

**LINES IN SPACE: AUSTRALIAN VERSE
NOVELS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
ADULTS (YA)**

IN CONJUNCTION WITH 'COPPER COAST'

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Doctoral thesis submitted: 28 March 2013

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ABSTRACT

Verse novels are new sorts of books for children and adolescents that can be found on Australian bookshop and library shelves, and awards lists. This thesis, ‘Lines in space: Australian verse novels for children and young adults (YA)’ — in conjunction with ‘Copper Coast’ locates verse novels as a significantly different genre of writing for the younger-than-adult market. Verse novels feature pared-back prose, set out as for poetry, which also tell a story, or a number of stories, in first- or third-person narratives, from single or multiple points of view.

The exegesis argues and the creative product illustrates that child and YA verse novels employ: voice-zones assembled in plot sequence; spare language; white space; and lines shaped into text tiles. The assumption that a verse novel is *verse* is challenged in this thesis. Verse novelists, like ordinary prose writers, may choose elements of expression traditionally associated with poetry but such features are not essential in verse novels for children and adolescents. What count are the characterisation, voice, and narrative pull, through the lines in space.

Using as a methodological research tool texts that have won awards, this exegesis surveys primary, review and critical literature, tracing contemporary beginnings of verse novels for children and adolescents in Australia. Critical research in relation to the creative product provides a conceptual framework that is briefly applied to a variety of contemporary American and Australian exemplars, including a focus on Catherine Bateson’s YA verse novel, *his name in fire*. This thesis identifies a recent local flourishing of junior verse novels.

Practice-led research is married with creative praxis in the innovative form of a verse (voice-zone text tile) novel manuscript for teens, ‘Copper Coast’. Reflection on the process of research and craft for the manuscript concludes the exegesis.

KEYWORDS

verse novel; children’s and adolescent / young adult (YA) literature; voice-zone; white space; spare language; text tile; creative praxis

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis (exegesis and creative product) does not incorporate without acknowledgment 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 another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Kathryn Jane Deller-Evans

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In honour of my scholarship, I am grateful to the Australian Federal Government. I give my sincere thanks for the expert supervision I was given by academics and writers Dr Christine Nicholls, Dr David Sornig and Dr Ruth Starke. Libraries are important resources, with Flinders University providing wonderful librarians including Mrs Veronica Ghee and Dr Aliese Millington, and I benefitted too from our community's Blackwood and Stirling Coventry libraries. Canadian expatriate Australian author and poet, Dr Kevin Roberts, brought to me the concept of white syntax in 1995 when he edited a selection of my poems. I value my employers' support: staff of the School of Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics at Flinders University encouraged my study, and my former workplace in the Centre for University Teaching financially assisted my attendance at conferences to present papers from this research. I wish to acknowledge this thesis was professionally proofread by Mrs Adèle Walker, and thank her, recognising that Dr Nicholls was likewise a keen editor. This doctorate is dedicated to my family: my late parents, Mrs Lorrie Palomino (nee Morgan, Deller and Bruner) and Professor Don Deller — they would have been proud of me; my stepson, Jared, and my children: Warwick, Rosalind, Marina, Imogen, and Lewis, for their belief in me; and most of all, my husband, Dr Steve Evans.

NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

In this exegesis I use the term *voice-zone* in a specific way. I use it to mean individual character sections of a verse novel. Similar sections in poetry have been termed the ‘voice-lyric’ (Thomas 2001), but for the verse novel I believe it more appropriate to take the term from Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of Alexander Pushkin’s nineteenth century verse novel, *Eugene Onegin*. In the *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin discusses how a fictional character has an individual zone, her or his ‘own sphere of influence on the authorial context surrounding him [/her], a sphere that extends — and often quite far — beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted’ (Bakhtin 1981, p. 320). The term he uses in the original is Russian, *речевая зона* / *rechevaia zona*, which is best translated as *speech zone* but can mean ‘voice-zone’ in the sense of voice as spoken (rather than, say, musical voice)¹. As Lodge and Wood (2000) suggest, ‘this zone... is not set off from authorial speech in any formally compositional or syntactical way; it is a zone demarcated purely in terms of style’ (p. 109).

In a verse novel this zone may comprise the entire work if there is only one protagonist’s voice, or it may be a page or two in the voice of a particular character, alternating with voice-zones of a second or multiple characters. Not every voice-zone in a verse novel will have the same form. One character may, for instance, be represented in first person present tense, and another character in limited third person immediate past tense. A voice-zone covers a variety of forms

¹ Thank you to colleague Dr Narulla Asamov for clarifying this distinction in the translation

of address and may include dialogue, letter writing or song lyrics, recollections, or it may be thoughts spoken out loud or as interior monologues.

An innovative term coined in this thesis is *text tile*. This I use in reference to sections of a verse novel that may or may not coincide with voice-zones. Individual authors of verse novels choose different arrangements of text; some may have character zones represented by entitled, numbered or named sections, and others may present one voice throughout the entire verse novel. Titles or first lines in bold font may separate sections of verse novel text. Authors of multiple verse novels may also vary their technique from book to book. I use text tiles in preference to naming separate parts of the overall text ‘poems’, despite some authors referring to their own work in that manner. I prefer the noun ‘tile’ to *block* or *brick* because the right hand side of lines of text in a verse novel are usually ragged, not uniformly regularly-shaped (unless done so intentionally). I envisage the tile encompassing various shapes.

In the accompanying teen ‘voice-zone text tile’ (verse) novel manuscript, ‘Copper Coast’, I employ two main protagonists as dominant focalisers whose narratives intertwine with those of two lesser characters. All four characters have individual voice-zones. Every time a voice-zone changes a fresh page with a character name and pictograph symbolises that transition. Locations are also given in a subheading with each fresh voice-zone. Within the voice-zones are text tiles. New text tiles are separated and the shift denoted by section markers (§). These function for me generally as new scene signifiers, just as rows of asterisks or blank lines may do in a prose fiction.

PREFACE

Some years ago in Canberra, eminent Australian academic historian Greg Denning encouraged participants in a graduate writing workshop to label their thesis headings inventively. With respect to this work I have imagined a local magpie (specifically, the South Australian state avian emblem ‘the piping shrike’) embarking on a journey of discovery; with each successive chapter in the thesis representing a stretch of that passage. A minor theme of birds in my novel echoes this. Interconnected for me is the 1980 Adelaide Festival of Arts world-famous staging of Peter Brook’s *The conference of the birds* (Carrière & Brook 1982), which took place over the course of a long night in a quarry. I liked that Brook’s conception sprang from the ancient, revered Sufi poem by Farid ud-Din Attar (1177). The play’s central tenet sees birds set out and return, to discover home as for the first time. This idea connects my exegesis, ‘Lines in space’, with my creative product, the teen voice-zone text tile novel ‘Copper Coast’, in which the protagonist is cast out from her home in Cornwall, alighting in rural South Australia, but tracking a reverse migration.

Writers who build a nest within the academy must position themselves. David Lodge admits in his ‘Introduction’ to *After Bakhtin* (1990), that as both an academic and a novelist he saw himself straddling both the world of scholarship and the literary-cultural world with all its consumption ‘for profit and pleasure’ (p.7). He talks of domesticating developments in literary theory for twin purposes: that of his own research articles of criticism, and as well for use in his campus novels, where he satirises academic lives and practices. Author DH Lawrence, too, understood the need to yoke the quotidian to the ethereal; and the higher calling of art to the ordinary, when he wrote ‘and you know there is a water-closet on the premises’ (1925, p. 181). In my creative product, the equivalent to the WC

is a long-drop, a classic ‘Aussie dunny’ intended to place my novel’s antipodean cultural heritage.

I recognise these quotations as representing the need for the real in fiction. For me, a verse novel is not just airy like the unencumbered flight of birds, but rather, also grounded in its human-ness, epitomised by that repository for the most basic of biological needs as noted by Lawrence. In Australia, we are girt by sea: there is the containment of oceans, surrounding the space of the continental earth, which may be riven by drought or flooded by rains, and the beachside littoral junction that is the site between. This creative writing doctorate encompasses both academic inquiry and the writing process. Ahead is an example, and also a reflection upon, a new kind of Australian writing, the verse novel for children and adolescents, which, as I will argue, owes more to its prosaic inheritance than to any poetical genetic traits. I will reveal how verse elements may be used by practitioners but how the form owes its strength to the elements of spare language lines shaped into text blocks in the form of voice-zones, advancing plot through white space. In this thesis I investigate verse novels for children and adolescents from inside and out, an exploration that has involved my taking a metaphorical voyage, a migration, an expedition — a trek roaming the skies, sea, and the land below — to a hoped-for happy landing.

INTRODUCTION — *THE PIPING SHRIKE ALIGHTS:* *THE PROJECT’S CONTEXT*

This introduction provides the rationale for the design of this thesis. It begins by positioning the exegetical work inside a particular context in time and place, and it outlines its scope. This thesis takes the form of a creative product, a ‘verse novel’ for teens, plus an accompanying exegesis. Contemporary scholarship into literature for children and young adults (YA) and original research into primary texts, as well as reflection on the writing process, have provided the framework for the creation of ‘Copper Coast’, which I call a voice-zone text tile novel. The reasons for the nature of my research being more cross-disciplinary than straight literary will be shown, as will the reasons for the genesis of this particular project. This section will conclude with a summary of the remaining chapters in the thesis.

Diverse but intersecting interests

In the ‘Coda’ to the recently released *Handbook on research on children’s and young adult literature*, the authors acknowledge what a ‘professional struggle’ it is to undertake scholarly work on children’s and YA literature (Wolf et al. 2011, p. 525). The crux of the difficulty lies in the divergence of interests in the pyramid of literature, librarianship, and teaching; each area of concern has its own foci, theoretical favourites, historical and cultural values, and specific literacies. In the chapter ‘Schools of thought’ Coats et al. identify for children’s and adolescent literature the ‘three primary perspectives on research... [that] provide different insights that can profitably complement each other’ (2008, p. 523), where:

[i]f educators are focused on the learner, and literary critics are focused on the similarities between books for children and adults, it is because our

disciplinary basis was founded on exactly the political ramifications of those issues (Trites 2008, p. 535).

But ‘reading [such scholarship] outside of one’s own discipline isn’t easy’ (Wolf et al. 2011, p. 526) for researchers (such as doctoral candidates) presenting exegetical and creative work for children and adolescents where:

What counts as valid evidence, for instance, as well as the prevalence and use of storytelling, the innovation of particular critics and methodologies, and the focus on texts have all developed differently along disciplinary lines. Whereas an article by an LIS [library and information studies] scholar might cite hundreds of titles on a particular issue, a literary scholar could happily perform an intensely close reading of just one or two, while an educator might talk about reading experiences in terms of children with little attention to specific book titles. *Each of these approaches is going to frustrate somebody* (Wolf et al. 2011, p. 526) [my italics].

What Wolf et al. (2011) term frustration was experienced by this doctoral scholar in research that traversed the fields of literary studies, librarianship, and pedagogy. The field of cultural studies was brought to bear on investigating children’s literature through the eyes of a creative writer. If I were to represent diagrammatically the domains of my research into verse novels for children and adolescents, this is how it might look:

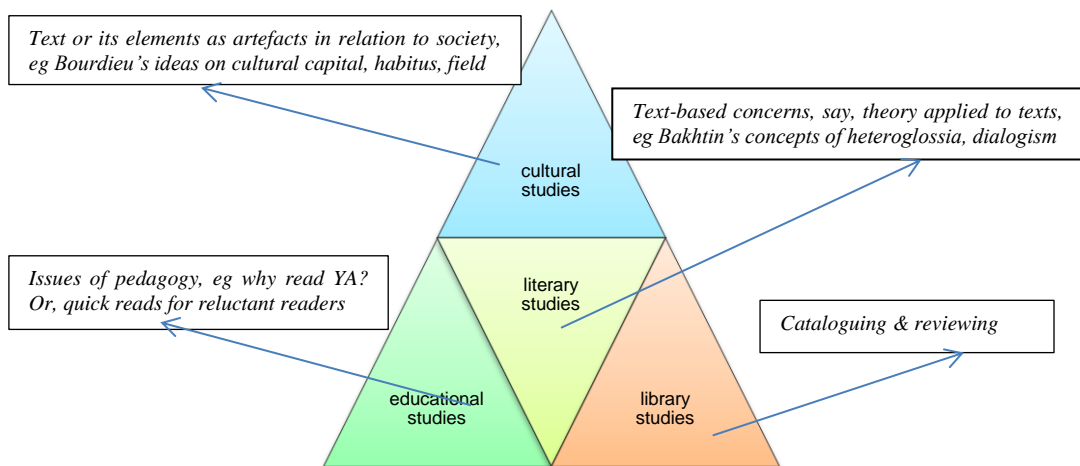


Figure 1: Pyramid of research for verse novels for children and YA

I have a background in literature, so the area of literary studies forms the centre of concern for me. Yet that is not enough for this creative writing project, because literary studies are text-focussed and may ignore the issue of the target market readers (who are also of concern to me). I therefore place cultural studies at the top point of the pyramid, because I am interested in the analysis of characters through this lens. Either side of the core triangle I have placed library and

educational studies. I have a prior degree in education and higher education qualifications, and an interest in the scholarship in the areas, but the focus for this research is not the end-point readers of primary, middle or high school students in classrooms, or the receivers of texts like teachers and school librarians, or indeed the relationship between students and their teachers. Rather, this research adds the writer’s perspective and creative process into the mix. Such scholarship involved here brings together the strands of literary, library and pedagogical inquiry *with* creative praxis. Altogether, this provides a richer texture and understanding of the various elements at play in the writing of verse novels for children and adolescents. For me as an academic writer, providing the most comprehensive picture is the critical aspect that brought about this multi-disciplinary approach.

The pyramid in Figure 1 illustrates the areas of scholarship concerning books for children and adolescents. In addition to this is the recent area in Australia of doctoral creative writing that intensifies the ‘professional struggle’ (Wolf et al. 2011, p. 525). Because this thesis exists in a newer space than the prior triangle, a new dimension or space must be added, as shown in Figure 2:

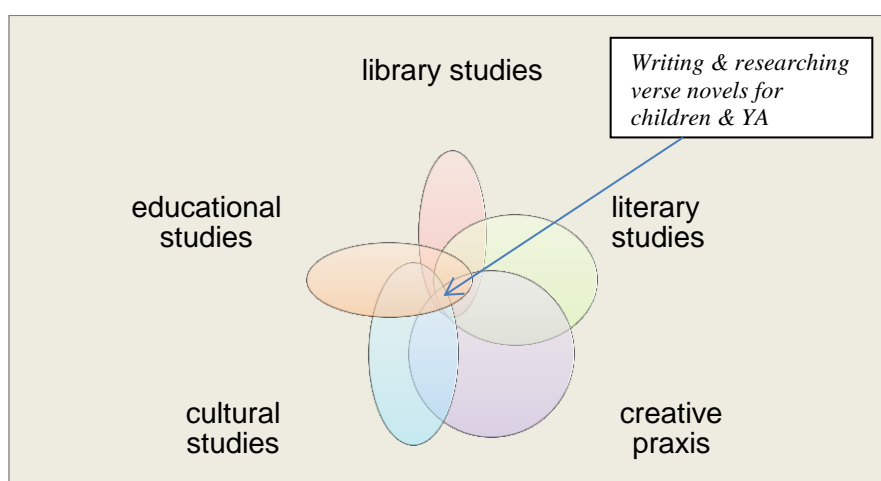


Figure 2: My writing and researching in relation to verse novels for children and YA

Figure 2, a Venn diagram, shows the areas of convergence, where the areas of scholarship impinge. This graphic is a way of expressing the convergence of research areas ‘as a consequence of creative practice’s intrinsic emergent nature... [as a] research design framework for multi-modal projects is a critical task for every higher degree candidate in this area’ (Phillips et al. 2009, online).

I have placed the area of this dissertation’s research at the centre of the ellipses. What concerns me most is the perspective of literary studies; but in this area of research into children and YA’s verse novels, it is difficult to extricate the scholarship of librarians and teachers. My investigation into the form has been enriched by the spectrum of interests these other areas bring to bear on research into verse novels.

Projected output

Situating the creative product in relation to the research is important. I visualise my own voice-zone text tile novel within the overlapping area and have constructed a graphic for my own writing perspective in Figure 3:

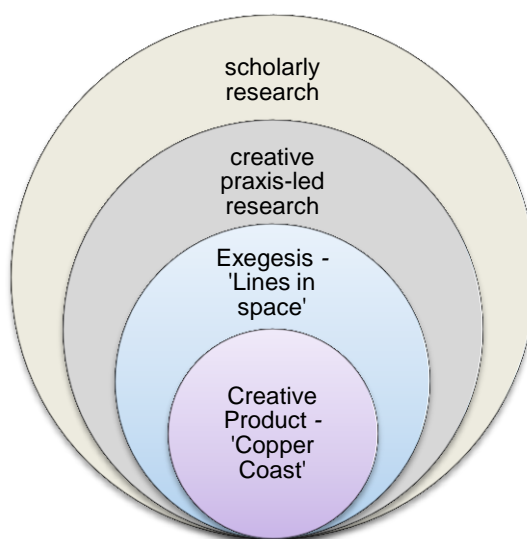


Figure 3: Target relationship of creative process to research

At the centre lies the manuscript I have written. It is underpinned by the exegesis, a text that reflects on the process of writing the verse novel and presents new and original research into the field of verse novels written for children and adolescents. Research fields that surround the creation of the products (whether from areas of interest of librarians, teachers or academics) are practice-led and/or traditional scholarship.

A creative writing dissertation that encompasses product and accompanying reflection speaks not only to its writer and researcher but also to its supervisors, examiners and hopefully, later, other students or researchers who themselves

might borrow the texts from the library. Given the Australian Government's Australasian Digital Theses program project (2012a, online) there may even be a larger online audience able to use this work as a resource towards further study and investigation. Beyond that is the hope of publishing the creative product, 'Copper Coast', in its own right, with teen readers, librarians and reviewers also reading that text.

Genesis of the project

The impetus for this project arose from a story brewing in my mind. Conceived originally as a time-slip fantasy, following Professor Jeri Kroll's idea that as a practising poet I should try writing a verse novel, it turned into a realist fiction in the contemporary form of what is traditionally termed a verse novel. Because the technique was new to me I wanted to rehearse. So I learnt to write a verse novel by rewriting my first prose novel manuscript for teens, 'Crossed oars', written as a Negotiated Project for an Advanced Diploma of Arts (Professional Writing), at the Adelaide College of the Arts. Other authors have reported the experience of rewriting a standard prose novel into a verse novel as liberating (Geoff Page 2012, pers. comm.), as was the case with me.

Foundation scholarship

The scholarship that underpins this dissertation is founded on its literature review. Tracing back the academic research leads to the crucial 1989 article, Patrick Murphy's 'The verse novel: a modern American poetic genre', wherein he asserts that long poems have become 'novelized' (p. 63). It is valuable to quote his explanation of Bakhtin making the argument that American long poems:

...become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally — this is the most important thing — the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic open-endedness, a living contact with un-finished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the open-ended present) (Dialogic 6-7)... In other words, the novelization of modern American long poems frees them from the restraints of traditional, historical genre requirements no longer appropriate for the production of long poems (Murphy 1989, p. 64).

Taking what Murphy expounds a step further, it can be established that in the long form of poetry he characterises as verse novels, more direct speech replaces authorial narration:

Like modern prose fiction, modern poetic fictions may very well present a story that is narrated from multiple points of view by means of changing narrators, or is essentially non-narrated, letting the characters advance the ‘narrated event’ through their own speech and actions (1989, p. 58).

Although Murphy assumes verse novels are a form of poetry (and this thesis does not), his quote is significant, showing that verse novels may have characters who narrate events or advance plot, whether in single or multiple voices. The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin have been cited by a variety of scholars, including those working in the field of children’s and adolescent literature (such as Mallan & McGillis 2003), reflecting on verse novels. Observation of the genre shows it tends to feature characters ‘speaking’ in their ‘own’ voices thus allowing a heteroglossic space, rather than the monologic authorial domain, and this provides for a more complete paradigm, historically aligned with prose rather than poetry. Murphy shows that:

Bakhtin conceives of the polyphonic novel as having a hero who becomes *subject* and enters into dialogue with the author and the reader, rather than an *object* of authorial analysis or simply a spokesperson for the author’s completed monological worldview (1989, p. 62) [my italics].

Verse novels distinguish themselves by inclusion of voices not as monologues addressing an off-stage audience (as some poetry does), but by being expressed in words of characters intimately in their mind’s eye, or aloud to other characters.

The position of the reader is also crucial. According to Murphy (1989), contemporary readers of long poems (or verse novels) understand compressed or difficult plotting, and enter a ‘contract based primarily on the expectations and conventions of modern prose reading in terms of redundancy level, plot complexity, and narrative structure’ (1989, p. 65). Thus it may be argued children and adolescents bring expectations of reading a prose novel to verse novels, just as do adults. Murphy contends that: ‘The reader becomes a *participant* in dialogue rather than merely a *recipient* of information’ (1989, p. 63) [my italics] and this is a crucial point in this thesis concerned with the crafting of fiction for younger readers. I believe that such participation allows for greater younger reader engagement and connection to such texts.

Research questions raised in the thesis

In Chapter 1 this project examines the figurative language researchers use to categorise the form of verse novels. It asks:

Question 1

What new simile can describe verse novels for children and adolescents?

Following at the end of Chapter 1 the next question is canvassed:

Question 2

How does space relate to lines in verse novels for children and adolescents?

In Chapter 3 this exegesis explores:

Question 3

How did verse novels for children and adolescents arise in Australia?

This follows with asking:

Question 4

In Australia, has there been a shift in recent publishing of verse novels from YA to junior fiction?

Chapter 4 follows with:

Question 5

Do verse novels for children and adolescents take more from elements of verse or more from novels?

Lastly, in Chapter 4 is:

Question 6

Could the form of verse novel writing provide the child or adolescent reader with a constructive place of engagement?

Methodology and innovations

This exegesis surveys and analyses a variety of verse novels for children and adolescents in the US and Australia and then briefly examines the findings in relation to the candidate's own creative practice. In conjunction with the creative product, this dissertation demonstrates independent methods and higher order reflections. It concerns a relatively non-mainstream publishing genre. This exegesis uses a method to limit the scope of research, focussing on verse novels that have received awards. This study provides new knowledge and formulates innovative ideas. The research is qualitative, by analysis of data gathered as documentary evidence (Smith & Dean 2009). It draws together existing critical knowledge about verse novels for children and adolescents through published primary texts, articles, reviews and archival material. In addition, it provides a close reading of one exemplar text. This area of research is important because it covers and creates new material and crosses the boundaries of divergent interests: literary, cultural, educational, and library information services, with the additional approach of investigation into the writing process. Answering the research questions also reflects upon the candidate's own original product.

