

Bohemianism in early 21st century Australia

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Bohemianism in early 21st Century Australia

Creative Artefact

The Metamorphosis of Clio

Exegesis

Writing a Transformative Postmodern Memoir

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University

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Synopsis

The Metamorphosis of Clio is an exploration into the transformative possibilities offered by postmodern writing techniques in the realm of life writing. It doesn't just prod or blur the boundaries between truth and fiction, it does away with them altogether as memory, imagination, desire, fact, and text knit together to create a kaleidoscopic, intertextual dream. The use of devices such as metafiction, montage, parody, palimpsest, and pastiche, as well as experiments with characterisation, time and point of view open up a plethora of nonlinear pathways that map inroads into the author's life, while simultaneously leading readers to consider her connections to the wider world, which is accessible within the pages of the memoir via a myriad of spiraling intertexts.

Through the lens of *Écriture féminine*, the transformative potential of a postmodern approach to life writing is investigated following Helene Cixous' claim that writing offers women a chance to reclaim an understanding of themselves and their bodies by illuminating aspects of their lives which remain hidden and unknown due to the internalised strictures of phallogocentric discourse. For Cixous, feminine writing invites women to look directly at the Medusa to see her monstrous mask is an illusion, an imposed construction which is placed on all of us through its association with female power, keeping women fearful of fully seeing or knowing themselves. It's easier to turn and run from the mirror pool. But as *The Metamorphosis of Clio* shows, a style of writing which embraces the *feminine*, as Cixous conceives it, can effect change in a woman's life as she moves into the text, and into the world and history using the language of a thousand tongues, one that is subversively poetic, erogenous and heterogeneous, and which purposely rejects the automatisms and historico-cultural conventions that render women formless, blind, deaf and dumb.

Bohemianism has been described as a literary phenomenon that originated in Paris in the 1800s with the publication of Henry Murger's humorous semi-autobiographical sketches, or mini narratives, about his life in the Latin Quarter which crystalised the glamorous myth of the 'starving artist'. This iconic figure continues to be portrayed as a romantic loner, a suffering eccentric whose artistic genius goes unnoticed and unrewarded as he struggles to survive at the edges of normal society. Through intertextuality, *The Metamorphosis of Clio* seeks to position Bohemia in 21st Century Australia, specifically Brisbane in the early 2000s, by drawing connections between my own life experiences and bohemianism as it appears in literature and other works of art throughout history and in contemporary popular culture.

The relationship between the exegesis and the creative artefact could be viewed as 'connective' in the sense that the exegetical discussion is reflective of a postmodern approach as it embraces multivocal discursive perspectives and literary experimentation in its search for theoretical insights which shape the development of the artefact.

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.



Megan Ellen Anning

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Memoir Redacted

Writing a Transformative Postmodern Memoir

There are stories that you can write, and there are stories that you can't write. And, in the end, you write the ones that you can, and that allows you to bear the ones that you can't.

There's nothing, I think, particularly upsetting about that — it's simply a strategy of survival. And it's also how we allow ourselves agency in the world, instead of being completely overwhelmed by the things that happen to us. We are, by the writing of that story, by the way that we tell what's happened to us, giving it back to ourselves instead of being powerless within it.

(Winterson, 2010)

PART ONE: SEARCHING FOR BOHEMIA

A Connective Exegetical Approach – Who is Speaking Here and Now?

as all of us know, you write because you do not know what to say. Writing reveals to you what you wanted to say in the first place. (Coetzee, 1992, p. 19)

Nike Bourke and Philip Neilsen assert that the term 'Creative Writing' is an appellative in the sense that it names what should be kept in the forefront of our minds when we think of the discipline: 'the principal concern is with the development, critique and articulation of process rather than product' (Bourke & Neilsen, 2004). Further, they stress that for Creative Writing to find success as an independent area of research with unique and identifiable discursive practices, students engaged in constructing an exegesis for a Creative Writing artefact should maintain this focus on *process* over *product* to avoid treating their own work as 'a sealed and completed object' which can only then be creatively *read* rather than *written* in their attempt to apply whatever analytical perspectives of cultural studies or literary theory they may be working with as they go about the task of articulating the process behind their creative output.

These observations relate to some of the central dilemmas of this exegesis: how to

inhabit this strange terrain where I'm compelled to think about my creative artefact as an object, something I can look at from a distance to clearly see how it works and has been put together, while knowing it is a part of me, having been born from my particular life? It exists both inside and outside of me – at times nestled in all my veins, pumping in my offbeat heart, coursing through my body like a peculiar dis-ease and at others, existing externally as a 'thing' which could be likened to a Frankenstein's monster constructed out of bits and pieces of other 'things' both literary and worldly. Who is speaking here and now and to whom? Jeri Kroll (2004) asks similar questions in her discussion of the exegesis in the creative arts:

Here is where the plethora of personalities really becomes confusing. Who is addressing whom in the thesis and in which part? When is the artist theorising and when creating? Is she speaking on paper to supervisor, examiner, university community, artistic community, or all at once? Is there ever a clear distinction?

The question of how to present this exegesis, this narrative of how I/we produced/will produce our creative artefact is perplexing given that I'm unsure which personality is writing, the creative, or the exegetical, or something else entirely. How do I delineate or reconcile my/our creative and exegetical selves? Where does the creative artefact finish and this document about that artefact begin? There is the feeling of being scattered, seeing myself 'over there' in the past/in the future/in front of that/this computer, piecing the creative artefact together, frowning, crying, lying stunned as a bird flown head first into a glass door, and yet also here and now in front of these words; then back there again in the past/in the future, on a chair/on the ground, my feathers not flapping before soaring high into the sun when the flow of words, the gossamer, is hit by a gust of wind, taking me/us far away until all of our eely legs disappear in the rush of it. It does feel like a type of illness: thinking. Better I was sleeping soundly in my bed rather than following along after these annoying little letters whose footfalls I must still hear some nights slipping into dream state.

Perhaps this is a glimpse into what it feels like to be schizophrenic. Nigel Krauth pins down the predicament astutely: ‘There’s a schizophrenia apparent in this situation. The researching writer, trying to be creative writer, is forced back to the role of critic distanced from the process, as opposed to being critic inside the process’ (Krauth, 2011, p.7). Jillian Hamilton’s identification of a ‘connective’ approach to the exegesis offers some answers to this conundrum by embracing the idea that ‘we can legitimately assume differing perspectives and a polyvocality within the exegesis’. She explains:

The connective model requires a reconciliation of multi-perspectival subject positions: the academic objectivity and disinterested perspective of the observer/ethnographer/analyst/historian/theorist at times; and the internal, invested position of the practitioner/producer at others. The author must also contend with adopting and integrating a range of writing styles: from the high academic styles of theory, analysis and exposition to the explorative, intimate, first person accounts of the diarist, reporter, and reflective practitioner. This requires inhabiting multiple speech genres and voices throughout the exegesis: from the formal, polemical voice of the theorist to the personal, questioning and sometimes emotive voice of reflexivity. (2011)

Hamilton argues that this connective style of exegesis has the potential to become a ‘polythesis’ whereby new knowledge is gained through ‘the interplay of voices rather than merely their co-presentation’ (2011). Seen through this framework, this exegesis could be viewed as aligning with Hamilton’s connective model given that I inhabit a range of speech genres other than the traditional academic/analytical voice, including a personal, speculative, and reflexive voice, along with my other ‘creative writer’ voice/s in my search to *write* rather than *read* my creative artefact. Included in this version of the exegesis are extracts from previous drafts which were conducted prior to the completion of the creative artefact. These prior drafts were essential in helping me gain valuable theoretical knowledge and personal insight into my creative-research project to develop the creative artefact further.

The Myth of the Starving Artist – Examining Memory, Time, and Place

When I returned to university to study Creative Writing in my early forties, I had many of the markers of a ‘mature age’ student – a young daughter, a secure, ‘real job’ – I had money and a room of my own, two things Virginia Woolf (1935, p. 6) famously stated women must have if they are to write, and I’d accumulated enough life experience to have a book in me, as the saying goes, a collection of swirling, interlinking and morphing memories and fantasies, resentments, desires and regrets that seemed to incessantly harass me, demanding my attention. I wasn’t sure what literary form a book about these experiences might take – fiction or nonfiction, or something in between – but one aim seemed certain: I wanted to, had to memorialise a period of time in the early 2000s when I was living in West End in Brisbane with my partner Zane, a pseudonym, who was tragically killed in a traffic accident on a Tuesday morning in November 2006, cutting short his audacious and radical career as an artist, and leaving me with many loose ends, unsaid words, ghostly memoirs and leftover detritus to pore over for too many years.

Not seriously committing to writing about Zane until nearly a decade after his death afforded me the vantage point of hindsight, and like Lynne Segal in *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (2007), examining my memories and the ‘historical contingencies of time, place and the other unpredictable encounters’ (p. 32) gave me a sense of ‘understanding life backwards’ in the broader socio-political context. From my perch in a fully furnished house in a coastal town, I could look back to see how different life was when I was living with Zane in inner city Brisbane. When we met, he was living the life of a ‘starving artist’, his only employment being washing dishes at a nearby restaurant; the little flat he was renting in West End was almost bereft of furniture, but the floors were covered by tiny canvases, and I observed him diligently working on these during our first days together. He was widely known as a unique and audacious artist who eschewed the pursuit of material wealth

and other markers of social status. A tribute by the Institute of Modern Art describes him perfectly: ‘Although his smashing mirrors in *I Am Genius, I Am God* might be read as an attack on his self-image’, Zane ‘certainly had a romantic idea of the artist as outsider. He cultivated a kind of James Dean attitude—he looked good smoking’ (Institute of Modern Art, 2007). From all accounts, Zane fit the quintessential image of the ‘starving artist’, a figure succinctly summarised by Bryce J. Christensen: ‘In the popular imagination, the modern artist is a struggling genius, starving in some obscure garret’ (1984, p. 1). The title of Randall K. Filer’s article, ‘The “Starving Artist” – Myth or Reality? Earnings of Artists in the United States’ (1986) also shows how deeply this view of modern artists has taken root in the wider cultural consciousness. What’s more, a google search of the phrase reveals a plethora of websites giving urgent advice about what readers, presumably would-be artists, should know about this myth, and the term even has its own Wikipedia page (Wikipedia contributors, 2022).

Given that Zane could be viewed as a ‘starving artist’, during my initial Creative Writing studies I was on the lookout for stories related to art and the lives of artists which might help shape the writing of my own story. Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2007) struck me as being particularly interesting given that the first line of the Preface reads: ‘The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim’ (p. 3), and the story begins in an art studio ‘filled with the rich odour of roses’ (p. 5). Here was a novel I felt I needed to learn about. Through my reading of this story and Wilde’s life, I learnt about nineteenth-century art and artists, and specifically the term ‘bohemian’. Though Wilde is known as being a part of the ‘Aesthetic’ movement rather than a ‘bohemian’, at the time of writing his only novel, Wilde existed alongside bohemians:

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s dandies, aesthetes, and bohemians coexisted

and often frequented the same cafes, cabarets, and theatres, each of them contributing to the spectacle of public life. (Deak, 1991, p. 11)

I became entranced by nineteenth century literature, and particularly by the artists and happenings in Paris. In my reading, I came across George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), as well as Henry James' *The Tragic Muse* (1890). With my focus squarely on nineteenth-century Paris, it wasn't long until I came across *The Latin Quarter (Scènes de la Vie de Bohème)* (1901) written by Henry Murger which was originally published as a series of sketches between 1845 and 1849 in the obscure satirical journal *Le Corsaire*, and then as a novel in 1851. Little did I know I could have saved myself the trouble by googling 'starving artist' to find a reference to this text in the 'Cultural Depictions' section of Wikipedia, just above the 'See also' list of terms which include 'Bohemianism' and 'Tortured artist'.

Murger's sketches span across approximately six years and revolve around four main players: Alexander Schounard (painter and musician), Marcel (painter), Gustave Colline (philosopher, teaches rhetoric/mathematics), and Rodolphe (poet). In his essay on Henry Murger, Walter Besant summarises the gist of the sketches:

Rodolphe's three friends, one of them an artist, one a musician, one a philosopher, scholar, and private tutor, are, like himself, poor and out at elbows. They are afflicted with a Gargantuan hunger. When funds come in, their first thought is food; they go out and eat; they go on eating till there is nothing left in the locker, then they go back to their customary short commons with the resignation of philosophers and the hope of youth. (1903, p. 173)

These four young men are the bohemians, while the women, Francine, Musette, and Mimi among others, are depicted as their love interests, and often described as money hungry, frivolous creatures. Rodolphe's romance with Mimi doesn't begin until they meet in Chapter 14, and over the course of that chapter, they fall in love, break up and get back together, and this pattern repeats over the course of subsequent chapters. At the time of Mimi's death of consumption in the second last chapter, she has left Rodolphe, and the

bohemians have reached age thirty. The final chapter, titled 'Youth is Fleeting', signals the end of Murger's sketches, which is summed up succinctly by Besant: 'But she dies. Then the band of Bohemians is broken up; they go into society; they take their places in the world; they become respectable, staid, and successful' (1903, p. 176). The focus on youthfulness in Murger's text, as well as its truthful yet illusory quality, is highlighted at the beginning of Besant's essay:

THE Prophet of Bohemia. We sing of the man who first enlightened the world on the lives of those that wait upon hope and struggle in the path of Art against an adverse fortune; who, while he tore down the veil and showed the truth, at the same time raised a cloud of illusion which permits the youthful imagination to hear only the laughter and to ignore the pain. It is only when one becomes older that the suffering shows more clearly than the joy, the days of privation are seen to be more numerous than the days of feasting. (1903, p. 170)

According to Besant, 'the truth' Murger showed readers is his own early life, as most of the characters appear as close portraits of his friends. Lisa Tickner echoes this view, stating: 'Murger drew on his own experiences, and those of his friends, in sentimental vignettes of life in the Latin Quarter' (2011, p. 979).

Murger's text resonated deeply with me as I could see many parallels between his work and my own project – a focus on the youthful past of characters who were starving artists, a central romantic relationship which ends in tragedy near the end of the story, and the use of real-life experiences as subject matter. Moreover, I found the light-hearted and comical tone of the stories very appealing. In the introduction, Arthur Symons notes the humorous, exaggerated depiction of bohemians in the text who live 'a life which is itself a tragic comedy in fancy dresses, a life wholly in exaggeration' (Symons in Murger, 1901, p. xiii), and states that Murger's main aim is to entertain with his 'adventures of a few young men and women living from hand to mouth with persistent gaiety' (p. xii). This entertaining portrayal of bohemian life as being an amusing 'tragic comedy' was especially interesting

as it helped me to view the ‘starving artist’ life in a whimsical and uplifting way, slightly dispersing the sense of melancholy and regret that hung about in my life whenever thoughts of Zane flittered into my mind.

I’ve felt haunted by the pain of grief, and the desire to take back words uttered angrily in the final ticking minutes of a life. Were it not for Zane’s death, I’m not sure I would have undertaken the intense, gruelling labour required to commit to writing a novel length work. In the introduction to his novel *Queer*, William Burroughs claims the catalyst for him becoming a writer was his wife’s death:

I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan’s death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing. I live with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. So the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out. (1985, p. xxii)

My own ‘Ugly Spirit’ might be the words I told Zane the morning he died. He would have been walking along Melbourne Street towards the intersection to go to GOMA, his little silver Nokia 3210 held to his ear, when he heard the words: ‘I’m leaving you’. When he asked if I meant it, I said, ‘Yes, I’ll get over you’. I must have slumped back to sleep only to be woken some time after by the phone. A lady from the Princess Alexandra in Woolloongabba said I needed to come to the hospital, but she wouldn’t say why. I stood looking down the hall, the air icy blue all around me, the house growing enormous. I noticed things I’d walked past every day without ever seeing them: the chipped eggshell colour of the front door; the beveled grooves of the glass at the top, and somehow, I knew Zane was gone. We would have made up, I’ve been assured many times over the years, just as we’d done countless times before. But no one will ever know. Did he purposely step off the traffic island into the path of the bus? A young bystander on his way to

university rushed to cradle his bloodied body as he lay on the road, a gym towel stemming the tide of life seeping out from his forehead. In the days after, I met that student, but I remember him only as a blur, a vague, light yellow-grey mirage with haunted eyes.

Zane's sudden demise was undoubtedly the match that sparked the fire powering this writing-as-research journey. I had to memorialise him in a great work of art, telling myself 'I must write this thing before I die' or be doomed to wander the streets as a hungry ghost. But my focus on creating a literary portrayal of Zane belied the real aim of this project: to write about *my* life experiences, however traumatic or difficult, in the hope I might gain insight and a sense of empowerment, healing and resolution not available via any other mode of creative, theoretical, or therapeutic practice. Harris suggests that 'writing about personal experience translates the physical world into the world of language where there is interplay between disorder and order, wounding and repair' (2003, p. 2). I knew I had unhealed wounds stretching far back before I met Zane, and the idea I might go exploring in that murky well was quietly terrifying. Even so, I was confident writing had the power of offering peace of mind, however fleeting and short-lived, having written poems and scribbled in journals over the course of my life to help me make sense of things, to release emotion, to rebut injustices, to give solid shape to my dreams, to make art. I just didn't know where writing got its power exactly, and the mechanisms of its operation.

Research Questions – Grappling with Fact and Fiction

A research question leading on from this line of inquiry might be something along the lines of: 'How can I write about Zane, whose sudden death left me with a gaping hole of sadness, regret and longing for which there seems to be no cure?' Or perhaps, 'How might words stitch up wounds in my life?'

Yet these didn't sit well with me – the spotlight was too brightly lit and pointing directly at me and my life, my emotional turmoil, and all the gloom of loss and trauma.

Thinking about my past and present life from this angle seemed to compound my sense of sadness. So many memory fragments and thoughts rushed at me, and they were saturated with painful feelings of shame, guilt, self-loathing, and resentment. The fact is that I knew very little about who I was when I began this research journey. The ebullience, excitement, and glamor of Murger's starving bohemians was far more enthralling, lifting me up and away from my own sense of emotional disrepair. I didn't want to write a memoir. *I* couldn't. It was too risky: undoubtedly, it would be 'self-indulgent', and "relegated to the pile of 'poor me' or 'misery memoirs' that dump misery on the reader, point fingers of blame, and have the effect of simply 'getting it off the writer's chest'" (Davidow & Williams, 2023, p. 69). No, I would create a great work of art, I told myself, so great that it would honour *Zane's* life as a great artist. Not *my* life. Who would want to read about my life? I wasn't an artist. I was a nobody, I told myself, a self that even I didn't really know.

I became fixated on the concept of bohemianism, and I figured that through exploring it as a central linchpin of my research, not only could I meaningfully situate my stories in a wider socio-cultural context, and thus hopefully produce some valuable 'new knowledge', but I could also simultaneously gain a deeper understanding of myself and life trajectory, exploring painful memories of my life along the way but only as a secondary by-product of the project, a less important prerogative.

