Editorial

What is driving writing-academics, just at present?

What is driving writing-academics, just at present? The essays in this issue of *TEXT* give some indication of interest, anxiety, curiosity and other motivations to write. In most cases it is clear that there is a fair bit of rumbling in the rooms: people are doing some very serious thinking about what writing means in the academy, and how we might position ourselves as individuals and our discipline to move forward, now that we are nearly a decade into the twenty-first century.

There are questions raised about currently untapped areas for research and practice. Rose Williamson, for example, suggests the field of magazine writing; Donna Lee Brien describes the possibilities offered in the area of foodwriting; Murphy and Neilsen explore the field of writing as therapy, and the links it has to creative writing theory and practice. All are research and writing areas that are undersubscribed by writing academics - both staff and higher degrees students - but that offer considerable advantages of social interest, and publication options. Then there are essays that discuss conceptual or pragmatics aspects of the writer's life. Gonsalves and Chan describe how Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* can be used to explicate the development of a writer's tastes and career; Johnston and Krauth examine the complexities of the peer review that is so central to academic publishing, and lay out very clearly how the field of academic publishing does work, and can perhaps be made to work better; and Davis and St Vincent Welch, in a lyrical almost-conversation, explore the contested space where the public and private meet, for teachers of writing. How do we manage to perform in the face of personal grief, of the distractions afforded by everyday life, of fear?

The problem of everyday life - grief, distraction and fear - is closely associated with another issue examined by a number of contributors; an issue that crops up regularly in the pages of *TEXT*. This is the social responsibility of writing and of writers. Allan Robins, in his essay published here, points out that 'Because texts are in and of the world, they have an effect on their readers that can translate into effects on extratextual realities'. This concept is at the heart of several of these essays. Karin Vesk, for instance, writes about the creative potentiality of centos and commonplace books, but central to her essay is the efficacy of writing in a time - this time - when social justice is hard to find. Her point in some ways exemplifies the discussion in Williams and Webb's essay about the paucity of creative writing that takes on the global challenges to human rights, especially the current bugbear of terrorism and its obverse, the so-called War on Terror. Sue Page revisits the Holocaust and explores the agonistics of writing about - representing - an event that is outside her own experience, yet has inflected her worldview, and that of many young readers. She posits another way of writing the Holocaust that might contribute to a more positive, more equitable, more productive space of exchange. Robins does something similar in teasing out the complexities for non-Indigenous writers of representing Indigeneity. In each of these essays, the authors make the case for a writing that is 'in and of the world', that attempts to translate the content of a text into 'extratextual realities'.

Paul Dawson's self-avowed polemical essay comes from a different position to those described above because he opens up space for an important discussion we

welcome in *TEXT*. His essay tackles the question of what constitutes research in the field of writing; how writing is (or is not) aligned with English studies, cultural studies or the creative industries; whether writing is really a pedagogical rather than a research discipline; and the institutional and bureaucratic pressures on writers in the academy to toe some sort of line. All are aspects that deserve illumination. We encourage contributors to submit essays for next year's issues that explore the nature of research for writers; the institution of the language of creative/practice-led/practice-based or emergent research; case studies on your own practice; the alignment (or not) between research, practice and teaching; or the conceptual space of an academic discipline. Australia is poised at the point of a major national audit of research quality; the UK and Aotearoa/New Zealand are well into their cycles of such assessment; the US has its own measures and processes. How does the discipline of writing engage with such administrative frameworks? Where do we aim our sights, for the next decade or so?

And in a related sphere, published writers in Australia are driven to mild excitement each April because this is the time for the ELR (Educational Lending Right) and PLR (Public Lending Right) surveys which lead to an annual allocation of taxpayers' money to support authors. This payment is designed to compensate writers for the lending of their books by libraries. Books are rated according to the numbers of copies on public and school/university library shelves.

