Philosophical Investigations* as attempt to overcome such an

understanding of existence through a focus on the connections and relationships between

people. He states in reference to *Investigations*:

> Wittgenstein argues that for language even to be possible, it must always be
>
> a function of relationships between persons ... So he makes language
>
> dependent on human community, but unfortunately we're still stuck … in
>
> here, in language, even if we're at least all in here together. (*Conversations*
>
> 44)

Smith argues in her essay that Wallace's work is so often seen as difficult not only

because it is at times purposefully difficult, in the sense of needing to be unlocked, reread

and contemplated, but also because the reader must firstly inhabit this recursive and lonely

place trapped within language. She states, "This … is where Wallace's hideous men live.

Trapped alone within language" (268). Yet, it is the moments between people, when a bridge of communication and connection is felt through this barrier of language which are the most significant. She writes, "He was always trying to place "relationships between persons" as the light at the end of his dark narrative tunnels" (281).

In terms of my own stories their narrative construction is more conventional, yet the characters that inhabit my stories are caught within a similar bind. Even in their most grotesque formations, such as "To My Son", or their most futile as in "Imago", there is always an empathy for the character that comes from their attempt to connect with others, even if for some this is impossible.

The only exception would be the title piece "Deterrence Vivarium" which I see as the bleakest in humour because it is a story, in a sense, about the consequences of a failure to connect, and an attempt by the characters to use language to both shelter and distance themselves from others, leading ultimately to the corrosion of self.

6. Four Stories of Deteriorating Connections

The story of "Amsterdam" I see as the most divergent stylistically to the other stories in the collection. I see it as drawing upon an influence from American minimalists in style. It was a story I wrote while reading Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*, yet I would see the progenitor to the story as more likely a book that I have loved and read many times, Helen Hodgman's *Blue Skies*. Although the stakes for the protagonist of *Blue skies* are much higher, and the vein of humour and political satire that runs through *Blue Skies* is absent from "Amsterdam", I have utilised the dry and distant prose structure of her short and direct sentences, while infusing the narrative with a disquieting sense of imagery. The narrator seems to be emotionally distant to their situation, and there is a building suffocation to *Blue Skies* that I have aimed to replicate in a smaller way in "Amsterdam".

The story was written to explore a sense of loss that is for the protagonist seemingly inevitable, but which they are unable to adequately or actively prepare for. There is a sense of helplessness and resignation that connects to many of the characters in the collection, in particular Callum in "By Numbers". The setting is also a nameless urban landscape, yet it isn't the outlying expansive margins of the suburbs like "By Numbers", but a more central stifling density. The setting plays a pivotal role in the story, building an increasing threat to the protagonist who seems to wilfully resign himself to the inevitable. The images of the rabbit, the gun owner and the council workers, through the protagonist's perceptions, begin to take on a life of their own. The aim of the story is for the reader to experience a small and subtle unsettling of reality, hinting at a potential derealisation of the protagonist's surrounds, with the surroundings intended to convey the emotional interiority of the central character.

"The Homecoming in the Snow" by Robert Walser in *Berlin Stories* is a story that uses such technique so vividly that I find its images return to me. It is able to create a lightness of voice, which elicits a sense of unburdening for the central protagonist, even in a situation of growing despair and wretchedness. Yet, for me as a reader there are also moments of not being exactly sure what I have read. The landscape and the imagery of this story have haunted my imagination often. In particular, the moment when a giant emerges from the snowing night, standing in the pathway, and the protagonist passes it with little note. It is a moment in which the image brings to life the interiority of the character. Standing before him could be a statue on the outskirts of Berlin, or a manifestation of foreboding. It is also a rising up of the character's immense sense of failure with the giant symbolising the city from which the protagonist had come to many years before with a sense of ambition and elation, but is now leaving destitute in the night, a failed writer. There is a force and ambiguity in "The Homecoming" which "Amsterdam" may not achieve, but it does use unsettling surrounds that almost come to life in order to draw out

the experience of the protagonist, and which the protagonist is unwilling or incapable of acknowledging.

