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Creativity

review by Inez Baranay

Kevin Brophy
Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing
Melbourne University Press, 1998
ISBN 0 522 84786 2

Can creative writing be taught? While the question is still being asked, creative writing *is* taught. It is a well-established subject in schools, universities and community workshops. And if it is taught, why, it is therefore learned. Is it similarly asked whether mathematics or music, history or woodwork can be taught? (It probably should be.)

I became a writer when the idea of learning writing at a school, learning it formally, as a subject, in a classroom, with a teacher, for marks, simply did not exist. It would have seemed preposterous. It's an idea that has taken some getting used to. I confess that I am glad I never had the choice to make - whether to become the writer I always knew I was by doing a course. I quite see the point of all these courses and classes, of course I do, or I wouldn't be teaching in them, and finding that the real writers, starting out, also go to them, it's their way of being able to write and talk about writing and hear about writing from people who've been at it for longer, who also learn a thing or two from this engagement. The culture has changed. People go to workshops and courses rather than cafes and informal writers' meetings. If the products of writers are studied so should the processes be; if the texts of writers have something to teach us then so do the people who created them. (No longer is it be possible for an academic to object to the appointment of a writer with "are we to invite an elephant to be Professor of Zoology?")

The very term creative writing has always sounded odd to me. Tautological. People are not taught creative music or creative sculpture. Yes, I do see, we are not talking of learning writing as children learn to form letters then words; we are not talking of putting together reports or lists or instructions. We mean the writing employing imagination and art, craft and technique; we mean stories and the artful use of language. We need the term. (A term "with a use rather than a meaning".)

But there is still something that makes the idea of teaching creative writing a prickly, uneasy one and I think the something is this: it is the mystery and mysteriousness of it all, of the way writing gets done. It's the obsessiveness and vocational call of it, the way that if you must write nothing can stop you and that you really only learn by doing. It is the way there are all these rules and then there are no rules. The way you must be both disciplined and flexible, to know where you're going but then to go where it takes you. It's the way dreams and magic and superstition and co-incidence have so much to do with it, and fear and danger; the way it troubles your life, the way trance and daydream and distraction will produce the necessary flash of insight but not when you try to make it.

I have been asked to schools to talk about writing and might, for example, talk about the process of writing as discovery, and the kids say "but the teacher said we have to always know the ending before we start". There is almost nothing that can be said about writing that is always true. Kevin Brophy offers a parable of a particular journey he took in Melbourne - a destination with a set arrival time; he had marked his way on a map. But then he looked at another map, and the trip become one of a sudden decision to take a different route, of unexpected road conditions, confusing signs and necessary detours. "...[I]t was not the maps which advised me on what route to take. They multiplied my choices."

Kevin Brophy's *Creativity* is immensely satisfying - dense with ideas and lively and fluid in style, the work of a writer whose credentials are both in the creative and intellectual fields, and who is ideally placed to subject the idea and construct of creativity and creative writing to a rigorous and learned discussion. I expect this book to become required reading for everyone involved in creative writing, and that it will inspire a good deal of response and discussion, setting a new standard for the understanding of a subject whose definitions and boundaries are still being decided and can be contentious.

Creative writing is explored as one point of a triangle; the others are psychoanalysis and surrealism. It is the pivotal role of the unconscious that links the three, and the complex historical and philosophical relationships between them.

If the application of scientific method were essential to a claim to be a science, psychoanalysis could have no such claim to make. Science, however, is variously defined, and the claim to science marked the assertion of legitimacy by psychoanalysis and marked, most importantly, its competitive need to prove its supremacy over art, particularly literature.

Brophy's extensive review of the treatment of art and artists by psychoanalysis are informed by his insistence on the political strategy behind its claims: Freud's strategy to displace the authority of literature as the field in which knowledge and wisdom about humankind is found. According to the psychoanalysts cited here, authors do not know what they are doing and readers do not understand what they are responding to; the power of works of art such as *Hamlet* were not understood until Freud arrived to explain them to us. While literature has provided evidence for psychoanalytic theory, the theory has claimed that authors arrive at insights and effects unknowingly.

I am not sure that Freud and the Freudians quite succeeded in making literature unable to be understood without reference to psychoanalysis, but its intervention and influence in this century's discourse on art is obvious.

Misogyny, as well as the central place of the unconscious, might be the strongest link between psychoanalysis and surrealism. For the surrealists, the unconscious was a technique for the production of texts. Surrealism took up psychoanalysis as starting point for a new, even more experimental and unprecedented discourse. And surrealists could only save their art "by leaving psychoanalysis at a loss for words".

Brophy's extensive reviews of the construction, practice and theories of psychoanalysis and surrealism, of the key events, conflicts and developments of these arts, their influence on our ideas on creativity - what it is, in what terms it is understood -, can be read as a background briefing for the section called "Creative Writing and the Institutions of Education".

Here I find named and examined the area of my uneasiness with the current sunny view of creativity as an enriching, therapeutic and containable endeavour to be promoted and overseen by government grants givers, writers centres and educational institutions. Where is the acknowledgment of its darkness, its danger, its sickness, its "empathy with perversion"?

