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Deakin University

Karen Le Rossignol and Hayley Elliott-Ryan

Braiding the exegetical voice through creative nonfiction research

Abstract:
Finding or developing an exegetical voice may be confronting for the nascent writer-as-researcher: they must transition from undergraduate disciplinary skills and knowledge acquisition to postgraduate research, and grapple with creative/critical research thesis requirements. Applying the authors' experiences supervising creative writing research candidates through Honours and Masters research projects, and in teaching the unit Manifestos at Deakin University, this paper will explore ways of traversing the perceived gap between creative and critical writing to help develop a creative/critical voice appropriate to the exegesis. To do so, this paper focuses on the experiential or personal essay form of creative nonfiction to initially identify the writer's personal voice through a process of interweaving threads of the autobiographical, data or the factual, and the universal (Huxley, 1959). A writer's manifesto, composed as part of a research program, then enables emerging writer-as-researchers to consolidate that voice as a bridge to writing their exegesis. Bringing together these aspects of writerly voice may lead to a complex exegetical pattern as a response to the tensions between the creative and critical in research: something like the braid this paper attempts to emulate in its structure. This paper argues that the exegesis is an experiment in voice balancing fragmentation and cohesion with a manifesto-style belief in the writing process, and creative responses to theory as rigorous approaches to research.

Biographical note:
Karen Le Rossignol is a Senior Lecturer in creative writing, editing, publishing and freelancing skills in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. She has extensive experience in developing industry-oriented curriculum across undergraduate and postgraduate courses including a focus on issues of creative writing research. Her supervisory work is extensive across the spectrum of research pathways and interdisciplinary creative projects, with a particular emphasis on creative nonfiction and the writer's manifesto.

Hayley Elliott-Ryan is a writer of fiction, poetry and performance works. Her PhD at Deakin University, in the area of narrative impasse, political ontologies and theories of

bricolage, also reviewed broader questions of waste, excess, currency and interventionist narratological methods. Published research has focused on interdisciplinary methods in the creative writing classroom and resisting capitalist logics in writing practice. She supports Higher Degree by Research and Early Career Research scholars through *c i n d e r* journal, of which she is the co-founder and ongoing co-managing editor. This journal publishes articles in the areas of writing and creative expression for HDRs/ECRs.

Keywords:
braided exegesis, writer's manifesto, voice, creative nonfiction

Introduction

Finding a fluent exegetical voice proves a challenge for the emerging writer-as-researcher, with their research project framed by disciplinary or academic approaches to the research on the one hand, and a creative writing disciplinary experimentation on the other. This paper reflects on a guided approach to developing an exegetical voice which requires the emerging writer to draw on skills gained through two forms of creative response: a creative nonfiction experiential essay as the creative artefact in their research thesis, and a writer's manifesto as a form of finding their way to an exegetical response. The experiential essay as defined within this paper is a subset of the personal essay, experimenting with personal experience through developing a public creative voice. The manifesto requires the emerging writer-as-researcher to develop a public voice in establishing the purpose and values of their writing, and to then synthesise this with their own style and voice as a creative writer. Writing (and reading) in the form of a writer's manifesto acts as a transition from the experiential essay voice to the exegetical voice.

This paper focuses on Honours and Masters coursework research theses with an experiential or personal essay as the creative project, with a total length of 15,000 and 20,000 words respectively. There is a creative writing discipline-specific Manifestos unit of study embedded in these Writing and Literature programs at Deakin, implemented as one of the requirements for the research component of the courses. Students explore a range of public and personal manifestos, and write a manifesto of up to approximately 2,500 words, open to any experiments so long as the material has a personal nonfiction-based integrity for the writer. Possibly arising from work on manifestos, creative research students are increasingly moving towards the creative nonfiction personal or experiential essay as their creative artefact, challenged by the tensions between public and private voice. This has enabled a rich vein of anecdotal evidence on the value of braiding the creative nonfiction personal essay and the personal manifesto as a writerly statement of belief or credo, to establish an emergent creative/critical voice for the exegesis.