If "Amsterdam" introduces us to a protagonist who is slightly uncertain of the 'reality' around them than the protagonist of "ONFF" is living a delusion. The story came about after speaking to a friend regarding numeral systems and the efficiency in terms of computing of a ternary, rather than a binary or the positional base-10 system of the Hindu-Arabic numerals (Hayes). The story works in an almost syllogistic manner in order to generate its humour. Firstly, the concepts of zero, death, sleep and off are used interchangeably, symbolically this might work, but the character as the narrative progresses is taking such substitutions in a literal manner. This is the same as the flawed idea that a change in a numerical counting system demonstrates a shift in the construction of reality. Yet, the protagonist's narrative perspective is what the reader has to go by, and it is clear that his perspective is far from stable. This then leads to the protagonist believing that a mechanical perspective on the world is different to a human perspective, working from the false premise that machines actually have perception. The story leads into the idea that machines might have a better understanding of what 'god' is than people. Of course, the ridiculousness of this proposition sits amongst a human history of more complex attempts to make the proposition of a 'god' believable, but the story's aim is not to raise the question of god's existence, but perhaps of the need for people to create gods, even if it is located in a toaster.

"jesussaves82" is another story in which the two central characters seek connection with each other, but their differences prevent the relationship from developing or taking on any significance. I went to Catholic school from a young age and found the whole idea of Jesus—an everyday guy who was also god—more than a little funny, in both senses, suspicious and humorous. I always wondered what people would make of him if he arrived in town and tried to make friends in the suburbs. It seemed that he never let himself be too human, as I understood that to be. At high school I found another version of Jesus in

D.H. Lawrence's *The Man who Died* which plays out the idea that after his resurrection he is riddled with despair at his life's waste and seeks comfort in simple human pleasures, and leaves the mythologising of his resurrection to the crowd. The Jesus of my narrative might be seen as someone who is using the identity of Jesus either knowingly or perhaps through a high functioning delusional disorder, but I see him more as the Jesus who has escaped from Lawrence's tale. He has left his pagan lover on the shores of Sidon and found himself in contemporary Australia setting up an online dating profile. Jeannie his date has no time, space or need in her life for the miracles he may provide. He comes off as egotistical and self-centred. Each character is more in love with the notion of wanting to love, or feeling the need to make the attempt to connect, while knowing that their lives are too separate and different for even a picnic in the park to work.

"Imago"*,* as a title, initially draws a reference to the 'mirror stage' of Lacan. The 'imago' is the image of recognition, an identification of wholeness that according to Lacan will never quite resolve and results in a continued sense of discord or alienation. As he claims of this recognition, "the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego in a fictional direction which will always remain irreducible … and by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality" (2). Of course, in the story "Imago" this discordance is amplified as the attempt to recognise oneself as 'whole' is disrupted by the transformation of the *I,* or the self, into another object altogether, that is a book.

This is one lens for a story about a man who transforms into a copy of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, but the title can also be seen as a reference to the adult stage of an insect, the moment after metamorphosis. I see the story "Imago" as taking up the adult stage of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in which the central character has found themselves suddenly transformed not into a bug, but into a copy of Kafka's novella. Of course such a reference rests upon my position as having only encountered Kafka through English translation, which gives a specificity to Kafka's creation that was not intended, yet has implications far beyond the purity of translating one word, instead embedded in the history of the text's

reception and continuing translation in English (Hubel 17). This adds another layer of what I see as a productive limit of language, a misrecognised 'wholeness' to language that feeds back into the story.

"Imago" works with a much lighter tone than Kafka's *Metamorphosis.* The narrator is overly anxious and almost petulant, but his situation is much less bleak than Gregor Samsa's, even with the tale ending in a lament. In one sense the story plays upon the refusal of Max Brod to grant Kafka's final wish to burn all his manuscripts (Butler 3), with the central protagonist's identity being subsumed by the book they become. This request and subsequent refusal rests on Kafka's own knowledge of the limits of language. Kafka would have been aware of the impossibility of his demand and his powerlessness to ensure the request would ever be met. As Butler notes, "Kafka's works are about messages written and sent where the arrival is uncertain or impossible, about commands given and misunderstood and so obeyed in the breach or not obeyed at all" (7). In her article, Butler responds to a court case that was set to determine the stewardship of Kafka's remaining manuscripts, and she points out the irony that, "Kafka's writings finally became someone else's stuff, packed into a closet or a vault, transmogrified into exchange value" (8). This is also to an extent the problem for the central protagonist of "Imago". They have been transformed into mass-produced paperback, 'transmogrified' into a product to be bought and sold. Although, some may argue that there is more literary merit or cultural capital in the works of Kafka than other mass-produced paperbacks, it still means the dissolution of the protagonist's identity in "Imago". There is an irony in the character insisting on being seen as an individual after their transformation:

> Did she really believe that I was interchangeable with any book with the same title? Had she not understood, even in the few sentences she had read, a uniqueness to my prose, if not in word than at least in sentiment?

