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Too, too many of us? Memoir as rogation in creative mentorship

Abstract
Autoethnographic memoirs as a genre form part of the experience economy, and as an art form are also spiritually anchored to storytelling's role in forming community. In the contemporary university and elsewhere, however, accounting systems for productivity do not always nurture or are able to calculate the value of abstract forms of mentorship afforded by the simple act of sharing story. Shared reflexivity about practice – such as storytelling – is essential to Creative Writing pedagogy because it allows congenial opportunities for formative development of emerging writers. This essay argues for the simple importance of mentorship through shared, spoken stories – micro-memoirs – of 'the writing life' to the work of fostering systems of belief in emerging writers. Such sharing develops trust and conviction which in turn promotes a professional commitment to the Creative Industries. Autoethnographic revelations of the practitioner-teacher in the creative workshop – through acts of disclosure exploring the complex ways of 'becoming a writer' – thus constitute a significant form of knowledge transfer.
Keywords: autoethnography, memoir, mentorship, storytelling

There are too many of us
That's plain to see
We all believe in praying
For our immortality
– Blur, 'There Are Too Many of Us'

Who'd have guessed that Flannery O'Connor (an important voice in American Literature) and Blur (superstar Britpop alternative rock group) would have so much in common? But O'Connor has also famously expressed her own version of the 'too many of us' sentiment, quipping when asked if universities stifle writers that 'My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them'. She went on to say that 'There's many a best-seller that could have been prevented by a good teacher' (O'Connor 1969: 84-85). Writers and teachers in the Academy are paid (and bound) to have expert opinions on this topic of supply and demand in the Creative Industries, and one's position no doubt informs both personal practice and pedagogical engagement. Whether or not we are ever prepared to be honest about what we believe, and to whom, is another matter and not without risk. What kind of advice, then – beyond technical instruction relating to craft – is valuable to share with emerging writers keen to join an industry that is arguably over-supplied?

If an emerging writer asks you what their chances might be in this business of Writing, then answers must be provided. To respond is to immediately enter that space of jeopardy, the circus that is 'Advice'. My own position on guidance – despite my first impulse being to hand out expensive chocolates and say *Now run* – is that at the very least emerging writers deserve a decent story that hopefully fosters reflexivity. Put simply, a shared anecdote. Additionally, I'm not sure that Blur or O'Connor – no matter how right they might be about one's chances of dignified success – should be allowed the moral high ground on this subject. I refer to my kind of shared storied advice as carnivalesque micro-memoirs, because they belong in that strange arena that blends magic and tricksters and performance and daring and joy. They operate as slant stories that are never one-liners: I share wound, twined, memories. Those memories, shipped as micro-memoirs, are a valuable commodity in mentorship paradigms. In business analyses of strategic leadership which focus on creating economic value, for example, understanding the value of 'experience economies' is considered essential: 'customizing a good turns it into a service, customizing a service turns it into an experience, and customizing an experience turns it into a transformation' (Pine II 2000: 118). What is story if not a customized opportunity for transformation?

Do emerging writers/creative writing students really want to hear your old-dog stories of becoming a writer? My only test of this is their constant asking of *How did you do it?* I usually and most often begin with stories against myself, in true confessional style. Here's a question I put: If your books go out of print /get pulped (insert here woeful tales) does that mean you are somehow diminished as a writer? Does it mean you are an 'unwriter'? Or is that the same kind of question as asking 'Is the mother of a dead baby still a mother?' For an industry that is difficult to break into and perhaps even harder to sustain a successful life within, the job of writer still remains one which is highly desirable. This, despite the obvious fact that perhaps there are indeed 'too many of us' which might explain why we can't all make a decent living (Steger 2015) [1]. Is the litmus test of Being a Writer whether or not you are prepared to write it on your customs immigration card? What is the test? Is there a test? If you've been writing for decades, these questions might bother you more or less than younger writers starting out. *How did you know you were a writer? When did you know? How do I get to be one? How will I know?* These questions are routinely put to established writers, so too to those who teach Creative Writing. I think we owe those questions deep consideration. Dorothy Parker's wry advice – 'If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second-greatest favor you can do them is to present them with copies of *The Elements of Style*. The first-greatest, of course, is to shoot them now, while they're happy' (Parker 1959: 28) – is witty but nevertheless seductive in an *I'm-dangerous-come-hither* kind of way.

