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Editorial

A dinner party that gathered together a critically acclaimed novelist, an erudite poet, a leading literary critic and an iconoclastic media commentator could hardly fail to witness a debate as to the relative merits of literary genres. This is certainly the case in Arthur Upfield's novel of 1948, *An Author Bites the Dust*, in whose opening chapter the acclaimed novelist denies that the 'atrocious efforts of a "whodunit" writer' could ever be qualified as a novel, or their creator as a novelist. The price to be paid by this person who incidentally is a critic as well as a writer of 'literature' – a type of writing that he regards as starkly opposed to the detective fiction that he scores as mere commercial 'fiction', is to find himself murdered before the beginning of the second chapter. For, of course, the novel in which the relative merits of literature and so-called genre fiction are discussed is itself a whodunit. Iconoclasm of this type, which sees the death of the author reflexively forecast in a title that contraposes the archetype of literary creativity (an author) with the debasement of popular jargon (bites the dust), is symptomatic of detective fiction. What Upfield is showcasing here is a set of oppositions on which detective fiction is characteristically predicated: it is both literary and generic, hiding its creativity in locked rooms (in this case locking the corpse of one non-creative creative writer in a room whose door later comes ajar, and keeping the creativity of another under wraps) and murdering its critics with brutal, but self-critical, flamboyance.

And yet, the playful way in which so much detective fiction plays with, and undermines, the opposition between the literary and – to use a term that is anathema to many literary critics but which seems appropriate here – the 'formulaic' has done little to undo the stereotypes that continue to dominate the genre's reception. Indeed, practitioners and scholars alike appear keen to maintain detective fiction's otherness, its edgy reputation as literature's underside. Melbourne-based crime writer Leigh Redhead, for example, is quite clear on her choice to write detective fiction as opposed to the 'literary' variety, noting that the rebelliousness of her early years was her discovery of 'literature with a capital L', which marked her out from the crowd of those around her, for whom crime fiction was the reading matter of choice (2013: 157). (This rebelliousness would both return and be overturned, when she finally joined the fictional mainstream as an author writing detective fiction *not* literature, only for her detective to rebel by pursuing an unusual parallel career as a stripper in a criminal universe in which stripping itself is

entirely, and perversely once again, normalised.) Treating detective fiction as reliable, as simply repeating well-established patterns, serves not only scholars of the genre, like Ken Gelder, who sees in it the very 'opposite of literature' (2004: 11), but also those for whom, on the basis of its very lack of creativity, it provides a control for their experiments with other literary genres or in parallel academic disciplines (see, for example, Moe and Žigon 2015: 147).

The juxtaposition of the literary and the generic forms part of an ongoing debate which detective fiction's commercial success has done little to quell. This is, however, only one opposition; indeed, the idea of literary criticism as something that criticises genre fiction for its lack of literarity is arguably the least interesting aspect of the nexus of the critical and the creative. For, in addition to giving detective fiction practitioners a heightened sense of self-awareness (a sort of productive inferiority complex, or perhaps one of superiority, of alternative generic canonicity) that leaves their works with an ever-critical edge even as it calls attention to their creativity, the creativity of the genre has also marked its critics. Often, critics are left with little to say: detective fiction's tendency not only to explain away its own mystery but also to offer continual comments on the 'how' of its whodunits can all too easily translate into critical exegeses that (often simply) reprise (often complex) plots with the addition of biographical pointers or comparisons to other examples of the genre. Yet, there is also a type of criticism that is truly, and positively, critical, that is able to move beyond the trappings of genre and engage with crime fiction as literature. The best examples of this can even employ a deal of creativity. Pierre Bayard's famous studies, for example, reconstruct classics of the genre, defying their detectives' discoveries of truth and offering alternative solutions. Far from acts of pure iconoclasm, such critical analyses pay tribute to crime fiction, engaging with it not only on its own terms (reviewing its clues and red herrings, the soundness of its plotlines, and so on) but also *as literature*, as fiction worthy of detailed analysis. And in so doing, these critical works become creative in turn. In fact, Bayard's studies market themselves as parallel investigations; by reopening cases that he reveals to be cold, he effectively writes a sequel. This is criticism as creative practice, scholarly work as quasi-fiction.

For this special issue of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* we asked contributors to consider the various ways in which detective fiction, by dint of its refusal to accept the critical and creative as discrete categories, is creatively critical and critically creative on both sides of the (highly porous) divide between scholars and practitioners.

We begin with two articles that explore the creative and the critical through practice-led doctorate programs: the authors offering investigations into the crime fiction genre through pieces that offer insights into the processes of producing an artefact and accompanying exegesis. Carolyn Beasley begins the discussion with her work on creating a representation of a murderous mother in a crime fiction narrative. In particular, Beasley looks at how crime fiction provides a natural space for intersections of the creative, practical and critical due to the genre's tendency towards social critique and, in doing so, offers opportunities to question the representations and cultural assumptions that surround us. Rachel Franks follows with an article that addresses ideas of how the task of writing an historical crime fiction novel, and accompanying exegesis,

can draw on both crime *fiction* and on crime fiction *criticism*. Franks looks at how this base, of the creative and critical, can inform the production of a work that offers an aesthetic quality and an academically rigorous contribution to conversations around one of the world's best-selling genres.