Accompanying the exegetical component of this project is a creative component: a teen voice-zone text tile novel manuscript entitled 'Copper Coast'. The two component parts of the thesis perform together where the project's findings reflect on the praxis and vice versa, elements of creativity reflect on the research. The critical research relates specifically to the individual creative product, providing a conceptual framework and setting it in a contemporary literary and historical context by examining important surrounding texts. The exegesis also considers how research underpins the candidate's own writing and the final form of the creative product and, therefore, how theory is integrated into practice. This document includes an appendix of presentations and publications from this research. The thesis concludes with a reference list.

Conclusion

This Introduction has set out the context for research covered in the dissertation as a whole. It covers the shape of the document and explains how diverging interests

in scholarship across a range of areas, including pedagogy, cultural, library and literary studies, may intersect in this study. The Introduction provides graphical figures to demonstrate the way the research is put together, with the creative product being the major percentage of the thesis, but bound together with the exegetical research that surrounds it. This section also reveals the origins of the doctoral creative idea, and at the start of the innovative scholarship ideas for the thesis with Patrick Murphy's article on American long poetry.

The next section, Chapter 1, establishes the coordinates for the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 constitutes a survey of the literature on verse novels for children and adolescents in the US. After that, Chapter 3 tracks the progress of verse novels for children and YA in Australia and covers the recent flourishing of junior verse novel fiction. An investigation of an exemplar in relation to theory occurs in Chapter 4. The creative product, teen voice-zone text tile novel manuscript 'Copper Coast', accompanies the exegesis. Self-reflection on the creative praxis is contained in Chapter 5, with a Conclusion completing the project.

CHAPTER 1 — SETTING THE COORDINATES: DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

This chapter briefly defines writing for children and young adults (YA). Verse novels for adults appear different from verse novels for children and adolescents. This chapter enters the debate about whether writing for children and adolescents differs from writing for adults, locates verse-novel writing in terms of its genre, and covers criticism of the form. This thesis looks to the concept of white space or ‘white syntax’ (Roberts 2001, online) to discover how it may work in relation to writing for the audience, as well as what it means for writing to be ‘spare’.

Writing for children and young adults

Finding clear definitions of childhood and adolescence is difficult. In the realm of literature it involves these questions: Who reads the literature denoted as suitable for children and YA? What age groups do these categories denote? What are these readers called? And can they be characterised for what makes them (if anything) different?

Children’s literature has been a field of scholarship for only the last thirty odd years, and it is an evolving and multi-disciplinary area. In 1992 the critic, Perry Nodelman, described in his pivotal text, *The pleasures of children’s literature*, what writing for children could offer:

simple but not necessarily simplistic, action-oriented rather than character-oriented, presented from the viewpoint of innocence, optimistic and with happy endings, didactic repetitions in diction and structure (p. 190).

Yet the debates around what exactly defines children’s literature lie like unexploded bombs littering a research minefield. The opposing poles of these debates can roughly be cast as the need to protect vulnerable readers (with the assumption of children as innocent), versus the autonomy of writers and respect for children or adolescents to choose their own stories to read. There is also a perception that children’s literature is not real literature, or at best is second class, and that study of it or research into it does not adequately fit the academic model.

Nevertheless, academics have studied the literature; reviewing, researching and theorising about it. In 1998, Maria Nikolajeva was able to enter into an argument with Nodelman’s description of ‘features that in his eyes characterise children’s literature’ and posit a revelatory perspective:

If we take a more thorough look at some renowned contemporary children’s authors... [an international list] we see that, given [Nodelman’s 1992] characteristics, none of their works would fit into the definition of children’s literature (2002, p. 221).

There appears to be a dilemma: authors are found to be writing material for younger readers that defies traditional definition. The readership is found to be more various. Writing for children can be cast in the sense of *difference* or of *sameness* with respect to adult literature. Lukens offers a solution of sorts to this dilemma: ‘Children are not little adults. They are different from adults in *experience*, but not in species, or to put it differently, in degree but not in kind,’ (1999, p. 9) [my italics]. Simply put, a child is someone who is not an adult. In Australia the legal definition of a child is a useful place to start:

One of the most difficult areas of criminal justice policy lies in providing appropriate legal mechanisms to reflect the transition from the age of innocence through to maturity and full responsibility under the criminal law. Australian jurisdictions have recently arrived at a uniform minimum age for criminal responsibility of 10 years. *Doli incapax*, or the maximum age of presumption against criminal responsibility, is also uniform at under 14. The maximum age of treatment as a child for criminal responsibility varies somewhat—in most jurisdictions it is 17 years, except in Queensland where the maximum age is 16 years (Australian Government 2012b, online).

The sense of transition from innocent child to mature adult is thus legally accounted for, yet that period between un-grown and fully-grown is complex. What is significant is that there are competing positions in the definition of the child reader of children’s literature and on the demands this makes on a writer for the target age groups, or in publishing terms, markets. Add to this the further

qualification of age ranges now that differentiate *child* from *adult*: baby; infant; toddler; pre-schooler; first-reader; chapter reader; junior fiction; 'tween, teen, adolescent and YA.

The specific category of YA literature, differentiating it from children's literature, has been in existence for the past three decades. Academic researchers use the age range 10 to 20 years for defining adolescents, though 'there is value in focusing on a narrower age range, 11-14 specifically, for interpreting research and for considering how to engage young people in literary reading' (Crumpler & Wedwick 2011, p. 63).

Conventional wisdom sees YA literature as sprung from the novelistic tradition of *Bildungsroman*:

a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character
origin of Bildungsroman German, from Bildung education + Roman novel
first known use 1910 (Merriam-Webster 2011², online).

As the reviewer Jonathon Stephens notes, 'Children's. Bildungsroman. Adolescent. Juvenile. Teen. Young Adult — so many names for such a controversial body of literature' (2007, p. 34). Stephens makes it clear that the coming of age story and other forms of writing for younger audiences are linked. As Michael Carr Gregg, Australian child psychologist, writes, adolescence is:

best understood as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood,
characterised by physical and psychological changes that do not occur on a
strict timeline but at different times according to a genetic roadmap unique
to each individual (2006, p. 6).

Defining writing for children and YA is highly contested on a number of fronts but nomenclature may spring from economic rather than academic pursuits. In Britain, for example, where novels are regularly sold in supermarkets and are available at check-out lines, 'in the 1990s publishers began to assign narrow age ranges on the front covers of printed books' (Pullman 2011, p. 313). This retail movement of providing books in variety store checkouts has an analogous progress in Australia and the US, and prompted debate from authors, particularly

² Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d., [viewed 26 Jan 11] online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bildungsroman>

in the UK (Pullman 2011). There may be thus a problem for authors with their imagined audience, be it child, teen, adult or undifferentiated. Inevitably, issues of censorship arise.

Writing for a specific or targeted age range may become subject to economic considerations. Jonathon Stephens expresses the problem seen through that commercial perspective:

As America's readership continues to shrink, marketing departments scramble for new strategies for getting books into readers' hands. Bookstores have reshuffled their shelves and re-categorized their sections, drawing titles from both Children's and Grownup Fiction... to create the new Teen, or Young Adult, sections of their stores (2007, p. 35).

Beyond economic considerations, the nature of what is considered 'children's' literature may also influence the perception of what is YA:

Because the Young Adult umbrella seems to shelter the many simpler, aimed-for-children books as well as the overabundance of catty, chick-lit-ish novels, this new category has brought with it certain negative assumptions from critics across the board. Young Adult Literature has been accused of being: For children only; Somewhat simplistic; Chick lit for teens; Less than literary; Not serious enough for use in schools; A marketing ploy; Written by less serious or amateur writers; Experimental; Not established enough to bid for spots in the canon (Stephens 2007, p. 34).

These criticisms suggest literature specifically for adolescents operates at the margin, rather than centre of literary concerns. Yet, instead of defining the genre through the negative, it is also possible to define YA literature through inclusion. For instance, Jago (2004) gives six reasons for choosing YA literature for teens to read because such books:

1. Are written in a language that is perfectly suited to the author's purpose;
2. Expose readers to complex human dilemmas;
3. Include compelling, disconcerting characters;
4. Explore universal themes that combine different periods and cultures;
5. Challenge readers to re-examine their beliefs; and
6. Tell a good story with places for laughing and places for crying

(cited in Groenke & Scherff 2010, online).

Thus, to sum up: texts for children and adolescents are defined by the audience as encompassing individuals who are *not yet* adult by specific means of their

experience. Nevertheless, it is important to examine how children and adolescents are positioned as subjects.

Addressing a young adult audience

Subject position is important, as McCallum and Stephens point out: ‘[t]he crux is always how a narrator’s telling of a story is related to a character’s perceptions as well as a reader’s understanding’ (2011, p. 362). One thing that often marks teen/YA fiction appears to be the use of first person narration:

There is a very strong prejudice against first-person narrators in children’s fiction... all mostly of a pedagogical-psychological nature, that assumes that young readers have difficulty identifying with the abstract ‘I’ of the story (Nikolajeva 1999, p. 71).

What could be added, that is important for this study, is that the story may be told in an identifiable younger-than adult voice. As Mike Cadden (talking about epistolary rather than verse novels) says there is a tendency for YA novels to be character-narrated, though, ‘Few people seemed concerned with the mystery of the narrator and his or her writing occasion, it seems, so grateful are they for the identifiable voice of a young adult protagonist’ (2011a, p. 309). Cadden characterises the difference between stories written for children from those aimed at YA readers thus:

[u]nlike the children’s novel, which isn’t usually about crises of identity apart from identity theft or surprise (being found to be a lost prince or wizard...), the YA novel’s primary subtext is usually about *identity construction* (2011a, p. 308) [my italics].

This construction of identity is the crucial element that distinguishes growth and development out of childhood into teenage years. Adolescents proceed through changes where discernible stages are evident (Carr-Gregg & Shale 2002). Young adults are constructing their sense of self and the books they read may be a part of that process:

Young adult literature exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation... we ought to approach YA literature with the same careful scrutiny, even if it is written about and to young adults rather than by them (Coats 2011, p. 315).

This locates the teen on the continuum towards adulthood and fiction of that experience is important: ‘that’s what a quality Young Adult novel does. It takes

its readers, youth and adult alike, to a place where adolescence lives on, a place where that journey toward identity continues to happen (Stephens 2007, p. 41).

Readership of YA literature may extend of course beyond individual teens and adolescents. Researchers and librarians express surprise at the derision they face because of their interest in YA literature. George (2008), for example, notes how fellow teachers used words criticising his activity, deeming the texts as ones that ‘teeny-boppers’ would read or, ‘[t]hat we should be commended for keeping up with the “trash that the kids nowadays like to read,” even though “there is no way that adults can relate to the books in the same way that the children do”’ (2008, p. 55). Assuming YA literature is unworthy of adult attention is as erroneous as casting it all as trash. As Bickmore writes, ‘the descriptor does not mean a qualifier of inferiority’ (2008, p. 77). As with adult literature:

YA lit is a diverse mix of genres and styles and themes and tones, and it spans the quality spectrum just like books for grown-ups do. While YA lit is written with teens in mind, it has evolved beyond the coming-of-age concerns that first popularized the category and now fully merits adult readers’ attention (Kolderup 2011, online).

Thus not only adolescents read YA literature.

When the award-winning author for children and YA Philip Pullman defines writing for his audience as: ‘free of the acid of irony’ (2011, p. 314), he says of irony that it has ‘such a delightful tang when you’re grown-up, but makes you feel unfairly got-at before you’re used to it’ (2011, p. 314). Importantly, he highlights: ‘[t]he shelves we set aside for children are those where connections are made, and we need to protect them and give children plenty of time and plenty of opportunity to make those connections for themselves (2011, p. 314) [*my italics*]. Pullman understands that need for human connection:

One of the processes involved in becoming a reader is the discovery of a genre that seems to speak to the very core of your being, and many a young person has become an adult reader by getting drunk on science fiction or ghost stories. That sort of passion isn’t likely to be stirred into life by some large bland category called books for children (2011, p. 314).

An authentic voice or multiple voices through narration are crucial in connecting readers younger than adult to fictional texts.

The phenomenon of YA literature highlights the importance of reviewing and researching the area, and perhaps, doing so especially from a creative praxis

perspective: '[c]hoosing YA literature does not have to mean providing a text of inferior quality, but it does mean that more of us should explain the craftsmanship in these novels' (Bickmore 2008, p. 77). As a creative writer involved in scholarship, I too believe children's and YA literature worthy of study. A new field of writing gains credibility when it becomes the subject of sustained literary criticism and the next section will discuss how books written for the younger audience have been received in academic circles.

Review and criticism

Literary criticism of children's literature has sometimes struggled for recognition, due to the aforementioned perception that books written for children were less worthy of attention, particularly in the academy. In 1996 Clare Bradford noted issues concerned with locating the research. She wrote:

The field of children's literature is a peculiarly unstable, sometimes uncomfortable, location in which to work. It shares with other areas of study the shifting boundaries and the redefinitions that characterise scholarship at the end of the twentieth century, but in addition it carries its own ambiguities of definition and scope, being a late arrival as a focus of research and teaching within universities and never having occupied a fixed place within the older taxonomies of the disciplines (p. vii).

Other significant writers in the field have suggested children's writing generally has not received the scholarship it has deserved (Stephens 1992; Nodelman 1992; Nikolajeva 2008). Equally, it has been implied that '[c]hildren's literature has historically been considered low-brow material and has only relatively recently begun to gain credibility within literary circles' (Walker 2009, p. 24).

This comprises a significant group of readers who constitute a captive audience to their gatekeeper librarians and teachers. While this area of writing may struggle to find a place within the academy, research in the children's arena is no less important than research for adults' writing, especially when it is considered that it offers so much that is new:

Contemporary children's literature has become a field of *innovation* and experimentation, challenging the conventions, codes and norms that traditionally governed the genre. Strongly influenced by the aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism, children's literature now reflects the dominant trends in adult literature and sometimes even *initiates* them. A wide range of previously taboo subject and complex narrative strategies — including polyfocalisation, fragmentation and gaps, absence of closure,

intertextuality, irony, parody metafiction — transgress the traditional demarcations separating children’s from adult literature (Beckett 1999, p. xvii) [my italics].

My emphasis here is on the ‘initiates’ and ‘innovation’, and research into the field is in itself future-looking.

Michael Cart identifies blogging³, for instance, as a new aspect to the study of children’s and YA literature (2011). Understandably, he allows that ‘[w]hile many blogs don’t feature traditional book reviews, the highly personal, (mostly) unedited, idiosyncratic, sometimes controversial, sometimes ill-informed commentary they do include is already changing the way many people would define reviews (and reviewers)’ (Cart 2011, p. 462). Thus, what defines scholarship in the academy for children’s literature must take account of technological change so that contemporary modes of review are recognised, such as blogs that may be accessed across a wide range of mobile devices.

The convergence of technologies is having an impact on what constitutes communication, what is written creatively, and also on what is considered research. Dino Franco Felluga (2003) raises the proposition that in the future, there must be more academic cross-over in order to make sense of contemporary research practice:

The future calls for perverse crossings: between genres, between periods, between theories. Although critics have responded to the demand for interdisciplinary and cultural studies for many years now, there are a few boundaries that have, nonetheless, resisted transgression: in particular [historical periods]... and those between poetry and the novel. One reason for this resistance, of course, is the very structure of academia: jobs are generally advertised for either poetry or the novel [or historical periods]... And various institutional structures support such divisions (national organizations, conferences, period and genre journals, even listservs). Such separations are, however, perfectly artificial, themselves the product of retroactive reconstructions of a literary history that is, inevitably, much more mixed (p. 490).

As far as this exegesis is concerned, examining blogs for opinions and views on verse novels is legitimate, particularly given the relative novelty of the form as

³ A *blog* is an electronic log posted on the internet, deriving from the contraction of *web* and *log*. In February 2010, searching ‘Kidlitosphere Central’, Cart found ‘300 active blogs on children’s and young adult literature’ (2011, p. 462).

well as the increasing use of the internet by all generations. It appears reviews may also increasingly be found electronically, rather than in hard copy. Cart notes for instance, the drop in newspaper and magazine reviews (2011), and I can provide my own experience as a reviewer where my commissioning ‘newspaper’ has gone completely online with no hard copy now produced⁴. Reviews, therefore, are more readily available online than they once were, as are dictionaries with definitions, and indeed many scholarly articles may be accessed in an open source manner. In this thesis materials have been researched electronically as well as in hard paper copy, including conventional bound books.

What verse novels are like

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (SOED)⁵ defines the novel as: ‘a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length, in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity’ (p. 1418). Verse is defined as ‘a succession of words arranged according to rules of prosody and forming a complete metrical line; one of the lines of a poem or piece of versification’ (SOED 1973, p. 2466). But the ‘verse’ aspect of the term for verse novel adds another layer of complexity that needs to be taken into account. For instance, Lukens denotes difference between *poetry* and *verse*: ‘verse differs from poetry... at one end is trite doggerel and at the other the finest of lyrics’ (1999, p. 257). Poetry is defined in the Macquarie Concise Dictionary⁶ as ‘the art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts’ (p. 888). TS Eliot made a distinction between verse and poetry, citing *structure* as an important point of difference (1917, p. 518), so it may be that ‘verse’ has been up until now the appropriate term to help describe this form, rather than ‘poetry’ or ‘poems’.

⁴ *The Adelaide Independent Weekly*, renamed *InDaily*, ‘dropping’ into email inboxes each day and available online.

⁵ Little, William, Fowler, HW & Coulson, Jessie, rev. & ed. Onions, C. T 1973, *The Shorter Oxford English dictionary*, 3rd edn rev. Friedrichsen, GWS, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

⁶ Macquarie Concise Dictionary, 1981.

In 2005 Australian teacher and academic Christopher Pollnitz defined the verse novel⁷ as:

a work the poet has chosen to call by that name, or any extended verse narrative that can be assessed in terms of both its versification and its handling of basic novelistic properties like character, plot and point of view (p. 229).

Historically, the term *verse novel* was used in contemporary US to categorise traditional long poems that appeared to be becoming increasingly narrative. In 1989 Patrick Murphy wrote:

A large number of modern American long poems are best defined as forming part of a new poetic genre, the verse novel. In terms of length, the work must have a sustained duration and intensity of reading experience with line length a contributing but not determining factor of this. In terms of structure, it may have a variety of structural shapes from continuous narrative to fragmented sequence of units of varying lengths, *but it must have an underlying plotted narrative involving characters and events occurring in time* (p. 67) [my italics].

Australian academic and poet and novelist Kevin Brophy noted ‘that Anglo-American writers generally did not distinguish between free verse and prose poems’ (2002, online). Brophy distinguished the difference between northern and southern hemispheres with respect to prose poetry:

For many English language poets free verse made room enough for the prosaic in poetry (which was Wordsworth’s great project), and at the same time drew prose closer to the poetic. Another suggestion has been that the prose poem might have been important in France where there was a more strict tradition of forms to rebel against. Anglo-American poetry was always less dominated and less restricted by rigid adherence to forms. This view would have it that the kind of revolution represented by the prose poem was not needed or desired in literature written in English. A further reason for the prose poem’s relative neglect might be that at this time no distinctively original prose poem was produced in English which might have demonstrated the potential of the form and might have inspired further work (2002, online).

So it may be that the literary heritage of the relative freedom in verse made verse novels possible but also that there was no urgent need for them.

⁷ In this thesis I will suggest ‘voice-zone text tile’ novels as a more appropriate name for verse novels for child and adolescent readers but will refer to verse novels where they are so characterised.

Initial critical reception of contemporary verse novels for children and adolescents focussed on definitions of form. Despite these first impressions and accounting for differences, Alexander (2005) believes there is such a thing as a typical ‘house-style’ for YA verse novels (p. 270). She states that:

[t]he entire story is told in the form of non-rhyming free verse. Very often each section is less than a page in length and only rarely more than two or three pages. Usually each of these sections is given a title to orientate the reader, which may indicate the speaker, or contextualise the content, or point to the core theme. The form lends itself to building each section around a single perspective or thought or voice or incident (Alexander 2005, p. 270).

Commentators vary in their emphasis or focus, and examine different aspects of the form, defining it through such aspects as: speaking voice, content, clarity in writing, lyrical aspects, figurative language, image, metaphor, repetition, alliteration or assonance, and the use of white space. Mallan and McGillis note that:

[b]efore dismissing the verse novel, we might well consider how this form blends narrative... [that is, the] more successful verse novels impress with their sometimes demanding and atmospheric style... seducing them [readers] with many short chapters and lots of white space on every page (2003, online).

Alexander (2005) talks about how ‘language and visual images produce ideologies of various kinds’ (p. 280) and how the speaking voice is accentuated as a feature of the verse novel. In his research on student and teacher readers of YA verse novels George discovered that teacher perceptions about verse novels were challenged, and he reports one response as:

‘It hardly seemed like a novel, but it wasn’t really like poetry either,’ observed one student. Agreeing strongly, her teacher stated, ‘I kept saying to myself, “this is really amazing.” It’s *both* poetry and novel and *neither* poetry nor novel at the same time’ (2008, p.61).

It is clear that there has been and continues to be debate concerning form.

Questions about the constitution of the form of verse novels (including for adults) have also tended to the negative in thrust. For instance, Symmons writes of the verse novel in general:

It sounds like a publisher’s nightmare: too long and prosaic for poetry fans, but too concerned with its own form and music for readers to dip into on the train. The verse novel (like the rock opera or the sound sculpture) is the awkward child of successful parents, destined to disappoint both of them. The pitfalls are many. Verse novels can be full of bad poetry: essential but dull building blocks to get from A to B. Or they can be strong on music but

light on narrative. Reading a bad verse novel is very hard work with little reward... The problem is the definition. It's a slippery one. I've drawn the line at poetic, lyrical fiction writing. There's plenty of that, but a true verse novel attempts something different. It is as intricate in form as any poem. It is often set out in stanzas. It may have a rhyme scheme... So how does it differ from an epic poem? Something about the scale and complexity of the story which pushes it into novel territory? Something about intent? You could argue that *a verse novel can only be written in conscious awareness of the novel as a form*, which counts out *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*, despite their scale and richness of story and character (2006, online) [my italics].

Clearly, an author's awareness of composing a text as a novel is important.

Structure features as an integral aspect of what constitutes the form of a verse novel. Perhaps it concerns the reading of verse novels as an act, but like Symmonds' rock opera / sound sculpture similes, observers of the form appear to reach for figurative language to describe the structure of verse novels. In 2004 Campbell provides a simile based on shape; saying it is: 'like a wheel, with the hub of compelling emotional event' and the narration 'spokes' (p. 615). US academic, Mike Cadden (2009) adds his own simile: '[i]t's rather like one of those picture mosaics that create from individual and unrelated pictures a larger image. I might go so far as to call some of these "mosaic novels"' (p. vi). While Cadden's central comparison actually moves towards a theory of the verse novel as analogous to stage drama and to cinema, he also contends that:

even the loosest verse novel has a conflict that is resolved over the course of the book, just as diary and epistolary fiction manage what life often doesn't provide — a plot. Even in those verse novels unmarked by act, one sees that the immediate juxtapositions that seem random have from a distance, a handful of monologues at a time, the causal chain that creates story rather than being simply narration. It's rather like one of those picture mosaics that create from individual and unrelated pictures a larger image (2009, p. vi).

