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One I made earlier: on the PhD by publication

Abstract:

The PhD by Publication is growing in popularity in the UK and Australia. This paper focuses on the growth of the so-called 'retrospective' model in creative writing, and the examination issues this raises. These include a lack of consistency across the sector in the criteria, particularly in terms of the previously published works, and the purpose of the exegesis and questions about equity and rigour compared with a practice-based research degree.

Biographical note:

Dr Maggie Butt is a UK poet with a background as a newspaper reporter and BBC TV documentary producer, and a PhD in creative writing from Cardiff University. Her poetry publications include: pamphlet *Quintana Roo* (Acumen Publications 2003); first full collection, *Lipstick* (Greenwich Exchange 2007); e-book and MP3, *I Am The Sphinx* (*Snakeskin* poetry journal 2009) a collection of short poems *petite* (Hearing Eye 2010); *Ally Pally Prison Camp* (Oversteps Books 2011); *Sancti Clandestini–Undercover Saints* (Ward-Wood Publications 2012), a fully illustrated poetry hagiography of alternative saints, including the Patron Saints of liars, looters, rank outsiders, compulsive hoarders, old dogs and infidel girls, illustrated by the staff and students of Middlesex University's BA Hons Illustration course, from famous and established artists to emerging talents. Her edited collection of essays, *Story–The Heart of the Matter*, was published by Greenwich Exchange in October 2007. Maggie Butt is an Associate Director for partnership development at Middlesex University. She was formerly Deputy Dean of Arts and Education and Chair of UK's National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) (2007–2012). Website: http://www.maggiebutt.co.uk

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In a classic UK children's television series called *Blue Peter*, the presenter used to demonstrate how to make something desirable and otherwise unaffordable out of household objects (usually coat hangers, washing up liquid bottles and sticky-backed plastic). At a certain point in the demonstration, he or she would reach under the counter and say, 'And here's one I made earlier,' drawing out a stunning, professional-looking artefact. This feels a little like the research degree by publication – or one route to it, as I'll discuss later – we do not live through all the frustrations of the 'making' but are presented with the beautifully finished end products, in our case the plays, poetry, non-fiction, novels or short stories published by a writer.

However, not all PhDs by publication are 'ones I made earlier'. In fact, the 'PhD by Publication' (also known as by 'Public Works' or 'Published Works'), can be taken in one of two very different ways. In the first route, what Steve Draper usefully calls the 'prospective model' (Draper 2012) the candidate can enrol for the doctorate, perhaps with one or two journal publications, and during the period of the PhD, instead of writing one thesis of some 80,000 to 100,000 words (or creative work plus exegesis), they will continue to write and publish shorter articles (or creative pieces). Their submission for the doctorate will be all the published works, plus a critical exegesis. In the UK this examination would always involve an oral viva. This model involves the supervisor in advising and supporting the candidate through the publication process during the course of the PhD. For example, Lisa Robins published 9 articles and a peer reviewed book chapter in Social Sciences during the course of her PhD by publication (Robins & Kanowski 2008). The prospective mode takes the pressure off everything resting on the final thesis. Starrs, whose PhD by Publication in Film and Television Studies consisted of 8 published papers, called the PhD by Publication 'a slightly more palatable alternative to this nail-biting process of the traditional PhD' (Starrs 2008).

Most research about the PhD by Publication to date focuses on the prospective route. Donna Lee Brien, citing McWilliam et al. 2002, summarises the challenges of it, including the fact that most academics themselves have traditional PhDs and therefore may 'not have the necessary experience in publishing themselves to guide another through the processes of planning, researching, preparing and editing a publication, and then responding to referees comments' (2008: 7). The literature about this model is primarily from students (Potts 2003, Starrs 2008, Robins & Kanowski 2008, Willis 2012) who, as Brien notes, are mainly positive about the experience (2008: 9), but more research is needed by those who can be seen to be objective. Starrs has a personal investment in the topic, but makes a strong point when he writes:

> I believe further efforts should be undertaken to heighten the differences in status between PhDs by published papers generated during enrolment, PhDs by published papers generated before enrolment and honorary doctorates awarded for non-academic published work. Failure to do so courts cynical comparison of all PhD by published papers with unearnt doctorates bought from Internet shysters (2008).