In a Master course completed prior to signing up for the PhD, I had written 'Erato', a 'short story I wrote to experiment with Helene Cixous' notion of *Écriture féminine* (1976)' (Anning, 2017). Using fiction and intertextuality as central narrative devices, I found I could map out some of my experiences in a way that was incognito – it wasn't 'Megan Anning' who moved through the story, but fictional Clio – and these novelistic, and postmodern techniques allowed me to access pathways into my life experience through writing without having to stick to the 'reader/writer contract' outlined

by the ‘father’ of modern autobiography Philippe Lejeune who states:

What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text. (Lejeune, 1989, p. 19)

My overwhelming desire to steer clear of this ‘contract of identity’ is apparent in the use of fiction in ‘Erato’, and in the accompanying author biographical statement which states that ‘Megan Anning’ is working on ‘her first novel’ (Anning, 2017). It is only now that I can fully grasp the irony and confusion inherent in wanting to hide my identity in amongst these obfuscations, while at the same time feeling compelled to explore what has come to be known as *Écriture féminine*. In her famous essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Cixous states ‘Woman must write her self...put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement’ (1976, p. 875). I had put a fictionalized version of myself into the text, but I still felt ambivalent about the idea, which is not the way a ‘feminist’ should feel, and certainly not a ‘feminist writer’. Yet I pushed on, curious, desperate to know what writing might do for me, ‘*what it will do*’, as Cixous says at the outset of her essay (1976, p. 875). I was laden with a nebulous sort of pain, which was eating away at me, keeping me stunned and confused for nearly a decade after Zane’s death, leaving me with no other resort but to turn to writing for a cure.

Settling on a Question – Defining a Radical Research Paradigm

Despite latently knowing I was on a search to cure myself through writing, my initial research question gave this aim a wide berth:

‘How can I write about my life in a community of artists living in Brisbane in the early 2000s, exploring ways Bohemianism was alive in the people’s behaviour and attitudes towards the practice of art?’

I began the investigation by reading widely on bohemianism with the purported intention of

answering the sub-research question: What is bohemianism? In this way, my theoretical approach to writing my creative artefact might loosely resemble the ‘iterative cyclic web’ model offered by Smith and Dean (2009, p. 7) through beginning with research-led practice (reading), rather than practice-led research (writing). My aim was to spark memories and ideas from knowledge gained through textual content analysis and follow those thoughts into what Alyssa Ryan terms ‘the interactive space of praxis’, where ‘theoretical connections between the two research structures’ are generated (2005). Through conducting writing experiments following reading sessions, with the aim of capturing my memories and thoughts on the page, I hoped to answer a second sub-research question: ‘Was Zane a bohemian?’

This ‘hybrid’ model of research methodology, which operates within a ‘rhizomic’ research framework outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 12) offered a way to work within a postmodern research paradigm, situating intertextuality and other radical experimentations at the centre of my cyclical creative and theoretical practice (Ryan, 2005). I’d hoped that following this path would eventually lead me to create something akin to Murger’s lighthearted collection of stories, though centering on the lives of bohemians in West End in the early 2000s. I didn’t attempt to plan my writing at this stage, but simply wrote down whatever came to my mind after reading as I sat at my desk surrounded by a plethora of open books.

In line with Nigel Krauth’s assertion that ‘breaking free of the linear and monomodal is the central issue of the Radical’ (2016, p. 8), my preliminary writings embraced nonlinearity and multimodality, weaving first person autobiographical recounts with reflective tracts and analytical insights as well as short creative narratives. These initial explorations were geared towards making connections in the ‘rhizomic’ research framework, exploring links between bohemianism as it exists in the literature and in my

empirical experience. I named the file ‘Writing, Drilling, Searching’. Inroads began to grow like exploratory tendrils of a plant, or strands of a spider’s web, giving shape to Krauth’s vision of the Radical in literature, embracing ‘multiplicity, collage or a rhizome of fragments’ rather than ‘the linear, the singular, the beginning-and-end structure’(2016, p. 7).

What is Bohemianism?

During this early phase, reading about the ‘starving artist’ phenomenon in theoretical texts felt more comfortable than writing – I imagined I was reading about Zane, searching for him, but from a distant and academic viewpoint – reading theoretical texts provided an emotionally comfortable and satisfying buffer against having to write, so I eagerly embraced the ‘research-led’ pole of my practice.

In *Bohemians of the Latin Quarter*, Murger loudly declares his expertise on the subject of the ‘starving artist’, with the Preface of his novel impressing upon readers that the ‘real Bohemia’ is the subject of his book, an ephemeral place which is populated by ‘those called by art’ to live ‘a life of patience, of courage’, a ‘charming and a terrible life, which has conquerors and its martyrs’ (1888). The preface was written specifically for the 1851 publication of his previously published stories, and its plea for readers not to confuse the bohemians in his book with ‘the Bohemians whom melodramatists have rendered synonymous with robbers and assassins’ is impassioned, outlining in detail that neither are his real bohemians ‘recruited from among the dancing-bear leaders, sword swallowers, gilt watch-guard vendors, street lottery keepers and a thousand other vague and mysterious professionals whose main business is to have no business at all, and who are always ready to turn their hands to anything except good’ (1888). For Murger, the bohemian class consists of numerous subcategories, the largest of which are the ‘Unknown Bohemians’, poor artists unable and unwilling to garner a bourgeoisie audience for their art, ‘obstinate

dreamers' who are 'disciples of art for art's sake', instilled with the 'ridiculousness of stoicism' and 'mad heroism' that often leads ultimately to death from hunger or illness (1888). These bohemians consciously reject monetary payment for their art, viewing it as antithetical to their identity.

In contrast, Murger's 'real Bohemians', 'know how to profit by even the accidents of the route', and 'go poaching on all the callings that have any connection with art, hunting from morn till night that wild beast called a five-france piece' (1888). At the end of the first chapter, titled 'How the Bohemian Club was Formed', he stresses that the text is 'only a series of social studies, the heroes of which belong to a class badly judged till now, whose greatest crime is lack of order.' Furthermore, the narrator claims that this class of bohemians 'can even plead in excuse that this very lack of order is a necessity of the life they lead' (1888).

Murger's depiction of the lives of a small band of writers, painters and musicians is often playful in its celebration of 'the rebellious artist opposed to bourgeois culture and living on the edge of society' (Sturgis, 2006, p. 18), with Arthur Symons writing in the introduction to a 1901 edition that Murger's Bohemia is the 'gayest and most melancholy country in the world' (p. vii), where readers are shown 'in his poets and painters and musicians, the raw material of Romantics, with a sympathetic mockery' (p. viii).

Contrastingly, in his introduction to the 2004 edition from University of Pennsylvania Press, Maurice Samuels claims the novel is 'more about money than about art' (p. 11). The characters in almost every story are busily focused on scrounging enough money to pay the rent or buy flowers and food, giving readers few insights into 'the aesthetic philosophy of the Romantic movement' (Murger, 2004, p. 11). He claims Bohemia is essentially about the 'painful process by which intellectual laborers had to submit to market forces to earn their keep' in the new social milieu of the nineteenth

century where the middle class, or *bourgeoisie*, had triumphed over the declining aristocracy following the Revolution of 1789, their political and economic power reinforced in the wake of the industrial revolution (p. 11).

Despite this grittier depiction of life lived in Bohemia, Samuels claims Murger's seminal text is 'no less mythologizing than Puccini's opera' *La Bohème*, which adapted the original sketches to create Rodolpho (drawn from the character Rodolphe) and Mimi, endearing their tragic love story to a mainstream audience in 1896 and cementing the myth of Murger's 'timeless race' of bohemians into the wider bourgeoisie consciousness. Joanna Richardson echoes Samuels' statement that 'Murger is largely responsible for creating the myth of Bohemia' when she writes that he deserves the title of 'The First Bohemian' as his *Bohemians of the Latin Quarter* 'crystallized the impression of Bohemia which has come down to the present day', giving it 'lasting glamour' (1971, p. 95).

This 'lasting glamour' captivated me, leading me to buy and borrow a trove of books on the topic, even going so far as describing myself as 'obsessed with bohemianism' in my third person biographical statement for published creative works. I felt compelled to answer the research sub question, 'What is bohemianism?' I agree with Virginia Nicholson that 'Bohemia is a hard country to place' (2005, p. xv) and the word bohemian, a 'curious, slippery adjective' (p. xvi); what's more, I gained keen insights into Elizabeth Wilson's claim that the task of defining Bohemia is 'complex and frustrating' (2000, p. 2). She writes that 'everybody has a mental pigeonhole into which the imaginary Bohemian more or less fits', with many thinking of the lonely artist's garret, gypsy-clad tavern drinkers, or untalented phoney, while others may include 'vegetarian nature-lovers living in caravans', or poseurs, 'lesbians in men's suits', or 'kohl-eyed beauties in chiffon and emeralds' as belonging to the bohemian category (p. xvi). I took to writing about these frustrations very early in my research:

Beginning to write about Bohemia is an exercise enacted in the middle of a miasma – a hazy, misty drift into an indefinable cloud of somethingness... and nothingness. It doesn't seem I'm getting closer despite my reading. Like swimming or sinking in quicksand or soaring high into the sky on a thousand different voices, I fall then fly up then fall again with the myriad of contradictory definitions, observations, and suppositions. A shining, untouchable jewel of a place, Bohemia can never be reached while I sit here it seems. A cavernous, airless room it is too, filled with hunger and suffering and despondent faces, all sporting lit cigarettes which dangle half-heartedly from grimacing mouths. (Anning, personal communication, 2020)

Not being able to grab hold of what it means to be bohemian presented me with a conundrum – how can I write about it, when it is a myth created and sustained by the very act of writing about that myth, as Elizabeth Wilson suggests? For Wilson, 'Bohemia is a cultural *Myth* about art in modernity, a myth that seeks to reconcile Art to industrial capitalism, to create for it a role in consumer society' (2000, p. 3). The 'clichéd idea of the rebel artist', as she puts it, is a 'Frankenstein's monster of a figure, patched up from competing and incompatible characteristics' (2000, p. 1), and it is the vast array of disparate and contradictory behaviours, individuals and communities to which the term bohemian has been applied that makes the task of defining Bohemia so difficult: 'The bohemian is both a genius and a phoney, a debauchee and a puritan, a workaholic and a wastrel, [her] identity always dependent on its opposite' (Wilson, 2000, p. 1). Further, Marilyn Brown traces the ways in which the 'modernist myth of bohemianism' can be found in the 'iconography of "real bohemians" in nineteenth-century French art' (Brown, 1985, p.2), concluding that the purpose of this myth was to mediate 'the perceived diametric opposition of bohemian vs. bourgeois' (p. 4) and that the proliferation of popular literature on the bohemian artist in the 1800s found its 'most acceptable bourgeois paradigm' in Murger's *Bohemians of the Latin Quarter*.

Intermittently, I switched from this comfortable research-led pole of the iterative cycle (reading) to investigating the concept of bohemianism through writing. I wanted to

drain my brain of memories surrounding ‘my life with Zane’ and crystallize them into fictional vignettes like Murger’s sketches – I thought that after pinning these memories onto the page, I could then examine them more closely to detect any evidence of bohemianism. After all, Murger himself drew from his own life experiences to write his stories of Bohemia, and this is reflected in Virginia Nicholson’s observation that ‘Bohemia as a recognized concept – a way of life encompassing certain forms of behaviour and a particular set of attitudes towards the practice of art – came into existence only when writers began to describe it and painters to depict it’ (2005, p.6). Jerrold Seigel echoes this point when he suggests that because Bohemia ‘remains so resistant to clear classification’, understanding it requires that ‘we must sometimes let ourselves be led by those who experienced it – participants or observers, friends or enemies’ (1986, p. 12). He further states that the testimony of writers claiming to have been a participant in or witness to Bohemia is ‘essential because defining Bohemia’s significance was a crucial way to participate in it’ (p. 12). Elizabeth Wilson similarly claims that this testimony, most often found in memoir and anecdotal reminiscence, was ‘the typical bohemian forms of “evidence”’ (2000, p. 6).

The Dangerous Game of Life Writing

But I wasn’t writing a memoir, I told myself; I was writing a great work of art! A novel! Something along the lines of Murger’s text, the most acceptable bourgeois paradigm for the figure of the bohemian. I set about writing a collection of mini narratives, drawing on my own life memories, but infusing them sneakily, cleverly into actions and sentiments of two characters, Clio (fictional me) and Tomas (fictional Zane), who were living together in West End in the early 2000s. All I had to do was put my mind to it so to speak –the memories would surely waft out of my head. Keeping on with a rhizomic approach, I allowed my mind to wander, capturing whatever memoirs spilled out regardless of whether

they veered away from Zane, our relationship, and the period of time when I knew him. By writing a series of mini-narratives rather than an overarching story with a traditional plot, my approach fits in line with Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of 'the postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives' (1984, p. xxiv) through the creation of a series of '*petit récit*' or 'little narratives' (p. 60). Through these 'little narratives', I sought not only to capture something approximating the 'truth' of Zane and the minutiae of our lives together, but to also replicate the experience of life and the mind's thinking as bitty, disconnected, exploratory and fragmentary. Furthermore, though I experimented with verb tense and point of view, writing at times in past, present or present perfect tense as well as from first, second or third narrative perspectives, I used correct grammatical syntax for sentences, which came out quite bereft of figurative detail overall.

Initially, I was buoyed by my ability to retrieve what I felt were clear memories, and I worked to render them as I imagined/remembered they'd happened. Yet most of these early portrayals read like superficial cardboard cut-outs of real life; I could see they were beset with the problems associated with what Margaret Drabble terms the 'dangerous genre' of life writing because it's 'very hard to tell the truth, and to get the tone right' (2010, p. 111), particularly when dealing with ever-changing and subjective memories of other people. Powers similarly notes the tendency toward 'narcissism, the confessional impulse, sincerity, [and] the hubris of assessing oneself with finality' (Powers, 2016, p. 323). I stopped to consider the nature and quality of my source material – memories, very soon realizing that my quest to render an accurate, truthful account of past conversations and interactions with Zane in this way was inherently futile. In *Writing the Radical Memoir: A Theoretical and Craft-based Approach*, Paul Williams and Shelley Davidow highlight the unpredictable, nonlinear, and highly complex processes that feed into memory recall because 'every act of remembering is an act of recreation' (p. 58). There I

was treating my memories as though they were static and fixed records long buried somewhere inside of me, and I could retrieve them, check them out like a book from a library, while in actuality ‘the process of recall is always contextual and shaped by story. Memory is not written down and captured unproblematically, but rather is emotive, sensory and associative.’ (Davidow & Williams, 2023, p. 68). John Paul Eakin similarly describes memory as a ‘revisionist faculty’ which makes fictions, not ‘untruths or lies’ but ‘that which is formed, fashioned, invented’ (2020, p. 94). O’Rourke describes this act of fashioning memories as ‘an inherently creative process of selection, omission, and recreation’ (2017, p. 24). Similarly, JM Coetzee emphasizes that the creation of ‘versions of the self’ (1992, p. 17) in writing involves careful decision-making; though the facts of a person’s life should be respected in autobiographical accounts, it is up to a writer’s discretion regarding which to include or exclude: ‘you choose the facts insofar as they fit in with your evolving purpose’ (p. 18).

To make sense of my preliminary writings so far, and why I’d selected some facts to include over others, I had to reflect on my evolving purpose if I was to continue to use memory as my main source material. My central aim was to memorialise Zane, and to a lesser extent our relationship, along with the time and place of West End, Brisbane at the start of the millennium; I’d also homed in on a desire to explore the concept of bohemianism as a socio-cultural framing device, and hiding up my sleeve was the more furtive aim relating to a need to delve into painful emotions in the hope I could be healed through writing. Yet, my research question only alludes to the bohemian element in these aims, and focuses on a ‘community of artists’, as though I was embarking on a social science or cultural theory research project. Perhaps this stance was influenced by Murger’s claim that his book was nothing more than a series of ‘social studies’, which may have struck a chord due to my undergraduate exposure to sociological thinking. Many texts on

what it means to be bohemian are written by sociologists who employ a range of research methods to construct their analysis. For example, *The Bohemian Ethos* by sociologist Judith R. Halasz aims to understand the 1970s to early 1980s ‘underground generation’ (2015, p. 8) of bohemians in downtown New York, employing a mixture of historical, ethnographic, and field research, as well as her own personal experience as a ‘child of the underground’ to build her sociological portrait of ‘bohemianism as a way of life’ (p. 6). Her text is an analytical study, with a commitment to objectivity and scientific rigor. She focuses largely on elucidating bohemians’ relationship to work, and the socio-economic conditions which allow bohemianism to flourish. Halasz’s discussion has the tone of impartiality and neutrality – she uses normal grammatical conventions, and eschews emotional revelation in her writing; further, she stresses that her project does not include the use of autoethnography, which ‘unlike traditional ethnography... places the researcher at the center of the ethnographic undertaking’ (p. 7); a main reason given for this is that though she is ‘a product of bohemia’, having been brought up in a bohemian enclave, she does not claim to be ‘entirely bohemian’ in her adult life due to her attitudes towards employment, and owning property and other capital (p. 7).

My research question as it stands would greatly benefit from the more objective scientific methods like those employed by Halasz – particularly interviews with people in the ‘community of artists’ I set out to study. However, from the outset, the most important artist in this community, the one person I felt at times desperate to speak with, was nowhere to be found, not in corporeal form anyway. Moreover, if I wanted to write something approximating a conventional biography of Zane, I probably wouldn’t be using a pseudonym to refer to him in this exegesis; and most likely, I would want to interview his friends and family, fellow creatives, acquaintances, teachers, and other bygone passersby to flesh out my understanding of his life as an artist, situating it in the cultural pantheon of

bohemianism. I would have to consult other historical records too considering that I only knew Zane for the last few years of his life; most of the knowledge about his life prior to that was acquired through conversations – him and others telling me about it, showing me things, him remembering past experiences and happenings, which are not reflective of a factually accurate past, but fabricated stories suffuse with emotion and associations, stories which were born at the time they were being told to me, thus driven by purposes specific to that contemporaneous context.

It was becoming clear to me how the disconnect between my emotions related to Zane, my initial research question, and the attempt to fictionalize my memories was extremely problematic, and not just because of the truth-telling issues related to the ‘dangerous genre’ of life writing already outlined. Another complication was that my main source material, memory, seemed to have just about petered out – it was frustrating and disappointing to think I could recall very few of the detailed and specific realities of my life in the past. I can attest to the truth of the claim that ‘our memory files become corrupt and as we get older, we seem to forget things more and more’ (Williams & Davidow, 2023, p. 66). The more I tried to remember and write about Zane, the memories and words refused to come. In addition, I felt the ‘heavy reluctance: a writer’s block like a straitjacket’ that Burroughs describes in the introduction to *Queer* (1985, p. xvii). He goes on to explain:

The reason for this reluctance becomes clearer as I force myself to look: the book is motivated and formed by an event which is never mentioned, in fact is carefully avoided: the accidental shooting death of my wife, Joan, in September 1951. (p. xviii)

My writer’s block seemed to stem from a combination of a dearth of memories to work with, and painful emotions surrounding Zane. This block had a silver lining though: it meant that I began writing in a more speculative style, yet still retained the use of fictional devices like characterization. I cringe when rereading some of these melodramatic

vignettes, but on reflection, I could see they were saturated with regret, guilt, self-loathing, and longing to change events of the past. Here is an example:

If they had left West End, gone to that house of his friend's on the South Coast near Byron, maybe things would have been different. Maybe Clio wouldn't be here now, trying to piece together what went wrong. How she could have been better. How he could have lived. (Anning, personal communication, 2020)

A sense of guilt is clearly discernible in this passage. In an article discussing the existence of survivor guilt in Anna Freud, Sigmund's daughter, after the family were terrorised and some of them murdered by the Nazis, John J. Hartman outlines work done on the topic:

Survivor guilt was listed by Nederland (1968) as one of a number of symptoms of those who have outlived someone close to them as the result of murder, suicide, war, genocide, natural disaster, or accident in which the survivor could also have died. Akhtar (2009) notes: "One variable that might determine the intensity of the guilt in such situations is whether the avoidance of ill fortune is the result of an active decision made by the survivor or due to mere happenstance [Mark Moore, personal communication, 3 April 2008]. (2014, p. 95).

