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ABSTRACT

The Australian landscape has a long Gothic history, as Gerry Turcotte writes: “long before the fact of Australia was ever confirmed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque space, a land peopled by monsters” (10). This grotesque space is brought into focus through the films, the graphic novel, and the videogame of the *Mad Max* franchise and transposed onto this landscape are survivors and remnants of society, many of whom are coded as disabled. These characters are set against the omnipresent Australian landscape, an unwelcoming land that opposes their very existence, yet whose presence compliments it. This paper will focus on the literary understanding of disability to explore the preponderance of physical differences in the *Mad Max* franchise. It will focus primarily on the latest releases, dealing with the *Fury Road* portion of the series, where living with physical impairment is a banal reality. This paper will ask whether the Gothic landscape of the Australian Outback in *Mad Max* codes the characters as disabled, or whether it is the able bodied characters that are outside the norm, as well as considering the positive (or negative) implications of representations of disability in the franchise.

KEYWORDS:

Mad Max, Australian Landscape, Australian Gothic, *Fury Road*, Disability, Videogame, Film, Graphic Novel

The Australian landscape has a long Gothic history: Gerry Turcotte writes that “long before the fact of Australia was ever confirmed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque space, a land peopled by monsters” (10). This landscape, brutal and unforgiving in many of its depictions in fiction, is more than simply a setting through which a story unfolds, but is often represented almost as a character in its own right, bringing the possibility of madness, depravity, and loss in its depictions in film and literature. As an audio-visual medium, Australian Gothic is a “recognisable group [of films] that owe part of their stylistic, narrative and thematic construction to the tradition of the Gothic,” and, while not a dominant genre, the Gothic in Australia has been a consistent presence “since European settlement,” according to Turcotte amongst others (Gillard and Thomas, Turcotte 11). The colonized history of Australia, the “fears and themes that are endemic to the [...] experience: isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown” are ably communicated through the Gothic, which emphasizes the “horror uncertainty and desperation of the human experience,” a concept that author’s trace in the landscape of Australia itself (11).

It is into this tradition that the *Mad Max* franchise belongs. Beginning with *Mad Max* (Miller) in 1979, the films that

make up the franchise to date and the graphic novel, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, Sexton and Lathouris), all take place in a speculative post-apocalyptic version of Australia. Across these connected narratives, and transposed onto this landscape, are the survivors, remnants, and descendants of contemporary society, many of whom the viewer codes as disabled, following the definition David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder offer in *Narrative Prosthesis* when they state that “whereas the ‘able’ body has no definitional core... the disabled body surfaces as any body being capable of being narrated as ‘outside the norm’” (49). These characters are set against the omnipresent Australian landscape, an unwelcoming land that opposes their very existence, yet whose presence compliments it, offering an ambiguous understanding of disability in the franchise. This paper will focus on the preponderance of physical differences in the *Mad Max* franchise, predominantly the 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the videogame *Mad Max*, and the graphic novel of the same name, which are set in a landscape where physical difference is a banal reality, rather than a deviation from the norm, exploring the relationship between these characters and the landscape of the post-apocalyptic Australian landscape. The latest film in the franchise appears to present impairment in an optimistic manner, and this paper will focus on how this is shown in order to ascer-

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tain whether this is the case, and whether this major Hollywood blockbuster does, in fact, portray impairment and disability in a way that is progressive and inclusive.

AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

Australian Gothic has been a constant presence in cinema and fiction, “an off-centre, almost intangible element of sinister peculiarity in Australian productions,” with a “small yet consistent flow of malevolence and disorder that is never far from the surface in certain Australian productions” (Gillard and Thomas). Australian Gothic uses the landscape to depict horror, with one of the precursors to the Gothic in Australian cinema, *Walkabout* (Roeg), using the landscape as a source of menace for its central characters. Critic Roger Ebert describes scenes in the film where director Nicolas Roeg “shows the creatures of the outback: lizards, scorpions, snakes, kangaroos, birds,” existing in a violent ecosystem, where “they make a living by eating each other,” highlighting the “subversive and malevolent side” of the Australian landscape, and the beings that inhabit it (Ebert). The opening (post credit) scene of *Mad Max: Fury Road* brings this intertextual reference to mind, as a two-headed lizard approaches Max, who catches and eats it raw. These are creatures, the opening of the *Fury Road*, like *Walkabout* states, who exist in a harsh world, and there are no sentimental representations of them in these films. The history of Australian Gothic film is evident throughout the *Mad Max* franchise; for example, the 1974 film *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Weir), which provides an even more “grotesque vision of rural Australia,” uses the motor vehicle as a form of Gothic monster, and the protagonist’s journey across the outback is shown as a series of brutal and frightening experiences that lead to the final act of the film, a narrative echoed in the *Mad Max* franchise, and there are gestures to the film in the *Mad Max* franchise through director George Miller’s use of the same type of car that features in *The Car That Ate Paris* for the Buzzard tribe (Image 1) (Gillard and Thomas).



