

## Editorial

### Writing and change ... and teaching writing

A major study of creative writers in Australia was announced in the media on 6 October this year. Titled *Book Authors and their Changing Circumstances*, the study was undertaken by the Department of Economics, Macquarie University. Its objectives were to investigate ‘the experiences of Australian authors in the contemporary international book industry’ (Throsby et al 2015: 4).

The study examines authors’ ‘experiences of e-publishing, self-publishing, use of social media and other promotional strategies, changes in income, and copyright infringement’. It also investigates ‘whether authors are changing their creative and work practices in response to shifts in the industry’ (Throsby et al 2015: 7).

We might also ask the question about ‘whether *teachers of creative writing* are changing their creative and work practices in response to shifts in the industry’.

The Macquarie study used a variety of research methods (forums, surveys, statistical research) with the involvement of writers, publishers, associated writing groups and government sources. ‘Over 50 authors participated in the forum’ (Throsby et al 2015: 63). The AAWP was included through its president’s participation. Interview and survey results were compared with data from the 2011 Census occupational classification *2122 – Authors, and Book and Script Editors*.

The report notes: ‘our classification of authors includes scholarly authors and focuses upon people who have written a book but may not identify their primary occupation as being an author’ (Throsby et al 2015: 12). Thus many members of the AAWP are included in this report’s findings.

I know it is lazy journalism, but in this case I think it is worth repeating a significant slab from the media release associated with the report:

#### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

##### Author demographics

- Women make up two-thirds of book authors.
- More than 80 per cent of authors have attended university and almost half have completed a post-graduate degree.
- Professional book authors are relatively old compared to Australia’s population. Half of book authors are aged 40-59 years and nearly 40 per cent are older.
- Nearly three-quarters of book authors were born in Australia.

##### Authors’ earnings

- 43 per cent of authors earn the average annual income for the Australian workforce in 2013-14 FY or higher (\$61,485).
- When all sources of income are included, the average total income for authors is \$62,000. 1 The average income derived from practising as an author is \$12,900.

##### Changes to authors’ practice

- The most widespread impact of new technologies is on promotion, with genre fiction (91 per cent), children’s (83.5 per cent) and poetry (82 per cent) the most likely to have experienced a change in promotion. 1 70 per cent of authors report they have changed the way their work is published or distributed because of new technologies.
- Two-thirds of authors report that new technologies are impacting the way in which they interact with readers, particularly genre fiction authors (85.8 per cent).
- Over half of authors report that new technologies have opened up new

avenues to publish paid, original work, with genre fiction (78.5 per cent) and poets (69 per cent) the most affected.

#### **Allocation of time**

- Nearly one-fifth of authors work full-time in this role.
- The highest proportion of full-time professional writers is in genre fiction, followed by children's and literary fiction.
- Authors spend on average 43 per cent of their working time on their creative occupation as a writer, including writing, research, administration, promotion and networking.

#### **Rights sales, translations and piracy**

- 44.5 per cent of authors have sold overseas rights to their work during their careers\*\*. 1 Nearly one-third of authors have had their work translated.
- Over 25 per cent of authors have had their work pirated and one quarter of authors were unsure. Genre fiction are the most likely to have had their work pirated (44.7 per cent).

#### **Promotion**

- Two-thirds of authors consider serious reviews of their work important for sales, particularly authors of literary fiction (86.5 per cent), scholarly works (75.8 per cent) and poetry (70.2 per cent).
- Nearly two-thirds of authors regard general reader reviews as important for the sale of their work.
- Winning a well-regarded prize relevant to an author's genre is regarded as most important for poets (60.7 per cent), literary fiction (55.1 per cent) and children's authors (49.5 per cent).

#### **Authors and publishers**

- 25 per cent of authors are not currently working with a publisher (other than self-publishing).
- Over 42 per cent of authors are working with one publisher and one-third work with more than one publisher.

#### **Publishing formats**

- The most frequently nominated format for works published in the previous year is a print book by a traditional publisher (44 per cent of authors), followed by an ebook by a traditional publisher (34.3 per cent).

#### **Self-publishing**

- 19 per cent of authors have self-published a print book or an ebook in the previous year.
- Genre fiction authors are the most active self-publishers with over one-third self-publishing.
- 59.4 per cent of self-publishing authors do so to have creative and financial control over their work, followed by just over one-third who were unable to interest a traditional publisher in their work.
- 28 per cent of authors report that self-publishing is becoming increasingly common in their main genre, most notably in poetry, education, creative and other non-fiction.

