**The University of New England**

## Donna Lee Brien

# *Recent Resources for Teachers of Creative Writing: A Review Article*

*Mooring Against the Tide: Writing Fiction and Poetry*
2nd edition
Jim Knorr and Tim Schell
Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2006 (first published 2001)
ISBN: 0-13-178785-3
396pp. Pb

*Crossroads: Creative Writing Exercises in Four Genres*
Diane Thiel
Pearson Longman, New York, 2005
ISBN: 0-321-12761-7
402pp. Pb

*Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: The Authority Project*
Anna Leahy (ed)
Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto, 2005
ISBN: 1-85359-846-1
222pp. Pb

The relationship between teaching and research, and the outputs generated from this nexus, is of current and continuing importance to writing as a field of academic inquiry in higher education in Australia and other countries. Receiving this set of three books to review has prompted me to consider the role of such student handbooks, textbooks and scholarly texts in both the field, and in the careers of those who teach writing.

Most teachers of writing generate a substantial range of teaching materials excellently suited to their purposes. Often extensive and sophisticated sets of multimedia resources, these materials may involve teachers of writing in generating lectures and supporting notes; powerpoint and other multimedia presentations; tutorial, seminar and workshop guides for students and sessional staff; unique and distinctive anthologies of readings and other resource materials; original writing and other creativity exercises; how-to and information guides on editing, grant writing, finding an agent, achieving publication, dealing with the media, reading and presenting in public venues, understanding copyright and intellectual

property and other professionally-relevant knowledge and skills; as well as a range of other materials which the teacher hopes will provoke or represent the ideas, concepts and processes he or she wants students to engage with, use and interrogate during the course of their studies. While some of these teaching materials are developed and refined by single individuals, others involve considerable collaborative work and complex negotiation as to whom is credited for, and on, what parts of the materials. In many cases, these materials draw from, and incorporate, the various areas of expertise that writing instructors bring to their teaching. These include the professional expertise of the teacher-as-educator, the scholarly approach of the teacher-as-academic and the creative abilities of the teacher-as-writer. The best of these materials are, moreover, often developed, improved, edited and/or added to over a substantial period of time and, as a result, are exemplary for the task at hand - teaching writing in the higher education context.

Yet, in Australia, there is little inducement or encouragement from the higher education sector, our employing educational institutions or publishers for writing teachers to edit and reconfigure such material into textbooks, as is common practice in the USA. One problem for Australian academics is that textbooks do not attract that all-important Department of Education Science and Training (DEST - <http://www.dest.gov.au>) recognition that is commonly termed 'DEST points'. Textbooks are, indeed, explicitly included in the types of books that DEST specifies are 'unlikely' to meet its criteria of research (Department of Education, Science and Training 2006: 27). Others in this 'unlikely' category are 'anthologies, edited books, creative works such as novels, translations [and] revisions or new editions' (27). Chapters in textbooks are, for the most part, also excluded (28).

Under this system, only a limited number of outputs - scholarly books, scholarly book chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles and refereed conference papers (Department of Education Science and Training 2006: 25) - make up the vast majority of the publications that are counted as 'research' and which result in direct funding being paid from the government to the writing academic's university. (How much of that money, and in what form, then filters down to the academic who produced the funding-attracting work, and how this differs across and between institutions, is another topic that warrants discussion, but will not be considered here.) This limited range of funding-attracting outputs is, logically, that which Australian institutions encourage their staff to produce. Such encouragement is, increasingly, taking the form of these outputs becoming the markers of distinction on which appointment, promotion and grant funding depend. In this climate, teachers of creative writing, who are often already producing significant bodies of creative, professional, industry-related and popular/mass publications (all of which are non-DEST countable) often feel they must direct any remaining energy to producing career-strategic DEST-point attracting outputs.

Moreover, in Australia, the intellectual property for teaching materials that are produced as part of an academic's paid work at a higher education institution (or that it could be argued are largely produced under those conditions) normally rests with the institution that funds that work. The moral property rights (of attribution and integrity of copyright) of such work, however, stay with the creator. Put simply, what a teacher is paid to create in the line of his or her employment is owned by the employing university, but that university must attribute the work to that creator and

cannot modify, alter or adapt that work in any way that reflects poorly on the creating academic's reputation or academic integrity.

