

## Massey University and Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), New Zealand

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### Scores from another ground

This special edition of *TEXT* represents a significant development in research and praxis within writing in New Zealand: it is the first time an international journal has put together a dedicated collection of essays about writing research, combined with creative works, from Aotearoa New Zealand. Writing courses and programmes have been taught in New Zealand polytechnics and universities for assessment or individual development since at least the 1970s, and we are grateful to the Australasian Association of Writing Programs for the offer and invitation to generate this original edition. It is also an opportunity to marry the work of the Tertiary Writing Network of New Zealand with that of the AAWP through the medium of such a well-established and respected journal as *TEXT*. We anticipate further opportunities for collaboration in the future, in particular co-hosted writing program conferences, such as is planned to occur in New Zealand in November 2014.

In 2005, Rosemary Clerehan of Monash University and Lisa Emerson were invited to submit a chapter about the development of New Zealand and Australian writing programmes to a North American text on writing programme administration: *The writing program interrupted* (2009). In their chapter they used a central conceit: 'scores from other grounds':

In the early days of television and the heyday of radio down under, Saturday afternoons were punctuated by the voices of the football commentators on the wireless bringing, as if by magic, scores not just for the match they were at, but from other grounds – some taking place up to forty miles away. This chapter looks at scores from other grounds, from outlying grounds, in academic writing – in particular, the experiences of Australian and New Zealand writing program[s].

The metaphor proved too unfamiliar for the North American editors, and was removed from the final published chapter. And yet it has remained – both the conceit itself and the removal of that conceit for a North American context – a significant image for the positioning of the development of academic writing in New Zealand. In so many ways we have been a game played at a distance – geographically, obviously, but also in terms of our relevance to internationally published research on rhetoric and composition (a field dominated by the North American experience), and in terms of our marginality within our own institutions.

Hannah Gerrard, in her excellent essay in this issue on John McMillan Brown, the first New Zealand academic to introduce and discuss writing as an aspect of the

tertiary curriculum in New Zealand, argues that we need to be aware of our own history, because:

paying attention to this history alerts us to the fact that there is a history – that in developing composition studies in this place, we do not start from a blank slate, or from a straightforward importation of American practices or traditions.

This has been the particular challenge of developing writing programmes in New Zealand universities: how to adapt North American models to a specific New Zealand context – and a context where writing is not yet seen as a legitimate part of the curriculum. Writing programmes in New Zealand emerged largely in the 1980s – somewhat later than other Western countries – and the primary influences on this emergence included the re-conceptualisation of English departments, and issues around equity and access – particularly the push to support Maori students and students from lower socio economic backgrounds.

The first influence – the reshaping of English Departments which saw developing writing programmes as market opportunities, a way to compensate for falling rolls in literature programmes at a time when universities were funded on the basis of student enrolments – led to the development of writing courses primarily built on models imported from the United States (freshman composition and WAC programmes). Yet, without the infrastructure associated with North American writing programmes (a writing centre, writing programme administrators, an institutional commitment to writing as an integral part of any degree programme), these programmes have often struggled in terms of staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, and legitimacy. Even now, no university in New Zealand has instituted a compulsory writing course for all students, and university administrators still tend to see writing competency as something that should be developed prior to tertiary study, as evidenced by Auckland University's recent requirement for increased literacy credits at secondary level for university entrance.

Yet writing teachers within these programmes have demonstrated considerable adaptability, in developing so-called 'generic' writing courses suited to students emerging from the New Zealand schooling system, but more particularly in developing subject-specific writing programmes, often in conjunction with subject-specific staff. An example of this is discussed in Angela Feekery and Lisa Emerson's essay in this collection on integrating information literacy into the planning discipline at a New Zealand tertiary institution.

A second branch of the university writing programme, writing advising, which has developed quite separately to the writing courses offered in English Departments, has also struggled with legitimacy – largely because of its emergence in the 1980s as primarily a remedial service, supporting, under the 'equity' label, students perceived as being without the cultural capital to succeed in tertiary study. As Pat Strauss shows, in her article on the positioning and experiences of learning advisors in New Zealand universities, staff in the variously named teaching and learning centres have struggled to gain traction in terms of working with staff and students. Staff conditions in these centres are variable and often tenuous: yet, from centres such as these, rich and varied

programmes have emerged. Learning advisors now provide support not just for entry level students but also for postgraduate students up to doctoral level, through individual consultations and not-for-credit workshops and courses, and learning advisors are adapting their roles to incorporate research into practice, whether this is considered a legitimate part of their role or not. In centres which combine student learning support and academic development, such as Canterbury University, writing initiatives have gone beyond supporting students as writers within courses, to supporting students as apprentice writers within the academy, as discussed by Keith Comer, Jennifer Clement, Erik Brogt, and Camilla Obel in their essay on supporting students in writing for publication.

At an early stage, the polytechnic sector in New Zealand was able to develop writing courses that were more concerned with personal development than academic achievement, associated as they were with community and continuing education courses, night schools and weekend workshops. Later these became developed into certificates and diploma courses particularly through the pioneer work of Owen Marshall at Aoraki Polytechnic, (at Timaru, then Dunedin, in the South Island) in the 1990s. Later, online courses such as those run by Janine McVeagh at Northtec and Jenny Argante at Wairakei adapted models from Massey University's extramural, online programme to create successful creative writing programmes with targeted genres, such as poetry or children's writing at certificate level. Since the late 1990s, polytechnics have been able to offer degree programmes and, in the case of the larger polytechnics such as Waikato, Manukau and Whitireia, these have developed in conjunction with existing professional qualifications. Waikato Polytechnic has a media focus in its Bachelor of Media Arts with an honours and Masters stream offered in creative writing, while Whitireia concentrates upon publishing and performing arts at bachelor level. More recently, Manukau has employed literary leaders Witi Ihimaera and Albert Wendt and rising star Eleanor Catton to provide a diploma in creative writing.