Writer's memoirs and reflections on the writing life offer certain banks of wisdom. But beyond such texts what role does the anecdotal revelation play in vocational mentoring? There are times when students and other emerging writers want nothing more than to hear 'your story' or a version of how you 'became' a writer, or 'decided', or were able to 'keep going' and remain 'true to your calling'. Faced with such requests, what is the ethical thing to do? Refer the inquirer (or plural thereof: such questions are most normally asked in large tutorials or writers' festival events) to your favourite writer on writing? Make something up? Improvise a fairytale? Or some combination thereof? I suggest all of the above.

On the ethics of 'making things up': Jeanette Winterson in discussing her book (widely considered an unofficial autobiography) *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal*, considers the distinctions between memoir and fiction. She laments

the analysis of what defines and constitutes memoir, and declares such enterprises 'frustrating'. She prefers to call her book a 'cover version', adding that 'labels are unhelpful', and levels blame at 'consumers' and their needs for labels: 'I don't know what's the matter with everybody since reality TV', she says (Northover 2012). I tend to view 'How to Write' manuals as being somehow akin to reality TV, and as a form of adorable junk food adding wastage to undergraduate set text lists. So, if not that, what then? The best I can offer are stories, my own cover versions, my 'mythological' memories of 'becoming a writer' and hope the gift of narrative encourages the will to write. Sharing such tales is not confession; it's not disclosure; it's just a story. Truth plays no lead-role in my configured (verbally improvised, here textually graphed) answers: spoken memoirs are not about the ethics of narrative, but the aesthetics of sharing. Memoir is always carnivalesque, and we need nothing less. I am speaking for the circus.

First story: On being lost

> I feel I'm anonymous in my work. When I look at the pictures, I never see myself; they aren't
> self-portraits. Sometimes I disappear.
> *– Cindy Sherman*

It was clear to me from the very beginning of my upper middle childhood that there was the real world, and then there was the imaginary world. Not knowing the difference was incredibly dangerous. It seemed to me, aside from kissing boys in the outer reaches of the school playground after being run to ground in kissychase, that the imaginary world was where the real action was at. But I was forever getting the two worlds mixed up. After lunch-break I'd sit in the classroom and look lazily out of the wide, open windows at the brown school paddocks and wonder where I'd left my shadow. Was it beneath the peppercorn tree? Or in the toilets maybe? Was I even wonderful enough to lose my own shadow, like Peter Pan did that night in Wendy Darling's bedroom? I was not entirely sure about my own credentials when it came to being wonderful. Perhaps I could begin to live a glorious life if I moved into the same London neighbourhood as the Darlings? I didn't care really about *being* wonderful, I just wanted to live wonderfully. I'd look beneath my desk. Sigh. There it was, my shadow. I'd look up again, feeling disappointed and stupid to be disappointed both at once. Ahead of me, mathematics chalked on the board. With any luck I might fall asleep. And fly.

Sometimes when you're a child your yearning is so powerful it's hallucinogenic. The laughter and the games in your childhood that come before everything – that is where the petrol for the imagination comes from. There, and the stories people tell. Most of my story fuel came from reading books. *Peter Pan* was a certain favourite at this kissychase period of my life. And Wendy Darling, Peter's female lead in JM Barrie's classic tale of childhood utopian dreaming, well she was absolutely the best friend a rude adventurer could ever have. Peter Pan, I knew, was a boy who could fly all the way from Neverland to London and back again in one night. Although a boy, he's really a girl: the history of pantomime proves this to us. Every actor might aspire to play Hamlet, but playing Peter Pan is to perform the most famous cross-dressing role in history, a role long coveted by lead actresses the world over. As if Wendy (what a name: pure, sparkling invention) and her gentle, highly-skilled sisterhood weren't enough, Wendy's mother was extremely kind and beautiful, and her nanny was a dog (which about sums up the history of childcare), and her father was a London banker ripe for socialist conversion

and her brothers were sweet, ineffectual lost boys. J M Barrie sure knew how to write a good story, or at least my nine-year-old self thought so. I remember the moment of finishing *Peter Pan* as the first felt tragedy of my life. How could it be over? It was summer time, and I'd spent much of the last week hiding in the cool branches of a giant, gnarly, old wattle tree on the edge of our small country town avoiding chores and gulping down story.

