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Processing Fictocriticism

reviewed by Rosslyn Prosser

the space between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism

Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettlebeck (eds)

Nedlands W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1998

Literature is processed, a salami sausage, and packaged. Writing and writing about writing seem very far apart.

Ania Walwicz - "Look at me, Ma - I'm going to be a Marginal Writer"

Writing in Text (Vol.1 No 2 October) in 1997 Anna Gibbs stated "There's a strange forgetfulness around the term fictocriticism as it's used in Australia now - for fictocriticism made its appearance here in the writing (mostly non-academic) of women very well aware of those strange, exciting and provocative texts emanating first of all from France and then later from Canada from the late seventies onward".

In "Notes towards an Introduction" Amanda Nettlebeck outlines the conditions of possibility for, and ways of thinking about fictocriticism. She discusses the gendered nature of the selection of writers for this collection demonstrating the continuum with Anna Gibbs' point. However, it is the "Notes on Contributors" which reveals a shift from the mostly non-academic women. In this collection most of the twenty two contributors "teach" or are associated with academic institutions. This shift may be demonstrating the concern with the critical as a place to work from, along with the shifting nature of the academic as author. In some of the of the pieces this is worked out through the use of the autobiographical "I".

As a useful work in itself the "Notes towards an Introduction" provide rules of engagement with the works here and fictocriticism generally. It is possible to see the effects of the uses of a particular group of theorists and theories in Australia.

The rules of engagement noted by Amanda Nettlebeck are helpful in thinking about the contents of this text. They are "self reflexivity, the fragment, intertextuality, the bending of narrative boundaries, crossing of genres, the capacity to adapt literary forms, hybridized writing, moving between fiction (invention/speculation) and criticism (deduction/explication) of subjectivity (interiority) and objectivity (exteriority)".

With these rules in mind the collection displays a range of techniques at work. Anna Gibbs uses the cut-up as a technique to produce another (newer) text and in her Afterword discusses the process and the effects produced, generating a discussion of writer/cut-up/reader relations. Brenda Walker places an anecdote about birth and the vernix mask against a critical piece about women's writing. Working through a range of texts to discuss metaphors for writing, writing with the mask and writing with the body. The piece works well with Nettlebeck's introductory notes as a way of thinking through the theoretical background to fictocriticism.

It's relevant to the project of fictocriticism that intertextuality is working here within and between the writings collected. The image of typewriter overboard in Robyn Ferrell's piece is a fitting end to a discussion of "writing like a woman - writing like a man". Whilst for some of the writers it is the insertion of the autobiographical "I" that allows an acknowledgement within the text of the authorial/academic position, it is the construction of a different self in Dr Zeo by Dr Zoe. Dr Zeo calls on Dr Zoe's knowledges of the cyber, the techno and the sexual/textual to make a new dictionary. The "A-Z of Technosex".

Demonstrating that theory comes in handy when talking about new space. This is amusing work with the joy stick spinning an inter-generic fantasy.

Fictocriticism is developing ways of knowing, demonstrated in works here that consider place and identity as subject to historical shifts and meaning changes. Deane Fergie negotiates her position as anthropologist and the problematic of naming in Australia. She argues with the proposition that "autobiography within anthropology is regarded by some anthropologists as mere narcissism". The interrogation of Australia is carried out in many pieces and situates the text as a whole in relation to writing which is peculiar to this place - Australia.

Also with contributions from Ania Walwicz, Noelle Janaczewska, Gail Jones, Meaghan Morris, Gabrielle O'Ryan, Susan Ash, Alison Bartlett, Sue Gillett, Kerry Goldsworthy, Lucy Dougan, Anne Brewster, Marion Campbell, Cath

Kenneally, Linda Marie Walker, Alison Georgeson, Lyn McRedden, and Lucy Sussex, this collection is successful in its range and situatedness.

