

*A Glitch in the Script:  
Fantasy, Realism and the Australian Imagination*

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**Abstract:** *The Glitch* is a six-part television series first aired on the Australian public broadcast network, the ABC, in July 2015. My interest is in ways that the series reflects certain aspects of Australian culture and history and, in particular, how inclusive the series has been in representing Indigenous Australian ways of seeing this history. *The Glitch* — set in a fictional Australian outback town where a number of residents who have lived and died there return from the dead — holds great potential for critiquing the cultural and perceptual frameworks that have created what popular culture often describes as ‘quintessential Australianness.’ Narrative genres that have a particular relevance in framing Australian identity within a postcolonial context are also important to my examination. They provide a way to explore the aesthetics of identity in the play between reality and unreality where an Australian Gothic sense of the uncanny is contrasted with the subversive way Magic Realism places the extraordinary within the same realm of the possible as the ordinary everyday event. This aligns with contemporary analyses of Australian Indigenous narratives where Indigenous perceptions of reality question a Western hegemonic view of what is magic and what is real and highlights the cultural origins of both. It is the mix of the mysterious and the mundane and the play between reality and fantasy that has enormous potential in *The Glitch*. However, as I also discovered, maintaining the magic and the real in such a delicate and continuous balance is no easy task.

**Key words:** Fantasy/reality in Australian television drama, Gothic, Magic Realism

I am not a fan of the Zombie genre, finding the horror those stories of voracious beasts (once living human beings who have returned from the dead) invite just too sad and too terrible to enjoy even the most compelling and well-written narrative within the genre. So, when I first saw the trailers for the Australian television series *The Glitch*, with

muddied bodies crawling from their graves, my immediate reaction was that I was not interested in the series. However it was hard to ignore the advertisements for the series that ran nightly on the ABC in the lead-up to the first episode and my interest began to grow. Finally I watched the first episode just to see what it was like. Soon I was looking forward to the regular weekly timeslot when the show would be screened.

It is exactly in its movement between and across the fantastic and the realistic that magical realism (dis)locates itself, registering the determinate indeterminacy of interstitial cultures by its refusal to come down solely on one side or the other - just like television, in its own move between fantasy and reality. Both of these terms (*fantasy* and *reality*) designate TV genres - and not just any TV genres, but ones that are especially significant to commercial television's place (even continued survival) in today's multichannel, multimedia, multinational, corporate universe. (Joyrich 2009: online)

There is potential for the various narratives that are played out in *The Glitch* to explore what Jonathan Rayner terms 'Australasian Gothicism' a sense of the gothic that includes Australia and New Zealand and one that Rayner asserts "assumes a new, particular and cultural importance" (2011: 91). Susan Dermody and Liz Jacka describe Australian Gothic as a genre where "the normal is revealed as having a stubborn bias towards the perverse, the grotesque, the malevolent" (cited in Rayner: 91). Most readings of Australian Gothic also reveal a sense of the uncanny and the corresponding alienation that occurs in the play between reality and unreality. For Bennet and Royle the uncanny is "an effect" and as such is reliant on the "effects of reading" and lies with "the experience of the reader" or what Brecht describes as alienation effects in drama itself (Bennett and Royle 2004: 35). Similarly television as a medium for story-telling also holds a particular mix of fantasy and reality both within the alienated medium of television itself, which can be seen as both magical and hyper-real, as well as through television's ability to translate and moderate the ordinary and the magical in narrative itself. Here the empathy associated with visual representation promotes a suspension of disbelief conducive to understanding both the magic and the virtual as belonging to the realm of the real. This also aligns with the way, in contemporary analyses of Australian Indigenous narratives, there has been a great deal of discussion around Indigenous perceptions of the real that question the very heart of a Western hegemonic view of what is magic and what is real and highlights the linguistic origins of both. That an Aboriginal Australian reality might be seen as fantasy to an Australian framed by a European sensibility is important here.

The scriptwriters for *The Glitch* knew they were dealing with uncomfortable, if not alienating, subject matter. The series is daring in its confrontation of Australia's cultural history, whether it is actual humans returning from the dead, a man discovering that his wife has returned from the dead when he has remarried his wife's best friend, or an Irish drunk who was once the mayor of the town but who also has had children to a local Aboriginal woman. Journalist and critic Walter Marsh writes.

