‘Peninsula Blues’

(a novella)

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Borrowing the Blues:

Appropriations, Marginalisations, and the Ambiguous Voice in Women’s Autobiography, Fiction, and The Blues

By

Amanda Williams
B.A. (Hons) Flinders University

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PREFACE

Music, for many people, acts as a sound track to their lives. Like literary fiction, it can open up a space in which to experience and reflect on our own and others' experience of the world. The Blues, in particular, narrates autobiographical stories of love and loss, of hardship, of failure, and also of action, appropriation and change. The Blues, like autobiography and fiction, tells stories, often in metaphoric terms, of what it is like to embrace life, in all its archetypal and universal similarities. Music informs my writing; in particular, the genre of blues music, with its history of appropriation and is reflected in my novella 'Peninsula Blues' presented here at the beginning of this thesis. The research that underpins the exegetical component of this thesis, following on from my novella, includes feminist theories of women's autobiographical fiction and African-American theories of literature and music, as giving voice to marginalised subjects. This dissertation explores appropriation in women's autobiographical fiction and the Blues to suggest that appropriation is a universal trope in all forms of art and that marginalised subjects often use appropriation not only as a response or to pay homage to what has gone before, but also as a political tool with regards to agency and autonomy.

What happens when my imagination re-interprets an oral story or family scenario? What do I use, what do I imagine? These are the questions I am exploring through the practice of writing. But who am I to appropriate these stories? From an historical view point, to name is to appropriate in some way, but when you are invisible, culturally and historically, surely to name is to bestow a forgotten identity.

All I can ask is that you listen to my Blues and maybe recognise your own.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

…….
Amanda Williams

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Thanks to everyone who came along for the ride: my mum for her never ending support and understanding, my children for the same reasons, and my supervisors, Associate Professor Steve Evans and Dr Dymphna Lonergan for their patience and insight.

And ultimately, thanks to those Blues men and women who not only inspired me, but inspired generations of musicians and writers with their bravery, their honesty and their talent.

‘Peninsula Blues’

By

Amanda Williams

‘Life as a reality is absolute presence: we cannot say that there is anything unless it be present, of this moment. If, then, there is a past, it must be as something present, something active in us now.’ (Ortega y Gasset)

‘You got my heart, you got my soul
You got the silver, you got the gold.’ (Rolling Stones 1969)

I grew up on the Lefevre Peninsula, a little patch of land bordered by sea and river that lies at the outer northern end of Adelaide. Outer Harbour, the last train stop on the line from Adelaide, was the end of the line in more ways than one. My father, a boiler maker but unfulfilled jazz musician, and my mother, an office worker with a penchant for tap dancing, found a safe haven in this sandy enclave to raise a family and live the Australian dream of home ownership in the 1950s. It was the end of the line for them; once the Peninsula gets into your blood it stays there. My twenty-five year old father, sporting a silk fringed scarf, a cleft chin and an irresistible smoothness like a six foot Frank Sinatra was just travelling through from Newcastle, on his way to Perth and adventure, but the Peninsula got in his blood, just as my mother, a local Semaphore siren with flaming red hair, winking blue eyes and an always full dance card got under his skin that first night he saw her at The Palais. He was gone on both. They tried to live for a while in Newcastle after they were married, but the Peninsula beckoned so with a five pound deposit, they bought an asbestos fibre three bedroom and created a life for themselves amongst the sand dunes and the spinifex.

My childhood was full of sand, sea and sport. But music, always music in the background, was the soundtrack to my days. It stole my heart and soul, and I am forever in its thrall. These were the days of the special on television. I remember watching, along with my dad, mum and brother, on our new black and white HMV, Elvis Presley, Sonny and Cher, Sammy Davis and of course Old Blue Eyes and Nancy. Every Saturday night, usually after the football, a Wally May-commentated epic, we

would all sit down to our TV dinners on our TV trays and be entertained by these music greats. But it was Traditional and Dixieland jazz resonating through the house that I remember most, and Satchmo was the king. My dad's prize possessions were his thick shellac 78s in their uniform brown paper covers and copperplate lettering, along with his clarinet and later his tenor sax. Friday nights while my brother and I watched TV in our pyjamas, Mum and Dad would do the week's housework and washing to free up the weekend for my brother's football. Dad would be in the kitchen bopping away to Satchmo, a beer not too far away, while Mum would be outside hanging the washing. Dad would sidle up close, a scotch and dry in his hand for her, and they would dance under the Hills Hoist, the wet clothes, the bills and the working week forgotten for the moment. He was one hip cat my dad, and my mum had rhythm that a drummer would die for. Together they were as smooth as silk, even on the wet and uneven couch grass of our suburban backyard. My dad was the king on Friday nights and my mum was his beautiful consort. Music reached out its long bony fingers to me and has never let go.

Friday night was party night, but Saturday afternoons were the time for languid lying around. Hot summer days, lying on the cool red painted cement of the laundry, listening to my dad's portable radio, an amazing contraption about the size of a first edition hardback, encased in a green leather cover with a large circular dial on the front. My dad and I would fight over that radio, like the telephone we were eventually to get. Every time I was on it, which I guess was quite a lot, my dad would yell at me to get off as there might be an important call coming through for him. The fact that nobody ever seemed to ring him was not important. On Saturday afternoons my dad liked to listen to the races. He always had a bet on and would come in search of me and the precious radio so he could listen to the 3.15 Stakes from Randwick or some

other exotic location. I'd hand it over reluctantly and he would move that dial through the frequencies, split second sound grabs there and gone, like lives and moments, tantalisingly audible, until he found the familiar sound of the race caller. I must admit, some afternoons listening to the races with my dad and family were pretty exciting. We would all ride home the horse my dad had bet on, jumping and hollering, and my dad would laugh and say 'It's fish and chips tonight' and we'd know he'd won big.

Was it those Saturday afternoons, when he won, that instilled in me a sense of the gambler, the risk taker? Maybe it's just in the genes. Like gambling and music, my dad's big passions. I've inherited both. I remember the disappointment in his eyes, every Saturday night, when his lotto numbers didn't come through. My dad only ever gambled with his money though, not his life, as I seem to have done, many times over, but only if the odds are good.

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‘And she’s buying a stairway to heaven.’ (Led Zeppelin 1971)

The rhythmic moaning from the room next door that had kept her awake finally ceased. It was the mandrax still running through her veins, seeming to pool at the back of her eyes, that was the culprit now. The orange and gold wallpaper on the wall opposite her chocolate-brown covered single bed taunted her. What was it with her parents? Did every room they decorate have to end up looking like a bordello? Even the orange perspex light shade, like a flying saucer made out of atomic glowing worms seemed to suggest sex, as the tiny worms wound their way in and out of each other. She masturbated and felt her body relaxing, the golden swirls of the wallpaper and the glowing worms took on a less insistent shape, fuzzy around the edges, and her eyes decided to stay put for the time being. But after the climactic momentary emptying, she could feel her blood make its way back up to her head and her eye balls were desperate to be on the move again. No use fighting it she thought. She got up and walked over to her stereo and put a record on the turn table, releasing the arm expertly down on to the revolving vinyl. ‘There’s a lady who’s sure all that glitters is gold ... and she’s buying a stairway to heaven’. The gentle guitar riff caressed her skin like a lover, as she swayed to the building rhythm. Her day had begun.

‘Can’t you turn that bloody racket off?’ came the usual response from her dad. He didn’t like music in the morning; it interrupted his interrogation of the paper. She shall have music wherever she goes. Her thoughts like her speech seemed to work in lyric format.

‘You’re very bright eyed this morning, love,’ her mum said. ‘Must have been the early night. It’s done you good.’

She looked at her mum and remembered the events of last night: climbing out her bedroom window, and heading to Dave's party. Everyone was there, Dave and Woody and even China Mick. She'd never seen anyone like him before, not in Taperoo anyway. His long straight jet black hair, his small but muscular body encased in a tight white t-shirt. He was scary, dangerous, and fucking gorgeous. He handed out mandrax to girls like candy. He smiled his wicked smile and she remembered the thrill of having his undivided attention, even if that lasted only a second. He disappeared quickly, and a few others had followed him into a bedroom. They didn't reappear for the rest of the night, but she knew what went on in there.

How can you dance with a head full of shit? You can't, came the answer, and dance is what she did: The Who's *Live at Leeds,* The Doors *LA Woman* and a bit of Bob Marley *Live*, The Rolling Stones *Let it Bleed, Sticky Fingers* and *Exile on Main Street,* and her favourites, *Led Zeppelin II, III* and *IV*. She and Dave and Woody were gonna get a band together. She was gonna sing and play percussion. Get a tambourine, man, Woody had said to her. He called everybody man, even the girls. She loved Woody; he was kind and gentle in a spaced out sort of way, always giggling, but it was Dave who stole her heart. Close to dawn he took her into his room and loved her like the wild boy he was and later played her a near perfect version of 'Stairway to Heaven' on his acoustic. She had climbed through her bedroom window and into bed just as her parents began stirring.

It was Saturday morning, but it felt like a Sunday what with all the jobs done. Her brother played football in the afternoon and his morning would be spent out in the home-made gym her dad had set up for him, warming him up, firing him up, for the big match. She almost felt sorry for him. Was she the only one who could notice

the look of fear in his eyes as he headed out the back door with his dad's arm around his shoulder? He'd been chosen to play for the Port Adelaide Under 16s; the Colts, they were called. Her dad had visions of him donning the famous black and white lace up guernsey of the Magpies and becoming another Fos Williams or even Johnny Cahill. But she knew her brother had visions of himself playing electric guitar in a blues rock band. They'd jammed a couple of times, him playing, her singing. The desire to make music was strong, but this was the 70s, and everyone wanted to be a rock star.

'Coming to the game, love?' her mum enquired hopefully.

'Can't, mum, sorry. Got lots to do and Lucy's invited me and Wanda to sleep over. Is that okay?'

'Sure. You had a quiet night last night, you deserve a bit of fun.'

She hated lying. She wanted to tell her all about Dave and his guitar playing and his kissing. She wanted to tell her about the boy who makes her ache with longing and ask her if that was how it was with her dad. She wanted to, but she couldn't, because her mum would then have to tell her dad and that would be that. She had loved his big working man's hands, loved his easy smile, but her brother had all the focus now.

'On the road again,' she said as she got up from the breakfast table.

'What was that, honey?' said her mum absently.

'Nothin.'

She went back to her room and shut the door gently behind her. Her room had become like a cell. She looked beyond the now chocolate brown slatted doors of her wardrobe and remembered when they were white, all white, with painted metal handles. The once pale blue walls, now orange and gold, cried out behind their covering. She dreamt of the home she would have, all to herself, all white and pure,

but for now the orange and gold walls closed in. She picked up her guitar and heard the deep hum from the top G as she grasped the neck. She rested the polished walnut body on her knee, always astounded at the perfect curve of the bottom bowl and began to pick out some notes. It's so easy to put on a record and be carried away with the emotion, harder to concentrate on fingering and strumming. Some play, some listen. Both are as important as each other. She started to sing and her strumming intensified. 'Listening to you, I get the music, gazing at you, I get the heat, following you, I climb the mountain, I get excitement at your feet ...' Fucking cool she smiled to herself, fucking cool. She gently leant her guitar back against the wall, grabbed her black velvet bag and opened the door. She was gonna do it. She was gonna sing. If she took just one step outside of this room there would be no turning back. She took the step.

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‘When the levee breaks mama you got to move’ (Led Zeppelin 1971)

She’d done it before, it wasn’t hard. Walking into the Port along Victoria Road, one straight line, one foot in front of the other, the noise of the traffic kept her safe. The side streets beckoned as they had done once before, their emptiness hiding the menace behind, but not this time. One, two, one, two, three, four ... one, two, one, two, three, four ... eyes straight ahead; she wouldn’t be enticed to stray off the path, no not this time. As she stepped out her comfortable rhythm, the memory of that quiet Sunday afternoon when her world changed forever forced itself into her consciousness.

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Enclosed in her self protecting bubble, all she hears is the echo of her footsteps. Her swinging arms keep the beat, as she makes sure she doesn’t step on the cracks. It is a late Sunday afternoon, no one on the streets. The grey pavement stretches on for miles, as does the matching grey boxes that pass for houses, like oversized Lego blocks of cement, small gaps for windows, cartoonish front doors. Nothing and no one stirs. It is as if she’s walked on to a movie set, incredibly real but only a façade. A rusty tin trike left in the front yard, empty crumbling flowerpots, letter boxes tumbling over. She has no connection with this make believe world. Her existence begins and ends in her head. Her body is a metronome, one... two, one two three four, one... two, one two three four.

A voice bounces off the bubble that surrounds her, ‘Hey, Mandy’, it says. It tries again, but she is oblivious. Touch is the only way to break through. She

responds to the electric surge as she feels a hand on her arm. The rhythm stops, the bubble has burst, her protection has gone. 'Hey, Lee,' she says. He is a boy from her older brother's class at school. His long greasy straw-coloured hair hangs in his face, and his dirty black t-shirt and Levis hang on his skinny frame. His golden skin, clammy from sweat, covers his bones tight, like cling film. He is the boy of her dreams, he is her nightmare. 'Come in for a minute,' he says and as she follows him inside, like automatic doors closing, the bubble re-forms, she is there, but she is not. She moves slowly, trailing behind him, as if encased in a diving bell. Her purposeful rhythm has vanished as she floats effortlessly forward.

Inside the cement box the block structure continues. The same roughly-hewn walls give the feeling of being inside a cave. The sunlight streams through a small window casting his shadow above the unmade bed he is sitting on, beckoning her to join him. She is enthralled by the shadow, like Plato's cave dwellers. He is her rocking horse hero. 'Come over here,' he says, and she obeys.

His body is strong and smooth, slippery and sleek, in his cling film protection. She is like a deep sea diver. He reels her in, slowly but surely. She floats towards him, while mentally she stays behind, safe inside her breathing apparatus. She watches herself being undressed. She sees his small penis protruding from the safety of his plastic skin, pink and clean, like a freshly healed wound. Then nothing, just blackness, as if the lights have gone out, as if a shadow has passed in front of her diving bell view-hole. She counts softly to herself, one ... two ... one, two, three four, one ... two, one, two, three, four. As she adjusts to the lack of light, slowly an image begins to emerge. The whiteness of the rocking horse releases slowly into the space.

She is four years old. The shed is dark, except for the ray of shimmering sunlight pouring through the cracked window, like in the picture of Jesus she has sticky-taped to the wall above her bed. The light streams from his radiating heart, out to her, always to her, filling her up with his golden love. The rocking horse is smiling, its huge white teeth framed in red lips, grinning seductively. She climbs onto its smooth, shiny back, places her small sandalled feet into the stirrups and grabs on to its coarse, straw-like mane. Slowly, rhythmically, she starts to move. She is riding the rocking horse, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, one ... two ... one, two, three, four, one ... two, one, two, three, four. She is alive, she is full, her blood ebbs and flows with each beat, with each movement. The joy is overpowering, she could ride on forever, her mind clear, the only sound she hears is the whoosh of her blood as it fills and then dissipates within her body in time with her rocking. She has found it, the reason we are here. Life is a heart beat, no more no less, one beat and then another, one foot in front of the other. She was born to it, we all are.

She awakes from her memory. A voice is calling out to her, 'Mandy.' It is Lee, she is outside again; he is gently rubbing her arm with a piece of broken bottle, affectionately caressing her. He is not finished with her yet. 'Mandy,' he says again. He knows he can do it. She will not stop him. This moment will be forever replayed. Stop me, he will always cry. I dare you, she will always say. 'Tell no one,' he whispers. She looks up into his face and sees, for an instant, the man he will become, the man he is meant to be, haggard and alone. He will remember this moment, just as she will. The desire overwhelms him, as he cuts into her soft yielding flesh and yanks the glass down her forearm, like butchering a carcass. She watches the blood seep and spread. There are no words, there is no pain; the shock is everything. Tell

no one. That's how it will be, she will tell no one. She is walking, one foot in front of the other, one ... two, one, two, three, four, one ... two, one, two, three, four.

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She looked down at her arm, hoping the scar would be gone, but it was still there. As she continued walking, cars hurtled past, honking and waving. 'Get a job' came the cry from a souped up Ford. Walk on, she told herself and counted out the beat. She saw the Birkenhead Bridge in the distance, not far to go ... one ... two, one, two, three, four.

'Hi, Mike,' she said as she entered the music store.

'Hi, Mandy. You walk in?'

'Yeah, always walkin'.'

'You alright?'

'Yeah, I'm alright. Got any tambourines, Mike?

'You joinin' the Salvos, girl?'

They both laughed.

'Mum wanted me to once, but I just couldn't go for those streamers you know.'

They laughed again. She remembered her mum's desperate pleading for her to join the local chapter. Sue's daughter's in it, darling. She's so lovely, and you used to love Jesus so, remember? Yeah, she remembered. But her pin-up Jesus had made way for David Bowie and Mark Bolan.

'Dave and Woody have started a band and they've asked me to sing back up,' she said proudly. 'First practice today and we're playing tonight at Lucy's. '

'Didn't know you could sing.'

'No, me neither. But I'm gonna find out.'

'You go, girl,' he said as he reached up on the wall behind him and brought down a tambourine for her inspection.

'This is the real thing, not one of them toys. Got real skin and everything.'

'Great, thanks Mike, sounds ... well very tambouriny,' as she gave it a shake and felt the tightness of the skin as her hand bounced off it.

'Yeah, very tambouriny. You got a way with words,' he said and they laughed again.

'So how much?' She asked, as she fingered the ten dollar note in her pocket.

'Let's call it an investment in local musical talent. Just remember to put my name on the door when you play at The Pier.'

'Cool,' she said.

She put the tambourine into her bag and headed for the door.

'Thanks, Mike,' she said. 'Gotta move.'

'Yeah, the levee's breakin' round here too, sunshine.'

She opened the door and headed back out into the bustling metropolis of Port Adelaide on a Saturday morning. Cars pushed their way around the Black Diamond Corner, shoppers streamed in and out of Woolworths and the Red Spot Bakery, while early drinkers made their way into The Federal to begin a new day. The pace was relentless and for a moment she paused to take it all in. She spotted Christine coming out of The Federal who beckoned to her urgently. Not again, she thought, not today.

'Hi, Mandy, what you been buying in Mike's? Don't tell me you still got some dole money left. Mine went days ago,' said Christine, eyeing her bag.

'Just a new pick,' she said, as she pushed her bag and the tambourine behind her back and fingered the ten dollar note still in her pocket. She didn't want Christine to know about either of them.

‘Oh, right, okay, cool,’ said Christine. ‘Just lookin’ for Dad. He didn’t come home to the flat last night . Can you come back inside with me? They said he was in a room upstairs but you know how grumpy he is after a bender and I need some money.’

Yeah, she knew. She knew the smell of the front bar: beer, cigarettes, piss and vomit all mingling together rising up out of the worn carpet. The eyes of the early morning drinkers, already half gone, following them hungrily as they climb the stairs. Yeah, she knew. The sight of Christine’s dad sprawled across the single bed: piss stained trousers and dirty singlet, thinning hair plastered to his sweat soaked scalp, moaning and half heartedly fighting as Christine rifles his pockets for a few dollars and some small change, while she looks on gagging on the stench. Yeah she knew.

‘Can’t today, Chris, got lots to do, sorry. You’ll be okay, he’s probably asleep anyway, he won’t even know you’re there. Got to go. Seeya,’ she said.

‘Oh, right, okay, cool,’ said Christine. ‘Seeya Mandy.’ But she’s already on the move again, and disappeared into the morning pedestrian traffic, humming to herself as her steps kept the beat, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

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‘No one knows what it’s like
To be the bad man, to be the sad man
Behind blue eyes’ (The Who 1971)

My dad was born in 1931 in the Newcastle suburb of Waratah, New South Wales, the second youngest of five. Mothered by his adoring older sisters and ignored by his war ravaged and absent father, he was a talented runner and was destined to run all his life. The run from the poverty that prevented him from acquiring the running shoes he needed to attend an athletics based high school, from the dreams of being a journalist that so eluded him, and eventually from life itself, dying in 1991 at the age of sixty. To some he was a bad man, to others he was a sad man, to me he was both.

He was a boiler maker by trade but a musician and creative dreamer in his heart and soul. He read voraciously and I don’t think there would have been many, if any, copies of Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* on people’s bookshelves in my suburb of Taperoo in the early seventies. I think that book affected him greatly and confirmed to him his feelings of worthlessness, which he would learn to identify as nihilism, but that only masked his sadness and anger at an unfair world, without the means or the ability to find the deeper joy and contentment that he desired and craved. It was only when he played his mournful tenor sax that he allowed his pain and sorrow to show through.

I would quietly watch him from behind the wrought iron room divider that created a kind of hallway from the front door into the lounge room. He made it with his own hands and it was inlaid with painted tiles of the Waratah flower. I would peek through the gaps and watch and listen. He had a sort of ritual before he started. Everything had to be in its proper place before he could begin. His saxophone,

cleaned and immaculate lay waiting in its velvet case, his music stand at just the right height, his long neck beer bottle and glass, ashtray and cigarettes within arm's reach. After a last drag and a lip moistening long pull on his beer he would be ready. A few scales to begin with, to warm up. When I first started teaching myself the guitar he would say, 'practice your scales, it's all in the scales,' but I disappointed him when I moved on to chords and left my scales behind. He had no time for the modernists who jumped around the melody. He never wavered from the notes he was reading, the melody was everything. His milky eyes would become moist as he struggled with his breath and the reed to hit the lower registers, but the vibrato he created was like a gentle caress, the resonance travelling towards me, through me, and into my heart. With practice over for another day, he would stub his burning cigarette out with the thumb and forefinger of his hard and calloused working man's hands, a feat that would never cease to amaze me, my amazing dad, and head out into his garage, giving me a pat on the head as he went by. I think he knew I watched him, I know he knew; music was our connection and our battlefield.

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‘Standin’ on a hill in the mountain of dreams
Tellin’ myself it’s not as hard, hard, hard as it seems’ (Led Zeppelin 1971)

Walking down St Vincent Street towards Black Diamond Corner, she is jostled by passing pedestrians, seemingly moving in the opposite direction, but momentum pushes her along, always against the flow, always on her own. She reached the corner, the black diamond, like a beacon, commanding the ant-like human traffic making its way around onto Commerical Road. As if in a sped up film, all movement around her was chaotic, ceaseless, but she was quiet, contained, focussed. The tambourine in her bag accompanied her natural rhythm, as she left the hustle and bustle behind and headed down towards the docks. The empty bale houses rose up on either side. The Saturday morning traffic now just a distant hum. She saw Dave’s beat up green VW parked outside one of the bale houses, now a practice space for bands on a budget, but she walked on by for now. I’ll just have a smoke, she assured herself and lit up as she peered down into the insipid liquid that was the Port River. Dilapidated vessels with peeling paint butted gently against the dock wall, creaking and crying out for attention. She found them comforting at this moment and sat down on a bollard to finish her cigarette, contemplating a time when they hadn’t seemed so friendly.