Image 1: *Mad Max: Fury Road* screen shot, showing the Buzzard Vehicle.

Australia was coded as a Gothic place at the initial point of its colonisation, when the First Fleet arriving at Port Jackson saw rock outcrops suggestive of “the grand ruins of the Stately Gothic edifices” (Turcotte 12). Turcotte suggests that, in the early days of the colonization of Australia, the

anxieties of the convict system, the terrors of isolated stations at the mercy of vagrants and nature, the fear of starvation or of becoming lost in the bush, are distinctly Gothic in effect – and dare one say, uniquely, originally, Australian. (13)

The theme of colonization “lends itself” to the Gothic, “inasmuch as each emerges out of a condition of deracination and uncertainty, of the familiar transposed into unfamiliar space”—and “can often locate itself at the outskirts of civilization, its protagonists lost or disoriented or abandoned” (Turcotte 1, Gelder and Weaver 5). The landscape of an Australian Gothic text is more than simply a setting upon which the drama of a narrative unfolds; it almost has an agency of its own, bringing with it shades of corruption, defeat, and insanity as human characters become defined in relation to this unwelcoming, foreboding landscape: a landscape that opposes the presence of the humans trying to survive in it. This can be seen in films such as *Wolf Creek* (McClellan), which uses its setting to embody “a cold and emotionless natural world that doesn’t care if you are dying,” and where violence is visited upon the unwary traveller who does not respect the landscape and the danger they are in by simply entering it (Weaver 87). The Australian Outback in these narratives is portrayed as a grotesque space, which is disturbing, perverse, and malevolent, and where the ill-equipped traveler attempts to integrate themselves into the landscape with no success. The novel *Wake in Fright* (Cook), telling the story of a school teacher stranded in a small outback town with no money, also invokes the Gothic, through its description of the Australian Outback as “the silent centre of Australia, the Dead Heart” (Cook 6). This is an apt description of a landscape that is frequently portrayed as grotesque, nightmarish, and deadly, and moreover, one that lends itself perfectly to the post-apocalyptic, and increasingly Gothic, franchise of *Mad Max*.

MAD MAX ROCKATANSKY AND AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

Landscape, as the precis above shows, is a recurring theme in many Australian films, but its malevolence is captured best in Australian Gothic, and it is in this tradition that *Mad Max* belongs, offering a distinctive depiction of the Gothic landscape as it exists in Australia and drawing on the Gothic’s unique position in Australian literature and film. As Susan Dermody notes in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*,

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It would be impossible to survey the field of recent Australian film melodrama without mentioning the important position of those errant road-movie car-crash films, those heroic explorations of ‘the monstrous masculine’ perhaps, *Mad Max*, *Mad Max 2* (the Road Warrior) and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. (250)

Jonathan Rayner, writing in 2005, states that “among the most successful Gothic films are components of the *Mad Max* trilogy,” (99), and while the franchise as a whole “adopts the features of the apocalyptic paradigm—destruction, the promise of a new world, the language and imagery of Biblical discourse—[it] subverts each aspect, ultimately presenting an Australia that is as far from the apocalyptic ideal as possible” (Rayner 99, Weaver 88). It is “the reliance on the characterization and narrative themes of the western that connects the *Mad Max* films with the Australian Gothic’s depiction of horror in the rural landscape,” especially as “one of the features of Australian Gothic is the way in which it freely borrows from popular genres and then revises and parodies their conventions” (Rayner 99, Cornea 133). Taking place in a near future speculative version of Australia, the *Mad Max* franchise presents a landscape becoming progressively more dystopian, ruined, and grotesque as it progresses through the four films (to date), the videogame, and the graphic novel. Presented as an alternate—for the time of its release—present, this narrative is set in a contiguous future, lending itself to the Gothic in its depiction of the wasteland as a postmodern reworking of the ruin motif of the Gothic mode.