One of the series strengths is how the back stories explore and challenge aspects of Australian identity and history, from mythologised ANZACs to relationships between early settlers and Indigenous women. For some these themes might be confronting in their subversion of our comfortable cultural

outlook. (Marsh 2015: online)

Director Emma Freeman gives credit to the writers of the series, saying “it was all in the script and it was all in the characters, so for us it was just being as truthful as we possibly could be in developing those characters” (Freeman in Marsh: 2015). Freeman was also interested in introducing Gothic elements to the series that captured a particular Australian sensibility; one that she describes as being able to embrace “our ‘Australian-ness’ while not being ashamed or trying to hide it, but also connecting to the truth, having a grounded-ness and naturalness to the environment” (cited in Marsh: 2015).

Gelder and Weaver write about the way an Australian sense of the Gothic evolves through the bush being a particularly alien place that is “invariably a place of settler disorientation and death, as if the promise of settlement can never be fully realized” (2007: 5). What better way to achieve a sense of the alienation and strangeness associated with the uncanny nature of Australian colonial history than through a narrative about characters who return from the dead in an Australian country town?

## **The play between fantasy and reality**

In buying into the narrative tropes that the series provided, I believe that both viewers and those involved with the production of *The Glitch* have become caught up in the play between fantasy and reality that Lynne Joyrich refers to in the quote that opens this essay. Joyrich is concerned both with the content of television programs as well as the magical potential for television itself that has involved “a different kind of magic ... as television has transformed itself within our media reality” (Joyrich 2009: online). The kind of magic that may require:

imaginative modes of thinking about television and the real within our mediaverse - creative ways of talking about these appearing/disappearing acts that can account for both their prosaic and perplexing aspects, their ordinary and extraordinary elements. (Joyrich 2009: online)

Joyrich refers to discussions about Magic Realism in television as being peculiarly absent in Western cultures whilst still enjoying popularity as a literary genre within those same cultures. In Western cultures the terms magic and real combined together more commonly imply a polarity of conceptions that define magic and real in an oppositional way. Alternatively when interpreting narrative through the lens of Magic Realism, the supernatural and ordinary everyday-life come together to interrogate these perceived cultural notions of magic and real. Magic Realism as a genre has a way of framing narrative that holds a key to a particularly Australian conceptual framework, one that may enable a greater understanding of an Indigenous Australian sense of reality, which, while I may have difficulty in knowing in a cultural sense, I have a deep respect for. I believe that the lack of understanding of this Indigenous sense of the real by non-Indigenous Australians contributes to a sense of the uncanny central to many Australian narratives. This turning away from an Indigenous reality from the beginning of the colonial invasion of the country has had a huge effect on the way being

Australian has been framed. That an Aboriginal Australian reality might be seen as fantasy to an Australian framed by a European sensibility is important here. Similarly television as a medium for story-telling also holds a particular mix of fantasy and reality both within the medium of television, which can be seen as both magical and hyper-real, as well as television's ability to translate and moderate the ordinary and the magical in narrative itself. Here the empathy associated with visual representation promotes a suspension of disbelief conducive to understanding both the magic and the virtual as belonging to the realm of the real. It was the potential in *The Glitch* to explore Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing in new and exciting ways that drew me to this series. While it is a contested framework in terms of reading Indigenous work, the play in Magic Realism between what Joyrich describes as a mix of the mysterious and the mundane is exactly the play between reality and fantasy that I believe moves the narratives in *The Glitch* along. The 'how dunnit' that applies to many murder mysteries applies in this series to the mix of reality and fantasy that any narrative predicated on the return of the dead to the town where they died requires. But in answering this question of how, or even why, these characters in the fictional town of Yoorana have returned from the dead, one is immediately caught between a realistic expectation of narrative closure and a parallel and fantastical paradigm that these living breathing humans (not ghoulish dehumanized zombie beasts) are at once affected by and will affect other characters in a realistic way. It is both the strength and the weakness of the narrative arcs in the series that they can be read through both a realist lens, with its need for closure, as well as a more indeterminately Gothic sense of narrative resolution.

Realism as a narrative concept involves a naming and recognition of objects, places, characters and ethereal emotions as if there is an externalized universal truth based on a consensus of recognition known by all. In philosophical terms this consensus of recognition gives realism a discursive quality while still insisting on an all-encompassing notion that objects in the external world exist with a recognizable and independent internal logic of their own. As an attempt to deal with the world of the everyday, artists often work conceptually within realist paradigms by attempting to capture so-called universal concepts and apply this to their knowledge of objects in the world. Most realist writers would also agree that the causal processes involved in setting up a realist narrative also mediates, or interprets, directly perceived appearances in the text. The paradox of realism as an art form then becomes the way that realist art is also an illusion; that realism can only ever achieve an *affect* of reality. For, like literature, television as an artistic medium utilises the formalist idea of defamiliarisation, or making the familiar strange, but reality is also made strange by the medium itself. This same paradoxical paradigm is at the centre of Joyrich's exploration of the magic in television and at the heart of my narrative explorations of *The Glitch* series.

