(Re)Scripting the Self: Subjectivity, Creative and Critical Practice and the Pedagogy of Writing

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Abstract

This PhD research focuses on Queer Theory and its application to subjectivity in the contexts of creative practice, Practice-Led Research (PLR) and Creative Writing pedagogy. One of the principal concerns of the project is how a queered PLR might foreground subjectivity as a practice in itself and view both creative practice and critical research as components in an “ethics of the self” (Foucault 1978) or “self-bricolage” (Rabinow 1997).

In this context, creative practice is conceived as an intervention into subjectivity and creative works are framed as artefacts that both document this interventional process and express or disseminate new subjectivities arising from that process. In a similar vein, research in the Creative Arts is seen as a performative act that includes affect (produced through engagement with both creative and critical texts) as a form of knowledge. As with creative practice, this kind of research informs the ongoing constitution of subjectivity.

The research project also explores the notion of effeminacy as a liminal masculinity of considerable discursive potency that simultaneously disrupts both masculinity and femininity. This exploration is undertaken in relation to the Southern Gothic genre of literature, cinema and television.

The PhD project has both critical and creative components. These components take the form of a critical exegesis and a script. The critical component describes methodology, contextualises the project in terms of relevant ideas and theory and connects the creative component to a critical context. The creative component, the script, expresses critical ideas around subjectivity in a broad and accessible way and disseminates narrative expressions of queer subjectivity, specifically expressions of liminal masculinity. Moreover, reflections on the process of writing the script are used to discuss the ways that the writing practice and attendant research acted as part of an ethics of the self or queer becoming.

Keywords: Queer Theory, Creative Writing, Screenwriting, Practice-Led Research, Southern Gothic, Queer Becoming.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) ____________________________
Dallas John Baker
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Earlier iterations of some sections of the exegesis were published as articles in academic journals or as refereed conference proceedings. A version of Chapter Six was published in *Creative Industries Journal* (2011 4:1). A significantly abridged version of the same chapter was published in the proceedings of the annual conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (2010). These versions had slightly different orientations to what became Chapter Six in this exegesis. Also, a much shorter and somewhat different version of what became Chapter Eight was published in the proceedings of the 16th conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (2011). These publications are not included in the exegesis exactly as they appear in the publications. That is, the exegesis has been written in standard thesis style with previously published material rewritten and folded into the chapters. The sections that include previously published material are indicated with citations and are included in the Bibliography.

Finally, I would like to thank Martin Galafassi for his wide-reaching support throughout the doctoral candidature that included readings of various iterations of the script and exegesis. I am indebted and extremely grateful to him for his considered and intelligent comments on both the creative and theoretical components of this project.
Author’s Note

A brief note on formatting and spelling: The two components of this research project employ different approaches to formatting and spelling. The script uses American standard spelling quite simply because it is set in the United States. The exegesis, because it needed to meet the specific style guidelines of the university in which the research project was undertaken, uses the Australian standard for spelling and punctuation.

Additionally, the script’s format does not strictly adhere to either the American or British standard television formats. This is because I wanted to produce a script that was readable by a general audience as a text in itself irrespective of any possible future production.

The highly standardised approach to screenplay and teleplay formatting has been critiqued as not necessarily relevant for modern media contexts and, indeed, as unnecessarily dogmatic (Millard 2010). The standardised formatting for screenplays and teleplays also privileges professional readers (producers, directors, cinematographers). I wanted to produce a script that a general reader would find at least as readable as a stageplay, whilst retaining its functionality for any future production.

The reader will also note that, for the most part, I use the term “script” to describe the miniseries text. This is an allusion to Kristeva’s notion that all writing is scripture (1982). The word “script” also emphasises that the text produced as part of this research project is discussed here primarily as the artefact of a writing practice (“script” comes from the Latin word for writing “scribo”). Also, by not signalling the mode of production or reception (television or cinema), the term “script” reorients the reader from approaching the text as ancillary to a finished and screened production to approaching it as a finished creative work on its own terms.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Germinal to this research project was my own wish to explore and describe gender and sexual difference. For me, the wish to engage with difference both preceded and inspired the intention to write. In addition, my research interests flowed from the wish to discuss and understand difference and to contextualise the description, expression and exploration of that difference in my own creative writing. In other words, this research developed out of my own experience of difference and a need to theorise and express the same. As Joan Scott (1991: 779) has suggested, '[i]t is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience'. In this sense, to explore and explain my specific lived experience is to understand and express the ways by which my own subjectivity was, and is, constituted. In more general terms, interrogating lived experience provides a means for understanding how knowledge garnered through experience is core to the constitution of subjectivity and for understanding the histories and knowledges of ourselves and others. In significant ways, this project is part of my own ongoing queer becoming (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 272); my own self-bricolage or self-making.

The research project focuses on Queer Theory and its application to subjectivity in the contexts of creative practice, Practice-Led Research (PLR) and Creative Writing pedagogy. One of the principal concerns of the project is how a queered PLR might foreground subjectivity as a practice in itself and view both creative practice and critical research as components in an ‘ethics of the self’ (Foucault 1978). In this context, creative practice can be conceived as an intervention into subjectivity (a self-bricolage) and creative works are framed as artefacts that both document this
interventional process and express or disseminate new subjectivities arising from a self-making practice.

The research project consists of a critical and a creative component. These two components take the form of a critical exegesis and a script. The script is a Southern Gothic television miniseries. The project approaches the script from within the discipline of Creative Writing rather than Film and/or Media Studies in order to emphasise the creative practice of scriptwriting rather than institutional or production issues specific to screen production.

The critical component (this exegesis) describes methodology, contextualises the project in terms of relevant ideas and theory and connects the creative component to the critical context. Specifically, the exegesis describes the PLR methodologies that were employed to produce the creative writing artefact.

The exegesis, and the creative artefact, both explore notions of subjectivity, in particular how creative writing practice can illuminate the ways that subjectivities can be seen to be performative (Butler 1990) and produced in and through discourse. The creative component, the script, expresses these critical ideas around subjectivity in an accessible way in the form of narrative and disseminates textual expressions of queer subjectivity. As a compliment to this, the exegesis explores liminal genders. This exploration is undertaken in relation to the Southern Gothic genre of literature, cinema and television.

The exploration of liminal gender draws on Judith Butler’s (1993b) notion of gender insubordination. Throughout the exegesis, I will be deploying the term “abject genderqueer” to describe gender insubordinate characters or figures of the Southern
Gothic genre that defy heteronormative gender structures and are therefore constructed in dominant discourse as somehow abject, as that which must be expelled or destroyed (Kristeva 1982). The term “genderqueer” arose from the firmament of discussion and debate around gender in the queer community (and queer academe) that has been ongoing over recent years (Nestle, Wilchins & Howell 2002). The term signifies and evokes a simultaneous refusal of constrictive heteronormative binary gender norms and engagement with a potentially limitless number of approaches to thinking about and living gender. Genderqueer is meant to describe the multiple ways that individuals and groups navigate or bypass rigid societal conceptions of binary gender and explore the plethora of possibilities for re-making gender and identities (Nestle, Wilchins & Howell 2002). The genderqueer “movement” is, clearly, influenced by the work of Queer Theorists like Judith Butler (1990 & 1993). For me, the tomboy and the sissy, who occupy a place outside of heteronormative femininity and masculinity, are prime examples of the genderqueer.

To sum up, the project threads together a number of creative and critical ideas: the notion of creative and critical practice (writing and research) as performative bricolage; the notion of writing as part of an ethics of the self; the notion of subjectivity as core to the project of writing and research in the context of a Foucault inspired self-making; and the idea of queer texts and discourse as components in an ongoing queer becoming.

The Research Questions

This project addresses two interrelated questions: ‘How might a shift in understandings of subjectivity (especially in relation to gender and sexuality) impact
on writing practice and pedagogy?’ and ‘How might these understandings of
subjectivity be expressed in creative form?’

To answer these questions, the exegesis explores confluences between subjectivity,
the practices of writing and critical reading and the teaching of Creative Writing. In
other words, this project explores the ways notions of subjectivity impact on the
academic domain of Creative Writing which includes the core practices of reading,
writing and teaching (of reading and writing).

In answering these questions, the project explores how notions of subjectivity impact
on the reading and writing of marginal genders, specifically liminal masculinities.
This exploration of liminal masculinities serves to illustrate, and provide an example
of, how notions of subjectivity inform writing and reading praxis. This exploration of
liminal gender is undertaken primarily as part of the writing process in the production
of the script.

This creative and critical research project can be seen to be making an original
contribution in that it:

- Produces an original miniseries script that explores non-normative gender and
  subjectivities, in particular effeminacy, in a way that privileges (rather than
  marginalises) them.
- Undertakes an analysis of the impact of non-normative or queer notions of
  subjectivity on the pedagogical practices within the domain of Creative
  Writing in a way not yet fully explored.
- Undertakes an analysis of how shifts in subjectivity impact on the practice of
  writing which, to date, has not been explored in depth, particularly with
reference to the writing of liminal genders and the practice of queer self-
making.

- Addresses a paucity of Creative Writing theory that focuses on the script.
- Uses a multidisciplinary approach that draws on a range of disciplines
  including Critical Theory, Creative Writing theory, Queer Theory and
  psychological research, all in the context of Practice-Led Research, which in
  itself is innovative.

**Liminal Genders and Queer Becoming**

The creative component of the project examines, among other things, representations
of non-normative or liminal genders as artefacts that trigger an ongoing queer
becoming. That is, the practice component both analyses and demonstrates how the
gendered subject and subjectivity are constructed in certain discourse and writing and
how representations of normative masculinities might be written differently (or
rewritten). An emphasis is placed on those constructions of gender that are
characterised by an aspect of gender variance or *gender insubordination* (Butler
1993b) and/or sexual difference. Specifically, the project focuses on the liminal
masculinity of effeminacy.

The representation (or writing) of sexual and/or gender difference has been selected
because sexuality and gender are often perceived as the most significant “norms” or
components of subjectivity (Butler 1991). It could be said that gender and sexual
norms, because they are often subject to normalizing discourses and oppressive
mechanisms of power, offer the most potential for textual and discursive resistance
(Baker 2010). In particular, it will be argued that the way we construct our own
subjectivity influences how we understand (or read) liminal genders and how we then
construct (or radically deconstruct) those genders in the practice of writing. It will also be demonstrated that a reverse process, whereby cultural artefacts and the practice of writing itself act as triggers for a rewriting of the self, are also at play in queer engagement with cultural artefacts.

These deconstructions and reconstructions of liminal masculinities can have considerable potency, particularly in relation to culturally or textually inspired queer self-making. Judith Butler has argued that exposure to alternative and non-normative forms of gender and sexual subjectivity can ‘undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one’ (2004: 1). In other words, an experience of a text or discourse featuring a non-normative gender or sexual subjectivity can—to use Butler’s terminology—‘undo’ one’s personhood and facilitate the emergence of a new subjectivity. Butler’s notion of the “undo” echoes earlier ideas from Michel Foucault. Foucault described a process by which new subjectivities are formed through the ‘appropriation, the unification, of a fragmentary and selected already said’ (cited in Rabinow 1997: 209). The “already said” that Foucault is referring to here is all of the discourse currently in circulation to which the subject can be or has been exposed. Thus, the discursive subjectivities at the heart of queer cultural artefacts (novels, poems, scripts) can be seen as inspiring and facilitating the ongoing becoming of the queer subjectivities of actual individuals.

My notion of a queer becoming (or queer self-bricolage) is adapted from that of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), for whom the process (or perhaps practice) of becoming is not one of mere imitation or comparison. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is directly related to the concept of *repetition* (1987). This insistence on repetition as core to becoming seems, at first glance, to undermine any possibility of the truly new,
of a truly new subjectivity or gender formation. In fact, as far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, the opposite is the case. Deleuze argues with regards to repetition and becoming that—far from denying the possibility of the constitution of something new—the truly new can only emerge through the process of repetition (Zizek 2003). Here Deleuze seems to be thinking of repetition in the way we might think of replication. Take as an example the replication of genes. Each time a gene replicates, based on DNA code, there is a possibility of mutation, of change, of the emergence of something significantly new.

Repetition is also at the heart of a queer sense of subjectivity, as has been articulated most keenly by Michel Foucault’s (1997) and Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of the subject and subjectivity as a repetitive or performed practice. In a queer becoming, the subject does not merely imitate or conform to another or external subjectivity or mode of being. Becoming is a generative process, the constitution of a new subjectivity altogether. Becoming is a new way of being (a new way of practicing subjectivity or identity) that is the outflow of social and cultural influences rather than a display of mere “resemblances” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). The process is one of altering or ceasing current practices (or functions to use the Deleuzian term) of identity and constituting or constructing new ones through repetition or replication. The constitution of new identity practices is inspired and facilitated by engagement with discourse; with, among other things, cultural artefacts.

Engagement with the notion of becoming and of gender and sexual subjectivity in the act of producing an original text (script) led to a new personal understanding of the relations between subjectivity, gender and sexuality and the practice of writing itself. In addition, the script demonstrates how liminal genders can be rewritten in a way that
foregrounds alternative notions of sexuality, gender and subjectivity and that facilitates more open narrative trajectories. These rewritings provide opportunities for ongoing engagement in the act of queer self-making or becoming. More to the point, the script replicates the liminal gender of effeminacy and, as a kind of template or model or discursive code, encourages further replication and inevitable mutation.
Chapter 2: The Southern Gothic as Queer

Television Miniseries

A description of the creative component of the project is warranted here. An in-depth discussion of the script’s thematic and stylistic elements—in terms of plot, characterisation and themes or story—is undertaken in Chapter Nine. That chapter also includes a reflection on the creative practices employed in the writing of the script. This chapter, on the other hand, establishes formal and broader concerns such as the format, genre and setting of the script. It will also describe the critical reasons behind the positioning of scriptwriting within the discipline of Creative Writing rather than Film Studies or Screen Production.

Why the South? A Brief Dip into Autoethnography

The script is a four-part television miniseries set in the South of the United States in the Civil Rights era (1960s). The script is entitled The Tree. The setting of the script—rural Georgia, USA in the Civil Rights Era—was selected for a number of reasons. The first, and most difficult to explain, is my own personal fascination with and interest in the South as a place and as a source of literary and cinematic writing.

The initial spark of interest in the South came when I was told, as a child of about eight, that one of my great-grandfathers may have been a Southerner. The story of this man’s origin had been passed down from generation to generation but has never been verified. Some said that he was from the coastal lowlands of Northern Georgia, some that he was a sailor who had abided in the port of New Orleans for a time. Obviously, I never met this man and to this day know very little about him; but his possible origin
in that place of murky marshland, Spanish moss festooned swamp cypress forests and grand plantations ignited a life-long fascination.

I have visited the American South—including Georgia, the landscape of *The Tree*—a number of times over the last decade or so. The most recent visit was in 2011 on a research trip that was part of this project. Although I am certainly drawing on my experience of the South during those visits in the writing of the miniseries script, I am doing a bit more than that. I am writing about a landscape that exists beyond the physical boundaries of the Southern states of the USA. I am writing about the discursive South; the South of literary and cinematic discourse. I am also writing about a South of the imagination (McPherson 2003); a South of the mind.

My first encounters with the American Deep South were as a child through old black and white films replayed on television. I was a reclusive child, constantly skipping school, and I spent many of my mornings watching these old movies. The first one was *Jezebel* (1938), starring Bette Davis and set in New Orleans. That was enough to get me hooked. Then I saw *Hush… Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Yearling* (1946), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1960), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *Tom Sawyer* (1930), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and a number of others. A common thread among these films and others is one of a “not quite normal” protagonist learning to live in a hostile or strange environment. In fact, the South, Helen Taylor argues, ‘is celebrated or vilified as the Other place, an exotic site that is more deviant, dangerous, and depraved than anywhere else on the North American continent’ (2001: 11). It is perhaps no surprise then that a queer boy like me—and other queer individuals who, until recently, were classified as deviant, depraved and, in many places, as criminals—found the South so
alluring. In literature and film the South is depicted as a home to our sexual “kin”.

Of course, these films are partly about the real South, the historical and factual South, but they are more about the metaphorical South, the South of the mind and of the imagination. I got to know this South very intimately as I avoided the drudgery of my all-boys Catholic school. I am not sure why the local television station in Toowoomba—my hometown in regional Australia—played so many films set in the Deep South. It seems a very strange thing for them to do. After all, what had the American South to do with Toowoomba, a small town nesting on a mountain range in the Darling Downs?

Toowoomba was then, as I was growing up in the 1970s, a town known for being something of a peculiarity in the state of Queensland. This was primarily because of its distinctly eccentric atmosphere. However Toowoomba was also was noted for being quite fervently nationalistic and conservative. In this respect at least, Toowoomba had something in common with Southern American towns which are, in my experience, both eccentric and deeply patriotic. Of course, there was also the fact that many films set in the American South, particularly those of the Southern Gothic genre, had rural settings. Toowoomba, when I was young, was very much a rural town. There was something in those depictions of the rural American South—its empty spaces, its wild terrain, its heat, its strangeness—that resonated with my own rural experience. At that time, and indeed even now, it was difficult to find depictions of queer or simply gender non-conformist characters in non-urban settings. Until recently, queer culture, and indeed Queer Theory, has had a strong metropolitan bias (Herring 2010). At the time of writing however, there is a growing thread in Queer Studies towards the rural and against a homogenizing metronormativity (Herring
This shift to rural sites of analysis defies the anecdotal understanding that rural spaces are hostile to queer subjects (Herring 2010).

It is widely held that many budding young queers project their longing for acceptance and freedom onto only those few urban centres that have a long history of accommodating and harbouring Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) individuals. As a result, there are a number of urban centres that have acquired a potent cultural significance for LGBTIQ subjects (Herring 2010). New York, San Francisco, London and Sydney are key examples of such sites in the English speaking world. These sites are a continuing focus of a globalized (and highly urbanized) queer culture.

Although it may often be true that rural sites are hostile for LGBTIQ individuals, those of us who hail from outside urban centres cannot erase our memories of our places of origin, nor our abiding affection for rural rather than urban terrains. Perhaps this is another reason why these films resonated so strongly with me as I was becoming aware of my own difference. The Southern Gothic is one of very few genres with a plethora of depictions of “queer” and/or gender non-conformist characters in non-urban settings. Thus, this research project turns away from traditional urban sites of LGBTIQ longing and looks instead at the rural South of the USA as another site of significance and longing for a globalized LGBTIQ community.

This global fascination with the South’s literary and cinematic culture is well acknowledged (Taylor 2001). Take as examples the global interest in the musical forms of the South such as Jazz and Blues. For LGBTIQ subjects, the literary, theatrical and cinematic works of Truman Capote, Carson McCullers and, perhaps most of all, Tennessee Williams were also inspirations for a queer fascination with the
South. Of course, I am referring here to that South of the mind, or of discourse, more than the geographical location. The South of discourse is certainly not the South itself and it is prudent to keep that in mind. The geopolitical space of the South is complex and not perfectly rendered or represented by the Southern Gothic genre.

There was another stand out quality to those Southern Gothic films that reminded me strongly of my childhood and hometown. This was Southern cinema’s fascination with the supernatural, for the Gothic. Toowoomba was a place equally captivated by these things; ghost stories, gruesome crimes, tall tales and outlandish characters.

Perhaps those Southern Gothic films were also aired on Toowoomba television because the programmers felt what I came to feel sometime later, that there were many themes and issues explored in those films, and that affected Southern society, that reflected similar themes and issues pertinent to that strange town on the mountain. The Queensland of my childhood in the 1970s and 1980s was a police state noted for corruption, wonky elections and the repression of non-whites, women and homosexuals (Moore 2001). In some ways, Toowoomba in the 1970s, the era of the ‘White Australia Policy’ (Carey & McLisky 2009), was not dissimilar to the South of the 1960s. In common parlance at least, Toowoomba was said to be stuck in the 1950s and Queensland was often compared to the American South. A notable example of this comparison occurs in the play Travelling North by David Williamson (1990). Many of the marginalized residents of Queensland must have seen the issues they were dealing with in their everyday lives reflected in those old films. I for one certainly did. For me, Queensland in the 1970s was socially and politically similar to the South of the 1950s and 1960s.

In that time and place, my difference stood out like a sore thumb. As a young boy it
became apparent to me that other boys like me were not appreciated in Queensland. I was a bit of a sissy and found other boys much more fascinating than was considered normal or appropriate. In fact, at the time I was watching those films, homosexuality was a criminal act in Queensland (Moore 2001). If you indulged your fascination for members of your own sex and were discovered or exposed, you could look forward to a custodial sentence in some of the nation’s most backward prisons. This did not change until the mid 1990s (Moore 2001).

A little later, when I was a teen and should have been enjoying myself by exploring the delights of the flesh, the AIDS pandemic hit. Suddenly homosexuals were not only evil and unnatural, they were diseased, infectious, vampiric and condemned by “God” to a slow, agonizing death (Hanson 1991). In other words, they embodied the abject (Kristeva 1982). One AIDS activist commented, rather controversially, that because of the AIDS pandemic homosexuals had become the “niggers” of the world (Bram 2012).

The “N word” is not as shocking as it once was, these days it is frequently used in Rap & Hip Hop music and even, by some African-Americans, as a term of affection for each other. But in the 1980s it still had the power to shock, offend and outrage. What that AIDS activist intended to say by using it, was that because of the HIV virus homosexual men had become the most despised group in every nation across the globe. He was not referring to the actual African-American community, but to the notion of a universally vilified and oppressed category. For me, problematic and insensitive though it was, that statement also made a connection between the mutual struggle of African-American and queer people for equal rights. Southern cinema and literature reflects some of those struggles, particularly pertaining to race and gender,
and does so in ways that Australian cinema and literature are yet to do.

It was around this time that I fell in love with Southern Gothic literature, principally Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty and the plays of Tennessee Williams. Much of this writing explored gender and sexual dynamics in a direct way and made more explicit for me the ways that the discrimination and oppression experienced by African-Americans, women and queers in the South of the U.S.A. was not dissimilar to that experienced by marginal groups elsewhere in the world, including Queensland.

I am not surprised at all—when I look back at it—that I identified with the marginalized characters of those Southern films and books, spurred on by my distant (perhaps mythic) genealogical connection to the place. To my young self it seemed that queers were oppressed, because of their sexual difference, in a way not dissimilar to the ways that African-Americans were oppressed because of their racial difference and Southern women were oppressed because of their gender difference. Of course, Southern racial and gender dynamics are much more complex than I could have grasped at the time. Nevertheless, those films and the books of Capote, McCullers and Welty gave me a way to recognize, think about and reflect on all of these injustices. They also acted as a kind of exposure therapy, a safe visit to unsafe territory that helped me to frame and to deal with my own hostile environment. I am extremely grateful that I was exposed to them when I was.

Having said all of that, the script at the heart of this project does not directly address why a sissy boy from Toowoomba grew up obsessed with the Deep South. Instead, it reflects my fascination for the South’s culture and history and recounts and retells stories I encountered on my visits there. These stories were in the form of oral history
or urban myth and concerned the historical and current treatment in the South of persons resisting dominant notions of proper and improper sexual and gender practices. The script is also quite simply a reflection of my continuing love of the cinema and literature, the grand narratives, of America’s Southern states.

Furthermore, because I am often writing about a South of the mind, a metaphorical South, the script has the taste of the South that I encountered in films and books. This is often the taste of the actual South, but sometimes differs from reality in subtle ways that are difficult to express in words. While travelling in the South, I found it impossible to relate to the place and people without those films and books feeding into my perception. Every street corner was haunted by those films, every building filled with celluloid ghosts. The landscapes and the people were “written over” by the South’s literature and by its myths. I am not sure if I should be concerned about that. Perhaps I should, but the metaphorical South so completely overlaps the landscape and features of the actual South that, for an outsider anyway, it is practically impossible to encounter one without the other. Taylor (2001) notes that even in ‘contemporary accounts of the region, there is a reliance on a mythical South that is familiar from literature, film and song’ (11). This means that it is difficult to make connection with the South as it really is.

Southerners themselves often talk about their home with reference to those very same films and books. Visitors are encouraged to experience the actual South while reflecting on the metaphorical South. It is almost as if Southerners don’t really want outsiders to see the real thing. Perhaps they prefer the depiction of the South in those narratives to the sometimes bleak reality. Perhaps they wish to preserve the perception of the South as beautiful and alluring behind a cinematic and literary veneer. That
veneer is very nostalgic and tends to gloss over that which is dark about the South (McPherson 2003): the racial inequality, the conservative (often closed) mindset, the environmental degradation, the lack of focus on heritage and cultural preservation, the political hypocrisy. But, every place has its good and bad. Every place has beauty and ugliness. Every region has its saints and its villains. The South is no different in that regard.

But the South is unquestionably different in other ways, notably its history, landscape and its African-American influenced culture. Perhaps the most significant characteristic that sets the South apart, in terms of the script, is the prevalence in its literature and cinema of gothic motifs. Any visitor to the South, especially to New Orleans, will note the plethora of voodoo museums, spiritualist churches, New Age stores and the many haunted house and ghost tours available to tourists. This fascination for all things dark, supernatural and otherworldly evident in many Southern cultural artefacts has given rise to the term Southern Gothic, which is a well established literary and cinematic genre.

**The Southern Gothic**

Although the initial reason for the selection of the South as the setting for The Tree was my own personal fascination and interest, there were also other (critical and theoretical) reasons. These reasons have to do with the qualities of Southern Gothic as a genre. The first of these critical reasons is the richness of examples of non-normative subjectivities in Southern Gothic literature and cinema. Think of the effeminate boys Joel, of Truman Capote’s Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948), and Dil of Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird (1960). Think of the tomboy characters Frankie, of Carson McCullers’ Member of the Wedding (1946), Idabel Thompkins of
Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948) and Scout of To Kill a Mockingbird (1960). Think also of the cross-dressing Randolph of Other Voice’s, Other Rooms and Uncle Rondo of Eudora Welty’s short story ‘Why I Live at the P.O.’ from her collection A Curtain of Green (1941). More recent examples are Idgie, the tomboy turned female-to-male cross-dresser of Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café (Fannie Flagg 1987), and the troubled teen homosexual protagonist of Jim Grimsley’s Dream Boy (1995).

The second reason for setting the script in the South has to do with a perception of the South as an allowable location or setting for fictionalised or discursive deviancy (Richards 2005). Richards (2005) argues that the South has been expressly designated as a territory of deviance and otherness. Helen Taylor (2001) notes that the South is perceived as ‘a world slightly out of control, saturated in lust and criminality, haunted and obsessed by its “moonlight and magnolias” past, incestuous and sick at heart’ (11). The South is deviant, dangerous and depraved (Taylor 2001). This designation of the South as a territory of otherness provided Southern writers with significant liberty to explore sexual non-normativity and gender variance (Richards 2005), as the examples in the paragraph above attest.

Traditional Gothic fiction as a genre is also noted for its featuring of non-normative gender and sexual subjectivities. Judith Halberstam makes this clear when she writes that ‘Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy and the pure can be known’ (1995: 2). This is even more the case with the Southern Gothic which, as has already been mentioned, takes place in a territory already designated as somehow perverse; a quarantine zone for the queer.
Southern Gothic is a uniquely American subgenre of Gothic fiction which, like all
gothic fiction, ‘emphasises the grotesque, mysterious and desolate’ (Jing 2006: 55).
The standard definition of the grotesque is that which is strangely distorted,
incongruous or blending the real with the fantastic. It also has connotations of the
bizarre, misshapen and monstrous (Bailey 2010); or, in the Kristevan sense, the
abject. The grotesque of the Southern Gothic narrative is most usually associated with
decay and deformity but it also often foregrounds the Gothic fascination with
misshapen desire, with sexual “deviance” (Bailey 2010).

Southern Gothic is exclusively set in the American South and, like Magical Realism
with which it has much in common, blends the realistic with the fantastic (Goddu
1997). Southern Gothic narratives routinely feature an element of the supernatural or
mysterious alongside freakish (and deeply flawed) characters (Jing 2006). Unlike
other narratives in the Gothic genre, Southern Gothic stories actively engage with
social, political, and cultural concerns, especially in regard to the socio-cultural
character of the American South (Goddu 1997). It is in its engagement with the
realities of the American South—such as violence, poverty, racism and shame over
the South’s defeat at the hands of “Northern aggressors”—that the subgenre
distinguishes itself. Indeed, Goddu (1997) clearly links the frightening literature of
Southern Gothic with the South’s sometimes horrific social reality and argues that the
Southern Gothic style employs the macabre and grotesque specifically to examine the
values of the American South.

Leslie Fiedler (1998) has identified expressly nationalistic concerns in the Southern
Gothic narrative, particularly in terms of the relationships and tensions between races
and genders. The Southern Gothic also routinely deals with trauma, such as death,
sickness, separation and violence (Bailey 2010). Furthermore, Bailey (2010: 271) argues, the genre is ‘characterised by obsessive preoccupations’ with blood bonds, family, inheritance, racial, gender and/or class identities and notions of place and home.

Although the Gothic and Southern Gothic are frequently concerned with the supernatural, they also often feature extreme or aberrant desire as the source of suspense. As Bailey notes:

While the Gothic as a literary form is typically understood to have begun in eighteenth-century England with Horace Walpole’s supernatural tale of usurpation and retribution, The Castle of Otranto (1764), by the end of that century, the enormously popular novels of Ann Radcliffe had done much to establish a non-supernatural form of Gothic fiction, one that depicts human beings, rendered grotesque by their extreme and incongruous passions and obsessions, as the ultimate source of horror (2010: 269).

A survey of the traditional Gothic narrative shows that the genre differs from Horror primarily in that its monsters are not usually paranormal. The two genres, Gothic and Horror, occasionally overlap, as with Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), to form Gothic Horror. There is also a distinct Southern Gothic Horror subgenre, the most notable examples of this subgenre being Anne Rice’s The Vampire Chronicles—as adapted in the films Interview with the Vampire (1994) and Queen of the Damned (2002)—and Charlaine Harris’ Southern Vampire series of novels now adapted as the HBO television series True Blood. Although Southern Gothic Horror often features non-heteronormative characters, such as the distinctly queer vampires at the heart of Anne Rice’s The Vampire Chronicles and the many sexually ambiguous characters of Charlaine Harris’ Southern Vampire novels, it is less insubordinate in terms of its treatment of gender (and of course race). The one exception to this is the character
Lafayette Reynolds, of Charlaine Harris’ *Southern Vampire* novels. Lafayette Reynolds is a queer and gender ambiguous African-American character who is notable in that he is among the first black “sissies” featured in the genre (sadly he is killed off early in the series).

These hybrid examples aside, the Gothic has long been distinct from Horror in that paranormal monsters are not the norm for the Gothic narrative. This was already evident at the time of the mutual beginning of these genres in the 1800s. Even one of the classic examples of Gothic Horror, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) features a monster that cannot be classified as paranormal as he is “man-made”, the result of what from our modern perspective might be called bio-engineering. The Gothic genre does however often feature a fear of the paranormal, as in Jane Eyre (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. This fear is often represented by the figure of the ghost, as in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) but just as often in the figure of a strange, mad or obsessed person. As noted by Bailey (2010) above, the monsters of the Gothic genre are most often human beings with “disturbed” minds and “deviant” passions or desires.

It is this thread of the Southern Gothic that I intend to explore in this exegesis and have featured in the creative artefact — that of desire and gender or sexual non-conformity as the source of unease, as the abject. Therefore the script focuses on this aspect and features human beings displaying what in dominant discourse might be described as ‘extreme and incongruous’ (Bailey 2010: 269) genders and desires. In this sense, the creative artefact is largely realist. The script contains no traditional monsters, no vampires or werewolves. Having said that, the script does feature a ghost and includes some other aspects of the supernatural. These supernatural aspects serve
primarily to emphasise the social displacement, the marginal position, of the characters, their *insubordination*. These elements also serve to disrupt conventional understandings of the natural and unnatural. The supernatural aspects featured in *The Tree* are also mostly concerned with the practice of voodoo, itself a marginal spiritual tradition.

**Gender Insubordination in the Southern Gothic**

At this point, I would like to turn to a fuller discussion of gender nonconformity or insubordination in the Southern Gothic genre. I will be referring here to examples of the Southern Gothic which have multiple iterations (as novel and as play and/or as film). The reasons for this will become clear in the ‘Scriptwriting as Creative Writing’ section below.

As noted earlier, there are enough examples of gender nonconformity in literary and cinematic narratives depicting the South, over a significant enough period of time, to consider that the gender non-conformist (the tomboy and the sissy) is a stock character in Southern Gothic texts. This section uses representations of gender in the Southern Gothic to demonstrate that the South of discourse is a space in which gender is much more complicated (and queerer) than one might presume. For the sake of brevity, I want to specifically single out gender ‘non-conformity’ in just a handful of texts that began as novels and then were adapted into plays and/or films. These Southern Gothic narratives are *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960), *The Member of the Wedding* (McCullers 1946), *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (Flagg 1987), *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (Capote 1948) and *The Grass Harp* (Capote 1951).

I would suggest that the South of these narratives signifies a space in which tensions between gender compliance and gender insubordination are played out. The
metaphorical South is represented as a site in which gender is contested and queered. One only has to think of the public gender performativity on a grand scale that is New Orleans Mardi Gras—and of the highly ritualized and codified gender performance that is the Southern Belle and Southern gentleman—to get a sense of the performative nature of gender south of the Mason-Dixon line. This performative turn evident in displays of Southern gender feed into the literature and cinema of the Southern Gothic. The examples that I have chosen however do not contain the kind of highly conformist gender expressions that are the Southern gender clichés; they contain altogether different kinds of gender performativity.

Now, moving on to the narratives, take for example *The Member of the Wedding*, both the 1952 and 1997 films based on Carson McCullers novel and play of the same name. The main protagonist of *The Member of the Wedding*, an adolescent girl named Frankie, is a tomboy obsessed with joining her brother on his honeymoon. This aspect of the film has been read in a number of ways (Halberstam 1998; Richards 2005), but for me it connotes Frankie’s total gender identification with her brother; her wish to be like her brother and to have his approval. Frankie is a true gender insubordinate; she dresses in boyish garb and wears her hair in a page boy style (McCullers 1946). Her behaviour is also marked as gender variant in that she refuses to comply with the life specified for her by her society and culture. She is rebellious, she refuses to accept the social role that she is expected to fill, namely that of wife to a Southern man and mother to a brood of Southern children. Frankie has her sights set on adventure. She wishes to be active in the world, like her brother, rather than a passive observer of the world through kitchen windows.
Unfortunately, Frankie is not totally free to choose her own path. One of the key themes of the narrative is the pressure on Frankie to abandon her tomboy gender (her masculinity as it were) as she grows into adulthood, and womanhood. As Judith Halberstam (1998) has noted with regards Frankie, tomboyish behaviours are only tolerated in girls because it is presumed that they will eventually conform to their “natural” gender when they reach adulthood. ‘The image of the tomboy,’ Halberstam argues, ‘can be tolerated only within a narrative of blossoming womanhood; within such a narrative, tomboyism represents a resistance to adulthood itself rather than to adult femininity’ (1998: 6).

Consider also the Idgie character of Fried Green Tomatoes (Flagg 1987) and the Idabel character of Truman Capote’s Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948). In both of these texts, these girls are extreme tomboys, not merely dressing boyishly and wearing short hair, but also engaging in activities deemed proper only for men — fishing, fighting and skinny dipping. They also socialize with boys and men rather than other girls and live out their lives in public rather than private spaces. In the case of Fried Green Tomatoes, this gender insubordination goes so far that the Idgie character enters into what can only be described as an informal same-sex union that seems totally accepted by the small Southern town in which she lives (Flagg 1987).

Idgie also enters into business for herself, and although this is in the domain of food, it is nevertheless a venture into what—in the place and era in which the text is set—was still considered a man’s world. Interestingly, the character of Idgie finds it possible to navigate this world because she is committed to the ideal of a rural life shared by her community but also precisely because of her gender insubordination. She is like a man and so her manly actions are somewhat accepted.
A quick review of the Southern Gothic genre reveals that there are many more examples of gender variant girls than there are of gender insubordinate boys or men. This may be because, in some senses, gender insubordination in adolescent girls is more palatable than gender variance in boys (sissies). The two most notable examples of gender insubordinate males in the Southern Gothic genre both come from Truman Capote. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms* we have an aged Southern sissy named Randolph, whose favourite pastimes are all traditionally feminine; making collage, dressing in women’s Mardi Gras costumes and reminiscing about the past. We also have an effeminate boy by the name of Joel Knox. Joel is described in the novel, from the perspective of a Southern truck-driver, in a way that leaves us in no doubt that he is a sissy:

> He had his notions of what a “real” boy should look like, and this kid somehow offended them. He was too pretty, too delicate and fair-skinned; each of his features was shaped with a sensitive accuracy, and a girlish tenderness softened his eyes, which were brown and very large (Capote 1948: 4).

In *The Grass Harp* (1951), we have Collin Fenwick, a boy small for his size who is an object of pity and derision. Collin spends all of his time with women, indeed lives in a house full of women, and develops a weak-hearted crush on a local girl mainly because she is the object of another boy’s affection. This boy, Riley Henderson, is a bit of a wayward youth for whom Collin nurses an unspoken infatuation. For part of the narrative, Collin and Riley live together in a tree-house (with some other misfits) forming a kind of runaway queer family.

All of these effeminate males defy the traditional masculine roles of their society and era, most obviously by preferring the company of women and girls and by inhabiting a largely private world normally perceived as the domain of women; the salon, the
kitchen, the sitting room. These non-normative males, or sissies also display a notable affinity for the rural life and the non-urban space in which they are placed.

The script produced as part of this project, *The Tree*, as a Southern Gothic narrative, is actively engage with social, political, and cultural concerns of the South (race, gender, violence) and foregrounds “misshapen” genders and desires in order to explore wider social and cultural values. However, the script is specifically focussed on exploring gender norms and the ways that social and cultural relations apply pressure, on all those who fall outside or refuse to be subjected to those norms, to submit and conform. The two main characters of *The Tree* are examples of “misshapen” or non-normative gender. Percival Huckstep is modelled on the familiar sissy character of Southern Gothic narratives and Alison Mayflower is a re-imagining of well-known tomboy characters like Frankie, Idgie, Scout and Idabel.

*The Tree* is, like a number of other Southern Gothic narratives, concerned with racial, gender and sexual identities. It is also concerned with notions of family and of home; specifically how to form “queer families” and make or find a home in a hostile social environment. Moreover, *The Tree* is an attempt to recast the South as a place queerer than might be expected, and as a site in which gender performativity and insubordination are not uncommon. Most of all however, *The Tree* aims to upend the historical role of the Gothic and Southern Gothic as a technology of subjectivity that produces, and then marginalises, “deviant” subjectivities. Instead, *The Tree* is a technology of subjectivity that produces and privileges queer subjectivities.
Why a Television Miniseries?

The process of deciding on the format for the creative component of this research project was based on the following six factors (arranged in order of significance):

1. The project was inspired by other Southern Gothic cinema and television;
2. Television has been implicated as a formative medium for queer identities (Davis & Needham 2009) and can be seen as part of a queer becoming or self-bricolage;
3. There was a creative and critical intention to explore themes in more depth than allowable in a standard length feature film script;
4. There was a creative and critical intention to foreground dialogue in a way that is currently discouraged in mainstream feature film writing;
5. The project was inspired by the ready availability of theory around sexuality and gender in film and media and the relative and inverse paucity of Creative Writing theory focussed on the script;
6. Feedback from industry professionals indicated that there might be a greater likelihood of future production of a miniseries television script.

As described in the ‘Why the South?’ section above, my interest in the South as a place and in the Southern Gothic genre were inspired by exposure to re-runs of Southern Gothic films on television. These first youthful encounters with the Southern Gothic, including two of the most popular television miniseries of all time—Roots (1977) and North & South (1985)—predisposed me to choose a television script as the creative component of this project. I wanted to pay tribute to my early televisual encounters with the Southern Gothic because, when I think of Southern Gothic films, I do not see myself watching them on the big screen. When I think of the Southern
Gothic, I see myself watching films on television. For me, the Southern Gothic genre, the television format and my own sense of myself as queer are intimately entwined and somewhat inseparable.

This is despite the fact that television is widely considered to be ‘closely associated with the home, the family, the quotidian; in other words the heteronormative’ (Davis & Needham 2009: 6). My experience of television was clearly different to that of my heterosexual peers. My experience of television was intimately connected with other places—places beyond the constrictive climate of my home—and was not about the family at all but about the discovery of others like me; other exiles from the normative family structure. Television fed into my burgeoning queer desire. ‘Television’, Michele Aaron notes, ‘must be reconsidered, therefore, for its potential influence on subject formation’ (2009: 71).

This sense of television as formative to one’s queer identity is echoed by Davis & Needham (2009: 6) when they write that, when thinking about television, they were reminded that their ‘first confrontations with queer images were almost solely through television, and that many of these encounters now serve as cherished, fond memories’. Furthermore, they suggest that television was a significant factor in their ‘emerging queer subjectivities’ (Davis & Needham 2009: 6). Indeed, many young queers must have turned to television in their search for reflections or representations of themselves during their formative years (Davis & Needham 2009).

Another element at the heart of the decision to write a television miniseries is a personal love of reading and writing dialogue. The rhythm and patterns of conversation have long fascinated me. Indeed, there is a tradition among “queer” writers of valuing conversation as an art; take as examples Truman Capote (Hill 1957)
and Oscar Wilde (Waldrep 2004; Sinfield 1994). Take also the dialogue heavy stage plays of Tennessee Williams. I will show later, in Chapter Nine, that proficiency with language (conversation, dialogue and writing) in boys is considered, in heteronormative discourse, as one of the marks of effeminacy and homosexuality. Therefore, as this project engages with effeminacy and the abject genderqueer, one of my creative and critical intentions in writing the script was to foreground dialogue in a way that is currently discouraged in mainstream feature film writing.

There is a strong current in mainstream scriptwriting to privilege action above all else (Boon 2008). This is understandable to a degree, after all film and television are visual mediums. The dominant position in the screen industry is that action is character and that ‘what a person does is who he is, not what he says’ (Boon 2008: 89). However, this principle has been exaggerated ‘resulting in characters who eschew dialogue in favour of action, and scripts that are little more than a string of action sequences’ (Boon 2008: 89). The same tendency exists in fiction writing, as evidenced by the well-known injunction to “show, don’t tell” that is a core element of Creative Writing pedagogy (see the ‘Writing as a Pedagogy’ section in Chapter Seven).

This marginalisation of dialogue as a kind of aberrant act makes it the abject of scriptwriting discourse. This is surprising and difficult to understand given that the ‘primary site where meaning is engendered in the script is between the audience and the characters in dialogue’ (Boon 2008: 94). As Boon argues, audiences enjoy and appreciate good dialogue and respond positively when they encounter films based on dialogue-heavy scripts, such as those by Quentin Tarantino and David Mamet (2008: 89).
This tendency to favour action and the visual over the verbal could be understood as an expression of masculinist heteronormativity. The domain of language (particularly refined language and conversation) has long been considered a feminine domain (Cixous & Sellers 1994; Money, & Epstein 1967). It is well established in common parlance that men are much more drawn to visual stimuli than women are and there is some scientific evidence to support that idea (Hamann et al 2004). Masculinity as a gender is certainly more defined by what a man does (his actions) than by what he says (Connell 1995). To be a man one must act in the world, a man must be active not passive; he must do and not just talk about doing. In fact, the reluctance of men to converse—especially about certain things (feelings, ideas) and to certain people (women, queers)—is so widely acknowledged that it is practically a truism.

Therefore, in the context of this project, the foregrounding of dialogue is a kind of resistance to heteronormative discourse and the dominant view in the screen industries that action is superior to conversation; that action is character and that what a character says is irrelevant. This strange attempt to silence characters is not dissimilar to the silencing of marginal individuals, especially queer individuals, who are routinely exhorted to keep quiet about the material realities of their lives, particularly their sexual lives and especially in the religious domain (Baker 2008). A privileging of dialogue is also a metaphorical act that gives the abject genderqueer, the sissy and the tomboy, a voice.

A completely different attitude to dialogue exists with playwriting (writing for the stage). As Boon (2008) eloquently notes, ‘a play is a thing made of language’ (91). A stage play has specific spatial and structural limitations which mean that much of the dramatic tension:
…must be generated by characters engaged in limited action; therefore the bulk of the
dramatic weight rests on what the characters say and how they say it, the
conversations they engage in, and the dynamic relationships among speeches within
the context of the play (Boon 2008: 91).

Although television does not have the same spatial restrictions, it has others—mainly
due to production limitations, financial constraints and the more intimate character of
television—which mean that it is more dialogue friendly than feature film. Take as an
example the profuse and rich dialogue evident in the television scripts of Julian
Fellowes such as Downton Abbey (2010) and the miniseries Titanic (2012). In the
Southern Gothic genre, the groundbreaking miniseries Roots (1977) relied heavily on
dialogue to construct dramatic tension. Examples of the Southern Gothic genre on
television also include dialogue rich scripts; such as the single season series American
Gothic (1996) and the recent micro-miniseries The Heart, She Holler (2011).
Altogether this meant that a television script seemed the most appropriate format for
the project.

The question of length (why a miniseries and not a telemovie or series) was decided
for quite simple reasons. As part of a critical research project, it was important to
explore the relevant themes in more depth than allowable in a feature film script. The
miniseries is noted for this aspect (Montgomerie 2012). As Margaret Montgomerie
notes:

…the miniseries, at its best, offers a unique televisual experience, often dealing with
harrowing and difficult material structured into an often transformatory narrative. The
time lapse between episodes allows occasion for the audience to assimilate, discuss
and come to terms with the difficulties of the narrative. The extended narrative time
offered by serialisation makes possible the in-depth exploration of characters, their
motivations and development, the analysis of situations and events. But the
conclusive narrative resolution of the series, also allows for evaluation and reflection (2012: n.p.).

A miniseries is generally conceived as a limited run program of more than two but less than the 13 episodes associated with serial or series programming (Cunningham 1989). It was determined that a four-part miniseries of hour-long episodes would provide adequate space to explore the project’s narrative themes. Moreover, a script for a longer series would have exceeded the maximum length dictated by Griffith University’s policies regarding research-based higher degrees. It also became apparent, after consultation with industry professionals that occurred as part of the project methodology, that there was a perceived greater likelihood of future production of a miniseries script as opposed to a feature film or series. It was deemed that both a feature film and ongoing series would require major financial and other commitments from producers that might prove prohibitive.

Television and Queer Becoming

For me, the experience of television viewing can be understood as a component in an ethics of the self (self-bricolage) that can inform (re)constitutions of subjectivity as part of an ongoing queer becoming. Certainly, in my formative years when I was becoming aware of my own burgeoning difference, I found reflections of that difference in television re-runs of Southern Gothic films. Those films provided a means for reflection of that difference in a way that has meant, to this day, many of the reference points for how I understand my own sexuality and gender are taken from the Southern Gothic genre. Indeed, Davis & Needham (2009) have argued that television is often the medium through which proto-queers first encounter and see their sexualities mirrored.
The discursive representations of non-normatively gendered subjectivities (specifically tomboys and sissies) discussed earlier can be seen to inform queer subject-formation not just in the South but among globally dispersed LGBTIQ communities who engage with the Southern Gothic genre. As we have seen, both Foucault (1997) and Butler (2004) have indicated that exposure to non-normative subjectivities and genders within such cultural artefacts can facilitate the emergence of new subjectivities. These emergent queer subjectivities constitute acts of power or ‘reverse discourse’ (Foucault 1988: 50-51) that resist heteronormative discourses around gender and sexuality. Thus, discursive representations of the metaphorical South—as a site in which gender is contested and queered—can inform and influence queer subject-formation among queer individuals in a globalized LGBTIQ community.

In this sense, self-bricolage (Rabinow 1997) through the television experience is a Foucauldian “practice of the self” that, as an aspect of the queer cultural environment, informs and alters the way subjects actively constitute themselves. In other words, television provides “models” of gender and sexual subjectivity that strongly influence the on-going becoming of queer subjectivities.

This exposure to new subjectivities or discourses (Foucault’s “already said”) occurs at the point of reception which can be conceived as a performative moment of intersubjective connection between discursive subjectivities and the embodied subjectivity of the viewer/reader. This performative moment does not end with the final moments of the narrative but rather continues as the subject/viewer recalls the text and reflects on its narrative and on their own cinematic experience. The interconnected practices of viewing, reflection and narrative-inspired experimentation can provide a means by
which subjects reconstitute themselves as part of a self-bricolage (Rabinow 1997) or ethics of the self. This process of “undoing” in which new subjectivities emerge can be described as a “queering of the self” or as a queer becoming.

Thus, the moment of reception or viewing, and later reflection on or engagement with discursive (filmic and textual) models of gender and sexual subjectivities, can be seen as a set of entwined practices in a self-bricolage that both explores and produces performative genders and sexualities and facilitates the emergence of non-normative subjectivities.

**Scriptwriting as Creative Writing**

Scriptwriting is a practice. More to the point, scriptwriting is a writing practice that foregrounds collaborative processes (Maras 2011 & 2009). Scriptwriting foregrounds group process, collaboration and a reflective relationship with readers/viewers and social and cultural structures (Sawyer 2006). As a collaborative practice, scriptwriting displaces a number of ideas about writing and creativity. Scriptwriting refuses the notion of authorial integrity and disrupts the idea of “authentic voice” which is often at the heart of Creative Writing teaching. Scriptwriting also displaces the idea that creativity is an internal and individual or solitary process. These ideas are explored fully in Chapter Seven.

As a practice, scriptwriting draws on ‘a set of processes, techniques and devices’ (Maras 2011: 275) that differ from context to context and project to project. The academic domain of Screenwriting Studies can be characterised as an investigation of the practice of writing for the screen (television, cinema and new media) that places close scrutiny on these processes, techniques and devices applied in the practice of writing scripts.
Scriptwriting as a field of academic study is surprisingly under explored (Nelmes 2010). Steven Maras (2011: 278) has argued that ‘screenwriting research is a relatively new area’. Ian W. MacDonald (2010) posits that this is ‘probably due to film academics frying bigger fish, focusing on New Waves, semiotics and male gazes, and only intermittently recognizing a need to consider the formation of the idea for a screenwork as something of interest’ (7). Another reason for the lack of critical attention to scriptwriting is the perception in Film and Television Studies of scripts as mere “blueprints” for films and programs, as unfinished and transitional and insignificant to the finished and concrete film or program (MacDonald 2010).

MacDonald (2010: 7) notes this marginal position within Film and Television Studies of scriptwriting when he writes that it is:

An awkward and peripheral subject…, sidelined because of its problematic relationship to the apparently more concrete final ‘text’ of the film. Considered as rough sketches or the “blueprint”, or as incomplete or transitional, who would not look at the script in its various forms as somehow inferior?

This critical dismissal of scriptwriting as a field of study could be seen as a problem of discipline. Film and Television Studies will always privilege the study of finished films and programs over the study of scripts. Literature Studies also replicates this anti-script bias due to its privileging of published texts (Boon 2008). Oftentimes, scripts are never published and when they are—as with screenwriters such as Tarantino and Mamet—these scripts are not necessarily the versions used in the film production (Boon 2008). Literature Studies does not however exclude study of stage plays, even though the structure of plays (such as the inclusion of stage directions) and their formulaic nature is not substantially different from that of scripts (Boon 2008). In fact, literary scholars ‘generally approach Shakespeare’s plays as written documents, not performances. That is, the written play is privileged over its
performance’ (Boon 2008: 30). This privileging of the text over performance makes sense when it is acknowledged that a play can have multiple productions, each staged somewhat differently.

Take as an example the rather diverse stage and screen productions of Shakespeare’s plays. Taking screen adaptations of just one Shakespearean play as an example, think of George Cukor’s (1936) orthodox film rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* to Franco Zeffirelli’s (1968) version and, nearly three decades later, Baz Luhrmann’s (1996) postmodern adaptation. These films are stylistically very different from each other—and draw out quite different themes from Shakespeare’s text—however they all adhere rather faithfully to the play’s structure and core dialogue.

The prevalence of the Hollywood remake is another example of the multiple productions a script or screen idea can have. One such example from the Southern Gothic genre is the script for the 1987 film *Angel Heart* (written and directed by Alan Parker). This script is based on a novel—*Falling Angel* (1978) by William Hjortsberg—though deviates from the novel enough for it to be considered a new work. A remake of this film based on the original script and not the novel is currently in the early stages of production by Michael De Luca, formerly of New Line Cinema.

A more potent example of the many lives a script can have, also from the Southern Gothic genre, is the number of stage and film productions based on Carson McCullers’ play of her novel *Member of the Wedding* (1946). This novel has been adapted for the stage, cinema and television many times.

McCullers stage adaptation of *Member of the Wedding* opened on Broadway in 1950 and was revived in London in 2007. The first film version—adapted by Edna and Edward Anhalt and directed by Fred Zinnemann—was produced in 1952. McCullers’
stageplay was then adapted for television (1982, directed by Delbert Mann). Another film version, adapted by David W. Rintels and directed by Fielder Cook, was produced in 1997. It could be said that the script *Member of the Wedding* (1950) has had wider dissemination than the novel.

Given all of this, a continued bias against scripts seems to have no basis. As Boon argues, ‘[o]ther than the fact that stage plays have existed much longer than scripts, it is difficult to come up with objective criteria that would enable us to embrace one and exclude the other’ (2008: 43). William Horne (1992: 53) summarises the need for scripts to be studied independently from any film or production based on them when he writes:

> There will be no substantive study of the script, until and unless it is afforded its own legitimate aesthetic existence—not merely as a set of interim production notes or as a substitute film—but as a separate work… it is crucially important that the script be viewed not only as a shooting script but as an independent text (emphasis original).

This discipline bias is, however, not likely to be duplicated in Creative Writing departments where scriptwriting would be taught simply as another writing practice; a practice with the same significance as poetry and fiction writing or, for that matter, writing for the stage. In Creative Writing departments, scripts are approached as independent texts. This attitude in the Creative Writing domain towards scriptwriting is facilitated by the many similarities between writing for the stage and writing for the screen (Boon 2008). As discussed above, both stageplays and scripts are texts that have a number of iterations. More to the point, both may (or may not) lead to production or staging and publication (Boon 2008). Within the domain of writing, the lack of production or publication is not necessarily an obstacle, as the text can still be studied as an artefact that evidences specific creative practices.
Within the discipline of Creative Writing, it is possible to study scriptwriting as a practice and view the script or script as more than a mere blueprint for the ‘real’ text that is the finished film or program. When the study of scriptwriting is undertaken from within the discipline of Creative Writing, a script can be studied both as a text in and of itself (irrespective of publication or production), much as plays are, and as a text which documents the practices and investigations that are a part of the writing process itself. Also, scriptwriting as an academic sub-discipline within writing might prove to be a valuable position from which to investigate writing practice as it manifests in the screen industries, which emphasise a more collaborative approach to writing than say poetry or fiction.

Maras (2011) notes that, in the developing field of Screenwriting Studies, a number of distinct research trajectories are emerging, each with significantly different approaches. One of these research trajectories is that of Practice-Led Research, which Maras describes as relating ‘to the growing recognition of practice-based enquiry as a research method’ and is often undertaken by ‘individuals who span both practical and academic expertise’ (2011: 280). To date however, only a handful of scholars, such as Millard (2006) and Nelmes (2010b & 2007), have engaged with scriptwriting as a creative practice.

For all of these reasons, this project is situated within the domains of Creative Writing and Practice-Led Research rather than that of Film Studies or Screen Production. By situating it thus, the project privileges the script written as part of the project as a text in and of itself (that documents a creative practice) over any future production it may or may not receive.
Summary

This creative and critical project can be understood as constituting a nexus between a wide range of intersecting domains. Furthermore, the critical component of the project is more than an exegesis or hermeneutic discussion of the creative artefact, though it does perform that function as well. It is a critical reflection and analysis of all of the principal factors which were implicated by the topic as the project progressed. These factors, for the most part, concerned how conceptualisations of subjectivity impacted on writing practice. Having said that, the research project was undertaken in an academic setting and this brought into focus questions of creative practice as research, creative works as research outcomes and pedagogy in the Creative Arts. Thus, this exegesis, for want of a better word, describes and contextualises all of these aspects of the project. The project that the exegesis describes can be understood more simply as applying notions of subjectivity in a number of interrelated areas or disciplines. This is perhaps best described in visual form (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Intersecting Domains
As illustrated in Figure 1, this project consists primarily of a discussion of four overlapping theoretical domains: theories around the notion of subjectivity and/or identity, including a discussion of liminal genders; theories around critical reading; theories around writing and scriptwriting, and; theories around creative writing pedagogy. In this analysis, the project draws on a range of disciplines and theoretical frameworks including Poststructural theory, Queer Theory and research from the discipline of psychology. As already noted, the project is further divided into a traditional research paper or exegesis and a creative component. The inclusion of the creative component necessitates a discussion of creative work in the context of the academy, or Practice-Led Research (PLR). This discussion of scholarship around PLR occurs mainly in the *Creative Arts Research* chapter. Furthermore, the project begins with the premise that the way we understand and construct subjectivity influences both the way we write and read and the way we teach creative writing. The way Creative Writing is taught then in-turn impacts on reading and writing practice within the domain. The research project also looks at how constructions or conceptualisations of creativity fit into particular paradigms of subjectivity and how this relates to writing pedagogy. It will be argued that the practices of writing (and reading), meaning-making and the formation of subjectivity can be viewed as components in an interrelated process, as illustrated in the diagram below:
Chapter 3: Models of Subjectivity

It is certainly clear by this point that the notion of subjectivity is central to this endeavour. The way that subjectivity is conceived or understood informs how the research and creative practice were approached in significant ways. Therefore, a discussion about subjectivity needs to occur before we turn to an elaboration of the project’s specific research methodologies. This chapter then, outlines what the term “subjectivity” means in the context of the project.

Jacques Derrida has argued that the ‘question of the subject and the living “who” is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies’ (1991: 115). Echoing this sentiment, Nick Mansfield (2000: 1) has written that the ‘focus on the self as the centre both of lived experience and of discernible meaning has become one of the—if not the—defining issues of modern and postmodern cultures’ (original emphasis).

There are many different models of subjectivity and many meanings associated with the term (Zahavi 2006). As Mansfield (2000: 5) has suggested:

The theorisation of subjectivity in the twentieth century has produced a range of different models and approaches. It is not even agreed with any certainty what the subject itself is. Different theories follow different paths to different ends.

Having said that however, there is a ‘consensus amongst theorists that the subject is constructed, made within the world, not born into it already formed’ (Mansfield 2000: 11, original emphasis). There is also a consensus in many approaches to subjectivity that ‘the sexual has always been a defining issue’ and that ‘the era of the subject is the era of sexuality’ (Mansfield 2000: 117). For Mansfield at least, ‘it is impossible to

The definition of subjectivity below is a little long, however it encompasses all of the aspects of the term as it will be used in this research project:

Subjectivity [is] often used interchangeably with the term “identity”. Subjectivity more accurately denotes our social constructs and consciousness of identity. We normally speak of identity as a flat, one-dimensional concept, but subjectivity is much broader and more multi-faceted; it is social and personal being that exists in negotiation with broad cultural definitions and our own ideals. We may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation etc., and a subjectivity that is comprised of all of those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of ourselves (Hall 2004: 134).

As the quote above indicates, the term “subjectivity” encompasses the notion of identity and, as it also encompasses consciousness and self-awareness, it can also be seen to encompass the term “Self”.

Although subjectivity and/or identity is widely considered to be both stable and lasting and somehow natural, or internal, there is a significant body of research, mainly in the domains of psychology, Poststructuralism and Queer Theory, that argues that subjectivity is better conceived as a set of performed and repetitive behaviours, including thought patterns, that rely heavily on socio-cultural and group conditions (Weiten 2007; Butler 1990). This is made clear when it is taken into account that the major components of subjectivity—such as gender, sexuality and culture—have already been shown to be situational, temporary and themselves reliant on repetition and performance for their constitution (Butler 2004 & 1990).
Moreover, much psychological research indicates that subjectivity (as in the self, identity, personality and self-perception) is neither fixed, stable nor lasting (Weiten 2007). This is especially the case if one reviews the positions of the four major traditions or theoretical perspectives dealing with subjectivity: the Psychodynamic, Behavioural, Humanistic and Biological approaches (Weiten 2007: 481-486). None of these four approaches can adequately describe subjectivity by itself and most leading-edge psychological research emphasises a balance between biological, environmental and socio-cultural influences in the formation of subjectivity (Weiten 2007). Having said this, all of these traditions acknowledge socio-cultural influence as a key component; either as the main and direct stimulus to the formation of subjectivity or as a mitigating force operating on other factors, such as biology (Weiten 2007).

In this light, subjectivity can be seen as something that can adapt and change with the only limiting factors being temporary constraints within the subject’s field of socio-cultural conditions and/or any constraints imposed by physiology (Baker 2008). In this sense, subjectivity or identity can be seen to be ‘largely constituted by the repetition of performed behaviours and practices within a field of socio-culturally established possibilities and limitations (within the context of a specific physicality) rather than something that is natural or inherent to a specific person or group’ (Baker 2008: 350).

Judith Butler (1990: 184) has argued that the subject and subjectivity are the “resulting effect” of discourse. Butler argues that ‘to understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effect of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and
mundane signifying acts of linguistic life’ (1990: 184). Butler’s conceptualisation of
the subject and subjectivity fits within what Dan Zahavi (Zahavi 2006: 8) describes as
the narrative concept of subjectivity or self. The narrative concept of subjectivity
foregrounds socio-cultural conditioning and language as the progenitors of
subjectivity and the subject (Zahavi 2006). This is most clearly articulated by Michel
Foucault (cited in Bailey 2005: 122) in the quote below:

[T]he subject is not so much a substance as a form, and subjects can occupy a variety
of positions both “subject to” discipline and capable of “self-constitution”; albeit
within the resources offered by his/her culture, society and social group.

