

**Enigmatic Pearls: Authorship and Representation:
Competing Cultural Positions in *Pilbara Pearl*, *Nullarbor Pearl*
and *Shoalwater Pearl***

Written by Sarah Rossetti

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Additional Materials to Enigmatic Pearls

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Appendix A: *Pilbara Pearl* Script

Appendix B: *Nullarbor Pearl* Script

Appendix C: *Shoalwater Pearl* Script

Appendix D: *Pilbara Pearl* DVD

Declaration

This major creative work and thesis are submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of PhD in Media Studies at Murdoch University, Western Australia. I declare that it contains my own account of my research, and, as its main contents, work which has not previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Sarah Rossetti

Preface

This doctoral thesis is praxis driven, emerging out of an ethnographic, self reflexive perspective, coinciding with screenwriting praxis for fictional works, feeling its way through a matrix of interdisciplinary investigations to arrive at conclusions which are designed to inform and assist screenwriters, who may follow in my footsteps. The task has taken three years of full time research and scripting, proving that writing about what is psychologically unresolved garners the most intriguing results.

My thesis reveals how explorations into my psyche as a screenwriter motivated the articulation of the actions of my fictitious central character, Pearl, adhering me to Pearl's multiple narratives until some semblance of resolution had been arrived at in my life. I arrived at this resolution via writing the following film script/s: *Shoalwater Pearl*, which has emerged directly out of this research; *Pilbara Pearl* and *Nullarbor Pearl*, which also feature the same central character, leading me to entitle my doctoral thesis, *Enigmatic Pearls*. This title reflects the level of authorial intrigue I have with this fictional lead character, Pearl.

Through Pearl, I focus on issues of great significance to myself as a Caucasian, Australian, multicultural, female author, whose central character belatedly discovers her Aboriginality, leading me to closely examine how authorship, representation, identity and Aboriginality compete and coincide in my major creative work, *Shoalwater Pearl*, and in my other *Pearl* film scripts, as my thesis chapters reveal.

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Enigmatic Pearls: Identity and Representation: Competing Cultural Positions in *Pilbara Pearl*, *Nullarbor Pearl* and *Shoalwater Pearl*.

This thesis was supervised by Associate Professors, Jennifer de Reuck and Mick Broderick.

Abstract

This work is an inquiry into the creative pathways I have undertaken, as a screenplay author, when formulating a body of work, which interrogates issues of importance to me, as a Caucasian, Australian, multicultural, female author, writing within a fictional feature film script construct. It is an interdisciplinary investigation, punctuated by self consciousness. Mindful of my own subject position, I believe my negotiations through this, as reflected in the body of my past and present work, have created an original thesis which argues for the aesthetic, reconciliatory power of screenplays. In wishing to create a positive lead role for an Indigenous actress, I had to ultimately put aside reservations about my origins as a non-Indigenous screenwriter. As a screenplay author, I will demonstrate why I find it hard not to agree with Michel Foucault's supposition that: "it is not enough to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared" (Foucault 101).

The creative component of my thesis is a magic realist feature film script, entitled *Shoalwater Pearl*, written as a prequel to the two other enclosed film scripts largely written outside of this doctoral thesis, featuring the same lead character, Pearl. Pearl carries the weight of my self-consciousness, and through her, I reveal the creative pathways I simultaneously interrogate as I research theoretical issues of importance to me as a screenplay author.

Faris could not have more aptly put it, regarding the magic realist aim, which I have adapted to my representation of Pearl, as, “a disturbing element, a grain of sand in the oyster of [. . .] realism” (Faris 168).

The theoretical component of my thesis is interwoven with theories of Authorship and Representation including issues of Identity, Aboriginality, Multiculturalism and Gender to better document how my creative and theoretical pathways intertwine, followed by a short Conclusion, Bibliography and Filmography. The Chapter titles, ‘Authorship’ and ‘Representation’ are used advisedly, as it could be argued that they are controversial subjects. It will be revealed that none of these terms can be considered as stable or abiding. However, each chapter introduces its title as a methodological and normative term for a category or definition from which the chapter emerges.

As a result of my interdisciplinary approach, I have posited an original pathway for other screenplay authors, who, whilst remaining mindful of marketplace interests, may also enter into identity politics or study social movements in order to create screenplays representing contentious aspects of cultural change in contemporary Australia, whilst paying homage to their own unresolved issues or unique life narratives.

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Additional Included Materials to *Enigmatic Pearls* Thesis

Appendix A: *Pilbara Pearl* Film Script

Appendix B: *Nullarbor Pearl* Film Script

Appendix C: *Shoalwater Pearl* Film Script

Appendix D: *Pilbara Pearl* DVD

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professors Jennifer de Reuck and Mick Broderick, for their support and guidance throughout the research and writing of this doctoral work.

A very special thank-you goes to Karen Olkowski at the Murdoch University Graduate Centre for her ongoing scholarship support, patience and help in the form of facilitating encouraging guidance courses for candidates, in particular those provided by Cecily Scutt.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for all their help, support and patience during the writing of this doctorate. Family is a big word in my lexicon. After all, without both parents I would not be born, and without several father figures during the course of my life, my identity would not be what it is today, multifaceted and rich. To my mother, Julie, a special note of gratitude for your abiding love over the years. Daughters are never easy, least of all me. To my daughters, Chloe´ and Sophie, thanks for your interest and for letting me get on with it, in the hope that you will both soon surpass me. Nothing would give me greater joy. Special thanks must go to Sophie for being such a diligent proof reader. To my ex husband, Nick, thanks for financially supporting the early days, when Pearl was prompted into being; and to my current partner, Wyn, your love and understanding means more than I can say.

Introduction

I have dispensed with a conventional thesis introduction, diverting from a detailed theorisation of ethnography in favour of evolving my own ‘improvisational style’ of ethnological praxis, which conforms to this definition of ethnography, provided by Agar, in *Speaking of Ethnography*:

The social research style that emphasizes encountering alien worlds and making sense of them is called *ethnography*, or “folk description”. Ethnographers set out to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another. Such work requires intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, and improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher’s making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes (Agar 12).

Alien worlds, in this context, have been interpreted by me to mean the worlds I create as an author of screenplays, in which my personal involvement as author is intense, and within which the circumstances of my life, not all of my making, in addition to the many mistakes of my own making, can play out on screen in the guise of fiction, until I am satisfied that such personal issues are satisfactorily resolved for me through the writing process. Social action, in this context, should be understood as scripted action for the screen.

This approach adequately facilitates my processual portrayal of the developing self as subject as an important contribution to the academy. Furthermore, my lack of theoretical framework throughout, in the traditional sense, *is* my critical process, and therefore can be considered as justifiable critical praxis.

Ethnographer, Pink's definition of ethnography as a navigational tool also provides a useful viewfinder through which to consider this thesis:

Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge [. . .] that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced (Pink 22).

Before we journey into this ethnographical world in which the notion of absolute truth will be called into question by the self in her many guises, let us pause to briefly consider what it means to write, in ethnographer, Richardson's estimation:

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing"--a method of discovery

and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it (Richardson 928-948).

I support this estimation, and extend it by claiming that, for this author and researcher, a thesis which examines how much of the self infiltrates the enclosed fictional film scripts, whilst theorising about that journey, will, precisely because of the writing process which Richardson describes above, reveal more than initially intended at the commencement of the thesis writing journey. In my estimation, such revelations can most ably be supported, rather than silenced, within an ethnographic form. I must further agree with Richardson, who adds, “Form and content are inseparable” (Richardson 928-948).

I now present this doctoral thesis, articulated in two parts: a major creative work, and a self-reflexive examination of the creative work as it is positioned within my body of creative work/film scripts, all featuring the same lead character, Pearl. The creative work is presented as a dialogue between two fictional screenplays and their theoretical interpretations, resulting in a third new screenplay, *Shoalwater Pearl*, written as the major creative work for this doctorate, which has evolved directly out of these theoretical explorations.

The purpose of this approach is to offer an investigation into the nature of creativity in developing works for the screen, as well as a reading of some of the contemporary cultural questions being confronted in Australia today, such as

examining how representations of Aboriginality and multiculturalism inform notions of an Australian identity, which is always contentious. It also provides a potentially useful strategy which other screenplay authors can follow in the development of their own new screenplays.

Chapter one adopts a journey structure to describe my impetus for this approach whilst generating questions about Authorship, which this thesis attempts to answer. Simultaneously, it introduces the reader to the process and reasoning behind the creation of a new screenplay as a prequel to the two existing film scripts.

It is a chapter devoted to taking the reader on a sometimes autobiographical, sometimes theoretical journey through the writing of this doctoral thesis, to arrive at conclusions about what drives the writing process, revealed through praxis.

Chapter two again adopts a journey structure to describe the way I have chosen to approach all the other major elements which contributed to the screenplays. It situates my three film scripts as texts and demarcates how the discussion of their inter-relatedness is informative to the academic world at large. In detailing this approach, my struggles are described ethnographically, as I aim to create an original pathway, and in doing so, attempt to acknowledge the potency of, yet not be silenced by, the theoretical research I encounter. Because originality is a contentious concept, my methodology also questions notions of originality, both in a theoretical sense, and as a marketplace concern, for emerging screenplay authors.

The Conclusion reveals how this pathway for emerging screenplay authors contributed to academic endeavour in order to earn its PhD approval; the Bibliography documents the concise, yet highly focused, area of background research, which has informed the writing of this PhD, and the Filmography documents the three *Pearl* films I have written and discussed throughout.

Note: This thesis assumes the reader has already read the three appended *Pearl* film scripts and viewed the ten minute short film, *Pilbara Pearl*.

Chapter One: Authorship

Heroic Journeys, Narrative Therapy and Life Narrative

Nullarbor Pearl

At closing time she grabs a tea towel
and heads for the wheeze and gurgle
of the aquarium,
leans over it to wipe fingerprints.

The smell of ocean shocks her absent skin
like a reprisal.
She reaches in to touch the seaweed,
webs her fingers with it,
glances at the door,
takes a breath,
and
plunges
all of her face into the tank.

A sea-horse glides down her nose,
sweeps the dust from her smile.
The smallest inmate nibbles
her spinifex eyebrows.
A Truckie slaps the side glass.
She leaps
in a bubble-flurry of fins,
wipes her face with the tea towel
and runs behind the counter
giggling.

“This is the tale I pray the divine Muse will unfold for us.
Begin it, goddess, at whatever point you will”
(*The Odyssey of Homer* quoted in Vogler 3).

The Journey Begins

In *The Writer's Journey*, Vogler purports:

The healing power of words is their most magical aspect. Writers, like the shamans or medicine men and women of ancient cultures, have the potential to be healers. [. . .] Shamans have been called ‘the wounded healers’. Like writers, they are special people set apart from the rest by their dreams, visions, or unique experiences. [. . .] Many writers come to their craft only after they have been shattered by life in some way (Vogler 282).

What does Vogler mean by “shaman” above? In *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narrative*, Halifax defines the shaman in many ways, but the version I most agree with in the context of this thesis is this:

The shaman, a mystical, priestly and political figure [...] can be described not only as a specialist in the human soul but also as a generalist whose sacred and social functions can cover an extraordinarily wide range of activities.

Shamans are healers, seers, and visionaries who have mastered death (Halifax 2-3).

In this chapter, I investigate ways in which I have overcome unresolved psychological issues in my life by dramatising them into three film scripts, featuring the same central character, Pearl. Writing these film scripts did not begin with a therapeutic aim, however, in the process of writing and researching, it has become clear that a therapeutic resolution is indeed an outcome, and therefore must be discussed.

When I commenced my doctoral studies, I was a successful television writer, who wanted to write feature films, having made the transition out of poetry and prose into scriptwriting since completing my BA in English in 1998.

This thesis and the enclosed creative work, *Shoalwater Pearl* (Rossetti Shoalwater Pearl – Unproduced Feature Film Script) together demonstrate what I believe to be a universal truth: that writers seek to heal their unresolved psychological issues through storytelling, and that writing fictional narratives is a means of linking the personal and the universal in order to offer such narratives to a readership or audience as entertainment. Rather than choosing to instantly defend this possibly contentious proposition, I have chosen to qualify and clarify my position in an exploratory fashion, as chapter one unfolds.

Crystallizing a doctoral thesis largely focused on three film scripts I have written began by researching along distinct almost obvious axes in relation to these texts, such as authorship, identity, representation, and Aboriginality, yet, having researched many theories closely relating to these topics, and having used that research to inform, interrogate and deconstruct all three scripts, I realized that I still had to define my mysterious motivation for writing three *Pearl* films as I set out to prove the therapeutic benefit of writing them. In other words, I had to document the ways in which writing these films helped me to heal previously unresolved psychological issues in my life.

Years before I had this thesis in mind, I wrote the first ten minute film script, *Pilbara Pearl* (Rossetti Pilbara Pearl – Produced Short Film Script) which emerged directly out of my poem above, entitled *Nullarbor Pearl*, featuring a girl of no specific cultural origin, yet to be named Pearl, who missed the ocean so much, out in the desert roadhouse where she worked, that she submerged her head in a fish tank, only to be brought back to the harsh reality of the roadhouse by a cheeky truck driver, slapping the glass side of the aquarium.

Pilbara Pearl introduces a magic realist quality to the representation of the roadhouse girl, whom I made Indigenous, and named Pearl. I offer definitions of magic realism in the following chapter, which concerns itself with representation, as well as discussing notions of identity in greater detail. Thus, it suffices to say here that I have made Pearl Indigenous for various reasons, primarily because this helped create the binaries at work in *Pilbara Pearl*: two lead characters, one

Caucasian, one Indigenous; one a pragmatist, one an idealist; one who wants to leave, one who wants to stay; in a location which is half desert, half water, offering strong visual contrasts. I blithely anticipated no resistance to my writing about an Aboriginal girl because her gift was of my imagination not derivative of Aboriginal myth or any lived experience of Aboriginal culture. This turned out to be correct.

In 1998, with Australian society largely in the grip of reconciliatory sensibilities, this Pearl was viewed as a positive representation of Aboriginality. Saunders, then the Director of the Indigenous branch of the Australian Film Commission, described the script as “a gem”. The script was offered his approval, then went on to be funded by the Australian Film Commission, in addition to its initial production funding from ScreenWest. From Saunders’ 1997 facsimile: “This is a gem (no pun intended) of a story. [...] I enjoy the fact that Pearl’s Aboriginality is not an issue, yet the mere fact that she is black and Eddie (I assume) is white is a contrast that is understated in the most becoming way” (Saunders 1).

As I began thinking about this thesis by deconstructing just what I was representing as Pearl’s unique vision or gift to me, herself, her community and her audience, I had to cross examine my motivations for writing her as an Indigenous woman, as outlined in the following chapter which partially concerns itself with Aboriginality. At the time of writing *Pilbara Pearl*, I understood Pearl to be Aboriginal and as untroubled as I was by ideological debates regarding her identity. What I was more amalgamated to convey, visually, in the short space of that ten minute film, was the bizarre way Pearl could fully immerse herself in the roadhouse fish tank and swim

about in her underwater world, real or imagined, so that we, the audience, could witness her doing that. I furnished this Pearl with a name and a dramatic problem: how to relate to her doubting boyfriend, Eddie, inspired by the cheeky truck driver in the instigating poem, who now drives up in an old utility. Eddie would become a windmill maintenance man in *Nullarbor Pearl* (Rossetti Nullarbor Pearl – Unproduced Feature Film Script) the script to follow, but in *Pilbara Pearl*, he just had to present Pearl with a problem in that he did not believe in or share her unique vision of her world, so that his suspension of disbelief could become a gift of love to her, enabling him to turn his utility around and return to Pearl, ultimately joining in her unique vision with her.

From *Pilbara Pearl* emerged the feature film, *Nullarbor Pearl*, where my main focus was to understand Pearl's gift and the mysterious ways it informs her life, and the lives of all those who come in contact with it, especially her family. This gift, at first treated as a curse by the women in Pearl's bloodline, can only be seen by them, even if they deny it at the expense of their health, so Eddie can never see Pearl's watery visions now.

Unlike the romance at work in *Pilbara Pearl*, *Nullarbor Pearl* is largely concerned with the mystery of Pearl's identity, consequently only the women in Pearl's birth line can see 'cursed' visions within water now. The men in Pearl's bloodline are absent, therefore silent, and all the women except Pearl deny the gift's healing potential, because they believe it to be cursed by a tribal elder, who banished Pearl's great grandmother, also named Pearl, effectively sentencing her to death.

I did not need to research tribal elders to imagine this scenario. My funded screenwriting task, then, was to create a scintillating screenplay, not to academically defend the choices I made within it.

When nobody breaks the familial taboo to discuss her lineage with Pearl, the gift nevertheless surfaces into consciousness through the conductor of water. It thus became possible for me to define Pearl's gift as her unique ability to travel back in time, via the conductor of water, not only to piece together the truth of her identity, but to psychologically heal herself, her family, and non-family members residing in the Nullarbor location of her birth. The gift opens channels of healing in others when Pearl is able to relate to them, verbally or through her paintings, images she has seen of them in the water, images which reveal exactly what is psychologically blocking each of them from their full potential. These images arise when a possession of theirs is placed in the water with Pearl, who at first only learns how to do this by accident.

Shoalwater Pearl, the attached prequel feature written precisely for this doctoral thesis, was consequently written last, bringing with it a great deal of awareness of all the Pearls who had gone before, yet creating another unique stand alone Pearl, aged twelve. Since Pearl would only discover her Aboriginal identity halfway through *Nullarbor Pearl*, the construction of identity could not become a central concern of this film. Consequently, this shamanic healer, pubescent Pearl, has only a hazy awareness of her specialness, which is being severely discredited and ruptured by family trauma, despite her enormous efforts to heal the family.

The process of writing this Pearl felt like looking back through the veil of time at my pubescent self, only with writerly and scholarly awareness. How wise we are in retrospect, with more compassion for the human fallibility and frailty within all the characters of our life narratives, particularly ourselves. And how very long it takes to recognize our uniqueness.

Discovering Where I End and Pearl Begins

Whilst researching for this chapter on authorship, I read many discourses and theories written over decades, including those written by Barthes (1975), Foucault (1975) and Derrida (1992). Their theories ranged from authorship and apotheosis, which stemmed from cultural and spiritual ideas such as the linguistic departure from the belief in the ‘divine’ authority of the author; to the death of the author, which pushed aside notions of ‘author as God’, creator of the text, in favour of viewing text as a storehouse of signification which resists solo meanings (like some I have posited about my own texts here). The pressure of imposed meanings upon texts either by the author, critic or theorist led to the resurrection of the author, superseding the author as biological hero, in favour of a quasi position which allows the reader to engage in the pleasure of the text without allowing the author to become too acknowledged or prescriptive.

Whilst acknowledging a vast array of often conflicting discourses surrounding the notion of the author over time, I must firstly agree with Foucault’s supposition that: “it is not enough to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared”

(Foucault 101). Secondly, I must purposely step aside from discussing such discourses in individual depth, because I cannot do them justice in the limited space afforded by a chapter of a thesis whose primary function is to comment on the major creative work accomplished in the screenplays attached.

Instead, I have chosen to predominantly quote Burke's insights from *The Death and Return of the Author* because he neatly summarises criticism and subjectivity in the theories of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida in ways I largely agree with, allowing me to use his summation as a stepping stone from which to launch us on our journey. Burke's project, to argue convincingly that the concept of the author remains active beneath the theories of all three theorists, even when they were arguing for the death and disappearance of the author, is persuasive, particularly to this researcher/author. Burke asserts:

The death of the Author might be said to fulfill much the same function in our day as did the death of God for late nineteenth-century thought. Both deaths attest to a departure of belief in Authority, presence, intention, omniscience and creativity. For a culture which thinks itself to have come too late for the Gods or for their extermination, the figures of the Author and the human subject are said to fill the theological void [. . .] fulfilling much the same function (Burke 1992, 22-23).

It is worth repeating that my aim, rather than describing myself as a theoretically live or dead author, is to deconstruct the three film scripts I have written, which are in varying stages of readiness for the screen and its audiences, in order to uncover what contribution to knowledge I can offer. I do this by taking readers of this doctoral thesis on my journey as I reveal the sometimes mysterious motivations which germinated these scripts into existence. In defence of this approach, I again must quote Burke, who stresses:

The Author is to his text as God, the *auctor vitae*, is to his world: the unitary cause, source and master to whom the chain of textual effects must be traced, and in whom they find their genesis, meaning, goal and justification. The Author thus becomes, in Derrida's words, the 'transcendental signified' and attains the supernatural privilege of being at once the beginning and end of his text (Burke 1992, 23).

Whilst agreeing with the above quote, I am aware of the dangers of positing this thesis as autobiography, even if it is partially autobiographical, because what is represented here, and in my film scripts, is a range of interpretations of a life lived, thematically focused on the inevitability of resolving one's issues, interpreted by me through a series of fictional film scripts. I have taken a self-reflexive, ethnographic, interpretative approach to this doctoral thesis because I also largely agree with Bakhtin, quoted in *Tzvetan Todorov* by Burke. Bakhtin asserts:

Even if the Author-creator had created the most perfect autobiography, or confession, he would, nonetheless have remained, in so far as he had produced it, outside the universe represented within it. [. . .] To identify one's 'I' with the 'I' that I tell is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one's hair (Baktin quoted in Burke 1992, 55).

Rather than purporting the writing of autobiography to be an impossible arena of signification, which would only lead to me tying myself up in Barthes-like knots of duplicitous representation, I prefer to prove that 'I' in the present can not only interpret the 'I' of my past, but also answer its riddles and heal them. Ironically, it appears that Barthes would have had little objection to this approach, as related by Burke:

Barthes has no objection to autobiography when it is uprooted from its naturalistic setting, whilst it is accepted that the past subject of the text cannot be spirited in all reality into the here and now of the text's composition (Burke 1992, 57).

Resolving the riddles of existence for me lies not in the prescriptive truth telling of past events, but in the knowledge that every rendering of a life changes the story, even those renderings posing as autobiographies. We are the sum of our choices,

including the past events we have focused on, denied, or dealt with. I draw on this translation of Foucault, to help me elucidate why I resist describing the self in this thesis as prescriptively autobiographical. I agree with Foucault's suggestion that:

As soon as you start writing, even if it is under your real name, you start to function as somebody slightly different, as a "writer". You establish from yourself to yourself continuities and a level of coherence which is not quite the same as your real life. [. . .] All this ends up constituting a kind of neo-identity which is not identical to your identity as a citizen or your social identity (Foucault quoted in Jacob 106).

Rather than resorting to the obfuscation of identity, my aim is to excavate my impetus for writing three *Pearl* scripts, for this impetus will lead unerringly to unresolved issues of identity, which were attempting to percolate to the psychological surface at the time of writing these film scripts, in order to heal. This 'I' resides in the character of Pearl, as she appears in successive scripts, working her way through my psyche, until I, her author, am ready to relinquish the issues she encounters as resolved for me personally. I make this statement fully aware that it is contentious, in fact it flies in the face of theories which problematise the possibility of excavating the 'sources' of a work, as posited here by Barthes: "The Text's social function is to pose a problem for classification because it doesn't like limits" (Barthes 118). Barthes further claims that:

To try and find the ‘sources’ [. . .] of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a Text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas (Barthes 120).

Determined to disprove such ‘impossibilities’, I realized I would need interpretive tools in order to assist me in my ‘digging’ to the sources of my texts, and I would need to identify any assumptions I make about utilising such tools. Consequently, I state here that I agree with the assumptions made within this definition of interpretive research, as defined by Rowlands, who largely draws his conclusions from Walsham:

The foundation assumption for interpretive research is that knowledge is gained, or at least filtered, through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings. In addition to the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality, interpretive research acknowledges the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being explored, and the situational constraints shaping this process (Rowlands 81-92).

In theoretical terms, Armstrong discusses the dangers and delights of choosing an interpretative approach, in ways I wholeheartedly agree with, as writing autobiography was never my aim.

This thesis, as indicated above, aims to deconstruct my journey through the writing of three *Pearl* film scripts, whilst mapping the journey so that others may agree or disagree with my findings in relation to their own research or creative processes.

According to Armstrong:

Every interpretative approach reveals something only by disguising something else, which a competing method with different assumptions might disclose. Every hermeneutic standpoint has its own dialectic of blindness and insight – a ratio of disguise and disclosure which stems from its presuppositions. To accept a method of interpretation is to enter into a wager – to gamble, namely, that the insights made possible by its assumptions will offset the risks of blindness they entail (Armstrong 7).

Nevertheless, Agar neatly draws our attention to the essential connectivity between ethnography and the utilization of an interpretive approach in order to achieve it: “Ethnography is neither subjective nor objective. It is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third” (Agar 19).

So let me lead you now, perhaps “blindfolded” by my own blindness, as defined by Armstrong above, perhaps not, back to the old world, to the beginning of my journey, as I begin to investigate how life and writing may meld together in the formation of multi-layered cinematic narratives.

The Old World: How Life Narrative Informs the Writing

In search of author/theorist guides to most ably escort us on our quest, I turned to Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*, cross-examining their points of convergence and difference as they related not only to my film scripts, but to my 'heroic journey' as the writer of these texts and this thesis.

As a Caucasian, which I define as non-Indigenous, multicultural woman, who was not always a writer, there were many aspects to consider. As this chapter emerges, I explore the hero's and heroine's journeys I have travelled along in detail in order to clarify my motivations for writing these scripts, and to assist me in finally putting Pearl, and my previously unresolved psychological issues, to bed.

On that journey, whilst examining the divergence between writer and woman, who was not always a writer, I entered the realm of narrative therapy, encountering concepts first originated by White, who, put simply, theorised that externalizing our internal monologues can assist us in objectifying our problems by revealing to us that we are not our problems (White). Narrative therapy requires a therapist to work with a client to assist in re-storying a life narrative, delving deeply into the subconscious through the power of story, to assist the client, not only to see his/her life with greater perspective, but to deconstruct the past in order to write a more fulfilling future, which can be lived.

Whilst I did not engage a narrative therapist to assist me in my quest to make meaning of my life journey or work, I did engage with my texts in a deconstructive manner, excavating the unresolved issues which drove me to write them, and extrapolating how a sense of healing resulted from writing them. Consequently, this thesis afforded me the retrospective opportunity to perform work similar to that of a narrative therapist, upon myself and my work.

Further reading into narrative therapy would make even greater connections with my project within this thesis. My ethnological, interpretive approach resonated well with the approaches to therapy adopted by narrative therapists, Epston and White, who quote Bruner's contrasting modes of cognitive functioning as a defence for their own interpretive, narrative based approach to therapeutic work:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. [. . .] A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as a means of convincing another. Yet what they convince is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude (Bruner quoted in Epston and White 77).

My further reading of narrative therapy theories afforded me answers to many of my questions regarding about how writing narratives can be therapeutic, and how important story telling is in life, even for non-writers. Epston and White reason:

If we accept that persons organize and give meaning to their experience through the storying of experience, and that in the performance of these stories they express selected aspects of their lived experience, then it follows that these stories are constitutive – shaping lives and relationships (Epston 12).

As a screenwriter, I came to this doctoral thesis with the notion that filmic narratives are primarily written to inform and entertain an audience. However, I discovered, in the process of writing the Pearl narratives, that this perception broadened to embrace the understanding that writing film scripts, which are ultimately produced, can heal unresolved aspects of the writer's life narrative. Furthermore, they can motivate audiences to similarly seek out the sources of their unresolved psychological blockages, in order to also evolve beyond them and heal. Turan, in the forward for *Why We Write* purports that:

screenwriters [. . .] have something to say that keeps people lining up at the box office to be informed, entertained, and sometimes transformed. These screenwriters are inspired by

their peers, their friends, their children, and all of the world around them. They can't just sit back and watch, they are driven to comment on their experiences and to share these comments with countless other souls (Turan xiv).

As a 'shamanic' screenwriting practitioner, who is often inspired by all of the world, and driven to share such inspirations with an audience, I wholeheartedly agree. I began asking myself, is it *really* possible for this non-psychologist-person-who-became-a-writer to offer psychological salvation to an audience by offering Pearl and her gift narratives up as roadmaps to healing? Researching narrative therapy sources fortified my readiness to subscribe to the power of storytelling for therapeutic ends, since from the beginning storytelling and psychoanalysis have been linked. Spence suggests: "There seems to be no doubt that a well constructed story possesses a kind of narrative truth that is real and immediate and carries an important significance for the process of therapeutic change" (Spence 21). I support this view, and further believe that storytelling is central to human existence, no matter whether the person relating the story is a writer or not.

Narratives permeate every corner of our existence, from the jokes we may flippantly pass on to win approval or alleviate tension, to the routine relating of the day's events to one's partner who wasn't there, through to more elaborate storytelling, which may try to trace the trajectory of an entire life in order to make sense of it. Narrative therapist, Levinson, relates:

people are always telling stories: to organize experience, to try to understand and solve problems, to offer examples and metaphors to enhance argument or logic, to explain, to teach oneself and others, to protest or to act against their oppressors, to advance science, to enrich literature, to amuse and entertain, to unify generations, to discharge anxiety and rage, to regret and to mourn. Stories constitute the psychological grist of life (Levinson 10).

Further exploration of this observation would uncover exactly how telling stories constitute the psychological grist of life, as related by Bruner, whose specialist area of research concentrated on finding convergence between psychology and anthropology:

It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture. The performance does not release a pre-existing meaning that lies dormant in the text [. . .] rather the performance itself is constitutive (Bruner 11).

For Bruner, each 'performance' of an individual is an expression of one's full personality (Bruner, 1986), an understanding which I extend to performing the work of writing fictional film scripts, which transform one's lived performance into the guise of fiction. Consequently, I discovered that my endeavors, whilst not identical

to the processes of narrative therapy, were nevertheless in accord with its broadest aims: to transform one's self restricting problems and self concepts via a process of re-storying.

Many interesting correlations emerged as I examined my 'hero's' quest' as a person-turned-writer, writing filmic narratives written for performance, which related to my life narrative in subterranean ways. As I have said, researching the theories of authorship I have alluded to above, followed by *The Hero's Journey* as it appears in Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, then Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*, led me inexorably toward narrative therapy, in the knowledge that all of these texts and schools of thought pay homage to such seminal theorists as Freud and Jung.

The psychological underpinnings of Campbell's and Murdock's texts, which, amongst other things, relate life and fictive narratives as journeys, which deal with or represent pathways to human healing, led me to seek further answers in narrative therapy, which also links the psyche to narrative. Consequently, I have quoted such narrative therapists as Chudnofsky and Faust (1995), Juhasz (2003), Richert (2003) in this section, then for the remainder of the chapter I have remained primarily focused on Campbell and Murdock's separate forays into hero and heroine quests to assist me in the mapping of my journey/s. Along the way, I argue academically that my instinctual certainty was correct, regarding how one must write about what is unresolved in order to adhere to years of research, resulting in something of importance to say to an audience, as well as oneself.

Within narrative therapy, the nature of self can be considered as content. Richert suggests that we are our own story, when he subscribes to an integrated narrative/humanistic-existential approach to the self as both the process of generating meanings and the meanings that are generated. He describes this possibility in the following way:

As content, self is thought of consisting of a collection of situation specific vignettes or stories, each of which may portray a different *me*, or protagonist. These stories are at least loosely organized into an overarching life narrative in which the sense of *I*, or self as narrator, organizer, may be explicitly developed. Self, then, is both multiple, as reflected in the various *mes* that populate situation-specific stories, and coherent and organized, as reflected in the overall narrative (Richert 193).

In literary theory, notions of ‘the self’ such as those described by Richert above, have been lengthily debated within the discourse of the death of the author, as noted earlier in this chapter. And the notion of ‘the self’ as a priori subject has been much argued against by literary theorists such as Barthes (1975), Foucault (1975) and Derrida (1992). However, I must again defer to Burke, who poses this question: “How is the concept of the author only tenable if a transcendental subjectivity is [...] designated?” (Burke 107).

I find Burke's answer, quoted below, utterly convincing, and useful in terms of my aim in this thesis, as by subscribing to his response, I can continue on my journey unhindered by my authorial "life" or "death" as I deconstruct my attached film scripts:

First and foremost, any criticism which sees the author as a specification of the transcendental subject must detach the author as an empirical agency from the author as a purely ontological principle of the text. To be conceived in transcendental terms the author must be emptied out of all psychological and biographical content: a personalized, psychobiographically constituted transcendental subject is unthinkable (Burke 107).

Accordingly, I, the self as narrator and organizer by Richert's definition above, decided to adopt three major subject positions on behalf of I, the self who wrote not only my enclosed life narrative vignettes, but also this thesis and the attached scripts, whilst dividing this chapter into several sub-sections to assist the reader to follow my authorship journey in chapter one. These subject positions include three sub-subject positions, as outlined below.

The first subject position speaks autobiographically about my life as a *Caucasian, Australian Woman of Multicultural Origin*, a person whose vignettes or 'life

narratives' reveal how unresolved issues subconsciously fuel the narratives I feel most amalgamated to write.

The second subject position describes myself as the *Writer of Filmic Narratives*. Within this subject position, it is possible to posit three sub-subject positions in relationship to the authorship of my three appended *Pearl* film scripts.

The first sub-subject position is that of *Author*, relating to *Shoalwater Pearl*, deriving from the literary notion of authorship, which grew out of an essentially Romantic reading of the writer as the only person responsible for his or her creation. Antecedent to the *auteur*, this status attributed to the writer as author precedes all notions of saleable intellectual property, including film script as commodity. In his article, *Comment on the Idea of Authorship*, Heath states:

The task of criticism has been precisely the construction of the Author. It must read the Author in the texts grouped under his name. Style in this perspective is the result of the extraction of marks of individuality, a creation of the Author and the area of his value. Criticism, in short, is the modern hermeneutics; the passage from God to Author (Heath 1973).

The second sub-subject position, which I will entitle *Trading Author*, relates to *Nullarbor Pearl*, by foregrounding that the script has been developed with the

assistance of ScreenWest, and it is thus in the process of being marketed to producers, so that its intellectual property can be purchased and the film can be made into a saleable commodity and ultimately exposed to an audience. This, however, does not yet constitute the transition from author of the film script to filmic *auteur*, as *Nullarbor Pearl* does not, at the time of this doctoral thesis submission, have a director attached to whom the baton of creative control can be passed.

The third sub-subject position, relating to *Pilbara Pearl*, derives from the first significant critic of auteur theory, Sarris, who used the term “criterion of value” to speak about the *Director as Auteur* (Sarris 132). However, Caughie refuted this argument, by stating that: “Auteurism was not itself a theory: *Cashiers [du Cinema]* proposed it as a policy; Sarris was prepared to admit it was more of an attitude than a theory; and *Movie* refused theoretical elaboration” (Caughie 13).

Nevertheless, *Pilbara Pearl* alone has surpassed the subject positions of *Author* and *Trading Author* by being creatively controlled by a director, Watson, who has, moreover, written his own honours dissertation about that process (Watson) and that film has consequently been successfully screened to audiences on two Australian television networks, Qantas international flights, on the big screen before the feature film, *Radiance*, and on television networks around the world. *Pilbara Pearl* was produced with the assistance of ScreenWest, The Australian Film Commission, The Lotteries Commission of Western Australia, The South Seas Pearl Consortium and the SBS television network.

In the third subject position I adopt the title of *Researcher*, whose function is to decipher and discuss theories written by other people, who were not always theorists, allowing this multicultural woman/writer/author/trading author and researcher to amass enough comprehension to form a thesis, which adequately informs and interprets the appended body of creative work. I function as a *Researcher* when I self-consciously use the narrative thrust of this authorship chapter to prove that writing fictional film scripts has helped heal unresolved psychological issues in my life. This understanding is supported within the interpretive approach adopted by narrative therapists. Richert relates:

for the narrative therapists in the social constructivism tradition, self is story, or a collection of stories, the blending of experiential/existential and critical constructivist thinking [. . .] suggests that self can usefully be understood as the process of storying, which includes the process of carrying forward felt meaning, as well as the telling of a story, with story and experiential meaning being in constant, reciprocal interaction (Richert 85).

In the process of fictional storytelling, I make meaning of my life narrative/s as I revisit the psychological places where I have felt blocked by my life in order to better understand the resultant traumas of negative experiences and move beyond them. Moving beyond them also means being able to move beyond writing

narratives which involve Pearl, because when I write how she travels away from the things that have blocked her ability to live her life fully, I also heal those same inabilities within myself. Richert explains:

as they [people] offer their stories about others as well, people's stories of self are inevitably shaped by this process. Moreover, given the reciprocity between experience as lived and meaning as articulated [. . .] articulated meanings will inevitably affect a person's lived experience as well as his or her conscious story of self (Richert 86).

As we come to the end of this section, which largely concentrates on introducing the findings of narrative therapists in support of my proposition, I now rest more comfortably on the tenet that, for me in every subject position, the memorable feature films which make a lasting impression on audiences come from sacred unresolved places within the writer, which the writer must resolve by the end of the story or stories. In doing so, he or she takes the audience on a hero's or heroine's journey with his or her central character to mythical places where the writer may never have been.

I also wish to foreground that when the process of fictional storytelling happens there is always an 'invisible' measure of self in the soup, and *that* self is inevitably the self which is seeking to heal.

So let's begin where it all began, before I was a writer, seeking to document and solve unresolved parts of my life story via fictional narratives.

The New World: How Writing Informs the Life Narrative

In *The Hero's Journey*, Campbell, an American mythologist, writer and lecturer, describes the beginning of the journey as a 'Call To Adventure': "A blunder- apparently the merest chance-reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. As Freud has shown, blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts" (Campbell 51).

Where was my blunder, my 'Call To Adventure', my suppressed desire or conflict? After year twelve of high school, before I became a writer, I was a nomad of sorts, driving my commercial van around the country selling costume jewellery purchased in bulk from Hong Kong. On the road I met many characters like the ones featured in the *Pearl* scripts: oddball, likeable outcasts, hanging together rebelliously in the remotest parts of the country.

Before year eleven of high school, I was part of a family growing up on the Gold Coast and later in the hinterland beyond. Hardly an outpost, it was a reassuringly bizarre banana mañana land of wall-to-wall tourists, minutely clad in beachwear. After my parents split up I spent the rest of year ten living with dad and my brother

in the hinterland behind the Gold Coast, while my sister attended university in Brisbane. Then I went to live in Western Australia to be with my mother and stepfather. After I left school, I had to make some money, which is how I came to live like a nomad on the road. The calling, then, was one of pragmatic financial necessity. The folks had moved as far away from each other as humanly possible, living on opposite sides of the country, and for a while I roamed about selling stuff in-between. This binary exists in every scene of *Nullarbor Pearl* – Pearl’s artistic sensibilities conflict sharply with the financial demise of the roadhouse. She wants to become an artist, but chooses to work in the middle of nowhere to eat. As in life, one ultimately enables the other, conflict becomes conduit, binary opposition becomes suspension.

At that time in my life, I read a lot of fiction. Words seemed to have special power, tugging at my heart in that way that felt like a calling to write, the same sort of calling I now feel links my future storytelling with healing. According to Murdock, author, educator, and Jungian-oriented psychotherapist, in her book, *The Heroine’s Journey*, the first stage of the journey is ‘Separation from the Feminine’ (Murdock 13). My mother split first, which confounded things a bit, but when it was my turn to leave home, I predictably bolted for the exit. Murdock suggests:

To accomplish this split from the mother, many young women make their mothers into the image of the archetypal vengeful, possessive, devouring female whom they must reject to survive. A woman’s actual mother may

or may not embody these qualities, but the daughter internalizes them as a construct of the inner mother. According to Jung this inner mother begins to function in us as a shadow figure, an involuntary pattern that is unacceptable to our egos. We can't accept it in ourselves so we project it onto others (Murdock 18).

Some of those others may, in fact, be fictional characters, like the 'bad' mother, Marnie, in *Nullarbor Pearl*, whom Pearl can't wait to get away from, or like the 'good' mother, Marnie's sister Beryl in *Nullarbor Pearl*, equally fabricated in the mind of the daughter, who represents a Garden of Eden, the big tit, or selfless provider of unconditional love, Marilyn Monroe with a soup ladle. Either way, the daughter feels the need to split. Murdock quotes Rich, in *Of Woman Born* 1976: "The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. [. . .] and, in a desperate attempt to know where the mother ends and the daughter begins, we perform radical surgery" (Rich quoted in Murdock 13).

Juhasz uses relational psychology to make sense of this surgery thus:

Women writers are grown up daughters, and for many of them writing has everything to do with their relationship with their mothers. [. . .] Recognition of the mother by way of writing is often what enables adult daughters to make art. Recognizing the separate subjectivity of the

mother helps to bring a daughter's self identity into being, even as her own subjectivity is what permits her to recognize her mother (Juhasz 32).

As I have said above, for a year after my mother left, I lived with my brother and dad – at least I thought he was my dad. He was always kind and loving to me and we all got along, in a mad Queenslandish sort of way. Freud explains what subconsciously happens for many young girls during this Oedipal stage, as they journey toward mature heterosexual development: “The little daughter puts herself in her mother's place, as she has always done in her games; she tries to take her mother's place with her father, and begins to hate the mother she used to love” (Freud 428-429).

Years after leaving home, I would write the opening of *Nullarbor Pearl* where Pearl has an explosive argument with her abusive, fearful mother, Marnie, who only wants to protect her from the curse of the gift (Pearl's full potential) but in the most controlling fashion. Pearl jet propels herself out of her ordinary world, into life, in the first scene.

EXT. RUN DOWN COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

PEARL, a spirited, tanned girl with sun-bleached hair in paint-splattered boardies and T-shirt, is defiantly painting a huge, poor-quality mural on the crumbling fibro fence.

MARNIE O.S.

You listening to me, Pearl?

PEARL paints on, not listening. The mural features herself as a 12 year old, walking beside her freckle-faced dad, BIG RED, as they beach-comb with a metal detector.

Pearl's mother, MARNIE, doubled over in a too-tight nurse's uniform, is yanking on her nurse's shoes facing out of the driver's door of her old sedan, fag in mouth.

MARNIE CONT'D

Paint over it I said.

PISS POT, the old CARETAKER, comes over, sucking on a tinny.

MARNIE CONT'D

Don't worry. It'll be gone by tonight.

PEARL

Will not!

MARNIE

Save yourself the effort. Doesn't even look like him.

PISS POT

Paint all you like, luv. Your dad
was a good mate of mine.

MARNIE

Do you mind? I've got a hospital
job lined up for her.

PEARL

Not cleaning shitty bed pans, no
way!

MARNIE

Yes you are. Don't have to keep
you, now you're eighteen.

PEARL

Don't have to listen either. Can
do what I like, bitch!

Where does Pearl go? To the Nullarbor, to experience the unconditional love of a
different kind of mother, represented by her aunty Beryl.

My mother resides in both these characters, Marnie for the bad times, Beryl for the
good, with the good far outweighing the bad. Jung lists many examples of the
ambivalence of the mother archetype:

Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to medieval allegories, his cross. In India, "the loving and terrible mother" is paradoxical Kali (Jung 346).

In *Shoalwater Pearl*, it is Pearl's father, Big Red, who leaves and never returns, for reasons later explained, leaving beleaguered Marnie, victim of her own fearful upbringing, vowing to do her best to look after Pearl, in this final scene.

EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAWN

MARNIE rises beside PEARL. Disgruntled seagulls squawk on shore. PEARL throws her arms up.

PEARL

And stay there!

MARNIE

(indicating the baby seahorses)

I've never seen anything like it,
Pearl. They're amazing.

PEARL juts her chin.

PEARL

That's the *dad* under there, doing
all the hard work. Way to go, Mr
Curly. What a legend.

BEAT. MARNIE looks into Pearl's eyes.

MARNIE

We're both staying.

(eyeing the deep)

You look out for them, I'll look
out for sharks.

PEARL is chuffed about this. It shows on her face.

MARNIE notices. MARNIE turns toward the deep, her back
pressed against Pearl's.

MARNIE CONT'D

I may not be ya dad. . .

(voice quavering)

but I'm here, and I will always be
here.

PEARL pulls Marnie's arm so she can look in her face.

MARNIE CONT'D

Put in for day shift today.

PEARL sees love and pain entwined in her MUM and is finally able to accept a hug, and hug her fiercely back.

The landscape between this final scene in *Shoalwater Pearl* and the opening scene of *Nullarbor Pearl* (above) remains unwritten. The reader must make the conceptual leap between the scripts, or examine each text as a stand alone narrative.

How conscious was my choice of names for these characters? Pearl's name was chosen for all of its luminous, mysterious possibilities. Marnie and Beryl have more ordinary names because they are, by design, pitted pearls, too fearful to embrace their full potential until Pearl breaks the curse in *Nullarbor Pearl*, saving her great grandmother Pearl's life, consequently herself, and all her family. This enables both of her mother figures to save themselves from the curse that has dogged them all their lives.

Examining my own processes, I could write a bad mother so long as I could replace her with a good mother, and could outweigh the bad with the good. Murdock explains: "There is considerable guilt and anxiety experienced by women who surpass their mothers. They experience their success as a betrayal of the mother/daughter relationship and feel guilty for having left their mother behind" (Murdock 53).

I have also noticed these emotions at work in the departure of my eldest daughter, when she left Perth to study at Yale in the USA. Despite my stated wish that she should surpass me, there was still that familiar pattern of daughter mother revulsion propulsion at work in the time prior to her taking off in search of her own gifted uniqueness. *In Moments of Being*, Woolf wrote of her mother:

Until I was in the forties [. . .] the presence of my mother obsessed me. [. . .] I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. [. . .] one day [. . .] I made up *To The Lighthouse*, in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. [. . .] I wrote the book very quickly, and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed with my mother. I could no longer hear her voice. I do not see her. I suppose I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and laid it to rest (Woolf 80-81).

Embarking upon writing a doctoral thesis served as another beginning, facilitated by Dr Josko Petkovic, who lured me into the programme with the possibility of a scholarship and extra for excellence, because of my track record in the film industry. This, along with his well articulated argument that I should take the time to think again, rather than writing one commissioned television script after another, without taking time out to understand my life's purpose within writing,

immediately captured my creative and analytical attention. I asked myself, if I stopped writing commissioned scripts for long enough, would I be able to distil what it is I've been trying to say as a writer, and why? What would my 'original contribution to knowledge' be?

As I look back upon that moment, having embarked upon the research, I recognize in it what Murdock describes as 'Addiction To Perfection' as part of 'Identification with the Masculine'. Murdock relates: "A young woman may appear to succeed while bleeding herself dry emotionally. Because of an innate fear of female inferiority, many young women become addicted to perfection, overcompensating, and overworking because they are different than men" (Murdock 41).

I could certainly relate to that, having earned my BA in English with Distinction, whilst being twice listed on the Vice Chancellor's List at Curtin University of Technology, followed by years of published work, then practitioner success in the film industry, where I amassed many television credits as well as winning five national awards as a screenwriter across five different genres. So why was it taking me quite some time to arrive at any point of coherence within this thesis?

Researching these models assisted me to understand.

In the beginning, like all good heroes and heroines, I refused the 'Call To Adventure' by accepting my stipend, and procrastinating on the theory, in favour of the safe, familiar world of beginning to write the new film script, *Shoalwater Pearl*. Surely this was doing as expected? It was, after all, a creative doctoral thesis.

I knew that integration between the theory and the creative work would throw up more questions than I then could answer, so I paused writing the screenplay and immersed myself in the theories which would inform and sustain my journey. Regardless, many convoluted meetings with Dr Josko Petkovic proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had forgotten how to think critically. If this was academia, I wanted out of these uncharted waters, back to the relative safety and familiarity of commissioned television.

I turned to Campbell for an explanation and found it here: “Refusal of the summons turns the adventure into a negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or ‘culture’ the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (Campbell 59).

When I realized how stuck I was, I did what all victims do, placed the blame squarely on my sole, male mentor/oppressor supervisor, whom I replaced with a more balanced 50/50 mix of supervision from Associate Professors Mick Broderick and Jennifer de Reuck, one male, one female, in keeping with these hero and heroine models I am now seeking to counterbalance. Jung, in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, urges us to look upon such life choices archetypically. In doing so, I could consider this choice of male and female supervisors as a mother and father balancing act, no longer out of sync with the hero and heroine’s journeys I was researching. Jung relates:

The deposit of mankind's whole ancestral experience—so rich in emotional imagery of father, mother, child, husband and wife...has exalted this group of archetypes into the supreme regulating principles of religious and political life, in unconscious recognition of their tremendous psychic powers (Jung 336-337).

Whilst I subscribe to the importance Jung attributes to archetypes, it is important to note that I consider the hero and heroine's journeys as discursive models, which need not be considered as prescriptive. They are derived from centuries of story telling, and each narrative, whether real or imagined, either emulates the quest structure, or rails against it, in order to surprise its audience or reader.

It is consequently possible to use Joseph Campbell's model to view my first supervisor as a Trickster Mentor, there to provoke me past my first refusal of the call. Alternately, Murdock's model may help me view his early influence like a bad father figure, whom the heroine must rebel against, or in Campbell's model, he may also be considered as a supplier of Supernatural Aid. Campbell suggests: "For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Campbell 69).

In the case of this doctoral thesis, such amulets may take the form of early supervisory suggestions about how to structure my thesis. Some of these have

lasted the distance, such as examining authorship, identity, representation and Aboriginality in my work, in addition to assisting me to find early information about how to obtain a scholarship, before I began.

In *Nullarbor Pearl*, the supernatural is, of course, the curse/gift, and its representation first appears to the audience before Pearl sees it as the underwater spectre of her great grandmother Pearl, who swims through Pearl to save her from a shark attack. This gesture visually demonstrates the passing down of the gift through the matriarchal line, whilst indicating to the audience very early that they are in the realm of magic realism. This use of the supernatural occurs in all three films to help us understand Pearl's uniqueness.

Murdock relates that the next stage in the journey is 'Identification with the Masculine': "During the second stage of *The Heroine's Journey*, a woman wishes to identify with the masculine or to be rescued by the masculine. When a woman decides to break with established images of the feminine, she inevitably begins the traditional hero's journey" (Murdock 36). To a large degree, this identification with the masculine is described by Murdock as relating to good and bad aspects of the father. The good dad nurtures, listens, tells the young heroine that the world is at her feet and there is nothing she cannot turn her hand to career wise. The bad dad encourages the belief in her that she is lacking in competence, intelligence or power. Those women who emulate the good dad drive themselves hard and bleed themselves dry emotionally. Those who take on the beliefs engendered by the bad dad seek to be rescued by a male, or may back into success through rebellion.