Akhtar's observation that the intensity of the guilt in such situations depends on the decisions and actions of the survivor surrounding the ill fortune led me to want to interrogate my memories of my own actions in the days and nights leading up to when Zane died. I wanted to understand why I felt so guilty for his death, and for so long. I committed to try to retrieve these memories, if there were any left, by writing about them using a first-person perspective, and with a figuratively sparse, 'matter of fact' style. Given the mind's propensity for storytelling, some decorative descriptions did creep in to those passages. I haven't included those excerpts here, knowing they are just a version of the 'truth', a biased account, one that is shaped by emotion and the careful process of selection and omission that goes into fashioning a story. How might Zane's version of events differ from mine? And who might take issue with my account if it finds its way into the world at large? John Paul Eakin echoes these hesitations when he asks, 'What is right and fair for me to write about someone else?' (1999, p. 160). The unfairness of writing about someone who is no

longer here to defend themselves feels especially wrong. But these first-person writings were vital for helping me to gain a bit of perspective, revealing that a complex mix of unresolved feelings of resentment and indignation also lingered in my emotional stew alongside guilt; compounding the situation was that many of these feelings were not limited to Zane but implicated several other people, and were related to events and interactions which took place in the years following Zane's death.

Who are the *Real* Bohemians?

I returned to the easier task of reading about bohemianism. My obsession only seemed to grow. I googled 'Boho Chic', a style of fashion with 'roots in the flower power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s' (Allaire, 2019, September 6), to see actress Sienna Miller materialise on the screen dressed in a wine-red crocheted coat, floral dress and studded cowboy boots courtesy of her appearances at the Glastonbury music festival in the mid-2000s, which helped catapult the 'Boho look' into the twenty-first century cultural consciousness. I clicked on a website to be schooled in 'How to Become Bohemian Goddess'. I noted one of many paradoxes at the heart of the fashion advice: readers are warned not to overdo the 'ethnic looks or nomad outfits', while beneath the enormous pictures of women laughing and striding through fields of flowers wearing peasant blouses and fedora hats, a 'Buy Similar Here' icon is conveniently positioned to whisk viewers to Amazon's 'Women's Clothing' online shopping page. Readers are assumed to be cash-ready buyers, and this 'How to be Bohemian Goddess' advice is symptomatic of the 'mainstream commodification of alternative culture' by corporations hoping to profit from 'mining rebellion from the fringe and repackaging it for the middlebrow' (Barsanti, 2005). In contrast, the introduction on the cover of Lauren Stover's *The Bohemian Manifesto* offers a 'way out of a brand-washed mass-market

consumerist culture and into decadently delicious Bohemianism' (2004). This 'field guide to living on the edge' lives up to Stover's description as a 'playful exploration' of Bohemia and proposes that Bohemians possess the key defining attributes of 'courage, audacity and revolt' (p. 7), but above all are 'willing to suffer for their beliefs, their art' (p. 6). While Stover candidly avoids 'somber depressions, morbid fantasies and extreme poverty' (p. 10), everything else purportedly to do with Bohemia is celebrated and promoted from the psychology, 'threads' (clothing) and even preferred fragrances of its inhabitants who are classified into five 'mind-set/styles' (p. 34): Nouveau, Gypsy, Beat, Zen and the Dandy Bohemian. Stover takes pains to stress her moneyed 'Nouveau Bohemians' should not be confused with 'Bourgeois Bohemians' or 'Bobos', those curious hybrids of the bourgeois/bohemian dichotomy, 'bourgeois' meaning capitalist and 'bohemian' denoting counterculture, specifically that which began to pepper arty inner city American coffeehouses during the 1990s to the intrigue of David Brooks who couldn't distinguish an 'espresso-sipping artist from a cappuccino-gulping banker' (2000, p. 10). According to Kurt Andersen, Brooks seeks through 'comic sociology' to dig past the fashionable exterior of 'Bobos', the creative 'new establishment' elites at the helm of the information age, to reveal their essential proclivities and attitudes on variables ranging from work and leisure to sex, morality, and spirituality (2000). What he finds is that the worldview of 'Bobos' is comfortably primed with an interlocking dialectic of once supposedly competing ideologies. Andersen succinctly phrases this dialectic in his review of *Bobos in Paradise*: 'people seemed to have combined the countercultural 60's and the achieving 80's into one social ethos', breaking down the dialectical genesis and composition of the Bobo in detail using a simple formula: "'dialectic" – thesis (stuffed-shirt squares), antithesis (generation '68 vagabonds), synthesis (Bobos)'. Stover's umbrage at Brooks' Bobo version of Bohemia stems from his claim that 'only a shallow

person would spend hundreds of dollars on caviar, but a deep person would gladly shell out that much for top-of-the-line mulch' (Brooks, 2000 in Stover, 2004, p. 36). The careful, magnanimous, even spiritually influenced consideration allegedly given by Bobos to how they should spend their oodles of money contradicts Stover's idea of 'Nouveau Bohemians' who are prone to 'celebrate extravagance, art and deviance' (p. 36), ostentatiously using up money when they have it without a thought for necessity, just as Murger's iconic 'real Bohemians' were wont to do. Stover's claim that 'the Nouveau Bohemian does not consider the Bobo, who carefully distinguishes between need and want, to be a Bohemian at all' (p. 36) harks back to nineteenth century attempts by artists and writers to delineate 'real bohemians' from a myriad others to which the term had been purportedly misapplied. The image of the 'real Bohemian' as being in direct opposition to bourgeois culture, as well as the idea of Bohemians as necessarily 'living on the edge of society', clearly informs Lauren Stover's dismissal of David Brooks' dialectical hybrid Bobo version of Bohemia. Interestingly, this definitional stoush between Stover and Brooks regarding who can claim 'real' Bohemian status evokes the very same argument that was disseminating throughout the nineteenth century from the Bohemian epicentre of Paris, France.

This made me wonder – can a person who has a secure job, and carefully saves their money rather than spend it frivolously on unnecessary but desirable things really claim to be a bohemian? And if they do claim to align themselves with the term, are they then a fraud? A fake? These questions have clouded my mind throughout the course of this research project. I wrote about this issue very early on in the journey:

I am reminded of a conversation I had recently with a couple over a dinner of calamari and sweet potato chips smothered in enormous dollops of aioli. 'I'm sorry but I have to say,' the woman said, 'you don't strike me as a bohemian at all. Your hair is too neat.'
'I know,' I offered, sadness slightly tinging my words as they slipped out. Should I

apologise? Am I qualified for this task? (I'm not a *real* bohemian at all). But this presented a wonderful opportunity:

'What is your idea of a bohemian?' I proffered, sneakily sending forth investigative tendrils, homing in on my subject.

'A bohemian is someone who lives freely, making art, not caring about where they go. Someone who lives with other artists, maybe communally and wears bohemian clothes – paisley-patterned flowing dresses, beaded necklaces, and rings.' I embellished the last part of what the woman said just now – I can't remember what she said to be exact, but the words 'freedom,' 'art', 'living in a community of other likeminded types' still ring fresh and true.

'Sportsgirl and Tree of Life and other shops sell 'bohemian' dresses for over a hundred dollars each!' The woman and I discussed this. I expressed my indignation at the idea.

'The 'true meaning' of what it means to be bohemian is being packaged and sold as 'Boho chic' to women who must surely not be real bohemians if they can afford a hundred-dollar dress!'

The woman surprised me with her altruistic, contrasting view.

'If *that* boho dress makes *that* woman feel good about herself for *that* day, then it must be a good thing.' I saw the point and agreed, but inwardly, *boho chic* still galled me.

I've since amassed quite the collection of long, flowing, floral boho dresses – they make me feel like I'm floating above rather than walking on the ground. It was a different story in my late teens and twenties living in inner city Brisbane: I used to hate shopping, particularly for clothes, and especially in 'normal' mainstream shops like Myer and David Jones. Not only were the clothes too expensive, but I held the view that choosing *not* to buy 'things', including clothes, was a personal-political principle, having read some of Marx's work at university. My preference for spending a couple of dollars at most on used plastic jewelry and other items from Op shops etcetera was informed by my 'anti-capitalist', anti-bourgeoisie stance. That is what I told myself anyway. Second-hand stores also offered a wider and more interesting variety of garments with which to create an individual and unique bohemian 'look' to wear around the streets for entertainment, aesthetic effect and sometimes shock-value.

In 1843, Theophile Gautier decried Dennery and Grange's version of Bohemia in their play *Les Bohemiens de Paris*, by rejecting 'frightful villains' and 'hideous toads who hop in the mires of Paris' as members of the 'real bohemians' (cited in Brown, 1985, p. 1),

insisting on two distinct categories of ‘real Bohemians’: the first modelled on gypsies he found in Spain in 1840 wandering ‘majestically wearing noble rags’, their ‘black diamond eyes’ breathing the ‘mysterious melancholy of the Orient’; and the second, consisting of ‘foolish youth... who live day to day by its intelligence: painters, musicians, actors, poets, journalists, who love pleasure more than money and... [prefer] laziness and liberty to everything’ (p. 1). The conversation surrounding who are ‘real Bohemians’ continues to this day, with Elizabeth Wilson recalling that whenever she mentioned her work on bohemians, people hurled questions at her: “‘Who *were* the bohemians?’ ‘Who were the *real* bohemians?’” (2000, p. 1).

I switched to the practice-led pole of the research cycle, exploring parallels and points of difference between Murger’s text and my own life:

The task of writing about the ‘community of artists’ I lived in at the dawn of the 21st century in West End Brisbane is complicated because I was an outsider in this community, to my mind: almost everybody was a practising artist or had gone to art school. Murger’s Rodolphe claims he was very much a part of the ‘Bohemian Club’, and this is stated from the outset in the first chapter. And so, there is an obvious point of difference between myself the writer and Murger the writer in terms of the roles we played in the bohemian community about which we write. Murger is the bohemian within the story (Rodolphe), as well as the narrator (writer) of the story. I am the narrator (writer) of the story in process, but was I a bohemian within the story? Was I a writer back then, but not conscious of it? I dabbled in many different arts – particularly music. I wrote songs and lyrics and imagined performance art works, probably because of Zane’s influence, but I’d had an interest in this well before I met him too. If anything, I was a confused artist, a muddled bohemian unsure of which path in art to take. Another obvious difference is Rodolphe is a male character, while I’m a female ‘character’/writer. Murger (Rodolphe) writes about the ‘Bohemian Club’ members as heroes, devout disciples of art, noble warriors for art’s sacred cause, while their female counterparts are painted overall in a far less flattering light. We the readers don’t see inside the women’s lives in a real sense and are only told about what the women crave and desire: usually ‘gold coins’ and social standing, or the grandeur of being the subject for an artist’s gaze. But there are many striking similarities between Rodolphe and us: he loses Mimi, and we lose Zane. Theirs was a tumultuous love, and so was ours, fraught by the turbulent undulations of love caught in the waves of an artistic

life, lived on the edges between bohemia and bourgeoisie life. (Anning, personal communication, 2019)

The writing conducted in this initial research stage was helping me make small inroads into my understanding of bohemianism, yet all the contradictions and half-truths glared back at me from listless sentences. In retrospect, I could have included some of the other ‘facts’ of my life I’d chosen to admit. I could have said:

Though I began to write in my teens, poetry in particular, I’d gone to Law school in 1994, only to drop out after a year or so, much to my parents’ chagrin, and thereafter I spent close to a decade enrolling in and dropping out of a variety of other disciplines in multiple universities. I took a few creative writing courses towards the end, with one lecturer suggesting I pursue writing further, before finally crawling to a tenuous undergraduate conclusion in 2001, graduating with a Sociology degree. I swiftly flew to Japan to teach English before returning to Brisbane where I ensconced myself in the bohemian enclave of West End, working as a waitress to get by. I was in no hurry to get a ‘real job’ despite being in my late twenties. In Japan I remember sketching notes for a novel and keeping a dream journal, but back in Brisbane I seemed to forget this; instead, I played music, wrote songs and lyrics, but this eventuated accidentally when I was living in a share house. My house mates were in a band, and it was only because I kept drifting downstairs to play the old upright Hammond organ that I got into music. All those classical piano lessons I’d gotten growing up were coming in handy. Perhaps I should/could be a rockstar, I thought to myself. That would be something more than nothing. Something much more exciting than being a lawyer. Or a failed lawyer. A failure in general. There was a major problem though: I turned my keyboard down the few times we played gigs, not wanting people to hear me, not wanting people to see me. I continued to have strange visions of performance art works which had been harassing me inexplicably for years long before I met Zane. The same goes with dreams. Dreaming has featured hugely in my life, having had three years of recurring dreams in my early teens, and many other hyper visual dreams which I captured on paper in a journal and kept for decades. I’m a keeper of things, detritus, scratchings on paper, proof that ‘I was there’. I’ve still got exercise books from primary school – I can’t seem to let them go.

But I didn’t write these revelations early in my research. What kind of bohemian would that have made me? A *fake* as opposed to a *real* one?

When the memories of Zane wouldn’t come, I found myself writing mini – narratives about my own life as a young child and teenager. I was surprised by the subject matter – why was I writing little stories about little moments of my life that seemed

insignificant and wholly removed from my task at hand? I couldn't seem to make any meaning out of these disjointed, exploratory tendrils. I feared that if I kept on writing in this way, I might be led into an abyss of chaotic and diaristic textual fragments that could spiral away forever. I was also becoming stuck in a mire of reading academic books about what it means to be bohemian, without making any real progress on the creative artefact. Despite my awareness of the importance of memoir to the creation of and participation in Bohemia, I was still balking at the idea. The prospect was terrifying. Nigel Krauth observes, 'writing about one's life is always dangerous', particularly when using a type of automatic writing style where the author wishes 'to keep the flow going, only directed by the whim of the moment of writing' (Krauth, 2016). According to Krauth, the danger lies in the fact that some recollections are likely to cause trouble in certain contexts, prompting the need for writers to make careful decisions about which events are included in the recount, lest they stray into dangerous confessional territory. In my case, I found certain confessions difficult to make even to myself, in the context of my own self-understanding, let alone anyone else's. Was this the real cause of the writing blockages? The reason for the disjunction between my research question and methodology? I needed to angle the spotlight more toward me. Truth can hurt. It's understandable to want to look away. But as I've since found out, confronting painful truths through writing can reveal the source of confusion and trauma, and this is a vital step on the path toward healing.

Bohemia in Brisbane – Mother Memory is a Creative Writer

In *Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory* (1991), Gayle Green states that a person's sense of identity and reality relies on the pivotal function memory plays in connecting the 'past and present' versions of their self-identity. She refers to ancient Greek mythology to explain how remembered versions of the self are malleable stories written by memory

herself: ‘memory is a creative writer, Mother of the Muses (Mnemosyne in Greek mythology), maker of stories – the stories by which we construct meaning through temporality and assure ourselves that time past is not time lost’ (p. 294). The way we recollect the past is like a ‘connecting’ or ‘assembling’ process, and Green refers to Virginia Woolf’s metaphor of memory as a ‘seamstress’, running her needle ‘in an out, up and down, hither and thither’ (1956, p. 78) to illustrate this point. Yet in those very first writing sessions, my needle seemed to be on the blink – I couldn’t see how any of the mini-scenes related to one another, or to my present ‘adult’ self. One passage stood out as being particularly interesting, mainly for the way it made me feel like wanting to crawl into bed and pull the blankets over my head:

At age twenty-eight, Clio knows the world expects more from her than what she is offering. Her theme song, if she had to have one, would be *Loser* by Beck. Even as she walks along Melbourne Street, clicking heels on the footpath, catching glimpses of herself in the sheen of passing windows, she hears the words bouncing breathily in her mind: ‘I’m a loser baby, so why don’t you kill me.’ Though the song had been released ten years earlier when she had just left school, when she was young enough for no one to expect her to be or have done anything much at all, the sliding tremolo guitar, nonsensical lyrics and broken beats still soothe, are the gentle ‘there, there’ of an internal life coach, her secret reminding friend that she is not the only person in the world who has ever felt this way.

The beauty of following a ‘rhizomic’ method of writing is that whatever is hiding beneath your surface mind, whatever is in your subconscious can spill out onto the page, knit itself seemingly of its own volition into a type of narrative, however small and puzzling, and you can reread it to try to make sense of it. When I first reread this passage, I felt stupid and well... like a loser. This didn’t sit well with me at the time. I needed healing, not self-flagellation. I discarded the words, let them burrow back into the dark recesses of my computer and my mind. What kind of ‘feminist writer’ thinks of themselves as a loser? Where’s the agency? The action rather than passivity? Where’s the self-esteem? If I was to be a main character in my story, I had to be a confident heroine type. It’s just about mandatory these days – did my suffragette and bra burning predecessors battle and rage for

my freedoms just so I could betray the cause with an apathetic blip of confused
submissiveness? ‘Give yourself some agency, you stupid nitwit,’ I hear the voices of my
forebears echoing from the annals of history, ‘For the benefit of all of us, all of us, all of
us...’ The voices of some current-day publishers, editors and academics might have chimed
in too.

What could I make of this awkward turn of events? The only positive I could see is
that for a loser, Clio couldn’t have had a cooler theme song. In an article titled ‘The story
behind the song: Beck and the crowning of the ‘Loser’ generation’, Tyler Golsen explains
how ‘Loser’ turned singer/songwriter Beck Hansen into the reluctant ‘emblematic figure of
a new wave of burnouts and confused kids who made up Generation X’, the ‘slacker’
generation (2022). Released as a single in January 1994, my first year out of high school,
‘Loser’ is a hypnotic blend of droning folk and rock music, drum break loops and samples
overlayed with slide guitar and surreal rapped lyrics about ‘plastic eyeballs, spray painting
vegetables, and termites choking on splinters’ (Golsen, 2022). Hansen however rejected the
dubious label of pin-up boy for the ‘slacker’ generation, stating ‘That slacker stuff is for
people who have the time to be depressed about everything’ (Golsen, 2022). I can see his
point, but some of us really were depressed, confused, and burnt out, and in need of a cool
theme song.

