

TEXT Volume 21 No 1 April 2017

Editorial

Creative Writing magazines

Recently, in the Runaway Bay newsagency (north of Surfers Paradise), my eye was attracted by a sign on one of the shelves: it said 'Women's Interest'. Below it, six magazines – all of them to do with creative writing: *The Writer* (US), *The Writer's Chronicle* (US), *Writer's Digest* (US), *Writers' Forum* (UK), *Writing Magazine* (UK) and *Literary Review* (UK). They cost me a total of \$92.16 [1].

These are genuine creative writing magazines aimed at the developing writer (with the exception of *Literary Review* which is equivalent to the *Australian Book Review*, relevant as it says, 'For people who devour books'). They are magazines with pedigrees: *The Writer* has been published for 130 years; *Writer's Digest* for more than 90 years; *The Writer's Chronicle* represents the vast network of the American Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), and *Literary Review* was founded 40 years ago at Edinburgh University and features reviewers who are 'usually authors themselves, not just critics'. Each magazine has its own lively and informative website.

What topics exercise the minds and interest of these magazines' authors and editors currently? Judging from the front-page headlines:

- Young Adult writing / Top 17 sentences in literature (*The Writer*)
- The myth of 'Show, Don't Tell' (*The Writer's Chronicle*)
- Write that novel! 21 ways to keep your plot moving (*Writer's Digest*)
- Get Published! What to write while you're writing your novel (*Writers' Forum*)
- Beat writer's block: Busting the myth and dealing with the reality (*Writing Magazine*)
- Jonathan Swift's outrageous world (*Literary Review*)

A predictable swag, it seems. One can imagine most of these headlines circulating and recycling across the group's covers throughout the year. But commercial magazines rely on sales, so presumably these perennial issues are money-spinners. Let's take a look inside.

The editorials are not so predictable: the influence of one's reading as a child on one's later writing and reading; the need to support new YA and children's writers (*The Writer*); the Nobel Prize Committee's decision to award the Literature prize to a singer/songwriter compared with another Nobel laureate poet, Rabindranath Tagore (*The Writer's Chronicle*); the fearful uncertainty and exciting possibility of sitting down to write and not knowing exactly where your story will take you (*Writer's Digest*); practising on smaller projects to boost your skills for the big (eg novel) project (*Writers' Forum*); the foundation of good writing is reading, so take a look at the magazine's selection of 20 best books of the year (*Writing Magazine*). *Literary Review* magazine does not have an editorial, but it does have a 'Pulpit' column written by a guest author. This edition focuses on the Brisbane Writers' Festival and Lionel Shriver's keynote speech about cultural appropriation (just as *TEXT*'s editorial did last issue).

I have to say that the editorials of these magazines tend towards a refreshing complexity and a recognition of the rich depth of creative writing practice, as opposed to the often superficial come-ons! emblazoned on their front covers.

So, at this stage of my newsagency investigation, I began to wonder whether or not I might actually recommend any of these publications to my students. I was already surprised by the sophistication of the editorials. Might the features, articles and columns be as impressive? There is not space here to fully review each magazine, so I will pick out aspects of just three of them.

The Writer publishes a feature involving Roy Peter Clark, the author of several books about writing process. In 'Read like a writer', readers of the magazine have sent in 17 sentences from famous writers and Clark has responded to them in terms of reverse engineering the writing to find the lessons about writing skills revealed. Sure, it's a big advert for Clark's book, *The Art of X-Ray Reading: How the Secrets of 25 Great Works of Literature Will Improve Your Writing* (2016), but it's also a perceptive piece about the reading tools a writer needs. I ordered a copy of Clark's book even before I finished reading the article.

Writers' Forum includes a piece funkily titled 'Technophobia: Handwriting and the modern author' by Keir Thomas, a computer expert. This is an account of the technologies available to transfer your hand-written MS to computer, which include OCR software, smart pens which work on pads, and even smarter pens which put real ink on real paper while also beaming a copy to your device. I want one, but they are expensive.

The *Writing Magazine* has a section on self-publishing. Three articles give step-by-step advice on how to self-publish using Createspace, Kindle, and also by going it alone. These are tutorials, really; they provide insight and advice about DIY processes that are not easy to undertake alone, especially in the first instance by the aspirant self-publishing writer.

Seeing these magazines sitting for sale in the Runaway Bay newsagency surprised me – at first because I did not think there would be buyers for them in a canal-lifestyle, middle-class, boats-and-barbecue suburb. But, on reading them, I was surprised in another way. Although they are glossy, highly pictorial, full of advertising, and laid out in the busy format magazines must have these days to compete with computer screens, they contain useful and sometimes deep analysis of writing processes.

I will indeed recommend them to my students, although I doubt any student can afford to buy them or subscribe to their websites (only some of which are free). And I will consider subscribing myself. The developing writers of Runaway Bay are well served by their newsagent even if they are, apparently, all women.

—Nigel Krauth

In this issue

Several of the authors who have contributed to this edition of *TEXT* interrogate collaboration, its practice, its meaning, its poetics. Others productively explore the cultural context for the creative practitioner, the challenges of industry change, and particular instances of naming, remembrance and retrieval, drawing on the work of writers and thinkers as diverse as Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Carter, Isobel Armstrong and Estelle Barrett.

In a timely industry-focused article on the question of platforms, Nick Earls gives us a professional writer's perspective on ebook publishing since the launch of Stephen King's commercial ebook novella *Riding the Bullet* in 2000. This is a robustly researched work in which Earls argues that pitting ebooks against paper books has been a profoundly unhelpful approach. He tracks the rise of the digital audio book as well as other emerging forms, and argues that contemporary creative writers need to be prepared to maximise a work's potential in any available platform, and that we ought to engage dynamically with several platforms at once.