What happens then, in the case of Pearl and I, when the dad you have grown up with proves not to be your real dad, and the real one is absent? According to Psychotherapists, Faust and Chudnofsky, in their study of Oedipal triangles in adolescents, the adolescent girl would experience depression: “Should she lose her father, her fantasy love object, the loss would be great because with the father’s loss goes a piece of her own identification. Hence, in addition to grief, she would experience a loss of her own identity” (Faust and Chudnofsky 94).

Alternate narratives emerge, prompted by the departure of Pearl’s dad in *Shoalwater Pearl*, then her quest begins in earnest to find out what happened to him in *Nullarbor Pearl*. My life narrative runs parallel with this.

At the age of Pearl in *Shoalwater Pearl*, I asked my mother who my true father was, because I did not connect with ‘dad’ in a way that convinced me I was his biological daughter. She was good enough to tell me the truth and a new life narrative emerged, one which I would adopt and run headlong with, right into an identity crisis. My real father was a merchant sea captain from Sicily, who loved my mother and with whom my mother had a ten year affair. One day I would go there, to Sicily to find him, and have all my romantic illusions shattered about being accepted by him and his Sicilian family. Here was a man whom I vaguely recalled from the last time I saw him, on the Gold Coast when I was six, a man who quite often came to our house to make pasta, who gave me a gold cross on a gold chain, and took my mother dancing, a man who now lived in the shadow of Sicily’s brooding Mt Etna with a family of his own, in a world so different from the

uninhibited Queensland banana mañana world I had grown up in. His questions would solely focus on my mother, who had rejected him, and he, me.

Does rejection beget rejection? I remember being happy that I was not uprooted from Australia, where I was born, to live in that alien little fishing village so far from my reality. I left him my West Australian address, but he never wrote. It was I who wrote, not to him, but against the trauma of not knowing him as a father, later grandfather to my two daughters. I wrote to understand and move beyond, to rise above, to heal.

In Jungian terms, mother and father archetypes can be both positive and negative, and one's reactions to life events involving one's parents can prompt projections upon them on behalf of the child (Jung). Since it is all too easy to ascribe positive or negative traits to one's parents, or to incorrectly self diagnose, when one is not a psychologist, I will refrain from doing either.

I will, instead, relate that when my mother first saw *Pilbara Pearl*, she told me that my father, risking further rejection, came back from Sicily to try and convince her to marry him, and live with him there, along with my older half brother and half sister, who were dad's 'real' children. When my mother declined and sent him back that last time, he said that his love for her was like a pearl in an oyster; he would keep it in his heart forever - something I was astounded to hear, after writing *Pilbara Pearl*. Such occurrences no longer surprise me.

Over the course of writing these film scripts, many imagined characters and situations have later manifested in reality. Such is the mystery of the gift.

INT. STATIONARY UTE CABIN SUNSET

EDDIE tentatively reaches into his pocket, and withdraws something dainty in his big fingers, and rolls it into his palm.

EDDIE looks down at his open palm with wonder. Within it, is a glowing grey-tinged pearl.

SFX: A haunting memory of PEARL, the strangely-beckoning Aboriginal vocalist, singing softly to herself.

EDDIE contemplates the meaning of the pearl for a long, long moment, and reaches a decision. He turns the engine back on with new determination.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY SUNSET

The UTE does a fast U-turn, and heads back [to Pearl's roadhouse] at speed.

Taking the decision to turn Pearl from an imagined Caucasian girl in the initial poem, *Nullarbor Pearl*, to being clearly Aboriginal in *Pilbara Pearl*, to being of mixed 'Broome Creole' ancestry, and later discovering her Aboriginality half way

through *Nullarbor Pearl*, reflects my confusing experience of finding out, in my teens, that I was not entirely who I thought I was, in that my biological father was not the father whom I had grown up with.

Writing Pearl's discovery of her own identity directly stemmed from my past urgent need to piece together all of the missing parts of my life narrative, which had been previously denied to me. Not surprising then, that Pearl's father stays absent, and like my understanding of my own biological father, Pearl comes to understand through her unique perception, that metaphorically or not, as much as he may have once loved her, or not, her father is now dead to her.

My life narrative did, however, present a positive alternative to the false father and the absent father in the shape of a stepfather, presented in the sometimes stern, often gregarious character of Yanush in *Nullarbor Pearl*. Yanush's steadfast love of Beryl is very like the real abiding love of my stepfather for my mother.

As we have seen in Campbell's and Murdock's hero and heroine's journeys, there has been a departure or separation where the hero/heroine, Pearl, leaves her comfortable, ordinary, common day world to venture into a far more challenging, unfamiliar world, answering Campbell's 'Call To Adventure' (Campbell 49-90).

In the world of life narratives, in one vignette I venture on the road to earn a living like a nomad; in another, I venture overseas to Sicily to uncover my true identity; and in the present I have written this doctoral thesis to demonstrate how life quests

and art quests mirror each other structurally, in keeping with these models. And according to these models, what follows are trials, descent, and initiation, as will soon be revealed.

Hats I Wear on the Journey

As we venture forth, it is worth repeating that I have chosen a number of subject positions through which to view these trials encountered on various journeys and including three sub-subject positions regarding how I have chosen to represent such trials for my character, Pearl, as she also journeys forth.

As described earlier, we know that I created a roaming wholesale jewellery business, which I equated with living on the road like a nomad. As successful as that business ultimately became, we know that, even then, words were calling to me, beckoning me toward a new profession. I sold the jewellery business and went to university at age thirty, supposedly to become a novelist by majoring in creative writing with a literature minor. However, pretty soon it became apparent that this new world of artistic representation would most satisfactorily meet the familiar world of commerce for me within scriptwriting, where I belatedly settled, after studying just one screenwriting unit, toward the end of my undergraduate degree.

The trials on the journey through university coincided with some personal obstacles when I decided to have babies whilst attaining my Bachelor of Arts, simultaneously explaining to my Italian (therefore idealized) spouse that I no longer thought of

myself as a bread-winner or a business woman, but a would-be writer, who then studied feminism, further altering many of our shared ideals about marriage in the process. That marriage journey ended in separation and divorce at the time of this thesis completion, although not the 'Separation from the Masculine' as Murdock has entitled it, of which *The Heroine's Journey* speaks (Murdock 29-44).

Whilst I was married, Pearl emerged in the shape of the girl in the *Nullarbor Pearl* poem, who enjoyed sticking her head in an aquarium with her fish and frolicking with them, to escape the arid environs of her roadhouse reality. If some part of me was Pearl, was my engineer husband the pragmatic truck driver, slapping the side glass to wake me up to myself? Giggling Pearl in that instigating poem soon matured enough to realize how certain she was of her vision and creativity, as she stood her ground at the roadhouse, defending her uniqueness, forcing Eddie to turn his truck around instead. Rather than breaking her vision, Pearl's alternate reality urged Eddie to suspend his disbelief, so that it was he, not she, who changed – a sort of wish fulfillment reflection of my real life yearning.

And what of Pearl in *Nullarbor Pearl*, rushing back to her aunty, who functions as a substitute loving mother for Pearl, in the safety of the desert where she was born, as far from her absent, abusive mother's fear and the cursed ocean as she could get? Pearl finds on the Nullarbor that we cannot run from our uniqueness or place the blame on others when we are blocking ourselves from being all that we can be. Our lives are the sum of our choices, and yet, no matter how we suppress it, or how

far we run, our gifts go with us, lying dormant as seeds in desert soil, awaiting just enough water to emerge as flowers.

Narratives abound where shamans, such as the wounded healer shamans defined in the beginning of this chapter, including Jesus Christ, go in search of their souls or life direction in deserts. In *The Value of Solitude: The Ethics and Spirituality of Aloneness in Autobiography*, Barbour, whose text studies the links between solitude, ethics and spirituality through the viewfinder of autobiographies, relates:

Particular societies have found value in the position of those who live on its margins. Individuals may seek solitude because their society does not satisfy their spiritual needs, but they often persist in solitude because they feel supported by the community, and their insights and experiences are recognized as contributing something other people need (Barbour 28).

In such narratives, solitude in the desert offers time and space for self-awareness, a place where one's gifts erupt into consciousness. I have deliberately depicted the desert, not as a place of spiritual aridity and death, but as an enriching place where Pearl can find herself and her true identity amongst an oddball community of outcasts residing in remote Australia. Despite internal and external obstacles, the shaman is ultimately cracked open to his/her full potential, despite his/her early refusal of the call. Pearl paints in her sleep because her familial fear and taboo

silences about the curse have delayed the progress of her gift into consciousness, demonstrating the unrelenting nature of inner drives.

And what did these preceding Pearl narratives tell me about young Pearl in *Shoalwater Pearl*? That, although she is the victim of a ruptured family reality, a girl whose reach exceeds her grasp of her uniqueness, this feisty girl ably demonstrates that she will overcome her early psychological trauma.

Narrative Therapist, Richert, describes this process of re-storying thus: “When basic limitations are acknowledged, the person can be encouraged to examine how he or she prefers to deal with them and to develop stories of such successful management” (Richert 101).

It is Pearl’s destiny to save her family in *Nullarbor Pearl*, but in *Shoalwater Pearl* she doesn’t know it yet, so I juxtaposed Pearl’s immense disappointment at being abandoned by her father, after not being able to remedy her parents’ broken marriage, with her fierce determination to save and protect the baby seahorses, despite the early doubts and disapproval of her mother. This saving of the seahorses offers Pearl a successful outlet for her healing powers in the final scene, and an opportunity to re-bond with her mother and re-gain her approval, effectively boosting Pearl’s self esteem, until we meet her again in *Nullarbor Pearl*.

Within Campbell’s hero’s journey, he describes the transgressive nature of change in psychological and mythic terms as the hero crosses the first threshold of change:

The regions of the unknown (desert, jungle, deep sea, alien land etc) are free fields for the projection of unconscious content. Incestuous *libido* and patricidal *destructo* are thence reflected back against the individual and his society in forms suggesting threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight – not only as ogres but also as sirens of mysteriously seductive, nostalgic beauty (Campbell 79).

As researcher and subject of this thesis, I interpret such ‘sirens’ as sidetracks down creative pathways away from theory. Two sides of the creative doctoral thesis must find their balance, but for this writer-researcher, the creative always dominated, providing many temptations to deter me from my journey’s end.

Until I reached the end, ‘The Supreme Ordeal’, as Vogler puts it (181-203) my doctoral thesis completion was another world away, and creativity remained my safe cocoon. I turned to each of my ‘archetypical’ supervisors for their ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ mentor advice on all of this as the thesis writing continued. They waited and watched and quietly encouraged me to explore how my journey dovetailed or diverged away from those hero’s and heroine’s journey researchers who had gone before. They urged me to place these journeys within wider theoretical contexts. They offered advice, but not answers. To do so would have been to rob me of my own potential and uniqueness. The heroine must battle her own demons and find her own resolutions. Murdock observes:

The heroine crosses the threshold, leaves the safety of her parents' home, and goes in search of her self. She journeys up hills and down valleys, wades in rivers and streams, crosses dry deserts and dark forests, and enters the labyrinth to find what is at the centre of her self. Along the way she meets ogres who trick her into going down dead ends, adversaries who challenge her cunning and resolve, and obstacles which she must avoid, circumscribe or overcome. She needs a lamp, a lot of thread, and all of her wits about her to make this journey (Murdock 46).

I turn to the myth of Persephone here, as another way of placing the self within an archetypal construct within this thesis. I do so because I identify with Persephone, defined here as a mythical figure, who is intimately acquainted with suffering, yet who ultimately emerges from her introspective 'underworld' journey richer in wisdom and insight.

In the hero and heroine's journeys, this dark place is known as 'the descent' to Murdock and 'The Belly of the Whale' to Campbell. Persephone's mythical journey into the underworld is often metaphorically utilized to represent a dark, unforgiving place, a place of deepest reflection, where the hero or heroine appears to have died. There, he or she must draw upon his/her own psychological reserves in order to resurface and ultimately triumph. Jungian analyst, Bolen, in *Goddesses in Everywoman*, also looks at Persephone as an informative archetype:

Once a Persephone woman descends into her own depths, explores the deep realm of the archetypal world, and does not fear returning to reexamine the experience, she can mediate between the ordinary and non-ordinary reality. [. . .] If she can transmit what she has learned, she can become a guide for others (Bolen 222-223).

Interestingly, the heroine's journey details many stages in the journey now, which the hero's journey seems to leap beyond, both converging again at 'The Belly of the Whale' (Campbell 90-97) and 'The Initiation and Descent to the Goddess' (Murdock 87-107).

On Murdock's 'Road of Trials' (Murdock 46-58) heroines encounter many obstacles which heroes needn't encounter, precisely because they are men, before we all stop to take psychological stock. Due to my own life experiences, I agree with Murdock in this chapter, who purports that girls battle being dependent, feeling that they are inferior to men, and they battle romantic love. True to form, I felt I had to earn my autonomy by leaving my marriage, for within it I operated under the myth of romantic love, which I permitted to enslave me. Murdock suggests: "Many women who labor under the spell of illusory love want their spouse to be a demi-god who takes care of all their worldly concerns: mortgage, insurance, car payments, decisions about moves, and so on" (Murdock 60).

During my own 'descent', I not only had to ask myself what skills I would need to be able to survive in the new post-divorce world, I also had to ask myself, how does Pearl learn to take full responsibility for her own life? As we have seen, by bonding with Marnie at the end of *Shoalwater Pearl*, mother and daughter face their combined future back to back, scanning all horizons against adversary, conflicted, yet linked in the absence of Pearl's departed dad, Big Red. In *Pilbara Pearl*, Pearl suffers internal conflict as she struggles to deal with the sort of romantic love which does not respect or understand her uniqueness:

PEARL reverently opens the paper bag, withdraws a Japanese pagoda aquarium ornament, and holds it up to the light. It glows almost magically in her fingers. PEARL is wowed.

PEARL

Always wanted to go to Japan.

EDDIE enjoys watching PEARL carefully place it into the aquarium, but his enjoyment is edged with discomfort. All of Pearl's attention is now focused on the pagoda.

SFX: Faint, lilting Japanese music.

She leans closer to listen, smiling. EDDIE grabs her arm. PEARL looks at him. The music stops.

EDDIE

Come with me.

PEARL wasn't expecting this. She stares. EDDIE is standing opposite her, with the aquarium between them. The slanting rays of the setting sun play on their faces.

PEARL

This is my place.

EDDIE

You've never been anywhere.

PEARL is hurt. She glances into the aquarium.

PEARL

Just got back from Ningaloo.

EDDIE

In your dreams.

PEARL

(firmly)

You'd better go, Eddie.

EDDIE shifts uncomfortably on his feet.

EDDIE

I can't stand the thought of you out here alone with your head stuck in that flamin' fish tank. Some bastard could come along and . . .

PEARL

Edd-ie.

EDDIE

(simply)

I love you, Pearl.

BEAT.

PEARL is torn. She glances at the aquarium, and back.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I'm offering you a life.

PEARL shakes her head.

PEARL

Half a life.

BEAT.

EDDIE abruptly begins to leave. PEARL is struck by the reality of losing him forever.

PEARL (CONT'D)

(going after him)

Wait.

EDDIE stops just inside the door-way, but doesn't turn around. PEARL hesitates, then withdraws something precious from her pocket. She moves to EDDIE quickly,

pulls his shoulder back, and pushes her gift into his shirt pocket.

PEARL (CONT'D)

It's something special ...

from Ningaloo.

EDDIE flicks the bells and vinyl-strip fly deterrent aside with annoyance, and leaves.

We stay on PEARL as she stays inside, watching him go.

SFX: The driver's door slamming, the diesel engine firing.

PEARL flinches.

In *Nullarbor Pearl*, Pearl sidesteps two forms of completely different romantic love offered by Eddie and Massimo, in favour of at first seeking her departed dad, which gives way to Pearl finding herself and her true identity through her matriarchal, gifted heritage.

The Oedipal implications of all of this are complex. In *Shoalwater Pearl*, Pearl had to relinquish her Oedipal wish to be her father's fantasy love object, in Freudian terms. The resultant feelings of isolation felt to her as an acute loss of her father's love, leaving her in the company of a highly critical, rejecting mother, where we leave her, albeit in a bonding moment with the baby seahorses.

This being with her mother proved to be unhealthy and abusive, as we saw in the opening sequence of *Nullarbor Pearl*. Marnie does all she can to enmesh her daughter, and it turns ugly when Pearl needs to leave. The film journeys through to psychological progression as Pearl wrestles information about her identity and gift out of familial taboo and deals with the final abandonment/death of her father. Consequently, Pearl fails to form an attachment with her male peers in *Nullarbor Pearl*, but there is a hint at the end, that finally she may be ready . . .

Murdock describes the ‘Lack of a Positive Masculine Ally’ as damaging to a heroine in this way:

lack of genuine involvement or negative involvement on the part of the father, stepfather, uncle, or grandfather deeply wounds a woman’s sense of her self. It can lead to overcompensation and perfectionism or virtually paralyze her development. When a father is absent or indifferent to his daughter, he indicates his disinterest, disappointment, and disapproval, which can be as damaging to the heroine as explicit negative judgments or overprotectiveness (Murdock 38).

As we have seen, in *Shoalwater Pearl*, Pearl intensely bonds with Big Red, who ultimately departs and abandons her forever, leaving psychological scars.

In *Nullarbor Pearl*, Pearl searches for her father and discovers him dead.

Supernatural aid comes from her great grandmother, the sort of aid which is disguised as a curse by Pearl's mother, Marnie, and her sister, Beryl, who both believe they have reason to protect Pearl from the facts for her own good.

Fortunately, there was so such taboo on my life narrative when I asked for the truth about my identity, and received it from my mother, even if it had been kept a secret until I asked. Campbell makes special mention of the trauma that arises when: "the father is the invisible unknown" (Campbell 345). He states:

Where the goal of the hero's effort is the discovery of the unknown father, the basic symbolism remains that of the tests and the self-revealing. [. . .] The test is reduced to the persistent questions and a frightening look. [. . .] We have seen, in our review of the adventure of the hero, to what degrees the severity of the father can go (Campbell 346-347).

As mentioned above, Campbell describes the dip, after passing the first threshold, as entering 'The Belly of the Whale' (Campbell 90-97). Another reading of this stage for me could be the realization that I was not only completing a trilogy of *Pearl* films, I was also etching my unresolved issues into them in a way that ultimately needed to surface and be resolved.

In this reading, it is a little authorial death, a cave we must enter to gain understanding, a dark and unforgiving place of self-annihilation, where we wallow awhile, before picking ourselves up to continue on our quest. The openings are guarded by fierce creatures, to ward off all who are incapable of encountering the higher planes within. Campbell explains:

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died (Campbell 90).

In a film there would be a beat or dramatic pause here, to allow the audience to register the threat of death. As author, I pause to remember times when the threat of death to the theoretical thrust of this thesis was real, moments of great hope and fear in relation to its inception and completion. I hoped I would find the courage to coax inner healing truths out of the safe harbour of fiction, and feared that I wouldn't. As a film audience, will we hope that Pearl can save her family, and fear she will drown trying, submerged in Eddie's bathtub on the edge of the world? I too am holding my breath, as I search for the right producer and director to do justice to this material, but, if my hopes are dashed, I too will exhale, and survive.

Meeting the Ogres Head On

It is often said, “What does not kill us makes us stronger.” Ultimately, and true of my life narrative/s, Pearl surpasses this setback afforded by an absent/disinterested father, by drawing her power and potential from the beleaguered matriarchs in her line. In doing so, she turns their curse into a gift, which saves them all from their self-imposed limitations, stemming from the sanctions of a past patriarch, a medicine man whose understanding could not encompass Pearl’s ancestor’s uniqueness.

In writing that I found my salve and inner life direction.

Writing such narratives becomes therapy: my *raison d' être* for creating a contemporary Pearl, who refuses to be cursed or contained within that past paradigm, as she approaches selfhood toward the end of *Nullarbor Pearl*.

INT. CAVE NIGHT

PEARL is standing facing the cave wall, ankle deep in dark cold water.

She holds the necklace and removes the shark tooth which she uses to confront the unseen ELDER of the past.

PEARL

This is for me and Pearl Healy.
Tellin' you to stick your curse up
your arse, ya bastard.

PEARL drops the shark tooth into the cave water and
leaves.

It took me three drafts to realise the necessity of that scene, as a step along Pearl's path to saving her great grandmother, her family, and ultimately herself. Such understandings, and the craft to realize them dramatically, come at a personal cost, a price that has to be paid on the road of trials, according to both models I am foregrounding. Murdock describes 'The Road of Trials' as: "obstructions along the way both in her outer rational world as well as in the inner world of the psyche. The outer road of trials will take her through the expected obstacle course that leads to academic careers, promotions, prestigious titles, marriage, and financial success" (Murdock 47).

The inner journey perhaps yields more satisfying fruit dramatically, because it is the stuff of emotions. Murdock relates: "Along the inner journey she will encounter the forces of her own self doubt, self hate, indecisiveness, paralysis, and fear" (Murdock 48). To find oneself amongst all of this takes courage. It is not the heroine who appears to have died, like the hero in 'the Belly of the Whale', but her previous perceptions about her limitations, which must be put to death.

My life narrative has moved quite predictably along this path, from attaining a degree, success in the film industry, a marriage which became the casualty of personal growth, after giving birth to two female children, one already studying overseas, the other, recently commencing study interstate, both well on their way to selfhood. Meanwhile, I moved on to a spate of short term relationships, as the search continued, to finally settle into a long term relationship, by the completion of this thesis, with a partner who is the antithesis of all who have gone before.

For Jung, this progression would represent the healing of my own anima/animus, my own feminine and masculine archetypal and unconscious aspects. This is the healing I yearned for, and aimed for, when I began writing the *Pearl* films, culminating in this thesis journey. Jung describes the anima and animus thus:

The anima, being of the feminine gender, is exclusively the figure that compensated the masculine consciousness. In woman, the compensating figure is of a masculine character, and can therefore appropriately be termed the *animus* (de Laszlo 179).

Is there an answer within these models of what precisely the search was all about?

Murdock describes 'Slaying the Ogre Tyrant' as carrying a sword of truth and:

sharpening her blade on the stone of discernment. Because so much of women's truth has been obscured by patriarchal

myths, new forms, new styles, and a new language must be developed by women to express their knowledge. A woman must find her own voice (Murdock 56).

Does Pearl find her voice, or do I find my voice through Pearl? The relationship is symbiotic. Murdock relates: “As each woman dispels the myth of female inferiority, she becomes a role model for others” (Murdock 56). Pearl could not afford to find love, nor do it justice until she worked through all of this for herself. It is her journey. Interestingly, *Nullarbor Pearl* went through a second draft where the love triangle between Pearl, Eddie and Massimo was foregrounded, due to pressure put upon the script by a producer, who was more interested in that story than the story I was enamoured to tell. As trading author I can assert that one must never trade away one’s vision, so we parted company. Now the search is on to find a producer and director who will honour and nurture my vision for Pearl’s journey through the film. Murdock relates:

In the myth of romantic love a woman is said to search for a father/lover/saviour whom she thinks will solve all her problems. She is prey to false notions of fulfillment. [. . .]
The unspoken message is, ‘I won’t have to figure out what I want to do. I can live *his* life’ (Murdock 57).

The real work, for Pearl and for me through her, happens when I stop, and take stock, asking myself, what do I need to do to gain selfhood? What wrongs do I

have to right? What curses do I have to reverse? This is how I arrive at my real, individual point of view. Murdock advises:

When a woman stops *doing* she must learn how to simply *be*. Being is not a luxury, it is a discipline. The heroine must listen carefully to her true inner voice. That means silencing the other voices anxious to tell her what to do. She must be willing to hold the tension until a new form emerges. Anything less than that aborts growth, denies change, and reverses transformation. Being takes courage and demands sacrifice (Murdock 83).

Campbell also arrives at a similar place, which he describes as ‘The Meeting with the Goddess’:

The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage [. . .] with the Queen Goddess of the World. [. . .] This is the crisis at its nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth, at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chambers of the heart (Campbell 109).

For me this equates with the masculine hero's encounter with his feminine side, a glimpse of the ying and yang, or what Jung describes as the anima and animus, which must find their balance within us all, before we are able to complete our quest and find peace, for the golden fleece lies within, not without, according to Murdock's model. When we stop doing, and start being, when we work out that self love is not pain, we are well on the way to overcoming all the obstacles and ogres of self deception we have put in our own paths.

I found solace in this knowledge when I decided to just be, to linger in the cave, when my wheels were spinning on my research, when the doctors told me the one in a million condition I have can cause Leukemia, when my stepfather was diagnosed with cancer, when my daughter in the States had no time or inclination to talk for months on end, or another lover left because I was too unobtainable or difficult. In the face of pain and disappointment, when the quest seems too tough, it is worth remembering that one needs nothing, nobody, outside of oneself to find completion, but it takes 'being' time to come to terms with this understanding and value it.

Murdock's arguments agree with Campbell's 'Belly of the Whale' precisely at this juncture: "The descent is characterized as a journey to the underworld, the dark night of the soul, the belly of the whale, the meeting of the dark goddess, or simply as depression. It is usually precipitated by a life changing loss" (Murdock 87-88).

She further explains: “Women find their way back to themselves not by moving up and out into the light like men, but by moving down into the depths of the ground of their being” (Murdock 89).

It takes time to realize this, to put aside notions that one’s pain can be eased by burdening a relationship with it. Pearl understands this in *Nullarbor Pearl*, when she resists Massimo’s advances and ventures alone to the cliffs. There, she finds the bathtub left by Eddie, whom she also does not enter into a relationship with. Pearl immerses fully in the bath to save her great grandmother, and in so doing risks her life. Deep within, she senses their destinies are entwined; her identity now matters more to her than her life. From *Nullarbor Pearl*:

EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

PEARL unwinds the bandage off her foot, sitting on the edge of the world, on the edge of Eddie's bathtub.

She solemnly disrobes down to her undies and scatters the remnants of her Great Grandma's necklace into the bath.

PEARL looks at the mother of pearl pieces glinting in the bottom of the bath, her breath quickening as she swings her legs in and slides under, submerging completely, surrendering utterly to the spirit of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL.

In *Shoalwater Pearl*, young Pearl finds solace in the oddball boy in the aquarium, Jackson, who has suffered the loss of his mother who drowned, just a year before Pearl's arrival. They are pubescent soul mates, able to console each other with their other worldly belief that spirits who have drowned reside forever in the water. It offers both characters a sense of the never ending bond they can still have with both of their drowned relatives, within their watery graves.

Jackson offers Pearl solace and support over the loss of her father, and she offers the same solace for him about his mother. In a way, they prop each other up, when their worlds are dark, and the cave is lonely. It is not yet what Murdock describes above as 'the myth of romantic love', or its predecessor, just a comforting step on their adolescent journeys. If I were to continue to write them growing into adulthood, they would both ultimately reside in an array of adult relationships for a while, believing these relationships hold the answer, until they ultimately see them as less of 'the' answer and more like soul tests on the journey to selfhood. From *Shoalwater Pearl*:

EXT. COOGEE BEACH NIGHT

PEARL and JACKSON are on the beach with a torch, illuminating their faces as they make a memorial of shells. JACKSON has brought some floating candles which they silently light and set on the sea.

Solemn silence as they watch them bob and eventually flicker out.

PEARL

Doesn't matter what Dad says,
there's spirits in that water. I
can feel 'em. Even from here.

JACKSON

You think she's in there with me,
every time I go in?

PEARL

Every time.

What happens, in art and in life, after spiritual aridity and metaphorical death? Campbell calls it 'The Ultimate Boon'. He relates: "The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization" (Campbell 190). Death is defeated. There is only the return to complete, with the freedom to live as yet a distant hope. Murdock describes this resurrection after spiritual aridity and death as an 'Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine'. She suggests:

When a woman has made the descent and severed her
identity as a spiritual daughter of the patriarchy, this is an

urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine, whether that be the Goddess, the Mother, or her little girl within. There is a desire to develop those parts of herself that have gone underground while on the heroic quest: her body, her emotions, her spirit, her creative wisdom. [. . .] She may now be reminded that her body and spirit are one. [. . .] The mysteries of the feminine realm will appear in her dreams, in synchronistic events, in her poetry, art, and dance (Murdock 111).

What does Pearl do in *Pilbara Pearl*, after being abandoned by Eddie? She accepts his return and allows him into her world, enabling him to see. This Pearl is still in the phase of her journey when she believes in ‘romantic love’, as I did, then.

What does Pearl do in *Nullarbor Pearl* after saving her family? She paints the once taboo master narrative of her identity on the roadhouse wall, enables Beryl to take over the healing of the community, and prepares to set off on her return.

What do I do in my life narrative after resurrecting Pearl in *Nullarbor Pearl*? I find the little girl within and also call her Pearl. Then I go back to the source and urgently reconnect with her in *Shoalwater Pearl*, all the while incorporating what I have learned on the journey into this thesis. In doing so, I finally find the means to explain how, for me, life is narrative and narrative is life, as I continue my journey along the pathway of yearning to make meaning of my existence.

Pearl realizes she is gifted with a certain sort of perception, and so do I. When she takes responsibility for her self healing, so do I. Does our story end here? Not according to these models. Campbell relates:

When the hero-quest has been accomplished [. . .] the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. But the responsibility has frequently been refused (Campbell 193).

Perhaps this would explain all my procrastination, when it came to writing this thesis, and yet, for Campbell, the answer lies in greater understanding. For him, ‘Crossing the Return Threshold’ means becoming master of two worlds, the divine and the human. He explains:

The hero ventures out of the land we know into darkness; there he accomplishes his adventure, or again is simply lost to us, imprisoned, or in danger; and his return is described as a coming back out of the yonder zone. Nevertheless – and here is the great key to the understanding of myth and symbol – the two kingdoms are usually one (Campbell 217).

In his preface, Vogler offers us a handy definition of myth from Campbell's point of view: "A myth, as Joseph Campbell was fond of saying, is a metaphor for a mystery beyond our comprehension. It is a comparison that helps us understand, by analogy, some aspect of our mysterious selves. A myth in this way of thinking, is not an untruth but a way of reaching profound truth" (Vogler vii).

Campbell and Murdock appear to agree that: "the hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he *is*" (Campbell 243). For Murdock, the return is not so much of a flight back to where one began with a trophy or golden fleece; rather it is a path of healing of both the mother daughter rifts encountered early in life in the Oedipal stage, along with the wounded masculine, in the shape of the father, and the masculine within. I found this most intriguing, in terms of Pearl saving her great grandmother in *Nullarbor Pearl*, and her great grandmother passing on her gift to Pearl. Murdock explains:

Many women call upon the image of Grandmother as a guide to the mysterious realms of the feminine. [. . .] Like Hecate, Grandmother Spider, and Hestia, she embodies qualities of feminine insight, wisdom, strength, and nurturance which may be missing from a woman's daily life. We call upon this crone of the feminine to help us through difficult transitions (Murdock 141).

As we have seen, I began by writing *Pilbara Pearl*, which was constructed out of binaries and dualities, thematically centred on the exploration of romantic love, then I began writing *Nullarbor Pearl*, which was less interested in romantic love, and more interested in the exploration of identity and selfhood, beyond the realm of which it may be possible to imagine Pearl eventually sustaining a relationship, something that is hinted at, in the final scene.

Meanwhile, I wrote *Shoalwater Pearl* as a stepping stone on the healing journey, whilst reconnecting with the little girl within. I offer here a researcher's reflection upon all of this, my own summation of my personal journey beyond the binaries.

Murdock too arrives at a similar position, which she describes as 'Beyond Duality':

The sin of dualism mars our psyche, contaminating our attitudes about mind, body, soul, women, men, children, animals, nature, spirituality, as well as about political structures. We divide ideas and people into hierarchies of good/bad, us/them, black/white, right/wrong. We separate spirit from matter, mind from body, science from art, good from evil, life from death, women from men, fat from thin, young from old, socialist from capitalist, and liberal from conservative. We see the other as the enemy, and we rationalize our criticism, judgment, and the polarization we create by arrogantly saying that we are "correct" or that we have God or the Goddess on our side (Murdock 169-170).

Clearly, there has been a psychological progression for myself as a person, who was not always a writer, through the *Pearl* films, from a naive romantic narrative presented in *Pilbara Pearl*, through to a more riveting and real rendering of psychological struggle in *Nullarbor Pearl*, deriving from evidence presented in *Shoalwater Pearl*. Again, the gift works its magic in mysterious ways.

“Summoned or not, the god will come”

(Motto over the door of Carl Jung's house quoted in Vogler 33).

The quotation does not attempt to define God and neither will I, for I do not know if there is a God or Goddess on my side, but I do, by and large, subscribe to the views of Campbell and Murdock, regarding the emotional truths described in their interpretations of the hero's and heroine's quests. Murdock's answer to the end of the quest is simple - integration. In her estimation:

The task of today's heroine [. . .] is to mine the gold and silver within *herself*. She must develop a positive relationship with her inner Man with Heart and find the voice of her Woman of Wisdom to heal her estrangement from the sacred feminine. As she honors her body and soul as well as her mind, she heals the split within herself and the culture (Murdock 184-185).

As the trials now draw to a close, it feels to me that my thesis is almost complete, however, the mythic journey is never complete, and there is much still to be passed on.

The Return: How I Inform Pearl and She Informs Me

“There are only two or three human stories,
and they go on repeating themselves
as fiercely as if they never happened before”
(Cather in *O Pioneers* quoted in Vogler 13).

Are the hero's and heroine's journeys two of them? I tend to believe various permutations of the journey are bubbling away beneath all of them. Researching these quests has informed my work and my life, assisting me to write three unique films and a chapter of this thesis. It is my hope that it will have cross cultural appeal and psychological relevance for other writers who may also be struggling to come to terms with their own unresolvedness, via the medium of screenwriting.

Have I adhered to my unspoken task, of healing the rifts within and therefore the world as I perceive it, through writing film scripts and a thesis which fictionalizes then theorizes about the unresolved until it feels adequately resolved? Can Pearl now be put to bed? Is the whole quest an inner drive to understand and ultimately dispel personal pain? What does Pearl do when she leaves enabled Beryl at the roadhouse to continue on with her communal healing work?

Beyond the world of the scripts attached, two of which must still be refined before they can be considered shooting scripts, as writer and author, I can tell you that Pearl allows Eddie to bring her to her dead father so that she may bury him. She returns home and makes up with her mother, and in doing so, answers her true calling from the outset, to heal all the rifts within.

According to Richert: “A person who understands him-or herself as a truly empowered authentic self/narrator can fashion whatever type of life he or she wants” (Richert 100). I don’t need to write another *Pearl* film to know this. Her work is done.

Narrative therapy practices lead the therapist to examine recurring themes in self narratives, which are closely listened to because they provide clues regarding how the client is dealing with, or failing to deal with, their problems or psychological blockages. In the absence of a therapist, I have sought my own answers by writing fictional narratives with themes which explore my life narratives. As demonstrated, my themes through the scripts have moved as my life journey evolved, enabling me to, finally, put Pearl to bed. For Campbell:

The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear,

rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding [. . .]
every one of us shares the supreme ordeal – carries the
cross of the redeemer – not in the bright moments of the
tribe’s great victories, but in the silences of his personal
despair (Campbell 391).

Now that my ethnographic, interpretive approach as a person/writer/researcher has
been firmly established, let’s venture on, into identity, representation, Aboriginality
and gender. It is a different journey with the same aim in the destination window:
to arrive at my various ‘truths’ as a Caucasian, multicultural, female author, who
peers through the many lenses of her fiction, in order to understand and heal.

Remember – a storyteller wants to be all his [or her]
characters or knows he [or she] is already all of them
(Berry quoted in Parkinson 27).

Chapter Two: Representation

Diving into the Wreck

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light

the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments

that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

(Rich 22-24)

“What is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not disavow,
what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable”
(Butler 1993, 234).

When one of my supervisors, Associate Professor Jennifer de Reuck, drew my attention to the above poem by Rich, I decided to cite it because its themes resonate with those in my *Pearl* films and with the focus of this thesis, in particular what this chapter articulates in terms of identity and representation. Like the persona in the above poem, and, as evidenced in chapter one: “I [too] came to see the damage that was done and [write to reveal] the treasures that prevail” (Rich 23).

And, is it possible that Rich, above, and Murdock, in her exploration of *The Heroine's Journey*, quoted extensively in the previous chapter, agree that “I am she: I am he” (Rich 24) in the moment of recognition, that the heroine’s journey into self awareness takes her beyond the borders of binary gender duality, into the realm of inner integration between genders? Furthermore, in her image of androgyny, does Rich not propose her own myth, beyond “the thing itself and not the myth” (Rich 23) just as ironically as some cultural-literary theorists such as Barthes (1975) and Foucault (1975) who, whilst insisting on the death of the author, posit their ‘own’ alternatives as authors?

The last lines of the above poem resonate particularly well with me because my name does not appear in my screenplays, only on their title pages as author; however, my dilemmas do appear, draped in drama, in the other worldliness of the mysterious deep water delver who is Pearl.

Butler’s point, above, resonates differently for me. It speaks to me of the mystery of unraveling what is written for performance, in order to find different buried treasure such as the unresolved psychological issues, which I believe always inform one’s writing, as outlined in chapter one. The *Pearl* screenplays are the fiction, beneath which my motivating personal ‘truths’ pulsate, and I now reverse this process in this thesis, in order to reveal how those ‘truths’ operate for me as the author of the appended screenplays. Another subterranean layer, which the performance of my fictional dramas conceals, is my authorial aims and objectives for the material, as we shall soon discover.

The Journey Begins

This chapter begins by broadly examining representations of minority cultures within the Australian landscape. It peers through the lens of gender as presented in my three *Pearl* film scripts, resulting in a better understanding of the various means by which these representations, and my specific relationship with them as author, have been operating in the creative component of this doctoral thesis.

In many ways, it is a chapter which must take us on a journey backwards, through the maze of contentious, conflicting ideologies and theories, which had to be negotiated before arriving at any sort of conclusion, whilst holding fast to idealised notions of love and truth, which thematically underscore all three *Pearl* films.

Almost on the doorstep of the conclusion, we arrive at the beginning, at *Pilbara Pearl*, where we pause to reveal how, when romantic love takes precedence, magic realist elements will sway it, like an insistent undercurrent, into the realm of the sublime and trauma, prompting the use of different critical and theoretical viewfinders. From there, we can only venture further back, beyond the life of the scripts, to life itself, to make meaning of the entire endeavour in conclusion.

It is my contention that theories of authorship, representation, identity, gender, multiculturalism and Aboriginality are each in perpetual motion and dynamic, which is precisely what makes them contentious at any particular time.

Before we embark on our chapter two journey, I must point out that the term multiculturalism is particularly in contention. Professor of Cultural Studies, Ang, uses the term ‘cosmopolitan multiculturalism’ in defence of her claim that: “multiculturalism has fallen from favour, rapidly overtaken by strident calls for integration” (Ang 2008, 230). She additionally asserts that she makes this claim: “to promote an ethos that starts with the knowledge that people are different, but also recognizes that there is much to learn from our differences” (Ang 2008, 230). Like Ang, my aim in discussing multiculturalism also stems from an interest in emphasizing our multiple identities and the changing dynamic character of what it means to be ‘Australian’, especially in our remote communities.

When I choose to incorporate an array of multicultural and Aboriginal characters in my screenplays, as I have done, I do so representationally, so that these small communities can operate as microcosms of the nation. Anthropologist, Cowlshaw, draws upon the assertion of Bourdieu (enclosed within her quote) to argue for a similar approach to cultural theory: “just as 'it is possible to enter into the singularity of an object without renouncing the ambition of drawing out universal propositions' so it is possible, by entering into the singularity of a small town, to draw out propositions about the nation” (Cowlshaw 249).

Armed with this understanding, let’s begin our journey in this chapter, which reveals the sometimes conflicting psychological hurdles and understandings I have encountered, whilst articulating my own ‘authorial’ relationship to representation, identity, multiculturalism, Aboriginality and gender within my three *Pearl* scripts.

Then we will venture further, digging deeper into the beginning, into the realm of the sublime and trauma, at work in the originating screenplay, *Pilbara Pearl*.

Identity, Aboriginality and Multiculturalism: Encountering Barriers and Complexities in the New World

The hallmark of all three film scripts is the cultural contrasts they represent. *Pilbara Pearl* features a romance between a gifted Aboriginal woman and a disbelieving Caucasian Australian man. *Nullarbor Pearl* presents these same lead characters amid an outback community of competing minority cultures, and *Shoalwater Pearl* also represents people who seem to have run from their own potential, only to find solace and acceptance in each other, via Pearl's gift. As alluded to above, I use the term multicultural advisedly, knowing that there is a vast array of theory in circulation around the term. I will begin by subscribing to this view of multiculturalism posited by Gunew:

multicultural critical theory can serve to remind one of both the local and global in that it introduces minority perspectives as well as suggesting diasporic networks. It continues to be a way of situating subjectivities outside certain nationalist investments and hence may be used as a way of paying attention to minority perspectives, using

them to critique dominant discourses and practices (Gunew 2004, 28).

In line with the hero's and heroine's journeys, as outlined in chapter one, after the initial disturbances she brings into her remote multicultural community in *Nullarbor Pearl*, Pearl is positioned as a conduit to greater self-awareness for all of the inhabitants' 'minority perspectives', including those of her own, as gift bearer.

Pearl's gift and her Aboriginality are entwined, in a hidden narrative, which is at first rejected as an unacceptable curse by the secretive matriarchs of the narrative, Marnie and Beryl. These matriarchs hide Pearl's Aboriginal ancestry from her because of their fear of its 'curse', which has nothing to do with cultural stigma, but with a real curse which we discover has been put upon their ancestor by a tribal elder.

Besides paying homage to my own life narrative, as described in chapter one, in which my true identity was kept a secret from me until I reached my teens, why would I make Pearl's Aboriginality a secret from her until she reached her teens? And why did I wrap her identity in the dark cloak of a curse, which only transforms into a gift once Pearl adopts it proudly as a sign of her uniqueness? My stated aim in chapter one was to demonstrate the power of reconciliatory change to global audiences in an evocative mode of cinematic representation, widely known as entertainment. To understand why my aim is reconciliatory, I turn to Hodge and Mishra, who state:

For the past 200 years Aboriginal culture has been produced against the background of repressive policies which attacked Aboriginal people on two fronts: through overt racism and through more devious methods of ‘Aboriginalism’ (Hodge and Mishra 71).

To take this further, my aim is also to help redress the racist way many non-Indigenous Australians have perceived Indigenous Australians historically, particularly the damage caused by our disapproving, white coloniser’s gaze.

What do I mean by our ‘white colonizer’s gaze’ precisely? With regard to Aboriginal communities, Cowlshaw states: “The white gaze is ubiquitous and disapproving” (Cowlshaw 87). Elsewhere she adds: “Public imagery worms its way into the meanings a place has for its residents. The outsiders’ gaze can generate considerable self-awareness. Residents are familiar with media images and ideas about their town [... but from within, this] operates as a joke on outsiders” (Cowlshaw 3).

As a screenwriter, the audience’s gaze is of central importance to me. I must therefore ask myself: can my positive representation of Pearl help Indigenous viewers redress white-tainted, negative self-recognition, inflicted upon them by this ‘white colonizer’s gaze’? In his article, *The Politics of Recognition*, Taylor links identity and recognition thus:

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor 98).

No matter what colour my skin, for me writing Pearl is a form of idealised utopian re-vision, offering me the opportunity to promote an alternate reality, in which recognition from within and from without in the form of self and community transformation can help erase systematic, historical non-recognition, enacting enormous change in one woman's lifetime. That is the idealised world I wish to represent, and if positing this exposes me to claims of white shame and guilt because of the systematic oppression of Indigenous Australians by our forebears, so be it. However, I prefer to view re-vision as a wish to promote future change in the narrative of a nation.

Consider this description by anthropologist, Geertz, who describes the motivation to create change as the need:

to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, numbed as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way (Geertz 60).

When I represent Pearl, Beryl and Marnie and Pearl's great grandmother, Pearl, I create a matriarchal line of narrative about a fictitious family, not an historical discourse on race, yet from this family of women many meanings can be extrapolated. One may ask, why are Aboriginality, the gift, and secrecy entwined in my *Pearl* films? Such a question is like asking why the conscious and unconscious motivations of authors are complex. I will do my best to answer it.

In regard to the process of creating a gifted woman character, who belatedly discovers her Indigeneity, I remind the reader that there is no need for me to defend my authorial choices in terms of race or gender, because I have already described how Pearl emerged in chapter one: as a consequence of binary oppositions in *Pilbara Pearl*. Furthermore, I can claim a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as a space for my imagining and creativity, because Pearl's gift is taken from my imagination, rather than the Aboriginal dreamtime, or secret business, as I have no lived experience of Aboriginal life. Put simply, my creative 'dreaming' is my justification, stemming from my psychological truth, when writing about a woman, who seeks to find her hidden heritage.

My gift to Pearl is self awareness, as revealed in chapter one, just as writing her has offered me self awareness in a complex, rather than deceptive manner.

Consequently, I do not anticipate claims of political incorrectness for being a Caucasian, multicultural author 'writing an Aboriginal woman', who at first does not know she is Aboriginal, because I, authorial 'mother of Pearl', have never claimed to be Indigenous. Unlike the scandal which erupted within Australian literary circles in 1995, when Brisbane writer, Helen Darville, of English descent, wrote an award winning novel, entitled *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, about her supposed Ukrainian family, under the nom de plume of Helen Demidenko, I commit no such acts of cultural ventriloquism.

Having stated my aim within chapter one: to map unresolved issues in my own life narrative, in order to reveal how they inform my work as author, I now reveal, in chapter two, how the treatment of these issues in a fictional narrative has assisted me in reaching for a broader aim: to urge societal change in the hearts and minds of global audiences. At the time of completing this thesis, only *Pilbara Pearl* has reached global audiences, so my reach still exceeds my grasp. Nevertheless, my journey through writing these three film scripts and this thesis has been a cathartic, healing chapter in my own life narrative. And I hope it will inform other authors interested in interrogating their life narratives to find stories to relate, which will not only help transform their lives, but also the lives of others in audiences around the world.

Years before I wrote *Pilbara Pearl*, produced in 1998, Saunders, then the Director of the Indigenous branch of the Australian Film Commission, asked me of a previous script, “Where are the black fellas in here? Are we invisible?” I believe Saunders was calling upon a long tradition of white suppression, which Hodge and Mishra describe as a strategy:

One major strategy is total suppression of the existence of Aborigines from major domains of discourse so Aboriginal history almost disappeared from the dominant histories of Australia (Hodge and Mishra 27).

Anthropologist, Langton, relates of the era: “By 1992, Aboriginal and Islander people were still virtually invisible on the three commercial television networks” (Langton 1993, 21). Aware of this, I later wrote *Pilbara Pearl*, a film full of contrasts, having by then decided that I agreed with Saunders’ perspective. It was time for me to do what little I could to personally reverse that trend and present not only an Aboriginal character, but a positive Aboriginal lead role character called Pearl. As stated in chapter one, Saunders called that script “a gem” (Saunders 1), The Australian Film Commission funded it, in addition to the finance afforded to it by ScreenWest, and others already mentioned.

In his book, *Australian National Cinema*, O’Regan describes the era in which *Pilbara Pearl* originated thus: “Critical and policy debate on Australian cinema over the 1990s was dominated by debates over directions, possibilities and limits of

internationalism and over an Australian cultural identity, which needed to be reconfigured in ways welcoming of cultural diversity” (O’Regan 2001, 18). My theoretical investigations into Aboriginality revealed a great deal of anxiety about Caucasian authors writing about Indigenous characters - anxiety which I did not feel when writing *Pilbara Pearl*. Nevertheless, I was challenged into thinking about Pearl in many new ways, and was forced to closely examine my choices in writing her, wondering if I had fallen under the spell of what Said, a founding figure in postcolonial theory, has widely theorised as ‘orientalism’. Hodge and Mishra state:

Orientalism in his [Said’s] account has a double movement, a fascination with the culture of the colonised along with a suppression of their capacity to speak or truly know it. [. . .] Within the Australian culture a similar phenomenon can be labelled ‘Aboriginalism’ (Hodge and Mishra 27).

I concede, as a Caucasian author, who has created an Indigenous character, I could be labelled as orientalist or Aboriginalist, or be criticised for ‘colonizing the other’. Langton explains: “Whatever the economic conditions, the discourse is colonial. The term ‘discourse’ is used here in the sense meant by Michel Foucault as a system of power. The subject speaks back, and the dominant culture is informed by Aboriginal cultural practices, particularly practices of resistance” (Langton 1993, 36).

Langton further cautions against the medium of film being invested with “some magical power to correct racism” (Langton 1993, 55). However, she also confronts herself with the following question: “Why are some people not racist?” (Langton 1993, 35). She adds, “It is important to recognise that some people are not racist and take the anti-racist sentiment in the film and television industry further” (Langton 1993, 35). I cannot ‘answer back’ for anyone, particularly Aboriginal people, regarding what might be said of my film scripts, my aims, or this thesis. I can only hope that there will not be silence of the sort described by here Langton:

The problem of discussing the politics and aesthetics of film and television production by or about Aborigines lies in the positioning of us as object, and the person behind the camera as subject. If we are so misplaced, it is therefore not surprising that the political and aesthetic critique of these images is so muted. The problem remains one of dominance (Langton 1993, 39).

My first response upon reading the following statement by Langton was to tend toward disagreement because of my assumption that today’s audiences are, by and large, screen savvy enough to recognise, when paying to see any fictional feature film, that they are witnessing an account or story involving characters, in which all ‘reality’ is representational. Langton states:

Representation and aesthetic statements of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people transform the Aboriginal reality. They are *accounts*. It is these representations that Aboriginal as subject becomes, under the white gaze imagining the Aboriginal, the object. The audience, however, might be entirely unaware that they are observing an *account*, usually by the authorial We of the Other (Langton 1993, 40).

