

Thalia Jane Henry

Creative thesis: POWDERED MILK

Exegesis: ISOLATION AND UNEASE

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ABSTRACT

The creative thesis *Powdered Milk* weaves a Gothic rural psychological story, set in Otago in southern New Zealand. It explores complex individual histories and a burgeoning relationship in an interwoven tandem narrative with dual protagonists, Delia and Luke. In four parts, following the seasons, the isolated environment and the nuances of the weather affect the characters' lives and moods. The novel, infused with foreboding, explores how human relationships can easily go awry.

The exegesis to follow frames the novel, and investigates my motivation behind the creative work, namely to reflect on the prevalent theme of isolation in New Zealand literature; how my creative work utilizes this and hence fits within the arc of isolated New Zealand Gothic fiction. A key theme in *Powdered Milk* is pursuit of freedom, and how difficult it can be to seek, even within an isolated and seemingly idyllic environment. The creative thesis is placed at the beginning, as I feel that to read the exegesis first might give away plot points. As is the objective though for the pair to speak together the order of reading is personal preference.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

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For their many and varied contributions I thank my family, especially mum (Helen Henry), Kate Shevland, Meryl Howell and the English department at Orewa College, Christopher Kinsler, Jenny Bowdler, Paul Ecclestone, Hilma Schieving, Annie Davis and Gillian Wadams.

Dedication

I dedicate this novel to Terry and Helen Henry.

My father, the late Terry Henry, who gave me the gift of flight in a Twin Astir glider in the skies above Alexandra and Omarama, and who taught me to look for hawks that fly above the heat of the winding roads to find lift.

And equally to my mother, Helen Henry, who has always encouraged me to write.

Exegesis:

ISOLATION AND UNEASE

An exploration of how *Powdered Milk* sits within the tradition of New Zealand Gothic
fiction

Powdered Milk is a small town novel infused with psychological New Zealand Gothic. It explores the interwoven tandem narrative of dual protagonists, Delia and Luke, whose narratives play out at Lake Aviemore, the Ahuriri River, Kurow and Aoraki Mount Cook in New Zealand's South Island. In these isolated settings the characters are often left to their imaginations, their psychological sense of isolation amplified by their stark surroundings. Tensions emerge, because although their threads and lives intersect, the two characters are essentially apart and isolated. The structure of the novel is aligned into four parts by the seasons. Summer represents the exposition, autumn and winter, the rising action and climax. Spring a fresh beginning, the denouement. The novel's structure is linear, however includes flashbacks and alternates between characters. It begins as Delia and Luke meet as strangers and share a cup of tea.

George Chamier (1891), in his novel *Philosopher Dick - Adventures and Contemplations of a New Zealand Shepherd* suggests that, "there is too much tea drinking going on in this blessed country" (p. 26). I noticed that during the early stages of drafting *Powdered Milk* the characters would frequently drink tea. I had to be careful to stop them drinking too much, else the narrative might be drowned in it. It occurred to me, as happens in real life, that the tea drinking was an avenue to connect the characters, they drank tea together because of the fact that people often do this, as a way to fill time. Surroundings that are devoid of action prompt the characters' lives to encompass contemplation, and conversation. Tea drinking is also, often, the suggested response when things go wrong – a means of, for example, comforting the bereaved. I called the novel *Powdered Milk* in homage to all of the nomads, gypsies, campers and tourists who have experienced the isolation of a stark New Zealand setting with a cup of tea, equipped with powdered milk in their hands.

SYNOPSIS

Luke is a nomad. He lives in a tent and refuses to remain in one spot for long. He rides a bicycle, prefers bare feet, and his belongings fit within pannier bags. Delia, a sculptor, meets Luke at Lake Aviemore, Otago, in southern New Zealand whilst she is lost in her thoughts, staring at two hawks. The hawks are a recurring motif symbolizing their combined desire for freedom. Delia lives in a cottage in Kurow framed by clenching wisteria. As she begins to follow Luke she soon comes to believe that he is someone lost from her past, and attempts to sculpt him to reflect that person. The antagonist of

the narrative, Delia's artist model (unnamed) poses for her too and begins to weave her way into their lives. She too lives in a cottage in Kurow. The township is cut in half; Delia's cottage cast in shade and the model's in light. Delia's psychology becomes increasingly fractured and as winter emerges the air becomes tainted with a sense of foreboding.

MOTIVATION

I grew up in Karitane, a small fishing village near to Dunedin. Consequently, I have been prompted to reflect on the prevalent theme of isolation in New Zealand literature and how my creative work utilizes this. This theme reflects both the individual landscape and the individual's interiority of it. My motivation for this exegesis is to explore how this theme gives birth to distinctly Gothic New Zealand texts. Moreover, I aim to explore how *Powdered Milk* sits within the context of isolated New Zealand Gothic fiction, and subverts it. The exegesis will be divided into a series of sections, sitting within the broader genre context of Gothic isolation. These include:

- The role of the supernatural in the text
- The hidden unease of small town New Zealand
- The gaze
- Portrayal of psychosis located within the New Zealand Gothic tradition
- Traumatic childhoods
- Pathetic Fallacy, nature positioned as a character

To locate *Powdered Milk* in the broader context of New Zealand literature I will draw on a selection of texts. These texts are: George Chamier (1891) *Philosopher Dick - Adventures and Contemplations of a New Zealand Shepherd*, David Ballantyne (1968/2012) *Sydney Bridge Upside Down*, Ian Cross (1957/1989) *The God Boy*, Fiona Farrell (2007) *The Skinny Louie Book*, Keri Hulme (1984) *The Bone People*, the film based on the novel by Maurice Gee (2004) *In My Father's Den*, the television series, Jane Campion's (2012) *Top of the Lake* and Graeme Sydney's (1975/1979) tempera paintings *Wedderburn* and *Auripo Road*.