My institution's policy on this, the *University of New England Policy on Intellectual Property*, clearly states that:

> The intellectual property (including but not limited to patent rights, eligible layout rights, design rights and copyright) in teaching and course material including on-line teaching and course material, created in the course of employment shall remain the property of the University. (University of New England 2003: 7)

While the University grants 'a non-exclusive and irrevocable license to the creator of the teaching or course materials' (7) for that creator to use that material 'for the purpose of conventional scholarly purposes such as publication in academic journals, including on-line academic journals' (7) and in 'teaching or research at the University and, with the approval of the University, at other institutions' (8), there is no statement in this part of the policy regarding the situation if the creator wishes to commercialise that material. Clause 3 states that if the University wishes to commercialise teaching and course material, including on-line materials, then

> the University will consult with the creator regarding such commercialisation and any benefit or profits arising from the commercialisation of IP rights under this clause will be shared with the creator. (8)

Those individuals interested in working to 'develop, commercialise or otherwise deal with intellectual property owned by the University' (13) - including 'the publication of a text book or other book...having potential commercial value' (13) - must read on to the section titled 'Applications to Deal with Intellectual Property', which outlines the process the creator of these materials has to undertake to gain the necessary license to these materials. While this seems very reasonable, and even benevolent - the policy states that the University will 'generally grant a license to the creator to exercise such rights where it is in the professional or academic interests of the creator to exercise these rights' (14) - a limiting factor cuts in at step 5 of this detailed process. This is highlighted in italics:

> *Once there has been a determination to commercialise any IP falling within the provisions of this policy, the process will then be guided by the operating procedures and principle of the Entrepreneurial Committee. In particular, that Committee will have oversight of all decisions relating to values placed upon IP, and the methods by which such values will be dispersed to the involved parties.* (15)

That is, a committee will decide how much of any publishing advance, royalty or other profit will be payable to the University in such an exercise. My point here is that while any financial profit the teacher of writing might hope to make from such a textbook will probably be small recompense for the effort required, the considerable additional work seemingly involved in negotiating IP with the employing institution, and then the sharing any small financial gain with that institution, are further disincentives to produce such a text.

The above negotiations also depend on whether the Australian academic can find a publisher willing to produce the book in the first place. Some

recent and forthcoming texts notably deal with teaching and learning creative writing in the university context - Hazel Smith's *The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing* (published by Allen & Unwin in 2005 and reviewed in the April 2005 edition of *TEXT*), Tess Brady and Nigel Krauth's *Creative Writing: Theory Beyond Practice* (forthcoming from Post Pressed, Brisbane) and Graeme Harper's *Teaching Creative Writing* (forthcoming from Continuum International Publishing Group). However, anyone who has approached a commercial or academic publisher with a proposal for a student textbook, teacher's handbook or book about teaching writing in the higher education context will know that while most Australian presses rate such books as unlikely to succeed in the local marketplace, it is equally difficult to find international representation while living in Australia (Brien and Brady 2004).

Such thinking, while disappointing for the Australian teacher-as-textbook- and/or -handbook-writer is based on publishers' understanding of a range of factors. Marketing issues aside (writers need to be available to promote their books), all writers and publishers are working in an environment where the price of books (both digital and print) is rising and where many tertiary students either cannot afford, or refuse, to purchase set texts. The University of Queensland's Library notes that: 'While students are expected to purchase textbooks, the reality is that many are unable or unwilling to do so' (University of Queensland 2006). Even in the US, where textbook use has been traditionally strong among college students, there are indications that the textbook may be becoming obsolete (Gordon 2005).

Three recently published texts: *Mooring Against the Tide: Writing Fiction and Poetry* by Jim Knorr and Tim Schell (2006); *Crossroads: Creative Writing Exercises in Four Genres* by Diane Thiel (2005); and *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: The Authority Project* edited by Anna Leahy (2005) make for an interesting discussion as they represent the key types of publications discussed above: the first, a textbook for creative writing students; the second, a handbook for writing instructors; the third, a collection of essays about teaching creative writing.