Reading Hedges assisted me in understanding what Langton's reference to "the audience" as opposed to my own equally generalised notion of "today's audiences", might both need to acknowledge, when discussing the consumption of cinematic representation. Hedges explains:

Cognitive psychology now tells us that we perceive the real world through "frames of representation" made up of previous experience, our acculturation within a given socio-historical context, and our learned strategies for dealing with unfamiliar information or situations. Thus "objective reality" will appear different to people of different cultures, classes, and historical moments. The spectator's ability to "read" a feature film depends, additionally, upon a familiarity with intertextual frames: a knowledge of film language at its present point of development, of film genres

perhaps [... and] an understanding of the narrative conventions of fiction films (Hedges 35).

Accordingly, I must acknowledge that every audience member's experience differs in keeping with the above description; however, utilising the device of magic realism helps distance my scripts from the danger of being unwittingly consumed as 'realism'. I define realism in this context as a film's relationship with reality when it is understood to be immediate and direct. A fuller discussion of magic realism will emerge later in this chapter, but firstly, I wish to agree with Labudovic's definition of the sort of cinematic realism I am attempting to diverge from when she observes that: "The West is prone to expressing its preoccupations in film through psychological realism: that is, through dramatized internal conflicts and dream sequences, rather than magic realism, which openly acknowledges and embraces possibilities of the mysterious and the magical" (Labudovic 47).

Interestingly, literary theorist, Mellen, believes one needs to provide "justification" for the use of magic realism, as if it should only be used particularly or sparingly:

There is no justification for enlisting magic realism unless there is a larger truth which cannot be reached but for distortion of ordinary social realism. Magic realism at its best relies not upon flights of fantasy, but on the peculiar fusion of fact and fantasy in the service of a quest for meaning (Mellen 6).

Whilst I disagree that “ordinary social realism” should take precedence, I posit that the screenwriter has at his or her disposal every cinematic device imaginable in order to assist in whichever rendition of his/her tale he or she favours. In *Pilbara Pearl*, I utilised magic realism to explore unresolved issues in my life, whilst presenting a utopian ‘vision’ to global audiences. Consequently, my use of the device, coincidentally, did meet all ‘the criterion’ mentioned by Mellen above.

However, utilising magic realism does not remove the complex representations of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ which are perpetually being negotiated on and off the screen. Postcolonialist, Naficy, in his article, *Self-Othering: A Postcolonial Discourse on Cinematic First Contacts*, explains:

Power relations are rarely unidirectional and unproblematic
[...] Most often, they are multidirectional and complex.
[...] The knowledge of, influence over, and resistance
against the colonizing power are based less on the
immediate, direct, coercive colonial experience than on the
generally one-way flow of meditations provided by the
ideological, conscious-shaping, and marketing institutions
of the emporium – among them, religion, tourism, banking,
education, journalism, and the media, entertainment, and
mass merchandising industries (Naficy 293).

It is important to note that these notions of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ referred to above are widely known in literary circles to have originated from the theories of Foucault, who posits that man is the subject and object of his own knowledge in *The Order of Things*:

At the foundation of all the empirical positivities, and of everything that can indicate itself as a concrete limitation of man’s existence, we discover a finitude – which is in a sense the same: it is marked by the spatiality of the body, the yawning of desire, and the time of language; and yet it is radically other: in this sense the limitation is expressed not as a determination imposed upon man from outside (because he has no nature or a history), but as a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation (Foucault 1973, 315).

In order to strive for authorial transparency in this thesis, I have conceded, above, that I could be accused of the very thing I am opposed to doing: representing Pearl as an ‘object’. However, by explaining the conditions of her origin and my aims for the *Pearl* films, I have also made it clear how I actively attempt to deflect such claims. Nonetheless, I find it difficult to disagree with postcolonial critic, Spivak, who uses Derridean deconstruction to remind us of the ways in which we all may become complicit in the very assumptions or social formations we oppose:

Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of an error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced (Spivak 1976, 28).

Every time I mention how writing autobiographical truth is problematised in this thesis, I am investigating ways of agreeing with Spivak's reminder above. Within the Indian context, in her article, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Spivak asks: "What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The questions of "woman" seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and a female you get it in three ways" (Spivak 1988, 294).

It is my contention, writing within the Australian context, that my representation of Pearl as a lead character in a feature film, who speaks, discovers and values her cultural identity in a magic realist narrative, lifts her beyond the limitations of Spivak's silenced Indian 'subaltern'. Nevertheless, as a Caucasian Australian, multicultural, female researcher and screenwriter, regarding my choice in creating a "poor, black, [albeit gifted] female" lead character (in Spivak's terms) what should I do in the face of possible criticism for my authorial choices? Abandon Pearl? Where does one begin to assert one's prerogative as an author, who refuses to be censored by such debates? What would be the point of *not* attempting to instigate

societal change or *not* attempting to encourage a better, more accepting interaction between the colonisers and the colonised of Australia, due to fear of criticism for one's creative choices?

It is important to acknowledge here how all the research I have encountered after writing *Pilbara Pearl* has, in many ways, influenced the other two *Pearl* scripts. Because of my research into Aboriginality, I decided to reach a hybrid position, after the second draft of *Nullarbor Pearl*, in which Pearl was Aboriginal from start to finish. In the appended third draft, I made her only discover her Aboriginality half way through the attached third draft, which more closely honours my own life narrative, regarding not knowing my true identity until reaching my teens. In doing so, I have also paid homage to the plight of the stolen generations, whose right it also is to know their heritage.

There are many confidential and moving first hand accounts given by stolen children in *Bringing Them Home, a National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, published in April 1997.

The Reconciliation Australia fact sheet, entitled *Apology to the Stolen Generations*, defines the 'stolen generations' as: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were forcibly removed, as children, from their families and communities by government, welfare and church authorities and placed into institutional care or with non-Indigenous foster families" (Undisclosed "Reconciliation Australia: Apology to the Stolen Generations").

Here is just one of the accounts from *Bringing Them Home*, documented as:
Confidential evidence 136, Victoria: man adopted into a non-Indigenous family at 3 months; still grieving that he was unable to meet his birth mother before she died.

I've got everything that could be reasonably expected: a good home environment, education, stuff like that, but that's all material stuff. It's all the non-material stuff that I didn't have - the lineage. It's like you're the first human being at times. You know, you've just come out of nowhere; there you are. In terms of having a direction in life, how do you know where you're going if you don't know where you've come from? (Undisclosed 1997, 9).

Researching such first hand accounts prompted me to ask myself: am I suppressing or appropriating the Aboriginal voice of the stolen generations by depicting an Aboriginal character, who has been denied her heritage? The answer was a decisive No. I am formulating my own interpretation of a character, who is at first ignorant of her Indigenous ancestry, then angry about not being informed, a character who journeys along the path of denial and rebellion, which ultimately leads her to reach acceptance of her ancestry and with it, her uniqueness. In doing so, I give voice to emotions true to my own experience, whilst simultaneously writing as a Caucasian Australian, who wishes, in some small way, to help redress the devastation inflicted upon Indigenous Australians by writing three reconciliatory *Pearl* screenplays, in the hope of them reaching global audiences.

Nevertheless, my further research into Aboriginality prompted more questions. Had I written Pearl as ‘a coconut’, to use an Aboriginal expression quoted by Hodge and Mishra? “Aborigines use the term ‘coconut’ (white on the inside) as a term of abuse for Aborigines who have, they feel, become too complicit with white forms of thought” (Hodge 75). Since my film scripts are fictional, dramatic and unconcerned with presenting documentary reality regarding Aboriginal culture, I soon cast that question aside, but, it did give me pause to deeply consider Pearl’s “white forms of thought”, as worded by Hodge and Mishra. I decided that since Pearl had no lived experience of being Indigenous, she could only have “white forms of thought” (whatever they may be) until she discovers her ancestry and either casts aside or embraces her uniqueness, as evidenced in *Nullarbor Pearl*.

I then moved on to further research and was pleased to discover that my life narrative quite closely resembled the dramatic shape of Morgan’s life, as documented in *My Place* (Morgan) which I was only to read after writing *Nullarbor Pearl*. Like myself and like Pearl, Morgan only discovered her true identity in her teens, and like Pearl, there were fierce secrets and censure surrounding the revealing of her Aboriginal ancestry in a family which had charaded as Caucasian.

Hodge and Mishra state: “the Aboriginalist doubt is raised, whether her [Sally Morgan’s] understanding of Aboriginality could be ‘authentic’, or whether it should be judged to be superficial and exploitative” (Hodge 98). Like Morgan and like Pearl, I did not absorb the cultural traditions of my identity until I was half grown

up, then only from outside the Italian culture. Consequently, my defence against such judgements is that it is a fact of such an upbringing that one's knowledge has been purposely limited and superficial, due to the upholding of the family secret.

In her book, *Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television . . .*, Langton questions the Commonwealth's definitions of Aboriginality, and discusses *My Place* in relation to this:

Sally Morgan's first best seller, *My Place*, demonstrated to the nation, the problem is not so straightforward, Morgan 'found' her 'Aboriginality' in adulthood, by suspecting a deceit. One wonders what the appeal of *My Place* was to such a wide readership. Perhaps Morgan assuages the guilt of the whites, especially white women, who were complicit in the assimilation program and the deception into which families like the Morgans felt they were forced? After all, Sally turned out to be a fine young lady, didn't she? (Langton 1993, 29).

It seems to me that while we, the Australian nation, appear to desire and appreciate some things about minority cultures, for instance, culinary diversity, dancing and singing, more controversial aspects are either swept under the mat or they make front page news. When Pearl paints, she paints people in an underwater mural of my imagination, rather than traditional Aboriginal landscapes, so, according to the

term above, quoted by Hodge and Mishra, my choice of her painting style and choice subject matter might delineate Pearl as a ‘coconut’, but it is certainly not a term I would use to describe her.

Despite knowing that I will ultimately have no power to dictate Pearl’s painting style, as this will ultimately become the realm of the director, specialist artist, and the art department, I imagine Pearl painting in the style of magic realist painters of almost a century ago. Labudovic points out: “magic realism actually originates not in the world of literature, as some might suppose, but in the world of painting [...] German art critic, Franz Roh was the first to use the term in 1925 to characterize a group of painters” (Labudovic 6). It is important to note here that the fertile ground for me, as a writer of filmic narratives, is precisely where I create a world in which I do *not* appropriate Aboriginal culture or lived experience. Instead, I aim for originality by mining my own emotionally unresolved memories, in order to offer these nuances to a character in this situation. I do so for the sake of conflict, drama and resolution, resulting in Pearl going through her identity crisis in order to finally embrace herself as she is, just as I did within my own life narrative.

To reiterate, I wrote *Pilbara Pearl* in 1998, when Australian sensibilities were largely in the grip of reconciliatory sentiment, despite the remaining decade of the Howard era, with its lack of apology to Indigenous Australians. I wrote *Pilbara Pearl* to create an alternate narrative, to invent a world in which racist notions were displaced by a positive depiction of an Indigenous woman/lead character in

relationship with a Caucasian man. For a definition of ‘racist’, I turn to Nyoongah in his article, *Passing for White Passing for Black*, written in 1994:

What happened in the film industry is that every major director has done their film on blacks. Of course, they are all white. [. . .] I don’t think at any point any of those films have advanced the cause of the Aboriginal people. I think mostly what they have done is reinforced what white Australians think about us. Low life. It’s negative images, reinforcing negative images all the time in the minds of the children about what Aboriginal people are. How do you get out of that? (Nyoongah 267).

It appears that there are no easy solutions. In Britain, they didn’t “get out of that” by simply reversing positive and negative Indigenous and non-Indigenous representations on screen, according to Hall, in reference to black British cinema:

Films are not necessarily good because black people make them. They are not necessarily “right on” by virtue of the fact that they deal with the black experience. Once you enter the politics of the end of the black subject you are plunged headlong into a maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism. You can no longer

conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject. Now, that formulation may seem to threaten the collapse of an entire political world (Hall 28).

Rather than allowing this thesis to get sucked into such black/white binary struggles over what might constitute politically correct cinematic positionalities, I pause to note that today in 2008, as I complete this thesis, the memory of Australian Prime Minister Rudd's formally repeated utterance of 'Sorry' to the Aboriginal people of Australia is still recent in the collective consciousness of our nation. And, at this moment in time, the notion of presenting an ultimately positive representation of Indigenous Pearl, who battles low self-esteem and ultimately attains social approval, written as a reconciliatory gesture toward Aboriginality, still holds a great deal of validity for me.

Reconciliation Australia's *Apology to the Stolen Generations* fact sheet provides answers to its own questions regarding: "*Why is it important to apologise to the Stolen Generations?*":

The Bringing Them Home report found that the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities has had life-long and profoundly disabling consequences for those taken, while

negatively affecting the entire Indigenous community
(Undisclosed).

Still adhering to my valid position, as stated above, armed with more research and greater awareness around issues of Aboriginality than I had when first conceiving *Pilbara Pearl*, I continued to write *Nullarbor Pearl* and *Shoalwater Pearl*. In the course of my research, I was constantly reminded of the lived reality for Aboriginal people in articles like *Come What May*, written by Araeen, who points out: “While all this [love of Indigenous art, music, food] is going on as part of the multicultural celebration, most of the Aboriginal people haven’t got enough food to eat, no decent housing to live in and no schools for their children, many of whom die in infancy” (Araeen 136). Langton says it more forcefully in “Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show”:

the potential of an economically empowered, free-thinking, free-speaking Aborigine has been set too long to one side because it is more interesting to play with the warm, cuddly cultural Aborigine - the one who is so demoralised that the only available role is as a passive player. The dominance of the ‘reconciliation and justice’ rhetoric in the Australian discourse on Aboriginal issues is a part of life (Langton 2008, 161).

One can only speculate on what Langton means in this context, but it appears to me that such statements do nothing to empower Aboriginal people, in fact, they reinforce and legitimate powerlessness. Should this statement be read to mean that there *is* no reconciliation or justice to be had for Aboriginal people? I cannot say. I can only ask myself: how can I make it clear to audiences that Pearl's late discovery of her identity is redemptive? Once she comes to see her 'curse' as a gift, her self-esteem grows, and she ultimately heals.

This is a *subject* position for Pearl I feel most comfortable presenting, because it has resonance for me. Through the acceptance of her oft-misunderstood gift, Pearl eventually finds self acceptance and love within a small community of minorities, where everyone is positioned as 'other' to one another, yet embraced for their difference. In 1996, O'Regan described this as new world cinema: "The new world cinema' is a cinema of the melting pot. It is populist in intent with its utopian ideological underpinnings" (O'Regan 1996, 319).

Cowlshaw presents this alternate view, based upon her reading of reality, rather than of cinema, which I did not, at first, subscribe to:

to pretend that we can, should, or do embrace different kinds of people without effort, is one of those fictions of the comfortable urban cosmopolitan citizens which is even more profound than the façade of tolerance which Hage (1998) argues protects a given hierarchical relationship.

The cosmopolitan fancy of enjoying exotic others operates to deny the difficulty of many kinds of difference, such as the generalized reciprocity that is a common feature of interpersonal relations in extended families, tribes, and village communities (Cowlshaw 249).

I could concede that, even in the relatively tolerant and accepting, fictional ‘escapee’ world of *Nullarbor Pearl*, tensions erupt as the community members are challenged to change by Pearl. As my research into representations of multiculturalism and Aboriginality broadened, harsher realities soon appeared in *Shoalwater Pearl*, which, nevertheless, is still not bereft of hope and beauty, emanating from the heart of adolescent Pearl.

As a screenwriter, I am always conscious that the audience must hope and fear for one’s central character in order to be engaged and entertained. In all three *Pearl* films, I attempt to ensure that by presenting the sort of cultural interaction and acceptance I believe will be palatable to a mainstream Australian audience familiar with the “cosmopolitan fancy of enjoying others” as Cowlshaw so aptly puts it.

Whilst I am aiming for box office success, I am also aiming to provoke a different response in Australian audiences to our minority groups, by not presenting my characters in a stereotypical fashion. Regarding stereotypical representations of Aboriginality, Cowlshaw concedes: “Perhaps cosmopolitan urban citizens are

bored with repetitious stories of depressed and racist rural towns where Aborigines appear to act against their own interests” (Cowlshaw 250).

As stated, being challenged by a vast array of theoretical understandings assisted me in making the decision to disguise, then reveal, Pearl’s Aboriginality half way through *Nullarbor Pearl*, so that I could canvas her feelings about it, whilst doing justice to my own personal history. In these scenes of *Nullarbor Pearl*, Pearl discovers she is of Aboriginal descent, enabling me to foreground notions of identity and Aboriginality, in ways which were not present in the second draft, prior to me researching this thesis.

EXT. INT CAVE DAY (CAVE VISION)

A mysterious flash of a primitively painted girl diving off a cliff.

PEARL sees glimpses of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL as the painter, the same age as PEARL is now, her view obstructed by young Aboriginal women, milling around the artist at work.

Then there's an ominous change of mood in the tribe's women. Unsettled whispers, fear of the flying figure, shock recognition, terrified nudging. The tribe women flee, water sloshing from their baskets.

GREAT GRANDMA PEARL is suddenly revealed to PEARL who, sensing Pearl's presence, stops painting, and turns.

Both PEARLS stand stock still, eyes widening with astonishment as they recognise each other through the eerie veil of time.

PEARL then jolts as she sees her ancestor's hand pulled from the wall by an angry ELDER, revealing the girl jumping off the cliff, painted over the ancient hand prints. The ELDER spits on the wall, as he splashes cave water over the new painting.

He rips a shark tooth from his necklace and throws it at Pearl's ancestor with the severest of banishment gestures.

She scoops up the sinking shark tooth in her water basket, accepting her fate, head hung with shame and grief.

INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PEARL, hastily changed with wet hair, is bailed up by BERYL.

BERYL

You alright? What happened?

PEARL

Was Great Grandma Pearl Aboriginal?

BERYL

No. We're Irish with a bit of
Broome mixed in. You know that.

PEARL

Her dad might have been Irish, but
her mum was Aboriginal.

BERYL

How'd you know that?

PEARL

Saw her. She was an artist too.
And she saw me.

BERYL takes a seat, tensely rubbing her eyes. YANUSH
marches over to PEARL, his paint brush dripping.

YANUSH

Enough mumbo jumbo. This is a real
wall. Paint it.

BERYL gestures for PEARL to get on with it.

Pearl's ancestry is positioned as part Irish, part Indigenous: her Aboriginal great grandmother's partner was a white Anglo-Australian Pearler. Additionally, Pearl's Aunty Beryl's partner, Yanush, is Estonian; and Pearl ultimately connects best with Eddie, the white Anglo-Australian windmill maintenance man, in preference to the Italian cave diver, Massimo. This again reflects the truth of my 'melting pot' family of origin; for whatever reason, we are all inter-racially partnered.

Representing this in my films too, may arouse critical debate. Cowlshaw suggests: "certain allegedly anti-racist orthodoxies, such as the prohibition on mentioning mixed-race heritage, instil apprehension rather than respect, distance rather than familiarity and trust, and preclude the recognition of current conditions of existence" (Cowlshaw 247).

Later in *Nullarbor Pearl*, the community's various responses to Pearl's newfound Aboriginality and gift are aired, offering the audience alternative viewpoints through which to view Pearl's newfound ancestry:

INT. NORM'S BATHROOM DAY

EDDIE chisels hard on the last of NORM'S bathroom tiles. NORM shelters behind the shower curtain. RAY stands in the doorway wearing his flying goggles.

NORM

If Beryl and Pearl's mum are a quarter, Pearl's only an eighth. Hardly worth a mention, mate.

EDDIE

That's not why I'm telling you.

RAY

Touch-y!

NORM

Pink told us about her tank prank.

EDDIE

Wasn't a prank. She actually saw stuff about Pink 'cause her head was in the fish tank with Pink's bracelet. How weird's that?

NORM

Reckon it's the dreamtime?

RAY

Nah, more psychic. Must be the Irish in 'er. Wonder what she'd make of me?

NORM

Don't go there.

EDDIE hauls out the pink bathtub.

EDDIE

Got a special posy for this?

NORM

Nah. Chuck it on the tip.

RAY

Reminds him of his ex wife.

EDDIE

Last night she painted her Great
Grandma in your cave on the
roadhouse wall in her *sleep*.

NORM

So she's a psychic Aboriginal Irish
artist. Reckon he's in love?

RAY

Reckon so.

INT. ROADHOUSE KITCHEN DAY (A LITTLE LATER)

BERYL

Bit of a shock finding out like
that, eh?

PEARL

Haven't had any sudden urges to
rush out and buy clicking sticks if
that's whatcha mean. You and mum
coulda told me.

BERYL

Didn't know for sure. You coulda
told *me* you were seein' stuff.

PEARL

Wasn't, 'til I got here. D'ya
think it's 'cause we're Aboriginal?

BERYL

Dunno. Don't think so. Maybe her
spirit's restless 'cause this is
her country. Just keep ya head out
of water.

PEARL

Like that'll fix it. You're
soundin' just like mum and the
ocean. So, what? We're all gunna
get eaten by sharks?

YANUSH emerges from the Mens' room looking suspiciously
from woman to woman, who lapse again into sullen
silence.

YANUSH

Enough I said. I want this wall
finished today.

BERYL shoves PEARL toward YANUSH. PEARL slaps down the scissors and heads through to help him.

When I turn to my other characters, for instance, Yanush, Beryl's Estonian lover – I do so to comment that it is my observation that, on the basis of race, there is virtually no critical debate or tension around the issue of a white author creating characters from minority cultures, so long as they are white. I can't imagine anyone being too concerned about me dreaming up a pseudo-Estonian love song so Yanush can comically sing it to Beryl as he weight-lifts the caravan to prove that he still 'has it'. I note this as a comparative lack in the critical arena, in comparison with the vast amount of critical attention afforded to Indigenous representations made by non-Indigenous authors and film makers.

If I place a Japanese pushbike rider on the Nullarbor in the beginning of *Nullarbor Pearl*, and pick him up again at the end, because push biking is so slow, as someone Norm and Ray want Pearl to help, this gesture is a passing wave at the community's ability to incorporate all cultures, not just Indigenous, Anglo-Australians, or Europeans. O'Regan quotes Tan in *Australian National Cinema* thus: "It seems we've got to the point where we're comfortable with European characters, and our culture is so Eurocentric that we can do that and do it pretty well. But when it comes to Asian characters, sometimes they make a good job of it, but often they botch it up" (O'Regan 1996, 308).

Whichever choices one makes as author, it seems that the scope of one's imagination has to be justified and defended, whilst offering readers all latitude in interpreting these texts any way they like. Whilst my imagination is influenced by its societal surroundings, I imagine characters, who I hope will help us re-vision ourselves and our interactions with each other as a nation, as already explained.

Importantly, I need not have lived with Aboriginal people or Estonian people, to represent my idealised, imagined characters. Sociologists Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis suggest that it is impossible to ignore the scope of the situated imagination thus:

It is our contention that standpoint theory, in general, and the transformation of situated experience into situated knowledge, in particular, are impossible to understand without incorporating a notion of the situated imagination [. . .] Crucially, the imagination in this context is not a straight-forward faculty of the individual, but is also [. . .] a social faculty (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 325).

From a globalisation perspective, John Fisher claims, in his article, "Towards a Metaethic of Shit", that:

The trick nowadays, of course, is how to effect productive change in the system as opposed to an intensification of

repressive controls. We can at least begin to form the fact that it is the perception of a need for social change that gives rise to the mediators of change, not vice versa, and it is these that operate on the mobile frontier of old and new knowledges (Fisher 72).

Could a feature film be considered a “mediator of change”, and are global audiences suggestible to change, because of the fictional narratives consumed on screen? How could such suggestibility be measured? If audiences can be influenced by narratives and images which, it has been argued above, form negative perceptions about Aboriginal people and the conditions of their lives, then it is my contention that the reverse is also true, that audiences can be influenced to redress those negative perceptions by consuming positive images and stories.

I call upon Cowlshaw to remind us that it is not just the negative perceptions of Aboriginality by non-Indigenous people which must be considered here; but, importantly, the negative perceptions consumed by Aboriginal people about themselves: “When social subjects lack the experience of social approval, an emotional space is made for the negative reactions of shame and rage” (Cowlshaw 22).

Regardless of whatever theoretical wagers may already have been placed on audience suggestibility within the academy, Pearl comes from my heart and mind, my lived experience, my imagination, and my interaction with the sort of theoretical

research which challenges me to broaden my own perspectives. I agree with Gunew, who argues: “one destabilizes their own cultural assumptions and certainties in producing meaning” (Gunew 2004, 126). Indigenous or not, Pearl leaves angry at her mother in the opening of *Nullarbor Pearl*, gravelly as the grit in the heart of an oyster, which eventually becomes a pearl.

INT. MARNIE'S CARAVAN AND PEARL'S ANNEXE AFTERNOON

Hastily shoving her clothes into a rucksack and her paintings in a folio, PEARL stops to gently pour her pet goldfish, CURLY, into a jar, then stabs some angry holes in the lid with a paint-splodged Stanley blade.

MARNIE appears at the back annexe.

MARNIE

Lucky to be alive.

PEARL hefts her rucksack on one shoulder.

MARNIE CONT'D

Where you goin'?

PEARL

Aunty Beryl's. No sharks, no shitty bed pans, no you.

MARNIE

Knew you'd piss off one day. Just
like your spineless old man.

PEARL glares, then shoves her shoulder into the
rucksack.

MARNIE CONT'D

Beryl know you comin'?

PEARL

Don't have to ask. She loves me.

MARNIE

Just make sure you pull your
weight, Pearl. They're battlin'.

As PEARL ducks out the back flap, MARNIE glimpses the
mother-of-pearl necklace that pops out from under
Pearl's T-shirt.

MARNIE CONT'D

Hey! That's mine.

PEARL

Time it got handed down.

MARNIE

You'll be sorry.

As PEARL runs across the caravan park, MARNIE sadly takes in Pearl's finished mural of her young self and RED, painfully aware that she's lost them both now.

Pearl's self-esteem is down; she knows at some level that she is being lied to by her mother, and her aunt; and, having fled to the Nullarbor; she finds that she does not immediately fit in with the desert community of her origin. Cowlshaw suggests: "Individuals, even families who initially appear different soon become familiar if they join us and are willing to not disturb our habits too severely" (Cowlshaw 250). However, Pearl's destiny is to disrupt her family and community in order to embrace her true identity and uniqueness. Consequently, I have positioned her relentlessly slamming into scene one, onward, into familial and community barriers, until she is able to wrestle the truth from the gatekeepers of the curse, thus reversing the family's fortunes, by turning their secret into a gift.

Such is the 'truth' of life and story, when one embarks on heroic journeys. We run into the walls of familial secrets; where the all too familiar rhetoric informs us that nothing good is easy to get. Life existed before drama was documented, not the other way around. Australia's much touted tolerance stems from gross intolerance, and this binary needed to play out dramatically to demonstrate Pearl's struggle for acceptance and self acceptance.

Something inside Pearl drives her to recklessly challenge familial fear as she seeks the truth of her identity, and this something, I have contested in chapter one, comes

from my psychological need to tell stories which challenge deception, in order to reveal the healing power of truth, even if the notion of absolute truth is always, as discussed above, problematic. Chapter one reveals how working with versions of what one might have once believed to be the ‘truth’ about oneself is the driver of narrative therapy, stemming from the urge to heal unresolved issues by projecting one’s dilemmas out, into stories which help find healing solutions, within.

However, Gunew argues: “the loss of a family tree may also deprive one of any place in the world at all” (Gunew 2004, 113) and if one branch of my family tree was lost to me, it certainly wouldn’t be lost to Pearl. That is the ‘truth’ I represent here. Pearl’s anger is my anger. Her need to know is my need to know.

Anthropologist, Said, purports: “in any instance of at least written language, there is not such a thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation” (Said 21).

I see my author-self beginning to emerge as the puppet master of a trickster, who performs on many levels. Like all good heroines, Pearl’s fearful anger is defeated by her courage, and her courage is purposely situated at a time when Australia needs to find its own courage to repair inter-racial relations and redress our Indigenous nation’s white tainted view of itself. Fisher stresses:

Tricksterism is about *action* and *creative invention*. It demands a performative use of language: a direct address in a collaborative event with the viewer. In considering tricky

artistic practices, we need to accept that art is not simulation, or reflection, of an authentic 'reality' but a reflection upon our experiences and interpretations of it (Fisher 81).

I wanted to present something engaging and enthralling to an audience about the need to know one's true identity, and how our ancestors are contemporaneously active in our present lives, whether we know them or not. When Pearl puts her head in water and sees flashbacks of her ancestor (as well as traumatic moments in the pasts of other characters on the Nullarbor) these visions at first shock and surprise her, then they intrigue her into ultimately risking her life to discover the truth of her identity. This is her hero's and heroine's journey entwined with magic realism, because Pearl seeks both the grail of her identity and her own inner truth.

On the peripheries of fantasy, in the heart of reality, exists a
dimension where the two mingle with barely a raised
eyebrow (Sturgis 1).

Sturgis, above, is of course indicating the realm of magic realism, and I have utilised this quote to signal that there will now be a shift to more fully discuss magic realism, without excluding issues of Aboriginality and multiculturalism.

Incorporating magic realism into all three film scripts assisted me in opening up discourses too enormous to do justice to within the realms of this thesis regarding

race, identity and gender, which entwine together to form the master narrative of the trilogy. I have been foregrounding *Nullarbor Pearl* because it is important to note that if Pearl does not risk her life to solve the mystery and save her ancestor in that film, she, her mother and her aunt would simply *not exist* in *Shoalwater Pearl*, *Pilbara Pearl* or *Nullarbor Pearl*.

In her thesis entitled *Cinematic Realism*, Labudovic defines magic realism in cinema thus:

magic realism is a narrative mode characterized by the non-conflictual co-existence and oftentimes fusion of the supernatural, extraordinary, unrealistic and fantasy with normal, quotidian, realistic and factual, a mode that destabilizes and confuses the very fixed positionality of these categories and opposites. It serves to challenge and subvert the representation of the supposedly unified reality of the mimetic narrative order and the received wisdom that order promulgates, and, thus, suggests multiple worldviews, opens up spaces for possibilities, and makes the world larger (Labudovic 5).

I agree with this definition and further agree with Labudovic, who links magic realism with postcolonial mimicry, quoting Bhabda, who defines postcolonial mimicry as:

a form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them (Bhabda quoted in Labudovic 48).

Whilst writing emanating from a postcolonial perspective is not a pre-condition for the production of magic realist films scripts, in my estimation, there is an historic leaning toward resistance to the dominant culture which characterises the genre, and I will extend this understanding to include my own resistance/s as an author who refuses to stifle her authorial prerogatives or intentions, as outlined above.

In her thesis, which examines the political force of magic realism, Baker has included a list of elements characterising works of magic realism, by McMurray:

1. They reject the narrow confines of traditional realism for multidimensional, metaphysical reality fraught with elements of wonder.
2. They depict the lingering presence of the mythical or legendary past in contemporary life, often resulting in the distortion of time and space and in the dual or fluctuating identity of the protagonist.

3. They reveal the acute authorial sense of aesthetics, representing poetic re-creations rather than mere imitations of reality.
4. They exude a persuasive, matter-of-fact tone and incorporate commonplace, everyday details, techniques designed to augment credulity (McMurray quoted in Baker 1997, 65).

All three *Pearl* scripts can be categorised as magic realist texts as measured against the criteria on this list. However, the device of magic realism functions differently within each film script. In *Pilbara Pearl*, it allows Pearl to travel to places she hasn't been, except in her imagination, and diving in the tank enables her to journey there, enlarging her world. It is a gift that sets her apart, which Eddie has to accept, in order to be with her. As such, it is central to the thematic romance.

In *Nullarbor Pearl* magic realism gives Pearl the gift to travel back in time in order to unlock and understand not only her past, but also times in the past of members of her community, where their psychological progress has been halted by a problem or traumatic event. The narrative hinges on Pearl's discovery of her Aboriginal identity, via her relationship with great grandmother Pearl. It is revealed that the gift is inherited; consequently, magic realism is central to the identity narrative.

In *Shoalwater Pearl*, magic realism enables the images to speak the subtext. This allows me to subvert the realist notion that there is one unified view of the world

that we all hold. The full impact of the gift and its secrets are withheld because they are revealed in *Nullarbor Pearl*, and, in adolescence the gift is undeveloped and relatively latent in Pearl. However, if I refine this script in future, on its pathway to production, I will be seeking ways to utilise the device more strongly, in order to make Pearl's character journey more active in this film.

Regardless of these different ways the device of magic realism is incorporated, I must reiterate, as a white multicultural writer, my gift to Pearl has always been to honour her representation by avoiding racist depictions and replacing them with the sort of acceptance which requires meditation. As idealistic as it may seem to want to reverse racist representations of Aboriginality on screen, that is my aim with these texts, whilst doing justice to my own life narrative, my own idiosyncrasies.

Consequently, this thesis sets up an ethnographic, interpretive practice which is aware and wary of notions of cultural difference and the hegemonic norms, which would marginalise or stereotype Pearl's representation. In 1996, O'Regan agreed with Jakubowicz's finding that:

Australian mass audience is 'significantly racist' and this is evidenced by the fact 'significant minorities' in Australia are unable to 'exert very little real effect on the [on screen] outcomes'. The mainstream still holds 'conventional monocultural views of nation and national identity' which

stand in the way of the multicultural ideal (O'Regan 1996
331).

As stated above, I am also aware of the influence the big screen could have on global audiences to help redress racism. Rather than Pearl's Aboriginality being a barrier to mainstream cultural acceptance, her gift forms a bridge to acceptance within the haven of her 'escapee' Nullarbor community, made up of minority cultures. Cowlshaw contests: "it is not only the blackfellas that are stigmatized; both segments [black and white] of the population are aware of their own secrets and stigmata" (Cowlshaw 12) and Pearl's gift gives her has an unusual ability to unearth these secrets. Labudovic asserts: "Magic realism does not pretend that it can expel hegemonic grand narratives; rather, it values its peripheral positioning against those and shrewdly subverts through imitation. In this effect, magic realism is an ironic compromise" (Labudovic 48).

That said, I must add, from my decades of screen industry interaction, that there is much market place resistance to cinematic narratives which emanate from the margins, such as magic realist narratives, because they escape easy classification for mainstream audiences.

Bill Mousoulis, in his article, *Dreams for Australian Cinema* neatly summarises Clayfield's views on the topic in the Australian e-journal, *Senses of Cinema*, thus:

Clayfield's essay [entitled *Killing the Gatekeeper: Autonomy, Globality and Reclaiming Australian Cinema*] postulates that Australian cinema (the filmmakers, but mainly the film-funding agencies) has been stuck in a particular groove the past 30 years, endlessly trying to produce a “national cinema”, in its quest to be distinctive, relevant and successful. And that, here's the catch, that's actually *harmed* rather than helped in the creation of quality films, because, apart from creating stereotypes and clichés within the films themselves, the focus on identity-construction has taken valuable energy away from other areas (mainly formal ones). It's a reasonable argument, and Clayfield rightly also equates the implementation of “political correctness” with this overwrought construction of “nationality”. A double whammy. For hardline critics and cinéphiles, this creates an Australian cinema which is limited (in the face of the riches of international cinema) and, for a general audience, it creates a cinema akin to a lecture: “This is what we are” (as opposed to “This is what we do” or “This is what we could be”). [. . .] But it's not as simple a situation as all this would suggest: there are more questions than answers (Mousoulis).

My refusal to abandon Pearl, and my insistence on setting these narratives within a magic realist construct, relegates my scripts to the margins of the market place, primarily because my lead, Pearl, cannot be played by a big budget star. In addition, she's a woman, and Aboriginal, making her triply difficult to market. Nevertheless, there is an expectation that Australian films can be "original" and "surprising", enabling them to succeed and be appealing to international audiences. Mousoulis argues:

Australia needs to start looking at countries other than America for its production model. It needs to start respecting and nurturing people and ideas that it perhaps has shunned in the past, for whatever reasons. It needs to fight financial paradigms, rather than bowing to them, and then despairing at the poor results. It needs to be imaginative, intelligent, bold. It needs to dream, and hard (Mousoulis).

Writing this doctoral thesis is my way of articulating and critically reflecting on my representation of Pearl, by foregrounding my awareness of all of these debates, whilst making it clear that I have no intention of allowing them to support or obfuscate my ability to creatively interpret my own life experience in any way I please. Labudovic refers to Hyde's understanding on the possibility of negotiating

divergent worlds by utilising magic realism when she notes: “tricksters inhabit spaces of heightened uncertainty and represent the intelligence needed to negotiate them” (Labudovic 49).

Have I emerged as this trickster, juggling minority cultures in *Shoalwater Pearl*, set in a run-down, ex-serviceman's caravan park on the outskirts of an urban industrial area, in order to reveal something enigmatic pulsating in the heart of Pearl, which might, ultimately, be me?

As already stated, I agree with Cowlshaw, quoted above, that these small iconic communities reflect equivalent cultural positions in other out of the way enclaves of Australia. However, all filmic compositions of cultures, which seek to define or critique a nation artistically and dramatically, will inevitably raise expectations that all, not merely some, local cultures will be taken into an account. In this sense it is impossible to please all, or represent all, because there will always be gaps. My aim then is to situate the multicultural dynamic sensitively, and at times amusingly, as Pearl's narratives play out. After all, where would we be if we could not learn how to laugh at ourselves in a mad mad world? Gunew comments:

While Multiculturalism is now often perceived as an empty signifier onto which a range of groups project their fears and hopes, the future for critical multiculturalism lies in an alertness to the inherent ‘hybridity’ and diverse affiliations

of all subjects which may be mobilized in various combinations (Gunew 2004, 109).

Hence, what am I dramatically constructing in relation to this nation, Australia, via my fictional *Pearl* films? It could be argued that all three scripts have a timeless nostalgic quality, representing a societal yearning for a past when things were simpler, more easily understood, including the ease of acceptance to be found amongst the escapees from mainstream society, who form our remote communities. This understanding is in agreement with Dika, from Cinema Studies, who suggests: “Cinema, especially films representing the past, could momentarily soothe our nostalgic longings through ‘metonymical re-experience’” (Dika 10).

Interestingly, since I began conceiving of all three films in the late 1990s, Barne’ offers an opposing viewpoint regarding the Chinese cultural landscape: that the surging culture of nostalgia in the 90s was an “indulgence” and a “luxury” only made possible through the amnesia of past horrors (Barne’ 321). If I have created nostalgia, was it prompted by a global longing to look back at the end of the Twentieth Century?

It would be impossible to create a global comparison in the realm of this thesis, however, thinking about it prompted me to concede that the lived experience of real Australians, versus the fictional communities I have created in my *Pearl* films, are much more likely to resemble this scenario, described here by Gunew, who argues:

The tension [. . .] is that individuals, as well as the group, are pitted against a cultural norm, a way of being in the world with which they are at odds, through language, through skin colour, or some of the markers of difference which are to some extent always arbitrary and all the more painful for being that (Gunew 2004, 119-120).

I believe my lived experience has made me well versed in this arena, as a white Australian author of multicultural descent, who, before I became an author, as described in chapter one, lived, worked and roamed like a nomad in many remote and urban Australian locations. Consequently, whilst I am not blind to the racism which exists in Australia, I am resistant to telling stories which perpetuate it.

As I journey one more self-reflective rung down Rich's poetic ladder, I begin to see this issue a little differently, more like Cowlshaw, who purports: "We, the nation, have assiduously hidden the secret, shared fear and contempt for strange or strangers' bodies, smothering occasional eruptions of racism with disapproval" (Cowlshaw 24). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to comprehensively establish how Cowlshaw classifies 'strange and stranger' in this context.

It is more fruitful to argue that the process of writing this thesis foregrounds an important issue, my conscious entry into a fraught political debate, where my attempts to interpret the world in order to change it are being deconstructed by me. And the first place where I counter prevailing orthodoxies is in my a-typical

representation of Pearl's Aboriginality. I have used the term 'Aboriginality' knowing it is loaded with many connotations and meanings. I defend its use regarding my cinematic representation of Indigenous characters as Langton does:

“Aboriginality” [. . .] is a field of subjectivity in that it is remade over and over in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation, and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create “Aboriginalities” (Langton 1993, 33-34).

It is also important to note that whilst my films showcase multicultural characters, I am aware that many Australian Aborigines have preferred to distance themselves, politically, from multiculturalism. Consequently, since writing *Pilbara Pearl*, Pearl's seeking of her lost identity has become privileged as the master narrative of *Nullarbor Pearl*, which takes its seed in *Shoalwater Pearl*. Gunew suggests: “they [Aborigines] see [it/multiculturalism] as pertaining to immigrant groups, whereas they wish to dissociate themselves from all notions of migration” (Gunew 2004, 42).

Regarding the role of the author in the invention of communities, Gunew asks: “How does the individual writer develop the formal devices to bear witness to cultural dispersion and dissolution that precede the establishment of other forms of legitimacy in a new cultural aggregation?” (Gunew 2004, 109). Her response is:

it may be time to consider the role of the writer as inventor of community where community is conceived not in the sense of the nostalgic return to the past and a lost place but as the impulse forward, the potential carried by the seeding of diaspora in hybridity, the reality of a process more easily recognized here and now as hegemonic groups within the nation are forced to accommodate the third- and fourth-generation descendants of major migrations (Gunew 2004, 109).

Since I am less interested in creating prescriptive realistic reflections or snapshots of contemporary Australian communities, and more interested in promoting a utopian sense of acceptance, via the fictitious communities I create, Gunew's point above is not particularly relevant to my work. However, it does help explain why, having situated my narratives within small, diasporic multicultural communities, designed to comment on the multicultural inter-relationships at work in the nation, my representation of Pearl's Indigeneity, dilemmas and gift are treated as uniquely different to those of the migrants and Anglo-Australians she encounters. Even in *Shoalwater Pearl*, Pearl is uniquely different, though she does not yet know it. Her point of difference is her uniqueness, as revealed in her emerging gift. As young as she is in that film, she is nevertheless a healer, whose deceased great grandma Pearl watches over her in ways which her mother works hard to deny.

EXT. COOGIE BEACH UNDERWATER/ABOVE THE SURFACE DAY

JACKSON and PEARL whiz along underwater, rising often for air. They see a young sea lion, which comes in close and cavorts with them. They duck under again and it swims very close to Jackson's goggles, whiskers twitching, then rolls underneath, studying their undersides playfully. Beaming down at it, JACKSON brings the scooter up for more air.

JACKSON

Reckon it was him?

PEARL beams back at him and takes a big breath.

PEARL

Nup. But he's wicked. Go again!

JACKSON beams back at her as they submerge to cavort more with the sea lion, following as it heads toward shore, but something makes PEARL look over her shoulder, a sudden shiver of cooler water accompanying the spirit of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL, gesturing urgently for PEARL to hurry in.

Seeing the spirit of her Great Grandma gives PEARL such a shock that she gasps and swallows seawater, letting go of JACKSON, arms billowing beside her, her Great

Grandmother's necklace falling from the pocket of her boardies, just as JACKSON zooms into the seagrassy shallows.

G.G. Pearl's spirit lingers with the now unconscious PEARL, buoying her up above the curious seahorses as JACKSON wheels the scooter around, looking for PEARL, startling as he sees her strangely suspended under the water but above the seagrass, without seeing G.G. Pearl's spirit. JACKSON drops the scooter, and gallops through the shallows to grab PEARL. The seahorses see his legs powering toward them and bob away.

What does it mean when Pearl sees the ghost of her ancestor in *Shoalwater Pearl* and *Nullarbor Pearl*? Regarding cultural haunting from a sociological perspective, I agree with Gordon, regarding my magic realist depictions of ghosts, who suggests that haunting may indicate many things, amongst them, more than one story to tell – operating as an indicator of complex social relations:

Haunting [. . .] is neither postmodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import [. . .]. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life [. . .]. Being haunted draws us

affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition (Gordon 7-8).

Incorporating a ghostly indicator of her identity and uniqueness helps me situate Pearl outside the confines of already represented Aboriginality and the constraints of already represented multiculturalism. I prefer to uphold Pearl's uniqueness as a healer and a messenger for global audiences to meditate upon. Gunew suggests:

It might be more productive, therefore, to learn to listen for voices outside the traditional narratives of race as presently constituted, with their normative privileging of the supposed accoutrements of a visually raced body. These are the possibilities for exceeding the claustrophobic paradigms of identity politics which can be constraining even when supposedly benignly situated in the realms of postcolonial and multicultural interrogations (Gunew 2004, 89).

So let me reiterate what I have already stated about Pearl. I have purposely been writing against stereotypical representations of Aboriginality by creating fictional film scripts which offer positive redemptive narratives about cultural tolerance and reconciliation. I do so perhaps because, like an increasing number of Australians

today, my family history now resembles a league of nations. However, my ‘idealistic utopian’ approach, as mentioned above, stems directly from the easy racial relationships within my own family and my aspirations for our future as a nation. I acknowledge that this may, to some, appear naive or ill-informed.

Consequently, in the re-drafting of *Shoalwater Pearl* I chose to present a world with a much harder edge than *Nullarbor Pearl*, one in which the idealistic imaginings of a gifted girl, who doesn’t know her potential, smash against the harsh realities of dislocation and dissolution of her ‘supposedly white’ nuclear family, who live in squalid suburban dysfunction. In doing so, I opened myself up much more to the emotional ‘truth’ of my own middle-class, yet dysfunctional, life narrative, whilst taking a step closer to the sorts of lived experience which is a reality for some Aboriginal communities. This represents, for me, something akin to what Rich describes in her poem at the beginning of this chapter, namely: “the wreck and not the story of the wreck” (Rich 24).

In this context, my critical reflection of my creative praxis, informing this doctoral thesis, brought me closer to what it means to explore my own ‘emotional wreck’ than writing my fictional *Pearl* scripts without research ever could.

In *Shoalwater Pearl*, the prequel to *Nullarbor Pearl*, young Pearl has issues similar to a rurally-based Aboriginal girl who does not want to relocate to the city, but, at this time in her life, Pearl thinks she’s Caucasian. From *Shoalwater Pearl*:

EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL eyes the olds inside as she dangles off the petrol pumps. When she sees they're not looking, she grabs a can, squeezes a little fuel into it, then slinks off 'round the side of the roadhouse dangling the tin beneath window height.

PEARL sits with the can between her knees, leans over and has a big sniff of petrol, several sniffs, reeling back as the fumes hit home, then she gets up and heads back 'round to the doorway of the roadhouse, peering in, still holding the can.

EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE (PETROL FUME VISION) NIGHT

From Pearl's POV, the room rips in half between her warring parents, who are now solidly throwing abuse at each other.

RED

What'd you just say? To Yanush.

MARNIE

That you'd better find a job, soon as Pearl's in school. Not slaving my guts out payin' for your piss so you can sit on your fat arse and drink it.

Then they all see PEARL, standing there with the can.

YANUSH rises first and pulls the can away, but he is a giant from Pearl's POV, albeit a gentle giant.

YANUSH

Who taught you that? You wanna fry
your brains?

BERYL rushes over, kneeling before pale PEARL.

BERYL

You alright? How ya feeling?
Sick?

PEARL nods.

PEARL

Too sick to go to Perth, Aunty.

PEARL smiles and looks about Beryl's face because BERYL suddenly has love hearts for hair. Then the world starts spinning and PEARL spins with it, closing her eyes.

Pearl does, however, meet up with an Aboriginal duo from the next caravan, widowed, cabbage-growing Violet, and her drug-dependent daughter, Dolly, so some representations of Aboriginality do come into play. But these are not the

stereotypical representations of Aboriginal shame and rage that Cowlshaw has described above, as they come from my imagination, which is far more like a *Cosi Fan Tutti* fantasy world, rather than the home of lived Indigenous reality.

As we have seen, in this (tougher narrative than *Nullarbor Pearl*) Pearl loses a parent, Red, who leaves the family stranded, altering its dynamic, causing Pearl to blame, not only her abusive mother, but also herself, in ways which drive the narrative in *Nullarbor Pearl*. A time gap ensues between *Shoalwater* and *Nullarbor Pearl*, which commences with Pearl returning to the Nullarbor to escape her mother and find her father as soon she finishes school. She also runs to escape her gift, but, true to both the hero's and heroine's journeys, she cannot escape her uniqueness, only embrace it, as is her destiny.

Synthesising Barriers and Gender Complexities in the New World *as a Woman*

Pearl operates on many levels: as a reflection of my need to heal my own life narrative, as an agent for societal change re-visioning Indigenous representation for global audiences, and as an Indigenous woman. There are very few Indigenous women on the big screen, and fewer lead characters of big budget feature films.

Thistleton-Martin appears to agree with this assertion when she claims, in her doctoral thesis, *Black Face White Story*: “Australian [. . .] fiction features few Aboriginal protagonists and even fewer who are women. Aboriginal women and girl characters are usually part of a much larger, mixed tribal group, appearing occasionally in the background to add some local ‘colour’” (Thistleton-Martin 214). O’Regan quotes Mellencamp, who also appears to agree when discussing the work of Indigenous filmmaker, Moffatt: “Moffatt recovers ‘history through fiction’ and inscribes what has been ‘missing in history and representation’ – ‘Aboriginal women’” (O’Regan 1996, 327).

I meditate on Moffatt’s statements about herself as discussed by O’Regan: “She [Moffatt] projects herself in a set of serial public identities which we read as her refusal to endorse a fixed identity, as a desire to disrupt conventional categories and confining stereotypes of Aboriginals and film making” (O’Regan 1996, 327).

Even though I am Caucasian, I find that my quest and aspirations regarding my representations of Pearl are not at all dissimilar. Before we venture further into the realm of gender, I offer this reminder by Langton, which neatly summarises the scope of the territory we have just journeyed through in a way which I wholeheartedly agree with: “Each representation of Aboriginal people is a reconstruction, an imagined experience, a tale told with signifiers, grammatical and morphological elements, mythologies” (Langton, 1993, 50.)

Having understood and incorporated changes to my scripts regarding Pearl's interactions without and within multicultural and Aboriginal representations, and, having synthesised these shifts in my work ethnographically for readers of this thesis, it is time for me to now take a closer look at Pearl's gender, and what it means for me, Pearl's author, to write as a woman.

It is important to historically situate gender, and I offer this definition by psychoanalyst, Fiorini, with which I largely agree:

The concept of gender originates in the field of social sciences and is applied today in disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy and psychology. It postulates that femininity and masculinity are categories which respond to a cultural construction [...] Historically, it responds to different needs: on one hand, to find theoretical instruments to understand the hierarchic relations between the sexes and phenomena of violence in this connection; and on the other hand it provides explanations of such growing phenomena as transsexualism and transvestism in relation to the concept of sexual identity (Fiorini 117).

