

Swinburne University of Technology

Dominique Hecq

Crypts of making

Biographical note:

Dominique Hecq is Associate Professor at Swinburne University of Technology. She has a PhD in literature and a background in French and Germanic languages, with qualifications in literary translation and psychoanalysis. She has published in the areas of literary studies, translation, creative writing, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy. She is the author of thirteen books of fiction and poetry, the latest being *Stretchmarks of Sun* (Re.press). Her creative writing has earned her many awards and publication in *Best Australian Poetry* over the years. *Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing* is her most recent scholarly book (Multilingual Matters). Dominique edits the online journal of writing and creative research *Bukker Tillibul* (<http://bukkertillibul.net>), which especially welcomes submissions by postgraduates and early career researchers.

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The dead leave us starving with mouths full of love (Ann Michaels 1997:29).

Sunday. Still and grey. Not a breath of wind. Love-in-the-mist is struggling through. Snow drops are in bloom. The sky is an ashen blue in between blankets of grey clouds. A bird I know nothing of cries out again as it did at night, keeping me awake. An uncanny, disturbing cry as if the bird itself were being choked again and again.

Frost. I had dreamed of putting in seeds again today. Poppies. Raking the soil to make it fine and even. Scattering the seeds over, raking, watering, marking the spot with a stick. Watering again. Trying a different method since I have trouble growing seeds where they are to grow. It's a shame. I think I bury them too deeply.

Silence. The rustle of my own breathing.

I am a coffin cold as stone.

In the shower the water whistles and makes a loud crackling sound. I burst into tears. My body heaves and shakes. Heaves and shakes. Heaves and shakes the inconsolable sorrow that inhabits me and seems to grow and grow from nowhere and pushes into my heart, bones, flesh.

Against the heavy sky lives a woman who repeats *mes mots* / my words with her sob sobbing and at times like these I don't know why I hold her close. Like shadows confined in broad daylight.

And then I remember. It is thirteen years since we buried the newly born, the one whose name can no longer be spoken, the one whose name in my fictions begins with U.

Human beings are like rivers; the water is one and the same in all of them – Beverley Farmer

Black birds gather like a frown. A studied frown this time around. The clouds thicken into ridges, pressing the ashen blue into the grey. Pressing the passing of time. Not at all the way but the body remembers.

U. The letter. The name of the baby in utero when we didn't know. Didn't know. Didn't know.

U. So dependent and yet so folded-in to itself – so separate – of itself. A letter made for each newly born, so folded-in to itself—so separate. Despite the transformations of pronouns.

And all too soon and too suddenly: a doll's face. Wax face. Small and smooth and shiny. White dappled with purple that is darkened on one side of the nose by a wash of blood.

Black moss
Stone flesh
Cradle grave
Nothing reflects back

Soon the brothers will barge in and break the unbroken tie that curves inside.

I compose myself

put U on the long finger

No time for waffles. I could make a cake, but that would be suspicious. I decide on bread and butter pudding. Some sunshine in all this blackness.

Putting on my clothes, a feeling of sadness washes over me like white sunlight that slides down a wall as though love in my heart has grown cold.

I scuttle down the stairs past the soft toys cupboard, getting lost in my thoughts.

What I'll need is to preheat the oven (190 C) and stick to the recipe, which I rarely do.

A handful of sultanas
2 large slices of white bread – crusts that I remove, and butter
a pinch of nutmeg
3 eggs beaten with energy
five spoons of caster sugar
a lime of which I grate ½ teaspoon, taking care of fingernails
250 ml cream – and mix

I butter an oven-proof dish and sprinkle half the sultanas over the bottom; layer the bread butter-side up in the dish; whisk the eggs, sugar, lime and cream together; sprinkle the remaining sultanas with a cloud of nutmeg on top and put it in the oven. It will have to bake for 45 minutes. Meanwhile I check there is Greek yoghurt to serve with. Yes!

Plates are laid on the table. Forks and spoons. A late camellia blossom in a saucer. Time will finish off the work.

A car door slams shut.

Hurried footsteps on the concrete stairs, and the door whooshes open.

Mum, we are off to watch the world cup this afternoon, says the first born with three approving brothers and their father in tow.

It is almost in astonishment that I realise life goes on, after all, and marvel at the first born's will to live and experience new things. I am in awe of this will to overcome the terror that must have been awakened in him by the certainty of his own death, thirteen years ago, a knowledge that he could possibly neither know nor comprehend, a knowledge of something that was and is outside time and outside the world as we know it.

Death. This absolute. The ineffable that eludes presence and yet makes the other, the loved one, even more present than things in actual life will ever do. With a presence so insistent that when we are not learning how to tame it we occupy ourselves trying to find a way of escaping its clutches in writing. It is this strange presence of death, liable to occur at any moment, that makes it the unwelcome guest at our table with its bread and pudding meant to celebrate life.

