Australian National University

Lucy Neave

Teaching writing process

Abstract
A fiction writer will often begin writing a manuscript in a rough and fragmentary manner, and over time transform these early attempts into what is hoped will be a publishable manuscript. Yet there is little in the creative writing literature on the practical aspects of writing process as utilised by writers, and/or on how writing process might be taught. Using writing process theoretical research, and accounts by writers of their processes, I look at how process, and in particular revision, can be taught in the undergraduate fiction writing workshop. I argue that effective student learning about revision occurs in response to assignments which ask students to re-enter the fictional world they have created, and make substantive changes.
Keywords: writing process, revision, pedagogy

Introduction

When Peter Carey started writing *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), the novel began with the following line: 'I wish to acquaint you with some of the occurrences of the past present and future' [1]. The following paragraph is from the beginning of 'Parcel 1' in the published novel:

> 'I lost my own father at 12 yr. of age and know what it is to be raised on lies and silences my dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but this history is for you and will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false.' (Carey 2000: 5)

The voice in the rewritten opening paragraph of the published novel is compelling. It suggests the character's history, his premise for writing and adumbrates the injustices Kelly suffers later in the book. The long unpunctuated first sentence, with its strong stress rhythm, foreshadows ideas crucial in the novel, such as truth/lies and fairness/injustice.

On close examination, the first draft manuscript reveals itself as almost identical to the opening line of the 'Jerilderie Letter' (1879) [2] with two words reversed: the original reads 'occurrences of the present past and future' (Kelly 1879: 1). In this draft, the voice appears flat, and the sentence does little to engage the reader. Carey has therefore travelled a great distance from the time he typed the first (borrowed) words of the manuscript early in 1997, to the published novel three years later.

Transformation of draft work into a polished manuscript is common practice for published writers, yet there is little in the creative writing literature on the practical aspects of writing process, and/or on how revision could be taught. In

this paper, I argue that facilitating student learning about their own writing process is a valuable component of the undergraduate workshop. This paper focuses on the development of fiction manuscripts, because the material available to me is in the form of interviews and manuscripts by fiction writers, and draft and polished examples of student fiction. All forms of writing involve a journey from idea to final product, though.

While I am interested in writing process generally, in my discussion of practical ways to facilitate the teaching of writing process I will largely focus on revision. This is because students can see a clear development in their own and peers' prose through revision. Revision is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, as 'the act of re-examining' or 'the action or an act of looking over or surveying something again', but revision of fiction frequently results in changes to a text which go beyond 'looking' or 're-examining' (OED 2011). In this context, revision entails making a series of alterations and/or changes to character, setting, voice, plot and tone. A revision usually implies some significant change to the fictional world that the writer has created. This distinguishes revision from the lesser changes implied by proofreading, or even editing. Revising is also something that the writer does, rather than something that can be done externally, by an editor. Practically speaking, it is difficult to isolate revision from writing process: writers will often revise paragraphs, and produce new sections of a manuscript in the same writing session. Therefore, in my discussion of process theory and writers' accounts of their practice, I will look at writing process more generally.

It is important for undergraduate students to 'learn' about their writing process because development of draft prose, and response to comments by editors, are part of a fiction writer's job. Revision is what a writer does when a story is rejected. This paper is not interested in revision as a means of orienting students' fictional work towards a real or imagined market, although developing a piece of writing may mean that it speaks more distinctly to a particular audience and/or communicates meaning more cogently. Rather, I suggest that a 'successful' revision enables a writer to engage in a different way with his or her material. In fact, revision is often driven by a writer's own sense that a work could be transformed, could contain more original metaphors, or a more authentic-sounding voice, for example. Thinking of writing as a process – while not a new idea [3] – is also a possible source of optimism for writers: with time, a piece can 'fail better' (Beckett 1983).

This paper looks at current theory about writing process, and how it is reflected in writers' accounts of their own processes. It uses this research to think about how revision might best be taught. Ultimately, I argue that the most effective learning of process occurs through practice. The paper looks at possible approaches to encouraging this practice on the part of students, and some preliminary results.