It is important to note early in this discussion that the terms sex and gender should not be considered to be interchangeable, because their differences have been hotly

debated theoretically for decades: Fiorini again explains, with reference to Laplanche, in ways I also agree with:

Laplanche (1980) questions the sex-gender system's placement of one term in the area of anatomy and the other in the area of psychology. He postulates that it is best to use the term sex for the set of physical or psychic determinations, behaviour and phantasms which are directly linked to the sexual function and pleasure; and the term gender for the set of physical or psychic determinations, behaviour and phantasms which are linked to the masculine/feminine distinction (Fiorini 120).

Reading Spencer made me question the ways that other apparently linked terms can and should be considered separately. For instance, I asked myself: Can there be an identity without gender on screen? Spencer suggests an answer:

The way in which individual and shared identity is constructed will determine how an individual relates to this image. Ethnicity, gender, nationality, social class, sexuality and community are aspects of the self that may lead to complex and conflicted interpretations of this image and its meaning as a public message (Spencer 26).

Faced with such complexities, I turned to *Speaking of Gender*, for further answers. Showalter neatly encapsulates the history of gender theory from a different perspective, which is incorporated here because it assists me to understand my own historical interaction with these theories, first encountered whilst at university in the 1990's, attaining my Bachelor of Arts in English:

Gender theory began to develop during the early 1980s in feminist thought in the fields of history, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and natural science, marking a shift from the women-centred investigations of the 1970s, such as women's history, gynocriticism, and psychology of women, to the study of gender relations involving both women and men (Showalter 2).

In 1989, in *Speaking of Gender*, Schweickart discusses gynocriticism, in ways which are still relevant to me as a female author, in terms of my sex, gender and identity:

Today, the dominant mode of feminist criticism is "gynocritics", the study of woman as *writer*, of the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of the female literary tradition (Schweickart 23).

Reading gynocritical theories begged me to ask more questions of myself, such as these, posed by Schweickart:

What does it mean for a woman to express herself in writing? How does a woman write as a woman? [. . .]
 What does it mean for a woman to read without condemning herself to the position of other? What does it mean for a woman, reading as a woman, to read literature written by a woman writing as a woman? (Schweickart 35).

Within the contested realms of identity politics, I had to ask myself: are my representations of Pearl written as antidotes to patriarchal power and dominance? Perhaps. The fathers in all three films are absent, and the male characters who are present are either enamoured of Pearl, or they cannot control or change her. Asking myself this led me to isolate and examine more recent theories of gender in relation to Pearl. Like many Feminist theorists I have encountered in the course of my research, Showalter argues that sex differs from gender thus:

Gender is not only a question of *difference*, which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal: but of *power*, since in looking at the history of gender relations, we find sexual asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society (Showalter 4).

Consequently, these *Pearl* films, rather than being written as antidotes to male power and dominance, could be said to subvert notions of male dominance by removing them from centrality because the female protagonist, Pearl, is our focus. It has become abundantly clear to me in the course of my research that one of Pearl's greatest psychological drivers, however, is to find her absent father, in keeping with my life narrative, as outlined in chapter one. Consequently, whilst Pearl is our central focus, she feels the lack of a father acutely until she answers the mystery of his absence with knowledge of his death. And how does she achieve this? Through a 'psychic' viewfinder afforded to her by her matriarchal lineage.

Additionally, Pearl refuses and reverses the family 'curse' handed down to her ancestor by the male Aboriginal elder (who could not comprehend Pearl's great grandmother's uniqueness any more than Eddie could initially comprehend it in Pearl in *Pilbara Pearl*). How does Pearl achieve this reversal in *Nullarbor Pearl*? By confronting the past and refusing the curse, whilst revaluing her great grandmother's ability to psychically 'see' as a gift. In doing so, Pearl saves not only herself and her ancestor, but her entire family, including the sight in Beryl's remaining eye.

As I have said above, in *Pilbara Pearl*, it is contemporary Eddie, whose comprehension stretches, enabling him to form a relationship with Pearl, largely due to her ability to forgive his initial inability to comprehend her. This 'stretching' to comprehend represents my hope for increased harmony between the sexes and cultures of Australia, rather than debilitating sanctions due to difference

(as represented by the past patriarchal elder in *Nullarbor Pearl*, who misuses his power to curse and banish great grandmother Pearl from her tribe because of her difference). I must remind the reader that this elder is fictional, as are all the Pearls, and his representation is not meant to represent to audiences that Aboriginal elders are or were all controlling males, rather it is meant to demonstrate that when power is misused, lasting damage is done, which may take decades and increased awareness to heal, if healing, indeed, can be an outcome long after one's affected relatives are dead, as is the case with Pearl.

In her article entitled *Difference*, Minh-Ha quotes Lorde, who neatly encapsulates the need for shared responsibility regarding the nurturing of increased comprehension, historically, *and* across gendered and racial divides:

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our difference, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought (Lorde quoted in Minh-Ha 155).

Whilst it has become abundantly clear in the course of my research that gender is considered to be culturally constructed and complex, I have decided that, since Pearl is a fictional character, her gender has been formed by the choices I have made as the female author of the screenplays which represent her. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler asserts:

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what is at any given juncture of time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternatively instituted and relinquished *according to the purposes at hand* [my emphasis]; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure (Butler 1990, 16).

Showalter appears to agree with the above sentiment of Butler, in her introduction to *Speaking of Gender* in ways I, too, agree with, having encountered a vast array of views regarding the construction of gender in my research:

Gender is far, however, from reaching a state of consensus. While most feminist scholars agree on the distinction between sex and gender, and the need to explore masculinity as well as femininity, and homosexuality as well as heterosexuality, there is vigorous intellectual debate

about the construction of gender, and the way it should be used by scholars and critics (Showalter 3).

Whilst researching sex and gender, in relation to my representation of Pearl, I had to ask myself: what have I learned? Overall, I tend to agree with Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, when she argues:

If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (Butler 1990, 113).

Clearly, the subject of gender is too immense to do justice to in the space of this thesis, so I must necessarily narrow my focus once again, to comment upon how gender is represented specifically in my appended film scripts. Before I do so, it is important to note that whilst I am comfortable discussing representations of gender in my work, I do not consider my scripts to be ‘gendered narratives’ or ‘gendered representations’ as these terms are considered dynamic and contentious within the academy, and using such terms would sway the reader’s focus too much upon gender in texts where it plays only a part in the complexity of the whole endeavour, as demonstrated by my many areas of investigation in this thesis.

I now leave the realm of gender with this observation, posited by Laseur in her thesis, *Seeing Film: Reading Contemporary Film Culture*. Laseur draws upon de Lauretis' deconstructionist theories of gender to suggest: "Both gender and race are a series of historical constructions or discursive formations, whereby attempts at representation are prefigured by ways of thinking that subsume notions of race *as* identification within a paradigm which has come to signify that which is 'always already represented'" (Laseur 119). I offer this observation as a reminder that one never begins with a blank page, when attempting to write or deconstruct one's own creative work, and that the realms of investigations must necessarily be delimited by the scope and size of one's thesis, to prevent such discussions going into infinity.

I now turn directly to the other characters in my Pearl trilogy, in order to discover how Pearl's gift offers me an interesting avenue to explore their unresolved issues, in particular how secrets function to destructively undermine all relationships, no matter which sexual orientation these relationship adopt.

We'll begin with *Nullarbor Pearl*, when Pearl unearths Norm and Ray's homosexuality, threatening their secret in a way which pleases Ray and displeases Norm, who prefers to disguise his homosexual relationship with Ray as mateship, causing them to split up, until the dust settles, and they can safely be reinstated into the community as a gay couple.

INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

MASSIMO is behind the counter still gazing at the mural when NORM enters.

NORM

Giddy mate. Got you working have they? I've got a bit of work for Eddie too. He about?

NORM gapes at Pearl's depiction of himself and naked RAY in the mural.

NORM CONT'D

What the fuck . . . does she think she's doing painting me and Ray on the wall like that? Bloody hell. Where is she?

EDDIE rushes in from the back door. None of them notice the mail truck pulling up outside.

EDDIE

Doesn't know she's doing it, mate. Does it in her sleep. I told ya.

NORM

Well she can bloody well unpaint it
with her eyes open. I'm not being
branded a poofa!

MASSIMO

It's a divinely inspired work.
Personalities and moralities must never
intervene.

EDDIE

Cut the crap, Massimo. It's his
life.

NORM

Too right.

RAY has entered behind NORM, and taken in the wall.

RAY

Find it offensive, do ya?

NORM

It's not you I find offensive, it's
her, putting it up there.

RAY

Footy grand final, ring a bell?

NORM

Yeah, we lost.

RAY

Fucken hopeless. You never notice.

NORM

What?

RAY

Me. . . . I don't mind if the
world knows.

NORM

That we're mates! That's all there
is to it.

RAY

I've had it with your stupid self
deceptions, Norman.

NORM

Fine. Then fuck off!

PEARL stands in the back entrance, gapes at the mural
and hurriedly backs out.

Queer theory has had a lot to say about the pressure on culture to define itself
within heterosexual boundaries, as dramatised in the above scene.

Mansfield helps define this territory by situating the emergence of queer theory as a reaction to Freudian concepts of sexuality and Foucault's rejection of 'sexuality' as an invented concept for the scientific and political classification (i.e. constraining discourse, a regime of ordering) around human behaviour and society, gender and power. Whereas Freud suggests a normal, biologically predetermined course towards heterosexuality and procreation where deviation from this is pathological and a perversion, Foucault argues, historically and culturally, that sexuality has been a shifting concept in many societies; hence there is no 'natural' predisposition towards patriarchy and heterosexuality (Mansfield 105-117).

Segal neatly encapsulates the theoretical attention such pressures have historically received by arguing:

Lesbian and gay studies – and now their provocative offspring, queer theory – have emerged into greater prominence, and controversy, over the last decade in academic and cultural settings. Largely inspired by Foucault, they provide a rich array of theoretical work on sexual diversity, or 'sexualities'. Their goal, to attempt to subvert the categories of 'normal' sexuality which, in ways we should now be familiar with, ties sexuality to gender through defining only heterosexuality as 'natural' (Segal 214).

Rather than having Norm and Ray simply part as a result of societal pressure, I chose to reveal how Norm responds to the pressure he feels to be a heterosexual male, and I utilise Ray's limited knowledge of Pearl's gift to prompt him to ask her to 'do a reading' on him, which also moves Pearl past her self-limiting fear of the 'curse', thus serving two dramatic purposes. Ray pushes Pearl to do the reading because it is his unspoken desire to rupture the secret of his homosexual relationship with Norm. Consequently, Norm is appalled and angry about their secret being exposed on the roadhouse wall, especially without Pearl asking permission. Pearl, too, is surprised by what she has painted in her sleep, for it is not her intention to rupture the community, but rupture it does, until all the secrets surface, and a new equilibrium evolves.

Ironically, when Norm's homosexuality finds acceptance from his long-standing mate, heterosexual Eddie, his relationship with Ray is restored, true to the utopian world of enhanced acceptance and understanding for all I have attempted to create in my film scripts. In this utopian world, the truth always ruptures then heals the self-limiting lies and self deceptions which precede it.

EXT. COUNTRY DOWNS DAY

EDDIE and NORM watch MASSIMO and RAY loading Ray's battered suitcase into the 'mail mobile', then they head off up the drive, MASSIMO in the mail truck, RAY bouncing down the drive in the crop duster.

EDDIE eyes disgruntled NORM, who resumes their smoko on the verandah.

BONOX twitches a fly off his ear nearby, like he's disdainfully listening.

EDDIE

Had a word with her. . .

NORM

More than a word. Bit bloody late.
Pink's left Davo, Beryl's black,
and we're gay. Who's gunna be
next?

EDDIE

Wouldn't matter if you were.
Wouldn't change anyone's attitudes
'round here. We'd still be mates.

NORM screws on his thermos lid like he hasn't heard a word, but EDDIE sees he's relieved.

Historically, there has not only been much societal pressure to dismantle and deride homosexuality, but also much theoretical pressure on its deconstruction, all of which it survives. Lynne Segal neatly summarises Sedgwick's view of this trajectory, thus:

Sedgwick points out that knowledge of instability of the supposedly ‘oppositional’ sexual divide has been continually available to us for at least a century – from Freud, through Kinsey to the present – without serving to dismantle it: ‘the nominative category of “the homosexual” has robustly failed to disintegrate under the pressure of decade after decade, battery after battery of deconstructive exposure – evidently not in the first place because of its meaningfulness to those whom it defines but because of its indispensableness to those who define themselves against it (Segal 217).

The exploration of Pink and Davo’s heterosexual relationship is disrupted by Pink already running from looking after Davo when we meet her, after Davo’s back was broken in a trucking accident, as revealed by Pearl in the fish tank. Pink’s reversal comes as a result of coming to terms with and forgiving herself for her temporary psychological inability to deal with the trauma of Davo’s accident.

INT. ROADHOUSE SUNSET

MASSIMO and PINK drink tea sitting on the bench before DAVO in his wheelchair.

MASSIMO

The right one came out when I
forgot where to look . . . but she
wasn't looking for me.

PINK

He picked a hard one with Pearl.
She's special alright. If it
wasn't for her, I'd still be
driving 'round in a cloud of pink
instead of realising how much I
still love this big bloke,
whichever way he comes.

MASSIMO

Ah life.

He gets to his feet and hands PINK the roadhouse keys
and his credit card.

MASSIMO CONT'D

I have to go. Use this to pay for
the water. . . I cannot say
goodbye to her again.

PINK

When people say their heart is
broken, it means broken open . . .

PINK CONT'D

ready to love properly when the
right one comes. You'll see.

MASSIMO

Si, certo. Love just is. She
doesn't need to love me back. But
it would have been wonderful.

MASSIMO shakes Davo's hand, gives PINK a double cheek
kiss, takes a long last look at the mural, and leaves.

The nature of heterosexual commitment is also examined within both Marnie and
Red's relationship when Red takes off, leaving Marnie and Pearl in *Shoalwater
Pearl*, and like Marnie, her caravan neighbour, Violet, has also been left by her
husband so she must bring up her drug dependent daughter, Doll, alone.

Beryl and Yanush's commitment offers Pearl the opposite model in *Nullarbor
Pearl* when Yanush steadfastly looks after Beryl through the loss of her eye, which,
we later discover, has been brought about by denying her gift, her ability to see.

In *Shoalwater Pearl*, Pearl's pubescent friendship with Jackson helps them both
find solace, offering Pearl an opportunity to help Jackson heal after the death of his
mother, at a time when Pearl faces the rupture in her parent's relationship and the
loss of her father.

While Massimo and Eddie also vie for a heterosexual relationship with Pearl in *Nullarbor Pearl*, Pearl's central focus is not romance but the discovery of her identity in that film, and so she cannot enter into a relationship with either of them until she comes to love herself, and embrace her gift, causing the film to actively resist the romance genre set up in *Pilbara Pearl*.

Only in *Pilbara Pearl*, does Pearl appear to want a heterosexual relationship, and only after standing her ground against Eddie's unwillingness to believe in her uniqueness and in her gift. It is he who makes the reversal so that they can be together, because Pearl refuses to accommodate his inability to fully comprehend her, which causes the film to play out its reconciliatory themes precisely the way O'Regan describes below:

Typically – though not always – reconciliation is staged through a romance plot in which there is a mutual heterosexual attraction between the peoples represented who synecdochically stand for their respective cultures. These storytellings are utopian projections of a larger socio-cultural reality (O'Regan 1996, 315).

For me this sums up the reconciliatory impetus of the nation. The Australian Government had to say Sorry, in order to begin to make amends for the harm it has historically done to our Indigenous people, but it could not be an empty word.

I believe that all Australians need to understand the meaning of that word in its entirety in order to enact societal change. The word 'Sorry' has been uttered, but ultimately healing and forgiveness must begin with the people who were wronged, not with the apology, which comes well after the initial harmful word was uttered: Aboriginal, as Foley relates, quoted in 1997 by Spencer in *Race and Ethnicity*:

A single English word can effectively, in an instant, disembowel the vast 100,000 year history and culture of about five hundred different peoples of Australia by naming us 'Aborigines'. That language was used by the colonisers as a weapon can be seen in the experience of numerous colonised peoples (here and in other countries) who were forced to use the coloniser's language (Foley quoted in Spencer 31).

I use the word Aboriginal, and I use English words to represent an Aboriginal character in the hope of offering a cinematic representation of healing for myself, and for a nation, poised on the brink of enhanced understanding. I do so alerted to the perils of positing a thesis which aims not to be excessively personal or overtly theoretical, a thesis which I believe strikes exactly the balance I set out to achieve when choosing an ethnographic approach.

I will now turn particularly to *Pilbara Pearl*, to see how the reconciliation enacted in that drama is not an empty word either. It is a silent word bubbling away in the subtext, prompting broadened comprehension, and healing change.

What is Love without Sublimity – Sublimity without Trauma?

In many ways I see the heterosexual relationship in the heart of *Pilbara Pearl* as sublime, in distinctly different ways to the other film scripts in the trilogy, which caused me to research along different axes for *Pilbara Pearl*, encountering theories of the sublime and trauma theories, because that film, alone, is romantically focused on ‘love’. In 1756 Burke defined the sublime as:

Whatever excites ideas of pain or danger in the mind. It produces the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling. When pain and danger press too close, they are simply terrible and therefore incapable of giving delight. However, at certain distances it may be observed that such things are delightful” (Burke 1998, 37-38).

I believe *Pilbara Pearl* uses tenets of four theorists of the sublime, which I will use as viewfinders to further examine it, and to lead us into notions of trauma, which I believe subconsciously informed the text.

What could be more potentially painful or delightful as love, or the fear that one's beloved might be endangering her life by immersing her head in a fish tank world which only she believes in? At first Eddie can only articulate his fear as a fear of outside threat to Pearl, "Some bastard could come along and . . ." (Rossetti Pilbara Pearl). That fear, along with his fear of rejection, causes Eddie's delight in Pearl to evaporate, and he leaves. Eddie's nearness to a love that is grander in scope than anything he appears to have encountered is tormented by its transcendently threatening origin, the other world of Pearl's fish tank, rendering its representation incomprehensible to him, unimaginable. But, from where we, the audience, sit, we're privy to Pearl's underwater explorations, and thus can be amused while we hope and fear that Eddie will turn his truck around and ultimately understand her uniqueness. . . . Such is the stuff of cinematic romance.

The postmodernists amongst us may feel that those early physiological theories of the sublime display a certain degree of naïveté, for in 1757, Burke was primarily concerned with how the sublime is felt rather than thought. And what does it mean to be postmodern in this context? Philosopher, Lyotard, in the 1980's, provides us with this sweeping statement in favour of anti-representationalism, if not an answer, which will be further explored as we proceed. Lyotard suggests: "Let us wage a war on totality: let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the difference" (Lyotard 1984, 46).

Film specializes in visual imagery, and we screenwriters, by and large, work hard to convey emotion without lumbering it with too much expository thought or

dialogue. It could thus be considered that my viewfinder, when first imagining *Pilbara Pearl*, was Burkian.

However, skipping forward to the Twentieth Century, Lyotard might have considered the abyss separating Eddie's imagination (or lack of it) and his reason as sublime. The movement in sublime feeling, "from pain to pleasure" (Lyotard 1994, 26) is particularly evocative of critical thought for Lyotard when he analyses sublime feeling as: "double defiance. Imagination at the limits of what it can present does violence to itself in order to present that it can no longer present" (Lyotard 1994, 55). "Postmodernity," posits Lyotard, "cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities" (Lyotard 1984, 38). Isn't this precisely what happens to Eddie when he suspends his disbelief by sticking his head in the fish tank to look for Pearl?

For me, the sublime presupposes an encounter with something beyond the subject's imagination. Eddie's pain transforms into the astonished pleasure we see on his face when he immerses boots and all in the tank with Pearl. Perhaps then, my subliminal viewfinder could be perceived as postmodern. However, it would be equally valid in the postmodern arena to talk about the sublimity of the film without any discussion of my authorial intentionality whatsoever.

If, as Lyotard purports above, the postmodern sublime puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, allowing us to share a nostalgia for the

unattainable (Lyotard 1984 81), then I must agree, for that is exactly what I sought to do in *Pilbara Pearl*, whether my intentionality is relevant or not. Lyotard argues:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of philosopher: the text he [or she] writes, the work he [or she] produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for (Lyotard 1984, 81).

So let the art look; you've looked at the art; my work here could thus be easily avoided, which it cannot be, so let's more closely examine the 'look' of the film, which showcases the ochre and aqua of the West Australian Pilbara landscape.

Australian artist and theorist, Barbara Bolt, challenges the metaphor of light as enlightenment, re-conceiving this 'revealing' light as the blinding glare of the Australian sun in her book, *Art Beyond Representation*, in which it is revealed that too much light may, in fact, reveal nothing (Bolt) unless we go back in time again, to the Seventeenth Century, to see whether this film could also be viewed through a Kantian lens.

Like Burke, Kant begins his treatment of the sublime by comparing it with the beautiful, and like Burke, he sees these as binary opposites. As stated in chapter

one, *Pilbara Pearl* is constructed of binary opposites, featuring a female Indigenous character and a Caucasian male character; one's pragmatic and one's a dreamer; one wants to leave, one wants to stay; the red ochre desert meets the cool aqua ocean where the promise of love meets the obstacle of sublime incomprehension.

For Kant the sublime has a subjective aesthetic quality, which settles somewhere between the faculties of imagination and reason, drawing moral judgments into his understanding of reason. Amid his aesthetical explorations, Kant has identified two distinct modes of sublime, which can be applied to this film: the mathematical and dynamical (Kant 23-26). Eddie's failure to comprehend the boundlessness and formlessness of Pearl's fish tank world would make it appear to be a sort of mathematical sublime. However, Eddie is standing before, even slapping, the side of a little fish tank, not witnessing an atomic explosion, or the immensity of the ocean, or the Grand Canyon.

Can Kant's mathematical sublime still apply? Certainly. Being challenged by Pearl to *imagine* a formless world, immensely different to the bound little interior of her fish tank, which Eddie has paid homage to with his pagoda gift, causes him to enter the tumultuous mental emotional state, a state Kant would describe as sublime. And is there not also a moment of dynamical sublime when Eddie comes back and sticks his head in the fish tank yelling for Pearl? This is the annihilation of the sensible self as Eddie's imagination tries and fails to comprehend the depth of Pearl's uniqueness amid the might of his love for her.

Although I have been viewing *Pilbara Pearl* through three key theorists' lenses, seeing the sublime in a film is not like putting on 3D glasses to make the genre stand out, for the sublime is not a genre but a fluid movement spanning centuries and generic boundaries. Is it possible to see the sublime and not also see trauma? Must trauma and the sublime go hand in hand? Unlike the sublime, trauma theory in the humanities has a relatively short history, stemming from psychology. The term, 'trauma theory' didn't appear until the late Twentieth Century in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (Caruth). I turn to Kaplan for her succinct definition of trauma, around which contemporary trauma theories currently revolve:

The structure of trauma is precisely that of a repeated rupture of safety by terror from some past incomprehensible event. The event possesses one without one having known it cognitively. The event was not processed through language or mechanisms of meaning (Kaplan 34).

I incorporate the notion of trauma here because I believe fear is an essential component of not only the hero and heroine's journeys, in that Campbell and Murdock both document the various ways fear can cause us to undermine our own potential to live a full life, if we allow it. For instance, it may be an outward indicator that some past event is psychologically causing us to balk at our 'calls to adventure' in life, or causing us to stifle the potentialities of relationships in which our world views might be stretched, like Eddie's world view in *Pilbara Pearl*.

I posit here that such self imposed limitations can be sublimely traumatic, particularly when what is generating the fear is unconscious. Consequently, I am arguing that the trauma of self limitations should have a legitimate place within contemporary trauma theory, even though it is not an 'easy fit' and here is why. *If* what is understood to be traumatic relies on the centrality of terror and catastrophic events, then *Pilbara Pearl* cannot qualify as traumatic. It hardly seems likely that Eddie will suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or disassociate himself from the memory of not believing in Pearl. And it's impossible to tell, since we leave him not after the event, but still happily ensconced in his epiphany. Eddie's trauma happens on the way to getting somewhere uplifting, rather than catastrophic, yet battle he must. In her article, *Trauma Theory: Contents, Politics, Ethics*, Susannah Radstone questions the boundaries of trauma theory thus: "For whom, when, where and in what circumstances are popular texts read and experienced as trauma texts?" (Radstone 24).

Must trauma theory follow traumatic events, examining the effects on its subjects and placing the examiner in the position of an all-knowing witness? Is a screenwriter an all-knowing witness? I only have room to offer concise suggestions within the constraints of this thesis, with full awareness that my texts must also always be the viewer or reader's to deconstruct. Pearl does, however, offer us an event without a witness, when she swims in her fish tank alone, yet it is an event which we, the audience, witness with Eddie, who's initially only privy to the exterior of the tank.

Upon closer examination of Pearl, one may arrive at a semblance of traumatic understanding. However, the cause of the trauma has been purposely withheld from the screen because I wanted the film to be a romantic magic realist odyssey, not a documentary rendition of the sources of my own internal conflict. One thing, however, is cinematically certain. When the film opens, Pearl is very much alone at the roadhouse. She is displaced from her culture for reasons unstated. And what does she do when she is alone? She dives into a fish tank where she encounters underwater creatures and elements, and, whilst these visions appear to be uplifting rather than nightmarish for her, it is Eddie who points out the danger of Pearl being so vulnerable “out here all alone with your head stuck in that flamin’ fish tank” (Rossetti Pilbara Pearl). It is his fear which speaks, and it is Pearl’s fear of not being fully comprehended or believed in which makes her respond that he is only offering her half a life by asking her to come with him to the Nullarbor.

But how does Pearl come to be in this Pilbara roadhouse in the first place? What does it mean to be a lonely girl in a remote roadhouse as far from immersion in the ocean as one can get? As stated, the film, *Pilbara Pearl*, sprang from my poem, *Nullarbor Pearl*, which I opened with in chapter one, reflective of that period of my life when I journeyed on the long stretches of Australian highway, including the lonely Nullarbor plains. Having grown up on the Gold Coast, I was a coastal dweller, who longed for immersion in the ocean on those dry, dusty stretches. I journeyed to come to terms with trauma in my own life - the divorce of my parents, resulting in one remaining in Queensland, and the other residing as far away as humanly possible within the same continent, in Western Australia.

How did this Pearl emerge into the Pearl we discover in *Pilbara Pearl*? It took twenty years for my marriage to fail. For me, this feeling of displacement was playing itself out in a repetitious fashion in ways Caruth elaborated on via the viewfinder of Freud in *Unclaimed Experience*: Caruth suggests:

the repetition at the heart of catastrophe – the experience that Freud will call ‘traumatic neurosis’ – emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one simply cannot leave behind. [. . .] the literary resonances of Freud’s example goes beyond this dramatic illustration of repetition compulsion and exceeds, perhaps, the limits of Freud’s conceptual or conscious theory of trauma (Caruth 2).

By now it should be clear that in my world there has been much trauma and displacement, which I always previously found difficult to articulate, except through fictitious narratives. Show me a ‘functional’ family. Perhaps my inability to recognize one comes as a direct result of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Perhaps many of us who feel traumatized by our own personal emotional disasters seek positive ways to prevent us suckling endlessly on our own sadness.

In *Trauma Cinema*, Janet Walker suggests: “In the first case, fantasy refers [. . .] to the nonveridical construction that is nevertheless ‘propped on’ a real event. To be sure, the real event is ‘fortuitous’, meaning that is not the origin of the fantasy but

rather the grain of sand around which the pearl of fantasy is deposited” (Walker 9).

Walker further elaborates, in agreement with Hodgkin and Radstone, that:

“Emphasis on the traumatic event as origin is misleading; what is absent from the teleological narrative, in effect, is precisely the way the mind makes its own meanings” (Walker 9). I agree with Walker, who posits that “fantasy and reality are inextricably – if mysteriously – bonded” (Walker 10).

I have revealed that *Pilbara Pearl* is, in fact, a text which sprang from the trauma of displacement followed by a failing marriage, as my antidote to trauma has always been to write a utopian salve in order to heal. How could I thus not agree with Walker when she reveals how the mind’s imaginative elaborations of reality can project one’s internal conflict onto the external world? For me this projection brings my writing squarely into the realm of narrative therapy, as stated in chapter one.

Walker reminds us that the mind is an active agent in the defensive transformation of events (Walker 11). Consider this scenario posited by Walker:

Imagine memory ranged along a continuum, with extremely veridical memories to the right, false memories to the left, and fantasies propped on reality but not perfectly reflective of it in the center. People would surely be more comfortable if memories on the right were easily distinguishable from memories on the left and could be

seen as completely separate, or if it were clear which memories belonged on the right and which on the left. But this is not the case (Walker 12).

As an author I can clearly distinguish which fearful, self-imposed limitations have adversely limited my life journey/s to date, and I have demonstrated how in transforming those grains of sand which most trouble me into three *Enigmatic Pearl* film scripts, I begin to heal, whilst emphatically agreeing with Walker that memories, false memories, and fantasies are inextricably linked.

In this thesis, and in this particular deconstruction of *Pilbara Pearl*, we have been on a sublime filmic journey, which encourages the reader to identify with both characters, even though they are fictional constructs, in order to reveal how their author delved into her own traumas to conceive them as a personal salve, and, at the same time, to offer an uplifting narrative for audience enjoyment.

And just beneath our surface enjoyment of the narrative is our fascination with Eddie's fear and Pearl's fear like our fascination with many non-fictional subjects, which are currently the focus of trauma theory? Radstone argues: "This model of a de-centred subject caught up in processes of symbolization, desire and fear that lies partly beyond the reach of consciousness has been central to the development, negotiation and mediation of culture" (Radstone 18). She adds: "In new trauma theory, it is the event rather than the subject, which emerges as unpredictable and ungovernable" (Radstone 18).

Falling in love is not primarily considered as the source of unspeakable suffering (although I'm sure we've all had our moments). The trauma Eddie experiences in *Pilbara Pearl* is the terror of surrendering to the unthinkable, before he immerses fully into suspending his disbelief in all Pearl says she is, all she says she sees, and all he can share if he has the courage to embrace it all and love her. From the moment he enters the fish tank with Pearl, we see transformation on Eddie's face, conveying his wonder and elevation, as his terror of love transcends from trauma into a positive epiphany, which is nonetheless sublime.

Ultimately, these explorations of gendered heterosexual relationships, and homosexual relationships, within all three *Pearl* films, marry representations of love and reconciliation in one paradigm, which relies on the presence of emotional truth. The essence of this began in *Pilbara Pearl*, when I created Pearl as an Aboriginal character who didn't need to change. As discussed, her uniqueness was a frightening enigma to Eddie, verging on the sublime, when he could not comprehend Pearl's immersion in the fish tank.

As stated, it is Eddie who must change to understand Pearl, and when he does, he is rewarded, and this reward plays out in almost the same scene at the end of *Nullarbor Pearl* as *Pilbara Pearl*. As mentioned above, Eddie's actions represent my reconciliatory hope for Australia, in that he embodies the sort of enhanced comprehension that is required of the utopian world of my imaginings, and Pearl embodies the ability to embrace forgiveness. In defence of these imagined communities, I call upon Woodward's explanation:

Since it is not possible to know all those who share our national identity, we must have a shared idea of what it constitutes. The difference between national identities therefore lies in the different ways in which they are imagined (Woodward 18).

As a screenwriter, my imaginings have the potential to reach mass audiences once my scripts are produced, as the short film, *Pilbara Pearl*, has demonstrated. Accordingly, feature films can ably ‘share the dream’ of imagined change with global audiences. From *Nullarbor Pearl*:

INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

EDDIE gently floats the goldfish bag in the new fish tank, noticing the pagoda within. Then he spends a few silent moments taking in the mural, emitting a low whistle. He frowns at himself in the middle, stealing the nugget, but looks well on the ending, where he makes peace.

EDDIE

Pearl? Where are ya, Pearl?

EDDIE is drawn to the tank, almost against his will.

EDDIE CONT'D

Nah.

He peers inside, then impulsively grips the sides. Knuckles white, teeth clenched, he takes a big breath and plunges all of his face into the tank.

PEARL emerges from the Ladies' toilet in a paint-splodged shirt, sees EDDIE with his head in the tank beside the goggling new goldfish and stops. EDDIE is yelling underwater, creating bubbles.

EDDIE CONT'D

Peeaarrrll!

PEARL slaps the side glass. EDDIE rears back, gasping.

PEARL

Whatcha doin', Eddie?

EDDIE

Lookin' for you.

They smile and embrace, as EDDIE undoes the goldfish bag knot and releases the goldfish.

EDDIE and PEARL look through the tank at each other, as CURLY 2 finds his way around, goggling and wagging his tail at each of them, into the credits.

Clearly, in addition to my personal journey as author, as revealed in chapter one, my overarching concern in chapter two has been to examine the meaning/s and representation/s of Australian identity in my *Pearl* scripts, so let's round the corner of return now, bringing with us these elixers, as I prepare this thesis for publication.

The Return: Same but Different

I believe O'Regan unwittingly encapsulates the tone of my *Pearl* scripts best when he makes this statement about Australian cinema as the 'New World' cinema of the melting pot:

A predilection for utopian emergence, distinguishes Australia cinema as a new world settler society cinema. Like all such narratives – and the cinema more generally – this is a mythic narrative improbable in the real, and conforming to the aim of any entertainment cinema to present the imaginary as if it were real (O'Regan 1996, 319).

Reading that quote, I'm reminded of Burke's thoughts *On the Sublime and Beautiful*: "If black and white blend, soften, and unite / A thousand ways, are there no black and white?" (Burke 2001).

And so our chapter two journey ends, only to culminate in a conclusion, which I hope will concisely and eloquently sum up our multifaceted journey through these Pearl texts, to arrive at some semblance of finality as I prepare to put Pearl to bed. She has been a worthy and wonderful companion, offering up pathways to my own interiority, which were mysteriously inaccessible to me before I embarked on the journey. Such is the hidden reward for all of us who write to entertain an audience, whilst secretly knowing the additional value of increased self awareness and truth.

Conclusion

Ithaka

As you set out for Ithaka

hope your road is a long one,

full of adventure, full of discovery.

Laistrygonians, Cyclops,

angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:

you'll never find things like that on your way

as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,

as long as a rare excitement

stirs your spirit and your body.

Laistrygonians, Cyclops,

wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them

unless you bring them along inside your soul,

unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.

May there be many summer mornings when,

with what pleasure, what joy,

you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time:

may you stop at Phoenician trading stations

to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean. (Cavafy).

Having journeyed with me a while, it should be easy to understand why the above poem has resonances for me in regard to this doctoral thesis. My journey with Pearl began with a poem, and ends here with three film scripts, three years of research, and this thesis. Like the Greek island of Ithaka, Pearl has given me a wonderful place to set out from and return to. Unlike Ithaka, Pearl did not precede me: my seed was always in her, as much as hers was in me.

How does one describe the indescribable allure of storytelling when those long buried seeds in one's psyche begin to germinate and relentlessly unfurl, propelling the writer forward like a restless traveler packing for an adventure? What drives these adventures, these impulses to travel, and what drives the pauses, the research and reflection? These are the questions chapter one asks and answers, for the answers are stated in many ways and in many ethnographic guises.

I have stated that it is possible to understand and heal one's unresolved life issues by setting out to write screenplays, because the act of writing creates a salve for the past, precisely when an ending emerges which couldn't be glimpsed in the beginning. Unfolding that mystery of healing via storytelling to narrative therapy is not the reason I ventured forth in the first place, but, I discovered, the healing occurs in the process of delving into what is unresolved, then exposing it to the rigours of research and storytelling to arrive at an unforeseen, yet most satisfying, ending.

For me, this style of writing becomes the most riveting, amalgamating me for the longest of journeys like no commissioned narrative could. The first prize thus is the healing, even though being paid for one's rights so that production can occur, and with it the ability to reach global audiences, satisfies a different aim, offering up a different reward, which is not only financial. To restate, the healing happens in the writing, in the surrendering and in the reinventing of oneself, via a fictional character, who must also journey.

Chapter two could not have been written without the presence of Laistrygonians, Cyclops, and wild Poseidon, for they journey with me. What a boring adventure it would be to travel without confronting such obstacles as self-limitation or fear that one's emerging ideas may be discredited, for these are just two of the gatekeepers of unresolvedness, which might otherwise dictate that it would be more comfortable staying home, shut up safely inside without a computer or passport.

When my first supervisor, Dr Josko Petkovic, asked me to pause and consider the sum of my screenplays, to consider what I was most amalgamated to write about and why, it was as if he handed me a travel brochure listing all the good reasons to go on the journey, whilst ignoring all of my reasons to stay home.

As I stated in chapter one, my first supervisor was a gatekeeper, whom I sidestepped to reach the end of my journey my way. Without such gatekeepers, one would not be prepared to fight when encountering the wild Poseidons, which surely await one further along the road, to track south or east or underground for a while, whilst railing, researching and revealing, for the journey is as much inward as outward, as much male as female, as both chapters reveal.

Have I left enough pebbles on the road behind me for other emerging screenwriters to follow? They fall from my boots in a haphazard fashion, for my journey through this thesis is my original contribution to knowledge, and I believe every screenwriter must find his/her own path. However, my ethnographic methodology could be used as a guide.

I began with *Nullarbor Pearl* the poem, where we first met Pearl, a girl in a lonely desert roadhouse, as far from immersing in the ocean as one can possibly get without throwing oneself off a cliff. Even there, in the remotest of locations, the kernel of Pearl finds a way. In this context, the ocean, water, is a conductor for the emotional interior, and, of all the people Pearl ultimately sees underwater in their most psychologically blocked moments in the film scripts to come, Pearl peers for the first time in the fish tank alone, diving into my font from which all of her subsequent stories emerged. As Faris so aptly puts it, with reference to magic realism: “[this] allow[s] these sacred spaces to leak their magical narrative waters over the rest of the text and the world it describes” (Faris 174).

From there she encountered Eddie in *Pilbara Pearl*, along with his sublime incomprehension. That is where the vexed question of reconciliation began to emerge. As explained in chapter two, Eddie metaphorically represents my hope for Australia. In *Nullarbor Pearl*, the feature film script, which was then at an unsatisfactory second draft stage, swayed by market forces into a romantic comedy, which did not pay homage to any of my thematic concerns, I knew there was much work to do.

Embarking on the research raised as many questions as it answered, fuelling the third draft, which I wrote to delve deeper into my own truths as well as to reveal some home truths for us all, as fallible human beings, and, as citizens of Australia. Unfolding Pearl's Aboriginality at the heart of that film caused me much theoretical anxiety, but true to my own life story, and my will to posit positive societal change, for reasons outlined in chapter two, I could not allow myself to be swayed from my focus.

Shoalwater Pearl, the major creative work written for this PhD, emerged as the last step in the journey, a return to the turbulent beginning, in order to understand and forgive familial omissions in my own past, whilst presenting a world closer to the lived experience of Aboriginal people whose heritage has also been denied to them.

Throughout it all, by revealing the healing power of truth about my own creative pathways to healing, I have afforded this thesis the opportunity to make its claim as an original contribution to knowledge within the academy. As often stated in chapter two, my vision for Australia can be considered utopian. The thematic thrust of these films is a reflection of global societal shifts toward enhanced understanding of Indigenous people and their unique ways of knowing, such as 'connection to country' in Australia, in this epoch, at this exact point in time.

I must concede that having a utopian vision is hardly new. It is my pathway which is my contribution to knowledge. To better understand the impulses which inform this undertaking, writing, whether it be screenplays, vignettes from a life, or a thesis, I'll journey, via Wicks, back to the German philosopher, Schopenhauer, who was much influenced by Kant in the late 19th Century, to peer through one last lens,

because I believe Wicks unwittingly sums up my journey through this thesis with Pearl most eloquently:

Compassionately recognizing at a more universal level that the inner nature of another person is of the same substance as oneself, one arrives at a moral outlook. This compassionate way of apprehending another person is not merely understanding abstractly the proposition that “each person is a human being,” or understanding abstractly (as would Kant) that, in principle, the same regulations of rationality operate equally in each of us and oblige us accordingly. It is to feel directly the concrete life of another person in a magical way; it is to enter into the life of humanity imaginatively, such as to coincide with all others as much as one possibly can. It is to imagine equally, and in full force, *what it is like* to be both a cruel tormentor and a tormented victim, and to locate both opposing experiences and characters within a single, universal consciousness that is the consciousness of humanity itself. With the development of moral consciousness, one expands one's consciousness towards the mixed-up, tension-ridden, bittersweet, tragicomic, multi-aspected and distinctively sublime consciousness of humanity itself (Wicks).

One may ask, where will I venture from here? It is my aim to adapt this ethnographic, self-reflexive thesis, perhaps reframing my approach, into an accessible textbook or story which screenwriters can follow, weaving my life journey and writing journeys together into an auto fictional work, in contrast to the extant, popular 'how to' guides which are in abundance on the shelves. As writers we all consciously or unconsciously journey through praxis to self-awareness in various degrees. I aim to assist other screenwriters in harnessing what is unresolved in their lives in order to not only heal themselves, but to offer up healing solutions to the public at large through the vehicle of narrative filmic fiction. To this end, I aim to further research narrative therapy to better inform this undertaking, and, as always, I eagerly anticipate all the obstacles and rewards that journey will surely offer up.

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Filmography

Watson, C. Pilbara Pearl. 1998. CVA Film & Television, 1998.

Rossetti, S. Nullarbor Pearl - Unproduced Feature Film Script. 2008.

Rossetti, S. Pilbara Pearl - Produced Short Film Script. 1998.

Rossetti, S. Shoalwater Pearl - Unproduced Feature Film Script. 2007.

Additional Materials to Enigmatic Pearls

Appendix A: *Pilbara Pearl* Script

Pilbara Pearl

© 10 March 1997

Produced by CVA FILM & TELEVISION July 1998.
Directed by Christopher Watson.

10 Minute Script

by

Sarah Rossetti

This short film was jointly funded by ScreenWest and the Australian Film Commission. Additionally, it secured a presale from the SBS network, corporate sponsorship, and AFI distribution. After production, it went on to acclaim with a theatrical release around Australia, screening before the feature film, *Radiance*. It was selected to screen at the Screen Producers Association of Australia conference of 1998, and in film festivals in Brazil (1999) and Aspen (1999). This script was the winner AWGIE award for short film script (1999) and it was nominated for the AFI Award for best short screenplay (1999). Additionally, it was the winner of the Lotteries Commission Award for Film Excellence (for the script) and winner of the *What if* Award (for the script) and winner of the ASC Award for Best Cinematography in a short film, all in 1999, and The Chris Award (Ohio) in 2000. This film has also enjoyed a popular broadcast life, screening on Channel 4 Movie Network in the UK, SBS in Australia, and on Australia's ABC Australia Day 2000 *Home Grown Shorts*, with an introduction from the Writer and Director. It has also screened on Qantas international flights. In addition, it won Best Cinematography in the West Australian Film and TV Awards 1999, and Best Overall Film for Emerging Director.

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1: EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY LATE AFTERNOON

A dirty 4WD SURVEYOR'S UTE hurtles by. We are assaulted by its speed, close proximity, diesel engine noise, rolling wheels, rattling undercarriage, dust, and flashes of equipment in the back as it passes.

As the w h o o s s h h of its passing dies away, and the swirling dust disperses, we make out a battered, white fridge door sign, hand-painted and decorated.

The dust settles. The sign says PEARL'S ROADHOUSE 10 KMS. It is decorated with an odd assortment of Aboriginal-style hand-painted fish, coral, shells, and a happy, black mermaid.

SFX A couple of crows swearing at each other, into a strangely-beckoning Aboriginal vocalist (Pearl) singing softly to herself. (Pearl's singing throughout is almost Anya-esque an ancient music form in a new metamorphosis.)

Roll Title Credit: *Pilbara Pearl*.

2: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE LATE AFTERNOON

PEARL, a youngish, attractive Aboriginal woman, wearing a simple screen-printed dress with ocean designs, and a shell necklace, is softly singing to herself, whilst dusting the laminex tables with a limp t-towel. It's very hot. There are sweat circles under Pearl's armpits. Her feet are bare.

The roadhouse is cluttered with the usual, unimaginative Aussie kitch, and one of Pearl's eerie sea-scape paintings, featuring herself as the black mermaid.

PEARL stops singing, pours a drink of chilled water from the fridge, and drinks it, facing the dining room. The free-standing fan revolves too slowly. The occasional fly is zapped by the fluorescent fly catcher. The clock ticks.

PEARL sits at the table near the fan, opens an old diving magazine, and turns to her favourite, sensuous advert for Ningaloo Reef. PEARL sighs. The water looks aqua-inviting, and the reef is teeming with brightly-coloured fish.

PEARL

Cool.

PEARL caresses the page, gazes out of the grimy window at the endless stretch of road, and returns to the advert. Her expression is filled with longing.

3: EXT. OLD ROADHOUSE/HIGHWAY LATE AFTERNOON

The ROADHOUSE is the only building for as far as the eye can see. Behind it, the 4WD UTE is a just-recognizable dot on highway, approaching. Dust billows behind it.

4: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE LATE AFTERNOON

PEARL hears the wheeze and gurgle of the AQUARIUM. She gazes at it, gets up, turns on the overhead light, and lovingly rubs some fingerprints off the side of the glass.

PEARL is sensuously attracted by something inside the aquarium. She leans closer to peer inside.

A few exotic little fish dart between the brightly-coloured ornaments at the sandy bottom of the tank. A sea-horse glides between strands of almost-transparent seaweed.

PEARL

Giddy, Curly.

SFX A bubbly little horse whinny.

PEARL smiles, leans closer, inhales, and closes her eyes.

SFX Faintly, we hear the hush and suck of waves rolling in, and the far away cry of a lonely seagull.

5: INT. MOVING UTE CABIN LATE AFTERNOON

The driver's big HAND changes the ute down a gear. As the diesel grinds down, we see the ROADHOUSE, a kilometer or two ahead, through the windscreen.

6: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE LATE AFTERNOON

PEARL reaches her hand inside the aquarium, and touches Curly. The sea-horse dodges away.

PEARL webs her fingers through the seaweed, and leans even closer. Air bubbles up from the little sea-chest ornament in the corner, tickling her palm.

SFX Children happily playing at the sea shore.

As the sound of a big wave breaks . . . PEARL removes her hand from the aquarium, holds the sides, takes a big breath, closes her eyes, and plunges all of her face into the tank.

7: INT. AQUARIUM LATE AFTERNOON

From beneath the surface, we see Pearl's eyes opening. Her submerged FACE, wide-eyed now, is diffused with pleasure and excitement as she looks around her brightly-lit underwater world.

SFX Underwater ocean noises, whale cries, and wondrous original instrumental music.

Behind Pearl's back, we see the UTE pulling in, as it parks outside the roadhouse, blocking some of the light.

SFX Keep up underwater sounds.

PEARL begins to roll forward into the tank. Her whole head is submerging under the surface of the water.

8: INT. UNDERWATER 'NINGALOO' FANTASY SEQUENCE DAY

PEARL, still in her screen-printed dress, completes her dive into her underwater world. We follow her as she kicks down, down, into the cool aqua ocean, her dress floating, her bare feet kicking.

SFX Keep up underwater sounds.

There are giant-sized ORNAMENTS on the sandy bottom, identical to the ones in the aquarium. Bubbles float up from the sea-chest. As PEARL playfully swims toward it, a brightly-coloured fish passes.

We see the ecstasy on Pearl's face as she follows it.

9: EXT. OLD ROADHOUSE LATE AFTERNOON

The driver's door opens. We see his sun-tanned hairy legs, dirty steel-capped boots, and footy socks as he jumps down with a thud.

SFX Cicadas, mosquitoes, and the peep peep of small birds settling for the night.

The driver's door is slammed shut. We see his BOOTS, as he stomps toward the roadhouse. The driver's HAND opens the front door of the roadhouse, and pushes aside the striped, vinyl-strip fly deterrent, and dangling tinkle bells.

10: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE SUNSET

EDDIE, the surveyor's assistant, sticks his head through the door expectantly, glances around, and frowns with disappointment.

11: INT. UNDERWATER 'NINGALOO' FANTASY SEQUENCE DAY

SFX The tinkling front door bells are distorted into the underwater sounds.

PEARL is happily swimming between the aquarium ornaments. She is delighted to see a giant CLAM SHELL with golden light coming from it's opening. PEARL swims closer, and reaches into the light. Her face is lit with gold.

12: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE SUNSET

EDDIE playfully slaps the side glass of the aquarium. PEARL lifts her head out of the water, gasping. She is very surprised to see EDDIE, the attractive, sandy-haired youngish surveyor, wearing stubbies and a ripped-sleeveless shirt.

EDDIE
(he's seen her do this
before)
Geez, Pearl!

PEARL
(delightedly slipping
something into her
pocket)
Eddie!
(slightly hopeful)
Aren't you goin' to the
Nullarbor?

EDDIE fidgets with something in his hands.

EDDIE
Had to say good-bye.

PEARL struggles with her disappointment. Eddie notices.
PEARL grabs the t-towel and wipes the water from her
face. EDDIE awkwardly gestures at the aquarium.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Where were you?

PEARL
Ningaloo!

EDDIE nods, like he doesn't believe her. PEARL frowns.
Eddie thrusts something in a paper bag at her.

EDDIE
I got you something.

PEARL is surprised. She doesn't receive presents often.
She accepts the paper bag, and looks up at Eddie.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(gesturing nervously)
Go on.

PEARL reverently opens the paper bag, withdraws a
Japanese pagoda aquarium ornament, and holds it up to the
light. It glows almost magically in her fingers. PEARL
is wowed.

PEARL
I've always wanted to go to
Japan.

EDDIE enjoys watching PEARL carefully place it into the aquarium, but his enjoyment is edged with discomfort. All of Pearl's attention is now focused on the pagoda.

SFX Faint, lilting Japanese music.

She leans closer to listen, smiling. EDDIE grabs her arm. PEARL looks at him. The music stops.

EDDIE
Come with me.

PEARL wasn't expecting this. She stares. EDDIE is standing opposite her, with the aquarium between them. The slanting rays of the setting sun play on their faces.