Jason Bainbridge explores how authors, writing in the legal thriller genre, present their lawyer protagonists as critics of both the law and the legal systems of which they are a part. Bainbridge contests some of the criticisms directed at these novels, concluding such narratives offer a way of understanding how just practitioners can operate in an unjust system and so constitute a powerful interrogation of how law operates. Moving from the legal procedural to true crime, Donna Lee Brien and Rachel Franks investigate true crime and biographical writing. They note how some cases result in narratives that successfully re-narrate the protagonists' stories in fully fleshed, satisfying biographical studies, while others are reduced to facts distilled from legal documentation and newspaper reportage. Thus some victims, such as Mary Dean and Mary Jane Hicks, fade; while their stories are repeatedly told, they are now the victims of true crime (writing), as well as true crimes, insofar as their stories have been insignificantly reimagined and, arguably, further obscured.

Alistair Rolls writes on reading and rereading, and writing crime fiction as well as writing critical re-interpretations of crime fiction. Rolls looks at the opportunities to revisit cases and, as in a reflection of the role of the detective as a central figure across the numerous forms of crime fiction available, we can occupy the space of the investigator. In highlighting intertextual occurrences, Rolls calls upon readers to take on the mantle of detective; drawing on experiences taken from other cases to expand our understandings and to solve (textual) mysteries.

Ideas around narrative point-of-view are taken up by Heath A. Diehl. This article advances claims that Sue Grafton's *"T" is for Trespass* (1994) is concerned with violations of generic and ideological boundaries. Diehl suggests this novel is markedly different from other works in Grafton's alphabet series – most notably in the two narrative points-of-view deployed – and so offers insights into creative writing practice within the field of hardboiled fiction.

This Special Issue also offers a variety of international perspectives. Matt McGuire takes us to Ireland looking at how the thriller represented the Northern Ireland Troubles. McGuire notes how critics dismissed the genre, claiming it offered clichés and stereotypes, marking the enthronement and reiteration of a problematically reductive take on the conflict. Yet, for academic critics, literary novelists and a new generation of Northern Irish crime writers, the possibilities and limitations of genre fiction have provided an arena in which key issues might be theorised and thought through. Jean Anderson looks at some of the creative strategies, namely imitation, limitation and inspiration, employed within the flourishing sector of French crime fiction, highlighting some obvious intertextual borrowings and influences. Anderson begins with a discussion of parody and pastiche and the replication of series' titles to launch new collections, then moves on to explore the role of Jean-Bernard Pouy in founding some of these important series and encouraging new approaches to crime fiction writing. Jamie Popowich takes readers to the United States of the late 1960s and the early 1970s

and the work of crime writer, Charles Willeford. Focusing on *The Shark-Infested Custard* (1993), Popwich looks at Willeford's efforts to produce solitary, selfish and obsessive male protagonists who become the embodiment of (a caricature of) the genre in which their stories play out.

Much attention is paid, within this Special Issue, to noir. K.A. Laity offers an analysis of race in Dorothy B. Hughes novel *The Expendable Man* (1963). Laity looks at this author, a master of noir, and how her skilful prose allowed her to recognise, within her fiction, the reality of the racial divides that continue to exist across the United States. This article presents an examination of how Hughes constructed characters within *The Expendable Man* to demonstrate how they fuel the power of her narrative suspense. Leigh Redhead notes traditional urban environments of noir fiction and how urban settings are integral to the genre, speaking to anxieties and alienations of modern life, feelings of anonymity of being an outsider, corruption and criminality. Redhead tests this and looks at how rural settings in some Australian noir, use landscape to subvert the pastoral paradigm and examine tensions between the exterior landscape and the interior life of the protagonists. Redhead also discusses research-led practice to consider whether this nexus between the critical and creative helps or hinders the creative writing process.

Jesper Gulddal and Alistair Rolls complete this issue with a postscript that places a theoretical frame around the intersection of detective fiction and the critical-creative nexus. Gulddal and Rolls demonstrate the interconnectedness of critical and creative practices, in the context of detective fiction. Indeed, writing detective fiction involves a critical positioning in relation to established genre conventions, while, conversely, detective fiction criticism, contains an element of the creative, stretching from imaginative readings to a complete critical rewriting of individual stories. In this way, the critical-creative nexus results in a new understanding of detective fiction as an inherently *mobile* genre constantly in the process of reinventing itself.

In this special issue of *TEXT* the critical-creative nexus is approached by writers who are, variously and to varying degrees, predominantly critical or creative. In the spirit of the journal, it also showcases work from academics at different stages of their careers. This is especially appropriate here, for crime fiction's iconoclasm has been matched only by its conservatism. Creatively and critically, crime fiction is ever in need of rejuvenation and re-examination. In this way, our approach to this nexus has been to test any number of borders, not in order to dissolve or transcend them, but to get them working together, to create new partners in crime.

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