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Writing Time: Coleridge, Creativity, and Commerce

Abstract:

The Romantic ideal of creativity elaborated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his introduction to 'Kubla Khan' (1816), in which he extols such experiences as solitude, inspiration, and an almost transcendental dissociation from the mundanity of everyday life, remains present in the contemporary consciousness as part of a shared mythology of creative practice. Rather than focussing on the psychological frameworks by which creativity is believed to be constituted, this essay centralises the *material* relations of creative practice, with particular attention paid to the experiences of creative writing *time* revealed in interviews with contemporary Australian novelists Isobelle Carmody, Kate Forsyth, and Lee Battersby. Drawing upon recent theories about the sociomateriality and cooperative frameworks of creativity, and Rita Felski's elaboration of heterogeneous temporalities, this essay explores the possibility of understanding creativity in the field of writing not in terms of existence within or without the experiential boundaries of the Romantic ideal, but rather in terms of its operation within matrices of temporal relations that encompass the sublime and mundane, individual and collective, asynchronous and synchronous, creative and commercial.

Biographical note:

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I.

In the summer of the year 2015, the author of this essay had retired to a nineteenth-century guesthouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. If this sentence sounds familiar, it is because it is adapted from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous account of his composition of 'Kubla Khan' (1816). I open with this account because this essay is largely concerned with the experiential dimensions of writing from the perspective of writers, and the ideas within arise from my own observations and experiences over my career. I do not hold that writers' experiences of creativity ought to be privileged over theoretical models of creativity, but that the two ought always to be in dialogue. For my part, I have long held a contrary position to Coleridge's account of creativity, which is a version of the inspired, lone genius myth; and yet here I was, in Exmoor, on a retreat, with all the time in the world to write. And I did write: several thousand words a day, in fact, before I had to return to my usual daily routine of professional responsibilities. Return to these mundane demands meant my ability to get words on the page became compromised. Again, if this sounds familiar, it is because it mirrors the last lines of Coleridge's introduction, when a 'person on business from Porlock' (2006: 446) arrives and Coleridge finds his inspiration has vanished. The structure of Coleridge's account, which I have adapted for this introduction, puts the sublime experience of art in opposition to the mundane and practical necessities of business. A dichotomy between art and business is a feature of many accounts of creative work. Bernard Lahire writes about how certain forms of creative production seem to go 'hand in hand with professionalism of an economic type', potentially marking them as ''industrial' literature' as opposed to works with 'a very high degree of literary legitimacy' (2010: 445). Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu writes about the literary field as being structured by the struggle between heteronomous forces (economic) and autonomous forces (imagined independence from the economy, or 'art for art's sake') (1993: 40). This is a dichotomy that writers continue to try to make their peace with, both privately and publicly. That writers experience the tension between these two aspects of literary production is demonstrated in Antonia Hayes's recent essay in *The Lifted Brow*, which explores the conflicted feelings that arise when 'your precious collection of words' is transformed by the publishing industry into 'a product' and the associated 'maddening shame spiral' of having to promote that product (2005: 108, 110). The tension between creativity and commerce remains 'the central tension of the publishing industry' (Squires 2014: 41).

The economic and industrial imperatives of how a writer spends their time are imagined in contrast to Coleridge's model of sublime creation. I take my definition of the sublime, fittingly, from the Romantics, particularly Wordsworth who, in 'Lines (Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey)', wrote of the sublime as 'that blessed mood' where 'the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened' (2004: 675). The sublime becomes associated with the inspired genius that is 'still preserved in our collective imaginary' (Glaveanu 2010: 149), whereas business is associated with the mundane 'gentleman from Porlock' who disrupts the sublime. In this essay, I argue that creative writing participates in both the sublime *and* the mundane, and that the writer has as much in common with Coleridge as they do with the businessman from Porlock. Recent sociomaterial theorists of creativity, for example Tanggaard and Glaveanu, seek to understand the links between creativity and culture (2016). This essay teases out some more granular ideas about creativity's relationship to the industrial aspects of culture, in particular how publishers (and perhaps even readers) exert pressure that may shape writers' experience of writing time. My

