

WRITING



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EDUCATION

Place-based creativity: Wyl Menmuir on independent writing spaces in schools; Peter Cooley writing in the wake of Hurricane Katrina

NAWE Conference Collection 2015: Anne Caldwell; Caroline Carver; Mandy Coe & Kaye Tew; Maureen Fenton; Victoria Field; Elizabeth Forbes; Paul Francis; Mike Harris; Andrea Holland; Gill James; Joan Michelson; Alyson Morris & Tim Kelly

plus: Paul Magee on poetry and acting; The Boat Is Coming (Part 2)



@NaweWriters

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Cover photo credit: Steve Tanner (see pages 49–52)

EDITORIAL

It is a curious pleasure to introduce an edition focusing on the NAWE Conference 2015 – the first one I have ever missed! Being so very familiar with the format, the tone of creative enquiry and camaraderie that characterizes the event, and now reading so many interesting accounts of what was explored, I am beginning to imagine that I was there after all. Of course, when attending the actual event (and especially as organizer) one is never able to attend more than a fraction of the individual sessions, so even those of you who were indeed there will probably make new discoveries here. Those who have never made it to our conference will I hope find considerable enticement – not only in the variety of topics, and the generous sharing of educational strategies, but also the sense of collaboration, and community. I think it is evident, from Victoria Field’s reflective article in particular, how the conference is not merely an academic exchange, but a wonderfully dynamic, social, and above all *writerly* event within which writers who give their time so tirelessly to others, in a variety of educational contexts, gain creative replenishment themselves. The NAWE Conference is unique amongst those of its equivalent organizations in other parts of the world in its emphasis on the creative writing workshop within its programme. (Yes, it’s strange that this isn’t the case elsewhere.) Articles by Joan Michelson, Gill James, Paul Francis, Mandy Coe and Kaye Tew – and Victoria Field herself – all give an insight into the workshops that took place.

Victoria also highlights the international dimension of the event. I was pleased that one of my University of Canberra colleagues (Niloofer Fanaiyan) was present, among several other Australians, who generally find it easier (and the weather more appealing) traveling during June to Graeme Harper’s Great Writing Conference, held at Imperial College London. I attended that event myself last year, and it was there that I heard Peter Cooley give his engaging talk about writing in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I’m pleased to be publishing his work in this edition; it is, apart from anything else, good to have creative work itself getting significant exposure – together with an absorbing account of how it emerged. This, you might think, is material more suited to our newer journal, *Writing in Practice*, but the expectation there is for a particular type of scholarly purpose. By the same token, recent articles in *Writing in Practice* that focus on teaching, (those, for example, by Tony McMahon and Tresa LeClerc) might well be considered to belong here instead. There is of course a connective domain between the two publications and the distinction between them is partly one of readership, and style.

We also include here our regular columns, relating to ongoing projects – and from colleagues overseas. Kathy Flann, in her “Letter from America” writes intriguingly about getting to grips with the business of self-promotion. “No one teaches you this stuff”, she writes, though here, through the Writer’s Compass and the Young Writers’ Hub, we have been doing just that. Universities themselves are increasingly incorporating such matters into their writing courses (though needing to hold back from suggesting that publication is a student’s prime aim). A hard-hitting article on the current state of universities occupies the final pages of this edition. Mike Harris may have thrown in the academic towel, but he’s clearly kept a pair of boxing gloves to hand.

Paul Munden

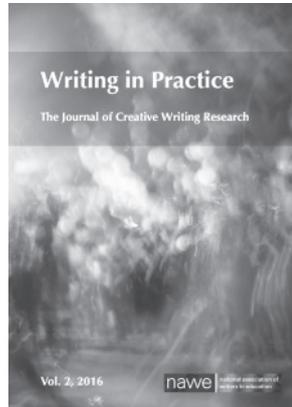
DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Following on from my editorial comments, I'd like to give further mention to *Writing in Practice*, the second volume of which is now accessible on the NAWE website. It was edited by Kathy Flann, Holly Howitt-Dring, Keith Jebb and Kate North – overseen by Maggie Butt as Principal Editor, before she handed over to Harry Whitehead.

As Maggie highlights in her introduction, the edition is thoroughly international: five of the articles are by authors living and working in Australia, and of the five authors based in the UK, one is Canadian-Welsh and another Nigerian-German. We trust that this international profile will be sustained, while of course encouraging more NAWE members to contribute.

Submissions are invited to volume 3 until 17 June 2016. We should like to stress, again, that we are looking for scholarly articles that explore the art of imaginative writing *from an authorial perspective*; the inclusion of examples of the author's own creative work itself is therefore all but mandatory.



With *Writing in Education*, we shall once again be including more members as part of the editorial team, and I shall soon be writing to those who volunteered but have not as yet had the opportunity to be involved.

This being the first edition since our Annual General Meeting within the Durham Conference, I should like to welcome the new Management Committee – currently a compact team of four: Jane Bluett, Jonathan Davidson, Keith Jebb and Kate North. Despite the considerable strengths of the group (and some virtues of its size), we will undoubtedly be looking to co-opt some specific

further expertise. Looking ahead, for those members wishing to be most actively involved in the association, there will be Higher Education Committee elections taking place in the Autumn, details of which will be circulated in due course.

Celia Brayfield is currently chairing the HE Committee, and her report is on page 7. You will also find advertised a number of forthcoming events, including the Great Writing Conference, a postgraduate symposium at Cardiff Metropolitan University, exploring creative writing as a research methodology, and a symposium at the University of Winchester, which I look forward to attending together with six Canberra colleagues. Before all of that, there is the AWP Conference in Los Angeles, where 22 UK universities will be represented on the NAWE stall. The NAWE booklet that we distribute to delegates (over 10,000 expected) gives them an impression of "who's who" within the UK Creative Writing landscape. It is highly recommended for universities to be included and those who have not previously featured might well consider starting negotiations with their marketing departments now, for next year, when AWP will be in Washington DC, in its 50th anniversary year.



Finally, and most excitingly, I should like to welcome our new Programme Director, Seraphima Kennedy, who we appointed in January, following a highly competitive application process. Seraphima introduces herself in the following column, and outlines some of the projects and priorities with which she will be involved. I have the greatest confidence in Seraphima leading on those areas, and indeed representing NAWE at top level while I am overseas. She and I will work together on various fronts, including the planning of the NAWE Conference programme, when I am back in the UK during June – when I also look forward to catching up with many other members.

Paul Munden

NEW PROGRAMME DIRECTOR



It's a real thrill to be joining NAWE at such an exciting time. I took up the post of Programme Director at the beginning of March but spent some time in February getting to know the NAWE team and some of our partners.

I've met with writers, performers and researchers; with heads of department and arts organizers; with education officers and, of course, poets. I've travelled to York, Bath and Bristol – and to the upstairs room of the Poetry Café in Covent Garden for my first meeting with our dedicated and welcoming Higher Education Committee. I've been struck by the goodwill, commitment and hard work that goes into maintaining, supporting and extending the reach of an organization like NAWE. It comes from a core belief that what we do – writing and teaching writing – has value, and that this value cannot be found in other subjects.

Writers at the launch of *Paper Cities: A Creative Nation for Young Writers*

As Programme Director, I will be leading on NAWE's involvement in the Arts Council-funded Creative Writing Education Hub with Bath Spa University and Bath Festivals. *Paper Cities: A Creative Nation for Young Writers* launched at Bath's Komedia Theatre on 2 March with a performance by students from St Mark's school, Bath. It's an ambitious project, seeking to upskill a generation of teachers, and embedding high-quality creative writing teaching in areas of low cultural engagement in Bath and the region. Look out for further updates from me on this project, and for more opportunities to become involved as we progress.

I'll also be heading up our work with Artworks, Engage and the Max Reinhardt Literary Awards; steering the new PhD Network (see website for details); programming NAWE's next conference in November 2016; and building and extending relationships with our partners and networks.

By the time you read this, Maggie Butt and I will have handed in our petition against the decision to scrap the Creative Writing A Level. Almost 7,000 people signed the petition, which is a tremendous result. We'll be taking it to Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for



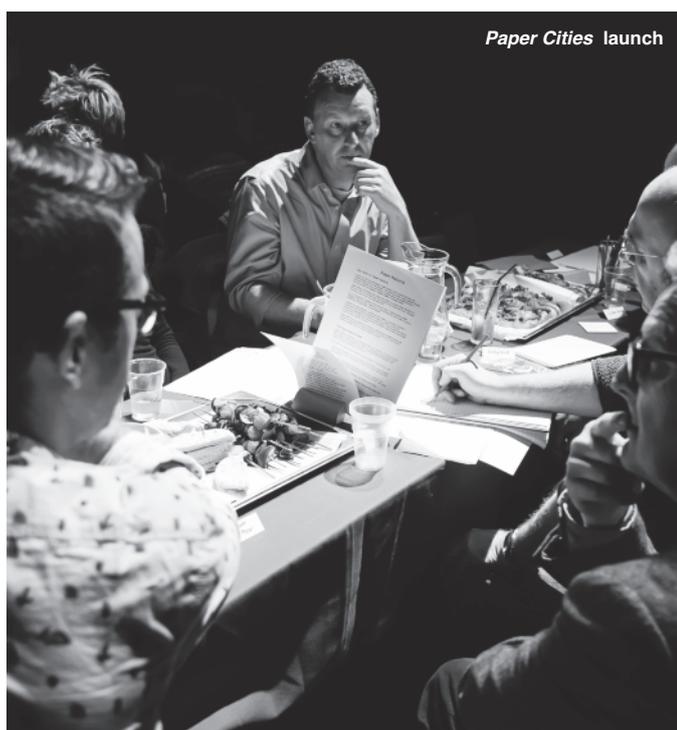
Education, and seeking engagement from members of the press. Look out for publicity on our website and on social media.

I'm looking forward to meeting as many members, supporters and partners as I can over the next few months, and to seeing new and familiar faces at our conference in Stratford in November 2016. The call for papers is now open (details opposite), and we will soon be busy plotting the programme. This year, we're particularly keen to encourage abstracts from new writers and diverse voices, and from groups working across all disciplines: not only poetry, fiction and life writing, but also digital narratives, experimental fiction, and spoken word. We're looking forward to reading your proposals – to be submitted this year online.

Thank you to everyone who has emailed or tweeted a welcome in the past few weeks. There's definitely a strong sense of a NAWE community. To me this sums up the excellent relationship that NAWE has built so far with you, its members. NAWE engages and supports writers, and its members *are* its business. I can think of no better place from which to start.

Comments, suggestions, welcome!

s.kennedy@nawe.co.uk @seraphimaAM



NAWE CONFERENCE 2016



NAWE Annual Conference, 11–13 November 2016 Stratford-upon-Avon, UK

The NAWE Annual Conference will take place this year in the beautiful medieval town of Stratford-upon-Avon, during the Shakespeare 400 celebrations.

The conference is the essential event for all those involved in creative writing at any level. It runs from Friday lunchtime through to Sunday midday, with special events scheduled in the evenings.

The conference venue is the four star Stratford Manor, perfectly located hotel for exploring the sights of Stratford-upon-Avon as well as the beautiful surrounding Warwickshire countryside. There is free parking and free wi-fi available to all delegates, plus a swimming pool, health club and spa. NAWE has exclusive use of the venue for the duration of the conference.

Booking (open from 1 April 2016)

Contributor rates (for members):

Full conference (with all meals and accommodation for two nights): £297

Full conference (with all meals but no accommodation): £162

Many other options are available, including day rates from just £36

See www.nawe.co.uk for further details.

Call for Proposals

The NAWE Conference invites writers and teachers to share their various approaches to writing and to the teaching and researching of creative writing at all levels.

Proposals are now invited, with a deadline of 1 May 2016.

Proposals should consist of a brief (100 word) outline, exactly as you would wish the session to be described in the programme, plus biographical information on all presenters (50 words each). Workshops, panel presentations and academic papers are all welcome. Please indicate the preferred type and length of your proposed contribution, eg: workshop (75 or 90 mins); shared presentation and discussion (75 or 90 mins); paper or other solo presentation (20 or 30 mins, to form part of a larger session planned by NAWE).

Please follow the submission process online at <http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-conference.html>.

Decisions will be made on all proposals during June, and programme slots confirmed in writing.

The full programme will be published in July and promoted worldwide.

All presenters need to register as delegates but benefit from a significant discount. Booking and payment deadline is 7 October.

It was by far the best conference I've ever been to and my brain is still buzzing and fizzing with excitement and inspiration. (Conference delegate 2015)

Enquiries: conference@nawe.co.uk



Stratford-upon-Avon

YOUNG WRITERS' HUB

**News from the Hub**

Since the launch of our Arts Council supported programme of activity in Spring 2015, we now have over 100 young writer members we're working with.

Membership benefits include access to the Young Writers' message boards, a profile, access to TLC Free Reads, the

weekly Writer's Compass e-bulletin, feedback, support and access to the online archive and free print compendium of our publication for young writers, *Myths of the Near Future*.

Young Writer Memberships are £20 per annum and more details can be found on the NAWE website under Membership. If you would like to sponsor a young writer or have any questions about membership, feel free to get in touch.

TLC Free Reads

We received a high volume of submissions to our Literary Consultancy manuscript appraisal bursaries and I've been busy making a shortlist of some excellent writing in various forms and genres. This follows a successful round of TLC Free Read recommendations earlier in 2015, where four young writers received excellent editorial feedback from the service.

Fearless

The seventh digital edition of *Myths of the Near Future* is looking for "fearless" writing and is assistant edited by Ella Frears. We're looking for new writing by under 25s that is surprising, confident, and allows the reader space to breathe.

Ella is a poet and visual artist working in South-East London. She has had poetry published in various publications including *BRAND*, *Smiths*, *Lighthouse* and *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, as well as poems forthcoming with The Emma Press. Ella was shortlisted

for Young Poet Laureate for London in 2014 and is currently Poet in Residence at Knole House in Kent.

If you are a NAWE member, you can download digital editions of *Myths of the Near Future* for free on the NAWE website or email me for your free PDF.

Arts Award Nano Courses

The next part of our programme of activity will be the opportunity to take part in Arts Award Nano Courses. Arts Award courses generally take place over a few months and in a physical space. Working with Nadia Gasper's Scribble Ink Story Consultancy, we will be able to offer accredited "nano" versions of the courses where young writers can take part in smaller sections of courses in their own time and submit for accreditation when they complete enough portions of the course as a whole. This approach will enable us to increase the capacity of writers we work with across the UK in a sustainable way.

***Myths* Compendium**

The first print edition of *Myths of the Near Future* will be printed and published in April. The compendium is a collected volume of the annual editions of *Myths* we've been publishing over a three year period and includes a wealth of exciting new poetry, fiction, creative non fiction, reviews and interviews with leading authors like Evie Wyld, Mario Petrucci, Ross Raisin and Helen Mort.

The Writing Squad is recruiting...

The Writing Squad is once again recruiting. The Squad is an active partner of the Young Writers' Hub, and as a graduate of the course (Squad 2, many years ago), I know just how valuable the Squad can be to a young writer.

Every two years, the Squad looks for 30 talented writers aged between 16 and 21 who work or study in the North of England to join.

Being a member includes:

- One-to-one tutoring and email feedback
- Four Squad days a year with guest professional writers

- Opportunities to work on projects
- Support and advice from a trusted network of writers

Being a part of the Squad is free. The closing date for applications is midnight Wednesday 30 March 2016. See writingsquad.com for more details or email Steve Dearden: steve@writingsquad.com.

When Lights Are Bright

“Maybe the protest is against the future?”

“Is that what protest is?”

A day in Leeds. The English Defence League and anti-globalization protesters are clashing in the streets. A schoolgirl is missing from a council estate and her parents are on the television. Contrarian journalist, James Oisin, is haunted by her face on the missing posters. He suspects the mother is behind it.

In a story about class, identity and capitalism, James’ search for the missing schoolgirl leads him to confront the truth of his past, the white working class and the consequences of his contrarianism.

For James, anonymity may be the most radical act of all.

After six years, about thirty-five drafts and losing my mind at least twice, my second novel, *When Lights Are Bright*, will be published this Spring. The launch will be at Dock 29 in Leeds on April 26 at an event called “ReWriting Ballard in Leeds” as part of Leeds Beckett University and Leeds Library’s ReWriting Yorkshire series.

Until next time.

Wes Brown
Young Writers’ Co-ordinator
w.brown@nawe.co.uk

HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS



The Higher Education Committee is one of the most dynamic and well-supported activities of NAWE and it is a great privilege for me to chair this group in 2016. With former chairs Professor Steve May and Dr Maggie Butt continuing as committee members, I feel well advised but aware of standing on giant’s shoulders.

With universities in the UK evolving in uncertain times, the committee considers a number of issues that have a major impact on writers both as tutors and as students. We had a sense that Creative Writing in higher education was progressing by two steps forward and one step back at our last meeting at the beginning of February. The publication of the Creative Writing Subject Benchmark, a document which marks the birth of Creative Writing as an independent subject at university in Britain, was imminent when we met, and has since been achieved. It is the result of years of consultation and advice from NAWE officers and membership and it is undoubtedly a major milestone. The new Benchmark Statement refers to higher degrees, but committee members are also preparing a separate Research Benchmark statement to support the increasing popularity of the PhD in Creative Writing.

Less welcome, of course, was the news last year that the Creative Writing A Level, in the development of which NAWE has also played a major role, was to be scrapped by the Department of Education, with the last qualifications to be available in 2018. The NAWE petition to overturn this decision has over 7000 signatures, many with eloquent comments, and will be presented to the Minister shortly. A suggestion which arose at the 2015 Conference was that a BTEC qualification might be introduced instead and the Committee invited NAWE’s management to investigate the pros and cons of this option.

A minor but important technical issue which the committee considered is the new coding system under which official statistics relating to Creative Writing, and

other subjects, will be collected. The present system, known as the JACS (Joint Academic Coding System) code, is anomalous and out of date. As it does not record figures under the heading of Creative Writing, much of the data collected for the subject, particularly the National Student Survey, is unsafe. HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) is introducing a new system and has invited consultation on a draft proposal. While this at least names our subject correctly, it seems to have significant omissions. We were also concerned that HESA's initiative to "consult stakeholders" did not appear to include NAWE in that number, and so have recommended that NAWE ask to take part in the process.

What happens to our graduates? Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education, has been quick to criticize humanities subjects in general on the grounds that they offer graduates poor career prospects, and we are not in a strong position to combat prejudice in high places without the facts to back up our anecdotal observation that our graduates contribute successfully to the creative economy. The committee is to develop our own system of tracking alumni.

After the conference presentation by Dr Susan Greenberg, the committee is looking forward to *The Academic Book of the Future*, a major new research project from the Arts & Humanities Research Council and the British Library, which is holding a conference in May to discuss open access publishing and the digital revolution. Universities are now establishing open-access research archives on-line, in which all doctoral theses will be deposited. This has obvious implications for Creative Writing PhDs, in which a major part of the thesis is often a creative work intended for commercial publication. If this work were to be available in an open-access on-line archive, it becomes much less attractive to agents or publishers.

If you work in higher education, you may be aware that one of the major academic unions, the University & College Union (UCU) has launched a campaign, Stamp Out Casual Contracts, to improve the employment conditions of lecturers employed casually throughout UK universities, often on contracts which are highly disadvantageous. While it is becoming common for as much as 50% of a faculty to be made up of casually-contracted tutors, this is a particular issue in Creative

Writing, where a high staff-student ratio is essential, and we suspect that many NAWE members are employed this way. The committee will be surveying the membership to determine the strength of interest in this issue, and also plan to meet UCU officers and the Society of Authors to help push for a better deal.

Dr Celia Brayfield, Chair, NAWE HE Committee

HIGHER EDUCATION EVENTS

Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP)

The 50th Anniversary AWP Conference and Bookfair will be held at the Washington Convention Center and Washington Marriott Marquis, 8–11 February 2017. The Call for Proposals opens during March and closes on 1 May 2016.

https://www.awpwriter.org/awp_conference

Make every word hurt: prose, poetry and creative culture

A Symposium with lunch followed by the Pop-up-Culture Café is to be held at the University of Winchester on 16 June 2016, where a number of academic poets and prose writers from the UK, Australia and the USA will gather to deliver papers, a Q & A session and generally discuss prose poetry in a literary and cultural context. Poetry is often disregarded in the literary and popular culture canon, prose poetry even more so and yet it has never been so vibrant. More details will be released shortly.

To be added to the mailing list please email andrew.melrose@winchester.ac.uk or paul.munden@canberra.edu.au

Great Writing Conference

Imperial College London, 18–19 June 2016

<http://www.greatwriting.org.uk>
greatwritingoffice@yahoo.com

Writing Between the Lines

A one-day postgraduate symposium exploring creative writing as a research methodology
Cardiff School of Education, Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff
Metropolitan University, Wales, UK
Saturday 3 September 2016

Keynote Speaker: Professor Kevin Mills (University of South Wales)

With a fusion of theory and imagination, fresh visions may be realized and broader evaluations become possible. If research is the methodical investigation of a subject or subjects in order to discover, uncover, develop and provide new knowledge, then postgraduate study in Creative Writing and Critical Practice becomes a powerful and worthy combined discipline within the academy.

This symposium seeks to bring together postgraduate candidates, teachers and practitioners to examine the relationship between theoretical study and creative practice with the aim of improving and upholding the sustainability of this expanding discipline at Masters and Doctoral level.

All delegates are invited to join a round table discussion of the research aspects within the creation of Dr David Oprava's forthcoming experimental novel entitled *The Codex Epiphany*, directly following this symposium.

Queries and correspondence regarding the conference should be addressed to Dr Lucy Windridge
luwindridge@cardiffmet.ac.uk
or Selina Philpin sephilpin@cardiffmet.ac.uk.
Queries regarding organization, accommodation and logistics should be addressed to Huw Jones and/or Donna O'Flaherty, conference administrators at:
cseenterprise@cardiffmet.ac.uk

For more information regarding this symposium, visit:
<http://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/education/enterprise/conferences/Pages/Writing-Between-The-Lines.aspx>



Cardiff
Metropolitan
University

Prifysgol
Metropolitan
Caerdydd



The European Association of Creative Writing Programmes (EACWP)

The EACWP will hold its next annual symposium and 3rd Pedagogical Conference in Turin, 21–25 September, 2016. The event will be hosted by Scuola Holden.