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The girls titter and stumble along the dockside pavement, their high ankle strap wedges clump out a calamitous beat. A black cat sky, smooth and sleek, shrouds the deep water of the harbour, the girls’ relentless chatter muffled against the heavy night air. Christine, with eyes and hair the colour of chocolate, leads the way. Lucy and Sue, sisters, conspire in whispers, their long jet black braids, like black ribbons, swing

in unison. She and Wanda laugh the loudest, for they are plain with nothing to hide and nothing to lose, while Maureen, hazel eyes, honey brown hair, a paler and softer version of her sister Christine, but no less vicious, brings up the rear. They suddenly quiet down and find some composure as the inky black oiliness that is China Mick appears from the shadows.

Maureen coils herself around Mick's hard-as-rock body, whispering her well practiced endearments into his ear. She looks back at all of us, smiling the smile that we all long for. He slowly uncoils her arms from around his neck, and gives her that this-is-business look. Confused but unperturbed, she stands aside and awaits instructions. Her power, as fragile as the silk fabric of the op shop dress that clings to her legs like water. 'Hi girls,' he says, turning on the charm, 'glad you could make it.' The anticipation is killing us. Will they all look like Mick, we wonder as he directs us towards the gang plank of a brightly lit barge moored further up the dock. We follow like sheep, even Maureen a few paces behind him. Our laughter has dissipated as we quietly convince ourselves we are sophisticated women. He tells us to wait as he steps up the gang plank. We hear muffled conversation, short and sharp, like rapid fire, then laughter as Mick returns shoving something paper-like into his tight jeans pocket. 'It's all set girls, a little party for some travelling sailors, just be nice and you'll be fine.' He steps aside and with a wave of his arm, directs us to climb the gang plank. He kisses Maureen on the mouth, whispers into her ear and disappears back into the shadows. Maureen, still looking a little confused, steels herself and is the first to step up. Christine follows quickly, suddenly not wanting to let her sister out of her sight. Lucy and Sue, still whispering, like Siamese twins joined at the hip, are next. She and Wanda give each other a smile and follow. The heavy night air closes around

them, like a giant black hand gently nudging them forward. Staccato voices and Christine's shrill laugh break the silence.

Inside the barge the bright lights almost blind them as they leave the velvety blackness behind. Talk, laughter, glasses clinking as introductions are made and allegiances forged. Maureen holds court, like a mediaeval princess. We watch in awe and wonder as she acts out her part perfectly. Lucy and Sue, both small and dark-haired, ease into a conversation with two eager young sailors, while Christine, basking in the light of her sisters' charms, finds her confidence and starts telling jokes. They are the perfect tag team, as they keep the men enthralled but at a distance. She and Wanda, the wallflowers, are happy to observe for the moment, sipping the strong liquor they have been encouraged to drink, and are soon joined by two older men. The girls all catch each other's eyes now and then. Be nice and you'll be fine, be nice and you'll be fine. The words echo in each of their heads. 'You like?' the old sailor asks her, his crooked and yellowing teeth displayed in his smile as she nods yes. 'You want more?' he asks as she nods yes again. Be nice and you'll be fine, be nice and you'll be fine. Why is she here? She doesn't belong here. She starts to feel sick as the thick syrupy drink works its magic. She wants to lie down and leans against Wanda. Maureen shoots her an icy stare. She feels threatened, she feels unsafe, but the others continue their party talk, like actresses playing their part. She gets up to leave but the old sailor grabs her arm. 'You stay,' he commands, but she can't, she has to get out of there, now, right now. She pushes past the others, still laughing and talking and stumbles back down the gang plank. She hears Wanda call out to her, but she doesn't stop. She doesn't stop, almost running now through the menacing dark side streets of old Port Adelaide, her high ankle strap wedges, suddenly more a hindrance than an enticement, slow her down. She doesn't stop

until she reaches the bright lights of St Vincent Street. Thankfully the Osborne bus has just pulled in and she climbs aboard. People stare at her, at the stupid shoe string strap dress that she felt so beautiful in, at the black lace shawl that she felt so sophisticated in. She just wants the safety of her quiet golden room. She settles back into the vinyl seat and looks out the window as the bus heads down Victoria Road and home.

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She took a last drag on her cigarette and flicked it into the river still feeling the fear and panic that overtook her that night. The girls had laughed at her, said she'd missed out and that China Mick wasn't happy. The next time she saw China Mick he only smiled and winked at her and her heart jumped as always. Danger is an enticement all its own, and he knows it's hard to resist, that's his power, but she would, she would resist. She made her way back through the now quiet and friendly streets towards Dave's car. She listened to her tambourine calling out to her. Don't forget. She kept the beat, one ... two ... one, two, three, four. Taking one last deep breath to settle her nerves, she pushed the rusty metal door of the bale house open and stepped inside.

'Hey, man,' Woody greeted her, friendly as ever. She relaxed a little and loosened her grip slightly on her precious bag. Late morning sun streamed in through the huge dirty windows of the church like building, bathing Dave in its golden light. He didn't look up, engrossed in perfecting some guitar solo. She recognised the notes as he played the intro of 'Gimme Shelter' and her skin tingled.

Hours of practising the backup vocals, hair brush in hand, had come to this. Dave looked up but didn't acknowledge her, and instead called out to Woody.

'Hey, Woodman, let's do this.' Woody ambled over towards his kit throwing Dave a look and nodded in her direction.

'Hey,' he said, 'you ready?' She nodded, words escaping her for the moment. Is she ready? She'd talked herself up and now she had to deliver. She put her bag down on the floor and brought out the tambourine.

'Cool,' Woody exclaimed, 'more percussion.' Dave just smiled while Woody started up a prowling, rolling drum beat and she took her place behind the mike. Woody's rhythm worked its magic and she began to relax. Her wrist loosened as the tambourine became an extension of her and kept time with Woody. Dave started his intro again, coming in at just the right moment, and gave her the nod to commence one of the most celebrated and recognisable female backup performances of all time, no pressure. She puckered her lips and started the descending three oohs that form the opening backup. But there was something wrong. The sound coming through the amp wasn't right, and she knew it was her.

'Let's try it again,' Dave said and off they went once more. As Woody prowled and Dave strummed the infectious intro she opened her mouth, but the magic faded. She looked at Dave and he shook his head.

'I thought you said you could sing,' he taunted.

'She's almost got it, Dave,' Woody said, forever optimistic, but almost wasn't good enough for Dave.

'Sorry,' she whispered, tears in her eyes. Dave looked at her and she knew she'd lost more than just a chance to sing. She put her tambourine back in her bag and turned to go.

’Hey, come tonight anyway. You play a mean tambourine,’ Woody called out. Dave didn’t say anything, lost in his own thoughts of fame and failure.

‘Sorry, Dave,’ she tried again.

‘Yeah, whatever,’ he replied.

‘What about Sandy, I know Sandy can do it,’ she heard Dave say to Woody. Stepping back out into the street she slipped on her sunglasses and headed back towards Commercial Road and another Saturday afternoon on the Peninsula.

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‘Well I am just a monkey man,
I’m glad you are a monkey woman too.’ (Rolling Stones 1969)

‘You’re only here because I love your mother,’ my father told me one day. I innocently accepted these words as a child, they came from my amazing dad after all and he should know. It was only as I got older that the true implications of this statement became apparent. I discovered that not all fathers thought this way, let alone tell their daughters. Just as I discovered that not all fathers walk around the house naked, that not all fathers grab their mother’s breast in a family photo and not all fathers refuse to speak at their daughter’s wedding because, to quote him, ‘What can I say about you, what have you done?’ Once again I accepted this statement as fact. As a child, innocently growing and learning, the sexual tensions and messages of disappointment and alienation infusing my early years were simply just my family.

Other families, I discovered, would have get togethers on the beach and at each others houses regularly. With my father coming from Newcastle and my mother’s only brother living in Queensland, not to mention her estrangement for a time from her own mother, we would often, but not that often, jump into Dad’s mint green FJ Holden and drive. Always looking, it seemed, for a secluded spot away from prying eyes we would end up skinny dipping in some lagoon or secluded beach. This was what all families did I thought on hot Sunday afternoons. Sunday dinner on these hot days often consisted of my mum’s famous salad sandwiches, four inches high with the lot, including beetroot. My mum still makes a mean salad sandwich and has only recently started to understand the legacy of her husband’s love and need for her and her only. He was the king, she was the queen, and my brother and I stumbled through the seventies, rejected for the prince and princess that we had failed to

become, finding solace in the music that defined our generation. We were an unhappy family in our own way. We just didn't know it.

***

‘Tangerine, tangerine,
Living reflection from a dream’ (Led Zeppelin 1970)

As she made her way back to Commercial Road, the once busy thoroughfare with its bustling pedestrians and streaming traffic seemed like a ghost town. It was midday and the shops had shut. Her tambourine still jingled in her bag but she didn’t hear, she was numb to its song as she stumbled along, her rhythm and momentum gone. She paused hopefully outside Mike’s shop, but the door had a closed sign up. She turned right towards the Birkenhead Bridge and home, hesitating for a second when the crossing lights started flashing and the boom gate lowered. The bridge was starting to open to let some tiny vessel with an out of proportion mast pass through. The two halves of the massive steel and concrete structure slowly separated, and she followed their gradual movement, as the once seemingly curved forms became straight. Turning back towards Commercial Road, she looked for somewhere to sit and light up. She saw a bench in the church grounds ahead of her and finally collapsed on to the hard but welcome seat. Leaning back, she felt her body relaxing, as she breathed in the nicotine and closed her eyes.

Dreams invade her thoughts, their clarity mingles with the reality of her morning. Like voices in the distance, they break through the fog of her jumbled reasoning, their messages relentless and defined. She is a participant in this dream world of hers, unlike seeming reality where she is the observer, removed, safe behind the wall she has built. In dreams she is there, open to experience, open to the messages, that is the exhilaration and the danger. She is a baby lying in her cot, darkness surrounds her, she cries out. The door of her room opens and a huge figure, silhouetted by the light from the hallway, looms large and menacing. The figure moves towards her, and she cries out again. As the figure gets closer her cries get

louder and more insistent. She is a baby, she has no language. She keeps crying. She sees the massive hand rise up, and feels the pain as it comes down and connects with her body. The figure leaves, closing the door and she is in darkness once more. She will never cry out again. Is this a dream or a memory, she's still not sure. Only the pain is real.

She feels the warm afternoon air on her skin like a breath, as it rustles through the leaves of the tree above. She opens her eyes but is unable to move, her body is heavy, still frozen in that moment of fear and supplication. The door of the church is ajar and she hears the sound of a choir as they practice. Their voices, soft and sweet, reach out to her, lifting her up out of her heaviness. As she listens her limbs soften, she feels the blood rushing through her body, tingling her skin, coming alive. She wants to join them, be a part of their world but a gust of wind suddenly slams the church door shut. Their voices disappear leaving behind only a trace of possibility. But that is enough. She stands up, stubs out her cigarette and is on the move again, humming softly to herself. The bridge is closed once more, the heavenly finger pointing the way. She takes a step and then another, keeping the beat, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

***

‘We are gonna dance and sing in celebration,
we are in the promised land’ (Led Zeppelin 1970)

My dad loved music, sport, making things, gadgets and celebrations. A typical list of loves for a man no doubt, but my dad was far from typical. He had a set of red bongo drums which he would play to the beat in his head, his man medallion swinging in time around his turtle sweatered neck; he was Maynard G Krebs incarnate. After work, changing out of his oil stained boiler suit, he would don his beatnik outfit and tap a while before making dinner. My mum worked in an office and didn’t get home till later, so he would ‘get the dinner on’, devising a scheme that Jamie Oliver would be proud of. To keep everything warm he would wrap each of our meat and three veg in separate foil parcels, carefully folding the edges, like wrapping a present and all Mum had to do was plate them up: home made take away. I think he got the idea from the TV dinners we would sometimes have, their little foil compartments separating each portion appealed to his sense of order. He was a meticulous man; if you were going to do something you may as well do it right was his motto. We all had our jobs and his was cleaning the bathroom. Like everything he did, he was thorough although unusual. Our bathroom was situated in the middle of the house, as if they had built the house around it. He would thread the garden hose through the back door and into the push out window of the bathroom that opened out on to a window lined hall. That’s how he cleaned the bathroom, with a garden hose. Maybe it had something to do with water pressure, maybe the water pressure in the bathroom wasn’t quite good enough to wash down the tiles, but that’s how he did it. Like everything else, I thought that’s how all dads did it, not knowing that most dads wouldn’t even attempt it, let alone use a garden hose.

He built a lined brick garage with his own hands. Not a mean feat owing to the sloping back yard which meant he had to first lay a raised cement slab. Later came the covered pergola and timber decking, all meticulously measured, and planned out in his neat capital letter handwriting. I never once saw a tradesman at our house; he did it all, on his own, the way he liked it. My mum's more free and easy style of housekeeping must have driven him mad, but not withstanding cooking dinner and cleaning the bathroom, his domain was outside and hers was inside and it all seemed to work that way.

We were one of the first houses in our street to have a TV. Not to mention we were one of the first houses, if the only house, to have a movie projector and a reel to reel tape recorder. He loved these new gadgets: home entertainment at its best. Then came the Polaroid instant camera, peeling the negative away from the positive always filled me with a sense of wonder and anticipation as the image assembled itself in front of our eyes like magic. As the emulsion corrodes over time, these pictures take on that psychedelic look which is pure seventies and never ceases to take me back to that house full of gadgets and an unspoken desire to be different, to be special.

Awaking one birthday morning, I was surprised to see not the expected presents waiting for me at the breakfast table but instead a little message lying on my plate. Look in the bathroom it said, so off I went excitedly to discover another little message sitting in the bathtub. Look in the laundry it said, so off I went again, the excitement and anticipation starting to build. In the laundry sink was another one, look under your bed said this one. By now I was practically beside myself, my dad following behind me, giggling like a school girl. On hands and knees lifting up the

cotton bedspread that hung down on either side of my bed, there they were, two perfectly wrapped presents, sitting amongst the dust and debris. Dragging them out, I knew what they were, my dad leaning against the door frame, a huge smile on his face, as he watched me unwrap the two books he had got, *Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes* and *A Children's Garden of Verse*. I loved those books, big colour illustrations, thick shiny pages. They were my first books and instilled in me a love of, not only words and stories, but books as objects. I still get excited opening the first pages of a new book and find it hard to part with them once they are mine. Words and music were our drug of choice, and my dad and I were both addicted.

***

‘People try to put us down,
Just because we get around’ (The Who 1965)

On the move again, she wondered where to head for next. Not Lucy’s just yet, she couldn’t face the questions and the fake sympathy. Wanda’s was on the way, maybe she’d be home, her Polish dad always ready with a drink and something to eat. Wanda was really Sue’s friend, a couple of years older than her, but there was a connection between them: their love of music, although not the same, just as intense. They would sit in their rooms together, either at her house or Wanda’s and discuss the merits of Wanda’s hero Freddy Mercury against her hero Neil Young. But he can’t sing was always Wanda’s argument. He sounds like he’s whining not singing she would say, knowing it would get her going. He’s singing from the heart, his voice is pure emotion, she would cry, laughing, as no one ever won the argument, It was just fun trying to convince the other with the passion that each one felt for their chosen god.

She remembered the first time she met Wanda. It was also the first time she had taken Mandrax. One of those wild nights that just happen, everyone in a good mood, the six of them in Maureen’s big bed, the heat emanating from their bodies so intense it caused the goose feather quilt to hover over them as the heat within the quilt rose and the speed did its work. It was a joy and camaraderie she was never to really feel as intensely again. For that one night Maureen and Christine forgot about the reality of their hopelessly alcoholic father, Sue and Lucy lost in their dreams of a better life off the Peninsula, and she and Wanda, finding a solace in each other, an unspoken connection between two unattractive outsiders who finally found somewhere to belong. Wanda was the only one of them who had a license and a car. As she drove them all home in pouring rain with only one windscreen wiper working,

luckily the driver's side, the world wasn't necessarily at their feet, it was just put aside for a while. She smiled to herself, remembering that night when they had become a family, just as dysfunctional as any related one, but a family just the same as she continued her steady pace, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

***

Once upon a time there was a little girl who loved horses, and an old man who also loved horses and loved the little girl. One morning the old man awoke suddenly, sensing danger. Like his horses rustling in their stables, he was restless and agitated. The leaves in the gum trees swirled chaotically, all of nature was on high alert. As he made a fire to boil his morning billy, a flock of gulls soared overhead, out over the mangroves and the sand dunes towards the sea, screeching their early morning warning. The air tingled with anticipation, but of what no one was sure. He took his billy tea to the stables, the steam warming his face as he soothed the fretful beasts. They immediately quietened down as he gently stroked each one in turn.

The little girl awoke, in the half dream state that she loved. She could still feel the air separating, like diaphanous curtains, as she rode her magnificent steed through the vaporous canopy of the sky. Her horse's wings stretched out on either side, keeping them airborne. As the reality of her day gradually took hold, she could still feel herself, she could see herself, riding off into the distance, but she would return, on another night, when her dreams and visions spoke softly to her of freedom and safety. She quickly dressed and padded down the silent hall to the unlatched back door. She could hear her parents' gentle breathing coming from their open bedroom as she passed. They had forbidden her to visit the old man. He's a black

fella they tried to explain, we don't understand his ways, and anything they didn't understand was automatically dangerous to them. But she knew, from the moment she entered the clearing and saw his shanty and stables of gently whinnying horses, from the moment she had looked into those dark shining eyes, that he was her protector, her guardian. She set off down the dusty track that began at the end of her parents' cultivated garden. The rusty wrought iron gate that separated civilisation from chaos closed softly behind her. The eucalypts soared upwards on either side, as the magpies warbled their morning greeting. She didn't notice the rheumy eyes following her, had been waiting for her, as they had followed her before and knew she would be visiting the old man today. His practiced and silent footfall fell in step with hers as he shadowed her down the track.

After his initial soothing, the old man could feel the horses becoming agitated again. Like the second sight that animals have of sensing danger, he too could sense the heaviness of evil lurking somewhere out there beyond the clearing. He knew she would be innocently making her way down the track, stopping to look at some creature or plant that took her interest, to try and remember the things he had taught her about the bush. In his mind's eye, he could see her, her small steps making no impression but he could also see the shadow moving through the eucalypts and he knew what he had to do. Mounting his fastest horse, its black coat bristling with the excitement of a gallop, he thundered down the path, dust rising as flocks of galahs, interrupted in their morning fossicking, took to the sky. She could hear him coming before she could see him. The sound of the horse's hooves drowning out the menacing crack of foot on the dried detritus of the bush floor, as the rheumy eyes came ever closer. As the old man exploded out of the rising dust, she saw him coming towards her and smiled, wondering how he had known she was coming, but he didn't

smile back, just kept his dark shining eyes on her, calling out her name. The rheumy eyes retreated back into the undergrowth as the old man finally came to a halt before her. 'It's not safe today. I will take you home,' the old man said. She didn't protest, she trusted him, as he reached down and pulled her up on to the horse's back, settling her in front of him and letting her hold the reins. They trotted back up the path towards her parents' house, she marvelling once again at the feeling of floating sitting atop the black horse, he searching around for shadows. They dismounted and after whispering something into the horse's ear and letting her stroke its broad nose, he followed her through the wrought iron gate and up through her parents' garden to the back door and knocked. 'It's not safe today. Keep her home,' was all he said as he gently guided her into the arms of her waiting mother, turned and walked back down through the garden to the patiently waiting black horse. The little girl was never allowed to venture down the path to the clearing again. At first angry at her parents for their misunderstanding, as she grew older and child-like thoughts and dreams slowly withdrew from her consciousness, she began to forget the old man and his horses, until finally they almost became a dream themselves.

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She was content for the moment as she walked on, smiling at that crazy ride home with Wanda. Her steps tapped out their ceaseless rhythm. She heard a gull call out and her gaze was drawn upwards as she watched it disappear beyond the horizon. The sun was high, but friendly; clouds moved across her field of vision, on their own ceaseless cycle, like horses she thought, they looked like horses, and she remembered a dream from long ago about freedom and flying, about danger and safety. She remembered the horse that grazed in the paddock, only three doors down from her

own house. As a child she used to feed it apples and pet its broad nose, but one day it bit her and she ran home crying. She was never allowed to feed it again. It disappeared one day, just like that, or had she just forgotten it. The sun's glare became too much and her eyes assumed their customary gaze downward, watching her steps, not looking left, not looking right, avoiding the cracks, one ... two ... one, two, three, four. Soft black eyes watched her as she moved on.

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‘My love is vengeance
That’s never free’ (The Who 1971)

What had made my dad so distrustful I will never really know. I can only guess that his experience of being the first born son of an Anzac veteran, prone to alcoholism and gambling as a result of his war years, must have played a part. What must it have felt like for him, watching his father drink away the rent money week after week, watching his mother, in the midst of trying to bring up five children on the small amount of housekeeping she was given, always smiling? Did he learn from his experience that people pretend: say one thing and do another? Was he always looking for the hidden dark side that he knew harboured in everyone? Was it his own dark side that he projected on to others? My dad was a distrustful man; strangers, friends, even his own wife, were subject to his paranoia. Maybe it was just his overwhelming sense of love and protectiveness towards his family that spawned these outbursts. I will never know. Doctors, insurance salesmen and preachers seemed to be the big ones on his list. In his mind, these benevolent characters, offering peace and protection, were really only in it for the money. When I was five a bad cold turned into pneumonia and my mum had to take time off work as I had been admitted into hospital. They needed money. My dad wanted to cash in an insurance policy they had been paying into, but because of an early cancellation of the policy, the dividend he got back was a quarter of what they had paid. My mum had to restrain him from climbing over the insurance salesman’s desk and throttling him. He took what they offered and never paid into an insurance policy again. By the time I was eleven, his distrust of officialdom had well and truly set in, unfortunately to the detriment of his family by this time. I broke my leg, falling off my brother’s heavy old iron bike, and after a week of making me try to walk on it he conceded a visit to the doctor was called for. An x-ray showed a fractured tibia and resulted in a plaster cast

from ankle to thigh. I can only assume his guilt over this was too much for him to bear, although it was never talked about, and when it came time for the plaster to come off, and he noticed my strange way of walking, it was back to the daily tirades of 'walk on it properly' until I finally did.

When I was younger, Sunday School was out of the question in my house, but at age thirteen I had joined a church basketball team and desperately wanted to go on the annual Hills camp. He relented, but after receiving information that I had been caught smoking on camp, his fears were confirmed; the church were the culprits. Letting his only daughter be exposed to such corruption only cemented his distrust and contempt for the clergy.

So, the man that brought me home, carrying me in his arms when I had broken my leg, was abused because my dad thought he had run me down in his fancy car, or the time my mum got an anonymous Valentine's Day card, an obvious joke by friends from his work, and mum got the third degree, or when he accused his best friend, younger than himself, of trying to seduce his fourteen year old daughter, only convinced him even more of the hidden agendas of the world; it was out to get him in some way. He became a joke in our neighbourhood, but my mum stood by him, still loving and understanding the lonely, hurt and disappointed man he had become. But my teenage self despised him, hated him, yet somehow was always still looking for his approval. His sax playing became more mournful, his desire to live became less fervent. As my light began to shine, his was dimming. He was my dad; that hearty laugh of his, those big hands that caressed my face all night when I was in agony over my broken leg, feeding me lollies like a smiling assassin, all were directed towards my

brother now. Virginia Woolf said she only ever became totally free when her father died. My dad was still living, but my freedom was nigh.