Then it ended. I was furious. I marched home. I went into the police station next door where my father worked demanding use of his typewriter. He often let me play secretaries. But I didn't really know how to use the machine so I stole some crisp white paper and the only pencils on the counter and ran home to my verandah bedroom. I sat on my bed, bottled up with tears, and began to write. The blue pencils were the same colour as the blue cover of the book. I had so much inside me that I wanted to say, but all I could manage to do was open *Peter Pan* and begin copying it out, verbatim, so traumatized was I at the thought of having to return the book to the library and lose its world. After four days and three chapters of dutiful transcription, I put in some extra girl characters, then abandoned the project completely and started going back to the local Olympic swimming pool all day to work on my butterfly and freckles and diving and underwater kissychase. Underwater, I discovered, kisses are different kinds of animals. They are seahorsegiraffes. Underwater, your heart gets wet and your shadow quivers in the sunlight. The swimming-pool-blue was the same shade of blue as my now-stolen-from-the-library copy of *Peter Pan*.

Thus began my career as a writer, firmly planted in imitation if not outright plagiarism. And a deep blue yearning that kept me undersea for life. I never quit Peter Pan. He'd quit me, flying off, but always to return. I've spent a lot of my life feeling the souls of my feet for the pain of stitch marks, hoping my shadow was intact. First time, seeing the pantomime on stage in Sydney: the shock of Peter being played by a girl was overridden by the outrage of chocolates being thrown into the audience never making it to my back row. Second time: as a postgrad student writing about suffrage theatre, and mucking around with rewriting Mrs Darling and Wendy as radical suffragettes in a (never performed) play. Third time: as a mother (repeat times three). Fourth time: discovering that the naughtiest Peter Pan in history was played by the actress (Sarah Churchill) I've been writing a biography of for more than a decade. Fifth: calling my secret diary (mission: to convince myself to quit writing) 'The Neverland Chronicles'. Peter Pan is a boy who never dies. But has he got it right? Peter Pan encouraged me to record my own misconduct. Or perhaps it was Tinkerbell? Anyway, between them they were stern muses allowing me no cheating in recording what the poet Robert Frost calls our 'inner weather'. Sixth: At the same time, never ever forgetting for a single moment that the royalties from *Peter Pan* are perpetually donated to London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. The hospital that saved my youngest daughter's life. Our un-stitched shadows are still there, in paediatric intensive care. We are writing a children's book together, me and that once-upon-a-time little girl, now taller than her mother. Seventh: reading Jane Dunn's biography of the Du Maurier sisters who'd grown up in London theatre royalty, playacting Peter Pan, with Daphne eventually playing Wendy in the West End. But: the real shock of this biography was learning that Michael Llewelyn Davies, their orphaned cousin who was raised by his uncle Jim Barrie and who was the main inspiration for Peter Pan, had died in a double suicide. He was a troubled young undergraduate at Oxford. It was 1921. He was 21. He was sensitive and poetic and he drowned on a fine, warm May afternoon in a still bathing pond in the Oxfordshire countryside with his friend Rupert Buxton. They died in each other's arms.

Peter Pan. His attraction is magnetic.

Second story: On not being William Butler Years

…don't be dull and boring and
pretentious, don't be consumed with self-/love.
the libraries of the world have
yawned themselves to
sleep
over your kind. Don't do that.
– Charles Bukowski (2003)

What kind of a job is it, really, being a writer? Is it one that will make you happy? Is it one that you can age with, and will age with you, and provide you what you need to move through life? The satisfactions of the vocation are obvious. For some they include wealth and fame, often (but not so often) accompanied by critical acclaim. Other professional benefits range from earning a jobbing wage through answering your calling, to extreme poverty and nagging insanity. Sometimes, though, being a writer is not only the only thing you are, it is also the finest thing in the world. When the famous Irish poet WB Yeats (1865-1939) wrote his poem 'Vacillation' he included in stanza IV an account of an extraordinarily mystical experience. His fiftieth year had come and gone, and there he was in crowded London 'a solitary man' yet feeling so greatly happy that he sensed his body blessedly blazing in a trance of joy for twenty minutes or more.