A number of EACWP members attended the NAWE Conference in Durham, and a brief report by Harriet Nachtmann from the Vienna Poetry School is available at: <http://eacwp.org/eacwps-participation-in-nawes-annual-conference/>

2016 Creative Writing Studies Conference

This new conference focusing on research and scholarship in creative writing will be held at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina 23–24 September 2016

<http://creativewritingstudies.org/content/conference>

English: Shared Futures

A major conference across the disciplines
Newcastle Civic Centre, 5–7 July 2017

The English Association, University English (the body for HE Departments of English) and the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), with support from the Institute of English Studies, are organizing a huge conference for the whole of the discipline of English in Newcastle in 2017.

<http://www.englishsharedfutures.uk>

HE NEWS: AUSTRALIA



We are currently inviting abstracts and expressions of interest for our 21st Annual Conference, hosted by the University of Canberra. The conference is themed “Authorised Theft: Writing, Scholarship, Collaboration”, and will explore the processes

of making creative works in writing. It will enable investigations of how we make and say; and it will provide opportunities to explore how creative writers engage with research.

Papers are invited in four streams:

- a refereed scholarly stream (a work of scholarship on or about creative practice, intended for inclusion in the published conference proceedings);
- a refereed creative stream (a creative work accompanied by a scholarly research statement, intended for inclusion in the published conference proceedings);
- a general (non-refereed) scholarly stream; and
- a general (non-refereed) creative stream; this should incorporate a scholarly framework that will be presented along with the creative element.

The 21st annual conference of the AAWP will be a site for the exploration of the processes of making creative works in writing. TS Eliot famously said that mature poets steal, and we steal his idea for the framework for this conference. Where do we find the sources for our ideas, our language, our stories? What are the ethics of making through theft, homage, citation, appropriation? What modes of poesis are involved?

The conference will showcase creative works and highlight creative modes of writing.

Papers and creative presentations are encouraged to explore, but are not limited to, the following:

- Writing as homage or as theft
- Collaborative practice
- The economy of writing
- Indigenous writing and Australasia
- Sociologies of writing
- Changing the guard: generational change in writing
- The ethics of transgression
- Writing and dispossession
- Writing and property, and ownership, and authority

To submit a proposal, please follow the instructions at: <http://www.aawp.org.au/annual-conference/21st-annual-conference/>

We began the new year with a new AAWP Executive Committee of Management, the membership of which can be found at <http://www.aawp.org.au/about/the-aawp-executive>. The 2016 Executive was elected at the 2015 Annual Conference in Melbourne Australia, hosted by Swinburne University of Technology. The conference was a fitting event marking the 20th year of the AAWP’s strong leadership role representing writing programs in Australia and beyond. Much acknowledgement and gratitude must go to the organizers of the 2015 Annual Conference for another first-rate gathering of the membership of the AAWP. The proceedings from this conference, edited by Eugen Bacon, Dominique Hecq and Amelia Walker, have now been published online.

<http://www.aawp.org.au/publications/writing-the-ghost-train-rewriting-remaking-rediscovering>

The AAWP has also announced the winners of the 2015 Postgraduate Prizes for the most outstanding theoretical and creative papers presented at the annual conference.

The winner of the theoretical stream was Amelia Walker (University of South Australia) for her paper “Re-Collecting the Self as An/Other: Creative writing research matters”. Highly Commended was Caitlin Maling (Sydney University) for her paper “Collage and ecopoetry in Brian Teare’s Companion Grasses”. The prize total is \$400, and the winner co-edited the conference proceedings.

The winner of the creative stream was Amelia Walker (University of South Australia) for her paper “‘I’ has to give: Rethinking Bloom’s apophrades and/as ghostly Derridean gifts”. The winner of this prize received \$300

and an annual subscription to *Overland, Island and Review of Australian Fiction*.

The conference as always provided an opportunity for valuable academic conversations: it is particularly encouraging to see discussions between postgraduates and professors. The conference also featured an ongoing initiative of the AAWP in professional development sessions for postgraduate students, where emerging academics provided helpful advice and mentoring for newly enrolled and continuing postgraduates.

The AAWP Executive Committee of Management met at the conference for our Executive AGM, where opportunities for the future were discussed, together with issues related to writing programs in Australasia. Our initiatives and activities as an Executive were reported to the wider membership via the AGM.

One of the most exciting developments for the AAWP is a partnership with the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (UWRF) for a new writing prize, sponsored by both the AAWP and UWRF. The results of that collaboration is the Emerging Writers Prize (www.aawp.org.au/1047-2). The prize provides the winner with a ticket to the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, accommodation for the duration of the festival and \$500 towards economy airfares. The winner also receives a one-year annual membership to the AAWP, fully subsidized conference fees to attend the annual conference of the AAWP, and the opportunity to read from their work. In addition, the editors at *Meniscus* will consider the winners work for publication. The prize closes on 30 May 2016.

The AAWP Executive will meet mid-year to discuss the progress of these and our other projects for the year, as well as the 21st Annual Conference.

Dr Lynda Hawryluk
President/Chair,
Australasian Association of Writing Programs

LETTER FROM AMERICA



When I ran into a writer friend at the local shopping mall, he asked me about the release date of my book. My short story collection had won an award and was coming out with a university press. I told him the date was three months away.

“So you’re busy promoting it then?”

Gulp. No. I understood that I’d need to promote it after it came out, but what should I have been doing right now?

“Girl, you’ve got to get on that,” he said. “What about reviews? What about guest blogging?”

No one teaches you this stuff.

Writers, most of us, think of the writing itself as the work. Once that’s done, well, what else is there? What else could possibly matter? It turns out there’s a lot, and I wish I’d been more savvy with my first book. It came out, was snapped up by family and friends, and then more or less disappeared. I may not have known much, but I did know I didn’t want that to happen again. So I started asking around for advice. After several long email and phone conversations with people more experienced than I was, I grasped that I was woefully behind on what would turn out to be the full-time task of being my book’s marketing director. I should have started several months earlier. I also began to understand how deeply uncomfortable I was in this role – it seemed icky, for lack of a better word, to be engaging in self-promotion.

Regardless, I settled down at the computer day after day. I sent scores of emails. I asked friends and family to email their local newspapers to request reviews. It seemed like a terrible imposition, but many were quite excited to be involved. These efforts yielded few responses – but the ones that did come through turned out to be invaluable.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the greatest response was in my own city of Baltimore, partly because I live here and partly because the book is set here. A connection to a place makes attention more likely, I learned. Although Baltimore's daily paper, *The Sun*, didn't review the book, I was lucky enough to have it named in the best of 2015 in the year-end round-ups in *Baltimore Magazine* and *Baltimore City Paper*. I was also interviewed on the local National Public Radio station. These things happened not just because I put myself out there (though this was obviously important), but also because I reached out to people who had reason to believe their audiences would have some reason to care.

As I figured all of this out, I contacted publications in other places where I had personal connections. Even though newspapers have dwindled, there are still about 1300 dailies in the United States. I couldn't write to all of them, and certainly most of them would have no reason to think their audiences would care about my book more than the many others being published. The one major city newspaper that committed to reviewing it was the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* – my dad is from Minnesota, as are many other Flanns. Flann sounds Irish, but is an adaptation of a Scandinavian name, and all of us who have it are related. Minnesota was where our forebears settled – the Flann ground zero, if you will. I made sure to explain all of this in my email. Also, a cousin who lives in the area wrote to the paper on my behalf. It astonished me how much work it was to get just one review.

In addition to pursuing reviews, I wrote numerous guest blog posts, and I asked several writer friends to interview me for blogs. All of this is to say that I've put a ton of time into this marketing endeavour that I could have spent on writing new work.

I'm still trying to figure out what's worth doing and what's not. Does any of this result in book sales? Or am I just creating a brand, a name people might remember? And does this further my work or just my ego? I wish I knew. What I do know is that doing nothing will have a predictable result.

Nothing. Not even crickets.

As much as it unsettles me to hawk my book in the crowded marketplace, jostling and elbowing for space,

even that mess is preferable to the fate that nothing promises, for it is literary death. And don't we write in the first place to sidestep the abyss, to reach toward something, anything?

I've been surprised to discover that the silver lining to all of this has been the people with whom I've connected, their generosity and camaraderie. As I mentioned, writers gave me advice, made introductions on my behalf, and interviewed me for blogs. Family and friends reached out to newspapers and promoted the book on social media. Being from stoic Midwestern stock, it isn't my nature to ask for help. But when I did, it strengthened my relationships. I remembered again that accepting the aid of others can be generous, as it requires me to reveal what matters, to share. Maybe when we face our struggles together, we're all made better by it. At the very least, it makes the work of marketing less icky and sometimes even – dare I say it – kind of fun.

Kathy Flann

LAPIDUS



Changes

As a wise man once said to me, "there's only one thing that is certain in this life and that's change." Our responses to change can range from utter delight to total despair. Is it possible to see it as an opportunity? Or does it cause

fear? The irreversibility of change can cause grief at the losses. Certainly, the era in which we are living seems to demand an ability to manage change on many fronts. Our individual responses to change may benefit from their expression and a safe experience of their expression, enabling us to grow into our new circumstances. Writing can be a helpful medium in this respect. For those of us who write regularly, the benefits from self-expression in words is a given. As Dr Gillie Bolton has said: "Writing is a means of making sense of experience, and of arriving at a deeper understanding of the self."

I shall introduce Lapidus for those NAWE members to whom it is new. I acknowledge those who are old friends and hope you will forgive such a basic start. Lapidus is an organization that was founded twenty years ago, designed to promote the benefits of writing (and reading) for wellbeing and to support practitioners in this field and those who write for their own wellbeing. Our members include people working in mental health, in the community, as writers, therapists, librarians and people with a personal interest in writing for wellbeing.

In November last year there were some changes to the board, bringing different energies and enthusiasms to the organization and adding to the skills and experience of the ongoing board members who continue to sustain the activities of the organization, all of whom work voluntarily. There are two paid staff, Mel Parks and Caleb Parkin, who are managing the website, the journal and this year's exciting mini conference.

2016 is a year when the board hope to build on the excellent work of those who have invested their time and expertise in the organization in previous years and to further consolidate the presence of writing for wellbeing as a beneficial activity on many levels. We are beginning to address the implications of this form of writing and hope to develop relationships further with related organizations and professionals. This includes working with those who commission work for wellbeing and mental health. We want to identify the base level of required expertise for practitioners in our field and provide a practitioner approval process. We are focusing on research that provides evidence of its benefits, examples of best practice, and that investigates its provision in a range of settings, fostering connections with institutions and professionals who are already involved in this work. (We have a "research special interest group".) We are involved in exploring ways of evaluating the work that we do. We are concerned to find practical ways to assist our members who are writing for wellbeing practitioners.

The one-day conference in May will contain elements of all these interests, as well as celebrating and enjoying creative writing per se. It is to be held at the University of Chester on Saturday 14 May. Enquiries should be directed to Caleb Parkin at info@lapidus.org.uk, subject: CONFERENCE. Tickets can be purchased at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/lapidus-day-2016-tickets-21560756804>.

We are aware of the benefits of creative writing for many circumstances and experiences, for example, for dealing with stress and burnout, post traumatic stress disorder, coping with bereavement, confidence and esteem issues. It can improve many aspects of the human condition: mental, physical, emotional, spiritual. It is being used effectively in areas of deprivation, in schools, in "at risk" areas, in the youth justice system to benefit the wellbeing of pupils for whom success and cultural comfort is an alien experience. An instance of this can be found in Houston, Texas, where Marlon Lizama works, "b-boy/break-dancer, spoken word poet, and speaker" and self-defined as a "Mexican immigrant" from Puerto Rico and El Salvador. His community programme, Iconoclast, works with young people who are growing up in the environment he grew up in. He works with the pedagogy of the Art of Story Telling, which enables self-expression and the growth in confidence to convey internal landscapes verbally. Lizama's first poem, at age 15, was "Where I'm From", imbued with the beat of hip hop, his early love. He writes with rhythm, passion and grace. One of his best known poems, "I Write", includes the following stanzas:

I write
to gain courage for them,
sanity for me,
and to keep her woo'd

I write
because paper is sacrifice
to not let the tree die in vain

I write ultimately,
to be free

Lizama was a dancer before he was a poet. His first successes were in break-dancing and he has brought that energy and movement to his poetry. This reminds me of the saying, "to survive you have to learn to dance on the rug, so that when it is pulled from under you, you can keep dancing". Finding ways to cope with change are about finding skills or tools that help to keep our equilibrium, dancing through the pain, perhaps. Writing is one of those possible tools that help us to keep our wellbeing.

“Be like a good seismograph: sensitive enough to register what happens but strong enough not to be wrecked ...”

“...human beings have to occupy that position between being so steady and dull that they can't register, and being so sensitive that they're wrecked by anything they register.” William Stafford

Lapidus is moving forward, embracing the changes, with new members of the board and building on strong foundations. Please join us as a member, on our website, at our mini conference, at any future events, in future activities.

Clare Scott, Lapidus Board Member

MEMBERS' NEWS

Amy Mackelden has published *Adele: The Other Side* (Squint Books 2016), available from Eyewear Publishing: <http://store.eyewearpublishing.com/collections/squint/products/adele-the-other-side>

Kate Miller's latest collection, *The Observances*, was published by Carcanet in 2015 and shortlisted for the Costa Prize.

A number of NAWE members have been commissioned by **The Laurence Sterne Trust** to take part in “Paint Her to Your Own Mind”, an exhibition relating to the blank page in *Tristram Shandy*. The blank page (Vol VI p.147) is central to Sterne's work. Of all writers he is perhaps the one that has the clearest understanding that although he does 50 % of the work with his text, it is the reader's interpretation that brings the text to life. By Volume VI his provocative approach to telling the story of Tristram's life and opinions has reached the point where he surrenders all responsibility and allows the reader to do all of the work. The page is blank. Sterne wants to stimulate the creation of the most beautiful woman that ever existed and invites the reader:

To conceive this right, — call for pen and ink — here's paper ready to your hand, — Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind — as like your mistress as you can — as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you — 'tis all one to me — please but your own fancy in it.

Continuing the conceit of the two previous exhibitions, (“The Black Page” and “The Emblem of My Work”, the new project invites 147 artists/writers/composers to join in creating 147 different representations of beauty. All contributions will be displayed in the gallery at Shandy Hall during July but the signature of the maker of each work will be hidden. The works will be auctioned with the proceeds going to the Laurence Sterne Trust. <http://www.laurencesterne.org.uk>

Manchester Metropolitan University is pleased to announce the opening of the third annual Novella Award. In partnership with Liverpool John Moore's University, Sandstone Press, Time to Read and NAWE, the Novella Award is open to any writer of novellas in the English language and aged over 16. This year's competition will be judged by Lucy English, author of *Selfish People* and *Children of Light*, and is open for submissions until 29 April 2016. This year's prize includes £1000 and publication by Sandstone Press. Further information at: www.thenovellaaward.com



The Novella Award 2016
Judged by Lucy English, author of *Selfish People* and *Children of Light*

Prize: £1,000 and publication by Sandstone Press
Deadline for entries: 29th April 2016
Entry fee: £17

Further details:
thenovellaaward@gmail.com
www.thenovellaaward.com

The Novella Award
[The Novella Award](https://www.facebook.com/thenovellaaward)
[@thenovellaaward](https://twitter.com/thenovellaaward)

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
MMU Cheshire
SANDSTONE PRESS
nawe
Time Read

NEW NAWE MEMBERS, SPRING 2016

Institutional Members:

Naomi Kruger, University of Central Lancaster

Professional Members:

Natasha Berger, London
 Cecilia Busby, Devon
 Jacque Frances, Kent
 Jasmine Gardosi, West Midlands
 Michelle Horst, Yorkshire
 Louise Naidoo, Buckinghamshire
 Harry Oulton, London
 Jacqueline Saphra, London
 Elisabeth Sennitt Clough, Norfolk
 Cherry Smyth, London
 Laila Sumpton, London
 Jessamy Taylor, London
 Susmita Bhattacharya, Devon
 Ruth Hatfield, Cambridgeshire
 Helen Moss, Cambridgeshire
 Erica Wagner, London
 Helen Fram, Suffolk
 Robert Garnham, Devon
 Alys Conran, Gwynedd
 Derek Adams, Suffolk
 Maria Apichella, Suffolk
 DeAnn Bell, Isle of Anglesey
 Jenifer Berry, Manchester
 Miriam Nash, London
 Sarah Bower, Norfolk
 Seraphima Kennedy, London
 Jo Clayton, London
 Jessica Davies, Worcestershire
 Henrietta Williams, West Sussex
 Helen Docherty, Swansea
 Jonathan Duddle, Flintshire
 Shelley Miller, Surrey
 Steve Ince, East Yorkshire
 Jennifer Hartley, Cardiff
 Kim Slater, Nottinghamshire
 Chris Arthur, Fife
 Sarah Hegarty, Surrey
 Ann Emery, Isle of Wight
 Diane Slaney, Nottinghamshire
 Caroline Horn, Surrey
 Christina Banach, Fife
 Lynne Blackwood, Hampshire

Associate/Student Members:

James Davies, Greater Manchester
 Ken Elkes, Somerset
 Jacqueline Scholes-Rhodes, Oxfordshire
 Martin Torjussen, East Sussex
 Becca Heddle, Oxfordshire
 Sylvia Hehir, Argyll and Bute
 Rosslyn Johnston, Co. Down
 Charalampos Seitanidis, Yorkshire
 Sabriena Loh, Surrey
 Emma Blemings, Merseyside
 Rachael Claye, London
 Philippa Holloway, Lancashire
 Scarlett Sangster, Somerset
 Helen Foster, Edinburgh
 Kerri-Jane Burke, New South Wales, Australia
 Neil Hargreaves, Shropshire
 Amanda Lomas, West Yorkshire
 Jessica Crichton, Merseyside
 Liz Bahs, Berkshire
 Natasha Tate, Liverpool
 Rachel Newsome, West Yorkshire
 Jeremy Over, Cumbria

Young Writer Members:

Amandine Coquaz, Staffordshire
 Simon Middleton, Dorset
 Anna Granas, London
 Kieran Cottrell, Cambridgeshire
 Rachel Slater, Lancashire
 Pamela Banayoti, London
 Annmarie McQueen, Warwickshire
 Sophie-Louise Hyde, Nottinghamshire
 Olivia Solola-Jones, Manchester
 Marni Appleton, London
 Madeline Elliott, Cardiff
 Luke Conmy Campbell, London
 Richard O'Brien, Birmingham

E-Members:

Jemma Borg, Kent
 Emily Powell, Manchester
 Rob Young, Surrey
 Heidi Stephenson, Devon
 Lauren Sankey, Wiltshire
 Claire Rutigliano, Somerset
 Oksana Grajauskaite, London

Walking the Old Ways

A personal reflection on the NAWE Conference 2015

Victoria Field



This edition of *Writing in Education* will be appearing around the time of year when, in medieval Europe, people would set off in their tens of thousands to make pilgrimages. They went to places associated with saints and martyrs, as well as to the Holy Land. In England, Henry VIII put a firm and violent stop to the practice,

making it illegal in 1538. In recent years, though, there's been a burgeoning interest in the whole idea of pilgrimage in its many manifestations.

The tradition of making a pilgrimage to a sacred site is common to every faith tradition, from Bahai to Zoroastrianism, as well as to all the major religions. Secular pilgrimages also abound. The list includes destinations as diverse as the Elvis Memorial in Graceland, the First World War battlefields of Northern France and the now defunct Diana "shrine" at Althorp. There are also many New Age pilgrim centres, such as Glastonbury with its rich melting-pot of pagan, Celtic and Christian traditions, and Sedona in the US where "vortex energy" meets a thriving artistic community.

The common factor, as a new academic centre at York University identifies it, is that we are "drawn" to go to these places. The reasons given are as varied as the individuals setting out and might include a desire to give thanks, or to connect with others, or the past, hope for transformation, a need to do penance, or wanting distraction, exercise or a change of scene – all of which

might lead to personal and spiritual refreshment. As Rebecca Solnit put it in her classic book *Wanderlust* (Penguin 2001), we travel "in search of the intangible".

So, I was "drawn" to attend the NAWE conference in Durham last November. It had been ten years since I attended a NAWE conference and I needed some writerly and intellectual refreshment. I'd never been to Durham before and the conference coincided with the famous Lumière Festival. Plus the comfortable hotel with its river views and swimming pool offered the opportunity of bodily refreshment. Human behaviour is multiply determined, so quite possibly there were motives too, that remain unconscious.

The conference was impressive. The organization seemed to have a light touch so that everything happened on time, in a relaxed way, in comfortable and spacious surroundings with coffee, fruit and pastries seemingly constantly available. Having been part of organizing similar events, I'm aware that the impression of a swan gliding along can belie madly paddling feet below, and I commend the organizers.

Compared to ten years ago, there seemed to be a greater proportion of writers and practitioners outside higher education, and certainly fewer sessions focusing on the need to justify the academic study of creative writing. Also, the conference felt much more international and I talked to people from Australia, mainland Europe and the States as well as from all over the UK. Like Chaucer's medievals, we exchanged stories, slept in unfamiliar beds, broke bread together and ventured into the city to marvel at the light installations.



some of the questions I have been left with and the speakers that inspired them.

