

TEXT

The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs

EDITORIAL

It's Time for a Professional Voice

Creative Writing as a discipline has - in the last four years (indeed, in the last decade) - virtually exploded onto the university sector in a sudden and ungainly manner. Like a rude girl she sits in the senate, her bright red lipstick out of place amongst all that beige and grey.

The professional association, the AAWP, is not yet three years old and has yet to function as an association in any meaningful sense other than hosting annual conferences and beginning to gather its research foundation in its refereed journal. In themselves, these advances are salutary, but there is plenty more to do.

We don't blame anyone here, the task is simply too large, the expansion and demands too great to be carried out by a handful of overworked academics from around the country. There are 142 named awards in Australia where a student may study writing, but there are not that many subscribers to this journal.

Even the tasks of framing a constitution, opening a bank account, or setting a membership fee, have proved to be too complicated. As members of the executive we take on board our share of this responsibility.

At the 1998 conference in Adelaide, Professor Andrew Taylor once again reminded us all of the urgent need for a national association with lobbying clout. But there is simply too much work to do and no one has the energy to set up the important infrastructure of the association. It appears that we can't even begin this process.

We do not wish to sound negative here, we simply want to point out that the task is so large it's daunting. Many more contributors are needed at the central level.

With an association that exists mainly perhaps by name only - unfunded, unwieldy, unacknowledged - we have however achieved a lot. There have been three annual Australian conferences, and a fourth is about to open in Perth in September/October 1999. The conferences are seen as an important part of our academic year and their location is now organised two years in advance. There is no shortage of offers from members or their universities to hold these conferences.

TEXT has set up a research culture and, almost by accident, a collegiality between writing departments. But here is the rub. That collegiality has generated a timid climate where colleagues are shy to respond to, or debate with, papers published in TEXT. The letters pages of TEXT are not overly brimming with correspondence, heated or otherwise. Where is the discourse,

the variety of opinions, the debate?

Are we calling for blood in the pages of TEXT? Perhaps not blood, just bright red lipstick.

And why do we need hot debates? Because almost everything we do in our teaching is a result of folklore - folklore applied at local levels. And in the end that isn't good enough - it's just too comfortable, too beige an environment.

Is dialectic needed for progress? No issue has ever been hotly debated in the Letters section of TEXT over six issues.

If the AAWP could form as a lively association where collegiality and communication of ideas was fostered, then TEXT might be opened to more vigorous and rigorous debate.

Of course, there's a fine line here. What we don't need is the development of unhealthy schisms and unresolvable conflict. The AAWP has shown itself to be, thus far, a significant grouping of like-minded academics all in pursuit of best Australia-wide outcomes.

But perhaps we should get even more intimately involved, one with the other. The nineties was our decade of explosion; we now need networking.

What writing in the university sector needs, now more than ever, is a functioning professional body, an AAWP strong in infrastructure and voice. To make this happen we need to get further behind its operation.

We urge you all to
do so.

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