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New material: a novella, and the accompanying exegesis, How to log into the book: cyborgs and fiction

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New Material – A Novella

And the accompanying exegesis

How to Log Into the Book: Cyborgs and Fiction

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Master of Creative Arts (Research)

From

The University of Wollongong

By Lucy Alexander

BCA (Hons) University of Wollongong

Faculty of Creative Arts

2007

Certification

I, Lucy Jane Alexander declare that this novella and accompanying exegesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Creative Arts (Research) in the Department of Creative Writing, School of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Lucy Jane Alexander

August 2007

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Masters of Creative Arts, Research – School of Creative Writing and Journalism, Faculty of Creative Arts, Dr Shady Cosgrove, 2007

Creative Work – New Material

Abstract

The novella New Material explores the intersections between fictional space, cyber space and mythic space, through three characters' narratives: Jo, his cousin Mei and Lee Wei Hong. Set in Singapore in 2007, the novella is narrated by each of these characters, whose voices interrupt and layer one another's stories. Jo is a teen hacker and computer expert who lives fully immersed in a networked world. Mei has come from Australia to stay with Jo's family, fleeing her parents' divorce. She is an avid reader and uses fictional space as an escape route from her troubled family. Thirdly, the older Lee Wei Hong, an offset printer, whose narration takes the form of a statement to the police.

It is seeing himself as his online avatar through his cousin's eyes that Jo begins transformation and when Mei insists they need to experience a rainstorm Jo comes into contact with physical reality in a way he has been avoiding. Mei's journey through Singapore leads her to explore her roots and she and Jo come to know one another better through talking about their shared grandmother's spiritual heritage. However, Jo's double-dealing with gamers online leads him to be assaulted in a back alley. Strangely, the alley is full of paper. The night of the hungry ghosts sees Jo and Mei immersed in the novel they salvaged. The narrative entangles the two of them, as they become part of the story.

Lee Wei Hong's confession is the lead-up to his 'crime'. During the course of his day he reads and falls in love with a book, the physical book that he has been working on. When he discovers that his work will not be available to the public, but that the novel will only be available online he is moved to act. In a state of passion he takes the printed pages of the review copy his company has, and throws them off the tenth storey of the National Library. This is his criminal act.

These are the pages that Jo and Mei have found, read and also been inspired to act upon. Through his hacking Jo has unearthed a series of emails that read well as fiction. He and Mei decide to send them on to the author to influence his next book.

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Exegesis – How to Log into the Book: Cyborgs and Fiction

Abstract

The exegesis situates the novella New Material in the surrounding landscape of literary fiction writing and theoretical posthumanism in two ways. First, it discusses the novel within the framework of two other novels, Peter Carey's My Life as a Fake and Jeanette Winterson's The PowerBook, both of which deal in very different ways with the cyborg within fiction, as both constructed character and constructed author. Secondly, the exegesis draws on the work of theorists and researchers Elizabeth Grosz' Space, Time, Perversion - the Politics of Bodies, Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminisim in the Late Twentieth Century", N Katherine Hayles' How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics and Sherry Turkle's Life on Screen; Identity and the Age of the Internet. These four writers' works are used as metaphorical global positioning systems to discuss the novella New Material, and map the territories where its concerns overlap with those of the Carey and Winterson novels.

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New Material

A Novella

To Mei Mei Chen and her father Dr. Eric Chen.
To Miles Cornel, Iris Peters and Lee Wei Hong.
And especially to Jo without whom, we would not have intersected.

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