How would it be to create poems, Grotowski-style, without recourse to words, by “walking the text” and “spelling the words physically”? (Lucy Burnett)

If you are adapting a classic piece of theatre for an outdoor fringe performance, do you need to drop the supernatural elements of the prelude to make it “accessible”? How do adaptation, translation and reinventing differ? (Rachel Connor)



Games are a great way to open the imagination especially in resistant young people. I’m not resistant but perhaps they are resistant for good reasons? (Billy Cowan)

If your father is illiterate and diagnosed with schizophrenia, should your published memoir and fiction based on life experience be comic in tone? (Sathnam Sanghera)

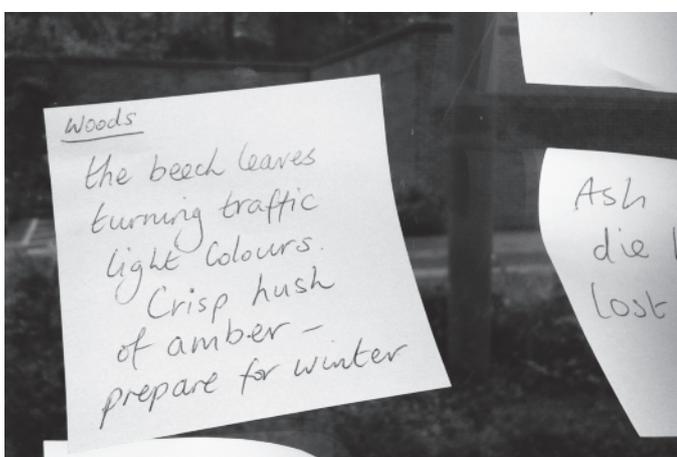
How does reading energize and connect us? Is it a coincidence there are so many shared childhood reading experiences in the room? (Shelagh Weeks)

How is it that our culture takes so little notice of dreams when they are so infinitely rich? (Niloofer Fanaiyan)



My own slot was shared with Caroline Carver presenting her work as poet-in-residence in the Marine Institute in Plymouth where her poems formed part of the new building. The fact that a whale heart is the size of a Mini [see p.33] has stayed with me. I talked about my residency in Blean woods in partnership with the local RSPB, “A Speech of Birds”. We made group poems using post-its, which later fell from the windows onto the carpet like autumn leaves. We explored the grief of extinction by bearing witness to the nature words now missing from the Oxford Dictionary for Children, and listened to the spring song of a nightingale in a Kent woodland, now in peril because of drought in Africa. As in all the sessions, we used language to make connections. My subjects of trees and birds live in the earth and the air, those focused on by Caroline are under the sea. She brought them and us together through a final exercise focused on the experience of refugees crossing dangerous waters.

I’ve learned, at conferences and in life generally, to follow my instincts when choosing which sessions to attend. It’s impossible to know from the descriptions where unexpected connections might be made, what’s going to be alive and what not. I attended workshops and presentations on performance and dreaming, boundaries and theatre, voice and work in art galleries, all of which were nourishing and heartening. Here are



Coincidence – or zeitgeist – meant that the next session I attended was specifically about the imagery of birds, evinced in the poetry and fiction of Robyn Bolam, Joan McGavin and Rebecca Smith. Every poem they shared was a window into wonder, reverence, and beauty and they skillfully brought in questions of metaphor, creature-centric writing, the perils of ecopoetry and the mystery of sharing this planet with small-boned, feathered, flying beings.

The next morning, the brilliant, if rather prosaically-titled “Pen to Mic” was the session of choice. Every time Jean Atkin and Liz Hyder started, the door opened and more people appeared until the large room was full and every chair taken. This was a model workshop in every way, from the intention of facilitating new work, collaborative editing and stretching us in our comfort zones, to the humour and skill with which they managed the huge group, without rushing and yet finishing on time. Bravo Jean and Liz! We were told the 75 minutes would “see you write a brand new poem and perform it to an audience” and it did. I still have lines

and images from the amazing work created by others in the group echoing in my memory, and a new poem waiting in my notebook.

And before and after all this head-stuff and bottom-on-chair stuff, there was time to walk into the city centre several times. The Lumière Festival meant the city was *en fête*, closed to traffic and its major buildings, squares and even the river, lit up in ways that inspired wonder and awe. I came a day early to catch it and some of the installations were truly spectacular, especially the projection on the side of the huge cathedral, its explosion of patterns drawn from sacred geometry and illuminations from the Lindisfarne Gospels, set to music, telling the history of the building. And inside, an abstract, constantly changing work in the vast nave was compelling.

I live in Canterbury, a popular pilgrim destination based on the Thomas Becket cult. All that’s left of the shrine there now is a single candle burning in a vast space up flights of stone steps worn by the feet and knees of pilgrims. Durham Cathedral housed the older shrine of St Cuthbert, also dismantled in the sixteenth century, but the bodily remains of the saint are still buried there and the area is intimate with hangings and decorations echoing the original shrine. The previous year, I’d been to Lindisfarne and seen Cuthbert’s tiny cell on Inner Farne. The Farne Islands are famous for their vibrant bird populations, and visitors have to proceed carefully to avoid treading on puffins and being dive-bombed by Arctic terns. In contrast to Canterbury’s Thomas, with his political nous and legalistic concerns, the earlier Cuthbert lived close to nature, the elements and non-human creatures. His cold feet were warmed by sea otters, an eagle brought him fish, a horse found him a loaf of bread found hidden in a barn. Like Francis, Cuthbert had an affinity with birds, especially eider ducks, known in Northumberland as Cuddy ducks, after the saint.

I experienced a number of synchronicities and strange meetings during my few days in Durham, which I attribute partly to the openness that pilgrimage engenders. The conference and the city, the generous presentations and conversations, history and the present moment, all seemed to come together as things do in this poem by Nobel Laureate, Tomas Tranströmer.

Romanesque Arches

Inside the huge Romanesque church the tourists jostled in the half darkness.

Vault gaped behind vault, no complete view.

A few candle flames flickered.

An angel with no face embraced me

and whispered through my whole body:

'Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!

Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly.

You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be.'

Blind with tears

I was pushed out on the sun-seething piazza

together with Mr and Mrs Jones, Mr Tanaka, and

Signora Sabatini,

and inside them all vault opened behind vault

endlessly.

Tomas Tranströmer, translated from the original Swedish by Robin Fulton, from New Collected Poems (Bloodaxe Books 2011), reproduced with kind permission of the publisher.

On a pilgrimage, at a conference and in writing, it seems everything can stand for everything else, the detail for the whole, the moment for a lifetime. On the Saturday

morning, we learned of the bombings in Paris. Many of the light artists were French and staying in the same hotel. Inner and outer. Our selves as individuals and as members of a world community. Our planet in peril. Yet, the wonder of it all.

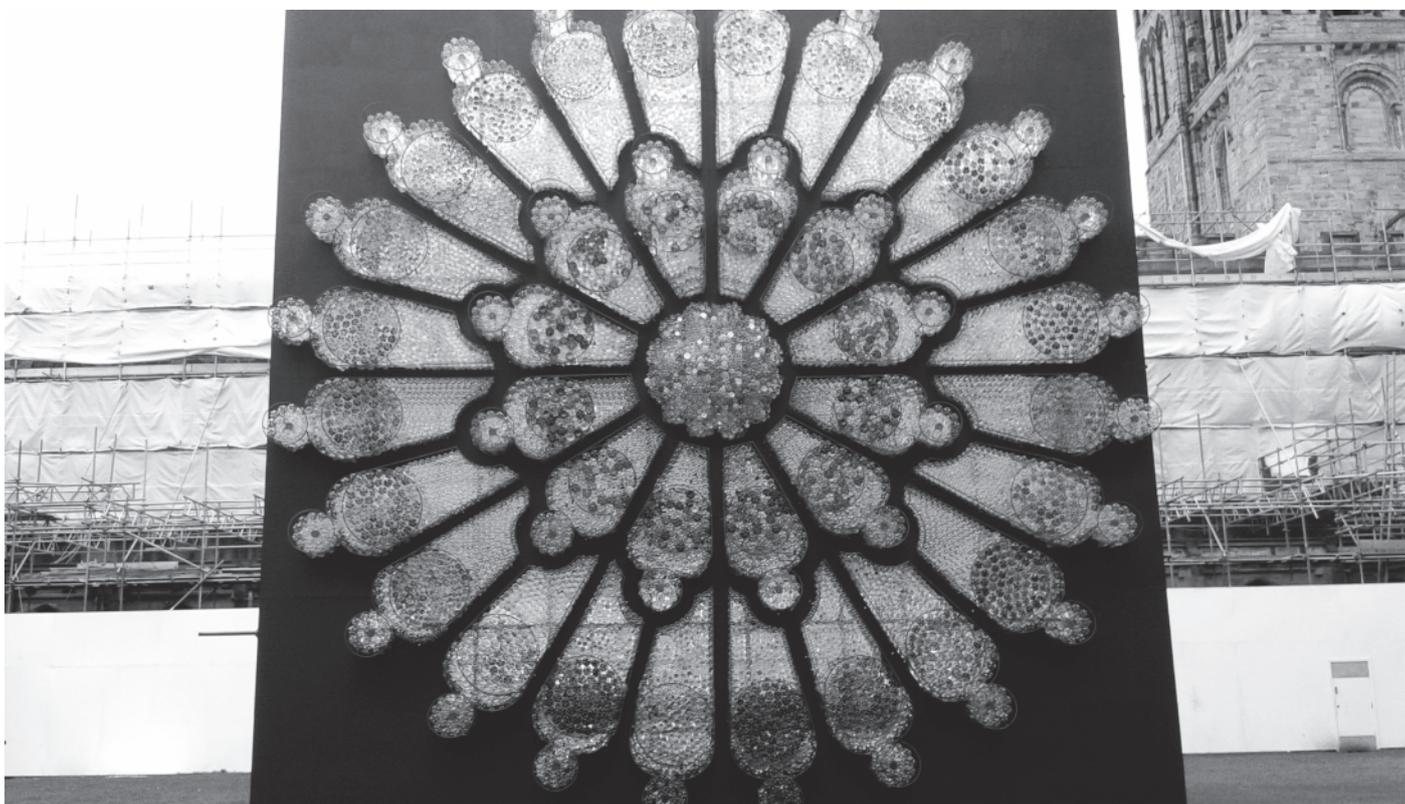
This article is a revised and extended version of a blog post contributed to Roselle Angwin's "qualia and other wildlife" website at <http://roselle-angwin.blogspot.co.uk>.

Visit www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage for their resources on all aspects of pilgrimage, including a bibliography.

*Victoria Field works as a writer and poetry therapist. Her memoir on pilgrimage and marriage, *Baggage: A Book of Leavings*, will be published by Francis Boutle in 2016. She is co-teaching a new online course, *Introduction to Therapeutic and Reflective Writing*, for the Professional Writing Academy, with next intakes in April and September 2016. <https://www.profwritingacademy.com>*

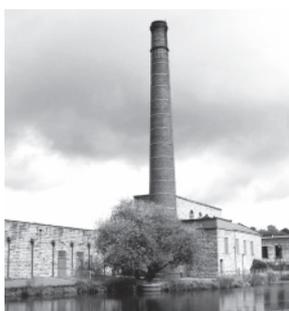
Further details on www.thepoetrypractice.co.uk

Photos of Durham and the NAWA Conference, November 2015, by the author.



Poetry at the mill to come unravelled

Maureen Fenton



Queen Street Mill.

I gave a brief presentation to the 2015 NAWE conference on a poetry activity for school groups visiting Queen Street Mill in Burnley, where I freelance as an activity group leader. The writing of poems is part of a Sounds of the Mill session, which includes drama and the enactment of a human loom, built of the

children. Sounds of the Mill came from a project in which class teachers led the process of developing new activities for Queen Street visits.

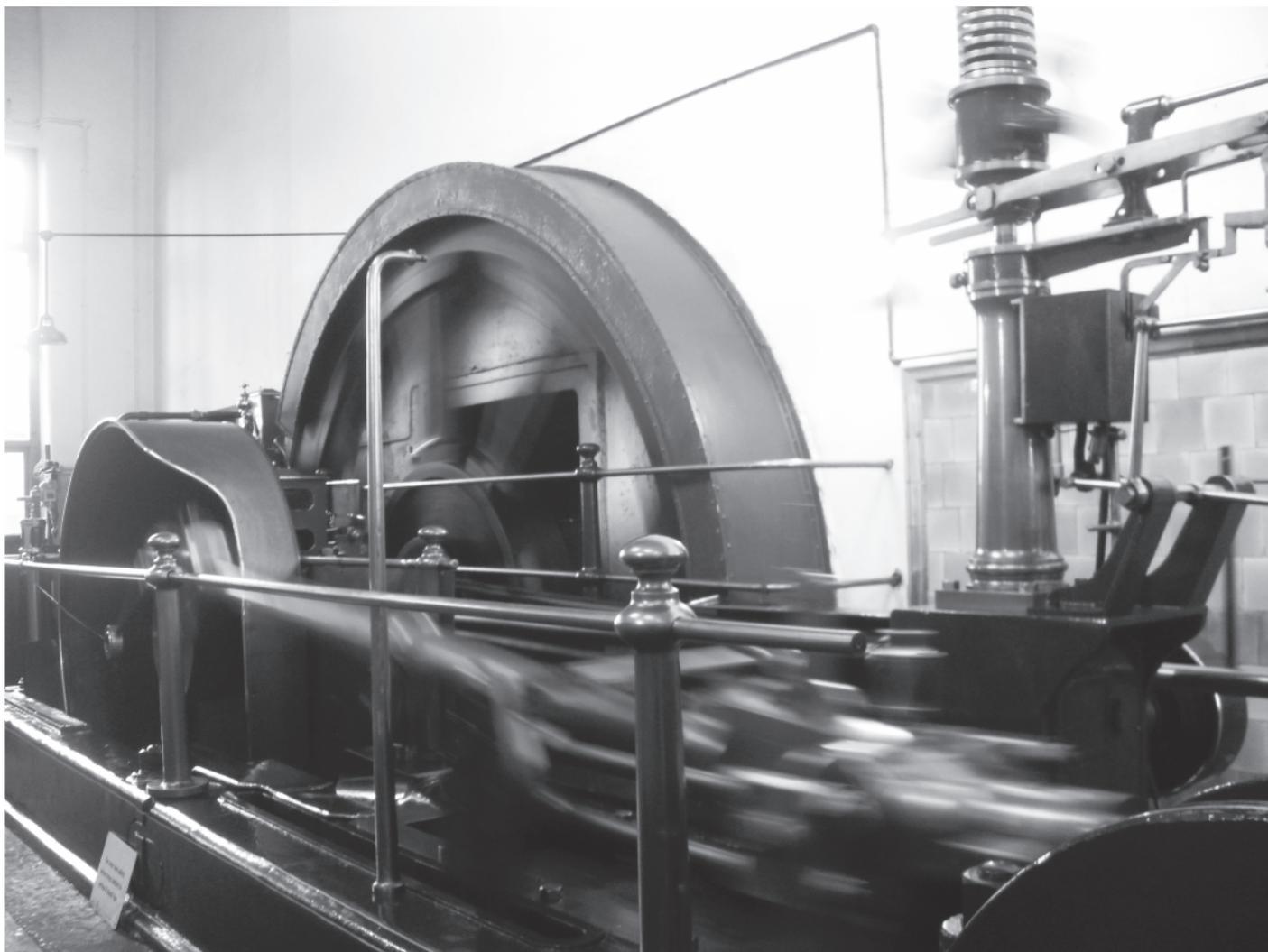
The poetry focuses on the process of creating and using steam power – fundamental for Queen Street, as this cotton weaving mill is thought to be the only place in the world where the original steam engine still drives the original looms. Delivered in 50 minutes or sometimes less, including a tour of mill lodge, boiler house and engine house, the session has to be tightly constructed, so the act of composing the poem is very directive. The process of creating steam and using it to drive an engine is broken down into six components, including less obviously inspiring items such as the gutters. These components, printed on card, are dealt out around the small groups. The children work in threes or fours, depending on group size, to produce two lines of poetry, with a focus on sounds and sights, about their given topic. One key instruction is that this poem does not have to rhyme; we look at other patterns of language as they emerge in creating the poem.

We re-assemble the topic cards in the correct order to put our lines of poetry together. Written on a flip-chart sheet, this first draft is read out in chorus then carried proudly away by the children for further work in the classroom. An important outcome, as well as the literacy

and expressive ones attached to the actual writing, is to reinforce children's understanding of process – in this case the process by which rainwater plus coal drives an engine to power machines that weave cotton fabric for tea-towels and similar goods.

At the conference, I was the second part of a shared session with the Wordsworth Trust describing how they are using letters from their collection with visiting schools. A member of our audience commented that we were both good ambassadors for our venues. I have, I admit, become passionate about the opportunities Queen Street Mill offers children for practical demonstration of how significant the cotton industry was to the economies of Lancashire and Britain, and of ways in which the Industrial Revolution altered people's lives.

A couple of weeks after the NAWE conference, Lancashire County Council announced budget proposals to cope with Government funding cuts so deep that, by April 2018, it faced not having sufficient income to cover its statutory responsibilities. Those proposals include the closing of Queen Street Mill and four other museums owned by the council at the end of March 2016. Of course, all directly involved are working desperately to find other ways to preserve the mill but, at the time of writing, it seems that the Sounds of the Mill sessions booked in for this spring will be followed only by the sound of silence.



The historic steam engine Peace at Queen Street Mill, built in 1894, running and driving original looms in Autumn 2015.

Maureen Fenton is a creative writing tutor and workshop leader for the WEA, as well as working as an activity leader with Lancashire Museums. She taught at colleges and universities in Lancashire after degree study, including an MA in Writing Studies, in the 1990s. Before that, she was a government press officer and a magazine journalist.

Postscript

A recent news item suggests that Queen Street Mill may yet survive, with Lancashire County Council in talks with private groups interested in running the museum.

<http://www.burnleyexpress.net/news/local/has-queen-street-mill-been-thrown-a-lifeline-1-7743750>

Experimentation, Adaptation, Collaboration

Andrea Holland



For my NAWE presentation at Durham, 2015, I began by asking attendees if they would put onto post-its examples of word/image or collaborative projects they appreciated or had experienced. I wanted people to think about what makes collaboration “work” and why some resonate. I then talked about the module I

organize at the University of East Anglia (UEA), where we offer a BA Lit with Creative Writing, which includes a collaborative, word and image project.

The first year Creative Writing cohort undertake two mandatory Creative Writing modules in Year 1; for each they are divided into groups with a practising writer as their tutor.

The Autumn Creative Writing module is workshop based, mostly focused on structured exercises using objects, handouts and visualizations to introduce students to the craft and discipline of writing prose and poetry... learning, among other things, to read as a writer and to write write write.

However, the Spring Creative Writing module is quite different.

The 12 week semester is divided in this module, with four weeks spent on three strands: Experimentation, Adaptation and Collaboration. My presentation focused on the Collaboration strand in which students create a collaborative project with Illustration students from Norwich University of the Arts (NUA), an independent higher education institution. The writers and illustrators are strangers “paired up” by myself (as module

organizer) or the NUA co-ordinating tutor. These pairs then have four weeks to contact/meet, create, collaborate and finally present their text/image project – writing a log book account as they progress, and as the project develops.

In order to contextualize their work, the UEA Creative Writing students are introduced to ideas and texts focused on the relationship between writing and visual arts practice and on collaboration and collaborative practice. Tutors ask students to:

- a) consider the relationship between the word IMAGE when used in a literary context and when used in a visual arts context. We know what imagery is in a poem, but what does it mean to an illustrator?
- b) consider ways that text and image correspond – and differ – in terms of practice; the creative process, and how writers and artists manage issues of “ownership” and innovation?
- c) look at context for the collaborative act and the work being produced; a gentle nudge towards theory and contextualization, primarily via Vera John-Steiner’s “Patterns of Collaboration Between Writers and Artists” (2000), and reference too, to my own article on collaborative practice, “The Good Collusion Defeats the Lone Ranger” (2008).

We also look at models of collaboration, e.g. artist Jim Dine and poet Ron Padgett, and artist Susan Barron and writer William Burroughs, from “Interactions between Artists and Writers”, an edition of *Art Journal* guest edited by Debra Bricker Balken (1993), as well as the more experimental of ekphrastic texts, such as “Dime Store Alchemy”, short prose/prose poems by Charles Simic on Joseph Cornell’s surrealist boxes.

Once the project launches the catalyst for the creative act is in a seemingly throwaway question I ask my students: “Where do people meet up?” This question is answered by individual students calling out suggestions: “a dentist’s waiting room”; “the supermarket”; “on a train”; “at a protest”.

These places are pooled and students then choose a location for their character to meet a visual character, as yet, unnamed. This is where the illustrators come in – the writer students are paired with an illustrator from Norwich University of the Arts, and over four weeks the pairs meet, on their own terms, to make their own, usually complementary, visual and written work. Their characters meet and transmogrify.

The schedule runs as follows:

1. I meet with the NUA Illustration tutor several weeks before to plan the practical features of the collaboration.
2. Students are given and discuss articles on collaborative practice.
3. Students use Dropbox, Twitter, Pinterest etc, creating a log book to document work in progress.
4. The UEA students give a brief in progress presentation to rest of their class one week before the end of the project – a formative assessment of sorts.
5. An end of project “pop-up” exhibition is staged – in previous years at Norwich University of the Arts, hosted by the Publishing/Illustration department. This year the work is being shown at an Arts Centre in Norwich for five days.

Assessment and outcomes

It would not be appropriate to assess the collaborative projects themselves, not least because some of the work will be that of the NUA illustrator. So UEA students submit a log book for assessment, which documents work in progress: ideas, emails, examples of other extant word/image projects, any critical reading they have done, and commentary on the creative process and working partnership as the project develops, with conclusions at the end. Giving a critical account of their work in this way allows students to reflect on work in

progress in a slightly different way from the usual critical commentary or self appraisals found accompanying a creative writing portfolio.

The best log books also contextualize their projects within collaborative theory, e.g. Vera John-Steiner’s “patterns of collaboration” – complementary, integrative etc.

We cannot assess the final presented work but instead we can assess and respond to their account of the project as a result of the collaboration.

By the end, students also have a piece of work (image/text) in the form of a small pamphlet, a canvas, a print, a 3-D object etc which uses their words and their partner’s image(s). They also often gain more – a partner for future projects and a way of understanding that creativity is flexible and doesn’t have to be just words on a page or spoken at a mic; that creative writing is dynamic and transformative.

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Walking Writing Workshop with Poems by Frank O'Hara

Joan Michelson



In 1964 City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco brought out Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* as number 19 of their Pocket Poet Series, made famous by its publication of Alan Ginsberg's "Howl" and the controversy surrounding it. The series' aim was to reach "beyond the provincial and academic... [and support]

ferment." The pocket-size format was particularly appropriate for this O'Hara collection ostensibly written during his lunch hour in response to his lunch hour walk.