When it comes to creative writing, what would constitute the 'published papers' to be submitted and accepted during the period of enrolment for the PhD by the prospective route? Peer reviewed articles in journals like *TEXT* certainly, but what kind and

volume of creative work – how many short stories or poems, and where should they be published, with an equivalence of 'peer review' to constitute work of PhD rigour?

The second type, the retrospective model, is the one I want to focus on principally. This requires the collecting together of a number of previously published papers, or books, or creative works instead of a thesis or dissertation. In the case of a creative writing PhD this would tend to be the author's previously published novels, works of creative non-fiction, poetry collections or plays. As with any creative arts practice-based PhD, the creative work is accompanied by a critical exegesis which locates and considers what drove the thinking and production of the texts and/or artefacts, and again, in the UK, would always be examined by an oral viva. The only work which is produced under supervision, after formal registration, is the critical exegesis. This is an increasingly popular option for well-published, established writers who are moving into work in the academy. However, it is referenced strikingly little in the literature. The only book chapter I have managed to locate on the subject, by Anthony Potts, promisingly called 'Reflections on research for the PhD by publication' (2003) concentrates entirely on the research he did for his book *College Academics* and does not describe at all the process, following publication, by which this became a PhD.

Before going any further, I should consider both models of the PhD by Publication in the context of our UK experience of other practice-based PhDs in the Arts. These programs, and their outputs, are sometimes looked on with scepticism by colleagues in the Sciences and Humanities – and, on paper, the PhD by Publication might look still easier. However, any practice-based PhD in the creative arts is 'difficult' in a different way from traditional PhD work in the sciences or humanities. A chemistry research student works in a lab on a project devised by his or her professor; his/or her experiments might fail to produce any new insights, except by a process of elimination, and s/he writes up findings using an existing methodology and discipline-specific style and vocabulary. A creative artist has to imagine and devise an individual work, create a piece which is successful in literary terms, original in its context, and highly personal in its style, and then devise a way of critiquing its contribution to their field. As Kroll and Webb write, this involves:

> a range of practical questions, including: as researchers, what are we trying to do? What knowledge are we attempting to contribute, or what problems are we intending to solve, in the course of our creative research? What is the difference between writing a novel or collection of poems for a doctorate, and writing a novel or collection of poems for publication? (2012)

Similar questions surround the creative writing PhD by Publication.

Let's remember that the 'traditional' thesis-based PhD is itself quite new in historical terms because the first doctorates, beginning in the 12th century in France, were much more akin to the modern Professional Doctorate (Harper 2012). The PhD by written thesis only emerged in Germany in the early 19th Century, the USA in the mid 19th Century, the UK in 1917, and Australia in 1948. The growth rate of research degrees since the 1960s has been remarkable: while 137 PhDs were awarded Australia-wide in 1960, by 2003 an average of 5,998 PhDs were completed per annum across Australia (Valadkhani & Ville 2007). However, as Brien has shown, the rates of attrition and

lengthy completion times continue to attest to the difficulty of these research degrees (2008: 3).

The PhD by Publication was originally developed in the 1960s in the UK to allow practitioners entering academia in mid-career to 'convert' their practice into the currency of the university. Arguments rage about whether the PhD by Publication is less rigorous, or infinitely harder, than a 'normal' research degree, but it is certainly a growing alternative to the PhD by thesis. Historian Richard Willis gained his own PhD by Publication, and has written the only full article published in the UK *Times Higher Education* journal on the subject, in which he states the degree 'is emphatically not an easier path than the PhD by thesis ... Producing six or seven papers worthy of publication is highly demanding – as tough as completing one thesis, if not more so' (2011). Obviously his view is subjective, and although he does not acknowledge that his views are based on his own personal experience in the body of the article, this it is mentioned in his author biography.

