TEXT Volume 20 No 1 April 2016

Editorial

Conflicting and connecting narratives

In Creative Writing we are familiar with the terms *narrative* and *culture*. They are part of the language we speak. But they are claimed today also by the corporate world: each institution develops a 'narrative' from the particular 'culture' it claims to have built. The 'narrative' brings members of the corporation or group together, puts them on the same page (so to speak), provides them with a shared history and identity, and tells a coherent story to those outside looking in. Managers talk about narrative as a managed thing, as something necessary in the process of inspiring a group and keeping it working.

As Creative Writing academics, we are involved in creating and maintaining the culture of our group – in teaching and research – within our university. And from that involvement we seek to make a narrative for ourselves: a story that reassures us that we belong, that there is a perceived value to what we do, and that the sky has not fallen. We are told by our masters – our master-storytellers – that the narrative, kept positive, will see us all through.

But creating our narrative is both like and unlike that other narrative-building we do as writers. It is impacted by setting (e.g. our university and its policies, the government and its vagaries), by characters and their plot-lines (our deans, vice-chancellors, closer colleagues, etc), and by our first-person viewpoints, emotions, flaws etc. Building and maintaining a Creative Writing group culture where a coherent narrative can emerge is indeed as complex as writing a big campus novel. Unfortunately, however, we can't simply write the characters and setting to operate as we see fit.

Here are some competing narratives in the environment at the moment which impinge on all Creative Writing academics:

- At the national education policy level, a new narrative favours innovation in technology and science. In the context of funding uncertainty, and a new focus on employability, where will the creative arts and writing end up being placed?
- At the national research policy level, the changed narrative we enjoyed hearing from the ARC is some 6 years old. Possibly the ARC is due to change its story. What will we hear from them next?
- The narrative in the publishing industry has changed gradually over the past two decades. While we sometimes don't want to hear this story, there's a slow revolution in the publishing of creative works (and academic works too) which means the forms and genres we write to are evolving. Where and when will the replacement of paper books by digital screens end?
- Knowledge itself is changing. Knowledge kept in books and libraries is being replaced by digital knowledge storage. This provides very different capacities for manipulation, extension, intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, etc. The new narrative here is about plurality and multi-applicability. We can no longer silo-ize our Creative Writing knowledge narrative, it has to fit with others.

The challenge for each node in the matrix of Creative Writing academic groups across universities is to create individual group narratives that intersect with others' and connect us in a strong overall culture of research and teaching.

--*Nigel Krauth*

This issue of *TEXT* begins and ends with papers that look to possible futures for writing in the academy. Between these papers, there are several deeply reflective and incisive papers that remind us of what we might otherwise devalue or overlook when we are thinking about writing, reading and creativity. There is much to savour and much to provoke, all evidence of the myriad directions research is taking in this field of creative writing.

While the future is out of reach, it is only achieved by coming to it with some vision of how it might come about. Ross Watkins and Nigel Krauth ('Radicalising the scholarly paper: New forms for the traditional journal article') aim to invigorate discussion on the positioning of creative writing in the academy, as new approaches to the journal article are emerging. Taking the example of Walter Benjamin's failed academic career, they re-examine the rhetoric and packaging of knowledge in the academy, re-opening discussion of fictocriticism's creative-writing bent, and asking whether such forms as 'open-review' publishing and an un-siloed, visually oriented internet might be throwing up new methods for presenting and testing knowledge, methods uncannily familiar to creative writing.

Another form of packaging for knowledge is, of course, typography. Welby Ings ('The visible voice: Typographical distinction in thesis writing') begins with the perhaps obvious but all the same surprising observation that typographical decisions in thesis writing can establish expectations about authority, credulity and identity. Here, the 'readability' of knowledge is the point, a matter that touches on the poetics of knowledge.

Paul Williams ('The performative exegesis') keeps the focus on forms of knowledge, questioning the role of the exegesis as a method for presenting and generating knowledge. Should we not be suspicious of an artist who interprets their own work for us? Does the exegesis risk confusing the meaning of a work with its intended meaning? And what might it mean for the exegesis when a writer brings playfulness and performativity to it? Paul Williams opens us to some examples of exegetical writing that do move into the performative, and perhaps demonstrate that there are creative directions for the impasse the exegetical document sometimes seems to be.