The ruin of the Australian landscape is an integral part of the *Mad Max* franchise’s Gothic structure, and this can be seen across all of the films, the videogame, and the graphic novel. The first film, which takes place prior to the wide scale conflict that brings about the apocalypse, presents a landscape with green grass and some vegetation still visible, but, by the time of the third film, *Beyond Thunderdome*, this has all but disappeared, existing only in small, hidden parts of the desert, such as in the crevasse where the children live. *Mad Max: Fury Road* takes this ruin further, including the “water wars” as part of its growing backstory. Scenes throughout the franchise gesture to the harsh, unforgiving, and devastated status of Australia, with the remnants of the past scattered across the landscape, in varying states of decay. The videogame *Mad Max*, which is set within the same timeframe as *Fury Road* (and which will be referred to as the videogame, to avoid any confusion), allows the player to explore the landscape at will, and to see, first hand, the decay that has—and is—taking place. This includes buildings that the player (controlling Max) can explore (some of which are buried under the sand) and an arid, dried up sea bed and harbour, which leads to a dead coral reef. These structures, some towering above the ground, are so

fragile that Max destroys them if he drives into this dead reef, reminding the viewer of the ruins of the grand castles and houses that the Gothic frequently features, as well as being reminiscent of the Gothic ruins that Turcotte speaks of and which were cited earlier. Drought has turned the once fertile (and inhabited) land to desert, which obliterates and conceals the past, refuting the presence of hope and any optimism for a progressive future. This is highlighted in *Fury Road* through the depiction of the mythical “Green Place,” which Max (Tom Hardy) and Furiosa (Charlize Theron) are searching for and that they unknowingly travel through, not realizing that the ruined, dead trees they pass are the remnants of this utopian place – it has become another site of ruin and destruction, the living, breathing heart of Australia replaced by death.

As well as the loss of green in the form of vegetation, the red of the sand, a colour frequently used to symbolize danger, works to embody a fear of the Australian landscape itself in *Mad Max*. This fear is repeatedly articulated in *Fury Road*. There is, for example, an extensive scene of destruction as the characters enter a huge red sandstorm that destroys indiscriminately. Furthermore, when Furiosa is stricken with grief at her discovery of the destruction of the green place, she is shown dwarfed against the red background, the sandy dunes refuting the presence of the greenery that has been lost. This semiotic coding is carried across media containing the franchise: the videogame features scenes of the sun setting over the landscape, crumbling buildings and dead coral reefs become silhouetted in the coming darkness, a darkness seemingly limned with blood from the setting sun. This places the franchise, at the “dead heart” of Australian Gothic: this incarnation of the landscape offers no hope, only a sense of desperation and defeat that emanates from the sand, rock, and decayed buildings, with an unyielding impression of doom that seems to be rooted in the vast, empty landscape itself. The backdrop of the *Mad Max* franchise, then, is explicitly coded as “a hostile, barren, dangerous environment,” with each episode of the franchise, showing it as being more so, the loss of the life supporting vegetation, and the red of the resultant landscape a reflection of the danger, despair, and downfall of both the land itself, and its inhabitants (Beeton 24).

Max himself maintains the understanding of *Mad Max* as a Gothic franchise: tropes of the Gothic include the wanderer in a perpetual exile and the ongoing journey he (in this instance) is making, lost in a decaying world and is “typically composed of several narrative fragments that reflect the disorder the wanderer feels” (Tichelaar 10). This is a valid description of Max and his ongoing journeys, where he “suffers pangs of guilt and is...often eternally damned” (Tichelaar 1). After the events of the first film –

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the murder of his wife and child – Max becomes nomadic, which allows him to function as the narrator of other character's stories, which in turn allows the films, graphic novel, and videogame to relate the lives of the survivors trying to exist in this cruel and demanding landscape, characters which are part of the ruin that the franchise highlights.