Inimical, irreverent, improvisational, with forays into the surreal inviting quick turns of thought, the voice in these poems is speaking in the here-and-now. We are clocked in, shown around, walked along and carried off with in mental leaps and pirouettes.

Walking has long been a mate for poem-making and *Lunch Poems* is an inviting poem-walker's guide. My NAWÉ session (one and a half hours) was divided into three parts. We read aloud from three of the *Lunch Poems*: "Personal Poem", "A Step Away From Them" and "The Day Lady Died". We discussed the poems keeping in mind that we were going to draft our own clocked walk poems. Then in small groups, or individually, we took notepaper and pens and set off. More or less on time, we re-convened, to read and discuss our efforts. In light of the O'Hara poems, by perceiving differences between O'Hara's poems and our own writing, we made further discoveries about his work, our own and the landscape of the walking poem.

Features we drew from *Lunch Poems* included O'Hara's use of a first personal narrator in his report of his walk. The poet employs immediate or continuous present time, drawing on subordinate phrases and clauses and on the conditional to bring in past and future. While focusing on the immediate present he opens the poem to extend its reach in time and place. In the first stanza of "Personal Poem", he makes an inventory of the contents of his pocket. He has an old Roman coin given to him by a friend and a bolt-head "that broke off a packing case / when I was in Madrid". In this way he introduces a friend and a trip to Spain. He tells us that the finds are charms and that he used to carry others but they never brought him too much luck, although they helped keep him in New York "against coercion" and that he is "happy", which he qualifies by adding "for a time" and that he is "interested". Now he turns his attention to the moment, the heat, the brightness, "luminous humidity", "loungers", and "the construction to the left" ... but just for four lines. We follow his thoughts. In playful mode, adopting a child-like simplicity, he wonders if he'll "ever get to be a construction worker". Reducing the difference to a change of hat, he goes on, "I'd like to have a silver hat please." Then he picks up on differences and, speaking for his poets' collective, a social network in a time before web-based media, he reduces vocational aims to a choice between fame or wealth, casting light on the ordinary poet's no-money plight versus the wages paid to those in the trade taking on high-risk construction jobs. He teases, "We poets just want to be rich / and walk on girders in our silver hats." In the third and last stanza he returns to the image of the construction worker and adapts his voice to speak for a poet collective. In this voice, with continuing playfulness, he aligns and compares the two vocations: the poet and the construction worker. He gives up

“even” the idea of fame, name entered in Poets Walk in San Francisco for being “rich / and walking on girders in our silver hats.” He ends his “Personal Poem” by buying a watch strap and going back to work “happy”.

As a New York City poet who once wrote “I can’t even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there’s a subway handy”, and as curator at the Museum of Modern Art, O’Hara’s lunch hour stroll takes him through mid-Manhattan, a city centre thickly peopled and buzzing with traffic and commerce

Like Frank O’Hara, we planned to walk, look around, follow our thoughts and write. Unlike him, hotel-based in Durham, Northeast England, which a number of us were seeing for the first time, we were removed from familiar routes and routines, and in this sense, displaced. Further, we were not in the centre but a riverside walk away along the Wear. It wasn’t raining but it might have been. It wasn’t dark but it would be soon.

In spite of differences between the setting for O’Hara’s walk and for ours, and differences between the habitual and the unfamiliar, the session proved fertile. It enriched our understanding of O’Hara’s poems, his way of thinking and critical awareness of how the poems work. Also, it stimulated and influenced poems we wrote on the day.

Here opposite, and following over the page, are three of the poems composed during the workshop.

Joan Michelson’s publications include *Toward the Heliopause (Poetic Matrix Publishers, USA, 2011), and poems in New Writing vols 3, 4, 14 (British Council), and many other journals and anthologies. Her poem “Stories” won first prize in the Bristol Poetry Competition, 2015. Former Head of Creative Writing, University of Woverhampton, she teaches creative writing to Medical Students at Kings College, University of London.*

Hotel Radisson Blu, Penny Ferry Row, Durham, November 2015

The open doors close as I walk towards them,
then think again and let me go.

One step and I am rooted, unseeing
all immediate concrete detail
for that distant view – on a wooded hill
above the river with its weir
whose steady mumbling flow outshouts
the city traffic on the bridge;
on a wooded hill, set so that the November sun,
coming not from the zenith but the west,
with that teasing warmth which is belied
by the breeze that ruffles the crowns of birch and beech
soaring up from the waterside walk
across the river, those trees now fragile
and delicate of bronze foliage
making dark patterns on the red-brick walls
of municipal building, which they, the trees,
however diminished, overtop.
This city surely once was built on fish,
now flaunting an immense and parti-coloured net
across its swollen river. Perhaps some trick of light
will reveal it as a writhing catch when that sun finally sinks
and Durham Lumière starts the nightly show
which will eclipse the stars.

And that wooded hill, where now the slanting light
attacks its square and grey-stoned castle
from the river face
will be but a handprint darker dark against an occluded sky.

I am supposed to be walking so I take two steps down,
am again halted by a travesty of nature –
a waist-high tub, square section,
slightly tapering to the ground and whose shiny
black gaze reflects the ribbed surface of the steps.
So controlled, constrained a container...

Maureen Fenton

Durham

Mid afternoon, mid November
 I am between trains
 with twenty five minutes
 to find you in an unfamiliar city.
 Hills everywhere. I climb past Nandos, Chiquitos, a hog roast.
 I have never eaten hog roast. Did you?
 At the Market Square, they're selling Lindisfarne oysters, Craster kippers
 You served them once on buttered toast
 In our kitchen years ago.
 This city is heaped on layers of other people.
 The wind blasts down from the old church at the top
 channelling hieroglyphs into the faces of passers-by,
 ancient characters I cannot read.
 Outside the library, six monks carry a coffin
 carved in wood and cast in bronze. You
 are dead
 but your remains live on.

Ebba Brooks

Welcome to Durham

(after Frank O'Hara)

It's 3:05, I've barely arrived
 and already it's ten days since I turned 54.
 They've strung a net across the Wear
 to trap the winter light
 and outside the Radisson there are flowers like faces
 puckered towards the Northern skies.
 The air falls straight from the Pennines here.
 I stand on Pennyferry Bridge where route 14 snicks
 ever route 70, and watch the ducks skitter like pinballs.
 My pockets are empty, empty and charmless,
 I dream of a crema fuzz, an espresso buzz,
 electrified air, but there's nothing here.
 A guy in a hoodie strides the quay
 against the flow, the flow of the weir
 and there seems to be
 fluorescent men
 everywhere.

Prose Poetry and Visual Art

Anne Caldwell



This paper explores the links between prose poetry and visual art practice in relationship to my current work. I will examine how both art forms make use of the frame and explore the brevity and hybrid nature of the prose poem. I will discuss the ability of prose poetry and photography to operate as a “snapshot” of time and place and also break these rules. I will then consider the use of the language of surrealism and

imagery in both visual art and the prose poem, particularly in the work of female practitioners and my own creative process.

My current PhD is a creative and critical investigation of contemporary women poets’ sense of place. I aim to produce a collection of prose poems that explores the concept of “the North” from a contemporary, female perspective. The first quality that I observed when beginning to write in the prose poetry form was its slippery nature. I did a reading at the wonderfully named “Puzzle Poets” group in Yorkshire in November 2015 and one of the resident writers asked me to define it. I said prose poetry was as lithe and supple as a fish. The poet Carrie Etter has also made this observation:

Carrie [Etter] opened the session by talking about some definitions of prose poetry and the slippery relationship between the very short story, (micro-fiction, flash-fiction) and prose poetry. She also talked about how the prose poem differs from the lined poem, “circling or inhabiting a mood or idea, perhaps remaining in one place (although not static) rather than moving from A to B as a poem does”. (Corcoran 2012)

Like a photograph being processed in the traditional way, in a dark room, the writing of a prose poem is also an alchemical process. I have discovered that the text

can end up in a very different place from where it might when using the process I have relied upon to create a more traditional narrative poem. The writing process is more organic: a non-linear, circular endeavour that relies on an exploration of image and dreams more than story or line endings. The critic Nikki Santilli, in a forward to the Cinnamon Press prose poem anthology, *This Line Is Not for Turning* (Monson 2011), expands on this idea:

The prose poem oscillates between what it expresses (presses out) from its miniature physical form and the wider worlds to which it gestures, beyond its own edges.

Like many poets before me (Ted Hughes in particular), I have had a fascination with the photography of Fay Godwin. I have also chosen to live for the last fifteen years in the Yorkshire landscape that inspired her. I see this oscillation as a characteristic in her work. She carefully chooses a particular frame for her landscapes, one that allows the maximum use of the sky and light, and often contains a path, a railway, a road, a particular vanishing point that gestures to the world beyond the frame.



“Path and Reservoir above Lumbutts, Yorkshire” (Godwin 1985: 71)

In this particular image, the packhorse route is a sculptural motif that sets up a rhythm of lines in the image, echoed by the line of hills, field patterns and dry stone walls which all seem to “press out” and suggest the wilderness and expanse of moors beyond the edge of the print.

The critic Ian Jeffrey unpicks a suggested function of this technique in his introduction to the book, *Land*, in which

the image appears:

Beyond the last wall like bracken and heather, rocks, hills, mists, clouds and the sky; on this side fields, hedges, huts and farms. The photographer is ceaselessly interested in differences between the wild and the cultivated, between what is primal, vast and even boundless and what is orderly and near to hand. (Godwin 1985: xxiii)

I have discovered in my own writing the tendency to refer again and again to an open road, a journey or vanishing point. I am fascinated as a writer by the relationship between the domestic space and the wild. These symbolize the position of a female artist in our society and her struggle for transcendence; the balance between civilization and a free creative mode. This poem from my next collection, *Painting the Spiral Staircase* (2016) uses the verbs “skirting” and “snaking” to symbolize this tension and ends with the image of an *animalistic* road that could easily feature in a Godwin photograph:

So she humoured him. Hid her diamante-studded wristwatch under her pillow. She let them skate on the surface of their desperate conversations, tried to cook meals at appropriate intervals, hoped that they wouldn't become too nocturnal, wide eyed, padding about the flat. She stood at the window, stared at the toll route to Keighley: skirting the moor, snaking down into the promise of the valley. (Caldwell 2016)

In the process of assembling this (forthcoming) collection, I realized that I also constantly return in my writing to the language of weather. Both the theme of the vanishing path and change of light are symbols in my work of the possibility of escape, of transformation and fluidity:

Waking to sunshine was a relief. She parted the yellow beaded curtain and looked up to the grit-stone moors, birch trees shimmering like unspoken words. (Caldwell 2015)

The prose poem, like a photograph – particularly a landscape photograph – can capture a moment in time but also gesture to the bigger space beyond the frame and the time just before and just after visual composition or writing. There is a tension here but it is a thoroughly creative one. Susan Sontag describes the making of photographs using a terminology borrowed from literary criticism:

They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing. Finally, the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads — as an anthology of images. (Sontag 2010: n.p.)

A collection or sequence of prose poems could also be described in this way, as an anthology of images that resonate against each other and produce new possibilities of connections. I am aiming for this result in my current PhD creative practice.

I can identify another major visual influence on my current work and a wish to explore the possibility that the prose poem offers in its use of layout on the page. This was a visit to a major exhibition of women surrealists in Manchester in 2008 titled *Angels of Anarchy*. The exhibition had a profound effect and opened up the desire to be more daring; to explore female sexuality; fully inhabit a language of dreams and metaphor within poetry. I also relished the idea of a relaxation on the restraint of form and line endings and the chance to explore a new way of playing with form on the page. The prose poem and its use of margins, the idea of writing in a “square” was something I began to explore. Anne Carson’s collection, *Short Talks* (2015), was a major influence.

Patricia Allmer, in her essay “Of Fallen Angels and Angels of Anarchy” (2010), which accompanied the exhibition, states that “flux, multiplicity, transgression, becoming and transformation are the major foci of the surrealist women artists’ works represented in *Angels of Anarchy*.”

Until recently the work of female surrealist artists was not recognized, just as the emerging form of prose poetry is still finding its academic/critical space in the world today. Meret Oppenheim’s fur lined cup was the only artwork by a woman to feature in MoMA’s landmark exhibition of surrealism in 1966 and it still has the power to shock me as a viewer. The exploration of the still life in this art work suggests the luxury of fur, the sexuality of both male (spoon) and female genitalia (cup) and looks at the objectification and fetishization of the female form with a sense of irony.



Meret Oppenheim, Object, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, New York.

The Manchester retrospective exhibition took this a stage

further and included a whole fur-lined room. I explore the memory of this visit to the exhibition in the following prose poem, produced within the Prose Poetry Project initiated by the International Poetry Studies Institute at the University of Canberra.

Nidderdale

Alice made a nest of coats in the caravan she borrowed from a friend. She was off grid. It rained all night, Nidderdale rain, heavy and persistent, drumming on the metal roof of her box-shaped room, with the sound of the river like a bass note in the music of water. Her father would have remarked, it's raining stair rods, lass or raining cats and dogs. She thought of Escher's stairways leading nowhere, the Bourgeois print of a woman cradling an angry baby at the bottom of a flight of steps. At night she dreamt of stray terriers falling from the sky. Would she be furred-in, rather than snowed in? Limp, sodden bodies piled up against the cinder blocks of the caravan? Waking to sunshine was a relief. She parted the yellow beaded curtain and looked up to the grit-stone moors, birch trees shimmering like unspoken words. (Caldwell 2015)

The link to visual art is apparent in the content of this poem and its direct references to Escher and Bourgeois. I wanted the reader to bear these images in mind as “backdrops”, references or base notes in the prose poem. The two “missing” prints complement my central image of cats and dogs, of being “furred in” a box shaped room, listening to the rain.

I also took the idea of dreaming and the surrealist discovery of the unconscious into another prose poem that explores the image of the knife and motherhood:

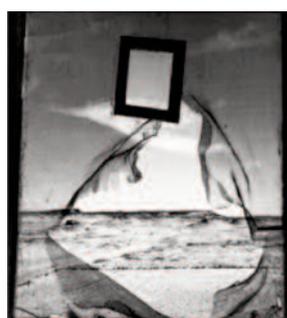
The knives in the cupboard drawer haunted her dreams. She imagined them lying together like a family that could slice itself up: hard edged, sharp witted, good at cutting up love into bite sized chunks, good at cutting skin or soft fruit. The knife with the serrated edge reminded her of her mother and she could not pin point why. ... all that gleaming Sheffield steel in the dark drawer lined with green felt. (Caldwell 2015)

In redrafting this poem, I discovered that this “dark drawer lined with felt” becomes for my work an image for creativity itself, for the power of memory but also the sexual nature of the hidden spaces in the body and the potential for violence. I would suggest some similar preoccupations emerge in the poem “Sisters” by Carrie Etter, with its focus on the body and sexual nature of hair:

Sisters

Snow banks the door so we waited for the sun. We began with checkers but were bored in three games. 'I wish I had your hair,' I said to Laura, whose thick hiplong hazel hair I had envied for years. 'If you get my hair, I get your waist', she answered. 'I want your skin', I countered. 'Then I want your teeth' she grinned. And so the stakes rose. (in Monson 2011: 45)

One of the photographs in the *Angels of Anarchy* exhibition catalogue that captures the transgressive nature of both surrealist art and the prose poem is by Lee Miller. “Portrait of Space” is an extremely interesting image for a writer as well as for the artists and photographers who have been inspired by it. There is a traditional frame within the frame of the photograph. There is also a tear in fabric and an open watery landscape beyond. All the traditional ways of looking and reading an image are challenged and jumbled up: even in the title itself.



Lee Miller, “Portrait of Space”, 1937, (in Allmer 2009: 161)

Lee Miller’s exploration of what a frame can mean, and of the act of looking itself, is de-constructed here. This image enabled me to come to a more sophisticated

understanding of the idea of *framing*, as Patricia Allmer explains:

Traditional Renaissance perspective understands the structure of a painting, as well as its content, as analogous to an ‘open window’ looking out onto reality, as was famously argued by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise Della Pittura in 1435, implying that a painting can be an accurate reflection of

reality. This perspective is radically challenged by Lee Miller's *Portrait of Space* (1937) Alberti's rectangular window has been here replaced by a tear in a net which opens up onto a landscape outside. The tear resembles the uneven shape of a vagina (which is also referred to colloquially as a 'crack' a type of tear,) a broken hymen but also the shape of an eye. In this photograph it is no longer the even rectangular frame of the window, or the painting which allows a direct view onto an outside, but the uneven, fragile shape of the tear/crack. (Allmer 2009: 19)

I would argue that the prose poem, particularly in the hands of a female writer, also displays these features. It is a hybrid form that offers perspectives on reality. The prose poem and its tight form are not just a window on the world, but a slippery, fish-like zone of possibilities that is just big enough to challenge the reader, but also make them aware of the dream-like, unconscious nature of image and perception itself.

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The Building as a Book

Caroline Carver



Like many interesting ideas, this one came about by accident. In 2012 Plymouth University had just finished an exciting new building for the Marine Institute, which was going to house some extraordinary talents, and offer amazing facilities. The jewels in the crown were a simulated bridge for the navigation courses, and a wave

tank (one of the largest and most sophisticated in Europe), as well as a smaller coastal management tank. (They told me if Concordia's senior officers had taken their bridge management course, the other officers would have learned how to take control, and the disastrous shipwreck might have been averted.)

The plan was that the interior walls of the building would be enhanced by wonderful photographs and illustrations of marine life. Outside was a large boulder which was going to be unveiled by the Duke of Edinburgh. Tim Guy, adviser on brand and campus design direction, and the mastermind behind some of these ideas, had enlisted the services of one of the world's most eminent stone-cutters, Lida Cardozo Kindersley, from Cambridge. But there were as yet no words for the stone. Lida told me later that she'd mentioned the project to Seamus Heaney, shortly before he died, and he'd said, "that's a tall order". So it was decided Tim should find a local poet. As he and I had worked together on many commercial projects over the years, I got an excited phone call saying the Duke was booked, the dignitaries lined up, a tight schedule was in place, with the stone-cutters due to come in six weeks to start work, and would I write the words for it. It was a terrifying commission and I'm glad I didn't know what Seamus Heaney had said until later.

I was called to come to Plymouth from my home at the further end of Cornwall, to look at the stone and see all the marvels of the building, and then I sat at my desk and wondered where to begin the search for the right handful of words that would brighten and explain what the Marine Institute was all about.

For the next five or so weeks I researched the kind of things people wrote on stones, and the philosophy that lay behind their ideas. I woke at about 5, several mornings a week, and wrote down possible words. I'm

normally a late riser, but I find the best ideas often emerge from the sleepy sub-conscious. A few weeks later, I'd looked through thousands of words other people had used to inspire and excite, tried to identify the logic behind them, finished and come up with a large number of haiku and haiku-type phrases to be mulled over by the scientists. Because I had come up with so many, it was decided that the words not chosen for the stone could be used alongside photographs and artwork, on all four interior floors of the building. On the way to these decisions there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and some debate over the scientific exactitude of some of the words. "Dot" in the description of the work in the Navigation department, for instance, caused a furore, but in the end it stayed in. The University's Tom Barwick, Senior Lecturer, Illustration, provided wonderful artwork.

A plywood house was built over the stone, which gave the strange impression that it had moved away from the building, its mother ship. Lida Cardozo Kindersley came from Cambridge with her team, and over a period of several weeks, the chosen words were painstakingly engraved in the new typeface she'd designed specially for Tim.

There was a scare because the Duke of Edinburgh became ill, and there's no taking back of words once engraved. But finally the building was ready for its launch day, including a special musical performance created by Dr Alexei Kirke, to harmonize with the computer-controlled wave activity in the tank. It was a great event. And what we were left with was a building of enormous scientific importance, which had poetry all over its walls to enhance the "presence" of the place – I can't think of a better word – and the words are always carefully read by the many overseas visitors who come to see it.

The building had become a book.

I find myself wondering what the famous communications guru Marshall McLuhan would have made of it. I'm certain he would have loved the idea of a "book" as a single immovable building, so that readers had to come to it, rather than being able to take the words and illustrations away with them. The words added another layer of meaning to the science, and celebrated its importance.

This was my first building. A second soon followed. At that time the university was sponsoring a number of educational projects within the city, many of which I had some small or not so small involvement with: the Mayflower Primary School, the Technical College, and importantly MAP, the Marine Academy in Plymouth. And so it came about that Tim and I were going to turn a second building into a book, but this time the theme of the words had to be found in a subject not driven by the school itself. They needed educational ideas that would relate to the kind of school it was, rather than just an enhancement of what the building stood for.

MAP was at that point mainly a building site, on the very top of a windy hill, in the St Budeaux area of Plymouth. Some old buildings were still being used, temporarily, but the main ones would be entirely new. So began the "hard hat" part of the planning. For several weeks we made frequent visits to the site, starting in January, when cold winds and rain were constant, and what was there was not much more than metal piping running over what would become floor; the first and second floors were still concrete layers only, connected by makeshift vertical ladders. No staircases yet. At each visit we were kitted out in the routine hard hats, reflective jackets, enormous gloves (which made note-taking difficult) and oversize work boots. It was the work boots that were not routine. Whoever made them had no knowledge of sizes. Each time I went I asked for boots two sizes smaller than the previous visit, and each time I felt like a child trying to wear her mother's shoes. When I had to go up a vertical ladder, I always asked the site manager to come close behind me, in case I fell. Each time we went, a bitter wind blew across the top of the hill. However, Tim and I had come up with an idea.

My residency work with the Marine Institute gave me wonderful freedom to write and read and meet all sorts of people, and do as much research as I liked. Almost at once I was struck by the blue whale, and began looking at it, the largest animal in the world, which lived on the smallest creatures, plankton, often known as krill. Tim and I plodded round the growing school buildings looking for suitable walls for the story of the blue whale, 90 feet or so long, and eventually found the perfect one in the enormous atrium, three floors high, in the centre of the building.