POSITIONING THE GENRE

According to Lawn (2006) readers traditionally associate ‘Gothic’ with “revival literature: fantastical tales involving entrapped heroines, the supernatural, sublime raptures, and Catholic depravity” (p. 11). Kavka (2006) adds that the term is closely associated with the “Old World and the detritus of its decaying aristocracies: mouldy castles on hilltops; gnarled gardens exposed to inclement weather; relatives going mad in attics while undead ones lurk in cellars” (p. 57).

The Gothic genre in New Zealand however has adapted to suit our unique environment. “Different nations (...) generate different types of Gothic that develop and feed into other Gothic forms which proliferate in one place but seemingly die out in another” (Smith, 2007, p. 4). Isolation, and its connection to the New Zealand environment is an essential theme guiding the New Zealand Gothic tradition and recent theoretical discourse elucidates this. Cruz and Ross (2011), for example, within their collection *The Lonely and the Alone* draw correlations between fictional representations of the “isolated subject and daunting landscape” (p. 1). The sections of analysis I have identified for this exegesis feed my interpretation of a new definition of Gothic New Zealand literature, each triggered by the over-riding prevalent theme of isolation.

In 1952 Bill Pearson¹ stated “we need an art to expose ourselves to ourselves, see ourselves in a perspective of place and time” (p. 12). He suggested that effective New Zealand fiction “in light of its ability to convey something authentic about New Zealand (...) conveyed the feel of New Zealand” (p. 40). In my creative thesis my aim is to reflect, like Pearson suggests, the “feel of New Zealand” in an “authentic” way. Like others in this vein, I have included localised references - both in vernacular language and in iconic imagery, locating *Powdered Milk* within the tradition of New Zealand authors writing about the land and local signifiers we are familiar with.

- She swept away knocking the ‘pint’ from the table, shards of glass shattering onto the floor, and droplets of ‘Speights’ hissing in the fireplace.
- Luke picked up a ‘tomato sauce’ spattered menu. The ‘locals’ turned their heads, watching as she turned on her heels, stony faced and strode out into the cold.
- On their way the ‘Four Square’ had provided them with food
- One sniggered at him, his ‘Swannndri’ falling off his shoulders. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

¹ According to the New Zealand Book Council (2015), “Bill Pearson was a fiction writer, essayist and critic. His influential essay, ‘Fretful Sleepers: A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications for the Artist,’ appeared in *Landfall* in 1952” (para. 1).

Typical New Zealand colloquialisms are also frequently used throughout *Powdered Milk* to convey the authentic feel of New Zealand:

*‘Oi Rodge,’ she hollered, poking her head into the kitchen, ‘got any more ‘chips’ comin?’
(First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

These examples illustrate how *Powdered Milk* engages with localised tradition. South islanders living in small towns will specifically be able to relate to these references, and those familiar with prevalent stereotypes of life in isolated New Zealand communities. Iconic imagery, such as references to the ‘Four Square’ and ‘Swannndri’ mobilise cultural iconography, not just engaging tradition but reinforcing and perpetuating it. The Gothic genre, Jennifer Lawn (2006) argues is “revealed as endemic to New Zealand’s self-representation” (p. 11).

“Only recently have we begun to realise how Gothic much of New Zealand’s literature and film is,” continues Lawn (2011, para. 2) who goes on to point out that as early as 1952 Bill Pearson “characterised Pākehā New Zealanders as “fretful sleepers, living anxious, twilight, unfulfilled lives, haunted by their own conventionality” (p. 11). William Schafer (1988) “deems a sense of ‘sinister and unseen forces’ to be endemic in modern New Zealand culture” (as cited in Lawn, 2006, p. 13) and, Karen Walker, a Fashion designer agrees:

There’s a heavy, ominous, slightly restrained kind of feel and I think that comes from our culture and our landscape and just the personality of the country. There’s a heaviness to it (as cited in Lawn, 2006, p. 13).

In places, *Powered Milk* diverges from the typical traits of New Zealand Gothic, for example when the death of Luke is not linked with any malice – malice itself is often classified as being a common trait of the genre. He is killed by accident. Further there is no brooding malevolent presence, such as the sinister old man in *The Scarecrow* by Ronald Hugh Morrieson (1963) or *Sydney Bridge Upside Down* by David Ballantyne (1968/2012). I argue, that Gothic signifiers do not simply emerge from those we are stereotypically familiar with. And, that the reader can construe the text as Gothic in alternative ways. In contrast to many Gothic texts, *Powdered Milk* has a deliberate lightness to it. The landscape and the seasons in the text create an atmosphere of unease, affecting the lives of the characters influenced by it, interspersed with a series of misunderstandings and unfulfilled objectives.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

William Schafer (1998) describes the largely unacknowledged “belief in the hauntedness of the landscape, the sense that Aotearoa, New Zealand is a land of sinister and unseen forces, of imminent threat, of the undead or revenant spirits” (p. 137). Engagement with the supernatural, often as a result of isolation, Jennifer Lawn (2006) argues is “commonplace in Māori cosmology²” (p. 13). Historically Aotearoa is considered to be a nation endowed by ghosts. “Spirits mate,” explains a Māori informant in *Where No Birds Sing*, “the old people. I’ll bet you a case of grog it’s the spirits – a tapu on the place” (Shanks with Potiki, 1988, p. 22). For the Māori, the existence of ghosts signals a connectedness with the land, essentially the “communal or family idea of turangawaewae³” (Schafer, 1988, p. 146). Ghosts share simultaneous cohabitation with the living.