IMPAIRMENT IN MAD MAX

Amongst the ruin, destruction, and drought of the Australian landscape in the Mad Max franchise, there exists the remnants of society—a society that is physically changed by the ruined world they try to survive in. Firstly, it is important to note that there is a difference between disability and impairment (where impairment is “an injury, illness or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a loss or difference in physiological or psychological function” and disability is “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers”), and the construction of normalcy, which Lennard Davis ably represents in the opening chapter of *The Disability Studies Reader* (Northern Officers Group). In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the representations are primarily of the impaired body, as opposed to the social and environmental barriers that denote disability in these definitions. Impairment and disability are seen in the original *Mad Max* films, most notably through the dual characters Master and Blaster in *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, and include a representation of how the two characters together circumvent their individual disabilities to become powerful, but it is in the most recent and interconnected incarnations, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, its prelude graphic novel, and the videogame that its presence is made explicit. The Gothic, according to the *Encyclopaedia of the Gothic*, makes “frequent use of disability as a marker for intense alterity,” and, in the most recent narratives, impairment and disability are shown as a consequence of the world the characters exist in, where variations in the human (and animal) body are reflections of the impairment of the landscape, which are personified in physical forms of the people that inhabit it (Hughes et al. 183). Melinda Hall writes that, “disability studies teaches us that horror uses disability because physical difference can signal moral decay or the lack of a moral sense,” and, while *Mad Max* is not a horror franchise, this is a truth that can be seen in the portrayal of the antagonist characters in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Hall). Immortan Joe's prosthesis, for example, gives him the visage of a monster (Image 2): Joe's pale skin, white hair, and the prominent teeth fixed to the mask—alongside the fact that it is capable of opening—present a devil like appearance and functions to show his strength and assumed immortality.



Image 2: Immortan Joe with his prosthetic mask.

This film does not simply view impairment as a symbol of moral deterioration and lack, as this might suggest, however. Instead, it depicts most of the inhabitants of the post-apocalyptic society as having some form of impairment, whether they are portrayed as being “good” or “bad” characters, countering the notion, as Rosemarie Garland-Thompson writes, “of physical disability as an absolute, inferior state and a personal misfortune” (Garland-Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 6). This is not to say, however, that the franchise views impairment and disability wholly in a constructive light, but rather complicates and problematizes how it is represented. “Nearly every culture,” disability scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder write in their seminal text, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, “views disability as a problem in need of a solution,” a statement whose validity is upheld in the franchise (48). It is particularly evident in the presence of the brides, “the purest and healthiest women” (Miller et al. 29) that can be found in this diseased world (this term is used deliberately to invoke the concept of the landscape being altered by a toxin that has contaminated it and is destroying it in the same way as happens with the human body), and who are used to try to produce a “normal” healthy male heir for Joe (Miller et al. 29). The depiction of hostile characters such as Immortan Joe and his children being physically disabled is presented in a grotesque fashion—alongside Joe's mask, his eldest son, Rictus Erectus, displays evidence of cognitive disability, and Corpus Colossus is described as being a man in a child's body (Miller et al. 29). This, too, shows Mitchell and Snyder's earlier cited statement to be true, and yet, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the videogame, and the graphic novel all appear to show impairment in an affirmative light, leading to reviews that state that Furiosa in *Fury Road* “presents ability in a realistic, beautiful way”; for example, showing her as a strong protagonist whose impairment does not restrict her progress in this

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society (Vaughn).

Rather than the hero of *Mad Max: Fury Road* being the titular character, Max, this role is taken by the Emperor, Furiosa, whose story is related through her proximity to Max. As is the case in many Gothic narratives, there is a great deal of doubling between Furiosa and the antagonist, Immortan Joe, begun before either of the characters is seen properly for the first time. Both characters are introduced via their impairments—bearing in mind that “the terms *impairment* and *disability* distinguish between bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments in the world”—which is followed by the donning, of their prostheses (Garland-Thompson, “Misfits” 591). Comparative to Joe’s breathing apparatus, Furiosa wears a prosthetic arm, which she is shown donning and which enables her to have a high position in the fictional society as Emperor: she is a military commander and trusted member of Immortan Joe’s retinue. This is a position that allows her to drive the War Rig and that facilitates the events that the film portrays: Furiosa’s escape with the wives and the defeat of Immortan Joe.