Evija Trofimova, in 'Closet Writing', explores academic writing as practice, process and product, arguing that the myth of mastery in academia works to hide most academic writers' experiences of a writing process that is messy, emotional and complex. Trofimova argues convincingly for 'more revealing conversations, processual exposure' and 'intellectual undressing' in the way we approach writing as academics so as to share, alleviate and diminish common feelings of anxiety and isolation. This is a perceptive and self-reflexive article that deserves a broad academic readership.

A collaborative essay by Francesca Rendle-Short, Stayci Taylor, Michelle Aung Thin and Ronnie Scott outlines their involvement in a recent storytelling project with the social enterprise STREAT, a group that works with young people who are homeless and disadvantaged in Melbourne's inner city Melbourne. This article takes Paul Carter's notion of material thinking and applies it to the #STREATstories project as an instance of artistic activity and intervention, exploring an applied creative writing approach to fieldwork. The result is a wonderfully engaging exploration of the many possible meanings of collaboration.

Ruby Todd, Lucinda McKnight and Owen Bullock discuss an ongoing creative and conceptual collaboration in which 'invisible' metaphors such as 'cloud' and 'screen' are explored in the context of the virtual. The authors consider the poetics of longing, revisit Baudrillard's simulacra, and work to locate their own creative productions as forms of assemblage, performance and heteroglossic play. The result is a productive contribution to discussions around poetry, materiality, technology, and language.

In 'Risk, Constraint, Play: A new paradigm for examining practice-as-research', Louise Tondeur uses a ludic methodology inspired by Isobel Armstrong to ask how we might resist reductive and restrictive positions and structures that do not match the experiential *process-led* version of practice. This provocative article examines the cultural contexts of the Creative Practitioner, and the cultural discourses we *come out* into, ultimately providing a cogent argument for the foregrounding of process. It's a thought-provoking contribution by an articulate creative-practice scholar.

Patrick West provides an example of how creative work can yield insights for research, both in its instantiation and its revisiting. West reflects on the title of his short story 'Nhill' and develops Amos Oz's notion of the beginning of a story as a contract that all texts make with their readers.

West posits[KJB2] 'Nhill' as a provocative instance of this sort of contract because it is an English-language corruption, and mis-hearing, of the Aboriginal word, 'nyell'. Taking Estelle Barratt's work on creative practice research as a starting point, West's discussion shifts us beautifully to 'the very edge of homophony, where sounds of language and other sounds, merge into place.'

Wendy Glassby considers Ross Gibson's novel *The Summer Exercises* (2008) in terms of its employment of images and discontinuous narrative as a means of representing what is here called 'the other' – in this case an historical Sydney. Glassby posits Gibson's novelistic method as a means for bringing the reader towards an ambiguity, or, as the writer articulately states – 'the reward from reading *The Summer Exercises* is therefore neither clarity nor resolution but, rather, a sense of something just out of reach, a perplexity that lingers long after reading is finished'. In this way, Glassby offers us Gibson's text as an exemplar for writers who seek to mobilise imaginative and sensitive possibilities for representing otherness.

—Kevin Brophy and Julianne van Loon

New special issues

Special Issue 38, *Illumination through narrative: using writing to explore hidden life experience*, edited by Margaret McAllister, Donna Lee Brien and Leanne Dodd, collates papers from a multi-disciplinary conference that explicitly targeted participating researchers from diverse disciplines. The conference, 'Enlightened: narratives and narrative strategies to awaken applied and creative humanism', was held in November 2016 in Noosa, Queensland. The papers gathered in this special issue explore the ways narrative is used across a range of disciplines, as well as the different theoretical underpinnings and skillsets used to discuss narrative and its effects in those disciplines.

Special Issue 39, *The Essay*, presents a range of interpretations of what the contemporary essay is and can be. Given the recent popularity of the essay in Australasia, editors Rachel Robinson and Kylie Cardell sought contributions that gauged and reflected on the genre's historical development, or that traced its inflection in international contexts of relevance to Australasian voices. The fifteen articles in this issue represent the lively scholarship in the area, exploring the essay's evolving form and function as an act of 'thinking through', as a conversation that moves the reader intellectually as well as emotionally, and as a form which demands response. Demonstrating these ideas, the issue collates articles on formal innovation in the essay, contemporary essayists, the relationship of essay to autobiography, polemical uses of the essay, the scholar as essayist, and the future of the essay.

Special Issue 40, *Making it New: Finding contemporary meanings for creativity*, is based on the idea that the long history of creative practice and exploration found in the art world has the capacity to inform and energise creative thought and discourse in those areas of human engagement that lie outside the domain of art and artistic practice. The editors of this issue, Monica Carroll and Jen Webb, invited a range of writers and academics to produce works on the topic of creativity from their own perspective. They responded with rich and highly varied essays that draw into conversation discourses from science, philosophy, creative writing, literary studies, health science, journalism, and cultural theory. This special issue also includes a range of vibrant creative works that address the theme of creativity.

—Dallas Baker and Ross Watkins

Note

[1] Details for these works:

Literary Review (UK) 2016 Issue 448 (November), London,
72pp, AUD11.99

The Writer (US) 2017 Vol 130, No 1 (January), Braintree MA, 48pp,
AUD15.99

The Writer's Chronicle (US) 2016 Vol 49, No 3 (December), Fairfax VA,
120pp, AUD16.99

Writer's Digest (US) 2017 Vol 97 No 1 (January), Cincinnati OH, 72pp,
AUD22.99

Writers' Forum (UK) 2016 No 181 (November), Bournemouth, 68pp,
AUD11.25

Writing Magazine (UK) 2016 (December), Leeds, 112pp, AUD12.95 return
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