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‘You gotta move, you gotta move,
You gotta move chile, you gotta move.
Oh when the Lord gets ready
You gotta move (Rolling Stones, 1971)

She fingered the piece of scrap paper in her pocket, now torn and frayed from constant handling. She sang softly to herself, ‘Well this coat is torn and frayed, it’s seen much better days, but as long as the guitar plays, it will steal your heart away.’ ‘Ain’t that the truth,’ she muttered quietly. She didn’t think she would use it; she hoped she didn’t need it, but after the band debacle today it was all she had left. She stopped her steady pace; Wanda’s could wait, and instead of turning right on to Fletcher Road, she continued on, down into old Semaphore and the dilapidated church that might be her saviour. She read the note again, Choir Auditions, every Saturday Afternoon. Moira had told her you could learn to sing there, just rock up and audition. She’d slipped the song sheet into her bag, just in case. She’d been practising it on and off, like a dirty secret: Elton John’s ‘Your Song’. She’d imagined Dave singing it to her one day, or maybe it was just the sentiment. For someone to write a song for her, just for her. The melancholia of ‘Torn and Frayed’ gave way to the sweetness of Bernie Taupin’s words as she made her way down Semaphore Road, past the op shop, laundromat and delicatessen. She knew the words off by heart; ‘It’s a little bit funny, this feeling inside, I’m not one of these who can easily hide, I don’t have much money, but boy if I did, I’d buy a big house where we both could live.’ She continued rehearsing in her head, her pace slowing to match the beat, and finally stopped in front of cement steps that led up to a heavy wooden door, closed but not locked. She paused, then pushed it open.

As the massive door moved aside, she stepped over the threshold, and her eyes were immediately drawn to the stain glass windows that rose up from behind the altar and the soft afternoon light filtering through them. All was quiet, peaceful, and she paused for a moment, in awe of the colour that bathed the room.

'Can I help you, my child?'

She muttered something about a choir audition, and stared down at her feet, still clutching her velvet bag and the precious tambourine hidden within.

'Ah, a newcomer. Welcome.'

She followed the priest as he led her past the worn pews and into a small ante-room where a burning two-bar electric heater and stool were dwarfed by an immense piano.

'They said I could learn to sing here,' she said.

'We can all sing my child, we just have to believe in ourselves. Now what would you like to sing?'

She reached into her bag, and pulled out the folded sheet music.

'Ah, a pretty song.' The priest sat down on the small stool and placed the music in front of him, smoothing its creases with his stubby fingers. He immediately began to play the opening bars, dee, de dee de dee, dee de dee de dee, dee, de dee de dee, dum. The tone of the piano, like his fingering, was lacy and delicate.

'Ready when you are, my dear.' He began the opening again.

She took a deep breath and came in exactly right, 'It's a little bit funny, this feeling inside. I'm not one of those who can easily hide,' and she was off, eyes closed, feeling the music and the lyrics. Her lower register vibrated through the first verse before she lost it to a higher key in the chorus where her voice began to weaken. She continued on through all the verses; her weak soprano strained with feeling on the last chorus and returned to its more comfortable contralto to finish. Enjoying

himself, the priest finished with a closing dee de dee, dee de dee, and the final dum reverberated in the small room.

'Ah a very pretty song,' he repeated again. 'But you weren't singing the notes, my dear.'

'But I thought ...' she stammered.

'I can teach you choral singing, my dear, but you need to learn the notes first. You have a pretty voice, but it's a bit weak in the high register, I don't think our choir can use you at this time, but please try again, won't you?' She is dumfounded but managed a thank you as the priest returned the sheet music to her which she stuffed back into her bag.

'But I believe I can sing, I really do,' she tried again.

'I know, my child. We can all sing, we just have to find our own voice. She turned and headed for the door, her footfall reverberating on the dusty wooden floor. She wrapped her cheesecloth jacket tighter around her, and hurried down the cement steps and back on to Semaphore Road, falling into her regular rhythm, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

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‘There is a train that leaves the station heading for your destination,
But the price you pay to nowhere has increased a dollar more.’
(Led Zeppelin, 1970)

She made her way past the dilapidated shop fronts of Semaphore Road. Passing an already full rubbish bin, she pulled the once much loved sheet music from her bag and along with the scribbled note from Moira, pushed them deep into the overflowing receptacle. Along with her pain, she pushed them in, until she was up to her elbow in rubbish. She pulled her hand free, suddenly repelled by the unknown detritus lying within. Baby she whispered. But which way to go, deeper into the shit, the dirty and unknown, or safe, clean and boring, she asked herself. She knew the answer. She looked down a side street: empty, grey, anonymous. She stumbled; her rhythm was broken. She looked to the left; the emptiness beckoned, all fluidity was gone. She looked down at the cracked pavement. The cracks became chasms. She was drawn in, drawn down, into the well, into the well worn path that she had trod before. She played that childhood game. I will not step on the cracks she decided. Her rhythm, that safe one two three four disappeared. She is dancing over the pavement; do not step on the cracks is her only rule. She disappears into herself, but away from herself at the same time. She sits above it all; the pain, the rejection, is hers, but not hers. It is comfortable there, but memories, like groping fingers, paw at her comfort. She tries to shrug them off, but the long pointy fingers break through. As she dances over the pavement she tries to observe, just observe, but she slips and falls, into the crevices of memory.

***

She doesn’t know how she got there. School was over for the day. The slow drip of a leaking tap and his heavy breathing resonates around the dirty tiled toilet

block. His hands down her pants are warm and gentle, as he whispers into her ear. You're a hairy one aren't you; hairy and wet, as he pushes his fingers up inside her. He kisses her. His full lips crush her mouth and tongue. His saliva, salty and garlicky, drips down her chin. She doesn't know how she got there. The leaky tap keeps dripping as his breathing becomes heavier. He grabs her small hand and wraps it around his hard penis. He comes immediately; a school boy moan, a cunt on loan. She sees the guilt in his eyes. The guilt, always the guilt that follows, but they harden again. His irises dilate and become cold pin pricks surrounded by gun metal grey. He is back. 'Fuck off slut,' he says as he pushes her away. Her shell is as hard and cold as the red brick she leans against. She reaches down to retrieve her underwear and sees the blood streaming down her leg. She tries to rub it away but it amalgamates with his cum on her hand. 'Slut,' he whispers again as he pushes passed her. She doesn't know how she got there.

The crevices deepen; her legs, like heavy slabs of concrete no longer dance. Each step pulls her further down, down into the mire, down into the mire of memory.

It was the laughter she remembers most, and also the stillness; the crispness of awareness. How did she get there? She hears voices brittle and shrill, each one clear and loud. 'I think she's gonna pass out,' one says. 'Dumb fuck,' another laughs. 'No really, she's had too much.' She stumbles out of the open car door into the black diamond night. It slams shut and roars away. All is still and quiet. The empty silence roars in her head. Her shuffling steps down the driveway thunder and quake. The dark expanse of her backyard mingles with the night sky. She lies down in the black glass coffin; stars twinkle through the opaqueness. The grass, like a bed of nails, pricks and pokes. Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is quiet.

Another memory fights for her attention, clinging to her like mud. They all cling, engulfing her, drowning her. Why couldn't she skate? Roller skate, ice skate, she just couldn't get it. Falling, bumping, wet. Come outside he said; she went. That's a nice necklace. It was a St Christopher medallion her father had given her. On a silver snake chain, the shining St Christopher raised up on a bed of black enamel. It was a nice necklace. Let's swap he said. This means we're together. She unhooked the silver clasp and gave it to him, as he placed his Woolworths bought nickel plated chain and cross around her neck. Why was she there? Why did she give it away so easily? She never saw him or her St Christopher again.

Memories still grasp at her legs like river weed, wrapping and tangling their fronds around her mind. The cracks widen, almost impossible to escape. Shut the door, shut the door, she screams inside, but the door will always remain ajar, a chink of darkness forever ready to envelope her. She continues her game, like a jazz riff, playing over and under the melody; her feet react to the cracks she dodges as she considers her next move. Eventually she decides Wanda's is the go and falls back into her familiar rhythm, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

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‘But my dreams aren’t as empty
As my conscience seems to be.
I have hours only lonely ...’ (The Who, 1971)

My dad once told me there is Literature that is spelled with a capital L. I scoffed in my all knowing, fifteen year old narcissistic way, that literature is literature; what would he know. He bought a gold embossed collection of Shakespeare and the classics from a travelling salesman, which took pride of place on the long narrow shelf that sat above our fifties, vinyl studded fire surround. *Moby Dick*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Lorna Doone*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, and all the rest sat incongruously next to his *The World at War* series and medical encyclopaedias. The pixelated black and white horrors of the war series covers juxtaposed against the red embossed medical books, with their watery red, yellow and blue illustrations of the minutia of the human body. He was fascinated and curious about the world, and like any great autodidact, whenever there was sickness in the family, he would consult his medical books and declare a diagnosis, or he would be found quietly discussing world affairs with his German friends, the Schlagels, at their annual Chistmas Eve party, while others laughed and cracked dirty jokes. My dad was an enigma, to me and to himself, but on clear crisp nights he would beckon to me through the back windows to come outside and look at the sky through his newly acquired telescope, excited and awed by what he could see through the lens, wanting to share it with his equally curious daughter. Being one of the original conspiracy theorists, and with men having just landed on the moon, I think he was looking for the stars and bars flag. ‘From parking inspectors to prime ministers’, the title of his never written book, my dad figured that everyone had something to hide, and I think he may have been on to something. As we looked through the lens and he adjusted it for my little eye, squinting to see what

he saw, he would talk about the craters and their names, but we never saw the longed-for flag.

Our backyard, like my idea of family, was unique in its own way. What goes on behind closed doors, or closed gates, is known only to its occupants. Our backyard, our big backyard, in the early days, was deep with overgrown shrubs and bushes lying in wait for an unsuspecting little girl, whose job it was to take down the rubbish to the incinerator, silently resting by the back fence. Every night I dreaded the call, 'Can you take the rubbish down Mandy?' The path, friendly at first, like walking through a meadow, began to take on a ghoulish countenance. Weeds and tendrils grabbing at my legs; the safe light from the back porch slowly dimming as I started off, walking fast and then eventually running, stopping suddenly and depositing its daily sacrifice, the lid lifted just enough to slide the bag in, like a mouth opening, and then closing with a final snap. I ran all the way back, safe for another night, into the warm glow of the kitchen, panting but relieved that it was over for another day.

On Guy Fawkes night, our backyard turned into a magical stage where watching safely from inside the glassed porch, my mum and I would wait for the penny wheels and sky rockets to ignite, as my dad and brother, the men of the house, would light them up for our amusement and wonder. I couldn't be coaxed outside until the sky was alight with colour and sparks and then, only then, my dad would beckon, entice me with a lighted sparkler. 'Come on love, its safe, this one's for you,' he would tempt, and I couldn't resist. The crackle and sparkle, like a life, burned brightly and then burned out, and became what it was all along, a wire coated in powder. Disappointed but still euphoric, I would crave another, and another, until

for another year, our backyard returned to its original state, just an oblong stretch of grass.

My brother was only eighteen months older than me, but I always felt like an only child. I knew there was a boy who lived in the room at the end of the enclosed porch at the back of our house, but like our relationship, he seemed to live on the other side of my existence, with our adjoining walls our only connection. Like my room that simultaneously adjoined my parents' bedroom on the other side, I felt as if they belonged to only me. But even that belonging was fleeting, as really, they only belonged to each other; their love and desire for one another was an excluded territory. So within our each designated boundaries, physical and emotional, we all lived in close proximity, but worlds apart. Of course this isn't true. We had meals together, played together, but there was a separateness, a difference between us, that was mirrored by the roles my parents adopted. Boy to boy, girl to girl; the men of my house had freedom and presence, while the female element was subservient and protected. When my brother failed at going in tough when it came to his football, my dad told me once he wished my brother had my tenacity. This tenacity, however, would exclude me eventually from his world of subservient women, with my mum advising me that 'one day I will learn to keep quiet.' I never did.

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‘And if you walk you’re gonna get there though it takes a little longer
And when you see it in the distance you will wring your hands and moan.’
(Led Zeppelin, 1970)

Walking back down Semaphore Road through Exeter, towards Birkenhead and Wanda’s, she heard gleeful cries coming from the public pool a couple of blocks away. Another sunny Saturday afternoon, she could imagine skinny and freckly boys and girls splashing and playing in the beautiful blue water. Their little bathers saggy and dripping as they walked quickly, but never running, back around to the diving board and another go at getting their diving just right. She loved that pool when she was younger. She remembered the cacophony of little voices mingling into one loud hum and then disappearing as she dove under the water at the deep end, the bottom seemingly unattainable. It was a quiet world underneath the water where everything moved in slow motion; stick like arms and legs flailing gently beneath the undulating viscous, and then the frantic kicking, exploding through the surface, like breaking the waters into life, the loud hum of the children’s voices once again assaulting her ears in friendly comfort. She also remembered a cold Saturday afternoon spent there, completely alone. She had nagged her dad all morning about going to the pool. He had tried to reason with her; it was too cold, it was going to rain, there would be no one there, but she wouldn’t give up, wouldn’t give in, until finally he bundled her in the car, dropped her off out the front and told her she had to remain at the pool for the whole afternoon session. She spent four hours swimming laps in the freezing water, or bundled up in her towel shivering and goose pimpled, just her and the pool attendant, eating her soggy pasty and waiting for her dad to pick her up. As she climbed into the warm front seat, her dad never said a word and neither did she. Stalemate. They were stale mates and the lines of demarcation had been drawn, she just didn’t know it then. The sun suddenly moved behind a cloud and she shivered

once again remembering that day and her feelings of confusion and defiance, sitting next to her dad as he drove home. Her pace slowed a little, but the rhythm remained as she ambled down toward Fletcher Road and Wanda's, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

Turning left on to Fletcher Road, she saw them in the distance, like mirages, their op shop dresses shimmering and floating in the sunny afternoon breeze. Christine and Maureen were on the prowl. They waved first, in unison, like two kewpie dolls, their slender outstretched arms, and long painted nails signalled their sugary sweet facades. She responded in recognition, noticing and feeling her stumpy nail bitten fingers and freckled forearm, and quickly shoved her hand back into her jeans pocket. She stopped her pacing as they loomed larger, their tall and slender bodies, painted faces and animated talk descended upon her like overfriendly clowns.

'Hey Mandy,' they cried out together as they all hugged, Christine's worries of the morning having evaporated with her big sister's obvious windfall.

'We're goin' into town, wanna come?' She hesitated for a moment; the sisters' doe-like brown eyes, mandrax-dilated pupils, stare her down, enticing her, daring her. She could forget the party, forget Dave and the band, forget his disappointment and dismissal of her. It would be so easy to just not be there.

'What about Lucy's party? Aren't you goin?'

'Nah, China Mick wants us in town, got some people he wants us to meet,' Christine said excitedly. She noticed Maureen's eyes flash her sister a shut up look.

'We might make it back,' said Maureen, all fake sincerity. 'Come on Chrissy, or we'll miss the train.'

‘You girls have a good time then,’ she offered, relaxing a little, realising the danger had passed. For a moment, to be out on an adventure with these two glowing Galway gals had been tempting, but she knew, both the gals and the glow would let her down eventually.

‘Seeya,’ they called out in unison, as she watched them disappear around the corner, heading for Ethelton station. Christine gave her a furtive glance back. Black eyes smile proudly. One ... two ... one, two, three, four.

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‘Her face is cracked from smiling, all the fears that she’s been hiding,
and it seems pretty soon everybody’s gonna know. (Led Zeppelin, 1970)

The haven that was Wanda’s loomed large on her horizon. The front garden, so different to her parents’ crazy creation of pampas and succulents, or the overgrown cottage gardens that surrounded it, was precise and uniform; red standard roses stood to attention amongst the well-ordered white elysium groundcover, not a hanging basket or stag horn in sight. Wanda’s father, an eastern European, kept his garden well trimmed, like his pencil thin moustache, always hovering over his thick lipped and toothy grin. His requisite white singlet, always tucked into his high waisted and pleated belted trousers gave him an air of an off duty jolly sergeant. Wanda’s mother, Australian by birth, but European in appearance, big bosomed, with her house dresses and apron, also seemed to come from another era, so unlike her parents with their seventies regalia of turtle necks and caftans. Wanda was a doted on and late coming child, as she herself was doted on and spoiled in a similar way when she visited, like the little sister who never arrived. As she crunched up the white gravel path between the garden beds, and knocked on the front door, she could almost smell the Polish delights that would ultimately be offered. Eat, eat was the philosophy of the household, and she was ready to oblige.

‘Hello Mr Marzcek,’ she said to the familiar form behind the screen door.

‘Come in, come in. Wanda, Mandy is here.’

‘It’s alright Dad, calm down,’ Wanda said in her usual dismissive, but loving way.

‘Are you hungry Mandy? We have some pierogi left over, or would you prefer some nalesniki?’ enquired Wanda’s dad.

'Mmm,' she said.

'I think both, don't you? You look tired. Wanda, take Mandy to you room, and I will bring the food, yes?"

'Yes Dad,' Wanda said, as they both grinned at each other. She did feel tired, and flopped down on to Wanda's purple candlewick spread covered bed.

'Fuck, what a day.'

'Maureen and Christine were just here.'

'Yeah, I saw them.'

'They're not coming to Lucy's. She's gunna be pissed.'

'In more ways than one.' They looked at each other and grinned again.

'I think I've fucked it up with Dave,' she said after a long silence, both of them lost in their own dreams of the night to come.

'What do you mean? You were with him last night,' Wanda stated matter of factly.

'Yeah, well I saw him this morning. I, I had a try out with him and Woody, to sing, you know, and I blew it. He's gonna ask Sandy, to sing, tonight. I know he likes her,' she started blubbering. She couldn't hold it in any longer, her fuck you façade melting as she relaxed and let it go.

'Well if that's all it takes, then he's not worth it,' Wanda counselled. 'You didn't sleep with him did you?'

'No,' she lied, remembering the beautiful night before, him playing guitar and loving her gently. There was a knock on the door, Wanda's dad was ready with the pierogi.

'Well let's eat and forget it Mandy. I know you love to sing, but be realistic, you can be a bit flat sometimes,' Wanda said smiling. That was all she needed to hear. The anger rose up in her like a wave, her head fuzzy with the rage.

'Fuck you Wanda,' she screamed, pushing past Mr Marzcek as he opened the door, pierogi spilling out of the tray he was offering.

'Little one, what's wrong?' she heard Wanda's dad calling after her.

She flew out of the front door, crunching once again down the white gravel path. Her head felt like it was going to explode, her pace relentless and frantic like a jazz drummer's, as she made it quickly to the corner and turned left down Hargrave Street, heading for the beach. Her anger dissipated, the tears took over and her pace relaxed. She swallowed the pain and fell into her usual rhythm, one ... two ... one, two, three, four.

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‘Please don’t refuse me mister
I’ve seen your daughter at the oasis
And I’m beginning to blister (The Who 1973)

My family loved the beach. We lived within walking distance from the coast. In fact my mum was born, lived and still does live, metres from the same stretch of coastline. She left for about a year once, but returned. The sea has that strength, like the waves rolling in time after time, you can’t fight it, you have to go with it, roll with it. That’s what my mum does; she rolls with it, always. I am like the rocks the sea meets at the end of its journey, forever there, steadfast. I can take the crashing, but every crash seems to wear away a little piece. Like my dad, we are stuck to this earth, able to bear it all, but part of us wants to take off, go with the flow of sea and air, and so the sea beckons us for different reasons. It beckons my mum because she feels safe, it’s home, but it beckons my dad and me because it’s not safe, it’s not home, it’s the part of us that is not afraid to be who we want to be.

Our beach trips were events, none of this quick dip and then home like today. The car was loaded up with all the necessities: blanket, eski, table and chairs, and the big black inner tube dad got from his work that served as a dinghy cum pontoon, and kept my brother and me happy for hours. Mum and dad set up camp under the jetty. That’s why we had to leave early, to get the best spot, the spot under the jetty where you knew from experience you could stay all day and not get flooded. Like a fisherman who lived life by the tide, my dad could instinctively tell the best place. Like a water diviner, he would whisper, ‘here’. Mum, completely trusting, would drop everything, make camp and eventually sit back in her low straddling beach chair, holding a bucket and spade up to us kids like a female Neptune, and sigh. My dad

would disappear behind his paper, withdrawing, as usual, into his world of current affairs and sport.

I never much liked being under the jetty, there was something damp and menacing about it. I would prefer to be out in the hot sand, basking like a lizard on my black and white beach towel. 'How can she stand it,' my mum would sigh. 'She's cold blooded,' my dad would retort. Lying there in my aqua blue one piece swimming costume with the pleated iridescent green and blue frill around the bottom, I felt like a mermaid, I was a mermaid and when I got too hot I would head for the water, like a mermaid who has to return to her home. I'd dive into the cool water, staying under for as long as I could, wanting to stay under forever, pretending my short cropped urchin hair cut was actually long tresses of golden threads streaming out, like in a Waterhouse painting: greens and blues and golds intermingling until the dream was over. I had to choose: life or being a mermaid. Spluttering as I broke the surface, it was always a hard choice.

The only time my dad would emerge from behind his paper was to take a dip in the sea pool that was adjacent to the jetty. It reminded him of his childhood, where he'd spent hours swimming with sea creatures in a rock pool, a sea pool, hewn out of the coastal rock face by convicts to serve the Governor's pleasure. This sea pool was a far cry from that majestic creation, but I think, somehow, he was drawn to it, drawn to a time of innocence and optimism. He was always playful and talkative for a while when he returned, a different person from the one I knew who hid behind his paper. 'Think I'll give the sea pool a try,' he'd say, like it was time for him to get his top up of the life giving force of a good memory before the light extinguished all together. I'd want to come too but it was very deep and Mum instinctively knew he wanted to be

alone. ‘It’s too deep for you,’ she’d say, ‘give your dad some space.’ And off he’d go, his towel hanging round his neck like a life buoy.

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‘And if you feel that you can’t go on, and your will’s sinkin low
Just believe and you can’t go wrong, in the light you will find the road.’
(Led Zeppelin, 1969)

The Norfolk Pines of Lady Gowrie Drive beckoned like old friends in the distance. Like the bonsai pine offered to Lady Gowrie herself by a Japanese ambassador during the war, their incongruity spoke to her of both home and alienation; they were happy here, yet not of this place. Crossing the asphalt boulevard, memories of shoeless expeditions to the beach, the hot tar burning her once smaller feet, the smell of the pines and the forever expanse of salty seaweed mounds refocussed her thoughts, away from herself, out of herself, and into the realms of possibility and imagination once again. Was she always to walk this planet alone? And yet it felt comfortable with no other voices in her head but her own. No, not really comfortable, just familiar; it was when she danced and sang that she truly felt free. The cool powdery sand gave way under her now shoeless feet; the shiny rub of grain against skin broke her rhythm of relentless pounding, like an off beat or a blue note. She’d reached the end and the beginning. Her bagged tambourine gave a last muted chink as she collapsed onto a salt bush free gap in the sand dunes.

