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# Editorial

## *Who really did offer the first creative writing course…?*

### Oral history project

*We are the old pioneers, Ours were the hearts to dare…*
– popularly misquoted from 'Pioneers' by
Flexmore Hudson (1913-1988)

The details of history take time to emerge. The moment at which history replaces living memory as the record of events is often tragic but of great interest to writers. How many times is it said in a family?: We must get grandma's thoughts down on paper, her life / her era was so interesting…

The Creative Writing discipline in Australia is already fortunate to have Paul Dawson's well-researched history of the beginnings of creative writing studies in Australia [1]. Attention is drawn back to Dawson's account (which, of course, he never claimed to be comprehensive) by Laurie Hergenhan's review of Professor Leonie Kramer's book of essays / 'personal history' *Broomstick* (2012), published in this issue of *TEXT*. Hergenhan writes:

> As well as introducing the first major in Australian literature at Sydney University against fierce opposition, [Kramer] and writer-academic Professor Michael Wilding introduced the first Australian university course in Australia in creative writing, in the 1970s.

Those who were present at the first AAWP conference in 1996 will recall the lively debate which followed the question 'Who offered the first creative writing course in Australia?' Dawson's investigations went some way towards quieting this debate. He found that Teachers' Colleges and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) pioneered creative writing courses:

- AD Hope ran a 'trial run' creative writing 'course' at Sydney Teachers' College in the 1940s;
- Glen Phillips spoke of a 'poetry workshop' at Grayland's Teachers' College in Perth before 1966;
- Louis Johnson taught creative writing subjects at Mitchell CAE beginning in 1969;
- Canberra CAE offered a course in professional and creative writing in 1970;
- courses at Curtin University (previously WAIT) and University of Technology, Sydney (previously NSWIT) date back to 1974 and 1975 respectively.

Dawson found that the first creative writing course in a *university*, as opposed to a CAE or an institute of technology, was at the University of Melbourne in

1981, run by Chris Wallace-Crabbe. This was closely followed by the University of Wollongong in 1982, when courses from the old Wollongong Institute of Education were carried across by Ron Pretty.

But Kramer's recall, as reported by Hergenhan, sets the cat amongst the pigeons. Did Michael Wilding really have the first creative writing course in an Australian university, as early as the 1970s?

There is much to confuse in this history. It is hard to tell in Dawson's account, and in the material he was dealing with, what is meant by a 'course' or a 'workshop'. Were they officially gazetted for credit in the institutions or not? Were they extra-curricula activities run by enthusiastic academics in their spare time? What sort of course is described as an 'experiment' and a 'trial run', as in the case of AD Hope's offering? And so on.

I guess I have to class myself among the old pioneers these days. I participated in non-credit creative writing workshops run by Norman Talbot at the University of Newcastle, NSW in 1968 and 1969. Later, I was teaching English literature at Mitchell CAE at the same time Louis Johnson taught his full credit, gazetted creative writing subjects. And I have sat at lunch with Michael Wilding when, on more than one occasion, he has mentioned that he taught the first university creative writing course.

Perhaps I should write down my recall of these different events before my brain goes blank. Perhaps others should do so too. Now is the moment to flesh out Paul Dawson's inaugural account of the history of Creative Writing teaching at tertiary level in Australia. A number of longer-serving academics have already been approached to participate in an 'oral' (read email) history project.

We seriously welcome responses from anyone who might have knowledge, information, or just a thought on the matter, especially as regards creative writing courses in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Please email your memories to nlkrauth@gmail.com and please mention this to others you think might have something to contribute.

*– Nigel Krauth*

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The articles in this new issue sweep across the wide range of possibilities for creative writing theory. There are articles that focus upon questions for the practitioner in us, for the teacher and pupil of writing, and much here too for that one in us who sees how dangerously close creative writing is to uncanny questions of morality, beauty, history and ideology.

Julian Meryrick , eminent historian and activist of Australian theatre, kicks off the issue ('Does culture need explaining?') by asking some fundamental questions about communication, commentary, the reception of art, and the conversations it provokes, and ultimately the government policies and perfect storms of specialized jargon it generates. He writes in a lucid, real and exciting manner about the ways we turn the visceral into the verbal, the private into the shared. What hope do governments have of measuring the value of art? Julian Meyrick's paper was delivered as a keynote speech to the seventeenth AAWP conference in 2012.

Darren Tofts, professor of media and communication, continues the theme of crisis, personal and cultural, with his paper generated out of the anxiety of having to write a paper to a deadline ('When avatars attack! Anxiety, the creative act and the art of steam'). While John Cage's *4'33"* might speak, a blank page will not do the trick. The text moves from Pilate's comment on his inscription above the crucified Christ, all the way to Ormond College and *Scrips*i – a move in hindsight perfectly predictable. From questions of intention to revelations of the creative side of plagiarism via Coleridge's Kubla Khan, to cultural memory, simulacra and avatars that might become for some at least as real as themselves (how grand are the lives of their creators?). This dazzling performance of complexity theory, this blending of dreams and the virtual in the sauna at the Reservoir Pool is a flight you can take without planning ahead.