Like classic literary realism with an omniscient narrator, home grown Australian reality television shows have their own particular sense of the real that relies on the eye-witness account where the audience becomes witness to events that appear to just happen, as if unmediated by the framing of a camera or a person behind that camera. Rather than being constructed narratives with editors and producers these shows give the illusion that the audience is spying or eavesdropping on real life in a voyeuristic way. Classic long-running Australian soap operas like *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* employ similar realist techniques, relying on a predetermined sense of the familiar in

the literal sense of family within an urban setting for an urban family viewer. In recent times a spate of series that relies on fantasy or a sense of the supernatural have been shown in Australia. While shows like these are not new and television has a long history of developing the fantastic, these mostly apocalyptic shows like *The Walking Dead*, *Game of Thrones* and *Dr Who* are made overseas, while Australian television drama has, until relatively recently, preferred to use realist frameworks for their drama. In recent years this has begun to change and shows like *The Glitch* give evidence to a different direction being taken by Australian production houses. However, even the most realist fictional narratives involve a degree of fantasy and the way we set up expectations within these narratives involves particular internal logics that operate culturally to extend our perceptions of the world around us. I am interested in the ways these internal logics operate in narrative, both consciously and unconsciously, to reinforce notions of reality and fantasy.

## **Magic Realism and the Gothic**

For Wendy Faris writing in her essay “Scheherazade’s Children,” Magic Realism has “a sense of magic that grows imperceptibly from the real” (1995: 174) and so we have a genre that plays between the natural and the supernatural, the explicable and the inexplicable, where the two contradictory terms magic and reality are freed from a linguistic and conceptual binary opposition to form a literature that is truly marvellous and of extreme ontological importance to a contemporary sense of every-day reality. The discursive strategies of this particular genre require us to engage actively in the text and piece its disparate parts together, sharing the confusion of the characters in the text as they attempt to find order in their chaotic existence.

While the magic realist novel’s subversive capacities lie for many critics in the pressures brought to bear in a hegemonic, colonial reality on one hand, and on realism as a naturalised mode of representing it on the other, this hegemonic reality is once more reiterated in the very assurance with which the real and the fantastic are determined by white critics as being across two cultural locations. What would be more productive would be to return to the idea of the ‘magical’ and ‘reality’ as subjective experiences that are available in any cultural location. (Ravenscroft 2012: 67)

In Magic Realism the supernatural and ordinary, everyday-life come together in a way that gently interrogates perceived notions of both. The conventions of this type of writing draw upon a cultural system that is no less real than any of the other realist representations, but the subversive nature of the writing is dependent on the reader’s ability to suspend their disbelief in a much more rigorous way. In Magical Realism the reader or viewer is asked to place the extraordinary in the same realm of the possible as the ordinary everyday event. Magic is real, and the real is magic and so the lines we draw to maintain perceptions of reality are put to the test. This has strong associations with Bakhtin’s theories of the carnivalesque and the dialogical nature of all texts. Within Australia however discourses of realism have a strong association with postcolonial interrogations where questions can be raised about the cultural locatedness of a sense of reality, particularly in regards to the construction of notions of authentic Australianness. Questions of whose reality can be applied here go straight to the heart

of discussions about authorship, where what is seen as real and what is framed as fantastic depends on who is telling the story and who is receiving it. On the other hand, the ontological disruption in Magic Realism serves to create political and cultural uncertainties where the term magic creates a question mark around a rationality that relies on the very separation that the terms magic and real have previously engaged. Magic realist artists accept the supernatural as part of their world, and this is integral to the way that Magic Realism might be applicable to both an Australian Indigenous reality whilst also being accepted by a wider Australian audience.

In his analysis of the films *Walkabout* and *Long Weekend* Jonathan Rayner discusses the ways that the natural environment in Australian films offers both “a miraculous salvation” and “a focus for revulsion” where “the purity of the continent’s emptiness is marked and its invasion lamented” in *Walkabout*, while in *The Long Weekend*, “[t]he supposedly blank, innocuous or receiving land contains a monstrous and hostile fertility” (2011: 93). Rebecca Johinke writes that, “[a]ny postcolonial reading of Australian texts starts with the acknowledgement that white ‘settlers’ are by definition dislocated and disorientated (unsettled) in a hostile foreign environment and this renders Australia both terrible and sublime: an uncanny space” (2010: 111).

