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## ***The Literature of Reality: Writing Creative Nonfiction***

**review by Donna Lee Brien**

### *Tapestry*

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli

Random House Australia, Sydney, 1999

pb. 275pp

ISBN 0 09 183872 X

### *The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality*

Lee Gutkind

John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1997

pb. 211pp

ISBN 0 471 11356 5

When Brisbane author Venero Armano worked with a creative writing class at QUT last year he provided students with a series of quotations from respected writers. First for consideration was James Baldwin's assertion that 'A writer's job is to write about the world not as he or she would like it to be, but as it really is. The unexamined life isn't worth living.' This was juxtaposed with Tennessee Williams' question, 'Why would I write about real life? Real life is so ugly, and people's lives so petty, that I would prefer to write about my dreams'.<sup>[1]</sup> Creative nonfiction writers, we would like to believe, can have it both ways. Lee Gutkind agrees, and has written a manual for writing in this relatively recently-defined genre of creative nonfiction. I don't know if Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli would characterise her innovative memoir, *Tapestry*, in this way, but I have included her work as a set reading in a semester unit on creative nonfiction.

Creative nonfiction as a genre is recently-defined rather than new because much of that which comes under creative nonfiction's umbrella could be otherwise classified as personal essay, feature article, literary journalism, memoir or fictocriticism. Similarly, there have been books with creative nonfiction in the title, but much of what has been written purporting to be about a uniquely new-fashioned form of writing (called creative nonfiction) is more narrowly about how to write feature articles which are more personal and/or dramatic, interesting and vivid. Creative nonfiction, however, as it is now beginning to be written, published, understood and taught is more than journalism with flair, and offers fresh ways of writing, researching and thinking about nonfiction as a genre - new and creative ways, ways that most usually include utilising the techniques and forms more usually thought of as belonging to fiction writing. Such writing (in my definition of creative nonfiction) includes the types of writing listed above, together with narrative and dramatised history, fictionalised biography and other hybrid narrative forms sometimes referred to under the ugly umbrella of faction.

Lee Gutkind's definition of what others have called 'the literature of fact' or the 'fourth genre' <sup>[2]</sup> (after poetry, fiction and drama) is uncompromising.

Creative nonfiction differs from fiction because it is necessarily and scrupulously accurate and the presentation of information, a teaching element to readers, is paramount. Creative

nonfiction differs from traditional reportage, however, because balance is unnecessary and subjectivity is not only permitted but encouraged. (Gutkind 15)

For this passionate defender and promoter of the genre (which he labels 'a movement') the central factual elements - names, dates, places, Descriptions and quotations - may not be created or altered, but the author can utilise literary devices (such as Description, dialogue and the creation of a series of scenes) to narrate these facts. Pallotta-Chiarolli certainly desires to tell 'the truth' about herself and her family, but realises how complex initially finding this can be.

I lived many lives as a child in Australia. As my body was nourished with abundant good food, my heart and mind were nourished with stories and memories from the past, the many worlds of the present, and the possibilities of the future.

The reality on which my feet trod weaved itself intricately with the realities of my family in Southern Italy.

Whatever I saw was fractured into many pictures, multifaceted and yet crystal clear. (Pallotta-Chiarolli 'Preface')

It is not problematic for this author that 'some names and details have been changed in order to protect family members and others' (271) and some stories have been 'edited and softened' (208), for Pallotta-Chiarolli's desire is to relate larger truths that she judges more important than the accuracy of a singular name or detail. These are truths that can be arrived at despite, or even because of, the odd lie, conflation, omission, slippage or intentional forgetting.

*Tapestry* details how author/narrator Maria, born and raised in Adelaide of Italian-born parents, comes to trust both the Italian and Australian parts of her identity and history. 'Being second generation Italian in Australia has been really painful for many of us,' (135) she writes, asking her daughter (as herself) whether she is 'Italian, Australian, or both, or neither?' (4). To investigate this involves Pallotta-Chiarolli in what Gutkind defines as immersion research, seeking 'a personal experience by immersing yourself in the place or experience about which you are writing' (94). Gutkind writes at length on such research, noting this is not a new practice, such an approach having been utilised by Ernest Hemingway in writing *The Green Hills of Africa*, *A Moveable Feast* and *Death in the Afternoon*. Gutkind provides a series of useful pointers for the immersion researcher: how not to regard yourself as an interloper; gaining and keeping access to your subject; and the importance of remaining unobtrusive. He follows this with a short chapter on interviewing and a section on the essential importance of 'fact checking' (returning to the research information after the creative nonfiction piece has been written).

