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Editorial

Reflections on the next Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) exercise

As many of our colleagues in Australian higher education will know, the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2023 round is in full swing. This national peer review exercise, which reviews and assesses the quality of research produced out of Australian higher education programs over a nominal period, will see Creative Writing assessed for the first time under a disciplinary category unshackled from the music and performing arts disciplines at the level of the four-digit field of research code.

In the [ERA 2018](#) round, as with previous rounds, creative writing was grouped under the four-digit code of 1904 Performing Arts and Writing. In that round, the University of New South Wales was the only university to receive the top ERA rating of Well Above World Standing rating (indicated by a 5). It is notable that the University of New South Wales, along with the seven universities who received the next highest rating of Above World Standard (indicated by a 4) in the same round – University of Adelaide, Flinders University, Monash University, Griffith University, University of Melbourne, Western Sydney University and Sydney University – all have large and highly successful Conservatorium of Music and/or performing arts programs.

Meanwhile, many of the universities we see publishing regularly in TEXT and who have a relatively large, high quality and productive creative writing faculty, have tended to figure in successive ERA rounds as At World Standard (indicated by a 3). These include, for example, the University of Canberra, Wollongong University, Curtin University of Technology, RMIT University, QUT and Deakin University. Other institutions, renowned in our discipline as high-quality creative writing programs with high quality faculty producing outstanding research and creative practice (such as, for example, UTS) have more than once been categorised in ERA rounds as Not Assessed due to Low Volume (or NA).

Many would agree that the 1904 grouping of creative writing with performance studies has made it difficult, historically, to judge ERA outcomes for creative writing as genuinely reflective of the quality of the research and creative practice going on at our leading institutions.

The 2023 round will be different. After much lobbying from organisations including but not limited to the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the [Australia and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications or Field of Research \(FoR\) Codes](#) have had a major reshuffle. In the ERA 2023 round, the four-digit code 3602 has been allocated exclusively to Creative and Professional Writing. We expect this will see a major reshuffling of the deck with regards to ERA outcomes in our field. It may be that there are also positive changes afoot to the way peer reviewers assess our research outputs.

While many of us at the institutional level are preparing and reviewing our research outputs for ERA2023, the Australian Research Council has been consulting the sector on improving the ERA methodology. Their [Benchmarking and Rating Scale Consultation Paper](#) was out for consultation at the time of writing. The paper floats a new ERA rating scale, one based on letters rather than numbers, as well as new plain English descriptors for each of the ratings (e.g. ‘Well above world standard’ becomes ‘World leading’).

The paper also attempts to address a key weakness in the ERA exercise to date: problems with the results of peer review. Readers may remember the considerable national debate when the ERA 2018 figures were released and it became clear that disciplines relying largely on peer review were not seeing their rating scales improve across the regular ERA exercise intervals (2010, 2012, 2015, 2018) at the same pace as those reliant predominantly on citation statistics. Sadly, in binary terms, these results could be roughly tracked as a science/humanities and social sciences divide.

In our own area of Performing Arts and Writing, under FoR code of 1904, we can see these concerns in plain terms. Of the twenty-six institutions assessed under 1904 in 2018, only two (7%) improved their rating compared to their 2015 results. Looking back across four ERA exercises (2010-2018), 46% of institutions actively reporting under 1904 received a rating that went neither up nor down over four rounds of ERA, while 38% either dropped out of reporting under this code or saw their results waver or reduce such that ERA 2018 saw them no better off than they were in 2010.

Such general stagnation is in sharp contrast to results in many science-based disciplines over the same four rounds. The ARC’s consultation paper acknowledges these issues and proposes solutions that include more specific guidance for ERA peer reviewers. For example, they propose to ask peer reviewers more specific questions about disciplinary context, research practice and contribution.

These proposals, among others, have been carefully considered and are broadly welcome and sensible, but are they really necessary? John Byron, writing for [Campus Morning Mail](#) during the recent consultation period, captured the feeling of many of us in the sector, when he proposed that after a decade of ERA exercises, the benefit of ERA to Australian research

has perhaps reached its limit: “In other words, would it harm Australian research if we simply gave ERA a rest, and let researchers get on with, you know, researching?” We suspect not.