She looked out over the familiar empty beach and towards the horizon. The Semaphore Jetty in the distance, jutted out horizontally, like a feint pencil line. In the late afternoon sun, all was quiet except for the regular lapping of wave against shore. She saw a stickman figure, out of nowhere, break the emptiness, and like all beach goers, she watched him intently, ready to look away when he passed by. Mesmerised by his gentle gait, his thin black limbs and perpendicular large feet, like a child’s drawing, she fell into his rhythm; lap, step, lap, step ... step, step lap ... step, step lap ... growing larger as he came into close focus between her and the sea. Like

an eclipse, for an instant, he filled her vision. He raised his over sized hand in salute, and she saw he was holding something white with a silver bar that flashed in the late afternoon rays. Like a moment suspended in time, as clear as a thought, and like gazing into the sun, the white and silver object blinded her, but all at once his upraised arm fell back into its original rhythmic pattern, lap, step, lap, step ... step, step lap ... step, step, lap, as he passed by and out of focus. Her horizon was empty once again, but the residue of the moment remained. She felt drawn to follow. Was the shore the end or the beginning? Was the peninsula she lived on lands end or lands beginning? With the outline of the white object still burning her retina like a memory, she raised herself up, felt her bag fall into its familiar place over her shoulder, and she was off once again, trudging back through the sand dunes and to Lucy's ... one ... two ... one, two, thee, four.

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‘So if you wake up with the sunrise, and all your dreams are still as new,
And happiness is what you need so bad, girl, the answer lies with you.’
(Led Zeppelin – 1969)

The aloneness that I felt as a child was like the single peach tree in the backyard, its branches continuously reaching out for sun and companionship. I would pack up all I needed from my room: books, Barbies, baby dolls and blankets, bags of scrap fabric and my box for sewing, and set myself up under the tree’s welcoming canopy. Once settled, with everything in place, surrounded by my treasures, the static lifeless reality would eventually overcome me, and then everything would be dragged back inside.

Back in my blue room, the process would be reversed: books stacked neatly back in place; Barbie and her entourage enclosed once again in their little case, my first school bag, one rusty chrome lock broken; scrap fabric and sewing put aside, but the baby dolls were lined up in a row, sitting quietly, waiting for me to begin their lessons, and so the familiar ritual began: writing words on my little blackboard, saying them out loud, doing each of the doll’s spelling tests, marking them, and even writing report cards for them. I don’t know what I enjoyed the most about this ritual. Was it the feeling of control? I was teacher, student, and friend, and everyone behaved themselves. Or was it because I was the centre of attention, albeit my own? I glimpsed the isolation that comes with performance and felt comfortable. The magic world under the peach tree was never as good as I imagined it, but there in my little blue room with the white wardrobes and the chalky stillness, I was content.

The change from blue walls to orange and gold wallpaper was my own doing. The first of many choices I would regret making. The transformation had already begun when at twelve years old I finally took down my picture of Jesus from above

my bed and replaced him with cut out pages from magazines of my new idols: Mark Bolan, and David Bowie. I sticky taped so many up that they began to look like a wallpaper of faces and my parents suggested redecorating. I jumped at the chance, and chose the orange wallpaper with gold felt embossing, not realising I wouldn't be able to sticky tape anything to its surface anymore. I had said goodbye to my little blue room and to that child who inhabited it.

The woman in me was gradually making her presence felt, discovering pleasures that had nothing to do with the soppy black and white romances that Mum and I would watch on television on a Sunday afternoon. We'd sit snuggled up on the sofa, holding hands, both lost in our own fantasies. The moaning from my parents' room next to mine continued nightly, but I now had an inkling of what was going on. I saw my mum in a new light. Not the tireless provider and caregiver that she indeed was, but a subservient shell of a past self, no longer autonomous, no longer a separate entity with her own boundaries. I began to question her, to question everything, or at least to wonder about an alternative. Why do you let Dad speak to you like that? Why do you/we serve dinner to my dad and my brother first? Why, why, why? Why am I bleeding? Mum, Mum, I screamed after going to the toilet, wiping myself and finding blood on the paper. I'm bleeding. Why, why, why? Didn't I know about menstruation? Why didn't I know about menstruation? She comforted me, but I didn't like the bulky Modess pad she pinned to my underwear; I didn't like the meaty smell of the bright red blood that leaked out of me. I didn't understand, and the woman inside raged even more.

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'I tell you love, sister, it's just a kiss away' (Rolling Stones 1969)

She could hear the music drifting down Fletcher Road long before she got to Lucy's. The Who's 'Magic Bus' with Pete Townsend's guitar carved through the falling night as she kept the beat with her pace ... one ... two ... one, two, three, four ... one ... two ... one, two, three, four. And then she saw him outside Lucy's. Wally, standing on the tray of his ute, his great-coat flapping in the breeze, playing his air guitar to thunderous applause where the party was already in full swing.

She sneaked in through the front door while all eyes were watching Wally. She wasn't ready for drunken hugs and questions about her day, and anyway, Dave wasn't part of Wally's adoring audience. The familiar hallway was empty; like all the old cottages at the Birkenhead end of Fletcher Road, the long dark hallway with its four rooms, two on each side, ended at the kitchen, and those who weren't outside would be congregated there, leaning against silvery flecked melamine counters, in deep conversation. She wasn't ready for that either. She closed the front door behind her, and the driving bass line became a dull reverb. She could hear the muffled drone of voices coming from the kitchen, interspersed with an occasional high pitched laugh, but there was something else in the background, riding on the soundwaves, and she stilled herself to listen, gradually identifying the intimate and majestic melody of 'Wish You Were Here' coming from behind the closed lounge room door. She grasped the brass door knob and pushed. The sweet smell of weed and incense, fuggy and dense, enveloped her as she crossed another threshold. No one noticed her, lost in their own time and space. The music and lyrics: '... two lost souls swimmin in a fish bowl ... year after year ... runnin over the same old ground, what have we found ...

the same old fears ... wish you were here ...', called to her as she took her place, bodies naturally parting, to let her into the circle.

Her jerky movements as she sat down and crossed her legs in front of her, and darting eyes searching for his face, gave away her agitated state, and the circle was momentarily jolted out of its stupor. Glances and thoughts collided as the pot paranoia briefly took hold. She preferred the adrenalin rush of China Mick's mandies to the out-of-mind experience of dope, but as the circle settled itself back into its original state of wellbeing, she took a long toke on the cigar shaped six-paper joint that was passed to her from an unknown guy sitting on her right. Woody's work no doubt. Packed evenly, but not so firmly to let just the right amount of air through, the joint burned and crackled happily as she sucked in the dopamine inducing smoke. She immediately felt her edginess dissipate, and passed the joint over to an equally unknown guy on her left.

The last refrains of 'Wish You Were Here' melded seamlessly into the beginnings of 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond', echoing the blood racing around her body. She felt mesmerised by the pulse of both, but as the music started to build into its swinging crescendo she began to sway, and somehow raised herself up, arms outstretched and snake-like, moving to the sound. The circle broke momentarily as she danced away, but closed up again just as quickly. She was never really part of that circle, never would be. She danced into more space, arms flailing like a Hindu god, drawn to the large bay window that spanned most of the outer side lounge room wall. With her arms coiling about her, she scanned the tableau framed by the window as she sang along: 'And we'll bask in the shadow of yesterday's triumph, sail on the steel breeze ... Come on, you boy child, you winner and loser, come on you miner for

truth and delusion ... and shine.' That was when she saw him ... them ... Dave and Sandy, secretly snogging against the wooden side fence. She froze, arms still outstretched, her palms opened and flat against the glass. They caught her eye briefly and turned away.

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‘Take me to the station and put me on a train,
I got no expectations to pass through here again.’ (Rolling Stones 1968)

She walked home alone past suburban houses with low wire fences and hanging baskets of geraniums. She preferred the overgrown shrubs that lined the railway tracks. They flourished and survived in their own way. As she followed the line, a hum issued from the tracks before a train passed, the lonely toot to no one, for no one was at the crossing. Hum, hum, hum to me, come, come, come to me, but the train passed by. She had no ticket, no ticket, no ticket to ride. The rusty red train, the red hen, vanished into the night, as its ultimatum fell to a whisper, get a ticket, get a ticket, and slowly died. Her feet kept the rhythm; no ticket, no ticket, no ticket to ride. She stopped outside one of these brick clad houses. Not ginger bread with white icing but crisp bread: bland, tasteless, brittle. She was home.

As she reached for the ancient back door key in her pocket, thoughts of her last moments at Lucy’s replayed in her mind. She had stumbled and bumped her way through the circle of bodies, still sitting contentedly cross legged on the wooden floor, squeezed her way through Wally’s still adoring audience, and finally confronted Dave and Sandy, still secretly snogging against the fence. She took a breath and reached into her bag. ‘You may as well have this,’ she said to Sandy, thrusting her precious tambourine into Sandy’s hands, then stumbled, bumped and squeezed her way out of Lucy’s, away from the pounding music and amused faces, away from the beautiful boy and his new muse. She slipped the key quietly into the lock. As it clicked open, a light came on inside.

His silhouetted form appeared in the doorway in front of her, like a bear rearing up, ready to attack. She’d seen this before.

'What are you doing home? You told your mum you were staying at that Lucy's place. How did you get home?

'I caught the last train,' she said trying to sound innocent.

'Bullshit. I heard the last train go by ages ago.'

'There was another one, it was late, it was ...'

'Don't lie to me. How did you get home?'

'Okay, I missed it, I walked.'

'You walked all the way from Birkenhead? At this time of night? What's wrong with you? Don't you care about yourself? Anything could have happened.'

'What difference does it make? I'm here, aren't I? Fuck'

'What did you say?' She could have said nothing; she could have kept her mouth shut.

'I said ... fuck ... okay ...'

The bear attacked. She curled herself up to ward off the blows, but the woman inside still raged. He stopped, suddenly aware of what he was doing. She uncurled and looked into his face, straight into his sorry hazel eyes.

'Hit me again, go on, hit me again,' and with one final slap, he backed away, momentarily defeated. She brushed passed her silently weeping mum who had been watching from the doorway.

'You live in this house, you live by my rules,' her dad bellowed from behind her.

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‘And if you listen very hard,
the tune will come to you at last’ (Led Zeppelin, 1971)

Another Sunday morning on the Peninsula was trying to push itself into the afternoon as she sat at Taperoo station. After the uproar of last night, the house had settled into itself once again when she finally got up, unable to sleep. No sign of her parents, but she could hear and feel a dull bass line thumping from the other side of her bedroom wall. Her brother must have got some new music.

Looking north towards Outer Harbour for the slow Sunday train, she hadn’t noticed the figure ambling up the platform from the south, his big feet slapping in his thongs, as they crunched over the loose gravel of Taperoo station. As he sat down beside her, although they were the only ones on the platform, she automatically moved over a little.

‘Where you goin,’ girl?

She moved over a little further, unable to answer.

‘You know, used to be sand dunes, all round here,’ he tried again. ‘My grandfather, used to have horses, you know, back down that way,’ he said, pointing northwards.

‘Hard to believe, eh? All this was scrub and sand.’

‘Yeah?’ she said casually.

‘Oh yeah,’ he replied sensing an audience. ‘Looked out for everyone, did my grandfather. I’ve kinda taken on the job.’

‘Right.’

‘You gotta ticket?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘You gotta ticket to ride ... to ride the train?’

‘Nah, don’t need one, they don’t check.’

‘They always check ‘ventually.’

‘Do they?’

‘Oh yeah. Look, I ain’t goin’ nowhere, got too much happenin’ round here, have mine.’

Sitting on his outstretched palm lay something white with a silver band glinting in the midday sun.

‘Go on, take it ... take it,’ he insisted. ‘Look, I’ll just leave it here on the seat for ya, you think about it.’

She watched him amble away, back down the platform, his thonged feet slapping in time. One ... two ... one, two, three, four. She picked up the offering next to her and slipped it carefully into her jeans.

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‘When we all are one and one is all,
to be a rock and not to roll.’ (Led Zeppelin, 1971)

As my son stumbles into my room, clutching his favourite sea lion stuffed toy and rubbing sleep from his soft blue eyes, I’m once again amazed at the perfection of his tiny form. Since my dad passed away, my mum can’t seem to stay still, settle, she’s always off somewhere. My house is filled with mementoes from these watery places. I line some up on my window sill: a little sailing boat, a glass starfish, a trinket box with a watercolour sailing ship on the lid and an aqua ceramic spoon that says greetings from Noosa. It’s as though she wants to remind me of our connection to the water, but she doesn’t understand, I need no reminding, I will never forget. My dad’s ashes are scattered out over the Pacific Ocean. Some of them are anyway. On the day my mum and I finally did the deed, as he had sat in his earthen ware pot for a while before Mum decided to let go, it was a windy day and as she scattered and said goodbye, some of the ashes blew back on to us, covering our arms and legs. A last reminder of a man who, like the sea, ebbed and flowed, whose depths were unfathomable to himself or anyone else. I realize that instead of a golden sun god, my dad was just a man. He passed away over twenty years ago. He has never met my two sons, and will never take me in his arms and tell me how wonderful I am; it is up to me to do that, but I know he would if he could.

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Borrowing the Blues:

Appropriations, Marginalisations, and the Ambiguous Voice in Women's Autobiography, Fiction, and The Blues

Introduction

'The three fold structure of autobiographical writing … the event, the memory of the event, the writing of the memory of the event … a fourth layer, the writer's analysis of the writing of the memory.'[1]

'Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.'[2]

'If I were you, I would have asked myself this … If I could admit into autobiography the inadmissible: if the truly shaming facts can ever be fully borne, let alone perceived, without the panacea of imagination.'[3]

It starts in earnest today. The importance of not being earnest resonates with me. It's all there bottled up. Just visualise it, see it, describe it, explain it, but immediately questions of form arise. First person? Third person? Third person feels right, form wise, open for interpretation, the space, the seam, between thinking and seeing, thinking and feeling. What did it feel like? What did it sound like? What did I see? Allow it in, like when you press 'allow' on the download button. Allow it in, allow it! My present feelings colour my memories, or is the feeling the same, the same now, the same then? I will write my way out of this. I used my imagination. I imagined the possibilities then, I can do so now. I have to imagine what it felt like to be there and not there. I have to imagine what if felt like to not feel. I have started, no turning back. To accept my past, and to let go of the pain, I have to stand aside and observe it. In the present I have no pain; it is only in the past, or the future, where pain lies. In the present, in this present moment, I am free. The fiction writer observes reality from a separated place; the autobiographer leaves the space of observer and returns to the past. I am writing autobiographical fiction. I move around from space to space. Third person is not avoidance, it is observation, clear of confusing emotions. It is distance, like a

[1] Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p132.
[2] Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement', *MLN*, Vol 94, No 5, Comparative Literature, 1979, p 930.
[3] Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1988, p185.

wide angled lens, things become clearer, become more real. As I re-write my past, I re-write my future. First person is therapy; third person is possibility. The Blues is about acceptance, endurance, choice, action. I live in the space between the blues and gospel, between action and redemption. I live in the space between first person and third person. I use each to my own ends. I live in the cracks. I live in the void. I live in the eternal present. (Amanda Williams – Writing Journal, October 2010).

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The above journal entry came to me one morning while trying to write a particularly painful section of my novella 'Peninsula Blues'. I originally began thinking about writing as therapy; I had some family and personal issues to resolve, but immediately I began to question where freedom and truth lie when we are writing about ourselves. Do we actually hide from ourselves when writing in first person? Is there more freedom in distancing oneself via third person to express our innermost emotions about an experience? Do we do this consciously or unconsciously? Through research I then started thinking about Lacan's premise of the unconscious having its own language and the conscious and unconscious manifestations of metaphor and metonym found in different types of expression, including music. I was listening to a lot of Blues music at the time and became interested in the Blues tropes of double meanings and multi-voiced narratives, illusions and allusions, secrets and spaces, and the autobiographical nature of Blues lyrics. From earlier research done around women's autobiographical representations of themselves, I began to make the connection between the way marginalised subjects use autobiographical expression, in all its guises, as a forum for action and change. The following exegesis is a synthesis of all my research and the

experience, both personally as practice led research, and professionally as research led practice, of producing a piece of autobiographical fiction and memoir.

Anecdotal theory is a term coined by Jane Gallop who describes its purpose as being to 'tie theorizing to lived experience.'[4] Josie Arnold expands upon Gallop's term and calls it a 'subjective academic narrative', further explaining that it is a 'feminist activity that enables non-patriarchal ways of thinking and doing academic work.'[5] Subverting the either/or paradigm, anecdotal theory is a theory of inclusivity, a circular process, continuously on the move, in flux, where one can enter the circle at any position, drawing on empirical and intuitive knowledge gained through life experience, as a reader, writer and researcher, opening up a space for interpretation, existing on the liminal threshold. All these ideas of space, the liminal (and the subliminal), the in between, the threshold, historically inform theoretical ways of writing and reading autobiography; the grey areas between the subjective truth of memoir and autobiography and the supposedly invented fictionalised character are also informed by the Blues tropes of crossroads, hidden meanings and the lone traveller. All of these ideas have influenced the production of my novella 'Peninsula Blues' and also this thesis, where my use of journal entries to introduce each chapter are designed to act as a representation of the anecdotal, endeavouring to tie the creative and the exegetical together as an example of Gallop's 'tie[ing] theorizing to lived experience'.

The study of autobiography has a long history. Just as life has many beginnings, endings, digressions and philosophical dilemmas, the theory of autobiography, memoir, and autobiographical fiction has its own history of dead ends and disagreements. The ambiguous nature of who is speaking, who is seeing, and to what purpose, is still a disputed territory.

[4] Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002, p 15.
[5] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apophatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', *TEXT* Vol 14, No 1, April 2010, p 4.

This exegesis will consider the idea of appropriation with regards to originality and objectivity in fictional renderings through the lens of the tropes of Blues signification and ideology, to suggest that appropriation in creative renderings, and specifically, music and literature, is not only an accepted art form, but also a political tool allowing marginalised subjects their own voice, and more specifically, the idea of women using autobiography and fiction as a form of subject (re)positioning. The sense of marginalisation at the heart of this exegesis is that of the subjugated female figure who subsequently finds or reclaims her identity by appropriating dominant hegemonic genres and tropes. That empowering shift is reflected here through ambiguous, multi-voiced narratives.

From the self-effacing confessions of St Augustine, and the self exulting confessions of Rousseau, to Philippe Lejeune's 'Autobiographical Pact' and Paul De Man's defacement of this pact, autobiography and its sub-genre, autobiographical fiction, with its ambiguous nature, ultimately asks the question: what is fact and what is fiction, and does it really matter? Can fiction ever avoid its autobiographical nature, and can autobiography ever avoid the tropes and forms of fiction? From the rise of post-modernism in the fifties and sixties to the deconstructionalist theories of the seventies and eighties, critics have researched and discussed the process of the art of writing and reading literature, including autobiography and its fictions. This research and discussion inform my exegesis and creative project, but only as a starting point. From the title of this dissertation, one can see the connections: feminist appropriation of personal and political subject positioning, the tropes of metaphor and metonym and their psychoanalytic counterparts, condensation and displacement, and the genre of women's autobiographical fiction, but it is the Blues and the tropes that surround blues music, lyrics, form and content, and how these tropes talk back to each other, specifically from a feminist perspective, that aim to give this dissertation its cohesion. Afro-

American female writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison, inform this exegesis with research centred around theories of women's autobiography and fiction giving voice to marginalised subjects, and looking at the ways in which these women writers create their subject positions.

In both the expression and critique of autobiographical fiction, it is important to recognise who is speaking and who is seeing. Consciously and unconsciously, the writer makes choices when selecting their narrative devices. They may decide to speak in first, third, or even second person, as a means of portraying a certain subject positioning, or indeed, avoiding the positional subject through the narrative structure. Narrative is all construct, just as we construct our lives through the choices that we make. Autobiographical fiction's narrative structures reflect the form, the frame, the fabrication of our lives, both rendered and lived. The Blues speaks to women's autobiographical fiction in its form and content through appropriation and homage to what has gone before, to ultimately give voice to alienated and marginalised subjects. Through the experience of writing my novella 'Peninsula Blues' I have also made these choices, as conscious action, but also through unconscious emergence, as a writer staring into the abyss of the blank page in the early hours of the morning.

This thesis endeavours to both master the body of theoretical knowledge in this area, and to master the craft of speaking to this knowledge in a creative work, but will not be a reductive rendering of them. What do I produce when I endeavour to write about something that I know happened, but cannot really remember? What happens when my imagination interprets a scenario for my own personal and political re-positioning? The third person autobiographical fiction and first person memoir that is the form of my creative project, reflects an imagined/remembered version of myself and my family and friends at a specific

time in my life, while this exegesis will explore, through a body of theorists and creative writers, the voice, style, genre, convention and technique that embody autobiographical writing and fiction, specifically from marginalised subjects.

The inspiration for these choices initially came from two Australian novels: Barbara Hanrahan's *The Scent of Eucalyptus* and Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded*. Both these novels affected me greatly in their form and content; the way both authors use temporal and spatial, autobiographic and fictional elements to convey an immediacy infused with private thoughts and memory. Tsiolkas' use of music as a soundtrack and the metaphoric morning into night journey around his beloved city inspired my own appropriation of these forms, as I identified with his marginalised character Ari, and his journey of self-discovery. Hanrahan's autobiographical character, in a more poetic way, also spoke to me with her reminiscences of family life through the acute lens of the only child, a feeling I could relate to, although having a brother. I have endeavoured to juxtapose the poetic and the brutal, found in both, to render my own experience of growing up in a certain time, in a certain place, but also the timelessness of the loss of innocence. Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak Memory* have also influenced and inspired my ideas with Woolf's fragmented moments and Nabokov's plea to Mnemosyne reflecting my own state of acute remembering of a time passed.

As the title of this dissertation suggests, the main areas this thesis explores are the ways in which certain female writers, including myself, appropriate forms and content of autobiography, fiction and The Blues, for their own political and creative ends. Chapter one: 'Fictions Got The Blues' will look at theories and primary texts with regards to voice and focalisation, and the limits of both first person and third person perspectives within a

reader/writer – listener/performer paradigm. Canonical texts with regards to autobiography and fiction including Philippe Lejeune's *On Autobiography*, Paul De Man's 'Autobiography as Defacement', James Olney's *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* and Paul John Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography*, will be discussed with reference to theories of Blues form and content. Texts such as Huston A. Baker Jr's *Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature*, Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Signifying Monkey*, and Gayl Jones' *Liberating Voices* will explore the idea of the alienated female voice of autobiographical fiction in relation to the Blues, to further ponder the grey areas between fiction, autobiography, and self-reflexivity which includes my own experiences in the choices and performance of autobiographical fiction and memoir writing.

Primary texts such as Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road* and fictional *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will be discussed in relation to the rendering of Blues form and content in literature, such as voice and structure, identified by Baker, Gates and Jones, and my own appropriation of these forms.