Pleasure, though, also is a factor in the disturbances around the presence of creative writing in universities.

Creative writing courses, and the writing of poetry, are peculiarly popular in these days of the Ec.Rat. and apparently are proliferating. There are important issues for the academy to address. Some of these identified by Brophy: What is the purpose of students' creative writing? Who should teach it, and how? How can it be assessed? What is the relation of writing to reading, of art to theory, of creative writing to the production of literature? Can creative writing be legitimately recognised and assessed as research?

The complaints of anti-intellectual complacency. The counter complaints of the complacency of the champions of a counter-canon of trendy theory. The concerns about the generation of university-taught writers, the power of their connections, the limitations of their models. The enfeeblement of poetry by poetry schools. "Real" creativity not possible in these contexts. Brophy reveals criticisms such as these to be based on prejudices and misinformation.

Why do the accepted boundaries of research exclude creative areas from funding support? What is required for educational and funding institutions to change so as to include creative research, creative higher degrees? What are the implications for the freedom of expression and for intellectual property rights? How can a creative endeavour, with its potential for radical change, its refusal to be tied to acceptable versions of truth, with its tendency to play with the unsayable and impossible - how can this exist in the context of institutions and assessments?

Brophy expands, teases and quarrels with these issues, offering ways of finding one's way among them, enlarging one's understanding of what needs to be considered, and refusing to end with any illusion of certainty or safety.

Inez Baranay's most recent book, a queer sex-and-shopping novel, is Sheila Power: an entertainment. *She teaches Creative Writing at Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus and the University of the Sunshine Coast.*

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Going for Broke

review by Zan Ross

Gillian Swanson and Patricia Wise
Going for Broke: Women's Participation in the Arts and Cultural Industries
Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University, 1998.

Book as a fetish object - I like this one: print shop smell - I used to work in one (fresh ink, new paper, glue, slightly metallic, industrial virgin commodity); the paper - an excellent quality - smooth, satin-skinned, non-glare for headache free perusal under intense light (Confess - what did you mean by that insinuation/those statistics/that anecdote?); cover - plastic-covered for rough handling by people like me who gorilla their belongings; c-l-e-a-n cover design in tones of green; cover image ('Sweet Little Girl' by Jill Barker) is suggestive, intriguing. The book's backpack/briefcase portable - a message of exclusion: no housewives, bikies, working class (and would these populations be interested in the content anyway?).

Open and enter, go straight to the rear - the interesting stuff's always there (my expectation): interesting and informative. Note section: the BIBLIOGRAPHY was exemplary and extensive; check out the appendices - shit! look at this, and I mean NOW - questionnaire design and sample (explains statistical data, where the questionnaire was published, what populations composed the sample, what were factors that were taken into consideration in writing questionnaires), interviewees and those consulted in the research phase (bloody impressive, this), questionnaires for administrators and practitioners. There's no index, but then the CONTENTS page is so detailed that if one can't find the piece of info. one's after, ya gotta be a flaming idiot.

I'm reading, reading, stop...look back at the title. It hits me - why hasn't someone tackled this subject before? Is it a case of the arts/participant body/psyche/administration assumed to be masculine, standing in/speaking for OTHER/femme...?! Oooooo - I'm majorly annoyed already, think back to writing/trying to get published/going to exhibitions/sculpting/applying for funding, feeling/seeing/being made to see, "It's a boys' club." Where is the space for my experience/work; where can my needs be met?

Let's look at some quotes, eh? See if I hit the dog on the nose. (It's only a rolled up news paper.)

> Page 1
> One of the key features of women working in the arts and cultural industries is their diverse 'package' of employment: freelance, commercial and sponsored arts and cultural proactive; voluntary and committee work; involvement in arts and cultural policy; and organizational activities, etc.
>
> We can justifiably observe that women in the arts and cultural sector are characterized by a diverse career profile which adapts to personal and local circumstances, new developments and fluctuations in industrial, government and market influences, and new opportunities for training updates. Thus, while their incomes may not be commensurate with their levels of training and skill, women working in the cultural sector exhibit a high degree of self-reliance, vision and entrepreneurialism.

(And this says to me that it's the same old story as everywhere else in capitalist industries - women get paid less, full stop. If men take on the same positions as femmes in this particular industry, they get less than general for hours worked because, let's face it, from a cultural reading of the arts in general: It's for poofs and femmes. Sigh. What else is new?)

> Women working in the arts and cultural industries characteristically :
>
> - possess a high level of professional qualifications, experience and multiple skills;
> - demonstrate high levels of career mobility, diversification and adaptability;
> - contribute high levels of additional unpaid or voluntary activity in a wide range of capacities.

But:

- they earn low incomes, especially in their arts/cultural work.

From identified work patterns, we can discern a 'market-oriented' disposition, since the women we surveyed:

- show a trend to developing self-supporting and flexible working practices, such a freelance or self-employment;
- are less confident about applying for government funding than they are about starting an arts/cultural-related business;

Page 2

- identify business, financial management and marketing skill along with the development of practice as preferred professional development options.