This was not my experience of reaching what poet Robert Lowell called the 'upper middle age' of my writing life. Somewhere along the line I had lost my blessedness. But I wanted it back, that joy: who wouldn't, once you'd been ablaze with it? Because I had been. Once upon a time I had been nothing but a field of wild daisies arching to the sun. There are all kinds of 'missions impossible' in the world, but planting flowers is not one of them. So I decided (thank you WB) to do the best kind of gardening I knew how: the literary kind. Can you decide to be happy? Is this a profitable venture for writers? Freud argued that writers employ the same aesthetic principles as children at play in producing creative artifacts, and that a balanced approach to daydreaming, mining fantasies for material, and turning them into literature would result in that happy combination of 'honour, power, and the love of women' (Freud 1991: 423).

Deciding to be happy is first and foremost believing 'happy' to be a verb, a doing word. So along with dancing, and potting flowers, and promising to do as many deliberately joyful things as possible, I determined to write my way back to that place of trance, where 'I was blessed and could bless'. No one likes to be told to be grateful for what one has, but it does make me feel happy to count my blessings sometimes. Like the time I won my first ever literary prize, in third grade of primary school.

Henry Lawson, whose bush ballads were the first poetry I ever learnt to recite by heart, was born on the Grenfell goldfields. Grenfell in the late 1960s and early 1970s was still a wild frontier for a child growing up. It was recognizably a film set, the same as you saw on TV Westerns, with a wide, winding main street and an uncountable number of 'saloons', more than enough pubs anyway for our Dad to never be found as he migrated from one to the other. The goldfields population had disappeared, but the awesome architecture remained, along with a sense of civic dignity that matched the original town planning.

Except now it also partially felt like a ghost town. It was entirely feasible, in the mind of a child, that at any moment Ben Hall's ghost or indeed his ancestors might ride into town and do a spot of bushranging. Or plundering. And they might be looking for rebellious, like-minded recruits. In those days, that was our celebrity-bound imagination: a famous writer, and a famous criminal. A little later, Evonne Goologong from Barellan, not so far away, close enough to claim as local, hit the big time in tennis. I saw her play at the Grenfell Tennis Club (home of the never-empty Sunday esky) in some astounding regional contest. I had an enormous crush on her, she was so very pretty and talented and glamorous *and and and* she gave me her autograph!

What a great life the life of a child can be. I remember being so happy sometimes that I felt my mouth didn't have the musculature to smile big enough to match my feelings. Riding horses bareback. Spending ten unbroken hours at the olympic pool, day after summer day. Mud pies. Christmas. Wattle bursting out all over the damn place just before your September birthday making yellow your favourite colour for life even though it really, truly, does not suit you. A tiny back yard, above-ground, round swimming pool that only needed two of you to swirl around its perimeter for a good, fast three minutes to create a magic, rapid whirlpool that would float you in circles for a bit. An orchard of sorts, and seasonally, corn growing taller than you are, making the perfect hide-and-seek pasture for us kids when the adults were doing their Friday night BBQ thing.

Even school was a pleasure dome. First of all, our teachers were all young and beautiful, much younger than our parents. They used to squabble openly about whose turn it was to be transferred, having been forced to Grenfell after completing their teacher training as part of their bonded scholarships. How else would they staff such a vast state? All the clothes they wore were from Sydney, and some from recent trips to London. Above-the-knee suede platform boots: is there anything more luxurious? Coats that had all kinds of fluff and glamour about them. A pair of white patent leather knee-high boots that laced up. Mini-skirts. They weren't teachers they were film stars! Nevertheless, they forced us, like the rest of the world, to watch the 1969 moon landing all one long boring day. I remember seeing a screen moment of the astronaut wives, thinking my teachers are smarter-looking than them. Who would they marry, these wonderful women who taught me, if not an astronaut?

I was so bored this day – how excited could a kid get watching something on a very small black and white screen having to smell your classmates farting competition? – that I lay down on the carpet and wrote a story. I sometimes think that I'm only a writer because I like pencils so much. I buy them everywhere. Always. I have been known to go to the supermarket and bring home new packs of pencils for the children having forgotten to buy nappies. Miss McAlpine saw me prostrate and bored and gave me some bright pencils and said I could grab my scrapbook and draw some space pictures. A few friends joined me. While they began their own scribbles of stars and rockets, I wrote about ache. About the ache I could see on the faces of my teachers around the edges of the room, largely and clearly bored out their minds wishing they were somewhere else. I wrote about where they might go. I imagined them marrying presidents and astronauts and men in the city, not farmers or policeman or shy local doctors. But mostly I liked dressing them up, and describing what they wore on their adventurous lives beyond Grenfell. I can't remember how my story ended except the school had to close down because we had no teachers.