An example of an early foundational New Zealand European text, incorporating the supernatural, is George Chamier’s (1891) *Philosopher Dick*. Chamier’s protagonist, Raleigh, interacts with the supernatural as a form of company. Raleigh, modelled on the author, lives in an isolated mountain hut and leads a socially disconnected life as a shepherd. The novel is set during early colonial New Zealand between 1859 and 1863, when Chamier himself served as a cadet on ‘Marino Station’⁴. This period of New Zealand’s history illustrates a time of extreme isolation and uncertainty for many of the early New Zealand Europeans. Raleigh experiences periods of loneliness by choice and interacts with the supernatural as a consequence. Cruz and Ross (2011) comment that Chamier shows how the “presence of the uncanny other is signalled by various apparitions and ghosts, or by an apprehension of their imminent proximity” (p. 4). One example of this is when he meets a Scotsman in a hut. He is so surprised to discover a stranger in his midst that he mistakes it for a ghost. “Raleigh, aghast, glared – open mouthed at the strange apparition, and the apparition returned the gaping stare”

² “The twelve orders of Māori cosmology allow a confluence of zones between light and dark. In Western modernity’s elevation of ‘enlightenment’, darkness tends to hold more oppositional purchase and so excites a more phobic repudiation of death” (Lawn, 2006, p. 18). Examples of modern Māori texts which include the supernatural include: Patricia Grace’s (1988) novel *Baby No-Eyes*, Hone Kouka’s (2000) play *Waiora* and Witi Ihimaera’s play *Woman Far Walking*.

³ A place to stand.

⁴ *Marino Station*: “a frontier station in North Canterbury, where Chamier worked for his cousins, the Lances, from his arrival in New Zealand. The novel follows him through a series of adventures on the station and farther out back, which are interwoven with his philosophical contemplations of life there” (Sturm, 2010, p. 11).

(Chamier, 1891, p. 72). The effect of this is to show how socially dislocated Raleigh has become and how any human contact is staggering for him. His innate loneliness in an isolated environment creates confusion and psychological disturbance.

Often the supernatural evoked through psychological disturbances, stem from the loneliness of the New Zealand landscape. This is present not only in Chamier's novel set during early New Zealand European history but is evident in actual historical accounts. Sarah Amelia Courage, who lived as a sheep station owner's wife between 1864 and 1890 wrote that:

A shepherd's life is a terribly lonely one, especially if he is in an isolated position. A shepherd told me that men go mad with such a life. Every day is alike – work, food, earth and sky – and they live in a dull dreamless sleep, as it were. They feel themselves simply an atom of life in a lifeless world, and they have no hope or ambition. I have read that men living such lives become gloomy and superstitious, and fancy that people visit them in their whares at night (Courage, 1896, p. 100).

The role of the supernatural is a longstanding signifier of New Zealand Gothic fiction. The creative thesis *Powdered Milk* does not sway from this tradition. In the novel the role of the supernatural is defined and created solely by the psychological manifestations of the characters. Luke garners a sense of companionship when he sees a vision of two apparitions dancing on the surface of the lake. Eerily the images that Luke sees are not actually dead, they are projections of Delia and himself, pointing toward the potential for future calamity. This interaction serves the purpose of allowing the reader to delve into his thoughts within a stark landscape, where he otherwise would simply be alone. Luke is prompted to see apparitions because of his isolation, and loneliness.

This morning if the apparitions danced then they did so invisibly and in secret. They may have retired for the day to sleep, somewhere curled up under the shade of a tree and the privacy of a shadow. (First draft: *Powdered Milk*)

As the rising action progresses, Luke no longer sees these visions; Delia does, however talk to her statues giving them ghost-like qualities. She attempts to recreate a relationship with her deceased husband. These visions are signifiers of her delusions.

She woke with renewed vigour and picked up the chisel to carve a face in the stone, gently, a shallow relief. Delicate granules of dust fell to the carpet and hid its stains. The face she carved was small, looking at her directly, smiling.
'Ah, there you are,' she whispered. 'I wondered where you'd gone.'
(Third Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

As part of the exposition of the novel, the apparitions Luke sees show the reader that he is at times lonely. He is not always comfortable in an isolated environment. He does not quite fit the nostalgic stereotype of a New Zealand country living male⁵. Yes he can subsist on his own, but he is uneasy⁶. He is not the stoic ‘she’ll be right’ sort that you’d expect. This shows that even those usually comfortable in an isolated environment, can struggle. In this case Luke’s hallucinations are representative of his subconscious unease.