The three Pearson authors have their institutions - Knorr (Sacremento City College), Schell (Columbia Gorge Community College) and Thiel (University of New Mexico) - listed under their names on the title pages of *Mooring Against the Tide* and *Crossroads*. This underscores the vastly different role the writing of textbooks and handbooks plays in the professional life of a US, as opposed to an Australian, academic. To be a teaching academic who produces a textbook for use in that teaching confers significant prestige in the US system and thus, issues of creativity and personal satisfaction aside, writing a textbook in the US is a shrewd career move. It may also confer considerable financial benefit as undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts are usually sizeable and, as classes are repeated often, there is the potential for considerable sales of texts to students. Writing teachers are also often regularly involved in summer (and other) writing conferences (usually intensive residential workshops) where such texts can be utilised. In addition, it is not uncommon in the US for an academic's institution to sponsor the publication of such books, either by making a direct financial contribution to the publisher or by facilitating the publication of such textbooks through the hosting institution's press. Although such publication support is being offered by some Australian higher education institutions to their staff, this is far from common and, to my knowledge, is only ever for DEST-point attracting publications.

*Mooring Against the Tide: Writing Fiction and Poetry* by Jim Knorr and Tim Schell is obviously intended for use in the undergraduate classroom as a textbook, perhaps as a full year text for beginning students as its 13 chapters on poetry and 13 on fiction writing are obviously suited for use across the usual length of two semesters. The authors base this volume on a workshop-oriented structure, aiming to hone readers' writing, editing and critical skills through a representation of the skills and knowledges needed for, and developed through, the peer critique workshop.

This new edition extends the original text (first published in 2001) by adding brief introductory essays on 'how to read' (ix) poems and stories, as well as twenty-five poems (from the pens of Tennyson, Dickinson and Whitman as well as contemporary Americans) and ten short stories (including those by Joyce, Carver, Steinbeck and Marquez). The book is organised in a logical manner, with succeeding chapters focused on the standard list of elements of the genre under discussion (such as layout, rhyme, metre and voice for poetry; and point of view, plot, character, setting, dialogue, style, tone and voice for fiction). For each genre there is then a short chapter on revision, followed by a series of three on workshopping: 'The Poetry Workshop'; 'Workshopping a Free Verse Poem'; 'Workshopping a Fixed Form Poem'; and 'Participating in the [fiction] Workshop'; 'Workshopping a Story in the First Person'; and 'Workshopping a Story in the Third Person'.

*Mooring Against the Tide* is written in a highly approachable tone. Each of the chapters dealing with the specific elements of writing follow a logical structure, with what the authors hope is a 'utilitarian' (ix) definition of the element under discussion - I would have probably used the word 'useful' - followed by an essay on that element contributed by a series of different writers. The opening chapter definitions, which summarily cover the key features of each element under discussion, read rather like transcriptions of brief, chatty lectures, a feature younger students might appreciate, but which often uses highly colloquial language that might alienate some users. Examples of this are: 'One of our responsibilities as poets - writers of every sort - is to avoid beating up on people with language…' (64) and, 'Take a poem you wrote a while back…' (107). The essays that follow are written in a variety of styles and voices, offering material that will be of varying degrees of usefulness, depending on the stage of competence the student using the book has achieved. Each of these chapters conclude with notes directing readers to certain of the poems or short stories included, and brief directions on what to look for in these works in relation to the chapter just completed. Then, to finish, each chapter concludes with a short series of exercises the reader could undertake. These include writing and editing exercises as well as activities involving reading and/or observing the surrounding world and reflecting upon this observation. These exercises could easily be used, or adapted, by teaching staff utilising the book as either a class text or a teaching resource and would be particularly useful for sessional staff who are usually not paid to develop such teaching material.

The workshopping chapters include a rationale for workshopping each genre, and then a sample poem or story written by a student (this student authorship being a unique, and very positive, feature of this text), a set of questions to think about when reading the sample 'original' poem/story, then this poem/story annotated with those questions in mind, followed by a substantial (3-4 page) critique of the poem/story written by either Knorr or Schell. Readers can then peruse a revised version of the poem/story, supposedly rewritten while taking the critique into account. This is

followed by another, revised critique. Having followed the process thus far, I wanted to see what the next (student) revision brought forth - that is, the written up result of the second critique. It is, after all, the work that is the final outcome of the workshop for writing students, not the critique. As the total number of pages allocated to this section is relatively few, this addition would not take up a great deal of extra space and it would round off the instructional functionality of the representation of this process.