Story is paramount: narrative is plotted. With the proviso of a verse novel being 'done well', Cadden (2011a, p. 309) believes readers are presented with 'brief, lyrical glimpses of character and thought'. He first wrote in 2009 of his position of seeing the form as akin to drama and says: 'voice is the most important signature feature of the verse novel but there are other conventions and qualities that point to the genre of drama' (2011b, p. 24) and '[t]hey are always character-driven as dramatic monologues even when there's a clear plot' (2011a, p. 309). His updated simile is that reading a verse novel: 'is not unlike watching a movie in subtitles' (Cadden 2011a, p. 309), which is similar to Australian principal Steven Figg's perception, where verse novels are described in terms of movies:

‘providing readers with a cinematic view into the inner workings of characters’ minds’ (Figg 2008, pers. comm.)

Speaking in 2006 about ‘235 pages of unbroken verse’ in a review of Simon Jarvis’ *The unconditional*, Ruth Abbott neatly describes what verse novels could be like when she compares them to maps:

Maps are like verse not just because they both mark and are made out of lines, nor just because they enable a course to be plotted through difficult territory, but also because they are both a kind of powerful short cut. They are ‘outline’, they make a realm concrete because they are in themselves abridgements of a far more complex and difficult-to-imagine reality (p. 396).

She concedes that the metaphor of roadmaps may seem a ‘pedestrian’ (Abbott 2006, p. 395) way to speak of such writing but insists that the idea of reading through the work is ‘something like a road trip where one has interruptions or fragments of language and story along the way’ (2006, p. 395).

How verse novels are metaphorically imagined as rock opera, sound sculpture, drama, subtitled movies, wheel hubs, roadmaps, or picture mosaics, leads me to my own simile for the form. I coordinate a Professional Skills topic for first year university computer science, engineering and mathematics students who engage in the authentic task of finding low-cost solutions to third world problems through undertaking the Engineers without Borders Challenge (Deller-Evans et al., 2012). In the topic, I cover how to research and write, and how to speak in public in preparation for the final team presentations. I have the students practise with individual formative free-choice three-minute orals. When one student gave as his presentation a review of a role-play game, I realised I had the metaphor I needed for teen verse novels.

My student reported that the game’s plot was not its driving force. What counted were the characters. He liked best that you could hear them speaking about each other, giving additional information and insights into what was going on. I had the sense, too that he felt in the game that the basic layout structure of the ‘world map’ was in place, but the complexity was hinted at in sketch form, not fully explored. Thus there was room for him to imagine the rest, to construct, inhabit and connect. The game he was reviewing can be described as a multi-user dimension or domain, known commonly by the acronym, MUD. It can be defined as: ‘a software program that accepts “connections” from multiple users across the

Internet and provides to each user access to an imaginary on-line environment... A MUD is thus a kind of virtual reality that learners can visit' (Looi & Ang 2000, p. 3). With this in mind I posit an answer to:

Research Question 1:

What new simile can describe verse novels for children and adolescents?

Verse novels are like multi-user domain (MUD) games, allowing readers to engage simultaneously and virtually in multiple roles and realities. As children and adolescents participate in online and internet gaming, this contemporary simile is appropriate for the form of child and YA verse novels.

History and reception of junior and YA verse novels

The critical reception that greeted the publication trend of verse novels for younger readers was mixed. It included early interest by researchers (Cadden 2000; Pollnitz 2002; Mallan & McGillis 2003; Michaels 2003, 2005, 2006), indignation (Campbell 2004; Hollindale; 2004; Sieruta 2005; Kraus 2011), and further observations (Alexander 2005; Van Sickle 2006; Addison 2009; Cadden 2009, 2011ab). For adult verse novels a poetic literary history may be traced back to the nineteenth century with works like Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, but for younger readers verse novels are contemporary. It has been noted that: '[t]he verse novel for young adults is an even more recent phenomenon, and it has become something of a publishing trend' (Cadden 2011a, p. 309). As Cadden states, 'very few verse novels appeared before the late 1990s, making this format the first big development within young adult literature in the 21st century' (2011a, p. 309). Pollnitz noted a decade ago that in Australia '[o]f roughly twenty-five verse novels published in the last twenty-five years, some forty per cent have been YA (2002, p. 62).

The genre of verse novels in YA seems to have prompted researchers, reviewers and critics to mimic its form. In 2003 academic researchers Kerry

Mallan and Roderick McGillis published on the subject of YA verse novels in their pivotal article, ‘Textual aporias’. In the journal, *The Looking Glass*, they explored the ‘perplexities of form’ saying that the narratives: ‘offer readers an ostensibly easy reading experience, seducing them with many short chapters and lots of white space on every page. The reader finds encouragement to pause, reflect, and anticipate (p. 2). They concluded their substantial and significant paper by mimicking the form, which is reproduced in a similar graphic layout following:

<p>Rod: And so we can conclude, can we, that the Australian verse novel speaks two languages one national and poetic the other global and narrational?</p>	<p>Kerry: Two languages or double speak? National or global? Poetic or narrational? These perplexing aporias, like the Australian verse novel, are contradictory flexible and malleable undecidable and inconclusive</p>
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We can only begin again
 Working the language
 Wresting meaning
 Wringing understanding
 Withdrawing certainty
 Writing to fill the absences

(Mallan & McGillis 2003, p. 13).

The technique used in their article is for the authors to enter a dialogue with their own academic discourse and with each other in an innovative manner. They use alliteration and the performance of single and double speak mimics the form of the verse novel itself, although its pleasures remain academic rather than literary. It is further evidence that the form of verse novels influences commentators.

With the inception of verse novel publication specifically for younger readers (as opposed to adults) in the US, United Kingdom (UK) and Australia in the late 1990s, there is now over a decade of research available for analysis. In

2004 Peter Hollindale, writing in the UK journal, *Books for Keeps*, noted verse novels were: ‘a *fairly recent* but fast-growing addition to the repertoire of children’s literature’ (p. 12) [my italics]. Although the former University of York academic wondered whether the form were to be ‘a passing fashion’, he suggested that it also represented:

a major step forward in the genres of children’s literature, a way of bringing verse back into mainstream storytelling for older readers, opening up a new kind of realism and a new immediacy, as well as marking out some common ground where poetry, fiction and drama can meet (Hollindale 2004, p.12).

In this early article Hollindale reviews seven books both across the Atlantic and including Australia. Critically, he worries about the ‘temptation’ presented by *writing* in the genre:

Verse novels are very short. They cover a lot of pages with very few words. If you want to write a full-length children’s book in a hurry, and do not mind letting ‘everyday speech’ excuse banal and lazy language, then you can produce a ‘verse novel’ without much toil, tears and sweat. If you are seeking an excuse for self-indulgent autobiography, your very own equivalent of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, the verse novel may present a quick and facile way to a teenage reader’s sympathies. And if your taste is not only for self-therapy but for doing your readers good, the verse novel is a ready-made vehicle for conveying medicinal literature (2004, p.12).

Concerns about the quality of verse novels were evident from early criticism.

Hollindale states the genre ranges from ‘outstanding excellence to rubbish’ (2004, p. 12), and he marked US author Karen Hesse out as an exemplar for quality. At the other end of the spectrum he criticises Australian writer Steven Herrick (Hollindale 2004, p.12). He suggests that Herrick’s *The simple gift*: ‘is a story masquerading as teenage realism, and its lifeless prosy apology for verse betrays its falsity and thinness’ (2004, p.12). And he added the warning: ‘If verse novels become too fashionable, we risk many more turgid imaginings as this one’ (2004, p.12). It is interesting to speculate that if commentators did not expect ‘poetry’ or ‘verse’ then reception of some verse novels might have been very different.

In the *Horn Book Magazine* column ‘Sand in the oyster’, Patty Campbell (2004) writes in ‘Vetting the verse novel’ once again *in* the style and layout of verse:

The verse novel? What is it?

It’s poetry.

Poetry? What is it?

Who knows.

Maybe Webster knows

Or at least American Heritage

A composition designed to convey

a vivid and imaginative sense of experience,

characterized by the use of condensed language

chosen for its sound and suggestive power

as well as its meaning,

and by the use of such literary techniques as

structured meter,

natural cadences,

rhyme,

or metaphor. Aha!

Which about sums it up

Except for the part about rhyme

(p. 611).

She then begins her article:

If you think the above sounds like I've been reading too many YA verse novels, you're right. Twelve, to be exact, of the thirteen or fourteen published so far in 2004. An impressive statistic, because up until last year there had been only about thirty titles in the form's whole ten-year history (Campbell 2004, p. 611).

From the rapid increase she infers that 'the verse novel has become a standard part of young adult literature, rather than an occasional oddity' (Campbell 2004, p. 611). Campbell claims this approach to telling stories in verse is only to be found in YA literature, not adult (p. 612), although it is clear her context is the American market, rather than a global one. She states the 'first verse novel to be recognized as such was the masterwork *Make lemonade* by Virginia Euwer Wolff, published in 1993' (p. 612) although she acknowledges Mel Glenn with 'writing books of poems in voices of his high school students' (p. 612). This is an uncanny echo of Australian verse novelist Steven Herrick's early work where Herrick's path was similar to Glenn's writing of YA verse novels; beginning with collections of themed poems set in classrooms, leading to collections where

characters begin to interact. Of Glenn, Campbell believes his *My friend's got this problem, Mr. Candler*, 'came within a hair's breadth of being a verse novel' (p. 612). (This could be considered the case for Australian author Steven Herrick's 2005 *Naked bunyip dancing*, in spite of its now being publicised as a verse novel.) Like Campbell, Peter Sieruta, in *Horn Book Magazine* a year later also writes list-like down the page in 'The other stuff, ten things that tick me off!' the sequence:

Arranging words
prettily on a page
does not necessarily
turn prose
into poetry
(2005, p. 225).

In 2005 Belfast academic, Joy Alexander published 'The verse-novel: a new genre'. In the article, she claimed that: '[a]lthough it might seem to be a challenging and constraining form for a writer, and one with limited appeal for young readers, verse-novels are now *regularly* found on publishers' lists, aimed especially at the teenage market' (2005, p. 269) [my italics]. Alexander was concerned the form might become 'trite and slick' (2005, p. 272). What appeared of interest to critics was dissecting the form, was working out whether the verse novel's antecedents were poetry or prose traditions. Definitions presented by critics show the hybrid label. Alexander in 2005 focussed on 'verse-novel', a term where she uses the two words bound by a compound hyphen:

The term itself is problematic, but I am adopting the name, which the form most commonly applies to itself. Definitions of the verse-novel are necessarily elastic, since as a genre it is still evolving. There is the vexed question of distinguishing between a novel told in verse and a series of poems linked in a narrative sequence (p. 270).

And she noted: 'Both poets and novelists have been drawn to the genre from their respective directions' (Alexander 2005, p. 270).

As recently as 2011, reviewers continued the mimicry, with Sara Hathaway opening a paper on verse novel writing with the following:

The Verse Novel
Is it
verse
or funny-shaped

prose?
Does it breathe, dance and sing
truth
or does it lay bare a gaudy
trick?
Does it
matter?
(p. 23).

Perhaps displaying weariness with the trend, Booklist Online’s librarian blogger, Daniel Kraus, posted ‘My 2011 YA Wishlist’⁸ on January 3, 2011. Of the seven things he would ‘like to see change or just plain go away in YA fiction in the coming year’ one concerns verse novels. His item Number 3 is ‘Prose poetry’:

If there is no reason
to write your novel like a poem,
then why
would you do it?
Other than the obvious —
taking up page space
beautiful, beautiful page space
and looking oh so serious —
but that can’t be it.
Can it?
(2011, online).

There were 25 responses, including by some authors of teen verse novels, and some where a number of responses were critical of verse novels⁹.

Researchers and commentators have engaged with the form of verse novels for children and adolescents over the past dozen or more years. They have expressed both frustration and interest, which has at times been echoed in their criticism.

8 As Yokota comments, this is the ‘age of blogging and listservs’ (2011, p. 467).

9 For responses to his blog entries, see <http://blog.booklistonline.com/2011/01/03/my-2011-ya-wishlist/>

Short form writing

The pace of contemporary life is faster, perhaps calling for brevity. The lure of writing in short forms, be it called snippet or verse, pervades everyday life across technologies, old and new, not just in literary reviews or on listservs. Adelaide Morris says: ‘a pivotal source of inspiration for second-generation electronic texts is not literature but the skill and swagger of advertisements, music videos, film credits, and other digital constructions in popular culture’ (2006, p. 37), where, as Aronson writes:

[f]or teenagers self, text, and voice have all gone multimedia wild... The best new YA novels are finding how to bring the explosion of media narratives within the borders of bound books, giving young readers a space to recognize their imperilled and empowered selves (2001, p. 124).

This connects with my response to Research Question 1: verse novels for children and teens are like multi-user domain games, allowing participation in a virtual online world where commands are brief, and to the point. New digital technologies have an impact on subject readers as well as writers. Across all age ranges social media such as Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter, have been embraced. This may now account for the preference or expectation of short-form writing. The early uptake of form may have influenced the critics themselves, who mimic the lineation of verse novels in their own criticism. The way words are laid on a page in print, on a 3rd- or 4th-generation phone screen or on the web, rises to greater prominence, and the use of white space, the negative of the text letters, words and sentences or sentence fragments themselves, becomes crucial.

White space, spare writing and text ‘tiles’

‘White syntax’... Its concerns have to do with paper, the enter key and the space-bar. It refers fundamentally to the space, which may replace words on the page or create other syntactical effects. It deals with the time factor employed in or between lines or units or strophes of poetry. However it also has ramifications for fiction in terms of time jumps, or breaks or units or even chapters in the time flow of a novel. And, yes, the whole novel is ‘bound’ in a certain fashion, or enclosed finally, with ‘white syntax’ (Roberts 2000, online).

The words in a verse novel appear on a page differently to how they are arranged in a standard novel. Words do not extend across the width. In the paper published in *TEXT*, Australian expatriate writer Kevin Roberts explains his concept of white

syntax, which is his way of referring to the white space on a page of poetry, specifically, the way lines are constructed using end-of-line space and what amounts to inter-stanza space. While he is speaking about lines of poetry rather than specifically about verse novel lines, his concept is pertinent to the form of verse novels. The fact that Roberts is both a poet and a novelist has perhaps granted him the understanding of the utility of white space or ‘white syntax’ as he calls it (2001, online).

Syntax is defined as ‘the patterns of formation of sentences and phrases from words in a particular language’ (Macquarie Concise 1981, p. 1723). For verse novels, what is immediately noticeable is the amount of white space. Commentary on verse novels frequently mentions the (white) space, for example: ‘[t]he verse novel is mostly air, and we see that even in the textual nature of the layout’ (Cadden 2011a, p. 309).

In verse novels, words are written in lines on the white space of a page. These words in verse novels are generally not written in full sentences, nor are they crafted using ‘proper’ grammar and punctuation.

It is worth noting the term *spare*¹⁰ has been used as a term of value for the body of writing in children’s and YA literature: ‘[t]he achievement of great literature is that it extends and applies the *spare* language, the focused story, the sharply etched conflicts (Aronson 2001, p. 124). This quality of sparseness of language is particularly evident in reviews of verse novels, for instance ‘in *The simple gift* Herrick uses *spare*, ordinary language to tell the exquisitely touching love story of Billy’ (Campbell 2004, p. 616) and in a review of Herrick’s *By the river*: ‘Harry’s youthful voice is authentically rendered in poems notable for their *spare* beauty’ (Isaacs 2007, online). Authors themselves describe their own writing as spare, as Karen Hesse did in her Newbery acceptance speech for *Out of the dust*:

¹⁰ the following italics outside of titles are mine

[I] never attempted to write this book any other way than in free verse. The frugality of life, the hypnotically hard work of farming, the grimness of conditions during the dust bowl demanded an economy of words. Daddy and Ma and Billie Jo's rawboned life translated into poetry, and bless Scholastic for honouring that translation and producing *Out of the dust* with the *spare* understatement I sought when writing it (Hesse 1999, n.p.).

Van Sickle, reviewing Hesse's work in 2006, says:

Although it is believable and authentic, it is unnatural to speak in such poetic terms. Each poem, though *spare*, is emotionally dense. *The sparseness of Hesse language conveys the sparseness of the landscape* (online).

Even more reviews use 'spare' as a descriptor: '*Worlds Afire* is a spare, shocking story, but its poetry gives a voice to these individuals whose lives were unforgettably altered and to those who lost their lives' (Tarr 2008, online); and Jennifer Bryant's *Pieces of Georgia* is a '*spare* tale of love and growth' (Tarr 2008, online).

There is, too, is a more pedagogically-oriented argument that sees such spare writing in verse novels as therapeutically useful. This stream of interest focusses on the space as a positive: where 'all of that free space on the page can be heartening to a reader otherwise intimidated' (Cadden 2011a, p. 309) and, as Cadden writes: 'the YA verse novel may well make young readers more open to language play and the unconventional in general, perhaps allowing them to see lyrical vignette or lyrical surrealism as a legitimate option to the prosaic realist novel (2011a, p. 309).

Some (Tarr 2008; Cadden 2011a & b) have seen the form's utility as therapy also particularly for 'reluctant' readers, where verse novels can be a:

compromise between the need for an increased page counts and the desirability for beautiful and simple brevity. The verse novel is a book that reads 'faster' than one might expect and might well satisfy adults who place a page count on reading success (Cadden 2011a, p. 309).

Spare writing here amounts not only to concise expression but also to fewer words on a page.

With spare writing in verse novels, words are cut down to the essentials. Verse novel lines do not travel across the full width of a page but stop short. One line is followed below by another short line, and so on. There may be batches or blocks of text lines separated by section markers, dates, titles or new voice-zones. In this thesis I suggest the use of the term text tile as a way of expressing what

may, in a poem, be called stanzas, or in songs, lyric verses. Verse novelists may vary form from one text to the next.

The way text tiles operate in a verse novel will depend on the author's choice of how many narrators or character points of view are presented. As shown, Cadden writes of the importance of voice in verse novels (2009). Van Sickle postulates a breakdown of the form into sub-genres or sub-categories: 'poetic singular voice, multiple voice[s], and dramatic monologue' (2006). Australian academic Wendy Michaels (2005) has shown verse novels to be unlike dramatic monologues, although, as Van Sickle (2006) and Cadden (2009) say, episodes of dramatic monologue may occur. Single perspective point of view accounts for a number of verse novels although it may be argued that these suit children's fiction more than adolescent fiction as multiple points of view may confuse younger readers. Multiple-voiced narration may benefit YA readers who should have the requisite maturity to navigate opposing or different consciousness.

Cadden says a verse novel is 'done well' in comparison to when '[t]he form flops', which he sees in a text can mean: a 'fragmentation whose parts never make a satisfying whole and "poetry" that is reformatted prose — free of poetry rather than free verse' (Cadden 2011a, p. 309). He qualifies this by stating that the whole is usually 'more than the sum of its dramatic monologues, and readers can begin to get a full sense of the story as either perspectives shift from speaker to speaker or as the single speaker returns again and again, as in diary or journal fiction' (2011a, p. 309), but crucially, it is to the white space that Cadden attributes implied meaning: '[f]inishing a verse novel, I think I remember the exposition, though it was really just implied and *I read it in the white spaces*', (Cadden 2011a, p. 309) [my italics]. In a verse novel this white space functions as syntax, just as Roberts has suggested for poetry (2001) and it is here that it provides meaning. 'It is as if all of that white space left on the page is where most of the exposition might have been, and readers fill it in through association or create it on their own' (Cadden 2011a, p. 309). This exploration leads to answering the next research question:

Research Question 2:

How does space relate to lines in verse novels for children and adolescents?

Verse novels are constructed from spare lines into text tiles, scaffolded within white space.

Conclusion

This chapter has located writing and research for children and adolescents, and explored the history and reception of verse novels and the criticism they received. It set the coordinates for the remainder of the thesis by defining terms such as writing for children and addressing a YA audience. By setting out the history of scholarship on verse novels for younger readers it also covers what verse novels are like, and some of the descriptions including figurative language used to describe the form. This chapter described aspects of the genre, looking at qualities of short form and spare writing, text tile lineation and white space. A new simile for verse novels was proposed to answer the first research question as a multi-user domain game (MUD) where characters advance the plot events through different voices in an imaginary environment. Then, the second research question was answered, showing that white space operates in conjunction with spare lines formed into text tiles. Subject readers are then able to supply their own content to engage and connect. The next section, Chapter 2, constitutes a survey of the literature about verse novels for children and adolescents through the prism of awards given from 1993 to 2010 in the US.

CHAPTER 2 — CHARTING UNFAMILIAR WATERS: VERSE NOVELS FOR CHILDREN AND YA IN THE US

Introduction

Most publishing of junior and YA verse novels occurs in the US. This chapter reviews the literature of children's verse novels that receive awards. Examining the beginnings of verse novels for younger readers in the US assists in tracing the movement of the form in Australia. As highlighted in the Introduction, exploration of texts for children and adolescents has traditionally fallen into three broad areas: literary studies, often focussing on theoretical perspectives; library studies, often concerned with storytelling and increasing literacy of the disadvantaged; and educational studies, where the interest may rest upon pedagogical applications (Trites 2008; Wolf 2011). This chapter's investigations are in the context of each of these areas. Having a methodology of highlighting significant awards is used to profile verse novels for child and YA readers, with such issues emerging as: coming of age, mental health, fantasy or romance in settings that are gritty urban or rural, either in the past or contemporary times.

Value of awards for research

Awarding prizes for writing goes back as far as Ancient Greece (English 2005, p. 251). The inaugural award in the world for children's literature, however, was established in 1921 with the Newbery Medal, and announced at an American Library Association (ALA) conference (ALA 2013, online). Crucial to the genesis of this award was the stipulation that it was:

[t]o encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those

librarians, who make it their life work to serve children’s reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field (Melcher 1922 cited in ALA 2013, online).

In recent years, the practice of awarding of prizes has proliferated, according to Aronson (2001, p. 62). Yet it is crucial to note that awards are seen as a significant tool in the writer and scholar’s kit¹¹. Professor of Reading and Language at National-Louis University, Chicago, Junko Yokota, underscores the importance of awarding prizes and the attendant debates, selections, and implications of winning (2011). She notes that:

Children are often required to read award-winning literature in school, adults often view award winners as credentials determining worth, publishers see them as moneymakers, and authors and illustrators bask in the recognition (Yokota 2011, p. 467).