Part of the purpose in limiting this paper to exploration of the personal or experiential essay as creative artefact is its direct relationship to the manifesto's use of personal voice. The personal essay's consistency of voice is compounded by what Huxley (1959) terms the personal essay's three poles of autobiographical, factual and universal components. There is a separate yet parallel type of braiding here, in interweaving these three areas into a cohesive and consistent personal voice that resonates with a public audience, and this remains a difficult process for emerging writers of this creative nonfiction form. The personal manifesto, as described in this paper, is a vulnerable and internalising practice of exploring a writerly voice, expounding on creative writer responses to why and how they write. This voice braiding, synthesising the elements Phelan defines as "style (diction and syntax), tone (a speaker's attitude toward an utterance) and values (ideological and ethical)" (2014, p. 49) enables an emerging writer's personal credo which more clearly identifies for them a personal voice integrated through style, tone and values.

The manifesto may be both a form of public protest or commentary and a personal credo, whether organisational or individual. The public protest or commentary of some of the historical manifestos provided for analysis in the Manifestos units of study enables contextual explorations of what Orwell, in the essay 'Why I Write' (1946), declares political, aesthetic, historical and egotistical purposes for writing. Applying their own political, aesthetic, historical and egotistical motivations (or others which may emerge from the study of these differing manifestos), emerging writers-as-researchers may identify a writerly voice which crosses personal and public spheres. There is the potential to transfer this to the student's own approach to the creative and critical components of a creative writing thesis. This is progressing towards what may be termed a braided or synthesised creative and critical exegetical voice.

The emerging writer-as-researcher as described here has come from an undergraduate writing discipline program or major, with some experience in the genre they select for their research project, in this particular study the personal essay. For many students, writing an Honours or Masters thesis is the first time they are required to produce a significant exegetical piece of writing. Our observations are that students at this stage of their apprenticeship working in experiential or personal essay genres either struggle to differentiate, or are unable to create a consistency between, experiential essay voice and exegetical voice. Our focus enables a closer study of the strands that may make up a creative nonfiction voice, and the transition required to braid this voice into a critical exegesis, by exploring writers-as-researchers at the initial stages of skilling themselves for their research journey. We have not included PhD creative research theses, both because PhD candidates may be more experimentally confident in braiding or shaping their creative/critical voice, and also because PhD candidates are working more autonomously within longer timeframes and length of projects. The close study here of linkages between the experiential essay as a research project, the study of manifestos as a transition to writing an exegesis, and the clarifying of voice across these forms, enables a teasing apart of the components of writerly voice and identity within creative/critical research. By restricting focus to components of their experiential essay and the personal manifesto, the emerging writer-as-researcher is moving towards articulating and demonstrating the process of braiding strands of critical argument and creative voice across both the exegesis and creative artefact.

Background to the creative writing research project

The balancing of, or tensions between, different writing requirements and voices suggested by creative/critical research projects has been explored as research models at doctoral level since 1985 in Australia, with the first Creative Writing PhD offered at University of Wollongong (Krauth, 2011). Krauth has also suggested that the early exegesis form had a specific tension: "The researching writer, trying to be creative writer, is forced back to the role of critic distanced from the process, as opposed to being critic inside the process" (2011, p. 7). This critically-oriented exegesis has evolved into diverse forms which integrate the critic inside the process, described by Sempert et al. (2017) as, "many styles of exegesis, dictated by factors such as form, genre, the practitioner-researcher's previous experience, and cultural – even institutional – contexts" (p. 205). These exegetical styles within the creative writing PhD have been

examined in some detail (see for example Williams, 2023; Sempert et. al., 2017; Bacon, 2017). However the Honours and Masters coursework research candidates are emerging from a discipline-based study approach, often without some of the framing that is applied to PhD candidature, and find this openness of critical or creative form challenging within their shorter projects.

Candidates in Honours and Masters programs, as part of their preparation both for the research project and for further doctoral projects, are required to come to terms with their methodology or research design, and the need to justify, reflect on and critically evaluate their own writing practice. They are skilling themselves in research, and contemporaneously experimenting with their capacity to narrate that research. They are required to work as "researchers in the process of operating as creative practitioners" (Webb, 2015, p. 4). According to Webb, they need to reconcile "two apparently contradictory imperatives: they need to answer important research questions, and they need to produce works of the imagination" (p. 4).