Pallotta-Chiarolli's research as detailed in *Tapestry* reveals her attempt to discover and then understand and relate in text and images the rich material of her family history, the tapestry of the title which is 'rich with the colours of many realities, woven with the threads of many places, spaces and times that existed alongside each other' ('Preface'). These lives, memories and identities are densely interwoven, and Maria knows she 'cannot unthread the tapestry ... [can only let] the woven cloth reveal the shapes in its shapelessness, the clarities in its confusion' ('Preface'). As Maria pieces together the stories of family members across the past century and from Italy to Australia, any simple linear chronology is subverted, but various type-face fonts differentiate (and order) these shifts in time and place. Divers forms of writing and documentation are similarly intertwined to construct the narrative, which shifts from prose to diary entries, letters, short stories, poems, an extract from a school journal, dialogues between characters, and family photographs. The potential of these photos to generate meaning is greatly enhanced by their placement through the book's pages rather than segregated into a section in the middle of the book. The images are intensely evocative, but the lack of photo credit details means there is some obscurity as to who the pictures were of, when and where they were taken and by whom - information which would have only further increased the photographs' narrative power.

Pallotta-Chiarolli's text is rich with wonderfully observed images and detail. How Maria's father always cuts her toenails, how the floor of her parent's garage was tiled with pale blue and white tiles and kept oil free with bleach, how working in pie and tomato sauce factories was a disgusting experience. My own nan worked in a sauce factory in Melbourne in the 1920s and told me almost the same story as Maria's mother, 'Standing for hours on an assembly-line sorting tomatoes and mopping her brow, and trying not to throw up at the churned mess, including a few grubs, that's going to become the Australian version of their tomato sauce.' (114) The history of the street Maria grows up on is a familiar one, built up of a kaleidoscope of these believable real life stories. These are sometimes charming:

There are marriages for which everyone turns out onto the street to see the bride or groom before she/he heads for the church. And as the wedding cars go off with loud honking and loud cheering from the neighbours, the street is a rainbow-coloured carpet of confetti. (51)

Sometimes (blackly) humorous:

There's the local butcher who speaks strangely but has a huge smile and a delicious piece of fritz for her every time she accompanies Dora. One day her mother tells her sadly that the butcher has died. His son is the new butcher, coolly efficient, having studied small business management at university. He no longer gives away free fritz. The butcher doesn't do very well and sells up. (48)

Sometimes sad:

Another source of indoor discussion and public silence is an Aboriginal family who rent a house for a few months. The adults seem uncomfortable but are unable to articulate why. The children notice the discomfort but don't quite understand why. (52)

*Tapestry* is thus built up, as Gutkind promotes, from a series of these scenes and stories. There are birth stories, school stories, food stories, relationship stories, romance and sex and love stories. Stories of brides, of wives, of blood, of wars, of the church, of witches and magic. Stories about denim jeans and about being gay. Stories told to Maria by relatives in Italy, by relatives in Australia, by taxi drivers and by shopkeepers. There are difficult stories too, such as when her father, Stefano, beats her mother.

She's eight years old when she hears the shouting and the door-slamming. This has been happening for a couple of weeks. Maria Giovanna feels frightened but she goes to look for her parents. They're in the corridor. Her father has one hand around her mother's throat, pushing her against the wall, with the other he slaps her face, again and again. (85)

Pallotta-Chiarolli was understandably worried about how the people she knew would react to these stories but she writes she was pleasantly surprised - one of the very women she thinks will be most scandalised, instead, 'approaches her and kisses her, saying she is so honoured to know her' (96-7).

Gutkind also tells a great story. By far, the most engaging sample included in the 'Readings' section of Gutkind's book is that by the author himself, 'Teeth', a section taken from his 1984 volume of creative nonfiction, *The People of Penns Woods West*. [3] In common with the best of all creative nonfiction, this piece melds a sensitive authorial voice with a well-told tale of real life.

In contrast, poor creative nonfiction (as both detractors and writers of the genre agree) displays a twinned weakness. The presence of the writer can easily be overstated and result in an 'overbearing egocentrism' (Gutkind 69), a focus which is often joined to a lack of attention to what Gutkind terms the 'mission of the genre' - to write principally about a

subject (not the author) and 'to gather and present information, to teach readers about a person, place, idea or situation' (70). Within this brief, the writer's singular voice can form an active part of the text, exploring and chronicling individual discoveries or conflicts, interrogating the author's opinion or establishing or defining a personal identity, but not to the detriment of the subject being elucidated.

