

Report on the Master of Arts thesis *oink oink oink* written by
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This novella is a tightly written comic success: its greatest triumphs are its invention, its pacing and its lightness of touch.

The Abstract and the Discussion are among the strengths of this thesis. Both these introductory commentaries are fanciful, reckless and delightful. Dando makes some outrageous claims, for example, 'the narrator, Squirly Fern, suffers from self-inflicted sleep apnoea and must constantly refresh himself with little snoozes.' The dinkus zzz is used to represent these little snoozes and Eric Dando claims this dinkus reflects the snoozing but also the short attention span of the narrator and of popular culture itself. Whether or not the reader comes away convinced that the dinkus, zzz, which is part of the varied typographical landscape of the novella, evokes the short attention span of popular culture, is an open question. Eric Dando makes plenty of claims of this kind and some live up to their promise and others don't. For example sometimes the use of repetitious catch phrases, which he claims form a matrix within the text, merely remain as repetitious catch phrases.

Nevertheless, the sense of whimsy and playfulness and the use of over statement in the Abstract and in the Discussion are part of the strengths of the text. These sections are uniformly engaging and notwithstanding their extraordinary claims about highly resonant effects achieved are never pretentious. For example, one might have thought that Dando's exploration of the western tradition of pig imagery in all its ostensible spuriousness might fail to impress or entertain but it does neither of these things and is in fact a virtuoso set piece, full of jokes, confidence and insights.

The question that seems to arise is whether the novella lives up to the promise of its Abstract and Discussion. In these introductory statements Eric Dando identifies a number of major themes in *oink oink oink*- corruption in a number of manifestations, the role of the giant corporates in polluting the ecosystem and the genetic integrity of living things, the corruption of culture through the debasement of language, and the destruction of perception through drugs and addictions in many subtle forms.

Certainly *oink oink oink* does evoke a nightmare reality in which the characters are driven by surrogate desires and even Squirly Fern's father, who is ostensibly in some sort of control, is compelled by his addiction to Sleep and Awake, the major drug groups controlling this ghastly world and by his addiction to his transgenic pig bride, paula.

Toward the end of the novella father seeks, in his powerful powerlessness, to become more like paula through cosmetic surgery - a thickening of the nose and an acquiring of floppier ears. Father's spiralling down is a pale reflection of Squirly Fern's destruction and both father and son's collapse is in vivid contrast to the growing power of paula. In fact the heart of the narrative is not the horrors that the corporates have visited on the modern world but the nightmare modern fairy tale of the cruel reign of the evil transgenic pig stepmother, paula.