That was the beginning of me writing life as a fantasy. At age nine I won the school-wide creative writing competition. All the winners of the various other

school prizes for academic subjects and sport and community service and so on met in the principal's office one morning. I felt very self-conscious as the rest of the kids were in grade six. All across his desk and propped against the walls were big glossy books. Where did they come from? There were no such shops in Grenfell. My mum had to drive a three-hour round trip to Forbes for the fortnightly grocery shop. So many beautiful objects and I could choose whichever one I wanted, to be presented along with my name engraved on a trophy at a special evening at the Town Hall on Friday night (#lifeincountrytowns).

Despite the kind prompting of a teacher to maybe choose something else, I selected a science book about rockets. I was too embarrassed to pick out one that might reveal my real desire. I gave the book to my brother.

I remain incorrigibly bad at making decisions, and continue to scold myself into being interested in things scientific. My brother very sensibly studied medicine, making him a superb sibling for the perpetually impoverished Arts graduate and writer. I can only begin to repay him for all his kindnesses by dedicating a book to him, my fellow traveller through those goldfields of Grenfell where he made the local newspaper for his abilities on the football field as a 'bootlace tackler'. I have that clipping, along with the one of me holding my book and trophy, the first odd rewards of a writing life.

Third story: The last library of them all

> The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading, in order to write;
> a man will turn over half a library to make one book.
> – *Samuel Johnson*

Once in Berlin I stumbled across a hole in the ground. It was covered in industrial glass, and when you peered in you could see books in some kind of Alice-in-Wonderland spiral trapped deep below. In Bebelplatz, in Berlin's Mitte or central district, this otherworldly memorial never lets us forget the infamous Nazi book burning ceremonies that took place in this square in 1933. More than 20,000 books were burned, dragged from the library of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for the Science of Sexuality). You can peer through to the top of Micha Ullman's memorial to view empty bookcases in belowground chambers. The book burnings were a prelude of much burning to come. Being in Germany was always, always hard for me. I hadn't gone looking for anything, I was simply on my way to work, and there I was on the ground in a public square crying. What was wrong with me?

That was the week in late summer, I later found out, that I conceived my youngest daughter. Consequently, I have one daughter born to a German father, one daughter made in Germany to an English father, and one son made in England to an English father and born in an English summer. Scarlet had a Scottish midwife, and Hunter's middle name – Somerled – is after a Scottish king, so in my hopeful imagination I trust that this somehow links them to their Scottish (made with English father) sisters. It matters to me that they are webbed. It no doubt helps explain my sudden collapse in public spaces.

I remember the stickiness of that Berlin summer's night in 2001 as I sat with my paramour in a funky beer garden. It was strange to be in a country I knew well from being married to a German for more than a decade and having lived there on and off. It was. Strange. Because I was sitting there translating the avant-garde conversations buzzing around us for my English fiancé. (Everything in Berlin is always avant-garde.) I missed my ex-husband, and I

was woozy with love for my intended. Despite years of slutting around as a young adult before the chunk of monogamous marriage, I was completely unprepared for this reality, of being in love with two people at the same time. Weaning off one, drowning deeper in another. I thought again of the books we had seen that morning and the haze of war and reconstruction that still dominated the city and thought, 'Well if you have to be a glutton for something it might as well be love. Or books. Or both'. Noticing it was time to buy another beer, I realised I did not want one. Not in the least. Straight away, I knew I was pregnant. The webbing was stretching.

A decade later it is summer and I am in Melbourne and old enough to know that if any connections between those siblings matter, or even exist, then I deserve little credit. It is their time now, and their chance to do things their way, and their way is not my way or the way my way was when I was their age. I am also old enough to worry about dying. That might sound pathetic, but even for an optimist – which I am not – I have been in hospital too many times these last five years not to worry. Now, I am on day five into a visit that began in Accident and Emergency on Saturday night. It had been a 35-degree scorcher all day, and I shared that smashed up Emergency place with a lot of smashed up drunks and smashed up sporting saddos. Busy busy, it was, while I was screaming like I was birthing quadruplets. One last test to go tomorrow then I will be sent home mystified or not, but we now know that I don't have anything life-threatening. Due to the vagaries of hospital bed vacancies I am on the Bone Marrow Transplant and Cancer Ward. This is not a good place for hypochondriacs. This is a serious ward. This is a ward where everyone who hates paying taxes should be forced to visit every time they open their mouths to moan.