Writing process: theoretical developments

Since there is little scholarship specifically on revision, I will begin this section by looking at ideas which have come out of the literature around teaching 'composition' in the United States, a subject which focuses on writing academic papers. I will then examine some of the recent theoretical work on creative writing process.

In undergraduate teaching in the United States, the emphasis on writing process occurs in relation to essay writing. First year college students are expected to

complete a course entitled 'College Writing', 'Composition' or 'Writing Workshop 1', in which they learn how to write 'academic papers'. These courses teach research skills, essay writing and referencing, and give students a process by which to produce an essay or paper. Students are advised to read, take notes, generate ideas through pre-writing, come up with a thesis statement, write topic sentences, write a draft, have their drafts workshopped or peer-reviewed, rewrite their draft, have it peer-reviewed a second time, and then submit their paper for marking. For Claudia Keh (1990: 294), feedback on drafts is crucial to the development of essays. The idea that writing is a process is therefore an essential component of teaching writing at undergraduate level in the U.S. Implicit in this idea is the sense that students are not always fully conscious of what they wish to say when they begin writing. The writing process is a discovery process, which necessitates revision in order to clarify meaning and intent. Feedback is integral to the process because through comments on the part of the lecturer and peers, students realise what they have achieved in their essay, and what is still unclear or unresolved.

This idea of a linear process – research and pre-writing, drafting, peer review and re-drafting – has been critiqued in *Post-process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm*, edited by Thomas Kent (1999), because of the highly structured way students are encouraged to write essays. The contention that a singular process can be applied to all writing tasks is suspect according to Joseph Petraglia, because it fails to take account of different genres and audiences. Moreover, writing is produced through 'an almost impenetrable web of cultural practices, social interactions, power differentials and discursive conventions' (Petralgia 1999: 53-54), which means that no one process can be applied to any writing task. In my experience, the linear writing process critiqued by Kent and others is still the favoured pedagogical model for teaching essay writing in US colleges.

It is difficult to determine to what extent writing process and/or revision is explicitly taught in the MFA workshop in the United States, and in undergraduate and MA writing programs in Australia. Course descriptions available on the internet make some mention of revision, but the degree to which process is emphasised is unclear [4]. The increasing pressure on Australian academics to teach large numbers of undergraduates means that lecturers in this country are unable to manage the amount of reading and re-reading which is integral to many undergraduate composition classes in the U.S. There is scholarship on best practice in relation to teaching composition, but much less that specifically theorises writing process, and/or revision. This is where recent developments in the creative literature are important, because although few discuss revision explicitly, some focus on theories of process.

In 'Is Poetry Research' (2009) Paul Magee interviews a number of contemporary Australian poets about their writing processes, and examines to what extent poets 'do research', in part to address questions raised by the Excellence for Research in Australia exercise about creative practice as research. Magee observes that the research poets do involves wide reading of other poets, and a variety of texts – one poet mentioned reading astrophysics, for example – to trigger composition. According to Magee (2009: 8), the 'transposition from the poetic moment one encounters elsewhere into one's own creative production is by no means direct, simple or even necessarily immediate'. Magee goes on to explore the different interior voices poets hear and use. Although one of the poets Magee interviews mentions editing, Magee is mostly concerned with the immediacy of composition, and how some poets viewed the experience of composing poetry as being akin to improvisational acting.

Other attempts to theorise writing process – how writers research, write and revise their fiction – include those informed by the psychoanalytic tradition, such as Brophy's *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing* (1998), and work informed by the psychological literature on creativity, such as Pope's *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (2005) and Boden's *Dimensions of Creativity* (1994). As Krauth (2006) argues, these books focus more on what happens in moments of inspiration than on the hard work of revision. While the 'Aha experience', as Krauth calls it, certainly forms part of writing process, writing also implies hard work, a 'daily grind' (Krauth 2006: 191). As Jen Webb states in 'Something to Live Within: Writing as an Architectural Act' writing is 'the work of a labourer, and an artisan: one committed to the search for perfection, one prepared to work very hard indeed, one capable of infinite patience' (Webb 2006: 211). Constant and repeated engagement with draft work appears to facilitate moments of inspiration – at least in my experience – but writing process certainly involves a great deal more than inspiration alone, as suggested by Krauth (2006) and Webb (2006). What happens when a writer keeps returning to a draft piece of writing has not been thoroughly addressed in work on creativity, or in scholarship about writing process.