Chapter two: 'Beauty in a Blue Note' will expand on elements from chapter one and will look at the way certain women writers, including female African-American writers, as marginalised subjects, use the genres of autobiography and fiction to subvert the patriarchal and canonical notions of these genres to re-write their subject positions. Theorists such as Sidonie Smith and Shari Benstock identify the historically marginalised and silenced, less linear and more ambiguous lives lived by women, as reflected in their autobiographical writing. By absenting themselves from the autobiographical text through the use of fictional devices, the writer not only creates a space for reader interpretation, engagement and empowerment, but also creates space for a hidden self to speak. Primary texts by Gayl Jones

such as *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* will reflect on my own experience of writing autobiographical fiction and memoir, and consider theories of alienation and marginalisation with respect to The Blues being a vehicle of appropriation for the voices of its own marginalised and alienated subjects.

In chapter three: 'Signifying the Blues' the tropes of metaphor and metonym will be explored, both historically as elements of fiction, but also through a psychoanalytical lens as rendered by exponents such as Freud and Lacan, and feminist theorists, such as Leigh Gilmore and Barbara Johnson, to discuss the way ambiguous Blues tropes are appropriated, consciously and unconsciously, creatively and politically, by certain African-American female writers such as Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston. This chapter will reflect upon the act of writing autobiographical fiction through the interplay between remembered and imagined events in my own writing which uses metaphor and metonym as a means of opening up a space for ambiguity and reader interpretation.

Using De Man's theory of prosopopeia as a starting point with regards to signification in autobiography and fiction, which is the idea of the writer wearing a mask and speaking as a different person, a hybrid character, Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Signifying Monkey* and Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and African-American Literature* will be explored in greater depth. A discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's fictional *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will examine the idea of the ambiguous voice in Blues ideology, tropes and Afro-American literature which reflects the ambiguous first person, third person dilemma explored in chapter one, and is also reflected in the prosopopeiac tendencies of my own creative endeavours.

In conclusion, drawing on elements from all chapters, it is obvious that considerations regarding voice, tropes, the writer's subject position and methods employed to portray this subject position, either consciously or unconsciously, are all linked and overlap to a certain extent. Under the umbrella of the Blues, this thesis will endeavour to tie all these fragmented yet connected elements together, to argue that autobiography and fiction do not exist as separate entities, but in fact reflect and require each other as David Shields suggests (and appropriates) in his 2010 book *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*: '*Reality*, as Nabokov never got tired of reminding us, is the one word that is meaningless without quotation marks.'[6]

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the idea of anecdotal theory, one of the many theories that inform my thesis, will be represented through my use of journal entries that introduce each chapter, as well as anecdotal reminiscences of conversations, experiences and dreams, to illustrate my journey as a writer and researcher. Reflected, I think, in the closing lines of the introduction in Stephen Muecke's ficto-critical *Joe in the Andamans*: 'So *that's* how you got there, the reader sighs at the end, I never thought you'd make it!'[7]

[6] David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, New York: Vintage Books, 2011, p 4.
[7] Stephen Muecke, *Joe in the Andamans*, Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 2008, p 16.

Chapter One: Fiction's Got The Blues

'Insofar as autobiography represents the real, it does so … through the claims of contiguity wherein the person who writes is the same as the self in the writing; one extends the other, puts her in another place.'[8]

Still trying to find my voice. The 'I' doesn't sit well, sounds so earnest and forced. I want immediacy, but a literary immediacy, so I must ask myself, who is speaking and who is seeing? Either first person or third person, it is still the 'I' of now that speaks and sees. I can't sustain a voice. It keeps changing. My natural desire is to juxtapose, to jump around from past imagined to past lived. I want to leave this world of my present, I want to enter that imagined world. I ask again, who is speaking, who is seeing? I can be that fifteen year old me because that is how I feel now at fifty, eager for adventure, eager for change, no patience with small minded people. I value the outsider.

Is that why the Blues calls to me? The Blues resonates with stories of alienation and coming from the wrong side of the tracks, but also tales of action and agency. It is this mutual need between both performer and listener that appeals. Does it matter who listens and who performs? Can you have a legitimate voice that lies outside of expected notions of value of what is good and what is not? I was told early on, you can't sing, so I didn't. I was told even earlier to shut up, to be quiet, but like anything that is repressed, it just explodes when the lid can't be kept on anymore. I will not be silenced. I can't sing, but I can write. My writing will be my singing, my performance.

So who is this 'I'? She is a construct, she is who I want to be, she is me. I feel her when I sing, I feel her when I dance. She rises up into my heart, when the rhythm takes hold. I see her moving, simultaneously, with pin point precision, anticipating the beat, and yet

[8] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994, p 67.

reacting immediately to its message. My writing comes that way. I open up the space and invite it in. What can she tell me about myself? What secrets are hiding there?

This writing is not a goal awaiting completion; it is a journey, open to distractions and side tracks. It is on these side tracks where true knowledge lies. Toni Morrison said write the book you want to read. I want to read me, I want to read about she. The she I could have been. The she I am.
(Amanda Williams – Writing Journal, September 2010).

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In 2009 Flinders University ran a life-writing conference entitled 'The Story of the Story'. To get us out of our chairs and connect with each other in between papers we were asked to position ourselves along an imaginary line with theory at one end and creativity at the other. It was an interesting exercise and I found myself with only a couple of other colleagues in the middle of this spectrum. A few were positioned at the theory end, but the majority positioned themselves with creativity. I had come across narrative, post-colonial, cultural, feminist, historical and psychoanalytical theories, among others, while completing my Honours degree. I discovered that further research into these theories, not only served my purpose as a writer who wanted to produce more than just entertainment, but also that these theories have shaped my project in creatively inspirational ways. In addition, it pointed the way for me to consider not only my original idea of looking at life-writing as therapy, but also the idea of autobiographical fiction as a form of action, specifically relating this action to the idea of self-actualisation that I found was also prevalent in Blues ideology through its form and lyrical content.

I have considered and experienced both therapy and action in the process of writing my novella and this chapter will look at theories regarding narrative voice and truth in memoir/autobiographical fiction and the limits of both first and third person voices in a first person memoir/autobiography and third person fictional context.

In the twenty first century it is nothing new to suggest that all fiction and non-fiction writing contain elements of the other; novelists use personal, historical and cultural experience in their texts, just as non-fiction writers use fictional devices in theirs. Whether these elements are used consciously or unconsciously has also been scrutinised by critics and writers themselves, and so the idea of who is speaking has become an accepted way of reading texts, and also a tool for writers to exploit, for both personal and political reasons.

The idea of truth telling in autobiography, or the 'autobiographical pact', as identified by Philippe Lejeune,[9] has been deconstructed and discussed since its publication in 1989, although ten years earlier, in his essay 'Autobiography as Defacement' Paul De Man had already questioned this seemingly inescapable idea that defines the pact made by the autobiographer and the reader: that what is written and read, is the truth. Indeed, even a year before Lejeune's 1989 publication, Paul John Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self Invention* and James Olney's 1972 *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* also questioned this premise.

For De Man, the constraint of allying truth to autobiography is problematic, in that 'autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.'[10] He employs the term prosopopeia in his discourse regarding autobiography and truth. Prosopopeia is a

[9] Phillipe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p 19.
[10] Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement', *MLN*, Vol 94, No 5, Comparative Literature, Dec 1979, p 930.

Greek term which means 'a figure of speech in which an absent, or imaginary person is represented as speaking.'[11] Through this term, De Man is asserting that the act of writing autobiography cannot be totally truthful as the writer is assuming a mask; the present is masking the remembered past, and ultimately, disfiguring it.

James Olney sees this defacement as simply a metaphorical rendering of the subjective truth. He suggests that we 'know the self, activity or agent, represented in the metaphorising.'[12] Once again, this raises the question of conscious or unconscious knowing, but ultimately suggests that through the 'act' of creating an autobiography, one can possibly produce a deeper self-reflection that a mere top of mind rendering of a life, or part of a life, may not.

Paul John Eakin combines the two aforementioned subjective positions when he suggests that in the act of writing autobiography, writers 'come to understand the self they sought to express as necessarily a product of self invention … [but] to fashion selfhood is not only successful, but life sustaining, necessary to the conduct of human life as we know it.'[13]

Accepting that Lejeune's autobiographical pact, although still necessary to some readers, has been found problematic in that 'one cannot take the words of the narrators, and the stories they compose of themselves, only at face value,'[14] De Man's theory of masking and disfigurement, Olney's theory of self-knowledge through metaphor, and Eakin's theory of self-invention all accept the fictionalising tendencies of autobiography. Appropriation in all

[11] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/prosopopeia (accessed 9/4/13)
[12] James Olney, *Metaphors of Self; the meaning of autobiography*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, p 34.
[13] Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in autobiography: studies in the art of self-invention*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, p 190-191.
[14] Dan P McAdams, Ruthellen Josselen and Amia Lieblich, Chaim Noy, 'The Identity Drama: Narratives of Personal Change', *Psycritiques*, Vol 48, 2003, p 492.

its forms, either conscious or unconscious, present self of past self, or present self of past others, is a problematic element of writing autobiography and memoir, but how does this relate to autobiographical fiction? Philip Roth describes how he found when writing his autobiography *The Facts* through a fictional author Zuckerman's perspective: 'The autobiography consists in part in a clash of being torn between the facts and the fiction, torn between the autobiographical impulse to understand something and the fictionalising impulse to understand something.' Roth's interviewer, Mervyn Rothstein, suggests 'it is in the tension between the two that he (Roth) believes the truth abides.' [15]

It is this tension that I have endeavoured to illustrate by the choice of juxtaposing autobiographical fiction and memoir in my novella to create a space for both performer/listener, writer/reader, to experience their own subjective truth. Indeed, Lejeune, when talking about autobiographical fiction as opposed to autobiography, suggests that autobiographical fiction is a form of autobiography 'in which the reader is invited to an ambiguous reading.'[16] This idea of ambiguity of voice and structure will be referred to repeatedly in the following chapters with regards to women's autobiographical writing, and its relation to the form and content of the Blues, always within a writer/reader, performer/listener paradigm.

I experienced ambiguity as both a conscious choice and unconscious emergence in the process of writing my novella. Just as 'the Blues performer's signature articulates the personal … but at the same time leaves a space for the audience to make its own connections

[15] Philip Roth, Interview, 'From Philip Roth, The Facts, As He Remembers Them', with Mervyn Rothstein, in 'This Doubly Reflected Communication: Philip Roth's Autobiographies' *Contemporary Literature*, Vol 36, No 3, 1995, p 417
[16] Phillipe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p 19.

to the narrative or even to discover its own inner subjectivity,' I have endeavoured to replicate, or appropriate this Blues form to 'empower and move [the reader] to action.'[17]

It is complicated, but the following discussion is an attempt to tease out the elements of masking/unmasking, autobiography/fiction and the conscious and unconscious. De Man's idea of prosopopeia links to the idea of the Blues as a 'double voiced tradition,'[18] and my own unconscious and conscious masking (and possibly unmasking) of my fifteen year old self through the juxtaposition of fiction and memoir, creating the third space that lies at the subliminal crossroads between fact and imagination. De Man suggests masking is a form of defacement, something that is unavoidable in the act of writing autobiography because as soon as experience is turned into words, the prosopopeiatic voice, 'the restoration of mortality by autobiography … disfigures to the precise extent that it restores',[19] and therefore suggests that unmasking is an impossibility. It could be said then that fiction, in its imaginative state, is imbued with the possibility of 'unmasking' unconsciously hidden truths through the freedom of invention. So, the critique of De Man's belief of disfigurement through Olney's idea of 'self-knowledge' and Eakin's idea of 'self-invention' in autobiography, could be seen as being employed to a greater degree in the act of writing autobiographical fiction, and more specifically, with regards to the Blues' form and content, acknowledges Ralph Ellison's observation that, 'As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.'[20]

[17] E. Patrick Johnson, 'Wild women don't get the blues: a blues analysis of Gayl Jones' Eva's Man', *Obsidian II*, Vol 9.1, 1994, *Expanded Academic ASAP* Web. 22 March 2010, p 6.
[18] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p xxv.
[19] Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement', p 930.
[20] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, New York: Vintage International, 1995, p 78.

The above discussion reflects the male egocentric Western angst of who am I where 'that "I" signs for a patriarchal as well as imperial self since it marks the hegemonic space of a white, male territory of selfhood [where] in the twentieth century, that self and its traditional narratives are losing their hegemonic privileges.'[21] In Afro-American culture, *and* I would like to posit, in all non-hegemonic groups, including women, due to its history of existence in the form of survival, and its purposeful wily way of 'masking' hidden meaning, both for personal and political reasons, the Blues, in its form and content, and in its ideology, exemplifies how autobiography combined with elements of metaphoric or metonymic 'masking' subverts, or consciously positions itself at the crossroads. These crossroads include the literal polarities of metaphor and metonym, black and white, male and female, city and country, and written and oral boundaries.

Whether it is conscious masking, unconscious unmasking, or indeed the reverse, of these personal catastrophes, how does this lyrical expression manifest itself in autobiography, in memoir, and in fiction? I have used all three genres in my novella 'Peninsula Blues' to juxtapose, for both my reader and for myself as writer, the experience of the first person and third person voices. The reader is given the opportunity to listen to all, to travel along with the writer, in a circular fashion, as she moves around through her first person memory and third person imagination, to question both and also to follow her linear journey, both physically and metaphysically; as Josie Arnold suggests, 'it enables the reader to identify the insinuated and the implied.'[22] This structure looks something like a snail with its tail and head visible at either end of its mandala like shell, with the lines of memoir branching off, and into, the mandala. This structure and choices of narrative voice were conscious decisions,

[21] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol 9, No 1, Spring 1990, p 11.
[22] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apophatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', p 6.

calls to action on my part, but I am also aware that the thoughts and abstract manifestations of these thoughts were already there, in my subconscious, via my dreams, just waiting for me to unlock the door and summon them.

I had a dream recently. I was at the house of my complicated relationship entity. It is a lovely old house, like a lovely old man, like him, full of creaks and cracks, but good bone structure. I went outside to the old porch for some air where he often sits when he is waiting for me; where I have kissed him and loved him. My dad was sitting there, but he looked like a corpse, like when I saw him lying in his coffin. I took his hand and started sobbing, but he told me to shut up, and I woke up. What does that mean? I can decipher it in many different ways: my desire for acceptance, my hurt from rejection that was set up early on in my teenage years when my dad couldn't handle my burgeoning sexuality, and my continual fight to not be silenced. From a literary viewpoint, and in hindsight, I realise that this dream was my 'madeleine' moment. As Sven Birkerts in his *The Art of Time in Memoir* describes, the 'madeleine' moment comes from Proust's experience when he 'automatically dunked the crusty little cake – the famous *petite madeleine* – into his tea, he found his unpremeditated action released a stored association of overwhelming force.'[23] Birkerts further suggests that 'these recouped sensations throw open the door to the felt past, but the logic of their connection then helps determine the narrative strategy.'[24] The dual purpose of examining my journey out of innocence and endeavouring to understand my father as a man, and my relationship with him became the scaffolding for my novella.

The structure of my novella, with its divergences from the literal journey, into memories, dreams and fairy tales, reflects the freedom that a reader and a writer has available

[23] Sven Birkerts, *The Art of Time in Memoir*, Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2008, p 12.
[24] Sven Birkerts, *The Art of Time in Memoir*, p 13.

to them, if they allow themselves to enter. From my experience, in attempting to produce an autobiographical representation, the fictive third person has a freedom that differs from the inevitable constraints of first person with regards to the autobiographical contract, not only when it impacts on writerly performance, but also how it affects the reader/listener experience. A first person 'spilling the beans' scenario, however fraught with decisions regarding which beans to spill, can become, for the reader, an alienating telling of events, with less space for the reader to participate. Through the dramatising of events more, the third person voice 'assumes there is a shared ground between the storyteller and their audience.'[25]

Ralph Ellison explains, with regards to his own writing, that he has 'turned away from first person towards third person narration to discover the text's most expressive possibilities.'[26] I would suggest that Ellison is saying here, as the text is an extension of himself, that third person narration gives him the opportunity to discover his own most expressive possibilities. This is not to say that first person narration cannot be expressive; it surely can, and many of the primary texts I will be discussing in this exegesis or that have informed my thesis and parts of my own novella are written in a highly expressive and emotive first person voice. But all these 'I's are still fictional renderings, as acknowledged above, and so the element of imagination is forever present.

The two texts that ultimately informed my own choice to juxtapose the two voices of first person and third person to ultimately discover their inherent similarities and creative possibilities with regards to the Blues, are Zora Neale Hurston's first person autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* and her third person fictional story, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The similarities between these two books outweigh their differences and can be examined

[25] Sven Birkerts, *The Art of Time in Memoir*, p 23.
[26] Ralph Ellison, in Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 192.

together in light of Hurston's life and creative choices. Both protagonists, real and imagined, lived in Eatonville, Florida. Janie, the third person voiced fictional character, moved there with her second husband, while Zora attests to be born there but, in fact, was born in Alabama. Both protagonists fled oppressive, egocentric male figures; her father in the autobiography *Dust Tracks* and a husband in the fictional *Their Eyes*. Both men became the Mayor of Eatonville, and both had a predilection for 'my way or the highway' dealings with females. The father/husband psychology experienced by daughter and wife is a thread, although not new, that joins them together and its archetypal qualities spoke to me with regards to my own lived and creative experience.

Hurston uses dialect and free indirect discourse in both her novel *Their Eyes*, and her autobiography *Dust Tracks*. These literary elements imbue both texts with a double voiced narrative where her autobiography, as discussed above, not only cannot avoid the use of fictional devices, but purposefully incorporates these double voices to allude to the pluralities of existence, just as she does in her fiction. Both are autobiographical and fictional in nature as both are a representation of two women, one an extension of the other, whereby the fictional Janie gets to eventually find her own voice as a black woman, taking into account that she was 'black' and also a 'woman' with all the prejudices that entails, which reflects Zora, determined to start writing her first novel by the end of the autobiography, and as history attests, she did indeed write it and many more. Critics of her autobiography suggested that she purposefully left out the experiences of Afro-American life at that time: Florida in the early part of the twentieth century, where lynchings and abuses must have taken place. But it is important to remember that Eatonville was the first incorporated all Negro town in America, and so Zora's experience would have differed from the city dwelling Black critics who vilified her for leaving the race question out of her autobiography. Zora saw herself

foremost as an individual and an artist, and certainly not a victim. She felt no need to extrapolate upon the plight of the city dwelling 'niggerati' as she called the Harlem Renaissance literati whom she saw as wallowing in their own victimhood.[27] That was not her experience, not as far as race went anyway, and her autobiography, although condemned by some for its seeming pandering to white readers in its evasiveness of the race question, is an example of how Hurston positioned herself, through her own appropriation of the patriarchal model of autobiography discussed earlier in this chapter, in terms of her own artistic value.

Hurston's autobiographical first person voice in *Dust Tracks* reflects the possibility for change and growth that imbues the fictional *Their Eyes*. What connects these two texts is Zora's, and Janey's quest for self determination, to find their voices, which was personal and individual, and ultimately universal among women, tinged with the Blues in both content and expression. This connection is reflected in the following two passages. The first is from the autobiography where Zora is describing what if felt like watching her mother dying:

> Her mouth was slightly open, but her breathing took up so much of her strength that she could not talk. But she looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice … this was the morning of the day of the beginning of things.[28]

This reference to voice points to Zora's development as an individual and an artist and is echoed in the following passage from *Their Eyes* where Janie is talking back to her husband:

> Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation … 'It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens.'
>
> 'You gettin' too moufy, Janie,' Starks told her.

[27] Alice Walker, 'Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View' *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose*, London: The Women's Press, 1984, p 88.
[28] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, New York: Harper Collins, 2006, p 65.

These two passages speak to my own experiences of being told to keep quiet (women shouldn't be 'moufy'), being told I couldn't sing, and finding the freedom to become myself after the death of my father, which too became my 'morning of the day of the beginning of things', realising that although maybe I couldn't sing, I could write.

Both texts are tinged with Blues content and expression, but it is most redolent in the fictive *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The metaphoric and metonymic expression in this third person story will be discussed more fully in chapter three with regards to the Blues trope of Signifyin(g) and how this relates to my own story, but it is the third person voice that, I think, for Hurston, and for myself, gives the writer and reader the freedom to explore, through observation and displacement, the spaces and silences, the hidden meanings, of a possibly empathetic experience. As Toni Morrison suggests, 'The imagination that produces work which bears and invites re-readings … implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language.'[29]

This shared experience lends itself to not only the writer/reader perspective, but also with regards to the idea of the text as a Blues performance and the call and response trope which calls out to its audience to think about and respond to it. Free indirect discourse, although still in a third person omniscient narrated voice, veils this narrative voice and extends the experience of the reader/listener to beyond the more passive experience of being told, to the more active experience of being shown. Gates describes this narrative technique as a 'multivoiced discourse … a written voice masked as a speakerly voice,'[30] which also relates to the oral traditions of Black-American culture. Combine this third person free

[29] Toni Morrison, 'Preface', *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, p xii.
[30] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 243.

indirect discourse with metaphoric and metonymic language, repetitions and rhythms, and you've got the Blues, at its most evident in the following final paragraph of *Their Eyes*:

> The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room, out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing. Then Tea Cake came prancing around where she was and the song of the sign flew out of the window and lit the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see.[31]

This passage calls to me for a response, and I would respond with Amen, oh Amen!

My response is oral in nature, and it is the tension between the oral and written that is at play in this passage, not only in its form of free indirect discourse, of the written third person voice becoming an oral interplay between narrator and reader, but also in its tension between the Blues trope of 'thwarted potential' and the gospel trope of 'direction and optimism.'[32] It is not a coincidence that my response is the gospel inspired retort ending all pleas and announcements in the Spiritual vernacular. Both in form and in content, in my novella 'Peninsula Blues', I have endeavoured to reflect this tension between the written and oral, between the Blues cry for acknowledgement of what is and the Spirituals' desire for change and possibility. My desire was to illustrate through the continual interplay between

[31] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, New York: Harper Collins, 2006, p 192/193.
[32] Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices: Ora Tradition in African-American Literature*, New York: Penguin Books, 1992, p 151.

the written voice (first and third person) and the character's craving to find her voice, to be heard and listened to, the seeming loss of this voice, and the pointing to salvation through change and action. The difference, as well as the similarities, in the experience of writing a first person memoir and a third person, more removed and observational, fictional autobiography, produced, surprisingly, a coherent rendering of that time of my life that reflects the confusing feelings of being a teenager, wanting and needing to move on, and the burgeoning questioning of generational, including sexual, norms. The third person fiction allowed me to expose and understand situations unknown or equally misunderstood by my family, while the first person memoir allowed me to canonise the man who so affected my adult life. The combination of both, connected by his love of literature and jazz and my love of literature, jazz and the Blues in the form of its appropriation by '70s bands such as Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, highlights, I came to realise, our similarities more than our differences.