Creative writing research, and the exegesis, have arisen from concepts of studio-based enquiry that is a practice-based research, "generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies" (Barrett & Bolt, 2009, p. 1). Smith & Dean (2009) talk of practice-as-research as arguing for two practice positions which overlap. The first position is that creative work, by and of itself a form of research with clear outputs emphasising the process itself, could be titled practice-based research (Candy, 2006). The second position is that creative practitioner processes can become insights which can be theorised, generalised and written into research outputs, or practice-led research (Candy, 2006).

Emergent practice-as-research for Masters and Honours projects requires firstly to be understood by the beginning writer/researcher as an enabling methodology for rigorous research, then adopted as an iterative research cycle (Smith & Dean, 2009; Haseman & Mafe, 2009; Sullivan, 2009) modelled on applied research through writing practice. Writing into uncertainty for a student writer-researcher is potentially fraught without the context of the narrative they wish to tell both creatively and critically. However, finding a voice capable of this creatively developmental, uncertain and open-ended research creates difficulties for the emerging writer, much less the writer-as-researcher wanting to find a creative/critical voice across the perceived differing expectations of each element.

There are two aspects to consider in terms of finding the voice for the creative writing research project. The first is that the research needs to be seamlessly answering the research question/s across both the exegesis and the creative work, as suggested by Kroll (2004). The second is that a creative writer may find the creative voice more readily, particularly through creative nonfiction projects, and not clearly comprehend how to transfer that voice into the academic requirements of a standard exegesis.

Tensions in creative writing research projects

There is a potential tension and uncertainty in moving between creative and critical voices, with students expected to build on and integrate their range of disciplinary skills and knowledge within those projects. The undergraduate student studying across writing, literature, history or philosophy, for example, has been developing a public voice that is academically rigorous, demonstrating research across those aligned disciplines. At the same time, the undergraduate student creative writer is working to establish their own industry – or market-oriented creative voice, based on the requirements of genre and form. On commencement of their creative research projects, students within the Honours and Masters programs are required to propose the theoretical framework and the creative artefact within which their research questions will be examined. In the initial stages particularly, they are uncertain as to how those research questions can be explored in parallel across both the exegesis and the creative work. The positioning of the research questions is often emergent: that is, the students usually confirm the question or questions they believe they are wanting to answer when they have finished drafts of their creative project and they are constructing an exegesis. When postgraduate coursework programs were required to demonstrate at least 25% research-based content after 2011, based on the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011, the exegesis required close attention and clarification as the creative research core in the Deakin writing and literature program. The interplay between creative and critical was initially perceived by students as two separate or contrapuntal voices, academic and creative, attempting to answer relatively critical theory-based research questions. After its success in transitioning a writing practice-oriented theorising of both creative practice and critical reflections into shorter exegeses within the Honours program since 2013, the Manifestos study was introduced at postgraduate level at Deakin in 2019. The aim was to encourage the potentialities of a creative/critical flow between the writing process and voice, and the theorising of writerly and academic disciplinary areas. Manifestos in this context enable more clarification of an emerging writer-as-researcher's practice-based theorising of writing practice, demonstrated by more confident experimenting with personal manifesto forms and voices.

A further tension within the Masters and Honours programs is to move a relatively short research project from a proposal to a polished integration of the personal creative voice of the creative work and the theorising voice of the exegesis within a quite limited timeframe. A key point of concern for the writer-as-researcher is to identify what voice or voices they will use across the project, when the two elements of creative work and exegesis suggest a dichotomous relationship. James Phelan, in his editorial for a 2005 edition of the journal *Narrative*, believes "voice, when it refers to writing, is obviously a metaphor" (p. 2). Phelan identifies the metaphorical aspect as "individual voice or differences between two voices" (p. 2). To extend this narrative metaphorical level of creating a writing voice, he has defined voice as a fine-grained combination of style, tone and values, as "the synthesis of style (diction and syntax), tone (a speaker's attitude toward an utterance) and values (ideological and ethical)" (2014, p. 49). This provides a more analytical approach to what has previously been for the undergraduate creative writer a somewhat alchemical process of developing voice through their stories, often working at the metaphorical level. By centring the developing of a manifesto on

dissecting a writer's style as a particular diction and syntax, their speaking tone through implied attitudes and their demonstrated ideological or ethical values, the writer-as-researcher becomes more confident about initiating discussions of voice.

