

# Writing the Sixties: Stardust and Golden

Doug McEachern

Ph D Thesis

Department of English and Creative Writing

The University of Adelaide

June 2016

# **Writing the Sixties: *Stardust and Golden***

## **Table of contents**

Volume One: The Creative Work

*Stardust and Golden*

Volume Two: The Exegesis

Writing the Sixties

## Writing the Sixties: *Stardust and Golden*

### Abstract

The creative work, *Stardust and Golden*, a phrase taken from Joni Mitchell's 1969 hit *Woodstock*, is a novel set in Adelaide in the late 1960s. The story is told by Mark David who, in 2009, recalls this time after an unexpected encounter with an elderly Elizabeth Ryder, the mother of his closest friend from the 1960s. The novel is centred on the lives of two young men balloted for conscription in 1968. Although opposed to the Vietnam War and conscription they are not attracted to the idea of going into hiding as draft resisters or the prospect of two years in jail. They want another solution. Their lives are shaped by a network of social relations centred on a shared student household, a student commune, in North Adelaide, where the residents are involved in 1960s style political and social agitations as well as the insistent pursuit of pleasure, lots of music, some drugs, some alcohol and sex and varying degrees of generational conflicts with parents. Their 1960s do not turn out as they had hoped. Of the two central characters one dies in India having run from the draft and the other is too ill to be inducted. He too, more or less, leaves the country and has a career as a consultant in the oil industry.

The second part, the exegesis, focusses on the creative practice and research involved in writing *Stardust and Golden*. Here the focus is on how authors re-imagine the Sixties as an age of militant opposition to the Vietnam War and conscription and the rise of a counter culture of challenge to convention and authority. The phrase 'Writing the Sixties' also captures the essentially fictional construction of the era. Hence the exegesis starts with the novels of the Sixties, tracing different ways in which novels written either at the time or close to it compare with the research and writing strategies of those who seek, from a later vantage point, to re-imagine the Sixties. In this chapter a broad range of novels are used to document the anatomy of a Sixties novel. This forms the basis for an in-depth consideration of the writing strategies John Updike (*Rabbit Redux* and *The Witches of Eastwick*) and Philip Roth (*American Pastoral*) use to create a sense of the Sixties in these novels and how they build their characterisation of the times. The exegesis concludes with an account of the creative practice involved in imagining and realising the novel, with a focus on how research, of both the era and the events themselves and of literary forms and writing strategies, provides the scaffolding for reimagining and creatively re-building the sense of era for *Stardust and Golden*.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

.....

Signature

.....

Date

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable guidance and assistance provided by Professor Nicholas Jose and my other supervisors, Dr Sue Hosking and Mandy Treagus. I would also like to thank for their support Patrick Allington, Lata Mayer, Terry-ann White and Charmaine Collett.