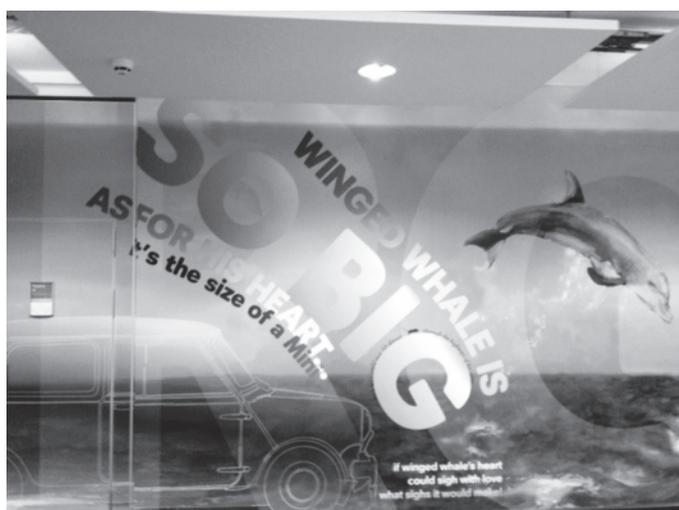
The plan was to use examples to demonstrate the almost unbelievable size of the whale. I was struck by the name the Swedish doctor, botanist and zoologist, Carl

Linnaeus had given it in 1758: *balaenoptera musculus*. He may have been thinking of the pleats around the whale's throat which expand to take in the enormous quantities of krill (plankton) that it eats. The whale's mouth is so vast that it takes a huge effort to open it, and perhaps that's why muscles were mentioned. But others thought that Linnaeus was making a joke, because the Latin word *mus* means mouse, and he may have been calling the whale "little mouse". So we decided to make the comparisons between the size of a whale and a mouse and that gave us the chance to add humour to the ideas. The designers did a brilliant job of preparing the words to run along the entire length of the wall. The whale's heart is the size of a Mini, so a life-size Mini turned up on the walls. Typefaces were used very creatively. And the tour de force was at the end of the wall, in the school cafeteria, where there is a floor-to-ceiling depiction of a whale bursting head first out of the sea. Again, we had turned a building into a book, and on the second floor of the atrium, Tim Guy added a timeline of the history of the site, going back to the Domesday Book.



forms, a pack of playing cards one month, a set of slides in another. One of his better known books is the *Gutenberg Galaxy*. He's famous for the phrase "the medium is the message". He would have smiled at the way radio and television continue to hold their own special places in the world of language, and been pleased to see how printed books still hold their heads up and perhaps even profit from the Kindle revolution. More people are reading as a result of this. He would definitely have enjoyed going round a building that was a book. Like me, he might have felt privileged to work in one of them.

Caroline Carver is a poet who has won many prizes, including the National Poetry Prize in 1998, the Italian Silver Wyvern in 2008, and the Guernsey "On the Buses" in 2010. She was commended in the 2010 National. Her work has been translated into French, Italian and Romanian. Caroline is a Hawthornden Fellow and has published five collections, the most recent being Fish Eaters (University of Plymouth Press). She's poet-in-residence at the Marine Institute, Plymouth University, an active member of the Falmouth Poetry Group, and gives readings and workshops around the country. She lives by the sea near Falmouth, Cornwall.



Where did this get us? To the realization that words can be presented in lots of different ways, and as Marshall McLuhan said, they work differently depending on their medium. He would have liked these buildings. He used to send out a newsletter which often used unusual

Developing Writers' Identities

Elizabeth Forbes



In addition to helping to stimulate and hone writing skills, tutors and mentors can have a profound effect on the developing writer's sense of self as a writer. Relationships matter and the "fit" of writer with mentor/tutor is important insofar as this

creates a fruitful interactive space that enables development of the writer's work and their self-identity. My session at the NAWE Conference in Durham (November 2015) invited discussion on the focus and qualities of such relationships by reporting recent research on the development of writers' self-identities in the context of mentoring and higher education teaching. Here I take the structure of the conference session as a framework to highlight some of the outcomes of my research.

To begin with, I invited the group to think individually about one or more key people who influenced their own sense of self as a writer, or to think about themselves in a mentoring or tutoring role – so being in the position of a committed but emerging writer at a formative stage, or working with such a person. I asked them to consider what was important about that interaction, with less of a focus on pedagogy and more on what made it significant, then to discuss this in pairs. The points identified were:

- believe in the student
- encourage the writer's self-belief
- space to grow
- student needs to believe in mentor/tutor – a sense of connection
- allow writers to find their own voice
- honesty about work and sensitivity
- affirming and validating

- engaging with the writer's starting point/idea
- empathy with the writer's writing process

It was gratifying that this immediately brought to the surface some of the issues which had arisen in my research.

The research outcomes discussed here were part of my PhD study, which asked the central question: *In what ways do writers' self-identities develop in the context of mentoring and HE teaching relationships?* This work followed on from my Masters which looked at what coaching offers to creative writers, the outcomes of which were discussed at the NAWE conference in 2012 and published in a coaching and mentoring journal (Forbes 2013, 2014).

This earlier research found the creative self of the writer to be integral to the whole person and that self development enabled development as a writer. It was apparent that there was scope, indeed need, for at least some writers to be supported in their development as writers; this demanded more than simply honing their writing output. One-to-one coaching was seen to provide an opportunity to address issues that may have a professional, creative or personal focus. This has the potential for a wider impact because of the integrated nature of writers' lives. Thus key relationships may be significant in enabling or shaping the development of a writer's sense of self as a writer. It appeared that the writer's sense of self, their identity, was an important factor in their progress. It seemed appropriate and intriguing to pursue this further. In the context also of wider debates about the teaching of creative writing, I became interested, then, in how developing writers see themselves, at what point they see themselves as writers and what part key relationships play in this.

Research approach

The focus of my doctoral research boils down to how writers develop the sense of themselves as writers and what is significant about mentoring or tutoring relationships. The approach was to look at developing writers in the specific contexts of one-to-one relationships so I did not look at group tutorials or workshop settings. This was about seeking to understand writers' individual stories and their experiences of the relationships with mentors and tutors. This meant that it was a qualitative process that focused on the interpretation of individual experiences as a basis for offering some broader insights. Eight emergent writers and their (four) mentors/tutors were each interviewed twice, at six monthly intervals. The writers also wrote a short reflective piece about the questions raised. The analysis of the very rich data that resulted from this process was inductive and, through a number of iterations, enabled some key discussion threads to emerge.

Underpinning this methodology was a conceptual framework that offered an understanding of the nature of writers and writing, the concept of self-identity and the nature of relevant learning relationships. This underlined the multi-faceted, individual and shifting nature of being a writer as bound up with the whole sense of self. The writer's self-identity is developed and expressed in interactions with the external world, both personal experiences and stimuli from other works, and in the creative writing itself. Though singular, it is nested in a cultural context. Mentoring and tutoring relationships provide in time and space the potential for significant development in the creative lives of writers and thus a context for the study of their self-identity. It is important to recognize, however, that there are multiple influences on writers as well as there being the potential for such experiences to be very powerful.

Research findings

While the research also explored different facets of being a writer and how these are shaped, the session at the conference concentrated on the relationships with the mentors/tutors. This included two distinct aspects: the focus of such interactions and the qualities of the relationships. In terms of focus, rather than feedback on the writer's own work, as might have been expected, a

broader range of issues was reported. The points raised were not the same for everyone – this was a very individual process. Interactions between writers and mentors/tutors covered a wide range of issues, such as:

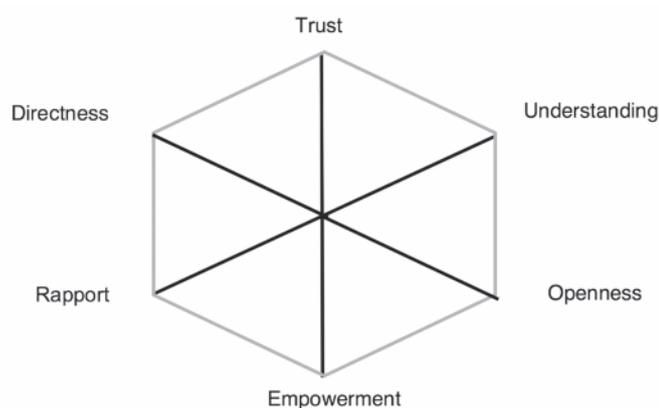
- the work including feedback in technical and specific terms on the writing generally and in relation to agreed or set tasks;
- identity as a writer in terms of voice, the territory of the work and positioning in the marketplace;
- practice as a writer including ways of working and time and space to write;
- career development in terms of submission of work and handling selection, rejection and modifications;
- pointers for reading and research;
- emotional issues provoked by the writing and its reception, including confidence.

The work became the way in, perhaps, but the whole was deeper, potentially, and more diverse than that, so that the relationship space was, at least implicitly, defined on an individual basis. It was apparent that some mentors/tutors were very conscious of providing the opportunity, at least, to address such broader issues.

While there was some common ground in terms of the approaches of mentors and tutors in one-to-one work, the two contexts were distinct, and student writers also worked with a number of other tutors during the course as well as participating in group work. Acknowledging the different characteristics of these contexts, the focus of my research related to the experiences of the specific relationships rather than the wider settings. I therefore did not evaluate different pedagogical approaches but did note the varying perspectives on, for example, workshop and group activities. Writers had made a conscious choice in terms of the kind of developmental support they were seeking and this reflected their learning preferences and perceptions of what mentoring or courses might offer.

There was also evidence that the quality of relationship matters in itself and there was some connection between this and the process: for example, in the value given to

constructive feedback on a writer's work while fostering the writer's own creativity and style, thus engendering trust. The mentors and tutors were themselves conscious of the delicacy of this need to help the writer harness their ability and potential without being overly directive. A constructive approach, building on positives, was seen to make a difference to self-belief and confidence and thus to the writer's development as a writer. Key qualities which arose in my research are identified in the following figure and explained below.



Some of these words arose directly in the data, others were chosen to convey a sense of qualities and experiences described by the writers. These features reflect the writer's experience of the relationship; they are not about the style or personality of the mentor/tutor. They are cast in terms of what the writers valued, but are not prioritized.

- **trust** in judgement and professional expertise, for example in relation to feedback on work – observed in terms of the tutor's understanding of the field, the marketplace, so that opinions were valued;
- **openness** in terms of comfort with sharing information and work of a potentially sensitive or emotional nature while respecting appropriate boundaries as articulated in terms of considering how the self is reflected in the work;
- **directness** in the challenge of the writer's work while giving advice and guidance, one writer describing her mentor as "fearless" in asking questions;
- **understanding** of the writer's vision, intention and

strengths, for example in terms of the mentor helping the writer to find her voice and to sustain commitment to the vision of her novel, or the tutor helping someone see things in the work not noticed by the writer herself;

- **empowerment** through a climate that respects the writer's individuality and enables the writer to be assertive when needed, seen in the encouragement of a writer to explore in the work unique qualities and experiences or to experiment with the form and tone of writing;
- **rapport** that enables a level of personal connection and approachability.

This model offers the possibility of mapping the importance or the experience of the characteristics of any individual relationship. It follows the established shape of a spider chart, which enables a "rating" system to be applied on the spines of the web, so that a particular relationship may be characterized in relation to aspirations or actuality.

These qualities are not a hierarchy but they do inter-relate. They echo some of the points raised at the beginning of the conference session. For example: "space to grow", "encourage the writer's self-belief" and "allow writers to find their own voice" link to understanding and empowerment; "honesty about work and sensitivity" relates to directness; and "believe in mentor/tutor – a sense of connection" and "empathy with the writer's writing process" are consistent with trust and rapport.

Relationships with mentors/tutors are complex and change over time. The fluid nature of the relationships and the diverse focus of the interactions between writers and mentors/tutors highlighted earlier suggest a relationship dynamic that is individualized and not wholly definable. Thus, just as the development of the writer is a very individual process and their creativity depends on that individuality, so the relationship forged, if it is to be positive and constructive, needs to be particular; the qualities identified varied in importance or prominence in different relationships. The personal nature of these qualities and the potential professional intimacy of the relationship that may arise from this underline the importance of "fit" in terms of the matching of the individuals in a relationship with regard

to disposition and the needs of the writer. This issue of “fit” was not a surprise given coaching and mentoring practice and literature and my previous research, but is perhaps not always given such prominence in tutoring situations.

It was evident that, even when being described in terms of adult-adult or with good rapport, these were not seen as relationships of equals; the mentor/tutor seems always to be regarded as the expert. Into this mix comes the added complexity of the reality of practising writer-teachers. Although this research did not explore in detail the sense of identity of the mentor/tutors, it was clear that their own identities as writers were very real and prominent for them to the extent that there is sometimes a perceived competition for the energy required for teaching and for writing. There is potential tension here and this may therefore present particular challenges for the commitment and quality of such developmental relationships. Other pressures also have a bearing, such as the time constraints and rotation of tutors on MA courses.

Implications

This research begins to re-frame ground previously described anecdotally in personalized accounts or from research in different contexts including schools, executive mentoring and creativity more generally. Through this work I am inviting debate, and hope to provoke reflection about what mentors and tutors bring to relationships with developing writers and how both are supported. Arising from this, some questions which mentors/tutors might like to consider are:

- how do you/should you help writers to address their emerging sense of identity as writers?
- how are programmes structured to foster the kinds of relationship qualities identified here as enabling positive development of writers? (this might include questions around the balance of one-to-one and group work, the continuity and fit of relationships)
- what training or awareness raising is undertaken with mentors and tutors to equip them to support writers appropriately?

There is a paucity of empirical research into the

development of writers and further work to test and advance the points raised here may help to deepen understanding and enhance practice. In addition, related threads that might be pursued as possible future lines of inquiry were also identified during the course of this doctoral research. They include: creative writing pedagogies; comparative approaches of mentoring and tutoring in nurturing the developing writer; self-perceptions of mentors and tutors.

This has been a very rewarding study and other aspects are being pursued for separate publication. In the meantime I should welcome further comments on this research or possible future studies.

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Elizabeth Forbes has recently completed a PhD in the Faculty of Education at Cambridge as a mature student, following a varied career in education and management, and practice as a professional coach alongside the endless wrestle with words.

Build a Book in an Hour and a Quarter

Gill James



This workshop is a cut-down version of one I've frequently used in schools. The Build a Book Workshop started out as a method of enabling schools who could not afford to pay for school visit nevertheless to enjoy one. The children

produce a book that parents and other interested parties buy. The profit on the book pays for the author visit. Often there is enough profit also to support a charity of the school's choice and sometimes that charity can be the school itself, even (quite appropriately) the school library. I've now completed several of these visits and it soon became obvious that although the fund-raising is still welcome, the Build a Book Workshop takes the student though all of the processes involved in "building" a book – so much so, in fact, that I now also offer this as a paid visit with the school using all of the profit for its desired charity.

Students have the opportunity to:

- go through a creative process that leads to a product, i.e. write a story, poem, piece of creative non-fiction or other similar item for the book
- critique and edit the creative product
- select what will and what won't be included in the book (Oh yes, some difficult decisions have to be made here. We have the choice of making it very "real life" and allowing students to reject some work or this can all be teacher controlled, perhaps ensuring that each child has a least one piece of work "published" and no one has more than three pieces included.)
- design the book
- illustrate the book
- produce a cover
- market the book
- attend a book launch

Particularly important is getting the motivation right for the initial creative process. Cynically, we may think that the whole point of writing is to get published and have that published book sell millions of copies. Yes, that is part of it. Yet we also have something to say. This has been replicated in miniature in several of the books we have built:

- a book that supported a children's hospital had courage as its theme
- a book supporting Child Line and the NSPCC took on an anti-bullying stance
- a book supporting cancer drugs for children contained stories about hope.

It was this creative motivation that I wanted mainly to look at with the participants in the workshop at the November 2015 NAWA conference in Durham. I also wanted to give them a sense of some of the fun that can be had in working towards producing a book. These days quite a few traditionally published writers also self-publish but often with little joy and with a great sense of responsibility. They either complete every process themselves, which is very time-consuming, or they have to buy in services from others. Editing is all-important and that's usually the first and often the only service to be paid for. The rest is doable though may be tedious. Most writers especially dislike marketing. In the Build a Book Workshop, there is no tedium. Even reluctant writers are motivated to write. In the second half of the day, students work according to their whims and their strengths on illustration, book design and marketing. There is a buzz about doing whatever it takes to get this book out there.

Creating in 75 minutes what takes at least a full working day in a school is a challenge. Often the schools do quite a bit of follow-up work, and the Build a Book Workshop has sometimes taken up three or more working days or

even lasted several weeks. The plan for the NAWÉ conference was to keep it simple. It intended to:

- introduce participants to the Build a Book workshop
- quickly establish a cause
- complete some warm-up exercises to get us into the writing
- invite participants to complete a little critiquing and editing
- offer them the chance to provide some illustration (Everyone can draw. Oh yes, they can.)
- discuss the option of creating a website rather than producing a physical book or even an e-book. I've used this option several times with schools that only wanted to raise money for a charity and did not need to cover my visit. This is also much more quickly realized. It can be linked to the charity concerned with a Just Giving button if required. In any case, for the adult participants of this particular session, it was probably more important to find a theme that worked for all of us rather than a charity to support.

It didn't quite go according to plan, for two reasons. Firstly, there was great interest in knowing more about how the Build a Book Workshop operates in schools. I had to field many questions before we could start some practical work. Secondly the shocking events in Paris on 13 November that had kept us silent at breakfast on 14 November were still slowing our thoughts at this session early on Sunday morning.

However, this did at least give us our theme. We wanted to celebrate Paris and express our sorrow about the events. It was clearly time for my "Gargoyles and Angels" exercise. This is really an exercise about using opposites. The first time I completed it, I used gargoyles and angels. The name has stuck. We divided our theme into what we love about Paris and what horrifies us about what has happened.

I've used the "Gargoyles and Angels" exercise many times in schools but with much simpler themes, for instance, to contrast Summer and Winter, home and school, or town and country. I've even used it in some workshops on creative writing in other languages. Even though here we were using a much more complex theme, it remains a useful exercise in getting the ideas flowing and also in producing some fresh, uncliché language.

It works best if students use lined paper.

First I discussed the theme of the Paris attacks and we decided on two sub themes: "We love Paris because" and "What happened on Friday in Paris saddens us".

I asked them to fold the paper into four, vertically, to produce four columns. At the top of the column on the left they wrote the words "I love Paris". See Figure 1.

I love Paris			

Figure 1

We worked for five minutes on writing down everything we could think that we liked about Paris. Participants could use odd words, phrases or whole sentences. They must never cross the vertical line, however, but go down to the next line. See Figure 2. The words in italics are mine.

I love Paris			
<i>artists</i>			
<i>Champs</i>			
<i>Elysée</i>			
<i>dark cafés</i>			
<i>Quartier</i>			
<i>Latin</i>			
<i>map like a</i>			
<i>snail</i>			
<i>Le</i>			
<i>Centre</i>			
<i>Pompidou</i>			
<i>cigarette</i>			

Figure 2

I sigh, and put away my pens and palette, my colours and my brushes and wish I wasn't an "emergency artist."

We also did some drawing. Here again I used an exercise I've frequently used in schools to motivate children who say they can't draw. Indeed, a group of established writers can be even more self-conscious about their drawing than school children. There were no illustrators amongst us. I must acknowledge Anthony Browne here as he first showed me this exercise. Each participant makes a random shape on a piece of paper. They then pass the shape to another participant who makes it into a picture. The results are always astonishingly good. That Sunday morning was no exception. I'd brought along pencils and colours so we had a bit of fun.

I always use colours in my school visits. Many of the illustrations will be in black and white but if we start with a coloured picture and turn it to grey scale, the picture has more texture than a line-drawing. Often, the cover ends up being a collage of these pictures. The coloured pictures can in any case be used in promotion materials.

The hour and a quarter went very quickly. We spent the last fifteen minutes or so talking about the use of the Build a Book Workshop in schools. The participants had many questions. The burning question though was "Is it really easy to organize a Build a Book Workshop in a school?"

Well, it's not difficult and it can be fun. It does have to be well-organized, however.

One of the challenges is getting all of the work presented in an acceptable digitized form. Certainly it should not fall to the teacher or the writer to type up everything. Follow-up IT lessons could allow the students to complete word-processing their work. Work could be saved to a shared drive and presented in an accessible form to whoever will put the book together. Any administrative help offered with this should be welcomed.

In any case, teachers may want their students to carry on working on their texts. The Build a Book Workshop may just be regarded as a kick-starter, especially if it takes just one day. Your one day in school can provide quite a

lot of material for the teachers. This may be worth remembering when you prepare your budget.

A further challenge is getting the book ready technically for your printer, e-book provider or for your website. My book, *The Build a Book Workshop*, explains this in detail. I gave away copies of this e-book at the session at the conference in Durham and am happy to do so for anyone reading this article. Email g.james1@salford.ac.uk and specify if you would like a copy as a PDF or for your Kindle.

There is something enormously satisfying about producing a book with a group of young writers. Most schools organize a book launch inviting friends and families, governors and colleagues – and of course, you, the facilitator. It's another call on your time, of course, but such events are always good fun.

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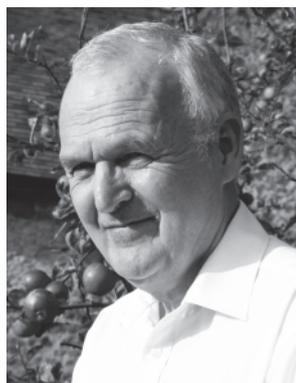
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Gill James is a senior lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Salford. She writes short and flash fiction for adults and longer fiction for children and young adults. She is a frequent visitor to schools and has run several Build a Book workshops. She ran the workshop described above and has written the book about it in order to give writing colleagues the opportunity to enjoy this activity.

Alone Together

Paul Francis



“Avoid cliques, gangs, groups. The presence of a crowd won’t make your writing any better than it is.” Trust Zadie Smith to stir things up. What about courses, workshops, writers’ groups? Are all of these delusions, tempting writers off the lonely track of their proper endeavour?

As an Arvon addict, and member of two excellent writing groups, I think she’s wrong, but we need to be clear about the precise benefits of collaboration.

Members of NAWE have dual identity, as writers and as teachers, and in my Durham workshop I drew on two separate strands of my own experience to explore ways in which writers can work together to improve their writing.