argument can best be made with reference to the experiences of published creative writers, and so this essay draws upon interviews as well as my own experiences. Howard Becker reframes art as an activity that comprises many tasks and resources: training, materials, equipment, time, support, and then later distribution, audience, and so on (2008: 3-5). This view of art foregrounds its materiality, the fact that it is a product of lived experiences and behaviours. His ideas accord with those of Lene Tanggaard, who promotes the importance of analysis of materiality in creativity 'understood as things, artefacts and physical conditions' (2012: 22). My essay focusses on the material resource of time (for reasons I will outline shortly), and puts sociomaterial perspectives on creativity into dialogue with literary theorist Rita Felski's conceptions of heterogeneous temporalities outlined in *Doing Time* (2000). My contention is that a writer's sense and use of time speak to both their identities as artists and as business people. We neither need to debunk Coleridge's account of creativity nor adopt it uncritically: rather, we need to read the story it tells in a different light.

For those unfamiliar with it, Coleridge's account reads as follows: while in a 'lonely farm house' he took 'an anodyne', and then fell asleep in his chair. He 'continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses', dreaming hundreds of lines of the poem 'without any sensation or consciousness of effort'. He woke and began to write it down, but '[a]t this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock' and the disruption meant that the lines of poetry, for Coleridge, 'passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast' (2006: 446-447). 'Kubla Khan', then, is presented as a fragment, a promise of what epic art it might have been if completed, its ragged edges providing evidence of the brutality of the interruption. It is both an idealised description of how creativity happens and a cautionary tale about answering the call of business.

Coleridge's myth of creativity has been contextualised or challenged by critics. Like the other Romantics, he had compelling reasons to present himself as living outside the mundane affairs of general society. Raymond Williams's essay on 'The Romantic Artist' (1983) shows us that the relationship between author and reader changed fundamentally during the Romantic period. This change was driven in part by technological change that facilitated the mass production and circulation of texts, which meant that art now became subject to the laws of the market. Arising alongside this change of relationship between writer and audience was a notion of an anonymous and multiple 'public', which was imagined to exert populist demands on writers. These factors generated a necessity for artists to see themselves existing above the fickle tastes of public and popular taste: 'the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius, was becoming a kind of rule' (Williams 1983: 32). These ideas and attitudes grew out of specific conditions of history, which Williams astutely points out were experienced 'on the senses' of Romantic writers (1983: 31), reminding us of the material relations that were wickered into the contemplation and composition of texts. If we hold, with Becker and Tanggaard, that creativity is a material activity, then for Coleridge it involved multiple behaviours and resources. One of these, according to his account, was uninterrupted solitary time to contemplate.

A century and a half since the Romantic period drew to a close, the idea of uninterrupted time for inspiration is still thought of as being incompatible with business, in either its sense of commerce (the demands of industry) or busy-ness (the demands of workplaces and families, who are also caught up in economic decisions about work and care). According to Glaveanu (2010), '[c]enturies of philosophical thinking and some decades of individualistic psychological theorising have embedded creativity into persons or

productions that 'stand apart' from their social background' (147), what Montuori and Purser (1995) call 'the hyper-individualist understanding of creativity' that is embodied in the myth of the solitary artist: 'The lone genius view posits an irreconcilable dichotomy… between self and environment…. There is much evidence that points to the contrary in fact being true' (71, 78). Becker's sociological approach to art offers some of that evidence. Becker argues that all artistic work such as writing 'involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number of people' (2008: 1). While that activity may be made explicit in the case of, say, film and television, where cast and crew are visibly and publicly listed in the credits, it is not as explicit in the field of writing. However, as Becker points out, 'this appearance of autonomy is… superficial' (2008: 14). Writers need publishers and booksellers, or even individuals who support them in other ways. Becker cites, for example, the case of Anthony Trollope who paid a groom five pounds to bring him his coffee every morning at 5.30 a.m (2008: 1). Trollope writes, 'I do not know that I ought not to feel that I owe more to him than to any one else for the success I have had' (cited in Becker 2008: 1). For Becker, the writer 'works in the centre of co-operating people' (2008: 25), except in the case of 'totally individual and therefore unintelligible works' (2008: 14). Similarly, Glaveanu holds that 'creativity is not the product of a 'disconnection', but of deeply rooted 'connections' between person and environment, self and others, creator and culture' (2014: 147). This is a radically different view of creativity from the one presented by the poet/narrator in Coleridge's account.