While the preface states this book is intended for the beginning writer, whether this is 'a student-writer in a creative writing class or a student-writer at home alone' (x) - these workshopping chapters would, in my opinion, be considerably more useful to students who have a peer cohort with whom they could discuss and practice what is suggested in these chapters. This is especially the case when the genre of creative writing handbooks has recently split into two recognisable groups: on one hand, the many texts aiming to help the individual writer working on their own and, on the other, a growing number of books (including those mentioned above by Smith, Brady and Krauth, and Harper) being produced with the university/college context expressly in mind. While offering valuable advice on what kind of editing choices an individual writer can make, these workshopping chapters would be of greatest practical use in the teaching context, where their content could be further explained by an instructor experienced in the group and interpersonal dynamics, possible outcomes and ethical concerns of the writing workshop. Considering this section of the book could also assist new workshop leaders in thinking through how they are going to approach this complex task, and provide structured material that could be used with students to establish the parameters of workshop interactions.

*Crossroads: Creative Writing Exercises in Four Genres* by Diane Thiel, is directed to an audience of instructors of writing, providing a series of exercises for use with students. The opening 'Preface to the Instructor' describes the contents of the book as the 'tools most useful to a creative writing classroom' (xi). The book, Thiel states, is driven by the philosophical principles (well known to most creative writing teachers - although 'philosophical' is perhaps a grand way of describing such fundamental disciplinary bases) that learning is accomplished by example and practice, writers are readers, and 'we learn by emulating those writers who have most inspired us along the way' (xi). Although this final point is used as a rationale for a hefty proportion of the book (more than half) being made up of readings (167-398), potential purchasers will have to take this into account in their assessment of the book - especially if they were hoping to purchase a collection of useful exercises as the title promises. The readings are integrated with the exercises, but the question here is whether purchasers really want to pay for copies of such readily available work as Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.

The four genres indicated by the title are non-fiction, fiction, poetry and drama, although, as in *Moorings*, fiction is largely represented by short stories. This selection may suit instructors who teach across this wide range of genres, but such a varied teaching practice is becoming rare as creative writing departments expand and staff numbers grow. In the current situation where teachers of writing are increasingly expected to be both published authors and scholars in the fields they teach, and the increasing use of sessional staff means that experts can (and will) be engaged as teachers, I wonder how useful such a collection of exercises is for the majority of teachers who mainly teach in one, or perhaps two, genres of writing.

While reading this book, I felt some dissonance regarding this stated audience and the text's contents. While the preface addresses the writing instructor, much of the rest of the book reads as a textbook for students. Both the first parts of the book - exercises addressing the various elements of writing across the genres (including beginning; voice, tone and style; perspective and point of view; setting; plot and tension; dialogue and the like) - and the second, which deals with genre-specific exercises, are written not for a teacher to consider and utilise, but directly for a relatively new student of writing. Part One, for instance, opens with, 'Keeping a journal is an indispensable part of being a writer' (11) and on the next page suggests:

> 1. If you don't already have a journal, begin one and record in it such things as: Your dream last night; Quotations from things you are reading; Overheard snippets of conversation; Intriguing scientific facts; An interesting name for a character; Something unusual you saw on the way home.
> 2. If you have been keeping a journal for a while, revisit some old entries. Open your journal at a random place and read a few pages. Pick a thought, an idea, an image, and explore it from your current perspective. Write a new entry that revisits an old theme. (12)

This tone and level of advice continues throughout the text. I found many of the suggested exercises recognisable - exercises based on remembering, eavesdropping and observing, reconfiguring texts in various ways and the use of surrealist and other techniques. Some were truly new and inspiring, but I had to read through many pages of the 'known' to find them. Having this book on my bookshelf, I will no doubt dip into it when in need of inspiration but, like *Moorings*, this is a book that offers most to those new to the discipline of writing: beginning students and new instructors. Both texts would, however, make useful additions to an institutional, faculty or discipline's library.

Their general usefulness would, in practice, be greatly enhanced if these texts were furnished with better indexes. Both indexes list only the titles and authors of works featured, with no entries for terms, genres or concepts. More comprehensive indexes would provide a cross-referencing resource for readers, whether students or teachers, especially (as both these books clearly show) it is impossible to discuss any one single element, technique or genre of writing without reference to many others.