The editors have included a guide to "Reading across the Collection". The three sections are "Language and Representation", "Cultural Interiors", and "Performing Sexualities/Identities". The text is categorised firstly as "Criticism - 20th century". As a directive to reading for particular theoretical/writing positions this ensures the works reception in particular fields.

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TEXT

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A Guide for Some, a Paperweight for Others

reviewed by Antonina Lewis

The Australian Writer's Marketplace 1999
 (The Complete Guide to Being Published in Australia)
 Compiled and Edited by Rhonda Whitton.
 Melbourne: Bookman.

"Very like the Yellow Pages" is the first thing I'm compelled to mention.

The Australian Writer's Marketplace 1999 is a thick tome, with a cover whose colour can't quite be placed with certainty as being the same tone as that of the ubiquitous phone directory. It's a cover crying out to have phone numbers (your new publisher? editor? agent?) scribbled across its surface with gleeful abandon ... A cover complete with subliminal encouragement to let your fingers do the walking and your keyboard do the talking ... A cover that could, for the purpose of review, be construed as a comment on the inherently disposable, always-already-superseded nature of publishing in a consumer driven environment.

Certainly the appearance of this revised edition less than a year after the initial publication highlights the limited lifespan of any print directory in an electronic age, demonstrated (with an irony that should have been intentional) by the outdated internet address for *TEXT* on page 406. And therein lies a question: is this to become an annual volume, always slightly circumspect, the Writer's Own Digest? Past the cover (although I am still bemused by the patriotic colour scheme ...) comes the pep talk, a strange blend of essays that comprise the first section of the book. From the clinically informative to the chattily promotional, the lawyer's desk to the aeroplane; these five pieces guide the reader through a whirlwind tour of the Australian writer's market place (to borrow a phrase).

All of which makes me wonder just who the market for this marketplace might be. Every writer without a network established would be an acceptable answer if the directory were being left on doorsteps in the dead of night, but it's not. The asking price for this baby is almost \$40 and, while I don't dispute the need for such a resource, I am a little concerned that it may become an annual fund-raiser for Australian Writer's Centres at the expense of the people they seek to support.

Despite such cynicism, it would be wrong to deny the value of this directory. David Andrews and Annalisa Curtis' concise guide to "A Writer's Rights" introduces ground every freelancer should make the effort to become familiar with, and Ivor Indyk's piece "Readers as well as Writers" provides an editor's perspective on submissions. More importantly, data is consistently and clearly presented in all categories - meaning the reader is never at a loss to find submission guidelines or contact names and details. Most of the entries also list costs, prizes, or rates of payment (as applicable), and many have additional information including target readership, circulation and tips for submitting. Browsing writers are almost guaranteed to find an outlet for their talents, while the various indexes make it simple for those who know what they're looking for to find it.

If not indispensable, The Australian Writer's Marketplace at least carries through on its most important promise: practicality. The "Magazines, Newspapers and Journals" section shies away from neither obscure specialist publications (*Australian Goat World*, *Corrosion Management*) nor small circulations, and most of the biggies can be found as well, from *Playboy* to *New Idea*. And in addition to periodicals the guide includes listings for literary awards and competitions, publishers, agents, writing courses, literary events, manuscript appraisal services, markets for scripts, and literary organisations.

For some writers this volume will serve not only as a reference tool but also as an article of faith "...all you need is a dream and *The Australian Writer's Marketplace*". Failing that, it makes a great paperweight.

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Talk Louder

reviewed by Kate Deller-Evans

Girls' Talk: Young women speak their hearts and minds

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (ed)

Sydney: Finch, 1998.

