Editorial

International Dialogues / Canadian Dialogue

This issue of *TEXT* features four articles from Canada - a survey of writing in Canadian universities, and three teaching-oriented discussions. Thanks to Emeritus Professor Kevin Roberts for Guest Editorship of the feature, and the Department of Creative Writing at Malaspina University-College, British Columbia, for their generous contributions.

Surrounding the Canada feature was a discussion related to comparisons between employment in Canadian universities as opposed to Australian universities. This included: the positioning of creative writing in larger departments; the numbers, quality and career outcomes of students; the way writing lecturers see themselves (as writers, or as academics); and the way lecturers' careers are furthered by their own creative writing publications. Professor Lynne Bowen, Rogers Communications Co-Chair of Creative Non-fiction Writing at University of British Columbia, wrote

The UBC Creative Writing Program is a reluctant member of the Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing. Reluctant because, though small, we function well and, for the moment at least, do not have the problems experienced by the other two components of the department. We have several interesting inter-disciplinary activities that go on between the three components - stage writers working with theatre directors and actors for example - but these would happen even without the departmental structure.

Pivotal to our successful functioning is the success of our graduate students who are being published in unusually high numbers before or soon after graduation. Many of them have two-book deals with major publishers like Penguin and HarperCollins. Many newspaper columnists and university administrators, and indeed the creative writing faculty itself, have pondered the reasons for this. Is it because the popularity of Canadian fiction abroad makes it financially prudent for publishers to lock up young writers on the chance that a few of them will hit it big and make the publishing house millions in foreign rights sales? Or is it the nature of the way we teach at UBC - workshops conducted by writers who are required to be making it in the real world - that attracts the most talented students? Once this phenomenon of frequent student publishing contracts got started the effect on the program became self-perpetuating. Whereas four years ago we would have had about 100 applicants for 15 positions in our first-year grad class, this year we had 168 for 21 positions.

The traffic is mostly in fiction because that is where the bulk of the publishing contracts have gone but because we teach several other genres - poetry, non-fiction, stage, screen, radio, children's and, next year, lyrics and libretto - we are starting to see publishing contracts in those genres too.

All this success has prompted much soul searching which includes the question of increasing the number of faculty and the number of graduate-student positions available and whether

to extend the terminal degree from an MFA to a PhD.

As I mentioned above, our teaching method involves workshops of approximately 12 students taught by writers who have made it and continue to make it in the real world. This has ramifications. For one, we do not require our faculty to have a PhD or even a masters degree. One of our faculty does not even have a bachelor's degree. Several novels and a Governor-General Award shortlisting were deemed to be enough to qualify him for teaching in our program. For another, we are not required to publish in academic journals to acquire tenure. In the past the small size of our classes and our lack of academic credentials have caused successive administrators much hand wringing but we managed to hold on to our small class sizes but now that articles about our graduates' exploits appear regularly on the pages of our national newspapers, UBC is glad to tolerate our eccentricities in return for the kind of publicity you can't buy. ...It is worth mentioning that our faculty is allowed to supervise master's theses even though we may not have a masters degree ourselves.

Our renegade status has proved to be a liability when it comes to getting scholarship and fellowship money for our students, however. Because they are, at present, unable to apply for any money except the University Graduate Fellowship (UGF), our students find themselves at an economic disadvantage when compared to other graduate students who have access to academic-funding sources. The irony is that our students are also ineligible for Canada Council funding which is the source of money for artists in this country. The fact that most of the UGF money goes to PhD level students in other departments is a further irony since our terminal degree is an MFA.

Sometimes we feel as if we're hanging on by our fingernails in the university community but because of our recent high profile we are tolerated and even congratulated.

With regard to faculty attracting outside funds, there is increased emphasis on this at UBC. "Research money attracted" looks very good on a faculty member's annual report. We look at ways to translate publishers' advances and screen production money raised into terms that a university administrator will appreciate.

I speak from the experience of having recently completed my stint as chair of the program but I speak for myself only. Hope some of this is useful.

Generally speaking, the idea of contributing to *TEXT* was seen by Canadian creative writing faculty as an "intellectual/academic" exercise, something outside the scope of their usual interests and focus. Mary di Michele, of Concordia University, a well-known, award-winning writer, said of the "academic" publishing issue:

I'm more interested in working on books. If that means I miss merit because it takes me five years for a novel so be it. Our chair is trying to sensitize the dean to the cycle of work of the writer of books, (this is true for scholars too), but so far we have two year performance reviews and we're expect to publish and produce on that schedule.