In the field of children’s literature, winning a big award can reap undreamt of success, as it is one of the ‘few fields of cultural consumption... in which prizes have a more direct and powerful effect on sales’ (English 2005, p. 97) so much so, it ‘is said that winning a Newbery Prize for Children’s Literature “guarantees 10,000 in hardcover sales in the first year”’ (English 2005, p. 360). Controversy may accompany the awarding of prizes. Readers, writers, reviewers and librarians sometimes complain judges choose strange sorts of books — hard one, dark ones, or issues-based ones — that readers won’t want to read. ‘From the standpoint of economics, prizes can appear lopsided and disequilibrating in any number of ways’ (English 2005, p. 6). English says ‘[w]e should think, rather, of a game that is being played at every point or position in the field, the entire fire of cultural production a full-contact marketplace’ (2005, p. 11). As Yokota poses:

[a]wards engender considerable discussion, debate, and written text, both before and after winners are declared, especially in this age of blogging and listservs. Yet with all that has been talked about and written about, what constitutes research in the area of awards in literature for children and adolescents? (2011, p. 467).

Researchers in the field of children’s literature can find it convenient to use a methodology selecting texts on the basis of merit as recognised by awards. For

¹¹ This is borne out by the inclusion of an entire chapter devoted to the topic in the 2011 text, *Handbook of research on children’s and young adult literature*.

instance, educational researcher Marshall George uses quantitative data analysis strategies in his 2008 study of how teachers reading YA verse novels compare with students reading the same YA verse novels. George selects Newbery awardees; his research uses winners from 1994-2000 in order to study the different aspects of reading between teens and adults.

Prizes may alert critics to the building of a body of work worthy of comment or research. Likewise, book publishers may take notice. School librarians, gatekeepers with book purchasing power in schools, read about shortlist contenders for prizes and purchase prize-winning titles for their school's libraries, thereby promulgating such books to their readers. The following sections will survey prizes awarded for verse novels for children's and adolescent literature in the US.

First verse novel, 1993

Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make lemonade* was published in 1993 and was awarded ALA Best Book for Young Adults and Booklist Top of the List. It is recognised (Campbell 2004) as being the first verse novel to be published for adolescents. Euwer Wolff explains how her the form for this first verse novel came about: 'I did try changing part of a draft into paragraphs, and I just got all blocked and stifled and couldn't do it (cited in Campbell 2004, p. 612).

In *Make lemonade*, protagonist LaVaughn's school is so large she might just pass through aimlessly like many of the others from hopeless backgrounds. With a father, although law-abiding himself, shot dead in gangland crossfire before the story starts, she could imagine a difficult path herself. Her mother's pushing is helpful, and at the school she is identified as deserving extra classes. Those classes are 'esteem', as in self-esteem, or 'steam' as the children abbreviate them to. They lead in the second book to extra grammar classes — the linguistic advancement that will make a huge difference to those children from the ghettos, learning language that will assist them to find a way out of there. LaVaughn secures a part-time job babysitting and in turn encourages Jolly, the young single mother of two little charges, to return to school so she can learn to read. But

payment for her services is rare and LaVaughn's mother gets frustrated that her daughter is being exploited. LaVaughn tries to explain:

29

... 'Jolly she's gonna get on her feet.
She's had bad luck. I don't know, it's like —'
I'm putting on my sweater and putting my math book
in the backpack.
'It's like, you know how a bowling ball goes,
when somebody bowled it crooked? It goes into the
what do you call that place?
You know, when it goes sideways...'

My Mom is giving a last swoosh with the sponge
to the counter.
She says, 'The gutter is what you call it, LaVaughn.'

I leave for school not forgiving my Mom for saying that
(Euwer Wolff 1993, p. 75).

True believer is its sequel and it won the prestigious 2001 National Book Award for Young People's Literature. In Section 3 the protagonist and sole narrator, LaVaughn, is sat down by her mother for a talking-to:

'Verna LaVaughn. You remember your college plans.'
This was not a question. She used both my names.

'Sure, I remember,' This is too offhand for her
...
With my mom you are alert at attention or nothing.
'Yes, I remember my college plans,' I say, polite.
(Euwer Wolff 2001, p. 7).

Resident in a high-rise tenement building, her single mother has won a better job that will require her teenage daughter to shoulder greater household responsibilities. Her mother tells LaVaughn she will need to focus on her studies:

'I understand,' I say back.

'I don't think so.'

You know what this means?
This means you can't do anything
real
dumb,
LaVaughn.'
She looks at me with a face full of rules.

I know the rules, have always known them.
Go to school, do homework,
have safe friends,
have a job after school,
don't make bad decisions.
...
'You need a long memory, LaVaughn.
You can't go forgetting the minute it gets too hard.'

I say I know that.
We agree I still mean it about college.
I tell her I appreciate her.
and I truly believe
those things are both completely true.
(Euwer Wolff 2001, pp. 8-9).

Euwer Wolff finished the trilogy finally in 2009 with *This full house*, a long and extraordinary verse novel that sees LaVaughn struggle past the unrequited love disappointment of *True believer* into the next year and extension classes in health sciences. Once again, her life becomes closely enmeshed with Jolly's, twisted and turning like the strands of literary DNA that bind the story together. The final page has its feature text tile:

I am going to college.
Me, LaVaughn.

I hold the letter in my hand
just inside the doorway
of this house of everything I have hated and loved
and feared, insisted, resented,
wanted, and wanted to forget.

It's not finished after all, my thinking and growing.
 I stand still and wish I could breathe it all in at once,
 the unexpected taste, the weight,
 the worrying, doubting heart of it,
 the joy
 in this full house.
 (Euwer Wolff 2009, p. 476).

This prize-winning trilogy has 'found a following among young adult readers' (Kaplan 2012, p. 32) due to its focus on contemporary urban realities. The next award after Euwer Wolff would be a verse novel focussed on historical harsh realities.

First Newbery Medal award for a verse novel, 1998

The first verse novel for children and YA readers to take out a significant prize in the US, the aforementioned Newbery Medal, was awarded in 1998 to Karen Hesse for her historical novel published in 1997 by Scholastic Press, *Out of the dust*. This story about the terrible dustbowl era of the Depression in the US is one Hesse claims to have set out to write from grant funding into 'agricultural practices on the Great Plains' (Mills 2011, p. 378). Hesse writes that her theme is one of forgiveness: '[t]he whole book. Every relationship. Not only the relationships between people but the relationship between the people and the land itself' (Hesse 1998, n.p.). *Out of the dust* was widely hailed for its spare language, which is a descriptor that I have shown in the prior chapter is frequently associated with verse novels. It was a highly awarded book. It was a different sort of story for its time, told, Hesse said, in a way she had not imagined, 'as spare and emaciated as the bare bones of the poems themselves' (1999, n.p.).

Often quoted for its historical perspective, the novel reads like diary entries with sections set out by seasonal date, beginning 'Winter 1934' and ending 'Autumn 1935'. The novel is told in the voice-zone of protagonist, child Billie Jo. The most significant text tile is entitled 'Hope Smothered':

While I washed up dinner dishes in the pan,
 the wind came from the west
 bringing —

dust.
I'd just stripped all the gummed tape from the
windows.
Now I've got dust all over the clean dishes.

I can hardly make myself
get started cleaning again.

Mrs. Love is taking applications
for boys to do CCC work.
Any boy between eighteen and twenty-eight can join.
I'm too young
and the wrong sex
but what I wouldn't give
to be working for the CCC
somewhere far from here,
Out of the dust.

May 1935
(Hesse 1997, p. 181).

Many classroom activities have been developed around this enduring and undeniably moving text, and Hesse has continued to publish books for children and adolescents. The next section covers a prize-winning author, Ellen Hopkins, whose work attests to a new level of gritty reality.

Contemporary urban tales

Ellen Hopkins features in the 2010 *New York Times* bestsellers list for her series *Crank* (New York Times 2010, online). Among numerous accolades for her dozen or so books, *Crank* won a variety of awards. Her verse novels are distinguished by all being thick, hard-hitting books. Hopkins wrote her first verse novel, *Crank*, and then *Fallout*, as a response to having a daughter become a crack addict (Hopkins 2010). Her protagonist, Kristina, she modelled on her own daughter, who begs her single wannabe-writer mother to allow her to visit her father whom she has not seen for years. Unfortunately, his hollow lifestyle with its ready availability of alcohol, drugs, and inappropriate company provide the

conditions to disappoint Kristina. She re-constructs herself as Bree, and following date rape begins a methamphetamine habit, culminating in remand and an unwanted pregnancy. *Fallout* isn't told in the voice-zone of Kristina, but from the points of view of Kristina's three eldest children. The speaking position of the narrator in relation to the author is interesting here. In the peri-text to the novel, Hopkins explains why she changed the point of view of the characters, aside from change in time:

I chose to pull out of Kristina's point of view, into her children's to give them a voice, and to give voice to my readers who struggle with their own parents' addictions... You will get 'the rest of Kristina's story', through different lenses because 'the monster' doesn't only destroy the addict (Hopkins 2010, p. 665).

As serious as the topic may appear, there is still so much normal adolescent activity going on:

I THINK

I just might go ahead and die
right here, right now. How
could anything be better than
the way I'm feeling this moment?
Ms. Dzumba blathers on
and on about amoebas, and all
I can think about is Bryce's
kiss. It *was* a kiss, wasn't it?
God, what if it was just an
accident? Was I supposed
to respond? What if that's
the only kiss I ever get?
(Hopkins 2010, pp. 183-184).

This ordinary teen activity recalls Euwer Wolff's character LaVaughn's first kiss with her childhood friend in *True believer*. Hopkins also has a 'short-story verse'

published in *Does this book make me look fat?* with her ‘Pretty, hungry’, about body image and anorexia clearly targeting a YA audience (notwithstanding being filed under Adult Nonfiction¹²):

See, Friends Were in Short Supply

With all the shuffling back and forth
between homes, I never developed

Solid neighborhood buddies. And in
school, being fat makes you a loner.

(Hopkins 2008, p. 159).

In Hopkins’ tale the overweight teen starves herself to gain her absent father’s approval yet resolves nothing in her family life, although she finds that being thin makes her attractive to men, young and old.

Hopkins’ books all include issues considered ‘tough’ for adolescents. The verse novel form appears to favour covering the topics of family dysfunction and mental illness.

Modern mental health and therapy themes

Sonya Sones is another popular award-winning US author who writes verse novels exclusively. Sones has a background in filmmaking and animation, and she attributes the desire to write for children as a response to her pleasure in reading to her own children (Sones 2012). Like Hopkins, she explains how her topic arose from her own life experience:

Stop Pretending, my first novel-in-verse, is autobiographical. It tells the story of what happened when I was thirteen years old and my big sister, who was nineteen at the time, had a nervous breakdown and had to be hospitalized (Sones 2012, online).

¹² In the Stirling Coventry Library, South Australia.

As seen in other verse novels, the themes of mental health issues and self-identity are on-target for the audience. In Sones' book the protagonist suffers as the sister of a young adult girl in crisis. As with her following books, the title explains the story's central problem. Each also has a matching text tile title piece, for instance:

Stop Pretending

Stop Pretending.
 Right this minute.
 Don't you tell me
 you don't know me.
 Stop this crazy act
 and show me
 that you haven't changed.
 Stop pretending
 you're deranged.
 Stop a minute.
 You'll remember things
 like they used to be
 when you used to read to me
 from Dr. Seuss in our backyard.
 Stop pretending.
 Right this minute.
 I'm your sister.
 Don't you tell me
 you don't know me
 (Sones 1999, p. 63).

Honours for *Stop pretending: what happened when my big sister went crazy* (1999) include the Gravida Award for Best Poetry Book; and in Europe, the Berliner Kinder Prize (Germany). As I have previously mentioned, some verse novels are recognised as therapy for reluctant readers (Tarr 2008, p. 2; Cadden 2011a) and it appears that the verse novel form may also feature psychologically therapeutic storylines, such as those by Sones, that is, dealing with mental illness. As she has written, her sister said about the book: 'this could be used in schools to open up discussions about mental illness' (cited in Sones 2012, online).

Sones published more teen verse novels: *What my mother doesn't know* (2001) and *One of those hideous books where the mother dies* (2004). The holiday romance between Robin and Sophie in *What my mother* is tested in the novel's sequel, *What my girlfriend doesn't know* (2007). The school year returns and Robin hopes his new partnership with a desirable girl will obliterate his tag of 'loser'. The fast-paced narrative is told from a young male perspective, with Robin's text tile in 'Seeing Tessa' expressing the thoughts of an aroused young man:

And suddenly all I can think about is

How much I want to touch her breast again,
 How much I want to get her alone
 And tear her sweater off

And just touch them
 And touch them
 And touch them...

(Sones 2007, p. 263).

Since 1999 Sones has won a number of awards and like Hopkins, she has written a number of 'short stories in verse'. Her most recent verse novel is for adults¹³. While Sones wrote a book in the voice-zone of a young male, there are male authors writing verse novels featuring male protagonists.

Male verse novelists

In tracing the history of verse novels for younger readers in the US, male authorship is significant as it is in Australia (and will be discussed in the next chapter). This is primarily due to the early collections of related poems that constitute proto-verse novels from which others have taken the lead. One author whose poetry books may have had an impact on US authors attempting verse novels for adolescents is Mel Glenn, whose publications prior to his first verse

¹³ like the Australian author Catherine Bateson's latest

novel included collections of themed poems for teens. In 1991 Mel Glenn's free verse collection, *My friend's got this problem, Mr. Candler*, included 'a bit of narrative cohesiveness to his vignettes' (Thomas 2001, p. 489). Thomas' criticism of this work is its 'disempowering ideology' (p. 491), and the voices of students are clichés and the students ultimately lack opportunity for action, where it is only the 'self-sacrificing [school] counsellor who stands in for institutional power' (Thomas 2001, p. 489). In 1996 Glenn's next book, which is subtitled 'a mystery in poems', *Who killed M.r Chippendale*, there is a narrative unified by different high school student voices into a more continuous form. Here, the plot's premise is that a teacher is shot and killed, and each text tile constitutes a voice-zone of a particular student in the high school reflecting on the events surrounding the shooting (Thomas 2001, p. 489). This verse novel was awarded the 1997 American Library Association Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults.

Robert Cormier, author of the perennial classroom favourites of the 1970s, *The chocolate war* and *I am the cheese*, wrote his first and only verse novel, *Frenchtown summer*, in 1999. It was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Award in 2000. The book's theme of the unhappiness of the young adult is similar to that of his others:

That was the summer of my first paper route,
and I walked the tenement canyons
of Frenchtown
delivering The Monument Times,
dodging bullies and dogs,
wondering what I was doing
here on the planet Earth,
not knowing yet that the deep emptiness
inside me
was
loneliness
(Cormier 1999, p. 2).

Male authorship of YA verse novels in the US appears to be increasing, with many new titles, including some from Ron Koertge and David Levithan (Tregay 2012, online). The form continues to diversify and expand with recent topics including those by Ryan Mecum on vampires and zombies.

Fantasy elements

Although it appears that verse novels noted so far favour gritty realism, whether historical like US Hesse's YA *Out of the dust* or contemporary urban tales like US Ellen Hopkins or Glenn, until recently there have been scant fantasy verse novels. Traditionally, science fiction/fantasy novels have high word counts, perhaps a factor that does not suit the spare language of verse novels. Nevertheless, examples are emerging that feature fantasy elements, with zombie, werewolf and ghost stories most likely.¹⁴

Helen Frost's 2008 verse novel *Diamond Willow* was judged Honor Book for the 2009 Lion and the Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Poetry. It is set in snow-bound north, 'Old Fork, a fictional town of about six hundred people, located on a river in interior Alaska' (Frost 2008, p. vii). There, the spirits of Willow's ancestors are animate and their voices are to be heard in straight prose pieces interspersed throughout Willow's voice-zone text tiles. These fantasy voices of the 12-year-old protagonist's ancestral spirits reside in the birds and animals that surround the living humans. These totem spirit characters include great-great grandfathers and great aunts of Willow, and her friends and other relatives. Willow is closer to these creatures, who now live as sled dogs. Of interest is the way Frost has embedded internal poems within the diamond poems through the method of selectively boldening words. These meta-level poems stretch the narratives into a new dimension, all the more appropriate because of the fantasy element.

Frost uses a shape poem format that she has wrought throughout her narrative. Each page's text tile is shaped in a rough diamond, mimicking the way some species of willows mutate under the influence of fungus to produce 'diamonding'¹⁵. On the page titled 'Fox', apparently fearless Willow is on her

¹⁴ This includes texts such as Lisa Schroeder (2008) *I heart you, you haunt me* and books by Ryan Mecum (2008, 2010, 2011), AM Jenkins (2006) and Carolee Dean (2012) as well as Australian author Catherine Bateson's (2000) *A dangerous game*, with its setting of Dungeons and Dragons. For further reference see Sarah Tregay's list online.

¹⁵ A diamond willow '*North American*: a willow tree with diamond-shaped depressions on the trunk as a result of fungal attack, resulting in timber with a diamond-shaped pattern of pale

way to her grandparents' house. Her journey is dangerous, as shown in the surface level of writing, which is descriptive and prosaic. An inner voice is denoted by a bold font where the inner text is an interior monologue and deeper narrative that betrays the emotional condition of the speaker: 'this / gets scary / sometimes / And I / love it' (Frost 2008, p. 16). The last line is the surprising 'turn' that marks where Willow admits to her pleasure at the terror. Willow's fearlessness is a character trait that is underscored by the novel's plot and the predicaments in which she finds herself, in part through her own impetuosity and actions. Other text tiles offer the same ambivalence about safety and danger, fear and comfort, terror and trust. The setting is crucial, too:

Fox
 tracks,
 new snow,
 red-streaked sky
 and full moon rising.
 I know **this** trail, know
 where it **gets scary**. I know
 where it **sometimes** floods and
 freezes over. **And I** know Grandma
 and Grandpa will **love it** when they hear
 the dogs, knowing that it's me mushing
 out to see them. I'm almost there.
 Can't be more than half an hour
 to go. Down this small
 hill, past the burned
 stumps. There—I
 see the light
 by their
 door.

(Frost 2008, p. 16).

sapwood and darker heartwood. Several species in the genus *Salix* are affected, in particular *S. bebbiana*⁷ (Oxford Dictionaries, online: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/diamond+willow>).

Reviewer Karen Coats says Frost has invented an, ‘ingenious poetic form for her story that is both stable and fluid’ (2008, p. 425). ‘Just as the dark heart of the diamonds in nature reveals the scar of a branch that has fallen off, these phrases often indicate a deeply felt loss or powerful but unspoken emotion’ (Coats 2008, p. 425). For Frost’s story set in the depths of winter in the wilds of small-town Alaska ‘as she ventures into the fraught territory between childhood and adolescence’ (Coats 2008, p. 425), this form within a form is apt because the child is able to express her voice-zone independently in text tiles and be surrounded by the security of a wider complex of family, included in plain prose.

Zombie, werewolf or ghost stories don’t necessarily need to scare, though verse novels utilising these themes for YA may do. *Diamond Willow* is suited to younger readers with its fantasy element of animal spirits talking to the protagonist who are comforting, not terrifying. Another feature of this novel is language play as highlighted by the bold lines within the shaped lines of text.

Language and literature

Awards for verse novels crossed the Atlantic when US writer Sharon Creech was shortlisted for the UK award the Carnegie Medal¹⁶ in 2001 for her junior verse-fiction, *love that dog*, then nominated for the same award again in 2005 with her later verse novel for junior readers, *Heartbeat*. Once a teacher in England, Creech’s most popular books for younger readers in the UK are the comical tales *hate that cat* and its sequel, *love that dog*. Both feature a young protagonist, Jack, who copes with the death of his pet dog in the first tale, then comes to terms with a character feline in *hate that cat*. In a theme that runs through a number of verse novels for both younger and older children there is an feature of coming to terms with *words* — whether prose or poetry, or, as seen in the case of Euwer Wolff, the

¹⁶ ‘The Carnegie Medal is awarded annually to the writer of an outstanding book for children. It was established by in 1936, in memory of the great Scottish-born philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919). Carnegie was a self-made industrialist who made his fortune in steel in the USA. His experience of using a library as a child led him to resolve that, “if ever wealth came to me that it should be used to establish free libraries”’ (CILIP 2011, online).

character's need to grasp traditional grammar and pronunciation. Jack becomes adept at writing poetry in answer to being 'introduced' to 'the poets' including William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost and William Blake; with a new poet introduced to the class each day. In the sequel Creech meta-textually includes a nod to other verse novelists when Jack's teacher, Miss Stretchberry extends the students' literature education. As Jack says:

May 2

Thank you thank you thank you
for showing me all the books
of cat poems
and all the books
that tell a story
in
poems.

I already read the one
By Mr. Robert Cormier
(alive?)
and next
by my bed
is that dust book by
Ms. Karen Hesse
(alive?)
and underneath that one...
(Creech 2008, pp. 113-114).

This continues with a list of other books of poetry and ends: 'and that poem / ... / about growing up / to / be / a / writer. // I now have / a treasure of words / in / my / room (Creech 2008, pp. 114-115). Creech includes the full texts of poems following the conclusion of her verse novel as well as a reference list of the 'Books on the Class Poetry Shelf' (pp. 150-153). Unlike those of Hesse, Euwer Wolff, Hopkins, Sones, Glenn and Cormier, Creech's texts are clearly for a more junior audience, like those readers of *Diamond Willow*. The books are funny and illustrated with whimsical line drawings, and their popularity in the US and UK is

enormous, perhaps also influencing the rise of verse novels for younger readers published in Australia.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a literature review of verse novel development for children and adolescents in the US. It shows how verse novels for children and adolescents grew from themed collections of poems set in the classroom in the work of Mel Glenn in 1991; were first published in Virginia Euwer Wolff's urban tale *Make lemonade* in 1993; and first awarded the major honour of the Newbery in 1997 in Karen Hesse's historical drama *Out of the dust*. It can be seen that in the US verse novels for children and adolescents began to garner awards and prizes at a national and regional level in the 1990s and this continues. Identified in the primary sources is a range of interests, including word play, language learning, and acculturation into literature, particularly with respect to canonical literary poetry. This research shows verse novels are often issue-based, for instance covering mental health or drug addiction problems. Everyday concerns are also covered: in more junior fiction the concern of socialising in the school setting; and in adolescent fiction the challenges facing those in their teenage years or coming into adulthood. This research uncovers form and setting as critical elements. Location is often important, such as the historical era of the dustbowl in the Depression, the wilds of Alaska, or contemporary urban tenement slums. Examples from a variety of representative verse novels show text tiles that feature individual voice-zones. These are revealed as using prosaic spare language through single or multiple first person narration that can include dialogue. Protagonists and other characters advance the plot through their own words and actions. Verse novel authors have created characters who are empowered by appearing to speak for themselves. In this chapter, excerpts of US verse novels for children and adolescents also show the use of lines working in white space.

This chapter has laid the context of verse novel publication in the US. The next section, Chapter 3, will map the history of verse novels for children and adolescents in Australia, using the groundwork of this chapter. As a method, it will canvas awards of texts in a similar fashion.