The difficulty or otherwise of a PhD by Publication can be extrapolated further to the discipline of creative writing where one novel or poetry collection would be written for a 'traditional' practice-based PhD, but a whole body of novels or collections or plays may be submitted for the retrospective version of a PhD by Publication. In volume and in time, the retrospective PhD by Publication in creative writing is likely to be far weightier. Some universities stipulate that the creative works must have been completed within a certain time-frame prior to the PhD submission (some Australian universities require a time frame of five to ten years before the date of submission), but others will accept works produced over a lifetime if they can be written about in the exegesis as a coherent body of work contributing to knowledge in the subject area.

Some UK universities only offer the opportunity of a PhD by Publication (either model) to their own academic staff, but a growing number are offering them to 'researchers who have a substantial body of published research' or 'mid-career research-active academics' from outside the University. The requirements of the published work vary. For example, in the UK, the University of Westminster will consider: 'books and book chapters; refereed journal papers; other media/other public output (e.g. architectural or engineering designs) (2013) The submission of a single book, work or artefact is also possible'. The University of Huddersfield says the outputs are 'likely to be academic or professional journal papers' (2013), whereas the University of Stirling requires 'between four and six interconnected, published research papers. May include papers, chapters, monographs, books, scholarly editions of a text, technical reports, creative work in relevant areas or other artefacts' (2013).

Starrs notes that in Australia in 2008 some universities specified prospective or retrospective routes exclusively: at Queensland University of Technology, papers must have been 'published, accepted or submitted during the period of candidature', the University of Canberra states 'articles or other published material must be prepared during the period of candidature' and Edith Cowan University will confer its PhD by Publications to those candidates whose thesis consists of 'only papers published in refereed scholarly media during the period of enrolment'. However, other institutions insist on the retrospective model: Swinburne University of

Technology specifies its PhD by Publications is to be awarded for 'research which has been carried out prior to admission to candidature' and the Griffith Law School states: 'The PhD (by publications) is awarded to established researchers who have an international reputation based on already published works' (ctd in Starrs 2008).

Criteria are constantly evolving. Ten years ago the Director of Research in arts and humanities at my institution, Middlesex University, London, turned down an application from a dramatist with an impressive track record of plays produced on the stage and on Irish television, on the grounds that he had not published any critical texts. Now, I hope we would accept such an applicant, if we had a suitable supervisor with capacity to guide them through the process of producing a strong exegesis.

There are no UK statistics for the number of people registering for a research degree by publication, but anecdotally, the number is growing. At Middlesex University, since 2003, we have awarded: 47 PhDs by Public Works and Published Works across subjects ranging from Business to Art; 26 DProfs by Public Works; and, 18 DPsychs by Public Works. That is the number of successful completions, and the number registering is growing year on year. At the time of writing, I am supervising one PhD by Published Works, one DProf by Public Works and externally examining another PhD by Published Works.

So what are the relative benefits of the two models? Brien summarises the benefits of the PhD by Publication under the prospective model whereby a supervisor will guide the candidate through the process of publication of articles and other works, so the newly qualified Doctor already has a portfolio of quality publication, produced with the support of supervisor, peer reviewers and editors; they have not been as isolated as the lone researcher; they enter academic life with a reputation in their field; and they have completed publications progressively which may have eased some of the pressure involved in preparing one large thesis (2008).

The principal benefit of the retrospective model is speed and simplicity. A well published writer, wanting to have the 'doctorateness' of his or her existing public work acknowledged, need only spend a year or so part time working on the exegesis which establishes their work as a coherent body, worthy of consideration for a PhD. In my experience, most writers embarking on the exegesis think it will be complete within a matter of months, but as we all know with scholarly work, the more they write the more they discover what they do not know, and it often takes much longer than they expected. The benefit of speed is not of course just for the candidate, the institution also benefits from a completion which has cost less in supervisory staff time, and if the candidate is an employee, from another doctor quickly on the staff.