PEARL
(gently)
This is my place.

EDDIE
You've never been anywhere.

PEARL is hurt. She glances into the aquarium.

PEARL
Just got back from Ningaloo.

EDDIE
In your dreams.

PEARL
(firmly)
You'd better go, Eddie.

EDDIE shifts uncomfortably on his feet.

EDDIE
I can't stand the thought of you
out here alone with your head
stuck in that flamin' fish tank.
Some bastard could come along .
. .

PEARL
Edd-ie.

EDDIE
(simply)
I love you, Pearl.

BEAT.

PEARL is torn. She glances at the aquarium, and back again.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I'm offering you a life.

PEARL shakes her head.

PEARL
Half a life.

BEAT.

EDDIE abruptly begins to leave. PEARL is struck by the reality of losing him forever.

PEARL (CONT'D)
(going after him)
Wait.

EDDIE stops just inside the door-way, but doesn't turn around.

PEARL hesitates, then withdraws something precious from her pocket. She moves to EDDIE quickly, pulls his shoulder back, and pushes her gift into his shirt pocket.

PEARL (CONT'D)
It's something special ... from
Ningaloo.

EDDIE flicks the bells and vinyl-strip fly deterrent aside with annoyance, and leaves.

We stay on PEARL as she stays inside, watching him go.

SFX The driver's door slamming, the diesel engine firing.

PEARL flinches.

13: EXT. OLD ROADHOUSE/HIGHWAY (BACK OF THE UTE) SUNSET

We travel fast with the UTE, looking back at the ROADHOUSE, as PEARL moves to stand just outside the doorway.

She looks vulnerable and very alone as the UTE travels away, revealing again the absolute isolation of the ROADHOUSE.

14: EXT. OLD ROADHOUSE SUNSET

PEARL remains standing just outside the doorway, watching the UTE growing smaller and smaller on the horizon.

PEARL goes to wave, but lowers her hand again, sadly.

15: INT. MOVING UTE CABIN SUNSET

Eddie's big HAND is roughly changing up into overdrive.

Through the windscreen, we see endless road, a rise, and more endless road ahead. EDDIE passes a truck stop sign. One KM.

He pats his pocket, then presses it, to feel the texture of Pearl's present.

The truck stop looms ahead. EDDIE abruptly changes down, and pulls in, braking hard.

16: INT. STATIONARY UTE CABIN SUNSET

EDDIE tentatively reaches into his pocket, and withdraws something dainty in his big fingers, and rolls it into his palm. EDDIE looks down at his open palm with wonder. Within it, is a glowing grey-tinged pearl.

SFX A haunting memory of PEARL, the strangely-beckoning Aboriginal vocalist, singing softly to herself.

EDDIE contemplates the meaning of the pearl for a long, long moment, and reaches a decision. He turns the engine back on with new determination.

17: EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY SUNSET

The UTE does a fast U-turn, and heads back at speed.

18: INT. OLD ROADHOUSE NIGHT

EDDIE pokes his head through the bells and vinyl-strip fly deterrent, and looks around expectantly for PEARL. There is only one light on, above the aquarium, as it was at sunset, when he left her.

EDDIE
(frowning)
Pearl?
(louder)
Pearl?

EDDIE strides across to the front counter, and looks behind it. He opens the door to the kitchen, and yells.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Pearl!

EDDIE stands, listening. The fan revolves too slowly. The clock ticks. EDDIE is worried. He strides to the front door, and yells at the top of his lungs.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Where are you?! PEARL!

A fly is zapped by the fluorescent fly catcher. EDDIE spins around. His gaze settles on the gurgling, well-lit aquarium.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(softly)
Nah.

EDDIE looks at the pearl in his palm, looks again at the aquarium with dread, and shudders. He glances up at Pearl-the-black-mermaid in her painting, and back to the aquarium.

EDDIE is drawn toward the aquarium as though against his will. He peers inside.

SFX The haunting memory of PEARL singing softly to herself.

EDDIE grips the sides of the aquarium, his knuckles white, his teeth clenched, takes a breath, and plunges all of his face into the tank.

SFX Toilet flushing.

PEARL emerges from the ladies, a little teary-eyed. She sees EDDIE with his head in the aquarium, and stops in her tracks. Her eyes widen with amusement.

PEARL creeps over to the aquarium, and slaps the side of the tank, with a giggle.

EDDIE rears back, gasping for air. Water streams down his shirt. He wipes the water and wet hair from his face.

PEARL
Whatcha doin', Eddie?

EDDIE
Looking for you!

PEARL laughs with relief, which quickly subsides, as they share this moment of quiet exaltation.

BEAT.

PEARL reaches out, takes Eddie's hands, and places them back on the sides of the tank. She covers his hands with hers.

SFX Liltng Japanese music.

EDDIE hears it. PEARL looks at EDDIE with a world of playful suggestiveness.

19: INT. UNDERWATER 'TOKYO' FANTASY SEQUENCE DAY

PEARL and EDDIE are swimming to the sandy bottom of the sea. PEARL is dressed as before. So is EDDIE, who is in there boots and all. EDDIE is awed. PEARL is delighted.

The giant-sized PAGODA radiates light. As PEARL and EDDIE swim closer, they look at each other. Their faces are aglow with golden light. They swim away together.

Dissolve Credits into underwater footage over 'Pearl' music.

Additional Materials to Enigmatic Pearls

Appendix B: *Nullarbor Pearl* Script

Nullarbor Pearl

Third Draft Screenplay

Written by

Sarah Rossetti

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Registered with the Australian Writers' Guild 11226

WRITTEN WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SCREEN WEST

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1: EXT. RUN DOWN COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

PEARL, a spirited, tanned girl with sun-bleached hair in paint-splattered boardies and T-shirt, is defiantly painting a huge, poor-quality mural on the crumbling fibro fence.

MARNIE O.S.

You listening to me, Pearl?

PEARL paints on, not listening. The mural features herself as a 12 year old, walking beside her freckle-faced dad, BIG RED, as they beach-comb with a metal detector.

Pearl's mother, MARNIE, doubled over in a too-tight nurse's uniform, is yanking on her nurse's shoes facing out of the driver's door of her old sedan, fag in mouth.

MARNIE CONT'D

Paint over it I said.

PISS POT, the old CARETAKER, comes over, sucking on a tinny.

MARNIE CONT'D

Don't worry. It'll be gone by tonight.

PEARL

Will not!

MARNIE

Save yourself the effort.
Doesn't even look like him.

PISS POT

Paint all you like, luv. Your dad was a good mate of mine.

MARNIE

Do you mind? I've got a hospital job lined up for her.

PEARL

Not cleaning shitty bed pans, no way!

MARNIE

Yes you are. Don't have to keep you, now you're eighteen.

PEARL

Don't have to listen either.

PEARL CONT'D

Can do what I like, bitch!

2: EXT. PERTH CLIFFS DAY

Close on Pearl's face, taut with fury and fear as she sprints at top speed along the cliff path, ripping off her T-shirt, down to boardies and bikini top.

The T-shirt and towel are flung aside as Pearl's arms pump, chest heaves.

As she reaches the edge of the cliff PEARL leaps up and out, yelling.

PEARL CONT'D
HAAAAAaaaaahhhh!

For a moment Pearl's face lights up as she soars through midair, free as a flying fish.

3: EXT. UNDERWATER CAVE DAY

PEARL whooshes down, eyeing with astonished wonder the nearby reef and flashing fish.

Cheeks puffed out from holding her breath, PEARL kicks upside down to peer in a sea cave. Something touches her cheek.

She jolts and looks behind her. Nothing. Then she looks in the cave again.

Barely distinguishable, but there in front of her is the spectre of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL, a young woman not unlike PEARL. There's the ghost of a smile, as she reaches for PEARL with transparent fingers.

PEARL can't see her, but she's suddenly uneasy. She turns to check behind her. A large REEF SHARK is approaching. PEARL screams underwater, releasing all her air. The spectre's expression darkens as she darts forward full pelt, swimming straight through PEARL, to divert the shark.

PEARL jolts and screams rocketing up through sunbeams and electric schools of flashing fish, too terrified to look back.

4: EXT. PERTH CLIFFS DAY

PEARL breaks the surface gasping, and is immediately confronted by a frantic redhead FISHERMAN leaning way out of his dinghy amid dropped fishing rods and an upturned bucket of flapping fish. He reaches out the oar to her with a freckled arm.

FISHERMAN

Here! Quick!

PEARL spins around, gasping with fear at the shark fin surfacing behind, spins back and latches on to the oar.

5: INT. MARNIE'S CARAVAN AND PEARL'S ANNEXE AFTERNOON

Hastily shoving her clothes into a rucksack and her paintings in a folio, PEARL stops to gently pour her pet goldfish, CURLY, into a jar, then stabs some angry holes in the lid with a paint-splodged Stanley blade.

MARNIE appears at the back annexe.

MARNIE

Lucky to be alive.

PEARL hefts her rucksack on one shoulder.

MARNIE CONT'D

Where you goin'?

PEARL

Aunty Beryl's. No sharks, no shitty bed pans, no you.

MARNIE

Knew you'd piss off one day.
Just like your spineless old man.

PEARL glares, then shoves her shoulder into the rucksack.

MARNIE CONT'D

Beryl know you comin'?

PEARL

Don't have to ask. She loves me.

MARNIE

Just make sure you pull your weight, Pearl. They're battlin'.

As PEARL ducks out the back flap, MARNIE glimpses the mother-of-pearl necklace that pops out from under Pearl's T-shirt.

MARNIE CONT'D

Hey! That's mine.

PEARL

Time it got handed down.

MARNIE

You'll be sorry.

As PEARL runs across the caravan park, MARNIE sadly takes in Pearl's finished mural of her young self and RED, painfully aware that she's lost them both now.

6: INT. BUS (PASSING FARMS) SUNSET

PEARL, in angry damage control, is watching CURLY, sloshing in his jar. Her rucksack is jammed beside her, barring other passengers from getting near her.

She stares intently out the window at the old mine shafts.

7: INT. BUS (AT COOLGARDIE) DAWN

MALE DRIVER (V.O.)
Coolgardie. Oldest mining town
in the West.

PEARL wakes yawning as a blinking push bike light lumbers past, ridden by a JAPANESE RIDER, JUNO.

One luggage flap is slammed down, affording PEARL her first glimpse of EDDIE, big, blonde, 23, stashing a windmill blade in the hold. A ripple of excitement passes between them as EDDIE looks up and sees PEARL eyeing him up.

PEARL hastily checks her reflection in the bus window. Her hair's ratty, her clothes are a mess. As EDDIE walks along the aisle toward her, PEARL self-consciously pulls Curly's jar from beside her, and pushes it into the netting pouch in front.

EDDIE stashes his duffle bag and takes the empty seat across the aisle from PEARL.

EDDIE
Morning.

PEARL gives him a quick nod, averting her gaze. As the bus pulls out, she notices her portfolio paintings are wedged between the seat and the side of the bus. She tries to yank them out, but one of them rips.

PEARL
Shit.

PEARL wrestles the window latch open and chucks her ripped painting out the window, then all her other ocean paintings out after it. PEARL glances at surprised EDDIE, but their gaze is broken by the FEMALE DRIVER.

FEMALE DRIVER
What'd ya think ya doin'?

PEARL
What's it look like?

FEMALE DRIVER
Littering. Stop it or get off.

As the DRIVER passes, PEARL gives her the finger, amusing EDDIE, who watches Pearl's ocean paintings blowing off the wide street into the desert.

EDDIE
Know what you just did? You brought water to the desert.

PEARL inserts a straw into Curly's jar, almost drinking Curly's water instead of blowing air into it.

8: INT. BUS (EYRE HIGHWAY) SUNSET

PEARL, sketching a prospector and a mine shaft, jolts as she sees EDDIE looking over her shoulder. She hastily chucks it under the seat.

EDDIE
What'd you do that for?

PEARL
'Cause it was crap.

EDDIE
Looked pretty good to me.
You an artist?

PEARL
Hmm.

EDDIE
Can I sit here?

PEARL moves her stuff and he slides into the seat beside her, eyeing the dry desert outside.

EDDIE CONT'D
It was all an ocean once.

PEARL
Better like this. No sharks.

EDDIE looks sideways at her like what a weird thing to say. He picks up Curly's jar and waggles him at PEARL.

EDDIE
(ominous *Jaws* sounds)
Ner nur. Ner nur.

Smiling PEARL looks at EDDIE like who's weird? EDDIE unscrews Curly's jar to look at him. PEARL notices the gold nugget strung on a leather strap around his neck

PEARL
You a gold digger?

EDDIE
Nah. Fix windmills.

EDDIE stretches his leg to get his hand down the front pocket of his jeans, withdrawing a small white shell, which he drops into the jar. Plink. CURLY likes it.

EDDIE CONT'D
(screwing the lid on)
There ya go buddy.

PEARL
Funny lookin' oyster shell.

EDDIE
Prehistoric they reckon. Came up the first time I sunk a bore.

PEARL
Bore water? Out here?

EDDIE
Yeah, s'part of what I do, sink bores under windmills. The rain seeps through the limestone into this giant underground sea.

EDDIE gazes at PEARL's necklace.

EDDIE CONT'D
That's amazing. Where'd you get it?

PEARL
Handed down from my Great Grandma. Never knew her. Her name was Pearl, same as me.

EDDIE
I'm Eddie. Good name, Pearl.

Their gaze meets for an electric moment as their hands clasp, but forget to shake. Then EDDIE notices CURLY madly wagging his tail at him.

PEARL
Ha! He likes you.

As EDDIE smiles at cute CURLY, PEARL sneaks a good look at him. Eddie's gaze tracks back to Pearl's necklace, and up into Pearl's eyes, captivated.

9: INT. BUS (EYRE HIGHWAY) PRE DAWN

PEARL and EDDIE are sharing a big coke bottle, which EDDIE tops up with the last of the Bundy below the driver's eye line.

EDDIE
Why'd ya come here?

PEARL
Had enough ocean.

EDDIE nudges Curly's jar with his knee.

EDDIE
Fish fuck in it.

PEARL
Not Curly. He's a fresh water
freak.

EDDIE
Me too.

PEARL
You from 'round here?

EDDIE
Nowhere special.

PEARL
Been up and down a bit myself.

PEARL kisses surprised EDDIE, who kisses her back. They kiss and caress amid the snoring passengers, with Eddie's gold nugget necklace draped over Curly's jar to amuse him.

PEARL is making little sighs. EDDIE looks into her face, wowed. One of his hands reaches up to gently cover her mouth, the other slides under her T-shirt. Eddie's necklace falls to the floor.

A suspicious MALE DRIVER, elbows the off-duty FEMALE DRIVER who, torch in hand, makes her way toward the back, suddenly switching on the torch, right in Pearl's enraptured face.

The MALE DRIVER snaps on the big lights, causing gasps and groans from the sleepy PASSENGERS.

PEARL and EDDIE part and hastily sit up in their seats, as the FEMALE DRIVER marches forward, grabbing the microphone.

FEMALE DRIVER

Sorry for the bright lights,
Ladies and Gentlemen, but there's
two young passengers up the back
there who think this is a hotel
room.

PASSENGERS crane their heads to find the culprits, zeroing
in on red-faced EDDIE and PEARL with shocked whispers.

FEMALE DRIVER CONT'D

That's right. It's a bus, kids.

EDDIE and PEARL look at each other. Then EDDIE leaps up
and pulls the chord for the bus to stop, grabbing his
duffle bag and Pearl's rucksack.

PEARL snatches CURLY out of his pouch, rescues Eddie's
necklace from the floor, and jumps off the bus behind him.

10: EXT. WINDMILL (EYRE HIGHWAY) DAWN

The PASSENGERS gork down their noses at PEARL and EDDIE as
the MALE DRIVER unloads Eddie's windmill blade, then the
bus drives off, kicking up dust.

PEARL and EDDIE laugh, relieving the tension as they dump
their stuff. Then they're awkward.

EDDIE

Don't worry. We're not gunna die
of thirst. Only sunk this bore a
coupla months ago.

They walk toward the windmill, both in silent disbelief
about what just happened. PEARL hands EDDIE his necklace.

EDDIE CONT'D

Ta. Glad one of us was thinkin'.

EDDIE puts on the necklace, moving toward her, but she
gently pulls back. EDDIE frowns, then smiles good-
naturedly, takes the empty water bottle from Pearl's
rucksack and goes to fill it from the low windmill tap.

PEARL

It's not that I don't like you,
Eddie. Just got a lot of stuff
to sort out.

EDDIE hands her the water bottle and picks up his stuff.

EDDIE

Let's just get you to a
roadhouse. That way, not far.
Nice people.

PEARL sits on her rucksack.

PEARL

Fine here thanks.

EDDIE

What?

PEARL

Just wanna go whichever way the
wind blows.

Unhappily resigned, EDDIE starts backing away. PEARL looks
him over, utterly attracted.

EDDIE

Okay. . . . Take care. If you
ever wanna find me, break the
windmill.

PEARL

Ha! Bye, Eddie.

By the windmill, PEARL watches EDDIE grow smaller on the
horizon, the sun glinting off his windmill blade. PEARL
finishes her water, puts her water bottle down and looks at
a scribbled mud map.

11: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PEARL trudges wearily down the highway, peering through the
heat shimmer to see a hot pink water tanker obscuring her
view of the rundown roadhouse. Faintly, she hears her
Aunty's voice and smiles in recognition.

BERYL O.S.

Righto!

The water pump shuts off. Beryl's hand pulls the pink pipe
out of the drinking water tank on a stand near the
windmill, catching the spillage in a watering can.

A little water splashes into her eyes. BERYL stalls, as if
she has seen something, wipes her eyes, then intently peers
out to the road.

PEARL breaks into a smile as she makes out her 50 y.o.
Aunty BERYL squinting in her direction.

YANUSH, 49, Beryl's Estonian lover, pads out barefoot in overalls with a yellow post it note stuck to his forehead. A pile of bills are scrunched in his hand, all with overdue fluorescent stickers.

YANUSH

Don't worry. There's another bus tomorrow.

BERYL smiles at his post it note, which says OFFICE TART. Then squints again into the heat-shimmer. A sliver of a girl emerges.

BERYL

She's here.

YANUSH

Nothing wrong with your eyes, Bubba. Still better than mine.

BERYL squints up at the truck's cabin.

BERYL

Pay ya later, Pink. Got family comin'.

PINK, the 48 y.o. TRUCKIE, sticks her head out of the cab in a pink peak hat.

PINK

Stretching the friendship,
begging for water you're too
skint to pay for. . . . Al-
right, on my way back to Perth.

BERYL

You're a gem, Pink.

PINK

Yeah, yeah.

YANUSH salutes her. PINK waves it away with a jangling pink bracelet as the truck pulls away.

PEARL now has an uninterrupted view of the roadhouse. The place is rundown, with an old caravan parked off to the side. Broken windmill, dried up herbs growing in a huge disused fish tank, plastic fish.

PEARL jogs over, ducking under Beryl's open arms to drink from the watering can, slopping water down her front. YANUSH frowns at the spillage.

BERYL

Been expecting you.

PEARL
Did mum call?

BERYL
Nah. Just knew.

YANUSH
Big now, hey?

PEARL
You've got bigger too . . . Bear.
Getting ready to hibernate?

YANUSH
Don't listen, Bubba.

PEARL
(eyeing Beryl, amused)
Bubba!

12: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

YANUSH drops Pearl's rucksack behind the counter. PEARL unscrews the top off Curly's jar and places it outside to air. BERYL frowns as she sees the family necklace dangling out of Pearl's T-shirt.

BERYL
That granny's necklace?

PEARL
Mm hm.

BERYL
Haven't seen that in years.

BERYL opens her arms for a hug, then recoils, from the smell.

BERYL CONT'D
Oh, poh!

PEARL ducks out of the hug to grab the last Mars bar off the counter. YANUSH frowns, but BERYL waves it away.

PEARL
Ta, yum, starving. Got chucked
off the bus for drinking.

YANUSH
Not Vodka I hope?

PEARL shakes her head, mouth full. She looks around the puttied, walls of the roadhouse, all planks and ladders, and some new paint, ocean blue.

PEARL fondly eyes the horizontal marks on the unpainted wall the top one saying *Pearl 12*.

PEARL
Grown this much, eh?

BERYL
Tall, like ya dad. Whatcha here for?

PEARL
Gunna be an artist, Aunty. Good paint colour.

YANUSH
Not a piss artist like your old man?

PEARL
You seen him?

BERYL
Not since you did. Sorry, luv.

YANUSH
You can paint all you like here, kid, as long as it's walls.

BERYL
Gettin' the place ready to sell.

But Pearl's not listening, she's angling for the sound of shower water running in the Ladies' room.

BERYL CONT'D
Make it quick. Water's low.
Give us a look at that necklace.

PEARL yanks the necklace off and hands it to BERYL, who pensively runs her finger along the edge of the centre piece shark tooth. PEARL pulls a towel from her rucksack and bolts through the Ladies' Room door, rattling a sign on the door saying *Express Showers Only*.

13: INT. ROADHOUSE LADIES' ROOM DAY

PEARL sits on the sink to wrestle off her runners, knocking lots of prescription eye drops into the sink, which she notices with a frown.

She stands to pull down her jeans, calling to the woman in the shower opposite.

PEARL
Hey you. Time to get out.

PEARL chucks the woman's towel over the door, then starts yanking off her T-shirt.

PEARL CONT'D
Come on. Quick.

The water shuts off. The curtain opens, revealing EDDIE, towel around his hips, amused to see PEARL kicking off her jeans with her head stuck in her T-shirt offering him an unrestricted view of undies and bouncing bra.

EDDIE
Need a hand?

PEARL wrestles off the T-shirt, gaping past Eddie's bare chest, up into his blue eyes.

EDDIE CONT'D
Glad the wind blew you this way,
Pearl. Did ya ask 'em for a job?

PEARL
Um . . . listen, Eddie. Beryl's
my Aunty.

EDDIE
Full of surprises, aren't you?

PEARL
. . . So . . . we never met,
okay? Just don't say anything.

EDDIE
What'd ya think I'd say?

EDDIE yanks his jeans off the hook in the shower cubicle and drags them on over his wet legs.

PEARL
You usually shower in the
Ladies'?

EDDIE
Only if it needs fixin'.

EDDIE snatches up a wrench off the shower floor as PEARL steps into the shower.

PEARL, washing her hair, luxuriates, but is soon jolted out of her reverie by a loud banging.

BERYL O.S.
Move it, Pearl! That's our
drinking water!

Just as PEARL hurriedly rinses the shampoo out, the Ladies' door is thrown open by YANUSH. PEARL snaps off the shower and pulls the towel to her chest, peeking out at him.

PEARL

Al-right!

YANUSH

No more showers this week.

YANUSH tensely closes the door. Shut.

14: EXT. ROADHOUSE (AND UP THE WINDMILL) DAWN

From the top of the windmill, EDDIE spots a tiny dust trail being kicked up by a trail bike approaching from a far away tent. He turns back to the 'job', dropping bits of bread for some cawing crows gathered below.

15: INT. PEARL'S ROOM DAWN

PEARL is abruptly woken by sound of the crows squabbling over something.

PEARL

Oh, no! Curly!

PEARL races out of her room in her T-shirt nighty, setting the crows alight, looking for CURLY.

16: EXT. ROADHOUSE (AND UP WINDMILL) DAWN

EDDIE steps back on the platform watching PEARL almost fall over Curly's empty jar with a blue arrow painted on it, pointed toward the roadhouse.

PEARL squints into the roadhouse at CURLY cruising in a huge, top-lit fish tank, placed high on top of a big old TV table.

PEARL

Wh-oa!

PEARL races into the roadhouse. EDDIE smiles, rubbing the inside of his first-bore-sink white shell with his thumb as he pockets it, and gets back to work on the windmill.

17: INT. ROADHOUSE DAWN

PEARL circles the tank and climbs on a chair, trilling her fingers on the surface, rocking Beryl's plastic fish, making bubbles.

PEARL

Hey, Curly. Amazing! Who put
you in there, baby?

CURLY is goggling one of the plastic fish that has sunk.
PEARL picks up a note from EDDIE and smiles.

PEARL CONT'D

Edd-ie.

PEARL leans in closer to see CURLY become increasingly
excited, doing fast laps around the sunken plastic fish.

PEARL CONT'D

Whoa, chill matey. I'll get it
out.

PEARL yanks up her sleeve and tries to reach for the toy
fish, but the tank is too deep. PEARL baulks, then takes a
breath and pushes her face into the water to reach it.

Behind her, MASSIMO, the 27 y.o. Italian trail bike rider,
appears out of the Mens' Room, wearing designer shades and
a leather jacket over speedos. MASSIMO gapes, arrested by
the sight of this gorgeous girl, with her head in a fish
tank, white knickers peeking at him from under her nighty.
MASSIMO pushes his shades on his head.

MASSIMO

Um-ah.

18: INT. UNDERWATER DAY (INITIAL FISH TANK FANTASY)

PEARL completes her dive into a mysterious underwater
fantasy.

A gorgeous huge live fish, BIG CURLY, whizzes past the
sunken plastic fish. PEARL beams and swims after him,
halting as she notices a door. The door opens. BIG CURLY
darts away. The vista through the doorway is mysterious,
out of focus.

PEARL treads water, unsure about this strange new aspect.
Could there be sharks, in here?

PEARL tentatively swims toward the troubled swirling eddies
and peers out at . . .

19: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY (TANK VISION)

. . . Mysterious flashes of a 6 YEAR OLD girl, wearing
Pearl's family necklace, bathing her 2 YEAR OLD little
sister in the fish tank, playing with the same plastic fish
PEARL went in after.

Further away, a much less distinct MUM is washing the front window of the roadhouse.

The happy mood abruptly shifts as the 2 year old tugs on the family necklace pulling her older sister's head underwater.

Terrified, the toddler looks directly at PEARL, who swims hard to help them, but rams into the glass, the hard wall of reality, dividing present and past.

MUM's hands surge in, one on each child, dragging them out. each of them screaming.

She grabs the necklace, yanking it over the 6 year old's head, the shark tooth grazing her cheek, drawing blood.

PEARL is pulled backwards against her will. As she withdraws, these visions disappear violently, like water down a plug hole.

MASSIMO O.S.

Come out now!

20: INT. UNDERWATER (INITIAL FISH TANK FANTASY) DAY

PEARL rushes back fast, past the lovely aquarium part of the vision, past BIG CURLY, back to being a face in the fish tank, grabbing the plastic fish as she rises.

21: INT. ROADHOUSE DAWN

MASSIMO is pulling PEARL out by a bunch of nighty, gripped between her shoulder blades.

MASSIMO

Signorina!

BERYL emerges sleepily from her bedroom, stopping in her tracks at the sight of this big half-dressed MAN seemingly pushing Pearl's shoulders into the revamped fish tank that wasn't there the night before.

BERYL

Get your hands off her!

MASSIMO jumps and abruptly lets PEARL go, extending a hand up to shake instead.

MASSIMO

Scusa, Signorina. Massimo Venuti.

PEARL, overwhelmed, wipes her face with her nighty, looks at the plastic fish in her hand, then back in the tank.

BERYL

Bear!

MASSIMO

Me, no, she, I am not a Bear, I
justa came for milk and she, she.

YANUSH steps aggressively out of the bedroom anticipating trouble, silencing frightened MASSIMO.

YANUSH

Rented Land Cruiser with the Two
Fifty on the back.

YANUSH scowls at the fish tank.

YANUSH CONT'D

Who filled that up? You?

PEARL shakes her head. BERYL shrugs. YANUSH scowls through the window at EDDIE, then thrusts a paw out for MASSIMO.

YANUSH CONT'D

Yanush. What's going on?

MASSIMO

I am diving today in the caves,
but not without a coffee, so I
came to buy the milk. No one was
here, so I used the bagno . . .
And when I came out the la la
signorina had her head in the
fish tank. What can I say?

YANUSH

Italiano, eh? Help yourself.

Relieved, MASSIMO rushes to the fridge. BERYL goes to silent, shocked PEARL.

BERYL

What happened?

PEARL

Musta been dreamin' or somethin'.

MASSIMO appreciatively eyes PEARL heading outside as he returns to YANUSH with the milk. YANUSH queries Massimo's unusual attire.

YANUSH

You usually ride, like that?

MASSIMO

Scusa.

YANUSH

You from the north?

MASSIMO

Venezia, si.

YANUSH

How many of you?

MASSIMO

Solo io.

YANUSH

A man can sleep alone, but he cannot eat alone. Come for dinner tonight.

MASSIMO

I can cook.

YANUSH

Bravo!

22: EXT. ROADHOUSE (AND UP WINDMILL) DAWN

PEARL is standing amid Eddie's tools, focused on Eddie's back as he makes his way down the windmill, not hearing anything of what's happening inside.

YANUSH O.S.

It's not much of a kitchen.

BERYL O.S.

Pearl.

EDDIE

Hey. Curly like his condo?

EDDIE frowns, seeing the concerned look on Pearl's face and BERYL gesturing for her to come back inside.

BERYL O.S.

Come here.

PEARL

Why'd you do it?

EDDIE

Nothing to it. Just had to clean out the dirt and get the aerator going.

Unhappy YANUSH stands beside BERYL in the doorway.

EDDIE CONT'D
What's up with him?

PEARL
Shitty 'bout the drinkin' water.
D'ya do something special to it?

EDDIE
Just got the chlorine out.
(to Yanush)
Don't worry 'bout the water,
mate. We'll have the windmill
working soon.

YANUSH
We drink windmill water, but the
fish had his trucked in.

EDDIE
Plain thank-you would've been
nice.

PEARL looks into Eddie's blue eyes and doesn't see answers there. He reads the look as renewed interest.

EDDIE CONT'D
Come up. Have a look.

As they climb the windmill, MASSIMO comes out and revs off. EDDIE yells after him.

EDDIE CONT'D
Loonie!

PEARL clambers up on the platform after EDDIE, looks out and gasps at the horizon. Less than ten kilometres away, Australia ends.

PEARL
Can you take me there?

EDDIE
Where? That loonie's tent?

PEARL points at the cliffs and endless sea.

PEARL
No. . . . There.

EDDIE looks down at cranky YANUSH and concerned BERYL, both frowning up. He calls down to YANUSH.

EDDIE
That part arrived for my ute?

YANUSH
(jutting his chin)
In the back.

EDDIE smiles at PEARL. Perfect time to split.

23: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

EDDIE pulls up in his beat up ute.

EDDIE
Better not stay long. Bear's
shitty enough

PEARL jumps out before the ute is completely stopped and
races for the cliffs, leaving her passenger door open.
EDDIE switches it off, staring after her.

PEARL rushes towards the edge, opens her arms and yells top
volume.

PEARL
HAAAAaaaahhhh!

Shocked, EDDIE sprints to catch her, launches into a footy
tackle and lands them off to one side.

EDDIE
You're mad.

PEARL commando crawls to the edge staring down at the waves
smashing against the cliffs far below.

PEARL
Fuck! Edge of the world!

EDDIE crawls beside PEARL and looks over the edge with new
eyes too. Triumphantly, she holds a small white seashell
under his nose, grubbed from the edge, much like his shell.
EDDIE looks at Pearl's windswept face, excited by the way
she makes him do mad stuff, see things anew.

There's a wild moment in her eyes, but she resists it,
leaping up instead.

PEARL
Let's go.

24: INT. ROADHOUSE AFTERNOON

MASSIMO walks in, wearing a black chef's half apron over
jeans and a white shirt for dinner. He spots PEARL, dazzled
by her magnetic smile.

MASSIMO

Buon Giorno, Singnorina!

PEARL

Hi.

YANUSH

Buon Giorno, Signore Chef. Enter
la cucina. Take the rest of
those photos down please, Pearl.
We're giving that side its first
coat tomorrow.

YANUSH slaps Massimo's back quite hard.

YANUSH

You like Vodka? I like Vodka.

25: INT. ROADHOUSE AFTERNOON

Vodka in hand, MASSIMO trails behind PEARL, as she takes pictures off the unpainted wall, showing her cave photos in his wallet as proudly as a parent offering baby snaps.

MASSIMO

I can't believe you have never
been in these caves. They're
phenomenal, forgotten places.

PEARL

Didn't say I wouldn't go.

MASSIMO is captivated. PEARL notices his expression and promptly returns to removing pictures. She is intrigued by a faded black and white shot of a girl wearing the family necklace, standing in front of the roadhouse. PEARL takes it to BERYL, who's setting the table.

PEARL

Who's this? Nana Rayleen?

BERYL

That's mum alright. When she
first got here.

PEARL

She looks so sad and skinny.

YANUSH O.S.

Mass-imo, your onions are
burning.

MASSIMO

Scusa.

MASSIMO rushes back to the kitchen. YANUSH laughs.

YANUSH O.S.

Gotcha. Have some more Vodka.
Nastravia!

PEARL

How come Nana came here if she
was born in Broome? Why didn't
she stay with Grandad the
Pearler?

BERYL

Musta thought she'd be safer
here, far from the ocean, after
her mum died.

PEARL

What is it with this family? Mum
never let me in either.

BERYL

Nana didn't even like us having a
bath. Suited us. . . . Why'd
you stick your head in that fish
tank?

PEARL

Just wanted to get the plastic
fish out. Curly didn't like it.

BERYL

Could have sworn you saw
something in there by the look on
your face.

PEARL

Like what?

BERYL shrugs, then abruptly heads into the kitchen.

PEARL CONT'D

Aunt-y.

26: INT. ROADHOUSE KITCHEN AFTERNOON

PEARL lets it go and returns to work as she sees BERYL help
herself to panadol and water, sitting heavily at the
kitchen table. YANUSH shovels an enormous spoonful of
sauce into his mouth.

MASSIMO

I will make more.

YANUSH grabs the Vodka and splashes a huge slurp in, making MASSIMO gasp and consult his cook book.

MASSIMO CONT'D

But it says Brandy.

YANUSH

Perfetto. In Estonia we say a man who does not know how to cook does not know how to love.

MASSIMO

My mother says it only happens once in a lifetime. The right one will only come out when I forget where to look, which is, of course, ridiculous.

YANUSH

You have to be lucky. If Bubba's water tower hadn't fallen over, I would never have met her.

BERYL

Bloody lucky . . . meeting a sexy Olympic weight lifter way out here. Million to one. Right when I needed him too.

MASSIMO

Olympian, eh?

YANUSH

I jumped ship but still I can't swim.

MASSIMO

I don't believe in luck.

YANUSH

Fate?

MASSIMO

Niente. No prophecies from the gypsies either.

YANUSH

When the right one comes, you'll know it. But your heart needs to be broken a few times first.

Lovingly, he massages Beryl's temples. BERYL sighs with relief.

YANUSH CONT'D

Love takes practice. Lots of practice.

27: INT. ROADHOUSE AFTERNOON

PEARL is pensively feeding CURLY.

She looks at the plastic fish that sank which she pulled out and is now too afraid to put back in. Instead, she props it against the tank glass. CURLY swims down and gapes at it.

28: INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

BERYL, YANUSH, PEARL and EDDIE are seated around the table, awaiting MASSIMO, who enters with flaming hamburger patties impressing everyone but EDDIE.

BERYL

Make some room in the middle, luv.

PEARL clears a space and MASSIMO places the oven dish before her with a flourish.

MASSIMO

Steak au-poivre with a little fantasia. These beef patties are fillet and the Vodka is Brandy.

EDDIE

I would've been fine with spag bol.

MASSIMO

Bolognese requires fresh tomato sauce, fresh basilica, fresh pasta.

PEARL

This tastes fine to me.

BERYL

Yeah, lovely tucker.

YANUSH

Anyone want a top up?

No takers. YANUSH tops his glass full with Vodka, stands and raises it to MASSIMO.

YANUSH CONT'D

Here's to us and those who love us, and bugger those who don't.

MASSIMO

Salute!

YANUSH

He lives alone.

EDDIE

Wonder why?

MASSIMO eyes EDDIE like an imbecile. EDDIE eyes MASSIMO like a stupid tourist.

BERYL

How long you here for? We've got rooms out the back going cheap.

MASSIMO

I'm not sure. But I love to dive in this cave. It's amazing.

EDDIE

Alone?

MASSIMO

Obviously.

EDDIE

Not a good idea.

MASSIMO

Why not? The water is as clear as air and the walls curve so sensuously, like the contours of a woman's . . . But what would you know?

EDDIE

Tell you what I do know, mate. A diver died down there a while back. Stirred up the silt and couldn't find his way back. So get yourself a buddy who knows the terrain.

MASSIMO

I will take Pearl.

BERYL

No you don't. Blackfellas reckon there's a bad spirit in that cave water.

PEARL

I'm eighteen, Aunty. Do what I like.

YANUSH

If Bubba says you're not, you're not. You're here to work.

PEARL glares at YANUSH.

MASSIMO

No problemo. We will go before work.

PEARL gives him a tiny excited nod. EDDIE irritably snaps open a beer.

YANUSH

You go too, Eddie.

MASSIMO

These Aboriginal people, where can I find them?

BERYL

All buggered off to the cities years ago.

MASSIMO

So it's an ancient water spirit . . . interessante.

BERYL

And that poor diver.

MASSIMO

So . . . do these people believe your spirit is trapped in the water if you drown?

BERYL

Don't ask me.

PEARL

I do. I believe that.

BERYL

Don't go anywhere near that water, and chuck some cave dirt in for the water spirit before he goes in as well. Right?

PEARL

Right.

29: INT. EDDIE'S ROOM LATE NIGHT

EDDIE lies in bed with his head on one arm, trying to read a magazine about rods for windmills, but throws it aside. Pensively picks his gold nugget off his chest and runs it along its leather strap with his free hand.

30: EXT. ROADHOUSE LATE NIGHT

The wind howls, the windmill clanks. YANUSH sings while lying on his back under the caravan, lifting the chassis like Olympic weights.

YANUSH

(singing, pausing to
grunt with exertion)

Once in a lifetime every star in
the sky shines for one reason, to
light your way to the one love
you'll find, once in a lifetime.

Amused, MASSIMO watches the white caravan going up and down in the Moonlight in time with each strain.

MASSIMO

Bravo, Yanush! It is true. You
are strong like a bear.

YANUSH

Still got it, Bubba!

MASSIMO

But a singer you are not.

BERYL

Come on, Bear. Time to go to
sleep.

MASSIMO kisses her cheek as he hands her his empty glass.

MASSIMO

Thank-you for your hospitality,
Signora. I hope I will not find
you here in the morning, Signore.

31: EXT. EYRE HIGHWAY LATE NIGHT

MASSIMO, wearing a head torch, is heading off the highway down the track toward his tent. The torchlight reflects off some small white shells like EDDIE has on his necklace and PEARL found at the cliffs. MASSIMO picks one up, rubbing the dirt off with his thumb.

He looks back to the roadhouse sees PEARL moving about in her room and is struck by desire.

32: INT. PEARL'S ROOM PRE DAWN/DAWN (PAINTING MONTAGE)

Thoughts of seeing things in the fish tank have kept PEARL awake. At first we see her painting just the sunken plastic fish, then eerie glimpses of the spectre of her GREAT GRANDMA emerge, intercut with PEARL fingering the family necklace at her throat. PEARL paints the two girls in the bath, pausing to squint into her painting, closing her eyes to remember, then begins painting with more impressionistic brush strokes. (Her painting style improves in time, but this painting is very child-like.)

33: INT. EDDIE'S ROOM DAY

EDDIE is woken by Massimo's trail bike starting up. EDDIE glances at the clock, 6.30am, and races to the door.

EDDIE
Shit.

34: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

EDDIE stands in his doorway eyeing PEARL on the back of Massimo's trail bike, clinging to him as they roar off.

He rushes out after them.

YANUSH is standing at the back door of the kitchen wearing white boxer shorts holding a glass of Berocca.

YANUSH
Got a lot to learn, kid.

BERYL rushes to YANUSH in her nighty, but pulls up sharply in Pearl's doorway. Then she's all movement in an anxious whirling blur, waving YANUSH over.

BERYL
Come here. Quick.

35: INT. PEARL'S ROOM DAY

BERYL and YANUSH sit on Pearl's bed, staring at the painting of the two girls and the ghost of Pearl's GREAT GRANDMA.

BERYL

That's exactly how I felt, seeing Nana's ghost in there with my baby sister. Never told Pearl, or mum, not even Marnie. Nobody but you. Pearl *musta* seen it in that fish tank . . . unless you told her?

YANUSH tsks dismissively, shaking his head.

BERYL CONT'D

We've got to protect her.

YANUSH

She's not twelve any more.

BERYL

Doesn't matter. Get down there. Get her back.

YANUSH

If she has it, she has it. What can happen? There's no sharks. Eddie's on his way.

BERYL

Feels bad, Bear.

YANUSH

Too much worry, Bubba.

BERYL looks scared.

36: EXT. INT CAVE DAY

MASSIMO dons his dive gear. PEARL, wearing his head torch, is enthralled by Aboriginal hand paintings on the wall of the cave, but to reach them she must wade into the water.

PEARL hesitates, stoops up some cave dirt and scatters it into the clear cave water, watching it sink as she tucks her skirt in her undies and wades in up to her calves. Sensuously, she places her palms over the palms on the cave wall, with the family necklace glinting luminously at her throat. PEARL barely notices MASSIMO, she is so totally absorbed by this very different place to the world above.

MASSIMO slides in the water and approaches quietly from the depths in a halo of bubbles, watching her. He surfaces, pushing his goggles on to his head.

MASSIMO

Come in, Perla. It's amazing.

PEARL

Nah, too cold.

MASSIMO rises fast, grabs her waist and laughs, as he falls back into the water holding her. Shocked PEARL gasps.

PEARL CONT'D

Oh no, n-not my head under.

MASSIMO

Don't be afraid.

MASSIMO looks into Pearl's eyes and kisses her, gliding them further back. For a moment, PEARL relaxes, then the water glides up and over their faces, causing her eyes to widen with fright, as she looks in the water and sees. . .

37: EXT. INT CAVE DAY (CAVE VISION)

A mysterious flash of a primitively painted girl diving off a cliff.

PEARL sees glimpses of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL as the painter, the same age as PEARL is now, her view obstructed by young Aboriginal women, milling around the artist at work.

Then there's an ominous change of mood in the tribe's women. Unsettled whispers, fear of the flying figure, shock recognition, terrified nudging. The tribe women flee, water sloshing from their baskets.

GREAT GRANDMA PEARL is suddenly revealed to PEARL who, sensing Pearl's presence, stops painting, and turns.

Both PEARLS stand stock still, eyes widening with astonishment as they recognise each other through the eerie veil of time.

PEARL then jolts as she sees her ancestor's hand pulled from the wall by an angry ELDER, revealing the girl jumping off the cliff, painted over the ancient hand prints.

The ELDER spits on the wall, as he splashes cave water over the new painting. He rips a shark tooth from his necklace and throws it at Pearl's ancestor with the severest of banishment gestures.

She scoops up the sinking shark tooth in her water basket, accepting her fate, head hung with shame and grief.

38: EXT. INT CAVE DAY

MASSIMO lifts Pearl's head above the water, breaking her vision. She violently pushes him aside to better see the wall where only the ancient hand paintings remain.

PEARL

Let me go.

MASSIMO

Wait please, Pearl!

But PEARL can't wait. She's scrambling over rocks toward the entrance, like the tribal WOMEN did before her.

MASSIMO CONT'D

I'm sorry.

Too late. MASSIMO yanks off his flippers, angry at himself.

MASSIMO CONT'D

Stupido!

39: EXT. MASSIMO'S TENT (NEAR CAVE ENTRANCE) DAY

Panicked PEARL races past EDDIE, who is peering in the opening of Massimo's tent. PEARL doesn't see him. She races for Massimo's trail bike, guns it, and revs off.

EDDIE

Pearl! Wait! What happened?

EDDIE turns and sees MASSIMO hurriedly hobbling over the entrance rocks barefoot in his unzipped wet-suit.

EDDIE CONT'D

What'd you do to her?

MASSIMO

I kissed her. She left. Never happened to me before.

The men glare at each other, then both hear the unmistakable sound of a shotgun being snapped together.

They turn to see NORM, the tough, 55 y.o. Station owner, approaching with the shotgun pointed at MASSIMO, who hurriedly raises his hands. NORM looks well and truly capable of murder with a couple of bleeding dead rabbits slung over his shoulder. He juts his chin at EDDIE.

NORM

Who's this?

EDDIE

Cave diver.

NORM steps back, still pointing the shotgun at MASSIMO, to peer in the window of Massimo's flash 4WD.

NORM

Give us ya keys.

EDDIE

Do as he says. You're on his land.

MASSIMO

There was no fence. I did not know.

He throws NORM the keys, who chucks the rabbits in the back seat of the 4WD.

NORM

Get in.
(to Eddie)
You. In the front.

MASSIMO gingerly nudges the bleeding rabbits aside with his wetsuited bum as he gets in the back, keeping his hands up.

40: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

YANUSH stands in the doorway in his paint-splattered T-shirt, paint brush in hand, as PEARL roars up to the roadhouse on Massimo's bike.

YANUSH

Bubba's been worried sick.
Where's Eddie?

PEARL

Dunno. Why?

YANUSH

Any more of this and you go.

PEARL

Al-right. Let me change first!

YANUSH

So much for you not getting in!

41: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PEARL, hastily changed with wet hair, is bailed up by BERYL.

BERYL
You alright? What happened?

PEARL
Was Great Grandma Pearl
Aboriginal?

BERYL
No. We're Irish with a bit of
Broome mixed in. You know that.

PEARL
Her dad might have been Irish,
but her mum was Aboriginal.

BERYL
How'd you know that?

PEARL
Saw her. She was an artist too.
And she saw me.

BERYL takes a seat, tensely rubbing her eyes. YANUSH
marches over to PEARL, his paint brush dripping.

YANUSH
Enough mumbo jumbo. This is a
real wall. Paint it.

BERYL gestures for PEARL to get on with it.

42: INT. ROADHOUSE KITCHEN DAY

As PEARL paints, she listens to cranky O.S. YANUSH and
BERYL talking about her in the kitchen.

YANUSH O.S.
I don't want to hear it, Bubba.
Every day something, food, water,
men, hocus pocus, and every day
what about you? More headaches,
eye aches. She has to go.

BERYL O.S.
Not sending her back, Bear.
She's here for a reason. I know
it.

YANUSH O.S.
Who cares? She's killing you.

That's it. PEARL bursts into the kitchen.

PEARL

I am not! You two stop talkin'
'bout me like that! Only here
'cause I love Aunty. And you, ya
old crank!

YANUSH smashes scissors on the kitchen table.

YANUSH

See Bubba's toenails? You know
who cuts them? I do. Why?
Because she can't see that far
anymore. You know why she can't
see her own toenails? Because
she's got eye trouble. You want
to help around here, or be a good
for nothing artist?

PEARL

Help.

YANUSH

Then shut up and cut Bubba's
toenails!

YANUSH shoves past and stomps back out into the dining
area. PEARL sheepishly picks up the scissors.

43: INT. ROADHOUSE KITCHEN DAY (A LITTLE LATER)

BERYL

Ow! Watch it!

PEARL

Sorry, Aunty.

BERYL

Bit of a shock finding out like
that, eh?

PEARL

Haven't had any sudden urges to
rush out and buy clicking sticks
if that's whatcha mean. You and
mum coulda told me.

BERYL

Didn't know for sure. You coulda
told *me* you were seein' stuff.

PEARL

Wasn't, 'til I got here. D'ya
think it's 'cause we're
Aboriginal?

BERYL

Dunno. Don't think so. Maybe her spirit's restless 'cause this is her country. Just keep ya head out of water.

PEARL

Like that'll fix it. You're soundin' just like mum and the ocean. So, what? We're all gunna get eaten by sharks?

YANUSH emerges from the Mens' room, looking suspiciously from woman to woman, who lapse again into sullen silence.

YANUSH

Enough I said. I want this wall finished today.

BERYL shoves PEARL toward YANUSH. PEARL slaps down the scissors and heads through to help him.

44: INT. MASSIMO'S 4WD (APPROACHING COUNTRY DOWNS) DAY

NORM crunches Massimo's gears savagely, as he drives along the beaten track like a madman, with Massimo's Italian Opera Favourites CD blaring.

NORM

Can't see. Put ya hands down.

MASSIMO hurriedly snaps on his seat belt.

NORM CONT'D

And don't try anything with those rabbits.

EDDIE laughs. MASSIMO realises he's been had. To make it worse, NORM raucously sings along with his CD.

NORM CONT'D

Arseolo mio. La la la la.

45: EXT. MASSIMO'S 4WD (APPROACHING COUNTRY DOWNS) DAY

NORM is gunning it up the driveway of a rundown station on a collision course with a taxiing old crop duster, fast bearing down on them. At the last moment, NORM bumps off the driveway, and RAY the Postman, wearing old fashioned flying goggles, pulls the plane to a rattling halt.

As the trio climb out of the 4WD and RAY jumps down, Massimo's eyes boggle at the mountains of rusting junk NORM and RAY have collected over the years, old cars, kero fridges, plate glass.

RAY
Who's *this*?

NORM
Trespasser.

MASSIMO wipes the rabbit blood off his hand down his wetsuited leg and shakes.

MASSIMO
Massimo Venuti.

RAY
I'm Ray. You've met Norm.

NORM
Like the place?

MASSIMO
Words can't describe it.

NORM
We're turning it into a tourist ranch called . . .

NORM AND RAY
. . . Country Downs.

MASSIMO
I'm sure many Italians will flock here. . . if word gets out.

NORM
What did I tell ya?

MASSIMO
I can cook rabbit.

NORM
Bewdy. Get him a beer.

MASSIMO looks for Eddie's reaction to RAY galloping across the paddock to the kero fridges on the junk heap, sending BONOX, Norm's Brahman bull, into a trot, revealing RAY staggering back with a slab of beer.

EDDIE smiles, certain they'll be there all night.

46: INT. PEARL'S ROOM NIGHT/DAWN

PEARL is up late, painting herself as a black, skinny 12 year old, crying, with her hard-faced mother, also black, firmly holding her other hand. We see the dust being kicked up by her father, Caucasian BIG RED, in a departing ute.

BERYL comes in quietly without knocking, wearing a nighty.

BERYL

Bear's snorin' his head off.

Then she sees Pearl's painting, sees Pearl's sad face and puts an arm around her.