I walk around. They encourage this. I found the library. It is the saddest library in the world. I have spent too much of my life with books, this I suddenly understand. I know someone who has written a beautiful book, *Reading By Moonlight* (Walker 2010), about their journey with cancer and the books they read that fed their soul. But I cannot imagine being like that. Seeing all those books there in that room furnished like a catalogue show room by generous bequests made me want to vomit. I would burn them if I could, those books so neatly, meticulously catalogued. They all looked well read, and cherished, but I hated them. I tried to calm down, thinking, well, maybe from now on you should only read books that you truly, really want to (this swiftly followed by the shock that this is what most of the world does already). Curse all these books, and curse their rotten stories. I suddenly understood myself to be Nero's child; I would dance while he fiddled if civilization blazed upon its own fatuous fables.

I needed a new line of work, clearly. I've always been overly attracted to terrorism.

Fourth story: On being a disciple

I'm worth a million in prizes
Yeah, I'm through with sleeping on the sidewalk
No more beating my brains
No more beating my brains
With the liquor and drugs
With the liquor and drugs
– Iggy Pop, 'Lust for Life' [2]

Iggy Pop once said that when The Stooges (the band that provided a twentieth-century soundtrack for youth and rebellion) started they were 'organized as a group of Utopian communists'. He thought that songwriting was about 'glory':

> I didn't know you'd get paid for it. We practiced a total immersion to try to forge a new approach which would be something of our own. Something of lasting value. Something that was going to be revealed and created and was not yet known. (Pop 2014)

Iggy Pop describes here the almost mystical pull that compels many in the creative industries. In this keynote address (an annual lecture honouring the legacy of BBC broadcaster John Peel, lifelong champion of the new) he does not neglect to also discuss the apprenticeship process. Pop emphatically stresses the importance of study (for him, working in a record store and exposure to all forms of music); the art of endurance and experience (instrumental practice and experimentation); and information as the three key ingredient for artistic freedom and growth (obtained for him through immersion, and finding 'people who were smarter than me'). All of these things are essential building blocks for the artist. In summary, his message was 'Get the knowledge'. We 'Get the knowledge' by apprenticeship, and forge art through relentless dedication. Sharing stories, I believe, well serves that quest. In such an environment, story becomes not an object or fact but just another source of immersion. If you dared, you could insert the adjective 'sacred' before 'source' and think of it as a kind of immersive, blue, religious, devoted drowning.

...and finally

> Hemingway was generous in so many different ways. In his letters and in his conversations with friends, Hemingway gave away the very substance out of which another man might have created an entire body of work.
> *– Lillian Ross (1950)*

I have not innocently recruited the lyrics of famous performers (or for that matter famous writers) to serve this exploration of the value of writers sharing their own stories of a life indentured to the 'circus' of writing. Creed and status have their certain currencies, after all, but it is the performative elements of storytelling and that ability to foster trust, intimacy, and inspiration that most preoccupy me. When you speak or perform, even if from a blueprint, you are in a random and wild space where anything might happen. Even something as comparatively tame as a writing tutor responding to a question from a student about being a writer (which I suggest can open up a more existential space than a technical question about the mechanics of writing might) has its dangers and responsibilities and joys and possibilities for transformation. Writers always have a lot to write, but unlike rock stars they rarely have to perform what they pen to stadiums of 'disciples'. Just as the medieval Christian church practiced rogation (which derives from the Latin verb *rogare*, to ask) – a ritual devoted to (via prayer) granting wishes such as *Please rain on my crops* – stadium bands have their faithful followers who all want something magic from them. The Rogation Festival, said to be based on a bible verse from John 16: 'Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full', was eliminated by the Vatican in 1970. To promise too much borders on the unethical, but that does little to qualify desire. Writing tutors are not rock stars or priests but we too work in the rogation business, and what is knowledge if not transcendence? It is not my job

to dissuade people from their dreams, whether they be for rain or writing. *Be generous with your stories*, I say when I've finished telling one of mine. And, always: there aren't too many of us – there's more in need of a good story than there are tellers.

Notes

[1] According to research conducted by cultural economist Professor David Throsby, the average annual income from creative work for Australian writers is $12,900. return to text

[2] The song's lyrics contain a number of references to William S Burroughs' experimental novel *The Ticket That Exploded*, published in the USA in 1967 (see Pop 1977). return to text

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