A third keynote from the high flying 2012 AAWP conference comes from Marion Campbell ('Polyamorous ventriloquy: Loiterature as textual cruising') whose riff deploying the concept of 'loiterature' as a mode of textual cruising and polyamorous ventriloquy sets up a dialogue and a performance between critical and creative enquiries. Her argument for the nurturing space the academy can offer for experimentation and for new creative departures is timely. Like Darren Tofts, she is restlessly and sometimes hilariously aware of the inadequacy of any notion of a single creator, or a single author. If you weren't there for her visceral performance, you can be there for the aftermath in text.

Stephanie Bishop ('Silent reading: The read voice') takes up one of the most mysterious aspects of the reading experience, an element in fact at the heart of the communication between writer and reader: the silence of the act of textual communication. How has this been understood, and how are we to understand it when our attention is drawn to it? Whose voice is this silent voice, whose voice is being heard as I read? What kind of culture and history does it announce? Bishop argues for the centrality of an inner vocality. Through Proust, Giorgio Agamben and recent neuroscience Bishop explores the aural nature of reading, the paradoxical nature of a voice without a body, and the connections of inner voice to self identity and conscience. We recognise conscience by the force of its sound within us, Bishop suggests. This article is itself a beautiful, intelligent poem in praise of reading.

Anne Surma ('Writing otherwise: A critical cosmopolitan approach to reflecting on writing and reading practices in fiction and non-fiction') asks us to consider the ways in which fiction might make ethical incursions into the public discussion of issues, events and people. She offers the possibility that fiction can resist the common dogmas of politics, government and even journalism. Where fiction can be open towards others, and can find nourishment in complexity, it stands in resistance to the stereotypes and the judgments of politicians and media. This 'side-politics' becomes an opportunity for certain ways of discussing texts with students.

Other kinds of ethical challenges are commonly faced by supervisors whose creative writing students are writing of memories of personal trauma. Sue Joseph ('The Lonely Girl: Investigating the scholarly nexus of trauma life-writing and process in tertiary institutions') proposes a model for preparing hopefully hyper-vigilant supervisors to be at least aware of the dangers that are present for these (often young) writers when they move into territory that will leave them vulnerable. This article provides a most helpful and possibly essential guide to any supervisor of a student writing a trauma memoir.

Ariella van Luyn ('Artful life stories: Enriching creative writing practice through oral history') reflects upon her experience of writing a novel based

upon oral histories. She has produced this work in the context of a series of 'serious' novels based upon history, from Kate Grenville to Anna Funder, Dave Eggers, Hilary Mantel and a range of others. Where can the 'artful' depart from the historian's responsibility to the facts, or data? This is an examplary report of practice-led research, and in itself a wholly engaging account of reading seminal texts of 'informed imagination', examining readers' 'reality hunger', writing, of oral history in practice, and complex creativity. How does the aim of the novel to cohesively entertain and engage the reader relate to the unruly authenticity of historical events and the personal nature of memory?

Paul Williams ('Writing the memoir of self-erasure: A practice-led exploration of constructing and deconstructing the coloniser-who-refuses') negotiates the wavering line between fiction and fact in pursuing his memoir of self-erasure. The context for his memoir is the transition from Smith's Rhodesia to Mugabe's Zimbabwe, and the agenda is to bring a corrective vision to the usual and misleading history. But what to make of your memories when you lived your life in a 'propaganda bubble', where not only was your life a lie, but you were ignorant of history happening around you? Textual solutions to these questions are discussed with great intelligence, honesty and clarity here, as the memoir's basis is exposed and explained.

The 1996 Nobel Prize winner, Wislawa Szymborska, drives into existence Dan Disney's meditation on how poets make meaning possible by making worlds ('Three stones: 'Objectivism' as poetic mode in Szymborska, Bonnefoy and Choi'). It makes a difference whether we are constructivist or objectivist in our perceptions of how the world comes to be the world. He argues for poets being different creatures to philosophers, but like philosophers their task is ethical perception and transformation. His readings of poems by Szymborska, Choi and Bonnefoy are elegant and instructive; his argument equally engaging for readers and writers.

*– Kevin Brophy*

**TEXT Special Issue 17**

We are thrilled to present with this issue of *TEXT*, Special Issue 17, *Mud map: Australian women's experimental writing* edited byMoya Costello, Barbara Brooks, Anna Gibbs and Rosslyn Prosser. This special issue, one of our largest yet, brings together and publishes a significant collection of new writing. It does not, as its introduction clearly states, claim to be exhaustive of the state of experimental writing by women in Australia at this moment, but it is an important – and extensive – snapshot of the interesting and exciting work being produced by established and emerging writers at this point in time. This special issue is the outcome of a project that was conceived in 2009 by Dr Moya Costello to develop and publish an anthology of Australian women's experimental writing, and has involved the collection's editors and *TEXT* in a mutually productive venture to source and circulate this important collection of works. Due to the way these works were first collected and edited – for print publication – they are not double blind refereed, but *TEXT* would like to acknowledge the diligence of the editors of this special issue in ensuring the high standard of all works included. *TEXT* is very proud that we could step in and publish such a collection that print publishers felt unable to produce, and note that we have other such innovative and significant work forthcoming forthe Special Issues site. Watch this space!

*– Donna Lee Brien*

## Notes

[1] See Paul Dawson, 'Creative Writing in Australia', *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (2005) pp. 121-157 and his earlier *TEXT* article at http://www.textjournal.com.au/april01/dawson.htm return to text

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