BERYL CONT'D

Is that how you feel now, black?
Or just sad 'cause of ya dad?

PEARL

Both.

BERYL leads PEARL to sit with her on the bed, in front of the painting.

BERYL

Dads. The whole family's had a rotten trot. Mum's left her here after Pearl died. I never knew mine, and yours buggered off back to the bush.

PEARL

It's not fair.

BERYL

No, it isn't. At least you'll always have your mum and me. Yanush too. He may be cranky, but he loves you.

PEARL

You *sure* you never heard from dad? All this time? He never passed through?

BERYL

I would've said, luv. God's honour.

PEARL

Maybe all this water stuff'll help me find him?

BERYL

He doesn't want to be found, luv.
Hard as that is, you'll just have
to let him go.

Close to tears, PEARL averts her gaze from BERYL to BIG RED in her painting.

47: EXT. ROADHOUSE (UP WINDMILL) DAY

EDDIE is busy, fixing the windmill. PEARL is up there with him, gazing at him while he works. His gold nugget necklace glints in the sun.

PEARL

My dad was like that, always
fixin' stuff. Big Red the petrol
head. Nothing his tool kit
couldn't fix, except his love of
booze and gold diggin'. Racked
off when I was twelve. Never
heard from him again.

EDDIE eyes PEARL, no idea what to say. He looks at the highway, saved by a truck approaching. He starts down the windmill, calling out to BERYL.

EDDIE

Here comes Pink.

48: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

Seedy MASSIMO sits near the window drinking some of Yanush's Berocca with a short coffee lined up, watching a PINK apparition dismounting from her pink water truck, pink sand shoes first, followed by pink jeans, pink belt, pink T-shirt, pink wishing stone bracelet and pink sunglasses.

EDDIE enjoys watching MASSIMO rub his eyes as PINK picks up a pink clipboard from the door of the pink truck with pink-painted nails and swaggers inside, looking pleased to be here, pulling a pink pen from behind her ear.

EDDIE

Giddy, Pink.

PINK

Howdy, Eddie. Yoo, hoo, Bear,
Bubba. Got some water in that
kettle of yours?

49: INT. ROADHOUSE AND OFFICE DAY

MASSIMO is diverted by the arrival of PEARL, trying to gauge if he's blown it in the caves. PEARL returns his gaze, unconsciously sucks her lip a moment, then she heads into the office to join BERYL and YANUSH.

YANUSH

Massimo's paying by card, hasn't cleared yet.

PEARL hands YANUSH her purse. He looks inside and sees the single fifty dollar note and hands it back.

YANUSH CONT'D

That's your bus fare home.

PEARL

I am home.

BERYL gives her a squeeze, then glimpses PINK approaching, looking no nonsense with her clipboard and pen out.

BERYL

Giddy Pink. You met my niece, Pearl?

PINK

Saw her comin', the day you ran up ya bill.

BERYL

I'll make you a cuppa.

PINK goes to inspect the fish tank.

PINK

Here we go. How'd you pay for this?

BERYL O.S.

Didn't, duffer. It's the herb garden.

PINK

Ooh yeah.

BERYL O.S.

Got some money coming in. Fix ya up later, promise.

Before PINK can react, PEARL quietly hands her the fifty from her purse, pleasantly surprising PINK, who pockets it and trills the tank water for CURLY.

PINK

S'pose it can hold off.

Just then, Pink's wishing stone bracelet catches on the glass edge and falls into the fish tank.

PINK CONT'D

Oh no! Davo gave me that.

PEARL grabs a fork off a table and leaps on a chair trying to get it before it sinks too far, but it's too late. She pushes her ear near the water and listens.

BZZT. The surprising sound of a hospital electronic buzzer which makes PEARL jerk her head up. BERYL, rushes past to the kitchen, pointing at her.

BERYL

Don't even think about it! I'll get the long tongs. Bear!

PEARL tilts her head again to listen. Then CURLY starts sucking Pink's bracelet. PINK slaps the side glass.

PINK

Get off! Off!

PEARL

Aye! Leave him alone!

PEARL is on her toes, leaning in with the fork, but it's just short. Her fingers strain, the tip of her nose is in the water, BERYL is racing back with the tongs, pulling YANUSH from the office doorway. Too late. PEARL flashes YANUSH a defiant look, takes a breath, and plunges all of her face into the tank.

PINK CONT'D

Err.

Everyone stands stock still, staring at PEARL.

50: INT. HOSPITAL ROOM ENSUITE (TANK VISION) DAY

PEARL swims down toward the bracelet on the bottom of a glass shower cubicle, not unlike the fish tank, but with a different view through to a mysterious hospital room.

Pearl's gaze travels up the tiles, spying PINK in a fleuro pink nurse's uniform, struggling to lift bearded DAVO off a bedpan. A paraplegic with one arm's in plaster, he's too heavy to lift himself with the other arm.

PINK presses the buzzer with her elbow, causing DAVO to topple on to his broken arm side. Ouch.

PEARL gasps. The pan upturns, soiling the bedclothes. PINK struggles to take the weight off Davo's broken arm, nose crinkled. DAVO, humiliated, waves PINK away. There's a blur of white as two nurses in uniforms enter. PINK steps back, relieved, recoiling from Davo's fury.

51: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PINK is concerned for PEARL.

PINK
Do something! She's fainted!

BERYL
She'll be right. We'll look
after her.

YANUSH yanks PEARL out of the tank with the bracelet, which BERYL grabs and gives to PINK.

BERYL CONT'D
There ya go. Catch ya next time,
Pink.

PINK
What's the matter with you?
Haven't even had my tea!

PEARL jumps off the chair, busting to tell.

BERYL
Don't.

Too late.

PEARL
What were you thinking, trying to
lift that big bearded bloke all
by yourself? Pink uniform was
cool though. I'd bugger off and
drive too, if I had to clean
shitty bedpans. Mum wanted me to
do that job, but there's no
friggin' way!

PINK
Is this your idea of a joke?

PEARL
Saw it in the fish tank.

PINK
Get yourself another water
truckie. Bye

BERYL
Nah, nah, Pink. Listen. I
didn't tell her. She's special.

MASSIMO
You see things, in there?
People?

PEARL
Yeah.

MASSIMO
You're amazing. Incredible.

PEARL rushes to the doorway in time to see PINK roaring off
in the pink water truck, engulfing BERYL in blinding dust.
Furious YANUSH rushes to Beryl's assistance cursing at
PEARL.

YANUSH
You're leaving.

BERYL
Pearl. Get in here!

52: INT. ROADHOUSE LADIES' ROOM DAY

PEARL opens Beryl's eyebath from the opened cabinet, while
BERYL leans over the sink splashing water in her eyes.
YANUSH puts the plug in the sink.

BERYL
Leave this to me, Bear.

PEARL
Aunty, you've got to see an eye
specialist.

BERYL
When I say don't I mean don't!
Pink and Davo are good friends of
mine.

PEARL
Didn't say anything that bad.

BERYL
Pink's been driving since Davo,
'that big bearded bloke' as you
so call him, fell asleep one
night at the wheel and broke his
back, poor fella.

PEARL
Fu-ck.

BERYL

The other truckies didn't like it at first, didn't think a woman could hack the Nullarbor run, so Pat went all out Pink, as a protest.

PEARL

True?

BERYL

Don't give me true. It's not funny seeing stuff. The things you see about people are sacred to them, and you've got no right saying anything unless they ask.

PEARL

Well why do I know if I'm not allowed to say?

BERYL

It's a curse, Pearl, not a bloody circus trick. I hate it. Bear hates it. Your mum hates it.

PEARL

Did dad hate it? Is that why he left?

BERYL

Don't go blaming the curse for anything your old man did. Plenty of people love it. All the lost sheep of the world, lookin' for answers. They never let up on Nana Pearl 'til the day she died. That's what killed her.

PEARL

Was not. It was a shark.

BERYL

Yeah? Well why'd you think she was down there? Prob'ly suckered in by some poor bastard wanting answers.

PEARL

Doesn't anyone know what happened?

BERYL

Maybe mum, but she never said.

PEARL pensively rinses spilled eye bath down the sink.
YANUSH yanks the door open.

BERYL CONT'D

She's stayin'.

YANUSH clamps his paw over Pearl's and twists off the tap.

PEARL

Ow!

YANUSH

Bravo. Let's all stay and die of
thirst.

53: INT. ROADHOUSE SUNSET

An ocean blue wave is painted on the wall. The arc of
paint begins to shape into Pink's face, then PEARL sees
YANUSH watching and paints over it.

PEARL

Why are we painting if ya got no
money?

YANUSH

To try and sell it before the
repossessors take it from us.

PEARL

What?

YANUSH

Nobody comes, not since the big
place up the road opened. Bubba
can't take the strain and having
you here hasn't helped. No more
trouble, Pearl.

54: EXT. ROADHOUSE (PEARL'S HILLOCK OVER HIGHWAY) NIGHT

PEARL sits across the highway on a small hillock amongst
the spinifex, hugging her nighty over her knees, revealing
the family necklace glinting around her neck.

She looks sadly at the derelict roadhouse. PEARL takes off
the necklace and looks through it, angling it so that the
shark tooth is pointing to the fish tank.

55: INT. PEARL'S ROOM NIGHT

MASSIMO knocks on Pearl's door.

MASSIMO

Pearl?

No answer. He can't resist going in for a proper look at the painting . . . baby MARNIE almost drowning, and young black PEARL crying over Big Red's departure. Both are so raw and riveting that MASSIMO lets out a low, impressed whistle. EDDIE hears him, and appears in the doorway.

MASSIMO CONT'D

She's inspired, searching.

EDDIE

What the fuck do you think you're doing, in here with Pearl's stuff?

56: INT. ROADHOUSE LATER NIGHT

PEARL gazes at the fish tank, family necklace in hand.

Silently she rises, places her chair close to the tank, climbs up, and eases the necklace into the water. PEARL focuses on the shark tooth glinting at the bottom of the tank. CURLY cruises wide, staying away.

She whispers just above the water.

PEARL

Why were you down there, Pearl?

57: EXT. UNDERWATER (PEARL LUGGER VISION) DAY

PEARL dives down to the sea floor, grabs the necklace and is startled by the big BOOT of a JAPANESE DIVER in a 30's diving suit and bell helmet. PEARL swims closer, toward indistinct movement on the surface.

The sound of child laughter increases.

Pearl's GREAT GRANDMOTHER and daughter, RAYLEEN, are swimming. The little girl's kicking like a fish in a bucket, causing great hilarity.

58: EXT. PEARL LUGGER AT SEA DAY

PEARL is arrested by the *crystal clear* beauty of the past.

The CHILD sinks a little, and bobs back up, assisted by her mother's hands. A little unsettled, she takes a firm grip of the white luminous necklace around her mother's neck and kicks hard again.

PEARL checks, the same necklace she now holds in her hand.

From the murky depths PEARL sees a sudden flash of mottled movement. With dread realisation, PEARL rears back.

PEARL

Shark!

The PEARLER throws himself on-deck, reaching both hands out as GREAT GRANDMA PEARL kicks hard for the surface. She thrusts their CHILD, necklace in hand, to the safety of the PEARLER, but can't lift aboard herself in time.

The Tiger Shark strikes her at the waist, violently wrenching her from boats hooks and panicked crew.

PEARL surges forward to assist, smashing her face hard into the glass at the same moment the shark drags her GREAT GRANDMA below the blood red surface and is gone.

59: INT. ROADHOUSE LATE NIGHT

Distressed BERYL drags PEARL from the bloodied water in the tank. Blood streams from Pearl's nose, who is so traumatised by what she's witnessed that she can barely breathe between sobs.

BERYL

Come here, shh. Tried to warn ya. What's she done to your nose?

PEARL

It wasn't her. I hit the glass. When the shark took her.

BERYL

Oh, God. Why'd ya wanna see that? What happened?

PEARL hands her the necklace.

PEARL

See for yourself . . .

BERYL

No, no. It's a *terrible* thing to see.

YANUSH hears crying, rushes out of the bedroom, and sees Pearl's head buried in Bubba's chest.

YANUSH

What's happened! Bubba, are you hurt?

BERYL
Got blood in my eyes. Can't see.

PEARL
What'dya mean you can't see?
Aunty? Aunty!

YANUSH
No blood, Bubba.

PEARL makes a tentative approach, but YANUSH shoves her back.

YANUSH CONT'D
Go. And don't come back.

60: EXT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL rushes for her room, throwing the family necklace to the heavens as she goes. It sails high and smashes the neon R out of Roadhouse on the roof.

61: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

The atmosphere is subdued as EDDIE and MASSIMO guide blinded BERYL into the passenger seat of Yanush's car.

PEARL rushes over, pushing between EDDIE and MASSIMO as they close the passenger door.

PEARL
Please let me stay, Aunty. I
wanna make it up to ya, finish
paintin' the place.

BERYL
Do what ya want. You always do.

PEARL
Gunna fix it up, I promise.

YANUSH loads the car with jeri cans of fuel, slams the boot, and starts driving off without looking at PEARL.

PEARL CONT'D
I'll guard it, Bear. Tie myself
to the pumps if anyone comes to
take it off ya.

BERYL
Just keep ya head out of water.

PEARL
(flatly)
Promise Aunty . . . Bye Bear.

YANUSH
Thanks, boys. Get some food in
if you can.

EDDIE
Will do. Take care.

MASSIMO
(waving Pearl's hand)
Ciao ciao.

62: INT. ROADHOUSE DAWN

EDDIE staggers through the kitchen door dragging a dead Kangaroo by the tail, appalling MASSIMO, who is unpacking gourmet food supplies from his tent boxes.

MASSIMO
That should impress her.

EDDIE
Shove over. This bastard's
heavy.

They push each other, spilling into the main area. Both men stop, arrested by the beginnings of a mural painted on the roadhouse wall, revealing GREAT GRANDMA PEARL, facing the wrath of the angry ELDER, gesturing her to go.

MASSIMO
Um ah. *This* is why she ran from
me in the cave.

EDDIE also moves closer to look, not seeing PEARL curled up asleep in a tarpaulin, bunched up against the wall at the foot of the mural amid paint mess and brushes. Eddie's dirty work boot kicks her and PEARL abruptly sits up.

MASSIMO CONT'D
Madonna mia!

EDDIE
Geez, Pearl.

PEARL
Didn't paint that.

PEARL sees paint on her fingers and nighty. EDDIE looks from her fingers up to her eyes. She sees that he doesn't believe her.

PEARL CONT'D

How could I? In my sleep. . .

MASSIMO is gazing at the mural and PEARL like they are both part of a holy fresco. Impulsively, he rushes to kneel before her.

PEARL CONT'D

What you doin'? Let go.

MASSIMO

You're amazing, Perla. . . .
This Aboriginal woman. . . . Is
she somehow . . . you?

EDDIE

Course not, moron, look at her.
Is she black?

MASSIMO kisses Pearl's hand as he rises then gestures at Pearl's ancestor in the mural.

MASSIMO

Is she Indigenous, or the
perception of an Indigenous
woman? Did the stimulus impinge
on the dream, or the dream
impinge on the image?

EDDIE

Wanker.

PEARL

Just found out. She's my Great
Grandma.

MASSIMO

But this is wonderful. So much
dimension. I wish I, I have no
idea what is in my blood. The
Huns swept through Venice, raping
and pillaging. . . and there have
always been rumours of a Moroccan
trader.

PEARL

Shut up, Massimo.

MASSIMO

You must be exhausted, Perla. I
will make you a Spanish omelette.

PEARL

Not hungry.

EDDIE

I could go a coupla fried eggs
mate, hold the Ratsak.

PEARL

Please just go. Both of you.

63: INT. NORM'S BATHROOM DAY

EDDIE chisels hard on the last of NORM'S bathroom tiles.
NORM shelters behind the shower curtain. RAY stands in the
doorway wearing his flying goggles.

NORM

If Beryl and Pearl's mum are a
quarter, Pearl's only an eighth.
Hardly worth a mention, mate.

EDDIE

That's not why I'm telling you.

RAY

Touch-y!

NORM

Pink told us about her tank
prank.

EDDIE

Wasn't a prank. She actually saw
stuff about Pink 'cause her head
was in the fish tank with Pink's
bracelet. How weird's that?

NORM

Reckon it's the dreamtime?

RAY

Nah, more psychic. Must be the
Irish in 'er. Wonder what she'd
make of me?

NORM

Don't go there.

EDDIE hauls out the pink bathtub.

EDDIE

Got a special posy for this?

NORM

Nah. Chuck it on the tip.

RAY

Reminds him of his ex wife.

EDDIE

Last night she painted her Great
Grandma in your cave on the
roadhouse wall. . . in her *sleep*.

NORM

So she's a psychic Aboriginal
Irish artist. Reckon he's in
love?

RAY

Reckon so.

64: EXT. INT CAVE DAY

MASSIMO, floating on his back, is gazing at Pearl's wall,
as if in a meditation tank. We can just hear him humming
Yanush's love song to himself.

65: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

RAY studies PEARL's mural with a bunch of window envelope
bills in his hand for the roadhouse. PEARL is
uncomfortable with his scrutiny.

RAY

Seen 'em do that hand gesture
before. Means curse.

PEARL

No kidding.

She sullenly opens and scrunches the first bill.

PEARL CONT'D

What'd ya know? Phone's gunna
get cut off.

RAY

Better pay up. Once it's off it
takes ages to get it back on
again, out here.

RAY suddenly produces a rabbit's foot on a key ring.

RAY CONT'D

Can I have a reading?

PEARL

Not sticking my head in there
again. Promised Aunty. And I'm
not psychic, just . . . cursed.

RAY

Don't believe in that gumph, do ya?

PEARL

Dunno. Can't see the future, only bad stuff from the past.

RAY twists the rabbit's foot off his key ring and drops it in the tank. Plink.

RAY

Please, luv. Need to know something important.

PEARL

No.

While PEARL is distracted by CURLY zeroing in on the rabbit's foot, RAY makes his escape.

PEARL CONT'D

Hey! You get that out!

RAY

Catch ya later, luv. Mail's gotta get through.

PEARL glares at the rabbit's foot, shaking her head, but CURLY wags his tail, liking it.

PEARL tries hard to resist. She sits on the edge of the tank struggling to pick up the rabbit's foot between her toes, ready to flick it out, but suddenly her bum slips from under her and PEARL submerges.

66: INT. EDDIE'S ROOM LATE NIGHT

EDDIE hears Pearl's room door open, pulls the curtain aside and looks out. PEARL is sleepwalking barefoot past the bathtub on the back of the ute, to the roadhouse in her nighty, holding her paints. EDDIE gets up and follows her.

67: EXT. ROADHOUSE LATE NIGHT

As soon as Eddie's room door opens, Massimo's does. Both men silently follow sleepwalking PEARL into the roadhouse.

68: INT. ROADHOUSE LATE NIGHT

EDDIE flashes a hand in front of Pearl's open eyes as she begins to paint something on her mural. She doesn't blink.

EDDIE looks at MASSIMO, like 'weird'. MASSIMO shrugs.
What do you expect from an Indigenous Oracle?

As the mural develops, EDDIE busies himself with fixing everything in the roadhouse - the air con, the vacuum cleaner and so on.

MASSIMO puts Pearl's paintings on the freshly painted wall with price stickers asking \$15,000.00 each. Then he sips short black and muses at this amazing woman, painting in her sleep!

There's no dialogue, just sound score and silent awe.

Both men stand before Pearl's painting of RAY standing stark naked except for a footy scarf around his neck before NORM, who is impatiently waving him aside so he can better see the TV. MASSIMO is amazed. Troubled EDDIE gently guides sleeping PEARL away from the tank and back to her room.

69: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

MASSIMO is behind the counter still gazing at the mural when NORM enters.

NORM

Giddy mate. Got you working
have they? I've got a bit of
work for Eddie too. He about?

NORM gapes at Pearl's depiction of himself and naked RAY in the mural.

NORM CONT'D

What the fuck . . . does she
think she's doing painting me and
Ray on the wall like that?
Bloody hell. Where is she?

EDDIE rushes in from the back door. None of them notice the mail truck pulling up outside.

EDDIE

Doesn't know she's doing it,
mate. Does it in her sleep. I
told ya.

NORM

Well she can bloody well unpaint
it with her eyes open. I'm not
being branded a poofa!

MASSIMO

It's a divinely inspired work.
Personalities and moralities must
never intervene.

EDDIE

Cut the crap, Massimo. It's his
life.

NORM

Too right.

RAY has entered behind NORM, and taken in the wall.

RAY

Find it offensive, do ya?

NORM

It's not you I find offensive,
it's her, putting it up there.

RAY

Footy grand final, ring a bell?

NORM

Yeah, we lost.

RAY

Fucken hopeless. You never
notice.

NORM

What?

RAY

Me. . . . I don't mind if the
world knows.

NORM

That we're mates! That's all
there is to it.

RAY

I've had it with your stupid self
deceptions, Norman.

NORM

Fine. Then fuck off!

PEARL stands in the back entrance, gapes at the mural and
hurriedly backs out.

RAY crumples into a chair as NORM roars off. MASSIMO
silently places a cup of tea in front of him.

RAY

Ta. Can't believe he's kickin' me out, after all these years. Mail's definitely not gettin' through today. I'd only drive off the road.

MASSIMO

You can use my tent if you like.

RAY

That's so kind of you, Massimo. Could you come with me while I get my stuff and some drinking water? Dunno what he'll be like when I get there.

MASSIMO

Sure.

70: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY (A LITTLE LATER)

PEARL takes the last coins out of the til and her high priced paintings off the wall, and heads up the road toward the new monstrosity roadhouse with them on foot.

71: INT. NEW MONSTROSITY ROADHOUSE DAY

Rattled PEARL speaks fast, pushing coins in the pay phone.

PEARL

Everything's fine, Aunty. The phone's cut off, that's all. Gunna try and sell some paintings to get it put on again. Have you seen the eye specialist? . . .

Behind PEARL, IAN the Monstrosity Roadhouse PROPRIETOR scribbles zeros off Massimo's price tags to bring Pearl's paintings down to a hundred and fifty bucks a pop.

The pay phone begins to beep. PEARL pushes in the last of her coins.

PEARL CONT'D

Eye cancer! Christ! You can't just let 'em take your eye out, not without a second opinion!
(more phone beeps)
What about the other one? Well bloody well make sure. Sorry Aunty. It's all my . . .

Pearl's coins run out. PEARL hangs up the phone and cries.

72: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

EDDIE sternly approaches the fish tank with a bucket and hose. PEARL paces anxiously behind him.

PEARL
Please don't drain it. Curly
needs it. Didn't mean to stick
my head in. Just slipped.

EDDIE
On purpose.

PEARL
You try livin' with a curse, see
how you like it. What I don't
get is, how come it makes me
paint in my sleep?

EDDIE
Pearl, I just fix windmills.
(softens as her face
hardens)
It's not that I don't care about
you. But I also care about me
mates. It's for your own good.
Just stirs everyone up.

PEARL
Let me get Curly out first.

EDDIE
Where's ya paintings?

PEARL climbs on a chair and scoops CURLY in the bucket,
puts it on a table and sits beside it.

PEARL
Took 'em up the road to sell.
Aunty's gotta have an eye out,
and I need to stay in touch.

BEAT. EDDIE struggles with a decision before taking his
gold nugget off its leather strap and offering it to PEARL.

EDDIE
Here. Send it to the Perth Mint.
Should fetch a fair whack, enough
to get the phone back on and some
food and water in. . . . Sorry
to hear about Beryl.

PEARL eyes the nugget undecided. EDDIE glances at CURLY
circling in the bucket.

EDDIE CONT'D

He can stay in on one condition.
No more sticking your head in.

PEARL

Can't help it. She's making me.

EDDIE withdraws the necklace.

EDDIE

No probs, I'll keep it.

PEARL

No no. It'd be a great help at
the right time, thanks Eddie.

EDDIE looks at PEARL like it might be a mistake handing it over, then he places it in the centre of her palm and gently closes her fingers around it. PEARL tilts her chin up to look in his eyes. EDDIE leans over and kisses her, passionately. PEARL rises the kiss intensifies and they press against each other.

NORM walks in mumbling to himself, at first not seeing PEARL behind EDDIE, or their kiss through the fish tank.

NORM

There you are. Fucken Ray's
making such a song and dance
about clearing out.

NORM rounds the tank, sees PEARL, and EDDIE reluctantly pulling out of the kiss, revealing naked RAY painted on the wall behind them. NORM gives EDDIE a look and heads out.

NORM CONT'D

Nice to know who your mates are.

73: EXT. COUNTRY DOWNS DAY

EDDIE and NORM watch MASSIMO and RAY loading Ray's battered suitcase into the 'mail mobile', then they head off up the drive, MASSIMO in the mail truck, RAY bouncing down the drive in the crop duster.

EDDIE eyes disgruntled NORM, who resumes their smoko on the verandah. BONOX twitches a fly off his ear nearby, like he's disdainfully listening.

EDDIE

Had a word with her. . .

NORM

More than a word. Bit bloody
late.

(MORE)

NORM (cont'd)
Pink's left Davo, Beryl's black,
and we're gay. Who's gunna be
next?

EDDIE
Wouldn't matter if you were.
Wouldn't change anyone's
attitudes 'round here. We'd
still be mates.

NORM screws on his thermos lid like he hasn't heard a word,
but EDDIE sees he's relieved.

EDDIE CONT'D
Got any more Jeri cans? Drinking
water's low. Waiting on a rod
for the windmill.

NORM
Help yourself.

74: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

RAY is sitting in a pink bathtub on the edge of the world.

The vista is so beautiful that it almost brings RAY to
tears as he waxes lyrical to EDDIE, flicking his hair back,
sending a cascade of drops through the sky.

RAY
How good's this? Only you could
rig this up in bastard Norm's
ex's wife's bathtub. You're a
true mate, Eddie.

EDDIE averts his eyes from Ray's nakedness as he unties his
rope, rock and bucket rig from the winch, throws it in the
ute and gets in the cabin.

EDDIE
Catcha.

RAY
Know who else'd love this?

But EDDIE doesn't hear because he's roaring off.

75: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PEARL is up on a chair padlocking her paints in a high
cupboard. TWO REMOVAL VAN DUDES pull up outside. VINCE,
the driver, enters, followed by DOOF, the passenger, both
pushing trolleys. They stand on either side of Pearl's
chair.

PEARL
What'll it be?

PEARL eyes the trolleys.

PEARL CONT'D
Pretty sure we didn't order
anything.

VINCE
We'll have your white goods and
your cash.

PEARL
What?

DOOF
You heard.

PEARL gets off the chair as VINCE casually hands her a letter from the finance company, then starts unloading drinks from Beryl's fridge, grabbing one for himself. PEARL spots Eddie's gold nugget on the bench, but they haven't seen it.

PEARL
Hey! You pay for that! What're
ya doin' with our fridges?

VINCE
Can't you read?

VINCE starts chucking their meagre food supplies on the floor, ice cream, lumps of frozen roo meat, the last of the burger rolls. PEARL rushes to put them up on the bench, snatching up Eddie's gold nugget in the process. DOOF lifts the til and jangles it.

DOOF
Fucken empty.

PEARL secretly drops the nugget in the corner of the fish tank, then races back to front them.

PEARL
You leave that til alone. Says
nothing here 'bout . . .

VINCE
Whole thing's about money, luv.
It's called debt.

DOOF
And we're debt collectors.

VINCE

Make sure the rest of this shit's
out by the tenth of the month,
including you.

CUT TO:

76: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY (LATER)

PEARL stands defeated in the middle of the roadhouse, now completely cleaned out of everything except the fish tank on its TV stand, with Eddie's nugget dully glinting in the corner.

77: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS EVENING

The pink water truck is parked at the cliffs. PINK is in the bathtub, wearing a pink shower cap, drinking pink champagne out of a pink plastic mug. The bottle is almost empty.

PINK

(sings)

Sav-iour of all the human re he
heh. She in-ven-ted med-ic-inal
com-pound.

Then PINK starts to cry, holding her pink mug high.

PINK CONT'D

Miss you, Davo.

78: EXT. ROADHOUSE EVENING

RAY and MASSIMO arrive in Ray's mail van as NORM and EDDIE pull up in front of them, in Norm's ute.

RAY

Thanks for your support today.
You've got a good heart, Massimo.

MASSIMO gives RAY double cheek kisses, not lost on NORM.

MASSIMO

Good luck.

EDDIE gives NORM a supportive slap on the back. EDDIE and MASSIMO eye each other adversarially. RAY and NORM do likewise. Then PEARL comes out crying, holding the letter from the repossessioners.

PEARL

They took every-thing.

EDDIE

Did they hurt you?

PEARL shakes her head and hands him the letter. MASSIMO leads her inside, distressed to see spaces on the walls where Pearl's paintings once were.

MASSIMO

Dio mio. The paintings.

79: INT. ROADHOUSE EVENING

EDDIE sets to work putting the turfed out roo meat and burger buns in the sink. PEARL rescues a king-sized vanilla ice cream tub, pours a huge slurp of Vodka in it from Yanush's stash and passes on the bottle.

MASSIMO pours everyone Vodkas. EDDIE hands the letter on to NORM and RAY, seated side by side on the kitchen bench.

MASSIMO

They can't take this place from Beryl with only twenty eight thousand Australian owing. . . Can they?

PEARL

Only! Who's got twenty-eight grand!

NORM

We would've sprung 'em the cash if they'd have asked.

PEARL

Too proud.

PEARL shovels more boozy ice cream into her mouth, eyeing the melting roo meat.

PEARL CONT'D

Chuck it, Eddie. It'll only go off.

RAY looks at NORM, then EDDIE.

NORM

Got plenty of kero?

EDDIE smiles and nods. NORM and RAY get to their feet, men on a mission. EDDIE rounds the bench and spies his gold nugget glinting in the fish tank. He leans over to give PEARL a suspicious look.

EDDIE
What's my nugget doing in there?

PEARL
Just tryin' to protect it.

EDDIE
Find out what you needed to know?

PEARL
What?

EDDIE
Pretty cheap, breaking our deal
like that.

PEARL
If that's what you think, you can
bloody well keep it. But the
water's staying in!

EDDIE
Fine.

EDDIE stomps around the counter and fishes the nugget out
with the long tongs.

PEARL
Careful of Curly!

EDDIE pockets the nugget and slams his way out the back.
MASSIMO watches him go.

MASSIMO
He's hiding something. Get
something of his and have a look.

PEARL
Nup. Promised not to.

MASSIMO
Who did you promise?

PEARL
Aunty. Eddie.

MASSIMO
Why?

PEARL strides a little unsteadily out the front, waving an
evasive arm at the mural.

PEARL
'Cause of her. Wait here. I'll
show ya.

80: EXT. YANUSH'S CARAVAN NIGHT

PEARL snatches up a framed photo off the caravan bed, backs down the stairs and heads back into the roadhouse.

81: INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL pulls MASSIMO close to look at Beryl's lugger photo.

PEARL

That's her in real life. She ran off with this white fella Pearler and had Nana Rayleen there, Aunty's mum. That's how come Aunty ended up with this place.

MASSIMO

They're in love. So easy to see. How lucky they were to have found each other . . . the Pearler and his Pearl.

PEARL

Weren't that lucky 'cause she got taken by a shark, but at least he bought Nana this place. First it was hers, then Aunty's, then it was gunna be mine, but that's not gunna happen now, eh?

MASSIMO

My family's been in Venice for six hundred years. All our buildings are sinking in the sea with all our marriages rotting inside. Everybody sneaks off to make love with other people and we call that love too.

MASSIMO holds up the lugger photo.

MASSIMO CONT'D

These people, they knew how to love. Yanush was right to leave Europe to be with Beryl.

He looks at PEARL longingly, but PEARL is falling asleep standing up, hugging her ice cream bucket. MASSIMO is just in time to catch her as her knees begin to give way.

PEARL

Oh, sorry. Must have nodded off.

82: EXT. EDDIE'S ROOM DAWN

EDDIE wakes in his swag on the floor, startled by the sound of water spraying against his window.

EDDIE
Pearl! Get up quick! It's
important!

83: EXT. ROADHOUSE AND UP TANK STAND DAWN

EDDIE scampers up the tank stand and stuffs his shirt into the leak. PEARL sees their precious drinking water squirting away and scrambles up to help him. EDDIE pushes her hands hard against his shirt.

EDDIE
Keep up the pressure!

EDDIE scampers down to his ute to fetch his tools. A jet of water soaks through Eddie's shirt, hitting PEARL in the eyes, blinding her momentarily. She blinks and opens her eyes. . . .

84: EXT. NULLARBOR DESERT DAY (WATER SPRAY VISION)

. . . in a vision, fast clearing of water, yet still mysterious. PEARL finds herself on a different windmill stand, in the desert.

PEARL looks down to see EDDIE kneeling beside a PROSPECTOR, his hat fallen over his face.

EDDIE pushes the prospector's leg with his boot. Nothing. EDDIE gingerly lifts the prospector's hat to peek underneath, abruptly pulling back from the smell of his decaying head.

Then EDDIE sees the PROSPECTOR has made a fist around something. EDDIE tries to open the Prospector's big fingers but his death grip is vice-like.

PEARL watches EDDIE force the prospector's fingers open, snapping them, revealing the gold nugget EDDIE gave PEARL. EDDIE pockets the nugget, then the Prospector's hat slides off.

PEARL reels back, closing her eyes, not seeing EDDIE ram the hat back over her father's flyblown face.

85: EXT. ROADHOUSE AND UP TANK STAND DAWN

. . . PEARL continues to lean away and begins to fall off the tank. EDDIE is racing up the stand, dropping tools, lunging for her.

EDDIE

Nooo!

EDDIE hugs PEARL to him at the last moment. His knees buckle with relief.

EDDIE CONT'D

That was close. Feel your heart!
Shh, breathe. Sorry I didn't
believe you 'bout the nugget.

EDDIE pulls the nugget from his wet shirt pocket and leans in, so relieved that he has a desperate urge to kiss PEARL.

EDDIE CONT'D

Here, please. I trust you. Have
it.

PEARL

Don't touch me. I know what you
did.

Eddie abruptly pulls away, releasing the pressure on the water, which starts squirting over them. EDDIE shoves his back into it to stem the flow again and glares at PEARL, who glares back.

MASSIMO roars up in his 4WD.

EDDIE

Bring us those tools, quick!

As MASSIMO brings them up, PEARL anxiously scrambles down.

86: INT. PEARL'S ROOM DAWN

PEARL slams the door behind her and collapses in a heap in the middle of her empty room.

87: EXT. ROADHOUSE ROOF EVENING

EDDIE is fixing the neon globe behind the broken R in Roadhouse. Then he sees Pearl's family heirloom necklace, which he pulls out of the cavity.

88: EXT. ROADHOUSE EVENING

PEARL and MASSIMO are coming back from the Monstrosity roadhouse, finishing ice creams as The R flashes back on. EDDIE saunters over, to offer PEARL her necklace.

PEARL ignores EDDIE and MASSIMO gives him a 'you win some, you lose some' look and follows her, leaving EDDIE in the middle of the road with the necklace extended.

There's a loud Honk as PEARL, MASSIMO and EDDIE watch a large truck pass by with a SWIM FOR YOUR LIFE banner and a see-through swimming pool with a MAN swimming his way across the Nullarbor inside.

MASSIMO

What the? . . . Madonna mia.

PEARL looks mildly surprised, but makes no comment. Nothing really surprises her any more. She looks back at the roadhouse.

EDDIE

At least take your necklace back.

PEARL

Should take out that front wall.

EDDIE

Yeah, why not? The roof'll fall in, but who cares?

MASSIMO

What have we got to lose?

EDDIE

You personally? Nothing.

PEARL

It's not your place either so shut up.

EDDIE abruptly stands, drops Pearl's necklace in the dirt, and heads back.

EDDIE

Hope you've got plenty of torches. Generator's on its way out. Have fun destroying the place, kids.

PEARL picks up the necklace and looks at MASSIMO.

PEARL

Do me a favour?

MASSIMO

Anything.

89: INT./EXT. YANUSH'S CARAVAN NIGHT

PEARL hands MASSIMO the necklace and steps inside the caravan.

PEARL

Here's the padlock and keys. And if you could please just hang the necklace on one of those high hooks

MASSIMO

I could stay with you, hold you. Never let you go . . . outside. All night.

PEARL is not interested, until she sees EDDIE watching from the roadhouse. Then she tilts her chin up to MASSIMO, who takes her in his arms and kisses her. PEARL sensuously kisses him back, half-eyeing EDDIE.

90: INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

EDDIE

Fuck!

91: INT./EXT. YANUSH'S CARAVAN NIGHT

Seeing Eddie's pain, PEARL pulls back from the kiss, confused.

PEARL

What'd you do that for?

PEARL extricates herself, gently pushing MASSIMO down the caravan steps.

PEARL CONT'D

If you see me walking in my sleep, shoot me.

92: EXT. YANUSH'S CARAVAN NIGHT

Reluctantly, MASSIMO allows PEARL to shut the caravan door and he padlocks it, softly whistling Yanush's love song.

93: EXT. ROADHOUSE PREDAWN

From Massimo's POV, the caravan's interior lights are out and the padlock's still in place. MASSIMO hits the outside wall hard, wielding a sledgehammer like a clumsy shotput thrower, pleased at the big chunk of wall he's taken out.

94: INT. ROADHOUSE DAWN

MASSIMO walks through the hole he's made and is wrong-footed by PEARL, rising from behind the kitchen counter.

MASSIMO

Hello Houdini. How did you get out of your hat box?

MASSIMO looks outside. The caravan is still padlocked, but a gust of wind makes the curtain flap in the open window.

MASSIMO CONT'D

Through the window, huh?

PEARL shrugs, eyeing the paint under her nails with distaste. Simultaneously, both look and see what she's painted: EDDIE kneeling before Pearl's dad, BIG RED, breaking his fingers to get the nugget out.

PEARL

Oh no. Has Eddie seen this?

PEARL starts slapping paint over it. MASSIMO struggles to stop her.

MASSIMO

Ah . . . so Bis Nonna knows best.
I *knew* he had something to hide.
Let me see. Wait. It's your best work. Who is this man?

PEARL

Dad.

MASSIMO

What has happened, Perla? Did Eddie kill him?

MASSIMO sees EDDIE standing with his hands on his hips by the pumps, eyeing the hole in the front wall. EDDIE steps in through the hole and is angered by the sight of the two of them embracing again.

EDDIE then sees Pearl's new addition to the mural.

MASSIMO CONT'D

Yes, that is you, animale. You
and your shameful secret.

Infuriated EDDIE tries to snatch the sledgehammer off
MASSIMO. PEARL rushes in to avert a fight.

PEARL

I never put my head in with that
nugget. And I locked myself up
in the caravan so I couldn't
paint it.

EDDIE

With him.

PEARL

No!

EDDIE

Liar!

PEARL

Where is he?

EDDIE

Who?

PEARL

Dad.

EDDIE suddenly wrenches the sledgehammer off MASSIMO.

EDDIE

That's enough. . . .

MASSIMO

You killed him.

EDDIE

I did not! Whoever he was died
of thirst.

MASSIMO

Same thing.

PEARL

Where is he?

EDDIE glares at them, then again at his greatest shame
exposed on Pearl's wall. He pulls the gold nugget from his
pocket and chucks it back in the fish tank.

EDDIE

Find him yourself.

EDDIE hefts the sledgehammer wide of the wall like a shot put thrower and crashes it into the side of the fish tank with a sickening Smash!

As the water gushes out of the tank on to the huge shards of glass, MASSIMO wrestles the sledgehammer off EDDIE, slamming them both into the wall.

CURLY starts frantically flip-flapping, cutting himself to shreds. PEARL rushes to rescue him.

EDDIE shoves his way out through the hole in the wall.

PEARL cuts her foot on the glass, but she's too late to save CURLY. PEARL squats in shock, staring at the bleeding, lifeless fish in her hand, her own blood staining the water on the floor.

EDDIE throws his duffle bag in his ute and roars off.

The gold nugget glints on the floor amid broken glass and bloody water.

95: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

MASSIMO carries PEARL, still holding dead CURLY, out to the 4WD, leaving a trail of blood drops. He winces as he eases a shard of glass out of her foot.

MASSIMO
Mi dispiace, Perla.

Silent tears roll down Pearl's cheeks as she looks down at dead CURLY in her palm.

96: INT. EDDIE'S UTE (ON EYRE HIGHWAY) DAY

EDDIE roars along the deserted highway toward Perth. The highway windmill comes into view, where he and PEARL were first thrown off the bus. EDDIE looks like he is roaring right past it, but at the last moment slides the back wheels around and jams on the brakes.

He gets out of the ute, walks to the windmill and washes his face. There he sees Pearl's discarded water bottle.

97: EXT. WINDMILL (ON EYRE HIGHWAY) DAY

EDDIE sit on the windmill platform to think. He sadly pours the water from Pearl's water bottle into the dust. The wind picks up, making the windmill turn. EDDIE drops Pearl's empty bottle and heads back down.

Resolved, EDDIE gets in his ute and drives towards Perth.

98: INT. ROADHOUSE DUSK

MASSIMO and PEARL have been busy cleaning up. The fish tank is gone, the floor is clean and the sledgehammer is propped beside the demolished wall.

Freshly showered, PEARL walks out of the Ladies' room. MASSIMO walks out of the Men's room, also with wet hair.

MASSIMO

We are going out for dinner.

MASSIMO lifts the family necklace off the wall and fastens it at the nape of her neck. PEARL shudders with dread as the weight of the necklace is lowered on to her skin.

99: INT. MASSIMO'S TENT NIGHT

Music is drifting in from the 4WD. PEARL and MASSIMO are dancing. He holds her close.

MASSIMO

You've changed my life, Pearl.

MASSIMO closes his eyes and breathes PEARL in, hoping she is his, at last, but she's distracted.

PEARL

Never thought it would be dad who found me. . . .

MASSIMO

This is a magic place where anything is possible. Perhaps we all came here to learn something. . . . I am going away tomorrow, Perla.

PEARL

Gunna check every windmill 'til I find him and bury him.

MASSIMO

Come with me to Venice.

PEARL

This is my place.

MASSIMO

Do you have any idea how
beautiful and exceptional you
are? . . . The world awaits you,
Perla.

PEARL

I don't love you, Massimo. Not
like that. . . .

MASSIMO

You love Eddie.

PEARL

I think I understand him, the
shame he must be feelin'.

MASSIMO

It is a terrible thing, what he
did.

PEARL

He didn't make dad leave us. He
didn't bust the windmill. He
just didn't get there in time to
fix it.

MASSIMO

But the nugget.

PEARL holds a finger to his lips. MASSIMO removes her hand
and brings it to his chest.

MASSIMO CONT'D

Don't let him crush your gift.

PEARL

I should go.

MASSIMO

I will drive you.

PEARL

Need to clear my head.

MASSIMO stands in the tent flap, watching PEARL quietly
walk out of the tent.

MASSIMO

Good bye . . . my love.

PEARL doesn't hear this. As soon as MASSIMO withdraws, she
stops walking toward the roadhouse, changing course to head
down to the cave.

100: EXT. INT CAVE NIGHT

PEARL is standing facing the cave wall, ankle deep in dark cold water.

She holds the necklace and removes the shark tooth which she uses to confront the unseen ELDER of the past.

PEARL

This is for me and Pearl Healy.
Tellin' you to stick your curse
up your arse, ya bastard.

PEARL drops the shark tooth into the cave water and leaves.

101: EXT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL takes in all the destruction, from the jagged demolished front wall, to the single unlit globe above the empty space that was a fish tank, and beyond. She gazes at the Moonlit mural where EDDIE still squats, stealing from her dead father.

102: INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL bows her head in silence for a moment, picks up dead CURLY from the bench where she left him, and heads out.

103: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAWN

PEARL is walking toward the edge of the world holding her dead fish. As the sun rises over her shoulder she spies Eddie's pink bathtub. PEARL rushes toward it, smiling wryly at Pink's shower cap, left on the edge of the bath.

PEARL

Oh, Pink.

PEARL walks to the edge, finally casting CURLY forever into the waves crashing against the cliffs far below.

104: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

MASSIMO is packing his belongings into the 4WD when Pink's pink water tanker pulls in, passing a lycra-clad Penny Farthing push bike rider and support vehicle. PINK, who's no longer wearing pink, climbs down from the tanker gaping at the destruction.

PINK

What happened here? Place looks
like a bomb hit it. Where's
Beryl?

MASSIMO

In hospital.

PINK

Don't envy her that, eh Davo?
Her eyes playin' up again?

MASSIMO nods.

PINK

Just stopped by to say sorry for
makin' a scene the other day. Is
Pearl inside?

MASSIMO shakes his head. PINK opens the passenger door and
uses a hoist to get DAVO down and into a wheelchair,
surprising MASSIMO.

MASSIMO

Massimo Venuti. Pleased to meet
you.

DAVO

Giddy, Massimo. Davo. Eddie
inside?

MASSIMO

No, no.

DAVO grins over his shoulder at MASSIMO as PINK wheels him
through the demolished front wall.

DAVO

So you're . . . *lookin' after the
place?*

PINK

What's the matter, luv? Got
enough water to make us a cuppa?

MASSIMO

Water, but no power.

DAVO

Easy fixed. Give us a hand to
rig up the ginny.

PINK goes to push Davo's wheelchair but pulls back,
watching with satisfaction how enthusiastically DAVO wheels
himself outside, to do blokey stuff with MASSIMO.

105: INT. ROADHOUSE SUNSET

MASSIMO and PINK drink tea sitting on the bench before DAVO in his wheelchair.

MASSIMO

The right one came out when I forgot where to look . . . but she wasn't looking for me.

PINK

He picked a hard one with Pearl. She's special alright. If it wasn't for her, I'd still be driving 'round in a cloud of pink instead of realising how much I still love this big bloke, whichever way he comes.

MASSIMO

Ah life.

He gets to his feet and hands PINK the roadhouse keys and his credit card.

MASSIMO CONT'D

I have to go. Use this to pay for the water. . . I cannot say goodbye to her again.

PINK

When people say their heart is broken, it means broken open, ready to love properly when the right one comes. You'll see.

MASSIMO

Si, certo. Love just is. She doesn't need to love me back. But it would have been wonderful.

MASSIMO shakes Davo's hand, gives PINK a double cheek kiss, takes a long last look at the mural, and leaves.

106: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

PEARL unwinds the bandage off her foot, sitting on the edge of the world, on the edge of Eddie's bathtub. She solemnly disrobes down to her undies and scatters the remnants of her Great Grandma's necklace into the bath.

PEARL looks at the mother of pearl pieces glinting in the bottom of the bath, her breath quickening as she swings her legs in and slides under, submerging completely, surrendering utterly to the spirit of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL.

107: EXT. G.G. PEARL'S WALK DESERT DAY (BATH VISION)

PEARL, dripping wet, emerges from a shimmering heat mirage in the desert. She looks upon her ancestor, a young woman like herself, in her Hessian dress, without the necklace. PEARL walks before her, but her ancestor doesn't see her.

PEARL witnesses the rest of the story in mysterious clarity.

GREAT GRANDMA PEARL solemnly walks into the desert away from the cave with her water basket and shark tooth. PEARL follows. Her ancestor looks upon the point of the shark tooth in the water like a compass. She scans the horizon for PEARL, through her and past her, but never sees her.

108: EXT. BROOME CLIFFS DAY (BATH VISION)

PEARL's exhausted ancestor reaches Broome's red cliffs. The shark tooth points to sea. GREAT GRANDMA PEARL makes a fist around the shark tooth, discards her basket and drops off the cliffs into the sea.

PEARL

Noooooo!

PEARL sprints at top speed to the cliffs, arms pumping, chest heaving. As she reaches the edge, PEARL leaps up and out after her GREAT GRANDMA.

PEARL

HAAAAaaahhhhhhh!

109: EXT. G.G. PEARL'S WALK UNDERWATER DAY (BATH VISION)

Whoosh! Pearl's finally made it back under the sea, where it all began.

PEARL sees her ancestor clinging to a rocky ledge, petrified, her fist still clutching the shark tooth. PEARL swims straight to her, easing her grip off the ledge, and drags her toward the surface with her free hand. A Bronze Whaler shark makes a lazy turn in their direction. GREAT GRANDMA PEARL sees it, but doesn't flinch.

PEARL startles at the shark approaching and swims faster, through sunbeams and darting fish, finally hurtling her ancestor above the surface, beside the white hull of a passing pearl lugger, into the life and love that certainly await her.

110: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

Pearl's head and shoulders rise in a rush out of the bathtub on the edge of the world. PEARL takes a huge breath, heaving her hair back, casting droplets.

When her breathing settles she gathers the glinting pieces of mother of pearl from the bottom of the bath, leans out and pushes them into the pocket of her discarded jeans, finding Eddie's gold nugget there in the process.

Still in the bath, PEARL looks long and hard at that gold nugget.

111: EXT. NULLARBOR DESERT DAY (LIVE ACTION)

EDDIE pulls up in his ute, jumps out with his tool kit and kneels beside the skeleton of BIG RED.

EDDIE

Sorry I stole from you, mate.
Was that what you wanted? Me to
give it to her? Well you got
your wish, eh. . . . Best girl
in the world.

EDDIE fixes the windmill, tucks Red's broken-fingered hand inside his shirt, then stands, removing his own hat.

EDDIE CONT'D

Rest in peace.

112: EXT. NULLARBOR CLIFFS DAY

PEARL rises from the bath, picks up the gold nugget, and pulls on her clothes. She is about to put her blood-stained bandage back on when she sees that the cut on her foot has healed.

113: INT. NEW MONSTROSITY ROADHOUSE DAY

MASSIMO is proudly collecting Pearl's two paintings off the walls. IAN, the PROPRIETOR looks at the piece of paper in his hand.

IAN

Tempted as I am not to say a word, mate, there's too many zeroes on here. The price is three hundred, not thirty grand.

MASSIMO

Thirty million where I come from and worth every one of them. Please sign for your five percent, pending the co-signature of the artist upon her receipt of the cash balance.

IAN

Anything you say. Won't be long.

MASSIMO goes to the phone box, pulling Beryl's reposessor's letter out of his pocket. He puts coins in and dials.

MASSIMO

Good morning. My name is Massimo Venuti. I am calling to arrange for the return of all goods taken from a Nullarbor roadhouse owned by my friend, Beryl Healy. . . .

114: EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE DAY

NORM and RAY see PEARL on her way back, and stop wheeling a couple of kero fridge through what was the front wall.