Madan Sarup (1996: 14) keenly illustrates the narrative conception of subjectivity
when he writes that identity/subjectivity is ‘fabricated, constructed, in process’. This
fabrication or construction of subjectivity has a direct relation to discourse and,
therefore, is rather ephemeral in nature (Davies 2000). Subjectivity is constituted
through the discourses with which the subject engages and, as these discourses shift
and change, sometimes directly opposing each other, it is therefore markedly
contradictory (Davies 2000: 57). Furthermore, Sarup argues that, when conceiving of
identity, ‘we have to consider both psychological and sociological factors’ and
remember that identities are ‘fragmented, full of contradictions and ambiguities’
(1996: 14). A large number of other theorists have also argued that identity is
produced through/by discourse in relation to socio-cultural, economic and material
conditions (Mansfield 2000).

This conceptualisation of the subject espoused by Foucault, Butler and many others
shies away from full engagement with the other significant philosophical school of
thought around subjectivity, that which takes first-person experience (consciousness)
as a core component in the formation of subjectivity and personhood, or, in other
words, the phenomenological tradition. The phenomenological tradition, Zahavi argues, ‘conceives of the self as the invariant dimension of first-personal givenness within the multitude of changing experiences’ (2006: 8). Zahavi (2006) further argues that these two notions of subjectivity are complimentary and, furthermore, that one, the phenomenological approach, can be seen as a presupposition of the other.

Within psychology, in particular neuropsychology, the phenomenological notion of ‘first-personal givenness’ is most often understood as something that arises out of the relationship between biology/physiology and environment (Weiten 2007: 491-493). It is an experience of being embodied and conscious. As Mansfield notes:

Subjectivity is primarily an experience, and remains permanently open to inconsistency, contradiction and unself-consciousness. Our experience of ourselves remains forever prone to surprising disjunctions that only the fierce light of ideology or theoretical dogma convinces us can be homogenised into a single consistent thing (2000: 6).

Given all the above, it seems apparent that whatever angle one takes there is little to justify belief in a stable, fixed or essential self/subjectivity that comes into being or exists independently from external factors. Moreover, as discourse is a core component of social and cultural relations—be it in the form of cinema, literature or television—the place of reading/viewing and writing in discussions around the formation of subjectivity is therefore significant. I would also suggest that, not only is it important to accommodate both narrative and phenomenological notions of subjectivity, but also the large body of evidence from the field of psychology that describes the first-person experience, a core component of subjectivity, as arising out of the relationship between biology/physiology and environment. For these reasons, this project foregrounds the narrative aspect of subject formation, particularly in
relation to any Other, however this is done without denying or eliding the significant influences on subjectivity of socio-cultural dynamics, consciousness and biology.

Following from Zahavi, I would also suggest that any understanding of the Other (or the non-heteronormative) ‘must include an appreciation of how we come to experience ourselves as embodied minds’ (2006: 9) This sense of selfhood as an embodied mind in relation to an Other or others is echoed by Mansfield (2000: 3) when he states that:

“Subjectivity” refers, therefore, to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is always linked to something outside of it—an idea or principle or the society of other subjects.

This sense that subjectivity is always in relation to others brings into focus another aspect of subjectivity that has been significant to this research project. This is the notion of intersubjectivity. The specific model of intersubjectivity drawn on in the project comes (primarily) from Buddhist philosophy. Having said that, intersubjectivity is a term used differently depending on the discipline (Buddhism, philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology) in which it is being deployed. In western philosophy, intersubjectivity is associated with transcendence and is theorized as the relation between beings which offers a measure of escape from the isolation of the separate self (Levinas 2003). Emmanuel Levinas, building on and departing somewhat from the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger, wrote that ‘[e]scape… is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I is oneself’ (Levinas 2003: 55).
In psychoanalysis, intersubjectivity is described as the relation between subjects (and between subjects and external objects) that allows both a shared experience of phenomena and for empathy between subjects (Stolorow & Atwood 1992). For psychoanalysts Robert Stolorow and George Atwood (1992), intersubjectivity necessitates the rejection of the myth of an isolated mind. Jessica Benjamin (1998) has further developed the notion of intersubjectivity to mean a rejection of a unitary self—that is, a self that excludes from within itself that which is considered Other—and posits instead a subjectivity that allows paradoxes and resists singular definition. In other words, intersubjectivity embraces within itself what would normally be considered intolerable binary opposites (masculine/feminine, self/other etc) and accommodates rather than excludes differences, opposites, tensions, contradictions and ambivalences (Kimble-Wrye 1999).

In Buddhism, intersubjectivity contains all of the above meanings but also the notion of a deep interdependence and connectedness or “oneness” between subjectivities/subjects (Baker 2008). To put it simply, the philosophy of Buddhism articulates not a discrete, separate subjectivity (however constituted) but a subjectivity that is at all times dependent on (and permeated by) all other subjectivities (Wallace 2001). By “dependent” it is meant that ‘subjectivity does not arise independently or autonomously but rather is constituted by an array of factors, such as biology, environment, language and socio-cultural conditioning and, importantly, the subjectivity of others’ (Baker 2008: 346). This Buddhist intersubjectivity is conceived as impermanent or changeable, and as radically open and fluid. As D. J. Baker (2008: 346) explains:

…this intersubjectivity is seen to arise anew from moment to moment. The sense of continuity that subjects feel in relation to their subjectivity is described as an illusion
and the apparent stability of their subjectivity (identity) merely the result of habit… or *performativity*… (original emphasis).

One of the most important outflows of this conception of intersubjectivity is that the subjects themselves have a high degree of agency to intervene in personal subject formation (with certain constraints). In other words, Buddhist philosophy posits that the individual has the ability to alter and refine their intersubjectivity at will (Baker 2008). This is not seen as an easy feat, by any means, and often is frustrated by psychological and socio-cultural restraints, but is one of the core assumptions of Buddhist thought — that subjects can change themselves at a very deep level (Baker 2008). In Buddhism, the trigger for this change—the “something outside” of the subject referred to by Mansfield (2000: 3)—is the application of Buddhist philosophy as a “way of life”.

The external or intersubjective factors that figure in the constitution of subjectivity differ from context to context. In this project, the “something outside” of subjectivity that triggered its (re)constitution was the practice of writing applied as part of a queer self-making. A number of Poststructural theorists have explicitly connected the ambivalent, shifting notion of subjectivity to the practice of writing (Davies 2000). Bronwyn Davies elucidates this point when she writes that subjectivity ‘is constituted through those discourses in which the person is being positioned at any one point in time, both through their own and others’ acts of speaking/writing’ (2000: 57, original emphasis).

The deeply relational quality of subjectivity is strongly emphasised in another idea from psychology, that of *distributed cognition*. I discuss distributed cognition in some detail in Chapter Seven where I outline how it has been applied in creativity research.
But here I would like to point out the resonances between the idea of distributed cognition and the intersubjective and discursive qualities of subjectivity. In distributed cognition, much of what we call “mind” is situated or occurs beyond the constraints of the brain (Gee 2000). In this schema, what we call mind is largely discursive and occurs ‘in the wild’ (Hutchins 1995) of social and cultural relations.

These ideas are directly applied in the creative component of the project. Indeed, it will be argued in chapters eight and nine that an understanding of non-normative notions of subjectivity (i.e. that subjectivity can alter and shift) can facilitate actual shifts in the subjectivity of the writer/reader (into alternate writing and reading positions) that could be seen to facilitate greater creativity and the production of more open, less prescriptive or heteronormative texts. The creative practice component (the script) evidences how the practices of reading and writing are impacted by shifts in subjectivity and also features a range of characters whose subjectivity changes/alters throughout the text in ways that privilege openness and diversity. These shifts in character subjectivity in the creative text can be seen as interventions/resistances to dominant and normalising constructions of gender and sexual subjectivity. These queer reconstructions of subjectivity are intersubjective in nature. That is, they are triggered by relations between subjects and in response to discourse. This is reflected in the creative component (script) by one of the main characters (Percival Huckstep) exhibiting a pronounced interest in Buddhism and its tradition of self modification. The script also demonstrates a more open, less normalising way of writing gender subjectivities; in this case effeminacy and the *abject genderqueer*. 
Summary
This chapter argued that subjectivity and the subject are *constructed* in, and by, discourse and that subjectivity is changeable and often ambivalent and contradictory. It was demonstrated that cultural discourse, and therefore the acts of reading/viewing, or engagements with cultural discourses, are central to the constitution of subjectivity. In a sense, subjectivity is always intersubjectivity because it relies on things such as discourse and cultural artefacts and others outside of itself for its constitution.

Given this intersubjectivity, the chapter introduced the idea that the act or practice of writing can be central to the constitution of subjectivity. The chapter also articulated the fact that any theorisation of subjectivity needs to address socio-cultural discourses on sexuality. It is for these reasons, it was argued, that this research project foregrounds the narrative and experiential aspect of subjectivity.
Chapter 4: Positioning Theories

As the research methodologies applied in the discipline of Creative Writing vary greatly, it is necessary to outline in depth the specific methodologies employed in this project. This research has been facilitated by the application of a methodology that includes: literature review and analysis, deconstruction, creative practice, action research, reflexivity and a queering of subjectivity. The methodology also includes a Practice-Led Research process that was used in the writing of the miniseries-length script. Central to the design and formulation of this complex methodology was a certain (queer) approach to critical theory.

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A broad literature review was undertaken to position the research in a field of enquiry, a set of disciplines and a theoretical framework. This positioning could best be described as multidisciplinary as it draws on Creative Writing and Scriptwriting scholarship, Critical Theory, Queer Theory, ideas from Practice-Led Research and psychological research around notions of subjectivity and creativity. In the end however, it became clear that this research project depended on the critical work of just a handful of theorists.

Firstly, the research is heavily influenced by the writing of Judith Butler, particularly with regards to her conceptualisation of gender as *performance* (1993: 95) and subjectivity as a practice (1990: 184). Butler’s theorem that gender and subjectivity are repetitive behaviours or acts, or in other words performative events, echoes the earlier work of Michel Foucault. Foucault is also core to the theoretical position of this project, especially his later work on ethics (1986b). As unlikely as it may seem,
there is much research in the discipline of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychology that resonates with the work of Butler and Foucault; though these resonances have rarely been explored. These echoes or confluences facilitated the drawing in to this project of psychological research around creativity and subjectivity that foreground their discursive and performative aspects.

Secondly, the project returns to the work of a number of seminal Poststructural theorists in order to take their ideas in directions other than those directions most frequently taken since their initial enunciation. The seminal theorists whose work is significant to this project include Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida. Kristeva’s writings are crucial to this project’s understanding of marginalised or liminal genders, what Kristeva might describe as the abject Other (1982). In particular, the research project utilises Kristeva's notions of abjection, or the process of exclusion of specific undesirable characteristics or types, and draws on her positioning of writing in relation to discourses of abjection.

Although Kristeva uses the term abjection in relation to the monstrous, I will be using it here to refer to discursive figures (or characters) that are marginalised and excluded because of their gender non-conformity. An abject figure does not need to be a monster to inspire revulsion and disgust; it does not need to display the standard signs of abjection such as bodily waste (blood, pus, sweat) and putrefaction (Kristeva 1982). The abject figure does not need to drool or ooze puss. It does not need fur or fangs or claws. As Kristeva herself has shown:

It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the shameless rapist… [A]ny crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject (1982: 4).
What is not overtly stated here is that the borders referenced include those between sexual and gender norms—norms associated with a “Self”, an assumed reader, or the dominant subjectivity of a discourse—and the abnormal. What is also not explicitly stated here is that the ‘fragility of the law’ that Kristeva is referring to directly corresponds to a fragility of the heteronormative subject. The abnormal is ‘constructed as other to the presumed reader, and other to the heteronormative narrative trajectory itself’ (Baker 2010: 82). The presumed reader is most often heterosexual, most often male and ‘this presumption is considered somehow normal or natural and the abnormal (queer) is therefore constructed as feminine, or in many instances as a feminised male, and as unnatural’ (Baker 2010: 82). The abject and the queer threaten the heteronormative subject with corruption, or worse, death. The abject threatens the heteronormative subject’s very existence which is why the abject must be expelled, exiled or eliminated. ‘In fact’, Mansfield argues, ‘the first and fundamental purpose of systems of order is to repress ambiguity and contradiction, to assert the singularity of truth, the certainty of law, the inevitability of order against the abominations of contradiction, mixture, incompleteness and difference in general’ (2000: 85).

Mansfield (2000: 181) further defines Kristeva’s notion of the abject in this way:

In the work of Julia Kristeva, the abject is that which challenges the subject’s sense of fixity and stability…. Metaphorically, the abject extends to all transgression of boundaries, such as ambiguity and ambivalence.

All a figure needs to do to be considered abject—to inspire disgust and to be excised from society and culture—is to be aberrant in its gender or sexuality. In other words the queer, especially the gender rebellious queer, is always already abject because of their gender ambiguity and sexual ambivalence. When thinking about abject gender, I
am thinking about the “sissy” and the “tomboy”. I would suggest that these terms, especially the term “sissy”, have connotations of that which is strange or queer, that which is deviant and abnormal; in other words, that which is abject. When referring to the sissy and the tomboy collectively, I use the term *abject genderqueer*, which is meant to encapsulate the “deviant” and “strange” or abject connotations of the word “queer” (see ‘Queer Theory’ section below) and the source of the figures’ abjection, which is their gender non-conformity. The term also evokes the sense of the abject as that which must be excluded, exiled or eliminated. The sissy in particular is a figure that is an exile from heteronormative social systems. One of the goals of the research was to find ways to critically inform the creative component, specifically how to (re)write the figures of the sissy and tomboy in a fashion that undermines the negative meanings historically attached to them.

I am drawing rather heavily on the work of Héléne Cixous, and through her the work of Jacques Derrida. I am specifically using the Cixousian conceptualisation of writing as *Écriture Feminine* and the Derridian conceptualisation of writing as *Différance*; or discourses or forms of writing that are not limited to set, and often binary, numbers of terms but rather discourses which are open at both the end and the beginning. I will return to these ideas later, but for now it is pertinent to understand that Cixous postulates this sort of writing as “bisexual” or “feminine” (Cixous & Sellers 1994). Cixous sets up this mode of writing in opposition to traditional (heterosexual male) discourses (Moi 1985: 105-107). Cixous refers to this sort of writing (a kind of writing ideal for use in any discourse that attempts to rewrite and revalue those constructed as Other by heteronormative discourse) as feminine writing (in French *Écriture Feminine*). I will discuss both Cixous’ and Derrida’s concepts of writing in detail in the proceeding chapter.
Apart from his own unique way of thinking about writing, the influence of Jacques Derrida on this project is mainly in the style of analysis used. Deconstruction, an analytical device put to great use by Derrida (Caputo 1997), has been employed to reduce normative discourses on gender to their fundamental narrative devices, in order to reveal the workings of power—objectification, demonization and marginalisation—that are embedded in them. This process of revelation also informed the creative component. Deconstruction in this sense meant an analysis of texts from the Southern Gothic genre; the stripping down of what might be called proscriptive discourses to reveal the masquerade of truth within them. This deconstructive effort aimed to neutralise these discourses’ claims to legitimacy or authenticity. It certainly destabilized their claim to accurately describe the Other and the queer (specifically the sissy and tomboy). This was done in an effort to reduce the efficiency, the objectifying power, of these discourses and to find ways to produce another, more open and queer, kind of text or discourse. An overview of this deconstructive analysis appears in Chapter Nine.

**Queer Theory**

One of the most significant influences on this research project is Queer Theory, most notably the work of Butler and the “founding father” of Queer Theory, Michel Foucault. Throughout this exegesis I will engage with a handful of potent ideas from each of these theorists. As noted earlier, Butler’s notion of subjectivity as a practice (1990) and her conception of gender as a performative act (1993) are central but so too is the idea of *gender insubordination* (1993b). Michel Foucault (1997) also theorised the subject as a kind of practice (or perhaps discipline) and his enunciation of this idea is also central to this project, as is Foucault’s development of an “ethics of the self” (Foucault 1978). A Foucauldian ethics is not a moral code but an ethics
which constitutes the self and which can be seen as a kind of self-making (Foucault 1978). The idea of self-making, and how that might be applied in the context of a creative and critical practice, is at the very heart of the project.

I will discuss these ideas and others from Queer Theory in more detail at various stages in the exegesis. Rather than providing a lengthy definition of all of the terms here—clustered at the opening without context so that their meanings might seem somewhat abstract—some of the terms and ideas will be defined as they are applied. As the exegesis unfolds, it will become clear how the ideas introduced above are applied to different aspects of the project in order to draw together the various creative and critical or theoretical threads mentioned in the introduction. Just as a reminder, these thread are: the notion of creative and critical practice (writing and research) as performative bricolage; the notion of writing as part of an ethics of the self; the notion of subjectivity as core to the project of writing and research in the context of self-bricolage; and the idea of queer texts and discourse as components in an ongoing queer becoming.

Although specific ideas from Queer Theory are discussed and explained in progressive chapters of the exegesis, a basic description of Queer Theory is warranted at the outset. This description is intended to give a general understanding of how Queer Theory is understood in the context of the project. Queer Theory has its origins in Poststructuralism (Jagose 1996) and employs a number of Poststructuralism’s key ideas (Spargo 1999). As Spargo (1999: 41) argues, Queer Theory employs:

Lacan’s psychoanalytic models of decentred, unstable identity, Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic structures, and… Foucault’s model of discourse, knowledge and power.
At the most basic level, Queer Theory is a set of theories based on the central idea that identities are not fixed and closed off from outside influences but rather fluid and permeable (Baker 2011). Queer Theory is also based on the idea that our gender and sexual identities are not determined by biological sex (Jagose 1996). Queer Theory proposes that it is meaningless to try to understand gender and sexuality (or indeed race or class) through limiting identity categories such as “man” or “woman”, “heterosexual” or “homosexual” (Jagose 1996). This is because subjectivity and identity are not simplistic but complex and consist of numerous elements, many of them in contradiction to each other. This complexity and in-built fragmentation of subjectivity and identity mean that it is reductive to assume that individuals can be understood collectively on the basis of a shared characteristic such as gender or sexuality (Jagose 1996).

The logical extension of this critique of sexual and gender categories or identities is a deconstruction of and challenge to all notions of subjectivity and identity categories as fixed, lasting and unified (or without ambivalence). In this way, the boundaries between other categories, such as race and class, can also be interrogated. Rather than fixed identities or categories, Queer Theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) suggest instead a subjectivity that is fluid, ephemeral, complex and ambivalent (as was discussed in the Models of Subjectivity chapter).

The quote below from Annamarie Jagose (Jagose 1996: 3) comprehensively describes the core concerns of Queer Theory:

Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability--which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect--queer focuses on
mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Whether as transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any “natural” sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as “man” and “woman”.

Thus, Queer Theory’s principal focus is the denaturalisation of categories/norms (Sullivan 2003, Jagose 1996, de Lauretis 1991, Butler 1990) and abrading the borders between “infamous” binary terms like male/female, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, self/other (Baker 2010).

The work of Queer Theory is one of deconstruction (Spargo 1999, Jagose 1996); to dissect and alter how we think about and live core aspects of human subjectivity such as identity, sex/gender, race and sexuality. This work is undertaken in the context of a culture steeped in heteronormativity — the discourse and practice of presumed and privileged heterosexuality (Butler 1990: 106). Queer Theory works to undermine the privileged position of heteronormativity by exposing the ways in which sexualities and genders are produced in/by discourse and the ways in which non-normative genders and sexualities resist, transcend and trouble normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality categories that would otherwise be widely (mis)understood as somehow natural, essential or incontestable. From a Queer Theory perspective, genders and sexualities (and subjectivities) are fluid, permeable, mutable and largely the result of repeatedly performed utterances, rituals and behaviours; or performativity (Butler 1993).
An early critical thread of Queer Theory connected the queer to the abject or monstrous. As Sue Ellen Case articulates: ‘The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny’ (1997: 383). Case outlines the connections between the monstrous and queer desire even further when she writes ‘queer desire punctures the life/death and generative/destructive bipolarities that enclose the heterosexist notion of being’ (1997: 384). Other theorists have connected discourses of the abject, the horrific monster, with actual individuals, most notably the gay male with HIV/AIDS (Hanson 1991). Ellis Hanson writes that gay men with HIV are represented as ‘the embodiment of evil sexuality’ (1991: 325). Hanson also argues that essentialist heteronormative discourses represent gay men as:

…sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polyvocal, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home, and phallus (1991: 325).

These notions of the queer as a monstrous threat to heterosexual culture draw out the abject connotations of the word queer and foreground the source of the queer figure’s abjection, their gender and sexual non-conformity; which is, in heteronormative discourse, its own kind of monstrosity. As noted above, the project draws on these ideas in its formation of the term *abject genderqueer*. The *abject genderqueer*, as a liminal or marginal figure, is the central thematic focus of the project.

**Performativity**

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity could be said to be one of the most influential ideas of Queer Theory (Jagose 1996: 83). Certainly, Butler’s notion of the performativity of genders and sexualities has had a wide-reaching impact on both the creative and critical practice at the centre of this project. Performativity is central to
how the project explores sexual and gender difference through, and in, practice and how knowledge garnered from that exploration is then expressed (or disseminated) in creative and critical forms. Therefore, although it will be revisited a number of times as the exegesis progresses—in the context of those elements of the project on which it most directly impacts—a summary of the theory of performativity is pertinent here.

Judith Butler first presented the notion of performativity in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler frames the notion of performativity in relation to gender and norms of heterosexuality (1990, 1993). Butler further argues that gender is a performance without ontological status when she writes: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; …identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (1990: 25). For Butler, performativity describes how what might be assumed to be an internal essence to something such as gender or subjectivity is ‘manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body’ (2004: 94). Therefore, it can be argued that genders, sexualities, subjectivities and identities are all equally performative; manufactured through a sustained set of acts (some of them cognitive) enacted through the racial, gendered and sexual stylization of bodies. Queer theories of performativity draw on and align with Poststructural conceptions of identity in which identity/subjectivity is seen as multiple, changing and fragmented (Sarup 1996). In this way, queer performativity re-conceives gendered identities and sexualities as plural, varying, fragmented and produced in, by and through discourse.

For Butler, performativity is not total “voluntarism” (2004). We do not freely choose how to enact gender or sexuality without constraint (Butler 2004). Our genders,
sexualities and subjectivities are not freely chosen but rather ‘compelled and sanctioned by the norms of compulsory heterosexuality (**heteronormativity**), and the subject has no choice but to exist within… norms and conventions of nature’ such as binary sex difference (Pratt 2009b). Performative subjectivities are also socio-culturally and historically embedded; they are “citational chains” and their effects depend on social conventions (Pratt 2009). According to Butler, gender and sexual norms and subjectivities are produced, disseminated and reinforced through repetitions of an ideal such as the ideal of “woman” or “man” (Pratt 2009b). As the heteronormative ideal is a fiction, and thereby unachievable or “uninhabitable”, there is room for disidentification (or counter identification) and human agency and resistance (Pratt 2009b).

Moreover, it can be said that performativity is an analytical tool and a process of enactment; it is a way of thinking about something and a way of doing something. Such a framework is appropriate for application to the reflective practice of writing. In other words, creative practice can be seen as performative. If we accept that the act of writing itself is performative—in that it produces discourse and is a process through which subjectivities are constructed and disseminated—then writing can be seen to be a highly appropriate methodology for exploring genders, sexualities, identities and performativity itself, especially in the context of writing as a practice of self-bricolage.

**Theory as Bricolage**

This project employed the critical technique of **bricolage** in a comprehensive and somewhat radical way. That is, the project was undertaken by producing a critical language—a kind of writing or discourse and research approach—which drew on
multiple disciplines and theories and, perhaps more importantly, fused techniques. These techniques included, but were not limited to: research, analysis, deconstruction, creative practice, fiction, reflection and imagination. Most importantly, the project approached theory with what Webb & Brien (2011: 199) describe as ‘a bricoleur-as-bowerbird’s selection of method’.

This method may seem overly dispersed and somewhat fuzzy but it develops out of writing practice which is itself bowerbird-like in approach, drawing on multiple threads to create new lines of thought and meaning. But this bricoleur-as-bowerbird method is not ill-thought or casual, even though it may seem overly eclectic or wild (Brady 2000). As Webb and Brien point out:

Writers take what they need, from wherever they can find it. And though such a process may sound slapdash and too casual to be taken seriously, it is, in fact, grounded on very careful and sophisticated investigation into research methodologies and how they function (2011: 199).

Hélène Cixous, herself a critical theorist and creative writer, a bricoleur, describes bricolage in this way:

It is the whole that makes sense. That which cannot be met on one path, and which I cannot say in one of my languages, I seek to say through another form of expression. (Cixous & Sellers 1994: xvi).

Cixous argues against ‘the quartering of herself’, the imprisonment of her intellect within a single mode of expression, within a single critical or creative language (Cixous & Sellers 1994: xvi). Cixous outlines her ideas in multiple ways, in criticism, in poetry and philosophy, in stageplays and in fiction. In this way she hopes to more fully explore the ideas that fascinate her which, she believes, cannot be fully explored in any single medium, in any single discipline. In reading the fragment above from
Cixous I think about bricolage as interdisciplinarity, or rather multidisciplinarity.

Cixous seems to be arguing that any complete analysis must be multidisciplinary in order to fully understand and articulate the ‘object’ or idea under investigation. By “it is the whole that makes sense”, Cixous seems to mean that there is something beyond mere articulation—shocking for a Poststructuralist for whom articulation and understanding are almost synonymous—and that this something is found in neither reading nor writing alone but in the reading and the writing together. Or rather, is something that arises out of a particular kind of reading and writing — the reading of a diverse array of articulations/discourses/writings and the writing of texts that contain within themselves this diversity of articulation; in other words, texts that are best described as bricolage.

Derrida adopted the notion of the bricoleur, the opportunistic theorist, outlined by Claude Levi Strauss (1966: 17) and simultaneously expanded and problematised it. The bricoleur is defined by Levi Strauss as someone who uses the “means at hand”, the methods or systems available, irrespective of the usage to which these methods and systems are usually put (Derrida 1967: 360). The bricoleur uses ‘the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used [by the bricoleur] and to which [the bricoleur] tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous’ (Derrida 1967: 360). In other words, the bricoleur uses heterogeneous forms, such as critical theory and creative fiction, and adapts them in an opportunistic way to meet his/her “needs”. In re-reading and re-postulating Strauss’ conceptualisation of the bricoleur, Derrida proposed that all theorists are bricoleurs and that all theory is bricolage (Derrida
1967). He posited that all theory, despite any claims made for its purity—its *discreteness*—draws on a wide range of discourses and disciplines (Derrida 1967). Of course, this is not necessarily made explicit by the theorists themselves and so it is possible to define bricolage as either *explicit* or *disguised*; as acknowledged or unacknowledged.

This project will explicitly acknowledge its opportunistic deployment of an array of critical theories. Moreover, this research intends to deploy the theories outlined in the section above in deliberately circumscribed ways. What will be created in this project will be a temporary hybrid, a transient melange of ideas that meet the project’s purpose. Particular theoretical frameworks will only be utilised so far as an agreement, based on research and reflection, can be found between that framework and the agenda or demands of the research project. For example, Kristeva’s conceptualisation of abjection describes a widespread phenomenon—the experience of disgust at certain bodily wastes, and indeed at certain types of bodies, behaviours and subjectivities—and so is useful in an analysis of representations of that disgust in texts. However, the universalizing and essentialist emphasis of much other psychoanalytic theory, including some aspects of Kristeva’s own work, fails as a precision tool for describing or analysing discourse and/or subjectivity. Despite this failure of psychoanalysis, there are certain insights made by a few critics working within that framework that are worth utilising in this study. Furthermore, the widespread dissemination and popularisation of psychoanalytic ideas in media and other discourse, its cultural familiarity as it were, makes it a strategic tool for appropriation within any discussion around marginalised or queer genders.
This project is not alone in its adoption of this kind of opportunistic position. It has been said that *bricolage* is the best term to describe Judith Butler’s appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis (Klages 1997). Butler is well known for using bits and pieces of Freud without investing wholeheartedly in its entire schema in order to accomplish the objectives of her work (Klages 1997). This style of critical bricolage could be described as one of the methodological hallmarks of Queer Theory. This opportunistic approach can be seen as necessary when it is understood that critical systems have, for the most part, been designed from within the very heteropatriarchal structures that Queer and Feminist theorists attempt to dismantle. Where escapes from the dominant critical paradigm have occurred, they have tended to be localised, contained within a specific study area or discipline. Without the application of *bricolage* even these critical escapes would remain inaccessible to those working outside the disciplines within which those escapes occurred. Indeed, these critical and creative escapes are essential to the writer’s project, that of making what is (theoretically and creatively) available ‘functional for the necessary purpose’ (Webb & Brien 2011: 199).

The fact that this kind of bricolage is not uncommon in Queer Theory for both critical and political reasons was not however the only reason that I adopted it in relation to this project. Another significant reason was quite simply that my own creative practice of writing has always drawn from diverse threads of both theoretical and creative work. In the act of writing, one draws on all the bodies of knowledge that one has accumulated up to the point of writing. Not all at once and certainly not in equal measure, but nevertheless it is the whole body of one’s experience and knowing that informs writing practice. One cannot forget or silence what one knows—or what one has experienced or learned—when one engages in creative practice. In fact, it could be said that our creative works speak of what we know much more loudly than of what
we imagine, even if our creative works are ones of fiction. What we know is, of course, not confined by (artificial) discipline boundaries or creative form or genre, even though what we know is specific to those domains with which we have actively engaged. For these very reasons, this project’s approach to the theories deployed within it will conform to Butler’s and Cixous’ approach, following from Derrida’s initial conception of the theorist as the *bricoleur*. 
Chapter 5: A Brief Genealogy of Writing

Before going any further, it is important to give a brief genealogy of how the term “writing” has been understood within Critical Theory. This project draws on a genealogy of theory around writing that begins with Poststructuralism and continues to Queer Theory. As already noted in the previous chapter, the origins of Queer Theory are in Poststructuralism (Spargo 1999). In that chapter, I described how Queer Theory employs a number of Poststructuralism’s key ideas such as the idea of a decentred, fluid identity (from Lacan), a deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic structures (from Derrida) and a more complex model of discourse, knowledge and power (from Foucault). Apart from these ideas, it is Poststructural theories concerning writing (text/discourse) on which this project has mainly drawn as it sought to connect Queer Theory and Creative Writing. Most significant of these Poststructuralist ideas are Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous’ conceptualisations of writing as Différance and Écriture Féminine respectively, which were introduced earlier. I would now like to introduce Julia Kristeva’s notion of writing as a prescriptive discourse or scripture (1982). The sections that follow outline the most significant theories about writing which intersect with a queered Creative Writing scholarship. For the sake of brevity, the overview of these ideas that follows is somewhat condensed.

Jacques Derrida and Différance

In Derrida’s groundbreaking text Writing and Difference (1967), an argument is made for recognising forms of discourse that foreground the contingent and constructed nature of meaning. Elsewhere, Derrida referred to these kinds of discourses as différence, a language of difference; a discourse that speaks at the periphery, or
margin (1982, 1973 & 1971). The term *differance* signals a feature that underpins the discursive production of meaning; namely, *deferral*, which is the notion that language (words and signs) are unable to precisely reflect what they mean and even then can only reach some semblance of precise meaning by association/relation to additional words/signs, from which they already differ (1982). For example, the word ‘sweet’ cannot transmit the experience of sweetness but can be more precisely understood by reference to other words like sugar, saccharine, and honey. In this way, ultimate meaning is deferred or postponed by an endless process of signification. *Differance* also signals the difference which distinguishes one word/sign or object from another and, through a process of identification with or against the self/subject, produces hierarchical binary oppositions which in turn organize meaning (1982). In this way, the self assigns value to itself and devalues its other, creating a profusion of binary opposites which place terms associated with the self on the side of normal or natural and opposite terms on the side of abnormal and unnatural. To put it simply, *differance* is a reflective discourse that foregrounds the contingent, inter-penetrated, shifting and constructed nature of meaning and of the self. Crucially, *differance* can be written as well as read. *Differance* is not merely an aspect of reading into texts/discourse (or interpretation) but can be actively undertaken as a practice; a writing practice.

**Hélène Cixous and Écriture Féminine**

Building on Derrida’s notion of *differance*, Hélène Cixous—in her landmark essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976)—argued for a turn away from writing that reproduces, disseminates and reinforces uneven power relations between men and women and heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. Cixous argued against ‘writing as dissemination’, or writing as heteronormative proscriptive discourse, that she argues has typified much literature produced in ‘phallogocentric culture’ (Moi 1985: 100).
Cixous advocated instead a kind of writing that she described as Écriture Féminine. I briefly touched on Écriture Féminine earlier. To reiterate, Écriture Féminine is a discourse—or form of writing—that is not limited to a set, and usually binary, number of terms or categories (of genders, sexualities and identities) but rather a discourse which features more open categories, more fluid genders and identities, and contains more open rather than closed endings (Moi 1985). This form of writing entails the inscription of (female) difference in both language and text (Showalter 1981). I already noted that Cixous postulates this sort of writing as “Other bisexual” or “feminine” and that she sets it up in opposition to traditional (heterosexual male) or heteronormative discourses (Moi 1985). Toril Moi (1985: 106) describes this in more detail when she writes:

For Cixous, feminine texts are texts that ‘work on the difference’… strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality.

Cixous (1976) defines much writing as trapped in patriarchal binary thought and, in the vein of Derrida, argues that terms, such as “man”, only acquire meaning in relationship to other terms, such as “woman”, or in the absence of other terms (Cixous & Sellers 1994). Within this system the terms that are more intimately related to the heterocentric term “man” subordinate all other terms. More to the point, in patriarchal binary thought, for one term to acquire meaning it must destroy the other (Moi 1985). The other term, more simply the Other, must be destroyed for the dominant system to come into meaning, to find purpose, to have a sense of itself and its boundaries. To put it more directly, Cixous ‘sets multiple, heterogeneous différance’ against ‘any binary scheme of thought’ (Moi 1985: 106). Écriture Féminine then, is a style of writing or writing process that foregrounds plurality, openness and gender difference.
with regards terms or categories and also with regards subjectivities or reading and writing positions.

The work of Derrida and Cixous with regards writing can be applied to both Creative Writing pedagogy and practice. In terms of pedagogy, the notions of *Écriture Féminine* and *Differance* are useful in the context of critical and reflective reading of literary texts and in the writing workshop in the reading and critiquing of students’ work by fellow students and writing academics. In terms of Creative Writing practice, the application of *Écriture Féminine* and *Differance* as writing process or practice can be significant. It is important to see these two notions as intersecting processes. One (*Differance*) scrutinizes and alters how we understand and attempt to produce meaning itself. The other (*Écriture Féminine*) scrutinizes and inscribes (writes) gender and sexual difference and non-heteronormative subjectivities into language and text. The bodies of knowledge and diversification of writing styles and themes that are the output of these complimentary processes or modes can be seen to enrich not only the texts produced themselves but also the studio environment, the writing experience of students and the discipline of Creative Writing as a whole.

**Julia Kristeva and Writing as Scripture**

[T]he frequency of defilement rites in societies without writing leads one to think that such cathartic rites function like a “writing of the real”. They parcel out, demarcate, delineate an order, a framework, a sociality without having any other signification than the one inhering in that very parcelling and the order thus concatenated. One might ask, proceeding in reverse, if all writing is not a second level rite, at the level of language, that is, which causes one to be reminded, through the linguistic signs themselves, of the demarcations that precondition them and go beyond them. Indeed writing causes the subject who ventures in it to confront an archaic authority (1982: 75).
In the excerpt above, Julia Kristeva implies that writing acts to describe and disseminate an order, a framework, which could be called a writing of the “real”; or a systematic discourse that positions borders between what is real and tolerable and what is unreal and intolerable and establishes and reinforces taboos (Kristeva 1982). Of course, what is real in heteronormative discourse is what is intelligible (Butler 1990), what can be understood and apprehended within heteronormative logic. Kristeva is arguing above that writing is akin to defilement rites (ceremonies) that clearly articulate the abject, how the abject is to be viewed, and how transgressions—movements into abjection—can be purified or managed. Kristeva infers that writing, as a second level defilement rite, acts as a normalising discourse that marginalises difference and insists on conformity to socio-cultural rules, to norms. She indicates that this kind of writing also guards against defilement, or transgression—meaning transgression of the perceived “order” or authority—by prohibiting certain behaviours (Kristeva 1982).

Having described writing as a process which disseminates and reinforces boundaries, laws, taboos, Kristeva has nominated writing as a discourse which is explicitly concerned with the abject, with the specific characteristics and shape of the abject and the processes that expel or destroy it. In other words, Kristeva defines all writing as a kind of scripture (Kristeva 1982). As has already been established, the abject can be more than just that which must be expelled from the corporeal body. The abject is also that which must be expelled from the social body, and from normative discourse. In this sense, writing is a practice which defines the limits of the subject, which constitutes subjectivity through a process of excluding or expelling that which is undesirable. The embodied abject that survives this expulsion from the heteronormative social body, or indeed thrives, is to heteronormative discourse an
unintelligible body (Butler 1990). The real, the intelligible, is the opposite of that which is abject. The abject embodied in the queer figure is clearly an unintelligible body and thus is outside of the real; it is a spectral figure, a phantom.

Here I would like to update Kristeva’s notion of writing as scripture by connecting it to Butler’s (1990) notion of a rule-bound discourse. There are poignant resonances between these two ideas. Both suggest that discourse acts to proscribe and prohibit certain acts and behaviours, indeed certain types of bodies and individuals. Kristeva’s conception of writing as scripture has a decidedly anthropological bent, whereas Butler’s rule-bound discourse is purely discursive. Both however foreground the power relations embedded in discourse and add nuance and depth to the ways in which writing can be understood.

Kristeva applies the notion of writing as scripture primarily to the novel; however this theory of writing as scripture, as a rule-bound discourse, can be transposed, or transferred, to any narrative discourse. The blurred boundaries between the narrativity of the novel, the short story, the television or film script and the stageplay—indeed all discourse based on writing—enables this transposition. The abject figure seems itself to be a transposition; a position that cuts across boundaries, exists in many (narrative) realms. Thus, Kristevan theory, appropriated in a quite transcribed way, can facilitate a re-reading (and then rewriting) of figures marked as abject (the abject genderqueer) in narrative discourse.

**Queer Writing**

The practice of queer writing (as employed in this project) draws on Cixous’, Derrida’s and Kristeva’s conceptualizations of writing and blends them with Foucault’s and Butler’s notions of gender and subjectivity as performative practices.
In the context of this project, a Queer Writing is one that also foregrounds the shifting nature of gender and sexuality. Queer Writing, then, is a writing practice that foregrounds the performativity of subjectivities (especially in regard to genders and sexualities) and that produces texts which express performative subjectivities whilst simultaneously denaturalizing categories or norms and abrading the borders between binary terms. Queer writing also works to undermine heteronormativity by exposing the ways in which sexualities and genders are produced in/by discourse and the ways in which non-normative genders and sexualities resist, transcend and trouble normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality. Queer Writing also refigures the abject not as that which must be expelled or destroyed but as that which must be embraced.

Significantly, Queer Writing does not frame the creative text as an expression of the internal identity of the author (Stephens 2009). Instead, the queer (or homoerotic) content of a creative text is seen as a discursive sexual non-normativity mobilized within the text to disrupt heteronormativity rather than as the (autobiographical) reflection of the author’s sexuality or identity/subjectivity (Stephens 2009). Elizabeth Stephens makes this point clearly, in her analysis of the writing practices of Jean Genet, when she posits that queer writing:

…reframes its homoeroticism so that this is no longer seen as the expression of a queer exteriority—of a perverse author whose intentions determine the meaning of the text—but rather as a dynamic mobilised within that text. (2009: 19)

Stephens goes on to state that queer writing ‘provides a way to maintain the centrality of sex and eroticism to the narrative without positioning these as the coherent expression of a stable sexual identity’ (2009: 19) and that ‘queer writing need neither
naturalize nor negate the role (or queerness) of the writer’ (2009: 20). Baker (2011: 8) makes the same point when, referring to writing in the queer domain, he argues that:

…the writing of queer subjectivities into literature is not seen as a reflection of a writer's identity, a representation of some imagined “internal” self, but rather as a deliberate inscription and dissemination of non-normative discursive subjectivities.

Thus, Queer Writing disrupts ‘the notion that discursive subjectivities appearing within literary texts are representations of the internal, stable identity of the creator’ (Baker 2011: 8). Instead, Queer Writing foregrounds the appearance of subjectivities within texts as a deletion or intervention into discourse for a critical or creative purpose (Baker 2011).

The above makes it quite clear that Queer Writing is a “discipline” that, to paraphrase Michel Foucault (cited in Martin et al 1988: 27) is concerned with the self and that the self is a core object and subject of queer writing practice. It is not a stretch to state that the subject or self is written; that is, that subjectivity is constituted or constructed (written) in ways that are, in many senses, not unlike how a text is written. A fuller discussion of the relations between the practice of writing and subjectivity in the context of self-making is undertaken in Chapter Eight (Creative Writing Practice as Queer Becoming).
Chapter 6: Creative Arts Research

A key component of the project methodology is the utilisation of a Practice-Led Research (PLR) process in the writing of the script. This process grounded the theory in writing practice and demonstrated how research informed the practice of creative writing and vice versa. This PLR process relied on three key elements:

1. Critical Practice (research - literature review, analysis etc.);
2. Creative Practice (writing, reflection, editing);
3. Collaborative Dialogue (mentorship, feedback etc.).

Research in this sense was undertaken in the traditional way (as described below). Dialogue in this context was that between myself and my academic supervisors, industry professionals and peers and can be seen as a variation on the group creative process common in creative endeavours; such as film and television writing. The practice element is the application of research findings arising from the literature review and analysis in the writing of the script, as well as the application of knowledge garnered about the writing process itself (including creativity) acquired through practice, research, dialogue with colleagues and/or supervisors and, perhaps more importantly, through an ongoing reflexivity.

As is widely understood within the academy, dialogue with supervisors informs the research process and, indeed, can inform the way material is interpreted (Brien & Williamson 2009). This project also argues that the practice of writing, which involves moments of reflective insight, also informs the research process. In this sense the basic process for this project was circular and can be illustrated thus:
Practice-Led Research

Practice-Led Research (PLR) is gaining increasing acceptance in the tertiary sector as a valid, rigorous and innovative research methodology in the creative arts (Smith and Dean 2009; Barrett & Bolt 2007; Green 2007). This is the result of an ongoing debate and discussion led, for the most part, by university academics in creative arts disciplines seeking to have creative works acknowledged as research outputs (Smith and Dean 2009; Haseman and Mafe 2009; Barrett 2004; Bolt 2004; Krauth 2002; Lycouris 2000; Marshall and Newton 2000). Further discussion of how PLR might be applied in a wider context in the creative industries has also been initiated (Jaaniste and Haseman 2009). A recent PLR focussed special issue of Creative Industries Journal (2011 4:1), in which a version of this chapter appeared, can be seen to be a significant contribution to that emerging discussion.

So far, much of this discussion and debate about PLR in the arts has been about what constitutes research (Smith and Dean 2009; Allen 2006; Haseman 2006). This chapter, in contrast, discusses what constitutes “practice” and describes a form of PLR that is influenced by Queer Theory. This queered PLR foregrounds subjectivity as a
practice in itself that significantly impacts on both creative practice and critical research. In other words, this project positions subjectivity as a core practice leading both research and creative endeavour whilst simultaneously seeing creative practice, research and subjectivity as intertwined and mutually informing each other. In this way, a queered arts research process can be seen to reframe creative practice and critical research as an ethical intervention into subject formation and knowledge production. This queering of arts research practices has the potential to innovate research in the creative arts and provide the creative arts researcher with new tools to enrich creative practice, diversify research pathways and increase points of connection with creative artefacts or products. A queered PLR is also envisaged as a dynamic and performative pathway to new knowledge.

The cluster of methodologies brought together to form a queered PLR will be described below. This queered PLR process and methodology are designed to enable writer researchers to produce creative writing artefacts that can adapt to a range of creative and critical agendas. The pairing of PLR and Queer Theory is also innovative and is suggested by the primacy of gender and sexual subjectivity (or identity) to much work and practice in the creative arts; which itself reflects an increasing primacy of gender and sexual identity in the contemporary world (Weeks 1998: 35). Subjectivities or identities expressed or represented within texts can be seen to be connection points for creative arts consumers’ own subjectivities. Thus, by shifting the primary focus of PLR from creative processes and the nature of research to the relations these things have with subjectivities or identities, a queered PLR ensures that the outcomes of such projects are texts that are creatively and critically rich.
The project is heavily influenced by the later work of Michel Foucault, in which the French philosopher advocated ethical interventions into the self that are implemented in order to effect a transformation of the self. Foucault (1986b) called this process an “ethics of the self”. Therefore, this chapter repositions subjectivity as central and foreshadows discussion in Chapter Eight of how a queered PLR process or methodology can be applied as part of an ethics of the self (self-bricolage) that can effect concomitant transformations of subjectivity, creative practice and research.

The starting point for this chapter is my own creative practice, in which the acts of researching, engaging with critical theory and producing creative artefacts (texts) are so intertwined with each other and with subjectivity that it is misleading to see them as discrete activities. Research informs practice, practice leads research, research inspires practice and practice inspires research. Research and practice inform and influence subjectivity and vice versa. Indeed, subjectivity is produced in and through discourse (Butler 1990: 184), which means that the research we do, the discourses we encounter and the texts we ourselves produce, are significant in the formation and performance of our subjectivities. Likewise, our subjectivities greatly impact the kind of texts we produce and consume. These intertwined practices are thus part of a circular process that produces, reinforces, resists and disseminates subjectivities. For me, writing is a process of self-bricolage through which subjectivities can be produced, tested or challenged and circulated.

**Defining PLR**

There are as many definitions of PLR as there are practitioners in the field. Rather than attempt to create a universal definition of PLR, and thus codify and limit the range of methodologies and bodies of knowledge on which it draws, a number of
practitioner researchers in the field have advocated that PLR be seen as multidisciplinary (Smith and Dean 2009; Stewart 2001) and have argued for a kind of radical disciplinary openness (Stewart 2001). In this spirit, I will not propose a universal PLR definition but rather define PLR as it is understood and applied in my own creative writing practice and within this project. Having said that, Smith and Dean (2009: 7) have presented the following loose description of PLR that is also useful:

In using the term practice-led research, we… are referring both to the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating insights which might be documented, theorised and generalised …. Ideally we would expect a research element to be present in both research and work creation, though we would normally see the documentation, writing and theorisation surrounding the artwork as crucial to its fulfilling all the functions of research (original emphasis).

PLR is epitomized by the artefact and exegesis model used in academic settings (Smith and Dean 2009; Arnold 2007, 2005; Milech and Schilo 2004; Barrett 2004). In this model, a creative artefact is produced in concert with a critical component (exegesis) that describes or explores the creative process or themes expressed in the creative work. Generally, the exegesis resembles a more traditional research paper in the Humanities and uses critical theories and standard academic methodologies. In PLR projects, the creative component and exegesis are seen to be research outputs of equal value and as two aspects of a single, unified whole. This is in accord with Scrivener who argued that theory and practice are ‘inextricably linked and mutually dependent’ (2000: 1).

The two components of PLR are unified in that they both produce knowledge. In the case of a queered PLR this knowledge concerns gender and sexual difference and the ways that subjectivities are constructed. The creative component in PLR can be seen
to be a non-traditional research output that Brad Haseman (2006) has defined as “performative research” (this idea will be explained later in this chapter). The exegesis, on the other hand, is often a more traditional research output presented in standard academic language. Having said this, it should not be considered that the creative and critical components of PLR do not overlap, inform each other and contain multiple, profound connections.

Smith and Dean note the ways that creative practice leads research and, reciprocally, the ways that research might inform creative practice (2009: 7). This notion of how research and practice are intertwined and mutually inform each other is crucial to my own understanding and implementation of PLR in a creative writing context. The ways that subjectivities are embedded in research and practice and the reciprocal production of subjectivities through and by creative practice and research (discourse) can also be seen to be ‘inextricably linked and mutually dependent’ (Scrivener 2000: 1).

**Writing practice as research**

Over the past few decades, a fundamental shift has occurred in which creative works are beginning to be seen as valid research outputs (Smith and Dean 2009; Green 2007). In particular, creative writing artefacts are also becoming recognized as research outputs (Perry 2007; Allen 2006; Brien 2006; Arnold 2005). Put simply, this means that creative texts (poetry, scripts or novels) are seen as meeting the core criteria of academic research. These criteria are usually based on an OECD definition that defines research as ‘creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and
society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications’ (quoted in Smith and Dean 2009: 3).

Many creative writing practitioners working in the academy have argued that creative works are ‘as important to the generation of knowledge as more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods’ (Smith and Dean 2009: 2). Indeed, many individuals understand the world in which they live through story, through narrative; whether that is a fictional or non-fictional narrative. As Raymond A. Mar argues, ‘human experience, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, is highly influenced by the act of comprehending stories, producing stories, and executing the sub-processes that enable such understanding and productions’ (2004: 1414).

Significantly, there is strong evidence to indicate that our skill with narratives impacts on our health, our capacity to recover from trauma, our understanding of ourselves and our ability to make decisions and judgements (Mar 2004: 1414–15). Thus, our understanding of the production of fiction narratives (how we write creative texts) can impact significantly on a wide range of human experience. In this light, PLR can be seen to be a dynamic tool in producing knowledge about how narratives are produced and understood. For the creative arts researcher, this production of knowledge, or research, often occurs in the performative moment of creative practice which, in itself, includes processes of reflection, revision and positioning (or contextualization).

Arnold (2007: 3) touches on the notion that creative writers conduct research even as they create when she states that PLR ‘enables the academy to look at practice as a way of bringing forth the research both in itself and in an interaction with the ideas and debates that may be teased out from it’ (emphasis added). Thus, Arnold asserts, ‘the practice both underpins and interacts with the research’ (2007: 3).
Muecke (2010) has argued that what ‘academics produce as research “outcomes” in creative arts now rarely takes the form of commentary, critical or otherwise, on others’ creative work’ (n.p.). More often, Muecke (2010: n.p.) continues, ‘we are composing our own works. In other words we have shifted from appreciation to production…’ (original emphasis). In a similar vein, Nelson (2008: n.p.) writes that ‘it is not sufficient for academic artists to create a body of scholarly work on practice (be it quantitative or qualitative)’. Rather, Nelson (2008: n.p.) posits, ‘the real challenge is to generate a critical vocabulary and body of knowledge through and about practice, which I conceive as a kind of experiential knowledge capable of apprehending the process of both production and reception’ (original emphasis).

Moreover, Muecke asserts that creative writing academics need to reconsider their approach and look at ‘contemporary interactions with texts that are not based just on the hermeneutic drive (“what it means”) but also on what it does…’ (2010: n.p., original emphasis). Muecke’s suggestion to investigate what texts “do” and Nelson’s focus on production and reception, reflects my own interest in how discourse contributes to the production of subjectivities, and to the expression and exploration of sexual and gender difference through the production and dissemination of creative and critical texts. Furthermore, an emphasis on what texts or creative artefacts do suggests the need to understand arts consumption (or reception) in the creative industries; which in this context are Gay and Lesbian publishing and LGBTIQ television production.

Certainly, an understanding of marketplace dynamics within these creative industries is core knowledge required by practitioners in order to be successful in the field. Questions of intended audiences (or readerships) for creative artefacts is therefore an
aspect of the PLR process that needs to be addressed in initial project and research design stages. In terms of a queered PLR, research into arts consumption is likely to circulate around how sexual and gender subjectivities lead, influence or inform that consumption. Research on readerships or audiences is most likely to bookend queer PLR projects; that is, it would occur prior to writing as part of a planning or research design stage and after publication, or performance, as part of an assessment or review stage. Knowledge acquired in these stages of the process can then be used to better understand consumption or reception of queer creative product.

Having said that, this project focuses on scriptwriting as a creative practice and so an analysis or discussion of consumption and reception was put aside for future projects that are more focused on production of a completed television program or film.

**Methodological Frameworks in PLR**

Like much PLR, the queered PLR applied in this project is informed by the Action Research (AR) model and followed the basic project stages as described in the Action Research process. I have adapted these basic stages to suit queered PLR projects (see Figure 4 overleaf). These stages should be seen as overlapping and cyclic (Dick 2009).

Action Research can be described as ‘a family of research methodologies which pursue action… and research (or understanding) at the same time’ (Dick 2009: n.p.). Kurt Lewin (1946), the originator of Action Research, argued that AR is context-specific and involves a cyclic process in which research, action and evaluation are interconnected. Dick (2009: n.p.) clarifies how action and understanding are pursued simultaneously when he writes about Action Research:
In most of its forms it does this by using a cyclic or spiral process which alternates between action and critical reflection and in the later cycles, continuously refining methods, data and interpretation in the light of the understanding developed in the earlier cycles. It is thus an emergent process which takes shape as understanding increases; it is an iterative process which converges towards a better understanding of what happens. In most of its forms it is also participative… and qualitative (original emphasis).

**Figure 4: Adapted Action Research Model**

In the context of a queered PLR, research and action (writing) are entwined with subjectivity which is itself, as has been shown, an emergent and iterative cycle. The starting point for this queered PLR project was a complimentary creative and critical intent. As described earlier, for me the creative and critical intent developed out of a wish to explore gender and sexual subjectivity. This might often be true in many other queer PLR projects. In the research and planning stage, the first phase of audience or readership and market research was undertaken in a limited way. As this was mainly a project intended for professional readers (academics) this stage of the process was
brief. The form or genre of the project was then selected after finding coherences between my intent as a creative researcher and data gathered about the target readership, in this case LGBTIQ academics and PLR scholars. At this stage, the project scope (what kind of creative artefact would be produced, how it would be produced and any means of dissemination or distribution) was also determined (Dick 2009). Basically, as the principle audience for the work was an academic one, I determined to disseminate the work primarily through academic publications in journals. I will also seek publication of the script (with a critical preface) as a stand-alone text.

In the action stage, the activities of critical research and analysis were undertaken simultaneously with creative practice (writing). In this stage, an exploration into the performative nature of subjectivities (Butler 1990) was also undertaken. This exploration was undertaken as both traditional research and experientially as creative practice and reflection. This stage was then be followed by further reflection on practice and a further review of critical research. The reflection stage was documented in a reflective journal. The reflective journal was then used to evaluate and revise both the research process and the writing practice. This then led to a refinement of both the research and practice that then required an adaptation of the project scope and revision of the creative artefact (script).

**Reflexivity and Reflective Journals**

Like other PLR projects, this queered PLR project gathered “data” in three primary ways (Arnold 2005):

1. Through traditional research;
2. Through practice, and;

3. Through reflexivity.

The data (or knowledge) from traditional research and writing practice—that is both qualitative and symbolic (Haseman 2006)—was presented in two ways; in this exegesis in standard academic format and in the creative artefact as a script for a four-part television miniseries. The insights (or data) arising from the practice of reflexivity were collected in a journal and then distilled in this exegesis.²

Reflection is a crucial aspect of both Action Research (Dick 2009; Schön 1983) and the PLR process (Arnold 2007; Nimkulrat 2007; Scrivener 2000). Boude et al. define reflection as ‘a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations’ (1985: 19). Scrivener further describes the reflective process in creative arts thus:

…the process spirals through stages of appreciation, action and reappreciation, whereby the unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it. (2000: 8)

In this queered PLR project, I felt that the term reflexivity was more appropriate than reflection. This is because “reflexivity” encapsulates the experiential aspects of creative practice and knowledge production and foregrounds the way in which both are dependent on and intersected with the creative researchers’ difference (Rose 1997). It also better describes creative researchers’ relationships to practice, discourse and the socio-cultural milieu in which they create and research (Alverson & Skolberg 2000). Reflexivity is defined by Matless (2009: n.p.) as ‘reflection upon the conditions through which research is produced, disseminated and received’.
Reflexivity also often includes discussion of positionality (Matless 2009). Douglas Macbeth defines reflexivity as ‘a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, Other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself’ (2001: 35). For Rose, reflexivity should highlight the ‘emergence of difference’ through the research process and be ‘less a process of self-discovery than of self-construction’ (1997: 313). These intertwined notions of difference, positionality, relation with an Other (intersubjectivity), intersection and self-construction within reflexivity were core to this queered PLR project. The practice of reflexivity drew out the performative aspects of the writing practice, the performative nature of the completed artefact as research output, as well as the ways that subjectivities, genders and sexualities are performatively constituted in and through discourse (Butler 1990, 1993).

The understandings and insights garnered through reflexivity were also documented in a reflexive journal and then presented in this exegesis. Nimkulrat argues that documentation like that produced in a reflexive journal ‘is of vital importance in performing practice-led research’ and that ‘practice without the documentation of the artistic process may not be sufficient to support a research claim’ (2007: n.p.). Thus, critical reflexivity can be seen as a crucial tool in queered PLR projects for documenting the research process and meeting demands for academic rigour. More to the point, reflexivity is also a kind of performative act. As we engage in reflexivity an experiential understanding arises that is, in fact, reflexivity itself. As we engage in reflexive acts, a sense of our own positionality and difference emerges that constitutes not only a new and more critically aware self-knowing but also a deeper understanding of our own practice. In a sense, when it comes to reflexivity the doing is the knowing.
**Practice-Led Research as Performative Research**

At this point, I would like to return to the notion of performativity, this time to how performativity informs the practice of research in the Creative Arts. Of the many Practice-Led Research approaches available, the one that was most important to this project was that of “Performative Research”. Brad Haseman (2006)—drawing on J. L. Austin’s (1970) theory of the performative—has argued that Practice-Led Research can be seen as Performative Research, a form of research that differs significantly from other forms of quantitative and qualitative research. Haseman (2006: 1) argues that PLR should be understood as ‘a research strategy within an entirely new research paradigm — Performative Research’ (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Research Paradigms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Performative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘the activity or operation of expressing something as a quantity or amount – for example, in numbers, graphs, or formulas’ (Schwandt 2001: 215)</td>
<td>Refers to ‘all forms of social enquiry that rely primarily on qualitative data… i.e. non-numeric data in the form of words’ (Schwandt 2001: 213)</td>
<td>Expressed in non-numeric data, but in forms of symbolic data other than words in discursive text. These include material forms of practice, of still and moving images, of music and sound, of live action and digital code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific method</td>
<td>Multi-method</td>
<td>Multi-method led by practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Haseman (2006: 6)

In Performative Research, an emphasis is placed on ‘research outputs and claims to knowing’ being made through ‘the symbolic language and forms of… practice’ (Haseman 2006: 4). Haseman defines the performative as ‘utterances that accomplish, by their very enunciation, an action that generates effects’ (2006: 6). A performative utterance—exemplified by the statements ‘I pronounce you …’ or ‘I do…’ spoken at marriage ceremonies—is ‘itself an act that performs the action to which it refers’ (Pratt 2009). This utterance enacts what it names (Pratt 2009). As Haseman clarifies, this utterance ‘performs itself and in the course of that performing becomes the thing
done’ (2006: 6). In Performative Research then, ‘the symbolic data works performatively. It not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself’ (Haseman 2006: 6).

Haseman appropriates the term “performative” from Austin’s (1970) speech act theory, as does Judith Butler. Haseman uses the term performative in much the same way that Austin intended it to be used — to describe acts of speech that, in their enunciation, accomplish the action they describe (Austin 1970). Austin later extended his notion of the performative to include all acts of speech (1970: 147). Haseman’s innovation is to further extend the performative to incorporate the act of research and to incorporate into the domain of research acts of a performative nature such as theatre or dance.

Austin’s extended notion of the performative, that incorporates all speech acts, was taken up in the deconstructive/queer lineages of literary and gender theory linking Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 2003). In this deconstructive and queer lineage, there has been an emphasis on decoupling Austin’s performative from ‘its localized dwelling in a few exemplary utterances or kinds of utterance and showing it instead to be a property of language or discourse much more broadly’ (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 2003: 5). Judith Butler, in particular, has extended the notion of the performative to encompass a broader range of “acts”, such as the habitual and stylized acts (or gestures) of gender and the practices (or acts) of subjectivity. To date however, no argument has been made for understanding PLR as performative research drawing on Queer Theory, in particular Butler’s (1990, 1993) theory of performativity. This joining of queer performativity and performative research, within the context of a multidisciplinary approach, can be seen to produce pathways to
knowledge about the performative nature of gender and sexual subjectivities and the ways that subjectivities or identities are produced in the process of self-construction.

Haseman (2006) does not engage with Butler’s queer adaptation and re-theorization of the performative. This is despite the fact that Butler is arguably the principal and most influential theorist in the field of performativity. Therefore, the queered PLR applied in this project addresses this by bringing together Haseman’s (2006) notion of performative research and Butler’s (1990, 1993) notion of the performativity of subjectivities, genders and sexualities.