During 2015 I published two books. *Writing for Blockheads* (Liberty Books) arose from my experience of freelance writing in various genres – fiction, poetry, drama (including radio drama) and non-fictional prose. The title is a riposte to Dr Johnson’s assertion that “no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.” It’s my argument that writing for its own sake, rather than for money, can be intensely satisfying, provided that the writer takes it seriously, and does everything that they can – including working with others – to make it better. I also produced *Writing Poems for Keystage 3* (ZigZag) a collection of classroom assignments designed to encourage students to write their own poems. There’s little incentive in the system to make that happen, and cuts ensure that it’s harder than ever to get poets into the classroom. Many English teachers don’t feel confident in getting their students to write poetry, and

some are actively discouraged from any activity that strays from the predictable norm. I wanted to offer a lively range of tasks that didn’t require expertise or performance skills on the part of the teacher. Their job is to organize the activity, and to respond to its results, and my pack includes suggestions as to how they might do that.

The workshop used two activities, one from each of the two publications described above. One comes from my own practice as a writer, the other draws on thirty years’ experience in comprehensive schools, but despite their differences in origin and style the two exercises have a powerful connection, which I’ll come to at the end of this article.

The first task concerned redrafting a poem, as outlined in the final chapter of *Writing for Blockheads*. Poets are committed to solo sessions of redrafting, in which they look at their own poems, and think about what they need to do to improve them. My suggestion is that they should read through their own poem as if it was written by someone else, and jot down a revision agenda, a list of things that need to change. Making the changes come later; first, you need the list. Many of the headings on it will be regular features – opening, ending, tenses, point of view, padding, repetition. But there will also be items which are specific to any one poem.

Imagine that I’m a member of your writing group. I’m thinking of entering a competition that asks for a poem “inspired by Thoma Gray’s *Elegy*.” I’ve got this draft, (a) “Shades of Grey”, and I send it to you with a request for help – “which changes do you think I need to make?”

a) Shades of Gray

The bells ring out as darkness closes in.
In curtained homes the chimes of News at Ten
spell out the message that we cannot win.
Huw Edwards states the facts of life again.

Here's where we keep reminders of our past
our hopeful projects and our harebrained schemes
the fantasies we loved that couldn't last
the burial of a nation's finer dreams.

The welfare state, that relic of a time
we thought we knew what government was for
before the experts taught it was a crime
to spend our cash providing for the poor.

But now it's different. Now there's climate change.
We face the crisis, looking for the switch
while there's still time we seek to rearrange
the permanent agenda of the rich.

The memories slip away, at breakneck speed
and won't be caught. That was the former time
of innocence, before the law decreed
that government checking business was a crime.

The light has almost gone, the day forgot
while better things still struggle to prevail.
We were the ones who went and lost the plot
and now the church and graveyard's up for sale.

b) Elegy for a Privatised Planet

No church bells for this parting of the day.
I hear the distant boom of News at Ten
as through the graveyard, tracking Thomas Gray,
I follow dreams that will not rise again.

Beveridge, Bevan. Work, a living wage,
good schools for all, fair social housing, health –
the relics of an optimistic age.
They rest in peace. The god we serve is Wealth.

Wealth makes our regulations, pays no tax,
dictates the news and auctions off the state.
Where once we tried to watch each other's backs
now government instructs us who to hate.

Meanwhile, the running debt of climate change
accumulates. We need to throw the switch
of how we use resources, rearrange
priorities decided by the rich.

But handcuffed rulers, threatened with the courts,
fear treaties which protect the right to trade.
A cleaner, greener life? Forget such thoughts
and face the fact that profits must be made.

The last light sinks, relaxing into death.
Can life go on? Will humans yet prevail?
What will remain of us? Don't hold your breath.
The graveyard's full. The church is up for sale.

I've used this draft at a number of workshops, and have lost count of the possible changes which have been suggested. To start at the easy end, there's the title, which is witty but inappropriate – it just isn't that kind of poem. Secondly, there's a loss of power in stanzas four and five.

The first friend I showed this to was brutal. "Just ditch them." I know what he means, and he was confident that they didn't belong with the rest of the poem. "It's about privatization and social damage, not climate change." I was reluctant to accept that because to me the whole apparatus of trade treaties like TTIP is part of the privatization process, and our consequent inability to tackle climate change is linked to various ways in which private businesses have eroded our social network – eg

in health, housing and education. Which is fine, in the realm of argument. But it doesn't solve the poetic problem, and if I want to retain that content then it has to be expressed with more poetic force.

In the workshop we looked at various suggestions for improving the poem, and I then circulated a later draft, (b) "Elegy for a Privatised Planet". This is unquestionably an improvement. It doesn't answer all the suggestions made, but in some cases I don't agree with those, or found them interesting but couldn't find ways of responding to them within this poem (the competition had a maximum length of 24 lines).

It's not perfect, but that's not the point. The point is the process, the movement from one version to another, and

the kinds of changes that make a difference. With these two drafts in front of us, we can have a useful, specific conversation about what works best. We shan't always agree, but the common territory of having these drafts to talk about is what enables us to hold the discussion in the first place. If you've never tried it, don't underestimate the strain of inviting other people to comment on your poems, but once that offer is made then it provides avenues for progress that you can't find any other way.

The second task we tackled was the group ballad. This is something I devised when I was teaching, and its basic building-block looks like this:

THE BALLAD OF THESEUS – stages in the story

A. After losing to him in battle, the Athenians have to send tribute to King Minos of Crete.

MODEL VERSE FOR THE BALLAD

King Minos beat the Athenians
And the price of their defeat
Was to send him tribute every year
To the labyrinth at Crete.

*4 line verses; rhymes a b c b; 4 beats, 3 beats, 4 beats, 3 beats;
ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum, ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum.....*

B. Each year, seven young men and women from Athens sail to Crete, and never come back. They are killed by the minotaur, a bull-like monster who lives in a group of tunnels called the Labyrinth.

C. Theseus is the son of King Aegeus of Athens. He is angry to see these young people killed every year. He asks if he can go as one of the young men, to try to kill the minotaur. Aegeus agrees, and they decide on this code. If Theseus has succeeded, the ship will have white sails. If not, the sails will be black.

And so on, until...

K. Theseus comes near to Athens, but he forgets to change the sails. His father Aegeus is watching from a cliff-top, but when he sees black sails he thinks Theseus is dead. He kills himself by jumping over the cliff. Theseus becomes king.

Before issuing the sheets, I ring one of the letters B–K on each sheet in order, so that the first ten go B–K, and with the eleventh sheet I start with B again. That way, whether you have 20 or 30 customers, you're sure of an even distribution between the different stages of the story.

Anyone at a NAWE conference is likely to be familiar both with the Theseus story and the ballad form. But you can't take that for granted, and certainly not with school students. So it's worth spelling out both the outline of the story and the pattern of the model verse. One of the problems with using rhymes is that pupils are impatient to jam the rhymes together. They want short "cat sat on the mat"-type connections, and very quickly that will lead them into doggerel. They need room in which to make sense, and you ensure that by leaving space between the rhymes – i.e. rhyming lines 2 and 4, not 1 and 2.

There's a place for innovation and rebel spirits, but not at this stage of this assignment. They can show their originality through choice of word, detail or image, but the whole thing works better if you're Stalinist about the model verse. I'd count stresses rather than syllables, and as always the test of whether or not it works is to read it aloud.

For a single lesson, this requires a lot of organization. You need plenty of small scraps of lined paper, each capable of holding one stanza. Encourage pupils to make a mess, cross out, and then rewrite on a new scrap. You've established the story and the model stanza, so now they need to get writing. Each pupil starts from the letter that's ringed. If their sheet has B ringed, they start there, and then move on to C. If they have F, they start with F and move on to G. If they have K ringed, they start there and then move on to B. But each stanza must be on a separate piece of paper. They don't carry the name of the person who wrote it, but they must carry the letter code in the top right hand corner. If one stage of the story is too complex to be told in one stanza, then they can use two, but they should still be on separate pieces of paper, labelled D1 and D2.

When this works well it can feel like a factory at full steam. This is a buzz, but it shouldn't get out of control, and when the fastest students have covered four stages of the story you should call a halt. Check that every stanza slip has an identifying letter code, and collate

them in piles from B–K.

You're now going to convert your fledgling writers into editors. Their job, in groups, will be to choose the best stanza covering a particular stage of the story, or to collate two versions to make a best stanza – but not to start again from fresh. The aim is to assess alternatives, and select between them. That's most easily done where there's no personal involvement, so editors are not dealing with stanzas they themselves have written. You can ensure this by implementing the following rota:

Writers of	B and C	edit	H and I
	D and E		J and K
	F and G		B and C
	H and I		D and E
	J and K		F and G

Throughout this process, the teacher is the organizer, running the process but not intervening. There may well be mistakes, but you can't help every group in the room. If you trust the process and encourage pupils to talk to each other, you may be surprised by how intelligent they can be. Also, if you stand back, you get a breather, and you know what's going on.

The point here is not perfect judgement, but to move to a communal reading of the finished ballad. Groups choose their best stanzas, have time to allocate readers and rehearse, and then you orchestrate a reading of the class ballad – pointing at each group in turn but not interrupting or commenting. It's a group ballad, and that's how it should sound.

That is an ambitious programme for one lesson. My main regret at the Durham conference was that I didn't meet any secondary teachers. But there were teachers in this workshop with experience of primary and higher education, and they felt that this could be a useful model in both those areas.

It's still a lot of work for one lesson, but not all lessons are the same. I see this as a launchpad, an initial investment that could lead in various directions, and the richness of these possibilities for me justifies the elaborate preparation and organizational work that this initial task demands.

First of all, you can celebrate the achievement of this group ballad by duplicating copies of the poem, or

displaying it – perhaps with illustrations. It could be performed on video, acted out, or presented in an assembly. In one junior school where I did this the head teacher just happened to drop in while the group's ballad was being performed. She smiled at me and asked "Is that one of yours?" "No," I said, "it's one of theirs." That worked as a happy accident, but you could contrive that kind of situation as a way of validating the work.

This lesson also provides a creative model for the future, an outline of how to write a ballad. You get your story, you fix on a model stanza, you write stanzas for each stage of the story, and then you make it as good as you can. Having done that with everyone in one session, you can then allow the time for each pupil to write their own ballad, following that pattern. That's where the room for originality comes in, and that also allows the opportunity for you to provide individual help where and when you think it's needed. It does take time, but your students will need that if they're to grasp what it's like to write a long poem of their own.

Or, if you want to get into the nitty gritty of ballad-writing, you can store all the original stanzas, and do your own analysis of particular choices they made. Here's three ways of telling this part of the story. Which details did each one choose? Which words work best? This is not about glorifying some individuals over others. It's about the process of looking at the alternatives, of working out which words work best, and why.

This is where the two assignments connect. In both cases, the customers are looking at "something not their own", and that makes a huge difference. Take away the personal investment of "I wrote this" and it's easier for writers – whether teenagers or adults – to make clear judgements about what works. As writers we are each of us alone, but we are better when, for brief occasions and specific purposes, we are alone together.

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Letting in the Stars of Children's Poetry – Together

Mandy Coe and Kaye tew



The PowerPoint was checked, handouts placed on seats, and after watching the conference-room door with that *will-anyone-come-to-our-session* feeling, in they came, balancing coffee cups and conference packs. We saw those smiles and knew things would go well – yet another reason this has been such a lovely project: poetry for children has so many fans!

Conference activities (our session)

“Hippo Writes a Love Poem to His Wife” (John Agard). After we’d outlined our project’s context and aims (see below) we arrived at the heart of the matter... Love! There was some initial wriggling in seats, but this bunch was game for anything, and by the end of the session participants had composed (and read to complete strangers) brand new Love Poems. There were blushes, giggling and declarations of needs and pleasures that had us in stitches. Laughter, reading, writing and sharing – this is what poetry for children is. The group didn’t even notice they were writing poems for children. Our thanks to all who came along!

Let in the Stars: a prize, an anthology and a campaign

The goal of our project is to support poetry for children.

Roger McGough, a judge of the 2015 Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award commented on BBC News (2015) on how sorry he was to see that “so few publishers are producing books for children and young people”, and Chrissie Gittins, highlighting how poetry for children is now categorized as “poetry and horror” or “poetry and joke books” said in *The Guardian*:

Booksellers say to me that there aren't many poetry books being published; book consultants and journalists tell me that they aren't told about new children's poetry books when they are published. It seems that the chain between children's poetry and its audience has many broken links. (Gittins 2015)

The *Letting in the Stars of Children's Poetry* campaign has been an adventure in three stages, providing a platform for new and existing writers through publication/performance opportunities and developing new initiatives for adult and young writers. Through the resulting one-off publication, *Let in the Stars*, we aimed to highlight the discrepancies between the obvious popularity of poetry for children (at home and in schools) and the reason given for its decline – lack of demand.

We started in 2013 with an international competition (the Manchester Prize) inviting adults to write new poems for children. Wanting to challenge the idea that poetry doesn’t sell, we carefully designed the resulting anthology, *Let in the Stars*, published by The Manchester Writing School at Manchester Metropolitan University. Contrary to current trends we were keen to create a “book for life” suited to a wide age-range.

We launched *Let in the Stars*, supported by the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, and Imtiaz Dharker at the Manchester Children’s Book Festival in 2014. Once launched, we set off to explore issues of promotion,

display and sales. The initiative was well-received, with many positive reviews and, in 2015, *Let in the Stars* was shortlisted for the Centre for Literacy in Poetry for Primary (CLiPPA) Award and featured in the *Guardian's* top ten poetry books for children. As a result of the CLiPPA short-listing, a number of poets in the book had their work filmed, published and distributed to schools.

Manchester Children's Book Festival, in June 2015, continued to celebrate children's poetry, featuring "Poetry from the Heart", with Carol Ann Duffy, Imtiaz Dharker (and Mandy Coe), reading alongside Poetry by Heart regional finalists in a celebration of multi-cultural Manchester. One of the young poets, Eve Piper, wrote a poem for the occasion, "The Manchester Bees", which she subsequently recorded as the sound-track for the official MCBF film. During the 2015 Manchester Literature Festival in October, we hosted an "in conversation" event with Michael Rosen, looking at the future of poetry for children.

A city-wide weekend of poetry

The 2015 Manchester Children's Book Festival, with funding from Arts Council England NW, also gave over the second weekend of the festival programme to a series of free events. Designed to celebrate the regard that children, teachers and families have for poetry, the "Letting in the Stars of Children's Poetry" weekend was a mix of drop-in, inclusive workshops, exhibitions and performances.

In the weeks running up to the event, we distributed bookmarks, shelf labels and posters to over 1800 schools and libraries and worked with local schools inviting them to "Create", "Adopt" and "Share" by either sharing a favourite poem, sourcing and adopting a new poem and/or writing new ones. Pupils' poems were displayed at local independent bookshops and children and parents came along for drop-in workshops.

Open mic events at Manchester Central Library and at Waterstones featured a mix of established writers – including Robert Paul Weston, Dominic Berry, Chrissie Gittins, Dom Conlon and Pauline Barnett – and a number of other up-and-coming writers, some performing publicly for the first time. They shared the microphone with parents and children, performing to large and very receptive audiences. "I am new to writing

children's poetry and I wanted to meet other poets and see how things are done", said one.

As adult shoppers are most likely to buy a poetry book for children, the Waterstones event was hosted in the adult section. Supporting this, we designed "A Gift for a Child" bookmarks including "To...." and "From...." spaces for names.

It was an inspiring weekend of family participation, memorable poems and readings. Its goals were highlighted by one Year 5 pupil, who, in sharing his favourite poems told the class that this poem had been "put in him" by his mother, and that his grandmother had "put that poem in her". He went on to explain that passed-on poems "stay inside us forever".

Why so many of us feel passionate about this

Poetry brings literature to life and into children's lives in a way no other genre can. Short, re-readable, visual, rhythmic, multi-cultural, subversive, funny, inclusive... poetry is at the heart of the work of many UK literacy and educational organizations. Our project (still evolving) has left us positive and full of ideas, and our NAW session left us inspired. The UK has an amazing community of children's poets as well as some passionate publishers and independent bookshops determined to see this genre thrive. Poetry plays a crucial role both within education and in democratizing literature for young people. Aside from this, it is an art form that pleases all ages and epitomizes creative freedom. The world would be a duller place without it.

How do schools and poets influence each other?

Poetry is a liberating force in schools. Many poets visit schools through author's visits or longer-term projects. As Louise Johns-Shepherd (CLiPPA's chief executive) says, "Poetry is a fundamental element in the development of children's literacy". So how do we balance the needs of literacy and education with the needs of this genre? The infrastructure and of the adult poetry world includes magazines, anthologies, open floors, reviews, competitions, prizes, courses and university degrees. Poets writing for children, however, have a far narrower infrastructure – schools. To ensure adequate book sales children's poets may be required to visit schools regularly. During these visits, poets are

often invited to read to whole-school assemblies (far easier if the work is performance-based and able to engage and entertain all abilities and Key Stages). There are implicit expectations that workshops are class-sized, and that they support literacy and curriculums requirements. These are all established and understandable forces familiar to many writers and literature organizations. Children's poets have, in turn, been welcoming, resisting and/or negotiating them for years: it comes with the territory. But perhaps in focusing on individual negotiations we missed the bigger picture: if this genre is now a sub-category of jokes, if new and existing poets are finding publication nigh impossible, we're in a pickle.

Bridging the gap

No single poetry project can fix this and it isn't ours to fix. What we can do is make waves and raise the issues. On our travels with this project we have come across many creative suggestions and our NAWE presentation was yet another chance to hear what people thought. Poetry for children is as diverse in voice, subject and form as poetry for adults. Poets writing for both (Philip Gross, Jackie Kaye, Carol Ann Duffy and George Szirtes to name but a few) cross the perceived gap between the two genres, allowing them access to a support network not shaped by the needs of the classroom. A question our session raised was this: Is it possible for this network to also support those only writing for children?

After all, both adults and children enjoy poetry for children. That readers find such pleasure in recalling their favourites and finding new poems is well-known, but that writers also relish the accessibility and experimentation children's poetry provides, hints that bridging this gap would be beneficial to writers of both genres.

Ways forward

Sharing the infrastructure of the adult poetry world can bring to children's poetry a sense of recognition and career development that reaches beyond the school gates. Anyone/everyone involved with literature or poetry organizations can help with these very simple steps, which were formed during our NAWE Conference session.

- invite poets to write/read the occasional poem for children at your open floor
- even once a year (National Poetry Day?) dedicate one page in your magazine to poetry for children
- review poetry for children and young adults
- run workshops in writing poetry for children (or incorporate a one-off in a course for writing for adults)
- feature a resource page for children's poets on your website
- create a poem-for-a-child prize within competitions (even a small prize would help)
- feature poetry for children in festivals and/or literature events
- feature a lecture or module within MAs in children's writing or in poetry MAs

These actions could arise from a public pledge and/or publicity coming from a coalition of literature and poetry projects. They are all doable, and while they do not solve everything, they have the cumulative power to shift the balance for poets writing for children. One last point from our NAWE session – this one specifically aimed at school and public libraries and also bookshops: *Give children's poetry a shelf of its own!*

Call to Action posters and links and resources can be found on <http://www.mcbf.org.uk/get-involved/let-in-the-stars-of-childrens-poetry>. Let us know what you're doing by tweeting @MCFestival using #LetintheStars and #PoetryTogether.

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Space to Write

Developing independent writing in schools

Wyl Menmuir



As writers we understand instinctively that the time and space we devote to our craft is vital. Consider, for example the care and attention writers give to their workspaces, whether Will Self's chaos of an office, with its post-it bedecked walls, Louis de Bernière's secluded cabin, or Virginia Woolf's minimalist writer's lodge.

We understand, too, Teresa Cremin's (2010) assertion that "writing involves time and experience, reflection and evaluation". We know writing is a process, and one that doesn't necessarily fit neatly into the confines of a literacy lesson.

So why does the teaching of writing in schools often ignore time and space when they are clearly so important to the writing process? Why do so many teachers rely on what Eve Bearne (2007) classed as a "disassociated skills approach" to writing when we know the writing process involves a complex multiplicity of practices? And is it really surprising that a recent National Literacy Trust survey (2014) on children's writing behaviours found almost 25% rarely or never write outside class, if schools are not developing opportunities for them to develop as independent writers?

The project

It was these reflections on the practices of professional writers and the teaching practices I've observed in both

primary and secondary schools that led to the development of *Space to Write*. I wanted to test the assumption that developing spaces to write independently in schools would make a difference to children's motivation to write for themselves. And aside from anything else, I wanted to open a dialogue in schools about authentic independent writing, writing that is not simply set by teachers for the circular purpose of learning to write.

Alongside two project partners, Kernow Education Arts Partnership and The Learning Institute, I worked with two primaries and a secondary school in Cornwall, helping them to develop a range of approaches to encourage children's independent writing over the course of a year.

The project involved teacher training in which we investigated the research into children's independent writing, some of the existing models from which we might learn – including Arvon, Ministry of Stories and Room 13 International – and ran a series of planning activities to help the teachers understand the complexities and opportunities of developing the "perfect" writing space. We explored the teachers' own writing preferences and prejudices, the considerations they would have to make when designing a space, and examined the range of approaches they could take.

The teachers took these planning tools back into their classrooms and used them to design, negotiate and build space and time for independent writing in their schools. Each school also had a visit from a practising author, who talked with the children about their writing space and the importance of space and time to their writing practice.

The teachers and children had to decide whether the space would run in curriculum time or at other times during the day; whether it would be a pop-up temporary space or a more permanent fixture; how much responsibility and autonomy the children would have over the space; the audiences for the children's writing; what, if any, of the children's independent writing would be shared; how authors might be involved in the project, and so on. We wanted to encourage the teachers and children to design a space according to their needs, bearing in mind the context of the school and the time and space available.

The writing spaces

In the first writing space, developed by a Year 3/4 class, the teacher renovated an abandoned shed in the playground before passing it over to the children. This space was entirely regulated by the children, who used the shed before and after school, during lunch and break times, and with only one rule, that it had to be used for independent writing. Each child was also given an independent writing book, which was not assessed or marked by the teacher.