The person-ness of the character has been taken from them. They become a product, and at best a few throw away lines of cultural capital, as demonstrated by the new boyfriend.

Gregor in his decision to crawl off and die, in a sense, reclaims his humanity through death, at least through the sympathy of the reader, if not his family. Kafka through his unburned manuscripts survives, transforming into something other than who he was in life, but Judith Butler's warning about the corrosive effects of capitalism which seeks to "exploit even the most anti-instrumental forms of art" (8) adds a layer to the lament of the protagonist from "Imago" which hopefully moves beyond self-pity.

7. Failing Masculinity

The male protagonists I have always been drawn to in fiction have been in some respects failures, or at least have a disconnect between how they are socially perceived by those around them and the way they view themselves. The lineage of such characters stretches back to *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*, but other novels I have read and see as key influences on my writing are Natsume Soseki's *Botchan*, Robert Walser's *Jakob Von Guten*, John Fante's *Road to Los Angeles,* John Kennedy Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces*, B. S. Johnson's *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry* and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder.* All of these characters and the humour that interweave their stories are generated through the misrecognition or reinterpretation of the world they inhabit, or through their lack of self-awareness and interactions with others. Callum Ryder I see as a direct antecedent of these characters, and many of the men throughout this collection of stories are also closely related.

The stories in *Deterrance Vivarium* are focused primarily on men and masculinities and their construction and connection to language. Feminist research and debate has shown for decades the constructed nature of gender, in particular highlighting the implicit and universalizing norms of an assumed 'neutral' masculine perspective that "goes unanalysed and, therefore operates implicitly and oppressively" (Dinshaw 72). Therefore, it is important to investigate the construction of these characters and to tease out some of their implications. As highlighted earlier in the exegesis, the aims and motivations of these

stories were in part an exploration of a current social milieu or logic, in part the voracity and effects of an instrumental economic rationalisation; therefore, gender as a primary social construct is a key intersection for investigation.

As "the sex-gender system, in short, is both a social-cultural construct and a semiotic apparatus" (De Lauretis 5), there lies an essential question at the centre of writing stories, in particular the focus of my narratives primarily around men, and that is to what extent such characterisation reifies or reinforces a hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity, or if it is in some way able to complicate such constructions? I am not going to argue that these characters are somehow radical reconfigurations of masculinity; the characters in my stories are for the most part white, heterosexual males. However, there is an interesting recurrence of failure, inaction, silence and absence that I believe complicates them as constructs of masculinity.

They have, for the most part, a lack of instrumentality; they have little worth to the capitalist and in turn the patriarchal values of the worlds they inhabit. They are unemployed, mentally or physically unstable or incapacitated, or have simply abdicated responsibility. The reader sees their alienation from a social world that the characters themselves don't seem to recognise and they in turn wilfully construct an image of themselves as 'whole'. This is the discordance that generates the stories humour, but most importantly their empathy too.

The story "To My Son" works as a letter that reveals from its opening lines the grotesque masculinity of its author, a father who believes his son to be 'ugly'. The letter continues revealing the father's disturbing perspective on the world, yet its humour is generated from the assuredness of the father and his confidence in his invention, which will lead both him and his son to their fortune. The father clearly is unable to read the world before him; even his assertion at the beginning of the story about his family's inherited ugliness is clearly a misperception. By the end of the l etter, the reader realises

that the father is trying to connect as best he can to his son, but within his limited capacities.

"The Suitcase" is another story that deals directly with a father-son relationship. The story centres on the idea of memory; the discrepancy that sometimes occurs between how a memory is collectively remembered, against how it is remembered personally, and finally how each can shift over time. Central to the memory is the disappearance of Danny's father, yet there is a substitute—Graham, an old man with Alzheimer's found on the side of the road. Masculinity is built here on withdrawal. The father both through his substitution and through hiding in his child's closet becomes both a presence and an absence. The father walks away from all of his responsibilities, his wife, his child and employment. He could be read as more detestable than the father from "To My Son" in his silence and withdrawal. At the conclusion of the story, with regard to the father, the narrator states:

> … he did feel his son's warm hand reach in and pat his hair, and he did eat that chop, and it was the thought of these sensations which eventually led him out of the suitcase, and before breakfast, leave for only he knew where and never return.