THE HIDDEN UNEASE OF SMALL TOWN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Gothic literature often explores the notion of hidden unease in small town New Zealand. As an example, David Ballantyne’s (1968/2012) underrated *Sydney Bridge Upside Down* is told in first person from the perspective of teenage Harry Baird, who lives in one of only five houses remaining in the fictional town, Calliope Bay⁷. The book’s focus is densely local. “Anyway I told her,” says Harry to his cousin and love interest Caroline, “how our teacher reckoned we lived on the edge of the world, and how you could believe this was so if you went out to the heads and looked at the horizon, and how there were people in Calliope Bay who felt lonely and faraway” (Ballantyne, 2012, p. 38). Calliope Bay is in a state of disrepair because of economic failure, further isolating it and its inhabitants. A particular aspect of Gothic imagery in this setting is the derelict abattoir. The freezing works acts as a local version of a haunted Gothic castle. Ballantyne, like other New Zealand writers such as Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Maurice Gee⁸, underpins the notion that not all small towns within New Zealand are as idyllic as they may first appear⁹. *Sydney Bridge Upside Down* “boldly mythologizes the local more than anyone had before attempted” says Hamish Clayton

⁵ A recognisable example is Sam Cash, a character who frequently appears in Barry Crump’s novels and who first the stereotype of a self-sufficient larrikin.

⁶ John Mulgan’s (1939/1972) protagonist, Johnson in *Man Alone* is another self-sufficient character, who similarly to Luke struggles with his “aloneness in an indifferent universe” (Bensen, 1998, para. 16): “There was a heaviness of the bush that pressed upon him, and weighed him down, until the sound of his own voice was startling to him” (Mulgan, 1972, p. 141).

⁷ Calliope Bay is a fictionalised version of Hicks Bay, on the east coast of the North Island. David Ballantyne was born in Auckland, and raised in Rotorua, ‘Hicks Bay’ and Gisborne.

⁸ *The Scarecrow* by Ronald Hugh Morrieson (1963). *In My Father’s Den* by Maurice Gee (1972).

⁹ During the forties, when Morrieson began seriously writing, he played with common convention, such as “everyday local realities of gossip, family history and shared deprivations” (Schafer, 1998, 135), and especially during times when technology was less prevalent, this ensured in novels, such as *The Scarecrow* (1963), a means of suppressing dangerous undercurrents. This effect often made the rupture and explosion of these undercurrents vicious. “Morrieson skates on the verge of spoof or outright parody in his handling of forms and conventions” (Schafer, 1998, p. 137).

(2012, para. 8). Siobhan Mercer (2013) elaborates stating that the novel's bleak setting "undercuts representations of New Zealand as a pastoral paradise that originated in the propaganda for the New Zealand Company aimed at persuading nineteenth-century Britons to leave their homes for the colony" (p. 401). Although the text is set during the Great Depression Kate DeGoldi (2010) suggests that it transcends this, recognising "the sing-song voice of the storyteller, evoking a fairy-tale ambience, alerting us to an 'other' world and the possibility that nothing is as it seems" (p. XI). This setting acts a backdrop for Harry Baird, a deliberately unreliable narrator, who begins to suffer psychological disturbances.

Off and on, maybe twice a year, I had black times; these had gone on for as long as I could remember (Ballantyne, 2012, p. 100).

A second description of a small town imbued with hidden unease is in an extract in *The Skinny Louie Book* by Fiona Farrell (2007). She prompts her readers to "imagine a small town," by first describing its wild surrounds and fraying edges. She finishes positively describing the centre of the town as "as sweet as a nut, as neat as a pie, as a pin" (p. 9). The body of the paragraph this phrase finishes with, glorifies the town as if it is a place of perfection. The beginning of the paragraph, however negates this, as the author decrees, "at the centre, things 'seem' under control," (p. 9) insinuating, in the same way as De Goldi (2010) describes Ballantyne's "sing song fairytale" setting, that "nothing is as it seems" (p. XI).

Delia's cottage, nestled in Kurow is located within a seemingly idyllic town. Kurow is surrounded by mountains and appears at first glance as a quaint country town. The town's feel of isolation intensifies Delia's own sense of isolation, exacerbated by her psychological difficulties. She is diagnosed by a psychiatrist in the novel as suffering psychosis¹⁰, stemming from a complicated grief reaction¹¹. The backdrop for her suffering, like Harry's is an isolated environment. I am not suggesting that Kurow is

¹⁰ Hilma Schieving (2015) a psychiatric nurse for the Nelson District Health Board describes how those who "lead a life according to a series of fixed false beliefs (delusions) can still be functional," rendering their confusion not always immediately apparent. Their thoughts and accompanying actions may be "further amplified by lack of sleep." Changes in behaviour, such as Delia being unkempt and not sleeping properly indicate a "prodrome" – or build up of symptoms over time (15 May, personal communication)

¹¹ According to Deborah Koshaba (2013) grief itself is "unpredictable." For people in mourning the "different stages of grief is much like a pinball machine. They bounce back and forth from shock, to depression, and back to shock again, until they are able to resolve their emotions and integrate the meaning of loss into their lives." Whereas in contrast, people who develop a complex grief reaction, "bounce back and forth through the stages of grief without resolution" (para. 6). Due to the loss of her husband Delia's brain has suppressed intolerable grief and she has subconsciously blocked it by way of her delusions.

necessarily a bleak place, like Calliope Bay is portrayed but for the purpose of representing Delia's psychological state I have illustrated Kurow as somewhat sinister, contextualising the novel within the New Zealand Gothic tradition. To research the location for *Powdered Milk* I visited Kurow, I noted that the town, unlike its surrounds, felt claustrophobic and, hemmed in when compared to the other locations I visited. The town seemed to be cut in half, one half cast in shadow. I found a cottage, one wrapped in wisteria that I modelled Delia's cottage on. The wisteria, clenching, in the novel mimics a sense of being trapped. The cottage in Kurow, although quaint and white, was cast in shadow and had an unsettling feel to it. When drafting *Powdered Milk* I positioned Delia's cottage in the shadowed half of Kurow, and the model's in the light, representing their split psychological states. The streets in these scenes are empty, or virtually empty. The eyes of neighbours watch, obscured behind windowpanes.



