

*The Mistake:*  
**Some Questions of Ethics and Form**

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## Abstract

This thesis is composed of a novel, *The Mistake*, and an exegesis, entitled *The Mistake: Some Questions of Ethics and Form*. The exegesis considers a number of critical issues connected to the writing of *The Mistake*. The exegesis will attempt to answer the question ‘How can I write this story?’, which relates to issues of both ethics and form.

*The Mistake* was initially inspired by the real-life story of Keli Lane, the woman at the centre of a sensational Australian infanticide case, which was under investigation throughout the period I spent researching and writing the novel. Lane was convicted of the murder of her child in late 2010 and was sentenced in late 2011. An appeal is in preparation as I write.

Part I of the exegesis examines the genesis of the novel, with an emphasis on the ethical dilemmas involved in writing fiction based on real-life stories. I examine other writers’ responses to the vexing question of writerly appropriation, in an effort to find an answer to my own dilemma. Part II examines the issue of genre and discusses the place of the novel both within the wider literary milieu and as part of a larger body of work. Part III, a coda, briefly consider elements of the novel’s reception, in particular those connected to issues previously discussed.

*The Mistake* presents the story of Jodie Garrow—a respectable middle-class wife and mother leading a life that appears to be a rather conventional open book. When evidence suddenly comes to light that Jodie gave birth to a daughter more than twenty years ago, and the child seems to have vanished into thin air, Jodie’s life, and that of her family, undergoes a series of radical transformations. When the police instigate a nationwide search for the missing child, Jodie is put under intense media scrutiny. Cast suddenly into the public glare, vilified and regarded as ‘the most hated woman in Australia’, her family life founders and Jodie is forced to confront her past.

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### **Author’s note:**

*The Mistake* was published by Penguin Australia in February 2012, however the version of the novel submitted for examination is the version written prior to editing and is all my own work.

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