Although Max does not have a prosthesis, he does have an impairment: a limp, which he received at the end of the first film, for which he wears a brace – although this is not particularly evident in *Fury Road*, but which is apparent in the videogame and so allows him to occupy a liminal space between the healthy and the disabled. He also has mental health problems, which, while not the focus of this paper, cannot be ignored: he is, after all, *Mad Max*. The mental illness Max suffers from is made manifest through hallucinations and hearing voices speak when there is no one there and which forms a significant part of the videogame narrative, as well as being present in *Fury Road*. Physically, however, he is, at the beginning of *Fury Road* at least, placed in the role of the victim rather than the aggressor, again occupying a liminal space at odds with the perception of him as the hero of the film and which substantiates the understanding of Furiosa taking that role. Max is abducted, branded, and hooked up to the War-Boy Nux as his “blood bag,” through a crude fishhook and IV tube, which is wound round a chain that both men are secured to with handcuffs. This ensemble is reminiscent of hospital treatment such as chemotherapy and blood transfusions, where the patient is attached to an external source of cleansing but deprived of the sterile hospital set-up of the real world, a reminder of illness and infirmity, even without the explicit coding of disability. Max being shown as powerless situates him alongside the women that are kept in the Citadel as property—he has no power in this society, just as they do not. Max, then, straddles the boundary of disability—and of masculinity—especially in the latest incarnations of the

franchise: *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Mad Max* the videogame, and the graphic novel, *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Where Max is presented as powerless in the post-apocalyptic society of *Fury Road*, Furiosa is shown as a mentally (and physically) strong woman and leader: her missing limb is never seen as a disability (as opposed to an impairment), as Garland-Thompson explains earlier; furthermore, her missing limb is never a plot device that is used to carry the narrative forward, and it does not show her as being physically or mentally weaker than any other character in the film. Indeed, she is physically stronger than any of the wives, all of whom are not disabled, as the fight scene against Max in the desert highlights: it is Furiosa who—without her prosthesis—does most of the fighting with Max. This is also highlighted during the second chase scene, where Max’s role is that of support for Furiosa, she is—at least—an equal in ability and skill. However, Furiosa’s dominance in this film is made explicit in a scene directly after this, when the War Rig has got stuck in a wet, sandy, quagmire. There are three bullets left in the gun Max is using and the enemy is approaching fast. Max shoots two of the bullets and misses. Furiosa comes up behind him and stands silently, almost involuntarily reaching for the gun, which Max, after a short pause, hands over. Furiosa does not miss with the final bullet. This scene, building on the previous one, establishes Furiosa as the more skilled character of the two and further shows that her impairment is not a disability at this point; she is simply the better shot, her missing limb, or its prosthetic replacement, has no relevance to her skill as a marksman.

Although it is fitting that Furiosa is the character that overcomes the antagonist Immortan Joe, the most potent moment for Furiosa is not the scene in which she kills him, but rather an earlier scene. Having discovered that the Green Place she remembers is gone, poisoned like the rest of the world, and in utter despair, she walks off, alone. As she does, she drops her prosthetic arm in her wake. Here, Furiosa’s artificial limb, with its strappings (which includes the symbol for Immortan Joe at her waist signalling his proprietorship of her), is removed. She strips all the remnants of her old life—and Immortan Joe’s ownership of it—away from her body, revealing her real self, a self that can show pain, her impairment evident, naked, and uncovered. *Fury Road* is at this point ambiguous as to whether the presence—or lack—of the prosthesis Furiosa wears is integral to her selfhood, complicating concepts of identity and self in disability studies. The film shows her both with and without the prosthetic limb, and does not indicate the origin of the impairment. Impairment does not challenge Furiosa’s strength and it in no way defines her as a character. Even the use of the camera supports this – it pulls away from her, leaving her in the middle of the shot, dwarfed by the sand dunes that

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the Vuvalini call home. In this scene, her missing limb is not evident, or its lack important: it is just part of her, just as she is part of the world.