(Interjection: Well, at least with this study we at last have data to confirm what we've always suspected.)

Page 3
A key analytical principle is that a survey of women's participation is not restricted to what have been defined as 'women's issues'. Features help to illustrate the equitable position of women (such as the proportion of total arts grant recipients), or the inequitable position of women (such as the lack of availability of childcare), were therefore supplemented by a more extensive set of industry indicators. While important in themselves, neither of these factors was critical in the general performance of women.

- While more than 50 per cent of arts grants at the state level are taken up by women each year,
- only 14 per cent of our respondents had ever received an arts grant in their career.
- In fact, freelance activities and self-employment appeared to be far more important to both practitioners and administrators as a means of sustaining their arts and cultural practice.
- Investigation of family background and inhibiting factors in making use of venues suggest that
- childcare responsibilities are neither as extensive a distinguishing feature of women as workers in the industry as has commonly been held, nor as insurmountable a problem. Other - industrial - factors appear to be of greater significance.
- Success in improving the rates of either grant receipt or childcare provision alone would remain of limited relevance to the majority of women working in these industries, since only a small proportion of the total number of women workers would benefit from arts grants and only 34-38 percent of all our respondents (practitioners and administrators) had children living at home. ...[M]ore systematic platforms are necessary for women to develop successful career in the arts and cultural industries; to provide this, there is a need for better career development in the sector generally.

It is suggested that gender equity measures should work from the precise coordinates of specific and located working practices, to develop a realistic approach responsive both to the particular features of women's working lives and the industry sector they occupy.

(So, the main thing is, why has no one ever asked us what we need? It's a bit like the patriarchal government not asking other ethnic groups what they wanted/needed, just deciding for them. Sigh. Swanson and Wise did ask these questions. Let's hope the Powers That Be listen this time.)

Page 4
As a result, a more varied and detailed range of indicators is charted in this report, to assess the positions of women in the industry sector and to point to measures for enhancing their

> participation. These indicators indicate that, far from being prevented from participating, women in fact provide a mainstay for the arts and cultural industries, particularly - but, of course, not solely - at a local and regional level. What may be more significant is the shape of an industry sector in which there are insufficient options for a flexible combination of paid work, unpaid work and the development of one's own practice being placed on s sufficiently secure economic basis. Even for women working in an administrative capacity, it may not be so much that there is a 'glass ceiling' as that the specific mechanisms for career progress and the forms by which a qualification, knowledge and skill base are translated into a job description, position level and award have been insufficiently formalized and rendered comparable to other professional levels or public service designations.

(Yeah - same old same old: women provide the backbone/stability/do the day to day, and get FA for it. HELLO! Is anyone listening out there?)

> Our findings suggest that women are a mainstay of the arts and cultural industries, but structurally disadvantaged by the very nature of those industries.
>
> While the designation 'emerging artist' is frequently applied to women who may not have the indicators of professionalism employed by government agencies, it is rather that women administrators and practitioners are dependent on the insecurities of an industry sector which is itself an 'emerging' industry, without the coherent infrastructure characteristic of more mature industry formations.

The rest of the book organizes/displays the results of the questionnaire and speculates on how the Culture industry might be sustainably changed to better accommodate femmes over the long-haul.

It was a reaffirming journey through the material, which undeniably proved that the battle for fair recompense for the primarily femme practitioner/primary producer/arts administrator has only just begun. As unappealing as the prospect may be, we must cross the line this report drew on the earth. About time...

So I says to meself, "These women are amazing - thorough, professional without being pedantic/alienating/condescending. Let's read it again."

Zan Ross is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Curtin University, WA. She is primarily known as a writer, having appeared in all the usual lit. magazines. Her first collection of poetry, B-Grade, *was published in late 1997.*

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Story Telling - full circle?

review by Elizabeth Mansutti

Annie Bolitho and Mary Hutchinson
Out of the Ordinary: Inventive ways of bringing communities, their stories and audiences to light
Canberra Stories Group 142 pp
ISBN 0 9585270 0 8

There was a time when community writing was viewed as neither 'proper' writing nor 'proper' history, but an odd activity invented as a means of gathering memories or anecdotes from 'ordinary' people about their lives and insights into the social context in which they lived. That view has changed and the cultural significance of written life experience is seen as an important addition to the records that a community leaves. There have always been diaries and letters that have enlivened biographies and histories but these were rarely written by 'ordinary' people. Proof that this form of writing is significant came with the official genre label ethnocartography.

However it seems to me that the methodology described in this book would not qualify under this label for much of the writing is filtered by the scribing process and does not seek the accuracy of audio recorded oral history or the primacy of a collection of written reminiscences.

This book has a timewarp quality. I and many other professional writers and oral history collectors have been doing this kind of work for years in a wide variety of community contexts with outcomes that include books, audio oral histories (with transcripts), plays, artworks such as murals, banners, prints and performances and more recently CDs, CD ROMs and multi media presentations.