**CHAPTER 3 — ‘OF DROUGHTS AND FLOODING
RAINS... MY HOMING THOUGHTS WILL FLY’¹⁷:
VERSE NOVELS FOR CHILDREN AND YA IN
AUSTRALIA**

Introduction

In 1996, three years after the US, Australia embraced verse novels for children and adolescents. The two countries are fertile grounds for the genre. Verse novels for children and YA readers appear to have entered Australia through the influence of children’s literature from abroad and adult verse novel publication in Australia. Like the last chapter, this chapter uses the awarding of prizes as a method to examine verse novels that have received attention. Also of significance in this chapter is the assertion that Australian children’s literature is presently undergoing a rejuvenation; that out of the drought, new verse novels for younger subject readers arise.

Early Australian YA verse novels

The manner of how verse novels for younger readers arrived in Australia is a matter of contention. There are competing theories: Joy Alexander postulates verse novel writing for teens in Australia as having happened ‘spontaneously’ (2005, p. 269), whereas Christopher Pollnitz sees two versions of the beginnings

¹⁷ Dorothea Mackellar, ‘My country’ (1911) in Mackellar & McLean, n.pp., 2010.

of Australian YA verse novel writing where ‘[b]oth of them seem to miss the mark’ (2002, p. 62). The first he sees is outlined as follows:

Sociological critics of literature think that writers choose certain literary genres because there is a demand for that kind of book... [but] [b]efore Steven Herrick sat down in 1995, there was no demand for YA verse novels in Australia because there were none (Pollnitz 2002, p. 62).

His other explanation is that verse-novel writing:

goes back to Aristotle, and holds that poetry and narrative are passed down through generations because poets and story-tellers look to the great models of the past and try to equal them... and that poets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries began to look for ways of reclaiming the prestige of these older verse narratives for poetry (Pollnitz 2002, p. 62).

These theories neglect the literary zeitgeist and the influence of writers from abroad. Also, authors who are not poets write verse novels. Even the author credited¹⁸ with being first Australian verse novelist for YA, Steven Herrick, writes that he was specifically influenced by Dorothy Porter’s adult verse novels, particularly *The monkey’s mask* (Pollnitz 2005). Pollnitz also quotes Herrick in personal communication as having read US authors Karen Hesse’s *Out of the dust* and Robert Cormier’s verse novel from 1999, *Frenchtown summer* (2002, p. 62).

In 2002 Pollnitz stated that around 40 per cent of verse novels published in the prior quarter century were YA (2002, p. 62) compared to those written for adults. In Australia, verse novels for the YA rather than the children’s market came to prominence first. There were few teen, middle school or junior fiction verse novels available in Australia at that time. In 2007 David McCooey wrote: ‘[t]he verse novel is one of the few forms of contemporary poetry that mainstream publishing has shown interest in. The most successful verse novels are those by Dorothy Porter etc... and Young Adult verse novels by Stephen [sic] Herrick and Margaret Wild’ (p. 200). Alexander credits Australia with many verse novel publications before the UK (2005, p. 269).

Researching prizes, as has been suggested, is a means of gathering information about a new genre. In Australia, the best-known awards for children’s

¹⁸ Alexander reports that Steven Herrick himself claims to have published ‘first verse novel written for young people in Australia’ (2005, p. 271) with his 1996 *Love, ghosts and facial hair*.

literature have been those of the Children’s Book Council of Australia¹⁹ (CBCA). This council is credited with ‘transforming the landscape of publishing for children... [in Australia where] [f]ormerly, children’s reading interests were supplied principally from overseas and the titles available were a product of the forces shaping publication in Britain’ (Foster et al. 2005, p. xv). As early as 1997 Australia acknowledged Herrick’s 1996 *Love, ghosts and nose hair: a verse novel for young adults*, with a CBCA shortlist. Alexander casts the verse novel as ‘patchy, and including fake emotion’ (2005, p. 271). The speech in it, she states, is ‘written-down... clipped sentences [with] a lack of punctuation’ and a plot ‘superficially handled... trite and slick’ (Alexander 2005, p. 272).

Over the next decade Herrick garnered awards for his verse novels. His 2007 verse novel *Cold skin* was a CBCA Older Reader’s Award Notable Book 2008, and features a murder mystery, in a way a cross-genre effort analogous to that of children’s author and poet turned adult verse novelist, Dorothy Porter. The novel serves as the third in a trilogy set in the country. Central to its concerns, although, is the character of Eddie, whom, it becomes apparent, is considered, ‘slow’. His life with his ‘smart lazy’ brother and dour father is miserable, but redeemed by the seeing Sally at school. Just as any young man would enjoy, Eddie spends time with Sally:

On Jaspers Hill
 we lie in the grass
 under the cliffs...
 Sally kisses me
 and I don’t want to run this time.
 I wrap my arms around her.
 Then, in one quick movement,
 Sally leans back and takes off her jumper,
 tossing it behind her.
 (Herrick 2007, p. 163).

¹⁹ ‘The Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) is a volunteer run, not for profit, organisation that was established in 1945’ (CBCA 2013, online).

When a young woman in the small town is murdered suspicion falls upon all the men of the town, and Eddie’s budding relationship with Sally does not protect him with an alibi. Herrick’s narrative includes a range of first-person male voice-zone narrators across the town: young and urgent, and older; creepy, grumpy. Girl readers may not resonate with Herrick’s texts that can seem sexist. Yet like the books by Glenn and Cormier, verse novels written by males may help provide recognisable characters and situations for boys and young men. Teen boys can be ‘entice[d]’ to read when books are specifically YA literature, which ‘can also help them learn how to survive adolescence and become men’ (Bilz 2004, p. x). Herrick’s verse novels have been studied in Australian schools and are available in the US.

By 2002 another author entered the lists, with Margaret Wild’s *Jinx* (2001) shortlisted in the CBCA. Highly awarded for her picture book texts, this was her first verse novel. Alexander critiques the book as one that ‘resembles a picture-strip in words in its sequence of “verses”’ (2005, p. 272), where its mix of first and third person narration is ‘a post-modern “fix” on reality, a collage of fragments without a meta-narrative’ (p. 272) although it uses a ‘suppleness in the crafting... using the form to support the telling’ (p. 272). Perhaps a more kind review of Wild’s next book, *One night* (2003), is from children’s author and reviewer, Sally Murphy:

The free verse style lends a bare-bones feel — fluff and fill have been excluded, leaving the raw emotion of youth for the reader to access and experience... *Jinx* is told in blank verse, which ensures that every word is carefully chosen and loaded with meaning. It also makes the novel a fairly quick read and accessible to readers of all abilities (2012, online).

Here, the critique is reminiscent of Hesse’s work.

Of the Australian verse novels that she first reviewed, Alexander’s accolades fall on Libby Hathorn’s 2001 *Volcano boy*, picked out for both its lyrical style, and also its ‘extraordinary, strange and powerful story’ (Alexander 2005, p. 272). Hathorn’s *Volcano boy*, published by the now defunct publisher Lothian, has its form noted in a subtitle: ‘A novel in verse’. It includes the reproduction of ‘diary-poem-confession’ marginalia of Shakespearean quotes from the first-person narrator Alex. This is analogous to Creech’s books, where the protagonist learns lines of poetry by rote; and enacts being a poet quoting a

poet. Of course, Hathorn’s book is YA, not junior, and its complexity appropriate for teens. *Volcano boy* was commended in Bi-annual Awards for Younger Readers by the Society of Women Writers on NSW in 2003. The granting of awards is not necessarily a reflection of subject reader choice or preference, indeed prizes may go to contentious choices, but researchers can use award lists in order to observe emergence of a publishing trend, as this thesis does.

This section has traced the influence of US authors for children and YA on Australian writers of verse novels for teens. It can be seen through the awarding of prizes in the two countries that verse novels for YA in Australia followed the US closely. Also revealed in this thesis is the clarification that the first Australian author of YA verse novels, Steven Herrick, had read a number of US YA verse novels, as well as being influenced by an Australian writer of adult verse novels, Dorothy Porter. Other Australian writers publishing in the genre were also aware of overseas verse novels. This exegesis can now report on the next question:

Research Question 3:

How did verse novels for children and adolescents arise in Australia?

Verse novels for YA arose in Australia in the early 1990s influenced by both Australian adult verse novels and verse novels for children and adolescents from the US.

Junior verse novels

In Australia there has been a noticeable increase in verse novels for readers younger than YA. For instance, Sherryl Clark, a lecturer in Professional Writing and the editor of a national women’s poetry magazine, *Poetrix*, has written junior verse novels and won awards. Clark states her first, *Farm kid* (2004), was written during a summer arts course in California. It won the NSW Premier’s Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children’s Literature in 2005. This story’s narrative drive is loose. The text reads more like a collection of poems and, indeed, on its cover the book is entitled a ‘novel in poems’. Clark explains:

It was only after I’d written about ten [poems] that I realized they were beginning to form a story, and the character of Zack emerged. *Farm kid* was never going to be a prose novel... To me, this verse novel is closer to a graphic novel than anything, because it’s a series of word pictures that tells what happens (2009, online).

In 2008 her *Sixth grade style queen (not!)* was Honour book in the CBCA awards for Younger Readers and more truly fits with being called a novel.

Clark’s next verse novel *Motormouth* (2010), functions in a more integrated narrative way than *Farm kid*. Of all Australian current junior verse novels it is most clearly pitched at boys. The voice-zone protagonist, Chris, dreams of owning a 1966 Ford Mustang. His older sister Leanna, formerly a good mate with whom to kick a footy, has started high school and now rejects him; and Dad is ‘a fitness freak’ (p. 11), who despairs because Chris does not play sport but is just ‘slobbering around’ (p. 11). Chris used to play cricket with his friend Dave, but with his death Chris now shuns of any sort of sport or physical activity. On his first day at school after his friend has died a girl classmate blurts out:

‘didja go to
Dave’s funeral?’
‘yes’

was it, like, sad?’
‘yes’
‘didja see his
mangled-up body

I’ve never hit a girl before
first time for
everything.
(p. 13).

Chris washes his mother’s car, where he can read the car manual and help out with a tune-up (but is not allowed to touch his father’s car). These ‘boy’ things are important as they highlight the different family dynamics.

Illustrations and layout mark this text as aimed at junior readers, and more specifically, boys. Aside from a three-colour cover, it is a grey scale significantly illustrated small volume with many strong black and white illustrations for text tiles. Every page is entitled, with a ‘Finish’ line tag in checkerboard pattern like a

racing flag. Each page number is encased in a hand-drawn ‘route’ image. The book comprises 64 ‘POEMS’, yet even a listing of the titles of text tiles reads like a mini-story itself.

Like Clark, Western Australian children’s writer and reviewer Sally Murphy has turned from prose fiction to writing junior verse novels. In 2009, her junior verse novel, *Pearl verses the world* won the 2010 Australian Family Therapists and Speech Pathology award and was shortlisted for the 2009 Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards. Her following verse novel *Toppling* (2010) won the 2010 Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards and was shortlisted for two other awards (Walker Books 2012, online).

Again, as with Creech’s stories, words, specifically poetry, are significant in *Pearl verses the world*. In its opening piece Pearl explains: ‘Sometimes I think / ...on an island... / trapped in a bubble / Floating aimlessly through a void’ (Murphy 2009, p. 7). It finishes tellingly with: ‘Wherever I am / No one sees me.’ The protagonist clearly feels alienated in her busy class with a teacher who should be inspiring but whose words of wisdom fall with a thud ‘like concrete’ (p. 9). The narrative call to action is when the teacher, Miss Bruff, wants the class to write a poem. Pearl also faces a crisis at home: in a multi-generational all-female household with working single mum, her granny is clearly ‘fading’ with dementia. Pearl’s problem is that Miss Bruff wants the children to write poems that rhyme, and Pearl’s poems don not rhyme (echoing a clear authorial choice, see Murphy 2009a, online):

Today, says Miss Bruff
 You must write
 About someone you know.
 Remember those rhymes!
 Miss B, I want to say.
 Some people don’t rhyme
 And some of us
 Don’t even want to rhyme
 (p. 37).

Granny used to read Pearl fairy stories and there were many princess references. In her own domain Pearl thinks about males on and off, working out who is

handsome and who isn't: Mitchell is, but not a Prince Charles, then there's a Charles at the funeral parlour. The teacher speaks with Pearl's mother:

Your Pearl, Miss Bruff says
Is a wonderful writer.
She writes the best stories
And essays.
I love to read her work.
But she doesn't like poetry.

Ha!
I say inside my head.
What do you know, Miss Bruff?
I love writing poetry.
You just don't like my style.
You want rhyme
And rhythm
And happy endings
But my poems
Don't rhyme
Can't rhyme
Shouldn't rhyme.
Rhyme
Does not a poem make.
(p. 61).

Pearl's clearly defined first person voice-zone text tiles show the child to be an independent thinker who exceeds her teacher's expectations of what constitutes poetry.

This form perfectly suits the narrative's gaps and provides a space Pearl and her grandmother can inhabit; a space about which her mother (or for that matter, her teacher) knows nothing. Significantly, her mother does not know how Pearl and her granny would tell each other stories; ones of an especially literary nature,

for example of the boy stealing the plum²⁰. Satisfyingly, Pearl then writes a poem for her granny. Of interest is that Pearl talks about herself in third person to describe how she composes the poem and its use in her grandmother’s eulogy. For Pearl, this becomes the defining moment for her to assert her independence. In Murphy’s *Motormouth* and *Pearl verses the world* the children’s words relate to their voice, and show their agency. These ideas are further explored in the next chapter.

Australian Prime Minister’s Literary Award

In 2010, Lorraine Marwood’s *Star jumps* was awarded \$100,000 for the Australian Prime Minister’s Literary Awards (Australian Government 2011), at the time the richest prize in Australia for an author of junior fiction in the Southern Hemisphere. Marwood’s *Star jumps* won the Children’s Literature category. The story is contemporary rather than historical and occurs in the drought that crippled much of the country during the first decade of the 21st century and was most severe from 2003-2006 (Australian Government 2006, online). Australia is a land where a significant part of the country may be drought-ridden while at the same time floods are devastating another part of the country. Such cycles of drought are difficult enough for the urban dwellers who live in the cities that hug the coast, but more so in the rural communities, where making a living can become perilous.

Star jumps (2009) is Marwood’s second junior verse novel. Just as her novel features the first flush of wildflowers, so verse novels for junior readers appear to be sprouting. Set in rural Australia, three siblings fear the loss of their farm due to the ongoing drought and Connor despairs at any efforts to save it, telling his sisters: ‘Soon as I get to Year 10 / I’m moving on, / getting a job building, / or something with money. / No more calves to feed, / or dying cows to

²⁰ This is the same story that is also used by Creech in *hate that cat* (2008) with reference to William Carlos Williams’s ‘This is Just to Say’ poem, pp. 85-89, 146.

put down, / or watching dad looking / at the sky all the time’ (Marwood 2009, p. 81). The narrator is Ruby, who afterward reflects:

I watch the moon make shadows.
no other lights around,
just the moon dancing
(Marwood 2009, pp. 81-83).

Where in Hesse’s *Out of the dust* characters feel blighted by the times, in the contemporary Australian text Marwood’s three child characters display a more positive range of responses to the drought that threatens their dairy farm. Youngest sibling Ruby is the first-person protagonist whose voice-zone is the one given in text tiles throughout the novel. She is the observant narrator for her older siblings, Connor and Keely. It is her elder sister who has instigated their ‘star jump Saturdays’²¹. These are the special days that denote the coming of spring. Just as the sap rises in the weeds, so the children emerge from indoors to create their own outdoor world. This is when the children create a network of tunnels and private mazes in the thickly-filled paddock of marshmallows.²²

Unlike the earlier forms of verse novels where each page is formed by separate text tiles as if they were entitled ‘poems’ (as in Murphy’s *Motormouth*), this verse novel is set out in chapters that have continuous lines and sections marked within them. In *Star jumps* these are graphically represented by drawings of what is intended to be a marshmallow weed. This fast-growing weed is found across much of Australia. In my own childhood on the Yorke Peninsula’s Copper Triangle, my twin brothers, two years my junior, would join with me to play exactly as described in *Star jumps*, when we created private landscapes flattened out with games of hide-and-seek. These experiences have become the tissue of memory (and more of this is covered in Chapter 5’s reflections on craft).

The rapid appearance of marshmallows in the paddocks often coincides with the calving season. Although the siblings in *Star jumps* can run riot and play,

²¹ In the US called straddle hops

²² This is the common name for the plant, *Malva parviflora* of the Hibiscus family, although the weeds closely resemble hollyhocks.

as farm children they are not free to relax on a weekend, but are called upon to help move the cows and to provide human barriers as the new calves are shifted around. Dairy farming is an unrelenting job. Chapter 3 of the novel sees the entire family on hand to help with a midnight crisis in the calving shed:

The light bobs
as Dad gives orders,
tells Mum to fetch the rope
and I know
it's a difficult birth,
maybe breech,
maybe the calf is too big,
the cow trying too long.
Can't live on a farm
where birth happens so much,
without death hitching along too.
(2009, p. 38).

Ruby, considered too young to be helpful yet, nevertheless genuinely contributes to the effort, and is rewarded by a rare treat from her father:

I catch a quick smile from Dad
in the tractor beam,
like a moonbeam.
(2009, p. 45)

Early in the novel it is clear the Dad is not happy and soon he contracts stock agents to purchase the farm's cattle. Despite water enough for weeds to grow, the enduring drought has not yet broken and the entire herd cannot be supported. If they are lucky, they will be able to keep at least the remaining breeding stock. The children are sad when they realise the cow they helped at midnight will nevertheless die, but they learn that is not the worst of it; their family's very livelihood is at stake.

Where Keely is angry, and Connor wants to leave, Ruby acts to fight for her family's livelihood by creating miniature hay bales. Although these would be eaten in a few gulps by the cows, they symbolise a youthful dogged spirit that will not give up. In order to create the enemy, Marwood evokes a personified Drought

through Ruby, ‘with cracked lips and long legs / like a bleached wand of couch grass’ (2009, p. 100), and more menacingly when the character is, ‘with a spear / out to drink my blood’ (2009, p. 101). Yet Ruby does set out, on her own, to gather the grass. Dangers can lurk on the farm, like the redback spiders that hide in the shed, or the poisonous snakes in the undergrowth, although they might need warmer weather to emerge. As Ruby recalls:

I try not to think of last summer’s
 long brown snake
 hunting those mice, under bags.
 Snake as long and thin as an extension cord,
 as old as me, maybe
 (2009, p. 91).

During the tunnel-building of the marshmallows in Chapter 2, Connor has screamed out that there is a snake, and although Ruby had seen the black cat, Stinky, flash by, and called out they were safe, such thoughts of dangers cannot be far away.

Lorraine Marwood’s first verse novel, *Ratwhiskers and me* (2008), is historically-based, set in the minefields during Victoria’s goldrush. Like Murphy and Clark her work is aimed at children rather than adolescents. In a form that looks more novel-like with its segmentation into ‘chapters’ and extensive use of dialogue, it is another Australian verse novel employing a rural setting. In *Star jumps*, by the novel’s end there is no redeeming rain. The newborn calf forgets its mother. Most of the dairy herd is sold off to go to another farm that uses irrigated water to protect it from the drought. And the marshmallow world has a short life span. The thick woody weeds stand proud for the few days then will be trampled as the new calves are sent into that paddock. While no flooding rains descend to rescue the farm, like wildflowers, verse novels for junior readers are reinvigorating the form in Australia, and promise a renewal.

Just as US dustbowl territory attracted the verse novel form for Hesse (1998), so a time of drought in Australia inspired an author to write a junior verse novel like *Star jumps*. Where Australia may not have ghettos like the ones found in contemporary YA verse novels selling today in the US, by writers like Ellen Hopkins or Virginia Euwer Wolff, an analogy may be drawn with the portrayal of

impoverished rural communities who are ‘doing it tough’. Similar ideas can be seen in Clark’s *Farm kid* and the earlier YA work of Australian verse novelists Catherine Bateson or Steven Herrick. This appears a theme that runs through a number of verse novels for both younger and older children; hardships on the land, whether today or in the past.

Evidence put forward in this chapter can now provide an answer to:

Research Question 4:

In Australia, has there been a shift in recent publishing of verse novels from YA to junior fiction?

Following a first flush of verse novels for YA, in Australia there has been a recent flourishing of junior verse novels.

Conclusion

Awards do not in themselves indicate an across-the-board highly favourable critical reception, but are one method of locating works in the public domain. The review of prizes, hopefully, indicates there is a market of significance, or at least, that a particular book or sort of book touches a chord. Looking at what the characteristics of these books are may throw light on the very nature of the texts. Such a survey of awards has not been undertaken to this extent before so that this is a useful contribution to placing verse novels for children and adolescents in Australia in the broader context.

When verse novels are nominated or win important national prizes such as the Newbery, Carnegie, Prime Minister’s Literary Awards and CBCA, they draw attention to the new ‘form’ or ‘genre’ of writing, with the news in turn subsequently influencing writers and critics abroad. This trend then is shown by the awarding of prizes across the countries. It reveals that the publication of verse novels has been occurring in US and Australia roughly in parallel. This chapter has shown a robust recent history of verse novels for teens and adolescents, that is now invigorated by junior prose verse novels.

What is of note in contemporary Australian publishing is junior verse novels which feature child narrators speaking in first person voice-zones. What is also of interest is the more novelistic shift towards continuous prose (rather than individual 'poems') set off in chapters and or scenes, the different text tiles denoted graphically with section marker punctuation.

Further research on verse novels for younger readers in Australia is in order, as with new work appearing in the US and UK. Some focus on the junior end of the market is merited, as shown by the awarding of such a prestigious prize as the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Research should also be able to enlighten further practice, and lead to improved evaluation of and understanding of the form, particularly in the field of creative writing in Australia.

The next section, Chapter 4, will focus on a contemporary Australian exemplar and it will answer Research Questions 5 and 6, whether verse novels take elements more from verse or novels and whether the form can provide readers with a place in which they may connect.

CHAPTER 4 — *AMID THE SQUALLING FRAY:* *THEORY AND EXEMPLAR*

Introduction

Verse novels for children and YA have become a feature of contemporary literature in Australia, the US, the UK and elsewhere²³. Having reviewed literature from the US and Australia, this chapter explores the research question of whether verse novels take more from *verse* or *novels*. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) ideas of heteroglossia and the dialogic are relevant to the argument²⁴ this thesis puts forward: that verse novels should be treated as novels rather than poetry. This chapter intentionally uses the work of Bakhtin as applied by David Lodge because Lodge is a contemporary and practising creative writer as well as an academic and academic writer. This chapter also picks from the larger work of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) only selectively a small selection of his cultural theories. As Lodge is a lens in this research due to its creative writing praxis angle, then so is the selection of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and agency, which are useful in examining the exemplar and in relation to the doctoral creative product. How YA characters secure a stake in their futures is crucial to this researcher's inquiries. Bourdieu examines social relations within contexts of institutional power and the young are subject to such power. Using such literary and cultural theories provides tools helpful to unpacking verse novel for children

²³ When I presented at the International Research Society for Children's Literature 2011 conference, I was told that verse novels for children are a feature of contemporary Afrikaans writing, though none is yet translated into English (pers. comm., Brisbane, July 2011).