Much research about writing process engages with questions about how writers operate in different spheres or domains, these being the 'real world' and their imaginary worlds. Krauth, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's 'Introduction: A Rhizome' from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), writes of the 'first domain' as 'the intimate space in the novelist's head where the project is conceived, managed and monitored', the 'third domain: the public space which is the domain of the readership towards which the writing process is projected' and other domains, including the 'fifth domain: the imagined space which is the fictional world where the characters reside and play out their lives' (Krauth 2006: 193).

The notion of fields (Gonsalves & Chan 2008) or domains (Krauth 2006) or multiple personality disorder (Kroll 2006) or the ego/superego (Magee 2011) and/or the problematization of creativity as involving conscious, unconscious and/or semi-conscious processes (Pope 2005) are all common to theoretical discussions of writing process. Although theoretical work on creative writing process is a growing field, there is little that specifically relates to revision as a component of that process. The lack of creative writing literature on revision may be due to the relative youth of the discipline, and the fact that writing process theory is at an early stage of development. It may also be due to the fact that revision is an integral part of writing, and is difficult to dissect out from process.

Writers' accounts of their processes

Theoretical views are consistent with writers' accounts. For Coetzee, the distance between the writing self and the public self is so vast that he doubts the relevance of his answers to interview questions. When speaking with David Atwell, he says:

> Let me talk first about the subjective experience of writing a novel and subjective experience of answering questions about it… The novel becomes less a *thing* than a *place* where one goes every day for several hours a day for years on end. What happens in that place has less and less discernible relation to the daily life one lives or the lives people are living around one … whatever the process is that goes on when one writes, one

> has to have some respect for it…
> In contrast, as I talk to you today, I have no sense of *going anywhere* for my answers. What I say here is continuous with the rest of the daily life of a writer-academic like myself. While I hope what I say has some integrity, I see no reason to have any particular respect for it. True or false, it is simply my utterance, continuous with me; whereas what I am writing in a novel either isn't me or is me in a deeper sense than the words I am now speaking are me. (Coetzee 1992: 205-206)

For Coetzee, the 'domain' in which writing happens is separate from the domain in which the finished product, the novel, exists. He goes to 'a place' when writing. Coetzee does not look into the 'black box' of his process, but insists that 'one has to have some respect for it'. There is a separation, for Coetzee, between the place one goes when one writes, and the place in which one lives (Coetzee 1992: 205) [5].

In many of the interviews conducted by Grenville and Woolfe in *Making Stories: How Ten Australian Novels Were Written* (2001), writers mention the importance of other mental spheres. For example, Jessica Anderson says: 'Writers depend on the subconscious. As a process, it's very hard, perhaps impossible, to describe. It's a conscious foray into the unconscious. No, that's wrong. But there must be a balance between those two states…' (Anderson 1993: 14). Helen Garner also referred to the subconscious in her keynote address at the Australian Association of Writing Programs Conference in 2008. She attributed her ability to write a weekly column to her refusal to consciously think about the material for it: '…when I forbade myself to think at all about the column, my unconscious mind was working away busily in the dark…so that on Monday, when I allowed myself to look, a lot of the preliminary work had already been done' (Garner 2008: 3). [6]