Although most academic writing initiatives in New Zealand did not emerge from the need to support students with English as another language, a significant part of the work on university writing in New Zealand has emerged out of applied linguistics. In this collection, essays by Margaret Franken and Ian Bruce represent very different theoretical approaches to supporting students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

What we have tried to capture in the scholarly essays in this collection is the diversity of writing research and praxis within New Zealand universities. Another distinguishing feature of New Zealand writing programmes has been that the different aspects of writing support and development within individual tertiary institutions – credit-bearing writing courses from English departments, writing support services from teaching and learning centres, and support for second-language students – have often developed quite separately, so that communication between people working in the field within one institution can be quite limited, and even competitive. A challenge for those working in writing support and development, then, is to engage in dialogue in a way that will facilitate a higher profile – and hence greater legitimacy – for writing as an integral part of a tertiary institution.

The small selection of creative works and works commenting on New Zealand writing, though not wholly representative of the population of practising creative writers in New Zealand, nonetheless illustrates a number of shared elements of style, theme or tone. There is, for example, a sense of ironic journeying in place and time in the two prose works by Thom Conroy and Sandra Arnold and, concomitant with this, an inquest into family and colleague dynamics. In Conroy's case, the seekers after 'the place of the fourfold miracle' after the 'World has worlded' find nothing 'of course' after journeying half a world through remote woods in Bohemia in search of Heidegger's unity of sky, earth, mortals and divinities, which a farmer is reported to have found on his property. Sandra Arnold's piece, an excerpt from a novel in progress, ends with a day of dislocation of the earth, when the world is 'unworlded' though the Christchurch earthquakes of 2011. It mingles the mundane conversations of two women with the profound disturbance to city and life that ensued.

The poems by Lisa Samuels and Emma Neale share a playfulness with 'a splintering of syntax', as Samuel's reviewer, Mark Houlihan, identifies. Apart from that review of Samuels' poetry collection, *Wild dialectics*, and its exploration of poetic grammar, the texts for review in this issue have been selected to reflect Australasian themes – children's books which focus on ANZAC Day or world war themes and a novel on the early life and first Pacific voyage of James Cook, *The secret diary of James Cook*, by Graeme Lay.

Lyn Barnes' article on obituaries, lamenting the demise of that journalistic institution, is a writing exercise which incorporates research, character, voice and tone in this discussion of what is, in itself, a neglected aspect of New Zealand writing.

This month (October 2013), Eleanor Catton, won the Man Booker prize for literature. Catton was born in Canada but the family moved to New Zealand when she was six, and she strongly identifies as a New Zealander (Romei 2013). It has not been possible to bring a planned interview with Catton into this issue as her schedule became impossible to penetrate once she had been shortlisted for this prestigious award, although it is anticipated that an interview with her will ensue in a subsequent issue of *TEXT*. Already a gifted writer, Catton completed a Masters in creative writing at Victoria University in Wellington; then a PhD from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She is now a member of the Manukau Institute of Technology creative writing staff. (An interview with Catton on *The luminaries*, her award winning novel, can be found on *The Guardian* website, see Gunn 2013). In place of the proposed interview with Catton, co-editor of this issue Gail Pittaway sent out an invitation to New Zealand writers through the New Zealand Society of Authors, with a short deadline and an invitation to provide a snapshot of being a contemporary writer in New Zealand, Aotearoa. The responses are collected under the title, 'Writing in Aotearoa right now: a bricolage' and make invigorating reading.

No editorial on New Zealand writing programmes would be complete without an acknowledgement of some of the key players who have influenced the development of writing within the New Zealand tertiary curriculum. Significant associations include the Tertiary Writing Network (TWN), founded by co-editor of this collection, Lisa Emerson, in 1996, which brings together all writing teachers in academic writing,

creative writing, and writing for second-language students for a biennial conference, and atlaanz, the association of learning advisors within Aotearoa New Zealand. Significant leaders in the development of New Zealand creative writing programmes have been discussed by Gail Pittaway in an earlier special issue of *TEXT* (12: 2011): Robert Neale, Bill Manhire, Albert Wendt and Witi Ihimaera. Within academic writing programmes, we would also highlight the work of Janet Holst and Brian Opie (Victoria University), Emmanuel Manalo and Donna Starks (Auckland University), Karen Rhodes and Lois Wilkinson (Massey University), Varvara Richards (Waikato University) and her research colleague Heather Ker (Waikato Polytechnic), Carole Acheson (Otago University) and Caitriona Cameron (Lincoln University). As well as, of course, those who have contributed to this special edition.

This special edition of *TEXT*, then, represents ‘scores from another ground’, a depiction of writing programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. We would like to acknowledge the AAWP and the general editors of *TEXT*, Nigel Krauth and Kevin Brophy, for their supportive and innovative programme of special editions, which enhance the already excellent level of contributions and issues. Most of all we wish to acknowledge the vision of the commissioning editor of this special issue, Donna Lee Brien, for recognising that now was the time to bring New Zealand writing, writing programmes and writing research forward onto the international stage.

### Works cited

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