I was born in 1976 in Townsville, living the first ten years of my life in the hot
Queensland mining town of Mount Isa before we moved to the Sunshine Coast for a
better life near the sea. The eldest child of four kids in a middle-class Catholic
family, I was a ‘good girl’ overall through to high school; say jump and I’d ask how
high. I loved dancing and during the eighties entered myself into competitions to
win a place in shopping centre dancing troupes, and even The Johnny Young Talent
School. We’d travel to South Brisbane for dance classes near where the old Expo
’88 pavilions used to be, and I performed in silky leotards, sequins and feathers and
fishnet stockings and even a gold top hat a couple of times. We had all the luxuries
of an average middle-class existence: days were filled with piano and ballet lessons,
netball games, poetry recitals in drama eisteddfods, surf lifesaving ‘Nippers’
carnivals and on Sunday’s mum ran Bible classes at our house. I read anything I
could get my hands on, writing long and strange stories. I also used to win school
athletics carnivals in the long-distance races. Life was a pleasant dream, everything

going along swimmingly, before leaks started to appear, and gradually but surely, I began to find myself drowning in the cloistered airlessness of a 1990s career woman's power suit, complete with shoulder pads and military buttons down the front, which seemed to begin wrapping around my face and body like an absurd straitjacket. I felt the weighty pressure of my Baby Boomer parents to strike out into the world, to take up a financially lucrative position in the adult world as a lawyer, or journalist, or any other of the respectable middle-class professions which offer a person a way to profit from an inherently nerdy, language focused disposition. In the wake of two waves of feminism, (my mother thought the Debutante Ball was an outdated ceremony for women), and the early 90s 'recession we had to have' (Smith, 2015), can you blame them for wanting to give me a gentle shove in the direction of financial and societal success? I did for many years without the benefit of hindsight and context, forgetting how us four kids delivered promotional pamphlets into letterboxes in the afternoons for a while there in the late 80s. I remember reading Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991), but it didn't stop me from loathing myself or my body which had quickly transformed from that of an athletic dancer to a burdensome lump of disconnected flesh belonging to a stranger, just foreign matter I wanted desperately to mould and control but didn't inhabit. I stared at the moon and listened to Siouxsie and the Banshees and Bauhaus on my Walkman late at night, outside on the veranda, smoking cigarettes secretly stolen from dad's packet. I got lost in school drama performances, and my dreams became slipping, sliding worlds I was disappointed to have to leave in the mornings. I wrote my first poem, a bizarre collection of fragmented images which was likely influenced by surrealism, given that we studied many such 'Avant Garde' theatre practices in Drama, and in 1993 our class travelled to Brisbane for the 'Surrealism: Revolution by Night' exhibition where I saw a performance set in a vast warehouse; figures moved about a wide and textured dreamscape as music and lighting fluctuated to create moody scene shifts. It seemed like a surreal painting come to life. While many of my peers moved out to successfully take up employment in the adult world less than a decade after we finished high school, I became locked in a push and pull battle of sorts, torn between expectation and obligation and the desire to feel connected to my own sense of humanity, my own identity, my body. Reading the fat law books was hell; when I found an old Torts book decades later it became starkly apparent why I was so depressed, but at the time I didn't seem to have the words to adequately communicate all of this to my parents, or university counsellors, having grown timid and shy of people and feeling overall detached and outside it all. Poor Neil from *Dead Poets Society* (1989) started to present like a mystical brother, but rather than shoot myself in the head I tacked large Salvador Dali prints to the wall of my room at university in Brisbane. I imagined diving headfirst into 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' (1937), opening an artistic window through which I could escape, however figuratively, from the conventional confines of a bourgeois type of mind.

Rereading the above mini-story wherein I've constructed a literary 'self' through a process of memory selection, I can't help but be aware of all the other memories I could have included into that portrait. Furthermore, if I interrogate certain 'truths' put forward in the above representation of 'how and why things have eventuated in my life', I realise that I

can't even be sure I've gotten the alleged 'truths' that are included correct either. Steven Pace writes that 'Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding' (2012, p. 2). My reading and learning about the late 1980s and 1990s socio-cultural climate in Australia subsequently led me to make connections between my personal family situation at the time and the wider context. For instance, I came to believe the reason why my dad lost his job briefly in the early 1990s was due to the national economic recession. Yet during a conversation over dinner, I've since learnt that my father's employment status at the time was not impacted by the recession at all, and he wasn't even unemployed for longer than six months. The story he told of that time differed entirely from the one I'd been telling myself in both the recent and far past. I'd gotten dates, times, causal factors, and many other things 'wrong', when compared with my father's version of events. This disparity in our two stories about the same event and time demonstrates how 'absolute truth' regarding life events is often impossible to grasp when mediated by a person's subjective memories. It follows then that a person's account of their life, even perhaps those told casually in conversation, should be viewed in the light of Philip Lejeune's claim that 'telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject – it is a fantasy' (1989, p. 131).

If my parents had known exactly how primed Brisbane was for youthful rebellion in the 1990s, their fervour for me to go there to further my education likely wouldn't have been so passionate. I was born at possibly the very same time the Saints were perfecting the raw sound of their single '(I'm) Stranded' at Window recording studio on Buchanan Street in West End, releasing it in September of the same year to ecstatic reviews from England (Mengel, 2012). The world of art and music was zapped awake by the song. In Andrew Stafford's *Pig City* (2004), Ed Kuepper is quoted as saying, 'I think the band was able to

develop a more obnoxious demeanour, thanks to our surroundings, than had everyone been really nice' (p. 3). Lead singer Chris Bailey remembers that when he 'was just a teen rebelling', getting around with long hair which had him pulled out of assembly on his first day at Oxley High, wearing 'radical feminist badges to school just to piss teachers off... Brisbane in those days was... a police state, a fascist state' (Stafford, 2004, p. 53). Noel Mengel writes that with the single '(I'm) Stranded', the band had 'captured lightning in a bottle' (2012), and in an article for *The Guardian*, Stafford notes that the song 'must have sounded like an emergency telegram from a lost land', with the 'central idea of being marooned' coming to 'stand for something bigger' (2014). It is the north-eastern region of this lost land on which Stafford shines the light of popular music history with his *Pig City*, illuminating longstanding ideas that Australia is a poor-relation beside the United Kingdom and the United States; with the state of Queensland being the 'Deep North', a 'hillbilly state', as Rupert Goodman is quoted as saying in 1969, populated by undereducated and uncultured hillbillies compared with the more sophisticated southern states (in Stafford, 2004, p. 13).

Stafford's valuable music history supports the notion that not only musicians, but other artists and thinkers have emerged out of the mire of what is now ironically and affectionately referred to as 'Brisvegas', a term originating 'many years ago as a tongue-and-cheek moniker comparing the Queensland capital to Las Vegas' (Hinchcliffe, 2017), to swim steadily and at times furiously against the tide of cultural and political repression. Helen Hambling, one of the original radio announcers for the guerrilla radio station Triple Zed, a station dedicated to voicing alternative views to those espoused by the bigoted, brutally oppressive and violent Bjelke-Peterson-led government in the late 1960s and early 1970s, attests to the existence of this crew of artists, revolutionaries, activists, misfits and eccentrics living lives in the underground of Brisbane's social fabric:

Brisbane had always had a thriving subculture, more so in my experience than Sydney or Melbourne or other places that are bigger and more diffuse. In Brisbane it was smaller, so people tended to know each other more. What I think Triple Zed did was it gave that subculture the capacity to communicate with itself (in Stafford, 2004, p. 43).

As Tony Moore outlines in his *Dancing with Empty Pockets*, Australia is not immune to the spores of bohemia which have floated across time and continents in search of new places and people in which to germinate afresh since the portrayal of bohemians in Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) positioned them as the embodiment of the 'romantic idea of the artist hero' rather than 'wastrels' and 'scallywags' (2012, Introduction, p. 4). This nostalgic view of the lives of young artists in the recent past of the 1830s became a 'guidebook of bohemia', causing the label to be applied to a variety of similar yet disparate manifestations of the phenomenon. Moore views this bohemian tradition as 'reinventing and revitalizing itself' (2012, Introduction, p. 6), citing European and North American painters, writers, and performance artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as part of Bohemia which inevitably went on to take up residence in youth counter-cultures from the 1950s including the American 'beats' and other dissenting movements including hippies and punks. In *Bohemia: The Protoculture Then and Now*, Richard Miller similarly seeks to trace the rebellious, anti-middle class bohemian impulse of youth from its nineteenth century Parisian roots all the way across eras and geographical locations to the late 1970s 'protoculture', portraying the bohemian as a soldier fighting to free art and the artist, scorning 'the weapons of the state in favour of its own: intelligence, imagination, compassion, honesty' (1977, p. 261). If there were to be a chapter on a peculiarly Australian, and specifically Brisbane iteration of bohemia in Miller's book, it would have no doubt discussed the punk aesthetic of the Saints' '(I'm Stranded)', and their follow up single 'Know Your Product' which took the weapons of the state, namely the commodification of art to task as it broached what Moore deems to be

the ‘romantic dilemma that had dogged bohemia since its inception: how to be a rebellious artist when art is just another capitalist product’ (2012, Chapter 10, p. 4). According to Moore:

The punk explosion was a signal that the boundaries between high and pop culture, past and present, male and female were collapsing. The Dadaists, surrealists and situationists had said similar things before, but not on Countdown. Postmodernity had landed in the centre of Australian pop culture and would inspire the work and subcultural style of a new generation of aesthetes and intellectuals coming of age in the 1980s. (Chapter 10, p. 4).

I can attest that Brisbane in the 1990s really was a hive of youthful subcultural rebellion during my long and illegitimate career as a thwarted but perennial student for most of the decade. There were tribes of music lovers, obstinate dreamers, hordes of amateur artists and pithy poets swaggering around the streets during the day and dancing into the night, making themselves visible to their counter-culture kin by their clothes and seething, sometimes obnoxious underground attitudes. While working in Brisbane bars and restaurants including The Orient, The Empire, and Ric’s Café among others over the wide expanse of the 90s, I observed and lived among the angry children of the late 1970s Brisbane punk scene, born as they were into the goth and punk subcultures which Darchen, Browning and Willsted investigate in their article ‘Alternative Brisbane: Evolution of goth and punk subcultures as ‘counter-cities’’ (2023). I agree that the ‘heterotopia’ Lefebve (1996) speaks of, the ‘otherness’ of different subcultures seemed to be everywhere, with PVC leather wearing goths carrying real spell books, and NOFX listening punks reclaiming their ‘right to the city’ by wearing the requisite regalia and symbols as they danced into the dying light of night, creating mini ‘counter-cities’ on alternative nights in a variety of venues (Darchen, Browning & Willsted, 2023, p. 3). Along with ‘ferals’ whose matted dreadlocks hung heavily over pool tables, nose ring pierced indie-hippies and Adidas tracksuit wearing Brit Pop disciples, the homogenous, mainstream status quo of normal society was infiltrated from all angles of the day and

night by this 'heterotopia', the loud anger and simmering cynicism of the young dull-eyed bringers of urban 'otherness' intent on raging against the machine for all, including themselves, to see and hear. All of it was connected to music, lounging around listening to it, sweating and jumping around to it on dancefloors, making it however poorly, and identifying with it as a badge of membership to a specific and alternate 'way of being, of doing, and of signifying' (Darchen, Browning & Willsted, 2023 p. 1). This is not a sociological study of those subcultures though, just a testament to say I was there, at times only in physical presence, a participant-observer of something happening between friends often fleeting and strangers and acquaintances in inner-city suburbs like Red Hill, Kelvin Grove, and Paddington, places where I lived, where pockets of university students found themselves marooned and perhaps like me weighed down by a hopeless sense of failure accrued as a result of copious overdue and failed assignments and a litany of awkward, embarrassing, and unsuccessful attempts at human interaction. We languished on velvet couches in run-down cheap-rent houses, debating and jousting like all true young diletantes about poststructuralist theories and existential philosophies we knew only a smidgen about, exploring instead the depths and limits of freedoms and sensual pleasures available to people who never seemed to plan very far past a few months or so. The thought of marriage never crossed our minds. We were content to get caught up in the systems of 'complex symbolic behaviour' which went into creating a real 'shared sense of the human experience' (Darchen, Browning & Willsted, 2023, p. 3) that marked us being different from the Baby Boomer generation. We were wary and suspicious of anyone over the age of thirty.

Moore explains how in the wake of punk, 'a general postmodern aesthetic interested in 'sampling' retro cultures' (Chapter10, p. 9) ultimately led to many Australian cities being taken over by tribes of 'mods' in the 1980s, through to neo-

Beatniks and rockabillics, psychedelic hippies, and skinheads and onward to ‘anti-fashion grunge fans and techno-music loving ravers in the early 1990s’ (Moore, Chapter 10, p. 10). It didn’t matter whether you were into Nirvana, Blind Melon, Pulp, Massive Attack, The Cure, Aphex Twin, Bikini Kill or the punk/hip-hop mashup of The Beastie Boys because they all existed relatively simultaneously after a while, and you could style yourself with the ‘look’ requisite to your chosen subculture depending on your mood or inclination. You were a kind of ‘political activist’ (Darchen, Browning and Willsted, 2023, p. 4), actively demonstrating your allegiance to a specific rebellious twenty-something subterranean tribe through choosing to wear sometimes whatever you had at hand – a safety-pin, torn stockings, a faded geometric retro-patterned ‘Op shop’ dress paired with doc Martens or Chuck Taylor shoes – in order to transgress the safe fashion norms of the mainstream deck shoe and checked shirt wearing ‘yobs’, the working class urban ‘bogans’, or the too-casual indifferent philistine looks of many of the ‘surfie’ clans (Moore, 2012, Chapter 10, p. 11).

Elisabeth Wilson also observes how bohemian dress was ‘fraught with meaning’, citing Joyce Johnson’s recollections of her time as a Beatnik in the 1950s in Greenwich Village where she explains how significant accessories and garments were a ‘sign of membership in the ranks of the unconventional. The way is smoothed for the wearer ... because the problem of outside matching inside is so beautifully resolved by this simple means’ (Johnson, 1984, cited in Wilson, 2000, p. 161). In addition, Sally Breen’s nostalgic and grit-filled portrait of subcultural life in 1990s Brisbane captures the anarchical spirit of the *mise en scene* of the day: ‘No matter where we’re from or where we meet, all of us are connected by a code of social experimentation and self-abuse; the pride we take in identifying ourselves as ‘alternative’ is not subdued. My friends are into anything vaguely anti-establishment, renegade and often not very well-thought-out’

(2011, p. 132). Like Breen who details how her share house subcultural conglomerations could temporarily home an unemployed goth/punk, a retro rock-chick, a techno hairdresser and a grunge couple under the one rented roof, I also will never forget my mother's face crumpling into horrified tears when she was leaving my place in Kelvin Grove, having visited for the first time, happening upon my new flat mates in the process: a militant goth/punk studying Environmental Studies at Griffith University, and an unemployed, waif-like, nose-ringed, cemetery haunting skater-girl whose claim to underground fame was that she made a cameo appearance in John Birmingham's *He Died with a Felafel in his Hand* (1994).

1990s Bohemia – Grunge Literature and Generation X

Having turned twenty in the mid-90s, my idea of what a book could be was shaped early on by the likes of Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1992) and *1988* (1995), John Birmingham's *He Died with a Felafel in his Hand* (1994), Nick Earls' *Zigzag Street* (1996), Linda Jaivin's *Eat Me* (1997), Justine Ettler's *The River Ophelia* (1995), and Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* (1995), books that were coloured (branded) by the motley, urban realist dirt of 'Grunge', a phenomena which Ian Syson claims shouldn't be understood as simply a marketing ploy, an 'ephemeral moment of literary fashion' whereby the nihilistic 'in your face' rage variously discernible in those works was ransacked, appropriated and transformed into a replicable commodity to sell back to the unwitting masses in order to satisfy the insatiable hunger of the consumer driven capitalist colossus (1996). Rather, Syson suggests these elements of 'Grunge belong to a long tradition of Australian writing that goes back to the convict ballads: the literature of social protest' which 'claims to speak for the alienated and disenfranchised' (1996, p. 26). But this summation of the era's so-called 'grunge' novels, Kirsty Leishman argues, fails to recognize how the protagonists in many of the stories, whether it was through

drug use, listening to music, engaging in meaningless sex or expressing boredom and disbelief, were representations of a decidedly new and philosophical standpoint which differed from the former, mainly masculine, tradition of literary protest through the joy and optimism which can be found in the way characters negotiate the immediate power structures closest to them, relying on minute self-conscious dispositions and technologies to construct alternative identities (1999).

When I first read 'Praise', I was living in a share house in Kelvin Grove. I must have been part of the 'large and young audience for Australian literary fiction,' which Syson notes became evident as a result of the 1990s 'Grunge' fiction wave/marketing campaign (1996, p. 26). After McGahan's death, Andrew Stafford wrote: 'If you grew up in Brisbane in the 1970s and 1980s, *Praise*, the debut novel by Andrew McGahan, was to the city's literature what the Saints' "(I'm) Stranded" was to music' (2019). I remember smiling in a daze for a while after reading *Praise*, having gotten the feeling I'd been personally let in on a secret club where the requirement for membership was that you had failed to launch into adulthood/the market economy like you were supposed to. McGahan seemed to be speaking directly to me and a lot of the people I knew. It was exhilarating to think that somebody could not only write a book like that, but get it published too. Rules I didn't even know existed were broken up and shattered in the portrait of Gordon, the unlikely protagonist, who illuminates for readers in rigorous detail the immense philosophical value of the smallest, seemingly insignificant moments of his life lived in the back streets of inner-city Brisbane.

Stafford describes *Praise* as a 'semi-autobiographical classic of Australian dirty realism' (2019), adeptly illustrating how McGahan, along with David Malouf, captures Brisbane's 'torpor and the ambivalence of its inhabitants':

"Look at this city," complains one of its [*Praise*] minor characters, on holiday from a bigger, brighter world. "There's nothing happening. There's no one on the

streets. How can you stand it?” Gordon (whose very name is used as a metaphor for the town’s plainness) replies that things are happening: “You just have to look a little harder. At least no one bothers you. There’s worse places than Brisbane.”

“There’s *better*,” comes the reply.

Johnno would have agreed. “Brisbane is so sleepy, so slatternly, so sprawlingly unlovely!” Malouf wrote. “I have taken to wandering about after school looking for one simple object in it that might be romantic, or appalling even, but there is nothing. It is simply the most ordinary place in the world.” (2019)

I can see Johnno’s point – Brisbane can be a real morgue a lot of the time, and it felt like it might become that for me more and more towards the end of the 90s. Though Murger claims that ‘it is only when one becomes older that the suffering shows more clearly than the joy’ (1888), even at the time, I worried I might be suffocated by my own self-abuse.

There were so many ways to bury yourself in different afflictions, to stretch, starve and expand your body and mind to their limits. No wonder I could rarely finish reading a book all the way through or complete an assignment by the due deadline. This pattern had started my first year at university, and it was already the back end of 1999. It didn’t really matter what had come first, the inability to read or the full throttle self-flagellation and rule breaking. The main thing was that my once furtive inward loathing began to turn more and more outward as the decade neared the millennial changeover; I was determined to finish an undergraduate degree. I’d limped too far along that confusing road to throw in the towel before getting the prize. But I must have been really sick of it because I began to get a stupid hit of pleasure out of being an obnoxious and outspoken pest in lecture theatres, derailing well-meaning questions posed by academics in Political Sociology and Ethnicity classes with ridiculous and overwrought anarchical rants or nonsensical and unhinged answers; turning up in psychedelic disco print dresses or frilly purple paisley blouses hell-bent on shocking fellow students and teachers by my outrageous sense of discordant dress and decorum. Like a belligerent refugee of delayed adolescent rebellion, I seemed to have no control over when these angry and indiscriminate acts of self-humiliation would erupt to splatter annoyingly over the faces of near strangers and distant acquaintances. Yet, memory is a fabulist coloured by mysterious rivers of emotion, and I can’t be sure if any of the above versions of my former selves come even close to approximating the authentic reality of things. One thing is certain though, I must have found enough determined energy to finish a kaleidoscopic range of undergraduate subjects, a motley crew of disparate, stitched together majors and electives to graduate in 2001 and then to choose life, *Trainspotting* style (Boyle, 1996), making haste to get a job half-way across the world in Japan whose economic bubble had not yet fully burst, meaning there were still a few okay jobs for inexperienced and bumbling native English speaking teachers, still a chance I might find a way through and out of the strange socio-psycho catastrophe which threatened to end me.