The benefits may be clear, but important questions still have to be considered. The first is whether producing a number of shorter articles gives the same academic training, with a focus 'on the acquisition of substantive knowledge' (Pole 2000, Ball 2002) as the traditional thesis. In our discipline this may relate to the question raised above about the publication of a number of 'uncollected' short stories or poems.

Secondly, we should ask whether the audit culture in higher education – the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise in the UK and the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) – is driving a move towards PhD by Publication. Redden calls this

'sweating your assets' defined as 'squeezing as much value as possible out of your assets … while minimizing financial inputs' (2008). Scandinavia has a longer history of retrospective PhDs by Publication. This drove Pat Thomson, Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham in the UK to bring together a Norwegian/English symposium in 2012 to discuss the PhD by Publication. The symposium wondered about the drivers for this model of research. She says:

> The sheer challenge of constructing a sustained argument over this many words clearly prepared the PhD for the book in ways that writing journal articles might not. So was there also something here, we wondered, about the PhD by journal publication being a way of preparing the audit ready scholar, already primed to turn out articles for high status journals, as opposed to what might appear as the increasingly less audit valued process of producing a monograph? (Thomson 2013)

The current UK REF exercise considers work published between the start of 2008 and the end of 2013. It will be interesting to see if five-year publication windows begin to appear as criteria for PhDs by Publication.

Thirdly, we should think about whether someone who has gained a PhD by Publication could be a suitable supervisor for a candidate who is producing a traditional thesis? They have not gone through the experience of amassing one substantial piece of research under the supervision of people who did the same before them. This is where the retrospective model seems to me to be infinitely superior to the prospective. The well-published novelist, who has agonized over their own critical exegesis, ought to be better placed to support a candidate writing their first novel as a practice-based PhD than the literary theorists who have supported many creative writing PhD candidates up to now.

Fourthly, we should ask whether that person is qualified to examine a traditional dissertation or thesis? Again, I would say that a retrospective model supervisor examining a practice-based PhD in creative writing would be well placed to take an informed view, provided they are not using the yardstick of their own publication record. And finally, we should ask the reverse question of who is qualified to examine the PhD by Publication when most academics who currently examine doctoral theses have PhDs by a more 'traditional' method?

These benefits and questions will no doubt be the subject of much further debate. Richard Willis, who describes his PhD by Publication as 'a chapter in my life that had been harrowing and distasteful at times' pithily summarises the pros and cons:

> (For) The publications are peer-refereed, so an examiner would find it difficult to argue that they do not meet the grade.
>
> As students tend to be part time and register for short periods, the cost of study is lower.
>
> You can combine producing published works and gaining a PhD.
>
> (Against) There are problems with university regulations as there is no consensus on length format or purpose. It is not always clear whether the supporting statement is intended to be an application form or an in-depth report.

> Some academics say a PhD by publication is not as good as a PhD by thesis. It may be hard to find a university to sponsor you (Willis 2010).

The first of his negatives above brings me back to the issues of examination and of equity. The University of Essex states that candidates have to ensure their publications are of 'doctoral standard' (2013). The University of South Wales (UK) adds that:

> The work submitted should be focused, coherent and comparable in quality to a conventional PhD thesis. It must be sufficiently extensive so as to provide convincing evidence that the research constitutes a substantial contribution to knowledge or scholarship at least equivalent to that normally demonstrated by the submission of a thesis (2013).

The University of South Wales also suggest that 'the submitted portfolio of projects or outputs must add up to a substantial and coherent body of work which would have taken a diligent student the equivalent of at least three years of full time study to accomplish' (2013). Pause for thought – how long would each of my own poetry collections taken to write, if I had been writing them 'diligently', full time, were such a thing possible?