This is, obviously, where memoir is a special case, for one of Pallotta-Chiarolli's main subjects is herself. *Tapestry* begins with a warning that there are at least four Marias in this book - that the very name Maria 'is like a basic chord that links many of the stories together' ('Preface'). The name has deep significance for the author who is named Maria Giovanna for both grandmothers, but who alternately identifies herself as Maria for her Australian self 'out there' in the world, and Maria Giovanna for her Italian self within her community. These two (at times) conflicting perspectives are further complicated when it is realised how complex the notion 'to be Italian' is. Maria finds, for instance, that some things are unexpectedly disappointing in Italy - the pastas and pizzas are bland and stale, Italians use shop-bought pasta sauces and salamis, put their old people in nursing homes and discuss sex at length. Coming to grips with her personal identity is not, however, the memoirist's only concern, as *Tapestry* weaves together the stories of five generations of her family to raise issues of identity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and cultural/racial stereotyping.

Throughout the text Pallotta-Chiarolli writes of herself in the third person. This voice allows the author to reflect on her own life from a distance not afforded by writing in the first person but, despite this, I never felt that the Maria of the story was not the author, and often found myself reading 'I' instead of the printed 'She'. In this, Pallotta-Chiarolli is possibly also investigating the narrative possibilities of adding a layer of (false) objectivity to the (obviously) subjective narrative, but if so, this adds little to the power of the narrative, which lies at least partly in its uncompromising directness. The third person point of view does allow the other family members to be represented with some substance of their own, and the story of Maria's parents' courtship, for instance, is far more vivid and interesting than the tedious litany of ancestry which often begins traditional autobiographies and memoirs.

Gutkind's text is clearly introduced and signposted as a process textbook. In chapters 1 through 6 ('The Creative Part') he offers concise and uncomplicated advice for all writers, fiction as well as nonfiction, with clearly signposted sections on writing Description, dialogue and scenes, and building a sustained narrative from a series of those scenes. In the subsequent chapters of the book ('The Nonfiction Part') Gutkind stresses that the foundation of creative nonfiction is the genre's desire to be truth-telling. In 'The Elusive Truth' he raises a number of the important ethical dilemmas many creative nonfiction writers encounter when compressing incident and conversation into coherent dramatic forms, using direct versus remembered quotations, and recreating another's thoughts in text. Gutkind emphasises that it is reaching for the 'factual reality' of the work which is paramount, striving not to 'misconstrue the inherent truth of the experience' (121), misquote the subject or mislead readers about the subject. Drawing the fine line between recreation and fabrication is a difficulty creative nonfiction continually faces, and Gutkind's warning regarding the litigation that can be brought against writers who misrepresent their subjects is as pertinent for an Australian audience as in his American setting.

One factual issue with which I would take Professor Gutkind to task is his statement that 'in countries outside of the United States, creative writing programs on a high school or university level are literally nonexistent' (149). Australia, as we know, has an extensive range of creative writing courses available at universities across the continent. Creative Writing can be studied as a single unit choice, a minor or major in an undergraduate degree, at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters and PhD level in Australian universities. Creative Writing is also a widely available choice in TAFE and high school programs. The Association of Australian Writing Programs (AAWP) is the professional body representing these courses and teachers, and a comprehensive guide to these courses was recently compiled by the AAWP and published in *TEXT*.

Gutkind's section on writing a book proposal guides by practical example, providing his own successful proposal for his book on heart transplants, *Many Sleepless Nights* [4]. This proposal indicates the significant preliminary research which is necessary, together with the level of planning and organisational ability such a successful proposal requires. On publishing creative nonfiction, Gutkind discusses the dealings the author must have with literary agents, editors, publishing houses, contracts and lawyers. Much of this advice has universal general relevance for writers, although some is only of more particular use in the USA market. Gutkind's text is particularly American in one aspect of the text, however - its consistently positive, upbeat tone. This is a 'how-to, can-do' text, with little indication of the dead-ends, dissatisfactions and disappointments of writing and the writer's life. Knowing, however, that writing creative nonfiction can be as taxing and frustrating as it is fascinating and rewarding, is never a reason not to persevere with writing in this, as any, genre. As Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli writes, quoting Adrienne Rich, 'When we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern' [5].