In *Out of the Ordinary* the writers detail the methods they used in a number of community writing projects in Canberra to record, compile, and publish community writing. It is a 'How to..." with many check lists and timelines and examples from the participants and from the organisers' own notebooks. They talk of the writers' voices, the power of the story, its value to the audience, they even mention the dreaded word 'therapy'. There is information on the perils and difficulties of group publishing, with comments on copyright, book design and markets. It is a detailed record of some of the processes used to gather the stories and some reflections on the value for the community that tells and writes and the wider community that may read this writing. The chapter end references are numerous and clear and in an odd way make the need for this book a mystery though perhaps its strength and interest is as a record exploring the documentation of the process.

All cultures have their oral traditions and storytellers who were the keepers of the community's history. In song or story artfully constructed, they used the rhyme and rhythm of language as an aide memoire and the stories were repeated generation after generation. Some of them were written down eventually. The lament then was that in writing it down all that was captured were the words and accessibility was limited to those who could read. What was lost was all the communication cues that the teller used, the tone, pace, pitch and volume of the telling, the gestures, the facial expressions, the pauses and the silences, all of which make up more than half of the listeners' keys to comprehension. Why stay with 'books' and writing on paper as the outcome?

There is also the problem of 'whose' writing is it? I would question the use of the term 'scribing' by the authors when they actually seem to mean noting down some of what the teller says. I question whether it is a valid way to record stories "to consider chunks of meaning rather than a mass of detail." (p. 66) They admit that they "were delighted with the fleeting and fascinating glimpses into people's lives that resulted" (p. 64) (They use the word 'poem' loosely too.) So this form of scribing seems to me to be dangerous and neither respecting the teller nor the tale, and allowing the instant editing of what the person says, perhaps the omission of what the 'scriber' doesn't find fascinating and there's a whiff too of censoring, or at least, changing emphasis.

The recording of oral histories and the accurate transcription of them gives far more that the written text alone. Not to mention the need for other strategies when community members do not have English as their first language.

In a recent oral history project that I did with former management and staff of the Mothers' and Babies' Health Association of SA 1918 - 1981, the outcomes were twenty-seven hours of audio tape, (now transferred to CD), transcriptions of every word they said and a one hour CD version of selected, significant excerpts. No written copy of their stories could ever convey, as their voices do, the dedication, caring and joy of these women, for the mothers and babies they served, nor reveal the depths of the anger and bitterness of some community members when the service was taken over by the government.

As our society searches for its identity and tries to rediscover a notion of community, accessibility to these stories beyond a scrapbook, a note book or a printed publication is desirable. I think community 'writing' now needs to be presented as it really is, as told story, and the answer lies in the use of multimedia technology. It is now increasingly possible to have the audio and video of the telling, restoring gesture and all the other visual cues, and the context further enhanced for the audience by photos and other images, published on the net or on CD ROM.

All we need to do now is come up with a label for this new format, the next step in the full circle of storytelling.

Elizabeth Mansutti, writer, educator and story teller - most recent publication on CD For Mothers and their Children.

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Documenter Website - www.documenter.com

review by Stephen Stockwell

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http://www.documenter.com

Why go to print? Readers of TEXT will be familiar with this question. The web offers the opportunity to produce a magazine that will be read around the world without exorbitant printing costs, tortuous distribution deals or any of those little compromises required to attract and keep a significant level of advertising.

The down side is that readers can only do their reading on a computer or from a print out so the webzine is not ideal reading matter for beach or bed - though I do know a few techno fanatics who connect their Powerbooks to the bedside phone line.

Also, the reader is held hostage to the vagaries of the medium and can spend quite a lot of time waiting for an article to materialise. The *Documenter* homepage is a case in point: the index of the issue is by way of a beautifully textured graphic but using my Mac Performa's Netscape 2 on a standard Ozemail line, the graphic took about 2 minutes to load up.

Even worse, my attempts to download Daryl Dellora's shooting script for something called *Conspiracy* crashed my computer twice in a 24 hour period. None dare call it conspiracy!

Nevertheless *Documenter* is an exciting innovation that shows what a webzine can do when it is approached with a seriousness of purpose. Its target audience are those interested in making and understanding documentaries and, if the first issue is anything to go by, it promises to keep us abreast of not only the ever-burgeoning debates about the nature, purpose and future of documentary but also the practicalities of the genre.

In fact, its practical focus is *Documenter's* killer app. Meaty interviews with Heather Croall and Steve Thomas reveal the bleak realities of documentary making in Australia. There is little money for production, few slots for programming and don't give up your day job but the rare pleasure of making something meaningful and getting it on screen keeps attracting people willing to give it a go - there's 500 self-identifying documentary makers in Melbourne alone.

They should all read John Marshall's practical insights into international co-productions and his down-to-earth-advice about how to approach this nebulous area. This article will be of benefit to all film and video makers, not just documentary makers and it makes a visit to this zine worthwhile all by itself. Perhaps if Tom Zubrikyi had read this article he could make some more significant contribution than his mercifully short piece bemoaning the failure of the ABC to give him lots of money for a documentary that he made without considering where it would be shown.