Death as that singular fear of finitude against a background of black light.

They eat. They eat with consideration. Or perhaps this is my own interpretation.

Mourning is a smudging

the stream so thin now

that it must be near – the source,

as far from the surface world – Philip Gross

Mourning is the experience of death in remembering, in being with the dead; it is a sublation of death and a strategy destined to fill the caesura made by grief, the discontinuity of temporality in which death means being hostage to a ghost. And beyond, in cloudless skies, that ghost and a trail of them reaches back. To say 'deceased' is a flight from the brutal reality of loss: death as a natural accident that happens everyday, perhaps essentially only to others. There is a distancing from death itself, and from the dimension of mourning that entails the resolution of the psychological conflict imbedded in the etymological proximity between 'deuil' and 'duel' in the Old French. Eros and Thanatos crossing swords, so to speak. The old battle ever newly restaged. Restaging a primal loss ...

I do it now. With this writing and so wonder whether this is solution or ritual. Or both. Whether it is normal or pathological. Whether there is a difference between mourning and melancholia as Freud thought in 1914 before his daughter died.

Mournfully tending toward what has been lost. Tending it. And for no clear purpose.

Troping into night and death to keep love alive.

Writing the thing itself, magma, lava, boue noire / black mud liquefying ...

Perhaps writing, especially poetry, is the art of loss. It is the blanks that are pressing. And what I hear through the interstices of words presses back to a kind of writing translated from the dark. It's like encrypting an enigma. For one moment I am in this interval between two modes of expression, and often, two languages, neither in one or the other, poised on the brink of some petrified mass of aesthetic conventions as well as tongues. It's an uncanny process. Exhilarating or terrifying, depending on how the echoes spread in the crypt, making silence or music.

Writing as perpetual fort/da. Reinscribing bits and pieces, *des restes*, remnants and revenants *dans des récits* that shift back and forth back and forth from one medium to another, mode to another, tongue to another, thing to another. *Rengaines*.

Going back to a (non)origin. The birth and death of meaning.

Une mise en abîme to write of desire, of water and fire.

Writing

undoing difference
inking difference

the difference within
the difference without

inkingthedifferencewithinthedifferencewithout

writing from it
away from it

The mark of infidel fidelity

FIDELITY, from the French *fidélité* or the Latin *fidelitas*; see FEALTY, which means the obligation of fidelity. XIV ME *feau(l)te, fealte* (mod. *féauté*): L. *fidelitas*, at, f. *fidelis* faithful, f. *fides* FAITH

... because *every soul is a rhythmic knot*, said Mallarmé

... because I hear FAULT in *feau(l)te* and because I am matter *mater, le corps lieu d'attache ultime de la parole et de ses effets matériels et aussi le chantoir—source productive multiple des conditions du sens et du non-sens* and as such know I can give life and death

a knot is a stone is a screen is a shroud unravelling

D.H.

un coup de dé / a dice throw

une ex-halaison / a last breath

une hache / an axe & the sharp cut

the *heitch été agapé* and the gap in love

a knot is a stone is a screen is a shroud unravelling

life and death in-bedded in me. Ambivalently nurturing and violent

life and death *déchaînées* / unleaching & unlinked

There is a Persian myth of the creation of the world. In that myth a woman creates the world, and she does so through the power of her own sex, which, of course cannot be duplicated by men. It is 'natural'; it is awesome. And she gives birth to a great number of sons. The sons, seriously puzzled, become frightened. What is this creative urge? This creative act? And why can't they duplicate it? Who can tell us, they ask, if she can give life, she can also take it away? And so, because of this enigmatic ability of woman, including all reversible possibilities, they kill her.

Loss is one with deliverance and the death of meaning.

From text to text in a movement of endless deliverance I cannot free myself of you, and that is fidelity.

Liebestod.

Research statement

Research background

The title of the poem echoes Philip Gross' book *Caves of Making* (2013). It suggests that crypts, unlike caves, are enclosed spaces where the work of death is everywhere present, echoing Derrida's puzzling suggestion that 'every work is a work of mourning' (Derrida 1974: 100, 140). The poem provides a writer's insider view into the relationship between writing and the (im)possibility of mourning from a *sexed* point of view – that of a mother who has lost a child. It stages a struggle between life and death inherent in the work of mourning.

Research contribution

By obliquely addressing the essentialism found in the work of French feminists Cixous and Irigaray, this text challenges the main argument put forth in Freud's famous essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1914) to question the distinction between introjection and incorporation of the love object in the economy of mourning and writing.

Research significance

This work gestures beyond both *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1975) and *écriture matière* (Eades 2015), highlighting as it does the symbolic dimension of the work of mourning. Further, it erases the distinction between mourning and melancholia.

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