Anna Leahy's edited collection, *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: The Authority Project*, is the first monograph in the New Writing Viewpoints series from Multilingual Matters, publishers of *New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*. Editor of *New Writing*, expatriate Australian author and academic, Professor Graeme Harper (University of Portsmouth) is also the editor of this book series, which has as its stated aim: to 'publish books which will ultimately inform teaching and research, but whose primary focus is on the analysis of creative writing practice and theory' (ii).

The essays in this collection set out to articulate a 'coherent creative writing pedagogy' in the US context (all the essays are by US-based contributors) where there are many hundreds of colleges and universities offering creative writing programs and many more offering coursework units but where, as recognised by this volume, creative writing has most often been taught by those who largely consider themselves writers, rather

than teachers or academics. This situation is quite different to that in Australia where university-level creative writing is increasingly taught by academic teachers with scholarly interests who usually also possess (extensive) professional creative writing experience and publication credits (Kroll 2004). This contrast is most explicit when comparing the almost exponentially increasing number of graduates holding PhDs in creative writing in Australia - the qualification now expected for most entry level positions in higher education in the discipline - with those in the US. Although recent commentary has noted that the PhD in creative writing, only offered at a handful of US institutions five years ago (Ritter 2001), is growing in terms of the number of courses and their popularity (Harper 2003: 15, Perloff 2006: 3), graduates from these degrees - with their scholarly as well as creative focus - are yet to make a significant impact on teaching creative writing at college-level.

For those interested in such comparisons, Leahy's introductory foreword provides a concise snapshot of the history of the discipline in the US, although this would have been more useful for researchers if it was a little more thoroughly referenced. David Radavich's important work in this area, for instance, is mentioned, but an exact reference is not listed. (This is probably his 'Creative Writing in the Academy', an address published in the Modern Languages Association's *Profession 1999*.) For those interested in extending their knowledge of this history, Paul Dawson's *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (2005), reviewed in the October 2005 issue of *TEXT* (Webb 2005) provides a thorough comparative analysis of creative writing programs.

As also stated in the foreword, the sense of authority discussed in this text is not 'authoritarianism, the simplistic sense of authority as the teacher's power to give orders' (ix) but rather, this term is explored in relation to the ways 'authority' (and its various meanings) is configured and expressed in the writing classroom. A consideration of the inherent permissions and privileges such authority confers, as well as how authority and power relationships can be subverted in the writing classroom, unites the essays in this volume. The word 'authority', of course, also contains that of 'author' within it, and this sense of the writing-writer is also explored in a number of essays.

The book is organised into four sections. The five essays that comprise the first of these, 'Understanding the Larger Influences', makes the most conscious attempt to present and analyse (although to a somewhat limited degree) some of the influences that affect what happens, and can happen, in the creative writing classroom. The second, 'The Teacher's Place Voice, and Style' is, as Leahy describes in her introduction, the most 'narrative' section (xvi) - four essays in which teachers reflect on what they do, how they do it, and why. The third, 'Course Design', offers some practical ways to think about creative writing courses and what they do, and might do. In this section, the term 'course' is used in the sense of a single unit or subject, but I would have liked to read some thoughts on holistic program design, where critical thinking, discipline-specific research and curriculum design, work together to structure entire undergraduate or postgraduate degree programs. The fourth, and final, section of the book, 'In the Classroom', moves back to narrative forms, as a number of teachers describe how a series of what Leahy describes as 'authority-conscious' (xiv) models work in their classrooms.

While the collection is framed with a disciplinary concern - 'authority' - which is necessarily relational, the essays themselves read as individual,

and unconnected, reflections on teaching and the dynamics involved. Any sense of a disciplinary discussion between these authors about practice, pedagogy and philosophy is lacking. It is also a pity that, except for the book's afterword, all the volume's essays are composed by a series of single authors. When unit and curriculum design are increasingly being completed collaboratively and often by large teams (Toohey 2002: 28-39) and many units are team taught, it would have been instructive to thus consider the issue of shared authority on the part of teaching staff and how this does, and can, function in the creative writing classroom. The closing afterword, by Graeme Harper and Stephanie Vanderslice, fruitfully compares the situation in the United Kingdom with the US, noting some of the similarities and differences between the territory mapped out earlier in the book with the British experience and, in a few fleeting mentions, with what is happening in Australia.