I've got a loaded imagination
 Inspired by girls' talk
 It's a more or less situation
 Inspired by girls' talk
 But I can't say the words you want to hear
 I suppose you're going to have to play it by ear
 My dear
 And now girls talk
 And how girls talk
 I just want to hear girls' talk

Elvis Costello, *Girls' Talk*

There are some things you can't cover up with lipstick and powder; real issues need real discussion, and in *Girls' Talk* Pallotta-Chiarolli is inspired by just that. As editor she has set out on a mission to establish "what girls want to know and what girls want to say". Ten chapters cover: rules, bodies and health; love and sex; families; school and friendships; sport; feminism; religion and spirituality; prejudice and discrimination; and finally, role models and activism. Each has sections all with snippets, quotes, creative and biographical pieces. There are interviews, poems and prompts for discussion. Contributions have been drawn from upper primary to post-school age young women as well as various authors. In places the editor turns writer and interjects with variously titled "I can't help it... I gotta talk" sections.

Here Pallotta-Chiarolli's academic and literary interests surface. She is able to draw on a past involvement with writing about prejudice (*Someone You Know*) and other issues crucial to adolescence (she contributed to *Boys in Schools*). This is a call to arms book where her conceptual framework is active encouragement for young women to rise and be counted. A small stylistic quibble I have concerns merging of fact (biography) and fiction. One long diary entry in the "body" section is not clearly labelled as the creation of an adult author (unless the appendix of contributors is consulted; "an out-of-the-closet-witch... enjoying an illustrious career as a telephone psychic") rather than an adolescent pouring out her guts. Perhaps its contrived nature is the give-away. At least if a teenager picks up a Glyn Parry *Spooking the Cows* s/he knows it is a fictive diary of a young woman's trials at school and in love. So it should be the responsibility of the editor that the boundaries of fictional integrity are not strained.

Health and Family sections of bookshops are rife with how-to manuals (raise boys, deal with problem children, get happy) yet there is space for this text, particularly as it bridges the generational divide and provides a platform for discussion between not only peers but older-younger adolescents and mothers-daughters (parents-children).

Girls' Talk appears to achieve its stated aims; a test run on my daughter and her high school friend yielded surprising results - two girls rushing from the lunch table to go "discuss things", then cloistered in bunk beds deep in "important stuff", then wandering the garden, refusing to acknowledge reminders of hometime. Eventually I resorted to wrestling the book from them but not before each had extracted a promise from her mother to buy a copy. I was handed a piece of paper:

It's a great book. I really enjoyed it. My best line in the book was: 'The past invades the present and casts a shadow over the future'. (Rosalind, 10.)

I was told:

What I like is that there are so many opinions from different people. (Claire, 13.)

And was asked the next morning:

Can't I take it to school today, Mum? (Rosalind, 10.)
 (No, I have to write a review.)

Secondary school health teachers may find the Talk tracks for your girls' talk sections of each chapter useful teaching aids. Good springboards for parent-child discussion, too, questions are clearly posed without sounding patronising. There are "what's it like?", "who?", "how?", "when?" and "do you think?" questions ideal for beginning and extending discussion on topics wide ranging as menstruation to NESBians ("wog-girls"). There are ways here for structuring not only discussions, but writing tasks, too. "What do you love about your cultural background?" "If you have started periods... Where were you when it happened for the first time? If you haven't started periods... Are you able to talk to people about it? Who and about what?"

A pleasurable book to handle; its matte cover photograph of a group of school girls laughing, its hot pink title's imputation of graffiti, white pages crammed with bits and pieces make this thick book edible; a good feed for your money's worth. Text is bite-sized. These are the chunks our fast-food age children like to handle. They are easy to get, quick to digest. The dozen type-faces and nearly as many font sizes wore me out, but I know the cut-up hip look will find broad appeal.

It is richly illustrated (in black and white). I found my young research assistants poring over photos of girls: school shots, sports teams, family snaps. Certainly the cartoons are value-added. Renowned Canberra artist Judy Horacek's contributions are a delight but other less polished efforts add to the general zing of production.

Some of the most useful things we can hear are other people's stories. To be able to compare and contrast our own life experiences must be a primary attraction if not function of narrative. Pallotta-Chiarolli has used a cut-and-paste collection of real-life and creative stories this way, editing a text that will surely find its place on the shelves of mainstream bookshops, one which deserves to be widely bought and pored over, and talked loudly about by young and old alike.

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