Postmodern Gothic Cinema: A Critical Analysis

Reflection Statement

The intention of my major work is to critically account for the contemporary appeal of postmodern Gothic cinema as a liberating discourse confronting contemporary consumer perceptions of individual and cultural identity, reality and the body. I aim to make explicit the foundations of contemporary culture, the Gothic and postmodernism in the first two introductory paragraphs (pages 2-4), before stating the thesis and essay preface in the third (pages 4-5). My essay is broadly scoped to reinforce the cinema's appeal across the breadth of contemporary culture, which could not be done by exploring three or fewer subgenres of the postmodern Gothic. In my opinion, this enables a more emphatic resolution of the question proposed, affirming the genre's "ability to confront … the disorienting dynamism of the postmodern world" (page 19).

The intended audience for this major work is those interested in the contemporary Gothic film and culture with academic acquaintance of postmodernism and related film theory. While the introduction (pages 2-5) frames the Gothic and postmodernism, a preliminary understanding of both is key for a heightened contextualisation of these phenomena and would further the reader's understanding of the "symbiosis" discussed throughout my major work. A basic understanding of film theory and postmodernism's influence is necessitated to understand the mode of analysis I have adopted throughout the work, particularly "the concepts of pastiche, appropriation, intertextuality, parody and comical exaggeration" referenced on page 4 of my major work from Timo Schrader's paper '"It Was Just Like a Movie." The Defining Features of Postmodern Gothic'. Finally, an interest in contemporary Gothic culture is essential, with openness of mind to appreciate the academic legitimacy of popular films such as the 'Twilight' saga alongside that of niche films such as Wake in Fright. The most suitable reader is one who has widely viewed postmodern

Gothic cinema in its suburban, urban and teen manifestations, and exhibits interest in Australian film and culture. The intended audience is thus composed of those who satisfy these requirements.

My major work's foundation lies in extensive independent investigation. Such investigation came from a variety of resources, most notably those in literary and webpage form, but also in journal form (Tom Drahos' article 'The Imagined Desert' from *The Coolabah*, used in analysis of Mick Taylor in <u>Wolf Creek</u> as an "agent of the landscape" on page 17), televised form (ABC's program 'Australian Gothic Cinema' from *Big Ideas*, from which analysis of "Australia [attempting] to interpret itself in the colonial vernacular" was used in <u>Wake in Fright</u> on page 14) and dissertation form (Romana Ashton's excellent 'Antipodean Gothic Cinema' paper, used on pages 5-7, 9 and 14 for analysis of suburban, urban and Australian postmodern Gothic cinema). In addition to utilising a total of eighteen academic resources in the final product, the very fact that part of the essay question was sourced from my extensive independent investigation most aptly demonstrates its role as the foundation of the work.

The extensive nature of my independent research ultimately drove the construction of the major work. Initially, I was intending to do an authorial study of Edgar Allan Poe or a study of the Gothic side of fairy-tales. Discussion with teachers throughout October 2014 refined this into a study Edgar Allan Poe's role within Gothic literature. However, it was a conversation I had with my father, an avid fan of Gothic, on 9 November which instigated my interest to compose a holistic study of the Gothic. Having studied postmodernism in Year 10 English, reading a chapter on its relation to the Gothic in John C. Tibbets' book *The Gothic Imagination*[44] – unused explicitly in this major work – roused my interest in a genre study of the postmodern Gothic. On 10 November, I bought some books which would be integral to

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[44] J.C. Tibbets, *The Gothic Imagination*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, p. 283-358.

my later research: Victoria Nelson's *Gothicka*, Clive Bloom's *Gothic Histories* and Fred Botting's *Gothic*.