—Julienne van Loon and Nigel Krauth

In this issue

Our feature article for the April 2022 edition of TEXT is Michael Sala’s “The dangerous ambiguity of being on foot: Reflections on the act of walking and negotiating the tension between pedestrian and car in the process of writing a novel” (University of Newcastle). Sala’s contribution blends close reading, reflective practice and life writing to examine the relationship between driving and walking in an urban landscape. The author has a non-normative relation to walking in part because of his experience of family violence: a personal history that influences his reading and writing and his teaching of writing. Here, he offers the experience of walking alone through the urban Australian landscape as a “narrative vantage point in which the dangerous ambiguities associated with gendered violence are emphasised”. His article outlines how his own walking and close reading practices offered him “specific opportunities and imaginative possibilities” as a novelist.

Elsewhere in this edition, Charlotte Guest (Deakin University) provides a rigorously researched survey of feminist revisionism post #MeToo, with particular attention on the recurring themes of gendered sexual violence and the punitive transformations that pervade the Greek and Roman myths. Guest’s survey of Penelope studies is enriching and timely, as is her analysis of Jennifer Saint’s *Ariadne* as an exemplar of feminist revisionism post #MeToo.

New work on the process of writing is well represented in this edition via new contributions from Paul Magee (University of Canberra), who draws on his growing and comprehensive body of interviews with poets to examine why poetic verse generates such a heightened sense of immediacy; and Oscar Davis and Patrick West (both of Deakin University), who take a close and critical look at the assumptions we make when we employ the term ‘intuition’ in practice-led research.

Questions of creative writing pedagogy are also well represented in this issue. Susan E. Thomas (University of Sydney) contributes a valuable discussion on the question of how to navigate gender bias in the writing classroom and writing centre conference. Collaborators John Vigna (University of British Columbia), Rose Michael (RMIT University) and Penni Russon (University of Technology Sydney) reflect on their respective shifts from in-class to online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, modelling an open, ongoing and necessary conversation about how we teach creative writing now.

Collaboration is a theme in new work by Sreedhevi Iyer, Alvin Pang and David Carlin (RMIT University) who reflect on digital collaborative residencies as a form of cultural exchange, exploring the challenges, constraints and opportunities offered by a digital collaborative residency in a Covid-constrained world. In addition, Rachel Hennessy

(University of Adelaide), Alex Cothren and Amy Matthews (both of Flinders University) explore the positive potential of collaboration in approaching climate stories, asking “might this be a model that emotionally strengthens us to manage what may come?”

Finally, in an original contribution on poetic form, Owen Bullock (University of Canberra), coins the term, ‘Tanka intrigue’, for examples of tanka that accentuate an element of mystery. This article builds on Bullock’s growing body of work on poetic form and practice, represented generously in recent editions of TEXT.

—*Julienne van Loon, Ross Watkins and Shady Cosgrove*

A new TEXT International Editorial Advisory Board

With this issue, we say goodbye to several longstanding members of TEXT’s International Editorial Advisory Board. We would like to thank (Retired) Professor Jack Hodgins (University of Victoria, Canada), Emeritus Professor Claire Woods (UniSA) and Professor Andrew Melrose (University of Winchester, UK) for their many years of service to our board. We thank and welcome back continuing members, Emeritus Professor Jeri Kroll (Flinders University, Australia) and Gail Pittaway (Wintec, New Zealand). And we are happy to announce and welcome three new members: Associate Professor Janelle Adsit (Cal Poly Humbolt, United States), Andrew Cowan (University of East Anglia, UK) and Emeritus Professor Kevin Brophy (University of Melbourne, Australia). Members of our international advisory board provide occasional expert advice and assist us to promote TEXT internationally.

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We also thank our Special Issues Editorial Team, particularly Emma Doolan, as well as advisory board member Jeri Kroll, for their recent work in helping us to revise and refine TEXT’s style guide in preparation for this edition. Readers and authors can find a refreshed and more detailed guide to TEXT style in the For Authors section of our website. We also have a scholarly article template available for TEXT authors for the first time. You can request a copy of that template by emailing our general editors at textgeneraleditors@aawp.org.au.