(Macquarie University Faculty of Business and Economics 2015)

Clearly there is much for creative writing academics to reflect on, respond to and critique in this report. For example, how do the metrics involved in this study reflect what we as teachers know, as practising writers? How do the findings relate to what we say to students about the industry that we prepare them for? How do our curricula address the report's observations about writing careers? Are we surprised by any of what the Department of Economics at Macquarie University has found?

Regarding 'Book Authors and their Changing Circumstances', I have the worrying feeling that many authors and academic-authors will read the words

#### **'Book Authors'**

in bold 24 point font, then reduce the words

#### **'Changing Circumstances'**

to 8 point. We don't like to hear about changes to our circumstances. But this report puts some of the writing on the wall.

– Nigel Krauth

## This issue

From Swinburne University, Dominique Hecq, Christine Hill and Stephen Theiler ('Looking for excellence: A comparative review of the splintering of the arts and sciences') bring us a model of co-authorship in practice. In his famous book on creativity, *The Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler mused that, strictly speaking, creative insights and discoveries are never wholly the work of an isolated individual but rather the outcome of one or several generations of thinkers tackling a common set of questions or dilemmas. Perhaps excellence in research is more likely to be achieved the more commonly we work as explicitly collaborative teams. Hecq, Hill and Theiler endeavour to uncover how the complicated rules surrounding academic research might relate to notions of excellence in research, and further how excellence itself might be measured with validity. This is an important debate for all who work in the tertiary sector across arts and sciences.

Just as collaboration might in fact be the template for all creative work, those who have experienced a long partnership understand that personal identity can be a phenomenon shared between two people. Through a reading of Walter Mikac and Lindsay Simpson's grief memoir, *To Have and To Hold*, Katrin Den Elzen ('Rewriting the bereaved self: The role of narrative in rebuilding the self and constructing meaning following the loss of one's spouse') explores the ways that fiction might help to re-assert and re-build an individual identity when a spouse dies. Jo-Ann sparrow ("Darling adopted daughter": A practice-led exploration of adoption wounds through the writing of a memoir') continues the theme of writing as healing. Is there a primal wound suffered by all, even infants, when taken from their birth mother to be adopted? — and how might one begin to explore this in an innovative practice-led research text that expands the possibilities of the grief memoir? This is a fine and exciting account of a research project that stays close to what matters to the writer.

A number of articles in this issue showcase questions of pedagogy in creative writing. Each makes a critical contribution to the picture of what is happening on the ground in creative writing classrooms. For instance, what can use of visual art as a teaching tool for creative writing show us about modes of representation in fiction? Christine Owen ('The poet, the vase and the kettle: "Show not tell" and the role of visual art') begins her exploration with the modification of the rule of thumb to a more open and subtle 'show not *just* tell'. She analyses three representations of objects: Daniel Defoe's earthen pot, Virginia Woolf's vase and Charles Dickens' kettle. Can an object be too solid and too detailed in a work of fiction? What are the politics behind over-described objects? Could a kettle be a character in fiction? What effects did photography and film have on representations of the world in fiction? This article is rich in observations and material for anyone wanting new ways to say to students, 'Show, don't just tell.'

Carolyn Beasley ('Teaching behind bars: Challenges and solutions for creative writing classes in prison') also focuses on teaching, this time teaching creative writing in prisons. Beasley taught a postgraduate writing program in a women's prison for six years. To the background of an overview of education in the prison system, she outlines some of the biggest challenges and her experiences in overcoming them. One particularly interesting challenge is whether to allow prisoners to publish details of their prison life (even if fictional or poetic) under their own names. Before this, though, there is the question of how to get prisoners to feel secure enough to tell their stories. These challenges, I think, find their way even in attenuated form into every classroom.

Paul Magee ('Poetry and risk: On the similarities between recital and composition') has taken the radical step of making by-heart recitals of canonical works an assessable task in his creative writing class. But most surprising of all is the willingness of students to talk in

detail and knowledgeably with confidence when advising other students on their recital performances. In contrast, they struggle to find what is best and most useful to say about their peers' poems on the page. This is inspired pedagogy and an article of deeply thoughtful responses to what students can and possibly could do.

There is continuing interest in reading, in understanding texts, in inquiries into the choices writers make that enhance or manipulate effects. Christopher Mellon ('Crossing shadows: Bridging the voices of hard-boiled detective and noir crime fiction') observes that in hard-boiled crime fiction (Chandler, Cain, Ellroy) voice is an integral aspect of the narrative. What then would happen to the nature of voice when a *noir* element is introduced (Woolrich, Hughes, Browne and others)? For anyone teaching genre fiction, this kind of discussion is a starting point and foundation. Semiotics offers further ways of writing about the effects and significance of choices writers make as they construct their texts.