It is clear from studying interviews by published writers that while writers are not always able to detail their choices, changes of heart, or the decisions they make with respect to their imaginary worlds, they are able to speak of acts they perform in order to write fiction. From these accounts, it is obvious that writers' processes differ widely. Sonya Hartnett, for example, follows a series of steps, which she calls 'gathering clouds' – or gathering ideas or plot points – and mapping out the novel on coloured paper (Hartnett 2004: 9-11) as a way of imagining her novels before she writes them. Hartnett's process of visualizing scenes before she begins to write enables her to complete her books with minimal revision. Garner relies on a notebook to accumulate sufficient detail, and uses the mass of notes as the bedrock on which she builds her books (Garner 1993: 62). While both Harnett's and Garner's processes are of practical use – they enable the writing of fiction and nonfiction – they also appear to allow the author to re-make private and public selves, in order to inhabit what could be called 'the imagined space which is the fictional world, where characters reside and play out their lives' (Krauth 2006: 193). That is, for Hartnett and Garner, conscious, deliberate acts allow them to operate in other domains or spheres, such as within their imagined worlds.

Of all of the writers examined here, Peter Carey is the most discursive about how he revises. For him, the idea of revision is integral to his writing, as is evident from his manuscript. In an interview with Radhika Jones, he discusses his process:

> …in the first draft, I'm inventing people and place with a broad schematic idea of what's going to happen. In the process, of course, I discover all sorts of bigger and more substantial

things. Within those successive drafts, my characters keep on doing the same things over and over… But the reasons they do them gradually become more complex and layered and deeply rooted in the characters…

Often I will reach a stage, say, a third of the way into the book, where I realize there's something very wrong. Everything starts to feel shallow and false and unsatisfactory. At that stage I'll go back to the beginning. I might have written only fifty pages, but it's like a cantilever and the whole thing is getting very shaky because I haven't thought things through properly. So I'll start again and I'll write all the way through and then just keep going until it starts to get shaky again, and then I'll go back because I'll know that there's … something deeply necessary waiting to be discovered or made. (Carey 2006)

The writing process is therefore also a discovery process for Carey. Through writing and revising, he determines the shape of the book, the characters and the narrative.

In many of the interviews conducted by Grenville and Woolfe, writers speak about how they developed draft writing into a novel. Jessica Anderson says that it took her a long time to find the appropriate setting for the beginning of *The Commandant*:

'I tried Sydney because I could put in the political background there. But while I was doing that part, it became clear that Moreton Bay … was … such a presence in the book, that I had to start there, and keep it as a core, an anchor.' (Anderson 1993: 9)

Anderson therefore used a process of experimentation and revision to find the right place to begin her novel. In the same volume, Garner talks about the kind of writing she did when she began *The Children's Bach*. She speaks about finding the 'right note' to jot down in her notebook. For Garner, a note has a tone, like a musical note, such that when Garner re-reads the note later, 'the same note will sound again, and remind me of a whole sequence of events or moods' (Garner 1993: 62). Once Garner had filled several notebooks, she could 'start to collate this mass of raw material into a usable shape'; that is, her re-writing process began with her typing out and editing the raw material she had collected in notebooks (Garner 1993: 63). In 'I', an essay published in *Meanjin* in 2002 (Garner 2002), Garner acknowledged the importance of community, friends and acquaintances to her process: in her writing she draws directly from life. Anderson and Garner were therefore working with very different material: Anderson was writing historical fiction, while Garner's novel was set in contemporary times, and was populated by the kinds of people she knew. Each writer was interested in a particular kind of raw substance, had to work with it, and turn her first attempts into a novel. As a consequence, Anderson and Garner approached the writing of their novels dissimilarly.

In their introduction to *Making Stories*, Grenville and Woolfe admit that they set out to focus on revision because they wished to reveal the work that went on behind a completed manuscript. In the process of approaching authors, Grenville and Woolfe became interested in the whole gestation of a work: from inception, research and notes, to completed manuscript. For them, the idea of revision did not encompass the totality of writing process, and other actions that writers performed, especially early in the process, were as important as revision. They also found focusing on revision difficult. One writer explained that 'she didn't work in anything as coherent as "drafts"' (Grenville and

Woolfe 2001: xi-xii). Grenville and Woolfe came to the conclusion that it wasn't possible to completely isolate revision from the writing process (Grenville and Woolfe 2001: xii). The diverse accounts in the preceding paragraphs highlights the need to acknowledge the importance of all stages of the writing process in the development of fictional works, and the various and distinctive practices writers undertake in order to complete a novel.