With its Gothic overtones or what Katrina Althans (2010) refers to as an interrogation of boundaries, the subversive capacity of Magic Realism to question the veracity of our perceptions by not privileging reality over magic is one of the important aspects of the series *The Glitch*. Our ability to suspend our disbelief that a person can actually return from the dead — not as a mindless zombie devouring all human beings it encounters and turning them into zombies too, but as fully formed versions of themselves as they were in the time just before their death — creates expectations of real human reactions to their situation.

It seems that there are several genres at play in the variety of narratives that the series brings to life via the resurrection of a range of characters who each have a history with the township of Yoorana. Co-writer Tony Ayres is quoted as saying that *The Glitch* is “not a vampire or a Zombie movie.” He goes on to describe the series as “using genre to explore primal emotions” and describes it as supernatural drama (in Knox 2014: online). The predominantly recognised genre in the series comes from the idea that *The Glitch* is actually a rewrite of the American series, *The Returned*, which was in itself a rewrite of the French series, *Les Revenants*. Roger Corser — who plays the enigmatic convict who has been resurrected from an unmarked grave and hence carries the name John Doe — disputes this idea of *The Glitch* being a conscious rewrite saying that the show had been pitched well before *The Returned* had been broadcast, adding that he felt that the returned-from-the-dead narrative had become a television genre in itself. Of course this is born out by the popularity of the American horror drama *The Walking Dead* with six series being produced between 2010 and 2015. This series, based on a popular comic series by Robert Kirkman, is set in a post-apocalyptic planet earth where people have been affected by an unknown disease that turns them into zombies. The main plot line involves survivors of this world, ordinary people struggling to stay alive against almost insurmountable odds and the way they interact with each other. In the early twenty-first century it is easy to see the resonances and the attendant anxieties that this dystopian narrative might produce for viewers embroiled in post 9/11 terror, post Ebola fear of a deadly disease literally going viral, as well as the threat of global environmental disasters where the world has gone too far to turn back. The popularity of this series

points to a certain cultural sensibility that operates on a global level in the contemporary world, one that might point to a “postmodern incredulity,” that, “can be usefully fleshed out from postcolonial positions” (Renes 2010: 8) while the popularity of these narratives point to cultural anxieties that have a long history of analysis within a European context. As Maarten Renes writes:

Australia, while seemingly on a far physical and spiritual remove from recent European turmoil, has long raised disturbing questions on national identity and a sense of home. As a settler nation of European stock, Australia casts its postcolonial definition of Self and Foreigner/Other in ways which puts Western essentialist philosophies to the test and sounds an uncanny warning to current European positioning in multicultural matters. (Renes 2010: 14-15)

There is no doubt that a recognizable sense of the Gothic has prevailed in Australian literature and film for a long time now. Oppositional to a European sense of the Gothic, Australia’s sense of it is deeply rooted in the colonial project that lies deep at the heart of Australia’s becoming and is therefore intrinsic to an Australian sense of identity.

Long before the fact of Australia was ever conformed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque place, a land peopled by monsters. The idea of its existence was disputed, was even heretical for a time, and with the advent of the transportation of convicts its darkness seemed confirmed. The Antipodes was a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain. It was, for all intents and purposes, Gothic *par excellence*, (*author’s emphasis*) the dungeon of the world. (Turcotte 1998: 10)

For Gerry Turcotte Australian Gothic is intensely connected to the colonial experience. He writes of the way that a sense of the uncanny, or what Freud identified as the movement from heimlich to unheimlich, is directly connected to the way nature in Australia posed difficult challenges for European immigrants. Gothic with its emphasis on “horror, uncertainty and desperation of human experience” with “characters trapped in a hostile environment, or pursued by unspecified or unidentifiable danger” are for Turcotte “fears and themes which are endemic in the colonial experience” (1998: 10). Turcotte credits the Gothic genre as helping to “establish a local Australian voice” (1998: 19) while at the same time silencing Aboriginal writers who found the genre a disabling one due to the way they themselves had been cast as “monstrous figures haunting the Australian landscape ... because they represented a physical threat to the white settlers” (1998: 20). Also, because the presence of Indigenous Australians drew attention to the lie of terra nullius or the notion that Australia was owned by no one, this “Aboriginal presence in itself unsettled ... the course of the Empire” (Turcotte 1998: 20). Katrina Althans (2010) on the other hand calls Australian Gothic, colonial Gothic in that this epitomizes the Antipodean nature of the European lens which then places Australia far away from the imperial centre, while at the same time enabling a peculiarly Australian sense of isolation that generates this Gothic fear of the unknown.