My extensive investigation of these three sources proved incredibly useful to my major work. Nelson's work has provided a knowledgeable outlook of the new Gothic which has proven useful to the major work, particularly her commentary on <u>Twilight</u>, such as her remarks on "hybrid [generic] sensibility" (page 10). Bloom underscores his extensive analysis with cynicism and sardonic overtones, such as one quotation used in my conclusion: "vampires are now dash and cool" (page 18-19). This research, however, has proven useful for my major work, impacting and framing my urban postmodern Gothic analysis through understanding of "veritable urban anxieties" (page 8). Botting's *Gothic*¸ however, has been the most influential source in all of my investigation. His analysis is admirably extensive, useful and relevant, and throughout my essay I have stylistically attempted to address concepts as he did, such as describing the Gothic's "supernaturalism, transgression, sublime terror and monstrosity" in the introduction (page 3). His study was also where I derived my academic understanding of alterity, monstrosity and transgression.

Research into postmodernism, although not conducted until the first half of 2015, was also crucial to the development of my major work. Whilst I investigated the philosophies of Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, the most influential works to my essay were Simon Malpas' *The Postmodern* and Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The former provided me with an excellent introductory understanding to postmodernism and was crucial to drawing value out of my analysis, particularly the notion of "identity [becoming] a matter of choice for the consumer" I drew from <u>Twilight</u> on page 12. It was from Jameson's work, however, that I was able to write academically concerning postmodern consumer society, "late capitalism", and "the 'schizophrenic' feeling of depthlessness associated with … 'non-identity'" which I discuss on page 2 of the work. This

insight, interlinked with research into the Gothic, provided me with an informed understanding of the genre.

Aside from these significant texts, the bulk of the initial composition took place in the latter half of January, as I was viewing and analysing my films and writing about them thereafter. In hindsight, a better way to undergo the composition would have been to write my paragraph of analysis into the major work after each viewing such that the film was fresher in my memory. Even though my logbook was used extensively for reflective and informative purposes throughout the process of composition, my scope of disposable information was limited as it was impossible for me to record every detail on the page. I was rescued by the extensive independent investigation, however, which further drove the refinement of the composition throughout the first half of 2015.

My major work is firmly rooted in the knowledge, understanding and skills developed in the English Advanced and Extension courses. From the Advanced course, my skills in composition are derived directly from outcomes 6 and 7, which focus on developing my skills in communicating at different levels of complexity and my responses to a range of complex texts. My understanding is enriched most significantly by the first objective of the course, regarding the purposes and effects of textual forms on contexts, and particularly outcome 2A as my major work is a study of genre, form and impact on a context. The practice of reflection is rooted in outcomes 12, 12A and 13, explicitly 12.3 in "evaluating [my] own compositions and compositional style". From the Extension syllabus, my study of genre in Preliminary and HSC courses has provided extensive background knowledge and understanding for undertaking a generic study of the postmodern Gothic, whilst Outcome 3 has significantly assisted the composition process by developing my skill in essay writing. Finally, the first two outcomes and objectives of the syllabus provide a strong knowledge and understanding basis for "how and why texts are valued", and particularly 2.3 in "speculating

about different ways in which texts might be valued". Thus, my major work is firmly rooted in the knowledge, understanding and skills developed in the English Advanced and Extension courses.

As a critical essay with a clear rationale for its intended purpose and audience, driven by extensive independent investigation, and firmly rooted in knowledge, understanding and skills from other HSC English courses, I believe I have satisfied the primary outcome in developing and presenting an extended composition that demonstrates depth, insight, originality and skills in independent investigation. Its structure coheres to that of a critical essay, and the metalanguage used throughout adheres to the conventions of the Gothic, postmodernism, as well as the thesis and question, thus creating textual integrity within the work. The foundation of such language in extensive investigation has allowed me to manipulate learned concepts as the means to communicate original ideas of complexity, relevance and insight into a coherent response, creating a holistic engagement with my intended audience – a process which I have fully enjoyed, in its development of my writing ability, research skills and sociocultural awareness. Therefore, I purport my extended composition to be of value, and through this reflection statement and rigorous use of the logbook, I firmly believe that I satisfy the second and final outcome of this course.