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Editorial

Creative writing and the new philistinism

It is clear to Australian academics that the current government does not value education, nor does it demonstrate the national valuing of the arts that existed 25 years ago.

In the international context, where Denmark spends 7.3% of GDP to support education and the UK 4.8%, while the European countries average 4.7%, Australia manages to outlay ‘an embarrassingly poor 1.8% of GDP’ (Richards, 2021, p. 24).

The ‘Jobs Ready Graduate Package’ reforms of 2020 instigated by Minister Dan Tehan, increased course fees in the arts and humanities and exacerbated our plight. New fees for arts programs were doubled while those for STEM programs were halved. As Ben Eltham wrote in *The Guardian*:

The government’s [own] statistics show that arts and humanities graduates are more employable than science graduates ... total employment for graduates of humanities, culture and social sciences courses in 2019 was 83.9%, while for science and mathematics it was 82.4%. (Eltham 2020)

In the US, there are similar findings. As Aaron Hanlan points out in a recent issue of the *MLA Newsletter* (2021), the stereotypical idea that those majoring in humanities, especially in language and literature areas, are putting their future employment at risk is damaging myth:

Data consistently show that majors in languages and literature and in other humanities fields end up employed at roughly the same rates as majors in other fields, including business, chemistry or psychology. (Hanlan, 2021, p.5)

Eltham makes a salient point when he adds that if you direct your browser to the Australian

employment department's Skills for the Future web page, you discover that the top two 'emerging skills' are 'creativity, originality and initiative' and 'analytical thinking and innovation'.

This advice echoes that of many economic bodies looking at the future of our multi-faceted workplace. The World Economic Forum, scarcely a band of long-haired basket-weavers, has forecast that the top three "skills you need to thrive in the fourth industrial revolution" are "complex problem-solving", "critical thinking" and "creativity". (Eltham 2020)

This new philistinism in Australia has entered the administration of universities via ramped up corporate thinking, managerialism, and profit-boosting policies; all of this exacerbated by funding challenges in a post-Covid landscape. The squeeze on the creative individual – and on the pursuit of free inquiry campus-wide – is alarming.

By way of example, Julian Meyrick's recent article in *The Monthly* (October 2021), tracks the widespread closure and downsizing of the performing arts programs in Australian universities during 2020. 'There are a number of rationalisations offered for the cuts,' reports Meyrick, 'creative arts courses are expensive to deliver, difficult to evaluate and not a "national priority".' The situation is further compounded by a tendency in the creative arts to bring in only a small amount of research funding compared to other disciplines. Meyrick found that 'in the 20 years from 2002 to 2021, across all grant types, the "19 code" attracted just \$108 million in grant money, out of a total \$13 billion for all codes'. Further, the fact that the arts and cultural sector has been one of the hardest hit by Covid lockdowns, makes industry-funded research projects an extraordinary challenge.

Given the times, it is imperative for all of us in the creative arts disciplines in higher education to double down our efforts to advocate for one another and for our students, not only to speak out for ethical workplace standards and national arts and education policies, but to share resources and tactics for doing so effectively.

With so many forces at work against the humanities and creative arts, it is indeed heartening to see how resilient creative writing teaching, scholarship and research remain, and to witness the high-quality contributions our field continues to make, not just to higher education, but to public life.

— *Nigel Krauth and Julianne van Loon*

Congratulations

Congratulations to Professor Kevin Brophy AM, a previous hard-working and insightful *TEXT* editor and long-term valued colleague to us all in the AAWP. In the 2021 Australian

Government Honours List, Kevin became a Member of the Order of Australia, recognised for his ‘significant service to tertiary education, and to creative writing’. Fully deserved, Kevin!

— *Nigel Krauth*

In this edition

The October 2021 edition of *TEXT* features eight new scholarly contributions to the creative writing discipline. We welcome new work from established Australian creative writing scholars such as Jen Webb, Jeri Kroll and Francesca Rendle-Short, and welcome first time contributions from international scholars Huw Grange (UiT Arctic University of Norway), Henry Svec and Zach Pearl (University of Waterloo, Canada), among others.

Our feature article for this edition is ‘Fictocritical Improv for a New Author Paradigm, or How to Render the Messiness of String Theory Research’, co-authored by Henry Svec and Zach Pearl. This original, experimental essay explores the complexity of collaborative authorship in the humanities, offering the string figure as a useful and adaptive model.

Meanwhile, Francesca Rendle-Short examines *communitas* in a creative writing context, foregrounding encounter and unfolding across three case studies; Jen Webb, Meera Atkinson and Jordan Williams provide new thinking on creative writing’s potential to build bridges across knowledge domains; and Jeri Kroll interrogates the use of bricolage as method, mapping the potential drawbacks as well as its possible benefits.

Elsewhere in this edition, Bonny Cassidy, Linda Daley and Brigid Magner offer teaching perspectives immersed in the times of pandemic that call for ‘unknowing expertise’; emerging scholar Alex Gerrans offers a new reading of Flannery O’Connor’s fiction, informed by a fuller sense of the writer’s lived experience of chronic illness; and Huw Grange looks at the potential impact of the anorexia memoir on the writer, with a special focus on Hornebacher’s *Wasted*.

We also welcome back Rielke Grimmer and co-authors Adelle Sefton-Rowston and Glen Morrison, who contribute a welcome reflection on literary journal publishing during a time of funding uncertainty (a fitting companion article to their contribution to *TEXT Special Issue* 54 (2019).

Acknowledgements

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Robinson, Elena Callcott and Katherine Thomas, all students in the Masters of Writing and Publishing program at RMIT University, who copy-edited the scholarly articles published in this edition. Thank you also to their generous mentor, Rose Michael (RMIT).

— *Julienne van Loon, Ross Watkins and Shady Cosgrove*

Special Issues

Associated with this October issue of *TEXT* are four new Special Issues:

- Number 62: *The place of writing in intercultural and intermedial creative collaborations*, edited by Felicity Collins, Hester Joyce and Noel Maloney
- Number 63: *Writing through things 2: The thing as writing prompt*, edited by Melanie Saward and Deb Wain
- Number 64: *Poetry now*, edited by Jessica L. Wilkinson, Cassandra Atherton & Sarah Holland-Batt
- Number 65: *Creative writing and surfing*, edited by Nigel Krauth, Sally Breen, Tim Baker and Jake Sandtner

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