Since Turcotte’s insightful writing of 1998, Australian art forms have come a long way and Indigenous Australian artists’ multifarious representations of what Australia means

to them has become increasingly visible across multiple platforms such as writing, painting, film and song. In her reading of Indigenous Australian writer Alexis Wright's extraordinary novel *Carpentaria* Alison Ravenscroft discusses the problematic way in which the term Magic Realism has become a "recuperation of the binary that associates Indigeneity with magic, irrationality, delusion and dream, and whiteness with realism, reality and rationality, with consciousness, a wakeful state" (Ravenscroft 2012: 13). Ravenscroft writes that when the genre of Magic Realism is read through an imperial anthropological lens, magic and dream are associated with the colonized other (in Australia that being Indigenous Australians) in a way that refuses to allow for markers of difference that interrogate "[w]hat is magic and what is 'reality' where the western world reads the other's reality as magic" (2012: 63). For Ravenscroft Magic Realism's subversive capacities lie in its ability to bring pressure "to bear on hegemonic, colonial reality on the one hand and on realism as a naturalized mode of representing it on the other" (2012: 67). Turcotte's notion of Australian Gothic articulates the colonial experience for European and British immigrants and he points out that, at the same time, it is a disabling genre for Indigenous people who are attempting to articulate a reality that is already predicated on a different sense of what is real and what is magical. Similarly, Ravenscroft proposes different ways of reading texts that are more subjective where "questions might better be posed (as): whose magic and whose reality" (2012: 65).

The potential the various narratives in *The Glitch* hold to question both reality and magic in numerous ways is a fascinating one. It is a potential that might take up Toni Morrison's claim — in answer to critics' comments on her novel *Songs of Solomon* — that black people really can fly (Morrison in Ravenscroft 2010: 63-67). For Morrison and Ravenscroft they can. The potential of Magic Realism to depict this kind of cultural reality is one that I believe makes it an important genre for the medium of television with its roots in notions of the real. It is also important to recognise there are different ways of seeing the world; to understand that your fantasy might be my reality and visa versa, or an Aboriginal Australian reality might be fantasy to an urban dwelling Australian framed by a European sensibility. When applied to the realm of television this recognition does, as Joyrich also proposes, "speak to the very status of reality itself today – or more accurately, to realities (author's emphasis) as it is precisely the coexistence of different levels of realness that marks our television universes" (2015: online). Television, with its capacity for magic inherent in its very evolution, is a perfect medium for explorations of reality and fantasy and in Australia the sense of uncanny invoked by the Gothic genre is an important framing device in the development of narrative on screen as well as in literature.

If the psychological thriller, *Wake in Fright* (1971) is a precursor to the way outback Australia and the red dust of small country towns gave birth to a new wave of Gothic in Australian film, then making the setting for *The Glitch*, the fictional town Yoorana, is an ideal place to pursue this theme. As Alex Grieg writes in her review of the series, "*Glitch* may have begun its own subgenre — a kind of Australian Gothic that works to great effect in the wide streets and abandoned pubs of our rural towns" (2015: online). For some the backdrop of the quintessential Australian town has spurred a new subgenre of Australian Gothic called Outback Gothic whose evolution may be attributed to the country/city divide and the way we cling to the edges of this vast continent, turning our backs on the inland and looking out sea. In this kind of urban/country divide

the view from the city provides the central trope where the Australian country town is rendered uncanny and the alienation of redneck country life and its discomforts loom high. Films like *Walk About* (1971), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *Shame* (1988) and *Wolf Creek* (2005), continue themes generated by cultural constructions of the Australian bush using alienation, isolation and fear as staple plot points for the evolution of the characters, and to express a peculiarly Australian anxiety about time and place.