As this is clearly a film concerned with the environment, disability can be seen to be reflected in *Fury Road* as “a denigrated symbol of earthly contamination,” in Mitchell and Snyder’s terms (49). It is interesting to note that the impairments in *Fury Road*, the videogame, and the graphic novel, are almost all a direct result of the man-made ecological apocalypse (49). The inhabitants of the Citadel suffer physically (and mentally) because of the world they exist in—a world where starvation, radiation sickness, and physical harm are a constant threat. The War-boys have “half-lives,” reflecting their doomed and shortened existences (as well as referencing the nuclear war that has brought about the apocalyptic landscape), and their desire for Valhalla is spurred on by the knowledge that they will die early. Showing the population with a variety of injuries, disabilities, and impairments, reflects the ruined state of the world that the characters inhabit and metaphorically symbolizes how the rule of Immortan Joe is a poison to the people he controls, and this is made clear through his offspring. Joe’s three sons, Scrotus, Rictus Erectus, and Corpus Callosum, are described in the graphic novel as “a psychopathic killer...a Herculean manchild...and a man in the body of a child,” respectively, and all are considered “true products of the wasteland”, and are represented the same way in *Fury Road* (Miller et al. 29). To try to combat this “degeneration,” Joe keeps a harem of women—his wives—who are considered as “breeding stock,” and who are kept prisoner for the purpose of providing Joe with a healthy male child (Miller et al. 29). This is something not achieved throughout the film, despite his creation of a “vault, with pure and clean water...a hermetically sealed oasis” to house the women, and to keep them from the diseased and ruined world outside (Miller et al. 29).

The radioactive decay that contaminates the world of *Mad Max* permeates all that Immortan Joe rules, a corruption that has infiltrated Joe’s physical body and affects his ability to procreate. The infant that is ripped from the dead wife Angharad’s body, is seemingly a perfect, dead, male. Rictus proclaims to the War-Boys “I had a little baby brother... He was perfect in every way” (Miller). This child, with no evident disability or impairment (although cognitive impairment cannot be ruled out), cannot survive because he is the offspring of the monstrous Immortan Joe, even though the wives are pure and can stay alive in the world. Joe desires that his future offspring are physically and mentally healthy and tries to enforce this ideal through the construction of the Vault, and through his selection of wives. These women are all “perfect” in that they are unmarred by impairment. This allows the franchise to use them to represent “contrastive bodily coordi-

nates” in order to foreground disability (Mitchell and Snyder 63). The characters in *Mad Max*, then, reflect the degeneration of that world, and, even with the creation of a perfect ecosystem to house his wives, Joe cannot overcome this ecological contamination or its effects on his own body and bring about physical “normalcy.”

It is interesting to note, at this point, that the Vuvalini are the only characters, other than the brides of Immortan Joe, who are not (at least visibly and in the context of the film) physically impaired in the world of *Fury Road*. These women, the remnants of the tribe that Furiosa belongs to, are simply older than any other characters in the film. They have managed not only to survive in the wastelands—even when they are forced to move away from the Green Place after it has become poisoned, they have managed to retain their physical health—and, more importantly, they carry the hope of the future: seeds and plants that can be used to begin the repair of the world. Only the Keeper of the Seeds has the power to restore the landscape to its pre-Gothic state, recreating the Green Place that Furiosa would recognize, rather than the decaying swamp the War Rig passed through on the way to meet the Vuvalini.

The use of impairment and disability is presented in a similar way in the videogame, *Mad Max*. As with *Fury Road*, every major character has an impairment. One of the first characters that the player (as Max) meets is Chumbucket, a mechanic with a severe curvature of the spine and who is instrumental in helping Max rebuild his car and, navigate the wastelands. As the game progresses, it becomes clear that the leaders of the strongholds that Max uses for shelter, and that are the source of side quests that he can complete, all have disabilities: Jeet endures severe pain in his head, which can be controlled by pain-inducing mechanisms such as piercings, while Pink Eye has no legs and uses a wheelchair. Gutgash uses a walking aid and appears to have a missing leg, and finally, Max himself is shown in the videogame with his disability and prosthesis: the leg brace that he wears as a result of the events at the end of the first film, a deviation from *Fury Road* that allows the character to be a conduit between disability and normalcy. This impairment, as Tauriq Moosa notes, is not simply aesthetic: when Max is in pain, he drags his leg and the player can hear the sound of the brace banging, and, if he kicks an object, there is often a slight limp for a few seconds as he compensates for this (Moosa). As with *Fury Road*, disability and impairment is not a cause for comment, and rather than being portrayed as people with disabilities, Pink Eye, for example, is a strong leader in political terms, having a clear achievable goal for her people, which Max helps her realize. After losing her legs in the original road wars (possibly around the time of the first *Mad Max* film), Pink Eye built herself a chair and spends her time rescuing and