In a large proportion of the accounts by writers I have discussed here, there is a mental movement on the part of the writer between the exterior world, and their interior worlds. Writers appear to use different strategies to foster these imagined spaces: Garner uses her notebook, Hartnett her colored paper, Carey his actual process of re-writing. But writers were largely silent about the mechanics of re-writing their work, and the extent to which comments from other readers or editors on manuscripts were used during revision. Hartnett's process – her careful pre-planning – makes the need for revision less pressing. It seems fair to assume that all published writers engage in some drafting and re-writing as part of their process, but how much, and how this revision is done requires further research. What is also missing from both the theory and writers' accounts is the tangled and impenetrable nature of writing process. In Grenville and Woolfe's interview with Carey, he says:

> I think that the one false signal that this discussion might give is that the whole journey was more straightforward than it really was… The process is muddier than even this indicates, and I know that this is muddy. (Carey 1993: 41)

How could writing process be taught?

Several ideas come out of both theoretical approaches to understanding writing process, and writers' accounts of their own practices. These are, at their most basic, that writing is a process, and that this process is – at times – a complex, perhaps even inchoate one. Looking at the short descriptions of writers' own processes, it is apparent that they differ widely. Theory about writing process points to the idea that how writers write occurs at different levels of consciousness, and/or in various fields and spheres. The processes fiction writers use to write their fiction, and the worlds they build and enter, arise from the passage between the world in which they live, and the imaginary sphere that they inhabit.

If it is the case that writing is, by its very nature, a process, is it necessary to emphasise fiction writing process at undergraduate level? After all, good students will write stories, and will often sense their stories' failings, or feel discomfort about aspects of their stories, and work on them. If a story is workshopped, or even a proposal or part of a story is workshopped, students will sense how their story was read, and measure their own expectations for the story against their peers' responses. Student-initiated re-writing is a form of experiential, practice-based learning, after all.

My argument for consideration of further emphasis on writing process arises in part because of my experience as a writing student, when pieces were workshopped, but revision was not discussed. In my graduate education, which was undertaken in the US, the kind of writing practices authors engaged in were not examined. The creative writing workshop often includes exercises, which allow developing writers to practice aspects of technique, but do not necessarily encourage students to re-engage with texts they are working on. As I and many of my peers began to publish stories and to work on novels, I

grasped the importance of being able to make significant changes to fictional worlds in order to overcome my own dissatisfaction with my work. Learning to do this with confidence was difficult.

Because of my experiences teaching in the American undergraduate system, and my experiences as a writer, when I began teaching creative writing I structured my undergraduate creative writing courses such that revision was emphasised. For me, revision was the most obvious and articulable aspect of writing process, and the results of revision could be seen clearly by beginning writers. Initially the emphasis was on assessment which required inclusion of drafts in portfolios. Student drafts were circulated before the workshop, and students were required to write peer review comments on these drafts. Students' comments were collected for assessment. Three or four students' stories were then discussed in the workshop. Extensive comments were also written by the lecturer on the draft story. At the end of the semester, students were required to submit their workshopped drafts and their revisions, along with any intermediate drafts and exercises for their portfolios.

From the outset, student portfolios included not only final versions of stories, and at least one earlier version, but also a document called 'Rationale for Changes' which detailed the changes the student had made, and the reasons for these changes. It was stressed that students did not need to follow the advice of peers or the lecturer closely, but to bear in mind the comments they had received on the work and their own aims for it, and to develop the story in accordance with their own thinking.