**Queer Performative Research and Bricolage**

At this juncture, I would like to add to this formulation of queer performative research the technique of bricolage. Stewart (2001) has argued for seeing PLR as bricolage and I have already noted that a radical bricolage can be seen as a distinctly queer approach to research. In the context of my own practice, a queered PLR is understood as a kind of *performative bricolage* that has embedded within it research practice, creative practice and practices of the self or subjectivity. That is, I conceive a queered PLR as a complex and performative process drawing on multiple disciplines, methodologies, theories and bodies of knowledge in which subjectivity, creative practice and critical research combine to produce interdisciplinary artefacts (creative and critical writing) that discuss and performatively express gender and sexual difference. Performative bricolage is a research technique, a methodology, and also the resulting products or artefacts of that technique. In this sense, performative bricolage is both the way that research is undertaken and the research outputs themselves. A queer performative bricolage is both a pathway to knowledge and a contribution to knowledge.
As a research approach and as a creative practice, a queered performative bricolage is something that is enacted. In other words, it is an approach or method that can be seen as a kind of performance, an enactment of a multidisciplinary and diverse or plural positionality. Performative bricolage as an artefact is a discourse or text that draws on multiple disciplines or theories, that fuses styles or genres and, perhaps more importantly, is a symbolic (or textual and discursive) expression of knowledge.

Stewart, drawing on Levi Straus, argues that the *bricoleur* (the user of bricolage) as writer ‘appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary’ (2001: 127). So, for me, when I use the term “Queer PLR” I am referring to a complex set of methodologies and ideas (including performative research and radical bricolage) that are designed with a specific agenda in mind: to destabilise heteronormative discourses by producing queer creative and critical artefacts that privilege queer notions of gender, sexuality and subjectivity.

**Queer PLR in Creative Writing**

The Queer PLR applied in this project enabled the production of both a creative and a critical artefact through which notions of sexual and gender difference were explored and expressed. The creative artefact produced within this Queer PLR can be envisaged as an example of how Queer Theory informed (performative) sexual and gender subjectivities might be expressed in an accessible way for both professional (academic) and non-academic readers/audiences.

Within this Queer PLR the creative practice emerged (and was embedded with) my creative and theoretical intention to explore and describe gender and sexual difference. The ways in which this intention was met in practice was documented in a reflective journal and then analysed for this critical exegesis. The bodies of
knowledge around sexual and gender difference (effeminacy) produced through reflexivity and (simultaneously) in the process/performance of creative practice and research are discussed in later chapters of this exegesis. The exegesis contextualizes and describes the exploration of difference through and in (Nelson 2008) creative practice. Central to how sexual and gender difference were explored through and in practice within this Queer PLR project and then expressed in creative form was the notion of performativity (Butler 1990), which we have already discussed in depth in earlier sections. The notion of performativity impacted on this Queer PLR project in multiple ways. The completed creative and critical components can be seen as performative research outputs (Haseman 2006) which produce discourses in which performative subjectivities are explored. Indeed, this Queer PLR project can be seen to be exploring the notion of self and subjectivity through creative writing. In effect, the creative writing artefact constitutes discursive sexual and gender subjectivities as characters and explores how they operate with and against each other.

The fact that performativity is, as an analytical tool as well as a process of enactment, highly appropriate for application to the practice of writing has already been established. To reiterate, when writing practice is seen as performative—in that it produces discourse and is a process through which subjectivities are constructed and disseminated—the production of narratives presenting performative genders, sexualities and identities can be seen to be a highly appropriate methodology for exploring both performativity itself and writing practice. In the discussion of performativity in the ‘Queer Theory’ section of Chapter Four, the notion of disidentification (or counter identification) was also introduced. To recap, disidentification is one type of resistance to the oppressive fiction of heteronormative ideals. In the context of this PLR project, this disidentification and resistance was
undertaken by producing texts (both the script and the exegesis) that resist heteronormative gendering and present queer models of gender and sexual subjectivity as performative. In addition, the production of narratives presenting performative subjectivities provides a platform for the sharing of knowledge around such subjectivities to a wider, as in non-queer, audience.

The introduction of one of the core tenets of Queer Theory (performativity) to a wider, more general audience in an accessible format can be seen to be one of the main goals of Queer PLR. Queer PLR also provides writer-researchers with tools to explore notions of sexual and gender difference in a way that produces more than a theoretical understanding. Indeed, as Michel Foucault has argued, in his groundbreaking text *The History of Sexuality*, any strategy aimed at resisting the discursive mechanisms of power that are engaged in the deployment of a narrowly defined sexuality, including mechanisms of repression, must involve a transgression of laws, a dismantling of prohibition and an ‘irruption of speech’ (1978: 5). Therefore, Foucault writes, ‘one cannot hope to obtain the desired results simply from… a theoretical discourse, however rigorously pursued’ (1978: 5). Thus, it is apparent that using non-theoretical ways of communicating the bodies of knowledge produced in such research and practice are appropriate and a means of giving queer writers a voice in the broader public domain that resists heteronormative discourse.

The creative artefacts of Queer PLR can be seen to disseminate knowledge in the context of narratives which readers directly experience, thus providing an alternative (and affective) way of coming to understand the themes or issues investigated in such projects. Affective experiences are not merely ways of experiencing but also ways of
knowing. To put it another way, affect is a form of knowledge. Haseman & Mafe (2009: 220) suggest that this acknowledgement of affect as knowledge:

…begins to shift what we consider knowledge to actually be and has epistemological implications for each study and the field. Affect is now actively brought into the equation and with it the indeterminacy of interpretation.

Affect is both a kind of research and a kind of knowledge; it is also performative. In the moment of experience we simultaneously understand or know something about that experience. Accommodating that affect is both a kind of performative research and a type of performative knowledge radically changes the way that we think about research in the arts. As Grayson Cooke (2011: 60) has articulated:

If research is the production of “new knowledge,” and if we can accept that knowledge may be able to be figured as affect… as something that happens in the mind of an audience member, then it is not “contained” in the work, it occurs only in performance, and the “research” does not precede the work’s public performance or dissemination but happens concurrently with it. Research in this sense is a process, a doing, an event, it is not something static that can be contained as such.

The exegesis or preface provides a further, complimentary (and explicit) presentation of this knowledge tailored for a more professional or academic audience.

A Queer PLR that foregrounds subjectivity and understands creative practice and research as part of a performative bricolage has the potential to innovate the application of PLR in the creative arts. It does this by providing a methodology for bringing together the diverse threads of subjectivity, practice and research into a coherent whole. Additionally, Queer PLR opens up the possibility of the practitioner researcher occupying a wider range of “subject positions” (or alternate subjectivities) in ways that enrich creative practice, multiply research pathways and increase points of connection with diverse creative artefacts or products with which they might not
normally have engaged. Significantly, a Queer PLR acknowledges that these shifts in subjectivity—triggered by practice and/or engagement with cultural artefacts—constitute an affective way of knowing, an alternative route to knowledge production.

**Summary**

This chapter described the complex methodologies of a Queer PLR that was implemented to produce creative and critical writing artefacts. These artefacts are envisaged as performative bricolage that explores issues of gender and sexual difference and performativity. I touched on how, in Queer PLR, creative and critical practice often emerges from creative researchers’ intention to discuss, understand, express, explore and describe gender and sexual difference. The methodology most appropriate for Queer PLR projects was described as a kind of *performative bricolage*. This performative bricolage is a complex and performative process drawing on multiple disciplines, methodologies, theories and diverse bodies of knowledge in which subjectivity, creative practice and critical research combine to produce interdisciplinary artefacts (creative and critical writing) that foreground the performative nature of gender and sexual difference.

A Queer PLR takes the form of traditional research teamed with reflexive investigations undertaken in the practice aspects (in this case writing) that are then documented in some way, most probably in a reflexive journal and expressed in the form of a creative work and a critical paper or exegesis. It was shown how knowledge concerning sexual and gender difference as performance can be produced through reflexivity and (simultaneously) in the performative act of writing. These bodies of knowledge were then:

- Described in this exegetical document; and
- Expressed as a narrative in the creative artefact (script).

I also argued that writing, in that it produces discourse, is a process through which subjectivities are performatively constructed and disseminated. Thus, it was suggested that the production of narrative artefacts that present and describe performative genders, sexualities and identities is a highly appropriate methodology for exploring performative subjectivities themselves. The concomitant research and reflection is crucial to generating bodies of knowledge about the interrelationships between subjectivities and creative arts practice. Finally, I would further propose that these bodies of knowledge are interrelated and core to the Queer PLR process.
Chapter 7: Queer Theory and the Pedagogy of Writing

An analysis of Creative Writing pedagogy and practice is core to the research project, particularly those pedagogical practises or techniques that correlate to certain repetitive discourses about subjectivity. This chapter explores how certain Queer Theories around notions of the self and subjectivity might inform Creative Writing pedagogy. It begins by displacing genre as the organising principle of writing instruction. Instead, the chapter positions gender and sexual subjectivity as the core organizing principle in Creative Writing studios. This repositioning is done in response to something I noted in the previous chapter: the growing primacy of gender and sexual identity in the contemporary world (Weeks 1998: 35) and its centrality to many individuals’ sense of self. A brief overview of traditional teaching methods within Creative Writing is pertinent before turning to a discussion of emerging scholarship connecting Queer Theory and Creative Writing pedagogy.

Writing as a Pedagogy

Creative Writing in the academy does not have a particularly long history. A number of scholars have tracked that history and outlined the major debates impacting on the discipline since its induction into the academy some decades ago (Harper & Kroll 2008; Dawson 2005; Krauth 2000). There is not space to reproduce that history here, nor to engage in the many and ongoing debates around Creative Writing as an academic discipline. The most significant of these debates to this project—the recent and ongoing discussion about the relationship between creative practice (writing) and critical research in the academy—has already been covered in length in the ‘Writing
Practice as Research’ section of Chapter Six. I want to focus here principally on Creative Writing as a distinct pedagogy (Dawson 2008).

Paul Dawson (2008: 16) has argued that the field of Creative Writing is best understood as ‘a distinct, theoretically informed pedagogy that occupies a space within multiple (and themselves permeable) disciplines such as English, cultural studies, media and communication, film and theatre studies, and the creative arts’.

Dawson goes on to argue that Creative Writing ‘is best understood as an interdisciplinary pedagogy’ (2008: 16). The interdisciplinary character of writing pedagogy has been noted by a number of scholars (Smith & Dean 2009; Stewart 2001). I would further suggest that Creative Writing is an interdisciplinary pedagogy with questions around subjectivity occupying a place of significance. In fact, many Creative Writing teachers draw on research around subjectivity from a number of disciplines—including cognitive science, creativity research and Poststructuralism to name a few—in the teaching of writing (Dawson 2008: 6); perhaps because they have already established the primary role of notions of subjectivity in the process.

Creative Writing as an emerging pedagogy does not approach the teaching of writing with any consistency (Krauth 2000). This is especially true in relation to the theoretical underpinning of writing pedagogy (Morgan 2012). This has been explained as the tendency of Creative Writing teachers to value “going it alone” over teamwork (Krauth 2000). Nigel Krauth has argued that this fragmentation in Creative Writing pedagogy arises due to writing courses having been designed largely by fiction writers and poets who tend to be resistant to team activity (Krauth 2000). It is apparent that these kinds of writing teachers have also been averse to inter-institutional collaboration which could have led to a coherent framework within Creative Writing.
pedagogy for the teaching of its core practices (i.e. writing and reading). Krauth argues that if ‘there had been script writers (stage, film, TV, radio, electronic writers) mainly involved in developing creative writing courses in Australia, the outcomes would have been different’ (Krauth 2000: n.p.). This insight refers to the fact that the script as a form and scriptwriting as a practice often foregrounds group process, collaboration and a reflective relationship with readers/viewers and social and cultural structures (Boon 2008; Sawyer 2006). As a collaborative form of writing, the script also refuses the notion of authorial integrity and disrupts the idea of “authentic voice” which is often at the heart of Creative Writing teaching.

Despite the fact that there seems to be no theoretical consistency across institutions regarding writing pedagogy, there are some pedagogical practices that have been consistently applied since writing’s entry to the university (Dawson 2005). These practices or pedagogical components form a tripartite method of creative writing teaching that includes:

1. The creative writing workshop (show, don’t tell, finding one’s voice etc);
2. Discussion of Critical Theory (especially theory influenced by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida) and;
3. Critical reading of canonical works.

Each of these three practices or components is informed by very different, and sometimes contradictory, theory. The creative writing workshop—which often focuses on little more than “finding an authentic voice” and the “show don’t tell” injunction (Dawson 2005)—draws on the age-old Romantic tradition of creativity as an inner quality, an aspect of personality (Montouri & Purser 1995; Weisberg 1993). The discussion of Critical Theory mainly draws on Poststructuralism, such as that by
Derrida and Cixous, which often directly contradicts the Romantic tradition. The critical reading of canonical works tends to draw on a wide range of theories, including feminist, postcolonial or postmodern theories that may or may not, depending on which form of those theories is applied, sit easily with the Romantic tradition and/or Poststructuralism. At first glance, this may seem like a somewhat schizophrenic approach, the unholy pedagogic marriage of Romantic notions of authorial authenticity used to teach writing and Poststructuralist theory around deconstruction, and the displacement therein of authorial intent and voice, used to teach critical reading.

Having said this, a deeper analysis—which takes into account evidence around the group nature of creativity (see the ‘Pedagogy and Creativity’ section below)—indicates that this methodology may not be completely ill-devised. Certainly the group dynamic of the workshop would seem to be beneficial to the development of creativity and the refining of creative works. There is evidence to support the notion that group learning exercises enhance creativity (Evans, Cook & Griffiths 2008). Also, the practice of critical reading of literature/writing could be seen to be developing domain specific knowledge, which is also, as will be shown later, ‘a key component in creativity’ (Sawyer 2006: 310). The odd egg in the basket, as it were, is Critical Theory, or at least that’s how it seems.

**Writing Workshop**

The writing workshop is a space in which student writers engage in the critical reading and critique of each other’s work. Strangely, these workshops are far more hermeneutic than practical. They are concerned with critique and interpretation of
work and rarely directly address the actual practice or process of writing, perhaps
because there remains no consensus on how best to teach creative practice.

There is a strong emphasis placed on “finding an authentic voice” within the writing
workshop which is a process which relies heavily on problematic
notions/constructions of selfhood (subjectivity). We discussed in Chapter 3: Models
of Subjectivity that the notion of a stable identity/subjectivity that has an “inherent”
integrity and “essential” nature (i.e. the “depth model”) has been largely discredited in
leading edge psychology and Critical Theory. There is no ‘authentic, foundational or
necessary self waiting to be discovered and liberated’ (Ambrosio 2008: 253). As
Merriam & Caffarella (1999: 357) argue: ‘The self in Postmodern thought is not the
unified, integrated, authentic self of modern times. Rather, the self is multiple, ever
changing and, some say, fragmented.’

However, it is the depth model of a stable identity most often deployed in the process
of “finding the writer’s voice”. This search for the authentic authorial voice is
undertaken largely in the context of group writing workshops (Dawson 2005: 106-
112). This model, which presupposes an inherent, internal voice that can be
uncovered, fails to recognise the writer’s voice as a shifting modality or “subject
position” largely dependent on social and cultural conditions. In other words, the
teaching of Creative Writing (and critical reading) is rarely framed as a deliberate
shift into other subjectivities (i.e. into a writing position and/or reading position).
Indeed Merriam & Caffarella argue that learning based ‘on the assumption of a
unified self privileges the rational, agenic self and thereby fails to recognise and to
give voice to other dimensions of self” (1999: 111). Merriam & Caffarella further
argue that the notion of a more fluid and open subjectivity ‘has implications for adult
learning and development’ (1999: 357). The “depth” model of subjectivity also fails
to adequately conceptualise how one might write the Other, especially given its
emphasis on finding an authentic voice which is basically a process of defining (and
limiting) one’s subjectivity; a process which necessarily excludes what has been
categorised as Other.

**Critical Theory**

In contradiction to this emphasis on authentic voice there is also a strong thread
within Creative Writing pedagogy of Critical Theory (Dawson 2005), which disavows
the notion of an essential self/subject and therefore indirectly the possibility of an
authentic voice. However, Critical Theory is largely taught in the context of critical
reading which, as will been shown later, is seen to be a key component in the
development of writers (Dawson 2005).

Dawson (2005) argues that Critical Theory has largely been applied in Creative
Writing in order to justify Creative Writing’s presence within the university setting. It
could be argued that this has been a necessity in an intellectual environment largely
hostile to the Romantic and Modernist notions of art and artistic genius that are
widespread in the fine arts and upon which much creative arts pedagogy draws.
However, the continued application of the notion of authentic voice in many Creative
Writing departments creates a tension between this idea, which is basically that of a
stable, authentic subject, and Critical Theory notions of subjectivity which argue the
direct opposite. Within Creative Writing departments the question often arises: how
does one develop writers post Roland Barthes’ (1977) ‘Death of the Author’?
This tension is easily resolved where Critical Theory is applied in Creative Writing pedagogy to more than the practice of reading but also to an analysis or investigation into subjectivity as a means to facilitate a more diverse range of writing positions available to the writer/learner. In other words, Critical Theories around subjectivity—supported by evidence-based psychological research around the fluidity of personhood, identity and personality—can be used to deconstruct the writing student’s conditioned/habitual notions around their own subjectivity in order to facilitate the emergence of other subjectivities, other writing positions. Also, new understandings of subjectivity can be applied to the design of creative writing pedagogy itself and thus produce a more effective teaching method and curriculum. Some possible trajectories around the application of alternative notions of subjectivity within Creative Writing pedagogy are discussed in more detail in the ‘Pedagogy and Queer Theory’ section below.

Critical Reading

It has already been argued that the role of reading and writing in subjectivity formation seems crucial. Within the domain of Creative Writing the importance of critical reading is strongly emphasised (Dawson 2005). It could be argued that reading is not only a core component of Creative Writing but is also an indivisible aspect of the (creative) writing process. As Kristen Davis and Sarah St Vincent Welch (2008: 1) have noted about their role as academics within the field of Creative Writing:

[O]ne of us teaches creative writing, the other creative reading. But neither of us is really sure where one begins and the other ends. Are our tutorials and lectures really so disparate? Doesn’t the writing bleed into the reading, and vice versa? Isn’t it all reading-slash-writing or writing-slash-reading?
A core aspect of reading within a learning context is to absorb knowledge or information and/or generate meaning. It has long been acknowledged that meaning is neither fixed by authorial intent nor arises directly, without interpretation, from an unassailable system of signification embedded in a text (Barthes 1977). The (now infamous) passage below from Barthes’ essay ‘Death of the Author’ has set the standard in the academy for how critical reading is approached:

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted (1977: 148).

This passage has been deeply influential, almost canonical in Creative Writing programs. However, Barthes formulation of the reader as without history, biography or psychology has been contested and replaced with a notion of the reader as positioned in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality (Klages 2006). Therefore, critical reading could be described as a way of reading that foregrounds interpretation and contextuality and applies, as techniques of interpretation, some means of critical analysis such as Marxism, Feminism, Poststructuralism, Post-colonialism or Queer Theory (Klages 2006; Dawson 2005). In this sense, critical reading is not a process that revolves around uncovering some embedded, inherent meaning but making meaning for a specific purpose; be that a certain type of analysis or critique or simply pleasure. In other words, critical reading can be viewed as a shifting modality or “subject position” largely dependent on social and cultural conditions and facilitated
by exposure to an analytical framework (e.g. Queer Theory). Critical reading can thus be framed as a deliberate shift into specific subjectivities (i.e. into a reading position) that allows a more complex, perhaps open, method for encountering/reading the Other (and indeed interpreting the Self) that might not be available from within the framework of one’s habitual/conditioned or normative subject position.

For marginalised individuals, particularly those performing liminal genders, the way that texts are read and understood (or interpreted) is of crucial significance (Klages 2006). We can either read in the normative way, or we can enact a resistant reading or read against the grain (Klages 2006; Fetterley 1977) in a way that exposes the actions of power within discourse. To teach how to read with resistance against the bias or assumptions of a text (to read against the grain) is the goal of much critical reading in Creative Writing. This is in effect an attempt to shift the student’s subjectivity into an alternative reading position (that utilises a critical framework). This seems in direct opposition to the overarching schema of the writing workshop, which is to encourage students to find and occupy a stable (and authentic) subject position (to find their “authentic” voice).

Writing as a Method in Itself

It is surprising to note that all of the pedagogical components outlined above are hermeneutic in approach. Although creative work is undertaken for the workshops, this work is secondary to and subjugated to the role of critique. Many of the traditional pedagogical practices in Creative Writing are concerned with assessment and interpretation of creative work and rarely directly address the actual practice or process of writing. This marginalisation of writing practice within writing pedagogy itself is bizarre but can be understood to be a result of the dominance of the
hermeneutic tradition in the humanities. Creative Writing departments are often housed in the humanities and rarely located alongside other Creative Arts such as music, fine art or dance (Webb & Brien 2011). In Creative Arts departments, it would be inconceivable for the core business of the respective disciplines to be subjugated to a hermeneutic analysis of its creations or artefacts. As any ballerina will tell you, the best way to learn ballet is to dance. A cellist does not learn to play by reading about the history of cellos.

This hermeneutic bias in Creative Writing can be ameliorated by recognising that the best way to learn to write is to do it; to recognise that writing practice itself is a pedagogical practice. As Laurel Richardson articulates: ‘I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about a topic’ (2000: 923). The topic in question is writing as a practice and writing as texts. In the act of writing, one learns about writing itself, about the structure of texts, about the requirements of form and the conventions of genre. One also—because writing involves introspection, contemplation and reflection—deeply engages with the themes of a work and leads to a greater understanding of those issues at play in the text.

Writing is also a kind of dialogue; with oneself and with Foucault’s (1997: 209) “already said”, the field of discourse circulating around that which is being written about. To put it another way, writing is a reflexive dialogue with the bodies of knowledge one has acquired to that point, a performative enunciation of what one knows and what one suspects one might discover. Writing is a way of knowing and communicating, a method by which one can investigate and simultaneously disseminate the process and results of one’s inquiry. That is the definition of a performative act. Writing is a method of investigating not only things of the world but
things in one’s mind; what one encounters and what one thinks and feels. Writing is reflective and investigative; both introspective and extrospective, equally inward-looking and open to the external world.

Moreover, writing as pedagogy can draw in many other topics besides the practice of writing itself. As Rob Garbutt (2011: 3) notes, ‘[w]riting becomes a way of concentrating then crystallizing the product of an extended critical, analytical and ethical meditation… an exercise of oneself as a thinking subject through writing’. Garbutt (2011: 3) connects writing as academic inquiry with writing as a practice of subjectivity when he adds:

And as the object and subject blur, the goal of this written meditation goes beyond enriching one’s own knowledge of the object. The meditation is aimed at forming the subject: a critique of the self that connects through to ethos.

There is little that cannot be explored through the reflexive act of writing; which already contains within it the inseparable processes of research, reflexivity, insight, and, of course, learning. Writing, then, is a highly suitable tool (and practice) for enquiries into subjectivity.

**Pedagogy and Queer Theory**

Now we turn to a discussion of how Queer Theory impacts on writing pedagogy. This discussion is facilitated by revisiting some of the queer theories of Judith Butler that can be used to elaborate on Poststructural theory around pedagogy.

At the outset, I would like to propose that Queer Theory has salience for writers (both students and teachers) irrespective of their genders or sexualities. Queer Theory is often misunderstood as a vehicle solely for LGBTIQ persons to investigate the specificity of their experience and culture. In contrast, I would suggest that Queer
Theory can be seen as an, as yet, untravelled field of enquiry for non-LGBTIQ academics and students, especially with regards pedagogy. As Hawke & Offord propose, ‘[a]s a non-normative critical humanist approach, Queer Theory has a profound relationship with real, everyday emancipator pedagogy’ (2011: 191).

Indeed, Hawke & Offord further suggest that:

Queer Theory appears to be deeply practical in the sense that it makes theory (and specifically embodied identity) radically tactile; it shows through a critical understanding of performance that derives from an ethical foundation that queer pedagogical space is emancipating, if entirely unruly as it ought to be by consequence (2011: 203).

Before continuing to a discussion of the application of a queered pedagogy in the discipline of Creative Writing, a brief reminder of the main concerns of Queer Theory might be useful. As has already been elaborated in some detail, the core concern of Queer Theory is the denaturalisation of categories/norms (Sullivan 2003, Jagose 1996, de Lauretis 1991) and the abrasion of the borders between binary terms like male/female, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, self/other. We need to realise that these terms refer to subjectivities (or identities) and acknowledge that the abrasion of these terms means to deconstruct those subjectivities. The principal deconstructive focus of Queer Theory—that of denaturalising categories/norms and abrading the borders between binary terms—has socio-cultural and political potency for Queer and non-Queer theorists alike. After all, we are all implicated in the processes of gender and the practice of sexualities. As Hawke & Offord (2011: 197) note:

Sexuality is fundamental to being human, but sexuality is also critical to becoming human. Indeed, sexuality is a fault line of epistemological and ontological earthquakes, where complex social, historical, economic, religious, legal and political
forces produce cultures and societies of paranoid sexuality, where diverse sexualities are subsumed, subjugated and oppressed through dominant hierarchies of sexuality (original emphasis).

As sexualities and genders are the very aspects of human subjectivity that are also sites of significant contestation—not merely intellectual contestation but often violent contestation—these aspects must be counted as significant not only by LGBTIQ or queer subjects but by heterosexual subjects as well. I mentioned in the Queer Theory section that this deconstructive work allows us to dissect and alter how we think about and live core aspects of human subjectivity such as identity, sex/gender, race and sexuality. Now I turn to a discussion of how this shift in understanding and lived experience of subjectivity impacts on pedagogical processes.

The way that we think about and live identity, sex/gender and sexuality impact on pedagogy and creative practice in myriad ways: from our approach to classroom dynamics and inclusive learning environments, to our understanding of creative self-expression. From how we structure and organise creative work to how we conceive of creative collaboration; indeed how we conceptualise (and teach) creativity itself. In particular, I would argue that the bodies of knowledge produced by engaging in a ‘queering of the self’—that I have described elsewhere as a shift in subjectivity and/or shifts from one writing/reading position to others—can be used to inform and enrich writing pedagogy and practice. Indeed, I would argue that much of the work of self-(re)making has traditionally occurred in cultural production—in the creative arts in general but especially in writing—which has historically been a domain of self-enquiry, self-exploration and self “transformation” (Waldrep 2004). In this sense, Creative Writing can be seen as a suitable site for queer “interventions” into both subjectivity and pedagogy.
An Emerging Scholarship: Queer Writing/Writing Queer

The significance of identity or subjectivity to pedagogy has been a topic of exploration for some time (Alexander & Wallace 2009, Hawisher 2003, hooks 1994). In particular, a significant amount of scholarship has been undertaken to address issues relating to gender and race in English and composition/writing pedagogy (Alexander & Wallace 2009). This work arises from the challenge to traditional notions of the self or subject mounted by Poststructural theorists (Sarup 1996). Gail Hawisher (2003) has argued, with regards the impact of Third Wave Feminism on pedagogy, that such critical pedagogies:

[S]eek to elicit in students a critical awareness of that which was once invisible—to provoke in students through reading, thinking, writing and talk a sense of agency, a sense of possibility. They aim to forward, through teaching, a feminist agenda that probes the dominant discourses of sexism, gender preference and… racism and classism (xvii).

Queer pedagogies then, can be said to elicit in students a critical awareness of not only that which was once invisible but that which was once unspeakable, unnameable, and to promote a sense of agency and possibility with regards the destabilisation of ossified identity categories, sexualities and genders. As far as a queered pedagogy is concerned, teaching is a reflexive and relational process in which both the student and the teacher learn and change. This change is not only the education of the student, the development of research and practice capacity within the student’s discipline, but also the transformation of the learning subject. This transformation of the learning subject is informed by queer conceptions of subjectivity and identity. It has already been shown how, after Foucault, the subject and subjectivity are seen not as fixed, unified or coherent and lasting but rather as mutable, fragmented, ambiguous, contradictory and ephemeral (Sarup 1996). In Queer Theory, as in Poststructuralism, the subject and
identities are not natural but socially-constructed; produced in, and by, discourse. More to the point, the queer conceptualisation of subjectivity emphasises the idea of “self-constitution” or a re-making of the self in response to the discourses with which one engages (Foucault cited in Bailey 2005: 122).

Foucault’s refiguring of the subject/subjectivities has facilitated an expansion of focus around identity and subjectivity in writing or composition pedagogy to include issues of sexuality. Much of this work has been done within the rubric of Queer Theory, within a sub-stream of Queer Theory that might be called Queer Composition Studies or simply Queer Writing (Alexander & Wallace 2009). A brief overview of this scholarship will now be undertaken.

**Queering Creative Writing Pedagogy**

The pedagogical rethinking of subjectivity in Queer Writing often takes the form of a foregrounding of the *performative* (Butler 1990) nature of genders and sexualities. As the notion of performative pedagogies is significant, let us just revisit the notion of performativity once more. In the ‘Queer Theory’ section of Chapter Four, we discussed how performativity reconceptualises what we assume to be an internal essence to something, such as gender, as ‘manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body’ (Butler & Salih 2004: 94). We also discussed in Chapter Four the fact that Queer Theory views sexualities, subjectivities and identities as all equally performative. So what does this mean for pedagogy? Basically, it means that pedagogy is being re-imagined as a change and growth process that is more than just content delivery but a lived experience (Hawke & Offord 2011) which simultaneously produces knowledge and alters the subjectivities of participants (including teachers).
Queer Theory informed Creative Writing pedagogy and practice draws on the notions of *differânce* and *écriture féminine* and complicates or troubles them. It does this by scrutinizing and exposing the provisional character of both gender and of difference—and adding a critique of heteronormative notions of genders, sexualities and identities. This critique of heteronormativity is an extrapolation of Foucault’s refiguring of the subject and Butler’s notion that the subject/subjectivity is the “resulting effect” of discourse and a *practice* (1990:184) much as pedagogy is a practice.

The wide net cast by Queer Theory has meant that it has impacted on Creative Writing pedagogy in myriad ways. Perhaps the most notable of these are the ways that Queer Theory has enabled an analysis and understanding of the role of gender, sexual and socio-cultural positioning in learning. Alexander & Wallace (2009), who completed the first substantive overview of Queer Theory’s impact on Creative Writing pedagogy, have argued that:

> [Q]ueer perspectives and experiences can serve a critical role in multicultural approaches to composition that seek to make teachers and students mindful about how different cultural backgrounds and allegiances shape different literary practices, both complicating and enriching public discourses in pluralistic democracies (303).

Alexander & Wallace have identified three distinct themes within what they call Queer Composition Scholarship (2009: 305). The first theme is concerned with ‘dealing with the most basic problems related to issues of sexuality’ presenting in university writing studios: that of homophobia in students’ writing, attitudes and behaviour and the presence (or absence) of openly queer writing academics (Alexander & Wallace 2009: 305-306). This scholarship gives queer subjects a ‘rudimentary presence’ in writing studios and provides writing academics with critical tools to address sexism, homophobia and hetero-centrism in classrooms and the wider
culture (Alexander & Wallace 2009: 306). This scholarship also makes an argument for openly queer instructors in university writing studios as ‘a way to inculcate tolerance, if not acceptance, of diverse sexual orientations’ (Alexander & Wallace 2009: 307).

The second theme within Queer Writing scholarship explores how queer experience or perspective can be brought into writing studios in a proactive way and begins with ‘the premise that queer people need to have their lives and perspectives represented substantively on their own terms and not only as an aberration from some mythical norm’ (Alexander & Wallace 2009: 309). This emphasis on the inclusion of queer voices in writing studios can be seen as a pedagogic technique for foregrounding difference, and for teaching the various ways that subjects and subjectivities differ in their material realities because of the way socio-cultural factors—foremost among them discourse—shape and influence the self and identities. Indeed, a number of Queer Writing scholars have demonstrated that writing courses informed by Queer Theory are both inclusive and critical in that they provide student writers with opportunities to examine how dominant social and cultural norms around sexualities and genders shape subjectivities and a sense of self (Malinowitz 1995; Alexander & Wallace 2009). Writing courses employing Queer Theory also facilitate a critical consciousness about the relations between self and social forces (Gonçalves 2005).

The third theme in Queer Writing pedagogy ‘attends directly to the tension between the need to make queer people and issues more visible in our classrooms and culture and the potential that doing so has to reinscribe the very problematic homo/hetero binary it works to unseat’ (Alexander & Wallace 2009: 311). This thread in Queer Writing scholarship focuses strongly on critiques of the notion of stable lesbian, gay
or bisexual subjects or individuals in favour of more performative (and fluid)
understandings of subjectivity and identity (Alexander & Wallace 2009). Some Queer
Writing scholars, influenced by Judith Butler, have argued for a performative
pedagogy that strives to take pedagogical thinking beyond circumscribed divisions or
oppositional categories relating to sexual identities (Kopelson 2002; Spurlin 2000). In
other words, more recent Queer Writing scholarship seeks pedagogy to go beyond
binary divisions in terms of genders, sexualities and identities. Instead, it aims to
produce a pedagogy that abrades the boundaries between these binaries in ways that
open and invigorate debates around how the subject and subjectivity is (and might be)
produced. Such a pedagogy simultaneously illuminates the varied ways that identities,
genders and sexualities are fictions produced by discourse and socio-cultural factors.
A Queer Writing pedagogy, that goes beyond a focus on stable identities divided on
one or other side of the hetero/homo binary, foregrounds that sexuality (and the ways
that it is produced and categorised) is an issue significant for all. Indeed, Jan Cooper
(2004) argues that:

> Queer theorists have given us extended discussions of active metaphors for
expressions of identity—performance, fluidity—that help us attend to the complex
experiences of individuals interacting with each other within and across cultures. In
those tropes we can find a better understanding of the ways that helping our students
examine their identifications inevitably calls into question our own, be they sexuality,
race, gender, nationality, or that most fraught of all labelling… economic class (36).

Thus, the foregrounding of Queer Theory and the performative in pedagogy displaces
content delivery as the single goal. Of course, in any pedagogy content delivery
remains central, however in performative pedagogies an investigation into how
individual subjectivities inform the way participants meet that content (and how
teachers deliver it) becomes significant as well. In this sense, the learning experience
becomes about engagement with the ideas and reflection on what those ideas mean for
the participant rather than a kind of static learning in which one merely accumulates
information. This echoes Brazilian pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire who once wrote
that ‘studying is above all thinking about experience, and thinking about experience is
the best way to think accurately’ (1985: 3).

Of course, to think about one’s experience means to think about oneself as well, to
reflect on one’s subjectivity. This reflection on one’s own subjectivity and socio-
cultural positioning means that ‘the pedagogical project can radically alter assumed
normative positions of gender and sexuality’ (Hawke & Offord 2011: 205). To cap
off, this all means that Queer Theory enables a re-imagining of pedagogy as a change
and growth process that is more than just content delivery but a lived experience
which simultaneously produces knowledge and alters the subjectivities of both the
learning and the teaching subjects.

Queer Reading
Another way that Queer Theory has informed writing pedagogy is by bringing into
discussion the notion of queer readings of canonical and other texts (Klages 2006).
This has occurred by the inclusion of Queer Theory in the compliment of theories
used to interpret or analyse texts, especially in the context of resistant readings, or
“reading against the grain”, that was introduced above (Klages 2006; Fetterley 1977).
This is significant for a number of reasons. It is generally acknowledged that, in
dominant discourse, the queer is subsumed and subjugated to heteronormative sexual
hierarchies, marginalised, demonised and marked as abject (Hawke & Offord 2011;
Hanson 1991, Case 1997). This is especially true of the gender insubordinate queer,
what I am referring to in this project as the abject genderqueer. The readings or
understandings available to queer people (and Queer Theorists) of such discriminatory discourses and texts are limited.

The question of representation becomes significant when those representations of the queer, in this case the sissy and tomboy characters of the Southern Gothic genre, meet with a violent or unpleasant end at the close of the narrative in which they appear. This moment of narrative closure is the point at which the queer is constrained, punished or even killed (Baker 2010). The abject queer who—as a figure of discourse that disturbs and denies culturally prescribed norms—is an entity whose story often culminates with death or exclusion (Baker 2010). The final scene of a narrative is the moment at which the queer character, ‘who has threatened to destabilise the narrative order, is sadistically dealt with, excised, exterminated’ (Baker 2010: 85). As Baker, discussing monstrous depictions of the queer, extrapolates:

Such extermination, entrapment or enfoldment at the moment of closure limits the reading possibilities for non-heteronormative individuals and encourages a kind of masochistic reading for queer-identified readers who are constructed as alike the monster (the Monstrous Queer) of the narrative. The execution or punishment of the Monstrous Queer routinely precedes a heterosexual union or reunion (often in the form of a wedding) and thus this punishment can be seen as a necessary precursor to heterosexual fulfilment. To put it bluntly, the death of the Monstrous Queer is precisely what constitutes a heteronormative happy ending. This moment of closure then, becomes a site of contestation between cultural norms and those outside them; those whose sexuality, gender, or physicality resist conformity to such norms (Baker 2010: 86).

As a queer reader or viewer, one must either identify with such representations fully—and experience the disappointment of the queer character being subjugated, marginalised and demonised and thereby witnessing, vicariously, their own subjugation—or one can resist these privileged readings. Although resistance is
certainly not futile, it is difficult given Queer persons’ affinity with the queer figure of
these discourses which, more often than not, is constructed as somehow monstrous.

It seems too obvious to point out that many Queer readers/viewers sympathise with
the *abject* *genderqueer*—even when they are constructed as monstrous, criminal or
murderous—as they understand the process of subjugation and demonization (which
is part of presumed and compulsory heterosexuality) only too well. The process of
marginalisation and demonization, of constructing the Queer as abject and the abject
as Queer, is often the very (familiar) thing that draws the Queer reader/viewer in.
Queer readers and viewers, as outsiders, often revel in the rebellious and deviant
characteristics of dominant representations of queer discursive figures. The same
reader might simultaneously empathise with the abject and have a wish to see the
abject destroyed. The widespread affection felt for the cross-dressing *abject
*genderqueer* at the centre of the queer Gothic musical *The Rocky Horror Picture
Show* (1975), Doctor Frankenfurter, is a case in point. It is unlikely that there is a
more widely admired fictional queer in any discourse. This admiration is of course
problematic given that Frankenfurter is both a murderer and a cannibal.

It is practically impossible for queer readers to ignore the profusion of negative
representations of the abject queer, who is their own reflection, a metonym for their
whole world. The result is that these negative discourses—that attempt to define and
delineate what is proper and improper behaviour, what is proper and improper sex,
what is a proper identity or subjectivity—are invited into Queer cultural (and mind)
spaces. A useful metaphor for this process might be the way a vampire must be
invited in before crossing over the threshold of a home. By embracing these narratives
of subjugation and marginalisation, queer people are embracing a homophobic
discourse. As a result, queer readers and viewers have complicated and contrary relationships with many representations of the *abject genderqueer* — a relationship typified by equal parts of loathing and affection. The sissy in particular, as will be demonstrated later, is a much reviled figure in both heterosexual and homosexual communities that, nevertheless, continues to occupy a place of significance in queer culture.

However, the internalisation of homophobic discourse is not a *fate accompli*; especially if queer readers and writers are exposed, as many student writers are, to the notion of queer readings of texts. Queer Theory enables queer readers, and especially queer readers who are also writers, to transform—through analysis, appropriation, through critique, and through the act of *rewriting* of narratives featuring the *abject genderqueer*—the discourse around how the queer, broadly defined, is represented. The problem of how queer readers and viewers might deal with “negative” representations of the queer is a point of contention. Some theorists have described the attempt to characterise texts as either negative or positive as a kind of ‘moralistic politics of representation’ (Hanson 1999: 5). Outside of the academy however, how queer individuals feel about or respond to negative representations of queer characters is a very real concern that shows no signs of going away.

A number of Queer Theorists have focused on possibilities for multiple and pleasurable readings of the monstrous or abject queer figure (Halberstam 1995). To support the notion that queer readers can enjoy these figures, most theorists have avoided analysis of the moment of closure at which the monster is destroyed, restrained or exiled. Such analyses, by failing to significantly address this key narrative element, fail to imagine other trajectories, other possibilities, for the abject
or monstrous queer figure. By highlighting the sadistic exclusion or excision of the queer character at the moment of narrative closure, it becomes clear that new trajectories, new articulations, of the abject queer are required if queer readers and writers are to find an unambiguous pleasure in these narrative figurations.

I myself, as a writer, have another way of dealing with these troublesome characters and texts. As a writer, a creator of discourse, it is possible to reconstruct (or rewrite) these negative discourses so that they are no longer discriminatory and proscriptive but rather protean, polysemous and plural. In other words, it is possible to create resistant discourses that disseminate another perspective on sexual and gender subjectivity and the *abject genderqueer*. A discussion of how this might be possible will follow in Chapter Nine, *Re)Scripting the Self: Rewriting Gender and Subjectivity*, which will deal with the notion of rewriting in the context of the miniseries script.

**Pedagogy and Creativity**

The notion of creativity is central to the domain of Creative Writing (Morgan 2012). In many ways, creativity is the principal goal of writing pedagogy. This being the case it is interesting to note that, as yet, Creative Writing teachers have not developed a standard theoretical framework relating to creativity and its development or refinement (Baker 2011). Indeed the domain of Creative Writing is significantly fragmented in its approach to writing pedagogy. Even more surprising is the fact that there is currently no discipline-wide agreement as to what creativity is or how it arises (Morgan 2012). As Chris Morgan (2012: 2) points out in regard to the Creative Arts, despite ‘a considerable volume of research, there are no shared definitions or models of creativity’.
What is Creativity?

Until recently, creativity was widely considered to be an aspect of identity or personality (Morgan 2012). Take as an example the popular conception of the artist as genius for whom creativity is an inseparable trait of his/her inner character (Montouri & Purser 1995; Weisberg 1993). Historically, conceptions of creativity have developed out of two philosophical (and creative) traditions: the Romantics and the Rationalists (Morgan 2012: 2). In the popular imagination, and in some academic disciplines, it is the Romantic tradition that still holds sway. The picture of the introverted poet labouring in a lonely garret is a stereotype for a reason. Though the notion of inborn creative genius has been displaced in most other disciplines, it is still influential in the Creative Arts.

As creativity has historically been linked to genius (Weisberg 1993) it has been seen as enigmatic and largely inexplicable (Sawyer 2006). That which is mysterious and beyond explanation is difficult to displace. In Creative Writing in particular, the writer is still often perceived as an inward-looking figure who works independently and largely in isolation. This perception of the writer as secluded artist has influenced the way that Creative Writing programs have developed. As Nigel Krauth argues:

The main contingent of teachers in tertiary institutions at present are fiction writers and poets. In fiction and poetry, the writer has traditionally seen himself/herself as resistant to the notion of team activity. ‘I write alone’ this kind of writer tends to say. Consequently, at the tertiary level, one particularly influential principle has been forged: ‘This is how I do my writing; this is how I do my writing course.’ Perhaps that stance has to change (2000: 10).

The perception that creativity is inscrutable and mysterious has meant that very little research into how it might be triggered or developed has occurred in the Creative Arts. The discipline of psychology, on the other hand, has been concerned with
creativity for a number of decades (Sawyer 2006: 1). Interdisciplinary encounters
between the Creative Arts and creativity researchers in psychology are not
commonplace. However, hoping to inspire Creative Arts academics to engage in such
encounters, among others, McLoughlin and Brien (2012: 1) have argued in favour of
more ‘interdisciplinary engagement with the crossing points offered by other
disciplines which afford new perspectives on the study of creativity’ within the arts.

The most widely accepted theoretical framework with regards creativity within
psychology is based on evidence generated through research with and/or about
creative individuals (Sawyer 2006). This research has been undertaken from within a
number of different theoretical paradigms—such as Behaviouralism or
Neuropsychology—however there is some agreement as to how creativity forms and
how it can be developed (Sawyer & Dezutter 2009; Sawyer 2006; Paulus 2003). For a
long time, creativity was defined as something like intelligence (Baer 2012).
Perceiving creativity this way is based on the old Romantic notion of the artist as
genius in which creativity is an internal quality of “natural” origin that can be refined
but not produced where it did not already exist. If creativity is akin to intelligence it is
an innate capacity that can be broadly applied (Baer 2012). That is, a creative person
should be creative in many domains. A number of studies directly refute this idea of
creativity as being “domain-general” (Baer 2012 & 1994; Feist 1998). The last decade
of creativity research has more or less displaced the perception of creativity as a wide-
reaching capability and now convincingly describes creativity as more akin to
expertise in a specific domain (Baer 2012). Creativity as domain specific expertise is
not an innate ability that can be generalised but rather a body of knowledge and
proficiency within a specific field of enquiry or endeavour that must be acquired
(through study, practice and hard work in that field). Therefore, domain specificity is
a crucial notion to the current understanding of creativity (Baer 2012, Sawyer 2006).

As John Baer (2012: 1) argues:

Creativity has commonly been thought of as a set of domain-general skills that can be applied broadly like a special kind of intelligence or as a general personality trait that colours a person’s approach to any kind of task or problem, but these ways of thinking about creativity are misleading. A better metaphor for creativity than either intelligence or a personality trait is expertise.

The debate between domain general and domain specific view of creativity is now ‘settled in favour of content specificity’ (Plucker 1998: 179). It is apparent then that creativity is best understood when seen as a kind of expertise, rather than some quality attached to personality such as intelligence (Baer 2012, Plucker 1998).

Understanding creativity as something like expertise impacts on the way it is taught. In a study that investigated how university academics in the Creative Arts conceptualise creativity, Chris Morgan has argued that Arts academics’ conceptions of creativity ‘tended towards the atheoretical, individualistic and, at times, idiosyncratic. There was little evidence of common, shared understanding of creativity across the creative arts, within disciplines or even in individual teaching programs’ (2012: 15). Without a shared theoretical understanding of creativity, it is difficult to see how it can be taught successfully in arts programs.

At present, the most common exercises used to develop creative capability ‘are those aimed at divergent thinking skill’ (Baer 2012: 9). Baer defines divergent thinking as ‘the ability to come up with many different and unusual ideas in response to an open-ended question or prompt’ (2012: 9). Unfortunately, the evidence does not support the idea that general divergent thinking skills equate directly with creativity (Baer 2012). The evidence shows instead that employing a wide range of learning activities within
a specific domain is more reliable in developing creativity (Baer 2012). Baer clarifies when he writes:

Of course, divergent thinking skills are only one part of the domain specific skills and knowledge one needs to be creative in a given domain. There is also much about the domain that must be learned, and many domain specific skills that must be acquired (2012: 10).

It seems that the old style advice in the domain of writing that ‘one should read as much great writing as possible and practice many different kinds and styles of writing’ (Baer 2012: 10) holds true as a pathway to greater skills, and creativity, as a writer.

**Creativity: Internal and Personal or Distributed and Collaborative?**

Another core debate in creativity research revolves around whether or not creativity is an internal and individual or a distributed and group process. Sawyer & DeZutter (2009) write that ‘by the 1980s scholars had begun to realize that a narrow focus on the solitary individual could provide only a partial explanation of creativity’ (81). Sawyer & DeZutter describe the insights of groundbreaking creativity researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi when they write that, for Csikszentmihalyi, ‘creativity emerged from a system containing the creative individual, the surrounding field of others working in the area, and the domain, or body of knowledge and prior works’ (2009: 81). Numerous studies have shown that ‘a high degree of collaboration’ is behind the creative ideas of many individual creators (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009: 81). To address this emerging understanding of the collaborative root of many creative works, creativity researchers have borrowed methodologies and frameworks from cognitive science (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009). Most notably, they have applied the notion of ‘distributed cognition’ (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009). Put simply, socially
distributed cognition proposes that human knowledge and cognition are not confined to the individual but rather are distributed among the objects and individuals in the wider environment or group. In this framework, what we call “mind” is conceived as ‘social, cultural, and embedded in the world’ (Gee 2000: 195). Sawyer & DeZutter (2009) clarify the notion of distributed cognition when they write:

> Researchers who study distributed cognition argue that knowledge and intelligence reside not only in people’s heads, but are distributed across situated social practices that involve multiple participants in complex social systems. “Knowing” is reconceived as the ability to participate appropriately in these shared cultural practices (83).

Distributed creativity then, refers to ‘situations where collaborating groups of individuals collectively generate a shared creative product’ (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009: 82). The idea of distributed creativity can also refer to the way that individual creators draw on domain specific knowledge and the history of prior works in their field to inform their creative process. No artist or writer works in a void. There is a deeply intertextual quality to what we call insight. It could be said that insight is a moment in which new connections are made between what we already know about our domain of activity (what Foucault would call the “already said”) and/or fresh connections between our own domain and other domains and environments with which we have contact.

Given all the above, it can be said that it is now widely accepted within creativity research that creativity is an expertise that forms in a collaborative (or distributed) way in relationship to social and cultural relations and within a domain specific context (Sawyer 2006). In another idiom and from within another discipline (Queer
Theory), we might say that creativity is discursive, that it occurs in a field of discourse dependent on the repetition of specific (and performative) acts.

**Creativity and Writing**

The above review of the psychological perspective on creativity clearly shows that creativity is an outward-looking, group or collaborative experience that is domain specific and socio-culturally embedded (Baer 2012; Sarmiento & Stahl 2008; Sawyer 2006: 205-221). Despite this, the large body of creativity research showing that even the supposedly solitary undertaking of creative writing is significantly group oriented has had little impact on Creative Writing pedagogy. There remain a set of influential myths that are still routinely disseminated in the Creative Writing domain that present creativity as an internal, individual and inward-looking experience (Morgan 2012).

The research shows that, rather than relying on introspection or inward-looking processes, as is normally assumed, writing relies much more heavily on outward-looking processes such as reading, research and collaborative dialogue (Sawyer 2006). This brings me back to a point I made much earlier, that we cannot forget or silence what we know—what we have experienced or learned—when we engage in writing practice. In fact, it could be said that our creative works speak of what we know much more loudly than of what we imagine, even if our creative works are ones of total fiction. Of course, what we know often comes to us through others, and so writing is deeply informed by our dialogue with those others. As R. Keith Sawyer argues:

> At first glance, writing seems to be far removed from social and contextual influences. You don’t need anyone’s help to write poetry; you don’t need complex tools; and you don’t have to collaborate in a system of cooperative work…. But these
reactions stem from our individual myths about how creativity works. In fact, many successful writers seek good editing, listen very closely to such comments, and are grateful for them (2006: 206).

Indeed, it is well-acknowledged that scriptwriting, for both film and television, is a group process (Sawyer 2006: 213-216). We have already seen that Nigel Krauth (2000) even suggests that if screenwriters rather than poets and novelists were responsible for establishing university Creative Writing programs, a far more collaborative approach to both practice and pedagogy might be likely. There is however already significant acknowledgement of the pivotal role of an editor in refining works of creative writing (Sawyer 2006: 208). Within academic settings, the benefit of the postgraduate supervisor in creative arts degrees is also widely acknowledged (Brien & Williamson 2009; Hecq 2009; Kroll 2009). Nevertheless, a set of myths continue to circulate in the Creative Writing domain that resist the emerging, evidence-based, understanding of creativity in writing. The mythical notions of the creative writing process are compared to the evidence-based notions of creative writing practice arising out of creativity research in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREATIVE WRITING MYTHS</th>
<th>CREATIVE WRITING IN PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity/writing relies on inspiration</td>
<td>Creative writing relies on sustained hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative works arise from the unconscious</td>
<td>Creative Writing is conscious and directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative writing is solitary</td>
<td>Creative writing is collaborative and socially embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative writing is internal and introspective</td>
<td>Creative writing is outward-looking and reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative writing depends on inspiration</td>
<td>Creative writing depends on domain specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity is ineffable and unteachable</td>
<td>Creativity is problem-solving behaviour and teachable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on R. Keith Sawyer (2006: 205-221)
To put it briefly, the myths listed above arise from the widely disseminated Romantic notion of the writer as genius (Weisberg 1993). As already noted, these myths have been disproven by a large body of knowledge in the discipline of creativity research (Sawyer 2006) and are considered dubious within Critical Theory which rejects the notion of a stable subjectivity with wholly internal qualities such as genius (Sarup 1996). Despite this, these notions of genius and the authentic authorial voice are still disseminated within many Creative Writing departments. If writing programs are to successfully teach creativity then these Romantic notions of writerly subjectivity and creativity need to be displaced in favour of models of subjectivity and creativity that emphasise the discursive (or distributed) and socially embedded nature of both.

A small contribution towards building evidence for the efficacy of this approach can be found in the creative component of this project itself. These new understandings (or new models) of creativity and subjectivity were applied in the production of the creative component of the project (the miniseries script). The writing process for the script emphasised the discursive quality of subjectivity as well as the domain specific and socially embedded nature of the writing process. Indeed, the completion of the numerous drafts of the script benefitted both from dialogue with supervisors and feedback from industry professionals and colleagues as much as from a growing domain knowledge as I exposed myself to narratives from the same genre with similar themes.

The writing of the script was not itself undertaken in collaboration per se, however the writing practice greatly benefitted from some aspects of group process (mentorship, dialogue, feedback etc.). I wrote the script completely independently, as is required in research projects that are submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of a doctoral
degree. This institutional requirement could be seen to be an obstacle to research in the creative arts into collaborative or distributed creative processes. Perhaps, in the future, the academy will develop policies for dealing with collaborative works that will allow them to be submitted as part of research degree projects. At the time of writing however, this was not an option. Nevertheless, though I undertook the writing alone, I engaged in a wider range of collaborative activities than might be the norm for a Creative Writing doctoral project.

Various iterations of the script were given to industry professionals for review and feedback. This feedback helped in determining the correct form for the script, as the possibility of a feature film screenplay, stageplay and television series had all been discussed. The decision to write a miniseries script was not the result of any single suggestion but arose out of these discussions and subsequent reflection. As the discussions continued, it became clear that the story I wanted to write, the themes that I wanted to explore and the way that I wanted to explore them did not suit a feature film, stageplay or television series. The script was too “talkie” for a feature film one reader said. The story is too “different” for a longer television series another commented. Another reader commented that much of the narrative’s appeal lay in its visual invocation of the South, in the physical placement of the characters in the setting, and that this would be lost in a stageplay.

Challenging and contradictory though some of this feedback was, I found it all useful for it produced reflection and provoked a problem-solving mindset. It was only in pondering my early encounters with the genre, in order to distil what it was about them that had really captivated me, that I recalled the joy I experienced watching Roots (1977) as it was played over a series of weekends. Half the fun was the almost
unbearable amount of anticipation that built as I waited for each successive episode to air. This memory, combined with all the other feedback, convinced me that a miniseries script was the right thing for the project.

Apart from the feedback garnered from industry professionals and peers, the most significant and beneficial collaboration was the mentor relationship that developed between me and my principle supervisor. Throughout the duration of the project we had weekly meetings (often teleconferences) to discuss the project. These discussions ranged from discourses about scriptwriting theory, discussions about genre, practical suggestions about narrative flow and plot sequence, to more grounded discussions about the difficulty of writing, of the creative process itself and how to think about all of this together. That mentor relationship was not only a source of guidance, information and inspiration but also productively benefitted my creative capability. This increased creative capability was then put to great use in the project.

As the project and this mentor-style collaboration progressed, certain themes within the script became more central and others less so as the emphasis on queer models of subjectivity shifted the trajectory of the work and increasing domain knowledge informed the narrative structure, pattern and direction. Furthermore, research into creativity changed the writing process itself, making it more outward-looking, domain focussed and intertextual in nature (see Chapter Nine for a fuller discussion of this aspect).

**Queer Theory and Creativity**

As stated above, Creative Writing has not yet fully displaced the idea that creativity is an aspect of identity or personality (as in the notion of the genius). In light of the
mounting body of evidence in favour of a different view of creativity, one that sees creativity as a kind of expertise, why is this outdated view of creativity still current in writing? The reasons are likely to be multiple but the most potent one is perhaps the seductive image of the writer as a solitary, quasi-mystical genius. That image has a lot of cultural cachet and appeal. It also draws directly on a pre-modern view of the subject and subjectivity as stable and lasting, as coherent and unified, as bearing a number of inherent personality and identity traits. There is a deep attachment to this model of subjectivity and a corresponding anxiety about notions of the subject and subjectivity that see them as unstable and ephemeral, as fragmented and displaced, as without any inherent or essential qualities.

To put it plainly, the notion that creative writing ability and genius are “inherent” personality traits is based on outdated models of subjectivity and identity that are appealing because—being somewhat simplistic—they are highly comforting and maintain the status quo. It was shown in the Models of Subjectivity chapter that more recent conceptualisations of subjectivity displace the notion of abiding internal traits or inherent identities altogether (Sarup 1996). Notably, I discussed how Queer Theory conceives of subjectivity as a practice; as a set of habitual or performative acts, constituted within a field of discourse. Comforting or not, this view of subjectivity needs to be taken into account in writing and creativity pedagogy.

The disciplines of psychology and Queer Theory are not often seen as happy bedfellows. Nevertheless, the evidence coming out of creativity research in psychology and fresh understandings of subjectivity and identity coming from Queer Theory share some significant resonances. I already mentioned the similarities between the notions of distributed cognition and subjectivity as a discursive practice.
These resonances between creativity research and Queer Theory facilitate a rethinking of creativity and Creative Writing pedagogy.

Much Creative Writing scholarship theorizes creative practice in terms of the unconscious and/or the creative “impulse”, usually with reference to psychoanalytic theories (Curtis 2009; Hecq 2008; Brown 2008; Brophy 2006, 1998; Harris 2001). In contrast, the Queer PLR applied in this project distanced itself from the sometimes “essentialist” tendencies of psychoanalytic discourse and instead theorized practice (writing, research, subjectivity) in terms of performativity. By theorizing creative practice as performativity, it is also possible to displace the entrenched and essentialist Romantic model of creative genius (Sawyer 2006; Montouri and Purser 1995; Weisberg 1993). Simultaneous with this, a queering of creativity also facilitated a disruption to the notion that discursive subjectivities appearing within creative artefacts are representations of the internal, stable identity of the creator. To reiterate, viewing creative practice as performativity foregrounds the appearance of subjectivities within creative artefacts as a deployment or intervention into discourse for a critical or creative purpose. Thus, the writing of queer subjectivities into creative works need not be seen as a reflection of a writer’s identity, a representation of some imagined “internal” self, but rather as a deliberate inscription and dissemination of non-normative discursive subjectivities. This last idea was explored more fully in the ‘Queer Writing’ section of Chapter Five.

Instead of conceiving creativity as a rarefied identity trait, it can be understood as a set of acts or behaviours that rely heavily on socio-cultural and group conditions (much as subjectivity itself does). In this light, creativity can be seen as something
that is distributed and discursive—and as situational and social—rather than internal, individual or personal.

More to the point, a queer rethinking of creativity resonates with creativity research in psychology that displaces the notion of creativity as natural or inherent to a rare class of people. This is because, in Queer Theory, relations between individuals—whether they be gender relations or relations of distributed creativity—are reframed as performative group processes. Distributed creativity, in the light of Queer Theory, as a relation between individuals that has a life beyond the confinement of specific individuals’ minds, looks a lot like some other discursive practices with which we are very familiar; namely subjectivity and gender. Just like gender, creativity, as distributed or discursive, is something that relies heavily on discourse. Moreover, it can be communally developed or learned through engagement or participation. This rethinking of creativity as distributed and discursive brings into focus the value to aspiring arts professionals of a Creative Arts education.

In the previous section I discussed the ways that Queer Theory is informing writing pedagogy. The pedagogy of creativity would benefit from a similar engagement with Queer Theory. Only by displacing the Romantic notion of writerly subjectivity and creativity as inherent genius in favour of a more evidence-based model of creativity—as socio-culturally embedded and domain specific expertise—can creativity be adequately taught and developed. A queering of creativity reframes it as a set of performed acts enacted within a specific domain which, post Butler, we can understand as a kind of rule-bound discourse. Creativity then, is neither enigmatic nor inborn; it is something that can be developed or learned rather than something that is natural or inherent to a specific, elite class of people (artists, musicians and writers).
Summary

To summarise, this chapter has explored how certain Queer Theories around notions of the self and subjectivity might inform Creative Writing pedagogy. A brief overview of emerging scholarship connecting Queer Theory and Creative Writing pedagogy was produced. The myriad impacts of Queer Theory on Creative Writing pedagogy were discussed. These impacts include:

- Giving queer people a ‘rudimentary presence’ (Alexander & Wallace 2009) in writing studios and providing writing academics with critical tools to address sexism, homophobia and hetero-centrism in classrooms and the wider culture.
- Making an argument for openly queer instructors in university writing studios as ‘a way to inculcate tolerance, if not acceptance, of diverse sexual orientations’ (Alexander & Wallace 2009, p.307);
- Including queer voices in writing studios that can be seen as a pedagogic technique for foregrounding difference, and for teaching the various ways that subjects and subjectivities differ in their material realities because of the way socio-cultural factors—foremost among them discourse—shape and influence the self and identities;
- Envisioning a pedagogy that goes beyond binary divisions in terms of genders, sexualities and identities and that abrades the boundaries between these binaries in ways that open and invigorate debates around how the subject and subjectivity is (and might be) produced that simultaneously illuminates the varied ways that identities, genders and sexualities are fictions produced by discourse and socio-cultural factors;
• Enabling queer readers, and especially queer readers who are also writers, to transform—through reference to Queer Theory—the discourse around how the queer, broadly defined, is represented.

A discussion of the transformation of pedagogy under the influence of Queer Theory was also undertaken. This discussion outlined how pedagogy can be re-imagined as a change and growth process that is more than just content delivery but a lived experience which simultaneously produces knowledge and alters the subjectivities of participants (both students and teachers). The chapter then described the various myths around creativity that are perpetuated in the Creative Writing domain and how these myths can be displaced by a queer rethinking of what creativity is and how it can be developed, refined or taught.
Chapter 8: Creative Writing Practice as Queer Becoming

This chapter discusses how Queer Theory, particularly Michel Foucault’s re-conceptualisation of ethics as a technique of the self, can inform writing practice as a tool in a process of queer becoming. How this impacted on my own writing practice within this project will be discussed in the next chapter — *(Re)Scripting the Self: Rewriting Gender and Subjectivity*. This chapter was inspired, in part, by the following quote by Michel Foucault: ‘The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity’ (cited in Martin et al 1988: 27).