The discussion above reflects the historical theory surrounding the autobiographical 'I' and its limitations and the freedoms that a third person voice gives to the writer and reader. It also points to the Blues trope of ambiguity of meaning and the importance that voice, for marginalised subjects, has in the fashioning of an art form relevant to those marginalised subjects.

In the following chapter I will revisit the autobiographical 'I' and discuss its history with regards to the original marginalised subject: women, and their experimentation with the literary form and content of autobiography, memoir and fiction.

Chapter Two: Beauty in a Blue Note

'Blue notes, true notes
Weird chords, Lord Lord.[33]

'Blue Note – definition – Musical jargon for departure from the major diatonic scale held to characterise blues.'[34]

'Alienation from the historically imposed image of self is what motivates women's autobiographical writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech.'[35]

My world is so small, less than a grain of sand, but in my imagination, it is infinite. I have jettisoned people, things, to make a space for truth, happiness and joy to enter my life. Side tracks, side streets, the quiet reflective moments: trees swaying in the wind, birds soaring in a flock, bare branches with spring's first buds, a message from my son telling me he loves me. I can let go of life, but I know that the love I am capable of won't let me. It is a powerful energy, driving me on.

When we remember a joyful, hurtful or angry experience, is it the detail or the emotion we experience again? When I write about my childhood, I am writing it through a filter of anger, anger that I am experiencing now. I wasn't angry as a child, but I was hurt, although I didn't know it then. It was just how it was. I feel self conscious writing in first person. I still want to be good. I don't want to hurt anyone, so I edit myself. Third person allows me to transfer the emotion I am experiencing now on to a created self. The emotion is the truth, not the detail.

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[33] Sara Martin, 'Cushion Foot Stomp' in Stephen Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary*, Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2009, p 25.
[34] Stephen Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary*, p 25.
[35] Shari Benstock, Ed, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p 41.

My mum tells me that my memories of my childhood are not entirely accurate, but she agrees that I don't need to change what I have written about my dad. They are my memories not hers, my experiences not hers. She is a very enlightened woman.
(Amanda Williams – Writing Journal, November 2010).

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In chapter one, the problematics and the possibilities of the first person and third person voice, in autobiography and fiction, were examined under the umbrella of the Blues, in its form and content. It is acknowledged that the 'I' who speaks, either directly or indirectly, is a fractured entity, a multiple self. Sidonie Smith describes it as a 'Site of fractures, splittings, maskings, dislocations, vulnerabilities, absences, and subjections of all kinds [where] the architecture of selfhood has collapsed into a pile of twentieth century rubble.'[36] This second chapter will discuss the proclivity of women to write about the internal, the domestic, the relational, and with it, create new subject positions for themselves through their characters, as well as to examine this proclivity in terms of fluid subjectivity and marginalisation which reflects the idea of the Blues as a vehicle for action and change. The title of this chapter refers to the 'blue note' found in between the usual musical scales in the Blues to suggest that there is beauty to be found in the margins, and in the experimentation of form that many female writers of fiction and memoir use, reflected in my own experimentation with form.

The old adage 'when you got nothin' you got nothing to lose' could be positively applied to writing from the margins. Being marginalised, one could say, has its advantages, although Smith 'warns against romanticising marginality, by remembering that my margin of

[36] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol 9, No 1, Spring 1990, p 12.

visibility is not necessarily your margin … each of us in our manifold positions in discursive fields, inhabits margins and centres simultaneously.'[37] Smith's acknowledgement of this fluid subjectivity reflects the Blues trope of action through pain, of possibility through change, and of appropriation as a means of re-writing the self. Within the reader/writer paradigm, this fluid subjectivity allows the reader to participate in the performance, and the writer to move around, or improvise, within that performance. Smith also acknowledges, with regards to the fluid subjectivity of marginalised subjects, in particular women, that 'their manoeuvrings within their "unauthorised positions" and their engagement in fluid entanglements with selves and narratives has often eventuated in unconscious and conscious interrogations of the master discourse.'[38] By writing from the space of the margins many women writers experiment with the form and content of autobiography and fiction to examine and reposition themselves, both personally and politically.

The *Encylopedia of Women's Autobiography* defines the genre of women's autobiographical fiction as '… often written as a means for the writer to create a space for her voice that has generally been marginalised and rendered powerless.'[39] It is not a coincidence, when discussing Smith's previously acknowledged rupturing of the site of the represented self, that she outlines that it was also 'at the historical moment when women and peoples of colour, those peoples marginalised in the imperial gaze of the old self, [were] demanding their own self-representations.'[40] This historical moment was the nineteen seventies and is

[37] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', p 16.
[38] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', p 18.
[39] Victoria Boynton and Jo Malin, Eds, *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*, Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2005.
[40] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', p 17.

reflected in my own autobiographical fiction of the time when I was fifteen, and it was nineteen seventy five, and all that that connotes with regards to female selfhood and sexuality.

But that is not to say that women were not already writing their stories of the domestic and relational kind. Around the turn of the century these stories were often produced, but with publishers and the reading public always in mind, and for both their acceptance as relevant to the patriarchal order, as well as their approvability with regards to content and outcome for their protagonists, the domestic landscape was genteel, the relational experience one of sacrifice, and for protagonists who did not fit the accepted criteria of woman, there was a figurative price to pay. However unfairly treated, misdiagnosed and misunderstood was the inhabitant of the yellow wallpapered room or the awakened free spirit, the socially acceptable outcome for these characters was usually madness, or a form of suicide, with drowning being the most popular because they questioned the hegemonic society from whence they came.[41] But these texts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* were the forerunners, are our forebears, and we recognise them for bringing predicaments such as post natal depression, sexual repression and economic inequality into the light. However, as discussed above, their character's inevitable outcome was a requirement for their acceptability. Any sense of agency and self reflexivity surrounding sexual desire, or any desire for that matter outside of the domestic sphere, 'remained unspoken within the ideological framework of the dominant discourse'[42]

[41] Elaine Showalter, 'The Awakening: Traditions and Talent' in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991, p 81.
[42] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*, Indianopolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, p 57.

In an effort to speak the unspoken, the bildungsroman, or identity quest novel,[43] has been appropriated by women and used as a way of producing self reflexive texts in an accepted form. Couched in self (re)presentation, 'women used the genre for self-creation and self-understanding, not as an escape from the real world … but as a way to approach experience with the hope of changing it.'[44] This idea of change through (re)presentation lies at the heart of women's autobiography also, where the protagonist is not necessarily an artist in the historically accepted form, but still an artist of her own existence, where she (re)creates her subject position into one that more recognises her life and experience. This is what I have done in my novella in so far as hinting at the possibility of change in my protagonist's future. My voice couldn't be silenced, and found another outlet. Writing is my singing, which is evident in the closing memoir section, where I am letting go of my dad, both physically in scattering his ashes, but also metaphorically in the fact that I am writing of the event.

Using hierarchal forms and subverting them, in fiction, in autobiography, or in a combination of both, women and other marginalised subjects have appropriated literary genres (and other art forms, including the Blues), and used them to further their quest for a recognised self-expression. Smith sums this predicament up by arguing that 'since autobiography is essentially patriarchal, "a father's narrative", women must either "speak as a man" through ventriloquism or embrace marginality and fracture the patriarchal perspective.'[45] This appropriation, or 'Signifyin(g)' *from* the margins is, 'a … quest for authority, autonomy and originality.'[46] Female African-American writers' appropriation, what

[43] Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991, p 24.
[44] Aranzazu Usandizaga, 'The Female Bildungsroman at the fin de siècle' *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol 39, No 4, Summer 1998, p 325.
[45] Sidonie Smith in Mary G Mason, 'Travel as Metaphor and Reality in Afro-American Women's Autobiography, 1850-1972', *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol 24 No 2, Summer 1990, p 349.
[46] Bernard Bell in Joyce Pettis, 'She Sung Back in Return: Literary (Re)vision and Transformation in Gayl Jones's Corregidora', *College English*, Vol 52, No 7, Nov 1990, p 788.

Henry Louis Gates Jr describes as 'intertextuality'[47] will be discussed later in this chapter and revisited in chapter three, but suffice to say, when writing from the margins, historically, culturally and racially, women have embraced their marginality, recognising the beauty in the 'wilted gardenia'[48] through their search for their mothers' gardens, and in so doing, found their own.[49]

Returning to Smith's historical moment in time, that of the sixties and seventies, it could be said this time in history saw the emergence of marginalised subjects simultaneously finding a voice through postmodernist devices of multiple subjectivity and intertextuality, and through the historical questioning of accepted social norms that influenced that era, such as the sexual revolution and the race question. But if postmodernism can be defined as 'modernism without the anxiety'[50], then it is no wonder that the modernist idea of the fractured, but ongoing, search for meaning also appealed to marginalised writers. Female writers, although not necessarily suffering from an anxiety of influence like their male counterparts, where they in fact embrace this influence through appropriation, were still suffering from an anxiety of existence. The modernist experimentation with content, voice and form, is prevalent in marginalised writing, both as a means of writing back to the prevailing patriarchal establishment, and also as a way of seeking acknowledgement of both the (re)presentation and the actual lives lived on these margins which, far from collapsing into Smith's metaphorical postmodern pile of rubble, are living and breathing and still searching for meaning.

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[47] Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York: Methuen, 1984, p 290.
[48] Toni Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008, p110.
[49] Alice Walker, 'In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South', *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose,* London: The Women's Press, 1984, p 243.
[50] Jonathan Lethem, 'The Ecstasy of Influence: A plagiarism, *Harper's Magazine*, http://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/0081387, viewed 26/10/2011, p 3.

With regards to the discussion above surrounding modernism and the marginalised female writer, Sidonie Smith and Alice Walker both use Virginia Woolf as an example of the marginalised female writer subverting the patriarchal order in her experimentations with form and content. Walker references Woolf's non-fiction book, *A Room of One's Own*, with regards to the ongoing concerns of the creative female who has to negotiate the demands that are placed on her as a mother, daughter and wife, while also allowing herself the space for her creative nature to emerge: 'For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty.'[51] Smith uses Woolf's autobiographical writing in 'A Sketch of the Past' as an example of the impulse that drives the marginalised writer to 'experiment with the instability of various boundaries – of history, memory, self, sexuality … [and] the paradoxical anonymity of the autobiographical narrator.'[52] This use of the literal and the metaphorical anonymous narrator, reflects chapter one's discussion surrounding the subverted autobiographical 'I' in Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* and her use of free indirect discourse, and points toward a further discussion of the signifying inclination of the marginalised writer, and the Blues, in chapter three. It also reflects the fluidity of (re)presentation, the beauty to be found in the side tracks, in the margins, that is the focus of this chapter and the intent that underpins my creative endeavours in 'Peninsula Blues'.

The above discussion has taken us on a journey from Woolf's early twentieth century modernism to Smith's postmodern moment in time, as an introduction into a more detailed reading of two texts from the nineteen seventies. These encapsulate the idea of writing from

[51] Virginia Woolf, in Alice Walker, 'In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South', *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose*, p 235.
[52] Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', p 19.

the margins, both in form and in content, looking back as well as forward, in their acknowledgement of the 'beauty in a blue note' and all that it signifies. These texts are Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva's Man* (1976).

In 1975, Toni Morrison said of Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* that Jones had 'written a story that thought the unthinkable … She had described the relationship between a black man and a black woman as no one else ever had with precision, ruthlessness and wisdom.[53] If Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, discussed in chapter one, had been published in 1975 instead of 1937, the same might have been said about her novel. The correspondences between these two texts are a testament to the Blues trope of acknowledgement through appropriation where 'most artists are brought to their vocation when their own nascent gifts are awakened by the work of a master … a kind of "open source" culture in which pre-existing … fragments and larger … frameworks are freely reworked.'[54] To use a musical analogy, in the history of female practitioners of jazz and blues, without Ma Rainey there would be no Bessie Smith, and without Bessie Smith there would be no Billie Holiday, no Nina Simone. The same analogy with regards to female Black-American writers could be used starting with Zora Neale Hurston, for without her, there would be no Alice Walker and without Alice Walker's influence, there would be no Toni Morrison, no Gayl Jones. The following words, although not Hurston's, I would like to think, still could describe Zora, calling to her artistic descendants: 'I thought about an art that would be born, an art that would open the way for women the likes of her. I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day … I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise song.'[55]

[53] Toni Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin*, p110.
[54] Jonathan Lethem, 'The Ecstasy of Influence: A plagiarism, *Harper's Magazine*, p 2.
[55] Jean Toomer, 'Avey' *Cane* in Alice Walker, 'In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South', *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose*, p 231.

The search for a voice, both physically and metaphorically, burgeoning sexuality, and paternalistic relationships are recurring themes found in Hurston's *Their Eyes*, Jones' two novels and my own novella. These themes are not new, but the historic specificity from whence they came influences their production/performance. Hurston's portrayal of Janie's emerging sexuality prefigures Jones' character, Ursa, in *Corregidora*, by suggesting 'that the contradictory impulses of societal expectations concerning chaste women and a notable sexuality can be reconciled in fiction.'[56] But whereas Janie's sexual experiences, within marriage and without, connote empowerment, whereby speaking up for herself on the porch renders her husband, Joe Starke, metaphorically and later physically, impotent, and her experience of sex with Tea Cake is all about 'pear blossoms and bees', Ursa's experiences of sex revolve around domestic violence, abhorrent (to her) sexual demands and male domination. Ursa does find a form of empowerment, but it is through reconciliation (with her female ancestors and her husband). This difference in the (re)presentation of these two female characters' experiences speaks to me of their historical specificity and Jones' desire to 'get across that sense of an *intimate* [my italics] history'[57], that reflects the seventies questioning of accepted marital relations and sexual practices. But having the freedom to talk about historically sexual taboos and having the freedom to practise them resulted in a generation of women who far from experiencing empowerment through 'free love', experienced another form of repression, for, although love may have become 'free' for men, it has never been free for women.

[56] Joyce Pettis, 'She Sung Back in Return: Literary (Re)vision and Transformation in Gayl Jones's Corregidora', *College English*, Vol 52, No 7, November 1990, p 793.
[57] Gayl Jones in Claudia C. Tate, 'An Interview with Gayl Jones', *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol 13, No 4, Winter 1979, p 143.

As mentioned above, the loss of, searching for, and finally finding, a voice, both metaphorically and physically, is a prevalent theme in much marginalised expression. The Blues trope of performance in its form and content, and appropriated in Black American literature with the idea of the 'speakerly text … which privileges the representation of the speaking black voice … an oral book … a talking book,'[58] imbues all of the aforementioned writings and is found in its most literal rendering in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*. Ursa Corregidora is a blues singer, but her husband, Mutt Thomas, doesn't like it:

> I don't like those mens messing with you,' he said.
>
> Don't nobody mess with me.'
>
> Mess with they eyes.[59]

This conversation ends in a scuffle, with Ursa falling down the stairs of their apartment block, ending up in hospital and requiring a hysterectomy. Jones has 'sung back in return'[60] and transformed the idea of voice finding that empowered Hurston's character Janie, into an historically specific flavoured moment, where, although Ursa has already found her voice, the repercussion of this is that she loses the ability to have children. This happens in the first page of the novel, and Ursa's journey towards reconciliation, of her heritage, and with her husband, Mutt, is illustrated through present tense conversations and situations, juxtaposed with remembrances of her problematic family history, specifically sexual, retold to her by her mother and grandmother. Ursa's surname, Corregidora, comes from a Brazilian slave owner who fathered both her grandmother and mother and continued to abuse Ursa's 'gram' and 'great gram' until one day they all fled following an event:

> It had to be sexual I was thinking, it had to be something sexual that Great Gram did to Corregidora. 'What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he

[58] Henry Louis Gates Jr, Ed, *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 296.
[59] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, New York: Random House, 1975, p 3.
[60] Joyce Pettis, 'She Sung Back in Return: Literary (Re)vision and Transformation in Gayl Jones's Corregidora', p 794.

> wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?' … A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin … a moment that stops before it breaks the skin.[61]

The story of this event haunts Ursa and affects her sexual marital relations with Mutt, but she reconciles with both at the end of the novel:

> "You never would suck it," he was saying. "You never would suck it when I wanted you to. Oh baby, you never would suck it. I didn't think you would do this for me." … It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was Great Gram and Corregidora … But was what Corregidora had done to *her*, to *them* any worse than what Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return, making her walk down the street looking like a whore?" … He came and I swallowed. He leaned back pulling me up by the shoulders. "I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you," he said. "I don't want a kind of man that would hurt me neither," I said. He held me tight.[62]

For Jones, this acknowledgement of the palimpsestic overtones of a layered history finds its roots in the Blues. She says: 'Blues talks about the simultaneity of good and bad, as feeling, as something felt … I think that's important because it has to do with being and it doesn't set up any territories … That's what interests me. Ambiguity.'[63]

Ursa's 'blues is a transmutation of their sorrows and suffering as well as an indication of her own.'[64] Earlier in the novel, through a remembered conversation, Mutt asks her:

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[61] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, p 184.
[62] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, p 184/185.
[63] Gayl Jones in Donia Elizabeth Allen, 'The Role of the Blues in Gayl Jones's Corregidora', *Callaloo*, Vol 25, No 1, Winter 2002, p 273.
[64] Joyce Pettis, 'She Sung Back in Return: Literary (Re)vision and Transformation in Gayl Jones's Corregidora', p 794.

What do blues do for you?

It help me explain what I can't explain.[65]

This suggestion of the Blues being a vehicle of explaining the unexplainable symbolises to me, in the context of my project, the representation of the outsider, the alienated subject of women's autobiographical fiction. It is finding the beauty in this alienation, in this blue note, the note of difference, of defiance, that informs the writing/performance of my creative project and hopefully allows the reader/listener to participate in and to sublimate their own feelings of alienation and suffering for in a blues context, in a nihilistic and desolate mood, solace can be found in playing and singing the blues.

Thematically, Jones' *Corregidora* is steeped in the Blues, but it also is reflected in passages of repetition and closure through call and response dialogue that mimics the form of traditional Blues lyrics:

"If that nigger love me he wouldn't've throwed me down the steps," I called.

"What?" She came to the door.

"I said if that nigger loved me he wouldn't've throwed me down the steps."

"I know niggers love you do worse than that," she said.[66]

This is an example, through a prose construction, of the traditional 12 bar aab blues lyric format with the first two (aa) lines rhyming and the third (b) acting as a response to the first two.

[65] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, p 56.
[66] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, p 36/37.

In one of those nihilistic and desolate moods where a rainy day can be seen as a friend I wrote the following song:

Devil Man

That's some hard stuff to swallow
You're a hard act to follow
Devil Man, I spit and I polish for you.

You take, I give
I die, you live
Devil Man, I spit and I polish for you.

You're a back door man
You got nothin in your hand
You say a spit and a polish will do.

Well this angel is gonna soar
Walkin out your front door
Devil Man, aint gonna spit and polish no more.

In the last stanza, the form takes an aaa format, reflecting a time in early blues lyric construction where the aab format was open to more improvisation. This last line pulls the listener up, to make a point. There is a story of empowerment in these ambiguous lyrics, and a subject re-positioned. The sexual angst of this song and its suggestion of change and action, from a personal point of view, speaks back to the fifteen year old me that is the character of my novella. It also speaks back, through the appropriation of the form and content of a Blues inspired lyric, to the appropriation by bands of the seventies of the Blues, such as Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, whose lyrics I use to introduce each new chapter in my novella.

The experience of revealing, albeit through fiction, my own early sexual situations, was difficult. My natural instinct was to use free indirect discourse to remove myself from the character I was writing about, although, to be honest, I didn't know it while I was writing.

It helped me avoid letting the anger that I felt about that fifteen year old self now, as a fifty plus year old woman, colour my representation of myself at fifteen. That authorial removal also reflected my experiences of those situations where I think that the real 'I' that was me, vacated, withdrew, but somehow was watching on, observing. Or is it the 'I' of now that is watching on, observing? I can never be sure.

The question arises again, both politically and personally: who is speaking? Personally, I want to validate the uniqueness that is I, but politically, I want to speak to that generation of girls who did not fit the hegemonic paradigm of the silenced and subservient female. A comment from an initial reader of my novella, a woman of my own age, suggested that your father hit you, so what, tell me something different. What does that say about my generation of girls? Were we all hit for speaking out, speaking up? Does that make it acceptable? Did I unconsciously not make it that dramatic because I too, accepted it as normal? What I deserved?

The form and content of the Blues, in its ambiguous connotations that reflect Jones' idea of the 'simultaneous nature of good and bad', is even more prevalent in her second novel, *Eva's Man*. Not only are there examples of 'intentional stutters and hesitations, and repetitions of words and phrases'[67], but these repetitions, in fact, repeat themselves where we see the same situations, fragmented and fractured, recalled and retold from different perspectives. Where in *Corregidora* the Blues is referenced literally through the character of Ursa as a blues singer, in *Eva's Man* 'the blues performer is more metaphorical or at the level of the narrative itself,'[68] through the Blues themes explored of 'imprisonment, sexual

[67] Patrick Johnson, 'Wild Women Don't Get the Blues: a blues analysis of Gayl Jones' Eva's Man' *Obsidian II*, Vol 9, No 1, Spring-Summer 1994, p 26
[68] Patrick Johnson, 'Wild Women Don't Get the Blues' p 26.

innuendo, broken-heartedness, poverty, racism, and sexism.'[69] It is indeed a challenging, and I found, vicarious, read where Jones deliberately renders Eva's history 'only in terms of horrific moments as a kind of challenge to the listener … whether the things that she recalled were, in fact, true, that she might have been, perhaps, playing a game ...'[70] The vicariousness I felt while reading *Eva's Man* is reflected in my own novella where the character experiences situations of a sexual nature that are 'unbelievable' from both a reader and writer perspective.

Jones suggests that the structure of *Eva's Man,* with its fluidity of movement through time and memory, is improvisational. She says, 'I wanted to get the sense of different times and different personalities coexisting in memory. I was trying to dramatise a sense of the "real" and the "fantastic" or fancied and real episodes coexisting together in Eva's narrative.'[71] Once again, this juxtaposed dramatisation of the real and the fantastic I have also used in my novella to suggest the historical acknowledgement of the fragmented 'I' with regards to autobiography and story telling, and also the internal and external world of my character where memories, dreams and fairytales coexist with her literal journey over twenty four hours.

Eva's Man moves around through multiple realities. The novel begins with Eva narrating her story from a cell in a mental institution. She simultaneously narrates her experience of this incarceration with first person present representations of her meeting with the man, Davis, whom she eventually castrates after poisoning, her experiences as a teenager unsuccessfully trying to avoid predatorial males including her mother's lover, a neighbour, and a young visitor to the house, who she eventually marries but then leaves, and ultimately, a female inmate, who initiates her into the, for Eva, freedom of lesbianism. All this is told

[69] Patrick Johnson, 'Wild Women Don't Get the Blues' p 26
[70] Gayl Jones in Claudia C. Tate, 'An Interview with Gayl Jones', p 143.
[71] Gayl Jones in Claudia C. Tate, 'An Interview with Gayl Jones', p 143.

through call and response repetitions juxtaposed with fragments of memory, conversations, observations and the personal feelings that emerge from these experiences.