Given the lack of consistency in the sector it is no wonder that Christopher Cowton, Dean of the Huddersfield Business School writes that 'my experience at several different universities suggests that even experienced PhD examiners find themselves less than sure-footed when it comes to a PhD by publication' (2011).

What might this mean for creative writing, particularly by previously published creative work? Clearly a word count is no help in defining 'doctoral standard'. The traditional PhD thesis word count of some 80,000 to 100,000 words will be eclipsed by a few novels or plays, but even four or five poetry collections might not reach it. Barbara Cartland's works would fill a lorry; the oeuvre of Keats can fit in one volume. No prizes for guessing which would meet the criteria of a research degree by publication.

My own investigation raises questions about what might constitute 'doctoral standard' in the practice-based creative writing PhD and refers to sensible and useful descriptors in the 1997 UK Council for Graduate Education report on practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design:

> The mastery of the existing techniques and knowledge base of the subject, a critical and analytical attitude towards them, and ability to apply them with a view to originating new knowledge or understanding and an ability to originate a contribution which is judged valid and significant' (11).

The report points out that the 'award of a PhD thesis admits the bearer to a community of scholars. It signifies that the holder is capable of distinctive/original thought and work, undertaken for the award (1997: 26).

So, does 'doctoral standard' mean mainstream, highly regarded publishers? Obviously not, since small independent publishers are free to take less mass-market and more experimental work which may make a more substantial contribution to the field. In

this way, publishers of creative work differ from the peer-reviewed journals which give a useful benchmark to academics in the sciences, social sciences and literary theory. They may be able to simply tick a box and say that six peer-reviewed journal articles equals doctoral standard publication, but with creative work and interesting small publishers, the experience and expertise of the examiners is all-important. And what of self-publication? Not all self-published work is Proust, Joyce or Whitman. But some might be, if we are open-minded enough to consider it; so perhaps we should not make assumptions, but be prepared to look objectively at the quality of the work itself. And we should fervently hope that the supervisors have done so before accepting such a candidate.

While the fact of publication may help to guard against plagiarism, it does raise the question of whose work it actually is – the writer's or the editor's? Kroll and Webb point out that:

> Some universities mandate that, in the case of published work, examiners will receive only the original (unpublished) manuscript, but it is not clear how they define 'original manuscript': is it the version that was initially submitted to the publisher, or the version that was produced with the aid of the editorial staff? Does this compromise the integrity of the examination process? (2012 Section 4)

Collaborative writing is relatively rare, but surely cannot be excluded from doctoral research in creative writing. How would we examine that in terms of whether our candidate was 'the author'? Perhaps we would have to consult our colleagues in the sciences and social sciences, who are much more familiar with collaboratively written books and papers.

Conversely, although it is hard to get published, the fact of publication does not guarantee 'doctoral standard' work. Plenty of second-rate books are published – perhaps particularly in genre fiction, although of course genre fiction can be, and often is, of high originality and literary quality. The criteria for doctoral standard in the creative work must be the same as for practice-based PhDs where many candidates are producing work beyond the narrow boundaries of 'literary fiction'. As long as the supervisors are assured of the freshness of ideas and the literary quality of the writing, the genre and form must be immaterial. In other words, twenty formulaic romance novels previously published by Mills and Boon will not do (because they are not pushing any boundaries, not adding to new knowledge in the subject) but four highly original and exciting roman a clef novels from a small publisher might. Best-sellers and sales figures are not the benchmark for a research degree and examiners should not be afraid that they can not fail a research degree just because the work has been published and bought.