The *Public Lending Right Committee Annual Report 2006-07* [1] contains an interesting series of appendices which list in order, for example

- the top 100 Australian-authored books in Australian public libraries in the last 3 years;
- the same for the last 33 years; and
- the top 100 Australian-authored books in Australian educational libraries last year.

The top 15 in public libraries in the last 3 years are:

- 1 Fox, Mem *Possum Magic*
- 2 Fox, Mem *Where is the Green Sheep?*
- 3 Courtenay, Bryce *Whitethorn*
- 4 Reilly, Matthew *Seven Ancient Wonders*
- 5 Reilly, Matthew *Scarecrow*
- 6 Bruce, Jill B. *Flags and Emblems of Australia*
- 7 Marchetta, Melina *Looking for Alibrandi*
- 8 Winton, Tim *Dirt Music*
- 9 Morrissey, Di *The Reef*
- 10 Courtenay, Bryce *Brother Fish*
- 11 Courtenay, Bryce *Four Fires*
- 12 Courtenay, Bryce *Smoky Joe's Cafe*
- 13 Vaughan, Marcia K. *Wombat Stew*
- 14 Li, Cunxin *Mao's Last Dancer*
- 15 Lester, Alison *Are We There Yet? A Journey Around Australia*

The top 15 in public libraries in the last 33 years are:

- 1 Courtenay, Bryce *Tommo & Hawk*
- 2 Courtenay, Bryce *The Potato Factory: a Novel*
- 3 Jennings, Paul *Unbelievable! More Surprising Stories*
- 4 McCullough, Colleen *The Thorn Birds*
- 5 Jennings, Paul *Quirky Tails: More Oddball Stories*
- 6 Jennings, Paul *Uncanny! Even More Surprising Stories*
- 7 McCullough, Colleen *An Indecent Obsession*

- 8 Courtenay, Bryce *Jessica*
- 9 Courtenay, Bryce *Solomon's Song*
- 10 Jennings, Paul *Unmentionable! More Amazing Stories*
- 11 Marsden, John *The Night is for Hunting*
- 12 Fox, Mem *Possum Magic*
- 13 Base, Graeme *The Eleventh Hour: a Curious Mystery*
- 14 Jennings, Paul *Unreal! Eight Surprising Stories*
- 15 Marsden, John *So Much To Tell You*

And the top 15 last year in educational libraries are:

- 1 Fox, Mem *Possum Magic*
- 2 Vaughan, Marcia K. *Wombat Stew*
- 3 Rodda, Emily *Rowan of Rin*
- 4 Klein, Robin *Hating Alison Ashley*
- 5 Jennings, Paul *The Paw Thing*
- 6 Baker, Jeannie *Where the Forest Meets the Sea*
- 7 Gleitzman, Morris *Two Weeks With the Queen*
- 8 Park, Ruth *Playing Beatie Bow*
- 9 Fox, Mem *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*
- 10 Jennings, Paul *The Cabbage Patch Fib*
- 11 Gleitzman, Morris *Misery Guts*
- 12 Klein, Robin *Boss of the Pool*
- 13 Jennings, Paul *Round the Twist*
- 14 Klein, Robin *Penny Pollard's Diary*
- 15 Gleitzman, Morris *Blabber Mouth*

These three lists seem to suggest:

- we should not stop teaching about writing for children and adolescents;
- we should probably teach more about writing in popular genres;
- we should possibly have more of these authors on reading lists for our students;
- and we should give up on thinking that our academic books are going to be best-sellers.

Most sad of all, perhaps, is this clear message: What we might think of as fine adult literature (and here we'll exclude *Dirt Music*) isn't ordered in multiple copies by libraries and doesn't hold a widespread place on library shelves. On the other hand, we should heartily congratulate the listed authors for producing work that people will borrow and love to read.

Notes

1. The report was published on 23 October 2007 and is available at:
http://www.arts.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/75606/PLR_annual_report_06_07.pdf
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