Rereading certain parts of the narrative I constructed above about my vanished yet lingering

younger self made me feel a deep sense of sadness just now – who was it that spoke so unkindly to that younger person? And why were such critical and disdainful adjectives used to describe her actions? Belligerent, humiliating, unhinged, nonsensical, overwrought. For a supposed some time renegade Generation X revolutionary, she seems to harbour quite a few disjointed beliefs about her core self, beliefs that appear to be saturated with the indignant offence that might have been hurled her way by the older bourgeoisie generation, the professional class, the traditional, conventional, tried and tested sort of identities. Why are these memory fragments so offensive? They are just memories after all. Understandably, for a once nearly nonverbal, perpetual bookworm, an almost straight A student, a ‘very good girl’, acting and speaking out of turn in such a public educational setting would have struck deep into her core sense of self. Why do memories of this behaviour continue to haunt and traumatize? Why not tell the story differently? Where is the buoyancy, the comedy, the frivolity of Murger’s bohemians? Maybe she was crying out for help? For someone to see into the long game of her life so she might know where to go next?

In *Writing the Radical Memoir*, Davidow and Williams draw on neuroscientific research to highlight how memory reveals itself in the form of narratives, and thus ‘the recalling and rewriting of specific moments, like writing our core wounds, can transform a traumatic experience for the writer, rewrite it and make a new reality out of it’ (2023, p. 68). How can I rewrite this narrative to transform the trauma connected to it? Tony Moore might write about the actions described above in a far different light, perhaps placing them in the context of a wider, bohemian socio-cultural struggle:

It was in their struggle with the controlling older generations over new ideas, visions and ways of living that the postpunks and postmodernist of GenX most clearly relived the romantic urge for artistic autonomy that lies at Bohemia’s heart. (2012, Chapter 10, p. 109)

The idea of a romantic, artistic struggle reads much better than a rant. Yet this more positive portrayal still doesn’t explain why my younger self chose the university for her

performance of revolt and alternative identity, or why this acting out entailed a peculiarly theatrical, precocious, and often uncoordinated array of discordant garments, speech, and behaviours. From the nineteenth-century, the anonymity of industrialised cities meant that appearances constituted ‘direct expressions of the “inner self” ... guides to the authentic self of the wearer and clues to private feelings. One really knew about a person by understanding him at the most concrete level – which consisted of details of clothes, speech and behaviour’ (Sennett, 1974, p. 153 cited in Wilson, 2000, p. 161). From this perspective, my inner self might have been feeling rather outside and overlooked to be signaling and calling out so loudly for all and sundry to look at and listen to. Nobody was keeping her there, were they?

We didn’t think of ourselves as bohemians in the 90s. I’d visited The Bohemian Café in West End, but I had no idea about the long and vast seam of theoretical and creative literature associated with the term. As Darchen, Browning and Willsted note, ‘Much of the actual ‘countering’ in the counter-city goes on without any regard for academic thought or literature’ (2023, p. 3). We were ‘alternative’ and the fact that only now can I situate my lived experience during my late teens and twenties in the context of the bohemian cultural milieu corroborates Moore’s claim that:

Making the case for an Australian bohemian tradition requires attention to connections, transmissions, and patterns of living often invisible to the historical actors themselves but apparent for the historian who takes the long-term perspective. (2012, Conclusion, p. 1)

Furthermore, writing a memoir about a ‘counter-culture’ youth not only has the potential to add to the Australian bohemian tradition by taking a long term, retrospective view of a life lived, but also offers an alternative mode of theorizing about the world by contributing knowledge via the peculiarly narratological medium of memoir. Jessie Speer argues that memoir, and particularly ‘outsider memoirs’, can be read as theory in the sense that ‘life narratives can reveal a deeply relational and intimate kind of theory in which knowledge

speaks beyond a singular context through connection across difference, rather than abstraction' (2019, p. 327). In addition, Speer emphasizes that memoir has the ability to 'help readers experience an emotional kind of knowing that is both deeply social and personal,' and this type of knowledge offers insight into connections between 'intimate and social phenomenon' not available via the more traditional style of object analysis (2019, p. 330).

Love Trouble – Gender Disparities

I do remember however that when I returned to Brisbane after living in Japan for a couple of years or so, when somebody asked me what subculture I identified with, I told them I was a bohemian. At the time, I knew my allegiance to the bohemian label had largely been shaped by the fact that one of my favourite bands, The Dandy Warhols, released a song called 'Bohemian Like You' on their album titled 'Thirteen Tales from Urban Bohemia' (2000). Singer Courtney Taylor-Taylor was inspired to write the song after witnessing an attractive woman with tattoos stopped at traffic lights outside his place. Described as a 'sardonic, lighthearted allusion to the countercultural bohemian movement, which saw a renaissance in the late '90s and early 2000s' (Explain this Song, 2024), the lyrics of 'Bohemian Like You' centre around the lives of inner-city creatives who play in bands, wait tables and eat vegan food, with the central focus being on an unconventional romance where a guy, the singer/protagonist in the song, has a casual sexual relationship with a girl who already has a boyfriend. All parties, the protagonist, the girl and her boyfriend, are aware and accepting of this sexual triangle, with the girl's boyfriend sleeping on the couch while she and her other lover are in bed. The song also values alternative dress and appearances, and this is evident in the accompanying film clip. In an article in the Guardian, Taylor-Taylor said:

The lyrics and the title summed up the girl – her tattoos, the car – and the way the

Dandys dressed then, straight out of secondhand thrift stores. My mum called us hipsters, but “bohemian like you” sounded better than “hipster like you”. (Simpson, 2019)

I’d seen them play a few times by then; I found their 1995 album ‘Come Down’ (1997) to be especially soothing. I appreciated how the song ‘Bohemian Like You’ focused on the unique ‘do it yourself’ attitude toward dress – the film clip features a variety of other uniquely dressed young bohemians dancing and cavorting around in front of the camera, kissing each other freely and wildly. I also love/d the music, along with the shock factor of the ‘free love’ angle regarding relationships, not to mention the portrayal of a seemingly sexually confident and free woman. The song’s portrait of what it means to be a bohemian directly attacks many mainstream bourgeoisie notions, particularly those surrounding relationships, marriage and sexuality. Many people in my parents’ generation would be horrified! But that is part of what it means to be a bohemian for ‘Bohemia needs to outrage the bourgeoisie’, as Tony Moore states (2012, Conclusion, p. 9).

Virginia Nicholson observes that the notion of Bohemia as being a place where citizens live by the mantras of ‘Love comes before All – Love and Art’ and ‘Free Love’ harks back to the ‘wide-eyed romanticism’ of 1900s Bohemia (2002, p. 33). She outlines how shifting cultural perceptions towards love, sex and human psychology fed into the new bohemian approach to relationships and sexuality, citing Marie Stopes’s book *Married Love* (1918), which called for sexual equality through the recognition that women also need and desire orgasm in sex along with their male counterparts, and Freud’s psychoanalytic theories pertaining to the repression of unconscious desires as examples of this changing cultural landscape. These developments came on the back of the rigid Victorian social mores: ‘the new generation was sloughing off the dead casings of the nineteenth century, emerging in a fresh skin, to rediscover Love and rediscover Sex’ (Nicholson, 2002, p. 33). Nicholson also explains how bohemians in the early twentieth century, including women,

saw the freedom to experiment with cultural rules surrounding sexuality as part of their idealistic worldview, one committed to ‘truthful living and truthful loving’ (p. 34). These bohemians struggled to embrace personal and artistic freedom from what they saw as the ‘prison of social expectations’, and the ‘profanity and barbarism’ of accepted institutions like marriage which condemned both women and men to a life of unrealized desires and passions (p. 34). Unrestrained sexual relationships and configurations like threesomes were explored as part of the bohemian ethos, gaudy jokes were told in public by women, and even those bohemians who were married engaged openly in sex with multiple partners.

Elizabeth Wilson observes that the Bohemia in 1800s Paris which Murger writes about offered both sexes an opportunity to live more authentically and freely from the strictures of respectable society. Yet this search for authenticity was far more problematic for women, particularly those from the working class. Though some women were able to construct identities related to ‘the transgressive forms of sexuality that were so important in Bohemia’ (2000, p. 85), she speculates that for many female residents of Bohemia in the nineteenth century, the romantic and sexual situations may ‘often have seemed more like an all too familiar seduction and betrayal scenario’ (p. 93). Wilson observes that many portrayals of romantic relationships in 1800s bohemian literature often involved a partnering between a male bohemian artist, and his female love interest, a *grisette*, who was not an artist but rather modelled on the seamstresses and salesgirls living in the Latin Quarter. These literary representations mythologized the *grisette* figure as much as the bohemian, and this myth, this ‘legendary coupling... was an insulting denial of female creativity’, one that reflected the view that bohemian women in the nineteenth century were often ‘classified as mistresses, courtesans, prostitutes and wives, their artistic aspirations and achievements ignored or denied’ (p. 92). After fleeing respectable social conventions for the freedom and creative autonomy offered by Bohemia, many women from the 1830s

onwards have found themselves in romantic relationships in bohemian households where gender roles operate more or less in line with those they sought to escape – they have continued to be constrained by the primacy of male genius, and the devaluing of women’s creative talents or desires. Wilson reveals how women themselves can harbour these attitudes in their own psyche. Writing about the relationship between Caitlin and Dylan Thomas, she states that the life of Caitlin Thomas:

shed some light on the psychological power of an entrenched belief, to which bohemian women were as much in thrall as men, that women were the handmaidens of men, or were the midwives to masculine genius. (2000, p. 113)

Mary Panிக்கா Carden writes that the autobiographers included in her book *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality* (2018) ‘describe functioning as house-keepers, financial providers, and/or unpaid secretaries to Beat husbands and boyfriends’ (p. 22). This corroborates Judith Halasz’s discussion of Rigney and Smith’s studies of the Beat Generation, where the ‘tormented rebel’ type of beat bohemian is thought of as a rebellious male with iconoclastic attitudes who is ‘employed sporadically and often relies on a wife or girlfriend for financial support’ (2015, p. 41). Similarly, in his review of Peter Kirkpatrick’s *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney’s Roaring ‘20s* (1992), Ken Stewart echoes some of the trends observed in the American context when he states that the Australian Bohemia explored in Kirkpatrick’s text is ‘ideologically elitist, masculinist, sexist, non-socialist, romantic, anti-Bush and inner urban’ (1993, p. 239).

I left Brisbane to teach English in Japan in 2001 and when I returned in 2003, I took a short CELTA course at the University of Queensland, staying with my sister and her partner in Red Hill, before moving to the more bohemian suburb of West End on the other side of the Brisbane River. After a time living in a share house with other bohemian types, I found a place of my own to rent in the top half of a house – my landlord, an old acquaintance who made music film clips, lived downstairs. Zane used to visit him, and we

met when I'd scurried down the back stairs to pay the rent. At the time, I worked as a waitress in a nearby restaurant on Boundary Street, and I remember feeling in no rush to get a better job, or get married, or do anything other than live each day as freely as possible. I was a bohemian: I dressed in garments and jewelry found in local Op shops to parade my bohemian identity down the main street, etcetera. After Zane and I got together, I moved into his little flat over the hill, and after a time it seems we may have begun living out many of the bohemian myths/realities outlined above. This is the story of how to transform these life stories into history, how to grapple with the lines between fact and fiction, myth and reality, mind and emotion, memory, life and art which are forever blurry and transforming. I wrote about some of these difficulties:

The mind's eye is blinded by the ego. Images of the self are warped and stretched and painted over with idealized pictures. These are then what the self becomes. Corridors of the mind are traversed with apprehension. Corners are navigated like waves under a ship. Mirrors are covered with other pieces of furniture. Some are mottled with age. All are liars. The ego lives in mirrors, breathes the glass, seethes and weaves a false façade. Even though you try to clean the surface clear, the picture is muddied by the ego. A damaged self hides inside itself. There is then no real self to contend with. Only layers, facades, waves of corners, piles and piles of sheets and towers of teetering furniture. There is no eye in the centre of a storm. Only a column of space which revels in its own nothingness. The tipping point for any human being is in these layers. Emotion is a spinning spindle which will undo, and undo, and undo until the end which is nonexistent. (Personal Communication, 2019)

PART TWO: POSTMODERN WRITING TECHNIQUES

Playing with Postmodernism – Experiments in Life Writing

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard states:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for (p. 81).

As someone whose formative years were shaped by the postmodern explosion of the 1990s, there was never any question in my mind when I embarked on this project that I would engage with postmodern techniques in the writing of my creative artefact. Fortunately, at that time I couldn't have grasped the colossal magnitude of such an undertaking, the emotional turmoil and cognitive confusion that in my experience can accompany an approach that does away with the familiar, the tried and tested. Taking on the role of philosopher, in Lyotard's terms, one who journeys through unexplored theoretical and technical terrain in search of new rules and categories for a work of art means that the traveler must often contend with feelings of doubt, disappointment, and even hopelessness as they navigate foreign corners and mountainous precipices without the benefit of a predetermined map. Conducting literary and theoretical research in this way means that a person is unable to *see* very far along the road which splits into a multitude of roads that crisscross and veer away in unexpected directions, twisting and turning, unexpectedly upsetting the explorer when paths spiral into emotional volcanos or stop suddenly at confusing dead ends. Yet choosing to stick to a well-traveled route set out in an already written guidebook means there is the potential to miss out on ecstatic moments of elation and revelation when an explorer happens upon previously hidden valleys of insight and healing.

I didn't set out to write a 'postmodern memoir', which Hugh Ryan describes as 'work that experientially creates in the reader a conscious resistance to the narrative, which replicates the author's own ambivalence towards the possibility of orderly narratives in life', and which switches from 'first-person to second or third, creating a nonlinear structure, and using fiction (openly) within the memoir' (2012). Similarly, I never intended for my creative artefact to be a 'radical memoir', described as 'a uniquely individual and authentic recollection and reconstruction of a life through words, a pastiche of psycho-spiritual-emotional experiences that have made us who we are' (Davidow & Williams, 2023, p. 5). Nevertheless, after following my experimental, exploratory nose, I've arrived at an understanding that *The Metamorphosis of Clio* undoubtedly fits into these categories, particularly considering the following description:

Radical memoir: it is an expressionist, post-modern capturing of 'real life' and the form shedding light on the non-linear. This kind of narrative allows for both the writers and readers to confront the experiences of love and trauma amidst chaos. (Davidow & Williams, 2023, p. 70)

My own writing-as-research quest has drawn upon a vast range of techniques and methodologies to capture and package non-linear portraits of 'real life'. There has, however, been an underlying lynchpin holding them altogether – a 'hybrid' research stance (Ryan, 2005), one that embraces Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome as 'a map and not a tracing' (1987, p. 12), with 'neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows...defined solely by a circulation of states' (p. 21). Just as a botanical rhizome thrives on connections and symbiotic relationships with other forms of life as it creeps along horizontally in unpredictable directions, shooting leaves from nodes and roots into the earth below, I've sought to 'map' rather than 'trace' inroads throughout my research by moving cyclically and constantly between theory (reading) and practice (writing), incorporating ideas into literary experiments, reflecting on results, then repeating the process continually, implicitly aware of how this type of work involves dealing with

multiple concepts sometimes simultaneously, along with fragments and assemblages. This approach could be likened to how an artist works to create a collage, a new image, using bits and pieces lying around nearby. Jeri Kroll explains how Deleuze and Guattari views the interaction between theory and practice inherent in a rhizomic approach as vital for the two research poles to develop:

In other words, the two activities must cooperate at various points, otherwise they cannot advance. Progress entails breaching metaphorical walls in order to pass through to virgin territory. A reductive analysis that postulates that theory should simply be applied to practice misconceives the relationship. (2010)

This has certainly proven true in my research – I’ve come up against many metaphorical walls, yet like a rhizome I’ve detoured away, circled back to progress across, tunnelled down to find a way up, peered into to see outside, always *in process* of growing larger, always constructing something new, pushing always out and only from the *always-middle*. Creating *The Metamorphosis of Clio* has involved a multitude of activities and stages: reading, stealing, pasting, kneading, thinking, gathering, transforming, scattering, flowing, imagining, painting, feeling, cutting, stimulating, remembering, catching, weaving, arranging, crying, laughing, splicing, fearing, writing. What follows is an overview of some of these research phases and techniques. It is important to note at the outset that contained within the coming sections are excerpts of earlier drafts of this exegesis which were written prior to the completion of the creative artefact out of a need to find ways to surpass metaphorical walls blocking the development and completion of the creative artefact.

The Intertextuality Game

Is the person sitting on this chair, typing these letters now, their author? In his autobiographical project *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977a), Barthes answers with a resounding ‘no’ to this question. Graham Allen succinctly summarises Barthes’ position: ‘the person who speaks or acts and the person who writes are never identical’ (2011, p. 41).

It's true – the act of writing/typing gives me the distinct feeling of vanishing, transforming, or fragmenting, a part of me seemingly slipping into the computer, metamorphosing into these black letters in a field of slippery snow, and yet my body remains on the chair, watching as the text comes into existence. I am both everywhere and nowhere, solid as well as ether, visible as well as invisible. Barthes describes this being/nonbeing feeling astutely:

Once I produce, once I write, it is the Text itself which (fortunately) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. The Text can recount nothing; it takes my body elsewhere, far from my imaginary person, toward a kind of meaningless speech which is already the speech of the People, of the non-subjective mass (or of the generalised subject), even if I am still separated from it by my way of writing. (1977a, p.4)

The idea that Text has the ability to take possession of a writer's 'narrative continuity' undercuts the traditional notion that text is the vehicle or tool used by authors who are the individual source of genius, to convey authoritative, stable, unified and monological meaning to readers. Rather than look to the 'real life' person or author of a text for meaning, Barthes suggests a reader should search for claims to knowledge inside the text itself, and the explosive and disruptive chains of intertextual relationships which characterise the 'stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers' (1986, p. 60). In his essay, 'The Death of the Author', Barthes explains:

it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality... to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me.' (1977b, p. 143)

In this light, Barthes views text as devoid of an author in the traditional sense it is viewed as 'a textual tissue of past citations' (1981, p. 39) rather than an original creation containing 'a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God)' (1977b, p. 146). The modern author is reconceived as a 'modern *scriptor*' who is not an ordained originator but a compiler, an arranger, someone who presents fragments of the cultural milieu in a 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original,

blend and clash' (1977b, p. 146). These ideas stem from the theoretical and linguistic shifts in thinking that gained momentum in Paris in the 1960s, a time when 'the human sciences made a quantum leap forward in all directions, with a number of hyper-active, avant-gardist, mostly leftist intellectuals trying to apply the theories and methodologies of those sciences to the study of literature' (Haberer, 2007, p. 56). In replacing the concept of an 'Author God' with the less powerful 'scriptor' figure who merely compiles messages rather than gives rise to their existence, Barthes' intention is to call into question the processes of literary interpretation and to highlight the tyranny of 'doxa' on readers as well as writers of texts. 'Doxa' is a Greek term viewed by many French theorists as being characterised by banality and ordinariness, by 'accepted ideas, trite expressions, and (bourgeois) stupidity', and therefore it constitutes a 'major obstacle to individual thinking and creativity as well as to genuine communication' (Amossy, 2002, p. 69). Barthes writes, 'The Doxa is current opinion, meaning repeated as if nothing had happened. It is Medusa: who petrifies those who look at her' (1977a, p. 122). Readers are rendered motionless and passive when reading text that can be classified as 'doxa' according to Barthes, and his strong desire to explore the potentialities of language, both for the reader and writer, can be discerned in his description of the oppressive effects of doxa:

Medusa, or the Spider: castration. Which *stuns* me, an effect produced by a scene I hear but do not see: my hearing is frustrated of its vision: I remain *behind the door*. The Doxa speaks, I hear it, but I am not within its space. A man of paradox, like any writer, I am indeed *behind the door*; certainly I should like to pass through, certainly I should like to see what is being said, I too participate in the communal scene; I am constantly *listening to what I am excluded from*; I am in a stunned state, dazed, cut off from the popularity of language. (1977a, p. 123)

Similarly, the poststructuralist theorist Julia Kristeva claims that 'any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (1986, p.37); texts are viewed as lacking independent meaning. Graham Allen gives an accessible summary of how theories of intertextuality emphasise the

interdependent nature of texts:

The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext. (2011, p. 1)

Inspired by the inclination toward psychoanalytical ideas prevalent in the 1960s, the theories of Barthes and Kristeva question normative cultural routines and assumptions surrounding the act of reading and writing texts as they are based on rationalism, a philosophical system ‘which, in the structuralist aftermath, has been denounced as man’s way of doing violence to himself by repressing his non-rational powers’ (McGraw, 1977, p. 945).