In the ‘Queer Writing’ section of Chapter Five, and more recently in the previous chapter, we discussed the idea that writing practice as performativity foregrounds the appearance of subjectivities within creative artefacts as a deployment of non-normative discursive subjectivities that is an intervention into discourse for a critical or creative purpose. This places the constitution of subjectivity at the centre of any discussion of Queer Writing.

Michel Foucault advocated an ongoing assembly and disassembly of subjectivity that constituted a kind of self-bricolage (Rabinow 1997). Foucault described this making and re-making of subjectivity as an aesthetic struggle towards an artistic ideal (1997). Foucault describes this process as an *ethics of the self* (1986b). The purpose of this transformative self-bricolage is to make philosophy a “way of life”. One of the examples Foucault gave of a technique used in such an ethics of the self—implemented to produce a desired or altered/transformed subject—was reflective
writing (1986). To put it simply, for Foucault certain kinds of writing are a practice involved in the production and maintenance of the self. This can be said to be more so when that writing is informed or organised by a philosophy of some kind that is applied as a way of life (Faust 1988).

This chapter explores the ways that writing informed by Queer Theory can be used as a technique in a Foucauldian ethics of the self. The chapter furthers the argument that Creative Writing is an appropriate site for “ethical interventions” into subjectivity and for explorations into how philosophy, in this case Queer Theory, can be applied as a way of life in which new forms of subjectivity are explored and produced. Before we continue, we need to engage in some necessary reorientations and displacements. Firstly, as discussed at length in the Creative Arts Research chapter, we need to reorient ourselves from thinking about research, practice and pedagogy as discrete undertakings to thinking about them as interconnected (and performative) components in a reflexive creative and critical practice. This reorientation is inspired and informed by Queer Theory which undermines the notion of discrete entities and practices (Baker 2010). This reorientation also re-conceptualises Practice-Led Research (PLR) as a creative and critical practice which embeds theory, research, creative practice and pedagogy in a non-hierarchical and interpenetrated process.

But this is not quite enough. As Foucault’s assertion that the self is something to write about suggests, our creative and critical engagement with writing might be enriched if we were to go beyond textual production and hermeneutic or methodological musings. Foucault encourages us to use writing as a technology to explore subjectivity, to engage with ourselves as writing subjects. Elsewhere, Foucault (1997) proposes that writing might be used as a tool in an ethics of the self, a re-making of
the self into an ethical subject. To accomplish this ethical praxis, we also need to displace the object of our research and practice from the production of creative artefacts and/or research outputs to the ethical (re)production of our subjectivities in a Queer Theory informed self-making.

**Queer Ethics of the Self**

Michel Foucault argues that who one is emerges out of the problems with which one struggles (Foucault 1997). Foucault advocates an ongoing investigation or struggle with the self—an ongoing assembly and disassembly of subjectivity—that constitutes a kind of self-bricolage; a making and re-making of subjectivity that can be seen as an aesthetic struggle towards an artistic ideal (Foucault 1997). Foucault describes this process as an ethics of the self (Foucault 1986b). He illuminates the purpose of this process when he writes:

…the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self (Foucault 1997: 208).

The purpose of this creative self-bricolage is to make philosophy a “way of life”, and an aesthetics. In this sense, subjectivity itself can be seen as an aesthetic practice; the making of the self is an art. Foucault refers to this process, this ethics of the self, as an *aesthetics of existence* (Foucault 1996, Thompson 2003: 123). It could be said that the creative artefact emerges from this struggle as well.

I noted elsewhere that much of the work of self-(re)making has traditionally occurred in the creative arts which have historically been a domain of self-enquiry, self-exploration and “self transformation”. Indeed, the Foucauldian subject and creative
texts share fundamental characteristics: they are both discursive, they both pursue aesthetic goals and, perhaps most significantly, they are both creative not only in form but also in the ways that they are constituted. Given this, creative writing can be seen as an appropriate site for interventions in subjectivity and for explorations into how specific philosophies or theories might be applied as a way of life.

One of the principal examples Foucault gives of a technique used in such an ethics of the self—implemented to produce a desired or altered/transformed subject—is reflective writing (Foucault 1997). This reflective writing produces the desired subject through a process of self-analysis or reflexivity, of questioning the condition and conduct of the self in order to construct a subjectivity in line with one’s ethics (Ambrosio 2008). To put it simply, for Foucault certain kinds of writing, those organised by a philosophy of some kind that is applied as a way of life, are a practice involved in the production and maintenance of the self. This is a direct reversal of the dominant model of the writer whose genius produces creative texts that are a direct reflection of that writer’s identity (Stephens 2009). In this Foucauldian model, it is the practice of writing, and the reading of texts and discourse, that produce the writer’s subjectivity; a subjectivity that reflects not an essential, inner identity but rather the discourses with which it has engaged (or struggled).

**The Aesthetics of Existence: A Productive Ethics**

Ramos (1994) argues that, in Foucauldian thought, there is a clear distinction between moral and social codes (rules and precepts) and the practice of ethics. For Foucault, ethics is concerned with the kind of relationship one has to oneself, how one constitutes oneself as an ethical subject (Foucault 1997, Rabinow 1997). Thompson (2003) argues that Foucault saw freedom as a prerequisite for the practice of ethics.
and saw the practice of ethics as constituting a kind of freedom. By freedom, Foucault means simply the ability to choose one action or direction over another (Thompson 2003). In this context, freedom is the ability to choose between one subjectivity and/or life trajectory and another.

A Foucauldian ethics of the self is a ‘direct political response to normalization’s effect of blocking us from asserting an identity, a self, and a future of our own making’ (Infinito 2003: 160). Infinito argues that underlying a Foucauldian ethics is the fact that the ‘discursive construction of identity as internal and enduring serves to perpetuate existing power structures’ (2003: 163). Therefore, Foucault proposed an ethical practice that was a reworking of subjectivity. This subjectivity was one that was perpetually reforming itself and that capitalised on its own mutability and discursiveness.

As indicated above, Foucault’s model of ethics is not focussed on an external moral or social code but rather on subjects’ relationship with themselves (Rabinow 1997). This relationship has at its heart how subjects conduct themselves (Thompson 2003) and critically contemplate their own and others’ lives (Infinito 2003). In Foucauldian ethics, the subjects’ attention to conduct and contemplation or reflection on life is linked to the notion of critique (Thompson 2003). Foucault posits that the purpose of critique is ‘to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries’ (cited in Thompson 2003: 122). This critique is harnessed to a process of self-formation, or self-bricolage (Rabinow 1997), in which subjects fashion for themselves ‘a mode of being’ that emerges from their own history and their own ‘critical and creative thinking and action’ (Infinito 2003:160).
Although Foucauldian ethics rejects external moral codes (Thompson 2003), and therefore is not extrinsic in character, it is not wholly internalised or obsessively introspective either. A Foucauldian ‘care for the self’ does not exclude a concern and acknowledgement of the contribution to our own being—especially with regards to its constitution—of others. Thompson (2003: 125) illustrates this point when he writes:

An “aesthetics of existence” means then that just as any technician, artisan, or artist, always crafts a new work under the guidance of critical scrutiny, examining what has been achieved thus far, recalling the rules of the art itself, and comparing the former against the latter, working under the direction of critical inspection, reminding ourselves constantly of the fundamental rule of this unique art, the principle of autonomy, not, of course, as a judge, assessing guilt, but as a craftsperson shaping new forms of existence, always comparing what we’ve made for its fidelity to the project and activity of self-formation itself.

In other words, an ethics of the self is a socially embedded creative practice that, though without an overarching moral trajectory, does have some aspects of “normalization” (Thompson 2003), though a normalization harnessed to the autonomy of self-formation. Thus, Infinito argues, ‘the locus of ethical activity is not in the solitary mind, nor even the will, but rather in the critical and creative capacities brought forth in praxis’ (Infinito 2003: 160). There are echoes here of the notion of intersubjectivity from both Buddhist philosophy and Poststructural theory which have significantly informed the way subjectivities are understood in both the creative and the critical components of this project. The critical and creative practice that Foucault saw as the principal field of this intersubjective ethical activity, this aesthetics of existence, was reflective writing.
**Queer Writing: An Exemplar of an Aesthetics of Existence**

Queer Writing as a sub-discipline of Creative Writing offers a clear example of the relationship between discourse and writing and the constitution of subjectivities in a Foucauldian ethics of the self. John Ambrosio, citing Faust, describes how writing acts on and with subjectivity when he argues:

> As a form of reflection and experimentation, writing is a technology of ethical self-formation that views the subject as a work of art and the self as an artefact, as an ongoing work in progress. When conjoined with a philosophical “attitude of resistance that incites new ways of thinking about the forms of experience”, writing enables individuals to begin to “question and modify those systems which make only particular kinds of action possible” (2008:264).

Queer Theory is such a ‘philosophical attitude of resistance’ that ‘incites new ways of thinking about… forms of experience’ (Faust 1988: 188) and which makes a wider range of actions and performativities possible. Another brief return to, or reminder of, the core project of Queer Theory is pertinent here. That core project is, of course, the deconstruction and denaturalization of categories and norms (identities and subjectivities) and the abrasion of the borders between binary terms in order to undermine heteronormativity. This is also the project of Queer Writing which foregrounds the appearance of subjectivities within texts as a deployment, or intervention into discourse, of queer subjectivities for a critical or creative purpose (Baker 2011). I would further propose that Queer Writing is a practice which directly intervenes in subject formation which leads to the constitution of altogether new subjectivities for the writers themselves.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Foucault (1997) uses reflective writing as an exemplar of a *technique of the self* implemented to produce a desired non-normative subjectivity. Foucault (1986) demonstrates how certain forms of reflective writing...
produce the subject through a process of critical self-analysis of one’s conduct and of one’s historical and social position. This self-analysis, or critique, aligns the self with one’s ethics that are themselves formed in response to, or indeed in resistance to, dominant forms and norms of subjectivity (Ambrosio 2008, Thompson 2003, Martin et al 1988). This critique is undertaken principally in the act of writing. One’s analysis is written down, reflected over, and these writings are then used in the refinement of the self; in the production and maintenance of a new ethical subjectivity. Foucault demonstrates how this writing as self-formation has historically been tied to a philosophical or moral tradition in which the desired subjectivity was one in line with specific moral or philosophical tenets (Foucault 1986). This being the case, a reflective writing informed by Queer Theory can also be used in the process of self-formation, as a _queered aesthetics of existence_ applied as a way of life, in order to constitute new (and radical) queer subjectivities. Queer Writing is just such a practice.

Remember that, according to Foucault (1996: 452), there is no abiding, sovereign subject but rather the subject/subjectivity is ‘constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through _practices of liberation, of liberty_… on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment’. Additionally, subjectivity (in particular gender and sexual subjectivity) is constituted in the interplay and correlation between ‘types of understanding, forms of normativity and modes of relation to oneself and others’ (Foucault 1986: 4). In this sense, self-bricolage through writing is a practice of liberty or practice of the self that, as an aspect of the queer cultural environment, informs and alters the way subjects actively constitute themselves. In other words, creative and critical texts arising out of a queered aesthetics of existence ‘are “models” that strongly influence the ongoing _becoming_ of queer subjectivities’ (Baker 2011: 11).
We have discussed how, drawing on Foucault, Judith Butler (1990: 184) reconceived identity as a practice that is ‘the resulting effect of a rule-bound discourse’.

Subjectivity, like creative writing, is a practice that is dynamic, reflective and creative. In fact, this dynamic quality of subjectivity is the result of, and triggered by, engagement with or exposure to discourse; that is, texts and creative artefacts. We have already seen how Butler (2004: 1) argues that an experience of an alternate or different subjectivity in discourse can “undo” our conception of who we are—our idea of ourselves, our subjectivities and identities—and inaugurate or constitute new ones. In other words, an experience of a non-normative subjectivity in discourse or creative text can trigger a dynamic shift in subjectivity or the emergence of completely new subjectivities. Butler draws on Foucault’s description of how new subjectivities form through an engagement with a selected “already said” (Foucault 1997: 209). In the context of Queer Theory, this process of undoing and/or (re)constituting subjectivities is an act of resistance against heteronormativity. This resistance, this re-making of identity, is not without limits or challenges; it is not total voluntarism (Butler 2004).

As Ambrosio (2008: 255), pointing to some of these challenges and constraints, argues:

> We cannot transform ourselves through a simple act of knowing, through critical reason or reflection alone, but only by risking who we are, by… seeking out and testing ourselves in situations that illuminate the contours of our subjectivity, that destabilize our certainties…. Transforming the self requires that we act with personal courage and develop a tolerance for uncertainty and vulnerability (emphasis original).

This exposure to new subjectivities or discourses (Foucault’s “already said”) can occur at the point of reception but also, significantly, in the performative moment of production. The practice of writing can provide ‘a means by which individuals… transform themselves, reconstitute themselves as ethical subjects through reading,
…reflection, and practical experimentation’ (Ambrosio 2008: 265). This process of “undoing” in which new subjectivities emerge can be described as a “queering of the self”, or a queer becoming. It can be extrapolated then that a queering of the self—facilitated by exposure to Queer Theory in the context of an aesthetics of existence—can enrich and inform writing practice and research; in effect bringing them into operation as a mutually interconnected self-bricolage or queer self-making.

The constitution of new identity practices is clearly inspired and facilitated by engagement with discourse—with, among other things, cultural artefacts—but I would suggest that the potential for dynamic shift in subjectivity can also be triggered or activated by the production of discourse, by the act of writing. This is because writing is also reading and reflexivity; a simultaneous production, engagement, analysis, and modification of discourse that directly feeds into the constitution of the self. Writing is a practice of queer becoming.

In a queer becoming, the subject does not merely imitate or conform to a subjectivity or mode of being found in discourse. As I noted at the outset of this exegesis, becoming is a generative process, the constitution of a new subjectivity altogether that is the outflow of social and cultural engagement and reflexivity rather than a display of mere “resemblances” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). The process is one of altering or ceasing current performative practices of identity and constituting or constructing new ones through replication. And remember that replication holds within it the possibility of mutation, of the emergence of something significantly different or new.

There is a paradox in this queer becoming. Subjectivity is constituted through engagement with discourse, constrained by specific acts of power, but that discourse is, of course, constituted by the subject. This circular process destroys any possibility
of finding an original or authentic subjectivity (either discursive or embodied in an individual). This is deeply Derridean, in the sense that Derrida deposed the notion of the original and replaced it with the notion of an endless chain of reproductions (Derrida 1982 & 1967).

This queering of the self/subjectivity is also, in effect, a denaturalising of the self — a decoupling of identity from notions of the natural. In other words, a queered self is one in which subjectivity and identity are not conceived as somehow natural and stable but rather understood to be ambiguous, ephemeral, fluid and largely produced by discourse in relationship with socio-cultural factors. This conception of the self and subjectivity opens up the possibility of the writer-researcher occupying a wider range of reading and writing positions in ways that enrich both the creative act and research processes. Movement into and out of these reading and writing positions is facilitated by the practice of writing and reflection (on what has been written) which are both techniques of a critique of the self. This practice of reflective writing opens up new possibilities of experience, and facilitates the emergence of new forms of subjectivity, as Foucault (cited in Martin et al 1988: 28) describes with relation to the practice of reflective writing in the Classical era:

A relation developed between writing and vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent.

A queered aesthetics of existence can also provide writer-researchers with tools to explore notions of sexual and gender difference in ways that produce more than a theoretical understanding. We discussed this in the ‘Queer PLR in Creative Writing’ section of the Creative Arts Research chapter, but a recap is warranted. Foucault
(1978) argued that any strategy aimed at resisting discursive mechanisms of power must involve a transgression of laws, a dismantling of prohibition and an ‘irruption of speech’ (5). Foucault suggested that any disruption of mechanisms of power (especially those around sexuality) could not be effected with a theoretical discourse alone (1978: 5). Thus, as I argued in the Creative Arts Research chapter, the use of non-theoretical ways of exploring and communicating the knowledge produced in writing research and practice are appropriate and, furthermore, a means of equipping queer writer-researchers with ‘technologies of the self’ (Ramos 1994: 21) that resist heteronormative discourse and normative models of subjectivity.

**Queer PLR and Queer Becoming**

An ethics of the self or queer becoming in the context of a Queer PLR project is a process by which creative and critical practices are used to inspire and provoke interventions in a queer self-making. Let us return for a moment to the quote by Hélène Cixous first introduced in the ‘Theory as Bricolage’ section of Chapter Four: ‘It is the whole that makes sense. That which cannot be met on one path, and which I cannot say in one of my languages, I seek to say through another form of expression’ (cited in Cixous and Sellers 1994: xvi). If this quote is used to think about queer self-making then we can conceptualise Queer PLR as a practice by which the bricoleur uses the means or methods at hand, to paraphrase Straus (1966), to constitute new subjectivities; irrespective of the usage to which these means or methods are usually put. In other words, the queer bricoleur uses heterogeneous forms—such as critical theory, creative fiction, reflexivity and deconstruction—and adapts them in an opportunistic way to meet his/her “needs” (or creative and critical *intent*) in the context of an intervention into subjectivity or a queer becoming.
Within a Queer PLR, it was proposed that the definition of “practice” be broadened to encompass not only creative endeavours but also qualitative research, engagement with critical theory and, most significantly of all, subjectivity. Indeed, performative research, bricolage and creative practice are contextualized within this project mainly in relation to the performative nature of sexual and gender subjectivity. The intent in understanding creative practice, research, critical engagement and subjectivity as mutually dependant performative practices is to explore the tensions or cohesions between what one does and who one is—that is, to breach the gaps between creative and critical research and writing on one hand and subjectivity or identity on the other—and to explore how subjectivities inform engagement, participation and consumption in the creative industries without reinforcing the notion of a stable, unified subject or self. Thus, within this context, the term Queer PLR means a set of entwined practices including research, creative writing, engagement with theory and subjectivity that lead to identifiable outcomes that include critical and creative artefacts but also new or emergent subjectivities.

In this way, a Queer PLR process can be seen to reframe creative practice and critical research as an ethical intervention into subject formation and knowledge production. This queering of arts research practices has the potential to invigorate research in the creative arts and provide the creative arts researcher with new tools to enrich creative practice, diversify research pathways and increase points of connection with creative artefacts or products. A Queer PLR is also envisaged as a dynamic and performative pathway to new knowledge that contributes to the constitution of new subjectivities in a queer becoming.
Summary

To summarize, a queered aesthetics of existence is a set of entwined practices including research, creative writing, reflexivity, engagement with theory and a critique of subjectivity that lead to identifiable outcomes that include critical and creative artefacts exploring and expressing performative genders and sexualities but also new or emergent subjectivities.

There are certain limits to positioning subjectivity as a core element to creative practice. It is crucial that the model of subjectivity used in a subjectivity-centred creative practice is not one that entrenches rather than disrupts the notion of subjectivity as stable, lasting and unified. For a queered aesthetics of existence to be effective, the model of subjectivity deployed ‘must be one that destabilizes the notion of identity/subjectivity as unitary, fixed and somehow natural’ (Baker 2011: 15). A subjectivity-centred research approach that views identity as natural and inherent to the subject, and sees the creative artefact as a direct reflection of the creator’s identity, is little more than a return to the essentialist model of the creative genius (Baker 2011).

By deploying a model of subjectivity that destabilizes the notion of identity/subjectivity as unitary, fixed and somehow natural, a queering of the self can enrich and inform writing practice and research; in effect bringing them into operation as a mutually interconnected Foucauldian self-bricolage. This queering of the self is facilitated by exposure to Queer Theory in the context of an aesthetics of existence. An ethics of the self, or self-bricolage through writing, is a practice of liberty that has the potential to inform and alter the way subjects actively constitute themselves. Furthermore, creative and critical texts arising out of a queered aesthetics of existence
can act as “models” that strongly influence the ongoing *becoming*, and ethical refinement, of queer subjectivities.
Chapter 9: (Re)Scripting the Self: Rewriting

Gender and Subjectivity

Now we turn to a more in-depth discussion of the creative component of the project. This creative component takes the form of a practical application/engagement with the research findings in the writing of a script for a four-part television miniseries in the Southern Gothic genre. The script explores issues of gender and sexual difference and is envisaged as an example of how subjectivity and gender might be rewritten in the light of queer notions of gender and subjectivity. These queer reconceptualised or (re-read) notions of liminal genders construct the abject as that which must be embraced. This rewriting, or simply Queer Writing, draws on a number of Poststructuralist conceptions of writing from Cixous, Derrida and Kristeva. Queer Writing blends these ideas with Foucault’s and Butler’s notions of subjectivity as both a performative practice and capable of self-constitution. Queer Writing also employs creative and critical practice as a kind of queer self-making or becoming.

This chapter specifically describes how the Practice-Led Research (PLR) methodologies that were employed to produce the creative writing artefact impacted on both the writing practice itself and on my own subjectivity. This chapter can be seen as a hermeneutic exercise but might be more aptly understood as mirroring the creative artefact in its exploration of effeminacy and notions of subjectivity. Moreover, the chapter discusses how the Queer PLR methodology itself—in particular reflexivity and a Queer Theory inflected reflective writing—facilitated the development of fresh understandings around the liminal masculinity of effeminacy.
and how these new understandings interacted with my own lived gender and embodied subjectivity.

**Queer Writing is Always a Rewriting**

Sue-Ellen Case (1997) notes that the queer and the abject (or monstrous) are often represented in dominant discourse as veritable synonyms. A number of scholars have demonstrated that representations of the queer in discourse can be seen as negative representative likenesses of actual queer individuals (Baker 2010; Hanson 1991). In heteronormative narratives, things do not usually end well for the abject queer (Baker 2010). The abject queer in heteronormative discourse routinely meets a violent end or is exiled or imprisoned by narrative close (Baker 2010).

Building on this, I would propose that representations of abjection in the Southern Gothic genre—the sissy and tomboy or abject genderqueer—can be recognised as a similitude, or representative likeness, of actual individuals who are non-heterosexual and/or gender ambiguous. These Southern Gothic narratives can be seen as scriptural outpourings, as Kristeva (1982) defines them, or as rule bound discourses (Butler 1990). Some Southern Gothic narratives—though they certainly contain figures that can be characterised as queer—are indictments of, and proscriptions against, the perceived evil of the abject genderqueer which is itself a metaphor for actual queer people. Although the Southern Gothic genre is one in which the abject genderqueer is often met with sympathy and indeed kindness, there are still enough examples of unhappy endings for the sissy or tomboy. Take as examples:

- The brutal rape and killing of the queer schoolboy who is the main character of *Dream Boy* (Grimsley 1995);
• The death of one and imprisonment of the other queer male character in
  *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (Berendt 1994);

• The death of one and isolation of the other insubordinate women of *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Flagg 1987);

• The brutal rejection of the sissy character by Pete, the object of the sissy’s
  affection, in the short piece ‘Sucker’ in McCullers’ posthumous collection *The Mortgaged Heart* (1971);

• The isolation and illness of the effeminate Randolph of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (Capote 1948) and the surreal delirium of Joel Knox;

• The heteronormative recuperation of the gay/bisexual character Brick of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* after the suicide of his male lover (Williams 1955);

• The illness and death of Fodderwing Forrester of *The Yearling* (Rawlings 1938);

• The addiction and alienation of uncle Rondo from ‘Why I Live at the P.O.’
  (Welty, 1941), and;

• The severing of the homoerotic bond between Huckleberry Finn and the ex-
  slave Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* soon after Huck
  masquerades as a girl (Twain 1884).

Given the negative or ambiguous representations of the *abject genderqueer* in some
examples of the Southern Gothic genre, how might queer writers—who identify with
many of the characteristics nominated as abject, whether that is gender ambiguity or
non-normative sexual behaviour—rewrite these figures of narrative discourse in a
way that privileges difference? How might queer writers in the Southern Gothic genre
foreground, in a “positive” way, the *abject genderqueer*, the embodiment of
abjection?
I would propose that the deployment of the philosophy of Cixous, Derrida and Kristeva, particularly in regards to their conceptualisation of *Différance* and *Écriture Feminine* offers many radical possibilities for such a rewriting. Both of these modes of writing are forms of discourse that can evade the limits of traditional—as in constrictive and proscriptive—ways of speaking and writing. Both offer ways to rethink the way that writing practice is theorised and undertaken.

In the writing practice of this project, I drew particularly heavily on Cixous’ notion of *Écriture Féminine*, specifically in regard to constructing a kind of writing practice that privileged plurality, openness and gender difference in relation to terms, categories and subjectivities (reading and writing positions). This “Other bisexual” writing, as Cixous once defined it, was ideal for use in the construction of a narrative discourse that attempted to rewrite and revalue representations of the *abject genderqueer* and allowed me as writer to ‘revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality’ (Moi 1985: 106). By adding to Cixous’ approach a number of other ideas and practices—such as Derrida’s conceptualisation of *Différance*, Kristeva’s theorem of the abject, Foucault’s notion of self-bricolage, and queer re-conceptualisations of subjectivity, creative practice, pedagogy and research—I was able to constitute a writing practice that met the complex creative and critical needs of the project. This practice, or mode of writing, could be called *Écriture Queer* (Baker 2010).

**Écriture Queer: Reconstituting the Familiar**

I described earlier in the exegesis the process, patriarchal binary thought or heteronormative discourse, in which the Other (or in this case the *abject genderqueer*) can only be described in reference to a process of extinguishment of it, the process of expulsion and subjection. As a result, heteronormative discourse can never give the
*abject genderqueer* equal space. Heteronormative discourse would be rendered unintelligible if this were to happen, if the queer were to be given equal space and equal voice. This is simply because the presumption of “Self”, as fixed with specific (heteronormative) qualities, would itself be extinguished. At this point the spectre of death, of loss of identity, arises and the Other or queer suddenly looks just like a corpse—pale, fluid, wet, bleeding—because the Other and the queer threaten to dissolve “Self”, threaten to bleed subjectivities into each other. The Other, or the *abject genderqueer*, pales, blurs and corrupts boundaries, returns the heteronormative “Self” to the darkness of non-existence (the metaphorical grave).

All of this is particularly true in reference to the *abject genderqueer*, which foregrounds the shifting nature of subjectivity/identity and displaces the notion of the “Self” as necessarily heterosexual and “properly” gendered. Discourse or writing that privileges the *abject genderqueer* displaces the very notion of a lasting and true, real and intelligible self. Moi (1985: 107) notes that writing ‘that presumes self located truth embeds within itself patriarchal binary thought, which pretends to be natural, and which flows directly from the presumption of self-presence as truth’. An Écriture Queer does precisely the opposite; it challenges the very notion of self located truth and embeds within itself not patriarchal binary thought but a radically fluid openness. This radical openness defies the very notion of the natural and flows not from the presumption of self-presence as truth but from the destabilisation of the notion of any abiding self-presence at all in favour of the notion of self-presence as a dynamic and mutable flow.

Nevertheless, a queer writing need not completely abandon conventional narrative form to achieve its ends. In fact, the opposite—that is, the maintenance of
conventional form and familiar characters—is more likely to produce results. It is by an inclusion of precisely those abject characteristics of the familiar sissy or tomboy figure, but without a negative or violent ending for that character, that these Southern Gothic narratives can be recuperated. By allowing the abject genderqueer to evade the closed or violent ending, so common for queer characters, a writing that reclaims, revalues and re-figures discourses about the abject genderqueer is facilitated. By producing texts featuring the abject genderqueer that remain open or ambiguous at the moment of closure—and thus full of narrative possibilities—the constraints on how such texts can be read and employed in queer self-making are eased.

Indeed Molly Hite (1989: 4) has argued that ‘[c]lichés tend to have unanticipated potency in relevant contexts, and certainly the notion of telling the other side of the story in many ways describes the enterprise of feminist criticism’. Hite further suggests that ‘changes in emphasis and value can articulate the “other side” of a culturally mandated story, exposing the limits it inscribes in the process of affirming a dominant ideology’ (1989: 4). In other words, the utilisation of familiar figures, stereotypes as it were, in familiar settings, with familiar plot devices but with a shifted emphasis, a revaluation, can have a deconstructive potency that is beyond what one would anticipate for such a, seemingly, simple undertaking. It seems clear that queer appropriations of Southern Gothic discourses featuring the abject genderqueer, and the rewriting of same, is a relevant context that promises some considerable potency.

Hite (1989) goes further by arguing that this kind of rewriting, this mixture of appropriation and écriture féminine, is possibly a preferred method to those espoused by Postmodernism. She writes that though experimental fictions by women share with Postmodernism certain ‘decentering and disseminating strategies’ these experimental
narratives are arrived at ‘by an entirely different route, which involves emphasising conventionally marginal characters and themes, in this way re-centering the value structure of the narrative’ (1989: 2). This different route privileges a politics of representation which, under the influence of Postmodernism, has been largely abandoned despite the fact that misrepresentation of marginal groups in discourse continues to be the norm rather than the exception. Thus, an Écriture Queer employs “decentering” and (queer) dissemination strategies that emphasise marginal characters and themes, specifically relating to abject manifestations of gender and sexuality.

It is the circulation of the very traits of the abject genderqueer—such as sexual difference, physical difference, androgyny, effeminacy, indeterminate identity, and openness—that evoke an instability in the (hetero-narrative) system that threatens to destroy it that is the best resistance. This is precisely because the most widely disseminated norms, the culturally accepted and acceptable terms—those put into place by patriarchal binary thought or heteronormative discourse—are perceived as stable, singular and true. When other terms, other subjectivities, are circulated, a multiplicity, a plurality, arises that speaks of the fiction of the normal, the fixed, the clean, the proper, the righteous.

The binaries embedded in our culture are infamous: self/other, man/woman, human/animal, activity/passivity, life/death, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal. If the normal threatens to become abnormal, or the unnatural natural, the other equal rather than subordinate, the binaries cease to operate in any powerful way and the (heteropatriarchal) “Self” destabilises, or at least seems less “real” or intelligible than it did before. Discourses of abjection seem to acknowledge that the abject genderqueer has this power over the “Self”. It is precisely this power that makes the
*abject genderqueer* dangerous, that provokes the attempt to destroy it. In particular, the refusal of gender norms and the enactment of what Judith Butler calls gender insubordination (1993b) threatens the very existence of the “Self” as constructed in hetero-narrative. Olu Jenzen (2007: 9) illustrates this point when he writes that Judith Butler ‘demonstrates in her writings how the binary gender system, and indeed heterosexuality, forms a precondition for one’s identity’. Butler herself writes that ‘the very notion of the subject’ is ‘intelligible only through its appearance as gendered’ (1990: 33). Butler argues that any subject that strays ‘outside of established gender’ puts the hetero-normative subject’s ‘very existence into question’ (Butler 2004: 27). The *abject genderqueer* is a figure that strays well outside of established gender and so threatens the hetero-normative subject’s very existence.

In the process of rewriting, queer authors would be well advised to simply not close off the openings that the *abject genderqueer* brings, the eruptions, the splits and tears in “Self” and “the real”. This is, of course, the agenda of much queer literature and cinema, to keep open the breach between terms and subjectivities, to agitate and abrade the borders between them so that the borders collapse, or reform. If the *abject genderqueer*—written in ways that it has always been written, with those familiar differences, those deformities, those queer predilections, but without any violent, homicidal or suicidal tendencies—remains alive and indeed thriving at closure, then a multitude of reading possibilities open up. Certainly, if the *abject genderqueer* is not only alive but also central to the narrative’s movement rather than tangential to it, or a threat to it, then the discursive system which attempts to constrain it is contained, itself limited. The dominance of patriarchal binary thought is fractured, and multiple voices arise. This is no great discursive feat, nor is it theoretically new as it has been the project of Feminist writers, particularly in the genre of Fictocriticism, for decades
(Kerr & Nettlebeck 1998), but the impact on those persons who identify with the qualities of the *abject genderqueer* can be great.

The creative component of the project undertook these *rewritings* in these suggested generically familiar ways. The script utilised stock scenes found in the Southern Gothic genre, typical Gothic plot devices, recognisable settings and familiar figures; but with completely different narrative trajectories and directions. This was done in order to usurp and appropriate the writing that came before it, to reclaim prescriptive discourses that have been widely circulated; discourses of the freak, the “deformed”, the effeminate or sissy, the androgynous, the outsider, the heretical and the “strange”. It is hoped that this deliberate appropriation of the generic, of the cliché, might, in at least a nominal way, diffuse the (heteropatriarchal) slant of the discourses to which my text refers.

It is understood that this appropriation and *rewriting* can only be undertaken in a limited way, the field of influence of this text (script) is small, but the research shows that it is something worth doing — it may potently ‘articulate the “other side” of a culturally mandated story, exposing its limits’ (Hite 1989: 4). This *rewriting* does however sit in a field of other queer appropriations and *rewritings* being undertaken by many writers in English across the globe (Baker 2010). As a body of work these individual *rewritings* gain some considerable significance. This kind of *rewriting*—which is in effect the unfoldment of an innovative discursive paradigm, or an *Écriture Queer*—can re-imagine certain histories and may destabilise, fracture, and multiply positions of speech, of language, of thought, leading to a revolutionary discursive openness.
Admittedly, these kinds of attempts to cut a new course in a non-normative direction, away from dominant discourse, are often constrained by an inevitable backlash in favour of heteronormativity, yet—simply because it exists—this queer reading and writing makes a lie of the notion of normal, of abnormal even. It also makes a lie of all of the constructions around what is good and proper, and deconstructs the notion that certain positions are fixed; that certain behaviours and, even subjectivities, are “right” and “natural” and that others are not. This is important simply because the language of the dominant continues to be disseminated and so too must this continual reconstitution of the language of difference.

**Another Southern Rebellion: Gender Insubordination in the Southern Gothic**

At this juncture, an outline of the plot of the creative component (miniseries script) is prudent. *The Tree* is set in the rural South, against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement. At the centre of the narrative is a strong friendship that forms between two unlikely characters. One is a twelve year old tomboy, Alison Mayflower, recently orphaned by the death of her father, the other, Percival Huckstep, is a man whose eccentricity puts him at odds with the inhabitants of his small hometown, Perseverance Georgia. After her father’s death, Alison is sent to live with her only surviving relative, Verna Hobb, her maternal grandmother. Alison discovers, much to her surprise, that her grandmother, and her mother who died in childbirth, are African-Americans. This throws Alison’s world upside down. One minute she is a Southern white girl and the next she is a pale skinned “coloured” girl and living on the “black side of the tracks” in a deeply conservative Georgian town.

Percival, though a grown man, is also an orphan of sorts, having been left to fend for himself, a task for which he is dramatically ill equipped, after the passing of his doting
mother. Percival is a man out of time and place. He effects old style Southern gentility
and has an all-consuming passion for the Orient, in particular the Far East. Percival
imagines that the Orient is a paradise in which he might freely be himself. He is the
town misfit, the village sissy, and has endured a lifetime of insults and mistreatment at
the hands of the townspeople. He is to gender what Boo Radley of Harper Lee’s *To
Kill a Mockingbird* is to mental capacity. He also, much to the annoyance of those on
the white side of the tracks, resists racial discourse and is conscious of his privileged
position as a white man.

The tree in the title refers to a crepe myrtle that is planted over Percival’s mother’s
grave. The crepe myrtle, because it was his mother’s favourite plant, has become a
symbol for Percival of his loneliness, but more so, of his yearning for friendship and
family that, despite the odds, he has faith will manifest in the future. Alison, also an
orphan and feeling isolated, adopts the tree as a symbol for her yearning for
acceptance. It seems only natural that these two misfits, Alison and Percival, would
find friendship in each other. However, they must first overcome barriers of race, age,
genre and class imposed by the society in which they live and the disapproval of the
townspeople, white and black. Much to their credit, they transcend these barriers and
lay the foundations of a true friendship.

As their friendship evolves a local church is burned down and a young man, Nate
Bowman, is arrested for the crime despite a total lack of evidence. The only
incriminating factors in the case are Nate’s distant Jewish background and his
rumoured support for the work of Dr Martin Luther King. By the use of
unconventional means, the two misfits procure Nate’s release and in the process
Alison learns of a dark secret held by Percival that explains why he is such a recluse,
why he has never really tried to fit in with the people of Perseverance. It is a secret which implicates the most powerful man in town. As the charges against the innocent Nate are resolved, Alison and Percival’s friendship faces its first real test in the form of jealousy. Alison takes exception to the friendship forming between Percival and Nate. Will Alison and Percival’s friendship endure? Will these two mismatched misfits find friendship and a sense of family in each other or will circumstances conspire to maintain their isolation and loneliness? Percival, unsure what to do or how to feel, seeks the advice of a local Voodoo practitioner by the name of Ruth, an unruly older African-American woman who lives alone in the swamp woods. With Ruth’s enigmatic advice, and perhaps a voodoo intervention, all things come together in a way that provides these two misfits, and those around them, with a real experience of love, family and friendship.

*The Tree* is a story about friendship against the odds, about the unlikely bonds formed between a Southern tomboy and a Southern eccentric, and the forging of an unconventional family in a time dictated by harsh convention. It speaks of a time and place not so distant in time but receding in memory, a time in which the price paid for being different was great and, conversely, the rewards for living one’s life according to one’s heart were even greater.

**Insubordinate Characters: Gender, Sexuality and Queer Becoming**

The script features a number of characters whose subjectivity, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, are non-normative, or alter as the narrative unfolds. One of the main characters is an “un-reconstructed sissy” (effeminate male) who views himself as something of an outcast. This view of himself (his self-perception) changes at story’s close. Another main character is a tomboy of twelve years old whose
subjectivity shifts in terms of her perception of both her gender difference and her 
race. At narrative opening, she believes she is white but soon discovers that she is 
African-American *passing* as white. One of the secondary characters is perceived as 
heterosexual at narrative beginning but this perception shifts into a more ambiguous 
sexual position at narrative close. All of these shifts in subjectivity are provoked by an 
external factor, they are intersubjective in nature. For the sake of brevity, this exegesis 
will focus primarily on the ways that the liminal masculinity of effeminacy was 
written (or rewritten) and understood within the project.

*Writing and Exploring Effeminacy*

The miniseries script explores issues of gender and sexual difference— specifically 
effeminacy—in the context of the rural South of the USA. As is well understood by 
now, the creative text also explores notions of subjectivity, in particular how 
subjectivities can be seen to be performative (Butler 1990, 1993) and produced in and 
through (and indeed despite) rule bound discourse (Butler 1990: 184).

I noted in the *Creative Arts Research* chapter that the creative text and this exegesis 
were produced as research outputs of equal value and as two aspects of a single 
research objective. I have described how the two parts of the project are unified in that 
they both produce knowledge around gender and sexual difference and the ways that 
effeminate subjectivities are constructed. In this way the script can be characterised as 
a non-traditional “performative research” output (Haseman 2006) which presents the 
project hypothesis (that genders, sexualities and identities are performative and that 
effeminacy is a potent liminal masculinity) in narrative form.
…You forget I’ve lived in the South all my life. I've heard all the stories: the young men found strangled in the woods. The girly little boys whose own daddies tie them in seed-sacks and drown them in the river like unwanted kittens... I know it's not just coloreds who need to be afraid of the knock at midnight.

The quote above is from the creative writing artefact *The Tree* (Episode Four: 370). This quote refers directly to the ‘horrific social reality’ (Goddu 1997) of the South as experienced by African-Americans and effeminate males. This section describes the specific insights that arose from writing about effeminacy as a liminal gender performed or enacted in the environment of the South and in the context of the Southern Gothic.

*The Self as Effeminate Subject*

As mentioned in the exegesis introduction, germinal to this project was my own wish to explore and describe gender and sexual difference. For me, the wish to engage with difference both preceded and inspired the intention to write. Additionally, my research interests flowed from a personal wish to discuss and understand my own difference and to contextualise the expression and discussion of that difference in my own creative writing. In other words, the research developed out of my own experience of difference as an effeminate male and a need to theorise and express that difference. The notion that lived experience is core to the constitution of subjectivity was first flagged in the introduction. As was noted there, Scott (1991) argues that subjects are constituted through experience. This makes experience central to the understanding and expression of subjectivity.
In order to draw on the specificity of my individual experience, it was determined that—although the script is a Southern Gothic narrative and not truly autobiographical in the strict sense of the word—it was possible to draw on my own life experiences in a very circumscribed way by using them to construct one (and only one) of the principal characters. Thus, although the miniseries is fictional, a semi-autobiographical process was used to construct the character of Percival Huckstep.

![Figure 5: The Author as Young Effeminate](image)

The character of Percival Huckstep is semi-autobiographical specifically in that it draws on my own experience with gender and sexual performativity (see Figure 5 above). The way I wrote Percival’s experience in the South was based on research but was based just as much on my experiences as an effeminate male in regional Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s. The script is a depiction of the significantly homosocial cultural milieu of the South (which resonates with the highly homosocial environment of rural Australia of my youth) and a performative exploration into the construction of both discursive effeminacy and my own effeminate masculinity.
This semi-autobiographical approach to character construction best enabled an informed (as in based on experience) discussion of the issues at hand — liminal gender, sexuality and identity. This approach to the constitution of Percival’s discursive subjectivity also enabled me to reflect on my own experiences as an effeminate male in a rural setting. Stewart (2007) argues that such autobiographical methods enable ‘a personal investigation of the self: self-research, self-portrait, self-narrative’ (129). Stewart explains this in more detail when she writes that autobiography provides:

…ways to incorporate and map a deep sense of the intricate relationships of the meaning and actions of artistic practice and its embeddedness in cultural influences, personal experience and aspirations (2001: 129).

In other words, as I wrote the character of Percival I found myself understanding the deep relationships between artistic practice (writing) and the socio-cultural situation and individual positionality and contextuality in which it was embedded. The strange connectedness between some of the character of Percival’s traits and my own produced other insights as well.

From the outset, the narrative was conceived as a discourse that would foreground the mutable and fluid performativity of subjectivity, sexualities and genders as well as the potential for productive resistance arising out of the act of creative self-construction. The key themes of the work—that of the shifting and “shifty” quality of identity categories, the self-constructability of subjectivity and the constraints and possibilities in the performance of effeminate masculinity—all lent themselves to ambiguity. This ambiguity, I felt, was best emphasised by a text that included a character largely modelled on myself but in a totally fictional story and setting. Given this, I felt that some aspects of *The Tree* resisted (and frustrated) easy categorisation, much as desires
and identities resist over-simple definitions. *The Tree* is fictional, yes, but Percival as a character owes much to my own history and experience. For me, this blurring of the boundaries between the effeminate character and myself as an effeminate subject foregrounds the performative aspect of the act of writing and the performative and reflexive quality of narratives.

**Queer Writing as Performative Self-Making**

As signalled above, the creative practice emerged (and was embedded with) my own intention to discuss and write about my own and others gender and sexual difference. Central to how this sexual and gender difference was explored in practice and expressed in narrative form was the notion of *performativity* (Butler 1990). We have been returning to this idea again and again. This is because it figured deeply not only in the writing practice but also in how, to paraphrase Ambrosio (2008), I was able to *risk* who I was and move towards constituting a new subjectivity. This new or emergent subjectivity was inspired by and is more in accordance with the fluid subjectivities and genders proposed by Queer Theory when applied as a way of life. This queer notion of performativity impacted on the project in many other ways as well. I noted in the *Creative Arts Research* chapter that the completed artefact can be seen as a performative research output (Haseman 2006) which produces discourse in which performative subjectivities are explored. Indeed, the artefact can be seen to be exploring the notion of subjectivity *through* writing. In effect, the artefact constituted or produced sexual and gender subjectivities and explored how they operated with and against each other; including how the discursive subjectivities interacted with my own embodied subjectivity.
This section describes the exploration of difference “through and in” (Nelson 2008) writing practice and outlines the ways in which my intention to explore effeminacy—through the application of Queer Theory informed performative bricolage—was met in that practice (writing). This section also discusses the new understandings, around the performative nature of sexual and gender difference and effeminacy, which were produced through reflexivity and (simultaneously) in the process/performance of writing.

The creative text is basically the story of an effeminate man, a Southern sissy, learning to accept himself as he is and to navigate the perils (and possibilities) of homosocial culture and queer desire as it manifests in the South. The main character, Percival, is based on my own experience but is not a factual rendering of myself. Percival is and is not me at the same time. The effeminate character of the miniseries is an amalgam and composite. He is based on more than a single actual person, usually combining traits of a number of fictional and real characters and even then somewhat loosely and not without adaptation, adjustment and creative re-figuring. In this sense, though the action may be totally fictional, the ways that Percival responds to that action are based on my own character traits, embodied gender and lived experience.

The process of writing and reflexivity illuminated the fact that all of the statements about the character Percival Huckstep above could be made about myself. I am an amalgam and composite. I embody characteristics from many of those I have known. I am modelled on others, though I have creatively adapted and refined myself to become the sort of person that I can appreciate; and parts of me are largely fictional. In fact, a number of those who read drafts of the script as it was being written
commented that whenever the character Percival spoke, they heard my voice. When I insisted that Percival was a fictional character, a number of them actually laughed. In the end, I understood that this strange juxtaposition between Percival Huckstep and myself reflected the complexities of subject positions, of identity; it revealed the reciprocal ways in which subjectivity, practice and discourse informed and constituted each other. It also blurred (or queered) the lines between what was real or intelligible about my own and Percival’s story and what wasn’t. I came to conceptualise this blurring of lines between the fictive and the “real” in the character of Percival as a kind of deliberate unintelligibility. In a sense, the character of Percival is a discursive example of an uninhabitable body (Butler 1993). It is not only his effeminacy that makes him unintelligible but his abrasion of the borders between the real and the unreal. Webb and Brien (2011: 197) make an interesting point about this kind of merging of fact and fiction when they write:

…juxtapositioning of memoir and fiction both explores and draws attention to contemporary debates about whether literature can represent the complexities of life with any accuracy, and what it means to “tell the truth” in a period when the idea of any absolute truth is outmoded and discarded.

Producing subjectivities within text, whilst engaging in an ongoing reflexivity, proved to be an acute and experiential method for highlighting the constructed nature of subjectivities. The act of producing (writing) Percival required reflection on my own history as an effeminate man. These reflections were themselves informed by research into the performativity of gender and sexuality. As the writing proceeded, and Percival emerged from the syntax, I began to see how my own subjectivity had also been produced within a complex matrix of discourses; including my own internal discourses about who I was and, perhaps more significantly, who I wanted to be. This
experience echoes Sarup’s (1996) argument that identities are narrative constructions adapted through self-talk. Our identities are the products of our own self-telling.

Like myself as a young man, Percival wants to be who he is in the place that is his home, more to the point, he desperately wants somebody, anybody really, to love him. This exaggerated need for love and attention arises from his feeling of being not merely undervalued but loathed. Anecdotally at least, this is considered a common response to the trauma LGBTIQ individuals experience from growing up and living within a homophobic culture. This is certainly my own experience. Percival is the much loathed Southern sissy whose life of aesthetic escapism blocks out the discomfort of his day to day reality, which is typified by loneliness, bullying and intimidation.

The excerpts below illustrate Percival’s tendency to live in the escapist space of aesthetics rather than the marginal space he is begrudgingly allowed in the “real world”. The first (Episode One: 232) is an exchange between Alison, the twelve year old tomboy protagonist of the narrative, and her grandmother, Verna.

ALISON
Who is that?

VERNA
That's Percival Huckstep. The queerest duck on the pond... spends his life in a fantasy world if you ask me. He’s one of only a few white folks left in town. And, to his credit or shame I'm not sure which, he’s the only white man with the gumption to shop in my store.

This next excerpt (Episode One: 234) illustrates Percival’s privileging of aesthetics over practicality and is in his own (effeminate) words:
Oh, you know me Verna Hobb, I spend all my time, and practically all my money, on the pretty things in life. I can’t see no point in doing anything else.

Apart from his many avoidance behaviours, Percival’s primary goal in life seems to be to survive, one day at a time, and to forestall what he fears is an inevitable violent confrontation with local youths and men. The strategy he employs to endure the fear and isolation he feels is to isolate himself from his own (white) community and only associate with those with whom he has some affinity as an outsider and who are not a threat to him — the local African-American community. For the same reason, he also avoids the company of men in favour of the much less threatening company of women.

Like other Southern Gothic narratives, The Tree engages with the ever-present violence of Southern life and its traumatic social reality (Goddu 1997). As with many other narratives in the genre, this violence takes the form of racism against African-Americans (Goddu 1997). Unique in the Southern Gothic genre however is the fact that The Tree also depicts this violence in the form of homophobic discourse and aggression towards homosexuals that is ever present in homosocial environments.

The term “homosocial” connotes a form of male bonding often accompanied by a fear or hatred of homosexuality (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1992). This male bonding often expresses itself as an equally virulent objectification of women and vilification and subjugation of effeminate or homosexual males. In many instances, homosocial relations have an erotic quality. This eroticism between men in homosocial
relationships is routinely repressed and disguised as a mutual identification over heterosexual desire and activity (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1992).

For Kosofsky-Sedgwick (1992), homosociality is a form of male bonding with a distinctive triangular structure. In this structure, men have avid but non-sexual bonds with other men, and women function as the conduits through which the passionate feelings aroused by these bonds are acted out, sometimes as shared heterosexual identification, sometimes as competition for women’s attention and sexual favours (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1992). Kosofsky-Sedgwick further argues ‘that such a triangle may disguise as rivalry what is actually an attraction between men’ (1992: 21). The feelings aroused by bonds between heterosexual men are often a kind of eroticism sublimated as aggression and physical competition. As this excerpt from The Tree (Episode One: 237) illustrates:

SIMON DONNELLY
Hey Percy! How are ya this mornin’ darlin’?

NATE
Out for a morning stroll petal?

Percival ignores them and walks past. The two men stop.

SIMON DONNELLY
Hey Percy, how about a bit of this!

Simon grabs his crotch whilst Nate, spurred on by his friend, starts to rub his own nipple.

NATE
How about it Percy! Wanna try some?

Gilbert Herdt notes that ‘the more polarized the gender roles and restrictive the sexual code, the more homosociality one expects to find in a society’ (1999: 152). Certain
parts of the rural South of the 1960s, where gender and sexual codes were strongly controlled and constrained, can be seen as such homosocial environments. *The Tree* is set in a homosocial environment in order to highlight the active bullying and persecution of all boys and men who failed to live up to the ideal of "hypermasculinity" (Scheff 2006, Nandy 1983). Hypermasculinity is not just an aggressive form of masculinity, in some societies it is deployed as a way to police effeminate and homosexual males. In other words, hypermasculinity is enacted ‘as a social system’ (Scheff 2006). This was certainly the case in the town and region of my upbringing and seems to have been common in many rural cultures of the recent past, including the South. In hypermasculine societies like rural Queensland in the 1970s and the American South of the 1960s, hypermasculinity can be seen as something of a totalizing norm. As such, *The Tree* is a critique of a situated, historical and extremely masculinist “heteronormativity” (Pratt 2009b).

**Effeminacy**

Effeminacy is understood as gender inappropriate traits in a male individual that are associated with stereotypical femininity; usually concerning modes of speech, behaviour, mannerisms or style of clothing (Bergling 2001; Sinfield 1994). Basically, effeminate males are seen to be inappropriately enacting or *performing* feminine gender roles. The word “performing” is important to the definition of effeminacy, for the effeminate male is seen as “acting out” feminine behaviours or roles rather than expressing their “true” gender. Unlike masculinity and femininity, effeminacy is not seen as a natural expression of biological sex or an inner identity but rather as artifice, as a staged display; as an effect of deliberate non-conformity or psychological
disturbance. It is no coincidence that effeminate mannerisms are described as “affected”.

Effeminacy is not only a liminal masculinity but a gender expression that attracts derision and disgust from both heterosexual and homosexual men (Bergling 2001; Sinfield 1994; Parker 1989). Heterosexual and homosexual men revile the effeminate male for different though connected reasons. To the heterosexual man, the effeminate is synonymous with the homosexual and thus an object of disgust and fear (Sinfield 1994). In heteronormative discourse there is no room for the possibility that any effeminate male might be heterosexually oriented. The reasons why homosexual men revile the effeminate male are a little more complex. One reason is the fact that many gay men see effeminacy as a negative stereotype that has historically been used to marginalise homosexuals (Bergling 2001; Sinfield 1994). Therefore, any person who behaves in an effeminate fashion is perceived as something of an embarrassment to the contemporary gay male community, which reveres the “straight-acting” man, the gay man who is indistinguishable from heterosexual men.

There is also a strong current of misogyny in the dislike of effeminacy; it is rooted in a dislike of the feminine in general (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1992). Moreover, hatred of effeminacy is rooted in a deep fear of gender ambiguity. Many gay men are just as socially-conditioned and normative in terms of gender as their straight male counterparts. The effeminate man troubles this (normative) sense of appropriate gender. Perhaps most significant however is that the queer effeminate male is distinguishable from heterosexual males. Effeminacy obliterates the sexual invisibility that the straight-acting schema produces. The effeminate male is highly visible and utterly destroys the “closet” and along with it the illusion of safety that the closet
sometimes provides. Thus, the effeminate male provokes in straight-acting and/or closeted homosexual men feelings of shame, disgust and fear. In this sense, “sissyphobia” is no different from homophobia.

In the Christian tradition, effeminacy is identified with evil and sin (Mahon 2004: 257). Strong arguments have been made that effeminacy or gender non-conformity is the true target of homophobic violence against males (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1994). Thus, effeminacy is positioned at the extreme limit of acceptable gender, as Alan Sinfield (1994: 4) has noted:

In all the current preoccupation with concepts of manliness and masculinity, effeminacy is rarely addressed head-on; yet it defines, crucially, the generally acceptable limits of gender and sexual expression.

Given this, it can be said that effeminacy is designated in much socio-cultural discourse as the ultimate abject gender, an *unintelligible* gender (Butler 2004) that cannot be understood as anything other than monstrous, or a sickness. For Butler (1990), the unintelligible is that which does not cohere with the logic of compulsory/compulsive heteronormativity. It is that gender or sexuality which, because it cannot be understood within a heteronormative and naturalizing system, is perceived as somehow unreal; somehow artificial and unnatural. An unintelligible gender is any gender that is perceived as not being “naturally” attached to, or arising from, natural sex (Butler 1990). Such genders are considered a kind of ungraspable deception. As Judith Butler elucidates:

The moment in which one’s staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in
question. When such categories come into question, the reality of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be “real”, what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality (1990: xxiii, original emphasis).

An encounter with effeminacy, however, is not one in which gender is impossible to ascertain. There is no sense that an effeminate male cannot be ascribed a gender. Effeminacy is not a gender which utterly confuses. Effeminacy is perceptible as a form of masculinity, but a masculinity that is insubordinate and subversive. Effeminacy is a visible and distinguishable refusal of heteronormative gender logic. It is this deliberate refusal which makes effeminacy incomprehensible and unintelligible. As such, effeminacy simultaneously disrupts notions of masculinity and femininity and is a threat to both.

Ironically, this unintelligible gender is often exposed through speech acts. The effeminate male is constructed as speaking in an overtly and exaggeratedly feminine way (Sinfield 1994; Parker 1989). A number of early psychological studies linked effeminacy (and transgender identification) with verbal aptitude (Money & Block 1971, Money & Epstein 1967), a gift for conversation as it were. An early psychological diagnostic tool—proposed for use in definitively identifying suspect effeminates—listed feminine modes of speech as a key indicator (Schatzberg et al 1975). This propensity of effeminates for conversation has been noted with regards Oscar Wilde (Waldrep 2004; Sinfield 1994) and Truman Capote (Hill 1957) both of whom are constructed in dominant discourse as the ultimate effeminate homosexual. Capote went so far as to place conversation ahead of writing in terms of significance when he said ‘conversation will always come first with me’ (quoted in Hill 1957).
It must be said however that this effeminate mode of speech is also simultaneously seen as not at all feminine; as a strange masquerade of femininity that is neither authentic nor natural. Indeed, it is inauthentic and unnatural, which is how effeminacy itself is defined. Thus, a circular logic dominates in which an effeminate is identified as a male individual who speaks (and behaves and dresses) effeminately; an effeminate is he who performs effeminacy. To paraphrase that famous notion of Judith Butler’s (1990:25), effeminacy has no ontological status.

*The Tree* appropriates these discourses of the verbally-gifted effeminate and constructs one of the main characters, Percival Huckstep, as a man with a noted propensity for adjectives. This reflects my own lived experience. The creative artefact retells (and refigures) a story from my own life in which I was informed by a rather disapproving classmate that I used words that other boys didn’t use. The implication was that they were words that boys shouldn’t use. When I begged for clarification as to which words were not appropriate for boys my classmate replied: ‘Words like *cute* and *nice*, words like *pretty* and *adorable*, words like that, poofter words’ (Angguish 2011: 10). With this statement, my classmate had identified the verbal aptitude which marked me as effeminate, and as homosexual; all of the “queer words” he had identified were adjectives. I have one of the minor antagonists in the *The Tree* voice a similar thing (Episode One: 237) in a scene in which two men are tormenting the effeminate Percival. The scene in the creative text in which this dialogue appears acts to foreground the connection in homophobic discourse between “female speech” and cultural anxiety about effeminacy (Parker 1989).

This verbal aptitude, much derided as effeminate, eventually led to my becoming a writer. My writing, as has been noted, is largely concerned with exploring the very
difference signified by this, and other, aberrant characteristics. In a sense then, my writing practice is profoundly entwined with effeminacy, in both generative and thematic ways. As a nod to the connection made in dominant discourse between verbal-aptitude or conversational skill and effeminacy, much of my writing foregrounds speech and is liberally sprinkled with adjectives. *The Tree* in particular is deliberately endowed with more than its fair share of dialogue and descriptive words.

*Reading and Writing the Effeminate Self*

The writing of *The Tree* revealed that, for me, the performative act of writing and the performance of effeminacy are creative practices of equal significance to the formation of my subjectivity. I write myself and perform myself. The creative text refers indirectly to my own and others’ performance of effeminacy and—once joined with knowledge from gender research and understanding garnered through reflexivity—acts as a formative narrative that informs the ongoing performance and production (in both the construction and theatrical senses) of effeminate subjectivity.

The miniseries script, as the creative practice component of a PLR project, was the principal means through which notions of effeminacy (sexual and gender difference) were explored and expressed. *The Tree* presents effeminacy as a uniquely constituted and performed gender. As stated earlier, the creative writing artefact was envisaged as an example of how Queer Theory informed (performative) sexual and gender subjectivities can be articulated in an accessible way for both professional (academic) and general audiences. Thus, *The Tree* targets audiences of not only Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) individuals but also an academic audience and professionals with an interest in queer television and queer scriptwriting. I mention audiences here because it is in the viewing/reading of the
creative text that a performative understanding (or knowledge) of the performativity of gender, in particular effeminacy, is produced. This experiential understanding occurs as part of what Foucault called an “object-event” (Foucault 2006), in which the text is an event that triggers a chain of further events. A text is consumed by readers/viewers, it inspires commentators to discuss its qualities, and it is the focus of ‘multiple interlocutors who constitute its various discursive contexts’ (Huffer 2009: xii). In this way, a text’s ‘truth effects ripple through the world like rings on water, as the light-bringing rupture of an expansive doubling’ (Huffer 2009: xii).

The “rupture” referred to here is a break in the citational chain (to use a Butlerian term) in which the history of a subject is interrupted and altered (and illuminated) by the intrusion of an alterior discourse. This alterior discourse is the irruption of speech that Foucault (1978) demands of any discourse aimed at destabilising normative ideas of sexuality. In this sense, The Tree, as a Foucauldian irruption of speech, is a discursive break from normalizing discourses about male gender and sexuality that performatively disseminates understanding about gender (in this instance effeminacy). This understanding is itself performative, as it occurs in the act of reading or viewing, reflection and discussion, and thus produces not only a theoretical understanding, which it does, but also produces knowledge as an affective experience. This is an alternative route to knowing, a different way of coming to understand the themes or issues investigated in creative works. As we engage with cultural artefacts, we experience them in quite an embodied way. We laugh, we cringe, we cry, we feel good, we feel bad, we sympathise, we identify, we rage. These affective experiences inform us about material realities and lived experience that we may never have understood otherwise. Affective experiences are another (and a non-theoretical) way of producing knowledge.
The act of *writing* the miniseries also constituted a break in the citational chain of normative discourses on sexuality. The writing of *The Tree* constituted a Queer Theory inspired rupture with normalizing discourses about male gender and sexuality as extant in my own history, memory and experience. This rupture provoked a new understanding of effeminacy as applied to my own subjectivity. This understanding was also itself performative and affective, as it occurred in the practices of writing, re-reading, reflection and re-writing, and thus produced more than theoretical knowledge. This experiential understanding was informed by research into queer theories around the performativity of gender and sexualities but was “brought to life” in the creative practice and reflection and in the application of the understanding and/or knowledge to my own subjectivity and its ongoing queer becoming.

