

CONFRONTING THE DARK:

VOLUME 1:
‘THE ART OF DYING’ (A NOVEL)

AND

VOLUME 2:
REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH IN AUSTRALIAN FICTION
(AN EXEGESIS)

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

“Confronting the Dark” is a creative writing thesis comprised of two interrelated parts: Volume 1: *The Art of Dying*, a novel; and Volume 2: “Representations of death in Australian fiction,” an exegesis.

In the novel, Gerard, the main character, is dying. As a consequence of his imminent death, he begins to focus on both the trauma of his early years and the great love he feels privileged to have experienced.

The exegesis describes how the practice of writing about death led to a critical inquiry into various philosophies of death that have been of interest to writers, as well as the transformation of the Western approach to death over the past few centuries, brought about by modernity. It presents a case study of two Australian novels, Helen Garner’s *The Spare Room* (2008), and Patrick White’s *The Vivisector* (1970). I discuss the writing of my own novel in light of the reflexive agency required for creative writing research and in terms of creative writing habitat, the creative domain, activities of writing, and the artefact. I conclude that writing about death occurs for primarily existential reasons. Writers are asking questions about how human beings feel about their impending death, how they cope with life goals and the possibility of unfinished business, and how the death of the other affects the lives of those who remain.

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.

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