The motivation implied here for the father's disappearance is the love of his son. It is a father who pre-empts his own failings and weaknesses and decides his family would be better off without him. In a sense, he has all the trappings of a middle class life—a job, family and home—yet his response is to simply disappear. In the terms of the narrative, he chooses non-existence. Danny, as the son, is left with only the reconstruction of his father through memory, something which is unsure and fragile, but to which he finds himself returning in an attempt to connect and understand this continuing absent presence in his life.

Of course, these masculinities are not constructed from a vacuum; these characters have been built from the men I have grown up with, often men I see and encounter in life,

as well as drawn from my own misrecognitions and failings. This is not to add, as Bethan Benwell states, to a "proliferation of "crisis" accounts of masculinity" (242) seeing traditional roles placed under pressure (242). The masculinities in these stories fall far short of the 'heroic', which still persist and are clearly observed in the storytelling of Hollywood, despite the ironic use of a stalling and disintegrating hero trope, these 'heroes' still come out on top (Kord 2). It is more to observe that the power structures from which these masculinities are constructed—the structures that place them in their position of privilege—might ultimately be a corrosive misrecognition of self, perhaps locked in and simultaneously looking into their own *deterrence vivarium*.

8. Returning to the Draft

Once I had a collection of stories suitable for the creative component, I needed to return to my first draft of "By Numbers". As stated earlier, the draft was divided by two distinct and contrasting tones. Having a number of stories before me I felt my strongest writing was humorous in tone. I was fortunate enough to discover at the same time the Ukrainian writer Andrey Kurkov and his novel *Death of a Penguin*, which once again assured me of the worth and complexity of humour in writing. The narrative follows the protagonist Viktor, who writes obituaries for subjects not yet deceased, and his penguin Misha, who has been abandoned by a zoo in Kiev because it can no longer afford to feed its animals. Both characters are caught in a world from which power operates beyond their control and comprehension. Yet, Kurkov is able to balance the bleakness and isolation of characters' situations with a lightness of tone, drawing out the absurdity and humour of the story. In redrafting "By Numbers", I realised I would need to attempt to provide a similar balance.

At the start of this project I had also purposefully returned to two of my favourite writers, Gogol with his stories 'The Nose' and 'The Overcoat', and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and The Margarita* to try and assist with tone and humour. Therefore, when I

embarked on another round of editing, I once again sought Bulgakov's assistance and began to read his novella's *Fatal Eggs* and *A Dog's Heart.* These influences can be seen at various stages of "By Numbers". Both novellas dealt with crazed experiments gone awry, and so I used Vladimir Persikov the Zoologist of *Fatal Eggs* and Filip Filippovich Preobrazhensky from *A Dog's Heart* to help me think through the character of Doctor Hensen, but it was Chapter 2 of *The Master and The Margarita,* where the narrative jumps from the narrative's present day, 1930s Moscow, to Jerusalem at the reign of Pontius Pilate that gave me the idea of inserting contrasting settings, timeframes, and voices that intercut the primary narrative of Callum Ryder. In other words it gave me the licence to disrupt the 'monologic' or singular perspective of the narrative.

The interweaving of three perspectives, Callum, Misha and Hensen, enabled me to then begin writing in shifting registers and voice. I used a similar process to my short story writing, seeking a 'voice' to each section. I had at this point eliminated more than half the first draft, so I began rebuilding and inserting into the remaining narrative with the perspectives of both Doctor Hensen and Misha. This enabled me to construct a novella that utilises what Bakhtin saw as an essential element to the construction of the comic novel, 'heteroglossia' (*The Dialogic Imagination* 311)—a parodic stylisation that builds a multi-voiced story, which as he says rejects any straightforward and unmediated seriousness (*The Dialogic Imagination* 312). In my own terms and as stated in this exegesis, I see a story's success as drawing in and maintaining a reader's interest, as well as giving them a visceral and immediate reaction, be it their laughter, their empathy, or if in a small way, opening up a new perspective on viewing the world around us. I hope *Deterrence Vivarium* as whole fulfils those aims.

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