### Notes

- 1 Baldwin was paraphrasing Socrates' famous quote. Return to article
- 2 See for example, Theodore A. Rees Cheney, *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 1991; and Michael Steinberg, Robert L. Root Jr, *The Fourth Genre, Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, Allyn & Bacon, US, 1998. Return to article
- 3 Lee Gutkind, *The People of Penns Woods West*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1984. Return to article
- 4 Lee Gutkind, *Many Sleepless Nights: The World of Organ Transplantation*, University of Pittsburgh Press, (reprint edition) 1990. Return to article
- 5 Adrienne Rich, 1975, quoted in *Tapestry*. Return to article

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### TEXT

**Vol 4 No 1 April 2000**

**<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>**

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## ***You Can read these***

### **review by Kevin Brophy**

Kernen, Robert

*Building Better Plots*

Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1999.

Moore, Karen Ann

*You Can Write Greeting Cards*

Cincinnati: Writer's digest Books, 1998.

Perry, Susan K.

*Writing in Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity*

Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1999.

Instruction? Education? Inspiration? Which is it you need? Whichever it is, there is a book out there that can guide and inform you. We all know, as well, that the important thing in the end is to put all the books away and find our own paths through the infinite nothing of blank pages to the blunt existence of words on the page, and maybe books on the shelves in bookshops.

Writing is a technical craft (as well as an ideological, historical, compulsive, creative, privileged, indulgent and highly stylised pursuit) and it would be the foolish writer who thinks she can go on developing and maturing by flying by the seat of her pants and a few flimsy maxims about breaking the frozen sea within us or recollecting that divorce in tranquility. *Building Better Plots (BBP)* by Robert Kernan, as it turns out, is one of the better books about the technical aspects of writing long fiction: 'One must approach the act of storytelling with the deliberation of an architect building a skyscraper.' Kernan urges the writer to know her story thoroughly before the actual construction begins. To this end Kernan discusses the differences between chronological order of events and the order of events as told in a story, the arch of a plot and its major pillars, scene pacing, three-act structures and suspense, the twist, parallel plots and much more including an introduction to using archetypes, back stories, subplots, parallel plots and much else.

There is real meat here. And real books are used to illustrate his points about plot-building: *Madame Bovary*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Hamlet*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Sound and the Fury* and others - a quirky mix of texts from undergraduate literature courses with a bit of middle-brow holiday reading thrown in.

Not that any of these writers ever read Kernan on plot-building. Most of them would have made lousy architects. The odd, illusionistic impression one gets here is something like seeking patterns in cloud-shapes only to be maddened by only being able to see human faces in profile over and over again. Some of the texts Kernan uses do adhere to and illustrate the big points he makes about plots, but in many of the others (e.g. *Absalom*, *Absalom* and *The Sound and the Fury*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Life: an Owner's Manual*) new categories (called plot devices) of 'the episodic' or the 'confusing style' or the 'tangential' are invented to make it seem that there are rules here too. It is gritty of Kernan to even mention aberrant texts in a work that purports to be a manual for storytellers when the aberrant ones so deliberately and brilliantly dismantle or ironise notions of pre-existing structures and instructions for successful storytelling - Or it is naïve of Kernan to consider that a manual of ever-expanding categories can in the end remain coherent about the few plot-rules that have

been identified? Identifying the rules of fiction-making by showing how existing fiction has been knowingly or unknowingly constructed according to the rules is a little like the effect of a little knowledge of psychoanalysis: once you have the concepts and the jargon you begin seeing the evidence everywhere, even where it isn't.

*BBP* won't make you a writer. It might make you a better writer sooner than you otherwise would have been. It will help you to identify the purely conventional plot, and perhaps provoke you into putting all that good-building aside for a more wonky structure that works because it isn't 'better' or 'built' or even 'plotted'. I was at the Port Fairy Folk Festival last weekend and bumped into my cousin Susan. She began talking to me about a time when I built her and her brother a cubbyhouse at the beach. She told me I had insisted they dig out a hole in the sand and then go collecting debris from building sites and backyards in the neighbourhood. She told me that the cubby lasted for many summers, that they took vases and books down there, and it has remained with her as a memory of the one true cubby of her childhood. I agree with Kernan about architects and the building of plots, but at the same time I remind myself that storytelling is older than the profession of the architect, that storytelling is sometimes a cobbling-together, a bricolage of used-up bits that are transformed by luck, instinct, 'feel', wit or sheer hard work into a cubbyhouse that can actually be inhabited. *BBP* can only ever tell half the story, though it is an essential and time-saving half.