Voice and the personal essay

The study described in this paper identifies voice through the movement from the experiential essay through the manifesto to transition a creative/critical voice into the exegesis. The first step is to identify the personal voice through the experiential essay form, considered here as a fluid movement between both personal and lyric essays. With student writers-as-researchers, this form enables experience to be reflected in a personal voice that finds a form of resonance (Freeman & Le Rossignol, 2015) through incorporation of the three poles described by Huxley as central to the personal essay. These are the autobiographical, the data or factual, and the universal (Huxley, 1959). That personal voice, the combination of style, tone and values, provides a more public resonance within the personal or experiential essay by moving smoothly between these poles and integrating them into the personal psyche or imagination of the writer. This double braiding, of the voice's style, tone and values and the personal essay's three poles of interwoven content and perspective, helps to explicate the process of developing a personal/public voice.

The emerging writer-as-researcher should, as identified by Paul Williams, "subvert traditional discourse binaries of academic/creative by breaking away from mechanistic forms of academic discourse" (2023, p. 69). This suggests elaborating on the concept of critical and creative voices as an interweaving or contrapuntal development that builds up this personal/public creative voice. In contrast, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework units of study often start from the position of the critical voice in a public forum of ideas and arguments. Finding the distinctive and authentic personal voice which Epstein refers to as "a distinct way of viewing the world" (1997, p. 21), encourages another engaging yet rigorous form of narration and reflection on the central issues or resonances of the personal essay.

Phillip Lopate articulates the structure of this *worlding* as a somewhat discursive process which needs to be anchored to clarity in the essay's purpose:

> The essayist attempts to surround a something – a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation – by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digressive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter. (1995, p. xxxviii)

This creation of a resonant worldview, surrounding the subject, mood and issue with digressive approaches is well illustrated when applying active experiments with form or structure. An example of what we mean by an experiential personal essay would be the *Australian Book Review* Calibre Prize-winning essay by Kevin Brophy (2009), 'What're yer lookin' at yer fuckin' dog?', which starts with:

> I have never been good at violence. Not even at mild arguments. So when the brick came smashing through our bedroom window in the middle of the night, I leapt from our bed and screamed. Our children came running in, more worried and frightened by the noise I had made than by the brick or by the glass scattered on our floor. This is all history now. Well, not quite. (Brophy, 2009, n.p.)

Brophy flows between engaging Žižek's theory of violence, his own personal narrative, and reflective writing which questions the implication of his actions within this philosophical framework. This method reflects Huxley's three poles which, when achieved, define a successful experiential essay: "There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal" (1959, pp. v-vii). In order to achieve these poles in the experiential essay, the writer must develop a voice which can unify different narrative and conceptual spaces, or to expand the braiding metaphor, voice is the textural commonality (or consistency) of the strands – it is the internal logic of the essay that enables the poles to be braided together in a way that offers resonance beyond the text. As Freeman & Le Rossignol (2015) describe it, "The internal resonance of the writer's emotional experience is established through structure, imposed by sequencing segments that have some form of associative link" (p. 389). Ozick describes links as associational scatterings:

> The marvel of [the essay] is that out of this apparent causelessness, out of this scattering of idiosyncratic seeing and telling, a coherent world is made. It is coherent because, after all, an essayist must be an artist, and every artist, whatever the means, arrives at a sound and singular imaginative frame – or call it, on a minor scale, a cosmogony. (Ozick, 1998, p. xix)

Encapsulating all three poles is rare when students start developing their voices from the personal and autobiographical, as they are often not clear on applications of the objective or factual, and do not necessarily recognise the value of establishing a universal resonance or purpose to the essay. As Freeman & Le Rossignol (2015) indicate, "While many essayists can master one or two of these poles, Huxley finds that the most talented essayists and personally resonant essays encapsulate all three poles" (p. 390).