THE GAZE

“When you think about it, the world we see around us is, in reality, examined all inside our head” (Cummins, 2015, para. 3). “In the depths of my eye” Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) describes of this vision, “the picture is painted” (as cited in Cummins, 2015, para. 3). It seems apt, given this sentiment, to begin this discussion of ‘the gaze’ – as an act of perception, by referring to the work of a New Zealand painter, Graeme Sydney¹².

¹² One of New Zealand's best known artists. Famous for paintings of Central Otago using egg tempura.



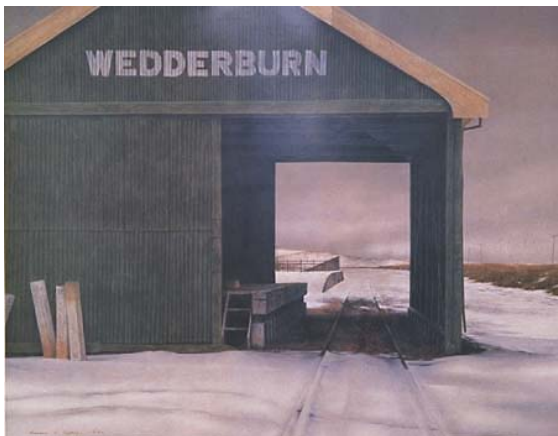
‘The gaze’ in *Powdered Milk* is evoked with similar embodiment to the work produced by Graeme Sydney. Sydney utilises perspective in this painting, *Auripo Road* (1979), contrasting close up images of letterboxes, backed by an extreme long shot of a road fading into the distance. His work correlates with my attempts to illustrate localised settings and wide open spaces. The space is devoid of people but the letterboxes are representatives of homes and those that reside nearby. Often as a bridge between character transitions in *Powdered Milk* I have utilised imagery beginning with a wide shot, zooming to medium focus and intimate close up, similar to visual techniques used in film. In the following example the gaze of the reader’s imagination is drawn from a broad view of Kurow, through medium focus details of the town, to be positioned within the third person subjective interiority of the protagonist.

Kurow sat in the shadow of the mountain cluster, the shroud cutting a line between light and dark down its centre. Greys blended into a verdant mixture of green tinge and shadows deepened the appearance of the curves between the peaks. At the skirt of this backdrop cottages gathered together, separated only by yellowed grass and weathered fences. One cottage sat alone, cast to the side, as if unwanted. Delia sat nestled in the grass in front of it, surrounded by tubes of paint and a bowl of methylated spirits. She held in her hand a fine paintbrush and a flat, water worn stone. (...) She pondered how many days and years it had resided at the lake, leading a life licked, swallowed and exposed to the elements. (Third Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

Further, in order to create the effect of rendering humans as small specks in a wider space both Delia and Luke take on omniscient roles. During the exposition of the novel, Delia visualises Aviemore through the eyes of a soaring hawk, rendering her own figure, which she has abandoned, small and insignificant below. Luke, when he glides in Omarama sees the scene beneath him through the canopy of the glider sweeping in a

wide arc. In these instances the pair are narrators of the setting, one that both embraces and consumes them.

The stark setting of *Powdered Milk* prompts me to construct characters, who - by sheer lack of close human contact are tempted to hide behind trees or beneath windows to listen or to look. Sydney has produced works, which are half lit and distinctly depopulated. It is easy to imagine in his paintings people lurking behind frames or doors. In Sydney's picture, entitled 'Wedderburn' (1975) the viewer looks through a frame toward landscape. This provides the effect that there is more to see than is immediately apparent.



In my creative thesis I have embraced a similar sort of imagery, including the use of frames to create a voyeuristic atmosphere, portraying scenes within scenes.

Two brown curls fell down either side of her face, framing her as if she were looking at him between a set of misshapen curtains. (Second draft: *Powdered Milk*)

Laura Mulvey (1975) suggests that when we take part in scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, we position the other person “as an object” (para. 2). Jonathan Schroeder (n.d.) elaborates, stating that to gaze “signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze” (as cited in Murow, 2008, para. 8). The character of the model in *Powdered Milk* poses as an object, allowing herself to be stared at. Unlike a statue however, her thoughts are not still, but kept hidden. James George (2015) suggests: “the model is in fact sculpting herself by her nudity in front of others, that she herself is being formed by the gaze” (written feedback, 2015). The model's aesthetic beauty is a threat, and her sequences too, contain fewer of her thoughts, than that of Delia.

Keri Hulme in her novel, *The Bone People* (1984) explores the idea that looking when you're not supposed to is wrong.

Well in case no one ever told you before, people's houses are 'private' and sacrosanct. Even peculiar places like my tower. That means you don't come inside unless you're 'invited'. (Hulme, 1984, p. 20)

The model in *Powdered Milk*, goes against this advice and enters areas that are "private (...), uninvited." Flashback sequences of the model's childhood show her spying on Luke, and as an adult she sneaks into Delia's cottage. She begins to form both a passive and an active role, first as an exhibitionist, and secondly as a voyeur, prompting the voyeuristic¹³ roles within the novel to change.