You can explore your ability to write whatever you want, without being criticized. (Year 5 child)

The space is symbolic as well as literal. (Teacher)

We helped organize and design the spaces to be places we would want to write. It made me more comfortable with writing, so I want to do it more often. (Year 5 child)

The second was a branded pop-up writing space within a secondary school library, with specific times set aside for pupils to use the space for their own independent writing. This project involved developing Year 9 pupils as writing mentors to pupils in years 7 and 8. The lead teacher promoted, in the space, a range of authentic purposes and audiences for the pupils to write independently, such as local poetry and fiction competitions.

In the third school, a Year 5 class developed a range of writing spaces in the classroom and around the school grounds. These ranged from a "secret" writing space within the classroom, to a writing tent in the school woods. The project mainly ran during curriculum time and the teacher developed a weekly writers workshop, based on Donald Graves's (1983) approach. During these sessions, adults and children worked alongside each other, developing their own writing, discussing progress and difficulties and supporting each other. All the children in this group also used un-assessed writing books, which the teacher did not access.

The results

Both teachers and children reported they were much more engaged with the writing process than they had been previously. Teachers reported children taking more responsibility for their writing development (some children chose to concentrate on developing longer, more complex narratives, others focused on presentation, others on the planning process, and so on). Many teachers commented on the increase in children's writing stamina, and in the quality of their writing in other areas of the curriculum.

This pilot study was small scale, so it is difficult to draw conclusions without a much larger sample size. However, our observations and interviews with teachers and children involved suggested:

- Children's independence and autonomy impacts on their motivation to write.
- The children found having spaces that were not assessed gave them freedom to experiment and to develop as creative writers, in contrast to the intensely monitored and assessed writing they were used to.



“We must find the time to encourage independent writing that is not heavily assessed, and allow children the time to experiment, to make mistakes, to reflect on their writing and develop a process that works for them.”

- The children were aware of the areas in which they needed to develop, and *Space to Write* gave them opportunities to practise the elements of writing that were important to them, in particular in the areas they believed it would help them in their writing in curriculum contexts.
- Opening authentic dialogues about writing is important. Having a forum in which to discuss writing processes, the complexities and difficulties of writing, appeared to be an important motivating factor.
- There appeared to be a correlation between involvement with the project and an increase in writing outside school. Engagement was particularly noted with

those children who had previously been less engaged with writing within school.

- Increasing the profile of independent writing may well be a factor in encouraging children to choose to write. Over the course of the year, writing independently appeared to become a more normal activity for many children involved.
- The project impacted on the teaching of writing. In many cases, both teachers and children came to understand they had differing requirements when it came to time and space to write. For some, writing is a predominantly social activity, while for others, more solitary, it requires times of quiet and intense



concentration. This understanding appeared to be a liberating experience for the participants.

If we are to develop our children into engaged, motivated, independent writers, we must consider the space and time we give over to their independent writing. We must find the time to encourage independent writing that is not heavily assessed, and allow children the time to experiment, to make mistakes, to reflect on their writing and develop a process that works for them. Teachers might teach the skills of writing (and teach them well), but without giving children the time and space to practise as writers, to consolidate and embed these skills in a wider practice, it's an incomplete picture.

We should encourage the development of spaces that work for the children. After all, if professional writers need such a wide range of types of spaces, why would we think all children will thrive writing at their school desks? As professional writers, we know we need to do all of these things, so why would we think children don't?

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*Space to Write photographer: Steve Tanner
Author photo credit: Dave Muir*

No More “Sensitive Thoughts”

Place-based creativity in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina

Peter Cooley



Like many of us, I began writing poetry about myself in what I thought was the unique and tortured place I occupied in adolescence. Years of education, workshops in school (the Iowa Writers’ Workshop foremost among them) and out of school with friends,

and years of teaching creative writing still lead me to this question: how much had all this dispelled the original notion I had of writing—when I was really honest with myself?

As a student studying, as a professor teaching, I had admired the “longer poems”—“The Wasteland”, “Deep Step Come Shining”, “Helen in Egypt”, “Paterson” (most of all) but never dared aspire to them.

Then Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf South. My wife and I stayed in the St Andrews Episcopal Church House and suffered little personal damage to our own home. But the devastation to the environment around us lasting for weeks, months, years to come was monumental devastation which, I am happy to say, has been remediated in amazing, but by no means in full, measure.

I was shaken out of the shell of “sensitive thoughts”: what had happened demanded to be written about. But before I go to my Katrina poems, let me read you a few examples of the poems I was writing until the storm struck.

Here is a poem published in *The Atlantic* and in my first

book, *The Company of Strangers*, in 1975, written in response to the snow in Green Bay, Wisconsin but foremost about incarnation, transcendence and the “politics” of solitude:

COMPOSITION

I have watched from this chair all afternoon alone, while snow traces features of hills I’d never noticed, watching the light fall, get up, fall, pulling the dark after it.

No one is here. No one inhabits me but my poem, images that stumble, rise to take the air, refusing measure, lines refusing breath. Tangible as angels.

The house is still, my wife & children gone till dinner. No one. The quiet almost breaks it is so fine, this paper always blank where I sit, shaking, shaking words like bells in the company of strangers, myself.

And here is its sister poem, written four years later when I had moved to New Orleans. The speaker is alive to the enclosed tropical environment in which he finds himself, but his concern is with the creative act of myth-making, the solipsistic, self-reflexive deities he is making up, only to have them vanish as quickly as they are made.

OBSERVANCES

The cloud cover has blown over.
 Now before the bamboo grove
 gnats fasten on the noon
 like a sudden shower in sunlight
 knitting the garden where I lie
 releasing them into their stitches, swarming.

When I speak it will be evening.
 I'll wait here, wrapped in light
 watching stars thicken between leaves
 around the moon, numberless, reflecting:
 somewhere in the other lives
 I came towards myself, myself,
 a dog barking after dark, a nightjar,
 a bevy of flies at the screen door.

Noon. I lie under the gnats
 taking the sutures in my skin
 to count these wounds my own,
 nobody to sing to, mute,
 but each little god I can make up
 calling him Peter, Peter, Peter,
 Peter, Peter, & knowing he never comes.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Now it was impossible to compose the poems I had written before. Afraid to leave New Orleans with a malfunctioning old car I had driven back from Sarasota, Florida, my wife and I took up residency in the Chalstom Church House of St Andrews Episcopal Church. There we heard the sound of landfall, a distant crash, like two train cars locking. It was immediately apparent from listening to the radio that the levees had broken: people were drowning, others escaping. In the largely deserted city, we and the remaining citizens were without electricity, water or phone service. We ate the gourmet dishes of the Episcopal Church Women (the ECW) from the church house freezer, then bologna sandwiches from the Salvation Army truck which drove through the largely deserted streets of the city. We sympathetically watched the looters raid the drugstore adjacent to our church, the church with a forklift next to it which was featured on national television.

President Bush came to New Orleans repeatedly, never spending the night. When he made but another trip after

which no help arrived, I heard Mayor Nagin break down in tears on the radio. I took out my notebook and wrote the following poem in a single, frenzied draft:

I SEE A CITY IN TEARS

And he said onto me: What do you see?
 Then I answered: I see only darkness.
 And he said: That will not do. Answer me.
 Then I said: I see a city in tears,
 abomination of desolation,
 bodies of the drowned afloat in back streets,
 graves of the dead buried above ground sprung
 open and skeletons whole and in pieces
 set out to decimate the morning light.
 And he said: That is better. But what else?
 Then I answered: My words are little, poor.
 Why do you persecute me to write this,
 I who lost so little, I who was spared,
 who drove home to find his house staring back
 with eyes none of which had a single crack
 nor was its head to suffer but black rain
 which rose before him in the blazing noon
 unscathed, therefore, why should I try to speak?
 And the voice, which will never let me go,
 voice standing beside me in my torment,
 my jubilations, all my days before,
 spoke again, merely repeating: What else?

This was one of those "gift poems." In contrast to most of my poems, which I labor over and which may take months or years, "I See a City in Tears" arrived like a voice spoken through me. But more important than the time it took me to write the poem was the fact that, without my understanding it, the voice had opened me to writing about significant social and political problems. I had long wondered how to write about the "characters" who are a part of the New Orleans landscape. The couple in the next poem are street people. Due to our tropical climate, we have many such folk since they can live even in the winter outdoors in New Orleans. Like many such citizens in every city, this pair appear to panhandle or sell drugs. We live next to a highway which has many commercial establishments: that is the "poor neighborhood" I refer to in the poem.

FORAGERS

Gagging, bent double from the dumpster's stench,
 where I've come to add my small donation,
 I catch these two I haven't seen in weeks,
 not since the hurricane swept through and left
 these, the survivors of life on the street
 slumming sometimes in my poor neighborhood.

The guy lifts a flask as if in salute;
 his girlfriend, stoned already, just looks down.
 They've found a home, abandoned gas station
 where they can sleep inside its looted store,
 forage a dinner from overlooked stuff,
 the junk food only junkies can keep down.

I don't want intimacy but I smile.
 Today they won't ask: What would I give them?
 My food comes from the Salvation Army.
 Theirs could, too, if they got in line with me.
 I think they won't. It's for the families
 along our street without electricity.
 This pair knows survival tactics I can't use.

But if the hurricane had enabled me to write "realistic"
 poems, it enabled me, too, to enter the realm of fantasy.
 While our phone service was operative, we were hearing
 stories from friends and acquaintances of their escapes
 from the city: trips from New Orleans to Baton
 Rouge—it is fifty miles of interstate—which took as
 much as seven or eight hours. Our three "grown
 children", twenty, thirty-three and thirty-seven, were
 calling us repeatedly, insisting that we should be leaving
 town, even as I repeatedly explained to them that our
 car could not safely make the trip.

In the poem that follows I enjoyed imagining that I was
 transporting that five thousand whom Christ fed in the
 "endless" back seat of my car.

VOICE OF A SURVIVOR

Those who believe in the resurrection
 hunch up in the backseat of my car.
 Around New Orleans now swirls Hurricane
 Elijah. It could be a direct hit.

You guys ok? I shout back to—whom?
 No answer. I-10 is all backed up.
 I'd started out with just my wife and son
 but all along the highway to Houston

believers appeared, their thumbs in the air.
 I have an SUV. Could I say no?
 The radio is all doom-but-stay-tuned-
 we-have-to-make-a few-announcements.

Then the road begins to ration gas and food,
 one-cup-of-each-per-family-at-each-stop
 rasps out the radio the radio the radio.
 It shouts: the road-is-ending-just-ahead-

go-on-you-can't-stop-now-you've made-a-path-
 a-route-that-cuts-straight-through-oblivion.
 And I say are you guys back there ok?
 Then, getting no answer, I turn around.

The multitudes are gathered, the backseat
 stretches, endless. There must be five thousand.
 I drive on. No one is behind me now.

More important than the genre of fantasy, however, was
 the poem of spiritual experience. The poem that follows
 is "literally" (as if any poem could be literal!) based on
 my returning to our home from the church house,
 wondering on my journey homeward in what condition
 I would find the house. But it was only the extremity of
 the situation which allowed me to encounter what St
 Paul called "The Third Heaven", and to speak of God's
 imagination.

THE THIRD HEAVEN

August 30, 2005

Because the spirit, too, knows loneliness,
disasters happen in the universe
and someone like myself, smallest of men,
finds grace, a nimbus on the wall at noon.

After the hurricane, I drove back home
from hiding out safely inside a church.
I saw downed oaks squashed across roof on roof
or telephone wires; coming down my street

I saw abandoned dogs joined in a pack
scrounging the garbage cans, I saw my house.
Nothing looked different but some scattered leaves
across the front walk: purple, blue and bold.

I knew I never had seen leaves before.
I picked up one the color of the sky.
I held it while I opened the front door.
But I was blinded. I had second sight.

Inside no lights, no water but just sun.
Everything just as God imagined it
for me to understand my human need
of the material: nothing, everything

was essential where I was staring now.
Only one thing was clear: someone was in the room,
someone larger than rooms and hurricanes
someone who shone brighter than any sun.

There was no word for this except the one
familiar to us all: deliverance.
What I was standing in I would call light
but it was brighter. I had my third sight.

Now, years later, I still have changing sight.

What was the “lesson” to be learned from the experience
of property destruction and the displacement of
thousands of persons, some exiled and never to return?
It was the appreciation of everyday life. And the
willingness to confront my own mortality.

The book I was writing, *Night Bus to the Afterlife*, turned

out to be about much more than Katrina. We know our
books write us, don't they? I knew that my hurricane
poems were taking me somewhere new, but I did not
know where. But I followed language as it wrote me and
discovered experience for me. Much of the remainder of
the book becomes a meditation on mortality and
survival.

Disaster heightens our awareness. I had never before
noticed the wild parrots who greeted me immediately
after Katrina every morning as I walked around my
neighbourhood. Then, as soon as I appreciated them,
they disappeared. Now—I will leave this to you to
figure out—on the upcoming anniversary of the
storm!—they have appeared again. They are too
beautiful to represent foreboding. I hope they represent
the continuance of the animal—and human—spirit.

Most of all, I was discovering new poetries: invective
dialogical poems, observed-character poems, fantasy,
remembered experience-spirituality, addresses to God,
whimsy. My subject matter was leading me in new
directions.

I am aware that the changes in my poetry I have been
describing are by no means unique, though I may be a
slow learner and require a disaster to open my eyes. It
was the influence of women poets and poets of colour
and alternative sexuality omitted from the canon who
burst forth in the 70s and 80s for my reading pleasure.
They showed me there was more to the world than my
solipsism. It took me some time to absorb their
influences. And I am still doing so.

Finally, another “poem which wrote me.” Over a
thousand persons died in Katrina. I survived. But I
could have been one of the perishing. Thinking about
the inevitability of my own death and the possibility of
an afterlife in which I watch you reading my work
brought me to this poem:

THE ONE CERTAIN THING

A day will come I'll watch you reading this.
 I'll look up from these words I'm writing now—
 this line I'm standing on, I'll be right here,
 alive again. I'll breathe on you this breath.
 Touch this word now, that one. Warm, isn't it?

You are the person come to clean my room;
 you are whichever of my three children
 opens the drawer here where this poem will go
 in a few minutes when I've had my say.

These are the words from immortality.
 No one stands between us now except Death:
 I enter it entirely writing this.
 I have to tell you I am, not alone.
 Watching you read, Eternity's with me.
 We like to watch you read. Read us again.

Thank you for taking this trip with me back through the
 writing process and the discoveries about my work
 which disaster made possible.

*This article was delivered as a talk at the Great Writing
 conference, London, 2015.*

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 Made of Starlight*, *Divine Margins*, and *Night Bus to the
 Afterlife*, all of which were published by Carnegie Mellon
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 received arts grants from the states of Wisconsin and
 Louisiana as well as an ATLAS grant from Louisiana and The
 Marble Faun Award in Poetry from The Faulkner Festival in
 New Orleans. He is the Poet Laureate of Louisiana.*

The Boat is Coming

Part Two: Pictures, Words and Meanings

Andrew Melrose



Having ruminated on how to introduce contentious and politically fragile stories to children in the last *Writing in Education* article, “The Boat is coming, Part One: Moses to Dalaman” (Autumn, 2015) I told how Stephanie Morris and I began collaborating on a “shared compassion for the subject of immigration [and on ways]... to create a shift in the perception of asylum seekers, through word and image...[in] a children's story book to challenge the perceptions of immigration (<http://the-immigration-boat-story.com/>).” In writing that first article we were still haunted by the images of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy lying dead on a Dalaman beach. Little has really changed since then. Two days ago (as I edit this) the bodies of nine

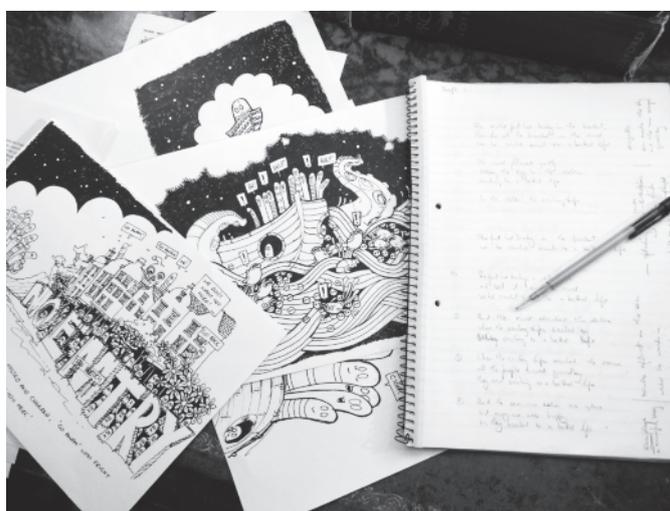
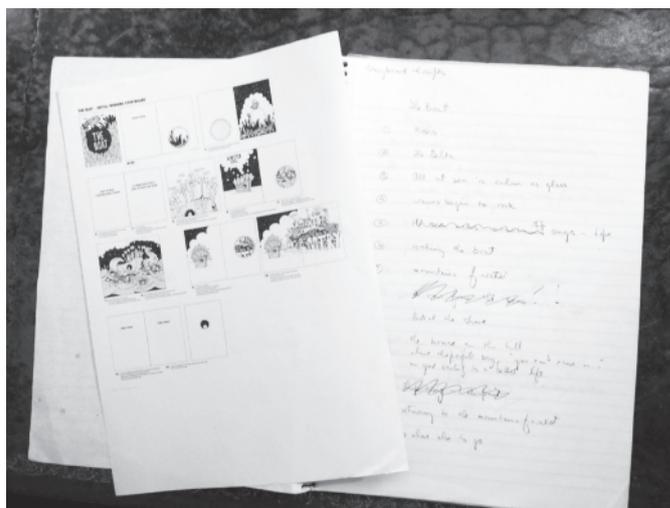
people, including two babies, were found drowned off the coast of western Turkey, after their boat trying to carry them to Greece partly capsized. At the same time, a storm was stirring in Australia and colleagues were protesting against their government sending more children to be detained at the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru. This was the result of a government initiative that reintroduced a system of third country processing for asylum seekers who arrive by boat without a valid visa. Under this system, asylum seekers, including children, are transferred to a third country (not their country) to be processed.

As I write, 267 people, including 37 babies, are facing

imminent transfer to Nauru after the Australian High Court upheld the legality of the government's offshore processing regime. Is it just me, or does the term "Processing Centre" have an ominous ring to it – like a meat handling plant where people with hopes, dreams, fears and a huge will to survive are dehumanized and shipped away to somewhere "other" and "strange". The "not in my back yard" nationalistic nimbyism has taken the way we treat human beings to new depths. For more information, I urge you to read "Tell Me About: Children in immigration detention in Nauru" by the Australian Human Rights Commission¹ but I am fairly certain that most liberal minded people reading this piece will understand the issues. Thus, the main questions we as writer/artist were confronted with right at the beginning of *The Boat* project remains: "How do you introduce such difficult subjects to children and indeed should you?" I think we established that the "should" question is answered by a resounding yes in the first article, but moving the "how" from the abstract to the concrete, from the idea to the artefact, needs more consideration. The Boat is still coming.

*

Even without the contentious issues, creating a picture book is one of those strange artistic experiences in collaboration, where two people are trying to tell a single story through a single medium. In our case, I have to write around 300 words into a story and Stephanie has to interpret the words and turn it into something a child can approach without being intimidated by the form or content; and then I react to the pictures and often rewrite the words, as the story evolves. Of course it isn't as simple as this – as the pictures here reveal, I am constantly writing and rubbing out and scoring out and rewriting, and then when I see the images I often change to adjust the tone, the ideas and the structure as we bounce ideas back and forward. At one time I, as the writer, suggested we had no words at all, just images, and Stephanie, as the artist, wanted the words. It's a constant process of passing material to and fro until we are happy we have something right. And then we canvass the opinions of others, including the peer group we are addressing. I am happy to say that we, along with Dr Jonathan Rooke and the University of Winchester's Faculty of Education, Health & Social Care, the Faculty of Arts and linked primary sector schools, will test run the story of "immigration" and "boat



work in progress: illustrations by Stephanie Morris

people". And we will be working through writing, illustration and education to create a teaching and learning environment that will begin in the University and transfer to schools (firstly in Hampshire and then across the country). The initial partner schools have been selected to reflect a diverse local population. But let's return to why we think this effort is necessary.

Picture books have to be regarded as one of the great mysteries in an adult-created, child-centred discourse.

They are not literature but contain great stories with great literary merit; they are not books of art but contain some of the most artistic pictures imaginable; they are in fact an amalgamation, a blending of the two and yet the words "picture story books" and "story picture books" hardly describes them at all. (Melrose 2012: 15)

The critical debate surrounding this is scant. Some effort has been made, notably by Nodelman (1988) and Nikolajeva and Scott (2006: 8), but it seems to me that their accounts have to be challenged by the writer/artist/makers, as I discuss in *Here Comes the Bogeyman* (Melrose 2012). This is because Nodelman, Nikolajeva and Scott's critical detachment reveals a missed opportunity. Let me summarize here.

Nikolajeva and Scott remark that Nodelman (1988) provides an "excellent grammar for reading and understanding pictures in picturebooks" (2006: 4) and that the thesis of his book concentrates on the visual aspect of picturebooks, whereas their approach explores a "variety of text-image interactions" (26) and the collaboration of words and pictures. This is all well and good, fine as far as it goes, but what is missing in the summary is the important ingredient which is the child, so let's address the concerns.

According to Nodelman:

Picture books – books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all – are unlike any other form of verbal or visual art. Both the pictures and the texts in these books are different from and communicate differently from pictures and texts in other circumstances. (Nodelman 1988: Preface)

He concentrates on this idea of the "pictures" and the "text" and indeed the combinations in relation to visual and verbal literacy development and how the reading child responds, and it does make sense. Nikolajeva and Scott make a similar point by saying:

The unique character of picturebooks as an artform is based on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual one and the verbal. Making use of semiotic terminology we can say that picturebooks communicate by means of two separate sets of signs, the iconic and the conventional. (2006: 1 – my emphases)

In saying this, they are identifying two important levels of communication. Nevertheless, as with Nodelman, they have actually missed the third and most important and unique component which actually involves the picture book and the responding early read-to/readers, who become a crucial component in the entire verbal

and visual experience. Nodelman alludes to this by saying:

Young children who look at the picture while they listen to the words being read to them do experience both at once; but unlike the voices which emanate directly from the actors on stage or screen, the voice speaking a picture-book text remains separate from the visual information, a distinct stream of a noticeably different sort of information. (Ibid.)