Kroll and Webb observe:

> One of the most contentious, and yet increasingly likely, situations is when examiners are confronted with already published work. Few university guidelines offer examiners guidance about how to ask for revisions if a work comes as a published artefact. This is a significant absence in the policies, because if the creative artefact has won a prize, been accepted by a publisher or is already in the marketplace, examiners might well be aware of its presence. What might this mean to examiners? Might they be influenced

> by the reputation of a candidate or by the fact that a publishing house has accepted the work? Does it make a difference if the publisher is prestigious? What if a work has won a prize, whether that leads to or follows publication? If a work has been reviewed, whether positively or negatively, how might this fact influence potential examiners? If they have knowledge of the work already, should they then recuse themselves? And yet would it be possible to find expert examiners who were not aware of the reception of a book by a well-known author or a young dynamo? The published creative part of a thesis therefore comes with an evaluative tag – *this work has been vetted by critical, creative and commercial reviewers already and has passed*. The subtext might be read as: 'Disagree if you dare' (2012: Section 4)

I suggest we can and should disagree if our disagreement can be well justified. And we would be greatly helped in that justification if we could agree on criteria.

So, the fact of publication alone should not 'swing it'. However, the fact of publication does mean that an agent and an publisher have selected the work and edited it, which makes it less likely that we will come across the thesis-novel which strives over-hard to dramatise an idea which the author wants to explore because they are writing a practise based PhD, rather than using their story-making craft to construct a memorable and engaging piece of work. Those pieces of work are dead in the water, and unlikely to convince any publisher. The fact that we do sometimes see such work in 'traditional' practice-based PhDs must be laid at the door of the supervisors. Equally, publication guards against a practice observed by Kroll and Webb in the examination of practice-based PhDs:

> We have seen doctoral candidates having to defend their theses robustly against examiners who had expected to see, say, a commercially viable creative work, and who dismiss the work on the grounds that it is not 'publishable' (in conventional terms).

I would always question 'publishability' as a criterion for PhD work. We may think we know what we mean by it, but many books of poor literary quality, without any originality in style or genre are published every year, because they are a marketable commodity. Those books are 'publishable', but not the right kind of material for a PhD. Other books, which may be adventurous and experimental, will never be published because they do not fit easily into the shelving categories in bookshops or the lists of publishers. Those books are technically 'unpublishable' but they might be a very good basis for a PhD.

In examination of the artistic element of the previously published work, we have to use all our experience and judgment to assess whether a work is of doctoral standard, regardless of its place of publication, or the number of published works or the volume of sales.

And then the published work, taken together with the exegesis, as a diptych, has to be measured by the faithful yardstick – does it contribute to new knowledge or shed new insight into the creative process. The University of South Wales says:

> The examiners must be satisfied at the oral examination that candidate has carried out a critical investigation and evaluation of an appropriate topic which has led to a significant, independent and original contribution to knowledge contained within the

> research outputs or projects (2013)

Even more usefully the 1997 UK report focuses on the creative arts, 'The practice-based doctorate advances knowledge partly by means of practice – originality, mastery and contribution to the field are demonstrated through the original creative work' (1997:14). But it also emphasizes that 'The written thesis and the creative work are of equal or near equal importance' (1997:12). It usefully suggests, 'whereas an artist can simply present his or her end product, and refuse further explanation, the academic art researcher is obliged also to map for his or her peers the route by which they arrived at that product' (1997:10).

The whole sector is in even more of a muddle when it comes to the critical exegesis. Draper notes that universities do not seem to publish anything about the purpose of PhDs by publication, and that we do not ask ourselves clearly enough what a PhD is, and is not, meant to certify, which perhaps leads to the central problem of the exegesis:

> The confounding issue is whether the accompanying document is meant to be an application form, i.e. a beaurocratic document, written as a communication to the examiners, directly arguing about the worth of the submission … or whether it is meant to be an academic document that goes into the library as a communication written for other scholars (2012).