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training the people she lives with in practical ways to survive in the wastelands, such as teaching them how to be mechanics and engineers. Similarly, Chumbucket, whilst being visibly impaired through the hump on his back, is never discriminated against for his curved spine, even as he is ridiculed for his almost maniacal religious belief in the car as a God, especially the car he refers to as the Magnum Opus that he builds for Max to drive.

The characters in the videogame, more than in *Fury Road*, function in opposition to the way Mitchell and Snyder describe when they say that “disability marks a character as ‘unlike’ the rest of a fictions cast, and once singled out, the character becomes a case of special interest, who retains originality to the detriment of all other characteristics” (Mitchell and Snyder 55-56). In the videogame especially, the characters are not singled out because of their impairment—all the characters are impaired, and, therefore, no character can be singled out for special interest. This is attempted in *Fury Road*, with some success, where impairment is treated more like the Steadfast Tin Soldier story that Mitchell and Snyder use as an example. Both Immortan Joe and Furiosa’s impairments are highlighted at the beginning of the film, and then the “difference is quickly nullified” (Mitchell and Snyder 56). These characters are only different in the eyes of the viewer, not within the context of the film, where, like the tin soldier in Mitchell and Snyder’s example, “the figure undergoes a series of epic encounters without further reference to his [or her] limitation”, and where their “disability remains a physical fact...that the text literally overlooks once the difference is established” (Mitchell and Snyder 56).

The *Mad Max* franchise is part of a Gothic tradition in Australian film and fiction that frequently represents the landscape as a grotesque space, in which humans are unwelcome, and in which impaired or disabled characters complements it. Beginning with the way the landscape was perceived at the point of colonization, Australian Gothic has grown out of the anxieties of the strange, inhospitable, landscape of the Australian outback and the fears of becoming lost and isolated in the environment, and the *Mad Max* franchise articulates these anxieties to great effect. The franchise positions itself in the Australian Gothic tradition through, amongst other things, the references to earlier Australian Gothic texts, such as *The Cars that Ate Paris*, which features vehicles that Miller has based his design of the Buzzards transportation on, and *Walkabout*, which is unsentimental in its portrayal of the Outback. Whilst its place in Australian Gothic is secure, the *Mad Max* franchise occupies a more ambiguous place in disability studies, inhabiting the same liminal space as Max himself.

Mad Max does offer a positive portrayal of the impaired individual, through Furiosa, the stronghold leaders in the videogame,

and even some of the inhabitants of the wastelands. Yet, it is equally true that *Mad Max: Fury Road* portrays sickness, disability, and impairment as a visual representation of the immorality and ruin of the fictional world it portrays. Impairment, this film tells its viewers, is something to be feared or despised; the disabled human form, like the mutated lizard in the opening scene of *Fury Road*, is a reflection of the diseased world the characters live in. As a critique, this is problematic: the disabled body is not, and should never be, a reflection of “badness,” in any form, and the portrayal of Furiosa as a physically and mentally strong, independent, female character, whose impairment does not stand in the way of her success, reflects this. However, this is one character in a cast of literally thousands of inhabitants of the wastelands, with many more characters representing disability as an adverse reflection of the world. Mitchell and Snyder comment that “disability...serves as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse,” and *Mad Max: Fury Road* takes this representation further, presenting not only a collapse of the social and individual order of society, but also shows an ecological and societal collapse, countering and complicating the first impressions of the affirmative understanding of disability that many considered the film to have upon its release (Mitchell and Snyder 47).

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