We argue that the voice developed as writers negotiate these poles of expression in the experiential essay could inform the writing of a manifesto, which will in turn inform the Honours or Masters creative project exegesis. Developing a voice in the context of an experiential essay is a skill students in undergraduate and Masters by coursework writing degrees practise under the guidance of tutors, but transferring qualities of the experiential essay voice to exegetical writing is not intuitive, nor are students guided to do this through coursework. In other words, students are more likely to rely on skills developed in units where they write formal essays, such as literary and cultural studies, than to apply the tools of an experiential essay to an exegesis, especially if they have not intensively read writing which theorises creative writing practice. The open-ended and exploratory experiential essay provides a starting point for opening up research methodologies that are emergent, but the student writer

is not necessarily confident in their capacity to transfer that voice into an exegesis. The manifesto provides the transition into a personal/public voice able to move between creative and critical more seamlessly as the writer-as-researcher becomes more sure of their own motivations for both how and why they write. A manifesto-style stance enables deeper exploration of their personal voice – their style, their attitudes and their ideological and ethical values – within the context of a public credo.

The manifesto's personal/public voice

Triggering the writerly imagination through the experiential personal essay aligns with and parallels the second step, the writing of a personal manifesto which clarifies the credo or belief system motivating the writer. While acknowledging that there is no single ideal critical voice, Phelan emphasises principles that "give pride of place to *clarity as inflected by audience and purpose*" (2005, p. 2, emphasis in original). Graff (2003) talks about entering the "culture of ideas and arguments" (p. 1) through moving students "beyond the undivided, one-dimensional voice that is a surer mark of weak student writing than incorrect grammar. And it's by writing the voices of others into their texts that students start learning to produce a public voice" (pp. 13–14). This public voice, able to identify audience and purpose, and to write voices of others into the text, is central to a writer's development across undergraduate degrees in both critical and creative work. The lack of clarity, the one-dimensional voice as Graff describes it, is linked to a lack of writerly discourse and discussion about the personal and public voice used across creative and critical work.

The strength of the Honours and Masters creative writing projects is that the students are then invested in the exploration and the debates surrounding their own work. They have a contextual public discourse within which they become embedded. As Graff (2003) puts it for any form of academic writing, "Students won't become engaged in academic debates about ideas unless they have a reason to be interested in them and can gain the rudiments of the public discourse in which these debates are conducted" (p. 13). Yoo (2017) indicates the pressure from "dominant institutional discourses [to] inhibit personal voice by favouring objectivity" (p. 444) while suggesting researchers influenced by postmodernists' principles are "depict[ing] their inquiry through a creative and literary medium to highlight the possible interpretations of 'truths'" (p. 445). Narrating the debates is to find the value of knowledge gleaned from opening up new views, discovering the excitement of the personal voice within the public discourse.

George Orwell's motivation to write indicates:

> there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience. (1946, n.p.)

Orwell very clearly establishes himself as a writer working to "make political writing into an art". His best writing is when "[m]y starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice". Orwell emphasises political purpose as being the best motivator for his own

writing: “Using the word ‘political’ in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples’ idea of the kind of society that they should strive after”. His essay synthesises style, tone and values into what is unmistakably Orwell’s public voice. The personal manifesto-style form of ‘Why I Write’ is an intimate and potentially vulnerable consideration of the writer’s values, interwoven into a more public credo, or public voice.