Owen Bullock ('Semiotics and poetry – why the relational axes might yet increase our understanding of poetic practice') asks questions of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of Michele Leggott's poetry, and extends this to speculating on the semiotic role of the blank spaces on the poetic page.

Ben Carey ('The reader-assembled narrative: representing the random in print fiction') looks at the works of BS Johnson, Robert Coover and Marc Saporta in his contribution to a growing scholarly focus on writing's digital environments. Carey is interested in the ways that an *avant-garde* paper-based environment might inform digital treatments of narrative, and in turn take up digital influences. This is highly relevant to forms of creative writing interested in experimentation and also the well-wrought phrase.

No issue is complete without an acknowledgement of the importance of the history of psychology and cultural treatments of psyche to creative writing. Maria Takolander ('From the "mad" poet to the "embodied" poet: Reconceptualising creativity through cognitive science paradigms') contests the culturally powerful trope of the mad poet in some way deranged, whose psyche is inevitably pathological.

From the work of Frederick Burwick, Takolander traces the history of this persistent trope. She argues that the three traits typically associated with 'mad poeisis' – emotional extremity, divergent thinking and unconscious processes – are in fact evidence of a healthy, complexly embodied engagement with the world. It is when we are at our best that some become poets. This is a richly learned article that will reward the attentive reader.

– Kevin Brophy

### Special Issues Nos 30-33

We also present four special issues with this issue of *TEXT*.

*TEXT* Special issue 30, *Creative Writing as Research IV* edited by Nigel Krauth, Donna Lee Brien, Ross Watkins, Anthony Lawrence, Dallas Baker and Moya Costello, responds to the current challenge faced by writers in the academy to identify with greater precision what it is about their work that genuinely makes an original contribution to knowledge across the field of creative writing (or, more rarely, in another field). In this issue, twenty-eight pieces of creative writing from writers based in universities from Australia and New Zealand are published under refereed circumstances with statements regarding their status as research attached. Contributors to this Special issue also worked collaboratively with the editors on what is now the fourth iteration in the series of *Creative Writing as Research* issues (following those published in *TEXT* in 2010, 2012 and 2014) to ensure that each work – comprising a piece of creative writing together with a statement of research background, contribution and significance – not only follows the latest requirements of the Australia Research Council's Excellence in Research for Australia process, but substantiates its knowledge claims.

*TEXT* Special issue 31, *Beyond Australia Queer* edited by Jay Daniel Thompson and Dallas John Baker, builds on a special edition of the journal *Meanjin* titled *Australia Queer*, a

pioneering collection of queer Australian writing published in 1996. This issue includes fiction, scholarly non-fiction and essays that address the question of what 'Australia queer' might mean in the current historical moment and/or that engage with the twin domains of writing (either creative or critical, or both) and Queer Theory. The editors have collected pieces that investigate whether 'queer' is still viable, twenty years after its inception, or if it has been superseded. These contributors also offer commentary on what it means, in the early twenty-first century, to be 'Australian' and 'queer', and what 'Australia queer' might mean.

*TEXT* Special issue 32, *Why YA?: Researching, Writing and Publishing Young Adult Fiction in Australia* edited by emerging scholars Jessica Seymour and Denise Beckton, presents a range of scholarly research articles on the theme of Young Adult (YA) fiction. This special issue also showcases a small selection of contemporary short stories by emerging Australian YA fiction writers, and concludes with a collaborative review article profiling and discussing the contributors' favourite Australasian YA novels and non-fiction works. The editors' propose that this Special Issue exposes, and gives credence to, the complex and extensive influence that Australian Young Adult fiction has both within the region, and also internationally, and the work presented ranges across fiction and nonfiction, and crossover works. Although the focus is on Australia, works and research from New Zealand and further afield is also included.

*TEXT* Special issue 33, *Art as Parodic Practice* edited by Marion May Campbell, Dominique Hecq, Jondi Keane and Antonia Pont, explores how contemporary parodic practices have, and might be, generating new modes of subversion. Examining both the historiography and the contemporary potency of social contestation through parodic artistic practice, this Special issue reveals the vital importance of the relationship between parodic forms and cultural politics, and the narrative and other methods that do the heavy lifting of reinventing and reimagining societal structures from within given codes. Based in theoretical, critical and creative textual musing and engagement, this Special issue proposes the possibility of such a thing as revolutionary laughter, and a radical *becoming other*.

These special issues are the result of the work of thirteen different editors and over sixty contributors. *TEXT* is pleased to be able to publish such diverse and important contributions to creative writing research, and continues to welcome expressions of interest for special issues.

– Donna Lee Brien and Dallas J Baker

## Works cited

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