The notion of creative solitude, then, has not gone unquestioned. In many ways, common sense would tell us that creativity cannot operate the way he presents it. Increasing attention paid to the varying levels of education, access, and privilege of writers across gender, race, and class is a strong rebuke against any such idea. However, the Romantic myths of creativity persist pervasively and popularly. The word 'gifted' is still used to describe creative people, suggesting that 'creativity is, indeed, a gift, emerging fully formed with no need for diligent study or the development of craft' (Montuori and Purser 1995: 78). Writing retreats are a recognised practice, funded by arts agencies, promising uninterrupted time to connect with creative work. The way writers speak about their work at festivals and in social media veers between practical and mystical: the title of Elizabeth Gilbert's book on creativity, *Big Magic*, captures this ethos (2015). I have taught many amateur writers who hold firmly to the notion of inspiration: in their reliance on dreams (and sometimes substances) to give them ideas, in their resistance to planning or project management, and in their belief that if they could just take a year off, they could finally finish a novel. Clearly, there is great pleasure in subscribing to such creative myths. But is there also some truth embedded within them that can withstand the close investigation of their material conditions?

II.

Most of the things we might classify as material resources for writing can be romanticised or even fetishised. In terms of sociomaterial resources, Becker's work on cooperative networks in art worlds shows how other people around writers are 'essential to the final outcome' of artistic endeavour (2008: 25); and acknowledgements pages often feature rapturous celebrations of support relationships between writers and peers or publishing professionals. Tanggaard writes of the 'close relationship between human beings and material tools in the creativity process' (2012: 21), and these too are sometimes idealised by writers. Social media allows writers to share photographs of

their writing spaces or dramatic views from writing retreats, creating a virtual narrative of idealised creative experience. My own fixation on ideal stationery became clear to me recently when I tidied one of my cabinets and found eighteen empty notebooks. Support, space, and materials are all necessary for writing to happen, but can be compromised readily. I can get by with only the cursory attention of my agent or writing group, I can (and sometimes do) write in my car while waiting for my daughter on the street outside her school, I can write with a cheap ballpoint pen on the backs of old documents. What I cannot skimp on, what will always undermine my best efforts of preparation, planning, and preservation, is time.

Time, in Coleridge's account, is referenced both explicitly and implicitly. The 'profound sleep' during which he dreams the poem is described as lasting 'three hours' (2016: 446). Moreover somebody who is free to hole up in a 'lonely farm house' does not have demands on their time made by an employer or a child (his wife, Sarah, was presumably caring for their infant son Hartley). Coleridge's *writing time* has multiple dimensions. As a precondition for creativity, it is unlimited and uninterrupted, which allows and invites inspiration. There are also complex dynamics at work in terms of how writing time and clock time may or may not synchronise. While time enables inspiration, the impingement of business disables it. The different dimensions of writing time are matters of immense significance to writers. In plain terms, time is a necessary material resource for the activities that comprise the craft: not just time to put words on a page, but time to read, to plan, to edit, to think, and to imagine. The amount of time these activities will take is not always predictable, and so a writer's abiding sense is that writing time is scarce. Writing time is implicated in how writers create long projects over months or years. Managing time both short and long term, then, becomes crucial for writers. Time must be found in the day, tasks must be fitted into time, even the most suitable kind of time is up for debate. Is the writer a morning person or a night owl? Must they have uninterrupted time or do they work better in snatches of time between other tasks? How many words can they write in an hour? A day? A weekend? A lifetime? Writing time may also be put under pressure by industrial imperatives, such as deadlines for publishers. The preferred way for an artist to make time is by 'raising money' (Becker 2008: 3). If a writer does not raise money, they have to raise time from elsewhere: reduce their work to part-time hours, forego sleep, leave work and rely on a spouse by taking on more family duties, and so on. Writers may, according to Lahire, 'alternate between time and investment in a 'literary life' and an 'extra-literary professional life''; he calls this the 'double life of writers' (Lahire 2010: 454, 446). The demands of cultural industry, then, are complexly implicated in an analysis of time and creativity.