Smooth movement between public and private voice is often illustrated by Nobel Prize for Literature speeches (which we claim are also a form of personal writers’ manifestos). These are broadly ranging public statements, an opportunity to present a political statement (for example Harold Pinter in 2005) or a narrative of social justice (Toni Morrison in 1993), or a personal view of otherness (for example 2003’s citation for Coetzee “who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider”). The strength of these speeches is hearing that personal voice, identifying its style, the tone and the values. Harold Pinter (2005), cited as a writer “who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression’s closed rooms”, started his acceptance speech with:

> In 1958 I wrote the following:
> ‘There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.’
> I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false? (Pinter, 2005)

Toni Morrison, the 1993 winner “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality”, started her lecture with:

> ‘Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise.’ Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless children. I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures.
> ‘Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise.’
> In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement. (Morrison, 1993)

These are both masterly narratives and writerly manifestos, engaging in what Williams has described as “a statement outlining a writer’s philosophy of life, writing goals and intentions, motives, and sources of inspiration” (2020, p. 71). They are very clear about their public audience and purpose, and their personal voice engages the listener/reader within “the culture of ideas and argument” (Graff, 2003, p. 1). As Williams indicates, “The manifesto is thus a meta-discourse, a self-aware literary text, and to write one, the writers need all the skills of a

performer, a rhetorician, a creative writer and an activist" (2020, p. 75). This is a complex process moving between personal and public voice, foreshadowing the creative/critical interplay that is also central to the personal manifesto.

Creative/critical voice research process

The emerging writer-as-researcher is working with narrative across critical and creative forms. But these forms are linked by their capacities for telling stories. Graff, on any form of persuasive writing, notes that:

> Argumentation need not be a joyless, bloodless activity, and there is no necessary quarrel between arguments and narratives. Good stories make an argumentative point, and arguments gain punch from imbedded stories. (2003, p. 4)

The research process for the creative writer is similar in both the critical and creative areas: to make meaning out of the narratives researched, evaluating then synthesising them into the writing. We argue that the writer-as-researcher may find value in establishing Phelan's (2014) elements of style, tone and values in the personal voice of the essay, then developing a more private/public voice for the manifesto, prior to being interwoven into the creative writing exegesis as a creative/critical public response.

As we have discussed, developing a creative/critical voice for the research project which does not rest on the vocabulary and tropes of academic critical writing proves challenging for the creative writing student as they immerse themselves in Honours and Masters research. Developing this new voice is part of the research process, and an important precursor to doctorates, where students may embark on projects which require a voice that can traverse the creative and critical in more experimental or integrated forms. Such an example is the braided essay outlined by Finlayson et al. (2017).

Braiding as a metaphor in creative writing research has previously been used in reference to the structure of a thesis or essay. Building on Krauth's "plaited structure" (2011), Finlayson, Kroll and Murphy discuss the braided essay as a structure which takes the interrelationship between these as its form. Finlayson et al. write: "the exegesis structure could reflect the way I envisage the relationship between creative writing research and practice, as two linked hands of the same body, or two aspects of a discipline, inextricably intertwined" (2017, p. 8). Finlayson goes on to describe chapters of her doctoral thesis as an example of braiding in the experiential essay:

> I weave together an account of my meanderings and musings in summertime New York, in which I converse, in my mind, with the ghost of Dorothea Tanning about her work and experience as a woman surrealist artist (Tanning 1944, 1986), with an exploration of Julia Kristeva's ideas about the isolating experience of being an uncanny stranger (1991), mashed up with ideas on creativity from theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and

> Félix Guattari (2014), Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (2006), as well as Nigel McLoughlin (2001). (Finlayson et.al., 2017, p. 8)

This braided version of a "scattering of idiosyncratic seeing and telling" works towards making what Ozick terms "a coherent world" (1988, p. xix), an example of a braided form where the author combines a personal voice with a more public discourse writing in one essay. Finlayson et.al. acknowledge that the braided form is not appropriate for every creative writing research project. However, whether the research project is one braided piece of writing, or two distinct sections, the experiential essay and exegesis both require the writer-as-researcher to do something skilful with voice. This emphasis on a creative/critical voice that Finlayson et al. (2017) suggest provides a model which may enable the student writer-as-researcher at Honours and Masters level to perceive an experimental flow from the experiential or personal essay to the manifesto, increasing their capacity to integrate the creative and critical in the exegesis.