Writing Palimpsests

Unsurprisingly, I gravitated to these poststructuralist theories of intertextuality – any approach to writing and text which ran counter to accepted ideas to allow individual creativity to flourish was my kind of approach. In his article ‘Plagiarism, Palimpsest and Intertextuality’ (2015a), Paul Williams gives examples of how writers actively engage with poststructuralist theories of intertextuality in their work: ‘Writing, according to Kristeva, is an act of plagiarism. We write palimpsests on top of other writing, acknowledging implicitly that we are derivative, that our work is intertextual, borrowed, sampled, ‘internalised’, ‘bowerbirded’ from other works’ (2015a, p. 169). Williams emphasises the *active* role writers play in the creation of intertexts in that they ‘consciously pilfer, and overtly play the game of intertextuality, creating palimpsests as a central narrative technique’ (2015a, p. 4).

I was buoyed by the creative possibilities offered by such an approach, and the use of words like ‘borrowed’, ‘sampled’ and ‘bowerbirded’ reminded me of the collages Zane used to make, and 90s music like Beck’s ‘Loser’ which contains ‘samples’ of other songs, fragments mixed into the beat, creating a multilayered musical soundscape. In addition, I

was excited by the idea of employing the concept of ‘palimpsest’ in my writing.

According to De Quincey, the term ‘palimpsest’ is Greek and refers to ‘a membrane or roll cleansed of its manuscript by reiterated successions’ (1845), while Rennicks defines palimpsests as ‘recycled parchments’ on which ‘earlier writing can still be read’ (2022).

Prior to the advent of the printing press, written texts were inscribed onto vellum and parchment made from animal skin when papyrus became difficult to source, and out of necessity these materials were reused by being ‘scrubbed and scoured to be ready for rewriting’ (Rennicks, 2022). Failed attempts by medieval scholars to irrevocably scrape inscriptions from vellum in order to make way for new texts meant that ‘traces of the elder manuscript’ remained visible (De Quincey, 1845). De Quincey claims that myths and stories uncovered in this way have been reworked and reinvoked to serve the contemporaneous interests of successive generations. Williams explains that the notion of the ‘palimpsest foregrounds the fact that all writing takes place in the presence of other writings, and further, subverts the concept of the author as the sole originator or source of his or her work’ (2015a, p. 170).

After learning about these exciting approaches to reading and writing, I was eager to experiment with intertextuality and palimpsest as central narrative devices. What other texts might I choose to rework and rewrite and for what purpose? Jencks describes Postmodernity as ‘a time of incessant choosing’ (1989, p. 7) characterized by art and culture that exhibits ‘The Presence of the Past’ (p. 41). In her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989a), Linda Hutcheon discusses the potential power of intertextuality, a term she closely associates with parody:

parody works to foreground the politics of representation. Needless to say, this is not the accepted view of postmodernist parody. The prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images. Instead, I would want to argue that postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and

through irony, the politics) of representations. (p. 94)

For Hutcheon, Postmodernism ‘works within the very systems it attempts to subvert’ (1989a, p. 4) in the way that techniques such as parody ‘paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies’ (p. 11). Allen reflects that for Hutcheon, a ‘double-codedness’ lies at the heart of Postmodern literature in that it challenges ‘available modes of representation in culture whilst recognizing that it must still employ those modes’ (2011, p. 183). Daniel Palmer gives useful examples of how Postmodernism can serve to interrogate repressive cultural representations in his article titled ‘Explainer: what is postmodernism’:

Postmodernism can also be a *critical* project, revealing the cultural constructions we designate as truth and opening up a variety of repressed other histories of modernity. Such as those of women, homosexuals and the colonised. The modernist canon itself is revealed as patriarchal and racist, dominated by white heterosexual men. As a result, one of the most common themes addressed within postmodernism relates to cultural identity. (2014)

Using Palimpsest to Explore *Écriture féminine*

As a woman, I couldn’t help but feel indignation and a pang of desire to rebut Guy de Maupassant’s portrayal of women when I read his short story ‘The Jewelry’ (1987). Told from a third person point of view, the narrative begins when the male protagonist meets a beautiful young woman, an apparently pure soul, and he falls in love with her at first sight. They marry and the woman is an ebullient, loving and kind wife despite her penchant for the theatre and fake jewels. However, after she dies suddenly the man discovers the jewels are very valuable, and likely gifts from men with whom she’d been secretly having affairs. After some time, the man meets another woman who is loyal, yet she has a violent temper and brings him much sorrow. Readers only learn about the terrible impact these women have on the life of the man. It is the man’s story – readers never learn about the perspectives or feelings of the women.

I decided to write a palimpsest on top of this story, scraping the surface of the parchment to make room for my version which was set in the real life place of West End in Brisbane, and had a female protagonist as its focus. In line with Helene Cixous' proclamation that 'woman must write herself: must write about women' (1976, p. 875), my new story 'Erato' (Anning, 2017) draws on my own life experiences, even though many of these experiences and events are fictionalized. In contrast to 'The Jewelry', I include references to a myriad other texts to play the intertextual game, creating intertexts to convey meaning. The following footnote interrupts the narrative after the first sentence:

The opening line of my story is intended as a palimpsest of Guy de Maupassant's short story 'The Jewelry' (1887/1884) which begins with the line: 'Having met the girl one evening, at the house of the office-superintendent, M. Lantin became enveloped in love as in a net'. This allusion, although obscure, is the first of many intertextual references throughout 'Erato', which is a short story I wrote to experiment with Helene Cixous' notion of *Écriture féminine* (1976). In line with Cixous' claim that a woman writer is 'the erogeneity of the heterogeneous: airborne swimmer, in flight' (Cixous 1976: 889), I approached the writing of 'Erato' as a reader first, as though I was swimming in a language sea, reading, collecting and incorporating allusions to a myriad of different texts I found at hand. The exposure to these other voices...enabled me to 'celebrate and play with the dissolution of the single subject', what Cixous terms the 'parental-conjugal phallogentrism' (1976, p. 876). (Anning, 2017)

One way I incorporate these intertextual allusions is through the characterization of Clio, a fictionalized version of my younger self, who is seemingly unable to read fiction books all the way through to the end. Clio's strange affliction allows me to refer to a multitude of other texts inside the story, and I can speak to, extend, explore, and transform ideas and representations for my own ends. In particular, the story uses intertextuality to trace a feminist position: when Clio reads the line of one of David Gascoyne's poems, her hair lights up and stands on end, and I explain that this is indicative of my goal 'to 'neutralise the misogynistic connotation of evil associated with female power, just as Cixous transforms the longstanding popular image of Medusa as wicked, alluring, and dangerously seductive into a beautiful, laughing woman' (Anning, 2017). Yet I make sure to clarify that

my feminist position is complex, ‘full of overlapping greys rather than a simple black/white view of female/male politics’, through the fact that Clio is unable to read Fay Weldon’s *Down Among the Women* (2014), which is filled with female characters who are ‘not painted as purely innocent victims, but shown to be eager to please men, and spiteful and rivalrous toward each other’ (Anning, 2017). If Clio were able to read Weldon’s novel, she might have become more cognizant of how disconnected from other female characters she seemed to be in her own life; she might have learned many other insights as well through identifying or not identifying with the events and characters in Weldon’s story; but though she owned a mountain of books in the story, being ‘acutely aware of their preciousness, and of how she longed to learn their secrets, their lessons’, Clio couldn’t learn these lessons due to an inability to read fiction all the way through to the end. In the footnotes of ‘Erato’, I explain how the selection of other texts to refer to in the story was a purposeful and deliberate use of intertextuality as a central narrative device:

I deliberately selected and read other texts before scattering their titles over the pages, revealing the space or connections between them. But this new space, this intertext which is visible only after readers ‘join the dots’ is not, as Barthes claims, ‘a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks’ (Barthes 1973), but a carefully constructed, multi-dimensional universe alive with voices echoing from different points in time. (Anning, 2017)

In contrast to Clio whose inability to read books was clearly a distressing aspect of her character, another fictionalised version of my ‘self’ appears in ‘Erato’ – the unnamed *older* woman Clio meets in the kitchen very early in the story. In the footnotes, I give the following explanation:

I imagined this character as myself – the writer, the embodiment of both Medusa and Arachne, the Goddess of classical mythology who embroidered defiantly honest stories for which she was punished (Habens 2016). This is hinted at when ‘the same face peered out of each lens’ as Clio is looking into the writer/Medusa/Arachne woman’s glasses. The woman in the kitchen, the writer/Medusa/Arachne figure clearly positions the text in the realm of *Écriture féminine* through her direct gaze at the protagonist Clio because as Susan Bowers observes, ‘the antidote to the male

gaze, and one avenue to women reclaiming their own sexuality, is the female gaze: learning to see clearly for themselves...’ (Bowers 1990: 218). (Anning, 2017)

This explanation seems to suggest that Clio, (my younger self), was unable to see clearly for herself when she was living out her life in West End in the early 2000s because of the seemingly internalised effects of the ‘male gaze’. Bowers’ view of the female gaze as something positive in women’s lives challenges cultural depictions which originated in the ancient world. Charlotte Currie observes that in the earliest written accounts of the mythical Gorgon Medusa, such as in Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, she is simply a terrifying, decapitated head capable of turning her victims to stone, and it is ‘her gaze’, her ‘bulging eyes and frontality that remain canonical in representations of the monstrous type’, with her sight being viewed as ‘the specific source of her especial power’ (2011, p. 171). Though as the Medusa myth slowly transformed over time, metamorphosing from maiden to monster and into non-monstrous, beautiful Medusas who continued to be decapitated, this power became associated with ‘something specifically female’ as both the beautiful and hideous representations came to be seen as ‘two complementary faces of female power’ (Currie, 2011, p. 172). Currie explains that these fluctuating accounts of the Medusa figure are presented dyadically in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as ‘a story of two halves’: Medusa is initially a priestess whose beauty attracts the attention of many men including Neptune, the sea-god who rapes her in Minerva’s temple. She is then punished by Minerva, transforming into a monster with deadly eyes and snaky hair before being decapitated by Perseus who turns her hideous face into a shield that can petrify enemies (2011, p. 172), suppressing and harnessing Medusa’s power for the benefit of men. Currie explains:

As becomes clear, Medusa’s parallel powers of attraction and petrification are both threats to the male – represented in the narrative by first Neptune and then Perseus – and must thus both be overcome through assertions of male – or in the case of Minerva, masculine – dominance. (2011, p. 172)

Male/masculine dominance over women continues to manifest in contemporary times in the

cultural primacy given to the male gaze. John Berger summarises the situation:

men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (1973, p. 47)

When considering the idea that women view themselves as objects of the male gaze which they've internalised, it's easy to understand Bowers' argument that women must learn to see themselves clearly from a female perspective if they are to reclaim their sexuality. In her famous essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous also urges women to reconsider their perception of themselves using the metaphor of the Medusa:

You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing. (1976, p. 885)

The purpose given for the older woman in 'Erato', 'the writer, the embodiment of both Medusa and Arachne' (Anning, 2017), is therefore informed by Cixous' call for women to put themselves in the text. In 'Erato', it seems I put two of my 'selves' into the text, one to represent my past self, Clio, and the other to represent my writer self, the older woman whose glasses Clio peers into:

Clio saw a face reflected in the woman's glasses. The same face peered out of each lens. For a moment, she didn't know who it was. Then she recognized herself – her dyed blonde hair, her eager eyes. (Anning, 2017)

Writing about my life retrospectively in this way enabled me to get the feeling I could see and feel concepts and emotions with more clarity and acuity than was possible when I was living the past in real time. I was able to explore my past and present perceptions, emotions and identity relating to the time when I was living in West End in the early 2000s by constructing them using novelistic techniques like symbolism and allusion. For instance, regarding the relationship between Clio and Tomas, I use description to create binary oppositions including sun/moon, awake/asleep, artist/muse. Furthermore, while

Maupassant's narrative follows the chronologically linear path of the protagonist, 'Erato' circles back to Clio's past to explain the persistent presence of a recurring dream wherein she is in a tunnel and walking toward a beautiful, laughing woman with black hair which writhes like snakes:

The dream first appeared years earlier, when Clio was studying law at university. She was a good, dutiful daughter. It had begun well enough. Clio attended classes and submitted assignments. Though it wasn't long before she started to feel hollow, as if air filtered right through a hole in her middle. She tried to tell people. But the right words were never there when she needed them. The fat law books became heavier, more difficult to carry, until they remained on her desk like dusty monoliths, left open and untouched for months at a time. She began to drink. Empty bottles stacked up. She hid them under the bed. (Anning, 2017).

The process of describing the hollowness Clio/(I) felt while at university studying Law, and the deleterious consequences, and that when she/(I) tried to communicate her/(my) situation to others 'the right words were never there when [I] needed them', allowed me to engage with and narrate those painful life events in a way that was emotionally comfortable. By using a third person limited point of view, and the past verb tense, along with the added protection of a fictional name/character, I could explore my past/present experiences and emotions from a distance. As Smith and Watson observe, many life writers 'take liberties with the novelistic mode in order to negotiate their own struggles with the past and with the complexities of identities forged in the present' (2010, p. 12).

Moreover, I found that taking a novelistic approach to life writing enabled me to simplify events and map them out as a cartographer might. In *Writing the Radical Memoir*, Paul Williams explains how chronicling life events using charts, graphs and other diagrams allows one to remember and identify the 'turning points... crises, the highs and lows' and patterns in a person's journey (2023, p. 23). Even though I used the device of palimpsest to harness Maupassant's story structure as a scaffold for my own, I found myself quickly veering away from his narrative trajectory as the turning points in my own fictionalised life

narrative began to reveal themselves while writing. These turning points often presented as emotional barricades or walls that I couldn't consciously grasp with words: the fragmented, fleeting and sometimes painful memories I did have of these disjunctions in my life's map were too disparate, disjointed, and multifaceted to be able to assemble in a coherent fashion. Yet through creating fictional scenes, dialogue, and other characters apart from Clio and Tomas, I could encapsulate some of the emotional truth surrounding these times in my life through symbolic representations. For instance, while at university Clio suffers a breakdown of sorts and is rendered catatonic on her bed; Sister Teresa, a fictional character, notices her room is strewn with books by female authors – none of these events occurred in the historically accurate record of the past. In addition, following the death of Tomas, Clio sits still and alone in the living room of their house for hours before going to the bookshelf to try to read (unsuccessfully) Weldon's *Down Among the Women*. Though I do remember sitting for hours alone in our living room after Zane's death, there wasn't a bookshelf in the room, and I didn't try to read that novel – I didn't know it existed at that time! In this sense, I was able to take the memory of when I was alone after Zane's death in the house we had shared and re-create that scenario, adding on the bit where Clio goes to the bookshelf. I was in effect re-storying, re-writing, re-making a narrative about the past, offering alternative events and actions than what really happened, much like a narrative therapist might do when working with people to transform their stories surrounding traumatic moments so they can better understand themselves and move toward healing (Madigan, 2011).

Writing fictional scenes, conversations and scenarios also allowed me to represent significant turning points in my life's journey, traumatic points suffuse with feelings of failure, loss, and confusion, in simpler, more symbolic terms. In 'Erato', these discontinuous junctures in my life story are linked with an inability to read books all the way through, but I didn't consciously set out to make this connection when I began writing the story. This connection was discovered through the process of writing, a process which

often felt like the text had a mind of its own: while writing 'Erato', at times 'I felt an indefinable unconscious force powering the creative flow and like a painter or sculpture, I intuitively dabbed and kneaded words across the white page as the narrative took shape' (Anning, 2017). On reflection, I realised I'd had problems with reading since university. When I tried to read, I couldn't seem to properly connect with the content of what I was reading; I'd reread and reread to try to grasp the meaning, often to no avail. Other times, words seemed to slip off the page, and slide around on their own so I'd lose track of where I was up to. It was frustrating and depressing. Who was I if I couldn't read books? Fiction was particularly challenging. After writing 'Erato', I investigated further to find that trauma is clinically shown to negatively impact a person's ability to read as Sian Ferguson, a former 'self-professed bookworm' explains: 'if we don't process trauma, we become so overwhelmed that we struggle to think, analyze, and empathize with the people and emotions we read about' (2019).

'Erato' constituted my initial foray into writing about my past life experiences which experimented with intertextual devices like palimpsest and allusion to explore *écriture féminine*. In addition, the use of fictional techniques such as characterisation and symbolic representations, along with a third person limited narrative point of view and past verb tense, allowed me to make rudimentary inroads into the task of constructing a written account of my life in a way that was emotionally distant and therefore comfortable. I could see the hole in Clio's middle, but I hadn't filled it or moved her beyond the living room where she remains at the end of the story. I needed to find different entry points into the story: a place from which I could dive down deeper into myself to get closer to where I suspected the core emotional truth was buried; a place where I could branch out more into the world beyond my relationship with Zane; a place where I could remain ever-in-the-middle of the rhizomic process, growing outwards and inwards, upwards and downwards,

forever circling and transforming.

Australian Bohemia is Carnavalesque – Entering the Kaleidoscope

A year or so into my PhD, I found myself stopped at an apparent dead end. The words refused to spring forth. Up till that point, I'd oscillated between theory and practice in line with a rhizomic research approach, experimenting with different concepts and techniques which resulted in the short story 'Erato' (Anning, 2017), and a small collection of other fragmented and disjointed memory-based writings. But I had no idea where to roam next, till one night I got so tired of cringing at sentences and ideas I didn't know how to fix, I pulled up a photo of Zane in the hope I might see or hear something new. But there was nothing, so I began to play, copying, cropping, and vandalizing it, graffititing it with patterns, silly eyes, stars, and other shapes. I asked, 'Might this be what memory looks like? Hazy at the edges, repeating on itself, but differently each time? Superimposed by fluctuating feelings, thoughts, and value judgements?' (Anning, personal communication, 2020)



The image is included here because playing with it is part of the process of writing the creative artefact. The 'pink cloud' over my eyes and forehead seemed to be nothing more than insignificant colouring at the time, though now that *The Metamorphosis of Clio* has been completed, I can see how this pink cloud found its way into the characterisation of Clio.