Rita Felski writes that time 'is a concept of enormous complexity, including questions of measurement, rhythm, synchronization, sequence, tempo and intensity' (Felski 2000: 16-17). Time encompasses and traverses our personal lives, work lives, and leisure, existing 'at many different levels' and experienced 'in radically divergent ways' (Felski 2000: 17). Felski suggests that time is felt differently by different social groups: a compelling example of this theory would be the way time is experienced by a new parent, when external indicators such as clocks and calendars and the distinction between night and day become almost meaningless. She notes, however, that our conceptions of time are not completely relativistic; rather they are marked by the difference between 'living *at* the same time and *in* the same time' (2000: 23). Felski posits 'three temporal levels' that allow us to theorise time and its material relationship to different social groups: everyday time, life time, and large-scale time (2000: 17).

Everyday time is our 'phenomenological sense of time' on a short-term basis. It might bear relation to 'clocks and timetables' as well as 'natural bodily rhythms' (2000: 17) and constitutes our 'sedimented daily routines' (2000: 22). *Life time* refers to how we construct a narrative of our lives, and 'encompasses and connects the random segments of daily experience' (Felski 2000: 17). *Large-scale time*, which Felski also calls *historical* or *mythic time*, refers to the 'processes of time that transcend the limits of our personal existence' and is associated with social memory and cohesion (2000: 18). Her chief question is how our experiences of these levels of time may be 'affected by our existence as embodied and sexed subjects with different social roles' (2000: 17).

While Felski's work aims to shed light on postmodernism and the lives of women, I am interested here in how time is experienced by writers. Writing is a profession, but I argue that the act of writing involves the activities, habits, and interactions of a distinct social grouping. This social grouping of writers incorporates a shared history and shared mythology, a significant part of which is derived from Coleridge and the other Romantics. I spoke to three successful Australian novelists about how they conceptualise and experience time: Isobelle Carmody, Kate Forsyth, and Lee Battersby. I deliberately chose novelists, rather than poets, for example, because the novel is both clearly imaginative work (as opposed to non-fiction) and more central to the commercial operations of the publishing industry. By engaging with these novelists' responses, my own observations, and Felski's experiential categories time, I hope to shed new light on Romanticism's sublime myth of creativity and its imagined antagonism to the mundane practicalities of business.

A writer's sense of *everyday time* centres on finding or making time in the day to write or perform other tasks associated with a project. All three writers interviewed express a sense of time being scarce. Forsyth notes that even though she has no other job, 'I… never feel that I have enough time to write' (interview 2016), and Carmody agrees that 'there's always a feeling of … not enough time …things take much longer than I think they're going to take' (interview 2016). The scarcity of time is always related to the other material circumstances of their lives. For Forsyth, it is managing 'business and administrative work such as sending invoices… tax and other finances', as well as 'public appearances at bookshops, libraries, schools, festivals and conferences' (interview 2016). Here, Forsyth cites aspects of commerce, business-like activities such as money, taxes, and promotion. For Battersby, writing time is colonised by a full-time career that can 'reach 60 to 80 hours a week at peak times' (interview 2016). His writing time happens 'when all else is put to bed', an interesting turn of phrase that evokes the sense of writing being the very last thing that happens in a day, when other agents—both familial and commercial—are sleeping. It creates solitariness in the margins of busy-ness. Forsyth's writing time has also been displaced by family demands: 'I've had to write at night, or in the early hours of the day, or in parks, or at the kitchen bench' (interview 2016). Time devoted to child care, or other kinds of family care such as shopping, cleaning, and food preparation may not be directly linked to commerce, but they fit the other definition of busy-ness: they are little recurring distractions that press against writing time, and are born of the economic necessity for parents to divide tasks linked to earning capacity and care.