The 'horrific moments' of Eva's life suggest a form of innocence and naivety where simply because of the way she looked: 'You don't wear earings,' he said … 'most women who look like you wear earings',[72] combined with her confusing sex equals love equals sex equals love experiences growing up, result in her reacting to each situation that is presented to her with a kind of detached acceptance. It is only in the last line of the novel where Eva says what she truly feels, where in fact she has the last word: 'I leaned back, squeezing her face between my legs, and told her, "now"'.[73]

In this chapter the discussion has examined, from an historical perspective, the way women (re)present themselves in literature, from Perkins' and Chopin's characters' required outcomes to Janie's 'pear blossoms and bees' to Eva's 'now' with regards to the representation of the complexities of women's sexual lives and experiences. But it is the tension between the 'what is real' and 'what is representation' that is forever present in Blues based lyrics and prose, through conscious and unconscious hiding and masking, both personal and political, that far from denying these experiences, these inter-generational and inter-textual couplings, work as a viable form of marginalised expression. The beauty in the blue note, the stories from the other side of the tracks, are always there, ever agitating, to produce the pearl.

In the preceding two chapters I have identified and discussed the problematics and the possibilities of autobiography and fiction with regards to voice and subjectivity. The

[72] Gayl Jones, *Eva's Man*, New York: Random House, 1976, p18.
[73] Gayl Jones, *Eva's Man*, New York: Random House, 1976, p177.

following chapter is a culmination of these two chapters, changing the lens from wide angle to a more microscopic to examine how the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonym are recognised and represented in their accepted forms of Western rhetoric, and also how they are appropriated and used by marginalised subjects, particularly, women's expression in literature, the Blues, and Afro-American female writings, to signify themselves through the art of Signifyin(g).

Chapter Three: Signifyin(g) The Blues

'The real does not efface itself in favour of the imaginery; it effaces itself in favour of the more real than real: the hyper real, the truer than true. This is simulation.'[74]

'Metaphor depends for meaning upon a relation of identity … the rightness of that relation depends upon it being grasped in an instant. Metonymy, however, depends upon a sustained patterning for meaning and therefore extends temporally in a way metaphor does not.'[75]

'Aw woman, quit tryin' to signify.'
'Ah kin signify all Ah please, Mr Nappy-Chin, so long as Ah know what Ah'm talkin' about.'[76]

Yesterday, today tomorrow; they are not separate entities but exist, instead, simultaneously in our conscious and in our very physicality. The diseases of tomorrow bide their time, awaiting their call to appear, but they bring the past along with them, for it is in the past when they were created. To live in the past or to live only for the future are one and the same, (for is not the future only the past once it arrives and leaves?) So what of the present? It is where our past self and lives and our numerous transformations meet. My present and future only exist because of my past. If by desiring an outcome and through repetition of patterns this outcome is never achieved, does that mean our desire is wrong? Could it be that by repeating patterns we are actually giving ourselves endless opportunities to create our new futures?

Where do I go when I vacate the present? Words fill my head but from where? From whom? Who is this person speaking when I am not there? It is a strange sensation but I only recognise it after the event. Doors open and close; I open up and I shut down. But I have no control over it. Like a house with all its doors and windows open before a storm hits and the

[74] Jean Baudrillard in Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 65.
[75] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 69
[76] Zora Neale Hurston, in Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p 197.

wind slams them all shut. Some open and close as the wind howls and swirls. I pull the blanket over my head and hide, but signs and symbols lie waiting in my subconscious, asking to be read, to be brought into the light.

I like to write early in the morning, in that still dream state when the doors to my subconscious are slightly ajar, and I stand on the threshold, before the day takes over, before conscious thoughts bombard. It is not enough to be in the present. There are two levels of present, just as there are two levels in the dream state: the manifest and the latent. It is that liminal state, between the conscious and subconscious, that creates a double layered present. (Amanda Williams – Writing Journal, December 2010).

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The above musings on repetition and patterning are reflections on the idea of reality, and the possibility of change and movement through knowledge of these patterns. To trust in your own recurring patterns and to use them to your advantage is the key. Like myths and fables handed down, I feel, they reside in our collective unconscious; we only have to be aware of them to let them in and learn from them. In my novella, literal thresholds such as my character's bedroom, and the idea of staying inside or making the move to leave, doors opening and closing, and her decisions of where to go next reflect change and growth as a conscious choice, but also the liminal space where new ideas and experiences emerge. Identifying and living in the space of the liminal threshold, artists make conscious choices, but simultaneously also allow the emergence of unconscious messages to appear. My own experience of standing at the crossroads, at the liminal threshold, as a teenager, as a writer and as a researcher, is reflected in my novella and also this exegesis. These messages, through

repetitions and patterns, through similarities and associations, emerge and are represented in literature and musical lyrics through rhetorical devices such as metaphor and metonym.

As Lauren Slater asks in her book *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies*, 'is metaphor in memoir, in life, an alternative form of dishonesty or simply an evasion?'[77] Another question could be asked: Is this lying or dishonesty or evasion through metaphor produced consciously or unconsciously and where does metonym fit within this question as a rhetorical device? And still another: Whether consciously or unconsciously, is its purpose personal or political, or both? All these questions I will attempt to answer in this chapter, with regards to female writing, and more specifically, African-American female writing, and how this relates to my own experience, from both a form and content perspective, of writing autobiographical fiction, with that most bluest of blue, ambiguous signifying filter firmly attached: the Blues.

'Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs, fuckin' up the scenery, breakin' my mind'[78] so the song goes. These angst ridden lyrics from the seventies, reflect the western historical investigation into the symbiotics of language began at the turn of the twentieth century which continued into the postmodern era of the sixties, seventies and eighties where it was acknowledged that a sign is made up of two elements, the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. This can mean different things to different people depending on historical experience, race, culture and gender; the signifier being the sound/image and the signified, its concept or meaning.

Whether, as in the lyrics mentioned above, the hegemony of the day was being questioned, with signification being acknowledged on a more political level, the sign became the word, (pardon the pun) and its limitless possibilities of differentiation with regards to

[77] Lauren Slater, *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies*, London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2000, p 192.
[78] Les Emmerson, The Five Man Electrical Band, 'Signs', 1970, http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/tesla/signs.html viewed 12/9/2014.

identity and identification became apparent. Signification is defined as, 'the play of differences and similarities between signs that constitutes language as a meaningful system.'[79] Jaques Lacan read these differences and similarities through the theoretical lense of psychoanalysis and suggested with regards to the production of, and understanding of, language that it is in fact the difference between signs that constitutes their meaning. He defined language as 'a synchronic system of signs which generate meaning through their interaction; meaning exists in and through a chain of signifiers, and does not reside in any one element.'[80] Lacan, also, through his reading of Freudian psychoanalysis, suggested that 'the unconscious is structured like a language … and likened Freud's delineation of the dream state of condensation and displacement to the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonym.'[81] In the western linguistic tradition, these tropes have been further likened and posited on an axis with metaphor positioned on the vertical paradigmatic axis that signifies meaning and metonymy on the horizontal syntagmatic axis that signifies structure. A simple example of this delineation would see poetry and Blues lyrics positioned on the higher end of the vertical paradigmatic axis where meaning is presented through substitution and allusion. Narrative prose and ballad type song lyrics would be positioned along the horizontal syntagmatic axis where syntactic association creates meaning through structure. The following is a simple example and the interesting question would be where do prose poetry and poetic and lyrical narrative prose fit within these axes? Compare the following prose:

> And then he asked me would I yes to say yes … and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will
>
> yes. (1922) [82]

[79] David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, London, UK: Penguin Books, 2001, p 352.
[80] David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, p 223.
[81] David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, p 223.
[82] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Middlesex UK: Penguin Modern Classics, 1984, p 704

To some Blues lyrics:

He's a deep sea diver with a stroke that can't go wrong

He's a deep sea diver with a stroke that can't go wrong

He can touch the bottom and his wind holds out so long

He boiled my first cabbage and he made it awful hot

He boiled my first cabbage and he made it awful hot

Then he put in the bacon, it overflowed the pot. (1928) [83]

The idea of comparing James Joyce to Bessie Smith, both emerging in the Modernist epoch of the early twentieth century, is to identify their similarities more than their differences with regards to rhythm and content in prose and music, and to illustrate, as mentioned above, the play between metaphoric and metonymic rhetorical devices in meaning and structure. In Joyce's prose we see metonymic repetition and patterning through association with the word 'yes' where 'yes' relates to both Molly Bloom's first sexual experience and also her desire for life where 'no' is not an option. In 'Empty Bed Blues', like many Blues songs, sexual allusions abound but are also masked by the metaphors that represent them. Joyce uses metonymic devices in free form, while in these Blues lyrics, metaphor is extreme but held together by a strict AAB lyrical format. It is the play within the metaphorical and metonymic axes, the similarities and differences, and the meeting points, that lend themselves to appropriation through conscious and unconscious knowledge and experience, and interpretation, both for the writer and reader (performer and listener) through allusion and similarity.

[83] J C Johnson 'Empty Bed Blues' in Angela Y Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, New York: Random House, 1984, p 277/278.

If meaning and identity are each arbitrary, it can be argued that so too is reality, reflecting the fictional elements of self-representation through autobiography, which is the overriding theme of this thesis. With regards to these fictional elements, it is how and why the rhetorical tropes of metaphor (leading to another through similarity) and metonym (leading to another through contiguity) are used, consciously and unconsciously, and indeed their inherent arbitrariness, that will be the focus of the following discussion.

As Leigh Gilmore suggests, 'the relationship between representation and the real concerns many critics of autobiography, as well as many autobiographers.'[84] Returning to Paul De Man's idea of prosopopoeia, or the masked figurative 'I', and James Olney's metaphorically understood 'I', with regards to autobiography discussed in chapter one, Gilmore further contemplates these different theoretical positions through an examination of the tropes of metaphor and metonym, reading them through a feminist theoretical lens. Gilmore interprets De Man's position as a question with which he answers: 'Which is the cause and which the effect: metonymic narrative process or the metaphorical definitions it produces? ... the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity … it is undecidable.'[85] While acknowledging that Olney's metaphoricalised self 'stands in the gap described by prosopopoeia,[86] she suggests that '… metaphor participates in the production of identity as … an essential sameness (the self) in different forms … metonymy recognises the continual production of identity as a kind of patterning … sustained by the modes of production that create it.'[87] So, from a feminist view point, if metaphor fills the gap, or the 'lack' posited by Lacan as the female site of the 'other', where he equates metonym

[84] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 65.
[85] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 71.
[86] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 74.
[87] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 69.

with desire and metaphor with bodily symptoms, [88] it is not surprising that a feminist reading of the usage and implications of metaphor and metonym side with the idea that, far from experiencing a lack of a metaphorical self, or a desire for the phallus, in fact, 'metonym is a favoured trope for female self-representation' as a trope for relational difference.'[89] Women's self-representation favours metonym as their desires are often not about a totalising idea of self (or of others), but simply a relational understanding. As Barbara Johnson suggests with regards to female self-representation, 'The sign of an authentic voice is thus not self identity but self difference.'[90] The difference of being female as opposed to male, the difference of being black as opposed to white, and ultimately, with regards to Black-American female existence and its corresponding representation, the difference of being black and female, as opposed to being black and male. In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's grandmother points this out to Janie:

> Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out … so de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see.[91]

Women's autobiographical fiction can be seen as a means of creating self-identity through self-difference by its inclination toward the more fluid and double voiced attributes of metonymy. Women's inclination towards ambiguity in self-representation as discussed in chapter one and chapter two, contrasts with the more patriarchal 'proper interpretation' found in metaphor to create not merely alternative, but polyphonic subject positionings in their writing where 'women are not identical in some especially metaphorical way … rather gender

[88] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 68.
[89] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 78.
[90] Barbara Johnson 'Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', in Henry Louis Gates Jr (Ed) *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York: Methuen, 1984, p 212.
[91] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p 14.

performance/existence, like metonymy, succeeds through repetition. In this way, the representation is the construction.'[92] In other words, women's self-representation through autobiography and fiction can be seen as being constructed as metonymic patterning and associations, which reflects a more fluid and relational self-identity through self-difference rather than similarity.

Returning to Gilmore's interpretation of De Man's rejection of the either/or of autobiography and fiction, this idea of representation as construction is supported by De Man in that 'narrative creates character through metonymy and identity in the text emerges through contiguity.'[93] Considering metonymy's associative nature and women's experience of their world and proclivity to represent themselves and this world through relation and connection, Barbara Johnson also rejects the either/or positions of metonymy and metaphor and suggests 'The reduction of a discourse to oneness, identity … to privilege either metaphor or metonymy is thus to run the risk of producing an increasingly aphasic (silencing) critical discourse.'[94]

The discussion above reflects the myriad possibilities of differentiation with regards to identity and identification through signification – one man's (or woman's) signifier is another's signified – and also reflects the elemental questioning of 'what is real' and 'what is representation' posed at the beginning of this chapter. Autobiography and fiction, reality and representation, along with metaphor and metonym, are simply different points on the axes, where 'the real clings to metonymy; metaphor skates off the real and transcends materiality … it is within the structure of metonymy, that autobiographical metaphors have meaning.'[95]

[92] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 84.
[93] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 71.
[94] Barbara Johnson 'Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', p 212.
[95] Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p 68.

Rather than an either/or reading, metaphor and metonym, like reality and fiction, are both elements of fictional autobiography and are mutually inclusive, which I have endeavoured to illustrate in my novella 'Peninsula Blues' where syntagmatic structure and associations (my character's literal journey through her neighbourhood and childhood, and journey of self discovery) sit next to paradigmatic memories, dreams and fairy tales.

Returning to Lauren Slater's question regarding metaphor as lying or avoidance, with regards to memory, dream and fairy tale, the question here is one of intent. Lying is not necessarily done on purpose; we all know people who, given the opportunity to be truthful or embellish, will opt for embellishment, without thinking about it. Avoidance too, via metaphor, can be a clinical strategy consciously or unconsciously produced, to remove oneself, or another self, from a painful or shameful memory. Memory, as discussed in chapter one, is coloured by the present of when the memory is occurring or being recalled, so memory too, and its accuracy in retelling, can be seen as having involuntary elements. In my novella I was able to write the memories and the memories within memories sequences either as an observer, or from a place of unknowing, through a child's eyes, to possibly avoid the shameful feelings I still experience when thinking about these events. The experience of sexual pleasure and pain are combined through the use of a rocking horse metaphor. Sexual desire and distress are 'condensed' into a menacing but attractive child's plaything, like Polly in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, who 'has no language to describe the memory of a past pleasure, except one drawn from her distant childhood.'[96] De-familiarisation, 'a literary effect of disrupting our habitual perception of the world,'[97]could also be seen as a type of metaphorical avoidance strategy, for both writer and reader. By de-familiarising the represented experience the writer is empowered to allow repressed emotions surrounding an

[96] Susan Willis, 'Eruptions of Funk: Historicising Toni Morrison' in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 263.
[97] Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p 53/54.

event to emerge, while the reader is given the opportunity to experience a familiar, read accepted, circumstance, and see it in a different light. Just as 'Morrison defamiliarises the portrayal of sensual experience … [where] sexuality converges with history and functions as a register for the experience of change,'[98] by combining unfamiliar metaphors with familiar circumstances, or the reverse, I have also endeavoured to historicise my character's sexual experiences in relation to her father and the era of the seventies.

Fairy tales, with their fable like qualities, although intentionally structured and expressed, have a base in myth and archetype through characterisation and plot which, once again, suggests an involuntary emergence of story. Jeanette Winterson hints at the reason for her use of a fairy tale in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by suggesting that 'fiction needs its specifics, its anchors. It needs also to pass beyond them. It needs to be weighed down with characters we can touch and know, it needs also to fly right through them into a larger, universal space.[99] Without embarking on a Proppesque examination of archetypal characters and plots, or an analysis of Winterson's use of the fairy tale, for that is not the focus of this thesis, I indeed appropriated my use of a fairy tale in my novella from Winterson for the exact same reason as she identifies. In fact, there is a story to tell with regards to its evolution.

I was in the process of researching possible indigenous benevolent characters with regards to the dreaming stories of the Kaurna people of coastal Adelaide and surrounds to try and find any similarities to the African myth of Esu, the trickster. To no avail, it must be said, but this unexpected and serendipitous narrative was the result. It was an oral story given to me by a white woman who grew up in Taperoo on the Lefevre Peninsula, my peninsula, when Taperoo was still only part sand dunes. Interestingly enough, the serendipity of receiving an

[98] Susan Willis, 'Eruptions of Funk: Historicising Toni Morrison' in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 263.
[99] Jeanette Winterson, Introduction, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, London: Vintage Books, 1996, p xiv.

oral story does in fact relate to the African myth of Esu in that, like many myths, it is a story preserved by African slaves through oral narration. She told me a family story of an indigenous man who kept horses in the area who brought her little sister home one day, on horse back, as there was a dangerous white man on the loose in the area. This unintentional discovery and receiving of a story, which I'm sure will be handed down through the generations of the very generous woman who retold it, immediately spoke to me of a fable that could be retold repeatedly with regards to fear of the other, and it also reflected my own experiences of the local white and indigenous populations of Port Adelaide when I was growing up.

Dreams epitomise the involuntary emergence of the paradigmatic, in their condensed and displaced format. Unless it is one of the lucid kind where the dreamer is aware that they are dreaming and seems to have some control with regards to content and outcomes (*Alice in Wonderland* is a famous literary example of lucid dreaming), dreams, on one level, act as a mechanism to sort through the day's events, but on a deeper level, through the reappearance of similar metaphors, they can be an indication of suppressed emotions and desires. If 'dreams don't lie' in their unconscious emergence, they certainly can confuse and mislead, but on the other hand, they also epitomise the ambiguous nature of paradigmatic meanings within a syntagmatic narrative. Toni Morrison asks, 'What prompts and makes possible this process of entering what one is estranged from, and … what disables the foray, for purposes of fiction, into corners of the unconscious held off and away from the reach of the writer's imagination?'[100] In an attempt to answer this question, I have used dreams in this way in my own writing to hint at the ambiguous nature between conscious living and the unconscious world of suppressed hurts and desires by the continual questioning of reality or the awareness

[100] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, p 4.

of my character of the conscious and unconscious colliding where, for safety and reasons of self preservation, 'the past is held separate and bracketed by dream.'[101]

The meaning of the word dream itself has different connotations. As discussed above, dreams can be an indicator of recent past events and deeper levels of repressed past experience, but 'to dream a dream' also has connotations of action and change. With regards once again to Lauren Slater's suggestion that lying and avoidance through metaphor have possible negative connotations, African-American literature and the Blues, on the other hand, can be seen as vehicles for this action and change through active 'positive' lying. Toni Morrison asks 'What happens when writers work in a highly and historically racialised society? For them … imagining is not merely looking or looking at, nor is it taking oneself intact into the other … it is, for the purposes of the work, becoming.'[102] This idea of signification as not just producing and identifying represented meaning, but also turning it into an action with purpose and possibility through the act of Signifyin(g) in the Blues and African-American literature is the focus of the following discussion. Also my own appropriation of Blues tropes through 'intertextuality' or my own Signifyin(g) in my novella and this exegesis will be discussed.

Mention was made earlier in this chapter of the African myth of Esu and a brief explanation is required with regards to its links to African-American Signifyn(g). Esu is the 'divine trickster figure of Yoruba mythology … traced back to the … Yoruba cultures of … Nigeria … that recurs throughout black oral narrative traditions … and contains a primal

[101] Susan Willis, 'Eruptions of Funk: Historicising Toni Morrison' in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 269.
[102] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, p 4.

scene of instruction for the act of interpretation …'[103] Through the generations with numerous cultural interminglings and overlappings … 'the Yoruba myth of the origins of interpretation … stands as the trace of Esu in African-American myth … the functional equivalent … of his Afro-American descendant, the Signifying Monkey.'[104] In the African-American story of The Monkey, The Lion and The Elephant, the monkey, through indirection and 'tricksiness' convinces the lion that the elephant said something bad about him, and the lion, because he doesn't understand or 'interpret' the monkey's words as playful at best, confronts the elephant and is made to look stupid. The monkey is 'signifying' something else that the lion doesn't understand, a form of lying, but is also 'signifying' upon the lion, insulting him, by showing up his ignorance and lack of ability of interpretation. This type of Signifying as insult in African-American culture is called 'lying' or 'playing the dozens' and is appropriated and dramatised in the film by white rapper, Eminem, in *8 Mile*. Gates describes the definition of the word 'lies' in African-American culture as 'a traditional African-American word for figurative discourse, takes or stories … signifies tale-telling and constituters a signal form of Signifyin(g).'[105] It is the duality of the meaning of 'Signifying' that denotes the distinctiveness of the African-American use of rhetorical devices where in fact the trope of Signifying 'subsumes several other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony.'[106] This uniqueness is illustrated thus, 'In the black community it is possible to say "He is signifying" [the meaning] and "Stop Signifying" [the action], sentences which would be anomalous elsewhere.'[107] There is also another doubling within this duality in that when talking about the verb or the action of Signifying, 'it does not always have negative valuations attached to it,'[108] where Signifying on another artist's work, whether it be

[103] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 4/5.
[104] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 13/14.
[105] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 56/57.
[106] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 52.
[107] Claudia Mitchell-Kernan in Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 81.
[108] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 83.

literature, art or music (read the Blues), is an art in itself, showing knowledge and understanding, through intertextuality and appropriation of form and content.

This duality of Signifying can be described as a kind of 'riffing' which is found in jazz and the Blues where phrases are repeated, both in form and content and also through a form of revision or intertextuality by repeating phrases from other artists, for a knowledgeable audience. While knowledge of these references is not necessary to enjoy the performance, to be 'in the know' is an element of being able to Signify and adds to that 'shared experience' that epitomises Blues performances, both musically and in literature.

The following is an example of a Blues riff, in its simplest ABAB format, denoting western rhetorical tropes through the African-American trope of Signifying, both in its representation of 'playing the dozens' where whomever is being Signified upon, bares the brunt of insult and also its Signification upon the Blues in form (rhyming lines) and content (desperate/ironic life situation):

Your mama's a man (metaphor)
Your daddy's one too (irony)
They live in a tin can (metonymy)
That smells like a zoo (synecdoche)[109]

To tie all of the above together, with regards to the interpretation and production of signification in language, both in its conscious and unconscious forms, which includes dreams, fairy tales and myth, and the uniqueness of Black-American Signification, Gates uses Lacan's reading of Freud to suggest that:

[109] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 86.

> Signifyin(g) constitutes all of the language games, the figurative substitutions, the free associations, held in abeyance by Lacan's paradigmatic axis, which disturb the seemingly coherent linearity of the syntagmatic chain of signifiers, in a way analogous to Freud's notion of how the unconscious relates to the conscious … directing, or redirecting attention from the semantic to the rhetorical level … allows us to bring the repressed meanings of a word, the meanings that lie in wait on the paradigmatic axis of discourse, to bear upon the syntagmatic axis.[110]

Gates acknowledges, just as Barbara Johnson does in the preceding discussion with regards to the hierarchies of metaphor and metonym, that signification (the lower case 's' he denotes as standard English) and Signification (the upper case 'S' he denotes as black vernacular discourse) are situated in a 'symbiotic and vertiginous relationship, each of which is dependent on the other.'[111]

Changing the lens to close up focus, the following discussion will look at the Blues, its form and content, in relation to the discussion above with regards to paradigmatic expression and syntagmatic associations, found in female Black-American writing and Signified upon by my own written expression in my novella 'Peninsula Blues'.