The writing of the creative text facilitated a deep exploration of notions of subjectivity, in particular how subjectivities are performative and produced in and through discourse (Butler 1990, 1993). The act of writing, which is in effect the constitution of discursive or textual subjectivities, by its very nature a productive act, both reveals and illuminates the performativity of subjectivity, especially gender and sexual subjectivity. This is even more so when that writing is informed by a philosophy of some kind. In this instance, the philosophy informing the writing was Queer Theory, in particular Butler’s notion of performativity and Foucault’s re-conceptualisation of ethics as a kind of self-bricolage. This brought into sharp relief the ways in which the act of writing not only evidenced performativity but was performative itself. Writing produces subjectivities, tests them out against each other—surveys their boundaries as it were, to see how they might respond in different scenarios—and disseminates them all at once.
Another thread of Queer Theory that produced intriguing insights in the writing process was another idea of Judith Butler’s. This idea relates to the impact discursive subjectivities have on individual or personal subjectivity. I am referring here, once more, to the “identity undo”. If we recall that Butler argued that exposure to a non-normative (or “new”) subjectivity can ‘undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one’ (Butler 2004: 1) then we can see that engagement with or exposure to a queer text can have potent effects. An experience of a non-normative subjectivity, such as effeminate masculinity in a discourse or text, can “undo” one’s subjectivity and facilitate the emergence of a new one. As an example of the power of discursive subjectivities to provoke shifts in individual identities, think of the way that Jack Kerouac’s novel On The Road (1957) triggered the “rucksack revolution”, the emergence of a counter-culture as individuals remade themselves in accordance with the subjectivities celebrated in Kerouac’s writing. Think also of the proliferation of “gender-benders” in the wake of the popularity of Boy George and also the global spread of grunge culture after the success of Nirvana.

This idea of Butler’s was proven accurate by a subtle change to my own subjectivity as I wrote The Tree. Before writing the piece, and undertaking the research that preceded it, I had ambivalent (and uncomfortable) feelings about my effeminate past. In writing the figure of Percival Huckstep, an effeminate character who refuses to be marginalised because of his gender insubordination, I was able to occupy a new subject position; one which embraced effeminacy as a radical position capable of powerfully disrupting oppressive gender norms. Put simply, the act of writing within a reflexive and theoretically informed queer PLR process, constituted a kind of immersive exposure to an effeminate subjectivity that triggered the emergence of a new, subtly different, gender position. This process, which I came to jokingly refer to
as “sissy exposure therapy”, was an intersubjective one in which research around queer theorisations of gender, exposure to the discursive effeminacies of the Southern Gothic genre, and my reflexive writing practice acted as the “something outside” that triggered affective experiences, which then produced new understandings around effeminacy as an embodied gender and lived subjectivity.

During the writing of *The Tree*, critical research and creative practice were intertwined and mutually informed each other in ways that enriched the creative process. This intertwined relationship between research and creative practice was core to the way I undertook the project and was crucial to the development of knowledge and an iterative understanding of my object of study; the performativity of effeminacy as a unique liminal gender. The creative text refers to my own and others’ performance of effeminacy and coalesces with knowledge from gender and sexuality research and reflexivity to become a productive, identity-forming narrative.

To put it succinctly, *The Tree* is a story about a marginalised figure attempting to find ways to resist the normative push of the heteronormative and homophobic culture in which he lives. In reflection and in the act of writing, it became apparent that the main character of *The Tree* was searching for a way to enact a Foucauldian “reverse discourse” (Foucault 1978: 76) through which the uneven power relations operating in his daily dealings with hegemonic masculinity might be ameliorated if not overturned. As the writing of the artefact progressed, it became apparent that the issues the figure of the effeminate male raised were not just about gender. As the narrative developed, it became clear that this reverse discourse must address not only the intimidation and bullying that Percival experiences but also the strange and unequal sexual dynamic...
between masculine and effeminate men in which the protagonist finds himself unwittingly entangled.

The theoretical and thematic importance of the strange sexual dynamic of a highly charged homosocial environment only became apparent after the writing practice, in concert with reflexivity informed by critical research, began. The sexual dynamic emerged as important because it revealed something significant about both gender and sexuality. Firstly, it revealed the fluid (and performative) nature of masculinity as a gender. In extreme homosocial environments, many males (especially adolescents) define and indeed constitute their gender in explicit opposition to effeminacy (Pascoe 2007). This reveals the central importance of the effeminate subject to the constitution of masculinity. Anecdotally at least, it is a kind of “common knowledge” that many adolescent males engage in erotic behaviours that are in contradiction to adult masculinity which is defined as exclusively and compulsorily heterosexual. *Cherry Blossom Bicycle Crazy*, a short memoir piece set in my hometown, discusses the highly charged erotic quality of homosocial and all-male environments in this way:

> I had become ensnared in the boys’ school mojo… we had entered what the Japanese call the ‘cherry blossom years’: youth. The time in-between childhood and manhood in which there is a magic that makes many things possible. Things that are impossible as an adult (Angguish 2011: 8).

Many men’s initial sexual experimentation is often with members of their own sex (Kinsey 1948) and it seems likely that this is even more the case in homosocial environments (like the South). This sexual dynamic reveals the centrality of the effeminate male to the development (and exercise or practice) of male sexuality. The centrality of the sissy to the constitution of masculinity as a gender and male heterosexuality is more pronounced in all-male environments (prisons, boarding
schools) but not insignificant in the male population in general. This is in accord with Kosofsky-Sedgwick’s (1990) groundbreaking argument that homosexuality is necessary for the constitution of heterosexual masculinities.

In homosocial environments like the South, the effeminate male is target and object of both desire and disgust. The effeminate is both the subject of an often violent discipline, and the very means through which some men might test the limits of and transgress that discipline. In a very real way, the sissy is necessary for the constitution of heterosexual masculinity and the exploration of its boundaries. The sissy is, in fact, the boundary embodied. This is expressed in the script when Nate Bowman, an ostensibly heterosexual male character, expresses his disgust with Percival’s effeminacy by victimising and bullying him only later to find himself attracted to the very object of his disgust. In other Southern Gothic narratives, this attraction might have been refused or repressed so that Nate could be recuperated into heteronormative culture. In *The Tree*, however, Nate’s attraction to Percival is allowed to develop and the actions occurring as a result of that desire lead to the disassembling and reassembling of Nate’s sexual identity so that, at narrative close, he occupies a much more open position. The following excerpt (Episode Four: 372) depicts the moment that Nate Bowman, the supposedly heterosexual character of the script, encounters the idea that he might be able to occupy a more open sexual subject position:

NATE
Look Percy, I… I just don’t know if this is me…. If I’m the kind of guy who...

PERCIVAL
Climbs in another man’s window in the middle of the night?

NATE
Yeah.
PERCIVAL
Well, I don’t know you very well, but I do know one thing for certain...

Nate’s interest is piqued.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
In this house, and in my room, you can be any kind of man you want to be. It doesn’t matter who you are outside, in this place, you can be whoever you want.

The sexual dynamic unique to homosocial cultures places the effeminate in a paradoxical position — one in which they are both oppressed and, in a limited way, empowered. In the sexual economy of homosocial (and especially all-male) environments, the sissy has significant capital, principally in the form of the pleasure they can provide.

Unfortunately, hierarchies in homosocial environments often respond to this problem of effeminate empowerment, which constitutes a challenge to the “normal” gender order, with techniques of violence and sadism. Many homosocial environments are governed by intimidation and force. This violence is often designed specifically to ensure that the body of the effeminate is treated as a mere resource to be plundered. The bodies and pleasures of sissies are colonised by the homosocial male hegemony. Despite this, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which effeminate men use this sexual dynamic in their own favour, much as post-feminist women might argue that their sexual attractiveness to men can be used to empower themselves. In some instances, even in the South, it might be possible for effeminate males to use their own sexual capital to empower themselves. The Tree explores that possibility. Having said that, an overt political act is beyond the character of Percival, however he manages to empower himself in other, more subtle ways. There is a scene in the last
episode of *The Tree* (Episode Four: 371) in which it becomes clear that Percival is more than a mere object of disgust, he is an object of desire as well. The scene features Percival and Nate Bowman, who has climbed in through Percival’s bedroom window in the middle of the night. We first meet Nate Bowman in Episode One, in a scene in which he and another man are tormenting Percival, making fun of the way he walks and speaks. In this scene, Nate has crept into Percival’s bedroom on the pretence of warning him that some of the townsmen are on the verge of doing something terrible to him. Thus, the following scene comes as something of a surprise:

NATE
I like you Percy, always have. Ever since I first laid eyes on you years ago... You make it hard for a feller though...

PERCIVAL
Making it hard for fellers is what I do best...

Nate’s upper body jerks back in shock at this very forward comment, as if he’s been struck. But he pauses only a second before he responds.

NATE
There you go again. Can't you have any decorum at all?

PERCIVAL
No, I’m afraid not. Besides, “decorum” is a strange word for a feller like you to use. Could it be there's more to you than meets the eye?

PERCIVAL
(meekly)
A whole lot more, if you're lookin'.

PERCIVAL
I am looking.
As these examples and the discussion above show, *The Tree* constructs the effeminate subject in a way that places him at the centre of the narrative, rather than at the margin. It also resists recuperation of marginal characters back into a heteronormative discourse and allows them to revel in their marginality. The script’s trajectory and conclusion produce a discursive space in which liminal masculinity survives despite the aggressive war against effeminate males (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1994) that the narrative documents and resists. Percival has used the desire that normative men feel for him to ameliorate, and perhaps even overturn, the uneven power relations of hegemonic masculinity that positions him as little more than an object in a sexual power play.

**Of Time and Dreams and Ghosts**

Although this chapter has mainly focussed on how queer theory has informed shifts in the narrative trajectory of the creative artefact, specifically in relation to the rewriting of the liminal gender of effeminacy, my scriptwriting practice was informed by Queer Theory in a number of other ways that are worthy of brief discussion. The principle focus of this project has been to investigate how shifts in understandings of subjectivity (especially in relation to gender and sexuality) might impact on writing practice and pedagogy and how these understandings of subjectivity might be expressed in creative form. Even so, one of my concerns has always been to produce a creative artefact that facilitated, for those who engaged with it, a certain affective experience, a queer affective experience. As the research process progressed it became clear that there were certain aspects of scriptwriting conventions themselves—other than changes in narrative trajectory and the privileging of queer characters—that might help in bringing to the script a kind of “queer affective charge”
(Chen 2012). The conventions that specifically interested me were the flashback, the voice over and the dream sequence.

The flashback and voice over both interested me because they enabled a refiguring of notions of time. Recent Queer Theory has suggested that time can be understood differently to the linear, synchronous notions of time found in heteronormative discourse (Freeman 2010; Edelman 2004). Freeman (2010) argues that the privileging of temporal gaps and narrative detours in creative artefacts can bring the past into meaningful and transformative relation with the present. Freeman (2010) calls these strategies “queer asynchronies”. In this way, flashbacks can be seen to disrupt the notion of linear time and of discrete, stable moments. When used in a certain way, flashbacks can disturb the normative notion that time flows always and inevitably in one direction and can abrade the boundaries between timeframes. Furthermore, flashbacks allow narrative elements from one timeframe to seep into another. Through the flashback, the past can speak to the future and, queerly, the future can also speak to and inform the past. With a flashback, meaning can be added to a moment or scene by exposing it to and connecting it with other moments, other times, in an asynchronous, non-linear fashion. In this way, moments or scenes far removed in history, space and culture can inform and alter each other. In *The Tree*, flashbacks are used to privilege narrative detours and queer asynchronies in a way that, it is hoped, might facilitate a greater queer affective experience for the reader/viewer. Voice over was used to achieve much the same thing, to bring a voice from the present or future to bear on the past.

The figure of the ghost was also used to displace notions of time and space. The ghost of *The Tree* blurs the boundaries between the past and present, between life and death.
The ghost occupies a border space in-between existence as we know it and the non-existence that can never be known. That is, the spectral figure occupies a space between the intelligible and the unintelligible. The ghost or spectre also troubles the division between life and death, it occupies a queer position in-between the clearly living and the utterly dead; between the breathing body and the rotting corpse. This echoes the idea that ‘queer desire punctures the life/death and generative/destructive bipolarities that enclose the heterosexist notion of being’ (Case 1997: 384). As such, the ghost is a rupture (and a contact point) between the natural and the unnatural, the normal and the abnormal, the wholesome and the abject, the normative and the queer. In this sense, the ghost is akin to the queer subject who also occupies in-between spaces or borderlands (Anzaldua 1987).

Dream sequences can be another method of enhancing the queer affect of a creative text. Dream sequences are used in *The Tree* to displace the notion of the subject as a singular or isolated entity—an isolated mind (Stolorow & Atwood 1992)—and to point to the notion of intersubjectivity. The dream sequences in *The Tree* are intuitive in nature and suggest that on some level the subject is interconnected with many other subjects; that subject positions are not separate and closed but rather open and seep into each other. This is not merely reproducing the idea of the soul or of an essential humanity but rather suggests that there are non-verbal (perhaps affective) routes to knowing that connect subjects in ways that are outside of, or beneath, routine communication and mentation. All of these elements—the flashback, voice over, dream sequence and the figure of the ghost—contribute to the queer qualities of *The Tree*. By privileging temporal gaps and narrative detours in *The Tree*, in other words by foregrounding “queer asynchronies”, a text was produced that is more likely to facilitate a queer affective experience.
Summary

This chapter discusses effeminacy as a liminal gender and how effeminacy was explored in a Queer Practice-Led Research process. This discussion outlined how understandings concerning sexual and gender difference as performance were produced through reflexivity and (simultaneously) in the performative act of writing. The chapter also describes how the practice of Queer Writing (or Écriture Queer) produced knowledge concerning effeminacy as a liminal masculinity that has the potential to disrupt masculinity and femininity simultaneously. These new understandings have been represented symbolically in the miniseries script *The Tree*.

Finally, I discussed how writing, in that it produces discourse, is a process through which subjectivities are constructed and disseminated. Thus, the production of a narrative such as *The Tree*—that presents and describes performative genders, sexualities and identities—is a highly appropriate methodology for exploring performativity itself. It was shown that these artefacts can then act as triggers for an undoing of gender and reformation of subjectivity within a queer becoming.
Chapter 10: Conclusion

In conclusion, this exegesis is the critical component of a research project that explores confluences between subjectivity, the practices of writing and critical reading and the teaching of Creative Writing. In particular, the exegesis discussed the ways notions of subjectivity impact on writing practice and how writing practice can be reframed as an ethics of the self or a queer becoming. A further key element of the project was how notions of subjectivity impact on the reading and writing of what has been described as the *abject genderqueer*, which is how I have been describing sissy and tomboy characters from the Southern Gothic genre.

The exegesis outlined the methodologies and theories used in the project, namely an application of a Queer Practice-Led Research approach that incorporated an analysis informed by a range of disciplines and theoretical frameworks including Poststructural theory, Queer theory and research from the discipline of psychology. This approach has been defined as a critical and performative bricolage.

Throughout the exegesis I suggested that the way we construct “self” or subjectivity influences both the way we write and read and the way we teach creative writing. Our subjectivities deeply inform and interact with our creative practice, our research and our sense of ourselves, which is itself arrived at through the practice of reflexivity. In particular, it was argued that the way we construct our own subjectivity influences how we construct (or read and write) the Other and our relationship to that Other, in this case the *abject genderqueer*, the effeminate male, the sissy. I would also posit that in discourse the Other—in this case the *abject genderqueer* of the Southern Gothic genre—is always important to the constitution of subjectivity, its own and that of its
heteronormative antagonist. I would further suggest that in some environments the
*abject genderqueer*, the effeminate sissy, plays a generative role in both masculinity
and male heterosexuality. This has been made quite clear by the discussion
undertaken throughout the exegesis.

A discussion about the fact that exposure to non-normative perspectives on gender
and sexual subjectivity can “undo” one’s personhood, and facilitate the emergence of
a new subjectivity, was also undertaken. This discussion focussed on representations
of the *abject genderqueer* in literature and cinema, which was described as a figure or
character carrying marks of abjection; such as sexual and gender difference. It was
proposed that the abject genderqueer of much discourse, which often faces an
unhappy ending at narrative close, operates as a similitude of actual queer people. The
exegesis suggested that (re)written narratives featuring such characters might act as
triggers in an ongoing queer becoming that could lead to the constitution of new
(queer) subjectivities. This process of the undoing and re-making of the self or
identity relies on the notion that something outside of subjectivity figures prominently
in the making of the self. The subjectivity of others, cultural artefacts and a wide
range of discourses all play a part in constituting our subjectivities. In other words,
subjectivity is always really intersubjectivity. In this project, the “something outside”
of the subject that provoked shifts or rewritings of the self was writing practice
informed by Queer Theory.

This queer becoming occurs in the context of the affective experience of
reading/viewing and also writing texts. I noted how the creative artefacts of Queer
PLR can be seen to disseminate knowledge in the context of creative narratives. When
readers or audiences directly experience these narratives they are engaging with an
alternative (and affective) way of coming to understand the themes or issues investigated in the text. Affective experiences are not merely ways of encountering a thing but also ways of knowing a thing. Affect is a form of knowledge.

The exegesis showed how Queer PLR practitioners—through the application of the practice of reflexivity in the context of research, writing and self-bricolage—can alter and/or realign their subjectivities. This is achieved by applying Queer Theory as a way of life. The re-making of my own subjectivity was undertaken in the context of an exploration of the notion of effeminacy as a liminal masculinity which, I proposed, contains considerable discursive potency. Specifically, I suggested that effeminacy’s potency relates to the fact that it simultaneously disrupts both masculinity and femininity.

At the end of this project I can say with certainty that I have moved into a more open subject position, that my sense of my gender in particular has been undone and remade. At the outset of the project I had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with my past, particularly my effeminate boyhood. As a child, I was mercilessly tormented for being a sissy. At the close of this project my relationship to that past, and my current engagement with it, has changed. My current position is one in which I embrace and celebrate the gender non-conformity of my youth and now actively resist the pressure to abide by the strictures of masculinity as narrowly defined by heteronormative discourse. My practice of self-bricolage has enabled me to see and describe myself as an effeminate genderqueer. That shift in perception has reinvigorated the way I understand and live gender and has transformed my subjectivity in subtle, though significant ways.
This whole exploration of effeminacy was focussed on the Southern Gothic genre of literature, cinema and television and deeply informed the writing of *The Tree*, the miniseries script. In this exegesis, discussions were undertaken to theoretically position or contextualise the production (writing) of the original text. That text, *The Tree*, a miniseries script of the Southern Gothic genre, features alternative notions of subjectivity and/or gender and sexuality. *The Tree* queers the Southern Gothic genre by changing the narrative trajectory for its queer characters. Specifically, *The Tree* features (and privileges) the sissy and the tomboy. I discussed throughout the exegesis that *The Tree* demonstrates how the *abject genderqueer* (particularly the effeminate man or sissy) can be (re)written in a way that foregrounds alternative notions of sexuality, gender and subjectivity and that facilitates more open narrative trajectories. Therefore, *The Tree* has a happy ending for the *abject genderqueer* and somewhat unhappy ending for their antagonists. At the close of *The Tree*, the effeminate character of Percival Huckstep and his tomboy friend Alison Mayflower have formed a kind of queer (non-normative) family and their narrative trajectories remain open to possibility.

The exegesis also describes the ways that the script was queered by the deliberate inclusion of certain stylistic elements. Specifically, slippages in time and place through the use of flashbacks, dream sequences and voice over were used to disrupt certain normative notions about time, the nature of subjects and the divisions between the natural and the unnatural. The notion of linear time, with its divisions between past, present and future, was disrupted by targeted use of flashbacks. The notion of discrete “isolated” subjects was subtly undermined by the use of dream sequences. The use of spectral figures and motifs from voodoo were used to trouble and abrade the boundaries between the normal and abnormal, the wholesome and the abject.
Significantly, the exegesis articulated that a Queer PLR is highly suitable for demonstrating that shifts in subjectivity—triggered by practice and/or engagement with queer cultural artefacts—constitutes an affective way of knowing and an alternative route to knowledge production. At the heart of this alternate route to knowledge production is writing practice applied as a kind of performative bricolage. Having said that, an engagement with (or reading/viewing) of creative works that are produced within a Queer PLR also constitutes a pathway to knowledge. The experience of creative works foregrounding the performativity of gender and subjectivities is a kind of embodied (or affective) knowing. With this in mind, the miniseries script that constitutes the creative component of this project can be seen to be a contribution to an ongoing queer becoming.
End Notes


2 As all of the relevant data collected in the journal is included in this exegesis, and for the sake of brevity, the journal was not included as part of the PhD submission.

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THE TREE

A FOUR PART TELEVISION MINISERIES

Written by

Dallas John Baker
THE TREE

SETTING
The Tree Miniseries is set in the state of Georgia USA, mostly in 1967. The fictional town, Perseverance Georgia, in which the action occurs, was once a hub serving a number of large plantations. The town is now largely abandoned. Those inhabitants who remain are mostly African-Americans, except for a few Caucasians who are descended from once powerful plantation families now in decline. There is a sense that Perseverance has become a “colored” town.

List of Locations:

The Perseverance Bus Depot and gas station
Verna’s Store
The cemetery by the pond
Percival’s dilapidated plantation house
The Perseverance jailhouse
Judge Junior’s mansion
Ruth’s Swampwoods shack
Perseverance’s main street
The Perseverance library
Countryside around Perseverance
The swamp

TIMELINE
The majority of the teleplay is set in 1967, with flashbacks (all in black & white) to 1928. There is also one flashback to Percival’s childhood in the 1940s.
ALISON MAYFLOWER – A young Southern Tomboy. Alison is twelve years old and is recently orphaned and discovers that she is not what she thought she was. She is searching for a sense of belonging.

VERNA HOBB – An African-American woman in her late 50s who is strongly independent. She owns the local ‘colored store’ and is the only colored woman in Perseverance Georgia who owns a car. She is Alison’s grandmother, but has never seen Alison before. She meets Alison in the first scenes of the teleplay.

HENRIETTA – A surly African-American woman who is in her mid 40s. She loves food and dressing too young for her age. She is judgmental and gossipy, both symptoms of her loneliness. She is Verna’s closest friend.

PERCIVAL HUCKSTEP – A white Southern eccentric, Percival is the town ‘sissy’. He is in his mid 30s. He is descended from Southern aristocracy, though any wealth and prestige he might have inherited has long since vanished. He feels out of place in his own hometown and is the focus of a lot of discrimination. He stays clear of the white inhabitants who abuse him and has only minimal contact with African American people who are, on the whole, more tolerant.

NATE BOWMAN – Nate is from Perseverance’s only Jewish family, though he hides his Jewish identity from the townsfolk. He is strikingly handsome. He has an ambiguous identity and, in the past, has been one of Percival’s main tormentors.
RUTH JAMES - An African-American voodoo practitioner and hermit. She is in her late forties and wears her hair in long dreadlocks. She is Eliza’s sister and is bent on revenge and justice for her sister’s murder.

THE MINOR CHARACTERS

NARRATOR - The narrator is Alison Mayflower looking back at the events of her childhood at forty-five years of age.

ELIZA JAMES - An African-American girl of about 14 years old. She is Ruth’s older sister.

BLONDE MAN - In his mid-twenties, he is nervous and dangerous looking. He is one of Eliza’s attackers.

DARK-HAIRED MAN - In his mid-twenties, he is slicked back black hair. He is one of Eliza’s attackers.

JOHN JAMES - He is Ruth’s uncle, a young African-American man of about 25.

SHERIFF TOMBS - a large, overweight man in his late fifties. He is the sheriff of Perseverance in 1928.

DEPUTY DEAN MADDOX - Also, in his mid-twenties, he is one of the deputy sheriffs of Perseverance in 1928. He is the father of Jim Maddox who is the sheriff in 1967.

Simon Donnelly - A young man in his early 20s. A good looking redneck, he is one of Percival’s main tormentors. He bears a striking resemblance to Blonde Man.
JUPITER JACOBS – A dignified African-American gentleman in his late fifties. He is in love with Verna Hobb.

MR. BURGHOFFER – A white farmer in his fifties. He is a crude and aggressive man.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX – He is in his late forties and is the current Sheriff of Perseverance Georgia. He is a virulent racist.

DEPUTY BOB BEAUFORT – In his late twenties, he is the current Deputy Sheriff of Perseverance.

JUDGE CUTTER/JUDGE JUNIOR – In his early forties, he is the local magistrate.

PRETTY MAID – A beautiful young African-American woman, she works for Judge Junior.

DOCTOR STORM – a “root doctor” or voodoo priest. He teaches Ruth James the art of voodoo.

SCRUFFY BOY – a white boy of about eight years old who falls victim to Sheriff Maddox’s cruelty.
FADE IN:

1. EXTERNAL. COUNTRY ROAD, ESTABLISHING – DAY (B&W)

In stark black and white and from a bird’s eye view, a country road snakes through a rural area in Georgia. The road follows a river valley, sometimes dipping into dark wooded gullies. In the distance, a humble farmhouse sits in amongst cultivated fields. Plumes of white smoke rise from its chimney. Brilliant white sheets hang on a line out back.

CUT TO:

2. EXTERNAL. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY (B&W)

Two young African-American girls walk along the road, holding hands and singing a nonsense song. They are sisters. The older, ELIZA, is about 14 years old. Her YOUNGER SISTER is only 8. They laugh as they sing the nonsense song and swing their hands together. They look into the distance to the farmhouse. This is home. The younger girl’s eyes light up.

YOUNGER SISTER
Look Eliza, mamma’s bakin’!
What d’ya think she’s makin’,
pie or just plain ol’ biscuits again?

ELIZA
It’s ’sposed to be a surprise
but..., Mamma’s makin’ pecan
pie, to celebrate your report
card.

YOUNGER SISTER
No kiddin’? She’s makin’ a
whole pie for me?
ELIZA

No kiddin’.

The younger girl resumes walking, at a faster pace, a huge smile on her face.

YOUNGER SISTER

Oh, hurry Eliza! I can already taste that pie!

The girls pick up their pace and walk down into a wooded gully. They are immediately enfolded in shade. The road runs for some way among the trees, bending to the left so that, if they were to look back, they would not be able to see very far.

CUT TO:

3. EXTERNAL. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY, CONTINUOUS (B&W)

A beat up 1920’s pickup truck coasts to a stop at the top of the rise above the wooded gully. ELIZA and her YOUNGER SISTER do not see it. Two men are in the cab, with a young boy of about 8 years old squeezed in between them. The driver, the DARK-HAIRED MAN, has distinctive black hair slicked back tight against his scalp. The other, the BLONDE MAN is nervous looking. The boy has jet black hair, like his father who is the driver of the truck. The truck slowly follows the young girls, who are oblivious to its presence.

The girls continue singing and swinging their hands together. They come to an even darker wooded area, huge oak trees loom overhead, dripping in Spanish Moss. There is very little sunlight now.

As soon as the girls reach this darker place, the truck picks up speed. The girls hear it and turn to see it as it comes around a bend into view. The girls look at each other nervously and pick up their own pace.

The truck accelerates even more. It is hurtling towards the girls. They turn again to see the truck speeding towards them.

ELIZA

Run!
The girls bolt down the road. The truck accelerates even more. It reaches them quickly and then veers to the side and passes them. The girls stop still. The truck stops as well, blocking their path home.

The two men get out of the truck. The boy stays where he is. He looks at the younger sister and she looks back at him. A glint of light draws her eyes to his throat. The boy is wearing a silver cross with a star in the centre around his neck. The boy then looks into Eliza’s eyes, and she looks back into his. Eliza sees in the anxiety on the boy’s face something of the men’s intentions.

ELIZA (CONT’D)
Run quick! Run!

Both girls dash into the woods. The men pursue. Soon, the girls are separated because of the thickness of the undergrowth and trees. The men continue to close on ELIZA.

The younger girl, still believing that she is being pursued, keeps running, as fast as her short legs will carry her.

Eliza runs for her life. The men are gaining on her, hooting and hollering.

SMASH CUT
TO:

4. EXTERNAL. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY, CONTINUOUS (B&W)

The YOUNGER SISTER breaks out of the woods into a field. The small unassuming farmhouse is at the other side of the open space; white smoke still drifting lazily up to the sky from its chimney. The younger girl breaks into a full run towards home.

SMASH CUT
TO:

5. EXTERNAL. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY, CONTINUOUS (B&W)

ELIZA falls. She grabs hold of a tree and drags herself up again. She turns to face her pursuers. The men reach her, puffing and panting and grinning menacingly.
BLACK HAIR MAN
(to Blonde Man)
Go back an’ git me son. I’ll watch her ’till yer git back.

The BLONDE MAN looks uncertain, unsure what to do.

DARK-HAIRED MAN
(CONT)
That’s what we brung the boy out for ain’t it? To learn him how ta hunt niggers?

The Blonde Man turns and runs back in the direction of the road. The DARK-HAIRED MAN sneers, leering at ELIZA, and pulls a hunting knife out of a holster at his hip. The blade flashes in the only beam of sunlight breaking through the canopy overhead. He turns the knife threateningly, and it flashes in the sunlight again.

FADE TO BLACK

[AD BREAK]

TITLE UP: GEORGIA, 1967

FADE IN:

6. I/E. A BUS, MOVING – DAY

In the middle of nowhere, a nowhere not unlike every other nowhere in the South, an old bus comes into view. The bus is an ageing silver chariot of the 1950’s.

The silver bus dissects the wooded fields and farmland of rural Georgia.

A young girl of about 12, ALISON MAYFLOWER, sits by a window. She looks weary and overwhelmed. Her hair is boyishly cut and she wears a pair of trousers and an ill-fitting shirt.

NARRATOR (V.O)
I never knew my mother. Never even seen a picture of her. She died giving birth to me. After that my daddy moved us to Savannah.
She holds a crumpled photograph in her hand. The photograph shows a slightly defeated looking man holding a baby girl. This is ALISON’S FATHER. As Alison gazes at the photograph, she remembers.

CUT TO:

7. EXT. SAVANNAH HOUSE, ESTABLISHING – FLASHBACK, NIGHT

A small Southern house amidst large trees adorned with Spanish moss. The yard is untidy and dark. A night-bird calls in the distance.

A single window of the house is lit with lamp-light and the flickering light of a black and white television.

CUT TO:

8. INT. HOUSE, BEDROOM – FLASHBACK, NIGHT (DREAM)

An open coffin sits in the centre of a modest living room. ALISON is walking towards it, her face tight with anxiety. As she approaches, she sees that a man is laid out in the coffin; a brown-haired man in a dark suit. Alison pauses with fear, and then continues toward the coffin. When she reaches it she looks inside and sees who it contains. It is ALISON’s FATHER; pale, dead and motionless. Suddenly his eyes open and Alison screams.

CUT TO:

9. INT. HOUSE, BEDROOM – FLASHBACK, NIGHT (DREAM)

ALISON wakes with a fright in her bedroom. White noise from the television is coming in from beyond a door that is ajar. Alison looks toward the door, then hesitantly throws back the covers and slowly climbs out of bed.

10. INT. HOUSE, SITTING ROOM – FLASHBACK, NIGHT

ALISON enters a modest living room, the same one in her dream, still wearing her pajamas and rubbing her eyes. The furniture is faded and none of it matches. The room is untidy, newspapers and clothes ornament the couch and chairs. The room is dimly lit by an ugly standing lamp. The television is on, but only white fuzz is on the screen.
Alison goes over to the back of an armchair where the slumped head of a man, ALISON's FATHER, is visible. Alison’s face takes on an expression halfway between amusement and exasperation which shows that she assumes that her father has fallen asleep in front of the TV.

Slowly, Alison moves around to the front of the chair. She shakes her father's shoulder in an attempt to wake him. He doesn't move. Her face turns from one of exasperation to one of trepidation.

Alison lifts her father's head and looks into his eyes. They are wide open and still. He's dead. Alison opens her mouth and screams.

CUT TO:

11. I/E. A BUS, MOVING – DAY

On the bus, still looking out the window, ALISON shakes the memory of finding her father dead out of her head, wipes a solitary tear from beneath her eyes. She looks back down at the crumpled photograph of her father. She stashes the crumpled photograph into her pocket and looks back out the bus window to watch the fields rolling by outside.

NARRATOR (V.O)
When my Daddy died from his broken heart I was sent to live with my Grandmother, on my mother's side. She was my only family. I never met her, not even once. I never met anyone on my mother's side of the family. Not an aunt, not a cousin, nothin'.

CUT TO:

12. EXT. A BUS, MOVING – DAY

The bus turns down a narrower, dustier road and heads towards a ramshackle gas station and bus depot in the distance. As the bus approaches the depot, it slows and pulls into the wide gravel area beside the gas station.

CUT TO:
13. I/E. BUS, STOPPED AT BUS STATION - DAY

On the bus, once it has come to a stop at the depot, ALISON gets out of her seat and heads down the aisle towards the door. She looks weary and nervous.

NARRATOR (V.O)
Now, I’ll let you in on a secret…. Sometimes I dream things before they happen. But I never dreamed anything like what was about to happen when I got off that bus.

CUT TO:

14. EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Two African-American women, middle-aged, smartly dressed, VERNA and HENRIETTA, are waiting for ALISON. They are standing by a red 1955 Buick which is, despite its age, in perfect condition. They watch as various people disembark from the bus. When Alison gets off the bus they look puzzled, then surprised.

VERNA
That can't be her?

HENRIETTA
Honey, I don't mean to alarm you but... that child is white! And I thought you said you was getting a girl?

VERNA
That's what I thought. Maybe I read the letter wrong.

Alison is looking around, clearly searching for her grandmother, whom she has never seen.

HENRIETTA
(to VERNA)
Well go on, go and get the child.

Verna walks towards Alison. Alison sees her coming but then looks in another direction, still searching.

VERNA
Alison?
ALISON
Uh-huh. Did my grandma send you?

VERNA
Honey... I think I am your grandmother.

Alison looks taken aback.

Verna's face is a map of discomfort.

Henrietta, wanting to end the discomfort, walks up beside Verna and extends her hand to Alison.

HENRIETTA
Hello little girl, I'm Henrietta.

Henrietta says the word “girl” with a tone of disbelief. As a result, Alison shakes Henrietta's hand somewhat reluctantly; mainly in order not to seem rude. However, Alison doesn’t look into Henrietta’s face, she just continues to stare at Verna.

ALISON
There must be a mistake. You can't be my grandmother.

VERNA
It seems there has been a mistake...

HENRIETTA
What makes you think that? Can't you see the family resemblance?

Verna rolls her eyes and ignores Henrietta.

VERNA
Let's see if we can clear this up. What was your father's name honey?

ALISON
Reginald Mayflower.
HENRIETTA
Was that his name? Sounds like
a show name to me, like Beulah
the Bearded Lady, you know
that one we seen at Augusta
that time...

Verna throws Henrietta a cold stare. Henrietta ceases to
talk immediately.

VERNA
It seems there's no mistake
honey. I am your grandmother,
your mamma's mamma.

ALISON
But, you're black...

HENRIETTA
(with sarcasm)
Well, no one can say she ain't
smart.

VERNA
Hasn't anyone ever told you
your mamma was a negro?

By the look on Alison's face, the answer is clearly no.

VERNA (CONT'D)
You ain't never seen a picture
of your mamma or met no-one
who knew her?

ALISON
No... I don't understand...

HENRIETTA
It's simple honey, your mamma
was a negro, fair skinned it's
true, but a negro none the
less.

VERNA
I never met your daddy but
judging by your skin I'm
guessing he was a white man?

HENRIETTA
A very white man.

Verna glares at Henrietta.
Alison nods in the affirmative. She is in shock.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
Oh dear lord, that daughter of yours Verna Hobb...

VERNA
Be quiet Henrietta.

All three stand silently at the bus depot. Each one of them is not sure what to do.

Finally, regaining her senses, Verna gently takes Alison's bags and gestures for Alison to follow her to the car. After a moment, Alison begins to follow and the three of them get into the red Buick.

CUT TO:

15. I/E. CAR – DAY

In the red Buick, on its way through Perseverance, Georgia. Verna drives while Henrietta is in the front passenger seat. Alison, in the back, sits quietly.

Alison looks out the window at the passing scenery of a small town. Every face that goes by the window is black. Alison's face is a little pale and anxious.

HENRIETTA
I sure do loves drivin'.
There's nothin' better. The fresh air. All the folks passin'-by lookin' and thinkin' "look at that so-phisti-cated lady travelling in that vehicle". It makes you feel so... superior....

Henrietta waves regally at a group of severe looking African-American women gathered outside a weatherboard church.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
Yes indeed, I sure do loves drivin'.

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VERNA
It's sitting on your backside that you love Henrietta. In case you haven't noticed it's me that's doing all the driving. Besides, you don't even got a license.

HENRIETTA
I can't be blamed for the prejudice of the County road authorities. I tried to get me a license to drive but they refused due to their racial bigotries.

VERNA
They refused because you nearly ran over old man Burghoffer's dog an' you know it.

HENRIETTA
Oh, that Lulabell is nothin' but trouble. Everyone knows she hates Negroes. She put herself right in the middle of the road to sabotage my drivin' test...

Just then a squeaky voice comes from the back seat.

ALISON
Why does she hate Negroes?

HENRIETTA
Same reason anybody does - plain stupidity. An' that dog's as stupid as they come. She sure is mean though...

ALISON
Will she hate me?

There is a tense silence as Verna and Henrietta take in what Alison is really asking.

VERNA
No Alison she won't. Henrietta's just being dramatic.
HENRIETTA
Just bein' dramatic! You wouldn't be sayin' that if you seen the way that dog looked at me after I swerved off the road during my test. I swear, she looked like the devil hisself.

ALISON
But, how would she even know, I mean, I don't look...

HENRIETTA
Oh, she'll know...

Verna interrupts Henrietta and indicates with her eyes that she should cease this line of conversation.

VERNA
That's enough now. Let's just enjoy the ride home.

Alison resumes looking out the window. She clasps the bottom of her shirt and rolls her hands in it, as if her fingers were gophers looking for a hole to hide in. She seems a little more worried than before.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

16. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE, ESTABLISHING - DAY

The red Buick meanders along a dirt road. This part of Perseverance is less populated. Rolling fields stretch into the distance. At the border of the fields, there are woods. A river moves slowly over pebbles and stones at the wood's edge. There is a sense of pastoral peace and rural beauty.

CUT TO:

17. EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY, CONTINUOUS

As the car continues towards an old bridge a figure on the roadside just over the bridge comes into view. It is an African-American woman with long dreadlocked hair. She is strangely dressed with an overly large men's fedora, an ankle-length black dress and big men's working boots.
As the Buick begins to cross the bridge, with that strange sound of tires rolling over loose timbers, ALISON sees the woman ahead. Her brow creases with concern — what kind of strange woman is this?

The woman is RUTH JAMES. She ambles by the side of the road with an old potato sack. She is collecting herbs and other wild plants from the roadside by the bridge. After stooping to pluck a bunch of wildflowers, she straightens up and looks into the oncoming car. She looks straight into Alison’s eyes.

ALISON

Who is that?

HENRIETTA

That’s Perseverance Georgia’s very own voodoo witch. Her name is Ruth.

As the car draws nearer to the strange looking woman, she looms large in the windscreen.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)

(hushed)

Don’t look her in the eyes child, she might hex you.

Alison’s neck tenses, her face pales even more, her eyes widen and then, almost convulsively, she clamps her hands over her eyes.

VERNA

Henrietta! Stop scaring the child with nonsense. Can’t you see she’s scared enough already!

Verna looks into Alison’s face via the rear-view mirror and speaks to her a little over her shoulder.

VERNA (CONT’D)

Don’t worry Alison, that’s only old Ruth. She’s harmless...

HENRIETTA

Harmless!? Don’t you remember when she hexed Ezekiel Jones? His lips swelled up an’ turned black as rotten sausages...

She turns to address Alison directly.
HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
He was tellin’ lies about ol’
Ruth an’ she found out...

VERNA
Henrietta! Hush!

HENRIETTA
What!? It’s true! I heard tell
his lips got so heavy his head
went all lopsided!

VERNA
(to Alison)
Don’t you listen to Henrietta.
She’s just superstitious...
Besides, there ain’t no such
thing as voodoo witches.

HENRIETTA
No such thing? But what about...

VERNA
Henrietta, if you so much as
utter another word I’ll hex
you myself.

Henrietta goes quiet. Alison turns and looks out the rear
window at the shrinking image of Ruth, who looks straight
back at Alison with unflinching eyes and what appears to
be a devilish smirk.

CUT TO:

18. EXT. Verna'S STORE, ESTABLISHING - DAY

On the outskirts of Perseverance Georgia sits Verna's
store, a small building with a covered porch. A flowering
vine grows over one wall, green leaves and white flowers
decorating a peeling sign that reads "Verna'S STORE NO
GAS". The store sits in a very tidy yard. Out the back, a
large tree throws shade over everything. Between the tree
and the house, a scuppernong (grape) arbor funnels a
light breeze.

CUT TO:
19. EXT. Verna's Store – Day

Verna carries Alison's bags towards the store from a tumbledown garage where the shining red Buick is now parked. She glances down at Alison who appears pale and frightened. Henrietta watches the two of them with some amusement. Verna's face is drawn tight; her downturned lips a closed seam that shows that she feels deep sympathy and compassion.

Verna
(to Alison)
I sure am sorry honey.

Alison looks up at her, blank faced, smiles meekly.

Alison
Sorry? Why?

Verna
I'm sorry that you are, that you've found out...

Henrietta
Verna Hobb! You ain't tellin' that child you're sorry she's black?! That child should be proud, like a noble African Queen...

Alison
But I've never been to Africa...

Henrietta
Makes no difference honey. I ain't been neither but I is still an African Queen.

Verna
How's the child supposed to be proud of what she don't know? And look at her, she looks more Gomer Pyle than African Queen to me...

Alison
You don't want me? You don't want me because I'm not black?

Verna and Henrietta's faces show that they are alarmed by Alison's question. Verna quickly kneels down in front of her and takes her by the shoulders.
VERNA
I am your grandmother. You’re my daughter's child. Of course I want you... if you want me as a grandmother?

ALISON
(sniffling)
...I suppose I don't really care that you're black. Besides, you're not that black.

Verna appears a bit shocked by this statement, however Henrietta simply looks amused. While Verna is immobile with shock Henrietta takes Alison by the hand and leads her into the store.

HENRIETTA
That's right child, Verna is practically Gomer Pyle herself.

FADEOUT.

20. EXT. Verna’s Store, ESTABLISHING – NIGHT

Verna's store at night. It seems an even smaller building at night. Its covered porch casts deep shadows over its signage and front door. Light shines from a number of its windows illuminating the flowering vine that grows over one wall. The vine looks somewhat less robust in the night as well and the store has a greater sense of decay and isolation.

CUT TO:

21. INT. Verna’s Store, Alison’s Bedroom – NIGHT

ALISON sits on the edge of her bed looking around. She appears uneasy in these strange surroundings. She looks around and out the window and then down at the photograph of her father. All these actions show clearly that she doesn’t want to stay here.

CUT TO:
22. INT. Verna’s Store, Kitchen - Night

Verna is by the stove. She is finishing making dinner. She has what seems like a dozen pots and pans on the boil. She gets two plates and serves up a little of each dish. It is refried ham, mashed potatoes, greens, okra and black-eyed peas.

Verna calls out to Alison:

Verna
Alison, come for supper child.

After a moment, Alison tentatively enters the room. Verna gestures for her to sit. She complies reluctantly. Verna puts the plate of food in front of her and sits opposite her at the table. Alison looks at the plate of steaming food and her face turns slightly red and then mean.

Alison
What do you call this?

Verna
I call it supper. What’s the matter with it?

Alison
I don’t eat this kind of thing. I ain’t a n….

Verna jerks to her feet and steps back.

Verna
(voice shaking)
Child, you weren’t going to use that word on your own kin?

Alison’s face softens, but only a little. She looks confused and angry.

Alison
I just don’t eat this kind of thing.

Verna
Well, what kind of thing would you like?

Alison thinks for a minute and then, as if it’s all finally become too much for her, tears start to roll down her face.
ALISON
I miss my daddy....

Verna’s face transforms into one of total sympathy. She moves to comfort Alison but the minute Alison senses her getting close she gets out of her seat and runs out of the kitchen in the direction of her bedroom.

Verna is left standing alone, the food going cold on the table.

CUT TO:

23. INT. ALISON’s BEDROOM – NIGHT

Alison leaps onto her bed and breaks into tears. After a moment, she pulls out the crumpled photograph of her father, continuing to cry. A few tears fall on the photograph. Alison wipes them away with a trembling hand.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

24. I/E. VERNA'S STORE, ESTABLISHING – DAY

It’s morning. In the early light the store gleams with neatness. The yard is tidy and inviting - the trees and shrubs are tended so that they show a kind of respectability of their own.

CUT TO:

25. I/E. VERNA'S STORE, PORCH – DAY

On the store's porch there are two benches. One either side of the door. On one, beneath a fading billboard displaying a Forties era Coca-Cola add with a voluptuous blonde bathing suit model, sit three young African-American girls, about five or six years old. All three girls have dreadlocked hair in pink ribbons and simple but very feminine dresses. Their feet are encased in perfect little black shoes. They are all sipping on cherry colas through pink straws.

On the other bench, beneath a smaller fading billboard of a Nineteen-Forties era baseball hero advertising shaving cream, sits ALISON in jeans and a faded blue t-shirt. Alison's feet, encased in worn canvas sneakers, fidget with each other.
The three girls stare unashamedly at Alison, taking in her faded clothes and scuffed shoes. Their faces show a mixture of curiosity and disbelief.

Alison looks increasingly uncomfortable and takes nervous gulps from a rather manly looking bottle of ginger beer.

CUT TO:

26. INT. Verna'S STORE, AT THE COUNTER - DAY

Verna watches Alison through the window. She looks concerned. She turns from Alison to the three little girls and back again.

Verna
(almost to herself)
Why aren't they playing with each other?

Henrietta
Prob'ly 'cause none of them colored girls know any white boy games.

Verna
What do you mean by that?

Henrietta
I don't mean to be harsh Verna but that child is... peculiar. She's a tomboy, that's what she is. And then there's her skin... it's as white as flour...

Verna
She can't do nothin' about her skin!

Henrietta
Well, it ain't gonna make her no friends 'round here, that's for sure.

Verna
What am I going to do? She looks miserable.
Henrietta

Ain't nothin' you can do. This ain't one of the things you can fix Verna Hobb. She'll either fit in or she won't.

As Verna watches, Alison gets up from her seat and moves into the yard. She goes over to a large tree, gently kicks its trunk, aimlessly looking for something to do. Every now and then, Alison glances over her shoulder towards the store. She is painfully aware that she's being watched by the three cherry cola girls on the porch bench.

Verna

It nearly breaks my heart to see her so.

Henrietta

There ain't no point worryin'. Little Spook Mayflower is just gonna have to sort herself out.

Verna turns to face Henrietta.

Verna

Why are you calling that child 'Spook'?

Henrietta

Because she's white as a ghost...

Verna

That's the meanest thing I ever heard!

Henrietta

No it ain't. All the other children already calling her that. If she claims the name for herself then it won't hurt her none when they use it against her.

Verna

You will never call that child 'Spook' again, you hear?

Henrietta

Course I hear. I ain't deaf.
Verna turns back to the window and continues watching Alison through the window, looking even more concerned.

FADEOUT.

27. EXT. Verna's Store, Establishing - Day

The sun rises over Verna's Store. Its gentle light enters into all the shady places in the garden and slowly creeps up onto the porch. A fluffy white cloud or two drifts across the morning sky. We get the sense of the passage of time.

CUT TO:

28. Ext. Green Field - Day, Dusk

A low afternoon sun sits on the hump of hills in the distance. Alison, carrying a stick, moves through tall grass passing the stick over the grass as she goes. She looks somewhat alone and out of place.

CUT TO:

29. Ext. Woods - Day, Early Morning

The sky is blue and the insects are making their summery noise. Alison sits on a log looking into the distance. She looks from trees and hills on the horizon to an African-American boy moving cows from pasture to pasture nearby. The boy moves in a deliberate yet graceful way. Alison watches the boy; she seems fascinated with the way he moves and goes about his chores as though he were born to do them.

Alison appears more at home in this place now, but still, something in her body, a slight stiffness in her shoulders, shows the residue of tension.

CUT TO:

30. Int. Verna's Store - Evening

Beneath the white light of a single bare light bulb, Alison watches as Verna tips large amounts of multi-colored sweets into their respective glass jars.
After a moment, Verna passes Alison a bag of sweets and encourages her to put them in their right place. Alison does so, looking happy to be included.

Out of the blue, Verna leans over and hugs Alison. Alison accepts the hug after only the briefest hesitation.

CUT TO:

31. EXT. VERNAL’S STORE – EVENING, CONTINUOUS

Outside, through the window, Verna and Alison can be seen as they continue stocking the shelves to the accompaniment of a symphony of insect noise.

CUT TO:

32. EXT. VERNAL’S STORE – DAY

The sun has risen over Verna's store, which sits solidly in its neat garden. A rooster crows nearby and morning birds sing their optimistic songs. The sun shines softly on the faded coca-cola sign on the porch, and slips through the window to light the jars of sweets and other good things behind the counter.

NARRATOR (V.O)
As time went on, I came to see my grandmother's store as a friendly wonderland – a ramshackle paradise of chocolate bars and soda pop...

33. INT. VERNAL’S STORE, BEDROOM/KITCHEN – DAY, CONTINUOUS

ALISON wakes from sleep to the smell of delicious cooking: coffee and eggs on the fry. She wanders out into the kitchen where Verna has prepared a splendid breakfast.

NARRATOR (V.O)
…but the greatest treasure was Gran herself, who I came to see as a kind and generous woman whose touch turned everything to gold...

Alison sits down and Verna places before her a large plate of eggs and bacon, grits and biscuits.
Before Alison begins to eat, she notices a small vase with a single pretty flower. It’s the kind of special touch that Verna adds to everything she does. Alison looks content and pleased and begins to eat. Verna continues cooking, watching over Alison and smiling.

CUT TO:

34. EXT. PASTURE BY VERNA’S STORE – DAY, DUSK

ALISON romps through the green grass in a pasture beside Verna’s Store. She is happy and smiling. Alison heads towards the store and, tapping trees in the yard with a stick as she passes, mounts the front steps with deliberation and a confidence that shows she feels much more at home now.

FADEOUT.

35. EXT. VERNA’S STORE – DAY

Early morning, ALISON, wearing her trademark t-shirt and jeans, sits on the front steps of Verna's Store watching with mild interest as VERNA rakes leaves.

As Alison watches Verna at work in the yard, a very dignified looking African-American man strolls slowly by the front gate, doffing his hat to Verna. He is JUPITER JACOBS. Verna nods perfunctorily but basically ignores him. He smiles politely at Alison and she, after checking that Verna isn’t watching, sticks her tongue out at him.

NARRATOR(V.O)
...Verna knew I was back to my old self when I started sassin’ and misbehavin’....

Jupiter Jacobs walks on, chuckling. After he has gone, Alison turns her attention back to VERNA.

ALISON
Who is that old man? I’ve seen him walk by here must be a dozen times, always dressed like he’s goin’ to church. Is he crazy or somethin’?

VERNA
That’s Jupiter Jacobs...
ALISON
Jupiter! Lord! What a name! That old man must be nuts!

VERNA
Don’t you be disrespectful! [softening] Besides, he ain’t so old, he’s about the same age as me. And no, he ain’t crazy... well, maybe he is a little....

ALISON
How’s he a little crazy?

VERNA
He’s got it into his head that if he walks by here often enough he might get an invitation into my kitchen... Well, he can walk by my gate a million times if he wants, I ain’t askin’ him in.

ALISON
[smirking] Does he love you?

VERNA
He’s got it in his head that he does, but I ain’t entertainin’ none of that foolishness.

ALISON
Why not? Don’t you like him? Isn’t he nice?

VERNA
Sure he’s nice, an’ I like him well enough. He’s one of the most decent men I ever met. But I already had me a husband, and buried him too, and one’s more than enough for anyone.

ALISON
That’s nuts! You can have a hundred husbands if you want ’em.
VERNA
Alison! Don’t say such heathen things, ‘specially not right out in the open in my front yard!

Alison smirks, clearly shamelessly unrepentant for her heathen thoughts.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

36. EXT. Verna's Store – Day

Outside her store, Verna has returned to raking the yard. After just a moment’s more work, she discovers a chocolate wrapper hidden beneath a pile of leaves, weighed down by twigs and rocks. Verna looks disconcerted for a moment - what’s this wrapper doing here? - but then amused.

NARRATOR (V.O)
Verna soon put a system into place to keep me in line. When I'd done something I shouldn't have, she exacted a kind of tax which she called "The Tithe Of Forgiveness": three full kisses followed by two hugs.

Verna glances over to where her granddaughter sits and smiles a somewhat knowing smile.

VERNA
Alison, come here and look at this. There's a strange kind of flower growing here beneath this tree.

ALISON
(interested)
What kind of flower?

VERNA
Well come and have a look.
Alison gets up and goes over to see. When she reaches Verna, she sees the wrapper and realizes what's happening. She looks guilty.

VERNA (CONT'D)
Alison Mayflower, did you steal a chocolate bar from my store and eat it and then cover up the crime by burying the wrapper here in my yard like some dead animal?

Alison's face shows that she sees no point in lying. Verna has a kind of clear vision that cuts through any attempt at deception.

ALISON
Uh-huh.

VERNA
Don't I give you enough good things to eat?

ALISON
Uh-huh, but sometimes it's not good things that I feel like...

VERNA
(interrupting)
Stealing and sneaking do not please those who love you... I'm going to have to tax you for this.

Alison rolls her eyes, a look of embarrassment rising on her face.

VERNA (CONT'D)
Come on then. Pay me my tax.

Alison leans in to her grandmother and plants a kiss on her cheek.

VERNA (CONT'D)
(counting)
One.

Alison delivers the other two kisses with Verna diligently keeping count.

VERNA (CONT'D)
Now my hugs.
Alison delivers the first hug.

VERNA (CONT'D)  
(counting)  
One.

Alison delivers the second hug.

ALISON  
There, that's two.

Alison goes to pull away but Verna holds on to her.

VERNA  
I will love you no matter what you do, but please don't do that again! You little thing!

ALISON  
Why do you always call me "little thing"?

Verna releases Alison from the hug.

VERNA  
Because I can't call you "little lady" because you are certainly no lady... and despite the way you get about...

Verna tugs on Alison's shirt.

VERNA (CONT'D)  
You're not a boy neither. So I call you "little thing".

Alison rolls her eyes.

ALISON  
You make me sound like a dog.

VERNA  
Well, you do bury things. And sometimes you come home from the river smelling just like Old Mr. Burghoffer's Irish Setter.

ALISON  
(playfully)  
I do not.
Verna smiles. There is a strong bond growing between them. It shows in the way they are together. Verna picks up the wrapper and gives it to Alison.

VERNA
Go and put that in the trash.

Alison heads back towards the store. On her way there she sees someone coming up the road. She stops in her tracks and watches as the person approaches.

CUT TO:

37. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE – DAY, CONTINUOUS

From behind, the object of ALISON's attention looks like some svelte actress. Whoever it is wears a well tailored suit, pants and jacket, which, despite its masculine cut, gives an overall impression of femininity.

CUT TO:

38. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE – DAY, CONTINUOUS

ALISON is still staring at the approaching figure. From behind, the object of ALISON's attention walks determinedly towards the store, moving with a swishy rhythm.

CUT TO:

39. EXT. VERNA'S STORE – DAY

VERNA walks up behind ALISON and sees the person as well. For a moment they stand together, two plain hens watching the approach of a glorious bird of paradise.

VERNA
Looks like Percival Huckstep's in need of something this morning.

CUT TO:
40. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE – DAY

PERCIVAL's face is angular and refined. His skin is smooth and pale. He is in his mid thirties. He wears a lurid red neck-kerchief with an oriental design. He carries himself with a kind of rebellious and resolute dignity.

CUT TO:

41. EXT. Verna's Store – Day

ALISON watches PERCIVAL approach. She is clearly fascinated by him.

ALISON
Who is that?

VERNA
That's Percival Huckstep. The queerest duck on the pond... spends his life in a fantasy world if you ask me. He’s one of only a few white folks left in town. And, to his credit or shame I'm not sure which, he is the only white man with the gumption to shop in my store.

VERNA heads back into the store. As Percival reaches the edge of the store's yard, Alison turns on her heels and runs inside. Percival sees this but has no reaction. His face shows a nonplussed resignation. Apparently he’s used to people behaving oddly around him; but one eyebrow shoots up to show that he’s noticed Alison’s sudden departure.

CUT TO:

42. INT. Verna's Store, at the Counter/Hallway – Day

Inside the store, Verna takes up her position behind the counter. ALISON enters and goes out back, to where the living quarters are, and peers back into the store through the glass beads that separate the shop from the residence.
PERCIVAL enters like a conquering general, with much bravado. He readjusts his lurid neck-kerchief and runs his fingers through his hair. He arrives at the counter having remedied the effects of the wind outside.

VERNA
Morning Percival. How are you today?

PERCIVAL
Lovely, lovely as a little twittering bird in the trees.

VERNA
That good?

From behind, the bead curtain Alison blinks; her eyes narrow to study every detail of Percival’s clothes and features. She looks at his hands. They are very slender and it is as if the bones shine through his sheer skin. His fingernails, though not long, are polished and sparkling. Alison’s face is colored by a kind of curious wonder.

PERCIVAL
It’s something about the end of summer. It makes me feel so free!

VERNA
The cooler weather helps. It’s not easy to feel free when you’re sweating like a farmhand.

PERCIVAL
Oh… I shouldn't think I'd ever do that. I don't sweat I...

Verna knows where he's going and joins in his self mockery.

VERNA
Perspire?

PERCIVAL
Glow!

Alison's lips form a perfect juvenile smile; an expression of pure and uninhibited pre-adolescent joy.
VERN
Well, you do have a certain
glimmer to you, I’ll give you
that. You look well too, got a
new scarf I see.

Percival fondles his scarf proudly.

PERCIVAL
Oh, you know me Verna Hobb, I
spend all my time, and
practically all my money, on
the pretty things in life. I
can’t see no point in doing
anything else.

VERN
If only we all had that
luxury. But some of us have to
work. So, what are you after
this morning Percival?

PERCIVAL
Well, I'm after a little
sugar...

VERN
For one as sweet as you?

PERCIVAL
Oh Verna! Sometimes you sound
just like a piano man...

VERN
How do piano men sound?

PERCIVAL
Well how should I know?

VERN
You brought it up...

PERCIVAL
It was a metaphor... a
meaningless metaphor. But I
imagine piano men have
slippery tongues, if you know
what I mean.

Verna politely changes the subject.
VERNA
How much sugar do you need?

PERCIVAL
About a pound... A pound of sugar to add to the spice and all things nice.

VERNA
(jibing)
Making a cake Percival?

Percival’s demeanor suddenly turns serious.

PERCIVAL
No. I'm going to put it in old man Burghoffer's gas tank. That Irish setter of his peed on my roses and I...

VERNA
I thought that was good for them.

PERCIVAL
That's tomatoes.

VERNA
Well, I don't think you should put sugar in his gas tank just the same. A man of your age...

PERCIVAL
If you're going to call me names, I shall never return to this shabby establishment....

His tone is one of mock offence.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Now please serve me my sugar.

VERNA
I won't be responsible if they lock you up.

Percival rolls his eyes. Verna hands him his sugar. He passes her the money and exits, with a dramatic swoosh. Verna counts the money and puts it in the register.
VERNA
A penny short. Even as a child he couldn't count to save his life.

Verna shakes her head and goes out the back. When she enters the kitchen Alison is nowhere to be seen. The screen door leading outside gently swings closed.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

43. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY

Outside Verna’s store, Alison is stalking Percival. She shadows him from behind trees. He heads down the road in the direction from which he came. He surveys the countryside, unaware of his little tomboy shadow. The scenery has about it a look of freshness, everything green and crisp. Some trees are beginning to gain their first hint of autumn color. The sky is clear and blue, a few streaks of white high in the stratosphere.

CUT TO:

44. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Percival rounds a bend in the road. Coming towards him are two shirtless young men. The two men are handsome in a redneck way. They’re well built but are wearing dirty, faded work pants. Their shirts are tied around their waists. Their names are Simon Donnelly and Nate Bowman - two local toughs.

As soon as Percival sees them, he takes a pair of round sunglasses out of his breast pocket and puts them on. He straightens his hair - clearly an act of vanity, pride, and anxiousness.

The young men see him. Simon thumps Nate in the arm and smirks - preliminaries to the ridicule he intends to throw at Percival.

As the two men get nearer, Percival steals himself for the inevitable.

SIMON DONNELLY
Hey Percy! How are ya this mornin’ darlin’?
Episode 1

NATE
Out for a morning stroll petal?

Percival ignores them and walks past. The two men stop.

SIMON DONNELLY
Hey Percy, how about a bit of this!

Simon grabs his crotch whilst Nate, spurred on by his friend, starts to rub his own nipple.

NATE
How about it Percy! Wanna try some?

The two rednecks laugh. Percival is not foolish enough to stop, but he can’t help but mutter a retort:

PERCIVAL
Just lovely. You boys are so cute I cannot find words to express....

Simon Donnelly suddenly jumps forward and shoves Percival, who nearly falls down. Nate Bowman grabs hold of Simon’s shoulder to restrain him, but then releases him when Simon gives him a look of disgust. Simon turns on Percival:

SIMON DONNELLY
You love words like “lovely” and “cute”, don’t you Percy. Yeah, you love words like that, queer words.

The word ‘queer’ resonates harshly. Percival is visibly disturbed. He turns and continues down the road away from them, trembling. Simon is about to continue his abuse but is stopped when, out of the blue, something strikes him on the head.

SIMON DONNELLY
(to NATE)
Jesus! What did you do that for?!

He holds his head where a projectile struck.

NATE
What? I didn't do anything!
SIMON DONNELLY
You threw a fuckin’ rock at me!

Percival glances back. He doesn't appear too interested in what's happening - he seems to know.

NATE
I didn't!

The injured man thumps the other. They have forgotten about Percival.

CUT TO:

45. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

PERCIVAL rounds another bend. He is safe. He takes off his sunglasses and puts them back in his breast pocket.

In the bushes, ALISON scampers away from the two young men, dropping a rock as she does so. The rednecks don't see her, they're too busy arguing about who threw the rock. Alison smirks and proceeds to follow Percival.