In the process of teaching these early courses, a number of issues became apparent. A problem with 'demanding' revision is that it is all very well to require a revision of a story, but when dealing with students who are just beginning to write, it is often hard for them to determine how to make effective changes to their work. One-on-one meetings with the lecturer were available, but with increased student numbers it was challenging to make sufficient time to give all undergraduate students the help they required. Exercises were then developed in the workshop to assist students with aspects of revision. These included asking students to re-write in rough draft form parts of the story with which they were having difficulty. Other exercises attempted to help students re-enter the imaginative space of the story through different means, for example by drawing a scene, or mapping the story's structure. In addition, more time for peer-to-peer suggestions and discussion of intermediate drafts was included in the workshops, particularly as the end of semester approached, and students were interested to see if the changes they had made to their stories had been successful.

Another issue with this approach was that it assumed students were capable of writing a complete rough draft of a story, and that they all worked in a similar manner, that is through writing a 'rough' and then a more developed draft. As the course developed and was itself revised, it enabled more flexibility around what constituted a draft, and allowed students to abandon pieces which were not working, and/ or to develop sketches into complete stories. That is, the course aimed to help students find their own process, rather than expecting them to follow a process in which the story was developed in a linear fashion. One of the ways the course engaged with questions around students' own processes was through the introduction of explicit discussion of creative writing process. Discussing process involves exploring the theory in relation to process. It also includes talking about writers' practices, as detailed in interviews, and looking at the changes writers have made to manuscripts, as and when possible. This is illuminating for students, since they can see how

writers have developed their own work, and diverse approaches to the process of writing.

Asking for revision is useful, because through revision the student re-enters the story as imaginative space, and through the experience of working with the revision, crosses between the world in which the story was commented on, and the imaginary world of his or her piece. The extent to which students were able to re-enter the imaginative space of the story was in part related to their 'success' in developing it. The most creative and interesting revisions were those which took stories in directions that the lecturer or peers could not have anticipated. The exercise of returning to a story, thoroughly engaging with it, and attempting to clarify aspects of it, was also deeply rewarding for students. It also makes teaching creative writing a more satisfying experience for the lecturer.

Examples of student work

The following gives examples from student draft and final portfolio versions from a fiction writing course. This course encouraged students to think about how published writers draw on, imitate and react against each other's work. I have included reference to student 'Rationale for Changes' documents, which demonstrate student thinking about their drafts.

The first draft is from a student who was initially unable to write a full draft of a story, although she had a well-established character and setting. Here is her opening paragraph:

> With a slight breeze tickling the leaves of trees, Mrs Witherton commenced her journey. She was heading towards the mail box at the end of her front path. It was blue. Mrs Witherton blue. A shade of blue that sat somewhere between happy and sad. The time was approximately 10:56am, Mrs Witherton was in a race against herself and the mail stealing youths she'd seen on television. [7]

The class discussed this story, and brainstormed ways that the student could further develop it. While the class and lecturer appreciated the evocation of the character's world, students felt that there needed to be some action or event in the story. The student worked on this piece, and completed it as one of the stories in her final portfolio. Some of her thinking about the development of this story was influenced by her reading of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In her rationale, the student wrote: 'Both these texts look at how home influences people, and this was a thought that remained present throughout the entire writing process for this story'. After the student's draft was workshopped, she says that she felt that the story was 'missing something' and that she received a lot of comments about how the story needed action. In her rationale, the student wrote:

> There were many suggestions of adding in some form of violence between Mrs Witherton and the youths. However, I felt that this didn't keep with what I wanted from the story. Instead I opted to have Mrs Witherton take action in her own unique way. Instead of violently fighting the world she feared, Mrs Witherton knitted herself away from everyone.

The end of the story reads as follows:

> …Mrs Witherton ached to belong somewhere else. Slowly she
> lifted her frail body and clambered inside the thing she had
> been making. She continued tying up the loose ends, knitting
> up her cocoon until she could only see darkness and pin pricks
> of light sneaking through the stitches.

The workshop and revision process has therefore taken the story in a direction which the lecturer and class could not have anticipated. Through re-entering the imaginative space of the story, the student has created an original and sympathetic character, whose actions are idiosyncratic yet comprehensible.