²⁴ This takes into account warnings that applying Bakhtinian theories to literature may provide inaccurate interpretation and be tokenistic (Walker 2009; Humphrey 2000).

and adolescents. Through examining an exemplar text, Catherine Bateson's 2006 *his name in fire*, the next research question can be answered, which is whether the form of a verse novel, using multiple voice-zones and spare language in lines through white space, offers a place in which children and adolescent readers might engage. Bateson's text is an appropriate exemplar in relation to this study's creative product in terms of its rural setting, age group, and characters who find agency through involvement in a creative process.

Applying the ideas of others

Criticism refracted through theory helps illuminate literature, and, as touched on earlier in the thesis, the theories of Bakhtin have been brought to bear on children's fiction (for example, Nikolajeva 1999; Mallan & McGillis 2003; Cadden 2009). David Lodge sees Bakhtin as having 'two interconnected ideas: the dialogic nature of language and the carnivalesque tradition of culture' (1990, p. 2). These, he says, spring from Bakhtin's critique of Russian formalism that was based on an alternative linguistics of language as speech (*parole*): language not as system but as social activity that is 'dialogue' (Lodge 1990, p. 2). What Bakhtin contributes to literary criticism, according to Lodge, is that his work satisfies IA Richards' maxim that a theory must provide 'an account of value and an account of communication' (1990, p. 4). This emphasis on communication is what marks Bakhtin as appropriate for the study of verse novels for young adults. Crucially, Lodge claims that Bakhtin's ideas in part restore a 'concept of the socially constructive function of language and literature' (1990, p. 4). In fiction, characters are vital, as are their community milieux and the vernacular of their communication.

Bakhtin represents the act of communication as a social function of the *dialogic* — that is, where something that is *said* has come from something *already said* and in the expectation that *something will be said to follow*. One of the most intriguing aspects of verse novels for children and adolescents is the place of speech. Bakhtin brings to light the importance of character voice in the novel; he shows that form is able to incorporate different discourses that are not contiguous, or under any one totalitarian authority. Bakhtin favours the novel's

heteroglossic approach to dialogue and utterance and his original definition of the novel includes verse novel. According to Bakhtin, '[t]he novel as a whole is a trend multiform in style and variform in speech and voice' (1981, p. 261). Bakhtin differentiates the form of the novel from all other genres (1981). Bakhtin revels in the messiness of ordinary life, in the multiplicity of many voices — a *heteroglossia* — and he sees in them the freedom from the yoke of oppressive monologism that is represented by the poetic discourse (1981). As David Lodge notes:

[t]he dialogic includes, but is not restricted to, the quoted verbal speech of characters. It also includes the relationship between the characters' discourses and other discourses outside the text, which are imitated or evoked or alluded to by means of doubly-oriented speech (1990, p. 22),

and

[i]t was the destiny of the novel as a literary form to do justice to the inherent dialogism of language and culture by means of its discursive polyphony, its subtle and complex inter-weaving of various types of speech — direct, indirect and doubly-oriented (ie parody) — and its carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, repressive, monologic ideologies (1990, p. 21).

Thus, the author cannot impose 'a single world-view upon his [sic] readers even if he wanted to' (Lodge 1990, p. 22). So, many voices (*heteroglossia*) equal the 'linguistic variety of prose fiction' thus allowing resistance to a 'monodiscourse' (Lodge 1990, p. 22). The crux is that the form allows characters to speak for themselves — so that even if it is, say, the one author writing the characters' different voices, the fact is that there is variety. Crucially, authors give their individual characters the liberty to speak in 'their own voices' or what in verse novels I have termed *voice-zones* after Bakhtin, and makes for polyphonic utterance. As noted earlier, Murphy (1989) shows characters can advance the plot through their voices and readers become participant, not recipient in the process. In verse novels this means that through direct address, readers are better able to engage and connect.

Nikolajeva (in Beckett, 1999, p. 71) shows why we need multiple perspectives, and extrapolates from this that verse novels are not 'epic' in Bakhtinian terms, because they are not covering the 'life story' but a slice, segment, moment of a life's story, or indeed of a few stories of lives (Nikolajeva 1999, p. 66). In contemporary verse novels for child and adolescent readers, an

author may create language from within a single protagonist voice engaging with others or multiple first-person character positions, thus constructing a dialogue of heteroglossic voices. The ‘social’ is an important part of the meta-textual discourses with which the novel engages. This is such that: ‘[t]he word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer word... it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction’ (Bakhtin 1981, p. 280). This element of the social has significance in terms of the form of the verse novel, particularly for children and adolescents, because in order to grow and develop they must engage and socially connect.

The verse novel as a novel

There is a great deal of critical argument about whether verse novels are actually verse *and* novels, or something different (for instance: Murphy 1989; Pollnitz 2002; Mallan & McGillis 2003; Michaels 2003; Campbell 2004; Alexander 2005; Van Sickle 2006; Cadden 2009; Addison 2009). This thesis’ proposition is that contemporary verse novels for child and adolescent readers represent a development of the novelistic genre. When Bakhtin describes the difference between the novel and other forms of writing (such as epic poetry) his model for a novel is a verse novel. Bakhtin uses examples of novelistic form from the model of Pushkin’s 1837 verse novel *Eugene Onegin*²⁵.

In translation, Pushkin’s lines roughly rhyme, a point of difference from contemporary verse novels for younger and YA readers, though not necessarily in the case of adult verse novels (such as Vikram Seth’s 1986 *Golden Gate*). Neither pole of opposition, poetics versus prosaics, ‘functions in isolation’ (Sloane 1996, p. 64) and there are bodies of research that variously dwell upon: the poetics of novels; the prosody of poetry; the prose poem (Brophy 2002); narrative short forms; and poetic long forms (Murphy 1989). What Bakhtin reveals is that the form of the novel is itself relatively young and new in the scheme of writing and

25 The version used in this thesis is the 2008 translation in the Penguin edition

that in the very nature of the form is its ability to develop and change. As Bakhtin writes:

the novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding... best of all [a novel] reflects the tendencies of a new world and [is] in total affinity with it (1981, p. 7).

This shows the novel takes over poetic forms, such as verse-writing, or monologues and dialogues, into the verse novel, now found in children's literature characterised as an expanding subgenre (Michaels 2005) or publishing trend. In such a 'new world' of YA verse novels, at the meta-fictional level, not just the intra-textual dialogues are important but also the inter-textual dialogues' multiple focalising narratives, and the dialogues that ensue. Elick suggests the words of the child may carry heavier 'narratological weight' (2001, p. 454) as a result of the younger subject reader position. In verse novels for children and adolescents, clearly voice-zones are crucial.

In 2002 Pollnitz predicted the mode of verse novels would incite theorists and critics to 'cross swords' (2002, p. 67) over whether the novel was dead and also over the role of narrative in poetry. Ten years later verse novels for children and adolescents show the writing (as shown by contemporary junior verse novels) has shifted into a more prosaic form. Verse novels are much more like novels with text tiles using section or visual markers rather than being set out as if for a long poem, or a sequence of poems in a loose narrative form.

Thus, with the benefit of time, evidence from this chapter can now answer:

Research Question 5:

Do verse novels for children and adolescents take more from elements of verse or more from novels?

Bearing in mind Bakhtin's analysis, contemporary verse novels for children and adolescents owe more to the tradition of novels than poetry.

Voice

Bakhtin understood that at the heart of the heteroglossia of a novel is voice. Voice is represented in fiction primarily through dialogue, which Lodge defines as ‘the interchange of direct speech between individual characters’ (1990, p. 6). Lodge clarifies, writing that ‘there is no such thing as the style, the language of a novel, because a novel is a medley of many styles, many languages — or, if you like, voices’ (1990, p. 6). Here Lodge allows that Bakhtin’s argument is a more sophisticated version of Plato’s argument where Socrates distinguishes between poetic utterances (*diagesis*) versus *mimetic* speech of characters. This is where the verse novels sit, at the point where poetry meets the novel. Mimesis is important in fiction and also in verse novels. Voice as constituted in voice-zone is important in verse novels. These aspects confirm this thesis’ contention of verse novels belonging to novelistic tradition.

Lodge notes that when Bakhtin, writing about Dostoyevsky’s poetics, asserts that one of the most fundamental characteristics of prose is that it presents: ‘[t]he possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourses of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a single common denominator’ (1990, p. 7). When Bakhtin states, ‘The writer is a person who knows how to work language while remaining outside of it; he has the gift of indirect speech’ (cited in Lodge 1990, p. 7), it applies, fundamentally, to verse novelists as well:

[f]or the prose writer, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his [sic] own voice must also sound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they ‘do not sound’. The prose artist elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogized overtones; he creates artistically calculated nuances on all the fundamental voices and tones of this heteroglossia. But as we have already said, every extra-artistic prose discourse – in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly – cannot fail to be oriented toward the ‘already uttered’, the ‘already known’, the ‘common opinion’ and so forth (Bakhtin 1981, p. 279).

Verse novels, figurative language (image, symbol, simile, metaphor, personification) is not much used as the ‘primary means of representation’ (Lodge & Wood 2000, p. 107). In novels there is a tension or ‘dialogue’ between the narrator and the author. Lodge shows that in novels there is a dialogue between

the author and the languages that author uses in fiction (1990, p. 6). ‘Narrative is itself a kind of language that functions independently of specific verbal formulations’ (Lodge 1990, p. 2). This research proposes that in verse novels, the narrative language is discovered through the sequence of lines crafted into text tiles in the heteroglossia of the voice-zones.

Bakhtin’s theory applied to children’s literature

There are valid reasons for identifying Bakhtinian theory as suitable for examining fiction for children and adolescents. As the educational researcher, Elizabeth Walker, notes, Bakhtin ‘helps critics to make sense of literary works that might otherwise go unnoticed’ (2009, p. 24). In 2001 Elick noted Bakhtin’s work had become, ‘increasingly important to the criticism of children’s literature’ (p. 454). She points to Australian researchers, Stephens and McCallum (1998), as recognising Bakhtin’s theories as ‘powerful constructs for understanding novels written for children and young adults’ (Elick 2001, p. 454). McCallum sees the impact of theory as limited in Australian adolescent fiction but argues for the significance of Bakhtin for comprehending ‘the formation of subjectivity as being dialogical — that is, an individual’s identity is formed in dialogue with other and with social discourses, ideologies and practices’ (1996, p. 19). Scholars such as Nikolajeva (1999); Elick (2001); and Dresang (2008) also see the emerging use of Bakhtin’s theories with respect to books for younger readers as potentially enlightening. As McCallum writes:

Since we can never see ourselves directly, we construct a sense of ourselves by appropriating the position of the other, outside the self. This means that subjectivity is grounded in an internal fragmentation and multiplicity (in Bradford, 1996, p. 17).

Jacqueline Rose reveals a sense of disconnection between adult authors and readers, saying there is: ‘no body of literature which rests so openly on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee. Children’s fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in’ (1993, p. 2).

In verse novels, child or adolescent readers are able to construct their own position, that is, the characters to whose interior monologues they are given direct access. McCallum and Stephens write:

...for a child to participate in society and achieve some measure of personal agency within its form or structures, he or she must learn to understand and negotiate the various signifying codes used by society to order itself. The principal code is language, since language is the most common form of social communication, and the particular application of language that concerns us here is the imagining and the recording of stories (2011, p. 360).

Thus it is crucial that the child or teen is able to view him or herself through reading literature that provides a pathway to forming a sense of self, by entering into a dialogue with the text, through engaging and connecting with the multiple perspectives of the characters.

Investigation into using ideas from Bakhtin provides the groundwork in which further investigation may look to Bourdieu's cultural theories to discover the relationship between agency and voice. The following section will apply such a lens to a case study of an Australian author's verse novel for young adults.

Bateson, Bakhtin and Bourdieu

The earliest reason for the selection of Catherine Bateson's novel is its connection in terms of rural setting to the thesis' creative product. Also, it features two adolescent protagonists, one male and one female, as does the manuscript 'Copper Coast'. Finally, is that Bateson is an Australian and exemplary in her craft. She is a published author of fiction for a younger readers across the range of junior to YA, including prose fiction and verse novels; she is a current practising and published writer; she is well-awarded with a track record of publication across poetry, prose fiction for children and verse novels for teens; she is the author of more than one verse novel, writing in the form consistently rather than as a solo response to a fad; and an examination of her teen verse novel through the lens of theorists Bakhtin and Bourdieu reveals the connections between engagement and YA character voice through lines and space.

John Stephens identifies a 'bundle' of five principles of ideological assumptions specific to Australian society including: 'autonomous selfhood... not self-serving; [d]emocratically organised political and social structures... the

nuclear family... and sexual equality' (2003, p. ix). Of particular import, Stephens argues, are specific qualities of the Australian setting, which help shape how the principles are applied (2003). Along with Steven Herrick, Margaret Wild and Libby Hathorn, Catherine Bateson was an early pioneer of writing verse novels for younger readers in Australia. Where prior research covers Herrick's writing (Pollnitz 2002; Alexander 2005; Michaels 2005), there has been less attention given to Bateson. Catherine Bateson's most recent verse novel for YA is appropriate for examination in this thesis, insofar as she uses multiple first person young adult narrators in a rural setting, each of whom is each struggling to find a place.

Born in Brisbane in 1960 and now resident in rural Victoria, Catherine Bateson is an established Australian author whose first publication in 1990 was the poetry anthology *Pomegranates from the underworld*. In 1998 her poem 'This is the Poem', won the John Shaw Neilson Award. It appeared in the collection *The vigilant heart*, which was shortlisted in the 2000 Adelaide Festival Awards. She began writing as a poet and it 'remains an abiding love' (Bateson 2012, online). Bateson is acclaimed for her writing and has won numerous awards. Her latest publication is collection of poems through John Leonard Press for adults, entitled *Marriage for beginners* (2009).

Bateson's first foray into the verse novel form for teens came between the publication of her first adult poetry collection and her first children's books. On her website, it is suggested the verse novel form came about through: '[c]ombining her love of verse with a desire to present a longer, narrative piece, [where] Catherine moved into the Young Adult arena with her verse novel *A dangerous girl* in 2000 and its sequel *The year it all happened* in 2001' (Bateson 2012, online). The first two verse novels are intricately bound. As a CMIS²⁶ reviewer Peta Harrison notes, 'It is very hard to review one title without making

²⁶ CMIS (Curriculum Materials Information Service) Evaluation at WestOne Services provides advice to teachers about books and online resources suitable to support their teaching and learning programs

reference to the other, as the story in the second flows from events in the first'. In her review she shows that Bateson:

incorporates an enormous amount in terms of relationships, happenings and development into this slim and concise book... [*The year it all happened*] will appeal to both male and female readers as it deals with love, commitment and rejection from both points of view and explores successful and not so successful relationships (Harrison 2004, online).

Bateson's following verse novel in 2006, *his name in fire*, was shortlisted in the 2007 Queensland Premier's Award and a Notable CBCA Book of the Year, Older Readers, 2007. The next section now examines this work as an exemplar text.

his name in fire

In the novel, ex-circus performer, Mollie, has taken a job ('the gig from hell' p. 6) to run a 'dole circus' — a one-off community show designed to engage out-of-work youth. Carrying her own burden of grief through recent bereavement, Mollie blows into the small rural Victorian town as an exotic stranger, appropriately dressed in a motley of tie-dye colours. Her entrance begins the narrative and it is the catalyst for change. The thrust of her narration is aimed at an absent second person, Seb, in epistolary form, headed, 'Letter to Seb'. When she appears in the street, it is clear that she is the outsider and therefore the stimulus for change:

I'm a butterfly, a tiger lily
 a bird of paradise
 a freak.
 People stop shopping to stare at me,
 children point, wide-eyed toddlers
 drop their icy poles
 teenage eyes caress
 or disdain and the men
 look away from the gecko tattoo
 on my shoulder
 (p. 4).

Mollie is interviewed by the local paper, while 'juggling firesticks' and realises the importance of her role when she says: 'I'm playing Pied Piper/... I want this town to run away with the circus / to follow me...' (pp. 4-5). Her role clearly taps

into the mythic structures of fairytale as well as the Bakhtinian notion of mardi-gras / feast of fools / function where she is the bringer of a small carnival to town.

his name in fire features multiple first person voice point-of-view voice-zones of protagonists teens Matthew and Emma and youngish adults Mollie, Shazza and Mozza. Various parents and partners are peripheral characters, though without voice-zones of their own. The lyrics of Matthew's father's band also comprise a number of text tiles interspersed throughout the novel. The novel opens with three discrete minor sections comprised of three voice-zones each narrated by characters Mollie, Matthew and Emma. Then, there are 11 sections from the range of various voices.

Mollie has twin functions: that of pied piper and clown, by which means she will, in some small way perhaps, be able to subvert the static order of monoglossia. What constrains the ordinary townsfolk is their lack of gainful paid work as a result of economic and class structures beyond their control. Mollie explains the background of how she finds the place she is now:

This is Abattoir Town. Despairsville.
Some stats today from the council arts
worker —...
high school drop out rate, teenage pregnancy
figures —

tertiary intake figures and finally
youth suicide rate — one of the highest in the
state
(p. 6).

Mollie with her dole circus becomes the impetus for things to happen.

Sharon (Shazza) is led into the ring by her husband, Pete, telling her she can 'stop bitchin'... 'Shaz, you're always saying nothing goes on / but nappies and playgroup' (p. 33) [italics in text]. Shazza is a former gymnastics champion, but her life now consists of eking out a meagre existence with her toddler, in accommodation where rent is owed and her husband counts himself lucky to get a week's work at the abattoir. Shazza's cultural capital arises from her participation in competitive gymnastic shows in her youth. Bourdieu (1973) suggests that

cultural habits can have attached values denoted either as high or low, but that each have relevance. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, p. 120) *Habitus* is the sense of behaving within a field, and is ‘the product of a practical sense’. This involvement has afforded Shazza a specific cultural capital that can facilitate a rôle in the town’s one-day circus. Indeed, her role in the program leads her by the book’s conclusion to evaluate her life, and repudiate the common view of her as a ‘monument girl’ — a girl who instead of being at school learning was ‘hanging out with those boys... going down the river, getting pregnant’ (Bateson 2006, p. 75).

With her limited small-town upbringing, Shazza’s cultural capital could restrict her involvement in the production of this artistic endeavour. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus where ‘values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts [that] ...are durable and transposable’ (Webb et al. 2005, p. 36) is a useful one to describe the position in which Shazza finds herself. Her habitus is both limited and limiting.

Even with a husband supportive of her efforts to extend herself beyond the narrow domestic sphere in which she has found herself, in ‘Countdown’, she despairs, expressing self-doubt:

Shazza

I’m sick of it, I tell Pete,
 I can’t do it anymore. I can’t keep
 juggling — Harrison and the circus
 you and the circus
 the nappies and the circus
 Centrelink and the circus.
 I want out and I want it now.

Pete chucks me three oranges
 so fast I nearly drop them.

Don’t be stupid, he says.
Come on girl,
Give us the False Shower Yo Yo,

and before I know it, the oranges fly up
 just the way they should
 (p. 148).

The carnival is there in Shazza's juggling of her tripartite difficulties: relationship with her husband; mothering the young; and dealing with a governmental agency for employment. That this quotidian an object as a piece of fruit, an orange, becomes representative of the circus act of juggling, is completely appropriate. As her aesthetics are grounded in the quotidian, so too is this domestic object, something so commonplace it would be expected in any household's kitchen fruit bowl. Grounded aesthetics are defined as by Paul Willis as: 'the ways in which the received natural and social world is made human... the creative element in a process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices' (1990, p. 21). And, as Inglis argues, in this banality of the everyday 'life contains within it more significance than we think' (2005, p. 3) and that:

if we want to understand everyday life thoroughly, beyond seeing it just as an assemblage of dull and unremarkable activities, we have to understand how wider society and social structures make it the way it is for different sorts of people (p. 4).

The values Shazza and Pete espouse might be expected to alienate them from participating in an artistic performance yet Shazza's background as a sportsperson, a gymnast, includes the ability to put on a show, and this is what provides a pathway through for her. Such 'popular and everyday equivalents of "high culture"' (2005, p. 103) Inglis writes, 'generally [go] unnoticed and unreflected upon in society like ours, except when those with biases toward high culture comment upon the alleged vulgarity of the tastes of "common people"' (Inglis 2005, p. 103).

As Raymond Williams identified in 1976, groups outside of high culture still encompass culture. Inglis supports this and add that these: 'ideas, values and beliefs of a group are embodied in symbols and artefacts' (2005, p. 9). In *his name in fire*, a domestic item such as a piece of fruit (the oranges Pete lobs to his wife, Shazza) may denote such cultural creativity. If we understand low culture to be where those at the base of the social hierarchy, that is, 'the working classes, disadvantaged minorities and other groups that might conventionally be seen as the "victims" of capitalist society' (Inglis 2005, p. 101), then involvement in what can be considered a cultural activity could engage them. Willis (1998) shows

these grounded aesthetics in which: ‘every commodity can be unique – in use – young people know this instinctively. Instead of being dazed and bewildered by – simply denying or ignoring – the decentredness, multiplicity and heterogeneity of post-modern culture, they exploit its new possibilities (p. 174)’. This might translate to ‘a kind of imaginative inventiveness that nothing in our assumptions gave us reason to expect’ (Inglis 2005, p. 101). Regardless of the humbleness of their lives, Pete and Shazza are thus empowered.

Almost everyone in Abattoir Town’s dole circus is literally getting their act together: Mozza the strongman, Shazza the lithe acrobat, Mollie the organiser and Matthew the musician. Only Emma, daughter of a popular Melbourne singer, resists change. As the opening and only night of the show approaches, Emma’s reluctance to even dress the part of the circus performer becomes problematic. As the show nears, each young adult character grapples with fear and each character threatens to somehow disconnect. Mollie hands out kites to fly for bright hope, but dissent swells in the ranks. ‘Shazza’s lost her glitter. / Matthew and Emma aren’t talking... Emma’s wrapped in scarves... some premonition of a cold. / No one’s laughed at Mozza’s jokes — / he’s sulking in a corner’ (p 147). The catalyst for Mollie to finally unburden herself of her grief is when Emma’s father, the Snake Man Jack Van, plays a CD of Sarah Freeman — Emma’s mother, a famous singer resident in Melbourne:

Her voice is heartbreak and solace, midnight
and the sun’s first flare.

It flows between us
winding around our separate griefs,
an intricate cat’s cradle of sound
bridging
dividing —
it doesn’t matter.

Her voice embraces both possibilities:

Heartbreak,
solace
(pp. 122-123).

Mollie admits that she knows the fate that awaited her because her own small-town upbringing was exactly that of Shazza's. Mollie realises that if her mother had not taken her to the circus then she would not have met Seb, or run away with him. Had she stayed in the small town of her childhood, she surmises that she too would likely have had a teen pregnancy.