While sitting on a bench in the garden pondering how to 'enter into myself' (Cixous, 1991, p. 52), I imagined Zane standing in front of me, and I heard my voice telling me, 'To

get to him, you have to go through you.’ Then I thought of one of his artworks, a video I’d seen of him standing beneath a camera, arms reaching upwards, while colour and falling debris swirled and spun like the fractal pieces of a kaleidoscope. I didn’t know him in 1995 when this piece was performed, only finding out that it was titled *The Man who Fell to Earth* after reading an article about Zane after his death (Jackson, 2008, p. 29). I then imagined Zane and I beginning to spin together into a whirling rainbow or kaleidoscope.

Following this imagination, I became curious about the term ‘kaleidoscope’, leading me to read about its origins on the internet. I wrote short summaries of this history, not understanding *how* these tracts might fit into the creative artefact, if at all. This writing emerged with the same objective, formal tone as that found in the online articles I’d been reading – I used a third person past tense point of view. Here is an extract:

The kaleidoscope and its ability to produce reflections of reflections through the careful placement of mirrors produced a startling mania in people in the early nineteenth century due to its widespread availability owing to a registration fault in the 1817 patent. (Anning, personal communication, 2021)

As I followed these tendrils of reading/writing/thinking/reflecting to see where they might lead, I came across other nineteenth century innovations like the phenakistoscope which I also summarised in writing. But when that pathway inevitably travelled to its end, I opened a chest where I keep debris left over after Zane died: a cigarette packet, his wallet, driver’s license and art journal, scribbled notes, receipts and other trinkets, photos, newspaper articles and other miscellanea. Much of this ephemera, especially advertising flyers for performance art shows, attests to the existence of a vibrant, alternative artist-run scene in the 1990s in which Zane was involved:

In 1993, the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) moved to Fortitude Valley (corner of Ann and Gipps Streets). Behind this building was a vacant lot and a semi-derelict building in which some local artists set up the artist-run space Isn’t Studios. (Jackson, 2008, p. 35)

I’d only seen videos of Zane’s performances, having not known him in the 1990s. As

Jackson observes, his work was ‘seductive and unforgettable’, ‘creative and inspiring’ (2008, p. 34), with a clear political message:

Milking the Elite was a direct parody of the main stream ritualised exhibition process where wine-drinking viewers attend an opening night to mingle with each other in the anonymous white gallery space amongst *objets d’art* which may or may not be of any real interest... in working-class clothing, [he] confronted his audience with their own conceit and served them something unable to be consumed. (Jackson, 2008, p. 34)

I’d never seen a lot of the ephemera left after Zane’s death until I began sifting through it to help with the process of writing the creative artefact. I wondered why some artefacts remain while others disappear. In his article ‘Marginal Notes: Towards a History of an Artist-run Scene Brisbane, the 1980s’ (2016), Peter Anderson highlights the importance of documenting the ‘ephemeral traces’ of artists’ ‘ephemeral practices’ (p. 61) which take place via artist-run spaces, organisations and cooperatives rather than through recognized art institutions like museums, galleries, and universities as these changes at the ‘grass roots’ level (p. 61) work to contest, develop and differentiate infrastructure for the visual arts (p. 59). In particular, he laments that many of Brisbane’s alternative art scenes, the ‘infrastructural activism’ in Terry Smith’s terms (2012, p. 99 cited in Anderson, p. 59), continue to go unrecognized by official cultural histories due to the ephemeral, temporary and anti-institutional nature of many of these practices and their residual evidence. Anderson seeks to counter the common and persistent perception that Brisbane is/was a ‘cultural wasteland’ where ‘nothing happens’ by compiling evidence of the vibrant alternative art scene which existed during the 1980s (p. 63). Through writing about artworks made by Zane and others, I too hope to combat the persistent perception that Brisbane is a dead-end where art is concerned; I hope to contribute something to the cause. After staring at a photo of Zane in *Eyeline Magazine* (Jackson, 2008), the image of the Ferris wheel in the background began to move and excited cries of people echoed and

mingled with the smell of buttery popcorn and fairy floss. But it all soon dissipated leaving me with nothing else to do but write about the process of *looking*, and the object/s being *seen*. This writing employed the present simple tense, combined with a third person point of view, and I portray myself as the fictional character Clio:

There are objects and the steam of dead-dry truth escaping from a chest she finds at a two-dollar shop, with purposely faded red stamps and tourist postcard pictures of the Eiffel tower, Big Ben, Pisa, Arc de Triomphe and the Colosseum half-eaten by time, lions, their shredded victims long gone but stamped on faux leather sides. She takes the magazine, *Eyeline*, with the back cover photo of him leaning against Bowen Bridge, staring at the tinsel edged world of glowing fireflies, the buzzing RNA showgrounds, the carnival, the silent Ekka beside his head, an enormous Ferris Wheel in stasis taking people on a trip round a small world... Clio stares, hoping to find his warm body throbbing, his voice clear in her ear. But it's just a graveyard blip of silence and no song, no one and nothing except crickets and squeaking bats, and the occasional caw of a crow coming from her chest, a grave cavity of leftover things. (Anning, personal communication, 2021)

This process can be situated in the fluid 'praxis' space of Ryan's hybrid postmodern research method in the sense that the picture is a text with analysable content in line with Neuman's assertion that a text can include 'books, newspaper or magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or videotapes, musical lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing, or works of art' (2000, p. 292). Through studying the picture and conducting exploratory practice-led research, writing, a new text materialised in the snow. Little did I know at the time that I was doing a type of 'ekphrasis', 'the literary and rhetorical trope of summoning up – through words – an impression of a visual stimulus, object, or scene' (Squire, 2017). I circled in to look more closely at my new text's curves and content. The image of Zane staring at the 'tinsel edged world' of 'the carnival', brought to mind Bakhtin's ideas regarding 'carnival':

During the century-long development of the medieval carnival, prepared by thousands of years of ancient comic ritual, including the primitive Saturnalias, a special idiom of forms and symbols was evolved – an extremely rich idiom that expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people. This experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression: it demanded ever changing, playful,

undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 10-11)

The idea that the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with the 'pathos of change and renewal' led me to want to strive towards rendering carnival imagery and a festive atmosphere in my creative artefact. To my mind, Carnival = Zane = karnivul = Tomas, the penultimate bohemian. Tony Moore claims that the need for Bohemia to outrage the bourgeoisie has been achieved with a particularly 'carnavalesque' approach in Australia, and this has often been met with harsh forms of retribution:

In Australia this was commonly achieved through a carnivalesque spirit of subversion... This style of dissent, whether lampooning the powerful, profaning religion, or transgressing accepted boundaries of sexuality, has attracted not just social censure, but censorship and even imprisonment. (2012, Conclusion, p. 9)

Moore traces this carnivalesque spirit across time from when it surfaced in the 'Bulletin's romance of the bushman' through to Normal Lindsay's 'art of pagan pleasure', and on to 'the satire of *Oz* magazine' and the 'vulgarity of Barry Humphries' ocker creations' (p. 9).

Releasing the Laugh of Medusa – Burrowing into Myself

I changed course with a view to digging deeper into my own mind/body where I knew the 'truth' or the 'real' resided, even if it was just emotional in nature. I had to find a way to 'enter into myself', to release the 'music in my throat that wants to resound', and the 'force that contracts the muscles of my womb' (Cixous, 1991, p. 52). How could I release the unconscious onto the page? How could I access the cackling laughter of Thailia, muse of comedy?

Luce Irigaray suggests that laughter is the first form of "liberation" from a secular oppression (This Sex); Helene Cixous calls for laughter because it can "break up the truth" ("Laugh") and "knock the wind out of the codes" ("Castration"); Julia Kristeva celebrates a laughter that can transgress rigid semiotic boundaries ("Postmodernism"); and Butler applauds the "explosive laughter" that jolts us into the recognition that so-called "copies" have never had a metalinguistic original

(Gender Trouble). These "feminists" are good laughers. Their muse is Thailia, the muse of comedy, because they know that laughter releases the "feminine," "desire-in-language" from its binary bondage. They are willing to laugh and to be laughed, to take the chance of losing consciousness and forgetting, if only for an instant, about the old battle. (Davis, 1995, p. 137)

What followed was a series of writing sessions which began with reading, and then writing *'petit recit'*, or 'little narratives' for a couple of hours. These story fragments aimed to focus on the fictional characters of Tomas and Clio who were living in West End in the early 2000s, yet I also found myself writing about disparate times, places and concepts ranging from dreams I had had as a teenager to fictional scenes from my early childhood. Many of the texts read during this phase of research were creative works by bohemian and Avant Garde artists including Kate Braverman's *Lithium for Medea* (2011), Jack Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* (2011), Diane di Prima's *Loba* (1998), Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* (2020). The writing that resulted in each session was often infused with the flavour, tone, and/or structure of whatever text I had used as stimulus, much like my kaleidoscope summaries had the same objective, formal tone as the informational articles I had been reading. During these writing sessions, I strived as much as possible to immediately capture whatever thoughts shot across my mind, resisting the urge to edit, confine, control or manipulate the thoughts and emotions spilling onto the page. In this way, these writings followed an automatic type of writing style like the one used by Krauth in his 'By the Fingernails' (2016) piece which 'tests the concept of memoirist narrative structure' using a 'process approximating automatic writing as defined by the Surrealists' (2016, p. 5). His recollections veer from memory fragment to fragment, embracing the wandering, circuitous nature of thoughts and memories. I aimed to enact a similar surrealistic type of writing practice in line with Andre Breton's belief in 'the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected association, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought' (1972, p. 26). This approach fits in well with the

‘rhizomic’ methodology outlined by Deleuze and Guattari who describe the rhizome as having ‘neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows... defined solely by a circulation of states’ (1987, p. 21). To reflect the immediacy of these thoughts as they appeared and vanished, I often used a present verb tense, though not always, and usually a third person narrative perspective, but again this varied. This free associative style of writing enabled me to access my thoughts and memories in a more ‘truthful’ way, grasping them as soon as they were ‘born.’ Often this writing didn’t respect grammatical or syntactical conventions, demonstrating how thoughts appear in their purest form. Barratt cites a poem written by a fellow psychoanalyst to illustrate this aspect of free associative discourse:

Come! Lay aside grammar and its narrative sense and non-sense, clause and comma, pause and stop, and rejoice in sentences run wild like children released, bursting on the last day of school, like star burst at night filling the sky with galactic light.
(2018, p. 486)

I also embraced the poetic, in line with Cixous’ claim that novelists are the ‘allies of representationalism’, while ‘poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffman would say, fairies’ (1976, pp. 879-880). A poetic style of writing allowed me to include a myriad of figurative devices like metaphor, simile and personification, and engage with emblems of the carnival idiom, as well as mythological symbols. Some of these passages fictionalize remembered scenes, places, dialogue and people while others are complete fabrications. Here are extracts from those little stories:

Clio peers in kaleidoscopic – juiced up little child at fair, one-eye squished closed blinded everything gone into nothing and left are rainbow lights swirling into other eye, eye pulled awake pinned glued open and careening with patterns flying inside magical tube of spirals, spinning isosceles triangles worming deep into spongy coral kernel in her mind in corners in coves, secret caves where carnival rides swoosh screaming giddy children side to side, arms and pony-tails flop and flail

against granite night, little hands carry fairy floss sacred pink torches through violet air, confetti strewn and smelling of caramel, Ferris wheel turning slow and regal, glowing spokes webbed spires slicing night into wedges of great glowing pie, great glowing crown overseeing it all.

Across the road from The Lychee Lounge is where they stop and Tomas jumps down from the driver's seat and Clio gets out too onto the molten earth and skittery horses are scattering somewhere in Autumn woods, reverberating all the way to Clio and Tomas who are searching the lava on the ground to find the three hundred dollars he has lost he says and together they look for the stolen goods, the look on his face when he can't find it, the blush that appears is really rifling and they both flutter at the idea of something vanishing into nothing. It's fallen out somewhere but they don't care for very long.

Magnetic fields all around them now and he is an alchemist, some kind of magus and just all round God-head of something otherworldly and she is Phoebus Apollo now too, some kind of risen phoenix, the last and final shoot from the single spore, the aching loneliness of the task, the broken dreams and desires, all of it is something at least surely, surely it must go on. (Anning, personal communication, 2022)

The writing produced during this phase of my research demonstrated many of the six aspects of 'performative' writing outlined by Della Pollock: (1) evocative, (2) metonymic, (3) subjective, (4) nervous, (5) citational, and (6) consequential (Pollock, 1998, pp. 80-95). Performative writing rejects mimesis in favour of embracing the playfulness of language, evoking unlocatable 'worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect and insight' (Pollock, 1998, p. 80).

While it was emotionally cathartic to write in this way, and enjoyable at times, after I produced around 30 000 words, this process began to feel suffocating. I wanted a more emotionally comfortable and less taxing style of writing practice. I was cognizant too of the need to synthesise these 'mini narratives' into a cohesive and entertaining story for the enjoyment of readers. Without a binding structure, those writings came across to me as narcissistic and solipsistic, too focused on my own 'insides,' my subconscious and memories without any consideration for grammatical and narratological conventions, and thus the needs of readers. I had no idea what to do with these most recent writing fragments, nor how I could use the kaleidoscope summaries. Once again, I needed to change direction.

Writing Fiction like a Bowerbird – The Bohemians of West End

To counter this issue, I returned to Murger's *Bohemians of the Latin Quarter*, deciding that I would use palimpsest to 'write over' that text with my own fictionalized life stories, just as I did with Maupassant's 'The Jewelry' in my story 'Erato' (Anning, 2017). Switching to third person past tense, I needed to create four central bohemian characters like Murger's Rodolphe, Schaunard, Marcel, and Colline, although my story would be set in Brisbane in the early 2000s. Keeping on with the commitment to writing 'little narratives', or in Murger's terms, 'sketches', I created a group of bohemians which included Clio, Tomas, and two other characters, Mick and Dean who I comprised from a patchwork of different characteristics taken from many disparate people I remember meeting while living in West End.

Though I began with memories to construct my fictional characters, as the narrative began to take flight on the page, these figures began 'thinking for themselves' in the sense that they increasingly exhibited physical traits and personality features far removed from any 'real life' memories and experiences from which they were initially drawn – fiction began to take over. For instance, Clio is portrayed as having long black hair rather than the short blonde style I had in the past. Her personality is also extremely passive, inactive and painfully shy, and though I'm sure I had/have these qualities in my 'real life' identity, these traits are exaggerated in Clio's character at times, almost to the point of being comical, making her into more of a caricature rather than a realistic portrayal of my real life, past identity.

Along with the use of these novelistic devices, during this writing stage I continued to embrace a hybrid research methodology by engaging with the research-led pole, attaining what Tess Brady describes as 'a working rather than specialist knowledge' of many different texts from which I could appropriate ideas to enhance my fictionalized life stories,

meaning that I functioned ‘a little like a bowerbird that picks out the blue things and leaves all the other colours’ (2000). I scanned a variety of other texts and picked out ideas to weave into my narrative through allusive descriptions and references. Angela Carter has been described as using a type of ‘bower birding’ methodology: she’s ‘a cultural magpie who is attracted to the glint of a glancing allusion and the sheen of empty simulacra’ (Davison, 2015, p. 199). In ‘Notes from the Frontline’ (1983, p. 74), Carter states that she ‘feels free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past...’ which she views as having ‘important decorative, ornamental functions’, as well as being a ‘vast repository of outmoded lies...’ (cited in Davison, 2015, p. 199).

The names I chose for the female characters exhibit this ‘bower birding’ technique. David Lodge states, ‘In a novel names are never neutral. They always signify, if it is only ordinariness. Comic, satiric or didactic, writers can afford to be exuberantly inventive or obviously allegorical in their naming... The naming of characters is always an important part of creating them’ (1992, p. 37). By invoking the name ‘Clio’, my intention is to allude to ‘one of the oldest archetypes in our Civilisation’: the Muse (Penier & Suwalska-Kolecka, 2015, p.1). In their collection of essays focused on the dynamics of famous and lesser-known creative partnerships throughout history, *Muses, Mistresses and Mates: Female Friends, Lovers, Sometimes also Wives*, editors Izabella Penier and Anna Suwalska-Kolecka preface their volume by acknowledging that ‘In the wake of the three waves of feminism the idea of the Muse may seem a bit obsolete, quaint or downright sexist. It is said to enhance a vicious stereotype of the creative, productive and active man and the passive, submissive and docile woman’ (2015, p. 2). But in many ways, the notion of the passive Muse could be seen as appropriate for the character of Clio as she often views herself as being caught up in this stereotypical archetype. Readers can discern Clio’s passivity in the way she sees herself as being elevated to immortality due to her association with the artist

Tomas, a godly genius, while simultaneously acknowledging her role as an inactive flower in comparison, doing nothing more than stare out of a vase, hover in the air and pluck harps.

Similarly, the older woman who Clio meets early in ‘Erato’ (Anning, 2017) is named Sybil in *The Metamorphosis of Clio* for a number of reasons, one being that in my real life, I played the role of Sybil Burlington in the play *Daisy Pulls it Off* (Coward, 2013). In the play, Sybil is the cruel, selfish, and spoilt ‘mean girl’ who schemes to thwart the kind and innocent Daisy. Another reason is just as Clio’s name is an appropriation from Greek mythology, I was inspired to appropriate the name Sybil from Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2007). Elana Gomel (2004) observes that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be ‘read as an allegory of artistic creativity’ (p. 80), and that the three main characters, Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton are symbolic representations of different subjective viewpoints involved in the process of artistic creation. In the story, Basil is the artist, Dorian his muse, and Lord Henry the connoisseur who ‘interprets and thus completes what he sees’ (Gomel, 2004, p. 81). Some references to women in Wilde’s text shocked and enraged me, such as Lord Henry’s declaration that ‘women appreciate cruelty’ and ‘love being dominated’ (p. 91), describing them as mere decoration, without anything to say. Furthermore, Sybil Vane’s suicide following Dorian’s cruelty led me to empathise with her plight and I felt compelled to counter her erasure by appropriating her name for my female artist character in *The Metamorphosis of Clio*. In this way, my thinking may align with that of Kate Zambreno who similarly identifies with erased and invisible female figures from the past in her memoir *Heroines* (2012), according to Kaye Mitchell (2020). The community of invisible women Zambreno creates in her memoir is ‘transhistorical’ and ‘affective’, and ‘functions through empathy and identification’ (Mitchell, 2020, p. 217). Even though Sybil Vane is a literary creation rather than a real female writer or writer’s wife, like Zambreno’s ‘heroines’, I don’t feel it’s necessary for me to be a fictional

character to empathise with or identify some of myself in the character of Sybil Vane.

Along with the reference to Wilde's character through her name, Sybil's character in *The Metamorphosis of Clio* is made up of a composite of multiple bower birded allusions: her hair is described as being like writhing snakes in reference to Cixous' Medusa; and her tendency to conjure visions out of her fingers that work as knitting needles is intended to be representative of the way a spider weaves a web, like Arachne weaves pictures into her tapestry. Furthermore, Sybil's characterisation is also influenced by my desire to allude to the artist Vali Meyers, considered by many to be 'Australia's bohemian high priestess' (Norman, 2022) in order to signal that *The Metamorphosis of Clio* takes inspiration not just from Murger's Parisian origins of Bohemianism, but also from successive, peculiarly Australian, iterations of the phenomenon. Just as Meyers' hair was strikingly red and wild, Sybil's hair is coloured a fiery red and is so long it drags along behind her as she traipses through the streets of West End. Furthermore, descriptions of Sybil's hair as being similar to tentacles and her character's association with the octopus have been arrived at after viewing Meyers' final major painting, Holy Ghost, wherein the artist is depicted as 'at rest with her foxes under the "protective arms of the largest creature" in the sea' (State Library Victoria, 2021), a giant squid. In this way, *The Metamorphosis of Clio* aims for a transnational portrayal of Bohemia, positioning Australia, and more specifically Brisbane in the early twenty-first century as being worthy of international recognition as a vibrant moment in place and time where bohemianism flourished.