She 'slithered' her way painfully through the mouth of the window frame and lowered herself to the floor. Strangely, she didn't feel guilt at her intrusion, she felt as if she'd returned home. The room was littered with statues of herself. (First draft: *Powdered Milk*).

In this sequence the model 'slithers' through the mouth of the window frame, alluding to the eel that haunts Delia's delusions when she is attacked at the hospital. She is given sinister qualities by way of her intrusive actions. She becomes jealous when she finds statues of Luke, creating a turning point in the text, whereby jealousy leads to a triangle of tension involving the three characters. The model had also previously spied on Luke as a young child, watching him beneath the cover of the trees at the orchard.

She tucked herself closer to the trunk, blending into it. He walked past her, his head lowered, his bare feet trailing through the soil. If he found her, he might think her a tree nymph and wish to become friends. He didn't. As always, he was oblivious to her. Her stomach rumbled, she too was ready for lunch. He must have been one step too far away to notice. (First draft: *Powdered Milk*)

The model's transition from exhibitionist to voyeur can be understood psychoanalytically as "a defence mechanism whereby an instinctual aim changes into its opposite, usually from an active to a passive form (...) voyeurism to exhibitionist" (Colman, 2009, para. 1). Freud (1900) refers to this type of transition as a, "reversal into the opposite" (as cited in Colman, 2009, para. 1). In this sense, the model begins the novel in the passive form as an exhibitionist and then fluctuates hereafter to active and back to passive. She is both the performer and the audience, and when in the active role

¹³ "An obsessive practice in which an individual gains gratification from observing others as sexual objects without themselves being observed" (Chandler and Munday, 2011, para. 1).

she becomes briefly the narrator of events. The model's psyche, contrasting to that of Delia, and more in line with Harry Baird, is controlled – albeit she is not a serial killer. An elaboration of this is when she dresses in disguise to visit the hospital. Her actions are premeditated.

She stopped at an eclectic costume shop and created within a few minutes perusal what she thought to be a convincing disguise. The shop was bright and garish, full of a hoarded concoction of costumes and plastic paraphernalia. She relished the opportunity to shed her skin and become another. The transformation was a necessity.
(Second draft: *Powdered Milk*)

Freud (1900) describes how the process of reversal “can affect characteristics of objects or people” and be able to “to create the disguises that enable the translation of latent thoughts into acceptable thoughts” (as cited in *Reversal into the Opposite*, 2006, para. 1). The model here creates her own disguise in order to hide her identity.

Luke too is voyeuristic. In this sequence he watches Delia through a window, his view of her framed.

He spied the outline of a statue through a window, the silhouette of a naked woman, elegant and healthy (...) A shadow passed across the curtain and he saw Delia wander through the room. She turned toward him and viewed him looking curiously into her home; he didn't know what had prompted her to do so. It felt strange to glimpse her in an environment beyond the lake.
(First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

I was conscious in *Powdered Milk* of using ‘the gaze’ to create an eerie atmosphere. Characters, such as the model and Luke look when they're not supposed to, discovering things about others they do not wish to learn. As a consequence their future actions become altered to adapt to their observations.

PORTRAYAL OF PSYCHOSIS WITHIN THE NEW ZEALAND GOTHIC TRADITION

According to Snodgrass (2009), states of insanity, depression and psychosis are pivotal themes in Gothic fiction, often the consequence of a character's engagement with gruesome events, or ghostly apparitions. It is not unusual, then, that psychosis and instability are important thematically in New Zealand Gothic literature, seen in works by Janet Frame as recognisable examples¹⁴. However, more often than not, it is the

¹⁴ *Faces in the Water* (Frame, 1961) and *An Angel At My Table* (Frame, 1984), a novel and autobiography which explore an asylum experience.

isolation of our environment, which has facilitated this psychotic condition. Frame described her feeling of mental isolation to her counsellor, John Money in 1948:

I have got to learn that I am alone for ever ... I will never have anybody close to me. The rest of the world is miles away over desert and snowfield and sea. Nobody knows how far away I am from everything. Looking at living, for me, is like looking mentally through the wrong end of opera glasses. (Drabble, 2014, para. 12).

A less well-known example, which explores psychological instability, is again David Ballantyne's (1968/2012) *Sydney Bridge Upside Down*. When reading the novel it is difficult to tell whether the protagonist's psychotic experiences are real or imaginary. In a review in the *Sunday Star Times* Harry is described as having a "murky and confused psychology" (Moisa, 2006, ed. 4). Mercer however (2013), disputes the idea that Harry is confused, suggesting that, "Harry is an apparently insane serial murderer who is in complete control of the story available to the reader" (p. 408). In the novel, Harry states, "I was there with Dibs Kelly" (Ballantyne, 2012, p. 1), but then after pushing Dibs off the cliff he uses a flashback, saying, "I go back now to the beginning of that day" (Ballantyne, 2012, p. 3). The reader is unclear as to the cause of events. It veers away from Harry assuming fault. Mercer (2013) identifies Ballantyne's repeated use of this type of flashback, in more than one example. She refers to its use as "internal analepsis," in which the story flashes back to an earlier point in the narrative (p. 408). Ballantyne deliberately casts his readers into a shadow of stilted confusion.

It is apt to assume that Delia's psychology correlates with Harry's; her psyche in parallel is "murky" and "confused." Delia, however is not in control of her actions or how her story is told. She is in fact delusional and her actions are beyond her rational control.