Researching a writer's manifesto

In her manifesto, 'Politics of Writing', originally delivered as an address at Message Sticks, Sydney Opera House, in 2001, Alexis Wright speaks about her creative process, the process of finding voices for her novel, the writers who inform her work and the context from which this work emerges. On the purpose of her writing, she states:

> To me, writing is like taking the snake out of the hole. The snake that has killed, maimed and stolen. The snake that still lives down his burrow and will not come out and account for what he has done because he is too busy thinking of new, more sneaky ways to kill. Writing is about crawling down the hole to see what we have all inherited. (2001, p. 18)

Wright's manifesto is divided into three sections. It begins with an autobiographical narrative, moves to a discussion about the social, cultural, historical and literary influences on Wright's work, and then engages in a reflective discussion about her practice and the specific process for her novel *Carpentaria*. The above quotation marks the transition from the political context of her work to the final discussion on craft. This discussion continues to draw connections between personal experience, political or ideological values, and the work Wright produces. The final section saliently connects creative decisions about voice to the values of the writer:

> In my work I like to take the voice of the people, not an Aboriginal political or community leader, chairman of the council. The most interesting voice to me is the voice I have to search for. The voice that is silent or elusive. You may only hear this voice sometimes, and sometimes you have to travel all day and night to find the voices for your work. These are the characters I am interested in writing into a novel, because this to me is the true face of where we are. Or, the pulse – as we say in the Gulf of Carpentaria – the pulse of our heartbeat. (2001, p. 20)

In her manifesto, Wright theorises and contextualises her practice and states her purpose for writing, consolidating both her reasons for writing and her voice – her style, tone and values are part of the clarification of herself as a writer. As Williams (2020) describes it, "A writing manifesto demands an interrogation of the literary, political, philosophical and material contexts of a writer's practice" (p. 71).

Developing writer manifestos

The Manifestos unit of study is embedded in the research project as a compulsory disciplinary reading unit, at both Honours and Masters levels, along with a somewhat broad-ranging study of theory and methodology. Across the ten years of so of delivery there have been at least forty manifestos written per year. As supervisors of some of the research projects, and as staff members involved in the delivery of the unit, we have observed that the writing of a personal manifesto can be very empowering, but also confronting. Initial forebodings arising from discussing the individual manifesto assessment task could be summarised as, how can I have the ego to state why my writing has value, or what can I possibly talk about over 2,500 words, indicating the lack of confidence and belief that the emerging creative writer has something important to say. Interdisciplinary study across history, literature, politics or philosophy is not perceived as immediately relevant to their work (or research) as writers. Students often respond initially to the Orwell manifesto, for instance, by declaring that they are not political writers, assuming a narrow frame of reference for political writing. When asked to develop their manifesto through writing fragments about their own philosophy, their politics, their socio-cultural frameworks, the students perceive how these fragments reflect their motivations. This is then linked to discussion of voice, using Phelan's framework or definition of style, tone and values to analyse the manifestos presented as models.

The manifesto has a proud and varied history, and the Manifestos unit of study highlighted in this paper reflects that diversity deliberately. 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1848), Breton's 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1927) and Solanas' 'SCUM Manifesto' (1968) provide examples of social-political-cultural public documents agitating for change, also beautifully curated in 13 short films-as-installation by Julian Rosenfeld, titled *Manifesto* (2015). The writerly approaches of Woolf (1925), Orwell (1946), Atwood (2002) and Didion (1980) are reflective of personal journeys and the writers' philosophical motivations for writing. The Manifestos unit of study starts from the public voice, comparing social or political movements or organisational manifestos such as those indicated above, or diverse forms such as *An Ecomodernist Manifesto* (2015) or Paul Keating's 1993 Redfern speech. These are touchstones for questioning audiences and purposes for writing, framed within political and social contexts. The next step is to review personal manifestos such as Virginia Woolf's 'Modern Writing' (1925) and Margaret Atwood's series of Empson lectures, 'Negotiating with the Dead' (2002). Although the latter are not labelled as manifestos, the individual voice in each is immediately identifiable as incorporating Williams' "interrogation of the literary, political, philosophical and material contexts of a writer's practice" (2020, p. 71). The aim here is to show students ways they might transfer their own literary, political, philosophical and material contexts into their individually voiced and structured manifestos.