In the second example, the student is drawing on an existing fairytale – Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes' – as a way to begin a story. The student's first draft began as follows:

> All good fairytales start at the beginning. This story arises with
> the sun, as a great city hazes into view. It is the story of two
> crafty brothers, one proud emperor, and the most beautiful
> clothes the world had ever seen … or not seen.

The initial draft was a fairly straight re-telling of Andersen's tale, although it took some steps towards characterising the tailors. In the workshop, the student was encouraged to make the story hers, to think of it in a way that might be distinct from the original. The class discussed ways that the author might approach doing this. Several weeks later, the writer brought a new opening to the story to class, and it was discussed in a small group. The new beginning imagined the tailors as modern-day conmen, who were selling cruises to the Caribbean. Peers and the lecturer felt this was a promising idea, and encouraged the student to develop the latter parts of the story further. The student's rationale describes her thought processes after the workshop:

> I did some experimenting. I put the conmen in fairytale prison,
> even, but nothing was working. Eventually I had a good, hard
> look at my original, and realised what I loved about it were the
> voices of those two shifty brothers. They weren't particularly
> unique to a fairytale world, and before long I could see them.
> There was Anton (the eldest and most evil one) settling into a
> floral chair, drinking a cup of tea and getting ready to scam
> some nice old lady out of her pension. So I just started writing
> it, and somehow, it all flowed… Going from my second draft
> (the first modern version) into my final draft was a bit harder.
> From there my main focuses were culling clunky sentences,
> making Anton my clear protagonist … and stopping and
> describing things more, from chairs to coasters... The end draft
> is drastically different to my first one, but I don't regret writing
> it the way I did the first time. It ingrained the story into my
> head; it meant I understood the plot and my characters very
> clearly and could transport them somewhere else
> comfortably… My final draft goes beyond the original story I
> felt so confined by… It was a real challenge for me to take my
> original and turn it into what I have now, but I know my work
> is a lot stronger in this final version, and I'm really happy with
> how it turned out.

The rationale indicates the student's satisfaction with persisting with her story, and finding an engaging way to tell it. The student's writing on her process also shows that it took considerable thought and experimentation for her to arrive at a place where the characters and setting felt satisfying to her. Re-writing stories

therefore gives students confidence that they can tell when a story is effective. The approach to writing fiction through a process allows students to feel that they have more time to work out aspects of a story, most often the narrative, before thinking seriously about characters, and the complexity of the world they are creating, as the second student example demonstrates. This is freeing for students, because they don't feel that they have to write a perfect story in the first instance.

Conclusion

While theory about writing process and writers' accounts of their practices are illuminating, there are still significant gaps in the literature pertaining to revision of fiction manuscripts, and the scholarship and material now available raises significant questions. The most thorough work on how Australian writers have produced novels, Grenville and Woolfe's *Making Stories*, was first published in 1993, and therefore cannot take account of recent technological advances – sophisticated word processing programs, for example – used when writing fiction. Basic questions from theory and writers' accounts include: What are the kinds of processes that writers use to revise work? How important are readers and/or editors in determining the final draft of a book? Other questions relate to the extent to which process and/or revision is taught at undergraduate or graduate level in Australia. While this paper demonstrates that revision is integral to writing process, investigation of other aspects of process may also be worthwhile. If these questions are addressed, it may be possible to develop courses which contribute to student engagement with their own writing process in a wholly informed manner.

But this paper shows that there are practical ways through which students can be encouraged to develop their own writing processes. Students can be required to demonstrate that they have engaged with a process through the submission of draft and final versions of creative work as part of their assessment. A uniform and linear writing process need not be imposed on students: exercises, and flexibility around what constitutes a draft can facilitate the development of an individual student's journey from idea to polished manuscript. In addition, courses in creative writing can explicitly discuss diverse approaches to writing fiction, through reading theory pertaining to writing process, and by inclusion of interviews and manuscripts by published authors. Writing-as-process can be explored more openly in undergraduate courses.