Mozza's role in the verse novel fits with Bakhtin's mock crowning and de-crowning of a carnival king (Elick 2001, p. 455). He is 'the fool', a drunkard at the Shamrock (the Shammy) Hotel. Bakhtin highlighted how the body disordered through drunken licence can 'disrupt official rules' (Inglis 2005, p. 105) through 'well-developed techniques for "taking the piss" out of authority figures' (Inglis 2005, p. 105), where the unempowered are given reign during time of carnival or circus, or in this case, the pub. Mozza gets drunk and swears. As the others worry: 'Did you see Mozza drop the club / and say shit so loud the front row heard?' (p. 167).

The novel is set in rural Victoria, a region historically famous for bushranging outlaws like Ned Kelly. It might not be too long a bow to draw the connection between the pub's Irish name and Matthew's family's Celtic rock-music-playing roots. Here, imaginatively, is the hint of the antipodean hierarchy that exists between poor Irish immigrants and land-owning English. Mozza's ambition was a career in stonemasonry. When his boss closed that small business, Mozza feels that all his dreams 'have gone north' (p. 80). Too scared to commit again, instead he downs pints at the local pub awaiting work for the dole schemes. He can't see how being part of a circus could lead to change, but it answers his secret desire to clown around, as evidenced by the more 'adult' version in the front bar.

Mozza becomes the formidable strongman of the circus, but he has the power to turn the success of the venture on its head should his nerve fail. This he threatens to do near the end of the novel, when he loses heart and nearly walks from the circus. '*It's no good, Mollie, / it doesn't feel right... like the end's wrong. / It's all empty*' (p. 150). Crucially, Mozza feels his very words 'struggle inside me / trapped. I know how I feel but the words won't come out' (p. 150). The big man of the circus, he yet wants the performance to be even 'bigger than all of us' (p. 150). Mozza represents the critique of the ruling power. Despite

being foolish, he is the ‘king’, where: ‘[t]he everyday culture of the socially disadvantaged, far from being a site of total control by governmental authorities and total manipulation by the Culture Industries, in fact is characterised by “a proliferation of inventions in limited spaces”’ (Michel de Certeau 1997, cited in Inglis 2005, pp. 101-102). By the book’s conclusion Mozza has not radically changed — he is still drinking (the tequila with the worm in it he tried to give to Mollie before she left town); and he’s still unable to ask Tracey to marry him (‘too scared she’d say no’ (p. 173)). However, the conversion from pub clown into the responsible actor and manager is evident in the final lines of the novel that are his to utter:

We don’t need Mollie.
As soon as my head stops thumping
I’m going to call the circus together.
Forget the Strong Man —
Next cheque I’m getting a penguin suit —
Ringmaster Mozza
(p. 173).

In the finale of the novel, and with Mollie’s departure to a new project, the implication is that Mozza will assume the mantle of Ringmaster, empowered for the first time to take his own steps forward.

The two teens of the novel are corralled into the circus by TJ, Matthew’s father. Once he has met Mollie, TJ realises she is a kindred artistic soul, and that Matthew’s musical talents would suit her conception of the one-day circus. Then when Matthew meets Mollie, he says of her, ‘[s]he’s city-feral and a bit edgy. / I could hear her nerves jumping / like picked strings.’ (p. 89). Such an analogy is fitting since his family is musical.

Emma, although reluctant, is brought in to take part in the circus by Matthew. The two teens first met in the music group at school where they both play flutes. Since Year 9 Matthew has been asking Emma out, but she’s kept their friendship at arm’s length. Her fear has been that if they were to grow closer she might lose herself, as she’s lost her mother, a famous theatrical singer. Sarah Freeman lives apart from Emma and her father, in the big city Melbourne, only to be seen on rare and short visits. Emma’s resistance to change is the strongest of

all the characters. Her fear of exposing herself and her fears has led to a voicelessness and stasis. Unlike the other characters, she doesn't even dress the part. Where Shazza has had the op shop ladies find her a tutu, she has nothing. As Matthew notes:

Only Emma's there wearing everyday jeans
and T-shirt and her everyday ordinary
look of strained fear.

We all pretend she's in sequins
just like we all pretend she's having fun
(p. 117).

Emma, stuck like a statue in her inability to participate fully in the circus, somehow rails against her condition:

and I'm the poxy drum roll between acts
to give me something to do.
My throat hurts. It could be a cold coming on.
It could be unshed tears
(p. 129).

Unlike Matthew and the others, she does not have a clear sense of herself, or her reason for participating:

I stand here useless, mix up my left and right,
get my feet tangled, could howl
with rage, frustration and fear.
What am I doing here?
(p. 129).

Emma's secret, and saving grace for the dole circus in its doldrums, is that, like her mother, she has an astonishing voice that can save the circus. It appears she has to fall silent until, when all is set to fail, she can redeem the whole enterprise. She opens her mouth:

Music.
I didn't mean to say it aloud
...
I'm not completely useless.
Can't juggle, cycle, cartwheel or do handstands

but I can open my mouth
 and words pour out
 winged notes
 pure and true
 hardly a dodgy one among them
 rising up to the rafters
 (p. 151).

Through her authentic engagement in the show, Emma is able to connect, showing that her grounded aesthetics, particularly appropriate in her role as a young adult in the novel, facilitate ‘meaning-making as the placing, fixing and development of identity, of personal possibility’ (Willis 1998, p. 175).

In this section I contend that in such a place as a verse novel for children and adolescents, characters are able to engage, and in various manners, connect. Narratives in verse novels differ from standard prose novels because they use spare language, like some poetry, winnowed of extraneous verbiage. Voice is crucial. When a prose narrative is told in first person perspective in verse novels it is immediate, direct and, therefore, can more readily engage the adolescent reader. Multiple voices provide readers with freedom to choose their position and there are gaps between those voices for readers to participate. Verse novels are dialogic in form and thus aligned to the Bakhtinian concept of prose fiction, the novel. Bakhtin appreciated the novel as a changing form (1981). Verse novels for children and teens are such a novel form. In verse novels, young readers can enter a dialogue with the voices of the characters.

Catherine Bateson’s *his name in fire* illustrates how, in the confines of a struggling Australian rural community largely dependent on hand-outs or peripatetic work, a government’s work-for-the-dole program (a genuine 1990s scheme²⁷) can be subverted for creative engagement. In the government’s efforts to overcome youth suicide and unemployment, Mollie is appointed by the council.

²⁷ For instance, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/community-development-employment-projects-cdep-program>

By conceiving of the dole circus, Mollie can help this low status provincial town to stage a creative event powerful enough to instigate positive change, and bring about self-realizations and greater formation of identity of its young adult participants. The voice-zones of different characters provide a variety to counteract the homogeneity of authoritative power structures, such as the Australian Federal Government. Here the characters arise to prove they have a validity, one that gives hope for a future created without an overarching dominion, but one where different things can happen, and protagonists' mouths can open to give them voice.

Bateson's text exemplifies quality writing, with her plot narrative driven by the intertwining of young adult characters' concerns. The variety of their situations provides gaps, as echoed in the white space used by spare language in text tiles, for young adult readers to engage, make connections, and construct their own place. Therefore this chapter answers affirmatively:

Research Question 6:

Could the form of verse novel writing provide the child or adolescent reader with a constructive place of engagement?

Spare writing, white space and the immediacy of first person narration in verse novels provide a form with which child readers can engage. For adolescents, multiple voice narration also empowers readers with gaps or spaces in which they may construct their own meaning.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how mapping ideas and concepts of Bakhtin and Bourdieu's theories might help navigate a path through an exemplar text written by an Australian author. Obviously Bakhtin did not diagnose the condition of the YA verse novel (as it did not exist at that time), although crucially he did treat Pushkin's verse novel as a novel, rather than a poem (Lodge & Wood 2000, pp. 106-107). For Bakhtin, the poetic language in a novel (which I apply to the verse

novel) has ‘no direct poetic significance at all’ (Lodge & Wood 2000, p. 107). Such clarification assists in the dissection of the form and the place of the strategy of applying any specific theory to literature, in this case, verse novels for children and adolescents. This thesis argues that ‘verse novels’ for children and YA should not be considered poetry or verse, though some poetic elements may be employed by authors. Verse novels for adults may be another matter but beyond the scope of this project. Using Bahktin, for children and particularly YA, voice is important and that the works should not be labelled poetry or verse. In this thesis, that ‘verse novels’ are sprung from variations in novels, is shown by Bahktin and not from the history of lyric poetry, which again, may be different for adult verse novels.

The featured text, Catherine Bateson’s *his name in fire*, shows how the agency of younger adults and teens can be extended through subversive but creative acts. This section also answers Research Question 5 about verse novels taking more from the tradition of the novel Research Question and Research Question 6, showing the form of the verse novel may encourage engagement and connection for subject readers.

The next section, Chapter 5, will investigate further the process to reflect on my own process in the writing of my creative product, the verse novel manuscript for teens, ‘Copper Coast’. This last section’s focus on Catherine Bateson’s novel relates to my manuscript as both are set in contemporary Australia with teen protagonists roughly the same age as mine. Her work features male and female characters, as does mine, and it concerns young adults moving away from parental influence to forge lives for themselves. The exemplar text for this study was chosen also for the authentic-sounding voices and formal skills of the writer. The next chapter covers the writing process as well as the field research for the content, background and context of the novel in the creative product.

CHAPTER 5 — REFLECTIONS: ON THE CRAFT

Introduction

This chapter reflects on the craft of writing the doctoral creative product, and examines how the process is bound to research and theoretical aspects of the study. In this chapter the reasons for writing in the form of a verse novel are revisited, and the aspects of the craft are covered. As the setting is crucial in the creative product, the role of landscape and identification of the concept of home is broached. A field trip for research into the novel was conducted and helped in many ways, including constructing identities of characters. Finally, the position of the author in relation to the creative product is examined.

Form chooses the author, not vice versa

Exegetical theses differ from standard literary doctoral theses. This exegesis accompanies the creative product, ‘Copper Coast’ a verse novel (what I term a voice-zone text tile novel) manuscript for teens. Given the possibility of a prejudicial reception likely to be given by publishers to the form of a verse novel for children and adolescents (as they are not considered ‘commercial’²⁸), the attraction of writing in this way had to be convincing in its own right. For me, it was because the form combined my abilities in writing poetry with my interest in writing fiction for teens and young adults. Many other authors (for instance, Hesse 1998; Euwer Wolff (in Campbell 2004); Sones 2012; Bateson 2012;

²⁸ Pers. comm. Omnibus publishers, Adelaide.

Herrick (in Michaels 2003); Marwood 2011; Cormier (in Campbell 2004); Clark 2004a; and Murphy 2009a) report that once the form takes hold, it is difficult to shake. The primary limitation in choosing the form was that it is a relatively new form for which there is not necessarily a fully accepted place in publishing. Writers like to get their work published, and it may be frustrating finding commercial publication for the completed manuscript.

But compared with writing in prose, for me the potential of writing in this genre was great. I felt a more immediate connection to my protagonists, not only due to my background experience in the rural setting but in the form I ‘recognised’ character voices in my head. I loved particularly that I did not have to worry about external issues of description beyond the minimum needed to establish the story in time and place. Setting was still crucial, but it could be sketched. In the Introduction I revealed the genesis of the project. I was ‘given’ the concept of writing a verse novel, but appreciated the gift immediately. My first effort was to rewrite a prose teen manuscript I had completed the year before. Rewriting a prose fiction into verse novel was a process I felt I had to go through in order to push on through to my own doctoral creative product, as was the case with Cormier: ‘[a]s I began to write it seemed to cry out for verse. I tried writing it in prose but it didn’t work, so I let it go its own way’ (Cormier in Campbell 2004, p. 612), or Euwer Wolff, who claims the form just came to her: ‘I did try changing part of a draft into paragraphs, and I just got all blocked and stifled and couldn’t do it (cited in Campbell 2004, p. 612). Thus, consistently reported by a variety of published authors, the form of writing in verse seems to take hold rather than consciously being decided.

Aspects of position in my writing

The particular technical problem I faced was born of writing in the first person narrative point of view. Originally in ‘Copper Coast’ I conceived of Maddy as the only protagonist. I felt this restricted my ability to portray a story beyond her immediate concerns, and I worried that it was beginning to feel one-sided, and potentially ‘whingey’. The form of the narration in verse novel also led me to ‘hear’ the voice of Owen so strongly that he needed his own ‘chapters’ and first

person point of view voice-zone sections. He was the ‘Other’ for Maddy not only in gender, but as the local, Australian character who would offer a counter to her Anglo-European view. Then, once inside his head, I felt it would be disrespectful not to listen to his own girlfriend’s voice. I almost didn’t want to go there, for Foxie’s experience of domestic violence was uncomfortable. Her experience is the source of the guilt that I feel looking back at a high school friend who suffered like that and for whom we girlfriends did nothing.

Writing in the form of verse novel thus provided the ability to focus on the distinctive voices of characters, what they were thinking and what they were saying to themselves, as well as out loud. What helped me choose multiple first person accounts over the ‘mono’ voice was the concern to allow for ‘gaps’ and ‘space’ where readers could insert themselves. Also, the usual problem of solo first person narrator needed to be tackled — one person can only be in one place at a time, which means they can’t always report everything that goes on. Multiple characters help show different sides of characters, even that of the protagonists.

In my novel I feel that Owen functions as Maddy’s doppelgänger. He is male, rural, antipodean, arts-based, sporty, whereas Maddy is a female every-person, and together they express many aspects of the teen condition. Michael Carr-Gregg has described the stages of adolescence (2006) and in ‘Copper Coast’ I consciously have my female protagonist Maddy express these stages in the text tile ‘The tasks of adolescence’. This is a reflective piece, one that does not advance the plot as swiftly as action or dialogue would do. It provides a novelistic pause equivalent to a descriptive piece in a prose text. In a verse novel, it is ‘thinking’ time for a character in their voice-zone. It is private and intimate. Maddy’s text tile here highlights a changing dynamic between mother and daughter. Likewise, Foxie has a revealing text tile when she contemplates her father’s violence towards her. Tyson has interior dialogues with Maddy ‘into his beer’, and the text tile of Owen’s that most closely resembles Maddy’s is when he considers the benefits of growing up in a country town.

It was important for my manuscript to have the matching weight of the boyfriend/girlfriend complex, thus Maddy has Tyson, and Owen has Foxie, both in some ways reflections of their shadow selves. Originally, neither subsidiary character had their own discourse definition, so a piece of their own was crucial.

It didn't seem right for Foxie not to be able to 'tell' her own story, albeit as briefly as she does. Likewise, Tyson suffers through his own disillusionment of having a girlfriend whom he thought to be tractable, take off, then not respond positively to his attempt to 'rescue' her. Each of the two protagonists must find it within themselves to be who they already are, in a sense, to work that out, how to fit in to their own truth, and have some semblance of a direction into their immediate future. That is also sketched out by the minor characters. These two characters have, in some sense, objectified themselves, and must suffer painful journeys to their own rediscovery of truth of themselves and their own potential, not through other, but through themselves.

My Bakhtinian carnival creature, Foxie, is the girlfriend pretending to be homogenous suburban girl but who really is excitingly volatile. Because he is secure in his own skin, and because of the warmth of his mother's love, Owen is drawn to the danger Foxie represents. Her threatening way is an element that he likes; the fact she is not safe and indeed, she is dangerous is something Owen recognises about her. He acknowledges he likes her 'pixie' ways, which is a particularly Cornish concept I deliberately employed in her characterisation. Smith (2005) points out that one can subvert the writing voice 'to avoid it becoming overly confessional, self-indulgent or self-aggrandising' (p. 162). So you can call into question the authenticity of voice by 'adopting an extreme alien one' (p. 162) and as this appears to be what is at work in Elizabeth Fensham's split-personality/schizophrenic narrator (in 2008 *Goodbye Jamie Boyd*), for me it comes into play with the ying and yang female and male narrators of Maddy and Owen.

Home and identity

Maddy's sense of identity has been constructed by where she has grown up in Cornwall and it is clear she does not share her mother's sense of Australianness. Ginnifer sings a snippet of the iconic 'I still call Australia home' song written and

first performed by Peter Allen (1980, cited in Commonwealth of Australia 2005, online) and immortalised in the national airline carrier, Qantas, in a set of advertisements with a goosebump-producing rendition²⁹. It has suited Ginn to have a husband living in London and commuting to Cornwall for weekends only while she focussed on her art, just as it has suited her to have an absent mother-in-law. There are no family ties for her, and she can remain in denial about her own sense of place and self. It is crucial that her painting style in Cornwall — the stranger in the landscape — is misty and muted where my research revealed that commercial artists in St Ives mostly paint realistic sharp-edged pictures of fishing boats on coastal water. Back in Moonta, following the aborted portrait of David Chenoweth, her painting becomes clear-sighted: the almond tree is not muted, nor misty. This is a physical representation of how she is growing, and putting behind her the past 18 years.

The 1980s was a particularly dynamic era ‘in the creation of unofficial national anthems’ (Convict creations 2012, online) and the Colin Hay (1981) Men at Work song, ‘I come from the land down under’, (Stratton 2006) that ‘revived the nomadic spirit of wandering’ (Convict creations 2012, online) was particularly successful. It was a song that:

inspired great patriotism [although Men at Work] later claimed that their song was being critical of Australia and wasn’t nationalistic at all. It seems that when they were singing, ‘I come from a land down under where beer does flow and men chunder’, they didn’t expect Australians would see the lyrics as a compliment (Convict creations 2012, online).

In my novel it is clear this is the song with which Maddy’s classmates at St Ives College taunt her. In 1982 I drove around Cornwall in a rented Volkswagen with the song often playing on the car radio — needless to say, since I was travelling with a couple of Australian girls we turned the volume up and sang along. The Men at Work song still appears to be ingrained into the UK consciousness. The other song famous at the time (1982) is by Iva Davies, then of Icehouse: ‘Great

²⁹ The campaign began in 1997 with the Australian Girls Choir, the Sydney Children’s Choir, and the National Boys Choir, then in its final 2009 advertisement the first verse was sung in *Kala Lagaw Ya*, a dialect of the Torres Strait Islands by the Gondwana National Indigenous Children’s Choir (Qantas 2103, online).

southern land'³⁰ (Stratton 2006). Ginn sings both these old songs when she realises she is going home.

Subjective knowledge of understanding our world, the concept of home, is an agreed set of shared understandings and clearly for Maddy and her mother, 'home' is not the same. It seems, for as long as her husband was alive, that Ginn considered the Cornwall house (or more particularly, her attached studio) her home. As a widow, though, she is divested of her 'ownership' of her house and its legal owner is shown to be her mother-in-law, a person who, without her son alive, is not prepared to allow her daughter-in-law and granddaughter to reside in her real estate. Here, the social agents are in conflict over the social structure, where it is: 'about the social world, about social action and about the relationship between structures and actors. Such [a social] theory is relevant for the entire field of social science' (Jackson & Sørensen, p. 162). Indeed, there is no shared agreement of what constitutes 'home' here, but the most powerless is the child, Maddy. With their eviction, the mother and daughter are put in the position of becoming truly 'home-less'. With only her tourist art income to earn any money, Ginn is not the sort of financial risk a bank would trust with a mortgage. Whether Maddy realises it or not, and whether her mother would have been able to articulate it coherently, they are set for a radical drop in living standards.

It is no surprise, then, that Ginn jumps at the idea of taking possession of the Moonta area (North Yelta) miner's cottage that she inherits. Although she knows intimately its humble nature, to her the house constitutes 'home', the place where she was born and raised. She has ancestral ties. Any sense of lowering of standards or any snobbishness of what was 'owned' in St Ives compared to the 'hovel' Maddy describes as the North Yelta place, are not part of her 'understanding'. This is despite the fact that Ginn has now to face up to the fact that she felt rejected by her mother and escaped from the confines of her birth home, yet in her middle years she and her daughter have suffered the same fate.

³⁰ Interestingly, in the *Adelaide Advertiser's* vox pop footer on 'Letters to the Editor' page, these very two songs were voted all-time favourites (27 November 2011).

None of this, though, is articulated or consciously understood by her, let alone known by Maddy. All Maddy can sense in her limited and somewhat protected young life (despite having had to ‘mother’ her own mother for so many years) is that all she has known has been taken from her, that the home that has been hers all her life is now not her home and she is being dragged across to the other side of the globe. There is a rich tradition in the UK of being derogatory and, moreover, feeling superior about Australia, perhaps from fear of leaving England, or from jealousy of the idea of the place, and it is this sentiment that is expressed to Maddy at St Ives College.

For all that Maddy has interacted with her peers at school, and their families, including Tyson’s mother, father and brother, and her besties, her construction of home marks her as British (or specifically, Cornish) and thus a native. Her mother’s sense of home has been shown never to have been transferred across the waves, as she ‘still calls Australia home’, evidenced by her wild singing of song and pop anthems. Once her husband is gone, Ginn is defined more by South Australia than any connections she has made in Cornwall. Ginn, and the other characters in ‘Copper Coast’, define themselves through their interconnectedness with others, such as: ‘[i]t is *through interaction* that people define themselves and the world they inhabit so it is through interaction that *the nature of the individual becomes apparent to themselves* and to others’ (Clapham 2004, p. 94-95 cited in Beer et al. 2011) [my italics]. Living back in North Yelta, Ginn is seen to integrate quickly back into Moonta and its population. Maddy, on the other hand, has constructed her interactions entirely in Cornwall and must struggle to find connections in her new place, with all its differences and frustrations. That she connects comes about through the relationship she forms with Owen, and also because she in a sense re-makes her relationship with her mother.

Imagined and real landscape

The Moonta district is an environmentally damaged area. Following the decades of mining that occurred from the mid-1800s to the 1920s, the area was declared a national heritage site in the mid-1970s. The land, though, was never effectively

remediated. The sulphuric acid leaching of the skimp heaps following the last of underground digging has left vast areas of poisoned slime. This is the area the tourist train now travels through. I wanted this fantastic, but damaged, land to work emotionally. I imagined flooding rains could swamp the mine diggings. When Maddy is rescued from a mineshaft I wanted it to act for Maddy as relief and release of grief over the death of her father. There are also remaining mining shafts now mostly filled with debris, potentially symbolic of suppressed desires. This is why Maddy's fall takes place not on a cliff like those at Sims Cove, but in the Moonta Mines, down a disused shaft. Foxie tries to stuff her own feelings down, as she tries to shove this rival girlfriend down the hole.

In my setting weather is important. The drought has affected the housing developments on the Copper Coast, with Copper Cove marina housing having barren front yards and artificial turf. One can see that the Pot O'Gold (an imagined title for a genuine development) at Port Hughes has stalled, pending go-ahead from Irish developers only if they win local council concessions. I reflect the real issues in my imagined novel, for instance, when Foxie deals with the meeting at the hotel.

The 'un-writing' process

Lines can organise our apprehension of story, according to James Longenbach (2008, p. 84) and in a verse novel this is true. White syntax is more than mere editing: 'if you're going to have to re-type you may as well re-write (Horniman 2008, online). As Kevin Roberts says:

'White syntax' suggests that most prose devices like colons and commas can be compensated for, or even dispensed with, by the implementation of suitable spacing and pauses. Other effects can be more clearly delineated by the employment of syntactical space. The space should not be arbitrary, but rather an integral part of the syntactical development of the poem. As such, the line lengths become critical.