Another very challenging yet fruitful area of personal/public voice, as discussed previously, is encapsulated in the Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speeches. They are both public speeches to a specific audience within a political institutional framework, and also an opportunity to take a range of approaches to the question of why the Nobel Prize for Literature winners write (and, by implication, validating why they have earned this award). They also demonstrate a personal voice moving comfortably to the public arena. Phelan's description of voice as style, tone and values (2014) is tested across this breadth of manifestos, enabling identification of what Hennessy (2018) calls a student writer's "needs to interact with their own author-ity to create a plausible voice; how they might traverse the boundaries of their knowledge respectfully" (p. 11).

The personal associational manifestos of Woolf or Atwood, or the more formal credos or creatively theorised statements of the Nobel Prize in Literature speeches, provide diversity in personal voices and structures. Presentations at conferences or panels (for example Joanne Harris 'A Writer's Manifesto', 2015), the artistic research statement (see Abramovich's 'An Artist's Life Manifesto', 2014), and the seemingly outrageous 'The Cappuccino Writer and the Idiocy of Contemporary Writing' (2000) challenge readership, audience and purpose. By the end of this initial exploration and study of these public manifestos across the first half of the unit, the students become eager to experiment with their own starting points as writers. Some go back to the most influential book they read in childhood, tracing how this developed their love of reading and/or telling stories. Others start from experiments in form, testing out question and answer style in poetic form, or finding philosophical voices that describe their own scattered sense of a cosmogeny of their writing world (Ozick, 1998). As they test their own motivations, we have observed their voices become more confident. They have moved beyond the intimate and internalised moments of life narrative, into exploring their motivations and theorising their voice in a more public forum and approach. They are, in point of fact, writing some form of experiential personal essay, interwoven with Huxley's three poles (1959), as a public credo.

The students are encouraged to take risk with form and content, finding their writerly voice through the genre they select. Some use poetry with annotations, others include handwritten notes from their own archival collages of early writings and drawings. Footnotes which tell a contrapuntal story (such as those used by David Foster Wallace in 'Consider the Lobster', 2004) match well with a postmodernist fragmentation and demarcation of their two voices, critical and creative. As is to be expected, there are no two similar manifestos, and when they workshop segments, then collate their various manifestos into a book to share, students are empowered both by their difference to others and the stimulation of how their peers have approached the genre of manifesto. By the end of the eleven weeks of both studying diverse manifestos and writing their own, students provide similar responses to those identified by Williams (2020):

> A manifesto can enliven and focus a writer's power as well as demarcate a territory, make an argument, and contribute to the ongoing debate about who we are as writers.

> But most of all, the experience of writing a manifesto for these students became an act of writerly self-realisation, a 'coming out' as a writer. (p. 78)

There is empowerment in this manifesto voice. Whether the writer's manifesto is focused on form – poetry, prose, text/image – or an exploration of their nascent sense of a philosophy or broader political purpose in their writing, these writers are committing themselves to expressing a personal response in a public form. We have observed that, by reflecting on their manifestos, the student writer starts to perceive an exegetical voice which can be both reflectively critical and exploratively creative.

Conclusion

Braiding the personal/public voice across the experiential essay by way of a manifesto enables a response to the research question/s across both the exegesis and creative artefact with greater understanding of the creative and critical strand requirements of the exegesis. This paper has identified personal voice using Phelan's style, tone and values (2014), as the central driver for understanding components of the personal essay through Huxley's (1959) three poles of personal, factual and universal contexts. Exploring that personal voice within a form of public statement of writerly motivation, the personal manifesto, synthesises the personal/public voice that is central to really strong research writing across the creative writing disciplinary area. The writer-as-researcher's manifesto theorises writing practice and provides freedom to experiment and explore.

We have observed the value of this process within the final exegetical work of the creative writing theses, where a creative/critical flow has grown into a more confident writerly exploration. Learning to sustain a creative/critical voice across the personal or experiential essay artefact and the exegesis encourages a more sustained capacity over longer forms of research such as the PhD. By owning an exploratory creative and critical voice through this braided process, emerging writers-as-researchers can be encouraged to integrate their own creativity into their critical approach.

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