Canadian writing programs are clearly putting greatest effort into publishing outcomes and creative industry careers - for staff as well as their students (see

Professor Stephen Guppy's article in this issue). Australian academics have become differently oriented.

What has happened over the years is that a particular discipline has been growing in Australia. It has taken the forming and growth of the AAWP, the ongoing debates in *TEXT* and the rise of research higher degrees in creative and professional writing, with the ongoing and helpful discourse over aspects of the exegesis, to achieve this. It is interesting to note that in 1999 there were 8 PhDs in creative and professional writing offered around Australia; in 2003 the updated Guide shows there are 17 such PhDs on offer plus 5 DCAs and D.Comms. The advent of so many creative writing doctorates will attract further interest through international examination, and will add to the fact that Australian universities are forging a significant research path in this field. Alongside the rise in research postgraduate courses, many non-research degrees have also flourished.

What underlies this growth, and we see it all the time in submissions to *TEXT*, is a comfort with the idea that a writer in the university context can embrace scholarship even in its most traditional forms. The creative does not exclude the academic; the academic does not extinguish the creative. We are a broad church here, for some there is talk of different hats, the creative and the scholarly, for others the move is seamless, as if the baseball cap can be worn successfully under, or with, or instead of the mortar board or the bonnet. Creativity and scholarship combining in a new kind of academic fashion statement!

This is becoming known as theory of praxis: the way in which we combine the practical and the theoretical in our understanding of (our growing epistemology), and our teaching of (our growing pedagogy), creative and professional writing.

Most of us welcome and explore the ways in which creativity and scholarship can support and enhance each other. We know that the one can (and does) exist without the other, but our task is in the exploration of the terrain which encompasses both. This is the international contribution of *TEXT* and those writer-scholars contributing to the discourse.

But things were not always this way. There was a time - go back and look at the early issues of *TEXT* - where we lined up, taking sides, defending our positions as if they were vital bridges in a chain of defence. But most of us have moved on, preferring to explore the new territory, the higher ground. At the frontiers even the old dogma is questioned. Notice how Paul Dawson slashes through the truism of *show don't tell* in this issue.

In this environment, an advertisement appeared on the web earlier this year promising yet another international journal concerned with writing in the tertiary sector - *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* - edited by Graeme Harper (University of Wales, Bangor) and Richard Kerridge (Bath Spa University College). Details can be found at <http://www.multilingual-matters.com/>. Their journal will be published in 2004 on paper, not electronically.

TEXT welcomes this new arrival. There is scope for many options, and *TEXT* already receives almost twice as many submissions as it can publish. We have a backlog of articles awaiting publication and others at various stages of development. We are excited by the possibilities of many voices and wish the editors of *New Writing* every success. Their journal is at the ideas stage and once an issue is released we look forward to reviewing it.

New-look TEXT

Meanwhile, the new-look front page for *TEXT* now provides a better international interface, consistent with the fact that a large proportion of our readers and contributors come from overseas. The US is the largest represented on our address list, with its huge number of writing schools, but alongside Australian subscribers we have readers and contributors in New Zealand, Asia, the UK and Canada.

Regarding Lawson's pen, we are pleased to be able to make use of the excellent library of images housed in the National Library of Australia. We acknowledge the Library's generous assistance.

New reviews editor

Patrick West is now the Reviews Editor for *TEXT*. Proposals for reviews of books or other media relevant to the interests of the AAWP can be submitted to him at Patrick.West@griffith.edu.au

TEXT will obtain the title from the publisher on behalf of the reviewer and send it on. AAWP members can of course submit their own publications for review. The reviewer will be selected for you.

TEXT is especially interested in reviews that comment on a grouping of texts in order to generate an argument about the production and/or teaching of creative writing, or to draw attention to new publication trends in the discipline. Submissions of this type might qualify for consideration as refereed review-essays. Usually a single-book review will be 1,000 to 1,500 words long, and a multiple-book review longer.

The review genre is an excellent means for starting to build a curriculum vitae of publications. Postgraduate students are particularly encouraged to forward proposals. It is intended that the *TEXT* reviews section will play a key role in furthering discussion about writing issues in Australia and overseas, with contributions from reviewers across a range of post-secondary institutions.

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TEXT
Vol 7 No 1 April 2003
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