In terms of debates about the genre, reflection about *Race Around the World* is ubiquitous and predominantly negative. I think this points to the central problem facing the documentary in Australia today. Russell Porter's "The Dumbing Down of Docos" and Deb Verhoeven's piece on *Race* attack the program's banal superficiality, the Racers' lack of expertise and the Judges for existing. They can see nothing positive in the interest in the genre it has generated or the experience and exposure it has given young players.

I am concerned that behind their attacks lies a view of documentary making not as a chance to document something that might be important to an audience but rather as a lifestyle that is so worthy that it deserves government support. This view of documentary will lead to its swift demise. As an activity, documentary-making is in danger of becoming so cerebral that it floats off above its audience while they tune into Real TV. What's wrong with this picture? The reality is that if you've got a video camera rolling in the middle of an interesting event, then you've got an interesting TV program and the audience is doing it for themselves.

The challenge for documentary makers is to learn from what works, to forgo the ultra-expensive feature film industry as a model and instead to look for models that have survived without government support by concentrating on communicating to audiences. Dare I suggest that it is time for documentary makers to consider lessons from the rock music industry which flourishes despite its anti-Establishment stance and governments' often malicious opposition?

Stephen Stockwell is a lecturer in Journalism at Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus

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Producing Videos: A Complete Guide

review by Kathryn Millard

Martha Mollison
Producing Videos: A Complete Guide
Australian Film, Television and Radio School/Allen and Unwin, 512pp.
ISBN 0 642 2458 2

Producing Videos is a lively, accessible guide to video production, providing an overview of such areas as Camera, Crewing, Sound Recording, Editing, Budgeting and Scheduling. The information within "Producing Videos" is particularly well presented; text is broken up with graphics, photographs and key quotes 'vox pop' style. The quotes/tips - primarily from production teachers/academics and students - are aimed at avoiding classic beginners' mistakes. This is an effective strategy since advice drawn from experience makes much more engaging reading than the lists of rules or "do's and dont's" often included in introductory production texts.

Two of the topics that are less successfully explored in *Producing Videos* include Scriptwriting and Documentary. In part, this is simply due to limitations of space and issues of focus. The "Scriptwriting" section has some useful introductory comments and provides a clear explanation of scriptwriting stages: from conceptualising the whole in an outline through to a more detailed treatment and then first draft. But some of the usual truisms about writing are reproduced. For example, "You should be able to write down the main concept in a few sentences, sometimes just one." Why? And at what stage? Isn't this something most scriptwriters can usually do after they've more fully explored the material? Can all ideas/concepts be developed from such concise statements of themes? *Producing Vidoes* provides some script pages as examples of layout. Reading these excerpts, I wondered if it might not have been appropriate to draw on a wider range of examples - preferably from contemporary short fiction, essay or documentary programs - selected not just with layout but also writing style, description of key images, sounds etc. in mind.

Similarly, the brief section devoted to issues of documentary form seems inadequate for use within tertiary courses. Complex issues of form and practice appear to have been reduced to a series of simplistic assertions about 'documentary' as opposed to 'drama documentary'. Given the book's emphasis on the range of contemporary video production (with useful sections on 'non linear editing' and 'video on the internet', for example) some attention to the new digital technologies and environments and their impact on documentary form might have been appropriate.

Overall, *Producing Videos* is an extremely useful text for video production courses in both educational and community contexts. It's strengths are clear, accessible information about the stages and processes of video production. However, the inadequacy of its material in areas such as Scriptwriting and Documentary is of concern to those of us teaching 'theoretically informed' screen writing and production and attempting to relate this teaching to a wide range of contemporary writing and production practices. I am sure these concerns would also be shared by some students. These problems seem connected to the limitations of the 'production manual' approach favoured by the *Producing Videos* writers and its almost inevitable privileging of material that can easily be broken down into stages and procedures. I would suggest that in many contexts, *Producing Videos* should be supplemented with other materials about script/program stricture and form.

Kathryn Millard teaches Screenwriting and Production within the Department of Media and Communications Studies at Macquarie University. Her credits as a writer and director include the documentary "Light Years" and the one hour drama "Parklands".

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Green Lizard Manifesto

review by Thomas Shapcott

Christopher Kelen
Green Lizard Manifesto
Cerberus (fierce mongrel guarding hell's gate) Press, 878 Markwell Rd,
Markwell NSW 2423

An intriguingly rich collection of 96 pages, which is quite a lot, and which imposes on any poet the task of transmitting their particular voice and cadence, without faltering or fudging it, over a considerable span of work. Christopher Kelen brings this off remarkably well, and with an immediately convincing and idiosyncratic tone of his own.

I was delighted that he prefaced his collection with a cheeky quotation from Robert Herrick's "To the Soure Reader".

> If thou disliks't the piece thou lights't on first;
> Think that of All, that I have writ, the words;
> But if thou reads't my book unto the end,
> And still dos't this, and that verse, reprehend:
> O Perverse man! If All digustfull be,
> The extreme Scabbe take thee, and thine, for me.