In addition, the character of Tomas is constructed using the appropriated symbols of Bohemia. Along with descriptions related to the 'carnavalesque' trope, Tomas is almost always smoking, and this feature places him in the bohemian lineage. Patricia G. Berman explores this connection in an article titled 'Edvard Munch's Self-Portrait with Cigarette: Smoking and the Bohemian Persona' which proposes that 'the cigarette, which was only

mass-marketed for the first time in the 1880s, constituted an emblem of Bohemian and Decadent culture' (1993, p. 627). Edvard Munch's 1895 self-portrait, in which he is depicted standing in a haze of moody blue smoke, staring directly at the viewer but conveying a strange detachment from the world from his position amid the enveloping mist, constitutes the artist's 'assertion of his affiliation with the European Decadent community', Berman argues:

The smoldering cigarette, Munch's sole prop in his self-portrait, was an object that served as a nexus for marginal social identities in the 1890s. At that time, the cigarette was associated with deviancy – cafe society, poverty, and illness – and with death. Suggesting a slippage between social categories – identities both male and female, upper- and lower-class – and between intact and disintegrating mental states and physical and political bodies, the cigarette challenged the notion of their boundaries. (p. 627)

In *The Metamorphosis of Clio*, Tomas takes this symbol, and physically transgresses the boundaries of social order by infiltrating public spaces and premises holding a lit cigarette. Though Zane was a heavy smoker in real life, the depiction of Tomas takes this real-life trait and runs with it into the realm of fiction. Similar to the way that other characters in *The Metamorphosis of Clio* reject mimesis in favour of fictional representationalism, Tomas is a very different creature to how I remember the real-life person I've named Zane in this exegesis. His cigarette is intended to be representative of the bohemian artist's mission to destabilise the bourgeoisie sense of public order with outlandish acts of artistry that seek to trace the line separating Bohemia from the ordinary world. Through his escapades into territories deemed 'smoke free', Tomas arguably embodies Tony Moore's assertion that Bohemia needs to outrage the Bourgeoisie which is often achieved through the 'crossing of arbitrary borders of society and the disruption of expectation' (2012, Conclusion, p. 11). Joanna Richardson notes that 'smoking was one of the first steps in the Romantic initiation' (1971, p. 33) and 'one of the features of the early *vie de Boheme*' (p. 35). It is unsurprising then that just over thirty years later Lauren Stover

devotes an entire chapter to 'Smoke' in the Bohemian Lifestyle section of her book

Bohemian Manifesto: Field Guide to Living on the Edge (2004). She writes:

The Bohemian is a connoisseur of sensation, so there will be smoke. Smoke is the Bohemian's cosmic scrim. It swirls the atmosphere with a foggy fever, an Olympian, cloudlike fairy-fire haze, the smoke of the underworld, the residue of unwholesome and mind-altering acts, the poetic blanket that softens hard edges. Candles, incense, smudge sticks, fireplaces and wood-burning stoves all figure in, but untipped, unfiltered cigarettes are the primary source: Gauloises, Gitanes, Lucky Strikes, Chesterfield Kings, Camels, American Spirits and clove. (p. 85)

Beth Jackson writes in *Eyeline* that Zane's artworks often featured smoking and cigarettes: his piece 'Macro Surveillance', shown in 2000 at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, 'featured two giant cigarettes, lit and stood on end so that they burned down to form columns of ash at human scale' (2008, p. 39). Other performance artworks that put cigarette smoking front and centre were 'Man Smoking' (2005) and 'Inhaling Kurt' (2006) (Jackson, 2008).

Furthermore, I looted and rummaged through Stover's *Bohemian Manifesto* among other texts to decorate the characters and settings featured in *The Metamorphosis of Clio* with bohemian ornaments – clothing, food and other insignia from the official literary past to identify my narrative as being a bohemian text, a hybrid, postmodern 'ficto-memoir' made up of real-life scenarios and fictional fabrications, appropriated transnational and transhistorical allusions, a timeless text set firmly in the real-life place and time of Brisbane at the dawn of the second millennium.

Still, this approach didn't contain the 'emotional truth' of my previous writings. The third person past tense perspective came across as too distanced from my emotional links to the story. It occurred to me to weave the two together, slicing sentences from the 'emotional'/present tense writing fragments and inserting them into the 'past tense' tracts. The following example demonstrates this weaving process:

Cigarettes. Coffee. Olives. Red wine so thick it left grainy berries on her tongue.

Where does a story begin, asks the nattering in the dark night corners furry with dust balls. She ran through a list of all the things she'd fed herself that day. Smoky letters drifted and disappeared in her mind. The story is an endless sea in which she swims eternally, even after the time she takes her last breath, and before her lungs first fill with air. (Anning, personal communication, 2022)

Harnessing Feminist Metafiction to Write a Life

Using this weaving process, I managed to construct a novel-length creative text, consisting of a series of fragmented mini-narratives which oscillated between the past and present tense. At that stage, the title for the artefact was *Bohemian Myth: Thirteen Tales of Urban Fantasy*, which demonstrates my intention for the narrative to be viewed as a novel rather than a memoir. This is evident when viewed through Gerard Genette's concept of 'paratext', outlined in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997b) and *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997a). According to Genette, paratexts include:

a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic. (1997b, p. 3)

These aspects are defined by Genette as 'a threshold... a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text' (1997b, p. 2), and these:

may impart an authorial and/or editorial intention or interpretation; this is the cardinal function of most prefaces, and it is still that of the generic indication placed on certain covers or title pages: novel does not mean "this book is a novel," an assertive definition which is not in the control of any single person, but rather: "Please consider this book a novel." (Genette & Mclean, 1991, p. 268)

In this light, I could see that the words 'myth' and 'fantasy' in the title aimed to position readers to view the work as fiction, despite being drawn from my life and situated in a real place, involving real life artworks and events. In many ways these paratextual signposts ring true: the characters are fictions – a real-life 'Clio' and 'Tomas' never lived together in West End in the mid-2000s as far as I know. A real-life 'Clio' never worked at a French Moroccan restaurant on Dornoch Terrace either, and the relationship between Clio and

Tomas plays out in fictional conversations, behaviours and encounters (mostly). Yet I came to an impasse at the scene of Tomas' wake at the Institute of Modern Art; the death of Zane couldn't be avoided, the historical fact of his wake couldn't be ignored. Grappling with how to synthesise the 'real life' foundations of my artefact with its fictional aspects has been incredibly difficult and painful, causing many writing blockages. The emotional barricade I encountered at the scene of Tomas' wake seemed impossible to surpass, until I switched from a third person point of view to the second, positioning Sybil as a writer who speaks directly to Clio, narrating her journey thereafter:

'You will leave this place and scurry along Brunswick Street like a spindly ant in a neon green night to Sharon's house where you'll drink Chartreuse from the bottle downstairs near the old organ, propped up on the floor by a rolled-up rug. You smell dust. You don't understand. You are spinning in clouds. Your body revolts when you see the image of Tomas on a cold silver slab, forever sideways. You feel sickened, green with wanting to vomit and cry in a lonely field for a night of eternal gloom, spinning webs on a loom, weaving tiny tears with glitter and gossamer thread.' (Anning, personal communication, 2022)

Here, Sybil not only has the advantage of being able to *see* Clio and her 'story' from an external vantage point, but she overtly takes control of the narrative viewpoint, outing herself/myself as the writer of the text to both readers and Clio. Sybil was no longer content to remain only furtively 'the writer, the embodiment of both Medusa and Arachne' (Anning, 2017); she demanded to announce herself as a metafictional device by drawing attention to the artifice of the narrative through the use of the second person narrative perspective. Patricia Waugh states that metafiction is fiction which 'self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (1984, p. 2). In my case, the questions posed by Sybil regarding the relationship to the fiction playing out in my creative artefact and reality led me to an awakening, an epiphany of sorts whereby I came to the realization that I couldn't possibly dress my creative artefact in the guise of a novel – why would I want to?

The pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place – my quest to write about Zane had always been a quest to write about my life, to rewrite it, to reconstruct it in language so that I could fill the void in Clio’s middle with healing text. Thereafter, the title of the creative artefact changed to *The Metamorphosis of Clio*.

Suddenly I glimpsed visions of how the narrative would play out. Sybil tells Clio what happens after she leaves the wake at the Institute of Modern Art, and it is Sybil who finds a way to package the multitudinous fragments of text into an overall structure by using palimpsest to bookend/start the never-ending narrative with James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* (1997); Sybil writes over Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (2022) to gather the fragmented memories of Clio’s childhood:

Stein does not offer romantic realism; she sketches a monologue of fragments. She uses sound and meaning the way a kaleidoscope uses refraction and reflection to create new patterns with familiar objects. Her method of taking language apart in order to understand it better is useful in the work of language revitalization. She demonstrates how to fall in love with language as it falls apart and is reconstructed each time we speak. (Noodin, 2018, p. 11)

Sybil is the artist who performs the summaries of the kaleidoscope and the phenakistoscope, and many other performances besides those along her journey to aid Clio *see* herself more clearly. Sybil is the one who constructs the gigantic, kaleidoscopic Frankenstein of *The Metamorphosis of Clio*, a *polyphonic* narrative structured according to the festive non-laws of carnivalesque structure (Kristeva, 1986, p. 42). In *Feminist Fiction and the Use of Memory* (1991), Gayle Greene states that metafiction ‘is a powerful tool of feminist critique, for to draw attention to the structures of fiction is also to draw attention to the conventionality of the codes that govern human behaviour’ (p. 293). Using Sybil as a vehicle to metafictionally call attention to the constructed nature of the narrative in *The Metamorphosis of Clio* is a feminist ploy which not only illuminates language as a site of reality construction, but also aids in helping me re-story the trauma surrounding Zane’s

death, remaking it into something resembling a whole, filling an empty hole with the fragmented shards of a kaleidoscope. In *Writing the Radical Memoir* (2023), Davidow and Williams draw upon the ideas of Lacan and Barthes to inform their discussion of the significance of these fragmented shards to our sense of identity:

we are a pastiche of perceptions ‘infected’ by language, and if we are to write an accurate memoir about our ‘self’ we have to deconstruct these grand narratives about ourselves and write about the fragments of self we are, how others see us, how we are determined by our language, culture and its rules and taboos. (p. 158)

Sybil is myself the writer, the spider at the centre of the web that helps me to unmake myself, ‘like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web (Barthes, 1975, p. 64). Sybil is Medusa who transforms into a beautiful, laughing woman in ‘The Awakening’, someone who offers Clio comfort and liberation after her ordeal, someone who has the power to make Tomas rematerialize in the gallery after his death, invoking a great kaleidoscope to lift out of the wall, whirling the three of them out and up into the air where they explode across the sky like fireworks, like in a dream.

Piecing the Puzzle Together – Montage and Surrealism

In his discussion of Walter Benjamin’s essay style, Ceserani (2010) refers to Adorno’s criteria for essays that resemble art: thinking is presented spontaneously, subjectively, and via fragments ‘just as reality is fragmentary’; reflection on the incomplete fragments is what progresses ideas forward; logical, dogmatic and authoritative conclusions are eschewed in favour of intellectual freedom, rhetorical sophistication and an emphasis on the possibility of error; the discourse is a ‘meandering, exploratory journey’ which embraces play and chance (pp. 84-85). These characteristics can also be found in montage literature, which tends to ‘playfully dissect language’, combine heterogeneous and disembodied discourses, and favour ‘ambiguity, irony, and paradox over narrative unity or totality’ (Barndt, 2016).

The focus on spontaneity, incompleteness, disruption and questioning rather than deductive authority brings to mind Martel's notion that Benjamin shines a 'pitch black flashlight' rather than bright light onto his subjects to purposely obscure meaning for readers. Martel describes Benjamin's idea of montage as 'the juxtaposition of unlike things for the purposes of textual – and other forms – of interruption', and these disruptions to sequences and contexts help readers see the 'allegorical nature of language in general', as well as break down barriers between the reader and author (Martel, 2015, pp. 584-585).

My creative artefact exhibits many of the features of montage literature: fragmentation, juxtaposition of dissimilar scenes, times and places, interruption, spontaneity, subjectivity and playful deconstruction of syntax, linearity, logic and literary conventions. These detours invite readers to focus on the form of the text, not just its content, in line with Benjamin's political approach to textual production, outlined in the essay 'The Author as Producer':

The best political tendency is wrong if it does not demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed... What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (1996, p. 777)

James R. Martel states that Benjamin's methodology, which emphasises form over content, calls for readers to become producers rather than consumers of meaning 'to ward off the meaninglessness of the fetishisms that would otherwise form the content of our experience' (2015). Martel suggests that Benjamin's use of 'allegory, montage and the production of texts as "pure means"' decenters his own authorial authority with the use of a 'black flashlight':

Rather than illuminate his text with his own knowledge, seeking to win the reader over by persuasion and textual authority, Benjamin seeks to obscure and complicate any meaning. He attempts to have his text fail to deliver a final verdict to the reader. The obscure, pitch black light Benjamin sheds on his own

and other texts leaves us as readers to our own devices, deprived as we are of the usual guidance of the author. In this way, Benjamin not only encourages but requires the reader's own intervention, a model for the anarchist politics he also describes in the text. (2015, p. 575)

In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin amassed a wide range of diverse materials over a period of thirteen years to construct a type of history of the nineteenth century (Benjamin, 1999, p. ix). These materials related to technological, economic, philosophical as well as literary and many other phenomena so that:

it was not the great men and celebrated events of traditional historiography but rather the “refuse” and “detritus” of history, the half-concealed, variegated traces of the daily life of “the collective” that was to be the object of study, and with the aid of methods more akin – above all, in their dependence on chance – to the methods of the nineteenth-century collector of antiquities and curiosities, or indeed to the methods of the nineteenth-century ragpicker, than to those of the modern historian. Not conceptual analysis but something like dream interpretation was the model. (1999, p. ix)

Morowitz observes that Benjamin's idea of inducing readers to interpret his ‘sprawling, frustrating, heartbreaking, poetic, brilliant, and often abstruse series of quotations, observations, and reflections’ was largely influenced by surrealism, the major contemporary art movement of his day in which he ‘recognized both the spell of the dream and the potential for revolutionary transformation’ (2017, p. 875).

Surrealism has also had a major influence on my creative artefact as it could be viewed as akin to Benjamin's *Arcades Project* in the sense that it is a montage of collected textual fragments, of *detritus* and *refuse* juxtaposed in a way that scrambles logic and linearity, making meaning abstruse and puzzling. Although, unlike Benjamin's textual curios which relate to the history of the nineteenth century, the materials, words, forms, symbols and motifs that make up the fragments in my creative artefact are a hypertextual mixture of stolen text, characters, memories and ideas that relate to the history of my own life in the sense that I, as the spider at the centre of my textual web, am the one who has

chosen to weave them into the textual fabric – readers are invited to interpret these fragments like they would a dream.

PART THREE: CONCLUDING TRANSFORMATIONS

Rewriting the Mirror into a Fragmented Whole

In November 2006 a wake was held at the Institute of Modern Art for an audacious and rebellious artist who played a key role in the alternative Brisbane art scene from the early 1990s (Institute of Modern Art, 2007). I can never forget the image of him spinning slowly on a video loop, suspended high above us all, one arm held up as though waving goodbye, or giving a final salute. After the speeches had finished, there was a ceremony of sorts, one befitting an artist who smashed glass and mirrors and lit fires both literal and figurative. An enormous sheet of mirror was carried to the centre of the space. Someone grabbed me from where I was sitting at the back on a concrete ledge, leading me to grab hold of the mirror too. But I soon let go, and when I was walking away to melt back into the wordless dark, I turned to see my reflection staring back at me, my wide eyes, brittle as stone, and the crowd gathered behind me, the pensive audience of a strange, dream-like show. The mirror was lifted into the air, and I watched my image lift too before it smashed across the concrete into a sea of glittery shards.

The process of reading and writing *The Metamorphosis of Clio* has felt like a gathering of these mirror fragments, a sifting through of memory puzzle pieces which have been damaged and torn and erased by emotion, making them even more difficult to fit together to see a bigger picture. Since the unexpected death of Zane, I've felt haunted and harassed by hazy edged memories, visions, and the unresolved need to tie up all the loose ends, to find a sense of resolution, and peace. Traumatic events lead to hollow spaces in a person's autobiographical memory, gaps and silences, the experience 'stored in fragments' which return intrusively as flashbacks, unwanted reminders, and nightmares (Holdenreid, 2019, p. 424). It follows then that a postmodern approach to life writing, with its embrace of

techniques like the open use of fiction, shifting points of view, metafiction, intertextuality, and montage is perhaps particularly suited to those people whose sense of identity is in pieces due to the memory shattering effects of trauma.

Writing *The Metamorphosis of Clio* has enabled me to find points of entry into my life and memories, ways to grow and develop a renewed, rewritten, remade sense of identity out of shattered slices of the past and present. Enabling fictions about our lives allows a chance to reflect on the disabling stories we have told and continue to tell ourselves, keeping us immobilised and stuck in a state of crisis (Greene, 1991, p. 294). By embracing memory as a layered, collage-like web of associations which constantly grows from an *always middle*, creating ‘little narratives’ about the world and our place in it, postmodern approaches to life writing offer exciting possibilities for making meaning through the juxtaposition of these stories, voices, things, events and experiences across time and place.

Yet this type of life writing is often accompanied by the destabilising and disconcerting multiplicities inherent in taking a poststructuralist slant on language and meaning. I often felt like a spider lost and dissolving in an ever-unravelling textual web (Barthes, 1975). However, it is only through entering the text, putting my selves into the text (Cixous, 1976) that I was able to decode and recode the mystery of my own being. Judith Harris elucidates how psychoanalysis offers a glimpse into the writing subject as a ‘core being’ in the process of writing, despite changes in identity which become apparent with the adoption of different discursive practices:

With its emphasis on the unconscious and on what one does not yet know about oneself until it is uttered or written down, psychoanalysis offers a view of the writing subject in process. Rather than seeing the writer as someone who is chameleonlike and changing with each protean discourse he adopts, the more holistic approach of psychoanalysis enables us to view the individual as a core being whose identity is fluid, mercurial, but self-constant. The writer unravels the mystery of being through the drama of writing whether that writing is overtly “imaginative” or frankly testimonial. (2001, p. 185)

Though writing a postmodern memoir affords a chance for individuals to tether swirling memory fragments, and debilitating life stories to the page where they can be transformed into invigorating narratives, breathing oxygen into a still life, this form of narrative therapy is inherently relational, and involves working with the concrete, socio-historical realities of people's lives in the meaning making process (Madigan, 2011). A 'hybrid', rhizomic research paradigm (Ryan, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), combined with a retrospective vantage point, allows connections to be made between times, places and circumstance, meaning that *The Metamorphosis of Clio* is a bohemian memoir as much as it is a radical postmodern memoir. It contains 'truth', 'subcultural truth', 'outsider truth', 'bohemian truth', even if it is mostly of the mythical and emotional type. Bohemia has been found in early twenty-first century Australia. For proof just read my memoir, the carnival reinventing anew.

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