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Introduction: Creative writing and sport

Until the mid to late 1960s in Australia, the very act of writing about sport – traditionally and essentially a working-class pursuit – would see the words immediately discounted from literary consideration. We now know sport of all kinds to be strong social, historical, increasingly political, and cultural touchstones for many communities here and elsewhere. Through its exploration of the relationships between creative writing and sport, this special issue comfortably eschews the lazy, though sturdy, conventions often ascribed to sports writing – the back page box scores, hagiographic biographies, and relentless match reportage – in favour of examinations of the intersectional, illuminations of the liminal, and foregrounding of the interdisciplinary and eclectic experiences the writing of sport can offer. As a collection, the articles in this issue illustrate the vast array of theoretical approaches brought to sports writing; they survey creative non-fiction and journalistic practices and situate poetry and short and long-form prose related to a diverse range of sporting activities alongside investigations of representation, interrogations of histories, and the combination of creative writing and sports practices as an approach to address trauma.

The contributors' voices are as diverse as the intersections of sports and writing in the landscapes they study. They juxtapose and contrast investigations of creative practice with analyses of sports literature and uncover revelations on sport in journalism and the production of new poetry, memoir, and fiction. Importantly, the issue gathers the work of emerging early career researchers together with that of some of Australia's most renowned sports scholars, and provides a strong representation of international scholarship. The editors are immensely grateful for all of the authors' contributions, for their engagement with the broad spectrum of the sporting human experience and its emergent and established themes. The contributors come to this special issue, arms wide, hearts open, with abundant and skilled academic understanding, compelling creative work, and dynamic insight. Their work offers new perspectives on, of, and in sports writing, providing new understandings of the significance of

sport in text, and extending creative writing and related interdisciplinary research through the employment of alternative lenses to view, and re-view, writing and sport.

As an excellent example of the rich texture and diversity in sports writing, the first article of the special issue delivers an evocative analysis of the cowboy myth, its related sporting activities in the rodeo and its existence in poetry. Christina Thatcher draws our attention to the exclusionary history of poetics in cowboy narratives and the construction of the concept of the ‘Anglo cowboy’. The author recognises, and goes some way to address, the invisibility of racially diverse riders in rodeo and its cow herding traditions. The article’s central examination is the absence of the cowgirl and the position, at once feminine and athletic, she holds in the space. To better inform her discussion, Thatcher presents two poems that work to expose pre-existing narratives, challenge the treatment of women in rodeo, and speak to long-held, outmoded, social hierarchies.

From cowgirls, we move to football (soccer), arguably the world’s most popular sport, and the subject of the second paper. Through his analysis of Diablo Santiago Chiquero’s 2016 short-story collection, *Once goles y la vida mientras* [*Eleven Goals and Life Goes On*], Adam Winkel interrogates the intersection of fiction and memory. Winkel discusses how the sporting moment, such as a goal, can impact those directly involved (the players), as well as those participating at various indirect levels (the fans and football’s extended communities), and the ways the lasting effects of these experiences inform memory and identity. Winkel teases out the complexity of characters in Chiquero’s writing and explores the complicated and contradictory positions of the fans who imbue an activity they inherently understand as a simple game with such layers of emotion and meaning.

Following Winkel’s consideration of the intersections of football and memory, Gráinne Daly interrogates the interplay of memory and the geography of a range of sporting sites – those locations that people gather in to pursue and/or consume sport. The author locates a number of sporting spaces in Dublin and examines the ways these spaces serve as “literary embodiments of memorial consciousness”. Volumes have been written on sport in Irish society, and volumes have been written on the sociological aspects of Irish literature. Where literature and sport are intrinsic to memory and the expression of culture, Daly’s analyses reveal the capacity for sport in literature from the late nineteenth century to today to elucidate the dialogic relationships between sports sites, memory, and Irish literature. The writing of the city’s literature, Daly argues, can be used to map its sporting heritage. The intersection of its sporting sites and the written word enable creation of a topographical view of its cultural and collective memory.

The theme of sport as site of connection continues as Sepandarmaz Mashreghi, through reflexive poetry practice, examines the impact of physical activity on Khorasani asylum seekers living in Sweden. Mashreghi challenges colonial ways of knowing in relation to sport and illustrates the capacity of sport to provide the tools for the reconstruction of identity and belonging for those who experience marginalisation. The author embraces the traditional poetic methods of her people – the Khorasani peoples of central/western Asia – to reveal her engagement with, and the expression and dissemination of, the experiences of displaced Afghani young people. Mashreghi’s perspective affords reflection on interdisciplinary research in a sport for development context and reminds us that all writing, whether academic or

creative, has the power to reinforce and/or challenge dominant ideologies and institutions, to bring silenced ways of knowing into re-existence.

To bring the knowing of a sport into re-existence is central to Kasey Symons' paper, which explores fan interaction during the third season (2019) of the Australian Football League's (AFL) national professional women's competition, AFLW. The paper examines and analyses audio and written content collected and presented during a featured section of Kate O'Halloran's AFLW themed radio show, *Kick Like a Girl*. The section, *Voices from the Stands*, highlights fans' accounts and feelings, and counters assumptions around match attendance and experiences, particularly for those returning to the sport following a voluntary departure due to disillusionment or their active exclusion as a result of toxic elements of culture around the men's competition. Symons' paper examines these fan narratives to highlight an emerging fan space that challenges portrayals of fandom in literature as well as notions around the elemental constitution of a "real fan".