Becoming a fiction writer involves learning to cross between spheres, worlds, or domains, and to have a secure and compelling imaginary space to which to 'go' to write a novel or story. The revision process involves this crossing between the conscious sphere – the comments in the workshop, for example – and the world of the story / novel. In this paper, I have outlined one method by which this 'crossing' can take place.

Notes

1. This quotation comes from the beginning of the first manuscript for Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* held by the State Library of Victoria, that is: Carey, Peter 1997-1998 'Secret History of the Kelly Gang' manuscripts. MS 13420 Box 1/3, Draft 1#3 (Carey 1997-1998). There is no way of determining whether these are the first words written by Carey of the manuscript which was later to become *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). return to text

2. The reference for the Jerilderie Letter is as follows: Kelly, Edward 1879 *Jerilderie Letter* Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. Available at: http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/jerilderieletter1.html [Accessed 20th December 2011]. The authorship of the letter is a subject of scholarly debate. While it is thought that Kelly dictated the letter, the penmanship is likely Joe Byrne's. return to text

3. Claudia Keh, in her article 'Feedback in the writing process: a model and methods for implementation', dates the 'process approach' to writing from the early 1970s. A paper by D Gordon Rohman, 'Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process', states that 'Writing is usefully described as a process' (106), and is dated 1965 (Rohman 1965). return to text

4. A thorough investigation of the extent to which creative writing process is taught, and how it is taught in Australian universities would need to involve interviews with lecturers and students, and is beyond the scope of this paper. Sample course descriptions which suggest that the teaching of writing process is a part of the unit appear below:

> At the University of Melbourne, in the course 'Creative Writing 2: Across the Genres' (http://www.unimelb.edu.au/HB/subjects/106-025.html) the course description states: 'students will be required to give a workshop presentation during the semester and submit a draft proposal for the writing project including a short review, a project outline and a draft sample of creative writing of not more than 500 words. These drafts will be returned with comments and resubmitted in a refined and extended form for final assessment of a writing project of not more than 4000 words'. In an assignment like this, students are clearly asked to develop and expand on their writing sample or story.

> In 'Creative Writing: Genre Fiction', a new course at the University of Queensland, the course description states that by the end of the course, students will be 'familiar with a wide range of research and development theories and approaches suitable for creative writing projects, and will be able to use research to produce a finished piece of fiction' (https://www.courses.uq.edu.au/student_section_loader.php?section=1&profileId=37962taught). Teaching is through a '1.5 hour tutorial feature[ing] group activities and discussions, individual creative exercises, and student presentations'. 'Development' is therefore important in this course, but it's difficult to determine to what extent students are engaged in developing their own fiction, or if 'development' is discussed in the abstract.

> At the University of Wollongong, in the second year course 'Narrative Studio', a learning objective for students is to: 'Edit and perfect a finished microfiction and/or short story'. How this is achieved in the course is not discussed explicitly on the webpage, of course, although the course appears to use the workshop model: https://sols.uow.edu.au/owa/sid/CAL.SUBJECTINFO?p_subcode=CACW203&p_year=2012&p_source=WebCMS return to text

5. Coetzee's interview suggests the difficulties involved in relying solely on writers' statements when studying writing process. In an earlier paper, I argued that what a writer says in interviews gives only a tiny insight into the composition of a novel, and that the use of writers' manuscripts alongside interviews was a more useful approach (Neave 2009: 6). return to text

6. The notion of the conscious/unconscious/semi-conscious and its role in creative process is problematised in Rob Pope's *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (2005). Pope argues that

many models for writing 'involve levels or stages of *more or less* conscious processing' (Pope 2005: 74), quoted in 'The Domains of Writing Process' (Krauth 2006: 192). return to text

7. Two students gave permission for excerpts from their final portfolios to be used anonymously in this paper as illustrations. The author would like to thank these students for their generosity. return to text

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Lucy Neave is a Lecturer in Creative Writing in the English Department at the Australian National University. Her fiction has appeared in Australian and American literary journals, and in Best Australian Stories 2009.