CUT TO:

46. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY

PERCIVAL comes to a small pond, its edges rimmed by swamp cypress trees. On the banks of the pond is a tiny overgrown graveyard. Percival stops to splash a little cold water on his face.

ALISON sneaks quite near in order to see what he's doing. She watches as he takes a handkerchief out of his pocket to dab his brow.

PERCIVAL
Little girl, haven't you better things to do than follow a person around?

Alison's face shows that she is shocked that he knows that she's following him. She contemplates that a moment then steps out into the open. Percival looks her over.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Aren't you Verna Hobb's new girl?
ALISON
Uh-huh.

PERCIVAL
I've heard about you. You're the one they call Spook. What's your name - is it Andrea? or Althea...

ALISON
Alison Mayflower.

PERCIVAL
Alison Mayflower. Quite a dignified name.

ALISON
I don't mind Mayflower but I don't like Alison much.

PERCIVAL
What would you rather be called? Not Spook?

ALISON
(nervously)
Al.

Percival looks at her boyish attire, and then rolls his eyes and smirks. But he says nothing about it. Apparently, he wants to preserve her feelings.

PERCIVAL
Like Al Capone?

ALISON
Uh-huh.

He puts his handkerchief away and sits on the grass.

PERCIVAL
I'm not sure if I'd like Al Capone - altogether too violent.

He pats the grass beside him, motioning for Alison to sit. She hesitates but does so.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
I must thank you for your act of bravado.
ALISON
My what?

PERCIVAL
Back there... the well aimed projectile.

ALISON
You're welcome. Anytime. Boys like those annoy me anyway.

PERCIVAL
Yes indeed. It often makes me want to cry that all these beautiful young men are so... ugly inside. And so... unadventurous.

He smiles wickedly. Alison appears not to understand. They sit quietly for a moment not quite sure how to take each other.

CUT TO:

47. EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

NATE BOWMAN walks towards a sun-lit grassy clearing on the riverbank. He is alone, but looks back over his shoulder as if to ensure that this is the case.

He sits down on the grass and looks into the water, where his own reflection shimmers and ripples. He looks up to the sky and sighs deeply. He seems disappointed with himself somehow. After a moment, he takes off his shirt and slumps back onto the grass to bathe in the sun.

After another moment, Nate sits up, looks around furtively to make sure that he is alone, and reaches into his jeans pocket. He pulls out a handkerchief. He unfolds the handkerchief to reveal a silver chain with a Star of David pendant. He looks around once more to make sure that he is still alone and then puts the pendant around his neck. He lies back down and closes his eyes. The Star of David pendant glints in the light. Nate relaxes into the grass and enjoys the heat of the sun.

CUT TO:
ALISON and PERCIVAL are still sitting quietly in the cemetery by the pond; unsure how to take each other. Percival looks across the cemetery to a large crepe myrtle tree that shades a cluster of tombstones near the graveyard's edge.

PERCIVAL
(pointing)
See that tree there, that big one?

ALISON
Uh-huh.

PERCIVAL
That's a crepe myrtle tree, otherwise known as Lagerstroemia Indica. They're very exotic. My Mamma is buried right beneath it. She always loved that tree - used to come up here and visit all her relatives that are buried here. I think she used to come as much for the tree as for the dearly departed. She was so fond of trees - she had an affinity for them.

ALISON
(tries to impress)
I like trees too. I love them!

PERCIVAL
Of course you do. You're like me, a little nature spirit.

The words “you’re like me” effect Alison in a visible way. Her shoulders relax and a small smile plays on her lips.

ALISON
My grandma likes flowers. I don't like them much - too stinky.
PERCIVAL
You'll grow to like them when they're all you have to remind you of your grandma... I live in a house full of my Mamma's things but none of it retains any of her spirit. She wasn't attached to those sorts of things. The tree is all I have that still holds something of her soul. When I'm near that tree, I feel like she's right here with me.

Alison looks at him with concern.

ALISON
Don't you have any friends?

PERCIVAL
(laughs)
Why no, I don't. Not one I could have over to visit.

ALISON
You never got married?

Percival looks surprised that she would ask such a thing.

PERCIVAL
Why, no. I'm not the marrying kind. Can't you tell?

ALISON
Why not?

PERCIVAL
I don't know... I've never had a romantic attachment...

ALISON
Never?

PERCIVAL
Never. No-one around here could tolerate my silly ways. I've always been alone, except for when mamma was here.

ALISON
I'll be your friend, if you want...
PERCIVAL
Why, that would be lovely, AL.

Alison smiles brightly at being called “Al”. They both sit in the cemetery taking in the breeze and the beauty of the pond. Alison keeps sneaking peeks at Percival who pretends not to notice. His mouth twitches with the smallest smile.

FADEOUT.

49. I/E. Verna's Store, Porch - Day

Sometime later - the sun has peaked and is on the downturn. It has been a number of hours since Percival and Alison first sat down by the pond.

Verna is standing on the porch. She's glancing down the road, looking worried because Alison has been gone for so long. She looks quite concerned for a moment then, as the distant shape of Alison comes into view, that concern turns into anger. She turns and stomps inside.

CUT TO:

50. Int. Verna's Store, Kitchen - Day

When Alison enters the kitchen she finds Verna sitting at the table with a cup of coffee. Alison sits down nonchalantly and pours herself a cup.

Verna
Having a cup of coffee Alison?

Alison
Uh-huh...

Verna
Do girls have cups of coffee in the afternoon - when their grandmother has spent the whole day worrying about them lying in a ditch killed by some runaway lunatic?

Alison realizes that she's in trouble. She doesn't look surprised, nor does she seem too worried about it.

Alison
No Grandma, I suppose they don't.
She gets up and leaves the table. Verna is left by herself, clearly bemused by Alison's behavior.

VERNA
(calling)
Where were you?

ALISON
(calling back)
Lookin' at a tree.

Verna thinks about that for a moment, shakes her head and takes a sip of her coffee.

VERNA
The girl needs her head checked.

FADEOUT.

[AD BREAK]

51. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND, A DREAM – NIGHT

Later that night, the world is black. Out of the darkness, a light grows; a light which begins to illuminate a huge tree. The tree's limbs almost hum with the light, its bark sparkles. Soon the light shines out from the tree and illuminates the whole sky - revealing clouds moving sleeplessly in the firmament above. The light illumines a pond, which glitters like mercury.

PERCIVAL stands looking on in wonder. The light has got into his skin and makes him look angelic and somehow supernatural. He turns to look behind him - his face transforms with joy. PERCIVAL’s MOTHER stands there, smiling. She is a beatific figure - silver grey hair reflecting sharp beams of light. She touches Percival's face. She opens her mouth to speak.

The sound of GLASS SHATTERING. The sound becomes louder and louder until it destroys the dream.

SMASH CUT
TO:

52. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM – NIGHT

PERCIVAL wakes with a start. He sits up in his bed as his window shatters. Someone has thrown a rock.
CUT TO:

53. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Outside of Percival’s house, a grand old ante-bellum style mansion of two stories with pillars at the front that has seen better days.

Three young men, one of whom is SIMON DONNELLY, who had taunted Percival earlier, are running away, laughing. They throw beer bottles at Percival’s porch as they go, which smash and spread their contents on the wall.

CUT TO:

54. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

In Percival’s dark bedroom, the curtains billow as the wind blows in and tear on the sharp edges of broken glass. PERCIVAL gets out of his bed to look out the broken window and sees the men running away, hooting and hollering.

CUT TO:

55. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

From a small distance, the grand, old ante-bellum style mansion seems pressed in on by the surrounding darkness. After a moment, we see an upstairs light turn on, which dramatically frames the broken window. The night is silent again.

FADEOUT.

56. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, IN THE GARDEN - DAY

The next morning PERCIVAL, wearing a bright red Japanese robe over his pajamas, tips broken glass from a dustpan into a trash can.

He sees a flash of red through the shrubbery deeper in the yard. He freezes; his face anxious. He peers in that direction and then realizes what he's seeing.

PERCIVAL  
Alison Mayflower! What are you doing lurking behind my shrubbery?
ALISON emerges from behind the bushes. She is wearing a red t-shirt and the ubiquitous jeans.

ALISON
I'm not lurking. I'm just...

PERCIVAL
You were lurking honey. But as my mamma used to say "to each their own". Come in for some coffee?

Alison looks very pleased at this invitation and follows Percival inside the house.

CUT TO:

57. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, SITTING ROOM – DAY

PERCIVAL's sitting room is decorated in an over the top oriental style. In particular, there are big Chinese fans decorated with painted flowers and Japanese parasols in a similar vein. In one corner, there is a Japanese paper screen featuring some shy Geisha girls. On a mahogany sideboard there is a cluster of golden Buddha statues.

ALISON, who sits alone on a Victorian sofa of red velvet, takes all this in.

When Percival enters with a coffee tray he has changed into more suitable attire, a well tailored navy pin-stripped suit with ascot tie. He looks jaunty yet casual.

Alison sits awkwardly on the sofa. She looks a bit like a Kansas farmer who has suddenly found themselves on Mars. She nervously picks up a dainty European style coffee cup and holds it tentatively in her hands.

Arranged on the coffee table in front of them is a wide array of scrap and note books as well as a pile of photo albums. Percival notices Alison looking at them with curiosity.

PERCIVAL
That's all my memorabilia. Scrap books and photo albums. I don't know why I put so much effort into it, there's never anyone to show them to.
ALISON
You can show them to me.

PERCIVAL
Really? Do you want to see them?

ALISON
Uh-huh.

Percival eagerly picks up the photo album nearest to him. It has a fancy home-made cover that reads 'Percival's Golden Youth'. He opens to the first page and sighs.

PERCIVAL
(pointing)
This is me and mamma. I forget the occasion. A church picnic I think. Mamma loved the church... that's one of mamma's tendencies I didn't inherit.

PERCIVAL turns the page. The next page has the heading 'Percival's Early Accomplishments'.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Oh, this is when I came second in my first three legged race. Unfortunately, I was partnered with Brownie Sullivan. She had a very peculiar odor - like a sow in spring - and I'm certain one of her legs was shorter than the other, otherwise I would have come first.

He turns another page. There is a picture of a group of children outside a school building.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
This is the whole school. Counting all the grades there was only twenty of us.

Percival points himself out.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
There I am... That uniform did nothing for my eyes...
Alison spots the figure of another boy at the back of the photo, among the older children. His face has been scratched out.

    ALISON
    (pointing)
    Who's this boy?

Percival pretends not to understand, and turns a little odd.

    PERCIVAL
    I don't know which boy you mean.

    ALISON
    (pointing again)
    This one. The one with his face scratched out.

    PERCIVAL
    I don't talk about him.

Percival turns the page. Recovers his composure.

    PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
    Oh, this picture is lovely. I look very svelte. This is the opening night of one of many school plays in which I featured... in this one I only had a supporting role. The director was a fool. But still, I look wonderful in costume...

Percival notices that Alison is a little uncomfortable. He looks embarrassed all of a sudden, as though he thinks she isn't interested in his memorabilia or because of his recent odd behavior.

    PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
    But you don't want to be going through all these reminiscences...

    ALISON
    (earnestly)
    Oh no, I don't mind... No-one ever showed me their special things before... But, you can reminisce all you like.
PERCIVAL
You and I are going to get along just fine!

Percival's face reveals relief and excitement.

As Percival pours more coffee, Alison looks again at the picture with the scratched out face - who is this boy in the photo and why won't Percival speak of him? She looks back up at Percy, curiosity written all over her face.

FADEOUT.

58. EXT. VERN'S STORE - DAY, ESTABLISHING

The following morning, at Verna's store. The flowering vine draped over the porch glistens with dew. A bee butts its head against the storefront window - as if watching what's going on inside. The store has about it an ambience of sunny comfort.

CUT TO:

59. INT. VERN'S STORE, HALLWAY - DAY

The sound of harsh voices has woken ALISON who stumbles down the hall rubbing her eyes.

Alison hovers out of sight, behind the beaded curtain separating the kitchen from the store, listening to the voices. One is her grandma, the other she doesn't recognize.

CUT TO:

60. INT. VERN'S STORE, AT THE COUNTER - DAY

In the store, Verna is talking to a coarse looking white man, he's a farmer of sorts and doesn't take much care of his appearance. He lingers on the threshold, clearly unwilling to enter a "colored" store. His name is MR BURGHOFFER. His hair is slicked back with some greasy concoction and his fingernails are filthy.

His dog, LULABELL, skulks growling by the entrance.

CUT TO:
61. INT. Verna's Store, at the Counter – Day

VERNA
I have no idea who would do such a thing Mr. Burghoffer.

MR BURGOFFER
Well I have a pretty good idea! It was that queer that lives up on the hill. A runt like that should've been drowned at birth!

VERNA
As I said Mr. Burghoffer, I have no idea who put sand in your gas tank... I've never even heard of such a thing.

MR BURGOFFER
That sand is goin’ to cost me a month's earnin's to get the engine fixed! You tell that queer I know it was him!

VERNA
If I see him, I’ll let him know Mr. Burghoffer.

MR BURGOFFER
Don’t pretend you ain’t thick as thieves. I know he comes down here and fraternizes with you filthy niggers.

Verna is so stunned that she is silent.

Mr. Burghoffer puts on his hat and storms down the front steps of the store, followed by Lulabell.

Alison comes out of hiding shaking her head. She cannot believe how awful that man was. Verna puts on a brave face and smiles at Alison.

VERNA
He asked me if I'd heard about anyone putting sand in his gas tank...

She smiles mischievously, looking out the door to ensure that Mr. Burghoffer is gone.
VERNA (CONT'D)
I didn't lie, I haven't heard anything about sand...

Her smile turns back to worry.

VERNA (CONT'D)
That Percival's going to get into trouble if he's not careful.

Alison looks worried too. She joins Verna in watching through the door as Mr. Burghoffer and Lulabell walk away down the road.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

62. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY

At the cemetery, PERCIVAL places flowers at the foot of the crepe myrtle tree. He takes a small object from his pocket - it is a tiny brass Buddha. He places it on his mother's tombstone.

He sits down on the grass and props himself against the trunk of the tree, folding himself into it as if he were a child and the tree were his mother. He lies there for a while with his eyes closed.

A shadow looms over him. Percival opens his eyes. MR BURGHOFFER, accompanied by his dog LULABELL, is standing over him with a large stick. He looks enraged. Lulabell bares her teeth and snarls.

PERCIVAL
What can I do for you Mr. Burghoffer?

MR BURGHOFFER
Don't play dumb with me ya, ya filthy critter, I'm onto you!

PERCIVAL
I don't know what you're talking about...
MR BURGHOFFER
(violently)
What do you think you're doin’
lyin’ around under that tree
like some, some freak! Who do
you think you are?!

Percival is silent. Mr. Burghoffer's rage has emptied him of thought.

PERCIVAL
I, I...

MR BURGHOFFER
(raising stick)
And don't think I didn't see
that heathen idol you put on
your mother's grave. It's a
desecration!

He roughly pokes Percival in the chest with the stick. There is a sickening thump. Percival winces with pain.

MR BURGHOFFER (CONT)
I reckon your Mamma died of
shame! A thing like you should
never have taken breath.
Buyin’ from niggers! Filthy!

He jabs the stick into Percival’s stomach.

MR BURGHOFFER (CONT)
Filthy!

He jabs again, this time very fiercely.

MR BURGHOFFER (CONT)
Sittin’ under that tree like
the queen of Sheba…. I  oughta
beat some sense into that
queer head of yours!!

Mr. Burghoffer raises the stick above his head to striking level.

Percival goes to shield his face, his eyes full of fear. His whole demeanor shows that he is certain he is about to be beaten to a pulp. Lulabell stands, back bristling, growling at Percival.
Then a voice comes from behind Mr. Burghoffer, startling them both:

ALISON (O.S)
Hey you two...

ALISON's voice causes Mr. Burghoffer to lower his stick and turn around. He sees Alison approaching.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Are you two havin' a picnic or somethin’?

MR BURGOFFER
What’re you doin’ girl?

Alison shows Mr. Burghoffer a skanky bunch of wildflowers.

ALISON
Brought these to put on Percy's mamma's grave. Have to remember the dearly departed, or at least that's what my grandma always says.

Alison invokes her grandmother's name as a kind of talisman. It reminds Mr. Burghoffer of a world of morality that would judge him harshly if he were to do what he wanted - to beat Percival within an inch of his life.

Alison smiles at Lulabell, the dog who hates colored people. Lulabell bares her teeth and growls even more.

Alison’s face shows clear dismay.

ALISON
(to self)
How does that dang dog know I’m colored?

Lulabell continues to growl so Alison turns her attention to Mr. Burghoffer and smiles. Mr. Burghoffer gives up, clearly rethinking his actions. He drops the stick and walks away.

MR BURGOFFER
(yells)
I'm onto you Huckstep!
Alison and Percival watch as the old man and Lulabell walk out of sight.

PERCIVAL
What on earth is the matter with him?

ALISON
He thinks you put sand in his gas tank…

PERCIVAL
What? I wish I did after that horrific display…
(rubs chest)
Once again I must thank you for your timely appearance. If it's not stones, it's flowers…

Percival takes a closer, critical look at the sad flowers.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
…and what lovely little… what the hell are they anyhow?

ALISON
(smiles)
I don't know. I picked them over there.
(points)

PERCIVAL
Over by old lady McPhee's grave? You know they say she was a witch - those little blossoms are probably hexed…

Alison promptly drops the flowers. Percival laughs.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Come and join us…

ALISON
Us?

PERCIVAL
Mamma and I.

Alison sits down. Percival leans back into the tree trunk again and closes his eyes.
Alison watches him in wonder. After a moment he speaks, whispers, so that Alison has to get very close to hear.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
You know Alison we're both orphans. But we'd be orphans even if our parents hadn't died. People like us are outsiders. We have to stick together.

Alison's face shows that she doesn't understand.

ALISON
(whispers)
I don't know what you mean.

PERCIVAL
(opens eyes)
You and I are different. People who are different are all orphans because no-one ever loves them for who they really are.

ALISON
My Grandma loves me.

PERCIVAL
Does she love you? I hope she does. Often people love a kind of ghost of us, a ghost of their own making. They love who they think we are rather than who we actually are.

Alison doesn't answer. Her brow tenses and she chews her bottom lip, signs that she is chewing over this notion.

Percival closes his eyes again. Alison watches him then turns to look out at the scenery.

CUT TO:

63. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

From ALISON's point of view, we see MR. BURGHOFFER a fair way down the road. He meets with SIMON and NATE who are coming from the opposite direction. They stop and talk.
Mr. Burghoffer is clearly telling them his story, his arms wave about in agitated fashion. Soon the three men head off away from the cemetery together.

CUT TO:

64. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY, CONTINUOUS

Worry crosses ALISON's face as she watches the three men walk off together.

65. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY, CONTINUOUS

The camera pans up and above ALISON and PERCIVAL and across the cemetery and settles on a wooden grave-marker in the colored section of the cemetery, bearing the name of ELIZA JAMES and the dates “1914 – 1928”.

The soft shapes of Alison & Percival are in the middle-ground. MR. BURGHOFFER and his companions are just outlines in the blurred distance. The wooden cross has a photograph of Eliza mounted on it in a cracked frame.

The camera dwells on the photograph, and Eliza’s name, a moment until a slow trickle of what seems to be blood oozes out of the frame and rolls down the wooden cross, leaving behind what looks like a blood-stained trail of tears.

FADEOUT.

END OF EPISODE ONE
FADE IN:

1. EXT. SHACK IN THE WOODS – FLASHBACK 1928, NIGHT (B&W)

In stark black and white, a 1920’s police car bumps and jerks up a rutted track towards a small shack in a clearing in the woods outside Perseverance.

As the patrol car moves toward the shack, its headlights illuminate the front porch, where a young African-American man sits on a hand-made chair.

The headlights flash onto the young man’s face. This is JOHN. As the headlights flash away from John’s face, he wipes a tear away from his eye.

The patrol car comes to a stop, just yards from the shack, its headlights lighting up the whole porch.

Two police officers get out of the car. We can see one of the officers clearly; he is a large man in his early forties. He is SHERIFF TOMBS.

The other man is in the background, lingering at the edge of the light. His face is covered by shadows. He is the one of the sheriff’s Deputies.

SHERIFF TOMBS
(to Deputy)
You take a look inside while I talk to this feller.

From behind, we see the Deputy mount the steps to the porch and go inside the shack.

John watches the deputy enter his house. His face shows unease but he does not protest. The Sheriff then mounts the porch and stands over John.
SHERIFF TOMBS
You know why we’re here?
(Beat)
I hear you was real close to
them two little girls.

JOHN
Yessir, they’s my sister’s
babies.

SHERIFF TOMBS
Some might say you were too
close to them little ones…,
that a single man of your age,
livin’ on his own out here,
oughtn’t be so close to no
little girls. Some might say
that was peculiar….

JOHN
I ain’t never done nothin’ to
them girls. I love them girls,
’n’ they love me. I wouldn’t
never hurt ‘em.

SHERIFF TOMBS
You wouldn’t be the first
nigger to rape and kill his
own kin….

John’s eyes flash with shock, anger and fear, but just as
quickly, he looks back down at the ground.

JOHN
(After a pause)
No sir, (he shakes his head) I
never hurt Eliza. I never
touched her.

The blurred shape of the Deputy comes out of the shack
and into view. His face is still obscured by shadow. He
is holding something in his hand.

The deputy extends his hand to show the Sheriff what he’s
found. It is the bloody hunting knife that was used to
kill Eliza.

John’s face is horrified, then alarmed. He looks up at
the Deputy. We see the deputy’s face for the first time.
It’s the Dark-Haired Man who killed Eliza, the owner of
the knife.
JOHN
(panicked)
That ain't my knife! I ain't never seen it before!

SHERIFF TOMBS
No point lyin' now boy; we found the murder weapon right here at your place....

The Sheriff turns to the deputy and says:

SHERIFF TOMBS
Cuff him....

John suddenly leaps up out of his chair and over the porch railing. He heads towards the woods at a full run.

From behind, it looks like John might just make it to the safety of the dark tree line.

Just before John runs beyond the reach of the patrol car's headlights, a shot rings out.

John drops to the ground. The camera swings around to reveal the shooter. It is the Deputy. For the first time we see his face. The Deputy is none other than the Dark-Haired Man, Eliza's killer.

The Sheriff and the Deputy, still wielding his gun, walk over to where John lies motionless. The Sheriff uses his boot to roll John over. John's eyes are wide open and lifeless. He is dead.

SHERIFF TOMBS
Congratulations son, you just killed your first criminal nigra....

The Sheriff continues to poke John with his boot. He looks down at John's body with a mixture of amusement and disgust.

SHERIFF TOMBS
(CONT'D)
Well, that's this case well and truly closed....

He turns to the Deputy and adopts a friendly smile.
SHERIFF TOMBS
(CONT’D)
You feel like a beer? I could sure do with a beer.

The deputy returns the Sheriff’s smile, though his smile is not merely friendly but looks more like a grin of triumph. He places his gun back in its holster and answers:

DEPUTY/DARK-HAIRED MAN
Sure, sure I could do with a beer.

FADE TO BLACK

[AD BREAK]

TITLE UP: GEORGIA, 1967

FADE IN:

2. EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – DUSK

ALISON is walking along the road near the cemetery. A broke down old pick-up truck rounds a bend behind her.

Alison turns to look back at the truck coming towards her and moves closer to the edge of the road to let the pick-up pass by. The truck slows as it approaches. Alison looks over her shoulder nervously. It’s getting dark and her face shows that she is a little uneasy with the slow approach of the truck.

She continues walking. When the truck falls in beside her, she turns and sees that the driver is JUPITER JACOBS, the dignified African-American man who is smitten with Verna. Alison looks slightly relieved, but still a touch wary.

JUPITER
(smiling)
Evenin’ Miss Mayflower.

ALISON
Evenin’.
Alison keeps walking. The truck coasts along beside her. Jupiter’s face is warm and friendly, but he is clearly ruminating on how he will say what he wants to say.

JUPITER
I don’t mean to put in where it ain’t my business..., but it’s nigh on dusk and young ladies shouldn’t be out this late.

ALISON
That’s why I’m goin’ home.

JUPITER
Good, that’s good... But, would you permit me to give you a ride? I don’t like the idea of you havin’ to walk home in the dark and your grandmamma worryin’ ’bout you.

Alison stops. She looks at the road ahead of her, at the sinking sun and at Jupiter’s warm smile. She thinks a moment and then decides.

ALISON
Alright, I’ll let ya take me home. But if you do anythin’ I don’t like I’ll poke your eyes right out with my thumbs....

She brandishes her thumbs.

ALISON (CONT.)
I got powerful thumbs and I reckon I could gouge your eyes right outta their sockets no problem at all.

JUPITER
Well now, I’m sure you could. But that ain’t no way for a young lady to talk...

ALISON
I ain’t no lady...
JUPITER
(smirks)
I’m beginnin’ to understand that myself... Now come on, hop in, I’ll take you home and I promise you can gouge me if I do anythin’ you don’t like.

Alison hesitates just a moment then opens the door to the truck and climbs in. Jupiter smiles and sets off down the road.

ALISON
(after a pause)
How’d you know my name?

JUPITER
I make it my business to know everythin’ of importance to Verna Hobb.

Alison rolls her eyes at this, then looks at Jupiter with scorn.

ALISON
She ain’t ever goin’ to ask you in. Not never.

JUPITER
Well, never say never. You can’t always tell what doors will open up for a person if they’s persistent.

Alison shakes her head, but smiles. She relaxes in her seat and happily watches the scenery pass by the window. Apparently, she quite likes Jupiter.

3. EXT. ROAD BY Verna’s Front Gate – Dusk, Continuous

The pick-up pulls up by the front gate of Verna’s Store. It is now almost dark. Verna is waiting on the porch, looking worried.

ALISON jumps out of the truck. Verna’s expression changes to mild irritation.
VERNA
When will you learn Alison
Mayflower that the proper time
to get home is well before
dusk?

JUPITER hops out of the truck.

VERNA (CONT.)
Oh, it’s you that brought her home.

Verna’s face shows clear relief and approval.

JUPITER
Yes mam. I couldn’t leave her
to walk home in the dark.

VERNA
Well, I thank you for that.
Lord knows she can’t get herself home on time.

Alison shrugs, looks at Jupiter and Verna standing there nervously and decides to leave them alone. She walks inside the store.

JUPITER
Well, I’ll leave you to it.
Just don’t scold the child too much. She’s a nice little thing…

VERNA
“Thing” is the word.

Jupiter chuckles.

JUPITER
She has got a funny way about her, ain’t she? But, that’s all the better in my book. A girl’s got to have a strong personality if she’s goin’ to get along in this world.

Verna smiles at this, recognizing it as a veiled compliment to herself.

VERNA
I’ve always thought that myself.
She smiles at him some more. Jupiter looks down at the ground, bashful.

JUPITER
Well, I’d best be gettin’ myself home.

Verna looks a little disappointed. She hesitates, glancing to the open door of the store, clearly contemplating inviting him in. Jupiter takes her lack of response and hesitation as her usual reticence with him and, smiling a little dejectedly, opens the door to the truck to climb back in.

VERNA
Thanks again, for bringing home my grandbaby.

Jupiter smiles, as if to say “you’re welcome” then hops in the truck. As he drives off, Verna looks a little frustrated at herself.

CUT TO:

4. INT. VERNA’S STORE, FRONT WINDOW – DUSK, CONTINUOUS

Alison is watching her grandmother standing by the front gate as Jupiter’s truck pulls away. She shakes her head in amused disbelief.

ALISON
Amateurs....

CUT TO:

5. EXT. VERNA’S STORE, ESTABLISHING – DAY

Verna’s store, beneath an early afternoon sun. The flowering vine that grows over the peeling "VERNA’S STORE NO GAS" sign is abuzz with honey bees.

CUT TO:

6. INT. VERNA’S STORE, KITCHEN – DAY

HENRIETTA, Verna and Alison are sitting at the kitchen table. A jug of home-made lemonade and three glasses are on the table.
Alison is shucking peas. Verna is peeling potatoes and Henrietta is sipping lemonade and eating the peas out of Alison's bowl.

An old radio sits on a sideboard behind them. From the radio, the sound of a news report emanates. The report describes police brutality and violence at a civil rights protest somewhere in the South. Verna gets up and turns it off before Alison takes too much notice.

The three settle into a comfortable, silent rhythm: peeling potatoes, shucking peas, eating peas. Verna watches Henrietta. Then, after Henrietta takes another handful of peas, speaks.

VERNIA
Henrietta, you are eating those peas quicker than Alison can shuck 'em. Keep your hands outta that bowl!

HENRIETTA
But I couldn't have had more than three...

VERNIA
You've had more than three handfuls and you know it.

HENRIETTA
Well, Lord Be, it's not like they's fattenin', they's peas!

VERNIA
No, but we'd like some left for supper.

ALISON
That's right Henri, we'd like some left for supper.

Verna and Henrietta exchange curious glances.

ALISON (CONT'D)
How many peas do you think I should shuck Vern?

Verna and Henrietta exchange an even more curious glance.

VERNIA
Just enough to replace what
Henrietta already ate.

The three sit quietly shucking and peeling for a moment.

ALISON
Henri, could you pour me some more lemonade please?

VERNA
Okay, I give. Why are you calling us by men's names?

ALISON
Was I? I surely didn't mean to. But, now you mention it, don't you think shorter names are better? More economical.

HENRIETTA
Econo-what?

VERNA
(to HENRIETTA)
Economical. It means thrifty.

(then to ALISON)
Now Alison, stop beating around the bush. What's your point?

ALISON
Well, take Alison as an example. AL-I-SON. It's long ain't it? But if you shorten it to "Al" it's a lot easier to say. Saves time and energy.

Verna and Henrietta exchange knowing, amused glances.

HENRIETTA
Al is certainly easier to say than Alison I'll give you that. But, you wouldn't want us to call you Al would you? I mean, it's not very pretty.

ALISON
Well, if it's easier for you I could live with it.
VERNA
Oh, I don't think that's necessary Alison. It's not so hard to say your name the long way.

ALISON
No, really, I don't mind at all. In fact, I insist. It's the least I can do to make your lives easier.

Verna smirks. She is on the verge of laughing. She looks away so that Alison doesn't see. Henrietta's lips are taught with a disapproving scowl.

FADEOUT.

[AD BREAK]

7. EXT. Verna's Store, Establishing – Night

That night, Verna's store and its garden are bathed in the light of a bright moon, beneath a clear sky full of stars. Insects chirp happily and an owl hoots in the far distance.

CUT TO:

8. INT. Verna's Store, Sitting Room – Same Night

Later that night, after dinner, Alison is sitting in front of the fireplace in her grandmother's sitting room. A small fire crackles in the grate.

Her grandmother, Verna, is reading. Alison glances over at Verna a number of times; she seems to want to ask her something but can't bring herself to do so. Finally, Verna puts down her book.

VERNA
What's the matter Alison?

ALISON
Why don't no-one like Percy Huckstep?

VERNA
Well, I s'pose it's because people think he's a bad egg.
ALISON
A bad egg?

VERNA
It means he came out wrong.
The way he gets about. People
don’t like it.

ALISON
I don’t think he’s bad.

She pauses and considers a minute.

ALISON (CONT)
Am I a bad egg?

VERNA
Sometimes you smell like a bad
egg, but no, you’re not.

Verna smiles at Alison. She’s just teasing. Alison thinks
for a while then:

ALISON
Do you love me?

Verna is surprised by this, she didn't see it coming.

VERNA
Of course I do. Why do you
need to ask?

ALISON
Do you love me for me? Or a
ghost of me?

VERNA
What are you talking about?

ALISON
Just something Percy said,
that sometimes people love us
for who they think we are
rather than who we really are.

VERNA
You are you. I love you.
Always have, always will.

Alison doesn't look convinced.
ALISON
But what if I turned out to be something different to what I am now?

VERNA
Well, that would only be natural. You're a young girl and young girls grow up to be young women.

ALISON
But...

VERNA
...But what?

Alison doesn't say anymore. The puzzled look on Verna’s face shows that she doesn't understand where Alison is coming from.

VERNA (CONT'D)
Do you want a hug?

Alison gets up and hugs her grandmother very tightly.

VERNA (CONT'D)
Goodness girl! You're going to squeeze the stuffing out of me!

While Alison hugs her grandmother, her face takes on a look of sad resignation.

CUT TO:

9. EXT. Verna'S STORE – NIGHT

Verna's store sits beneath a clear sky full of stars. The warm light from inside spills out into the garden invitingly.

CUT TO:

10. EXT. POND BY THE CEMETERY – SAME NIGHT

The pond and cemetery sit beneath the same clear sky bright with stars. The cemetery and pond are empty and still and quiet but for the small, insistent chirping of insects.
CUT TO:

11. EXT. FARMHOUSE, ESTABLISHING – SAME NIGHT

A well-kept farmhouse sits in a wide open field beneath a clear sky. Light from one window spills out into the farmyard and illuminates a gnarled tree.

CUT TO:

12. INT. FARMHOUSE BEDROOM – SAME NIGHT

A sparsely furnished, tidy and indisputably masculine bedroom is lit by the yellowish light of a single electric light overhead. NATE BOWMAN lies on a single bed dressed only in underwear. He stares up at the ceiling and chews on his bottom lip as if trying to make a decision.

A towel is draped over a wooden chair beside the bed. To one side of the bed, a door is ajar through which we can see a slightly steamy bathroom, where another electric light glows warmly above an old tub.

Nate suddenly gets up off the bed, looking determined, and grabs a pair of jeans that are folded on the seat of the chair and pulls them on. He then grabs a short-sleeved shirt hanging on the bathroom doorknob and pulls that on. Before buttoning up the shirt, he finds his boots and sits down to put them on as well. Then he seems to change his mind.

He jumps up off the bed again and takes off the shirt and hangs it back on the doorknob. He pulls off the jeans and sits back down on the bed in his underwear, resting his head in his hands, clearly tormented by some indecision. He slumps back on the bed and stares at the ceiling, chewing on his bottom lip again.
After a moment he gets up again and pulls on his jeans. He finds his socks and boots and puts them on. Then he grabs the short sleeve shirt off the doorknob and puts that on. As he’s buttoning it up, he looks at it and picks at one of the buttons, seeming dissatisfied with it. He takes the shirt off again and walks over to a wardrobe. He takes out of the wardrobe a pristine white long-sleeved shirt that looks very neatly pressed. He puts that on, rolls up the sleeves a little and then buttons it up. He pauses a moment, chewing on his lip again. Then, with a sigh of resignation he turns off the bathroom light and walks out of the bedroom.

CUT TO:

13. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE – SAME NIGHT

Percival's house, with its grand columns, is crossed by the shadow of a single cloud. The night breeze rocks a porch swing back and forth.

CUT TO:

14. EXT. PERSEVERANCE CHURCH, ESTABLISHING – SAME NIGHT

A typical Southern church, a modest white timber building with a white spire reaching into the starry sky, sits between two quiet meadows.

15. EXT. PERSEVERANCE CHURCH – SAME NIGHT

The night is dark. The muffled sounds of crickets are the only thing to disturb the silence. From behind, we see the dark shape of a man emerge from the shadows.

We follow the man's feet as they move towards the church. When he reaches the church, we see that there is a jerry can in his hand.

The shadowy man pours the jerry can's contents, which has the appearance of gasoline, over the church porch, door and front wall. He steps back, takes a box of matches out of a trouser pocket and lights a match.

The match-flame hovers before us for a moment, the church in the background, white and quiet. Then the man flicks the match against the door of the church. The pool of gasoline immediately bursts into flames.

CUT TO:
16. EXT. PERSEVERANCE CHURCH – SAME NIGHT

The church is completely enveloped in flames. Sparks fly into the sky as the spire collapses in on itself.

CUT TO:

17. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE – NIGHT

Percival's house is crossed by the shadow of a single cloud. The night breeze is still rocking the porch swing back and forth.

In the large garden, trees sway and leaves, carried by the wind, drift across the ground. The place looks unkempt yet dignified.

18. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM – NIGHT

In PERCIVAL's bedroom. The broken window has been taped up. Moonlight comes in between the strips of tape, giving a somewhat eerie appearance to the room.

CUT TO:

19. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE – NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

Outside PERCIVAL's house, someone is letting themselves in through an unlocked window. The intruder climbs in and makes their way upstairs. By their outline, we can see that it is a man.

CUT TO:

20. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM – NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

PERCIVAL is sound asleep, totally unaware that someone has broken into his house. The intruder quietly opens Percival's bedroom door and enters. The sound of the door opening causes Percival to shift a little in his bed but he does not wake.

The intruder reaches the bed, and places a large hand over Percival's mouth. Percival wakes and attempts to scream out for help, he can't - the intruder's hand muffles the sound.

CUT TO:
21. INT. VERNAS STORE, ALISON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Back at Verna's store, ALISON lies awake. She tosses and turns unable to sleep. Strange shadows dance on her walls. The wind causes her window to rattle.

CUT TO:

22. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - NIGHT

In the cemetery, the crepe myrtle tree creaks in a strong wind. Leaves are dislodged and fall to the ground - landing near Percival's mother's headstone. The brass Buddha holds a silent vigil.

Alison's discarded bouquet of hex flowers withers on the ground. The pond is turbulent - ripples scatter this way and that. The moon is obscured by dark clouds.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

23. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, ESTABLISHING - DAY

From beyond the fence, we see that it is early morning. Percival's house looks much less weathered in the light of the morning sun. The white paint of the columns shines brightly. The porch swing, without a breeze, sits still in the shade of the verandah.

24. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

ALISON, wearing her usual old jeans with a kind of bolero jacket over a Mickey Mouse t-shirt, peers in the window of PERCIVAL's sitting room. She walks around the porch and peers in another window.

Alison moves along the porch towards the back of the house.

CUT TO:

25. I/E. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

ALISON goes to the back door and knocks. No answer. She checks the door, it's unlocked. She turns the doorknob and lets herself in.
26. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN – DAY

As ALISON enters the kitchen she looks around. She calls out:

ALISON

Percy?

There's no answer. She exits the kitchen and enters the hallway.

CUT TO:

27. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, HALLWAY – DAY, CONTINUOUS

In the hallway, ALISON stops to look at an array of photographs on a hallway table. There are a number of PERCIVAL's MOTHER and an array of PERCIVAL himself. Alison picks up one of Percival and looks at it more closely.

She smiles. She runs a timid finger over the image of Percival's face. She sighs as she looks at the photograph of Percival. Her eyes show that she is developing strong feelings for him. For the first time we get the sense that perhaps Alison is developing an adolescent crush.

Alison continues to the foot of the staircase. She calls out again:

ALISON

Percy? You there?

Still no answer. The house is notably silent. Alison heads up the stairs.

CUT TO:

28. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALL – DAY

At the top of the stairs, she heads down another hallway, peering into the bedrooms as she passes. She comes to a door that is closed. She knocks.

ALISON

Percy?

There is no answer. There is a spooky quiet.
29. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

ALISON enters PERCIVAL's bedroom. The room is an explosion of color and oriental designs. There is a large vase of peacock feathers on a table against one wall.

An ornate dresser ornamented with photographs and an array of trinkets sits by a window.

In the middle of the room is an oriental rug and a wing-backed chair with a cushioned foot stool. On one wall is a tapestry featuring a Japanese scene with a white crane.

On a large four poster bed, under a pile of covers, is a lump that is clearly PERCIVAL.

We feel a sense of tension. Is Percival Ok?

ALISON

Percy?

Alison walks toward the bed to see why Percival is not waking. When she approaches the bed, she reaches out her hand to touch Percy’s shoulder....

When Alison touches Percival, he rolls over, still asleep, and she sees that he is wearing an eye mask and has cotton wool stuffed in his ears.

The eye mask is decorated with some oriental eyes, the half-lidded eyes of the Buddha. It makes it look as though Percival is sleeping with his eyes half open.

It is a comical scene and Percival is clearly breathing. Alison looks greatly relieved to see that he is ok.

Alison looks down at Percival for a long moment. Her face has a touch of awe to it. Even in this strange state, Alison is still in awe of her friend.

She timidly reaches out her hand and touches a lock of his hair at his forehead. She lovingly rolls the hair between her fingers.

She smiles. Percival murmurs. Alison quickly pulls her hand away and stands stock still. Percival doesn't wake.

Alison slowly and carefully draws out the cotton wool from one of Percival's ears.
ALISON
(Quietly)
Percy?
Percival murmurs again and begins to wake. He turns his masked eyes towards Alison.

PERCIVAL
Mamma?

ALISON
No. It's Alison.

PERCIVAL
(sleepy)
Alison.... My dear, you'd better have prepared me breakfast in bed...

(yawns)
...otherwise I'm going to reprimand you viciously for creeping into my sleeping chambers and disturbing me... I have been having the most intriguing dreams...

ALISON
I've got a surprise for you. Can you get up and come out?

PERCIVAL
Come out? You're joking?

ALISON
I'm not joking. I've got something fun waiting.

PERCIVAL
Well then my dear...,

Percival pushes up his sleep mask.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
...you'd better put the kettle on.

CUT TO:
30. EXT. A FIELD ON THE EDGE OF THE WOODS – DAY

ALISON leads PERCIVAL by the hand through a beautiful green field. The breeze causes the long grass to sway. A bird's light-hearted song is carried on the wind. A bull roars in the distance.

Percival, whose eyes are now shielded by his round sunglasses, is wearing a pair of loose linen trousers, a bright red short-sleeved shirt and a red and white kerchief around his neck. With his other hand he holds aloft a bright red oriental parasol.

As Alison and Percival make their way across the field, we get the impression of a grand procession.

Alison looks up at the oriental parasol a few times and then asks:

ALISON
Percy, why do you like them "China" things so much?

PERCIVAL
China things? Oh, you mean my oriental décor and accessories?

Alison nods.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
Well, I suppose it all started when I read about the Buddha philosophy. It read in this book that we can change our destiny, just by changing ourselves. When you change yourself, the whole world around you changes; and then, well anything is possible.... That idea inspired me so much, and changed me. It gave me a real sense of hope. All my oriental things, even this here parasol, remind me that I can be anything I set my mind to be.

Alison thinks on that for a minute but doesn’t ask anything further about it, she just smiles to herself and steps up her pace a bit.
Beneath the parasol, Percival struggles to keep up with Alison, who nimbly cuts through the grass towards the woods' edge.

PERCIVAL
This better be good my dear.
Otherwise you'll find yourself receiving a swift kick in the pants...

Percival looks at the seat of Alison's pants. From his perspective they loom large. A faded, dirty pair of boys' jeans.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
...and what lovely pants they are too...

CUT TO:

31. EXT. ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER – DAY

PERCIVAL and ALISON stand at the river's edge.

The river is overhung by trees. Spanish moss dangles down and touches the water's surface. The sound of another solitary bird trilling in the trees nearby ornaments the scene. The water is crystal clear and somewhat deep.

The odd pair are looking at something at the water's edge. Alison has a look of eagerness to her face however Percival looks bewildered.

PERCIVAL
You're joking?

ALISON
No, I'm not joking.

PERCIVAL
You want me to put that thing on?

ALISON
It's not a tutu. You more hop in it than put it on.

From Percival's point of view, we see two inner-tubes sitting on the water's edge among the tall grass.
PERCIVAL
But, we'll drown... or worse, I'll ruin my trousers!

ALISON
It's just water. Ya pants'll dry out.

PERCIVAL
But Alison, I see mud. I don't do mud.

ALISON
A little mud never hurt anyone. I heard tell some ladies in Atlanta even put it on their faces... s'posed to be good for their complexions or somethin'... Come on...

Alison takes off her jacket. She pulls the faded photograph of her father out of her jeans pocket and puts it carefully in the inside pocket of the jacket, which she places carefully on the bank. Then she goes to the water's edge and grabs one of the inner-tubes. Percival doesn't move. His whole demeanor is one of uncertainty and reluctance.

ALISON (CONT'D)
It'll be fun. We can be pirates!

PERCIVAL
Pirates? Oh no, I absolutely refuse to be a pirate.

ALISON
Well, you can be a mermaid then, just get in.

Percival's face brightens as his interest is suddenly piqued.

PERCIVAL
Oh, well, a mermaid is a whole other story...

CUT TO:
32. EXT. ADRIFT ON THE RIVER – DAY

From the bank of the river a cow, chewing lazily on a mouth full of grass, watches PERCIVAL and ALISON slowly drift downstream.

Percival, still holding his parasol aloft, dangles his free hand in the cool water. He is delighting in the feeling of being adrift, of being gently directed by the water's movement.

Alison, who is soaked through, splashes herself and periodically dunks her head in the water, then shakes it out sending droplets of water flying through the air to bomb Percival's parasol.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

33. EXT. ADRIFT ON THE RIVER – DAY

Later, after they have drifted for some time, ALISON is propelling herself through the water.

She is spinning as she goes, and bumping into PERCIVAL's Inner-tube. It is as if the inner-tubes are dodgem cars.

Each time she does this Percival shrieks with a mixture of delight and terror. After one particularly dramatic bump Percival yells:

PERCIVAL
Alison Mayflower if you drown
me my ghost will haunt you for
eternity I swear!

Alison ignores him, smirking mischievously, and does it again. This time water splashes into Percival's face, drenching his hair.

Percival grimaces, feigning irritation.

ALISON
Percy, why do people think
you're bad?

Percival thinks about this for just a brief moment. He tends to think out loud.
PERCIVAL
Well, what can I say about that?

(beat)
I suppose I cannot claim to be a good man. In fact, by Southern standards, I am positively wicked... but I do some good things. I'm kind to those without friends. I'm generous with what I have. I help whoever and whenever I can. I suppose what I'm saying is, though I can't claim to be really good, I'm not as wicked as some might think. Many in this town are the exact opposite... and it's them who judge me no-good.

They sit quietly; floating on the river. They smile at each other, a moment of understanding passing between them.

CUT TO:

34. EXT. ADRIFT ON THE RIVER - DAY

Even later, as the afternoon sun turns golden, ALISON and PERCIVAL are floating motionless in a wider, still part of the river.

The inner-tubes, with Percival and Alison reclining safely within, as if in large black donuts, are bobbing against each other beneath the dappled shade of a large tree.

Spanish moss sways to and fro in a soft wind. The sun shines gently into their shady world and, when they peer upwards, seems to spin and shimmer.

The rippling water casts reflections of light that dance on the tree and on the surface of Percival's sunglasses.

The two friends sit quietly, happy in each other's company.

Percival reaches out and touches Alison's face.
PERCIVAL
It must have been a turn of very good luck that allowed me to meet you... I so rarely have good luck. No joy for the wicked as they say.

ALISON
You keep sayin' that but I don't think you're wicked.

PERCIVAL
And that, my dear, is precisely the good fortune to which I'm referring.

Alison smiles. They both resume enjoying the quiet, easy delights of the river.

FADEOUT.

35. EXT. THE WOODS – DAY

Later that day, ALISON is heading home from her time with Percival in the river. Her hair is still damp. She’s walking along a track in a lightly wooded area. She looks down at the photograph of her father that she is carrying in her hand. She walks along paying more attention to the picture than to where she’s going. Then, she stops still as she hears something. It’s a woman’s voice, softly singing in a lilting Georgian accent.

RUTH O/S
Dig my grave lord, dig my grave... There's two white horses followin' me. An' there's two white horses followin' me... I got two white horses followin' me. Waitin' on my buryin' ground. Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Means another poor boy is underground...
Alison forgets the photograph for a minute and looks around. Off to her side, in the dappled shade of the woods, a shadowy figure moves slowly among the trees. It is RUTH, the older African-American woman Alison had first seen by the bridge, the one Henrietta had called a voodoo witch.

Ruth is humming to herself as she strolls along, periodically bending to pick a plant or flower from among the undergrowth.

Ruth takes something from her pocket; a flash of silver reflects sunlight. It’s a knife. She bends and cuts a plant at its base, shoving it into her burlap sack. As she straightens to walk off, her humming transforms into a soft singing again.

RUTH
Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Did you ever hear that coffin sound? Means another poor boy is underground....

The song is a version of an old Spiritual – “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean” by Blind Lemon Jefferson. In Ruth’s mouth, in these quiet woods, the song has otherworldly import; Alison glances down at the photograph of her father as Ruth intones once more:

RUTH (CONT’D)
Means another poor boy is underground....

As Ruth continues on her way, the knife glints in the sunlight again which enables Alison to identify what it is. Alison seems frightened by the sight of the knife and gasps. Ruth hears the gasp, turns and sees Alison watching her.

RUTH
Who you boy?

Alison’s brow furrows and her mouth pulls tight in irritation at being mistaken for a boy again.

ALISON
Alison Mayflower. Verna Hobb’s granddaughter.
RUTH
Alison? Granddaughter? Why, you don’t look like a girl at all.

ALISON
That’s not my fault... This is just how I look.

RUTH
Don’t get your pants in a bunch child... It don’t matter to me how you look. In fact, if anyone knows how little the outsides of a person matters, it’s me.

ALISON
What do you mean?

RUTH
Look at me child? Folks take one look at me and run the other way... but I won’t bite, not unless they rile me up.

Ruth laughs at her own joke. Alison half-smiles, not sure if Ruth is funny or scary.

ALISON
People are always sayin’ I look like a boy...

RUTH
Well, there’s worse things they could say. They could call you stupid, they could call you lotsa things. But it don’t matter what they say. What matters is that you know in your heart that you’re a good person. Are you a good person?

ALISON
I don’t know.

RUTH
Well, do you treat people kind and speak the truth?
ALISON
Most of the time.

RUTH
Well then, you ain’t got nothin’ to worry about. Just ignore what all them ignorant folks say.

Alison ponders this for a short moment, absentmindedly putting the photograph of her father back in her pocket. She looks back up at Ruth as she is stuffing another plant in her sack.

ALISON
Henrietta says you’re a witch.

RUTH
Henrietta? That empty-headed gal that’s always attached to your granma?

Alison nods.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Talk about ignorant…. Well, she wouldn’t know a witch if one rode in her window on a broom.

Ruth continues scanning the ground for and gathering herbs, giving Alison only half of her attention.

ALISON
She said you know voodoo...

RUTH
Did she now? Well, lots of people say lots of things an’ less than half of ‘em are true.

ALISON
Do you? Do you know voodoo?

RUTH
Why you want to know?
ALISON
Sometimes I wish I were someone else. Sometimes I wish there were some magic that could change me, make me normal….

RUTH
Well, there ain’t no mojo that can change a person that much, ‘cept their own will. If you want to be different, just be different. But, seems to me, you just fine as you is. Besides, there ain’t a soul on this earth that’s really normal. Normal is a myth.

ALISON
I bet Henrietta thinks she’s normal…

RUTH
And look what a cuckoo bird she is! No, child, don’t waste your time on normal. Just be yourself, that’s more than good enough.

ALISON
But… what if I don’t know what that is… What if I don’t know who I am?

RUTH
Well, you’d better figure it out.

ALISON
But how?

Ruth stops scanning the ground for herbs and gives all her attention to Alison.
RUTH
First thing you need to do is stop askin’ who you are and ask who you want to be. It don’t matter one bit who you think you is or who somebody else says you are. You don’t have to pay no attention to none of that. You can become your own person, find your own way.

This idea impacts on Alison deeply, but her face shows that part of her is still confused.

ALISON
But I still don’t know how to do that, how do I become who I want?

RUTH
Look to the people around you child. The people in our lives are mirrors to us. They’re our past and our present and they can show you ways into the future... They reflect our secret insides right back at us. Look to them, those that love you, and you’ll know which way you want to take. But in the end, the decision is yours and yours alone.

Alison looks clearer about this than she did before even though some doubt still plays on her face, but she doesn’t question further.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Now, come an’ help me gather up this John the Conqueror Root, my knees ain’t up to the bend...

Alison hesitates just a second, then moves over towards Ruth, who offers her the knife. Alison takes it and bends to dig up the root.

ALISON
What’s this for anyway?
**Episode 2**

**RUTH**  
It’s for justice child...  
Justice and revenge.

Alison looks up into Ruth’s face, which looks determined but unreadable. Alison turns back and digs the knife into the ground, and pries out the root.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

36. EXT. Verna's Store, Establishing - Dusk

Verna's store, late afternoon. The sun is beginning its descent to the horizon.

The shadows are lengthening in the yard, where chickens scratch around among the bushes. The store seems quiet. Alison notices that the garage door is open and the red Buick is absent. Despite this, the “Open” sign is hanging on the store porch.

CUT TO:

37. INT. Verna's Store, At the Counter - Dusk

ALISON enters the store, returning from her adventure. HENRIETTA is minding the shop. As usual she is eating, this time a box of chocolates, and drinking soda.

Open on the counter in front of Henrietta is a newspaper. The headline reads 'FBI Investigates Murder of Civil Rights Activists'.

As Alison moves towards the door to the living quarters out back, her face shows clear happiness which, for a reason soon to be revealed, seems to annoy Henrietta.

HENRIETTA  
Had fun did you?

ALISON  
Uh-huh. Where’s Granma?

HENRIETTA  
Had to run some errands.
Alison acknowledges that she has heard but doesn’t loiter. She goes to head out back of the store but Henrietta stops her with the words:

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
It ain’t right that you’re spending half your life with that Percy Huckstep… ain’t right at all.

Alison stops in her tracks and looks at Henrietta. She doesn't say anything, waiting for Henrietta to elucidate.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
It ain’t right to be hanging around with that peculiar white man. It don't look good.

ALISON
He's not peculiar.

HENRIETTA
Peculiar Percy. That's what everyone calls him. The only reason he ain’t been run out of town is because of his mamma. She was a good woman, good to white folks and to coloreds, but even she wouldn't let you two carry on the way you are.

ALISON
How are we carryin’ on?

HENRIETTA
He's more than twice your age and you is a colored girl. Colored girls don't run around with white men old enough to be their fathers.

ALISON
Why not?

HENRIETTA
Why not? Why not? Because it just ain’t right that's why not.

ALISON
He's my friend.
HENRIETTA
Why can't you be friends with someone your own age, and your own color to boot?

ALISON
I don't want to.

HENRIETTA
Why in God's Heaven not?

Alison's body tenses up with an inner distress.

ALISON
I don't feel colored... and I'm not like other girls.

HENRIETTA
(smirks)
Ain’t that the truth.... Honey, I sure as anything know what loneliness is, you could say loneliness and I have made acquaintance...

For the briefest moment, Alison’s face shows sympathy, perhaps even understanding, for Henrietta.

HENRIETTA (CONT)
...But hangin' out with that old queer is just goin' to make things worse.

As Henrietta continues her rant Alison’s sympathy and understanding vanishes.

HENRIETTA (CONT)
Your grandma didn't take you in so that you'd go and shame her by taggin' along after that old duck like his little tomboy duckling. You gotta be more like the other colored girls...

ALISON
But I'm not! I'm not like those other girls! And I don't feel colored. Not one little bit.
Alison pinches at her skin, pulls a little with her fingers.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Look at my skin! Look at it! Where's this color you keep talkin' about? Where? I'm white, like my father!

HENRIETTA
I'm going to tell you somethin' honey and you'd better listen...

Henrietta pauses for dramatic effect. Alison waits, with a defiant look on her face.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
In this world it don't matter how white your skin is, if you've got just one tiny drop of Negro blood in you then you is colored. And look where you live. You're living on the colored side of the tracks. Your grandma, a black woman, is your only family. You got nowhere else to go... You better get used to it honey or else you're going to make yourself, and your grandma, miserable. That Percy ain’t your family, heck, he ain’t even normal...

ALISON (hesitantly)
But he’s my friend... he reflects my insides....

HENRIETTA
Reflects the inside of your crazy head more like. I’ll tell you what you got inside you... you got colored blood, Verna’s blood, and there ain’t no point pretendin’ otherwise.

Alison looks distressed. Tears well up in her eyes but she doesn’t say anything. She walks out of the room towards the living quarters out back.
Henrietta takes another chocolate out of the box and stuffs it in her mouth.

FADEOUT.

38. EXT. Verna's Store, Back Porch - Dusk

That evening around sunset, a white man, the current sheriff of Perseverance Georgia, approaches the front porch of Verna's Store. He is SHERIFF JIM MADDOX.

Sheriff Maddox pointedly doesn't mount the porch steps but, after spitting on the bottom step, calls from the yard.

SHERIFF
Verna Hobb? You there gal?
Verna?

CUT TO:

39. INT. Verna's Store, Kitchen - Dusk

Behind the counter, re-stocking the shelves from a number of overflowing boxes, Verna hears the SHERIFF shouting.

ALISON, also hearing the shouting, comes into the shop from out back; casting lethal glances at HENRIETTA as she does so.

Henrietta is hanging about, more or less idle, as usual.

VERNA
What on earth?

Verna stops what she's doing and goes out onto the porch.

Henrietta and Alison wait a moment then scramble, with not a little malice towards each other, for a hidden position by the open window to eavesdrop.

CUT TO:

40. Ext. Verna's Store, Back Porch - Dusk

The SHERIFF looks over Verna with cold detachment. His face makes it very clear that he dislikes 'negroes' however it also shows a modicum of respect for Verna.
SHERIFF
Verna, we got a problem over at the church.

VERNA
The colored folks church?

The Sheriff reacts disproportionately strongly to Verna’s question.

SHERIFF
No Verna, ya dumb nigger..., Verna flinches at the Sheriff’s words. She folds her hands into each other at her stomach, a move that belies her struggle to control herself from retaliating.

SHERIFF (CONT’D)
...I’m talkin’ about the real church. The white folks’ church. Someone burned it up real good. You heard anythin’ about it? Only, I figured with all this Martin Luther King business it’s bound to be one of your people. Thought you might have heard somethin’.

VERNA
I haven’t heard anything Sheriff.

SHERIFF
If you do, you make sure you let me know... Oh, and you tell your people that we’re sure to catch the culprit. No doubt about that. Ain’t nothin’ worse than a church burnin’ nigger and we ain’t restin’ till we got him behind bars.

VERNA
Thank-you for coming by Sheriff.

SHERIFF
Uh-huh.
The Sheriff walks away, towards his car. He gets in his car and drives off, towards a now setting sun, without looking back.

Alison and Henrietta come out onto the porch.

VERNA
(to Henrietta)
You heard?

HENRIETTA
Sure did. They think some colored child burned down the white folk’s church. You think it’s true Verna?

VERNA
Around here it don't matter what's true. What matters is who's got the keys to the jail.

They all stand on the porch, the seriousness of Verna's words sinking in.

Alison is most affected by these words; she turns toward Henrietta with a look of defeat. Henrietta catches Alison’s eye and looks down at her smugly.

It’s very clear on Alison’s face that she now understands that, because of her Negro parentage, she’s in a world in which she holds very little power.

FADEOUT.

[AD BREAK]

41. EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH – FLASHBACK 1928, DAY

In stark black and white, Eliza’s YOUNGER SISTER is sitting on the edge of the porch of her mother’s house. She has a cloth doll in her hands and is nervously fiddling with its clothes.

A woman, her MOTHER, comes into view. She strokes the girl’s head and asks:

MOTHER
You need anythin’ honey?
The girl does not respond. She doesn’t even acknowledge her mother’s presence. Her slumped shoulders and hanging head show that she is deeply traumatized by what happened to Eliza. The mother walks away, but remains within sight of her daughter. Her face showing extreme worry and sadness.

A moment passes; then the young girl notices a strange light sparkling behind a clothes line full of freshly laundered garments. She stares at the light a second, then hops down from the porch and walks slowly towards the clothesline and the light.

When she reaches the clothesline, she stretches out her hand to push aside a dress hanging there that is flapping gently in the sunny air. When she steps past the dress, to the other side of the line, she gasps. She drops her cloth doll in the grass.

Just a few yards from the clothesline, an African-American girl is standing stock-still. We see her from behind. She is looking off towards the woods where Eliza was killed.

She is translucent, or hollow somehow. As sunlight strikes her, it refracts and sparkles. She also gives off her own light.

She turns her head and looks back. It is ELIZA. Eliza smiles at her little sister, then turns to continue staring at the woods. After a moment, she slowly extends her left arm and points to the ground to the left of her.

Eliza’s young sister steps forward to see what the ghost is pointing at. It is a small plant with a cluster of tiny white flowers. The younger girl bends down to pick a bunch of the blossoms.

**MOTHER O/S**

What you doin’ honey?

The young girl’s mother has come to check on her daughter. The young girl looks up into her mother’s face, then turns to look back at Eliza. But Eliza is gone. The mother looks at the flowers.

**MOTHER (CONT.)**

What you got there? Oh honey, don’t touch them flowers, that’s one of them voodoo plants. Lord knows what wickedness it’s used for.
The young girl looks at her mother, then to where Eliza stood, and then at the flowers in her hand.

A look of interest and subtle wonder transforms her face, replacing the grief and trauma that was all that had been there a moment before.

FADE TO BLACK

42. EXT. Verna's Store, 1967 Establishing – Day.

A few days later, at Verna's store, in the afternoon. The flowering vine that decorates the "VERNA'S STORE NO GAS" sign is beginning to drop its flowers. There are no bees now.

CUT TO:

43. I/E. Verna's Store, Porch – Day.

Verna and Alison are sitting in a porch swing on the back porch. They swing back and forth rhythmically.

They smile at each other, they're both enjoying this simple pleasure.

ALISON
Verna?

VERNA
Yes?

ALISON
What was my Mamma like?

VERNA
(beat)
I was wondering when you'd ask... well, she was a lot like you. Very willful, you could never get her to do something she didn't want to and if she wanted something she never gave up 'till she got it.

(beat)
She was very clever...
(beat)
and she was very beautiful,
all the men said so. In the end, it was her beauty that was her undoing. She let all the flattery spoil her.

ALISON
Am I like her?

VERNA
In some ways... but you have a strength about you that your mamma never had. You got a sensible head on you.