Delia visualised the eel whipping and whirring around her, and the model's body blended into her memory of it, grey and thick. Her action was accompanied by a yell. Orderlies quickly entered the room, pulling the two women apart. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

Another signifier of Delia's loss of reality is when she becomes unkempt. Being unkempt could be an indicator as elucidated by Cruz and Ross (2011) that "for some, biological survival has a lower priority than the survival of one's moral or spiritual identity and integrity" (p. 59). This, Delia struggles to reclaim.

Her travel weary sundress fell to the floor in a stained heap. She stood in front of the mirror, her cheekbones seemed more prominent and her face glowed olive. She took a pair of scissors from a cupboard and cut carefully at the most unsightly clumps in her hair.
(First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

One explanation for Delia's loss of reality may be linked to the isolation of her environment. Fromm Reichman, a German born psychiatrist, believed "loneliness lay at the heart of nearly all mental illness" (as cited in Shulevitz, 2013, para. 2). Studies of prisoners placed in solitary confinement showed that "prolonged solitude can severely damage those who are prone to mental illness" (Barret and Martin, 2014, p. 79). Depending on the circumstances, loneliness may have a severely detrimental effect on human psyche. Delia wishes to enjoy solitude, in order to become free and nomadic like Luke, however swiftly succumbs to its influence as a negative affliction.

Afterwards, Delia sat on a towel and dried her body beneath a lonely sky. She wore on her head a wide brimmed sun-hat, it shaded her face and her thoughts. Her skin glistened as it dried. She recollected an unsettling phrase from the night previously, 'a nomad wouldn't return home'... And well, she thought, if that was the case, neither might she. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

In Delia's darkened study she talks to statues of her deceased husband, giving them human qualities and creating a quell for her loneliness. These objects represent her desire to block the reality of her loss, and look back on a time when she hadn't been lonely in order to recreate it. She imprints the statues with her loss in the same way that she does with Luke, wishing and believing that he is Lukas.

TRAUMATIC CHILDHOODS

According to Schafer (1998) "the Gothic theme is usually linked explicitly with a story of adolescence, with the idea of growing up into an unknown and fearful adult universe" (p.137). An example of this is the youthful perspective of Jimmy Sullivan, a thirteen year-old protagonist who experiences familial discord in Ian Cross' (1957/1989) *The God Boy*. Jimmy's family has been affected by the Great Depression and he is exposed to domestic violence stemming from the stress of this on his parents. The conflict between his parents causes him to feel lonely. He creates what he calls his protection tricks by singing to himself to avoid listening and is also too scared to tell any of his friends what is happening. According to Ferreira¹⁵ (1962) "the experiences of loneliness, when occurring at a very early age, are likely to leave indelible scars" (p. 202). He further documents how "those who become emotionally handicapped" due to

¹⁵ Antonio J. Ferreira, M.D, Faculty of Medicine, University of Lisbon, Portugal, 1946; Diplomate in Psychiatry, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, 1955.

their loneliness are “more vulnerable to the impact of further psychopathogenic¹⁶ forces and traumatic relationships” (p. 203).

In *Powdered Milk*, in order to portray Luke’s latter rejection of society, I have included flashbacks to his childhood, describing a tense home life on an orchard living with his father. Tension between the father and his son throughout each of these sequences, stem from the absence of a mother, who has died giving birth to him.

His small feet dangled beneath the table swinging slightly and then grasped on to the legs of the chair, taut. Three chairs surrounded the table, one empty. His father placed an egg on his plate and two pieces of toast. He sat staunch, his feet cemented to the floor, his legs spread. They ate in silence staring at empty walls. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

His father struggles to keep the orchard running and Luke must work long hours picking cherries. The girls at his school describe him as weird and as a loner:

‘Who is the boy always eating cherries?’ the girl asked.
‘I don’t know,’ Amanda said, not distracted from her task, plucking a daisy and holding it in the air.
‘That’s Luke,’ another piped in, ‘he’s a loner.’
‘Yea.’
‘The other boys tease him because he’s weird.’ They giggled.
The girls then talked about other matters. Important matters. And then the bell rang and that was that. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

The model’s childhood too is an unhappy one, her parents do not notice when she vanishes for long periods at a time. Loneliness, and a distinct lack of affection, lead to the beginnings of her latching onto Luke, and forming, much like Delia an on-going obsession over him. The model’s relationship with Luke does ultimately become “traumatic” for her because she can never claim him, thus “thwarting” her desire to achieve “an inner craving for intimacy and closeness” (p. 203). Fromm Reichman, confirms this explanation:

The longing for interpersonal intimacy stays with every human being from infancy throughout life; and there is no human being who is not threatened by its loss (as cited in Heck, 1896, p. 23).

The Gothic genre is frequently inhabited by youth who are vulnerable. Traumatic events shape lives and futures, prompting dark consequences. It was my intention in *Powdered Milk* to show this vulnerability and the danger associated with innocence. In the novel the flashbacks of these children serve the purpose of providing backstory. They become narrators, providing context for their future actions.

¹⁶ “The study of mental disorders and unusual or maladaptive behaviours,” (Psychopathology, 2015, para. 1).

PATHETIC FALLACY. NATURE POSITIONED AS A CHARACTER

Pathetic fallacy is a type of personification coined by the English critic John Ruskin in *Modern Painters* (1843-60) “to describe the ascription of human feelings to the outside world” (*Pathetic Fallacy*, 2014, para. 1). This literary technique allows the natural world to reflect and to influence the moods of characters.