The writers' responses reveal an understanding of two kinds of everyday time: small windows that must be taken advantage of, and coveted uninterrupted periods of time. Battersby speaks of writing happening 'in the corners' of life (interview 2016), while Forsyth describes how she has to 'bend my writing life around [my children's] routines' (interview 2016). The language of *corners* and *bending* sharpens the sense of cramped

or restricted writing time, which contrasts markedly with the language used to describe the other proposition: 'long and blessedly free time to just write' (Forsyth, interview 2016). This long, free time (even the words sound capacious) is imagined in some cases to be the optimum condition for writing. Forsyth asserts 'I do my best work when I am free of distractions and interruptions' (interview 2016). Battersby agrees, and his interview response indicates the impact on creativity of interrupted time: 'It's very hard to get a consistent run at things, which means I'm constantly having to reinvent my momentum. I always feel like I'm having to start again, even when I'm deeply into a project' (interview 2016). This description provides a material example of writing in interrupted time. As in physics, the initial energy required to start motion (in this case, writing) is greater than that required once momentum is achieved. Interruptions force inertia, and that initial energy must be found again and again. Restarting is both exhausting and more time-consuming than continuing. All of these ideas bear out Coleridge's Romantic conception of creativity and its relationship to unlimited, uninterrupted time.

However, although the writers interviewed yearn for more time on the one hand, on the other they possess a paradoxical sense that the restrictions create an urgency that presses them to produce work. Carmody, for example, expresses mixed feelings about limitless, uninterrupted time:

> I had it once … I lived alone. I had no child; I had no debt. I lived by the sea and I wrote as much as I wanted… I look [back] now and I think I was sick on all that time. I was sick on it. … I was lost in that time ... It was just too much. You know I would sit for hours and I didn't see people for days and days on end (Carmody, interview 2016).

The language here is telling: the first freedoms Carmody offers as evidence are freedoms from family responsibility and the necessity of earning money ('no child', 'no debt'), which are the time constraints Forsyth and Battersby cite in their interviews. Even the image of living 'by the sea' feeds into the idea of freedom. The sea, as well as being one of the most coveted spaces to write beside (Porlock and Linton, cited in Coleridge's account, are both seaside towns), is evocative of unlimited and uninterrupted vistas and, like much water imagery, the perpetual flow of energy: think of the fluvial 'stream' of creativity into which the 'stone' of disinspiration is cast in Coleridge's account. But Carmody's reflection thereafter uses words that are almost entirely negative: 'sick', 'lost', 'too much'. The word 'sick' is repeated, suggesting the kind of illness acquired through overdosing on 'too much' of an otherwise pleasurable experience or commodity. 'Too much' and 'lost' evoke being overwhelmed, swamped by time. Without constrictions, there is no urgency to write and perhaps even no meaningful sense of direction, if any direction may be taken. Without routine, time is not divided into segments and therefore difficult to measure ('sit for hours' 'days and days on end'). Importantly, Carmody points out that even with so much time at her disposal, 'I didn't write better and I didn't write that many more books' (interview 2016). She believes she does better work with 'the energy of… constraint'. The notion here is that time pressure can create an energetic counterpressure in writers that can lead to productivity. It may also lead to ingenuity and resourcefulness. Forsyth asserts that writing in the spaces around her children's activities has 'taught me that a lot can be done in only five minutes' (interview 2016). Forsyth is therefore aware of her own contradictions in how she conceptualises time. While she expresses a desire to 'write all the time', she can easily imagine the negative side of unlimited writing time: 'I'd become a hunchback old crone flinching away from the light of day, unable to speak

with people who were not imaginary' (interview 2016). In this quotation, and in Carmody's long quotation above, we see that these writers imagine the negative aspects of unlimited writing time as a withdrawal from the social. To retreat, the key term in the much-coveted 'writers retreat', is to leave society behind. In Coleridge's 'lonely farm house' (2006: 446) it may be quiet and time may be uninterrupted, but it can also potentially distort and overwhelm by removing writers from the social world that they need for both stimulation and support. It is telling that writers can imagine so easily how unlimited spans of uninterrupted time can turn from something pleasant and productive, into something unhealthy and overwhelming. 'Constraint' produces a necessary 'energy'. These contradictions and paradoxes about everyday time for writers follow a similar pattern to the seeming ill-fit of art and business I seek to unpack in this essay. Even on a day-to-day level, writers are constantly balancing their creativity with mundane responsibilities, and feeling both restricted and energised through the act of finding balance.