For Turcotte the Gothic “suggests ways of interrogating the symbolic order, exposing the vulnerability of its systems of meaning, underlining the tenuousness of its power base and questioning the substratum upon which its laws, values and logic are predicated” (1995: 7). For Renes a psychoanalytical reading of the Gothic can be framed as a return of the repressed where “[m]ystic-spiritual views understand the Gothic as ‘a sign of the resurrection of the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural forces’”(Kilgour cited in Renes, 2010: 12). For Chudy, Cook and Costello the emergence of Gothic in Australian literature can be twofold: “One is subjective and affects a lament through the articulation of a gothic (*sic*) voice and the other is specific to an uncanny relationship to place” (2010:1). What they are proposing is a specific type of Gothic text called Gothic noir where there is “a pervasive presence of shadows which are both physical and psychological” and a “powerful sense of predetermination, a sense that the past is more real than the present or the future” (Chudy, Cook and Costello 2010: 4). In Gothic according to Chudy, Cook and Costello, the dark and the sinister past often threatens to destroy the present but there is also a chance of redemption “once the past secrets are unravelled, revealed and exorcised” but in Gothic noir “[t]here is no escape from the past which all but overwhelms the present and any hope for the future” (2010: 5). This is a core tension at the heart of *The Glitch* series, one that is articulated very early on in the scene where a young Indigenous boy, Beau Cooper, is riding by a graveyard on his bike and notices something strange. Instead of riding away in fright he takes out his mobile phone and films as a number of strange, muddled bodies struggle to break free of the graves. It is an interesting gesture on behalf of the writers as it privileges the gaze of this young Indigenous man as he witnesses the return of the undead to Yoorana. This sets Beau up as guardian of the country and eye-witness to the events, and encourages an expectation that this series is going to uncover a different kind of reality, one that Renes describes as encompassing the way “[s]ilence, shame and fear all form part of a Gothic return of the Aboriginal sacred which inscribes ‘truth’ in the Indigenous transmission and custodianship of sensitive knowledge” (2007: 17).

Each person struggling to break free of their grave in *The Glitch* has a story, and each of the stories covers a different aspect of post-invasion history in the town. Thus past and present intermingle as each character attempts to come to terms with the reasons why they have returned from the dead. Alongside each of these stories the present plays itself out via characters such as Sergeant James Hayes, whose deceased wife Kate is one of the undead who has just hauled herself out of her grave, and who is discovered by her husband when he is called to the cemetery to investigate the strange things happening there. In the time between Kate’s death and the present Sergeant Hayes has remarried Kate’s best friend Sarah, setting up one of the more dramatic narrative arcs around the menage-a-trois between these three characters. Young Beau ends up assisting Paddy, an almost clichéd Irish drunk, who turns out to have been one of the first mayors of

Yoorana in an intriguing narrative that encompasses and confronts the fact that Beau's and Paddy's stories are bound together in the colonial history of Australia. There is a sense that all the characters in *The Glitch* have unfinished business to resolve and this need for reckoning is what drives the various narratives forward. Some of the unfinished business resolves more easily than others; like devout Catholic Maria who, having died in a car accident in the 1950s with her daughter, manages to go back and explain things to her now old and demented husband. Young Kirstie, on the other hand, has no idea how she has died and so her narrative trajectory is one of wondering why and how, with poignant and disastrous consequences.

Very early in the series we learn that each of 'the returned' characters can only stay alive within the parameters of the town, and a bridge out of town provides the limits of their existence. Sergeant Hayes and the local doctor Elisha McKellar, who have become protectors of the undead characters, discover this when the sergeant tries driving one of the characters over the bridge and he disintegrates in front of his eyes. Thus, in true Gothic style, and one that also aligns closely with Indigenous cultural beliefs, nature becomes a character in the story in that the environment itself has the power to both nurture and destroy the characters. Into this intriguing mix of anxiety and alienation the sense of the conspiracy of big business and a concomitant medical research experiment adds to the fear elements of the narrative when it becomes clear that there is some connection between the return of these undead and a local medical research company that Dr McKellar is associated with.

All the various narrative arcs in the series have the potential to provide compelling television viewing but unfortunately they do not deliver in terms of narrative resolution; at least not for this viewer. But in calling for narrative closure am I forgetting the way both Gothic and magic realist texts deliberately attempt to overturn as well as interrogate the symbolic order? To do what Turcotte describes as Gothic's capacity "to question accepted positions in society," by using "recurring motifs to destabilize a reader's secure position" (1995: 17). When I began writing this essay *The Glitch* had just begun its first airing, and I was excited to be writing about an Australian television series that dared venture into a world that not only depicted different realities but through that expression of those different realities was able to contribute significantly to a conversation about Australian identity, and to point to some of the inequities of our history. The series does point to inequities in our history and in its making it has definitely contributed to a conversation about what it is to be Australian but ultimately the lack of narrative resolution was disappointing.