RAY

She's baaack.

NORM

Finally.

PEARL

What happened here?

RAY

Where you been?

PEARL

Walking. Just wanted the front all in glass. . . . Massimo helped.

NORM

Where's Eddie?

PEARL

Off fixing a few things. . . .

RAY steps back, to better take in the front.

RAY
Check it out, Norm. Would look
bloody good in glass.

NORM
Big job.

RAY
Where's the fish tank?

PEARL
Eddie smashed it.

RAY
Curly?

PEARL
Dead.

RAY
Massimo?

PEARL
Gone.

RAY
Didn't even say goodbye.

NORM
Get over it.

RAY
Only have to turn ya back for a
minute 'round here.

NORM
Reckon.

PEARL pauses in the doorway noticing the kitchen light on.

PEARL
Thought the power was out?

NORM CONT'D
(smiling at Ray)
Things have a way of rightin'
themselves.

115: INT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE DAY

Kero fridges installed, the trio sit side by side on the
bench sipping tea.

RAY

So you reckon the curse's gone?

PEARL

Yep.

NORM

There's something that needs to be said and I'm gunna say it. That stuff you see in the fish tank is a gift, luv. Pink says so, Massimo says so, and we say so.

RAY

You've given Norm and me a lot to talk about.

NORM

You should keep using it to help people.

PEARL

Dunno if I'd call it *helping*.

RAY

Like this little Jap bike rider we've got stayin'. Been pedalling his legs off across the desert looking for answers and not finding any. Reckon you could give him a hand?

PEARL

Haven't got a fish tank.

RAY

Easy fixed.

PEARL

Movin' on.

RAY

We could set you up at our place.

NORM

Perfect part of the Country Downs experience.

PEARL

Can't. Gotta bury dad, make up with mum, but you could ask Aunty. She could . . . maybe.

RAY

Oh, really?

NORM
Even with?

NORM indicates his eyes. PEARL nods.

RAY
Bewdy!

Then PEARL pours blue wall paint into a tray and begins painting over NORM and RAY in the mural.

RAY
Onya luv. Bad day that.

NORM
Best forgotten.

As PEARL paints, IAN from the Monstrosity roadhouse arrives, withdrawing a huge wad of cash from an envelope, which he hands to PEARL.

PEARL
What's this?

IAN
Some loonie came in, insisted on payin' too much for ya paintings.

PEARL, NORM AND RAY
Massimo.

IAN
Sign here.

PEARL
Thirty grand?

IAN
Twenty-eight five, after commission. Ta.

PEARL, NORM and RAY look at each other, delighted. PEARL shoves the money back in the envelope and rushes after IAN.

PEARL
Wait! Give us a lift. Gotta call Aunty.

116: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY/NIGHT (FINAL MURAL MONTAGE)

An impressionistic montage shows a quiet transition where PEARL spends all her days and nights repainting the mural as a master narrative. She does this with her eyes open, totally integrating the gift.

As the new mural evolves, the furniture and white goods quietly reappear, wheeled in by the same two THUGS who took them.

The mural, beginning with GREAT GRANDMA PEARL being banished by the ELDER, gradually makes its way to PEARL in the bath on the cliffs, and finally to EDDIE, making peace with Pearl's dead dad.

As PEARL paints, the mail truck pulls up outside, laden with plate glass. NORM, RAY and their JAPANESE TOURIST, JUNO, stagger about positioning the glass.

NORM and RAY put in a new fish tank. JUNO carefully places a small Japanese pagoda in the bottom as they fill it with water.

Montage complete, PEARL stands before her major work, exhausted and satisfied.

117: EXT. ROADHOUSE DAY

PEARL watches NORM and Ray's crop duster roar over, buzzing BERYL and YANUSH as they pull into the roadhouse in their beat up sedan.

NORM and RAY are leaning out of the plane trailing a PEARL-painted WELCOME HOME BUBBA AND BEAR banner behind it.

BERYL and YANUSH turn to the roadhouse and stop, amazed by the sparkling plate glass front and their first glimpse of the mural beyond.

118: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY

BERYL and YANUSH enter and gape. YANUSH grabs PEARL with a bear hug, whispering.

YANUSH
It's magnificent, kiddo.

PEARL
Ta. Why are we whisperin'?

YANUSH
Go. Surprise her.

BERYL
Pearl! Come here. This is wonderful, amazing.

PEARL rushes to hug her, then pulls back to look at Beryl's eyes. BERYL pulls free, to look at the mural.

BERYL CONT'D

Don't know if I can take it all
in.

BERYL points to herself dropping baby MARNIE due to the shock of seeing her Grandma's ghost in the bath.

BERYL

Terrible thing to be a child that
sees. They said it was Cancer,
but you know and I know. Not
wanting to see cost me my eye.

YANUSH

It's beautiful that new eye.

PEARL

Perfect. The other one can still
see, Aunty. People will come.
Norm and Ray'll bring 'em.

BERYL

Couldn't do what you do, no way.
Can't paint to save my life.

PEARL

Wouldn't have to. Just tell 'em
what you see.

BERYL looks challenged, almost excited. She looks to YANUSH, pouring himself a vodka in the kitchen.

YANUSH

If I had a glass eye, I'd have to
have two. A white one for the
night before and a red one for
the morning after.

BERYL gives him a sidelong look. YANUSH salutes her with his brimming glass.

YANUSH CONT'D

It's your life, Bubba, as long as
there's room for me.

BERYL

Can't do it if I don't
understand. Why'd you get in
with that shark, Pearl?

PEARL

Mad enough with mum to jump off a cliff. Musta been in trainin', but I didn't know it then.

BERYL

This is how it happened in time, but you went back. . . .

PEARL

Yep.

BERYL

When Grandma got cursed, why'd she walk all the way to Broome? Plenty of sharks off the cliffs 'round here.

PEARL

She had to.

BERYL

Why?

PEARL

'Cause she *saw me* in the cave before she got cursed, painted me jumping off *that* cliff to save her. Couldn't see me again, after that bastard cursed her . . . not alive anyway, poor thing.

BERYL pulls PEARL to sit beside her at one of the tables, which now all have glass tops over the old photos of the family and Nullarbor community.

BERYL

So, if you didn't jump off that cliff, none of us'd be here?

PEARL smiles and nods, pleased to see BERYL fully taking it in. BERYL looks down at the lugger photo under the glass, touches her GRANDMA tenderly and returns to PEARL.

BERYL

It's time for me to see.

119: INT. EDDIE'S UTE NIGHT

EDDIE pulls off the highway up the road, as the full impact of Pearl's well lit, fish tank roadhouse hits him.

120: EXT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

Full of trepidation, EDDIE clumsily gets out of his ute holding a bag of water with a goldfish in it.

EDDIE

Pearl?

121: INT. ROADHOUSE NIGHT

EDDIE gently floats the goldfish bag in the new fish tank, noticing the pagoda within. Then he spends a few silent moments taking in the mural, emitting a low whistle. He frowns at himself in the middle, stealing the nugget, but looks well on the ending, where he makes peace.

EDDIE

Pearl? Where are ya, Pearl?

EDDIE is drawn to the tank, almost against his will.

EDDIE CONT'D

Nah.

He peers inside, then impulsively grips the sides. Knuckles white, teeth clenched, he takes a big breath and plunges all of his face into the tank.

PEARL emerges from the Ladies' toilet in a paint-splodged shirt, sees EDDIE with his head in the tank beside the goggling new goldfish and stops. EDDIE is yelling underwater, creating bubbles.

EDDIE CONT'D

Peeaarrrll!

PEARL slaps the side glass. EDDIE rears back, gasping.

PEARL

Whatcha doin', Eddie?

EDDIE

Lookin' for you.

They smile and embrace, as EDDIE undoes the goldfish bag knot and releases the goldfish.

EDDIE and PEARL look through the tank at each other, as CURLY 2 finds his way around, goggling and wagging his tail at each of them, into the credits.

The End.

Additional Materials to Enigmatic Pearls

Appendix C: *Shoalwater Pearl* Script

Shoalwater Pearl

First Draft Feature Film

by

Sarah Rossetti

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Written with the Assistance of Murdoch University.

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1: EXT. NULLARBOR PLAINS EVENING

Establishing shot of the sun sinking into the Nullarbor Plains. There is only one building for as far as the eye can see, perched on the edge of the longest straightest highway in the world. It's a derelict little roadhouse with a windmill beside it and a couple of round old white caravans parked out the front, one hooked up to a beat up utility.

2: INT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE EVENING

PEARL, a slight 12 year old, feral looking bush kid with bare feet and brownie blonde ratty hair, is sitting on her Aunty Beryl's knee, fiercely hugging her. A goldfish in a glass bowl sits before PEARL on the table, with a backpack and some more of her things. She turns to MARNIE, her chain smoking Mum.

PEARL

Dun wanna go. Wanna stay here.
With Aunty. What's wrong with
radio school? You and Dad go,
have a second honeymoon. Ya need
it.

MARNIE scowls, a bit jealous about the bond between her sister and daughter. BERYL eases it and Pearl's grip around her neck by responding.

BERYL

Listen up, Pearl. You're gunna
have the best time in the city.
Meet lots of new friends.

PEARL pouts.

PEARL

Plenty of old friends on the
radio.

MARNIE

That you've never seen.

PEARL

Doesn't mean they're not real.

MARNIE

(making eyes at Beryl)
Some are, some aren't.

PEARL scowls.

Pearl's Dad RED, a big tough looking freckle-faced redhead, has been steadily drinking his way through a slab of tinnies in the kitchen with YANUSH, Beryl's big bear of an Estonian ex weight lifter lover. Both men round the kitchen counter to come out. RED rubs Pearl's hair.

RED

Not sold on the city either, kid.
But your Mum's snagged her little
nursie job, wiping arses,
cleaning bedpans, so off we go.

MARNIE scowls. YANUSH shrugs, What can you do? good-naturedly at BERYL as RED belches and heads belligerently for the gents.

MARNIE

(as Red passes)
Thanks for that, Pig.

PEARL

Don't.

BERYL skulls her own beer between drags.

PEARL slides off Beryl's lap and angles for a Mars bar, glancing first at YANUSH, who gives her the nod. On the way, PEARL overhears.

BERYL

Not good for Pearl, hearing you
two at each other's throats all
the time. Try and see it as a
new start.

MARNIE

(exhaling dismissively)
What for? Can't see it lastin'
much longer.

PEARL is noticeably upset by this. She heads outside, and dangles off the petrol pumps.

3: EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE NIGHT

PEARL eyes the olds inside as she dangles off the petrol pumps. When she sees they're not looking, she grabs a can, squeezes a little fuel into it, then slinks off 'round the side of the roadhouse dangling the tin beneath window height.

PEARL sits with the can between her knees, leans over and has a big sniff of petrol, several sniffs, reeling back as the fumes hit home, then she gets up and heads back 'round to the doorway of the roadhouse, peering in, still holding the can.

4: EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE PETROL FUME VISION NIGHT

From Pearl's POV, the room rips in half between her warring parents, who are now solidly throwing abuse at each other.

RED

What'd you just say? To Yanush.

MARNIE

That you'd better find a job,
soon as Pearl's in school. Not
slaving my guts out payin' for
your piss so you can you sit on
your fat arse and drink it.

Then they all see PEARL, standing there with the can.

YANUSH rises first and pulls the can away, but he is a giant from Pearl's POV, albeit a gentle giant.

YANUSH

Who taught you that? You wanna
fry your brains?

BERYL rushes over kneeling before pale PEARL.

BERYL

You alright? How ya feeling?
Sick?

PEARL nods.

PEARL

Too sick to go to Perth, Aunty.

PEARL smiles and looks about Beryl's face because BERYL suddenly has love hearts for hair. Then the world starts spinning and PEARL spins with it, closing her eyes.

5: EXT. NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE NIGHT

BERYL grabs PEARL before she falls, yelling inside to MARNIE.

BERYL

Get out here. What do I do?

MARNIE shrugs, waving it aside.

MARNIE

Plenty of air, let her sleep it off. She'll be right.

RED

Good one, nursie.

PEARL doubles over to spew outside and YANUSH catches it in the can, saying softly to BERYL, who's holding back Pearl's hair.

YANUSH

She's gonna be trouble if she hates the city.

6: EXT. UTE TRAVELLING ON NULLARBOR DESERT HIGHWAY DAWN

PEARL wakes on the mattress in the back of the ute headed for Perth. She raises her head to look out the back but there's the caravan there, and the roadhouse is long gone. Plus she finds, the minute she lifts her head, that she has a huge headache.

Realising they've left without her saying goodbye, PEARL lies on her back with her eyes closed, and thumps mattress with her fists clenched by her sides.

PEARL

Bye Aunty.

A rhythmical sloshing sound, water splashing against a bit of corrugated iron, distracts PEARL, making her look and discover equally seasick GOLDY, her goldfish, sloshing about in his bowl.

PEARL smiles sadly at him.

PEARL CONT'D

Giddy Goldy. You right, mate?
(puts the tin back,
dizzy)

Urk.

A flock of pink and grey galahs are shrieking in oncoming trees. PEARL flops on her back and looks up at them, closing her eyes, remembering.

7: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY FLASHBACK

Much younger PEARL and BERYL sit together hanging on every word coming from their school of the air radio on the kitchen bench.

RADIO SCHOOL ANNOUNCER V.O. FILT

Let's hear it again from the winners of the best animal noise by a country mile, Pearl Healy and her Aunty Beryl from the Nullarbor.

PEARL and BERYL jump up and hug, shrieking into the radio handset like a pair of loud galahs. BERYL gestures YANUSH who rushes to join in the hugging and leaping about hilarity.

8: EXT. UTE TRAVELLING ON NULLARBOR DESERT HIGHWAY DAWN

Pearl's reminiscent smile is rudely interrupted by boof! Her eyes widen in shock at an abruptly cut off galah shriek. PEARL knows what that means. She kneels before the glass dividing the front and back of the ute and bangs on it.

PEARL

Dad. Stop! Might still be alive!

MARNIE wakes with a start inside the cabin. RED raises his eyes at PEARL in the rear view mirror and applies the brakes.

9: EXT. NULLARBOR DESERT HIGHWAY DAWN

The family stand around the bloodied dead galah with their Ute and caravan behind them up the road.

The galah's distressed partner softly hoots nearby. PEARL tries to scare it away from the bloodied carcass, but it only flaps up and circles back.

PEARL

Bah! Get away. It's dead.

MARNIE

It won't leave. They mate for life, luv.

PEARL

But it'll get run over too.

RED

Better out of its misery. Come on.

PEARL yanks her hand away, holding her aching head, glaring at her parents, tears threatening to spill.

PEARL

Can't just leave it here to die.

RED

(mutters, eyeing Marnie)
Better off dead than cooped up in a cage missing its mate in the city.

MARNIE

And we haven't got a cage.

RED

Just a fucken caravan.

PEARL

Why can't you two be mates?

MARNIE silently leads PEARL back to the ute, to sit between them, but PEARL shrugs her off, as she climbs in, unable to resist taking some steps back to sadly look again at the hooting lone galah, still nervously eyeing its fallen mate.

10: EXT. NULLARBOR DESERT HIGHWAY DAWN GALAH VISION

PEARL sees a ghost galah flying about with the other one, nuzzling into it above its own dead body, which the live galah is unaware of, as MARNIE bundles her into the ute.

MARNIE

Come on, nothing we can do.

RED

Can back over it if you like.

PEARL

Don't you dare.

11: INT. RED'S UTE APPROACHING INDUSTRIAL BEACH DAY

Further down the road, PEARL shifts uncomfortably, wedged between her hot, tense parents.

PEARL

When we get there, I'm gunna show Goldy the ocean through his bowl.
(MORE)

PEARL (cont'd)
(googly eyed gesture)
Imagine his face when he sees
other fish.

RED cracks a tinnie, takes a gulp and puts it between his
legs.

RED
No goldfish in the ocean, luv.

PEARL
S'long as they're fish.

MARNIE
Promise you'll never let her in
by herself? And not without her
floaties. It's not safe.

RED shrugs.

RED
Better off breathin' clean ocean
air than petrol.

MARNIE
That's not an answer.

PEARL scowls at MARNIE.

PEARL
Not a baby. Don't need watching.

MARNIE
Yes you do, at least until you
can swim. You *know* what happened
to your Great Grandma. Red.

RED
Alright.

MARNIE crosses her arms.

MARNIE
And keep off the piss while
you're at it?

Red's tinnie stalls in mid air, halfway to his lips.

RED
Give us a break.

RED rebelliously sucks on his tinnie.

MARNIE
It's not about you, it's about
Pearl's safety.

RED

Drop it, Marnie. Just cause one
rellie got taken doesn't mean
they all will.

MARNIE

Fine. Go ahead and try it with
your own flesh and blood.

RED nods, annoyed.

RED

While you're a-fucken sleep.

12: INT. RED'S UTE DAY SHARK VISION

PEARL looks at Marnie's teeth and they become shark teeth.
Red's teeth become shark teeth too, as they snap at each
other, then both turn on PEARL and go to eat her. PEARL
throws her hands over her head to fend them off, and their
teeth return to normal, witnessed by PEARL peeking both
ways under her arms.

13: INT. RED'S UTE APPROACHING INDUSTRIAL BEACH DAY

Uncomfortable silence, except for the growling diesel
motor. PEARL peeks from parent to parent, uncomprehending.

PEARL

Thought Great Grandma drowned.

MARNIE takes Pearl's arms down, to look in her eyes.

MARNIE

It was a shark alright. Now her
spirit's stuck in that ocean
forever. Just stay out.

PEARL nods. RED notices, glares at MARNIE.

RED

Fucken mumbo jumbo. You're
turning the kid into a wuss.

PEARL

It is not. The ghost of that
dead galah's already haunting its
mate. I saw it.

Silence. MARNIE looks smugly at RED, enjoying his
annoyance.

14: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

The 'happy' family arrive at the seedy ex serviceman's caravan park on the edge of the ocean and industry.

RED

Not bad. Guess who's lookin' after it? Piss Pot from Meekatharra. Lookin' forward to seein' Piss Pot.

MARNIE

(mutters)
Just look in the mirror.

PEARL

Funny.

Then Pearl's distracted, scrutinising DOLLY, a young Aboriginal girl spaced out on the lawn, arms wide as the cross, looking into the sun, muttering something unintelligible to herself. PEARL winces, weirded out and anxious.

15: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY CITY VISION

As RED unhitches the caravan, PEARL glances at all the KIDS about. She sees CITY written on all their tops, even Dolly's Aboriginal Mum VIOLET, a long timer who's completely dug in next door to their spot, within a garden full of cabbages. VIOLET passes them as she tries to get DOLLY to get up, but DOLLY is off her face, limp and unresponsive as a rag doll.

VIOLET

Come on luv. Get up. You'll get burnt eyeballs.

PEARL looks down, pulling out her own t-shirt to read it, which says COUNTRY, as does Marnie's and Red's.

DOLLY looks over and giggles. PEARL looks more closely at DOLLY, whose t-shirt now says LOONIE. PEARL giggles at this. DOLLY looks over and laughs too, singing . . .

DOLLY

Loonie Tues-day, fishie Fri-day.

. . . as VIOLET drags her by the arm across the lawn into the shade.

PEARL

Goldy!

16: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

PEARL races to jump into the back of the ute to retrieve her goldfish, but all the motion of the trip has killed him.

BEAT. PEARL is very upset but says nothing, just slips away from her distracted parents, straight over the road to the beach with her limp dead goldfish in her palm.

17: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAY

PEARL stops, gaping at the vastness of the ocean, then determinedly wades straight into the ocean to show dead GOLDY the sea and set him free.

PEARL

Don't need your bowl now, Goldy.
Say hi to Great Grandma for me.

But before GOLDY can sink, he is snapped up by a voracious seagull. PEARL screams and her scream amplifies.

The gull flies away growl-squalling, gulping him down.

PEARL doubles over, a ball of pain, and sees some small sand whiting passing the seagrass swaying around her ankles, which are mesmerising.

Something is watching PEARL from the seagrass, a tiny bobbing male seahorse, CURLY, but PEARL doesn't see him.

18: EXT. COOGEE BEACH UNDERWATER DAY

CURLY watches PEARL's face from his below the surface bobbing POV, and he/we see MARNIE rushing up to snatch PEARL out of the shallows.

MARNIE (UNDERWATER FILTER)

Can't believe it. The minute my
back's turned. Weren't you
listening in the car?

19: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

Sulky PEARL is silently helping MARNIE, in her nurse's uniform, unpack the caravan. RED slips down the caravan steps with a carton of beer under his arm.

RED

Back later.

MARNIE

Before I go to work?

RED O.S.

Ye-ah.

MARNIE

Thanks for all your help.
Bastard.

PEARL scowls.

MARNIE CONT'D

Well he deserves it. Jump up and
help me unpack these high
cupboards, hey?

PEARL jumps up, handing down to MARNIE packed up things
like their toaster etc, that will now live on the bench.

MARNIE CONT'D

Real school in two weeks, big
girl. Excited?

PEARL

Yeah. Not.

MARNIE

It'll be great. Lots of new
friends.

PEARL

'Real' ones.

MARNIE smiles, remembering. . . .

MARNIE

You know what I did when I first
had to go to school in the city?
Ran 'round kissing the roadhouse
walls. Then I loved it better
here. You'll see.

PEARL

Mum. It's a caravan. And all
school's gunna be is a bunch of
city kids, timetables and rules.
I'll hate it. And they'll hate
me.

MARNIE

If you think you're gunna hate
it, ya will. Gotta give it a go
first. There's so much great
stuff in there.

PEARL

Like what?

MARNIE

Art rooms and big green ovals,
maybe even a swimming pool.
Dad'll drive you up there for a
sneak preview. Then see what ya
think.

PEARL pulls the empty goldfish bowl over her head. MARTIAN
PEARL now speaks in a Martian accent

PEARL

You come too. Work daytime,
Earthling, like everyone else.

MARNIE takes the bowl off Pearl's head.

MARNIE

Lucky for us I snagged this job
at all. Just keep the telly down
in the mornings so I can sleep a
bit, and I'll see about trying to
get a day shift later, okay?

PEARL shrugs, okay. Then MARNIE looks at her sternly.

MARNIE CONT'D

And stay out of that ocean.

20: INT. RED'S CARAVAN EVENING

VIOLET pops her head in from the caravan next door,
offering PEARL a cabbage greeting token.

VIOLET

Giddy. I'm Violet. From next
door? Take this for ya Mum. You
like cabbage? Dolly likes
cabbage.

Dolly? PEARL makes weirdo eyes at MARNIE, crinkling her
nose as she accepts the cabbage.

PEARL

Not really.

MARNIE gives PEARL a look as she extends a hand to shake
Violet's.

MARNIE

Hi, Violet. I'm Marnie. This is
Pearl.

(MORE)

MARNIE (cont'd)

She doesn't eat her greens much,
but Red and I do, ta.

VIOLET

Is he an ex serviceman? Mine
was. Dead now, thank Christ.

MARNIE smiles.

MARNIE

Nah, Red's not army. Can't even
fight off the piss.

(eyeing disapproving
Pearl)

Just on my way to work, Violet.
What would you say to a bit of
baby sitting sometimes when he's
too 'tired' to look after this
one?

PEARL scowls.

PEARL

Not a baby.

VIOLET

Wouldn't say no to a few extra
bucks to help buy my ciggies.

MARNIE offers VIOLET a cigarette. Both women light up,
making PEARL rush into her annexe, holding her nose.
MARNIE sticks her head outside, belching smoke as she
yells.

MARNIE

Get in here, Red. Some of us
have to work.

RED O.S.

She'll be right. Not a baby!

PEARL O.S.

Yeah!

MARNIE looks into the annexe and sees PEARL giving tinnie
toasting RED a triumphant thumbs up across the caravan
park.

21: INT. PEARL'S ANNEXE EVENING CABBAGE VISION

From her annexe flap, PEARL watches smoking VIOLET step out
of their van and make her way back into her own cabbage
garden van site next door. In the distasteful smoke haze,
from Pearl's POV, Violet's hair turns to cabbage.

She picks up a discarded doll some kid has dropped between the vans by the neck, and PEARL sees cabbage-haired VIOLET turning into a grotesque baby strangler. PEARL shudders.

22: EXT. CARPARK OUTSIDE AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

The next afternoon, MARNIE and PEARL walk across the road toward the rickety aquarium.

PEARL
How was work? Nice people?

MARNIE
Pretty good.
(yawns)
Just grateful to have someone to do their dirty work. Didn't need a nurse degree last night I can tell ya.
(another yawn)
Thanks for letting me sleep a bit.

PEARL
Coulda slept more. Don't want a new fish. Not even two, unless they're mates.

MARNIE gives PEARL a wise arse look.

MARNIE
Just have a look, eh?

PEARL shrugs, alright.

23: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

PEARL instantly spots JACKSON, the blonde twelve year old boy behind the counter, who also spots her, through a fish tank. Jackson's on the phone.

JACKSON (INTO PHONE)
Listen, dude. If you want them to say yes to the fish, start asking for a rat. Works every time.

PEARL smiles as she overhears his, viewed through aeration bubbles in the tank.

JACKSON (INTO PHONE CONT'D)
Gotta go, got customers.

JACKSON smiles through the tank at PEARL, causing her to have a quick peek at him, then she self consciously looks down. He sticks his head around the tank.

JACKSON CONT'D

Can I help you?

An awkward silence between JACKSON and PEARL as suddenly shy PEARL finds it impossible to speak. But she's looking up now, definitely liking the look of him.

PEARL

Just looking.

Jackson's Dad, FIN, sticks his head in from the dive section.

FIN

You two being looked after alright?

MARNIE gives him a smile.

MARNIE

Pearl's thinking 'bout a new goldfish.

PEARL

Am not.

(shooting a defiant look at Jackson)

Want a rat.

JACKSON grins. FIN points to JACKSON, amused.

FIN

Had to happen.

MARNIE stands on Pearl's toes to stop showing her up. JACKSON notices. Pearl's eyes flicker, but she doesn't flinch. JACKSON's impressed. Who is this intense girl?

PEARL

Maybe two, if they're mates.

JACKSON shrugs, eyes playful.

JACKSON

Rats aren't that romantic. . .

24: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY RAT VISION

PEARL looks in the tank, pleased to see two goldfish swim away from each other and turn into swimming rats.

JACKSON

But kissing fish can get pretty
pally.

PEARL crinkles her nose and the rats swim toward each other, turn into kissing fish and kiss.

25: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

PEARL returns to JACKSON.

PEARL

Nah, too mushy. You sell goggles
and flippers?

JACKSON

(indicating dive
section)

Yep. Through there.

MARNIE gapes, gets off Pearl's foot and grabs her hand.

MARNIE

Not today thanks.

There's a look between PEARL and JACKSON as PEARL is pulled out of the shop.

26: EXT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

As soon as they leave the doorway, PEARL shakes MARNIE off.

PEARL

I told you. Don't want a new
fish or even two new fish.
They'll only die on the drive
home.

Marnie's wide awake now, and peeved.

MARNIE

Get it through your head, Pearl.
We're not going home.

27: INT. PEARL'S ANNEXE IN RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT

Unable to sleep in her annexe, PEARL listens to the rain drumming on the annexe canvas and gazes at the empty goldfish bowl, then she hears singing. PEARL looks out of the annexe flap and sees DOLLY dancing in the rain.

DOLLY
Happeee, happeee, happeee . . .

PEARL studies DOLLY for a moment, then rushes through to whisper urgently to RED, who is lying on the bed watching telly.

PEARL
Dad, come quick.
(giggles)
The cabbage kid's, singin' in the rain.

RED and PEARL go through and look out the annexe flap.

RED
She's not funny, Pearl. She's sad and off her face, but she thinks she's happy. Maybe that's enough.

They watch VIOLET come out of her caravan with a brollie, trying to escort singing DOLLY back.

DOLLY
Happee, crappee, nappееey. Let go! Not a babbeee. Just wanna stay happeeee!

PEARL nods, not a stranger to that feeling. She turns to RED.

PEARL
Are you happy?

RED
Ecstatic. C'mon. There's a movie on. Mum won't mind if you sleep in.

RED herds PEARL toward the main part of the caravan.

PEARL
What's it about?

RED
Some bloke about to piss off from his missus.

PEARL
Why?

RED
(shrugs)
Not happy.

PEARL pulls up before they reach the murmuring telly.

PEARL

What do you reckon about a pair
of kissing fish?

RED

(shrugs)
They'd need a proper tank and
filter.

PEARL

S'long as they're happy. Mr and
Mrs Happy. Whatdayareckon?

RED moves through to eye the telly, but PEARL stays put.

SFX: TV sound. A car revving off with sad accompanying
music.

RED

(watching TV)
I reckon if they're your fish,
luv, you can call 'em what you
like.
(jutting his chin at the
screen)
Good move, mate.

PEARL eyes Red's metal detector in the corner,
uncomfortably.

28: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAWN

PEARL is out exploring the overcast dawn, turning over a
jelly fish with her bare toe, squatting to examine a dead
hermit crab, caught up near its smashed shell in the washed
up tangle of seagrass. She walks to the edge of the water
and slowly wades in, doubling over to stick her head in,
squinting because of no goggles so she doesn't see CURLY,
the male seahorse, but he sees her.

29: EXT. COOGEE BEACH UNDERWATER DAWN

INTERCUT BETWEEN ABOVE AND BELOW THE SURFACE.

PEARL wades in the shallows, then goes down on her hands
and knees because she isn't allowed in and can't swim, so
she continually sticks her head under, popping up for
breaths, scared of getting bowled over or caught with
fertive looks all ways, beneath her, into the deep and back
to shore.

CURLY is watching her. She doesn't see him, but she feels something watching her and turns back, creating a swirl with her ankles. Then she sees him, the most amazing sight (in real life).

Mates for life, MR and MRS CURLY spin together in their morning greeting ritual, each changing colour to become buttercup yellow upon first sight of each other, shot in a magic golden glow.

SFX: PEARL hears joyous bubbling whinnies, as they continue in their twirling dance. She's utterly captivated and is for the first time since she arrived here, happy. CURLY sees her, beaming at him and MRS CURLY underwater.

30: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

Soaking wet PEARL excitedly bolts into the annexe to find her goldfish bowl, but she isn't in time to catch RED, who she sees heading to the bathroom block with a towel over his shoulder. She calls to him out the door of the annexe.

PEARL

Dad! Dad! Guess what I saw?

But Red's out of range and it's windy. PEARL rushes into the caravan to snatch her goldfish bowl, smacking into tired MARNIE, who's just back from night shift.

MARNIE

Where were you?

Silence. MARNIE takes in Pearl's dripping PJs and the goldfish bowl in her hand.

MARNIE CONT'D

In the ocean. Without Dad or your floaties.

PEARL steps back, afraid of the fury in Marnie's eyes.

PEARL

Didn't swim, just bobbed in.

MARNIE tensely yanks off her nurse shoes. PEARL nervously eyes them.

MARNIE

What's the matter with you? Got a death wish or somethin'?

PEARL

Wasn't out far. Only up to my knees. Just up to the SEAHORSES!
(MORE)

PEARL (cont'd)
Come quick, help me catch 'em,
before they go.

PEARL goes to dash past, but MARNIE grabs her arm.

MARNIE
Listen here, my girl. You are
not going anywhere near that
ocean again without Dad or your
floaties. Do you hear me?
Babies can drown in two inches of
water.

PEARL
(screams)
I'm not a baby!

MARNIE
Really? Well you can imagine all
you the seahorses you like in
this caravan today.

PEARL
*I'm not imagining! They'll get
away.*

MARNIE
Any more of that and you can stay
in all week.

PEARL
How could I imagine something I
never saw before in real life?
Mr and Mrs Curly . . .

MARNIE
(almost screaming back)
Will you cut the happy couple
crap! You can't keep seahorses
cooped up in there. They'll die.

PEARL looks gutted. RED arrives, having heard most of what
MARNIE just said at volume.

RED
What now?

PEARL
She . . .

MARNIE
Shut it.
(to Red)
Where'd you get off, letting her
out in the ocean on her own?

RED
Forgotten your happy pill, dear?
Kid's alive, isn't she?

MARNIE
More by good luck than good
management.

RED throws down his towel.

RED
We'll talk about this when you're
human.

PEARL
(under her breath)
Yeah.

BEAT. If looks could kill, they'd all be dead. RED
shepherds PEARL into her annexe, away from MARNIE.

PEARL CONT'D
There's real live seahorses out
there and you've got to teach me
to swim before school starts.

MARNIE O.S.
Over my dead body.

31: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

PISS POT is moving the old time sprinkler outside PEARL's
annexe. She beckons him over conspiratorially, whispering.

PEARL
Hello Mr Piss Pot. I was
wondering. Has anyone ever seen
seahorses 'round here?

Amused, PISS POT bends to whisper back.

PISS POT
Hello, Miss Pearl. People used
to, out the front there, but not
since the industry went in.

PEARL frowns, suddenly unsure of herself.

PISS POT CONT'D
Why are we whispering?

PEARL
Grounded. Can't swim.

PISS POT
(amused)
By your Mum or Dad?

RED comes out with his metal detector. PEARL pops back into her annexe. PISS POT gives her a wink as he addresses RED.

PISS POT CONT'D
Perfect day for swimming lessons.

PEARL peeks out hopefully.

RED
Nah, we're fossickin'.

Pearl's eyes light up. RED beckons her out, speaking softly. PISS POT smiles at PEARL as she rushes out.

PISS POT
Didn't think it was him.
(leading, indicating
Red)
Once a gold digger, always a gold digger, eh Red? She looks lucky.

RED starts heading for the beach, but PEARL stops him, whispering urgently.

PEARL
Can I go up the fish shop first?

RED
Why?

PEARL
Wanna find out 'bout seahorses.

RED leans on the metal detector.

RED O.S.
Righto. Be quick.
(indicating caravan)
I'll keep an eye out for Mum.

PEARL beams and runs off.

32: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

JACKSON startles when he sees PEARL enter the shop, but quickly recovers when she asks him something he knows about.

PEARL
Ah, hi. . . .

JACKSON
It's Jackson.

PEARL
That your first name?

JACKSON
Yeah. What's yours?

PEARL
Pearl.

JACKSON
Cool.

PEARL
Um, just wondering. Got any
seahorses?

JACKSON
Nup. The ones round here are
protected. Dad won't touch 'em.
Totally in love with the little
critters.

PEARL
Yeah. Well. How cute are they?

JACKSON looks into PEARL.

JACKSON
You seen some? 'Round here?

PEARL
(avoiding his gaze)
Got any books on 'em?

JACKSON pulls a book from the shelf.

JACKSON
Check this out.

JACKSON opens the book, medicinal remedies section, showing
a string of dried seahorses, hanging in a Chinese
Apothecary.

JACKSON CONT'D
Know what Chinese doctors do to
seahorses? Whiz em up in
blenders for medicine.

PEARL
Err. Gross.

JACKSON
Chinese medicine man came in here
once, wanting to buy some.
(MORE)

JACKSON (cont'd)
Dad dobbed him in.
(smile)
Huge fine.

PEARL nods, uncomfortable.

JACKSON CONT'D
They're hard to look after too.
Gotta change their sea water
every day, feed 'em live shrimp
and stuff. When the boys are
pregnant they can suck up a pack
of Sea Monkeys a day.

PEARL
You mean girls?

JACKSON
Nah, boys. Here.

JACKSON shows PEARL a picture of a big bellied very pregnant seahorse and the caption underneath stating that it's male.

PEARL
Wow. What's a Sea Monkey?

JACKSON pulls down a Sea Monkey kit from the shelf to show her, coming closer. PEARL feels his presence acutely.

JACKSON
Easy enough to grow your own, but
they're not that romantic either.

PEARL
How much?

JACKSON
Nineteen ninety five.

PEARL
Every day!

JACKSON
So where are these seahorses
you've not got your eye on?

PEARL looks in Jackson's blue eyes, goes swimming.

PEARL
Right in front of the caravan
park.

JACKSON
Good eyes, Pearl. Most people
don't spot those ones. Leave 'em
alone, hey?

PEARL

Okay. Gotta go. Dad's waiting.

PEARL dashes out, her cheeks flushed with excitement and guilt.

33: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAY

PEARL and RED are beachcombing with PEARL picking up shells and RED showing her how to sweep with the metal detector.

RED

Big wide slow sweeps like this.
Covers more ground.

The metal detector beeps faster. RED dislodges another soft drink can from under the sand, adds it to others in the clear plastic shopping bag Pearl's carrying shells in.

RED CONT'D

(handing detector over)
Your turn. Feelin' lucky?

PEARL

Yeah.

PEARL drops the shopping bag, in a hurry to begin.

PEARL CONT'D

If I find treasure could we go
back to the bush? Mum could give
up the bed pans.

RED

Have to be a lot of treasure.

PEARL sweeps closer to shore. The metal detector beeps faster. PEARL drops it, digs and finds gold. A sand encrusted gold heart locket and chain. RED falls to his knees beside her.

PEARL

Treasure, Dad! Real gold!

RED

First go. Talk about beginner's
luck! Nice little piece too.
Should have a spring lock.

RED gently prises the locket open. A bit of sea water comes out, but they can just make out a ruined photo.

PEARL

It's a baby. Any writing inside?

RED
(handing it back)
Your eyes are better, luv.

PEARL
Here! On the back.
(squinting to read it)
*From Fin with all my love July
23, 1994.*

PEARL is excited.

PEARL CONT'D
Fin! That's a funny name. Maybe
he's a mermaid and it's a baby
mermaid!

RED
(ruffling her hair)
Nineteen ninety-four, same as
you, but a few months older.
(handing it back)
Here yar. Finders keepers.

RED puts the locket around Pearl's neck and fastens it.

PEARL
(admiring it)
Wonder how it got lost.

RED
People go swimming, pick up their
towel, flick stuff off. Or
sometimes their rings come off in
the water and wash up. That's
where Mum's engagement ring came
from. Never told her that.

PEARL
Da-ad. You should give her this
as well. We would take a good
picture of you and stick it in.

RED smiles.

RED
No such thing. And there's that
writing on the back. You keep
it.

PEARL
But she'd love it.

RED
Know what she'd love more?
(leading the way)
(MORE)

RED (cont'd)
Waking up and finding you cooped
up in the caravan where she left
ya.

They head back. PEARL takes off the locket.

34: EXT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

As they approach the annexe PEARL and RED talk softer.

PEARL
When you gunna teach me to swim?

RED
Tomorrow if you like.

PEARL
Yay! Can we get goggles? Wanna
show you the seahorses.

RED
Yeah. Snorkels too. But no
flippers. Ya gotta kick.

PEARL beams up at him.

35: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

MARNIE wakes finding PEARL at the end of her bed wearing an
old mother of pearl necklace, going through her jewellery
box and shoe box of old photos as quietly as she can.
MARNIE snaps.

MARNIE
What are you doing?

PEARL jumps, startled, surprised to be in trouble.

PEARL
I . . . I found this photo of us
three on your wedding day.

PEARL shows MARNIE, featuring happy MARNIE and RED
embracing at their wedding with young bridesmaid PEARL (5)
standing between them.

PEARL CONT'D
And this one of Great Grandma
Pearl.

MARNIE abruptly sits up. PEARL shows her the other photo,
of Great Grandma Pearl on a pearl lugger with her 6 y.o.
daughter (Pearl's Grandma Rayleen) in front of her, beside
the white PEARLER and multi-racial crew.

PEARL CONT'D

(eyeing necklace)

Must be where all that mother of
pearl came from, eh? You don't
think the shark tooth came from
the . . .

MARNIE

Gimme that necklace. Told you
never to touch that. It's no
good.

PEARL hands it over, upset. MARNIE snatches the necklace
back and throws it in her jewellery box grazing Pearl's
hand with the shark tooth. A dark round drop of blood
forms on the back of Pearl's hand. PEARL sucks on her hand
making it sting and slips her Great Grandma's photo into
her pocket with the other hand.

PEARL

Oooww ch!

RED comes through from the annexe with a tinny, eyeing
MARNIE.

RED

Can't you ever wake up happy?

MARNIE

Who wouldn't be unhappy, waking
up next to you?

RED

Best thing 'bout the night shift.
You don't have ta.

PEARL puts her hands on her ears, repeating.

PEARL

Not listening, not listening,
not. . .

RED

What's she done now?

PEARL

. . . listening, not . . .

MARNIE

Called up her Great Grandma's
spirit.

PEARL

Have not. Have I?

RED
(removing Pearl's hands
from her ears)
Course not.

MARNIE
Wanker.

At an anxious loss, PEARL pushes between them holding up the happy wedding couple family photo, defiantly turning it to each of them.

Silence. Discomfort.

36: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

JACKSON is showing PEARL how to suck in air to make the mask stick on her face.

JACKSON
Okay, breathe in.
(checking the edges)
Good.
(smiles, amused at
Pearl's sucked in face
)
Breathe out.

PEARL exhales and the mask falls into Jackson's hands. As it does so, he sees the gold locket around Pearl's neck.

BEAT. JACKSON stares at the locket and quietly speaks.

JACKSON CONT'D
Where'd you get that?

PEARL
On the beach. Lucky, eh? Real
gold with writing on the back.

JACKSON doesn't need to read it. Some of the colour has drained from his face.

JACKSON
From Fin with all my love July
23, 1994?

BEAT. PEARL lowers her hand with the locket in it.

PEARL
Who's Fin?

JACKSON
Dad. July's twenty-third's my
birthday.

Pearl's rushes to unclasp the locket and give it to him.

PEARL
So you're the bubby! Didn't
recognise ya.
(smiles)
Photo's a bit manky.
(offering him the
loket)
Your Mum'll be happy to have it
back.

JACKSON
She would, if she was alive.

JACKSON gently receives the locket, opens it, looks inside.

JACKSON CONT'D
Fin gave it to her the day I was
born.

PEARL shuffles her feet.

PEARL
What'd she die of?

JACKSON shrugs.

JACKSON
Went for a midnight swim and
didn't swim back, this time last
year.

PEARL
How come?

JACKSON
(shrugs)
Must've thought it a better way
to go. . . .
(clears his throat)
. . . than the breast cancer that
was eating her lungs.

BEAT. PEARL looks deeply into JACKSON.

PEARL
My Great Grandma's spirit's in
there too. She got taken by a
tiger shark.

JACKSON shudders and looks intently at PEARL. Oops. PEARL
pulls her Great Grandmother's photo from her back pocket
and hands it to him.

PEARL CONT'D

That's her in the middle and my
Grandma when she was little.

PEARL reaches for the photo, but JACKSON keeps it.

PEARL CONT'D

I can show you where I found the
locket if you like. You havin' a
memorial on the beach or
something?

JACKSON considers this, nods.

JACKSON

Can't believe it's a whole year
since it happened. I'll swing by
after work.

PEARL

It's only a caravan. Next to the
cabbage lady.

JACKSON nods, crinkles his nose.

JACKSON

Hate cabbage.

PEARL tries again to reach for the photo, but JACKSON
resists.

JACKSON CONT'D

Can I keep it this then?

PEARL eyes him strangely, wondering why.

PEARL

Not any longer or Mum'll go
ballistic.

JACKSON

What's she like, your Mum?
(smiles, remembering)
Step on your toes much?

PEARL

Yeah. How much for all this?

JACKSON drops the locket into his pocket and adds snorkels
to Pearl's two sets of goggles.

JACKSON

Fair swap.

PEARL

(touching his arm)
Ta.

PEARL leaves with the gear. JACKSON watches her go, then puts down the photo, sits, withdraws the locket and gently opens it, to solemnly look upon his waterlogged baby face. Deep, quiet sadness descends on him.

37: EXT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

While MARNIE faintly O.S. snores inside, Pearl's been telling RED about Jackson's Mum and the locket. Both are wearing their goggles on their heads with snorkels attached.

PEARL
How sad is that?

RED nods, pockets the goggles cash that PEARL gives back.

RED
Tough for a young bloke to lose
his Mum like that.

PEARL
Wouldn't wanna lose Mum no matter
how cranky she is.

RED smiles without humour, pulls the goggles off his head.

RED
I would. Never met such an angry
woman.

PEARL pulls off her goggles.

PEARL
So are you, so am I. . . . So?
Do something about it.

RED looks at PEARL, but doesn't answer.

38: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

INTERCUT interior and exterior caravan.

MARNIE has awoken and is now on her knees on the bed peeking out of the curtains, eavesdropping on RED and PEARL.

PEARL
She needs more hugs.

RED

Or a midnight swim. One look at
her would scare all the sharks
and ghosts out of the water.

PEARL gives him a look. RED squeezes she shoulder to show
it was a joke. RED glances toward the caravan and MARNIE
ducks down to listen below the open window.

PEARL

Why can't you two just kiss and
make up, like kissing fish?

RED

Do the lips.

PEARL sighs and does the lips, dejected. RED kisses them.

PEARL

The only thing I like about this
place is the seahorses. If I can
ever find 'em again. You comin'?

They head off.

RED

Give it time. You've already
made your first friend.

PEARL

How am I gunna handle school?

RED

Dunno, but you've gotta go. It's
the law.

MARNIE peeks outside again, but they've walked out of
earshot, so she flops back on the bed, looking troubled.
She reaches across and lights up a fag, doesn't look out
again.

RED pulls Pearl's Great grandmother's necklace out of his
pocket to show PEARL, who stops.

PEARL

What'd you bring that for?

RED

So you can wear it in and prove
there's no ghosts.

PEARL has a sudden awful thought.

PEARL

What about Jackson's Mum? She's
in there for sure. Her skeleton.
. . and her ghost.

(MORE)

PEARL (cont'd)
(doing an about face)
Nuh ah. Not today. No way.

RED
C'mon. We won't go far, just far
enough to find your seahorses.
Teach you how to float first,
hey?

PEARL
(trepidacious)
Not the necklace.

RED
(gently but firmly)
Yes the necklace.

39: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAY ABOVE AND UNDERWATER

INTERCUT ABOVE AND BELOW THE SURFACE.

RED is in the shallows with PEARL, in her goggles and snorkel, wearing G.G. Pearl's necklace.

PEARL is stiff, tense, anxiously eyeing the deep, and the waving seagrass beneath her. RED supports her tummy, tilts her up to listen to him.

RED
Relax and kick. I've got you.

PEARL
(removing the snorkel)
Not the necklace.

RED
(smiles as he puts her
snorkel back in)
Yes the necklace.

PEARL sticks her head back in, spots the seahorses and screams triumphantly through her snorkel, making RED jump.

PEARL
(pointing)
There!

Keeping a hold under her tummy, RED kneels and sticks his head in to look, smiling at Pearl's excited face underwater.

SFX: Gentle yet triumphant seahorse whinnies from Pearl's POV, as the CURLIES bob gracefully in the seagrass, pausing momentarily to hook their tails on to peering up at the humans.

SFX: Amplify the sound of Pearl's breath through the snorkel, quickening with excitement.

Then glide back into deeper water. Beyond PEARL, G.G. Pearl's spirit is closing in to peer at PEARL, but also keeping a wary eye on the darker deep.

PEARL doesn't see her, she is so focused on the seahorses beneath her. RED comes up to talk to PEARL. PEARL rises to hoot and yell, removing her goggles and snorkel. As the necklace leaves the water, Great Grandma Pearl's ghost vanishes.

PEARL

See? I wasn't imagining! The one with the big belly's pregnant and he's *the dad!*

RED

Yeah? Onya mate! Dads make better Mums, I knew that. *And no ghosts.*

PEARL

Can I keep them? Please? Better than stupid kissing fish.

RED

He needs to have his babies in the wild, luv.

PEARL

What about the seagulls? They ate Goldy!

RED

Lucky he was dead first, eh?

PEARL

Funny.

RED

Some live, most die, but they've got a far better chance here than in a goldfish bowl in the caravan.

PEARL nods, accepting this, looking up at RED sadly, yet adoringly.

40: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

JACKSON hands PEARL back the photo, outside her annexe. PEARL glances inside to the caravan as she pockets it. JACKSON is carrying a big black photo album under his arm.

PEARL

Hi. Ta.
(indicating album)
What's that?

JACKSON hesitates, then pulls the two folding chairs together and sits to show her, opening the album on his lap.

JACKSON

Mum, and some other people who've drowned.

PEARL looks at the photos of Jackson's Mum, a happy sporty looking woman, with kind eyes.

PEARL

She looks lovely - just like you.

BEAT. JACKSON looks into PEARL, liking the compliment. PEARL squirms.

JACKSON

Ta. Yeah, she was.

Turning the page, he comes across a few other people who have drowned, famous drownings. PEARL looks on with interest.

JACKSON CONT'D

Lots of famous people have drowned or gone missing at sea. Harold Holt, Natalie Wood, Silvia Plath.

(turns the page,
surprising Pearl)

I expanded that photo of your Great Grandma and cut her out. Do you mind?

Pearl's a bit weirded out, but then it makes okay sense.

PEARL

No, go for it, but she wasn't famous.

JACKSON

Doesn't matter. Nor was Mum. I was thinking of making a clear plastic envelope with the locket in it to stick on the front, so I could take it out when I want?

PEARL

Sounds good. Plus maybe a bit of sand from where I found it?

JACKSON nods.

JACKSON
Gunna wear it for a while first,
(closing the album,
rising)
'til school starts.

PEARL leads the way to the beach.

PEARL
What school you going to?

JACKSON
Freo High.

PEARL is jumping up and down inside happy to hear this, but she manages not to show it, much.

PEARL
Same here. Year eight.

JACKSON looks upon PEARL intently, sees excitement in her eyes, and smiles. PEARL smiles back, big, broad and defenceless. There's something similar in their oddball intensities that makes for an easy, eerie connection. As they crest the sand dunes, JACKSON pauses to look at the sea.

JACKSON
Know what happens when they
drown?

PEARL
What?

PEARL looks at the ocean, and back to Jackson's album, imagining . . .

41: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAY DROWNING VISION

Jackson's Mum leads all the famous people falling from Jackson's album as photos, arising from the sand as real people who walk in what they're wearing into the water and start swimming. JACKSON is oblivious, can't see them. PEARL keeps leading the way beside him, scanning the people.

JACKSON V.O.
They're determined to die so they
swim out far, as fast as they
can. But pretty soon they're
tired, weighed down by their
clothes. And afraid...

PEARL watches the people in the water slowing, stopping, as JACKSON describes it, finally tilting their heads back.