Which brings us to that normally suppressed question, 'Are you (after all) a greeting card writer?' Is greeting card writing a vocation or a chore? Is it writing?' Karen Ann Moore can answer all those questions. Her book is fascinatingly practical. It makes it seem possible to break into this world of authorless gems. You will learn how to submit to card publishers, what are the latest trends in card-types, how to fold cards, what 'prose' means to a card publisher, what poetic metres are most commonly accepted for publication. There are many examples of styles (e.g. the good news/bad news set up) and at the end of each chapter an 'idea jogger'. Probably the most important chapter is the penultimate chapter on how to submit your ideas and have them read by Hallmark or one of the other big card publishing companies. Moore's book is a lot of fun, and easy to make fun of, but really quite a challenge for any writer-poet-humourist-philosopher who faces up to the discipline inherent in writing a card that will actually get to the cash register in a customer's hand. The title of the book goes: '*You Can Write Greeting Cards*'. The italics are interesting. Where does the emphasis fall between you and can? How misleading or manipulative is the title? But then again how misleading is the title, *Creative Writing 1A* in a university handbook?

Susan Perry's *Writing in Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity* promises by its title to come under the heading of inspiration. Perry is interested in the 'how' of flow as well as the experience. Flow occurs when

- Your activity has clear goals
- You have the sense that your personal skills are suited to the task
- You are intensely focused
- You lose awareness of yourself
- Your sense of time is altered
- The experience becomes self-rewarding

Yes to all of these! As with most new discoveries in psychology, it has been discovered before. Tolstoy described writer's flow in *Anna Karenina* in 1878.

Intrinsic motivation is the first key to flow and thinking like a writer is the second. Loosen up and let this seem like a psychosis is the third key. Paying attention to attention, building the 'muscle' of attention is the fourth key. Then learn to live with the contradictions of the shifty process of flow. Along with these keys there are many quotes from writers on the experience of writing, and the book is a valuable resources for these wide-ranging observations. Susan Perry is a social psychologist who teaches in a Writing Program (a more honest title than the Professional/Creative Writing titles we go for in Australian



universities and colleges?). That is a challenge to the notion that writers should be teaching writers. Flow is a resource, I think, rather than a book, for it doesn't bear reading from cover to cover, though it is useful to dip into. All three of these books will sit on the dipping-into section of my bookcase, a section that is indispensable for writers who do a bit of teaching, and isn't that most writers now?

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**TEXT**

**Vol 4 No 1 April 2000**

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## ***River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative***

*review by Glen Phillips*

*River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative*

Vol 1 No 1, Fall 1999

Joe Mackall and Dan Lehman (eds.)

Department of English, Ashland University, Ashland Ohio.

Annual subscription: \$15 (\$25 institution)

Website: [www.riverteeth.org](http://www.riverteeth.org)

The title page of this journal claims that the editors intend to combine 'the best of creative nonfiction, including narrative reportage, essays and memoir, with critical essays that examine the emerging genre and that explore the impact of nonfiction narrative on the lives of its writers, subjects and readers.' This first issue of the first volume from the Department of English of Ashland University in Ohio, U.S.A. certainly tackles these laudable but ambitious objectives. I suppose their very ambitions are pretty daunting to a reviewer. So what does this launch issue offer, especially to tertiary teachers of writing?

In the crudest terms we get some 140 pages handsomely bound with a full colour cover incorporating an attractive photograph of what looks like a very pretty creekbed in a wilderness bush location. There are ten or so contributions of nonfiction narrative plus the usual introductions and information for contributors. At US\$15 for two issues it compares in cost quite well with such serial publications as *The Atlanta Review*. However, the question begged by a journal styling itself as offering 'nonfiction narrative' is whether it is possible to draw a satisfactory line between fiction and nonfiction. Not many modern historians, for example would find this an easy task. The popularity in some quarters today of 'faction' (as in Modjeska's novel *Poppy*) and the recent controversies over the supposed 'facts' expected by some readers in Nicholas Hasluck's *Our Man K* illustrate some difficulties of defining the watershed between narrative fiction and narrative nonfiction. Perhaps the creek on the cover symbolises this watershed? But no, the un-ascribed introduction, 'Facts that Matter', tells us that 'River Teeth' is an expression coined by writer David James Duncan and refers to the hard truths or facts that endure over time when more trivial aspects of recollected narrative are lost. Sort of Joycean epiphanies, key impressions which endure and give the substance of artefacts to specially remembered images of incidents or objects. Even more reason, one would think, for doubting the objectivity of such so-called factual narratives.