Felski's three levels of time are not discrete, but 'constantly intermingle and merge together' (2000: 17), and everyday time intersects with Felski's next category, *life time*. Within the context of this essay, life time refers to how writers conceptualise and manage the narrative of their careers over the long term, that is, how they put things in order to 'make sense of [their] identities by endowing them with a temporal *Gestalt*' (Felski 2000: 17). A writerly narrative of identity is forged over time in part by the projects and publications on which a writer works, and these will often involve a large amount of time in conception, creation, and preparation for an eventual audience. A novel, for example, may take a year or more to write. The parts of the novel—its chapters, scenes, paragraphs, sentences, words—must be worked at routinely within everyday time in order to come together to produce a whole. The actions scheduled and carried out in everyday time create, in the long term, the events that are registered as life time. While a writing career may be aspired to in Romantic terms—the themes and forms and connections that a writer hopes to produce—it is a repeated routine of writing, something that accords with a business-like attitude, that actively shapes a creative career. Each day at work on a writing project is a stepping stone; and the stepping stones eventually form the grander narrative of a path through a writer's life.

We cannot theorise a writer's relationship to life time without examining deadlines, which are time-based, project-resolving material facts of writing and publishing. Deadlines add structure to a writer's life time through putting pressure on everyday time. Forsyth suggests that deadlines 'help me manage my time and my word counts', while Battersby speaks of engaging 'in some restructuring of my life to get through [to a deadline], and even then, I often end up pulling all-nighters along the way' (interview 2016). Both these writers can be seen to be responding to deadlines, a marker of life writing time, through changing their activities in everyday time.

Deadlines, then, have the power to fundamentally reshape creative practice. They reshape everyday time in the examples above, but they are most implicated in the narrative of a writer's life time. Deadlines, among other things, mark milestones in a writer's career narrative. They are indicators and records of publications and other such public achievements. Here is business at its most intrusive: in the demand that a project must be finished within a certain time; and at its most enabling: in that it allows writers to connect with audiences and potentially frees up more time for further projects, because deadlines are usually associated with payment.

The overriding attitude towards deadlines among my interviewees, however, is negative: Battersby admits he avoids setting them as 'I can't ever guarantee that I can meet them' (interview 2016); Forsyth admits they 'add to my stress load' (interview 2016); Carmody says she feels deadline pressure 'constantly because I feel guilty about the deadline. I also know that that will never make me do it on time' (interview 2016). Avoidance, stress, and guilt are negative feelings associated with obligation. Creativity is not. Creativity initially proceeds from intense personal investment and desire for self-expression. The writer's first impulse to write during their lifetime is, according to Battersby, 'writing purely for self'. Recognition of talent, development of 'concentrated creativity', and the turn to the marketplace as an 'aspiring professional writer' came only as an adult (interview 2016). Forsyth also speaks of the pleasure of unfettered childhood writing: 'I don't remember a time when I didn't want to be a writer! My mother says I began scribbling stories from the moment I could hold a pencil. It always felt as if I was born knowing what I was meant to be.' Writers begin to write because they want to, not because they are obliged to: in Forsyth's account they are 'born' to it. In contrast to the metaphor of birth is the metaphorical death implied in a deadline, which obliges a writer to finish a project. That finishing date may arrive before a writer has disinvested themselves. That is, deadlines have the potential to 'kill' a writing project. They are both a time-based restraint, and a functional restraint on writing, where business dominates art, and the mundane suppresses the sublime.