Bill Phillips and Marlene Mendoza in their essay "The Dead Walk" discuss the way that monsters such as zombies provide a critique of human existence. For Phillips and Mendoza the imagined monster arrives at the same time as humans managed to dominate the animal kingdom and that of nature. It provides a moral dimension where the monster is othered, and symbolizes "our greatest fears for those things that seem most human but are not — such as dead bodies" (2014: 107). However they make a distinction between monsters such as the vampire or the Medieval (*sic*) incubi and succubi and the zombie. "Nothing ... is more monstrous than a zombie since it has the form of a living being, yet has no identity; is both physically active, yet intellectually and spiritually void" (2014: 108). This is a stark contrast to the characters in *The Glitch* who, while definitely being walking dead, display such human traits that they create a

narrative trope of human identification right from the beginning. It is in the gap between being human and being nonhuman that the distinction between fantasy, magic and reality begins to conflate. As Phillips and Mendoza write:

Zombies are subliminal reminders – of our atavistic survival instinct, of our fear of the other, our fear that we might be the other, of the death of the planet, of our helplessness and unwillingness to act meaningfully, and of death itself. (2004: 115)

While my dislike of zombie narratives may simply come down to my horror of death, I believe that when the un-dead characters in *The Glitch* become more human than zombies is when, in terms of writing strategies, the series moves out of Magic Realism and the sense of the uncanny so prevalent in Australian Gothic to become simply human drama albeit with a supernatural edge. To return to Joyrich's argument about the medium of television:

While we exist within and across these realities, we don't yet have a particularly effective language with which to discuss this, as attempts to analyze (*sic*) how the factual and the fantastical inform and intervene in one another tend to reiterate the very (il)logic of inadequate binaries - a reiteration that, as Justin Lewis has noted, defines 'the epistemological contradictions already involved in watching television.' (Joyrich 2009: online)

And yet even the most basic questions that engender an empathetic response to a realist narrative in a television-viewing audience are never fulfilled in the first series of *The Glitch*. Hardly any of the characters resolve their unfinished business, nor do we find out why they cannot cross the bridge and leave town. The sinister presence of a medical research company is given greater weight when in the last moments of the last episode we find out that the good Dr McKellar is herself one of the walking dead, but this is never given more than a shadowy presence in the six episodes and so does not gain any narrative agency.

While this narrative non-closure may give the producers of *The Glitch* an excellent segue into the next series where perhaps some of these questions may be answered, it was ultimately unsatisfying. The questions the narrative arcs in the series raised and the potential the series had to examine a particularly Australian relationship to fantasy and reality were never realised. But, as Turcotte writes, "the Gothic rarely moves towards conclusions, or if it does, it signals the failure of closure either overtly or covertly" (1995: 19). While I am aware of this, what I was looking for in the series was not the kind of realist narrative closure that distracts from the subversive qualities of a Gothic interrogation but something that leans more towards Magic Realism. There is a template for this in another Australian television series.

*The Gods of Wheat Street* is a ten-part ABC series written by Indigenous writer Jon Bell, who is described as 'creator, writer and co-producer' of the series and quoted describing it as "not your typical Indigenous drama ... there's some social realism stuff in there, but there's magic realism, (*sic*) there's a whole different vibe" (Bell in Barber 2015: online). The series is set in a fictional place based on the town of Casino in northern New South Wales where Bell's own family resides. The trials and tribulations of the Freeburn family are central to the overall narrative trajectory in the series with

Odin Freeburn under enormous pressure as he desperately tries to keep his family together against enormous odds. There are three generations of the family in the show but the oldest family member is a spirit; Odin's mother died in a car accident when Odin was just a small boy and she comes back in human form to advise and direct him, but only Odin can see her. On a 2012, Byron Bay Writers Festival Panel, Jon Bell describes the spirit of the mother as coming from another place and the family as "having a big destiny that only the mother is privy to" (online). On the same panel, co-producer of the series Lois Randall describes pitching the series to the ABC as "realism meets Magic Realism." While *The Gods of Wheat Street* is not a million miles away from a quintessentially Australian experience and is set in a country town, there is no sense of Gothic alienation, not even a moment of strangeness, in the way the spirit of Odin's mother is introduced. Bell describes the series as a "rough and tumble *Neighbours* with a ghost." In a gesture towards debunking the mythological readings of Indigenous cultural stories he says (in another interview), "Australian Aboriginal stories and spirituality are not Aesop's fables, ... There's not always a clear moral in the story. They can be a little inaccessible for Western audiences. Sometimes with indigenous (*sic*) cultures, the story is the thing that has value, not the moral framework" (quoted in Barber 2014: online). In a move away from the unfamiliar sense of the uncanny central to an Australian, colonial Gothic sensibility and a return to the familiarity of family ties both the real and magical are blended in *The Gods of Wheat Street*. The series, while having a particularly Indigenous Australian sense of identity, is also recognisably Australian to a broad cross-section of viewers. In an Australian Indigenous way of seeing what is uncanny to a non-Indigenous Australian becomes perfectly normal while the dichotomy between reality and fantasy and the sense of the uncanny so predominant in Australian Gothic begins to disappear.

