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Editorial

Julia Prendergast, AAWP President/Chair

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the preface of the April issue of TEXT – presented to me as an opportunity to speak to current issues across the discipline of Creative Writing. I write in my role as President/Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia. It is my privilege and pleasure to serve the AAWP community, and to write to you in that capacity.

To be frank, as I write I find myself in an unusually discombobulated frame of mind – hyper conscious that those of us who have a place we call home and live without the daily fear that those we love may be annihilated by wartime activity, are *lucky* – cognisant this is not what I was asked to write about, yet aware our unsettling world climate impacts our outlook upon, you know, everything.

My terms as President/Chair of AAWP encompasses COVID and what some refer to as post-COVID, although I'm not sure I subscribe to the logic, considering the ricochet effects on so many sectors, including the climate for writer-scholars employed in the tertiary sector. During the terms of my role, I've been in communication with many full-time ongoing colleagues managing drastic restructures to programs, as well as many precariously employed colleagues working under increased pressure – if indeed they still have work in the sector. During my time as President/Chair I've also laboured alongside an Executive Committee of Management, and various Conference Directors / Conference Teams, from whom I have learned – and continue to learn – a great deal. This is the gift of working closely with colleagues, in our home universities and in service to the discipline, the opportunity to bear witness to the minds' eyes and ethics-of-practice of others, in real-time.

I recognise that so many people are operating BEYOND capacity – wrestling the ramifications of large-scale, relentless and incessant change; cognisant of ongoing, sector-wide uncertainty for creative practice academics, nevertheless giving generously within their home universities,

as well as the broader AAWP community. This is my focus, in writing this contribution: my deep gratitude to the AAWP as a bolstering community of practitioners – a community who remind me that storytelling (broadly conceived, encompassing professional practice activities) is about deep listening. At a recent AAWP gathering I learned (from two learned friends)[1] that the Indigenous translation for deep listening is Dadirri.

Our 2025 AAWP conference was hosted by the University of Melbourne, managed by Associate Professor Julienne van Loon and the glorious conference team. This gathering marked the 30th Anniversary of AAWP. We celebrated this milestone with a 30th Anniversary Plenary Panel, featuring many past Presidents/Chairs of AAWP, together with Emeritus Professor Nigel Krauth, Founding Editor at TEXT Journal, a person who has given generously to emerging writers and thinkers, across many moons. A visual slideshow (including images of past conferences) was screened during the session. During the 30th Anniversary Plenary Panel we reflected upon three decades of leadership in our discipline, revisiting our organisation's achievements and orienting ourselves to the challenges of the present as a leading professional association. Recent initiatives and responses to current issues can be found on the AAWP website under the Engagement tab. A highlight "outcome" of the plenary session included passionate responses from those who are new to AAWP and keen to contribute to AAWP imperatives – in many cases HDRs and ECRs, emerging writers, soon-to-be Drs, new doctors, the future of AAWP. The Executive Committee welcomes input from AAWP members and encourages interested parties to join us in the work we do in service to the discipline, via the pathway of co-opting. We send a call in our newsletter, each year, in the lead up to the AGM. Please contact AAWP if you would like to be added to our mailing list.

Our 2026 Conference will be hosted by the Literary Provocations Hub at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. It will be held at the UNSW Kensington campus, situated on unceded Bidjigal lands. The conference is a cross-institutional collaboration between UNSW Sydney, Macquarie University, University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney, and Western Sydney University. **The theme of this year's conference is** "Voicing Our World".

Additionally, in 2026 AAWP will introduce an online symposium series to bridge our in-person conference held at the end of each year. Initial planning includes the delivery of four themed symposia during 2026 and 2027, focusing on issues of importance to the AAWP community. These gatherings will be held fully online, offering opportunities for connectivity for those who may not be able to attend our annual conference, or are only able to do so sporadically. AAWP aims to record these seminars for asynchronous viewing. The symposium series will be led by Dr Axel-Nathaniel Rose, in consultation with the Executive Committee of Management, as well as AAWP members and friends. Each event will include scope for audience questions/participation. AAWP members and friends who would like to contribute to the Portfolio's mission and activities are welcome to contact AAWP.

The symposia program emerges from the inception of the Access and Equity Portfolio, a new Executive Committee of Management Portfolio that aims to further improve the accessibility of AAWP membership and participation for Australasian writer-scholars, and friends of

AAWP. The portfolio arises from an Access and Equity Scoping Report, commissioned by AAWP in 2025. The report is the product of interviews with AAWP members, together with discussions among present and past Executive Committees of Management. This long-standing dialogue, including consultation, frames the portfolio and its imperatives, including the symposium series.