Well, this reader emerged scabless: from the very first Kelen poem I was wakened to an alert, taut, playful writer with a very real and personal sense of words. I think the Herrick quote prepared me for how and where to look (and listen): Herrick has a similar jaunty freshness with language, lyrical but unexpected, twisting our expectations with received phrases and tweaking them, and, most of all, convincing the reader that it had to be like this. What takes you by surprise, quickly becomes seemingly inevitable. That is exactly how I found Christopher Kelen's own contemporary lyricism.

The opening poem importantly throws us right into the challenge Kelen is setting us:

> scribble my making
> listening clues in vast corner
> paws of earth head of cut skies
> cock hearth ash heart
>
> everything crooked in my garden
> everything sideways in the soul cut no branch
>
> And nip no bud
>
> today in this wind
> taller than the eye can wish
>
> let everything go wild today
>
> tame no words and shape no sense
> let the spirits call our names
> and we will all requite them
>
> let everything wild in a day of big tides
> let each have its say
> let us run out of words
> in scratching to shape something
>
> cannot be spelled
> calls itself by our names
>
> then put a hat upon
> lusts with which we're made

then sing a lightest touch

ensouling sense
in the river runs over us
selves unsaid
let everything grow wild today

The small shock of dislocation ('let everything wild in a day of big tides') is balanced with those sweet, vivid images, a concertina effect pulling everything in tighter. This works, mainly because the cadence echoes longer (older?) rhythms that our ears respond to eagerly, in the same way that Robert Herrick's outrageous conceits work because they catch us, unexpected, in the midst of an anticipated sense of order. Kelen often counterpoints his nouns-as-verbs with echoes of older, more formal cadences ('everything sideways in the soul', 'and we will all requite them'). In modern verse, this is risk taking and time and again Kelen brings it off. It is as if he were reminding us, gently, that there is a tradition. And that it is not totally played out, even if we postmodern it knowingly.

With such a striking opening poem, the author sets himself a real task: how to maintain and expand the integrity and perhaps even the inevitability of that voice he has now established? One of the triumphs of the collection is that Christopher Kelen does just that. The sequence of poems builds more and more surely upon the voice initially established, and proves it to be flexible and always full of surprises that convince us they are inevitable. In a second collection by a newish poet, that is impressive.

The collection really gets off to a full start with a group of poems called *From Republics*. In this group, the long open prose-poem 'Republic' is just the right sort of substantial number to convince with its invention and its extended inclusiveness. It is enough to make you never want to use the word 'republic' again (no, I don't think Kelen is a Monarchist, either!). This is succeeded by a whole group of short and wittily playful poems, only one of which ('Reffos') seemed to become too congealed with its own allusiveness. But 'Ming' has to be almost an instant classic:

Magic of Ming is everywhere.
His was the throne of Oz, time was.
Friend of foes and sells us out,
gives them our mountains, packs
us off. Sad duty sinks in that
therefore. Calm and stern, our
brave papa, his fireside bottle
full of reds. Not Ben, not Doc,
not Arthur. Vastness of the panto
master makes the motor grovel.
Can't see the crown, holds off
the hoards, minions work
the miracles. Despite his ease,
his quarter acre, gadgets in
the kitchen now. His throne of
common sense, the motionless
grey swallowing. Magic of Ming
is everywhere! And with us
forever whatever we care!

The poems get richer and in the central section there are pieces that inhabit a natural world with an identity as honest and secure as the early Les Murray. His lyricism, incidentally, for this readers had echoes of the early Ray Mathew and his lyrical language games.

'Macro-skills' appears about two thirds through the collection. It is a very appealing poem about the poet and gives it to us straight:

All poets have a speaking voice
with which they do their this and that,
their I supposes, death and taxes
with which they make such fond denials
if only to catch listeners short.

('fond denials' is another example of how Kelen plays back upon older language conventions to trap us again). The book ends with a group of travel poems and pieces - from Java to Amsterdam and Hungary. These show the poet working through a wider range of material and testing out his particular voice in different ways. If these later poems lack the intensity of the main sections of the book (too much diversity, too much kodakulture) they do show the poet preparing himself for further challenges. I, for one, look forward eagerly to where he goes from here. (Has he written

more poems on his Hungarian travels, for instance, where one might expect some personal ancestor haunting?) He is already atop an impressive coastal range and we can hear his coo-eee splendidly.

Thomas Shapcott's most recent book is the novel Theatre of Darkness *(Random House, 1988).*

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Economic Rationalism Meets Contemporary Poetry-Fiction; Or Where is that Old Black Magic?

review by Barry Westburg

Verandah 12 (1997)
Anna Coleman, Kate Johnstone, Barbara Oakman, Caitlin Punshon, Winnie Salamon, Gary Smith and Kate Whitfield eds.
Burwood Campus, Deakin University
ISSN 0818-2124

So we live here
Forever taking leave

- Rilke

I just finished digesting the twelfth issue of *Verandah*. This is a literary magazine emanating from the Burwood Campus of Deakin University. I think it is a good magazine, distinguished of its kind. Of its kind. I was at first reluctant to read it, since the actual process of reading all the way through a "literary" magazine ranks of late fairly low on my agenda, what with Spring in the air. But then I heard on my beloved Radio National that only a minority of blokes these days bother to read fiction and poetry. Guys, if they read at all, will reach for the biography or the history. So I felt challenged: Was I one of those brutes? Why would guys not want to read poetry and fiction?