ALISON
Like my daddy. He was very sensible.

VERNA
If you say so I'm sure he was. I regret never having met him. It's not right I never met my own grandchild's daddy.

ALISON
I think he would have liked you.

VERNA
And I'm sure I would've liked him. He's sure done a good job of raising you.

The two cuddle and resume swinging.

CUT TO:

44. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY, CONTINUOUS.

HENRIETTA rushes up the road towards Verna's Store. She has a determined and excited look on her face. She's wearing a pink blouse and a black ankle-length skirt, both of which look a little too tight.

CUT TO:
45. EXT. Verna's Store - Day, Continuous.

When Henrietta reaches the store, she hikes her skirt up to free up her legs and rushes round the building towards the back.

CUT TO:

46. I/E. Verna's Store - Day, Continuous.

As Henrietta rounds the corner of the building, where Verna and Alison are still on the porch swing, she shouts out:

HENRIETTA
Verna? Verna? I gots news!
Verna!?

VERNA
(to Alison)
Here we go...

HENRIETTA
There you are Verna! Verna I got news!

VERNA
So I heard you shouting.

Henrietta mounts the porch and pulls up a wicker chair and sits down.

HENRIETTA
Guess what's happened?

Verna glances sideways at Alison and smirks.

VERNA
You've given up candy...?

HENRIETTA
Don't be ridiculous. No, what's happened is that Nate Bowman, that white-trash boy that ain't never learnt how to wear a shirt, has been arrested for burnin' up the white folks church! It wasn't a colored person after all! Ain't that somethin'!
VERNA
I can't imagine Nate Bowman doing something like that. Why they saying he did it?

HENRIETTA
That's the most excitin' part! They's sayin' in town that he's one of them white folks who loves Dr King. They sayin' he's got Jewish in him somewhere down the line - I don't know if that's true but I reckon he does have jewy shaped eyes for sure...

ALISON
What shape eyes do Jewish people have?

Henrietta seriously contemplates this question, and then shrugs.

HENRIETTA
I'm not real sure, but if any eyes are jewy, it's his.

VERNA
Oh enough of this... have they got any evidence other than his eyes?

HENRIETTA
They don't, but they got a witness who says they seen Nate with the same type of gas can they found at the church.

VERNA
Is that it? Half of Perseverance Georgia's prob'ly got the same can!

HENRIETTA
As I said, it's not just the incriminating evidentiariness of the gas can it's also the fact that he's suspected of jewry and supportin' Dr King.
VERNA
Don't tell me they arrested that poor boy just because his grandmamma was Jewish?

HENRIETTA
You knew! You knew he was a Jew all along! Verna Hobb how could you keep that from your best friend?!

VERNA
My best friend is Jesus the Lord and I'm quite certain he already knows, and don't care one little bit either and neither should you... A colored woman calling people 'Jew'. You should be ashamed.

HENRIETTA
(chastened)
But how did you know he was... Jewish?

Verna looks into the distance, her face marked with worry.

VERNA
My mamma used to clean for the Bowmans, before they lost the farm. She and Nate's grandma, Hesta, had a sort of friendship. Hesta told my mamma all about it. Of course, the Bowmans kept it secret. 'Round here it wouldn't done anyone no good for folks to know.

ALISON
What will they do to him?

HENRIETTA
If they don't lynch him for bein' a nigger-loving, church burnin', pinko commie Jew, they'll throw him in prison for all his natural days.
ALISON
Just for burning down an old church?

Verna and Henrietta both turn and look at Alison in dismay. Henrietta is scandalized. Verna’s face shows surprise but mainly concern.

HENRIETTA
That child’s been spendin’ too much time with that Percy, his heathen-ness is rubbin’ off on her.

Verna nods in slight agreement. Then, looking into the distance again and resuming her look of worry, she somewhat half-heartedly pats Alison on the knee.

VERNA
(softly)
At the very least we should get out the bible tonight and do us a bit of Christian deliberation.

FADEOUT.

47. EXT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE, ESTABLISHING – DAY.

A small jailhouse on the edge of a town square. The square is a little run down; the grass needs mowing and the benches around the square look worn. The place is empty. The jailhouse is an unassuming structure, the only thing identifying it as a place of incarceration being the iron bars over the windows.

CUT TO:

48. INT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE – DAY.

NATE sits in a small cell. He is wearing a torn singlet and jeans. He sports a black eye and a split lip. Clearly he has been beaten by the police. He stares blankly at the wall.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX and a deputy, BOBBY BEAUFORT, come to the bars of his cell. The Sheriff has a disgusted look on his face.
SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
You make me sick boy... Just between you and me, if there's anythin' I hate more than niggers it's jews, even if they's only a quarter. In my book, that's one quarter too much.

The Sheriff watches Nate, hoping to detect evidence that he is having the desired effect of inflicting fear on his prisoner.

Nate shows no such signs, simply stares at the ceiling.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX (CONT'D)
If it was up to me you'd be swingin' already... but I gots to abide by the law. Still, ain't no reason I should stop my boys from givin' you a good whoopin'.

The Sheriff looks to Bobby and grins.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX (CONT'D)
Don't think that's the worst of it neither. You're goin' down son. No jury in all of Georgia is gonna acquit no half-jew Martin Luther lover. Your life's as good as done.

Nate looks as though he is going to say something to defend himself but thinks better of it. Instead, he closes his eyes and blocks the sheriff out.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX (CONT'D)
That's right, you keep your mealy mouth shut. I ain't interested in nothin' you've got to say.

FADEOUT.
49. EXT. Verna's Store, Establishing – Night.

Light shines from the windows of Verna's store at night. The soft noise of music coming from a radio drifts out of the open back door. The yard is dark, particularly out the back where a large tree overshadows everything and where the scuppernong arbor funnels the night breeze.

CUT TO:

50. INT. Verna's Store, Alison's Bedroom – Night.

Alison is preparing for bed. She is wearing a pair of very boyish pajamas covered with images of American Indians.

As she pulls back her bed-cover, a stone flies in the open window and lands on her pillow. She turns to look out the window but sees no-one.

She examines the stone; a note is wrapped around it. She opens it and reads it.

It reads:

"My Dear, disaster has struck! Meet me beneath the scuppernong arbor forthwith!

Yours Most Sincerely, Percival Huckstep Esq."

CUT TO:

51. EXT. SCUPPERNONG ARBOR – NIGHT.

The night is beautiful and clear. The moon hangs deliciously in the dark Southern sky. Stars twinkle.

Alison sneaks down the back stairs of the store and heads to the side of the building.

Alison moves quietly towards the scuppernong arbor, a kind of long passageway overhung by a scuppernong (grape) vine. It feels a bit creepy.

CUT TO:
52. EXT. SCUPPERNONG ARBOR - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS.

ALISON stops in her tracks. Lurking in the shadows of the scuppernong arbor is a hooded person. The figure looks mysterious and ghostly. Alison does not recognize this figure as PERCIVAL.

ALISON
Percy?

PERCIVAL
Shh. Come under the arbor.

Alison moves under the arbor.

As she gets closer to the figure she sees that it is Percival wearing a long black, hooded travel cloak.

As Alison reaches his position he pushes back the hood, revealing a very worried face.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Thank you for coming my dear.
I have dire news...

ALISON
What are you wearing?

PERCIVAL
This is no time for discussing wardrobe my dear... it's a travelling cloak I had my mamma make me. She said I'd never get to wear it but tonight it seemed the perfect thing. It's wonderful isn't it... see the buttons, they're mother of pearl...

ALISON
What are you doing here?

PERCIVAL
Oh, yes, that's much more important of course. I'm here because of a vile injustice. Someone has been falsely accused and cruelly apprehended and we simply must do something about it.
ALISON
You mean Nate Bowman?

PERCIVAL
Yes. Nate. I need you to take a letter to the judge. It's our only hope...

ALISON
Why do you want to help him, he was so mean to you?

PERCIVAL
One mustn't think of oneself in times like this but of justice, besides I'm certain he didn't burn down that church.

ALISON
So's grandma.

PERCIVAL
Smart woman your grandmother.

ALISON
Why are you so certain?

PERCIVAL
Suffice it to say I know something of his character and arson is simply not in it.

ALISON
But what can the judge do, Nate's already been charged?

PERCIVAL
The judge can dismiss the charges due to lack of evidence.

ALISON
But why would he? I mean, they're saying he supports Dr King...
PERCIVAL
Yes, they'll want to punish him for that... but you see I have a little leverage with the judge. We went to school together. He's a few years older than me of course but still we encountered each other in the schoolyard. He will listen to me.

ALISON
Then why don't you go see him yourself. Why send a letter, and why make me take it?

PERCIVAL
Let's just say the judge would rather not admit me to his parlor... I'm not exactly well respected.

   (beat)
   It's best if you go. Nate’s innocent Alison.... Will you do it?

Alison pauses a moment, then decides.

   ALISON
   Uh-huh.

Percival grabs her and gives her a bear hug. Alison squirms but kind of enjoys it.

PERCIVAL
I knew you would! We must do it first thing tomorrow.

Percival pulls up his hood and goes to leave, then pauses.

   PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
   Oh, and one other thing. Those pajamas... they're just not right honey. Sorry, but I am bound to tell the truth on such matters.

He turns with a swish of his cloak and stalks off.

Alison looks down at her Indian pajamas.
ALISON
What's wrong with them?

She shrugs and heads back towards the house.

FADEOUT.

53. EXT. JUDGE CUTTER’S HOUSE, ESTABLISHING – DAY.

It is morning outside the Judge’s mansion. The Judge’s home is a typical southern plantation style mansion; two stories, covered porches framed by columns. The house and gardens are very large and very grand.

54. EXT. JUDGE CUTTER'S HOUSE, LAWN – DAY.

ALISON and PERCIVAL hide behind a large tree on the lawn of the JUDGE's house.

JUDGE CUTTER, a handsome and immaculately dressed man in his late thirties, sits at a garden setting on the lawn reading the paper after having finished his breakfast.

The front page of the paper features photographs of murdered black civil rights activists.

A PRETTY MAID, African-American and very beautiful and young, carries a tray of used dishes up towards the house and disappears inside.

PERCIVAL
You'd better go now, while he's alone.

Percival takes a letter from his pocket and hands it to Alison.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
Here's the letter. Now, off you go...

Alison, letter in hand, heads across the lawn towards where the judge reposes with his morning paper.

The judge sees her coming and stops reading.

JUDGE CUTTER
(to self)
What do we have here?
Alison reaches the Judge and stops nervously on the other side of the table.

JUDGE CUTTER (CONT'D)
Can I help you sonny?

ALISON
(annoyed)
I’m not a boy.

JUDGE CUTTER
Oh, I apologize for my mistake.

ALISON
I brought you this.

Alison hands over the letter nervously. Judge Cutter takes the letter and, as he opens it, weighs up Alison.

JUDGE CUTTER
Aren't you a little young to be a messenger?

Alison says nothing. Just waits.

The judge reads the letter. As he does so, his face pales. Clearly he does not like what it says. He looks up to Alison, shaken by what he has read.

JUDGE CUTTER (CONT'D)
Is he here?

ALISON
He's behind the trees over there.

JUDGE CUTTER
Good Lord... he doesn't intend coming up does he?

ALISON
Nope. Just wanted me to deliver the letter and see what you say.

JUDGE CUTTER
(angry)
I have nothing to say to him!
(calmer)
Do you know what's in this letter?
Alison shakes her head to indicate no, clearly a little frightened.

**JUDGE CUTTER**

(CONT’D)

Alright then, you may go.

**ALISON**

What should I tell him?

**JUDGE CUTTER**

As it seems I have no choice, tell him that I will do what I can.

**ALISON**

Thank you.

Judge Cutter says nothing. He is somewhat perturbed by being thanked.

Alison lingers, she has that look on her face she gets when she wants to ask a question but hasn't yet developed the words.

**JUDGE CUTTER**

Is there something else?

**ALISON**

You're very young to be a judge.

**JUDGE CUTTER**

My daddy was judge before me and his daddy was judge before him.

Alison's face shows that she does not see this statement as adequate explanation.

**JUDGE CUTTER (CONT'D)**

I was raised from birth to continue that…great…tradition.

Alison smiles awkwardly then turns and runs towards the trees where Percival remains unseen. Percival looks shaken but smiles nevertheless when Alison returns.

CUT TO:
55. INT. – VERNAS KITCHEN – DAY, CONTINUOUS.

Later that afternoon, on return from her visit to the judge, ALISON enters Verna’s kitchen by the back door.

As soon as she enters, she hears HENRIETTA and Verna talking in the store out front.

HENRIETTA O/S
I swear it’s true Verna. Millie Peakes says she seen it with her own eyes. She said it were night before last. She was comin’ home from her daughter’s place and had to go by the cemetery, and she says she seen her as clear as day, Ruth James working mojo by the grave of her sister Eliza.

The conversation catches Alison’s attention. She sneaks to the beaded curtain at the doorway and listens.

VERNA O/S
Oh, hush now Henrietta. You know I don’t hold with such nonsense. That poor Ruth James has enough lies told about her without you spreadin’ what that jabber-jaw Millie Peakes says.

We now see Verna and Henrietta by the front counter of the store. Verna is stacking shelves and Henrietta is standing in front of the cash register.

HENRIETTA
I ain’t spreadin’ lies, I’m just tellin’ you what Millie says she seen. You know what else she saw?

VERNA
No, but I’m sure you’re about to fill me in.
HENRIETTA
She said she seen Eliza’s ghost rise up out of the grave: pearly white and see-through... and drippin’ with blood...

VERNA
Henrietta! It ain’t decent to speak ill of the dead like that; ‘specially that poor murdered girl.

HENRIETTA
I ain’t speakin’ ill of the dead. Besides, don’t you know nothin’ Verna? Ghosts wants to be seen, they wants you to talk about ’em. That’s why they’s ghosts. And that Eliza James, she got more reason than most to be a ghost. Every colored person in Perseverance knows they never did get the real killers. And ain’t no soul can rest when it’s bein’ stirred up by no voodoo witch....

VERNA
Oh Henrietta, now I know you’re crazy. You’re sayin’ that poor confused woman is keeping her own dead sister from resting in peace? You should be ashamed of yourself. First she lost Eliza and then her uncle John. That woman has been through enough without you spreading rumors that she’s a voodoo witch.

HENRIETTA
I ain’t the only one that thinks so Verna. Lots of folks think that Ruth James is a witch and she done called up her murdered sister from beyond the grave to do her biddin’.
VERNA
Why on earth would she do such a thing?

HENRIETTA
Why wouldn’t she? They say she were there when her sister was killed, though she ain’t never spoke of it. In fact, everyone knows that she didn’t speak at all for years after....

VERNA
She was in shock. It often happens that way. Shock ties the tongue, sometimes for years.

HENRIETTA
Ain’t that the truth... I could barely speak when the zipper broke on my best dress. It was like my tongue was made of lead for the longest time....

VERNA
How long? A whole minute?

HENRIETTA
Much longer than that, at least a half hour.... Anyway, Millie Peakes told me that on the day Eliza was murdered, all old Sheriff Tombs could get out of Ruth was that it was two men and a boy that done it. All of ’em white. ‘Course, old Sheriff Tombs didn’t believe that. He was set on blamin’ some colored man the minute he seen the body. Then they went and shot the girls’ own uncle dead. In all the years since, that Ruth ain’t never said who the real killers were....
VERNA
(interrupts)
Because she don’t know. If she knew who they were she would’ve said so. Leave it alone Henrietta. Nothing good will come of digging up the past....

HENRIETTA
I know there’s some folks would agree with you Verna. But maybe that Eliza can’t rest until the ones that killed her are punished. And maybe that’s why Ruth turned to voodoo... to learn how to hex the ones that killed her sister, to curse ‘em into their own graves....

VERNA
That’s enough Henrietta, if you can’t say nothing nice...

HENRIETTA
Don’t say nothin’ at all. Yes I know Verna, but if I only spoke when I had somethin’ nice to say I’d never speak at all!

Verna chuckles. In the kitchen out back, Alison’s face is wide with intrigue about this story of the voodoo witch Ruth James and her murdered sister Eliza.

Alison tip-toes back to her room and sits down on her bed, clearly contemplating what she’d overheard.

56. EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – FLASHBACK 1928, DAY.

In stark black and white, it is a bright sunny day. Eliza’s sister, YOUNG RUTH, is standing stock still in the middle of a country road.

She holds a half eaten apple in her hand, frozen in mid air half way to her mouth. It’s as if she has forgotten it. Behind her the road stretches for miles into the open fields outside of Perseverance Georgia.
The camera swings around to show the YOUNG BOY who had witnessed Eliza’s murder. He has a stick in his hand, hanging loosely by his side. He’s standing at the edge of the road, as though he had stopped dead on emerging from behind a tree and come face-to-face with Young Ruth. The silver cross with a star in its centre glints at his throat.

They stand there for long seconds just staring at each other, silent.

Then the boy speaks:

YOUNG BOY

(voice shaking)

If you ever tell... If you ever say what happened..., no-one will believe you. And then they’ll kill you too.

His whole body is trembling with worry. It’s clear that he is only threatening Young Ruth to protect himself and, perhaps, out of fear of those who killed Eliza. His hands ball into frightened fists.

YOUNG BOY (CONT.)

If you tell... If you tell, I’ll kill you myself.

Young Ruth says nothing. She doesn’t move. The only sign that she has registered what he said is a stream of tears that erupt from her eyes and roll silently down her cheeks.

The boy turns and runs off into the field. Young Ruth blinks, and then collapses in the dirt.

The half eaten apple rolls to the edge of the road and settles against a small clump of wildflowers.

The camera pans up and above the unconscious girl. Her form lying on the road looks like a broken toy. The camera turns up and pans towards the sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE TWO
THE TREE

EPISODE THREE

Title Up: Swampwoods, Georgia, 1938

FADE IN:

1. EXT. SWAMP - DAWN (B&W)

In stark black and white, a young Ruth James makes her way along a shadowy, wooded trail beside a swamp. She is 18 years old now, and carries herself with an elegant dignity. She is clutching a small bundle wrapped in cloth.

Huge swamp cypresses, festooned with long tendrils of Spanish moss, line the trail. Ruth deftly climbs over the root buttresses of the larger trees that block her way, and scrambles over a number of fallen logs, until she finally comes to a clearing in a swamp cypress grove on the bank of a large swampy pond.

A very old African-American man is sitting, as if in meditation, in the hollow of a huge swamp cypress right by the water’s edge. A shaft of light is breaking through the canopy overhead to illuminate him. The light makes it seem as though he has a halo.

This is DOCTOR STORM. He has long grey dreadlocks and his face is painted white like a skull. At first, it seems that he is looking straight at Ruth, but it becomes apparent that his eyes are closed and only seem open because he has eyes painted on his eyelids.

Doctor Storm is sitting cross-legged on some kind of animal skin, surrounded by a jumble of bones and skulls, both animal and human.

Ruth hesitates before approaching him. She is frightened and, besides, the old man looks like he might be asleep. She looks back over her shoulder, contemplating going back the way she came. Before she makes up her mind, Doctor Storm opens his eyes and, with a slight gesture of his head, beckons her nearer.
Ruth walks over to the old man. He puts a finger to his lips as if to say “don’t speak” but motions for her to sit before him. Ruth sits down. She waits a moment, unsure how to proceed. Doctor Storm simply waits, watching her. Soon, Ruth takes something out of the small bundle she’s been carrying. It’s a bunch of small white flowers (the same flowers that her sister’s ghost had led her to).

Doctor Storm looks at the flowers, comprehends what they are by nodding, and then closes his eyes. He thinks a moment, and then speaks, with a very dry voice that sounds like it hasn’t been used in decades.

DOCTOR STORM
You want me to teach you that?

Ruth nods.

DOCTOR STORM
(CONT’D)
That road leads to shame girl, shame and loneliness…. You sure you wants to take it?

Ruth nods firmly. There is no doubt in her mind. Doctor storm closes his eyes again and sighs. When he suddenly opens them again, everything goes black.

FADE TO BLACK

[AD BREAK]

Title Up: Perseverance, Georgia, 1967

FADE IN:

2. EXT. PERSEVERANCE FROM ABOVE, ESTABLISHING – DAY

A birds-eye view of Verna’s store as the sun rises to an early morning position. As we pan left, we see the town in the distance, exhibiting the subtle signs of a town waking; small plumes of white smoke rising from the odd chimney, a car here or there pulling out onto a street, a solitary person walking the street.
3. EXT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE, ESTABLISHING - DAY

It is early morning. From across the town square the old jailhouse seems forlorn and silent. Birds sing from nearby trees. A few early risers walk by on their way to work or to run errands. Otherwise, the square is empty.

CUT TO:

4. EXT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE - DAY

The Judge exits the jailhouse looking both angry and stressed. He crosses the street towards the courthouse on the other side of the square in something of a hurry, readjusting his tie as he does so. He passes through the square without a single glance back at the jail.

CUT TO:

5. INT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE - DAY

NATE sleeps on the cot in his cell. He’s shirtless, wearing only underwear. He still sports a black eye and a split lip but he has cleaned himself up and the swelling has decreased.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX comes to the bars of his cell. He has an angry look on his face. He raps the cell bars with his keys.

Nate looks up, clearly having just woken.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
You got lucky boy... charges dropped, not enough evidence.

The Sheriff unlocks the cell door and swings it open.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT'D)
You can go.
Nate hesitantly gets up and fetches his clothes; he doesn’t quite trust that the Sheriff will let him go. As he puts on his trousers, he glances at the sheriff a few times just to make sure he is really going to be released. He doesn’t waste time putting on his shirt, he just bundles it up in his hand. Then he goes to walk past the Sheriff.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT'D)
(sneering)
Better put that shirt on in here son…. I'd hate to have to arrest you for indecency.

Nate unfolds his shirt and begins to put it on.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT'D)
Oh and son, just between you and me..., don't go thinkin’ you got one over on me. I'm just gonna have to get you for somethin’ else.... You see, folks 'round here bound to lynch a pinko commie jew as quick as a nigger. And I sure do loves me a lynchin' an' the next one’s been a long time comin'.

Nate looks both unsettled and disgusted. He finishes putting on his shirt and goes to walk out.

The sheriff grabs Nate by the throat.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT’D)
You sure do got a pretty neck.
Not too pretty for a rope necktie though.

The Sheriff releases Nate’s throat and Nate, a little dazed, walks out.

After Nate has left, BOBBY BEAUFORT, the deputy, walks up to the Sheriff. The sheriff turns to him and says:

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT’D)
Someone's gonna pay for this.
The Sheriff slams the cell door shut.

FADEOUT.

6. EXT. Verna's Store, Yard - Day

Alison is kicking around in the front yard by the large tree. She has a lolly-pop in her mouth and is humming along to herself.

She looks down the road and sees the three little girls from the porch, the ones with the braided hair and the pink ribbons, coming towards the store.

The three girls see her and walk towards her.

THREE LITTLE GIRLS
Hey.

ALISON
Hey.

LITTLE GIRL 1
What'cha doin?

ALISON
Nothin'

LITTLE GIRL 2
It ain't possible to do nothin'. You can only do somethin'. Least, that's the way I hears it.

ALISON
I mean I'm not doing anythin' in particular.

LITTLE GIRL 3
We ain't doin' nothin' in particular neither... just walkin'.

ALISON
Uh-huh.

The four girls stand uneasily. They look like they want to talk to each other but are unsure how to begin. On the outside, at least, they appear to have little in common.
LITTLE GIRL 2
You hear they let go that
Jewish feller they arrested
for burnin' the white folks'
church?

ALISON
They did? Already?

LITTLE GIRL 2
Sure enough did, first thing
this mornin'. They sayin'
there weren't no evidence.

LITTLE GIRL 1
My mamma says that's the first
time ever in Perseverance
Georgia they give two hoots
about evidence. She says that
white boy must've had friends
in high places...

LITTLE GIRL 3
He ain't no white boy, my
daddy say. My daddy say he's a
Hebrew.

LITTLE GIRL 1
Hebrews is white, ain't they?

LITTLE GIRL 2
They sure enough look white.

LITTLE GIRL 3
Lookin' white don't mean you
is white. Why, you can be as
white as snow and still be
colored...

Little Girl 3 notices her friends motioning with their
eyes for her to keep quiet, because of Alison's presence.
She looks at Alison and sees the discomfort written all
over her face. Then Little Girl 3’s face takes up a look
of remorse.

LITTLE GIRL 3
(CONT'D)
...that's what my daddy say,
anyway...

After a brief yet uncomfortable pause, Alison steps away
from the tree and says:
ALISON
I gotta go. I got something to do... See y'all later...

Alison heads off down the road, away from town, towards Percival's place. She is eager to tell him the good news.

LITTLE GIRL 3
Did you see her knees? They were as dirty as a farmhand's.

LITTLE GIRL 1
I know. She’s as good as a boy.

LITTLE GIRL 2
That lolly-pop sure did look good though...

LITTLE GIRL 1
Ya wanna get ourselves one to share?

The three girls all agree and wander in towards the store, eager to purchase their own lolly-pop.

CUT TO:

7. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND – DAY

ALISON is walking towards Percival’s house. As she comes to the cemetery by the pond, she sees RUTH sitting by one of the graves, the only one in the colored section that is more than just a rudimentary cross.

Ruth dusts off the top of the headstone, and clears away a few small weeds growing at its base. Alison goes through the gate of the cemetery and tentatively walks over to her.

RUTH
We run into each other again Miss Mayflower. I’m startin’ to think you spend as much time in woods and graveyards as I do. Folks’ll be callin’ you witch next.

ALISON
I’m goin’ over to see Percy.
RUTH
(knowingly)
Is you now?

ALISON
That’s what I said ain’t it?

RUTH
Don’t get sassy with me child, I ain’t as easy as your granma is. I ain’t got no problem with smackin’ your pale behind. You want to spend time with me, you better be on your best behavior.

ALISON
I don’t mean to sass, it just seems to come natural.

RUTH
Not much comes natural child, most things is learned; from the way we eat our breakfast to the way we treat each other. We learns it all from other folks, our kin mostly. ‘Course, some things come from a lack of learnin’.

ALISON
None o’ my kin is sassy so where could I’ve got it from?

RUTH
Must be one of them things that are from a lack of learnin’. But don’t worry, a few more years with Verna Hobb an’ you’ll be better behaved than a preacher’s wife.

Alison grimaces, as if to say “I sure hope not”. Ruth smiles and turns her attention back to her sister’s grave. Her eyes then reflect a deep sadness.

ALISON
That’s your sister, ain’t it?

Ruth nods.
ALISON (CONT’D)
Is it true... is it true that
she was murdered?

Ruth nods again, slowly, as though it is painful for her
to acknowledge this fact.

SMASH CUT
TO:

8. EXTERNAL. THE WOODS - FLASHBACK 1928, DAY (B&W)

In stark black and white, ELIZA’s killer sneers, leering
at her as she shrinks back against a tree. The DARK-
HAIRED MAN pulls a hunting knife out of a holster at his
hip. The blade flashes in the only beam of sunlight
breaking through the canopy overhead. He turns the knife
threateningly and it flashes again.

SMASH CUT
TO:

9. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND, 1967 - DAY

ALISON stands stock-still, watching the deep grief
transform RUTH’s face.

RUTH
I see it. Every time I close
my eyes. I see it.

This heartfelt revelation deeply moves Alison; she takes
a small step towards Ruth and chews her bottom lip, on
the verge of deciding to tell Ruth a secret of her own.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

10. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND - DAY

Ruth’s heartfelt revelation is still having its effect on
Alison. She chews on her bottom lip some more, deciding
to reveal a secret of her own.

ALISON
I see things sometimes too...
Sometimes I dream things that
ain’t happened yet.
Ruth looks up into Alison’s face, intrigued.

RUTH
Well now, is that so...

Alison nods, yes.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Seems to me child that you and me got some things in common.

Alison smiles. Ruth turns back to look at her sister’s photograph. Soon, the grief reappears on her face.

Alison looks on, immobilized in the presence of Ruth’s deep grief. She reaches out an arm and places it on Ruth’s shoulder. Alison’s touch brings Ruth out of her reminiscences.

RUTH
I loved her more than anythin’; ‘cept for my mamma. Eliza was my whole world....

Alison looks at Ruth with a mixture of unease and pity.

ALISON
That’s how I felt about my daddy.... I thought I would die when....

Alison can’t say anymore. Her eyes glisten with tears.

RUTH
We’ve both lost dear ones, haven’t we child. Yes, we seem to have a lot in common... Loss is not a nice thing to have in common, but it means we understand each other a little, don’t it?

Alison nods, wipes away a tear from the corner of her eye.

ALISON
Who done it? Who killed her?

RUTH
Two white men, and a boy. That’s all I know.
ALISON
Didn’t you ever see ‘em again?

Ruth shakes her head.

RUTH
I seen the boy, once. But I never knew his name.

Alison looks at Ruth with disbelief.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Back then, colored folks didn’t associate with white folks. ‘Round here, we could go months without ever seein’ nobody white. The only white person I used to see regular was old Mrs Huckstep.

Alison’s face lights with surprise.

RUTH (CONT’D)
That’s right, Percy’s mamma.

Ruth resumes dusting the headstone, and clears away a few more weeds from its base.

RUTH (CONT’D)
My own mamma used to be her maid. Mamma were real old then and not very strong, but Mrs Huckstep hired her anyhow. I’ve known Percy since he were a tiny little thing. I used to look after him some when he was just a baby…. Percy’s mamma weren’t like other white folks though. She treated us real good. That’s why Percy ain’t never done a mean thing to a colored person. He learnt to treat us right from her…. She even paid for this here cross. She always treated my mamma and us like we was white.

Alison’s face shows that she finds Ruth’s last sentence a strange thing to say, but she lets it pass without comment.
ALISON
Did Percy know Eliza?

RUTH
No, she was gone before he was
born. But I reckon she
would’ve liked him. She was
always fond of the weaker
things....

Alison smiles awkwardly at this. Then, she summons the
determination to ask another, more difficult, question.

ALISON
Henrietta says that you’re
using voodoo against them that
killed her.

RUTH
As usual, Henrietta’s about as
right as she is thin.

ALISON
So you ain’t?

RUTH
Don’t get me wrong child. If I
knew who they was, I’d work
some mojo against ’em. If I
was a less forgivin’ person,
I’d curse ’em all the way to
hell.

Alison’s face shows surprise at the idea that Ruth has
forgiven her sister’s killers.

RUTH
Again, don’t take me wrong. I
ain’t got much forgiveness for
the likes of them. I ain’t no
saint. I might not curse ’em
directly, but there’s things
you can do to bring justice
down on ’em. Things that make
it so that a wrongdoer’s ill
deeds come back on ’em all at
once. The more evil the
person’s done, the more evil
that comes knockin’ on their
door.
ALISON
Have you done that to the ones that killed her?

RUTH
Can’t. Don’t know who they is. Anyway, the mens’ll be dead by now, in hell for certain.

ALISON
What about the boy?

RUTH
He only play a small part. He were only a bit of a boy.

ALISON
But, he never told on the ones that did it. He never told the police.

RUTH
And for that, I pray every day that he rots in hell…. He’d be gettin’ old by now. Could be anyone. Could be anywhere.

ALISON
You got no idea who he might be?

RUTH
None. I only ever seen him the twice. All I know is he had a silver cross ‘round his neck, a cross with a star in the centre.

ALISON
Not many boys would have somethin’ like that.

RUTH
For all I know, every white boy in Georgia has one.

Alison thinks on this for a minute. It is clear by her face that she doubts the starred cross is a very common thing.
ALISON
(beat)
I wish it hadn’t happened... I wish they’d never done it to her... An’ I wish my daddy were still here....

Ruth reaches out and takes Alison’s hand.

RUTH
I wish it too child, but it ain’t ever goin’ to be. We got to go on. We got to live. Eliza wouldn’t want me to be sad, I know that for certain, and I don’t think your daddy would want you to be sad neither. He’d want you to live your life, to be happy, to be loved.

Alison tears up. She looks down to the ground and shifts on her feet, uncomfortable with Ruth seeing her pain.

ALISON
(after a pause)
But, who will love me?

RUTH
Why, anyone who has the good fortune to meet you Alison Mayflower. You’re a sweet child. Those that know you, will love you... Your grandmamma loves you, and I know that Percy is mighty fond of you too.

Alison smiles then, and squeezes Ruth’s hand which still holds her own.

RUTH
Now, off you go and have fun, I’m sure Percy will be thrilled to see you.

Alison smiles and relinquishes Ruth’s hand. She turns and walks away. Ruth looks back at her sister’s grave marker. She reaches out and wipes clean the glass framing her sister’s photograph and the dates “1914 - 1928”, then uses the same handkerchief to wipe away her own tears.
11. I/E. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

PERCIVAL is sitting on a porch swing. He’s wearing the same suit he was wearing when we first saw him - blue pin-stripe. He’s also wearing an ascot tie that features a traditional style Japanese drawing with blue waves and a snowcapped volcano in the background.

His eyes are hidden by his round sunglasses. He fans his face with a blue oriental fan.

On a table set beside him is a jug of home-made lemonade and some glasses.

He sees ALISON coming and smiles welcomingly.

As Alison mounts the porch, she takes in the scene and grins.

ALISON
You look like the Empress of China!

PERCIVAL
Thanks for noticing.

He indicates the jug and glasses with a small gesture of his hand.

PERCIVAL
Lemonade?

Alison nods her head eagerly. She helps herself. She notices that there are four glasses.

ALISON
You expectin' company?

PERCIVAL
Not expecting no, just kind of hoping.

ALISON
You hoping for anyone in particular?

PERCIVAL
Just a friend... or someone I thought was a friend... whom I fear is still detained...
Alison takes this in but doesn't respond, thinking it just another odd statement of his.

Percival pats the seat beside him and she sits down.

After a moment:

ALISON
I heard that Nate Bowman got outta jail?

Percival looks instantly relieved.

PERCIVAL
When?

ALISON
Just this mornin'.

PERCIVAL
That is good news.... Thank you so much for helping me with that Alison. If you hadn't delivered that letter, Nate might still be languishing in jail.

Alison smiles. She waits a moment and then asks what she really wants to know.

ALISON
Percy, why'd the judge let him go? What was in that letter?

Percival considers her questioning eyes from behind his sunglasses. He weighs up whether or not he will explain it to her. In a moment he decides he will.

PERCIVAL
I'm sorry to say Alison that the letter was not effective because it was an appeal to truth and justice. You will learn my dear that this town deals in an entirely different currency.

Alison nods as if she understands but her face says that she doesn't really.
PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
The mail you delivered to
Judge Cutter was blackmail...

Alison, true to form, is shocked, despite all she has
experienced, to discover that there is a dark underbelly
to her friend. She looks uneasy, perhaps a little
disapproving of Percival's actions.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

12. I/E. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

ALISON, her glass of lemonade in hand, is still looking
shocked. PERCIVAL sits next to her looking somewhat
guilty.

PERCIVAL
That's right, blackmail.... You
see, I know a little something
about the Judge's past that he
prefers I keep secret.... I
simply wrote in the letter
that if Nate was not released
forthwith I would go public
with what I know. Suffice it
to say that the prospect of
that was more than enough
motivation for the judge to
arrange Nate's release.

Percival notices the disapproving look on Alison's face.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
You mustn't disapprove of me
my dear. I can't bare
disapproval, especially the
disapproval of children.
Besides, Judge Junior would
have listened to nothing else.

ALISON
Judge Junior?
PERCIVAL
That's what everyone called him, right from birth, because of his coming from a long line of legal people....

CUT TO:

13. INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK 1940S, DAY

A small schoolroom with children arranged from youngest at front to oldest at back.

YOUNG PERCIVAL is in the front row, just as effeminate as a youth, although very sweet looking.

JUDGE JUNIOR is in the back row, handsome but with an edge of cruelty to his appearance. He is looking at Young Percival with disgust.

    PERCIVAL (V.O)
    Even the teacher called him Judge Junior and treated him with more deference than his faulty character would normally have brought him.

The teacher goes over to JUDGE JUNIOR with a big smile and pats him on the shoulder as she checks his work. He continues to leer at Young Percival.

Young Percival notices him leering and swiftly turns away. His face shows anxiety, maybe a little fear.

CUT TO:


Back on the porch-swing, ALISON looks questioningly at PERCIVAL whose eyes remain hidden behind the sunglasses.

    PERCIVAL
    Judge Junior was a mean and cruel boy. He was some years older than me but right from my first day in that miserable little school he made it his mission to torment me.

    ALISON
    Torment you?
PERCIVAL
He called me names, threw
stones at me...

CUT TO:

15. EXT. SCHOOL, YARD – FLASHBACK 1940S, DAY

YOUNG PERCIVAL is sitting on a bench under a tree eating
his lunch from an old fashioned lunchbox. He looks lonely
and vulnerable. Suddenly a stone hurtles out of nowhere
and hits him in the forehead.

He drops his lunch and grabs his face. Blood erupts and
trickles down to his eyes. He looks like he might pass
out. He searches for the source of the stone.

JUDGE JUNIOR, another stone in hand, stands nearby,
grinning and looking gleeful that he's made Young
Percival bleed.

PERCIVAL (V.O)
...He was always pushing me
around. Everywhere I went it
seemed he was there, bullying
and hurting me.

CUT TO:

16. I/E. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH 1967 - DAY

ALISON's face shows strong sympathy. PERCIVAL's eyes
remain hidden behind his sunglasses, but his lips are
drawn tight and his face is a little pale.

PERCIVAL
I was very small for my age
and he was big for his. I had
no hope of defending myself,
even if I had the temperament,
which I didn't... and I couldn't
tell anyone about it because I
was too ashamed.

ALISON
Why were you ashamed?
PERCIVAL
No-one wants to tell their teacher or parents that they're being bullied for being a sissy... So I just tried to avoid him. That's when I started to go to Verna's store instead of into town. Of course everyone, even Verna, tried to discourage me but nothing was scarier to me than Judge Junior. But as much as I tried I couldn't avoid him forever... and one summer, when I was picking flowers down by the old bridge, he caught up with me....

CUT TO:

17. EXT. OLD BRIDGE - FLASHBACK 1940S, DAY

YOUNG PERCIVAL is picking flowers among tallish grass under the shade of trees by an old bridge.

The flowers have small blue petals; they are the hex flowers that Alison once picked. Young Percival is in a world of his own and perfectly content.

Without being seen, JUDGE JUNIOR walks silently up behind him. Before Young Percival knows that he's there, Young Judge Junior grabs him by the arms and restrains him.

Young Percival drops the flowers he's picked and struggles to break free.

The hex flowers fall to the ground.

Judge Junior, older and stronger, easily pushes Young Percival to the ground.

The young judge is grinning perversely and then, holding both of Young Percival's wrists in one hand, he goes to loosen his own belt.

FADE TO BLACK.
18. I/E. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, PORCH 1967 - DAY

Alison's mouth is open in shock. Percival is sitting stiffly in the porch swing, one hand gripping and twisting a cushion beside him.

PERCIVAL
He... abused me... hurt me.

ALISON
What did he do?

PERCIVAL
I can't... it's unspeakable....

ALISON looks stunned. She puts her hand on PERCIVAL's knee to comfort him.

A single tear rolls out from beneath Percival's sunglasses and down his cheek. He wipes it away with a firm gesture and takes in a deep breath.

PERCIVAL
That's why I scratched his face out of that photograph you saw... the one in my scrapbook. If only I could scratch the memory out of my head.

ALISON
I'm sorry he hurt you.

PERCIVAL
So am I honey, so am I.

ALISON
Percy?

Percival wipes away another tear before answering.

PERCIVAL
Yes, my dear?

ALISON
Judge Junior didn't wear a silver cross 'round his neck, one with a star in the centre, did he?
PERCIVAL
No. I would remember something like that. Why do you ask?

Alison looks a little disappointed.

ALISON
No reason.

She takes a sip of lemonade and pretends not to notice as Percival takes out a handkerchief and wipes away the remains of the tears on his cheek. She looks over to a wicker coffee table nearby. A newspaper is folded there with a photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Maybe now that we got Dr King things like what happened to you won't happen anymore...

PERCIVAL
What do you mean?

ALISON
If everyone has their rights, the coloreds and everyone, then no-body will be treated bad.

PERCIVAL
My dear, even though I have the greatest respect for civil rights activists and Dr King, I fear they have none for me.

Again Alison looks confused.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
When people speak of equality they do not mean for me. No one marches in the street for my kind. We are at the bottom of the heap. Worse than Negroes and worse than Jews.

ALISON
But, what is your kind Percy?

PERCIVAL
Uh, the theatrical kind. Thespians and such.
ALISON

Thespians?

PERCIVAL

Yes.

ALISON

Why do people hate thespians?

PERCIVAL

They don't like the way a thespian's heart beats... They think it's an abomination to have a heart like mine.

(beat)

That's why I gave up on God and turned to Buddha. I ain't never kept a friend who doesn't respect me and treat me right.

ALISON

You shouldn't say such things. People will think you're a heathen.

PERCIVAL

But my dear, I am a heathen. A happy heathen. Although, I have often studied the bible, trying to figure out why it is that people like me, ah thespians, are so loathed. You know what I found?

Alison indicates that she doesn't know.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)

I found that there are more pronouncements against mould in the bible than against my kind. Mould! So I figure what I do with my heart can't be all that big a deal to God.

Alison smiles and considers this a moment.

ALISON

I'd march for you Percy... all the way 'round the world.
PERCIVAL
And I would do the same for you...

(pensively)
But I fear we would be marching alone honey. It breaks my heart to say it, but I don't think those civil rights people have a dream for me... If they did, I suspect they'd think it was a nightmare!

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

19. EXT. PERCIVAL’S HOUSE – DAY

In time lapse photography, the sun sets over Percival's House. The house’s shadow grows longer and slowly consumes the whole of the garden, throwing it into darkness. A white moon rises. Clouds drift silently across the night.

CUT TO:

20. EXT. GREEN FIELD - DAY, DAWN

The rising sun breaches the hump of hills in the distance. A field, populated by a few sleepy cows, glistens with dawn dew.

CUT TO:

21. EXT. WOODS - DAY, NOON

Some days later, the sun shines brightly. The sky is blue and the insects make their summery noise. An African-American boy moves cows from pasture to pasture. A dragonfly glides over lily pads in the pond by the cemetery.

FADE TO:
22. EXT. VERNAS STORE - DAY

VERNA is working in her yard, pulling weeds and planting seedlings. She is wearing a wide brimmed straw hat, gardening gloves and a floral apron.

From beneath the brim of her hat, she sees JUPITER JACOBS, dressed in the same dignified fashion as usual, walking up the road towards the store.

Her brow forms a small frown but then dissolves when a slight and uncontrolled smile forms on her lips.

The brim of Verna’s hat makes it so that she can watch Jupiter approach without him knowing. She watches him as he reaches the gate. He nonchalantly whistles to signal his presence, and strolls slowly by the front gate, waiting for Verna to notice him.

Verna takes a deep breath, stands up and turns to face him. She masks her smile with a faux frown.

VERNA
Jupiter Jacobs, I’ve just about had enough of this foolishness. A day don’t go by when you’re not castin’ your shadow on my gate… But, as I can see you’re either too stubborn or too stupid to give up… I suppose I have to ask you in… for a coffee… for five minutes.

JUPITER
Why, thank you Miss Verna, I sure do appreciate the invitation, curt though it was.

He doffs his hat at Verna and smirks. Verna huffs good-heartedly, takes off her garden gloves and heads towards the front steps.

VERNA
(turning to him)
Well, you comin’?

Jupiter swiftly opens the gate and follows her to the steps, removing his hat as he mounts the first one.

CUT TO:
23. INT. Verna's Store - Day

As they enter the cool darkness of the store, Jupiter says:

JUPITER
Persistence and deep feelin’.

Verna stops and looks up into his face.

VERNA
Sorry, what?

He smiles, pleased to have her attention.

JUPITER
Persistence and deep feelin’, not stubbornness or stupidity. That’s what drove me to your gate each day.

Verna looks surprised and slightly embarrassed.

VERNA
Persistence I’ll give you, but deep feeling? Jupiter Jacobs you don’t know me from nothing.

JUPITER
That ain’t true Verna Hobb. I know you better than you think. You’re a proud, honest, hard workin’, soft-hearted woman... and you’re lonely.

Her embarrassment turns to agitation.

VERNA
Lonely? What, with my grandbaby recently arrived and Henrietta doggin’ my doorstep every other day, and you prowling up an’ down outside my fence! Why on earth would I be lonely?
JUPITER
I don’t know why. I just know you is… and I ain’t too proud to admit I’m lonely too. I buried my good wife more than ten years ago, and though I love her just as much today as I did when we married, I ain’t so foolish not to take a chance at a new life. I wouldn’t have thought that Verna Hobb would be neither.

Verna looks stunned, but she doesn’t speak.

JUPITER (CONT’D)
Now, let’s have that coffee.

He walks towards the beaded curtain separating the store from the kitchen, leaving Verna looking abashed.

When Verna enters the kitchen she finds Jupiter putting the kettle on the stove.

JUPITER
Now, where’s your coffee
Verna, and the sugar. I can’t have my coffee without sugar, tried to for years, but just can’t.

Verna moves over to a cabinet and retrieves the coffee jar and sugar pot.

VERNA
I like a little sugar too,
perhaps more than I oughta.
(beat)
But, what’s the point of life if you don’t take the comforts.

Jupiter nods at this, recognizing that Verna is talking about more than the sugar. Verna places the coffee and sugar on the table. They smile awkwardly at each other, then sit down to wait for the kettle to boil.

FADEOUT:
PERCIVAL and ALISON are laying flowers at the grave of Percival's mother. Alison is wearing overalls and Percival is wearing casual pants and a cardigan with his usual ascot tie at his neck.

Percival snips at the grass around the edge of the grave with a comically huge pair of kitchen scissors. Alison uses her shirt sleeve to wipe dust from the top of the tombstone.

Once Alison has dusted Percival's mother's headstone, she glances over to where a large number of other headstones all bear the surname Huckstep. She goes over to the nearest one, bearing the name Reginald Huckstep, and begins cleaning it as well.

Percival notices what Alison is doing and, looking mildly disapproving, stops snipping grass and watches her for a moment.

PERCIVAL
What are you doing Al honey?

ALISON
I thought I'd clean up all these Huckstep headstones...

PERCIVAL
I wouldn't be bothered if I were you. Uncle Reggie is known for one thing and one thing only... He went slowly mad after his wife and child died of yellow fever and then, one Sunday evening after church, he killed his colored man and ate him for supper.

Alison looks horrified; she swiftly steps away from Reginald's grave.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Not one of them Hucksteps are worth a dime, except Mamma. They were a bunch of lunatics and cranks. That one over there...

He indicates a headstone bearing the name 'Eula Huckstep'.

24. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY
PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
...is my great aunt Eula. She was renowned as a fortune teller and witch... but in my opinion there weren't much magic in her at all.

Alison implores him with her eyes to explain.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
She died drinking one of her own potions. The potion was meant to impart immortality....

A glint of mischief sparks in Percival’s eye. He turns to face Alison, to grasp her full attention as he gleefully tells the story.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
The main ingredient was a plant that grows in the swamp on the outskirts of town. A real pretty little plant with a white flower. It turns out that plant with the tiny white flower is deadly poison. Eula dropped dead as soon as the potion hit her lips. 'Course, some people say she got what she wanted... eternity. S’pose it depends how you look at it. Anyhow, everyone knows only ol’ Ruth knows how to use them dark woods plants.

ALISON
...Is that why you're so different Percy? Are you a magic man?

PERCIVAL
Well, I am unusual that's for sure, in one sense of the word.... But to answer your question, no, I don't have any magic that other folks don't have.

ALISON
I think you do. I think you're a magic man....

357
Percival smiles affectionately at Alison, then returns to his task of cleaning his mother’s headstone.

FADEOUT.

25. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE - DAY, LATER

As PERCIVAL and ALISON walk down the road after their visit to Mamma's grave, a car rolls slowly up behind them.

As the car gets closer, it comes into focus and we see that it is the sheriff's patrol car.

When Alison and Percival become aware of the car, they move to the side of the road and the car pulls along beside them and comes to a stop.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX, wearing dark sunglasses, addresses them through the rolled down window, but keeps his eyes ahead of him, a sign of his disdain.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
Out for a little stroll Percy?

PERCIVAL
Just on our way home Sheriff, been up at the cemetery visiting ma...

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(interrupting)
You spend a lot of time in that cemetery. Some might say far too much.

Percival does not respond - there is nothing he can say to this.

The Sheriff turns and looks at Alison for the briefest moment.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT'D)
Who's that you got with you?

PERCIVAL
This is Alison Mayflower...

The Sheriff looks at Alison again, his cold stare felt even through his dark sunglasses.
SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
Mayflower? That ain't no local name. Where's she from?

PERCIVAL
She's Verna Hobb's grandbaby. She's just come over from Savannah...

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
I thought I could smell nigger.

Percival gasps with shock.

PERCIVAL
Her father was a white man!

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
Not much of a white man if he lay with a colored gal, now was he?

Percival and Alison stand still in shocked silence.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
(CONT'D)
(to Alison)
I'm goin' to keep my eye on you, so you'd better be a good girl, you hear?

Alison nods in the affirmative. Then the sheriff hoicks and spits in Alison's direction. She has to jump backwards to avoid the spittle landing on her shoes.

The Sheriff smirks and the car moves slowly forward. Percival and Alison are motionless in silence. Then, led by Percival who takes Alison by the hand, they continue walking down the road.

PERCIVAL
Don't you worry about him honey, I heard from a reliable source he was born with a deformity... that's why he's so mean.

ALISON
What kind of deformity?
PERCIVAL
Let's just say he has never
gone that he measures up to
other men.

Alison doesn't understand. Percival smirks but, at the
same time, his face shows that he is still disturbed by
what happened.

He squeezes Alison’s hand and smiles as if to say,
"everything will be alright". They continue down the
street, hand in hand, like two innocent children.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

26. EXT. VERNA'S STORE, ESTABLISHING- NIGHT

That night at Verna's store; A gentle light shines from
the windows out into all the shadowy places in the
garden. The store looks homey and safe.

27. INT. VERNA'S STORE, SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

VERNA and ALISON are each sitting and reading by
lamplight. Verna is reading a colored women's craft
journal. Alison is reading a book entitled 'SCARY TALES
FOR BOYS'.

Verna occasionally glances up at Alison who, with the
turn of each page, gets more and more spooked, glancing
out the window, over her shoulder, and even down the side
of the couch where she sits, half expecting to see a
ghost squeezed in there.

VERNA
I don't know why you're
readin' that nonsense.

ALISON
Percy gave it to me. It's real
good... scary.
VERNA
Those kind of stories aren’t
good for your mind. For the
life of me I can’t see why
Percy would give it to you. He
should know better than to go
around filling little
children’s heads with
nonsense... though Percy ain’t
known for common sense
himself.

ALISON
He said I could have it
because he wasn’t its intended
audience.... I’m not sure what
that means but I’m glad he
gave it to me.... It's real
excitin’....

Alison puts down the book and looks over at her
grandmother.

ALISON (CONT’D)
Have you ever seen a ghost
grandma?

VERNA
Can’t say that I have, but I
expect those who see ghosts
are those who want to and I
ain’t never wanted to.

ALISON
Percy says his uncle Reginald
was a cannibal who ate his
colored man...

VERNA
As I said, Percy is not known
for his sense.

(beat)
You spend too much time with
him. People are talking.

ALISON
What people? Henrietta?

VERNA
Not just Henrietta... it would
do you good to find some
friends your own age.
ALISON
Colored girls?

VERNA
Don't say it like that. Some of those colored girls are real sweet.... What about those three little girls who come into the store? Their daddies all own their own farms, why don't you go and play with them?

ALISON
They're just three dumb little monkeys...

VERNA
Alison Mayflower! You didn't just call those colored children monkeys!

ALISON
I didn't mean it that way! Geez, since I found out I was an African I have to watch what I say all the time! (despondent)
I'm always sayin' the wrong thing.

VERNA
(softening)
Some of the things you used to say 'round white folks you just can't say 'round coloreds, that's all. It's nothing to worry about. It's like learning some new manners. You'll get the hang of it.

ALISON
What if I don't?

VERNA
You will. It might help if you got yourself a colored friend, then you'd pick it up real quick.
Alison casts her eyes downward, contemplates Verna's words. After a moment, she looks up and smiles meekly and, after another brief pause, moves on to another subject.

**ALISON**

Why does the Sheriff hate negroes?

**VERNA**

Because his daddy hated them before him. He learnt to hate. Hate isn’t natural, you’ve got to get it pushed into you.

**ALISON**

That sounds like somethin’ Ruth would say.

Verna raises an eyebrow.

**VERNA**

Ruth James?

Alison nods.

**VERNA (CONT’D)**

Lord knows if you don’t got a knack for befriending all the wrong people.

Alison ignores this.

**ALISON**

Percy says the Sheriff is mean on account of his deformity.

**VERNA**

What deformity?

**ALISON**

The one that means he don't measure up to other men.

Verna's eyebrows shoot up again, then she smirks.

**VERNA**

Percy said that, did he?

**ALISON**

Uh-huh.
Verna
Maybe that Percy is smarter than he looks.

FADEOUT.

28. INT. Verna's store, Alison's bedroom - night

At the store, still later that night, Alison lies asleep in her bedroom. All is calm, but Alison is restless in her bed. She is having another bad dream.

SMASH CUT TO:

29. EXTERNAL. The woods - dream, day (B&W)

In stark black and white, Eliza's killer sneers, leering at her as she shrinks back against a tree. The dark-haired man pulls a hunting knife out of a holster at his hip. The blade flashes in the only beam of sunlight breaking through the canopy overhead. He turns the knife threateningly and it flashes again.

SMASH CUT TO:

30. INT. Verna's store, Alison's bedroom 1967 - night

Alison thrashes around in her bed. She is clearly very distressed by her dream.

CUT TO:

31. EXTERNAL. Verna's store - night.

Outside the store, all is still; still and dark.

CUT TO:

32. EXT. CABIN IN SWAMP WOODS - night, establishing.

A flickering light emanates from the windows of a small and ramshackle cabin in the woods on the edge of a swamp.

Hanging from nails on the covered porch are wind chimes made of bones, antlers and snake skins.
The place has an eerie, haunted feeling.

CUT TO:

33. INT. CABIN IN SWAMP WOODS - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS.

PERCIVAL sits at an old kitchen table in the dark one room cabin. In front of him is a small candle-lamp. He is at the table alone. He looks very nervous.

There are many strange objects around him, stuffed birds, bones of various animals and a dog skull with very sharp teeth.

Nearby a figure moves in the shadows gathering a small bundle from a cluttered set of shelves.

The figure moves into the light of the candle-lamp, revealing that it is RUTH.

Ruth moves toward Percival with a serpentine grace. She sits down in front of him and deposits a small bundle, wrapped in what looks like fur, on the table between them.

Percival, looking at the bundle, nervously adjusts his necker-chief. Ruth eyes him with intense scrutiny.

RUTH
That's a pretty thing you have about your neck Percy boy. A very pretty thing.

PERCIVAL
This? Oh, it's nothing...

RUTH
(to dog skull)
Such finery he wears on his flesh and bones. All to cover up that he doesn't like his own skin.

Percival's face blanches with embarrassment, as though a deep secret has been exposed in public.

RUTH (CONT’D)
(to dog skull)
Ever since he was a little boy, this one has carried so much shame.
RUTH (CONT’D)
(to Percy)
Shame is poison; it will kill you quicker than snakebit. Let it go boy. Let yourself be free of it. You don't need to hate yourself so much.

PERCIVAL
(after a pause)
...What I need is for you to read the cards for me.

RUTH
It's always the same with you.... Lord knows, you never come all the way out here in the dead of night just to visit with your ol' friend Ruth.

Ruth unfolds the bundle. Inside the fur is a collection of odd things - some crystals, a few knuckle bones of some large animal, the claw of a bear, a few polished dimes and a deck of large cards.

She lays out the cards on the fur and caresses the soft pelt. She looks at Percival, who is sitting nervously in his chair.

RUTH
Do you like my beaver?

Percival is mute with shock and confusion.

RUTH (CONT’D)
(laughing)
I mean the fur! It's beaver fur!

PERCIVAL
Oh, yes, it's lovely, a lovely beaver... pelt.

RUTH
(chuckling)
Not to worry boy, I knows that beaver ain’t your favorite animal.... Maybe it’s ‘cause of them big bucky teeth they have.
Percival smiles a tight smile and readjusts himself on the seat.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Shuffle the cards and split them three times.

Percival does this. Then Ruth folds the three piles of cards back into each other and waits.

RUTH (CONT)
Well, I ain’t got all night. What are your questions?

PERCIVAL
Well, this question is delicate…. There is someone who, I feel, needs to be… punished.

Ruth swiftly deals a card. The card is 'The Tower'. It depicts a stone tower being obliterated by a lightning strike.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

34. INT. CABIN IN SWAMP WOODS - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS.

Percival stares at the tarot card showing a tower struck by lightning. He fiddles at his shirt collar. Ruth is stroking the tarot card. She gives it a final tap and then says:

RUTH
Do nothin’. Justice is comin’ to that one… as it comes to us all.

Percival absorbs this information for a moment.

PERCIVAL
Well then, that is good news. There is someone else I’d like to ask about…
RUTH  
(interrupting)  
Don't tell me no names nor  
tell me no long stories. I  
need just the heart of the  
thing.  

PERCIVAL  
Uh, Ok, I need this person,  
this friend, to return to me.  
What should I do?  

Ruth deals a card onto the fur. It is 'The Lovers'.  

RUTH  
This one will come to you.  
Give it time... if you chase the  
doe, the doe always runs.  

PERCIVAL  
Doe?  

RUTH  
Your prey, the one you yearn  
after.  

PERCIVAL  
Oh, I see... I have one more  
question, if I may. There is  
a... person who has taken quite  
a shine to me... I can't help  
but feel it isn't the best  
thing for us to spend time  
together...  

RUTH  
(interrupting)  
Why not?  

PERCIVAL  
I feel that I might be a... not  
altogether positive influence.  

Ruth swiftly deals another card. The card is 'The Twins'.  

RUTH  
No, no, little Percy, you are  
soul friends with this one.  

Percival doesn't look convinced. Ruth adopts a prophetic  
tone:
RUTH (CONT’D)
You don’t need to think that just because you are ashamed of what you are that what you are will harm the child.

Percival looks surprised that Ruth seems to know all about Alison.

RUTH (CONT’D)
You are a good man, your friendship with the child can only lead to good for her. And let’s face it my boy… you need it as much as she does.

Tears well up in Percival's eyes. He looks away, embarrassed to show emotion in this way.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Oh, my poor boy, do not shed tears. Tears should only fall in joy or love, a happy shower.

(beat)
It may fortify you to know little Percy that the world will soon open its arms to you and you will have everythin’ you ever dreamed.

Percival wipes his eyes. Ruth has caught his attention.

PERCIVAL
How? How can that be so?

Ruth reaches out and places her hand on his. She strokes his hand comfortingly and tugs teasingly on his sleeve.
RUTH
You doubt Ruth? Ruth who’s long been your only friend? Ah, Percy, your shame and fear blinds you to love. I’ll tell you how it is so… Friendship is comin’ to you and friendship will transform you. Once you’re changed, the world around you will change as well because, my boy, the world is just a reflection of your very own heart. How's that for magic!

Ruth lets loose a low, rolling chuckle that seems to go on forever. Percival is still, taking in what Ruth said.

FADEOUT.

35. EXT. Verna's Store, Estabishing – Day.

It is morning. The sun rises and shines over Perseverance Georgia. Verna's store and surrounds are gilded with dew. The sky is the bluest we have seen so far. It is a perfect autumn day.

CUT TO:

36. INT. Verna's Store, Alison's Bedroom – Day.

Alison wakes late, feeling totally refreshed, and wanders down the hall towards the kitchen.

CUT TO:

37. INT. Verna's Store, Kitchen – Day.

Alison enters the kitchen and rummages through the cupboards for food.

Verna enters the kitchen. She looks bemused by Alison's disheveled state. She pours herself a cup of coffee and glances out the window.

Verna
Waking so late on a day as glorious as this? I don't think I've seen a day so glorious in my whole life....
Alison finds a box of cereal, sits down at the table and pours herself a bowl.

As she adds milk to the bowl, she notices that a newspaper is folded on the table in front of her. The headline reads: “Colored Man Lynched”. Alison doesn’t seem to respond, just keeps eating her cereal, glancing at the paper every now and then.

After a moment, a strange look emerges on her face, as though she is piecing something together in her mind. She stares at the newspaper with a look of dawning understanding.

Her spoon hangs mid air before her mouth. She reaches out her spare hand and touches the paper. Her eyes widen with a look of realization.

VERNA
Alison! You’re dripping soggy cereal all over my clean table!

Alison looks down at her spoon then puts it down. She stands and goes to exit by the back door.

VERNA
Where do you think you’re going?

ALISON
Outside.

VERNA
Not like that you’re not. Wipe your face and tidy up that tangle you call hair first.

Alison goes to the kitchen sink and begins furiously washing her face. Verna watches her for a moment then shakes her head in bemusement and walks back out into the store.

Once Verna has left, Alison stops scrubbing her face and rushes straight to the door and outside.

CUT TO:
38. I/E. Verna's Store, Porch - Day.

Alison steps out onto the porch and looks up at the sky. Its perfect blueness seems to reflect the clarity of her mind. She descends the steps in a few rapid, confident jumps.

CUT TO:

39. Ext. Dirt Road, Perseverance - Day.

Alison heads in the opposite direction to the cemetery, towards town. As she crosses the bridge over the river, she takes in the country-side, smiling at cows that graze at the fence by the road.

As she continues on her way Alison spots Lulabell, Mr. Burghoffer's dog, rambling along towards her.