Deadlines are, of course, an industrial imperative, returning us once again to a consideration of art's relationship to business. In order for publishing companies to confidently organise publishing schedules and sell books to the market, they require a reasonable idea of when they might take delivery of a finished manuscript. This industrial imperative is buttressed by the demands of readers, who now have unprecedented access to writers via social media. In a 2009 blog post, Neil Gaiman takes on a suggestion from a reader that George R R Martin's social media feed is 'avoiding the topic' of the next *Song of Ice and Fire* volume, and how it may 'lead readers to believe [he was] being 'slack' about finishing it'. Gaiman responds with the now famous phrase, 'George R R Martin is not your bitch'. Similarly, Carmody tells of being warned that if she does not get books out fast enough 'people will stop reading you' (interview 2016). The message is clear: your life time as a writer, that narrative you hope to shape, depends on satisfying publishers and readers through passing the threshold of the deadline on time. The sensitivity felt around this threshold is emblematic of the tension between creativity and commerce.

But life time is also shaped outside industrial demands. A growing number of writers, including all of those interviewed and myself, occasionally turn to small or boutique publishers to publish something that would not attract a large publisher's interest and may resist being governed by their tightly scheduled deadlines. This project-led rather than publication-led orientation suggests that life time also includes milestones that are the works themselves, rather than the works only in marketable form. As Carmody says, 'my allegiance is not to the deadline or to anybody that I've agreed to do anything for, or anyone who paid me any money. My allegiance is only to the thing that I'm writing' (interview 2016). Life time milestones are not entirely or even primarily owned by the business of publishing. With each publication or project, a writer gains new resources. Their craft evolves, they learn more, understand better, develop and shape a stronger sense of their life time as writers. Even the failed projects, the unpublished novels, the novels that could not be finished, the small experimental projects bought by only a few hundred readers imbue a writer's life time with temporal meaning. Once again, business

and art co-exist: there is room for both the mundane and the sublime in the unfolding of a writer's life time.

III.

In the discussion so far, we can see how questions of writing and time produce many answers that support the debunkers of the creative myth. There is not a lot of romance in the notion that writers must write to a schedule, take time out to work or file tax returns, or adhere to the demands of a publisher. This sounds very much like the work of the businessman from Porlock whom Coleridge presents as the antithesis, if not the death, of creative work. But thinking about time also unlocks one of the deepest held 'mythic' beliefs of creative writers: that time changes in the act of writing:

> When I am writing, time dissolves away…. hours can whizz past without my being aware of them (Forsyth, interview 2016).
>
> I tend to disappear into the work… I really don't feel the time passing (Battersby, interview 2016).
>
> The minute you start to write, time stops and you just expand into this…. You're just in this expanding time. In this expanding moment (Carmody, interview 2016).

The perception of disjunctive time is commonly voiced by writers. Of course, it cannot be true: a minute is sixty seconds long and no more. But if we use Felski's distinction between living *at* the same time (a minute is sixty seconds) or *in* the same time (writers experience it differently), we can explore this perception of time as a real phenomenon. A material explanation for this perception may be the concept of 'flow', a concept explicated by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He calls it 'an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focussed state of consciousness' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 110) where 'action and awareness are merged', 'distractions are excluded from consciousness', and 'the sense of time becomes distorted' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 111-113). In flow 'clock time no longer marks equal lengths of experienced time; our sense of how much time passes depends on what we are doing' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 113). Flow, for Csikszentmihalyi, can be used to describe any kind of artistic practice and, indeed, the term has been recruited to explain immersion in videogames (Salen and Zimmerman 2004) and gambling (Binde 2013), stripping it of its specificity to creative practice, but retaining its psychological relation to the incorporative processes of imagining and enacting within a phenomenological circuit of experience.

However, flow does not explain everything about the sense of distorted time that writers experience. There are other internal disjunctions between clock time and writing time that are unique and specific to writers because of the nature of the work they do. Within clock time, other times open out in aspects of craft such as setting, pace, and narration of events. Writers may use their everyday writing time in the present to open up other time periods as settings: history, the future, or even created worlds that measure time by radically different indices. Forsyth, who writes both historical fiction and fantasy fiction describes her experience of time's distortion as being 'totally immersed in the time and space of my imaginary world' (interview 2016). Moreover, when writing scenes that have a distinct rhythm or pace—for example a slow, sensual scene or a high-paced action scene—writers may feel they are passing time, as Battersby says, 'at the same speed as my characters' (interview 2016). Even the act of narrating events creates time disjunctions. A writer may work for an hour on a scene where a character experiences a minute. Conversely, with a deft use of summary, hours, weeks, even

decades can be narrated in a few working minutes. Immersion and flow are certainly part of the experience of asynchrony between writing time and clock time, but there are specific aspects of writing practice that amplify this feeling of disjunction, of time's distortion and expansion, and of the pleasure that feeling creates.