New Zealand is often construed as being a pastoral paradise. In a survey conducted in 2013 by the *New Zealand Institute of Economic Research*, one in ten international arrivals cited *The Hobbit*, a film trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s novel shot throughout locations in both the North and South Islands as alerting them to the appeal of New Zealand as a tourist destination (p. 6). Professor Laurence Simmons from the University of Auckland says that “New Zealand can shift from one idea of the land to the other - pastoral to Gothic, cultivated to wild,” and elaborates that “we are uncomfortable with the image of perfection and paradise, and so we are always looking for what might be wrong.” He provides Jane Campion’s (2012) television series *Top of the Lake* as an example of “a Gothic version of a menacing landscape” (as cited in Lane, 2013, para. 19).

In Jane Campion’s television series *Top of the Lake* the protagonist, a troubled police detective visits a remote hut and an empty lakeside – locations that unleash her emotions and determination as she searches for a lost child. Set on location in Queenstown and Glenorchy the scenery is recounted by Lane (2013) as being “more than a dramatic backdrop” (para. 1). One of the roles is a “part played by the landscape” (para. 2). Blundell (2013) concurs, “the geography,” in the series he says, “is really another brooding character,” praising its “angularities, shadows, and dark moods” (para. 12). The landscape in this text is “used to transform characters who interact with it” (Lane, 2013, para. 10).

Another example of the use of pathetic fallacy is clearly seen in the visual text version of the Gothic novel, *In My Father’s Den* (2004) by Maurice Gee, set in a small fictional town, Rapere Junction, modelled on Roxburgh in Central Otago. In Gee’s text the arid landscape is used to link to the sombre storyline of Celia, a teenage girl who dreams of escaping the constraints of small-town New Zealand. Mountains hem her in creating a

sense of claustrophobia¹⁷. Celia, feels out of place in it¹⁸, and the arid feeling of the landscape alludes to the sense of a barren society. When she disappears it is winter¹⁹. Her teacher, Paul stands alone in the classroom, tracing her initials, as rain pours outside – an example of pathetic fallacy, as the weather is used to express his feelings. When her body is lifted from the river it is misty and bleak. The hawk is seen circling as a symbol of death. The orchard is another prominent setting in this film, when in blossom creating a festive and happy atmosphere. This communion with nature links human emotion with surroundings. Nature is personified. The characters are, at least partially, expressed through the environment and are affected by it. Atmosphere is created by the weather, influencing their mood.

Powdered Milk makes regular use of pathetic fallacy, particularly in the way that the description of each season attempts to personify the outside world in order for characters to interact with it.

The branches caught him and cradled him. They adopted him and awaited his rescue. They held his mouth just above the surface of the water. Their leaves wept around him, moving delicately with the currents. The lake returned to its equilibrium as if he didn't exist. It went about its business ignoring him. (First Draft: *Powdered Milk*)

The prevalence of pathetic fallacy in *Powdered Milk* allows nature within the text to be positioned as a distinct character or set of characters. The protagonists are aware they are constantly under surveillance. There is a certain unsettling feeling that emerges; human characters become mere dots under a broad sky. The landscape becomes an omniscient presence, concurrently telling their story by way of their interactions with it. It would be impossible, in a setting such as Kurow or Aoraki for the landscape to not command this sort of presence. Furthermore, the use of the seasons to structure *Powdered Milk* prompted me to abide by a seasonal tonal palette, reflecting the changing moods of the landscape and storyline. Each season too is a separate character, changing and rearranging to influence and reflect the protagonists' moods. Again it is the isolation of the New Zealand landscape that facilitates this.

¹⁷ A parallel can be drawn here between Rapare Junction and Kurow, both hemmed by mountains.

¹⁸ This alludes to Luke seeking to escape. Celia dreams of lands outside of her hometown. She wishes to become nomadic.

¹⁹ Luke also meets an unfortunate end in winter. The sombre tone is partially created by the effect of the season.

SUMMARY

By exploring characters in isolation, facilitated by a series of Gothic New Zealand traits I aim to have created in *Powdered Milk* as Jennifer Lawn (2006) suggests a “shifting warp of the familiar” (p. 150). I wonder how, come 2015, can ‘solitude’, ‘isolation’, and ‘aloneness’ continue a dialogue with society in a nation that is evolving into a more urban, technologised society. Neville Peat (1992) says, “given the distraction of the technological age, there is a good deal of surrendering required to achieve any degree of stillness today” (p. 141). He recommends as James K. Baxter (2010) suggests in *High Country Weather*, to “surrender to the sky” p. 14). To “go cross country on foot or fly on quiet wings, or sit in the hills and listen for native falcons.” Here, he believes it is possible to achieve a “sense of place” (Peat, 1992, p. 141). It is my hope that potential readers of *Powdered Milk*, especially those that live in cities, can consider their own sense of freedom within this sphere. And, to challenge readers by prompting them to consider that, though idyllic, isolated settings have the potential to magnify relationships for good or for ill. Our reaction to being immersed in an isolated environment may depend largely on our perceptions, and for some, like Delia, the manifestation of what we imprint on an empty canvas, might not be positive.

Powdered Milk makes a contribution to the wider Gothic genre by diverging from its ‘tried and true’ expectations. It comes full circle, but not to a happy ending. The characters never come to understand each other. Their individual objectives overlap, leading to a path of demise.

The living landscape serves as a backdrop for this story and the lives of the characters are woven onto its surface. I endeavour to continue to explore such resonances of the New Zealand environment and the trials of characters that remind us that though their experiences are magnified by words, we are but small specks in a wider space.

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