Alison stops dead in her tracks. She watches the dog intently.

As the dog comes closer, Lulabell spots Alison and stops still. She stares at Alison and Alison stares back. It's a deadlock.

Alison squats down and shows her hand to the dog, hoping to make peace and thereby prove to herself that she is not really black. She clicks her fingers to entice the dog to come to her.

ALISON
Hey Lulabell... good girl... you don't hate me, look at my skin, fair as cream. Here Lulabell...

Alison makes a few tenuous whistles to attract Lulabell.

Lulabell stays motionless for a long moment and then, with sudden and frightening viciousness, bares her fangs and growls.

Alison is startled, she falls back. Lulabell lunges forward, as if to attack. Alison, suddenly pulling herself together, jumps up.

ALISON
To hell with this!

Alison picks up a stone and hurls it at the dog. It hits the dirt just in front of Lulabell.
Lulabell yelps and retreats.

ALISON (CONT'D)
That's right, you better run ya mangy hound! I'm an African Queen and I don't need you to like me!!

Alison watches the dog running away down the road. She cracks a wide, wide grin and continues on her way.

CUT TO:

40. EXT. ROAD AT THE EDGE OF PERSEVERANCE – DAY.

ALISON stands on a road looking toward a cluster of buildings and dwellings in the mid distance. She looks a bit nervous. She hesitates a moment but then heads towards the “white” part of town.

CUT TO:

41. EXT. MAIN STREET, PERSEVERANCE – DAY

ALISON walks down the main street of Perseverance. Most of the shop fronts are empty. There are only a few people moving about, all of them white, except for a black man who is sweeping the pavement out the front of the shabby town hall.

Alison crosses the street and comes to a small redbrick building that has seen better days. A wooden sign at the front of the building reads: ‘Perseverance Library’.

Alison heads towards the door and then sees another sign taped to the glass of the front window that reads: “Whites Only”. Alison stops in her tracks.

She looks down at her skin and then at the reflection of herself in the windows of the library. She thinks for a moment then, clearly deciding to take the risk, walks tentatively towards the doors.

CUT TO:
42. INT. PERSEVERANCE LIBRARY – DAY

ALISON enters the poorly lit library. It is silent and empty. A middle-aged woman wearing glasses sits behind the counter knitting. When Alison enters, she looks up and frowns. Alison stops dead where she is. It shows on her face that she is wondering if the librarian knows who she is, that she's colored.

The librarian adjusts her glasses to get a better look. She isn’t frowning, but squinting to make out Alison against the light from outside.

LIBRARIAN
(kindly)
Can I help you little man?

Alison looks both irritated and relieved. She may not have been exposed as colored but she’s been mistaken for a boy, again.

ALISON
I was wonderin’ if you keep any old newspapers, like really old ones...

LIBRARIAN
Why, no honey, you’d have to go to the Georgia State Library in Atlanta for that... I don’t think a little man like you would want to read them old papers anyway. We got some real good books for boys, about fishin’ ‘n’ huntin’ ‘n’ the like. They’re up the back there, why don’t you have a look at some of them?

Alison nods and heads towards the back, frustrated. On her way there she passes a wall with a glass cabinet featuring a display of historic photographs. A banner above the display reads: ‘Historic Perseverance’.

Alison stops suddenly, staring at a photograph behind the glass. Her face shows a mix of shock and fear. Her reflection partially obscures the photograph, but it is of a group of men and boys standing in front of a pick-up truck.

CUT TO:
43. INT. PERSEVERANCE LIBRARY – DAY, CONTINUOUS.

Alison is still staring at a photograph behind the glass, her face tense with shock and fear. Her reflection partially obscures the photograph of men and boys standing in front of a pick-up truck. She slowly turns towards the front desk and the librarian.

ALISON

Excuse me, what’s this picture of?

The librarian looks up then stands and walks to where Alison is staring at the photograph.

LIBRARIAN

Why, that’s a huntin’ party out by Deep River... trust you to find that photograph little man.

Alison points at the photograph.

ALISON

Who’s that?

The librarian looks closely at the figure at which Alison is pointing. It’s a young boy with a cross hanging around his neck, a cross with a star at its centre.

LIBRARIAN

Why, that’s our very own Sheriff Jim Maddox when he was just a boy.

Alison’s face is stunned. The librarian doesn’t notice, she’s still looking at the photograph. The bespectacled librarian points at a figure beside the boy and says:

LIBRARIAN (CONT’D)

That fellow beside him there, that’s his daddy Dean Maddox. He was the deputy sheriff when this photo was taken, and from what folks say, a real fine shot too.
The young man in the photograph that the librarian is pointing at, DEPUTY DEAN MADDOX, is none other than the DARK-HAIRED MAN, the same man who murdered Eliza.

Alison recognizes the Dark-Haired-Man from her dream. She pales, then turns and walks straight for the door without saying a word. It takes a moment for the librarian to notice that Alison is no longer at her side.

LIBRARIAN (CONT’D)
Hey, where you goin’ little man?

Alison answers over her shoulder as she exits the library.

ALISON
I got to tell someone something!

LIBRARIAN
(beat)
Why, I never…. what a strange little man....

CUT TO:

44. EXT. MAIN STREET, PERSEVERANCE – DAY.
Alison runs along Main Street heading out of town. Her face is tight with shock.

CUT TO:

45. EXT. SKY OVER COUNTRYSIDE – DAY.
Swirling storm clouds roll in over Perseverance. The day begins to turn dark.

CUT TO:

46. EXT. BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER – DAY.
ALISON runs along the country road heading towards Verna’s Store. As the bridge over the river comes into view, she sees that RUTH is standing in the middle of the bridge, seemingly waiting for her.

Alison stops, panting, then walks slowly towards Ruth.
Episode 3

CUT TO:

47. EXT. BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER – DAY, CONTINUOUS.

RUTH stands watching ALISON approach. Behind Ruth the storm clouds are building, growing ever darker. When Alison reaches her, she speaks.

RUTH

Storm’s a comin’. A big one.  
(beat)
You got sumthin’ to tell me child?

Alison is not surprised that Ruth knows that she has discovered something. She knows that Ruth “sees things”. Nevertheless, she hesitates to disclose what she has learned. After a brief moment, in which the storm clouds behind Ruth continue to build and roil, she tells Ruth what she knows:

ALISON

It was the sheriff… Sheriff Maddox is the boy with the cross… the cross with the star….

Ruth’s face darkens instantly. A look of rage, made all the worse by sadness, transforms her face. There is an ominous pause before she speaks again.

RUTH

I’ll tell you sumthin’ that you would do well never to forget…. ‘Round here, little white boys don’t grow up into men, they grow into monsters instead… monsters.

Alison looks distressed, she takes Ruth’s hand.

ALISON

Why is the world so awful Ruth? Why can’t everybody be better to each other?

Ruth doesn’t answer, just shakes her head as if to say “I don’t know”. She looks down into Alison’s face and sees the distress there. She regains control of herself.
RUTH
You have done a good thing by telling me this Alison. But don’t you think on it no more. Dark things are not for children to worry on. Dark things are for grown-ups to deal with....

ALISON
Are you goin’ to hex him? The sheriff?

Ruth’s face is noncommittal.

RUTH
I told you to never mind. Why don’t you go and find Percy now, distract yourself from this business... have some fun.

Alison is reluctant to go. She hangs onto Ruth’s hand as if unwilling to leave her alone.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Go on now, I’ll be fine. You go and play with Percy.

Alison reluctantly let’s go of Ruth’s hand and begins to walk away. After just a few steps, she turns to look back. Ruth is looking up at the darkening sky, tears freely flowing down her face, her lips tight with fury.

CUT TO:

48. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY.

When ALISON reaches the pond and cemetery she sees PERCIVAL sitting beneath his mother’s tree by the shore. He looks a bit anxious. Alison looks very pleased to see him. She says to herself:

ALISON
(relieved)
Percy....

At exactly the same moment, on the opposite side of the pond, a group of young men emerge raucously from the trees by the water's edge. They don’t know that they’re being watched by either Percival or Alison.
One of the young men, stripping off his shirt and trousers, leaving only underwear, dives into the water.

Alison and Percival, unaware of each other, watch the surface of the pond.

A few pert bubbles breach the surface and pop. A moment later, NATE's head emerges from the water. Thunder booms in the distance.

Percival immediately looks uncomfortable but fascinated. Nate is even more handsome when wet; his skin glistens.

Nate takes a breath and opens his eyes. He looks for his friends and when he sees them, now also wearing only their underwear and launching themselves into the pond, he smiles.

Alison watches Percival watching Nate. Percival’s interest in Nate is written all over his face.

The look on Alison’s face instantly changes from one of relief to one of anxiety. Something about the way Percival is watching Nate is very intimate and, to Alison, apparently disturbing.

In just a moment, the adoring look on Percival's face is too much for Alison to bear. Her whole body tenses up, her hands automatically clench into fists. Her face becomes a countenance of pain.

She finds the tenderness Percival clearly feels for Nate excruciating. It makes her forget everything about what she discovered in the library.

Jealousy, livid and green, now rises in her face, followed soon after by a very deep sadness. She turns and runs. It begins to rain, only lightly, but enough to dampen Alison’s hair.

CUT TO:

49. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE – DAY.

As ALISON runs along the dirt road, tears stream down her face. She is also having trouble breathing.

She halts to catch her breath. She stops herself from crying, angrily wiping the tears from her eyes.
She grabs at stones on the roadside and hurls them at the now overcast sky. She looks up into that grey expanse, that in her youth she believes houses God, and she screams:

ALISON

Why do you have to take everyone from me?!

Thunder rolls out from far away like a wave. She picks up some more stones and pegs them at a nearby tree. The sadness is now completely replaced with out and out mindless rage.

Alison finishes throwing rocks and turns down the road toward home, sobbing all the way. The clouds break and rain pours down.

CUT TO:

50. EXT. ROADSIDE BY Verna's Store - Day.

Later - as the sun falls and the day darkens, the rain has stopped and everything is damp. Alison sits by the roadside. Her eyes are puffy and swollen. She has done a lot of crying, and tears still loiter on her face.

An old pick-up comes up the road toward Alison. It is being driven by Mr. Burgoffer. Simon Donnelly is in the passenger seat. Both men look as if they've been drinking.

The car rolls up beside Alison. She wipes her eyes and attempts to ignore them. They stop and try for her attention.

Simon

Hey, you seen that Percy around?

Alison

I don't care what that sissy is doin'!

The men look surprised by her outburst. Alison pays them no mind and gets up to leave. As she starts to walk away, a look of vengeance passes over her features. She turns to face the men.
ALISON (CONT'D)
He's probably up at the pond
sittin' under that tree of his
dead mamma's that he loves so
much!

As soon as it leaves her mouth, it is apparent that she
regrets it.

Mr. Burghoffer nods his thanks as he puts the pick-up
into gear. As the pick-up pulls away, Alison spots two
full gasoline cans in the back.

The sight of the cans makes Alison realize what she’s
done. Remorse and guilt turn her pale. She doesn't know
what to do for a moment, but then surrenders to fear and
runs fast towards the store.

CUT TO:

51. INT. Verna's Store, at the counter - Day, continuous.

ALISON enters the store and heads straight for her room,
passing a perplexed Verna.

VERNA
What's the matter? Are you
sick?

CUT TO:

52. INT. Verna's Store, Alison's bedroom - Day

ALISON closes her bedroom door behind her. She falls on
her bed. She stares at the ceiling. A steady stream of
silent tears begin to roll down her cheeks. She cries
herself to sleep.

FADEOUT.

53. EXT. Percival's House - Night.

A vast inferno consumes Percival’s House. Flames are
erupting from all of the windows and rising from the
ceiling.

PERCIVAL staggers out of the front door and falls to his
knees before the blaze, covered in soot. Sooty tears roll
down his face.
He gets up and takes a blanket from the porch swing and tries to put out the flames licking at the door frame. The flames only grow fiercer. Suddenly, Percival's clothes catch light. He drops the blanket and staggers back. The flames shoot up his leave and in a moment Percival is engulfed in flames.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF EPISODE THREE
THE TREE

EPISODE FOUR

Title Up: Georgia, 1967

FADE IN:

1. EXT. PERCIVAL’S HOUSE – NIGHT.

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SMASH CUT

TO:

2. INT. VERNAS STORE, ALISON'S BEDROOM/HALL – DAY.

ALISON wakes suddenly in her room. She is disorientated. She’s been having a nightmare; a nightmare in which Percival is killed in an inferno.

Alison gets up and heads down the hallway, still dazed. After just a few steps, she hears voices.

One voice is VERNAS's. She is talking to an elderly sounding woman in the shop.

CUT TO:

3. INT. VERNAS STORE, AT THE COUNTER – DAY.

VERNA and an elderly African-American woman, MILLIE PEAKES, are talking by the shop counter.
VERNA
I just can't believe in this day and age grown men would do such a thing...

OLDER WOMAN
Well, Simon Donnelley is only twenty-one.

VERNA
Still, Miss Millie, that's no excuse to do what he did...

MILLIE PEAKES
I could see the smoke from my place and I'm miles from the graveyard. The flames were as high as a house.

ALISON's face shows that she fears the worst - have they killed Percival?

MILLIE PEAKES (CONT)
But you can't say that sissy didn't ask for it...

VERNA
(curtly)
Percival's never hurt no-one and he happens to be a customer of mine.

MILLIE PEAKES
Honestly, you sound as if you like the way it prances around...

VERNA
I've got work to do Miss Millie, I'd better get back to it.

VERNA abruptly leaves the store and bumps into ALISON who is lurking out back.

ALISON
(very upset)
Have they killed him?

VERNA
What?
ALISON
Have they killed Percival?

VERNA
Where did you get that idea?
All they did was burn that crepe myrtle tree he was so fond of...

Relief washes over Alison when she realizes that Percival isn’t dead, but, almost immediately after that, the news about the tree hits her hard. She unconsciously shakes her head; she’s in a state of disbelief.

ALISON
(to herself)
Mamma's tree...

VERNA
What?

ALISON
Is it...

VERNA
Burnt to a cinder… they used gasoline on it, fools. They already arrested the one who done it, that mean Simon Donnelly. Seems he was also the one who burnt up the church.

Alison shows shock at this revelation.

VERNA (CONT'D)
(explaining)
When they arrested him he was drunk and admitted the whole thing.

ALISON
What about Percival? Is he hurt?

VERNA
He was at home when it happened. But they say he blacked right out when they told him.
ALISON
Can I go see him?

VERNA
Well, I don't know…

ALISON
Please, please, can I go see him?

VERNA
All right, but you be back here in no more than an hour…

Alison runs out the door.

Verna watches her disappear down the road, her face full of concern.

CUT TO:

4. EXT. DIRT ROAD, PERSEVERANCE – DAY.

ALISON runs at full speed down the road in the direction of the cemetery.

CUT TO:

5. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY.

ALISON reaches the cemetery and stops still.

The tree is blackened and still smoking. Ash and soot covers everything, all the tomb stones.

Bits of smoking cinder float on the pond with other debris.

Alison is devastated by the sight of the destruction, but also by guilt. Her eyes glisten with rising tears.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

6. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY.

ALISON is looking over the devastation that the fire has wrought on the tree.
Then, she sees something move by one of the tombstones near the blackened trunk. She is startled a little but goes over to see what it is.

Kneeling by his mother's tombstone, PERCIVAL has a bucket and sponge and is washing the ash and soot away from her name. The sooty water runs down the tombstone like black tears. Percival doesn't look up.

Tears now fill Alison’s eyes. She stifles a sob. Percival finally looks up and sees her there.

PERCIVAL
You see what they do in this world to beautiful things... this is what happens to all that is lovely... everything decays... everyone dies... nothing that is beautiful can survive the sheer ugliness of the world.

Alison is taken aback. She stops dead in her tracks. After a heavy pause, she speaks:

ALISON
I'm so sorry.

PERCIVAL
There's nothing for you to be sorry for. You didn't make the world the way it is.

ALISON
I did.

Percival looks up, tears streaking his face. He looks very tired, his eyes are red, his face pale.

PERCIVAL
What?

ALISON
I told them about mamma's tree, I told them how you loved it...

PERCIVAL
Why? Why did you do that?
ALISON
I... I saw the way you were looking at that Nate Bowman.

PERCIVAL
(after a pause)
Ah, I see.

Percival puts down his sponge and sits, he motions that she should do the same. She sits.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
My dear, you and I are friends. We have what is called a fated friendship. Fate has conspired to bring us together, we two odd birds.

(beat)
It must be fate, why else would the two of us be here of all places? No matter what happens our friendship will always matter to me... The fact that you don't trust that hurts me.

Alison looks guilty. She cannot meet his eyes.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
...but never mind, we old sissies are very resilient.

He smirks, tussles her hair.

ALISON
But..., what if I want to be more than friends?

PERCIVAL
(not surprised)
My dear, you're a child, and apart from that I'm a sissy and you're a tomboy... it would never work. Mixed marriages rarely do.

ALISON
But... what if somehow I could be a.... If I were a boy?
PERCIVAL
You are not a boy. You are a girl. Confusion on that question can only lead to trouble... trust me. And besides, you are confusing your feelings. Grief often does that to us. You love me, I know you do, but when you’re older you’ll understand that there are all different kinds of love....

Percival looks Alison directly in the eyes, trying to connect with the deepest part of her.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
Romantic love, delicious though it is, is just one kind, and the most fleeting. Friendship, now, there’s a love as vast and enduring as the sky.

Alison turns away from him, sulking.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
Don’t avoid your grief over your daddy by fixating on me. It won’t work. Besides, it does our friendship a disservice.

ALISON
Don’t you dare talk about my daddy! You just don't love me. You don't love me because I'm not a boy.

PERCIVAL
(quickly)
Of course I do! You're my knight in shining armor.

ALISON
What about Nate, what's he?
PERCIVAL
(after a pause)
In order to answer that I need to tell you how I knew it wasn't Nate who set fire to the church....You may be shocked my dear, but please, do not judge him or me. I've had enough righteous judgment for the time being...

He glances at the burnt remains of the tree.

CUT TO:

7. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - FLASHBACK, NIGHT

In the cemetery, the tree, still intact, creaks in a strong wind. The moon is bright overhead.

PERCIVAL (V.O)
...You will remember, it was quite an atmospheric night; that night the church was burned...

Leaves are dislodged and fall to the ground - landing near Percival's mother's headstone. The brass Buddha holds a silent vigil.

Alison's discarded bouquet of hex flowers withers on the ground.

The pond is turbulent - ripples scatter this way and that. The moon becomes obscured by dark clouds.

CUT TO:

8. EXT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK, NIGHT

Outside the grand old ante-bellum style mansion that is PERCIVAL's house. The wind rustles the trees and the moon floats above; illuminating the house with its silvery light.

CUT TO:
9. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - FLASHBACK, NIGHT

In PERCIVAL's bedroom, the intruder's hand covers Percival's mouth. Percival is struggling. The intruder sits down on the bed - his face enters the moonlight.

It is young NATE BOWMAN. He is wearing dark blue jeans and a loosely buttoned but pristinely white long-sleeved shirt.

NATE
Shush will ya, shush. I'm not goin' ta hurt ya.

Percival stops struggling. Nate takes his hand away from Percival's mouth.

PERCIVAL
Nate Bowman! I should slap you silly!

NATE
I should be slapping you!
Goin' around town gettin' everyone all ticked off.

PERCIVAL
(beat)
What are you doing here?

NATE
I came to tell you to lay off.

PERCIVAL
Lay off what?

NATE
Just stay indoors for a while...

PERCIVAL
This is my favorite time of year. I have no intention of...

NATE
If they catch up with ya they're goin' to do somethin' you're not goin' to like!

PERCIVAL
I don't care what they do to me.
NATE
That's your problem Percy, you're just too reckless... But maybe some people don't wanna see you get beaten up, or worse.

PERCIVAL
Like who?

NATE
Like me maybe....

PERCIVAL
Well, you certainly have turned around. It seems only the other day you were tormenting me on the road.

NATE
I was just kiddin'. A guy's gotta go along with his buddy. It's like a rule.

PERCIVAL
That is a very dumb rule.

NATE
Maybe... I just wanted to warn you that Simon an' ol' Burghoffer have bees in their bonnets....

PERCIVAL
The things people do for fashion...

Nate stands up with a sudden outburst of emotion.

NATE
Can't you be serious! They might really hurt you this time! Don't you know what the Klan does to men like you?
PERCIVAL
Of course I do. You forget
I’ve lived in the South all my
life. I've heard all the
stories: the young men found
strangled in the woods. The
girly little boys whose own
daddies tie them in seed-sacks
and drown them in the river
like unwanted kittens…. I know
it’s not just coloreds who
need to be afraid of the knock
at midnight.

NATE
It's even worse than ever now.
The Klan are killing white
folks all over the place... and
it's not just crazy rednecks
behind it, it's Sheriffs and
Preachers... you've got to be
careful Percy.

Percival looks surprised at Nate’s concern.

PERCIVAL
Alright, alright. I’ll be
careful.... But only if you tell
me the reason you climbed in
my window in the middle of the
night dressed in your best
shirt and smelling like store
bought soap.

Percival looks down at his bedspread and coyly worries at
its edges with his fingers.

Nate looks considerably taken aback. He looks away from
Percival and out the taped-up window, then back at
Percival who is still coyly fiddling with the bedspread.
He is clearly lost for words.

CUT TO:
10. INT. PERCIVAL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - FLASHBACK, NIGHT

PERCIVAL is still worrying at the bedspread with his fingers. NATE looks on, clearly nervous and slightly agitated. Percival looks expectantly at Nate, waiting and wondering what will happen next.

PERCIVAL
Come on now, tell me the real reason you climbed in my window Nate Bowman? Surely you didn't just come to warn me....

Nate swallows hard, looks out the taped-up window again and then, somewhat hesitantly, sits back down on the bed.

Apparently, Nate’s closeness causes Percival to feel both nervous and curious, for his body tenses a little as Nate sits, but his eyes show that he’s intrigued.

NATE
I like you Percy, always have. Ever since I first laid eyes on you years ago... You make it hard for a feller though....

PERCIVAL
Making it hard for fellers is what I do best....

Nate’s upper body jerks back in shock at this very forward comment, as if he’s been struck. But he pauses only a second before he responds.

NATE
There you go again. Can't you have any decorum at all?

PERCIVAL
No, I’m afraid not. Besides, “decorum” is a strange word for a feller like you to use. Could it be there's more to you than meets the eye?

NATE
(meekly)
A whole lot more, if you're lookin'.
PERCIVAL
I am looking.

Nate blushes.

NATE
Look Percy, I... I just don’t know if this is me... If I’m the kind of guy who...

PERCIVAL
Climbs in another man’s window in the middle of the night?

NATE
Yeah.

PERCIVAL
Well, I don’t know you very well, but I do know one thing for certain...

Nate’s interest is piqued.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)
In this house, and in my room, you can be any kind of man you want to be. It doesn’t matter who you are outside, in this place, you can be whoever you want.

Percival smiles, sits up in his bed and straightens his pajamas.

NATE
I ain’t never seen someone go to bed with so much on.

PERCIVAL
I'm an imperfect being, forgive me if I hide behind a little flannelette... It's all right for you with your glitteringly handsome body.

Percival’s face shows that he fears that he may have gone too far too soon. But Nate smiles, he is clearly flattered. He soaks up the compliment for a while, then, acting on impulse, removes his white shirt.
NATE
(doubtful)
Does it really glitter?

PERCIVAL
It does to me.

Nate looks down at the skin of his chest, as if inspecting it.

NATE
It's just the moon.

PERCIVAL
No, it's not just the moon.

CUT TO:

11. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND - FLASHBACK, NIGHT

Outside the wind has slowed to a gentle breeze. The pond is still. The tree, still intact, spreads its limbs protectively over the graveyard.

CUT TO:

12. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND - DAY

ALISON and PERCIVAL are still sitting together in the graveyard. Alison's face shows a turbulent mix of shock, bewilderment, anger and jealousy. Percival looks sheepish and anxious.

PERCIVAL
So you see my dear, Nate has an alibi. He was with me that night.

(beat)
I had thought that Nate might be my secret companion, my little bit of happiness in this rotten world... But, that does not seem to be the case. We haven't talked since that night.
(beat)
Whatever he is, you’re still very much my best friend... if you want to be. But let’s not discuss how pathetic it is that my best friend is a girl of twelve.

Alison is still for a minute, she is still shocked and sort of sulking.

Percival straightens her hair with gentle fingers. He rubs her cheek. She throws herself in his arms and hugs him.

ALISON
You’re not pathetic. You're my best friend too. Do you forgive me?

PERCIVAL
Without question.

Alison takes the sponge and begins to wash the tombstone. She sees the little Buddha. It is catching the light, gleaming. The fire doesn't seem to have touched it.

Alison looks at it closely - she's been wanting to ask about it. She's never seen anything like it before. Percival notices her interest.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Why don't you just ask?

ALISON
Ask what?

PERCIVAL
There is no shame in not knowing everything there is to know. Just ask and you will find out.

Alison pauses to consider this.

ALISON
What’s that thing about?

PERCIVAL
That's my little Buddha.
ALISON
Uh-huh....

Alison’s face displays a desire to know more, but she hesitates to say so. Percival smiles at her knowingly.

PERCIVAL
Buddhas are magical beings. They're like angels I suppose. Would you like to know what their greatest magic is?

Alison indicates yes.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Their greatest magic is that they possess the quality of limitless love... they love every living thing. They even love cockroaches.

ALISON
Cockroaches!

Alison grimaces. She is quasi-disgusted at the idea of loving bugs. The grimace doesn’t last long, it is replaced by an intrigued expression.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Do you think these Buddha angels love me too?

PERCIVAL
I know so. Love you like nothing on earth.

Alison looks comforted by this idea.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
You know what else is magical about them? They live inside each and every breathing thing. Every person, every bird, even old man Burghoffer’s dog, Lulabell, has a Buddha, an angel, inside them... an untainted part that will never fade.

Percival is getting very animated; he realizes this and cools down.
PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
...At least that's the way I understand it.

ALISON (incredulously)
The angel inside Lulabell must be buried pretty deep, 'cause that dog is meaner than a snake.

PERCIVAL (smiling)
I suppose with some it’s easier to see that perfect part than with others.

Alison thinks about this as she continues to wash the tombstone. Then, a question pops into her head:

ALISON
But where do the Buddhas come from?

Percival shrugs his shoulders, he clearly has no idea. He offers a guess, masked as definitive knowledge.

PERCIVAL
Tahiti?

ALISON
Tahiti!?

PERCIVAL
Somewhere over there in Asia...

ALISON
I don't think Tahiti is in Asia.

PERCIVAL
Just you keep scrubbin' missy...

She grins and resumes scrubbing.

ALISON
They have pineapples in Tahiti...

PERCIVAL
It must be heaven then.
Percival says this quite seriously, his eyes cast to the distance. He looks at Alison with a meek smile, then up at the desecrated tree. A very deep sadness rises in his face, a sadness that has become part of his features, a sadness that was not there before.

FADEOUT.

13. EXT. A FIELD ON THE EDGE OF THE WOODS - DAY

A vibrantly green field on the edge of the woods. Clouds move swiftly across the sky. Water in a stream moves over pebbles at lightning speed. The sun glides from its position at dawn, its golden red light rising in the horizon, to its position at dusk, the same golden red light diminishing. We get the sense of time passing. Shadows lengthen and it grows dark.

FADEOUT.

14. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND – NIGHT

A weak moon shines down on a wooden grave-marker in the colored section of the cemetery, bearing the name of ELIZA JAMES and the dates “1914 – 1928”.

RUTH is kneeling beside the grave of her sister. She has a look of determination on her face. She turns and rummages in a bag on the ground beside her.

She extracts a candle and lights it, then places it on the ground by the cross. The candle illuminates Ruth’s face strangely, so that she looks menacing.

She takes something else out of the bag. It is a voodoo doll. She places the doll on the grave next to the candle. She then takes out of the bag two more things: a jar of white powder and a bunch of small white flowers.

SMASHCUT

TO:

15. EXT. FARMHOUSE – FLASHBACK 1928, DAY (B&W)

In black and white, YOUNG RUTH, holding a cloth doll in her hands, walks slowly towards a clothesline illuminated by a strange light.
When she reaches the clothesline, she stretches out her hand to push aside a dress hanging there. The dress is flapping gently in the sunny air. When she steps past the dress, to the other side of the line, she gasps. She drops her cloth doll in the grass.

The ghost of ELIZA is standing there. We see her from behind. She is looking off towards the woods where she was killed.

She is translucent, or hollow somehow. As sunlight strikes her, it refracts and sparkles. She also gives off her own light.

Eliza turns her head and looks back. She smiles at her little sister, then turns to continue staring at the woods. She slowly extends her left arm and points to the ground to the left of her.

Young Ruth steps forward to see what the ghost is pointing at. It’s a small plant with a cluster of tiny white flowers. She bends down to pick a bunch of the blossoms.

SMASHCUT TO:

16. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND – NIGHT

RUTH continues to work her voodoo in the cemetery. She places the jar of white powder against the wooden grave-marker. Then she takes the posy of flowers and holds them aloft before the image of Eliza on the cross. Then she slowly moves the posy in a circle in front of the photograph. She does this three times and then touches the flowers to the photograph of her sister before placing them on the ground beside the voodoo doll and the lit candle. Then she begins to sing in a deep, eerie voice:

RUTH
Dig his grave Lord, dig his grave. Dig his grave Lord, dig his grave. Take him down Lord, take him down, take him down into that coffin ground, take him down into that coffin ground. Dig his grave Lord, dig his grave....

CUT TO:
17. EXT. CEMETERY BY THE POND – NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

From beyond the cemetery gate, the cemetery is filled with Ruth’s eerie song. The pond reflects the clouds but otherwise is still. A shadow passes over the moon. A dog howls.

FADEOUT

[AD BREAK]

18. EXT. RIVER IN WOODS – DAY

The next day, PERCIVAL is sitting alone by the bank of the river. It is well into autumn now; many of the trees have lost their leaves. His face has recovered some of its vibrancy but there is something lingering there from the destruction of the tree, perhaps loneliness.

Percival spots a dandelion nearby, perhaps the last one to bloom, and plucks it with one hand. He twirls it about. Then, almost tentatively he plucks a petal.

PERCIVAL

He loves me...

He continues to pluck petals one at a time.

PERCIVAL (CONT’D)

...He loves me not. He loves me...
he....

Across the river NATE BOWMAN strides out from among the trees and approaches the opposite river bank. He sees Percival and, after a brief hesitation, he waves.

Percival, quite anxious and tentative himself, waves back.

NATE

Hey... what you doin'?

PERCIVAL

(after a pause)

Nothing... just watching the water.

NATE

It sure is a fine day.
Percival nods, and then just sits there awkwardly, not knowing what to do.

NATE (CONT)
(after a pause)
Mind if I come over?

PERCIVAL
Uh, no, not at all.

Nate smiles. He approaches the water's edge. Just before entering he removes his boots and socks, then his shirt and jeans, leaving on just his underwear.

He wades into the water with his belongings held above his head.

Percival is somewhat hypnotized by Nate's beautiful form. His eyes linger on his chest a moment, then look away shyly.

As Nate reaches the riverbank Percival quickly stuffs the dandelion into the grass in an attempt to hide it.

Nate, wet and smiling, shivering a little, approaches and sits down beside Percival.

An awkward moment passes.

NATE
I'm sorry I haven't been to see you.

PERCIVAL
Not at all. You're not required to visit me...

NATE
I know I'm not required... I wanted to, it's just with everything...

PERCIVAL
I understand perfectly. You don't need to feel obliged...

NATE
And you don't need to be snippy.

Percival is taken aback.
NATE (CONT)
I wanted to come see you but I figured it was best to lay low for a while... that sheriff's got it in for me an'...

PERCIVAL
Of course, I do understand.

This makes Nate relax a bit. Percival pretends to nonchalantly watch the water. Nate watches Percival.

NATE
(meekly)
...I heard from the Judge's maid, that pretty little colored gal, that it was you who convinced 'em to let me go...

PERCIVAL
This town never surprises me... how did she know that?

NATE
She musta found out somehow. Pretty thing like her, I'm sure she has ways of findin' things out.
(beat)
I want to thank you for what you did... whatever it was it got me outta that cell and for that I'm truly grateful.

PERCIVAL
It was nothing.

NATE
(hesitantly)
I do like you Percy.

PERCIVAL
You do?

NATE
Yep... a whole lot. I been desperate to see you again.
PERCIVAL
My heart needed to hear that!
You know a friend of mine said
that you would be coming back
to see me but until now I
didn't allow myself to hope.

NATE
I'm sorry if you've been
hurtin'.

Nate places a hand on Percival's shoulder.

PERCIVAL
I just wanted to see you is
all...

NATE
I know... but I just couldn’t
afford to get in any more
trouble with the law.

PERCIVAL
The law? It’s hardly against
the law for you to visit me!

NATE
But Percy, for me to come
callin’ on you is against the
law. For me to feel the way I
do, for me to want to see you... 
those things could send me to
jail Percy.

PERCY
Of course... I wasn’t thinking...
star crossed lovers...

NATE
What?

PERCIVAL
Something from Shakespeare...

NATE
I ain’t never read none o’
that.

PERCIVAL
Never mind... it’s not
important.
There is another pause in which the two of them realize that they both feel the same way about each other.

**PERCIVAL**
I must admit, I have thought of you often since... that night in my room.

**NATE**
I ain't thought of nothin' else.

**PERCIVAL**
Really?

**NATE**
Uh-huh. I ain't never felt so good in my life....

**PERCIVAL**
Nor have I.

They look into each other's eyes. They wish to kiss each other but are hesitant, tentative; filled with desire and fear at the same time.

Just as their lips are close to touching, HENRIETTA appears in the distance. She spots them and, waving, heads over towards them.

Nate and Percival quickly pull apart and look in opposite directions. HENRIETTA is marching towards them.

**HENRIETTA**
Hey there, Percy... Percy Huckstep is that you?

As Henrietta closes in on them, and spots Nate, a knowing smirk crosses her face.

**HENRIETTA (CONT'D)**
Beautiful mornin' isn't it!

**PERCIVAL**
Hello Henrietta.
HENRIETTA
(eyeing Nate)
Why, Nate Bowman, I thought it was you but I said to myself, 'That can't be Nate Bowman sitting there with Percy - that just doesn't make no sense'. But here you are all huddled up together like a couple of turtle doves!

Nate looks embarrassed. Percival’s shoulders are tense, his face drawn into a frown; he’s annoyed.

NATE
We were just talkin’...

HENRIETTA
I'm sure.

She turns to Percy.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
You sure do look fine today Percy, that color suits you real well. Don't you think so Nate? Don't you think that color looks fine on Percy?

Nate looks terribly embarrassed. He drops his head and says nothing. After a very uncomfortable pause, he stands.

NATE
I might go in again, cool off a bit.

HENRIETTA
Coolin' off sounds like a real good idea... even though the air 'round here is a might cool, it bein' autumn an' all.

Henrietta smirks to herself in a way that shows that she knows exactly what's going on between Percival and Nate.

NATE
Well, you know what they say - cold water's good for circulation.
HENRIETTA
Circulation you say. Well then, best you go in. I wouldn't wanna stand between you and your circulation.

Nate heads down to the river's edge.

Once he is out of earshot Henrietta turns to Percival.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
The air ain’t the only thing that’s chilly ‘round here. Nate coulda been nicer.

PERCIVAL
It’s just that he isn’t used to coloreds talking to him like that...

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
Like what? Like an equal?

PERCIVAL
No, that’s not it. He’s just not used to it, that’s all.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
Well, he’d better get used to it. Times are changin’. We all gots to get along now, be civil.

PERCIVAL
You know, Henrietta, there’s folks ‘round here who wouldn’t take kindly to a colored woman speaking to white men so. You better watch out...

HENRIETTA
Oh, don’t you try to scare me Percy Huckstep...

PERCIVAL
I wasn’t trying to scare you, I was just saying that it isn’t safe...
HENRIETTA
Sure you was tryin’ to scare me. Don’t think I don’t know you want to chase me away so you can be here with Nate all by yourself.

PERCIVAL
I... I don’t know what you mean...

HENRIETTA
Oh, don’t play the fool with me. I’m talkin’ about you and Nate. I seen ya kissin’...

Percival looks stunned and frightened. Henrietta looks smug, like the cat that got the cream.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

19. EXT. RIVER IN WOODS - DAY

PERCIVAL is still stunned. HENRIETTA stands over him smugly, a knowing smirk across her face. NATE is still wading in the river. Percival looks over to him, searching for support in this uncomfortable moment with Henrietta, but Nate can’t hear what’s happening on the shore.

HENRIETTA
That’s right, I seen ya kissin’.

PERCIVAL
Don’t be absurd...

HENRIETTA
I’ll be whatever kind of bird I want to be...

Percival is totally bamboozled by this strange comment. He looks up at her with mounting frustration and anxiety.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
...And don’t get uppity with me! What you’re doin’ puts you on the same level as colored folks...
Percival is shocked. Henrietta stares down at him indignantly.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
And let me tell you somethin’ else for free: those “folks” you’re talkin’ about, them ones in the white sheets, they’s the same ones who’d kill you as quick as look at ya. To them, you is no better than a nigger, maybe even worse, which means I can talk to you however I like and stay here all day if I wants to.

Percival takes all this in. After a moment, he looks resigned to his fate.

PERCIVAL
I suppose I have no say in it?

HENRIETTA
None at all. I ain’t goin’ nowhere Percy, best you get used to it....

Henrietta looks at Percival’s anxious face and softens perceptibly, then even seems a little deflated.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
To tell you the truth Percy, I’ve been a might lonesome of late. Verna’s so busy with that stinky Spook Mayflower and I..., well, I been at loose ends....

Percival struggles to look sympathetic; his mind is still on Nate who is shivering in the shallow water, his torso covered in goose bumps. After a moment, Henrietta pulls herself together again and puffs herself back up to her normal size.
HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
Besides, I want to gets me a
drivers license, I wants some
freedom to go where I want,
and the whole town’s talkin’
bout how you got influence
with the authorities, ’bout
how you got Nate outta jail
when they was already tyin’
the knot for his noose. So, I
decided we’re goin’ to be
friends.

PERCIVAL
(sarcastic)
I couldn’t be happier…

HENRIETTA
I knew you would be….

Henrietta turns to watch Nate as he shivers waist deep in
the river.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
But don’t you worry honey. I
ain’t got nothin’ against boys
like you. I won’t tell no-one.

Percival’s shoulders perceptibly relax; the tension in
his face fades away. Henrietta continues to ogle Nate.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
I only got one other thing to
say...

Percival waits for her to speak with nervous expectation.
She pauses, her pupils dilating and nostrils flaring at
the sight of Nate’s goose-bumped flesh.

HENRIETTA (CONT’D)
That white boy sure is fine!
Look at that chest, mm, mm,
mmmm. He sure do got what it
takes to get my hormones all
fired up!

Nate is still waist deep in the water, he looks back at
Percival and Henrietta and smiles. Henrietta gives a
cutesy little wave in return.
HENRIETTA
I don’t know how I could ever have thunk that boy was a fire-o-maniac.

PERCIVAL
Pyromaniac.

HENRIETTA
Whatever kind of maniac he is, it must be the sweet and tasty kind! Mmmm, mmm, mmmmm.

FADEOUT.

20. EXT. Verna’s Store, Establishing – Night

That night, another storm has blown in. The wind races through Verna’s yard, chasing leaves from one end to the other and blowing many onto Verna’s porch. Clouds move overhead, heavy and black. Lightning flashes silently in the distance.

CUT TO:

21. INT/EXT. Verna’s Store – Night, Continuous

ALISON is lying in bed awake. The wind is making the house creak. She is watching the clouds and the distant lightning through her window. After a moment, she gets up and goes to the window and looks out.

A figure is moving outside in the storm; a dark shape that is slowly walking down the road past the store. Lightning flashes again and Alison recognizes the figure as RUTH. Alison turns and quietly leaves her bedroom.

22. EXT. Verna’s Store – Night, Continuous

Alison exits the kitchen door, looking to where Ruth is now some way down the road. She leaves the porch and heads after her.

ALISON
Ruth… Ruth!

Ruth turns and sees Alison coming. She turns and walks away more quickly.
ALISON
Ruth! Ruth why won’t you stop?!

Ruth stops. When Alison reaches her, she scolds:

RUTH
Girl, what’re you doin’ out in this weather in the dead of night?

Alison is surprised by Ruth’s harsh tone. She looks Ruth up and down as if to see what might be making her so angry. She notices that Ruth is clutching a strange bundle. The bundle, wrapped in dark cloth, is about the size of a small plate.

ALISON
I couldn’t sleep. The wind is too loud. And the lightnin’... I ain’t never seen no silent lightning before...

RUTH
Well now you seen it, you take yourself back inside to bed before that lightnin’ strikes you right on yer head.

Alison ignores this.

ALISON
What are you doin’ out in the storm? Ain’t you scared?

RUTH
No I ain’t scared... and what I’m doin’ is my own business.

Ruth turns to walk away.

ALISON
Why won’t you talk to me? Why wouldn’t you stop when you saw me comin’?

Ruth stops once more. She turns to face Alison.
RUTH
Child, if you ain’t the most disobedient girl on earth…. I done told you to git. Now you git.

Alison plants her feet firmly in the dirt of the road.

ALISON
I won’t git. An’ you can’t make me. An’ why won’t you talk to me?

RUTH
(angry)
I ain’t got no business associatin’ with no little girls, ‘specially not disobedient ones like you!

Ruth’s face softens a little at the look of shock on Alison’s face.

RUTH (CONT’D)
Truth be told, I ain’t got no business associatin’ with any regular folks, not no more. I gone too far into the dark for that....

ALISON
The dark? What you mean?

RUTH
I done things child, things a good person would never have done. I ain’t good. It’s settled now. Now leave me alone.

She turns to walk away again.

ALISON
Sometimes good people do wrong things… That’s what Granma says anyway. Why, I done bad things myself. I betrayed my friend… I told somethin’ I shouldn’t. I even stole a candy bar right outta my own granma’s store....
Ruth stops and turns to face Alison again.

RUTH
What I done is a lot worse than stealin’ candy... a lot worse.

ALISON
Well, whatever it was, you musta had a good reason. I know you wouldn’t do nothin’ too bad if you didn’t have a reason. You’re good. I know you are...

RUTH
You don’t really know me child....

ALISON
I know you enough... but you’re right, I could know you better. Why don’t you come and visit me and granma sometime? We can have cake. It’d be real nice...

RUTH
No, I ain’t never gonna visit with you an’ your granma. I ain’t fit to sit in her kitchen....

ALISON
Sure you are Ruth...

Alison goes to take Ruth’s hand. Ruth shakes it away.

RUTH
You’re wrong girl. I’m not good.... Now you git, you git back inside before this storm blows you half way to Alabama.

Alison doesn’t move.

RUTH (CONT’D)
I said git!

Alison refuses to move. She reaches out to take Ruth’s hand again. Ruth jerks backwards and in doing so drops the bundle she’s been clutching.
The bundle hits the ground and unfolds. Lightning flashes. In the momentary flash of light, Alison sees that the bundle contains a severed hand.

Alison is startled and jumps back. Ruth yells:

RUTH (CONT’D)

Go!

Alison is shocked into doing as she is told. She turns and heads back towards the store. Ruth gathers up the severed hand, rewraps it in its bundle, and then turns away and heads in the other direction.

Lightning flashes again, causing Alison to stop in her tracks. She turns to look back at Ruth. The lightning flashes silently once more, revealing Ruth crossing the bridge before the darkness descends again and Ruth passes into the shadows. Alison turns and runs toward home.

CUT TO:

23. EXT. COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE PERSEVERANCE – DAY/NIGHT

A wind moves in a stormy night sky, blowing the clouds away until the sky is clear. The moon dips below the horizon. The sky fills with dawn light. Shadows shorten and light effuses everything. We get the sense of time passing.

NARRATOR (V.O)

In the weeks after the storm, I waited for Ruth in all the usual places: the cemetery, the woods, the river by the bridge. But she never came.

The wind blows on a field on the edge of the woods. Autumn leaves fall to the ground and are chased away, leaving the trees bare. Winter is coming.

NARRATOR (V.O)

I asked Percy to take me to her house in the swamp, but he said no, that Ruth wanted to be alone. But I still waited for her to come to our old places.
Water swirls in eddies in the river beneath the bridge. The fields are fallow. The grass, once green, is now withered and brown.

NARRATOR (V.O)
The weeks passed. It got so I thought I might never see Ruth again.

The sun moves from its position at dawn, cold orange light turning to a crisp white, to its position at mid-morning. Although it is winter, Perseverance Georgia still has a natural beauty to it.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

24. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND, ESTABLISHING - DAY

Some months later, it is now mid-winter by the pond. The midday sun shines down on the small pond edged by swamp cypress trees and the tiny overgrown graveyard that we know so well.

NARRATOR (V.O)
As time went on, I didn’t go look for Ruth no more. I found myself distracted with other things: my new life in the store with Gran... and the coming of a very special event....

The cemetery has recovered from its burns. Everything looks as it did previously, except for the tree, which clearly is dead, a twisted, blackened stump.

CUT TO:

25. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY

VERNA and ALISON are setting up a picnic. Alison spreads a large, many colored blanket. Verna puts out place mats and glasses which she takes from a large picnic basket. Alison places a cardboard box, covered with a cloth, on the blanket.
Verna takes out of the picnic basket a very beautifully decorated cake, bright pink, and places it proudly on the blanket. Written on the cake in white frosting are the words ‘Happy Birthday Percy’.

Once again, Alison’s face shows that she wants to ask her grandmother a question. Verna pre-empts her.

VERNA
What is it Alison?

ALISON
(hesitating)
Why do you love me Grandma?

VERNA
What a silly question!

ALISON
(a little upset)
I don't think it's silly.

VERNA
All right then. I love you because you are my grandbaby. I love you because it is my job to love you. But most of all, I love you because you have a strong and courageous heart, a heart that finds its own path. That's why I love you – even if you do use the pretty dresses I make you as cleaning rags! Have I answered your question well enough?

Alison appears pleased with this answer. She nods in the affirmative before she goes back to work preparing for their picnic, fussing around, smoothing the blanket etcetera.

VERNA (CONT'D)
It's not like we're having a party for the Queen of England...

Verna looks at Alison with a funny expression after she realizes that she’s compared Percival to the “Queen”. Alison mimics this expression and they both laugh.

PERCIVAL O/S
What's so funny?
26. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY, CONTINUOUS

PERCIVAL is walking towards them with NATE beside him. It is immediately apparent that Nate and ALISON are dressed quite similarly in overalls. Nate carries a picnic basket also. Verna and Alison smile but do not answer.

ALISON
Happy Birthday Percival!

She runs up and kisses him.

PERCIVAL
When you get to my age sugar it's quite difficult to be so exuberant about birthdays.

NATE
You're not that old.

PERCIVAL
Thank-you!

Nate smiles. He and Percival sit down on the blanket. Percival unpacks their basket, then sees the cake.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
Oh! Look at that! It's like a pagoda in a heavenly paradise! Is that for me?

NATE
It's bright pink, frilly and way too loud for its own good. Who do ya think it's for?

ALISON
I helped with the icin'!

PERCIVAL
You did! You're too good to me. What did I do to deserve all this?

VERNA
Nothing in particular. Just being yourself.
PERCIVAL
If I'd known being myself
would deliver such wonders I
would never have been as
restrained as I have!

Alison, Verna and Nate all look at each other with a kind
of amused trepidation.

Nate hands Percival a small gift wrapped in brown paper.
Percival tears it open with unbelievable speed - it's a
glass Buddha dangling on a string.

NATE
For your room... something else
to reflect the moonlight. I
know you like them China
things.

PERCIVAL
I'm going to burst into tears
momentarily, just you wait and
see.

He puts his hand on Nate's shoulder, touching the one he
loves in appreciation.

NATE
Damn sissy.

PERCIVAL
Careful honey, or I shall
reveal all about your night
time predilections.

Nate looks scared and embarrassed but feigns nonchalance
for Alison and Verna.

VERNA
I will have no talk of
predilections while I'm around
thank you very much.

PERCIVAL
Party pooper.

VERNA
I won't have any of your sass
either. We're going to have a
nice civilized picnic.
PERCIVAL
(under breath)
Sounds worse and worse.

Verna begins to serve out the food; handing Percival a plate first. He disinterestedly puts his fork in and has a bite of something. His face is immediately transformed.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
This can't be potato salad!
This is divine!

He hoes in. The others are amused.

CUT TO:

27. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Henrietta arrives at the cemetery gate. She is squeezed into an overly frilly pink dress with a white lace lapel and trim. She looks like a living version of the birthday cake. She waves cheerily at the picnickers.

HENRIETTA
Hey there, hey there everyone.

CUT TO:

28. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The others return HENRIETTA’s wave, except for NATE who looks a little nervous. ALISON notices Nate’s discomfort and says, in a whisper so that Henrietta doesn’t hear:

ALISON
What’s the matter Nate?

NATE
Who invited Henrietta?

ALISON
Why, Percy asked me to invite her personal, said it was time we was all friends. Why?

NATE
It’s nothin’ really... it’s just that she always looks at me like I’m a piece of fried chicken.
VERNA, Alison and PERCIVAL all chuckle.

PERCIVAL
Well, you are mighty delicious to the eyes.

NATE
Quiet, don’t encourage her!

ALISON
She’s not so bad really.

VERNA
Why Alison, what’s changed your mind about Henrietta?

ALISON
Oh, I just figure she behaves the way she does because she’s lonely. I know how that feels.

Alison looks at Percival knowingly, he smiles approvingly back. Verna smiles too, proud of her granddaughter.

Henrietta arrives at the picnic blanket.

HENRIETTA
My oh my, look at all these fine delicacies you gots on this blanket…

(she eyes Nate)
It’s enough to make a woman drool right all over her Sunday lapel.

CUT TO:

29. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, LATER

A little while later, the cake has been cut and the other food all eaten.

VERNA, HENRIETTA, PERCIVAL, ALISON and NATE all laze in the winter sun.

SMASH CUT
TO:
30. INT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE – DAY

At the jail house, SHERIFF JIM MADDOX enters his office, dragging a scruffy-looking little white boy of about eight who is struggling to escape.

The sheriff drags the boy over to a built-in broom closet, and opens it up. It is very small and dark and creepy inside. He shakes the boy in front of the closet, making him look into the dark space.

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX
I’ll teach you to play with them nigger boys you little bit o’ white trash.

The sheriff shoves the boy inside the broom closet, shuts the door and locks it. The boy bangs and the closet and screams:

SCRUFFY BOY
Please sheriff! Please, I won’t play with them boys again! Please let me out! Please! Let me out!

The sheriff ignores the boy’s cries and sits down and starts working at his desk, oblivious to the boy’s pleading.

After a moment, the sheriff opens one of his desk draws. A sudden puff of white powder erupts out of the draw and covers his chest, neck, chin and mouth. He swears. He opens the draw carefully and peers inside.

We hear Ruth’s voice softly singing her version of Blind Lemon Jefferson’s song “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean”.

RUTH O/S
Take him down Lord, take him down, take him down into that coffin ground, take him down into that coffin ground. Dig his grave Lord, dig his grave....

Ruth’s singing gives import to what the sheriff finds in his desk.
The sheriff looks in the draw and finds a voodoo doll, punctured with many pins. A photograph of ELIZA is pinned to its chest. The Sheriff lifts up the doll and then, realizing that the photograph is of Eliza, looks horrified and hurls it into a trash can. He suddenly turns pale and looks a bit sweaty. He puts his hand to his chest. He isn't feeling well.

SMASH CUT

31. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

ALISON and NATE, dressed in their overalls, lie on their backs chewing on long stalks of grass and gazing at the sky.

Alison, amusingly, is clearly imitating Nate. Her attempt to be like him shows that they have become friends — after all they both love Percival with all their hearts.

SMASH CUT

32. INT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

At the jail house, the SCRUFFY BOY is still screaming inside the closet. SHERIFF JIM MADDOX, looking even worse, gets up from working at his desk and goes over to the closet. He unlocks the door and releases the boy. The scruffy kid sees the white powder, the sweaty look on the sheriff’s face and runs for his life.

The sheriff heads to the door of his office. He stops and winces with pain. He is now very sweaty.

He puts his hand to his throat to tug at his open collar. The cross, with the star at its centre, is hanging around his neck. He winces and puts his hand to his chest again.

He continues on his way out of the office. The voodoo doll stares up out of the trash can.

SMASH CUT

33. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

VERNA and PERCIVAL look at the pond serenely, like two wise owls. HENRIETTA is still eating fried chicken.
VERNA
(to Percival)
It's such a shame about your mamma's tree.

PERCIVAL
Yes. But all things come to dust, don't they.

VERNA
That's the truth, they sure do. The good and the bad.

SMASH CUT
TO:

34. INT. JUDGE CUTTER'S HOUSE - BEDROOM, DAY

Outside JUDGE CUTTER's bedroom door, BOBBY BEAUFORT and another police officer draw their guns and, after a momentary pause, burst into the room.

In the bedroom, the judge is in bed with the PRETTY MAID. The Judge looks very surprised. The PRETTY MAID however doesn't look surprised in the least. They both attempt to cover themselves.

BOBBY BEAUFORT
(sneering)
Now, now, of all people Judge Junior you should know it's against the law to...
fraternize... with colored gals.
'Specially one so young.
'Could get you twenty years with the right judge....

The deputy turns to his fellow officer and says:

BOBBY BEAUFORT
(CONT'D)
Cuff him and bring him in.

The Second Deputy grabs his cuffs and moves towards the bed where the Judge looks stricken with fear.

JUDGE CUTTER
Please, this will ruin me...
BOBBY BEAUFORT
(smirking)
You shoulda thought o' that before you crossed us Junior and made us release that Jew boy.

CUT TO:

35. EXT. JUDGE CUTTER'S HOUSE – DAY

Outside the Judge's house, with the police car parked prominently in the drive, RUTH watches from behind the tree where Alison and Percival once hid. In the distance, Ruth sees the judge led out in handcuffs. She smiles and kneels down.

There at the base of the tree is a bizarre kind of altar – a picture of Eliza, a candle, a jar of white powder, a bottle of liquor and the rotting severed hand. Ruth pours the liquor over the lot and uses the candle to set it alight.

She stands up, looking triumphant, and turns to leave.

CUT TO:

[AD BREAK]

36. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND – DAY, CONTINUOUS

VERNA is looking off into the distance, as if waiting for something. After a moment, the tall figure of a man appears on the road. Verna begins to tidy herself up, smoothes her dress, runs a finger through her hair. The others soon notice the man approaching.

When the man reaches the gate, he removes his hat and waves. It is JUPITER JACOBS. ALISON looks at VERA in surprise.

VERNA
Don’t you look at me like that. I’m allowed to invite a friend to a picnic ain’t I?

Alison smirks.
VERNA (CONT’D)

Don’t you smirk at me Alison
Mayflower, you just keep your
smirks to yourself.

Verna goes quiet as Jupiter Jacobs opens the gate and
walks over to them.

JUPITER JACOBS

Evenin’folks….

He looks a little nervous. He glances at Verna and
smiles.

ALISON

Why don’t you come sit down
Mr. Jacobs, I can make a spot
right by me…

Jupiter steps over and sits down.

JUPITER JACOBS

I see you’ve got the best seat
in the house Al, right by the
cake…

Alison beams at being called “Al”. She looks at Verna as
if to say “I like him”. Verna relaxes immediately.

JUPITER JACOBS

(spots the cake)

Why, is that strawberry cream?

HENRIETTA

(flirtatiously)

Why yes it is, would you like
me to cut you a piece?

VERNA

(grabs knife)

You keep your hands off that
cake Henrietta, or I’ll
relieve you of a few of them
chubby fingers.... I’ll serve
Mister Jacobs a piece.

Alison and PERCIVAL smirk at each other knowingly.
HENRIETTA scowls. Jupiter beams.

SMASH CUT
TO:
37. INT. PERSEVERANCE JAILHOUSE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

SHERIFF JIM MADDOX, still looking very unwell, with white powder still smearing his chest and chin, locks the door to the jailhouse and walks towards his car. He stops and winces with pain, leaning on the hood of the police car with one hand.

He is now very pale. He looks to the sky. His eyes go cold and still. He falls to the ground clutching his chest. He is dead.

SMASH CUT

TO:

38. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Later that day, VERNA, JUPITER, HENRIETTA, PERCIVAL, ALISON and NATE are all still lazing serenely by the pond.

Alison sits up, looking at Nate. There is some secret between them and she is looking to him for permission to reveal it.

He nods yes.

Alison gets the box covered with cloth.

ALISON

We have another present for you Percival.

PERCIVAL

You do? Why, how extravagant!

Alison shoves the box towards him. Nate sits up as Percival removes the cloth.

Percival opens the box and looks a little bemused.

In the box are six little seedlings.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)

(confused)

Why, thank you...

ALISON

Nate and I collected the seeds, and Gran helped us to grow them.
PERCIVAL
(still confused)
They're very... cute....

NATE
The seeds were from your
mamma's tree.

Percival makes a loud gasp and puts his hand to his
mouth. He is overjoyed. He begins to cry.

VERNA
A man your age crying like a
baby...

PERCIVAL
If you're going to call me
names...

He smiles, tears falling down his face.

He picks up a seedling and holds it against his cheek. He
turns to Nate, Verna and Alison each in turn with a huge
smile of thanks.

PERCIVAL (CONT'D)
You beautiful, beautiful
friends.

ALISON
Now your mamma'll be
everywhere.

Percival continues to blubber. Alison and Nate look at
each other and shrug, bemused.

SMASH CUT
TO:

39. EXT - WOODS ON A RIDGE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

RUTH is walking back from the Judge's house through a
shadowy wood. She has a satisfied and serene look to her
face. She knows vengeance has been done.

As she walks, she sees a strange light ahead. She slows
down, peering ahead through the trees. Then, as she steps
around a large oak tree, dripping with Spanish Moss, She
sees a ghostly figure. The figure is facing her, smiling
deeply. It is ELIZA.
The ghost turns her head to her left and points off through the trees. Ruth takes a step or two in that direction, to a gap between the trees.

From her standpoint, Ruth can see through the woods to the cemetery and the pond. She takes another step forward and sees in the distance the party of friends gathered for a picnic. She smiles warmly.

When she turns to see Eliza again, the ghost is gone. In her place is a shaft of golden sunlight breaking through the canopy of trees. Ruth looks back toward the cemetery and the picnic.

RUTH
(to herself)
Oh Eliza honey, you're always lookin' after me, ain't ya....

Ruth continues to watch the picnic through the trees and smiles even more deeply.

CUT TO:

40. EXT. CEMETERY BY POND - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Still at the pond, PERCIVAL is beginning to settle down.

ALISON passes him her handkerchief - a very manly thing that Percival hesitates to use.

After a little while, Verna attempts to distract him:

VERNA
(to Percival)
You never did admit to putting sand in ol' man Burghoffer's gas tank.

PERCIVAL
That's because I didn't.

ALISON
If it wasn't you, who was it?

NATE smirks. At first the others don't notice but soon they're all looking at him - he can't hold the smirk in.

They all simultaneously realize that it was Nate who put the sand in the gas tank. The surprise shows on all of their faces.
NATE
Well, I never did like the way he went around callin' people names.

PERCIVAL
I don't believe it.

VERNA
I think that's a taxable offence! Come on, pay up!

Nate is confused, hesitates, then Alison explains.

ALISON
Three full kisses and two hugs.

VERNA
(to Percy and Alison)
And seeing how you two are bound to play up anytime soon you'd better pay up in advance.

Alison and Percival roll their eyes but soon all three, Alison, Percival and Nate, are giving Verna her kisses. She counts them out.

VERNA (CONT'D)
That's one from you. That's one from you. And one from you... That's two from you...

HENRIETTA looks on disinterestedly and mutters to herself:

HENRIETTA
These people is crazy. All that huggin' and kissin’ when theys could be eatin’... Mmmm, mm, this chicken sure has a good scold on it.

Verna continues to count out her kisses.

We pan up and backwards until our vision is filled with a wide vista encompassing the whole cemetery and pond and the verdant countryside surrounding.
A figure walks into the foreground of the scene as we continue to pan up and out. She pauses at the cemetery gate, then opens it and walks in. It is RUTH.

Everyone gathered at the picnic waves a friendly welcome. Alison stands up and runs towards her.

FADEOUT.

41. EXT. PERSEVERANCE CUNTRYSIDE, FLASHFORWARD – DAY

From a high point, the rolling hills and fields of Perseverance Georgia look like a picture postcard dream.

It is early morning, just after dawn. The golden morning light scatters the darkness of the night and tinges everything with its luster.

Here and there, within this picturesque landscape, are perhaps a dozen trees sporting brilliant scarlet flowers.

These are crepe myrtles in bloom.

NARRATOR (V.O)

We planted the seedlings all over the district, so that today people come from all around to see the crepe myrtles in flower...

CUT TO:

42. EXT. PERSEVERANCE CUNTRYSIDE, FLASHFORWARD – SAME DAY

Up close, panning from the trunk to the highest limb, one of the crepe myrtles looks strong and glorious, its limbs festooned with lush scarlet blossoms.

Through the tree’s branches, we can see a number of other trees with scarlet blossoms nearby.

NARRATOR (V.O)

It's true that nothing beautiful lasts long...

When we reach the top of this tree and emerge from its green canopy out into the sky above, we pan around and see that this tree is planted in the cemetery, beside Mrs. Huckstep’s tombstone.
...but there's always something to replace what is gone; something that reminds us that friendship, once awoken in the heart, never really leaves us.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF MINISERIES
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