Each symposium will host a panel of writer-scholars with shared experiences of minoritised selfhood. The aim is earthed discussion facilitated by a panel chair – an opportunity for panellists to discuss their work, processes, practices, challenges, and aspirations. Panellists will be invited to discuss how their institutions – as well as the writing programs, organisations and initiatives that have impacted them – have shaped their journey as writer-scholars. We also aim to discuss how AAWP might improve its engagement with, and support of writer-scholars of minoritised experience. Themes for the initial symposia program include: First Nations Stories; Stories from Regional and Remote Universities; Disabled and Neurodiverse Stories; Australasian Initiatives and Imperatives.

In partnership with publishers and writing communities in Australasia, AAWP manages a large-scale Prizes and Partnerships Portfolio. We offer publication pathways and networking opportunities for writers and translators working across various forms, with an ongoing commitment to facilitating opportunities for emerging writers and under-represented voices. This portfolio abounds in positive energy generated by outreach and engagement. I take this opportunity to encourage you to share our 2026 suite of prizes, with submissions closing 30 June.

In recent years, our annual conference has included an increasing number of writer-scholars presenting material focusing Arts-Health writing, research and related activities. The activities of AAWP members undertaking cross-disciplinary research in Arts-Health is a current priority area for AAWP. We are preparing a report of these activities with a view to an organisational approach to showcasing diverse initiatives and outputs, as well as providing opportunities for members and friends.

At the close of my welcome to the 2025 AAWP Conference I shared a proverb in Māori. I encountered this proverb at a recent gathering at my home university, when we farewelled our long-time Arts colleague and union representative. To my mind the proverb exemplifies the modus operandi of the AAWP Executive Committee. The translation of the proverb is:

> **He aha te mea nui o te ao?**
> **He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata!**
>
> *What is the most important thing in the world?*
> *It is people, it is people, it is people!*

When I accepted my current role as a full-time, ongoing writer-scholar – a position I am inordinately grateful for – I received straight-shooting advice from a fiercely intelligent person, someone who has engaged with my developing thinking since my first prevaricating attempts

as an emerging creative practitioner. She said: “Don’t you *ever* fucking forget why you got that job, Julia – because you are a writer.”

As I continue my journey – wrestling a wide variety of challenges, hyper conscious I am *not* alone – I continue to draw strength from the AAWP community, as I have from the very beginning when I attended as a new PhD candidate who knew *no one.* The AAWP reminds me NOT to forget, but rather to celebrate the ways our creative and scholarly activities bolster each other in sustaining and highly generative ways, informing our professional practice, as well as our way of being in the world.

Notes

1. Conversation with Dr Wayne Applebee and Dr Paul Collis, 2023 Annual Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), University of Canberra: Australia.

In this issue

Scholarly contributors to Volume 30, Issue 1 (April 2026) of TEXT include established and emerging voices across creative writing research. Ekaterina Pechenkina, Carolyn Beasley and Julian Novitz examine hyflex pedagogy in higher education, demonstrating how flexible delivery models can support real-time idea generation and sustained creative development for undergraduate writers regardless of attendance mode. Paul Hetherington and Cassandra Atherton turn to ekphrasis, tracing the “ekphrastic inheritance” and “enchainment” of poems responding to Vincent van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* (1889), and revealing the intertextual dialogue that emerges across discrete works addressing a single artwork.

Sarah Holland-Batt and Delia Falconer explore the evolving role of the poet laureate within the Australian National Cultural Policy as a mentorship role, offering a comparative analysis of international models within the context of current mentorship theory and practice. Seth Robinson examines zombie fiction as a subgenre of horror, situating it within speculative fiction and considering how it presents writers a means to articulate contemporary anxieties associated with the “polycrisis” and imaginaries of collapse. Delia Falconer also contributes a second study, mapping the history and changing practices of creative writing mentorship in Australia, and identifying the emergence of hybrid and less traditionally dyadic mentoring models.

Jenny Hedley engages performative writing through a feminist and queer lens, responding to Ann Cvetkovich’s call to write through embodied experience by positioning depression diaries and so-called “navel-gazing” to write through symptoms of depression and systemic brokenness. In a collaborative article, Jenny Hedley, Gareth Morgan, Stayci Taylor and Jessica Wilkinson examine the relationship between collective authorship and form, exploring asynchronous exchange, colliding metaphors and the possibilities that emerge when writing is shaped through dialogue, experimentation and shared critical reflection.

In Creative Works, editors Nigel Krauth and Anthony Lawreance have collected the poetry of 5 authors and prose works by 11 authors, each exploring writing-related issues in unique and provoking ways. And under the editorship of Aidan Coleman and Verity Oswin our Reviews section features 11 reviews of titles published by valued TEXT contributors, as well as authors further afield.

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—Julienne van Loon and Ross Watkins, Managing Editors