Cowton calls for academia to get its house in order in relation to the critical element of the PhD by Publication. He asks 'What is the nature of the accompanying commentary, and what is it supposed to achieve?', and suggests, 'My preference is for an overview of the methodological approach and the key points of contact with the literature'(2011). That seems insufficient to me for a practice-based PhD by Publication and I return again to the 1997 UKCGE report which summarises doctorateness as 'the transition from being instructed on what is already known, to the ability to originate, explain and justify something new' (1997: 11). The report suggests that a candidate should be able: 'To apply methods and techniques appropriate to the subject in self critical and rigorous ways to grasp contingent areas of knowledge context and production' (1997:11), that they should be able to document 'the process of origination in a way which is communicable to peers in a permanent and reproducible form' (1997:11), to develop 'sustained and logical argument contextualised to relevant discourse' (1997:11) and justify 'actions and decisions relating to process and product' (1997: 11).

In the comprehensive Australian government funded Office of Learning and Teaching priority projects report 'Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards', Webb, Brien and Burr note that 'the variation across programs and universities is potentially damaging to scholarly rigour and consistency in the field'. (2013: 7) They note wryly that 24 terms are currently being used in Australian Higher Education creative arts doctoral degrees: analytical comment; contextualising document; conventional written narrative; critical analysis; critical commentary; critical essay; critical explanation; critical reflective written work; discursive text; dissertation; documentation; durable record; exegesis; explicit critical analysis; reflective component; reflective dissertation; scholarly essay; scholarly

written work of critical analysis; theoretical dissertation; thesis; written component; written documentation; written research; written thesis; or written work (2013:28). To add more, my own university uses the word 'critique', and the University of South Wales uses 'overview' but for the sake of simplicity, and also because I happen to like the term and the level of critical engagement which is implicit in it, I will use the term 'exegesis' in this article. In this regard, Webb, Brien and Burr make the following recommendation:

> That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on a preferred term or terms for the critical essay, one that more precisely denotes the role and function of this document; and that this is communicated to universities with a clear recommendation that the sector aim to achieve both consistency and clarity of terminology (2013: 29).

Hear, hear.

Whatever we call it, it seems clear to me that the exegesis has an even more crucial part to play in the retrospective model of a PhD by Publication in creative writing than in the prospective route, where material is more likely to have been published as a consecutively produced journey of thought or development of theme, style or process. However, we should pause to consider Draper, who posits a case where a Prize winner or someone whose previous publication has had huge and identifiable impact might submit their work for a PhD by Publication. He suggests that these (in his field perhaps, which is not the creative arts) might only require a one sentence covering letter, or possibly nothing at all.

UK universities require different word lengths for the exegesis of a PhD by Publication, which range from 2,000 to 25,000 words of exegesis. I return to my yardstick of new knowledge or insight into creative practice. In order to demonstrate new insight, the writer needs to have a word-count for the exegesis, which allows them space to present, analyse and comment critically on their contribution to their field. Cowton writes 'it would make sense for the sector to settle on an appropriate maximum or guideline length' (2011) but does not suggest what he would consider to be suitable. Kroll and Webb describe a problem which already exists with the exegesis for a practice-based PhD: 'We have (also) seen examiners dismiss the critical work on the grounds that it is insufficiently substantial, apparently not taking into account the difference between a conventional thesis of 80,000 words, and a critical essay of 30,000 words' (2012). How much more dangerous if the exegesis of a PhD by Publication is limited to 10,000 or 2,000 words? Or even a single sentence?

Allowing a candidate as little as 2,000 words to explain the 'doctoralness' of their work, or merely requiring a summary of methodology or literature review undermines the necessary rigour of the exegesis. It ought to go far beyond a mere autobiographical chronicle of what was done. It should be scholarly, academic and needs a stable critical framework. It must be meticulously referenced. A word count of 5,000 words would allow for the depth of contextualising, critical analysis and referencing which I would expect to see in an undergraduate module; 10,000 might allow for the depth one might expect from Master's work. Of course some writers are more succinct than others, but based on 23 years experience of assessing creative

writing at every level, I would suggest that a doctoral level exegesis cannot be completed rigorously in fewer than 20,000 words.