JACKSON V.O. CONT'D
So they stop for a bit and look
back, realise they can't swim
back, too far, but some try.

It's a wrench for PEARL to see that. The others sadly return her gaze from afar. JACKSON sees the disturbing effect on PEARL and distracts her with hand gestures.

JACKSON
They're upright with their arms
out like this, flipping a bit.
Some look at the sky with their
heads back to catch their breath
but it's getting hard to breathe.

JACKSON is doing some gaping gestures at the sky, spooking PEARL, so that she doesn't see her (Young Woman) Great Grandma's photo fall from the album. G.G. PEARL rises from the sand to stand before astonished PEARL.

BEAT. PEARL stops in her tracks, gaping at her GREAT GRANDMOTHER, who smiles on her, steps forward and embraces PEARL, pinning her arms.

PEARL
Wo-aw.

JACKSON doesn't see this, only PEARL halted by his description, standing tightly erect.

JACKSON V.O.
Water gets in their mouth and
they hold their breath, can't
help it. Some say that's when
their lives go back before their
eyes, but I don't believe that.
They're unconscious, sinking.
It's peaceful then. They don't
feel the convulsions or see
themselves turn blue. Pretty
soon they're rigid on the bottom.
And dead.

GREAT GRANDMA PEARL releases PEARL, and walks into the water, a shark fin appears the back breakers, startling PEARL out of her vision. All the other swimmers have disappeared.

42: EXT. COOGEE BEACH DAY

PEARL yells.

PEARL

Wait!

JACKSON jumps, eyes PEARL, who blinks, snapping out of it.

JACKSON

Where? Here?

PEARL checks. G.G. PEARL and the shark fin have vanished.

PEARL

What?

JACKSON

Did you find it here? Mum's
locket.

PEARL

No. Up there.

They walk the little way there in tense silence.

JACKSON

Then what were ya yelling about?

PEARL

(glancing at his album)
Don't ask. . . .

JACKSON

Where'd you come from? Pearl.

PEARL

The Nullarbor.
(rushing)
My Great Grandma doesn't belong
in there. Shark took her before
she was ready.
(looking in his eyes)
Give her back.

JACKSON is a bit taken aback by Pearl's tone, but okay.

JACKSON

Course.

JACKSON gives her the blown up copy of the photo.

PEARL

Thanks.

They cover the remaining distance in unsettled silence.
Get close enough to touch hands, jerk back. PEARL pulls up
where she found the necklace.

PEARL CONT'D

Here. Right here.

BEAT. JACKSON looks out to sea. PEARL shifts sand with her toes. JACKSON kneels and scoops a little sand into his shirt pocket, looks up at PEARL.

JACKSON
I'm coming back at midnight, just
me and some candles for Mum.
Wanna come?

PEARL looks into his eyes for a long moment.

PEARL
Yeah.

43: EXT. COOGEE BEACH NIGHT

PEARL and JACKSON are on the beach with a torch, illuminating their faces as they make a memorial of shells. JACKSON has brought some floating candles which they silently light and set on the sea. Solemn silence as they watch them bob and eventually flicker out.

PEARL
Doesn't matter what Dad says,
there's spirit's in that water.
I can feel 'em.

JACKSON
Mum's with me when I'm out there.
Rest in peace, Mum.

44: EXT. RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT

JACKSON sees that PEARL safely slips into her annexe whispering.

JACKSON
Thanks for coming.

PEARL
Went for my Great Grandma too.

JACKSON leans forward and kisses Pearl's cheek goodbye, which is right when they get sprung by red-faced, pissed RED, switching on the light, startling PEARL and JACKSON apart.

RED
Where the hell have you two been?
Piss Pot and I have been scouring
the caravan park, just about
called the Police!

The KIDS gape, shamed.

PEARL

Down the beach. Memorial for his Mum.

RED

At this hour? Without asking?
Just the two of you?

PEARL crosses her arms.

PEARL

Knew you wouldn't say yes.

RED

Damn right I wouldn't. Bloody good excuse that. Wasn't born yesterday.

JACKSON is offended.

JACKSON

It's not Pearl's fault. I asked her to come, float some candles near where she found the locket.

RED demurs a bit, nods like he doesn't quite buy it.

RED

Well you can forget about hanging out together at night again. Not without asking, anyways.

(juts his chin at Jackson)

Get going.

(and Pearl)

You. Get to bed.

45: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK NIGHT

JACKSON is only too relieved to back out of the annexe. As he rushes through the caravan park in a fast, tense walk, off her face DOLLY springs out from behind a tree and tries to hug and kiss him.

DOLLY

Kissy, kissy, kissy, he he he.

JACKSON

Err, get off.

JACKSON shoves her off, mortified, and runs. DOLLY calls after him.

DOLLY
Waa-iit. Come back. Cutey.

46: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

PEARL offers some sandwiches to JACKSON the next lunch time.

PEARL
Sorry Dad blasted you last night.
D'you get caught too?

JACKSON
(shrugs, smiling)
Nah. Fin's a serious sleeper.

A tiny awkward moment, looking at each other eating.

JACKSON CONT'D
How long can you hold your
breath?

PEARL
Dunno. Never tried.

JACKSON
Wanna?

PEARL
Sure.

Both KIDS lower their sandwiches, take slugs from their water bottles and look at each other.

JACKSON
Ready?
(eyes Pearl who nods)
Go.

Huge breaths. JACKSON relaxes his body, watches his watch and remains calmly yet intensely still, but PEARL can't sit still for long; she has to walk around like a wound up stick insect, fast becomes uncomfortable. Victory already in Jackson's eyes re their contest as PEARL walks toward the dive section and sees RED, talking with FIN. PEARL can't say anything to JACKSON, just gesture for him to look in the dive section. JACKSON shrugs, stays still.

47: INT. DIVE SECTION AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

Red-faced Red's fronting FIN, who stays cool, looking a teeny bit amused.

RED

Are you gunna speak to him?

FIN

(heading toward
aquarium)

Do most days. Yeah, now.

CUT BACK TO:

48: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

Eyes panicked from lack of air, PEARL is now doing fast anxious laps around the counter. Her eyes open more as she sees the DADS quite far back, but heading through. They don't see her.

PEARL pulls up sharply, then flops behind the counter, unconscious. JACKSON sucks in air in a gasp and rushes behind the counter.

JACKSON

(quietly, intensely)

Pearl. Breathe.

The DADS enter, don't hear this, don't at first see JACKSON behind the counter shaking PEARL.

FIN

Just don't think there's anything
to worry about.

(throwing Red a smile)

If they were vertical.

RED is the first to see them as JACKSON goes to give PEARL mouth to mouth, his lips almost touching hers with the love heart locket dangling between them. RED roughly pulls him back.

RED

What the hell do you think you're
doing?

JACKSON

Mouth to mouth.

RED

What?

FIN shoves into between them.

FIN

Bloody breath holding.

But before FIN can kneel beside her, PEARL suddenly comes 'round with a gasp.

RED
(to Fin)
Get out of the way. She's my
daughter.

RED pulls PEARL to her feet, holds her face.

RED CONT'D
You alright?

PEARL
(to Jackson)
Who won?

JACKSON
Me, of course. But you were
pretty good. One minute fifteen.

FIN nods impressed. Brings up a chair.

FIN
Not bad. Sit down, kid.

PEARL sits on the floor. FIN turns to JACKSON.

FIN CONT'D
That ceremony you did for your
Mum last night?

RED
(crossing his arms)
Possible ceremony.

FIN
(ignoring Red)
That. . . .
. . . was a really thoughtful
thing to do. Just wish I was
there.

JACKSON looks at FIN, sheepish.

JACKSON
Sorry, dad.

FIN
S'okay. You're a good kid.

PEARL looks upon FIN like she wishes RED was like that.

RED
(to Pearl)
Come on. We're going.

As she is being bundled out of the shell shop for the
second time, PEARL halts to call back to JACKSON.

PEARL
How long can you last?

JACKSON
Two and a half minutes, if I sit still.

PEARL
Bull.

JACKSON
Nuh ah.

RED
(pulling Pearl's arm)
Christ, Pearl. Can't believe you held your breath until you fainted. You'd better rest up in the caravan today.

PEARL
(mutters, pulling away)
More bloody time out for non-existent kissing.

RED
Watch it.

49: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY

Silent PEARL rebelliously sets to work trying to make things right again between her parents, creating a big I Love You cardboard heart locket with a pasted wedding picture of her parents and her inside it. Happy Anniversary it says boldly on the front. She's wound up, emotionally drained by all the changes lately, being uprooted, staying up late, being unconscious, and wearing Red's late night suspicions, but her way biggest anxiety is that her parents will fall apart.

MARNIE wakes and sits up. PEARL silently presents her with the love heart and a tense smile. MARNIE sighs, puts the love heart down and lights a cigarette. She beckons PEARL.

MARNIE
Come here. You know it's not our anniversary and your father and I aren't in love any more. Sweet as it is, that love heart won't fix it.

Emotionally overwrought, tired PEARL surprises MARNIE by dissolving, then crying. MARNIE puts an arm around her.

MARNIE CONT'D

Hey, hey. Didn't mean to hurt ya. Just trying to be honest.

PEARL

(crying harder)

It's not true! You do so love each other.

MARNIE

We both still love you.

Hearing the tears, RED comes in folding his newspaper, to see what's up. He glares at MARNIE, whilst standing in the annexe opening. PEARL sees him.

PEARL

Mum says you don't love each other any more.

RED

Big news.

RED shakes his head at MARNIE, turns and walks out of the annexe. MARNIE silently picks up a towel and heads out the front of the caravan for a shower, calling after him.

MARNIE

Not gunna lie to her.

BEAT. PEARL snuffs back and fiercely rips up the love heart.

50: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAY LATER

VIOLET enters the caravan, where the love heart is now in shreds.

VIOLET

Ya Mum asked me to look after you til ya Dad gets back. What you doing? Making confetti?

PEARL glares at VIOLET and yells.

PEARL

Don't need lookin' after. Not a baby!

VIOLET backs down the caravan steps.

VIOLET

Well you sound like one, screamin' like that.

(MORE)

VIOLET (cont'd)

You can stay in there alone if
you promise to stay put. I'll be
next door making us something to
eat. Alright?

PEARL

No cabbage!

VIOLET

Alright!

Minor victory won, wound up PEARL flicks the love heart
confetti over her parents' bed, takes G. G. Pearl's
necklace out of Marnie's shoebox and pockets it. As she
does this she hears RED coming back, pulled up by VIOLET.

VIOLET O.S.

Giddy, Red. Just makin' dinner
for you and ya kid. Rudest girl
I know, besides Dolly.

RED O.S.

What for?

VIOLET O.S.

Ten bucks an hour, according to
Marnie. Got a tenner? Ta.
(under her breath)
Clear where she gets it from.

RED blearily comes in, putting his wallet away, eyeing the
confetti.

RED

Clean that up. Then we'll get
your school books out and
labelled. Gotta have your name
on everything in the bloody city.

PEARL

Don't wanna go. Won't know
anyone, 'cept Jackson.

RED

Not going with him.

PEARL

Why not?

RED

Don't trust 'im.

PEARL

Too bad. He's the only friend
I've got.

RED feels a bit sheepish about this for a moment, then
rants.

RED

What's a guy supposed to think
when his twelve year old daughter
nicks off with a boy in the
middle of the night then lets him
kiss her?

PEARL slams her books on the bed, upset.

PEARL

Try kissing Mum sometime, stupid.
See what happens. Wasn't a
proper kiss anyway, just a peck.

RED

Who you callin' stupid? And what
do you know 'bout proper kissin'?

PEARL

Can't you just try and be happy?

RED pulls the ring off a tinny and takes a slug.

PEARL CONT'D

And that stuff doesn't help.

RED

Just get those books done and
shut up. We'll check out the
school tomorrow.

PEARL glares at him.

RED CONT'D

Go on. Get 'em.

PEARL storms into the annexe, yelling behind her.

PEARL

Stop ordering me around. Going
ta bed.

RED

What about dinner?

PEARL

No!

RED

Go hungry then, see if I care.

51: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

The school grounds are utterly intimidating to PEARL, who thinks of the place as a prison, especially as it's wired up and padlocked. The school is big, lots of buildings.

PEARL
Err. Prison.

RED
Nah, that's just for the holidays. See that building? That's the front office. We'll go there the first day and sign you in. Tell 'em you've never been to school before.

PEARL
Can't say that!

RED
Have to, so they can show you what to do, where your classes are and that.

PEARL
Jackson'll show me.

RED
What if he's not in the same class?

PEARL
Same class. Same year.

RED
It's a big school, luv. You'll be in different classes sometimes for sure. I don't trust him to look after you. He'll just wanna hang with his mates.

PEARL bites her nails, frowning as she imagines . . .

52: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY FIRST DAY NIGHTMARE VISION

. . . The school yard crowded with kids wearing CITY printed on prison uniforms, except for PEARL, lost in the middle with COUNTRY on her prison uniform.

PEARL
'Scuse me, do you know Jackson?
Have you seen Jackson?

Each person she asks stops and stares, then they all start pointing at her, and her COUNTRY t-shirt.

SCHOOL KIDS CHANTING
(closing in on Pearl)
Country, country, country.

PEARL hides her head in her arms and runs . . .

53: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

. . . back to the car. RED follows, concerned.

54: INT. AQUARIUM AND DIVE SHOP DAY

Sus FIN is eyeing a couple of young divers suspiciously, as he fills their scuba tanks.

FIN CONT'D
Where ya divin'?

DIVER ONE
Out from the caravan park, under
under the jetty. Some good reef
further out, we've heard.

FIN
Not after seahorses are ya?
You're aware they're protected?

DIVER ONE
Nah, didn't know.

DIVER TWO
Don't care. Not after any.

His friend smiles, waggles his Crayfish lure.

DIVER TWO
Few crays'd wouldn't go down bad
though.

DIVER ONE
(showing Fin their Cray
license)
And before you ask, yes we do
have a license and we know the
bag limit.

They grin at each other about seahorse obsessed FIN in a way that FIN reads as guilt. He slams their license into the copying machine.

DIVER ONE

Hey!

FIN crosses his arms.

FIN

Shop policy. No ID, no air.

FIN hands them their tanks, and gives back their ID. They shake their heads at each other about FIN as they leave the shop, hefting their tanks. FIN grabs the underwater scooter, rushes into the aquarium section and shoves it into Jackson's chest.

FIN CONT'D

Keep an eye on those seahorses.

JACKSON

Not again.

FIN

Just do it.

55: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAY

Cutting through the caravan park for the beach, JACKSON slams into PEARL (who's wearing the same boardies as yesterday) as she rushes toward the caravan. The weather has turned cloudy.

PEARL

(indicating bright
yellow underwater
scooter)

Hey! What's that?

JACKSON

Underwater scooter.

PEARL

Coo-ul. Can I've a ride on it?

JACKSON

Behind it. You'll have to hang on tight. Gotta go after some divers now. Dad reckons they're sus, but to him they're all sus. What you doin' now?

PEARL

Nuthin'. Dad wants more bait.

PEARL glances at the caravan, then abandons the bait errand. They race over the sand dunes in time to see the DIVERS backing into the water in their scuba gear.

JACKSON rushes down the dunes, but before PEARL can go after him, she sees RED with PISSPOT on the jetty, standing up from his esky seat, gesturing with a tinny for PEARL to hurry back. PEARL bites her lip, stops, and calls after JACKSON.

PEARL CONT'D
You go. I'll watch from up the
jetty.

JACKSON waves okay and continues on. PEARL runs back to the caravan to get the bait.

56: EXT. COOGIE BEACH JETTY DAY

PEARL hangs over the rail watching the yellow scooter and black wetsuit blob that is JACKSON following the DIVERS intently. A storm is brewing now, darkening the sky. RED eyes the sky.

RED
Good fishin' weather.

PISS POT
Should be a few sharks about.

PEARL bites her lip and never takes her eyes off Jackson's bright yellow scooter trailing after the DIVERS quite far out, now well past the seagrass. RED sees the direction of her gaze.

RED
He'd better steer clear of our
tackle, or he'll know all about
it.

PEARL stiffens, points just behind JACKSON.

PEARL
What's that black blob, behind
him?

RED and PISS POT stand, look.

RED
What black blob?

PISS POT
Nothin' I can see.

RED
(to Piss Pot)
Pretty good imagination, Pearl.

PEARL

I am not imagining! There! Is
it a shark?

Before they can stop her, PEARL races down the jetty waving
her arms at JACKSON, screaming.

PEARL CONT'D

Jackson! Get out. Quick!
Jackson!

JACKSON surfaces, hears and sees her waving him in, smiles
and heads back toward shore.

57: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAY

JACKSON smiles at breathless PEARL.

JACKSON

Thought you were just pulling
their legs so you could get away.

PEARL

Nah. Definitely something black
behind ya, no fin.

JACKSON shrugs.

JACKSON

Dunno. Divers checked out.
Straight in the caves after
Crays. Didn't see any reefies.
No seahorses either.

PEARL

Reefies?

JACKSON

Reef sharks. Seahorses must be
lying low with this storm coming.
(indicating scooter)
Want a dink?

PEARL stares. Suddenly timid. She glances at the jetty,
but RED is preoccupied with the flapping fish he's just
landed. JACKSON unzips his tight wetty a little.

PEARL

What'd you think?

JACKSON

Ray or a sea lion, wanna check it
out, or not?

PEARL sees that he's wearing his mother's locket and gets goose bumps. She rubs her arms. JACKSON sees the direction of her gaze.

PEARL
What was your Mum wearing, when
she died?

JACKSON shrugs.

JACKSON
Her black wetty was missing.
Coupla weight belts. You think?

BEAT. PEARL nods, shows him the goosebumps on her arm. Without a word, JACKSON zips up his wetty and hurriedly pulls the scooter back in the water. PEARL dashes in after him, impulsively grabs his waist and they zoom off.

58: EXT. COOGIE BEACH UNDERWATER/ABOVE THE SURFACE DAY

JACKSON and PEARL whiz along underwater, rising often for air. They see a young sea lion, which comes in close and cavorts with them. They duck under again and it swims very close to Jackson's goggles, whiskers twitching, then rolls underneath, studying their undersides playfully. Beaming down at it, JACKSON brings the scooter up for more air.

JACKSON
Reckon it was him?

PEARL beams back at him and takes a big breath.

PEARL
Nup. But he's wicked. Go again!

JACKSON beams back at her as they submerge to cavort more with the sea lion, following as it heads toward shore, but something makes PEARL look over her shoulder, a sudden shiver of cooler water accompanying the spirit of GREAT GRANDMA PEARL, gesturing urgently for PEARL to hurry in.

Seeing the spirit of her Great Grandma gives PEARL such a shock that she gasps and swallows seawater, letting go of JACKSON, arms billowing beside her, her Great Grandmother's necklace falling from the pocket of her boardies, just as JACKSON zooms into the seagrassy shallows.

G.G. Pearl's spirit lingers with the now unconscious PEARL, buoying her up above the curious seahorses as JACKSON wheels the scooter around, looking for PEARL, startling as he sees her strangely suspended under the water but above the seagrass, without seeing G.G. Pearl's spirit. JACKSON drops the scooter, and gallops through the shallows to grab PEARL.

The seahorses see his legs powering toward them and bob away.

59: EXT. COOGIE BEACH JETTY DAY

Red's kicked over can of beer spills over the side of the jetty alongside his dropped fishing line. RED and PISS POT are on their feet, having seen what's happened to PEARL.

RED
She's blacked out. Fuck! I'm
gunna kill that little bastard.

RED thunders down the jetty. PISS POT spots a decent sized reef shark meandering toward shore and yells to his mate.

PISS POT
Shark! Headin' in.

As he runs, RED yells to JACKSON, but he's far from shore.

RED
Shark! Get her out! Shark!

60: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAY

JACKSON is so busy trying to resuscitate PEARL that he doesn't hear RED.

61: EXT. COOGIE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

MARNIE arrives on the crest of the dunes ready for work in her nurse's uniform. She hears RED running and hollering, sees PISS POT pointing, sees the fin, and JACKSON dragging limp PEARL on to the beach.

MARNIE
Oh God no.

MARNIE gasps and runs down the dunes, but she's also far away.

62: EXT. COOGIE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

The shark fin angles back toward the deep as JACKSON pumps Pearl's heart and gives her mouth to mouth.

JACKSON
Come on, come on.

Suddenly Pearl's back, abruptly vomiting seawater.

JACKSON CONT'D

Err, good. Cough it up.
(pats her back, waits)
What happened? See something?

PEARL wipes her mouth, shuddering and struggling for breath. Neither KID has ears for faint O.S. RED hollering.

PEARL

Saw my Great Grandma's ghost.

Jackson's eyes widen.

JACKSON

Wow. What'd she look like?

BEAT.

PEARL

Me.

PEARL gazes longingly back into the shallows, returns to JACKSON.

PEARL CONT'D

Had to be your Mum in with you.
Family can call them up,
'specially if they're wearing
their stuff.

JACKSON looks at PEARL, utterly captivated by knowing someone who is so like him. PEARL feels in her pocket, but her Great Grandmother's necklace is gone.

PEARL CONT'D

Must've fallen out . . . Or
maybe she took it back?

JACKSON

You're amazing.

JACKSON gives PEARL a hug, gazing into the sea over her shoulder. PEARL clings on in defiance eyeing both parents descending upon them. RED arrives first, yanks JACKSON away from PEARL.

RED

(to Jackson)
Get off.
(to Pearl)
You alright? What happened?

MARNIE arrives in time to breathlessly hear Pearl's reply.

PEARL

Took the necklace in like you
said and Great Grandma's ghost
came.

(to Marnie's shocked
face)

I saw her.

MARNIE turns on RED, furious.

MARNIE

Happy? Any longer out to it and
she'd be brain damaged, or taken
by that shark out there. I've
had it with you, Red.

RED

Didn't know she was goin' in.

(shoving Jackson's
chest)

Told you to stay away from her.

PEARL

Leave him! It's not his fault.

MARNIE

(to Red)

Nobody's fault but yours.

RED glares, his tone lowers.

RED

Never took my eyes off her for a
minute, which is more than I can
say. . . .

MARNIE

(interrupting)

Yeah, I know. More than you can
say for me slogging my guts out,
cleaning up shit to try and feed
us, if you don't drink it first!

As they argue, PEARL scans the water and spots the heirloom necklace, mother-of-pearl glinting luminously on the bottom beneath the seahorses in the seagrass. PEARL walks into the knee high water pleased to see the seahorses as she retrieves it. Both parents are too busy fighting to notice.

PEARL

(holding up the necklace
to Jackson)

Yay, found it.

(looking fondly down)

Giddyay, Curly.

JACKSON heads in too, to collect his scooter. Then RED sees them, back in the water.

RED
Get back here you two.

PEARL holds up the necklace.

MARNIE
Have you got a death wish or somethin'?

PISS POT arrives and goes to RED.

PISS POT
Pearl okay?

RED
Fucken mad women. The pair of 'em.

PEARL stands still in the seagrass.

PEARL
I AM NOT MAD!
(holding up necklace)
You shoulda seen it. Me and Great Grandma's ghost in touching distance underwater. Same name, never-ending bond. Amazing! Until I swallowed half the ocean.

As PEARL talks, MARNIE strides into the water, snatching the necklace and pulling PEARL out.

MARNIE
Gimme that.

PEARL
(wrenching free)
Watch the Curlies!

JACKSON drops the scooter and goes to stand by PEARL, but before he can take two steps, RED is upon him, giving him a back-hander, shocking JACKSON into staggering back.

PISS POT
Steady on.

JACKSON holds his face, stunned. PEARL charges off-guard RED, who falls on his arse in the water.

PEARL
Pick on someone your own size.

JACKSON picks up the scooter and hesitates, not wanting to leave PEARL with these two.

Rain begins to fall, thunder claps. PISS POT shakes his head at RED and heads back to the jetty. RED gets up and fronts JACKSON, dripping over him.

RED

Where do you get off, taking a kid who can't swim out on *that*?

JACKSON gapes, looks at PEARL.

PEARL

Thanks, Dad.

JACKSON

Sorry. Didn't know.

But he looks sorrier for PEARL with these two for parents.

MARNIE

Saved her life didn't he? Not his fault.

For a moment, JACKSON looks relieved, until RED takes an angry step toward him again.

RED

(to Jackson)

You know what you can do with your scooter?

This time, JACKSON hefts his underwater scooter and scoots.

JACKSON

School, tomorrow, Pearl.

PEARL nods, excited. JACKSON gives RED the finger. PEARL smiles.

RED

Little bastard.

63: INT. RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT

The storm raging outside is nothing compared to the one raging inside the caravan. Dripping wet, drunk RED dumps his fishing gear on the bed.

MARNIE

Get that slimy shit off my bed.

RED blearily waves her away.

RED

Your bed. You do it. You're the shit cleaner.

MARNIE

I'll get Violet. You're in no
fit state. . .

RED

No you fucken won't.

MARNIE

Yes I fucken will. Wish I'd
never married you. Piss head.

PEARL looks from one to the other in turmoil, imagining...

64: INT. RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT SHARK CONFRONTATION VISION

. . . both parents with shark heads hacking into each
other.

65: INT. RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT

RED belligerently shoves his belongings into a duffle bag.
Grabs his metal detector.

PEARL

Don't go. You're just mad.
Don't leave us here. We'll pack
up too. Go with you. Back to
Aunty's.

MARNIE

We're not going anywhere. Came
here to get you an education and
you're gunna bloody get it.

RED

Blame it on the kid why don't ya.

MARNIE

You leave, your choice. Sooner
the better. Loser.

RED shoulders his metal detector and out!

66: EXT. COOGIE BEACH CARAVAN PARK NIGHT

RED yells out of the ute to MARNIE as he drives off.

RED

She's scared of that school.

PEARL cries in the rain and wants to run after him, but MARNIE has her wrist in a vice like grip, as Red's ute burns rubber.

PEARL
Why'd ya let him go?

MARNIE
Cause he's a . . .
(yelling after Red)
Worthless hunk a shit!

MARNIE pulls PEARL between the caravans to knock on Violet's door.

MARNIE
Giddy, Violet. Can Pearl please stay with you tonight? Red's just pissed off. Need to borrow your car too. I can pay extra, fix you up for the fuel.

VIOLET
Saw it coming, luv. Here.
(handing over car keys)
What are neighbours for?

PEARL
Don't wanna sleep in there. She stinks.

DOLLY appears beside VIOLET just in time to hear this. It makes her giggle and hold her nose.

DOLLY
Reckon!

MARNIE steps on Pearl's toes.

MARNIE
Do as you're told. Can't afford to lose this job now. Back soon as I can.

As MARNIE leaves, PEARL screams in fury, squatting in the mud between the vans, shaking off VIOLET, hating everything, everybody.

67: EXT. COOGIE BEACH CARAVAN PARK NIGHT LATER

SFX: Violet's loud snores.

Clothes are being chucked out of the window of VIOLET's van, followed by DOLLY, silently slipping out. PEARL sticks her head out of the van after DOLLY, hissing.

PEARL

Dolly. Wait. Where you goin'?

DOLLY

Can't sleep with that lawn mower.
Gunna join an all girl band.

PEARL

Whafor?

DOLLY

All men are wankers and I'm sick
of eatin' cabbage.

PEARL

Wait.

PEARL slips out of the window too, and quickly gathers up
Dolly's wet things.

PEARL CONT'D

Can't go without ya clothes. See
this place?
(indicating her caravan)
Man free zone. No cabbage. Got
a guitar too.

DOLLY

Lead on!

Relieved PEARL ushers DOLLY to safety up her caravan steps.

68: INT. RED'S CARAVAN PRE DAWN

DOLLY is happily strumming the guitar on the bed beside
PEARL.

PEARL

Man, your Mum can snore.
Couldn't sleep a bit.
(bites at her cuticles)
First day of school tomorrow.

DOLLY puts the guitar down, fossicks through some pills in
her pocket, and slips PEARL an upper.

DOLLY

Don't need sleep. That'll get
you through.

PEARL looks at the pill in her hand.

PEARL

What's it do? Make ya see stuff,
like petrol? See enough stuff on
my own.

DOLLY

Nah. Just keeps ya awake. I see
stuff too, brilliant things.
(frowns, scratching)
Sometimes creepy crawly things.

PEARL

Euw. Seen a few sharks.

PEARL pockets the pill.

DOLLY

Know my dad? Course you don't
cause he's dead. Died when I was
the same age as you.

DOLLY pulls a syringe out of her bag.

DOLLY CONT'D

Don't get fucked up, eh.

PEARL eyes DOLLY, the syringe, and the pill in her hand.

69: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAWN

PEARL O.S.

Euw, hate needles. Does it hurt?

Exhausted MARNIE opens the door and taken in the trail of
wet clothes and DOLLY shooting up in her bed, avidly
watched by sleepless, bug-eyed PEARL.

MARNIE sees furious silent red as she gingerly removes the
syringe from supine Dolly's arm, wraps it in a tea-towel,
undoes the tourniquet, and drops the tea-towel in her
handbag.

MARNIE

Never touch a needle, Pearl.
Could kill ya. Where's Violet?

PEARL

Next door. Snoring.

Without another word, furious MARNIE pulls spaced out DOLLY
to her feet and drags her out to Violet's car.

DOLLY

Owww, leave meeeee, honey bee.

PEARL

Don't hurt her! Where you goin'?
I saved her. Can I come? Not
gunna die is she?

MARNIE

Stay here, taking her to detox.
She'll be right. Have breakfast
and get your school stuff on.

70: EXT. RED'S CARAVAN DAWN

MARNIE

(shoving Dolly in the
back of the sedan)
Back in time to take ya.

PEARL

Don' wanna go to school.

MARNIE gets in the driver's seat and sighs, exhausted.

MARNIE

Please. Just do as your told.
Hard enough as it is.

Tense, tired PEARL watches MARNIE drive off at speed with
DOLLY lolling in the back.

71: EXT. COOGEE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAWN

PEARL, in her school uniform, is half way taking off her
heavily laden new school bag so she can get in the
passenger side of the car, when VIOLET makes a furious bee
line for MARNIE in the driver's seat.

VIOLET

Get out of my car. You had no
right to take Dolly to hospital
without my permission.

MARNIE

Every right, if I find her
shooting up in front of my twelve
year old in my caravan! Get in
Pearl.

VIOLET wrenches the driver's door open.

VIOLET

Get out, I said.

PEARL can't take it. She drops the bag and stands beside the car, hands over her ears.

PEARL
Not listening . . . Not
listening.

MARNIE gets out and throws the keys in the dust, furious.

MARNIE
Lucky I didn't take her to the
Police.

72: INT. TAXI OUTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL DAY

MARNIE arrives at the school with silent, sad, stressed
PEARL in a taxi.

MARNIE
I'll get a car and meet ya right
here after school, okay?

PEARL nods, distracted and intimidated by the sheer amount of KIDS going in, most excited to reunite with their friends. Some look into the taxi to see who's in it, spotting PEARL.

MARNIE CONT'D
And if I'm late for any reason,
just wait here.
(to the taxi driver)
Can you switch it off while I
take her in? Won't take long.

TAXI DRIVER
Can't do that. Sorry. Have to
leave it running.

PEARL sees JACKSON and jumps out of the taxi.

PEARL
I'll be right. There's Jackson.
See ya after school.

Before MARNIE can do anything about it, PEARL has sprinted to JACKSON, with her bag of books bouncing on her back. JACKSON smiles, pleased to see her.

MARNIE sees PEARL has accidentally left her lunch money on the seat. She grabs it, calls out the window to PEARL, but PEARL is across the courtyard by now and can't hear her.

MARNIE
Forgot your lunch money! Pearl!

TAXI DRIVER

That's how they make friends
bumming food, learnin' how to
share. Where to, luv?

MARNIE is wrenched about going, but money's tight and the meter's running. She eyes the meter, sees JACKSON escorting PEARL toward the front office, and sighs, stretched to breaking point.

MARNIE

Know any good cheap car yards?

73: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

Nervous PEARL just about clings to JACKSON as he takes her toward the main office.

JACKSON

How come you came in a taxi?

PEARL

Dad pissed off, took the car.

JACKSON

What? For good?

PEARL just gives him a sad nod that says it all. JACKSON gives her hand a reassuring squeeze, which is not lost on his two friends, JOSH and SIMON, who rush up.

JOSH

Hey, J.

SIMON

Who's ya girlfriend?

JACKSON and PEARL drop hands like hot potatoes.

JACKSON

(embarrassed)

This is my *friend*, Pearl.

JOSH

Friends don't hold hands, dude.

SIMON

Too true.

JACKSON turns toward PEARL but she's taken off, rushing and blushing headlong into the main office without him.

74: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY LATER

Pearl's form TEACHER, MISS KINGSLEY, leads PEARL to her form class through crowds of mostly older KIDS, some GIRLS taking delight in ragging a short, nervous NEW GIRL, JACKI.

REBECCA
Nice uniform.

SONYA
Did ya Mummy make it too big?

MISS KINGSLEY stops.

MISS KINGSLEY
I see you two are up to your usual antics. Move on, if you don't want to find yourselves in detention.

Rebecca and Sonya's attention focuses ferociously on PEARL, which PEARL finds excruciating. The school siren rings for all to go in. Relieved JACKI escapes. PEARL jumps. REBECCA and SONYA laugh, sure of some sport with PEARL later, when Kingsley's not around, which is not lost on MISS KINGSLEY.

MISS KINGSLEY CONT'D
Move on I said.

As REBECCA and SONYA saunter off, chuckling back at PEARL, amplify the siren sound from Pearl's POV to sound like. . .

75: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY SCHOOL STRESS PERCEPTION

. . . Alarm bells. Every kid in the courtyard turns and closes in, surrounding and staring at PEARL with cruel intent. No prison outfits or City or Country written on their chests this time, just a barrage of alarm bells and visual intimidation.

76: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

PEARL shuts her eyes and puts her hands over her ears, surprising MISS KINGSLEY into removing one of Pearl's hands from her ears.

MISS KINGSLEY
You alright?

The siren ceases. PEARL snaps out of it.

PEARL

Not used to sirens, 'cept
ambulances and fireys.

MISS KINGSLEY

(smiling kindly down)
Awful aren't they? You get used
to it.

They arrive at the classroom. MISS KINGSLEY enters. PEARL baulks at the door, then spots JACKSON within and rushes to grab the desk beside him.

77: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM DAY

Jackson's mates smirk knowingly at them, making PEARL uncomfortable and unable to really pay attention to the induction talk the TEACHER is giving.

MISS KINGSLEY

Welcome to your form class for
year eight. Form time's for
gathering yourself, talking about
how you're going in the rest of
your classes. Time out to make
sure you're settling in.

Pearl's seat is cold. PEARL adjusts her shirt to not feel it. She opens the desk to put her stuff in and has vertigo, imagining . . .

78: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM DAY CLASSROOM FANTASY

Pearl's desk now appears cavernous to her, just about swallowing her up. In slow motion she struggles to close it and drops it, making a bang and calling attention to herself from all the other kids and the TEACHER, who now looks eight foot tall. There are smirky smiles and whispers, much shuffling of books and settling in. PEARL closes her eyes and holds her breath, wishing to be home, far from here. She takes a hurried sip from her water sipper bottle and shoves it in her pocket.

Sound segue: The induction speech takes on a CB radio tone.

MISS KINGSLEY V.O. CB TONE

Settle down kids, tune in.

79: INT. ROADHOUSE DAY FLASHBACK

PEARL sits before the little black radio box on the bench.

SCHOOL OF RADIO TEACHER V.O.
Nullarbor Pearl, you tuned in?
Over.

PEARL
Yep. Over.

MISS KINGSLEY V.O. CB TONE
We're going to introduce
ourselves now. Just your name
and what school you last went to,
thanks. We'll start with you,
Pearl. Pearl's had a very
different schooling experience to
most of us.

PEARL is jerked back into awareness by . . .

80: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM DAY

. . . JACKSON elbowing her. PEARL gasps, suddenly
remembering to breathe. The still eight foot tall TEACHER
rapidly shrinks as she looks upon gaping PEARL expectantly.

PEARL
Nullarbor Pearl. Over.

Everybody laughs, except the TEACHER, even JACKSON, who
thinks Pearl's joking. PEARL startles, rabbit in the
spotlight with all eyes on her, and seems to wet herself in
terror. A little puddle appears on the floor.

The KIDS recoil and giggle.

VARIOUS KIDS
Euw. Gross. Pissed herself!

Mortified PEARL rushes to the door, pulling the leaky water
bottle from her pocket, which doesn't stop the kids ragging
her.

VARIOUS KIDS
Bit late. Piss pants. Haven't
done that since kindy!

PEARL runs headlong from the room amid riotous laughter.

MISS KINGSLEY V.O.
Quiet please. All of you.
(calling after her)
Pearl?

81: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

But PEARL doesn't know where the toilet block is and it's too late anyway. She angrily slams the sipper down, checks her wet skirt, hiding in the trees, and finds Dolly's upper pill in her other pocket. Without hesitation she drops the pill, then sinks to the ground to see what happens.

82: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY OVAL STRESS FANTASY

MISS KINGSLEY, now even bigger, comes looking for PEARL. Her voice now sounds like a giant drill in Pearl's head.

MISS KINGSLEY

Pearl? I'm sorry about the kids.
I shouldn't have made you first.
Come back in, okay?

PEARL

(strangled and fast,
sweating)
No. Please.

MISS KINGSLEY

Are you feeling unwell? Would
you like me to call your parents?

PEARL

No please. Just need to the
bathroom.

MISS KINGSLEY

Over there, see? I'll talk to
them.

PEARL struggles to her feet, then sprints off, full pelt. MISS KINGSLEY looks on with concern.

83: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

PEARL, holding a wad of toilet paper, rushes back to the classroom, but pulls up abruptly, struggling to get the guts to go in. She lingers outside, out of sight of the doorway, listening to the TEACHER, admonishing the KIDS.

MISS KINGSLEY

I don't want to hear another word
about this when Pearl comes back.
She's never been to a school
before, and will need all your
support settling in.

VARIOUS KIDS

And a nappy. Is she retarded?
She gunna clean it up?

MRS KINGSLEY

That's enough. It's just water!

Totally mortified PEARL turns to the school bags outside and in a silent frenzy rips up all the form's lunches, throwing many in the bin. The siren sounds again, startling her into running for the open space of the oval.

JACKSON is the first out the door, baulks at the sight of the lunch carnage, then runs after PEARL, yelling.

JACKSON

Pearl! Wait!

84: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL AND ACROSS THE ROAD DAY

Charged with the upper pill, PEARL sprints fast across the oval. JACKSON races after her full pelt, but she's too fast, already across the road before he reaches the school perimeter. He pulls up, yelling.

JACKSON

Wait! Come back.

PEARL screams shrilly back.

PEARL

Not staying here so everyone can
laugh at me. Going back to the
bush.

A bus passes between them and stops. PEARL leaps on it as JACKSON crosses the road. The bus moves off. Stressed JACKSON realises PEARL is on it, pauses, then races back.

85: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

JACKSON struggles through the chaos of irate KIDS and lunch carnage, pushing through them to the TEACHER.

VARIOUS KIDS

At least you can eat yours.
Mine's in the bin. Bloodie
loonie.

MISS KINGSLEY

Quiet. Please. I'll need some
of you here to clean this up and
the rest to help me find Pearl.

JACKSON

She's taken off. On a bus.

MISS KINGSLEY moves swiftly toward JACKSON.

86: EXT. FREMANTLE STREETS DAY

PEARL is chucked off the bus at the next stop.

BUS DRIVER

No pay no ride, sorry.

87: EXT. COOGIE BEACH CARAVAN PARK DAY

PISS POT is hammering on Marnie's locked caravan door, holding a cordless phone. VIOLET arrives back in her car, overhearing.

PISS POT

Marnie, wake up. School's on the phone.

(into phone)

Sorry, she's not here. Or she's not answering.

(listens)

No mobile that I know of. Nah, gone bush. I'll leave a note on the door if ya like. Best I can do.

PISS POT hangs up with the press of a button and asks VIOLET.

PISS POT CONT'D

Seen Marnie? Pearl's racked off from school.

VIOLET

Famous Doll trick that one. I know where they hang out. Want me to have a look? Marnie'll be lookin' for a car, I reckon.

PISS POT

Ta. Violet. I'll ring round.

VIOLET

Doin' it for the kid, not her. Meddlin' bitch.

PISS POT shrugs, heading off.

PISS POT
Whatever. Red's me mate.

88: EXT. SHOPPING STRIP DAY

VIOLET is getting out of her car when she sees PEARL going up to a stranger outside the shops, being ignored as she begs for bucks. VIOLET creeps up and grabs PEARL, scaring the living daylights out of her. PEARL is full of anxiety, in a cold sweat.

VIOLET
Giddy, luv. What you doin'?
Waggin'?

PEARL looks like she is going to run, but Violet's grip is firm.

VIOLET CONT'D
Not so fast. You look sick. Did
Dolly give ya somethin'?

PEARL nods, too freaked out to lie.

VIOLET CONT'D
Come on. We'll go find ya Mum.

VIOLET puts an arm around Pearl's shoulder, leading her to the car. Overwrought PEARL allows herself to be led like a lamb.

89: INT. HOSPITAL ROOM DAY

A very pale PEARL ends up in a two bed room with sheepish DOLLY - both on drips. MARNIE sits beside her, and VIOLET beside DOLLY. MARNIE holds a bucket in case PEARL is sick again, PEARL retches, but can't bring anything more up.

DOLLY
You'd think she'd have nothing
left by now.

VIOLET
Thanks to you.

PEARL slides to the floor and cries.

PEARL
Don't wanna stay here. Don't
wanna go to school. Want Dad and
Aunty.

MARNIE slides down beside her, and strokes her hair.

MARNIE

There's a phone box in the lobby.
Soon as they let us, we'll give
Aunty a call, eh?

PEARL nods, momentarily appeased.

90: INT. RED'S CARAVAN NIGHT

Marnie's O.S. snores permeate the annexe where PEARL and JACKSON sit whispering.

PEARL

Can't go back after what I did.
They'll hate me. Forever.

JACKSON

Why'd you do it?

PEARL

Why'd you think?

JACKSON

(smiling)
Cause they're bastards?

PEARL frowns.

PEARL

Yeah.

JACKSON

Josh and Simon think you're
brilliant. Best stunt they've
seen in years. The rest'll get
over it.

PEARL momentarily brightens, but quickly sobers again.

PEARL

I'll just do something else.

JACKSON

Looking forward to that. You in
a hurry to get expelled?

BEAT. PEARL nods, looking dangerously close to tears.

PEARL

Yeah. Need to find Dad, but Mum
won't let me.

BEAT. JACKSON doesn't know what to say. He sees the hurt in her, but can't fix it. Quietly, he takes her hand.

JACKSON

If anyone says anything bad to you or about you ever again, I'll fill their face in.

For the first time that day, PEARL smiles.

91: INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM DAY

Everybody looks at PEARL and JACKSON as they enter form. PEARL freezes, then blurts out.

PEARL

Sorry I ripped up your lunches.

Looking down, PEARL rushes to her seat.

MISS KINGSLEY

Thank-you, Pearl. That took a lot of courage. You will attend detention every afternoon for the rest of this week. For the rest of you, this matter is over. I hope I am making myself clear.

JACKSON scowls, raises his hand.

JACKSON

Toilet, Miss.

MISS KINGSLEY

Excused.

PEARL anxiously watches JACKSON leave. SIMON catches the rebellious look JACKSON shoots him, and elbows JOSH.

MISS KINGSLEY CONT'D

So, how's everyone else settling in? How was your first day?
(smiling at Pearl)
They all got free lunch from the canteen, so that was a good start.

JOSH and SIMON look over to PEARL.

JOSH

Legend.

SIMON

Cool.

Before MRS KINGSLEY can continue, all hear suspicious unzipping ripping then smashing noises outside and JACKSON, muttering away.

JACKSON O.S.
Bit harsh. First week in
detention.

92: EXT. HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

MISS KINGSLEY rushes to the door and catches JACKSON red-handed, doing exactly what PEARL did to everyone's lunches yesterday. All the KIDS flock to the windows and door, stunned. JOSH and SIMON, Jackson's mates crack up.

MISS KINGSLEY
What do you think you're doing?

JACKSON
(flashing a look at
Pearl)
Same as Pearl yesterday.

JOSH
Way to go, dude.

MISS KINGSLEY
Back inside, this minute.

SIMON
Suck it up.

MISS KINGSLEY
May I ask why?

JACKSON
She'll need someone to keep her
company in detention.

JOSH and SIMON cheer and whistle.

MISS KINGSLEY
Detention granted. And yard duty
every lunch time.

JOSH
Bit harsh.

SIMON
Reckon.

MISS KINGSLEY
For the three of you.

BEAT. JACKSON, SIMON and JOSH look at each other.

PEARL
Can I have yard duty too, Miss?

When the class laughs this time, PEARL laughs too, surprised to feel herself accepted as an outlaw. MISS KINGSLEY sees this and struggles not to smile.

MISS KINGSLEY
Granted.

93: INT. MARNIE'S NEW OLD BOMB CAR ON FREEMANTLE STS DAY

PEARL
Detention's fun.

MARNIE, driving in her nurse's uniform, is a bit peeved to hear this.

MARNIE
Coulda told me they were lockin'
you up all afternoon.

PEARL
Would of if you had a phone.

MARNIE
Next thing on my list. Just
behave tonight, okay? I'm late
as it is. Can't have another
night off.

MARNIE hands PEARL a small parcel, postmarked Coolgardie.

MARNIE CONT'D
This came today, from your dad.

PEARL rips it open. Inside is a jewellery box with a gold heart locket inside and a picture of RED inside that. There is a small piece of paper folded inside that. PEARL reads it and reverently folds it up again.

MARNIE CONT'D
What's it say?

PEARL
You dun wanna know.

MARNIE
Yes I do.

PEARL
Says sorry treasure, not your
fault, Dad and a couple of
kisses.

MARNIE
Kisses? Bastard. Fine words
coming from that hunk a piss.
(MORE)

MARNIE (cont'd)
No address I notice. Wouldn't
want to have to pay child
endowment.

PEARL silently puts on the locket. Her words come out a
bit strangled.

PEARL
He's not coming back is he?

MARNIE
Don't hold your breath.

They drive on in silence.

94: INT. RED'S CARAVAN DAWN

PEARL wakes early, at sunrise, wearing Red's locket, puffy
eyed from crying, surrounded by used tissues and feeling
very low as her predicament dawns.

PEARL looks inside the locket to gaze at Red's photo.
Fresh tears well in her eyes, but she stifles them.

PEARL creeps out past VIOLET snoring in a tiny corner of
Marnie's bed, with DOLLY spread-eagled beside her.

95: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAWN

PEARL walks over the dunes and sits on the edge of the
water for a while, making an important decision.

Then she walks determinedly into the sea in her pyjamas and
does her best to dog paddle out, but she still hasn't
mastered swimming and struggles to get far.

She strikes out and tries again, but it's no good. Heart
thumping, upset PEARL stands panting in the seagrass. She
smacks the surface of the water.

PEARL
Can't even drown.

96: EXT. COOGIE BEACH UNDERWATER DAWN

An enormously pregnant MR CURLY is watching PEARL. MRS
CURLY sees him and does her greeting dance, which he tries
to reciprocate, but he's twirling strangely, in the first
throws of labour.

The first tiny replica of him appears from his belly
button.

PEARL pushes her head in and kicks off, determined to try again, then pulls up in shock as she sees straining CURLY.

More baby seahorses are popping out, astounding her. They float around her floppy at first, some cling to the seagrass.

PEARL is utterly amazed and astounded, it lifts her spirits, breaking the well of pain inside her.

White wings twirl in the air above the surface. A seagull dives almost snapping up straining CURLY. PEARL rears up screaming underwater, amid expulsions of air.

97: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAWN

PEARL stands in the water screaming.

PEARL
Get lost, bastards. They're my
babies and you're not getting
'em. Go, shoo, *piss off!*

PEARL pushes her face in to see how Mr Curly's going, but the seagulls are wheeling back.

PEARL CONT'D
Get! They're alive and so am I!

MARNIE rushes over the sand dune, alarmed by the sound of PEARL screaming, still in her nurse's uniform from night shift.

MARNIE
Pearl! Get out! Now!

PEARL waves her arms at the seagulls, ignoring MARNIE.

PEARL
Bah! Bugger off!

MARNIE
(rushing down the dune)
Did you take something again?
Get out I said!

PEARL
Leave me.

MARNIE rushes straight into the water in her nurses uniform, shoes and stockings, trying to yank PEARL out, but PEARL shoves her back before she can get close. Hard.

PEARL CONT'D

Didn't take anything and I'm not imagining. Look out! Mr Curly's having his babies.

MARNIE

What?

PEARL

(gesturing at the water)
See for yourself. Not coming out 'til they're all safe.

98: EXT. COOGIE BEACH UNDERWATER DAWN

MARNIE and PEARL push their heads under together. MARNIE is amazed. She and PEARL look at each other underwater, their cheeks fat with withheld air.

Some baby seahorses curl their tails around loose strands of Pearl's hair, delighting them both. Very gently, so as not to hurt them, PEARL slides them from her hair and rises for air.

99: EXT. COOGIE BEACH DAWN

MARNIE rises beside PEARL. Disgruntled seagulls squawk on shore. PEARL throws her arms up to keep them there.

PEARL

And stay there!

MARNIE

I've never seen anything like it, Pearl. They're amazing.

PEARL juts her chin.

PEARL

That's the Dad under there, doing all the hard work. Way to go, Mr Curly. What a legend.

BEAT. MARNIE looks into Pearl's eyes.

MARNIE

We're both staying.
(eyeing the deep)
You look out for them, I'll look out for sharks.

PEARL is chuffed about this. It shows on her face. MARNIE notices. MARNIE turns toward the deep, her back nestled against Pearl's.

MARNIE
(almost in tears)
I may not be ya dad. . .
(voice quavering)
. . . but I'm here, and I will
always be here.

PEARL pulls Marnie's arm so she can look in her face.

MARNIE CONT'D
Put in for day shift today.

PEARL sees love and pain entwined in her MUM and is finally able to accept a hug, and hug her fiercely back. The End

Additional Materials to Enigmatic Pearls

Appendix D: Pilbara Pearl DVD

Appendix D Pilbara Pearl DVD is unavailable online. If you wish to obtain a copy please contact adt@murdoch.edu.au