Leahy frames this collection with the statement that, in the US:

> college level, creative writing teachers learn largely without field-specific teaching mentors, pedagogy guidebooks, or shared bodies of knowledge about what it means to lead a creative writing course. (xii)

Reading this made me consider how, while in Australia we have few specifically-badged 'How to teach creative writing' training courses, it is a common situation that sessional and new teaching staff (many of whom are postgraduate writing students) learn to teach under an informally organised apprenticeship system. In this, a new teacher is offered a field-specific teaching mentorship by unit coordinators, his or her research degree supervisors (if a research student) and/or other academic colleagues. This training is also usually supported by the employing institution's specialist teaching and learning unit, most of which offer generic university-wide teaching workshops and short courses that staff (including sessional staff) can access on a voluntary (and sometimes paid) basis. There are also more comprehensive, in-depth internationally accredited courses such as the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education that can be tailored to meet the needs of specific disciplines. In my experience, this training-by-mentorship is often reasonably intensive with preparation assistance, regular meetings, assessment moderation and, in some cases, specially composed instructional handbooks that support tutors and guest lecturers in their teaching. In Australia, moreover, rather than the lack of 'pedagogy guidebooks' and 'shared bodies of knowledge' identified above, I (as many others) can attest to the central role the articles and other material published in *TEXT* and the presentations and discussions at the Australian Association of Writing Program's annual conferences have had in my own development as not only a teacher of writing, but an active academic researcher in the discipline. In this, I have been privileged to not only share in, but also contribute to, this growing and constantly evolving body of knowledge.

Such texts as *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom*, which deal with the teaching of writing as disciplinary-specific practice, have the potential to stimulate US-based teachers and advanced students of writing at a time when the discipline in that country is looking beyond craft-based practice to build its own set of research-based bodies of knowledge. Here, I agree with Harper (210) that it is the airing and discussion of issues that is important to the discipline of creative writing as a whole. We will not all necessarily agree with what is written in this (or any) text, but opening up

such searching, informative and collaborative discussions is precisely what is making, and keeping, our discipline vital and viable.

Finally, considering such texts as those discussed above might well pose a question about what kinds of books are most useful for teachers in the discipline: those offering practical, craft-based advice about writing or those presenting historically and theoretically informed scholarship on creative writing pedagogy and other disciplinary issues. One way of answering this question is to think about the wide range of teaching, and teachers, the discipline encompasses, and how individuals teaching writing shift between, and amalgamate, the related practices of teaching, research, writing, administration and community service. Practical texts are, for me, most useful when I am teaching a particular subject area for the first time, returning to material after a considerable absence or seeking a jolt of inspiration. While these books are of inestimable use for those beginning teaching careers, for more experienced educators, the experience of reading such texts is like having a conversation with a colleague - it is instructive (as well as fascinating) to read what others are doing, and consider that material in relation to one's own practice. Similarly, for both new and more experienced teachers, a consideration of historically and theoretically informed scholarship about the discipline is essential, but its influence on any particular reader will vary according to that individual's personal interests and the stage he or she has reached in their teaching career.

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*Dr Donna Lee Brien is a Senior Lecturer in Writing, Editing and Publishing in the School of English, Communication and Theatre at the University of New England, Australia. Widely published in the areas of writing pedagogy and praxis, creative non-fiction and collaborative practice in the arts, Donna has an MA and PhD in Creative Writing. Her biography* John Power 1881-1943 *(Sydney: MCA, 1991) is the standard work on this expatriate artist and benefactor, and Donna is also the co-author of* The Girl's Guide to Real Estate: How to Enjoy Investing in Property*, 2002; and* The Girl's Guide to Work and Life: How to Create the Life you Want*, 2004 (both with Dr Tess Brady, Sydney: Allen & Unwin). Founding Editor of* dotlit: The Online Journal of Creative Writing *(2000-2004) and Assistant Editor of* Imago: New Writing *(1999-2003), Donna is an Associate Editor of* New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing *(UK). She is also President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs.*

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**Text@griffith.edu.au**