The comparison with BA and MA level work is important because the expectations we have of an undergraduate exegesis should be developed to their highest level in a PhD. And this is where the candidate for PhD by retrospective publication is at a disadvantage compared with one who has undertaken a BA and MA in creative writing and fully understands the conventions and expectations of such a piece of work. It is a major task of the supervisors to ensure that the candidate is 'brought up to speed' on what they would have learned over four years of producing exegeses through a traditional UK BA or MA. Candidates for PhD by Publication must understand from the outset that it may not be a quick or easy process to construct the exegesis. It may only be 20,000 words (or less), but it has to make explicit what Professor Susan Melrose, throughout her writing, calls the 'tacit knowledge and expert/creative meta-practice' which has gone into the production of the published works, and that is not a simple task.

The writer needs to demonstrate the freshness and originality of their work by showing a clear understanding of the context of publication, through some kind of literature review. It is impossible to demonstrate that one is doing something new without discussing what else is being created by others. Creative work does not come out of a vacuum, it needs proper location in terms of its influences and what others are doing, and perhaps discussion of what it is trying not to do. It should show awareness of existing theoretical material, for example in journals like *TEXT*. If the work claims to be stretching the boundaries of genre, the exegesis needs to evidence an understanding of the existing conventions and structures to which the work is related. This is not to say that the exegesis should be a piece of literary theory (too many UK practice-based PhDs fall down here), but that it should demonstrate awareness of the literary context, expressed in suitable terminology.

The exegesis also needs to identify what unites the creative works – which might be themes, form, style, genre – and set out clearly how they contribute to new knowledge or insight into practice. In the case of a DProf rather than a PhD, the candidate would have to argue how their particular professional practice gives a unity to the work. While I would expect the exegesis of a creative writer to be stimulating to read, I would also expect it to demonstrate academic convention in terms of structuring and defending a hypothesis relating to his or her own work, and its contribution to the field. In academic terms it should explore the 'research questions' which drove the work; in simple artistic terms this might mean 'What did I set out to do, why did I want to do it like that, who else was doing similar work, and how successful was I in achieving my aims?'

Finally, a practical note of caution to potential examiners. A 'traditional' thesis may be around 100,000 words. For creative writing that might mean a novel plus exegesis. But a research degree by published works may involve the close reading of six long novels, plus an exegesis from a candidate who may be unused to critical writing. Be warned. The PhD by Publication is not an easy option for the candidate, and neither is it an easy option for the examiner. However, setting aside the time it may take to do

the reading, the examiner should not have to work hard to find out how (or if) the writer is contributing to new knowledge or insight. The exegesis should lay out the arguments so clearly as to be irrefutable.

I am a hopeful person. I approach the examination of a PhD with anticipation and optimism. Whether this is a practice-based 'traditional' PhD, or a PhD by Publication, I want to read creative work which is fresh and unlike anything I've read before. I want to be affected by it, excited by it, haunted by it, and to carry it with me. I want to read critical work which opens a window on why and how that work was produced, what drove it, what makes it cohesive as a body of work, and what other writers might learn. I want to hear a writer talk about their work in a way that sheds new light on some aspect of creative writing, for example craft or theme or style or genre or the psychology or philosophy of writing. I want to come away feeling enlightened and grateful. I want to feel certain that a new house has been built (or at least foundations laid) in the city that is our subject discipline.

Endnote

1. For the term 'tacit knowledge', Melrose references Michael Polanyi's books *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* and *The Tacit Dimension.* On expert-creative practitioner meta-knowledge, the term refers to the expertise of more mature creative practitioners who show the capacity to step back from their practices in order to reflect on those 'knowledge practices' as 'epistemic objects', identifiable as such and available for ongoing research enquiry. Melrose says the notion of epistemic objects comes from the field called 'practice theory' and in particular the work of Karin Knorr-Cetina.

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