*The Glitch*, on the other hand remains a particularly Gothic tale. The questions that the series raises, even in relation to the title *The Glitch*, point to a sense of alienation, asking: what is the fault in the system, what or who has caused it and why? Is it the medical company or the ill fit of the settler into Indigenous country? While the series promises to do what Turcotte describes as interrogate "historical and literary textualisations of racial, sexual or gendered 'otherness' ... to alert us to the sinister side of Australian history" the story could also serve to "remind us that that the air is thick with unacknowledged revenants, and that the process of healing in regards to the fallout from the colonial enterprise that gave birth to Australia can only begin when we heed Derrida's call to sit, at last, and 'talk with ghosts'" (2009: 361-362). But the series never really talks to the ghosts as ghosts nor do the ghosts talk to each other very much, at least not about their situation or why they might have come back from the dead.

What I have been looking for in the series has been a different way of seeing things, one that might make inroads into a deeper engagement with Australian colonial history and its associated discontents. There is a strong connection between postcolonial representations and Magic Realism in the way that they both draw attention to the blindness of the imperial centre to its own machinations. Australia as a nation is both colonized and colonizer and is often blind to its treatment of its own Indigenous people while still looking towards a British imperial centre for a sense of identity. If the writers of *The Glitch* began with an idea of trying to address changes in Australia's colonial status and corresponding identity then perhaps they have become caught up in the difficulties of representing that very change. Magic Realism, with its potential for revisioning history via changes in perception, aligns with the type of narration that

Bakhtin (1981) refers to as a dialogical discourse; one that writes away from the imperial centre and towards non-hierarchical, heteroglossic ways of seeing. These narrative framings open up possibilities for categories of magic and real in the languages of storytelling that break out of the narrowness of a Western binary opposition and into more pluralistic and inclusive representations. This, in turn, creates a situation that Linda Hutcheon describes as being 'ex-centric' where "[t]he centre no longer completely holds" and, "[t]he concept of alienated otherness (based on binary opposition that conceals hierarchies) gives way ... to that of differences" (Hutcheon, 1988: 12).

I will be watching the next series, if there is another one, as I believe there is potential inherent in the series for a representation that allows for the suspension of disbelief involving both the magical and the real, not in opposition but in non-hierarchical combination. It is possible too that *The Glitch* might also be able to employ a new genre, one that is more inclusive of an Aboriginal reality while also combining an uncanny realism that might reflect more accurately the settler experience and the way it effects them. Perhaps then we might find that Paddy's Aboriginal lover, the ancestor of the young Beau Cooper, can come back from the dead to provide some Indigenous insights and ways of seeing. Then we might be able to arrive at a point where Australian identity moves away from Gothic alienation and into an identity that is crucial to a shift in power relationships, one that allows for the colonial experience to be told within an Indigenous language framework. Something that Indigenous Australian author Kim Scott describes as:

The potential of stories to shift relationships to demonstrate something like sovereignty. The tangible reality of sovereignty and language and stories that connect to landscape, that deep, deep Indigenous narrative that feels like something special ... that would have, regional Indigenous roots anchoring a shimmering nation state to its continent. (2012: online)

In 2015 questions of Indigenous sovereignty are high on the Australian political agenda. For many non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians recognition of Aboriginal people as the original peoples of Australia in our constitution is a welcome change in the political landscape. However many Indigenous Australians insist that they have never conceded their original sovereignty and so have no need of recognition within a white Australian, Anglo-European system of law. Again it is a question of whose reality designates what is Aboriginal Australian sovereignty. When I think of those muddled bodies rising from their metaphorical graves in *The Glitch* I see an image that points to a kind of rebirth, a chance at remaking history. It is also a chance to acknowledge Indigenous Australian sovereignty and in so doing, discursively as well as in a material sense, draw a comprehensive map of an Australian nation state that truly acknowledges its Indigenous heritage.

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