Taking a lead from Ina Schabert's seminal 1990 study on fictional biography, James Vicars ('Discarding the disclaimer? Reappraising fiction as a mode of biography') reappraises the potential of fiction as a mode of biography. Vicars examines the case of writers who openly engage the imagination in producing an account of a life. Peter Robb, Julian Barnes, Drusilla Modjeska, Peter Carey and Hilary Mantel are among the writers he discusses, asking what kind of disclaimer might best serve their historical works.

Andrew Craig ('Closure and the novel') performs and embodies many of the arguments and perspectives explored above in one of the most compelling academic articles I have read for many years. While writing his thesis on the concept of closure in literature, his own life is about to be cut short under a diagnosis of cancer. His writing is analysis, performance, memoir, research document and un-putdown-able fiction as well.

Jessica Seymour ('Cartesian dreams, engagement aesthetics, and storytelling strategies in the online space') is one of the first academics to explore the creative significance of transmedia narratives. These events happen virtually, re-telling the stories of classic literature, but as social media events that people can engage with online. Just as Descartes warned we cannot be sure we are not being deceived by demons, can we be sure we know anything or anyone when our contact with event and characters (people?) is purely online? Welcome to the new weird, wired world of transmedia narratives.

Vassiliki Veros ('Marginalising children's reading experiences: From series books to paratextual reading'), like Seymour and Ings, reminds us of what is easily devalued, ignored or passed over. What do children read? They might read books, but many spend their time and energy on the 'paratexts' – fanfiction, review sites, reader forums, and other off-shoots from the longform text. Perhaps we need to value and encourage more the forms of reading outside the book. There are lessons here for writers too, and a rich vein for new research into what it means to read.

Rosemary Williamson ('Writing for transition: The role of food studies in the general academic writing classroom') focuses on the challenges we face with transitional students. How can we best generate inclusion and engagement? Using food studies and writing about food as common ground, Williamson develops a template for teaching. Food passes the relevance test, it is ideal for accounting for diversity, and the specialised form of professional writing we call academic writing can be put productively and engagingly to the task of writing about food. Williamson's account of doing this in the classroom is highly practical and superbly well organised. Her article continues a history of discussions of writing about food in *TEXT*.

Ruby Todd ('"In losing we have something to gain": Examining the analogous movements of "mobilising" absence in literary language, authorial impulse, and elegiac writing') draws from Roland Barthes' elegiac meditations on literature, loss and writing following the death of his mother, to generate a discussion of the analogous movement between the operations of the linguistic sign as a structure based upon loss, and the writer's experience of loss when writing from that loss. This elegant and beautiful meditation on the paradox of elegiac writing sees that while loss can mobilise writing, writing mobilises the narrative and aesthetic powers of absence for its own ends. This is an essay you will be pleased to have read, and one that many will re-read.

Many months in preparation, Brentley Frazer's paper on e-prime – its potential, its life-changing power, its effects upon prose, and its argument with common English – is a revelation and an inspiration, especially for teachers seeking a new approach to teaching the meaning of writing prose ('Beyond *IS*... Creative writing with English Prime'). Frazer has lucidly explicated some of the most complex aspects of e-prime's basis in a linguistic critique of English.

--Kevin Brophy

TEXT Special Issue 34, *Writing and illustrating interdisciplinary research*, is edited by Simon Dwyer, Rachel Franks, Monica Galassi and Kirsten Thorpe. This Special Issue presents writing at what the editors call 'the betwixt and between'. The articles in this special issue are developed from work presented, and discussions held, at the inaugural conference of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Inquiry, at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, in April 2015. The Special Issue looks at how the objectives of the

conference – to promote multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research as part of a broader effort to connect different experiences, research fields and spheres of knowledge – were achieved through explorations of different types of storytelling and narrative writing.

--*Donna Lee Brien*

TEXT
Vol 20 No 1 April 2016
http://www.textjournal.com.au
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