Forsyth calls this asynchrony 'that miraculous space of being outside time' (interview 2016). Her use of the word miraculous is typical of the kind of effusive reaction writers have when talking about time's distortion: when I asked Carmody about it, for example, she paused for nearly ten seconds, eyes closed, in rapture. Perhaps the fact it is expressed rapturously and talked about mystically, as though it is sublime, may create the impression that it is little more a Romantic myth. However, it is important to remember, then, that writers are describing here *their actual experience*; and their truths are expressed so similarly as to be verifiably real (and are shared by me, and by many other writers of my acquaintance). It connects writers' experiences to Coleridge's escape to the lonely farm house and intoxicated rejection of the mundane. Forsyth says that the time distortion makes her forget 'all I need to do in the real world' (interview 2016), while Carmody says when it happens 'that real stuff, that daily stuff goes away' (interview 2016). It also connects to the idea of writing that flows outside of time's constraints, like Coleridge's experience of dreaming lines of poetry 'without any sensation or consciousness of effort' and then writing them down 'instantly and eagerly' on waking. We could call this experience of time 'Coleridgean time', an imaginative escape from the material reality of the present into a state of intertemporal flow. This Coleridgean time connects the lived experience of these writers to the body of Romantic mythology about creativity, including Coleridge's account. It supports Glaveanu's assertion that creativity 'belongs to broader cultural patterns of activity that are, at once, individual and social, symbolic and material, and embedded within longer histories' (2014: 65).

The pleasure of sharing that mythology is one of the ways writers cohere socially. For example, in each case, asking the question about whether or not time feels different when writing, the interviewees were engaged and animated in their answers: it was clearly their favourite question to discuss. In this way, Coleridgean time intersects with Felski's category of large-scale time, which includes the way 'narratives around group identities' develop over long-term time frames and are sustained through retelling (Felski 2000: 18), a kind of 'distributed creativity' as Glaveanu would call it, where creative works have their 'value understood in relation to the entire life and evolutions' of the art form (Glaveanu 2014: 67-68): the belief in this value is part of the narrative of writing time. When writers take their pleasure in perpetuating the experience of Coleridgean time, they are participating in Coleridge's history and mythology about those inexplicable creative moments where the world disappears and all that is left is expanding time. In Coleridgean time, the sublime transcends the mundane.

IV.

An aspect of time that cannot be ignored is that, for most writers, it bears a relationship to economic necessity. The sensible goal for most writers is to persuade a publisher to give them enough money so they do not have to work elsewhere, can outsource other time-consuming tasks, and have enough time to write. If this is not possible, a writer needs to find another way to support himself or herself, through work or economically motivated family arrangements. This means that art, which requires time, cannot escape the deal it eventually must make with the practicalities of business. But no matter how

business-minded writers become about their time, there is still available to them the pleasure of the undeniable 'mythic' elements of writing time. There is much pleasure to be had in 'Coleridgean time', and pleasure to be shared among writers in speaking of it. Coleridge's account, then, ought not be taken as a truth to be adopted or disproven, but read as a powerful metaphor. Perhaps the 'gentleman on business from Porlock' is actually a version of Coleridge's self, who needed to manage his responsibilities, hustle for patronage from the Wedgewood family, and pull himself out of expanding and endless time, to connect with the world where his poem continues to circulate in print, two hundred years later. Creative writing does not take place wholly within or without the experiential boundaries of the Romantic ideal: it operates, rather, within matrices of temporal relations that encompass the individual and the collective, the creative and the commercial, the sublime and the mundane.

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