As the eye moves from left to right across the page, the poet, reading aloud, acknowledges the end of a line with a pause of slight or larger dimensions, obliging the listener (and hopefully, the careful reader) to follow the notation of the 'white' space at the end of the line — or the deliberate slide from one line to another, which rolls over the expected pause.

As we all know there are 'hard' consonant endings and softer open vowel lines which do not close at all but seem to continue on into the 'white syntax'. All these techniques contribute to emphasis and meaning. However,

‘white syntax’ can also work effectively in the middle of a line or elsewhere, as a necessary pause, or movement, extended or momentary (2001, online).

I experienced this process of editing through, first of all, past writing poetry then in this project with writing my voice-zone text tile novel.

In the novel’s dialogue it is awkward to correctly portray parallel language, as all the sections are in first person point of view and in everyday speech correct grammar is rarely followed. Even if not in direct speech, being in voice to get the sense of the character, grammar may need to be sacrificed. For instance, with Tyson’s first text tile, *After the funeral*, I first wrote, ‘looking down on Maddy / and as well as down on her mother’ but amended it to ‘and as well as on her mother’. The former is correct for its parallel construction, but sounds too formal. It is a grammatical error often made by people even when in formal language, so it is no problem to write ‘incorrectly’ in this context. I do not want readers to think I do not know about correct sentence construction, but that cannot be helped, and it is an author’s concern, not her character’s concern.

Alexander (2005, p. 280) says ‘Creech’s lines are more than rearranged prose, but use alliteration, pace, word order and line-breaks for poetic effect:

and thump-thump, thump
 down the hill we go
 to the creek
 one l-e-a-p over to the bank
 (p. 16).

It will be noted this example is from a younger audience book than YA, and I believe that makes all the difference. Journalist Chris Power wondered why writing in verse novel form would be attractive to a writer, so he experimented by copying out stanzas as prose and what clarified for him was that ‘the verse form subtly adds a good deal of shade and emphasis that otherwise simply isn’t there’ (2007, online). It will be recalled that the oral discourse of writing in the contemporary technological world means the author may construct the novel ‘as though orchestrating it for reading aloud’ (Alexander 2005, p. 271). Many practitioners will emphasise the need for a budding writer to read his or her work out loud as a process of editing it. For a verse novelist, this is crucial. Alexander (2005) delineates the process where a verse novel writer can: ‘shape the rhythm, position the line-break so as to add emphasis, vary the pace through the line-

length, or borrow and exploit poetic devices such as repetition, caesura and enjambment’ (p. 217).

The performative aspect to writing is especially important in verse novels. There has been the suggestion that the only artistic pay-off of a novel lies in ‘all in the mind’ (Kivy 2010, p. 106). Where experience of other art forms is direct and external, the novel is the only one to be experienced ‘mental[ly]’ (Kivy 2010, p. 107). Kivy proposes that ‘silently read literary fiction... evolved, so to speak, out of a performance tradition, [with] the possibility... [that] it retains vestiges of the performance tradition from which it evolved... [hence] the plausibility of regarding silent readings of novels as self-directed performances’ (2010, p. 109). Thus, ‘reading of literary fiction might be understood as a kind of performance’ (2010, p. 109). It may be that readers benefit from listening in their heads to voice-zones, wherein characters are constructing their identity and empowering themselves.

I think the voice-zone text tile novel form that I employ is more ‘readable’ than some verse novels where there are separate ‘poems’ on each page, with or without individual titles. Instead, my novel moves forward with a strong narrative, alternating the dominant narrators with the lesser ones in a continuous fashion. YA verse novels are often told in a sequence of first person narrations (for example, Elizabeth Fensham’s *Goodbye Jamie Boyd* and Sherryl Clark’s *Sixth grade style queen (not!)*) or alternating multiple voices (as exemplified in Steven Herrick’s *The simple gift*, *Cold stone* and *Lonesome howl*, and Margaret Wild’s *Jinx*). In ‘Copper Coast’, I carefully plotted the sequence of who speaks, where, when, and to whom. Early drafts started with text tiles to a page, indeed with titles, but progressed to merging the pieces together, separating with section markers (§). These more continuous lines draw a reader’s eye on and pull the narrative thread through the interweaving stories.

My choice of characters resulted from an organic process. The first verse novel I wrote was in one voice-zone only. In my earlier manuscript ‘Crossed oars’ my protagonist was younger than Maddy and less emotionally formed. I heard her voice in my head, but not those of her rowing partners, or her best friend from school. I did not feel the need, as I did in ‘Copper Coast’, to bring in first person narration from other characters. From the start of my sporting novel to the end,

TC's journey was what counted. This was not what happened in 'Copper Coast'. Although the story began with the character of Maddy, right from the start was the corresponding character of Owen, with his own need for his side of the story to be told. What then grew from their stories was the need for each character's corresponding girl/boyfriend to be heard. I felt the need to be democratic about this. Why should Maddy get first person and Owen third? Or, if Tyson gets a say then why should Foxie not have her say, not simply through the lens of her boyfriend? I felt it especially important she voice her own narrative, since her actions are the darkest, and her motivations so hidden from other characters.

An additional benefit to using multiple voices was to overcome the classic first-person only dilemma of a reader only knowing what one character knows. It was a useful plot device to add characters, for instance, adding Tyson as a vocalising character supports the reader in understanding how difficult it is for Maddy to leave Cornwall. Tyson's text tiles also add complication of hearing what is going on back in Cornwall once Maddy is isolated in the North Yelta cottage.

'Un-writing' concerns breaking down formal composition in dialogue to arrive at more adolescent characterisation, and as such in verse novels, construction of lines and where to break to the next line are crucial. Line breaks are important, too. Euwer Wolff, describes the process in *True believer* by which she worked and reworked her line breaks for three years:

I probably read every line out loud hundreds of times. That was how I decided where to put the line breaks... I divided the lines 'aurally', for the ear, as much as I could... I rewrite them a lot and kept reading them aloud... trying to feel the rhythm, and at the same time getting to know the characters and their lives... I just hope it sounds like LaVaughn's voice speaking, with the breathing pauses and the hesitations that I believe are part of natural speech (Euwer Wolff 2001 in Alexander 2005, p. 274).

Sharon Creech is particularly interested in punctuation and it has been an element of verse novels commented on by reviewers and researchers. Terminal punctuation on lines is important. For instance, Alexander criticises Karen Hesse's comma usage in *Out of the dust*:

I pushed her to the ground,
desperate to save her,
Desperate to save the baby, I

tried,
 beating out the flames with my hands.
 I did the best I could.
 But it was no good.
 Ma
 got
 burned
 bad.
 (Hesse 2005, p. 61).

And I agree they are awkward. Lineation, as described by Roberts (2000), is crucial.

At about the mid-point of the second draft I felt the revelation of titles. Writers of all walks talk about ‘hearing’ the voices of their characters. Poets may struggle with titles for their poems — titles are often a crucial aspect of a poem. A verse novelist may choose to entitle each text tile separately: Tim Sinclair does in his *Nine hours north* YA novel; Bateson does in *his name in fire*; as does Taylor Brown in *Hugging the rock*. Many of the YA verse novels have a poem’ to each page or two, separately titled, others may have distinctions between times, or place, like Savvides’ *Against the tide*, with run-on pages of ‘poems’ separated by section breaks of place: ‘At School / Westmead, western suburbs of Sydney’ (2008, p. 17); ‘Manly / One of the northern beaches’, (2008, p. 209).

In her 2001 verse novel, *Witness*, Hesse used no upper case lettering (Alexander 2005). Alexander (2005) says of Hesse’s choice that it equalises all names where: ‘[t]he eye is deprived of the distinctions that capitalisation conventionally accords and readers are forced to place greater reliance on the ear if they are to understand and differentiate rightly’ (p. 278). The choice to only write in lower case, including beginning sentences and for proper noun usage appears to be a brave one, for lack of usual sentence punctuation can disaffect some groups, including the teacher librarians who have the gatekeeping purchasing power within schools and who may object to the lack of formality. Secondly, lack of traditional punctuation may concern parents of school children, about whom the teacher librarians may also be sensitive. I have experimented with all lower case usage (in an adult poetry manuscript) but believe I assist

children and adolescents in their reading by employing traditional grammar and punctuation usage as much as possible.

Field trip research, and my own subject position

I was nine years old when my father took a sabbatical break and went to Stanford University, but did not take the rest of the family. My mother's reaction was to buy a miner's cottage in North Yelta on the Yorke Peninsula. When my father returned she moved my younger brothers and me out of our large nineteenth century North Adelaide terrace and local primary school and into the cottage and local Area school at Moonta. The cottage was sold in 1980 when I was at university and in the intervening years I have only made rare visits to the region.

Not until I actually travelled to the site for my doctoral studies was I able to fully plot my novel. I had envisaged characters, their jobs, hopes and dreams, but visiting the region again changed a number of things. I stayed in a limestone symmetrical cottage in the township of Moonta proper. My protagonist's miner's cottage was an instigating and motivating feature but was owned by someone else and I had not stayed in it for a decade. Such houses are fragile. For my research field trip, Chloe's cottage provided my first stay in the town. Originally, I thought it would be a model for where I wanted my male protagonist to live but instead I chose a more substantial house around the corner that had once belonged to my mother-in-law's family. Small things were useful to observe. Until that visit, I had not realised the Town Hall clock rang on each hour, through day and night. In a country town of few people, the stars overhead are magnificent, and the silence pervasive. Only the revving of the occasional hot-head's car was audible.

Staying at Chloe's cottage gave me entrée into the more refined housing of the place: 10 foot ceilings, fireplaces and mantels in each room, pressed tin ceilings highly decorated with art nouveau floral motifs and ceiling roses. Our rental accommodation also meant we were situated around the corner from the old School of the Mines, which allowed for further research. National Trust volunteers staffed the now-museum for only a few hours twice a week. I was able to attend on the Wednesday afternoon, thereby securing the sole attention of a volunteer for questions about family histories of the area.

The twin protagonists in ‘Copper Coast’ realise their identity is formed in part from where they have grown up. Maddy, dislocated from St Ives, finds it difficult to bridge the gap, although the connection from Cornish coast to Gulf St Vincent³¹ is made through the littoral landscape. Owen feels connected to country as a rural identity distinct from the cityslickers, and for him, the alien otherness of Maddy representing the ‘city’. Nevertheless, Maddy defines herself as a Cornish girl, not one from the big English city of London, despite its being where her father worked midweek.

Subject position

My novel is a narrative that interweaves the central protagonists’ point-of-view stories in continuous lines separated by section markers. First is female teen protagonist from Cornwall, Maddy, who meets the young South Australian male, Owen. Cadden understands the significance of voice order, where readers will in all probability most sympathise with the first character to whom they are introduced. Cadden says voice order has ‘its own narrative logic in a novel with alternating voices, and certainly in the verse novel’ (2009, p. iv). This fits with my theoretical research and conclusions evident in my exegesis that narrative voice aligns with implied ideologies of text for the subject readers (Stephens 1999). It is the author’s role in constructing this to mirror the ‘real’. Individual agency is examined against the ability to act independently and an ideal of finding a real self should not be too at odds with ‘lived experience’.

What I as the author of a teen text have attempted to draw out is that my characters embody the sense of what Stephens notes of ‘empowering critiques of social processes’ (p. 185). Furthermore, aligning the document to my theory of verse-novel as novel, I amended my manuscript to include many more punctuation markers, particularly commas, but also created more ‘sentences’ and employed em dashes to set off ‘side thoughts’. *Actual thoughts* are denoted by italics. By doing this I intended to create a more connected narrative; one that

³¹ (also known locally as Gulf of St Vincent)

does not rely on readers being familiar with any verse traditions. I use the concept of ‘white syntax’ drawn from my understanding of Roberts’ work, particularly with respect to my use of terminal spacing and lineation.

The residual elements of the research into my creative product exist in essence in the peri-text of my novel. This is not an unusual have in fiction, either adult or children’s, that covers an area of interest. Stories for younger readers are more likely to have such addenda. The layered peri-text of ‘Copper Coast’ is thus crucial where there are multiple layers of endings. Layer One comprises the traditional conclusions to the threads of the story. These follow the climax of the story where Foxie has pushed Maddy down the disused mineshaft. The subplot crisis is when Owen discovers his father has absconded with the family money. Resolutions here are that: Maddy will not press police charges against Foxie; Owen’s mother will still provide for his study; Tyson will return alone to Cornwall; and Maddy makes peace with her mother where they share an understanding of the forces that have led to this moment.

Layer Two is the Epilogue where each of the verse novel’s focalising narrators have a final postscript text tile of their own: Foxie has found a safe haven of part-time employment with Owen’s mother and accommodation at Flathead’s house; Tyson has returned to St Ives thus completing his story just as in *The conference of the birds* (Attar 1177; Carrière & Brook 1982) where his journey ends where it began and he appreciates who he is and where he is from; Owen is finishing his Year 12 exams with confidence (hinting that he and Maddy are now an item); and Maddy is swotting for exams for the first time, and looking forward to her future in Adelaide. Maddy’s terminal position as last in the Epilogue is significant and echoes her primary position in the text and its prologue’s dream sequence text tile. In her final text tile she reveals that she has ‘written’ the novel as a piece to submit for her Year 12 SACE studies with the further intention of aiming to gain entrance to a university creative arts degree.

The conceit of the central teen protagonist as writer is immediately undercut with my own authorial admission. Layer Three is the only adult voice-zone text tile, and the start of the final pages outside of teen voice-zones. In the ‘Author voice-zone: My mother bought a miner’s cottage...’ I provide the context for my own creative output of writing ‘Copper Coast’. Then, there is the last, Layer Four:

which comprises ‘A brief history’, where I include a one-page brief history of mining in Moonta and the area’s heritage. At one stage I included a final page recipe for Cornish pasties, as Karen Hesse in *Out of the dust* included a recipe for apple pandowdy, but decided to exclude it. Finally, the creative product concludes with a page of acknowledgments for the manuscript.

Conclusion

What impact has my research had on writing the creative component? The research generally led to greater reflection on the creative process. Particularly, it changed my number of first-person voices and led to my sense that Maddy was the originator of the text for the purposes of study and that she was imagining how it was for the significant teens around her. The other new writing that occurred specifically as a result of research was the coda, effectively the author’s afterword, which I felt I needed to express my motivations and reasons as for writing as an adult for a younger audience. I felt a particular responsibility to publically divulge the position from which I was writing.

Many aspects of primary research impinged on my writing of a teen verse novel. The impact my exegetical study had on the creative writing was profound, at both micro and macro level, and resulted in a strengthened manuscript, which was more consciously and thoughtfully constructed and reflected upon than had no research on the form had been undertaken. Field trip research was integral to the writing of this creative product.

Structurally, the largest difference is that the novel is no longer ‘poem-like’ looking but instead constitutes a more continuous narrative, with section breaks denoted graphically by section break markers (§). I also followed advice to ‘flag’ each character with a pictograph, which should help readers recall the identities of the first-person narrators with text tile ‘scenes’. From my research on Bakhtin, I strengthened carnival elements, and through my research on Bourdieu I more consciously thought about cultural habitus, focussing on the fields of potential employment for my protagonists. My intention is that these aspects will not be obvious to subject readers. The next section is the Conclusion, which will sum up the scope and breadth of this exegesis.

CONCLUSION — ‘TIME PAST AND TIME FUTURE’³²: CONNECTING BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS

In the Introduction I covered how different interests overlap in the field of children’s literature. This thesis grew from academic and creative interests, not only from my practice as a poet, but primarily from my desire to tell a story. But writing in the form of a verse novel required significant tracking of what the form means. Patrick Murphy’s 1989 academic paper was the first important one to consider contemporary verse novels. What a creative practitioner brings to academic inquiry is the mix of practice-led research with creative praxis. This led to my appropriating Bakhtin’s term of voice-zone for more general use, and to coining ‘text tile’ as an innovative term that describes the equivalent of a prose novel’s ‘scene’ within a chapter.

In Chapter 1 I defined writing for children, and discussed how addressing adolescents might be different. Studying children’s literature is important in the academic realm, and I showed what reception verse novels for children and adolescents received. I asked what verse novels are like, and continued in the recent tradition of constructing a simile, mine being that of the MUD (multi-user dimension) player game. The chapter closed by defining what I meant in terms of white space, spare writing, text tiles, and voice-zone.

Chapter 2 charted a literature survey of the US and used the method of looking at awards as clues to the rise of verse novels for children and adolescents.

³² TS Eliot ‘Burnt Norton’ (1936) in *The four quartets* (1945)

Australia is a land 'Of droughts and flooding rains' and Chapter 3 uncovered how verse novels migrated here. In a similar path to Mel Glenn, Steven Herrick published an assembled collection of poems from class members brought together into book, which post-publication was re-named a verse novel. Awards once again provided a platform for observing children's and YA literature in Australia. Authors like Margaret Wild, Libby Hathorn were early adopters of the form for adolescents, followed more recently by children's authors Sherryl Clark and Sally Murphy. The coveted Prime Minister's 2010 prize for Lorraine Marwood's verse novel *Star jumps*, gave notice of the recent flourishing of junior form of the fiction.

A case study of Australian poet and novelist Catherine Bateson's *his name in fire* was supported in Chapter 4 by using ideas of Bakhtin and to lesser extent, Bourdieu. This quality verse novel, like a number of others locally and globally, covers YA issues in its fiction. Bateson's protagonists discover their agency through their voice and a comic humour through their roles in the Dole Circus. The social and cultural aspects of the novel align with the technical expression evident in a verse novel: in the gaps of spare language through white space in text tiles, in voice-zone of their own the young adults engage, make connections, and become agents of their own sense of self and their own possible future.

Accompanying the exegetical component of this doctoral project is a creative product: a teen verse novel I rename a *voice-zone text tile novel* manuscript entitled 'Copper Coast'. The two component parts of the thesis perform together where the project's findings reflect on my own praxis and in reverse some elements of the narrative reflect the research. What operates in my manuscript is the fast pace, ease of comprehension, yet sophisticated place available to readers able to imaginatively enter the various voices and create personal space. I make the case in part the original contribution to knowledge of the doctorate arises from the relationship between these two parts of the thesis. My research and creative practice experience indicate the writing of verse novels for children and adolescents is significant.

Chapter 5 mines my own research efforts and a field trip to connect St Ives, in Cornwall where my novel opens, and Moonta, South Australia, where it ends. As others have attested, the passion for writing verse novels for younger readers

has not abated and if anything, there is a growing popularity. Research for my novel included reading nonfiction and historical documents, studying other fictions set in the area and travel to one of the settings (four times). This research informed both my creative product and my exegesis. It also involved self-reflection on my praxis as well as the conditions under which I created a fiction, this particular fiction.

Weighing my creative product research against the criteria, I judge that this demonstrates: broad interest; application; a transferable outcome; and the results can be meaningfully communicated to others (and have done in conference papers and refereed publications). In terms of broad interest: verse novels are currently a feature of the publishing market for younger readers; Australians want to read about their own place (country); the history and consequences of mining in the Moonta region is intrinsically interesting; first-person narratives suit teen readers, who like the immediacy of the voice; and moreover adolescents like to think about where they fit in (Carr-Gregg 2002) so a book about adolescents trying to articulate and work out where they belong is apt.

There is need for further research in this field, which could be undertaken both across this country and overseas.

Finally, I ask myself whether I write differently because of this study. In the course of traversing writing for children and adolescents I have encountered authors who only ever publish one 'verse' novel or very few, after which the mode appears to desert them. I still have more novels in me. My next voice-zone text tile manuscript, 'Own dark medicine', is underway. My bedside cupboard contains plans for more. The form is one of which I have not tired, nor do I believe I will.

APPENDIX A — Publications and presentations

Publications from this thesis

- 2011 'Out of the drought: Australia's junior verse novels' vol. 3 no. 1, pp. 68-75,
Write4Children: The International Journal for the Practice and Theories of Writing for Children and Children's Literature, Winchester University, UK.
<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/EnglishCreativeWritingandAmericanStudies/publications/write4children/Documents/w4cnovember2011%282%29.pdf>

Publications pertinent to creative work prior to thesis

- 2002 'Sailing the heaps', 'Slag heaps', '93 Moonta Rd, North Yelta', 'Under the planks' and 'Our miner's cottage' from *Travelling with Bligh*, New Poets Seven, Wakefield Press, Adelaide.

Creative writing presentations from this thesis

- 2012 *Writers and their Worlds*, Central Library, Flinders University, 25 October, Adelaide.
- 2010 *Wordfire Salon*, Crown and Anchor Hotel, King William Street, Adelaide, South Australia, April http://www.word-fire.com/Salon_April_2010.html

Conference presentations from this thesis

- 2011 'Lobbed oranges: overcoming stage fright to juggle and sing', *Fear and Safety*, 20th Biennial Congress for the IRSCL (International Research Society for Children's Literature), Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- 2011 'Research for the creative writing product — to what does it amount?', *W(H)IP* Flinders University, Adelaide.
- 2010 'Finding their voice: how the young and disempowered gain agency — applying the Bakhtinian theory of the carnivalesque to an Australian young adult verse novel', *Strange Bedfellows or Perfect Partners*, Fifteenth Annual AAWP (Australasian Association of Writing Programs) Conference: RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), Melbourne.
- 2010 'You talkin' to me?: adult writers' verse-novel speak for teens', *W(H)IP*, Flinders University, Adelaide.
- 2009 'Research proposal', Flinders University, Adelaide.
- 2008 'Words into verse: what's at stake?' *W(H)IP*, Flinders University, Adelaide.

APPENDIX B — ‘Copper Coast: a voice-zone text tile novel’ synopsis

After her father’s death, 16-year-old MADDY’s life is upended. Following eviction from their home in St Ives, Cornwall UK, Maddy’s Australian artist mother GINNIFER inherits the miner’s cottage of her birth in small-town Moonta, on South Australia’s Copper Coast. Wrenched from her earlier expectations of work, and from her boyfriend TYSON, and high school girlfriends, Maddy must now navigate homemaking in a near-hovel. Frustrated by the region’s non-existent mobile phone coverage, arid landscape and her hostile classmates, Maddy’s only friend is Year 12 boy, local football captain, OWEN. Owen is involved in conflict at home, with his mother HELEN shielding him from his restless and ambitious father, DAVID, who runs a small plumbing and home improvement shop. David expects his son to begin full-time work in the family business soon, as does Owen’s intensely possessive girlfriend, FOXIE. Foxie wishes to marry Owen and build their marital home in the Copper Coast’s proposed development, virtually scuttling the young man’s dreams of studying in the city. When Ginnifer succumbs to illness, then apparently to the lure of her old love, Owen’s father David, Maddy is tested to discover just where her loyalties lie. She and Owen must consider who they really are, where they are from, and how they might forge their own futures.

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