With this ABC sound-bite on the scandalous demographics of readership ringing in my ears, I cracked the covers of Verandah 12. Relax! Guys are still writing fiction-and poetry. One of the seven editors is a guy. The table of contents, besides quickly reassuring me as to gender-balance (remember gender-balance?) usefully breaks down its contents generically: Poetry (36 instances), fiction (8 instances), artwork (7 instances), "prose" (2 instances), and essay (1 instance).

The sole essay, on "migrant literature as symbolic capital", hovers in lone splendor, provocatively, in ironic relationship to the creative contents of *Verandah 12*, and that tempts me to imagine an intent - a playful or perhaps even satanic editorial process behind this mag. For, unless in some Pickwickian sense we are all migrants, there is precious little migrant literary capital - symbolic or otherwise - being "produced" in this anthology. In fact, the first thing that began to dawn on me as I read from cover to cover, was - despite the varied content and the stylistic expertise displayed in so many of the individual pieces - a claustrophobic sense of what maybe could be called "monoculturalism". Or maybe the absence of difference. If I had time to read through the elephantine bibliography at the end of Leah Saunders' brief academic-style think-piece I might emerge better instructed as to what name I might give to all this absence of difference: The presence of sameness? (And yet others might feel a warming sense of the Return of the Familiar.)

Or maybe once again I am dead wrong. And being unfair. And picking on just one rather well-produced mag out of so many struggling organs. This monoculturalism might be the presence of Zeitgeist. And, in particular, the presence of a specifically literary moment or culture within the Zeitgeist. The presence, if you like, of a tacit agreement about how authentic writing must be produced. Very likely writing programs are the sites where this tacit knowledge is produced and disseminated. If we are in the presence of a specifically literary culture when we read *Verandah*, then perhaps the search for difference would be for difference at the same level - for nuances, as it were. Or for differences at the level of subject rather than a shared aesthetic.

If you read *Verandah* backwards, you discover your map to the monoculture. Stuck way in the back by the dunny and the rusty lawnmower is a "prose" piece by Jim Buck called "Get Real." This is presumably an impersonation of the monologic voice of the Writing Program. (Is "Jim Buck" an invention, like Huck Finn?). This imagined Writing Program is currently promoting Dirty Realism. Dirty Realism is probably yesterday's name for what we see in this anthology as traces of a literary subculture in shock no doubt from Economic Rationalism. The stories and the poems seem to have emanated from product-testing laboratories where toxic experiments are being performed on human subjects and where these subjects are even forced to experiment on themselves. Where all of us humanoids have been stripped jaybird naked in some awful delousing chamber at the end of the Second Millennium. We have no childhood, no past, no lovers, no families, no jobs, no talents, no prospects, no jokes, no music - no place. Is this the sign or symptom of the triumph of globalism, of global entropy? If we have a past, it is one of obscure victimisation

(Kylie Monty, "An Artless Affair"); if we have families, they are sites of abuse; if we have lovers, either we or they, or both, are betrayers or just indifferent ("Tumble" a very clever story by Ashlley Morgan-Shae; "Lucy's Self," another good one by Emma Appleton). If we have futures…well, futures are for the Stock Exchange,

Three renowned writers from three far flung continents contribute to this issue of *Verandah*: Les Murray, Margaret Atwood, and Seamus Heaney. The first two have submitted workshop-shavings, but Heaney's contribution is two pieces ("Translated by the author from the Gaelic of Antoine Raftery 1784-1836"), which to me are the touchstones for this anthology. (By the way, editors, there are at least three typos in as many pages of Heaney's poetry. Is that a nice way to treat a Nobel Laureate? Not to mention the inconsistent spelling of his name!) Most of the poetry in this anthology deliberately eschews musicality. Perhaps, like humour (which also makes a rare appearance), music's a luxury item we can no longer afford. Poetry itself must no longer appear luxurious - gratifying in and for itself - or it will get its funding cut. Poetry had better get down to business. And it better be profound, too, or it is wasting our time. There is one villanelle in this anthology. Villanelles are 'sposed to be pretty and sonorous and maybe even sound profound. Villanelle form is a little contraption like a music box, guaranteed to spin deep echoes out of almost any skein of words. But in this one we get the not much other than the sound of a broken spring. (What economists call the ratchet effect?) By comparison, next door down the corridor, is "Raftery's Killeaden" by Heaney. It is a poet's Keynesian vision of earthly paradise, at once retrospective and prospective, laced with rich undertones of elegy and irony. Here the human voice, though migratory as a stormy petrel, has an imaginative grasp of place and time, of homing instinct, compassion and companionship, and this is conveyed in the reassurance of music itself, levitated by wit and humour. O where are the songs of yesteryear?