So let's look at a few of the hallowed narratives. Actually, there's quite a range of topics for the articles in this first issue of the journal. After David James Duncan's brief introduction to the concept of River Teeth, 'the hard, cross-grained whorls of human experience that remain inexplicably lodged in us,' we have Kim Barnes' account of a fishing trip with her family and the challenge of extricating her car from a washed-out bush track. Leon Dash and Susan Sheehan write about a displaced family and its deterioration into poverty, crime and murder on the part of some of its members. Nancy Mairs, a multiple sclerosis sufferer, gives a witty account of some of the problems facing her and other disabled people; and Jon Franklin tells the story of the death of a lemur in a 'Primate Center'. Another story of death is Joe Mackall's account (a 'factional' reconstruction) of his uncle's murder by the type of muggers who prey on homosexuals. R.J. Nelson analyses 'the language of love' in a Selzer novel and

Brian Mooney writes about various family deaths from pollution. The issue finishes with accounts of war and misery in the Balkans in both 1915 and 1999.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that five of the pieces are by members of the editorial board of *River Teeth*. The more important thing is whether we need a journal of 'nonfictional narrative'. I for one do not, interesting as many of the above pieces are. The reason is that I can't help remembering how many times I have come across aspiring authors, including many of my writing students, who have the notion that 'factual' confers some holy writ status on their texts; a status that absolves them both from being judged as to the quality of their writing and from the responsibility to subject it to improvement through editing. It is as if the point of real achievement in writing is shifted back to a sort of primeval innocence which renders drafting and editing irrelevant. This is what I often call the schoolroom syndrome, the notion that the composition of written text could ideally be internalized to the point where the 'fully cut diamond' can be plucked directly from the mine, freed of all artifice that would fashion it further; freed of responsibility for the crafting knowledge and industry of writing which the myth of spontaneous creation opposes.

In the past, many literature courses (in the old canonical mode, anyway) encouraged this attitude in generations of elitist worshippers of the great literary texts, from whom the blood, sweat and tears of writing were concealed and who were recruited to the usually hopeless yet hopeful ranks of aspiring sonateers and other such would-be creators of great literature. I guess it cleared the way for the tiny percentage of genius writers who could produce admirable writing without apparent effort. We wouldn't be recruiting many students to tertiary writing courses if we had maintained that myth! In any case, such geniuses probable never need 'teaching'.

Back to our friends of the narrative nonfiction cause. It seems to me that the good bits of writing in this journal (and there are quite a few in most of the selected pieces) are usually the result of imaginative narrative approaches, the implementation of sufficient editing processes and the authors' strong emotional involvement in their chosen subjects. This is where their writing 'lives', with or without the slightly creaky 'river-teeth' theorising. It's a nonsense to suggest that narrative nonfiction has some special access to 'real facts' that is denied fiction writers. Even science fiction and fantasy at its most extreme distance from 'everyday reading' is only comprehended because readers can know such worlds by their variation from the 'constant' of the so-called normality of average readers' lives. Fiction writers and their even more untrustworthy partners in imaginative crime, the poets, seem to put larger and larger portions of time into researching information as an appropriate (even principal) ingredient of their writing. And, anyway who are these serious and self-selected editors and authors of nonfiction narrative? Have they discovered some unique methodology to insulate themselves from the age-old human limitation of subjectivity? Have they somehow bred themselves to be a race of reporters of 'facts' and 'realities' which are unchallengeable? The answer is no, of course not. Their narratives are most lively when they risk becoming emotionally engaged with their subjects. They become immediately boring when they deteriorate into merely parading their 'knowledge'. All of them could be considerably improved by even more judicious editing and re-drafting, together with acceptance that all narrative is an artifice of one kind or another.

With such provisos, I must conclude by saying I accept there's a place for a journal which can provide for the writer who wants to operate at this particular end of the fiction-factual writing spectrum. There are many writing students who, for good reasons, prefer to concentrate on 'finding' narratives to re-tell in the world 'out there' rather than challenging themselves to invent 'other worlds' within or beyond the one most known to all of us. *River Teeth* could provide such writers with some interesting reading and publishing opportunities.

*Associate Professor Glen Phillips teaches writing at Edith Cowan University, Perth.*

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**TEXT**

**Vol 4 No 1 April 2000**

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