As has already been identified and suggested throughout this thesis, through its history of political and playful appropriation of Western rhetoric, the Blues has given a voice to marginalised subjects to re-position themselves. By standing on the liminal crossroads of meaning and subjectivity, looking in and looking out, Blues practitioners and their created characters, either as an autobiographical 'I' or a projected and identifiable 'me', have used

[110] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 58.
[111] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*, p 50.

their marginalised position to question, relate and revise what it means to be alienated. 'Being on the move, on the road, and on the margins [is] somehow essential to their art … by indirection, preferring to insinuate, imply and raise doubts rather than to judge and fulminate openly … one has to listen carefully in order to hear it.'[112] The psychology of expression pertaining to the Blues employs its inherent multiplicity by saying this is what happened (albeit hidden or disguised in metaphor and metonym), listen to me, empathise with me, but don't judge me. Houston A. Baker describes the Blues thus as 'polymorphous and multi-directional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between … the juncture is the way-station of the Blues.'[113]

The idea of the liminal crossroads of looking in and looking out, of inside and outside, of the place betwixt and between, and how it pertains to a combination of the rhetorical devices of metaphor and metonym, is at its most prevalent in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in the scene illustrated in chapter one of this thesis, where Hurston's character, Janey, signifies upon her husband, Joe, on the porch; the porch being a liminal figurative crossroad between her life in the shop and the greater world outside. This relates to the doubling and fluid subjectivity of the Blues where 'the distinctions between spectator and spectacle, rehearsal and performance, experience and representation are not fixed.' [114]

After questioning her husband's God like power by actually participating in the Signifying that happens on the porch, from which she is usually excluded, and suggesting her husband doesn't know what he's talking about, Janey has an epiphany where she realises what

[112] Robert Switzer, 'Signifying the Blues', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No 21, The Lyrical Phenomenon, 2001, p 28.
[113] Houston A. Baker, 'Criticism in the Jungle' *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 7.
[114] Barbara Johnson 'Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 208.

has happened to their marriage, illustrated in a rhetorical comingling of metaphor and metonym where the inner is externalised and the outer is internalised.[115] The external metonymic narrative associations of where Janie and Joe live as a house behind a shop, Janie internalises metaphorically as a way of describing her feelings: 'The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlour … the bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in …'[116] Simultaneously, she internalises the external metonymic narrative associations of the shop by describing her feelings where: 'She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her.[117] Barbara Johnson describes this comingling of metaphor and metonym as, 'the former is a metaphorically grounded metonymy and the latter is a metonymically grounded metaphor'.[118] Both Johnson's and Gates' theories of metaphor and metonym in relation to African-American literature are at play here where it is the combination, the relation, of both to each other, that illustrates Houston A. Baker's idea of the Blues as 'offering interpretations of the experiencing of experience.'[119]

The idea of crossroads and liminal thresholds, train tracks and the freedom and fear of the journey, are all Blues metaphors and metonyms that inform my novella 'Peninsula Blues' through a combination of experiential and rhetorical (read 'real' and 'representational') positioning. In the more paradigmatic autobiographical fiction, my character's literal journey over twenty four hours connects to the memoir via the metonymic idea of 'the journey' through its associations with life and growing up. The metaphorical allusion to thresholds in the autobiographical fiction via dreams, and memories; doors, and doorways; trains, and the

[115] Barbara Johnson 'Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 211.
[116] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p 71.
[117] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p 72.
[118] Barbara Johnson 'Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in Henry Louis Gates Jr, (Ed), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, p 212.
[119] Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984, p 7.

train station connects to the metonymical 'journey' of associated action through movement. Travel and movement, on foot and by rail are Blues icons originating historically in America with the advent of the locomotive and the opening up of the North to Southern African-Americans. The train with 'its whistle and its wheels promised movement … that such people [marginalised subjects] would view the locomotive as a challenge to the integrative powers of their imaginations.'[120] The idea of 'going loco' although a Spanish word for going crazy, could also be interpreted through its Latin origins of 'loco' meaning place and 'motivus' meaning motive or to move by a change of position.[121] All these definitions of locomotive reflect the Blues idea of challenging the integrative powers of the imagination through challenges to change one's position, both figuratively and literally when standing at the crossroads.

Like the train, the crossroads is another Blues icon which 'symbolises freedom of movement, travel and self-determination; the dilemma of the crossroads is that one must choose which path to follow.'[122] The African myth of Esu, the Signifying trickster, discussed earlier in this chapter, relates to the, also iconic, Blues story of the musician at the crossroads who 'sells his soul' to the devil (the trickster) to attain 'superhuman' musical ability. This 'little devil' or trickster has been appropriated by Ralph Ellison in his essay 'The Little Man at the Chehaw Station' where he says that 'there'll always be a little man hidden behind the stove … and he'll know the *music* and the *tradition* and the standards of *musicianship* required for whatever you set out to perform,'[123] to suggest that, in the Blues, with regards to Signifying, you always have to know what you are talking about, as someone will always be

[120] Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, p 11.
[121] Oxford Online Dictionary, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/English/locomotive/ viewed 23/9/2014.
[122] Ayana Smith, 'Blues, criticism and the signifying trickster', *Popular Music*, Vol 24/2, 2005, p184.
[123] Ralph Ellison in Houston A Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, p 12.

listening, ready and waiting, to give you 'advice'. This dilemma of what to do next, what choices to make, and the trickster figure cajoling or warning, I have appropriated in my novella which culminates in the last scene at the station where my character, who originally had no metonymic ticket, is offered one by a trickster figure who has been repeatedly appearing throughout her journey, and she makes an alluded to decision to move on, to change her destiny, by slipping the ticket into her jeans pocket.

From a feminist perspective, the metaphor of travel, via walking and the train, as a form of purposeful movement, and the mythological train station as the liminal crossroads, reflects both the myth of Hecate, the Greek Goddess of the crossroads who 'walked the roads at night and was unwilling to sacrifice her independent nature,'[124] and also the idea of women's autobiography as a figurative 'movement from place to place [where] the author positions the self in relation to some other.'[125] Using the 'symbolic freedom of myth … [which] finds its conditions of possibility in … liminality (a transitional or marginal state) where anything can happen … where elements of culture and society are released from their customary configurations,'[126] I have endeavoured to illustrate in my novella through metonymy and metaphor, the personal and individual choices that were and are possible for young females standing at the crossroads of their destinies, but also historicised in Smith's (and my own) moment in time, that of the seventies, discussed in chapter two.

With regards to the idea of the relational duality of women's identity, and the fluid subjectivity of women's autobiography and fiction discussed in chapters one and two, the discussion above suggests that women writers stand at the liminal crossroads where 'the

[124] Hecate, Greek Goddess of The Crossroads, http://www.goddessgift.com/goddess-myths/greek_goddess_hecate.htm, viewed 12/9/2014.
[125] Mary G Mason, 'Travel as Metaphor and Reality in Afro-American Women's Autobiography, 1850-1972, *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol 24, No 2, Summer 1990, p341.
[126] Houston A Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, p 116.

liminal is the space that describes something that is between the known (where we are) and the unknown (where we are entering). The liminal is the threshold.'[127] This space also invites interpretation by apophatic reading which is 'shown as a way of indicating what is both said and kept away from saying [where the reader] enters into an engagement with the text that is both allusive and elusive.'[128] The liminal crossroads allows women writers to Signify on their place in the world, both personally and politically, culturally and historically, through a combination of conscious and unconscious appropriation of metonymic associations and metaphoric allusions to create a space for their own subject re-positioning.

Returning to my use of the horse as a metaphor for freedom and desire (and fear of this desire) discussed earlier in this chapter, the serendipitous moments of unconscious appropriation I have experienced, among many, while writing my novella and exegesis occurred when reading the closing lines of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*: 'For now he knew what Shalimar knew. If you surrender to the air, you could ride it.'[129] I then discovered Houston A. Baker's Blues inspired interpretation of these closing lines where he says 'An awesomely expressive Blues response may well consist of improvisational and serendipitous surrender to the air.'[130] Using the keyboard as my piano, through my conscious and unconscious 'riffing' or Signifying on literature, music and theory while writing my novella and exegesis, I allowed myself to 'surrender to the air' and indeed felt serendipitously, if only for a moment, that 'I could ride it.'

[127] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apohatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', p 1.
[128] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apohatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', p 1.
[129] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, New York: Vintage International, 2004, p 337.
[130] Houston A Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, p 14.

Conclusion

'One must acknowledge, at the outset of one's project, that all fixed points are problematical.'[131]

'The blues poet has been where we are all afraid to go … a forbidden place that corresponds to a place in ourselves where we experience the tragic sense of life and its amazing wonders. In that all-night blues and soul club, we feel the full weight of our fate … we are simultaneously wretched and happy …the blues, in the end, is about a sadness older than the world, and there's no cure for that.'[132]

'I walked and I walked 'til I wore out my shoes
I can't go no further, yonder comes the blues.'[133]

So it's come to this. I've never felt so alone. Time, always time, I need so much of it and waste so much. So how does it feel? Strangely familiar, from a distant past, decisions to make, routines to set up. Here I am. So it's come to this.

Where did my voice go? This Masters has become, or always was, a journey. It's not just a mastering of my skills as a writer and researcher; it's a mastering of me. I'm glad in a way that it's taken so long. The finished document will be better for it. I said in the beginning that it would be a journey of self-discovery and so it has been.

As a woman, daughter, mother and friend, and now, as a teacher; the initial euphoria, the realisation that I had found where I was meant to be, gave way to injury, stress and sickness. And so, here I am. In my novella, I thought I wrote to discover the me that I was, the me I could be, the she that was me, but when you go on a journey, you always have to take yourself with you, and so it has been on this one. The fiction and the memoir were

[131] Houston A Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, p 200.
[132] Charles Simic in Robert Switzer, 'Signifying the Blues' p 26.
[133] Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey in Robert Switzer, 'Signifying the Blues' p 33.

always going to be influenced by the present, the perpetual present that changes from day to day. Just a moment in time, but time itself is fluid, like identity, always moving from the past to the present, and always with an eye on the future. I have music, paper and a pen. You don't need to suffer too much to find yourself. It is the solitude, wherever and whenever you can find it that is the key. You can feel alone in a crowd, but you can also feel like you've got a companion by yourself. Hello. It is you. Long time no speak. I think we are going to enjoy each other's company.

The palimpsest of memory beckons. Fractured, but always looking for the whole, that is me. That is what drives me, what I want to find again, that drive to heal the fractures. But to heal the whole, does that have to mean shutting the doors and windows and not being open to intrusions? I see in my mind a single cell, the whole, being penetrated. One becomes two. Growth, expansion; it is endless. That's it. Create the whole then expand on my own terms. Each penetration and intrusion creates something new. Everything is important, but then let it go.

(Amanda Williams – Writing Journal, August 2014).

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The fluidity of subject positioning, and the multiplicity of identity and voice permeate this exegesis, and also the idea of the liminal space as a conduit for self realisation and self expression. I have used my writing journal both as a means for the reader to 'share' my experience of writing my novella and exegesis, and also as a conduit to connect the two together, as a space open for interpretation between my 'story' and the exegetical examination of it in a culturally and historically situated academic environment by 'revealing the academic

text to be sewn together as a compilation of the scholarly, the anecdotal or popular, and the autobiographical.'[134] With regards to African-American literature and Blues ideology, as Houston A Baker suggests in the quote that introduces this conclusion, fixed points, or one could say, fixed positions, are problematical, but only in their avoidance of the acknowledgement of this fluidity in the representation of experience and experience itself, and in the examination of this represented experience. This exegesis endeavours to be an example of Josie Arnold's 'subjective academic self as …a liminal space between the known and accepted academic voice and the ways in which narrative may be employed in academic non-fiction.'[135] The anecdotal becomes the 'conductor' in both its scientific and musical definitions by allowing the energy of each discipline to flow freely between each other and also as a means of directing writer and reader attention to the many faceted elements of the project as a whole.

The reader may notice the 'gap' of a number of years from my earlier writing journal entries introducing chapters one, two and three to my last one which introduces this conclusion. This gap in time reflects the side tracks and derailments that I experienced while endeavouring to produce my Masters dissertation. But as I have already acknowledged, this gap or space allowed time for reflection and new experiences and discoveries to enter which enhanced all three forms of expression: the creative product, the exegetical examination and the writer's journal.

So, the liminal, the crossroads, the betwixt and between, all reflect the discussion of this exegesis with regards to the self-representation of women writers as marginalised

[134] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apohatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', p 4.
[135] Josie Arnold, 'The liminal and apohatic voice of the writer in/as autobiography: a subjective academic narrative', p 11.

subjects, while using the Blues form and content, its ideology and theory as a means of tying these discussions together. My discussion with regards to the tension between first person and third person voice, between autobiography and fiction, between reality and representation, alludes to this tension as being something positive where alienated subjects appropriate western patriarchal forms to create new subject positions. Through the use of free indirect discourse, Zora Neale Hurston, in her fictional *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and also in her autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road*, speaks to De Man's idea of the prosopopeiac or masked voice, where the author, by absenting themselves from the narrative, opens up a space for reader interpretation/participation. By using De Man's acknowledged suggestion that autobiography struggles to be a true rendering with regards to the representation of the real because of its inherent masking via fictional elements, I have suggested that the third person voice, through this exact idea of fictional masking, can act as a freer forum for the writer to explore hidden truths. These hidden truths can be political as well as personal and relates to the Blues, in its form and content, as a means of insinuating and alluding to subversive connotations through metaphoric and metonymic masking.

Free indirect discourse is a dual voice in its written and read form where through the absence of a narrator, the reader experiences both a written and spoken voice. This spoken voice relates to the ideology and mythology of the Blues as being an oral tradition. Once again, the tension between the written and oral voice is not a negative one, but instead creates something new and reflects the idea of tension as the push and pull between entities, the continual interplay between voice and structure. I have endeavoured to reflect this interplay in my novella 'Peninsula Blues' by juxtaposing first person memoir with third person autobiographical fiction and also in the structure of this exegesis by incorporating my writing journal entries and anecdotes into an academic dissertation.

Who is speaking and who is seeing? I have attempted to answer this question through an examination of theories surrounding the autobiographical 'I', its possibilities and limitations, and a further questioning of voice, both in its production and its receiving, to illustrate the myriad of ways marginalised subjects appropriate these forms with an emphasis on the Blues being a way for reader/listener participation.

Women's autobiography and fiction, its combination of both, and the interplay between these historically separated genres, is an example of the marginalised subject appropriating hegemonic discourses to discover through emergence, or to create through subversiveness, their own identity through discourse. Using the Blues as an umbrella, I suggest that there is beauty to be found in the weeds that line the train track sidings, or are pulled up out of a pristine garden, and is reflected in the 'blue note' of women's writing where difference, due to both proclivity and marginalisation, is celebrated. This appropriation is reflected in the oral traditions of the Blues where 'many writers have searched and wandered until they have been surprised by the blooming orchid, then called out in their own clear voices … for others to come and see.'[136]

Historically, the idea of women as receptacles of another's desire through being daughters, wives, mothers, and muses, gave way, ironically, because of this relational identity, to women appropriating these positions and representing themselves through relational difference, as indeed having desires of their own. By subverting the form and content of autobiography and fiction, women writers acknowledge their fluid subjectivity by experimenting with accepted boundaries of genre and focalisation, and indeed use their

[136] Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voice: Oral Tradition in African-American Literature*, p 190.

anonymity as an autobiographical and representational tool to speak from, and examine, life on the margins. The domestic sphere and their relational identity within it, especially their sexual identity, as a way of speaking back to the patriarchal canon, I would like to suggest, became their 'canon fire'.

Female Blues practitioners have been, and still are, re-writing their subject positions through the continual appropriation of Blues form and content. To use a Blues based metonymy, they've always got both barrels loaded and are never afraid to use them. This empowerment, although at times couched in loss and melancholy, spoke to me with regards to choice, action and change for theirs and my own, real and imagined protagonist. In this thesis I delineate, through a personal and theoretical paradigm, the era of the seventies as a moment in time, where theories of the accepted autobiographical 'I' came into question and were reflected in experimental texts of women's representation appropriating the form and content of the patriarchal canon and subverting it to re-create subject positions. This moment in time also reflects the emergence and appropriation of the Blues by seventies bands such as Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, and while some would question, as a feminist, why I use lyrics from these bands to introduce each section of my novella, I would respond by saying that they were the sound track of my teenage years; I didn't see them, then, as bad boy figures of desire, but figures, while not entirely asexual, of questioning and rebellion, of cutting open the repressive and stifling box that I felt I lived in on the Le Fevre Peninsula, Port Adelaide, in the seventies. In 2014, this is all not new, but as a girl born in 1960, I wanted to, through my novella, create an historical document, as well as a personal one, that reflected this time of great change and upheaval.

But of course, this is 2014, and my present colours my past, both in experience and knowledge. Through my theoretical research and reading of primary texts, I have identified the relational nature of women's writing, both autobiographical and fictional, and found the connections and the historical differences between certain African-American women writers who, like the Blues' element of positive appropriation, talk back and to each other in a cultural and historical way. Like the Blues, where proactive empowerment can be couched in relational reaction, I have connected Zora Neale Hurston's examination of sexual empowerment through finding a voice, in her fictional *Their Eyes Were Watching God* published in 1937 and her autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road* published in 1942 to Gayl Jones' examination of African-American female sexual identity in *Corregidora* published in 1975 and *Eva's Man* published in 1976. Jones alludes to, and is reflected in their decade of publication, the idea of a more fluid subject positioning in the outcome of her protagonists where both Ursa and Eva find acceptance of themselves through reconciliation of the past and recognition of sexual difference. This difference I allude to in my novella where I suggest that my protagonist's acceptance of herself as different, from her peers, from her parents, from her neighbourhood, points towards a more positive future.

It is appropriation, in its fluidity, not from the more patriarchal 'anxiety of influence' position mentioned in chapter two, but from a relational, cultural and historical perspective that informs both my novella and exegesis in its form and content as an example of women's autobiographical and fictional representation where 'their contradictory and fluid subject positions lead them to intervene in … cultural fictions, interrogating, cannibalising, rereading the stories to their own purposes.'[137] I suggest that the fluidity and 'open source' elements of the Blues are reflected in this type of appropriation where marginalised subjects, specifically

[137] Paul Smith in Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', p 21.

African-American women writers, speak to each other through a palimpsestic layered history, but always ultimately situated in their own historical moment.

To further delineate my discussion of appropriation in women's autobiographical fiction and the Blues, the historical and cultural understanding of language and its practice became a focus for my research where the western acknowledgement of language as a series of differential signs and its tropes of signification aligned with psychoanalytical theories resulted in an analysis of the specificities of signification with regards to the Blues trope of Signification. Through this research I discovered that African and later African-American signification was not only a way of describing how paradigmatic and syntagmatic word choices are used to create meaning (and to mask it), but that Blues Signification was an action where intertextuality or appropriation was Signified upon, and further that people could be Signified upon through playfulness of language and insult. In African-American language, Signifying, through meaning and action is the trope of tropes where metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony are incorporated in varying degrees to create not only a 'masking' of a specific meaning, but a duality or a doubling of different meanings through action.

One of the overriding themes of this thesis is the questioning of 'what is real' and 'what is representation' in autobiography and fiction and how these elements intertwine. Roland Barthes suggests 'Literature does not tell the truth, but truth is not to be found only where there are no lies (there are other sites for truth, if only the unconscious).'[138] By combining the real and the representational through autobiographical fiction in a combination of metonymical association and metaphorical similarities, and including within this narrative, dreams and emerging memories, my intention was to suggest, as Barthes has done, that truth

[138] Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1985, p 237).

and reality, the truer than true, can in fact be found through the freedom of representation in imagination. As Barthes also suggests, truth telling can come from an unconscious place where unconscious emergence combines with conscious appropriation, for playful or political reasons. This, I suggest, is reflected in the Blues' conscious appropriation or intertextuality and unconscious emergence through oral story telling and mythology which I have also endeavoured to reflect in my novella.

Another overriding theme of this thesis is the way women writers, through fluid subjectivity, question and indeed play with these paradigms in an organic way with a proclivity toward relational metonymic representation, but like the Blues, women writers use multiple voices to create ambiguous open ended subject positions to allow reader interpretation/participation as a kind of sharing. This sharing, in both its female proclivity and open sourced appropriation in the Blues, I suggest, are connected in their coming from marginalised personal situations. Metonymic reality and metaphoric representation are appropriated by marginalised subjects and combined in a myriad of ways to question and agitate towards a subverting of accepted canonical genres and the binary opposition, the either/or, of metonymy and metaphor, of reality and representation.

Returning to the idea of the liminal crossroads mentioned at the beginning of this conclusion and the Blues idea of action through Signification, I suggest that this exegesis, from the space of the liminal crossroads, is a form of Blues Signifying upon theoretical knowledge and literary forms, through my own intertextuality and appropriation, to ultimately suggest that there are palimpsestic elements of conscious and unconscious appropriation in all forms of discourse, fictional and nonfictional. To say that appropriation is a form of copying is to negate the importance of these historical palimpsestic elements. Ralph Ellison suggests

'Replication isn't reproduction. The copy transcends the original.'[139] Art, in all its forms, is not created in a vacuum; it is created through experience and rendered through imagination, with this imagination existing in its own particular context. With regards to appropriation, Jonathan Lethem further acknowledges, 'Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos. Any artist knows these truths, no matter how deeply he or she submerges that knowing.'[140] The caveat that surrounds this argument resides in the word 'humble'. As Nisi Shawl suggests in her article 'Appropriate Cultural Appropriation', there are 'responsibilities to that source: the responsibility to recognise it, to learn from it, to serve it, to enhance it …'[141] I suggest that both women's appropriation and subversion of canonical literary forms in their autobiography and fiction, and the Blues idea of Signifying as an art form in itself through appropriation and intertextuality, reflect Shawl's caution and Lethem's admission, through an empathetic understanding of living and creating in the liminal space of the margins.

From the body of this exegesis, and the above concluding statements, the reader can follow my journey and see the workings of my own empathetic understanding through appropriations of primary texts, and theoretical knowledge which influenced the production of my novella 'Peninsula Blues'. To reiterate Stephen Muecke's appropriated closing lines from my introduction, I exclaim, 'So *that's* how you got there … I never thought you'd make it![142]

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[139] Ralph Ellison, *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, John F Callahan (Ed), New York: Random House, 1954, p 511.
[140] Jonathan Lethem, 'The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism', p 3.
[141] Nisi Shawl, 'Appropriate Cultural Appropriation', http://www.irosf.com/q/zine/article/10087 viewed 9/11/2011.
[142] Stephen Muecke, *Joe in the Andamans*, p 16.

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Appropriations in 'Peninsula Blues'

'What's appropriation art? It's when you steal but make a point of stealing, because by changing the context you change the connotation'
(Peter Mountford in David Shields, *Reality Hunger* pge 90).

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