The expression of hidden or silenced thoughts and memories sits at the heart of the article co-authored by Donna Lyon, Claire Gaskin, and Gabrielle Everall, who explore the creative and reflexive re-telling, re-claiming, and re-storying of experiences of disconnection and shame associated with trauma and survival of childhood sexual abuse. Their paper captures personal accounts of traumatic experiences explored through a non-contact boxing program centred on a creativity and wellbeing research initiative that targeted female survivors. The article meditates on understandings of "self as a lived and (dis)embodied space" that emerge from the personal accounts of survivors who participated in the 2020 University of Melbourne creative arts and sports intervention program, *Left / Write // Hook*. The paper observes the ways that the processes of writing inform trauma, trauma informs writing, and embodied acts of boxing inform movement of trauma stored in the body. We would like to provide a content warning to readers that this article includes personal accounts of rape, incest, and the long-term and adverse effects of childhood sexual abuse.

During periods of personal or economic disruption and instability, people often experience what Amelia Walker describes as "uprootedness". Through autoethnography and discourse analysis of cues contained in DVDs of choreographed barbell fitness classes, Walker contemplates group fitness as a textual practice and site for creative writing research analysis. The methods employed by the author reveal the ways that creative approaches to research can inform cultural attitudes and deepen our understanding of human responses to uprooting situations, including the first waves of the COVID-19 outbreaks and the global financial challenges emergent in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The author contextualises the call of moral philosopher, Elizabeth Minnich, to revive Hannah Arendt's theory via attention to "the evil of banality" by aligning Arendtian writings on twentieth-century totalitarianism with Simone Weil's account of "the need for roots".

On the subject of unprecedented changes in an environment, the final research article returns to football, this time to focus on the development of writing in Britain's quality broadsheet newspapers across the game's transformation from working-class pursuit to its current status as obscenely lucrative economic engine. Echoing previously noted dismissals of negatively perceived literary value, this form of football writing is usually relegated from consideration.

Yet since the 1930s, through innovation and evolution of the work of literary sports writers, such as Don Davies, Brian Glanville, and Hugh McIlvanney, some football writing has gained the same regard and high cultural status as political or arts journalism. This paper's central focus is on Kevin McCarra, arguably the most recent innovator in football's move away from the functional narrative and inverted pyramid toward deeper intellectual analyses of the game's cultural and social import. McCarra's work for *The Guardian* (2002–2020), exemplified and broke new ground in the literary approaches to football writing. Paddy Hoey, Lee McGowan, and David Forrest analyse McCarra's position in the context of contemporary football writing.

Before concluding this special issue, the editors are delighted to include two works of analytical commentary that challenge attitudes toward, and the histories and portrayal of, women and Indigenous Australians in sports literature and other forms of sports writing. Marion Stell and Roy Hay, two of Australia's most esteemed sports historians, underline the importance of their broader bodies of work in papers that uncover "hidden" histories, examining underrepresented and marginalised narratives in Australian sports, and offering sharp and poignant considerations in their respective reviews. Stell reminds us that the absence of women in mainstream sports media does not reflect their absence in related sports literature. Rather her work challenges us to *see* them. While the presentation of their actions and efforts in narrative works may persuade readers to ignore them, sporting women are undoubtedly there. Across a compelling engagement with memoir, creative non-fiction, prose, and poetry, from outback horse riding to trout fishing, the researcher deepens our understanding of women's "cultural knowledge of sport" by examining the multitudinous ways women – particularly in Australia – have been the agents of their own narratives of sport and physical activity. Stell encourages us to seek alternative sources and to look beyond narrow parameters attributed to sports literature and its socially accepted definitions. In his review of nineteenth century Australian newspaper sports writing, Roy Hay seeks to review the presentation and portrayal of Indigenous athletes in Australian newspaper reportage in the second half of the nineteenth century. This article explores the value of the sporting press as a means to understand the contributions of Indigenous athletes to sporting activities in the same period and begins to reveal the previously hidden extent of their contribution to modern Australian sporting histories.

The collection concludes with a creative piece by American writer, Scott Peterson. The editorial team felt it important to feature an example of creative practice reflective of some of the discussions that occur across the special issue. The excerpt from Peterson's baseball novel, currently a work in progress, highlights the application of creative practice as research. The author engages with historical record, and investigates and re-imagines the sports writers and the press box at the 1922 World Series. Creative practice is deployed to depict and unpack a well-known sporting event through the perspective of fictive narratives of real people to bring to life, and provide insight beyond, the potential exclusionary nature of existing sports journalism accounts.

The collation of research articles, commentary, and creative work in this special issue underline the difficulties in definitions of sports writing and negate boundaries placed around its form. This issue reveals theoretical, practical, creative, and conceptual approaches to creative writing

and sport where sports writing is under-recognised as a creative practice. Narratives of race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and sporting level, from the serious and professional to simple means of engagement with community, intersect with research of writing and sports literature and practice. Where the act of sports writing as intellectual pursuit is seen as cultural or has been politicised, we are afforded rich and fertile territory to explore sports' many and multifarious issues. These articles are a reminder that writing about sport, as with sport itself, is dynamic, and engages with the complexity and nuance of human emotion and experience. It is a site of cultural and collective memory-making.

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