The spare non-committal clinicism of many of the other pieces (E.g. "The Question of Keeping Lists," by Mary Szymanski; "Swimming" by Cathy Randall) contrasts starkly with the gorgeous inventories of Heaney's poet. Is this Enlightenment rationalism reborn as a minimalist style for Hard Times? Many other stories and poems here are segmented into lists and some of these are numbered. ("Number, the language of science"). Accordingly, many of the "alienating" anti-humanist hyperreality-enhancing devices of the French nouveau Roman and later American surfictionists are well-integrated into this new monoculture of letters. In Rebecca Law's very expert narrative, "The Fade-Out," one of the most accomplished in this mag, we taste, as elsewhere the flinty nadas of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Robert Coover. In poetry, see the fine piece by John Allison, "The Point of Departure," from which I have stolen my Rilke epigraph, which sums up the Zeitgeist so consistently and so well displayed in *Verandah 12*. By the way, when you read this mag don't miss "A Hot Dry Country" by Nathan Jackson-Smith. Or Steven Warburton's fine photographs.

Barry Westburg's most recent volume of short fiction, Rage of Angels, *(Wakefield Press) was launched at this year's Adelaide Festival.*

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Iron Lace

review by Terri-ann White

Iron Lace
Anne Bartlett, Cath Kenneally, Lesley Kinnoch and glen r johns (eds)
University of Adelaide, 1998.

Student creative writing publications are sites of great importance, and should be celebrated as such. They can be the place where writers are first published and therefore can be cited along a career, beyond the memory merely of a department, an institution. Through the goodwill and skills of the editors and coordinators they are an asset to a creative writing program and a contribution to the reputation and sense of the work that is being done in that teaching institution. And, generally, a thrill to each of the writers represented. They are never limited to a departmental readership because the multiple contributors always have families and friends and make sure that the publication is widely sighted.

Iron Lace is an anthology of writing by students from the 1997 Graduate Diploma in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide. That it has been produced out of the gastronomical capital of Australia, Adelaide is pretty obvious from the contributions: of the nineteen poems and eighteen stories, I think I can only identify one that doesn't involve food; sometimes it's a peripheral thing, but more often a central concern or device. I'm pleased that the annual AAWP conference is being held in Adelaide this year, she thinks, anticipating fine dining pleasures.

A few points are worth explaining at the beginning. This publication marks the first year of a creative writing program at the University of Adelaide as a result of the appointment of Tom Shapcott as Professor of Creative Writing. Judging from the tone of excitement in the preface by Eva Sallis, the year was highly charged and productive and a venture that impacted upon the other business of the English Department valuably. Having just finished reading Kevin Brophy's *Creativity*, Reviewed in this issue where he argues for creative writing remaining within departments of English and not sequestered out on their own, I am pleased to read Sallis on "the two worlds are each permeated by the other" and how good this new development is.

Creative writing programs in universities are fascinating constructed places: all that opening up into personal voice in spaces that have traditionally eschewed the private, the intimate, the confessed. Not that all writing becomes those whispered secrets: that isn't what I am suggesting. But the observation of many outsiders is that it is an uneasy fit, this valuing of the practice of making literature alongside the critical study of it. For me, it is a perfect marriage. To scrutinise the product of the labour of other writers, to look at the context out of which it is made and received, and to hold it all up to the light of a range of theoretical devices to make sense of the whole enterprise and of ourselves, and to be engaged in a parallel adventure of finding your own voice and material and writing in a supported and charged atmosphere, is a brilliant praxis of theory and action. Workshops can contribute to the accelerated development of a creative writer, move the tentative markings done in the privacy of a dark corner at home into a communication that has been formed through ideas and the crafting of language, opened up to scrutiny and suggestion, and then often submitted for publication.

This means, of course, that some of the writing might not have had as much time to mature as required to be fully realised and successful work. The editors have made their choices based on writing submitted to them, and this means that there has already been two decisions made about the poem or story or fragment. Firstly the writer has been bold enough to hand it over for consideration, and then the editors have chosen it to be included.

What you get with a publication like *Iron Lace* is the 'usual' range: an amazing collection of voices and writerly decisions - about form, about experimentation, about the dipping of little toes into unknown waters (and sometimes the full immersion of the body - as a dive or a belly flop). What student writers should do best is to take risks and try out some new steps.

Some of these writers, though, while they are enrolled in a diploma course in writing, are already really proven as writers. They have had their own books published as well as work in journals and anthologies. I'm particularly referring to the poets Cath Kenneally and Steve Evans, both well known nationally. Looking at the biographical notes gave me a wonderful sense of just how charged and lively the year must have been from the wealth of experiences the writers have brought with them to their university course. It serves as a place of consolidation, then, and a chance to push things.

And back to that idea of writing not quite matured enough, yet. Some of the works are a little too descriptive, a little stiff: they haven't had the chance to be stretched as far as they might, to take on another life, to fulfil their

potentiality. But that is the package deal involved in any anthology. You sample it, for what you like and what you don't, what you see could be done better. At my university, we use our biennial student publications as texts, so that the following intake of students is reading work produced last year and the year before. This engenders a good sense of generosity as well as an entry into the world of what is possible in a semester-long workshop routine that includes making work for assessment.

Iron Lace is, hopefully, the first of a series of publications that will continue and thrive; a student initiative, led and run by students. We should congratulate them for that.

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