I have a problem agreeing with the main thrust of this statement and indeed with Nikolajeva and Scott's, "combination of *two* levels of communication" (my emphasis). What both of these contentions imply is that a picture book is a combination of text and image with a disembodied voice. But it's a mistake to rely simply on this idea because there are more than two "levels of communication" in the picturebook experience. The further level is one of shared experience, the relationship between the reader and the child as mediated by the book and the connection as nurture. This cannot even be reduced to a single factor making it three levels of communication, and to miss this point is to miss the function of the book and the potential it has in the nurturing process. The picturebook isn't just a book of stories and pictures; it is a polysensory event, a vital physical, emotional and developmental discourse in nurture, where all the senses of touch, sound, sight, smell and taste, warmth, security, affection and love can be brought together in the shared intimate experience being mediated by the story. As Webb and I have already written:

This involves several epistemological acknowledgements. One is to confirm that we are indeed dependent upon intimacy, and that it is incumbent upon us all to nurture such relationships. This is at the heart of the African philosophy of the self, ubuntu, the humanistic ideal that can be loosely translated as, "a person is only a person in relation to others". (Webb and Melrose 2011)

Children cannot be excluded from this just because they are children. Therefore the picturebook is not just a muddle of words and images of representation in translation or interpretation; there is a huge emotive element to be considered. Of course, this also goes beyond the book in the rituals of parenting, and so on, and there is not enough space to consider this and it is enough to say what I have. It is also an introduction into the whole

While children may view the world from a different viewpoint to their adult counterparts, as defined by age and experience, the astonishment and amazement at witnessing or hearing about the ongoing experience of sheer existence is the defining challenge at the meeting in the space in between for both of them. The experiential difference between the parent/reader and the child is mediated by the book, and they both enter the space that exists between them, mediated by the wonder of storytelling. The book, the text, the story stands as the mediator, as an arrested moment in experiencing something new that will not stand still, for it will never be new again, but will always be, Penelope-like³, starting over. Just as it did for the writer, so too will it for the reader. The arrested moment, the meeting between writer and reader and reader and child, in that brief intervention, is the point at which ongoing experience is confronted just as it is about to move on. The picturebook maker's job is to help to provide a story that allows them to explore and experience that nurture moment, as children come to reaffirm what they already know and to try and understand what they know not.

This is what Stephanie Morris and I, with the help of Jonathan Rooke and his students, are trying to achieve. The creation of a text that brings parent/teacher/carer/reader and child together in a shared experience mediated by a story – in this case about those unfortunate enough to be called “Boat People”. As we wrote in the last article, the idea behind *The Boat* should not be misinterpreted:

this is not a manifesto for “didactic” stories for children, but for stories that allow them to engage in the good, bad and ugly issues that help them to find meaning in life and in the world they live in [...] if the people represented to us in The Boat could speak to us they would not like to be remembered as “boat people” but people who are seeking a better life, people who want to live and love and be the people they are. (Melrose 2015: 22)

Our job as writers and artists is to try and let children have access to balanced thinking on the issues some people have to confront in their everyday lives, while nurturing in them the goodness of storytelling. *The Boat* is coming.

Notes

1. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/tell-me-about-children-immigration-detention-nauru>
2. See Melrose, 2002
3. Penelope in *The Odyssey* is Odysseus's wife awaiting his return from the Trojan war. In order to remain faithful to her husband she fends off her suitors by saying she will not choose one of them until she has finished weaving a burial shroud for Odysseus's elderly father Laertes. It's a little trick, because every night she undoes part of the shroud and starts again the next morning.

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- Andrew Melrose is Professor of Children's Writing at the University of Winchester. He has over 150 writing credits, including The Story Keepers film series, broadcast in 105 countries worldwide and 33 books as well as articles and chapters on writing for children.*
- Stephanie Morris (illustrator for The Boat) is the Marketing Manager of a large independent energy provider. She also works as a freelance illustrator, creating strong linear graphics for a range of projects.*

Student Radio Dramas

Alyson Morris and Tim Kelly



I loved having my radio drama to listen to... I've used it to enter competitions and it was also showcased at a University open day last year: I'm very proud of it. (Shannon Enola-Rae Rawlins, BA English)

As part of the module *Writing for the Theatre and Radio*, English and Creative Writing students at Coventry

University were asked to adapt their ten-minute plays to eight-minute radio dramas. They had to adjust visual elements into aural ones, which involved considerable rethinking and revision of content. This necessitated the recording of voices, creation of sound effects, addition of music and so forth using audio recording and editing software. Students had also to accompany their radio play



with an oral commentary. It was a new learning experience for all concerned, and the dramas have attracted interest from BBC Coventry and Warwickshire Radio. This paper will outline the development of the project.

The Theoretical Grounding

It was perfectly predicable. Radio was bound to present us mortals with a new art form. (Béla Balázs 1924)

The Hungarian film critic, writer and poet, Béla Balázs,

whilst primarily concerned with cinema, was nevertheless impressed by the emerging “art form” of radio. Although the first experiments in wireless transmission had begun in the previous century, it wasn't until the early 1920s that radio began to be broadcast commercially. In what was the period of silent movies, Balázs noted: “as cinema is the art for the deaf, we now have radio drama, art for the blind.” He also drew attention to those aesthetic elements peculiar to radio, noting it had “its very own way” of “depicting nature”. In other words, the theatrical stage or the filmic image, the spectacle for the eye, has to be translated into sound:

We hear the creaking of a door the scraping of a chair, the ticking of a wall clock, and recognize the cozy atmosphere of a quiet room. We hear the din of a big-city street, which makes it hard to catch the words. Then we hear the chiming of a village church bell, a rooster crowing, sheep bleating, and we are clearly in the country. Then the muffled echo of approaching footsteps, the jingling of a bunch of keys, a scream, a shot, and all is still. (1924/2006: 47-48)

Steve May, in his article “Writing for Sound/Radio”, referring to the social, ideological and commercial framework that surrounds and imbues writing, states that some writers write without paying conscious attention to “any outside forces shaping their work” and that students find it difficult to engage with the external forces that shape their work. May insists that ignoring this makes students less capable of reflecting on and analyzing the choices they make as writers (Harper 2013). May's article is mostly about the pressures and possibilities that these outside forces exert on writers, but there is one phrase that resonates with our own experiences of radio drama, and that is when May refers to radio as “sound-based art”. The notion of aural aesthetics was hence a conceptual prerequisite to our

plans and impressing this notion on our students was to be our first pedagogic move.

Stephenson (2010) states that radio has “frequently been denigrated as a blind medium” that lacks “the sensorily rich visual inputs of theatre or film...” and that radio “seems woefully incomplete by comparison.” She then, however, goes on to reject radio’s inferior status:

it is precisely this property of the incompleteness of radio drama that opens up perceptual gaps for self-reflexive play on the core theatricalizing processes by which apprehending audiences bring fictional worlds into being. (Stevenson 2010)

In other words, the audience is forced into using its imagination to picture the characters, settings and events unfolding not in front of their eyes, but via their ears.

A related concept is what Stephenson refers to as “synaesthetic perception”. She quotes Merleau-Ponty on everyday phenomenological experience in which “the senses intercommunicate by opening on to the structure of the thing. One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when with a tinkling sound it breaks, the sound is conveyed by the visible glass” (Stephenson 2010). Hence the sight and sound experience are “enmeshed” in the real world.

Whilst this might appear to highlight the dilemma for the student of radio drama, it allows for the possibility that the correct choice of sound effect will immediately convey the visual image to the listener: the synaesthesia of real experience can be utilized by the producer of sound effects to replicate that experience for the radio listener. The film score composer, Carter Burwell, puts it this way:

You’re watching a movie, in a theatre or at home, and starting to doze. You can’t keep your eyes open, but the sound of the film still seeps in through your ears, which sadly are never closed. Your mind paints the picture itself in that meaningful but not quite visual way that dreams play out. (Stevenson 2010)

Hence, given the power of the human imagination, and given our human nature, rooted as it is in sensory synaesthetic perception, radio need not be conceived of as an inferior art form, simply because it does not

stimulate the eyes directly, but rather can be perceived as a fully stimulating form of “sound-based art”. And it was these notions (radio drama as art, sound as synaesthetically stimulating) that we took to our students when they began the process of converting their ten-minute stage plays into radio dramas.

Producing Radio Dramas

As mentioned above, students had already completed the writing of their ten-minute stage plays when they were asked to rework them into radio dramas. The purpose was both to experiment with the medium and to highlight the differences between writing for the theatre and writing for the radio, differences we felt would be less apparent if students wrote a new work for the radio. Adaptation of their existing plays to the new medium would force them to confront the difficulties of representing what is to a significant extent a visual spectacle, aurally; the creative challenges arising would hopefully expose the areas of dichotomy and overlap and give students a greater appreciation of the specificities of both mediums.

The Brief

The two pieces of coursework for this module are:

- a theatre script plus annotated bibliography;
- a recorded radio drama and commentary.

The radio drama coursework carries 60% of the overall module mark. It is attached to learning outcomes such as: creating dramatic situations and applying theoretical knowledge; following a procedure through its stages of development; analysing key differences between the genres, and so forth.

The coursework brief is made up of three components:

1. Audio recording of Radio Drama (75%)

Adapt your theatre script to a radio drama. You should include sound effects and music in your radio drama if appropriate. The radio drama should be no more than 8 minutes long.

2. Audio recording of commentary (25%)

Your commentary should be between 4 and 5 minutes long. The commentary on the creation and process of writing theatre and radio scripts (including radio production) should incorporate preparation, writing style and a discussion on the adaptation. You must refer to your reading/research.

3. Written radio script and reference list (for plagiarism checks only).

The two audio files should be uploaded to the module web in mp3 format.

The Process

The normal pedagogic activities of exposing students to the medium using professional exemplar and theorizing upon the process were followed by a breakdown of tasks which included:

- reworking the theatre plays so they would be suitable for the ear rather than the eye;
- rewriting of scripts in radio drama format;
- planning the sound;
- rehearsing readings;
- recording of dialogue;
- downloading of copyright-free sound effects and/or creation of sound effects;
- choosing copyright-free music and/or composing of music;
- editing the soundtrack using digital audio editing software;
- writing and recording an audio reflective commentary to accompany the drama.

Tools and Facilities

At the time we were working with a fairly limited set of tools and facilities. We had a PC lab, complete with cheap PC microphones. We downloaded Audacity as it was free audio editing software. We had a laptop, one high quality USB microphone (Blue Yeti) and a small tutorial room which could be booked for recording. In addition, most students had their own laptops and some used their mobile phones as recording devices. Undoubtedly the better the equipment, the better the audio quality. Whilst there is no necessary correlation between the quality of the final drama and the quality of the recording software (no direct relationship between technical and aesthetic quality), when one approaches

the lower regions of audio quality the results can interfere with aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment. Insofar as you are concerned with the learning experience, the quality of the equipment is not key (indeed the use of the mobile phone as a recording device added a much greater degree of flexibility to the process); however, if you intend to make use of the outputs in some way, as we did (more on this below), then having higher quality recording devices will help. We found a significant increase in audio quality when students used our Blue Yeti microphone, which is not particularly expensive (under £200 at the time of writing). We would add that, due to a recent switch in Faculty at Coventry University, in the coming academic year we will have access to professional recording studios; we will hence have the chance to see if these have a significant impact on the quality of the radio dramas produced.

Student creativity and improvisation

The students displayed an extraordinary capacity to be flexible and innovative. As mentioned above, they managed to improvise with a set of limited resources. They commissioned acting students, staff, friends and family to perform their dramas. They created their own sound effects or sourced them from copyright-free websites. And they found new ways to present a visual to audio-only play by rigorously reworking their stories. Their reworkings were informed by workshop read-throughs and peer feedback. Student Raef Boylan summed up his experiences as follows:

I felt that we were encouraged to be creative with sound-effects, making our own if what we needed was not available online. As long as there is leniency when judging the quality of these, due to home-recording limitations and time constraints, it was a great imaginative process. The video we were shown of the BBC sound production team was encouraging, because we saw how many household items were involved even in the world of professional sound-effects – it opened up possibilities. It was good fun; the world is full of noises that you don't consider weird until you hear them isolated, again and again. I'll never forget the night I spent trying to find the perfect "unzip" noise – realizing too late that I could have just used the zip on the clothes I was wearing! There were a lot of resources on the free-to-use websites suggested to us, but it depended how specific your needs were.

Feedback

By and large students were very positive about the process, despite the challenges:

It was difficult for many of us to create a dramatic story arc for the stage that lasted just ten minutes. Reducing this down to eight minutes, including music at the start and finish, was extremely challenging. Getting it done in a short space of time was merely the bitter cherry on top. However, it IS possible to get it done in ten days. Just expect a few stressful breakdowns. (Raef Boylan, BA English and Creative Writing)

Adaptation required a lot of deep thought about how to get the more sensory elements of the play across on an audio base. For my play I had to think very carefully about intonation and flow of dialogue since there was no facial expression to tell your story... I did, however, find the experience very rewarding, developing a core theme into a full-blown mini-production. (Matt McGreevy, BA English)

The External Examiner was also very positive:

This is an impressive and very innovative module which requires students to engage in textual transformation (from stage script to radio script) and in the subsequent production of their own radio plays. An additional assessment component which involves an oral commentary on the transposition process is also to be commended. Students are well supported in their assignments by clear and detailed online guidance and by in-class and online advice about technical aspects of recording.

The Results

In 2013-14, when the introduction of radio dramas was in its second year, Paul Munden from the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), who was then our External Examiner, found the aural commentaries more detailed and engaging than the previous year's printed versions: they displayed, in the spoken word, the students' enthusiasm as the project progressed and how delighted they were to be part of it.

We observed that the radio dramas, perhaps due to the reduction in length by two minutes from the theatre plays, were tightly packed, the sentences were terser and the dialogue more succinct. Although initially students found the theatre scripts difficult to adapt, after

spending time listening to radio dramas currently on air and reflecting on the creative challenges posed by reworking, most successfully managed to adapt their theatre plays. Most of all, students expressed their pleasure at hearing their words come to life, and at managing to bring their projects to fruition:

It felt good to have a completed project, something tangible to remind me as a writer what can be achieved in a short space of time. I haven't done anything with it myself; however, my generous tutor took it along with others to the BBC Radio for a discussion about airing student dramas on their station! (Raef Boylan, BA English and Creative Writing)

Conclusions

Due to expansion and structural changes at Coventry University, the English and Languages Department is now the School of Humanities, situated in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. This is proving beneficial to our creative writing programme. This year we are able to use the recording studio and collaborate with students in Performing Arts and Media. The Walsgrave Hospital and the BBC Coventry and Warwickshire are both interested in airing our student radio dramas, and the students this year are already keen to explore new ideas and experimentations in producing a short drama for sound only.

As Shannon Enola-Rae Rawlins indicated (quoted at the top of this article), the radio dramas are an excellent accompaniment to a CV, demonstrating a student's ability to present their creative work effectively in a digital age through the various modes of social media. And in relation to employability, student Matt McGreevy makes innovative use of his radio drama:

I have used it at interviews to demonstrate my ability to conceptualize and produce my own work under strict time limits and to be creative.

A selection of student radio dramas can be found on the CovWords website:
<http://blogs.coventry.ac.uk/coventrywords>

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“Something you’ve already done in the sleep of your life”

The relation between poetry writing and acting

Paul Magee



I will start with a perhaps heretical comment. Its context is a unit I teach at the University of Canberra entitled *Poetry and the Imagination*. I have taught this unit for twelve years now. The unit’s aim, as its Coleridgean title perhaps suggests, is to induce original composition in verse. The comment is as follows: I am not convinced that peer

feedback has all that much to offer my students.

Creative writing units typically require students to present their writing to the class, on the expectation that they will take guidance from the range of peer responses elicited, and find ways to edit their work accordingly. Facilitating this can be highly frustrating, and I am not the first to say so (see also Adnot-Haynes & Mellas 2010; Irvine 2010; Vanderslice 2010). Student feedback on verse compositions is particularly problematic: haphazard images in prose rhythms are, for instance, regularly applauded on the simple grounds that the student applauding does not realize better are possible. The bulk of the students judge in this manner, according to criteria derived from years of reading novels, at speed. Most have to be taught the very basic facts that verse generally has to be read at a speaking pace, at times even slower (Attridge 1995: 2), and that it most reveals its pleasures when one returns, to reread and dwell (Coleridge 1962: 12). By the time such teaching has

sunk in, most of the semester has gone.

I am referring to a broad cultural illiteracy to do with the avoidances built into our education systems and popular media. One can, it is true, exert a certain teacherly authority in scenarios. The poet Aileen Kelly described an instance, when I interviewed her in Melbourne some years ago:

I said to a writing group the other day that I felt that—I must admit I was being tough with them—it was as though they were trying to paint a portrait with the skills they learnt painting a living room. They were using words as in prose.¹

Sometimes such comments break through—but at the risk, as Kelly implies, of appearing churlish or elitist, and at any rate in basic conflict with a democratic tutorial model developed as a training ground for the back and forth of intellectual conversation, much more than a means for generating genuine, qualitative judgements on individual artworks. I despair of how often I hear the group run with an eager appraisal of lines I know to be unpublishable to say nothing of unmemorable. I despair of how often a student’s honest critiques of such work, especially when acute, are treated by others in the group—with the weight of numbers on their side—as mere statements of personal taste. It is hard to see the learning in such moments.

It was entirely the other way round, I am pleased to report, with the experiment I want to focus this article upon. It will require some backstory. For the twelve years I have taught *Poetry and the Imagination*, students

have been obliged, as a compulsory assessment item, to perform to the class a by-heart recital of one of the poems on the syllabus. I had always suspected this risky and difficult task would have a good effect upon the students' own creative writing. But I had never asked students to give each other feedback on those performances in the minutes immediately following. That is the context. The experiment relates to a change I imported into this teaching practice in 2014, some months after attending an acting workshop run by Shakespeare director, dramaturg and performance scholar, Bridget Escolme². Bridget's workshop opened a door, by bringing home to me at once the skill involved in acting, but also its closeness to what we do and see every day of our lives; its closeness to poetry. I suddenly wanted to know what would happen if I trained that poorly functioning technology of peer feedback on something else, something more to do with acting. I took a guiding role in discussion during the first few assessments (by-heart recitals of poems by Medbh McGuckian, Anne Carson and John Muk Muk Burke), pointing out features to do with moving at a natural pace through the lines, what clarity of diction is necessary for rhythms to be heard, the importance of thinking about how to perform line breaks, the need to allow emotion without swallowing the performance in it, and so forth. What startled me, in the weeks that followed, was how rapidly the twenty-odd students in each class internalized my lead, and began to make persuasive, often highly perceptive, critical comments: "You paced it very well over the first two stanzas, though 'harvest wheat' was a bit swallowed." "You conveyed the emotion of Auden's 'I love you' very well"; "There was something of a monotone creeping in over lines 11 and 12"; "You handled the enjambment from 'the first' to 'are you to turn' beautifully"; "Your staccato really accentuated 'the grill lights'"; "I found 'the heroin whore' particularly well dramatized, in fact the whole run of lines from 19-27." Not only were students making subtle observations. They were acquiring the skill to audit a performance of twenty lines, all the while holding in memory specific moments in that performance, for the sake of critical comment. This led to confident and convincing judgements. I could see the learning before my eyes.

Even more significantly, it was clear that the recitals were themselves improving by the week.

Open, critical discussion of recitals was having an impact not just on the quality of students' judgements as to how others had gone, but on the quality of their very own performances. The sort of competencies I am referring to under the rubric of quality are well illustrated by poetry educator Mario Petrucci's description of an exercise he uses when coaching people to read poetry in public. He calls it "Holding the Thought". It involves two people: one to read the poem, the other to listen. Imagine you are the reader, tasked with performing the first twenty lines of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Moose". The listener stops you, Petrucci explains, "when, in some way, you lose intimate contact with a text you're reading to them out loud." One might create all sorts of variants on this exercise, Petrucci adds, but what is important to all of them is that the listener stops the reader if ever that listener starts to doubt

that the reader knows, unhesitatingly, exactly where they are and where they're going, that they're utterly inside the text and what it means, rather than feeling their way through it or handing it over in a detached way, as a series of phrases. Indeed, a great recitation comes across as a kind of hologram, where the whole is somehow present in every passing part (Petrucci 2014: 50).

Interestingly, Petrucci does not seem to feel that such an alert listener is all that hard to come by.

Equally interesting, I find, is the resonance of Petrucci's description of the qualities of "a great recitation" with something Medbh McGuckian wrote me from Belfast when I interviewed her by email earlier this year. This was in relation to a question I had posed her as to whether sight or sound felt uppermost in the moments of composing her verse:

I believe what happens is what Baudelaire and the symbolists described as association of senses, where a sixth sense is aroused that contains all the others but is a single sensation of learned experience. So they all act as one the words react against and with each other to create a cinematic reality maybe stronger than reality in that it doesn't fade, but stays crystallized in the amber of the words like the Grecian Urn. (McGuckian 2015)

These comments are not, note, about recital, but about original composition—the composition of poems as dizzyingly new as McGuckian's. But there seems a

strong resonance all the same between that “association of the senses” she describes and Petrucci’s “a great recital comes across as a kind of hologram.”

But more on composition below.

My point for the moment, to reiterate, is that through auditing and workshopping each others’ recitals, my students were rapidly possessed of the critical capacity Petrucci so unproblematically vests in “the listener” to his “holding the thought” exercise. As I said, they rapidly gathered the capacity to point out, with precision (e.g. lines 19-27 of Ginsberg’s “An Open Window on Chicago”), those moments when the reciter was “utterly inside the text and what it means”, and those when not. They could spot just when that reciter was, as actor Stephen Berkoff put it, “alive” to the words:

Once “alive” in a scene you can do no wrong, and every actor knows what I mean [...] In these times we are inspired [...] Nothing can shake us and disaster is even welcomed as a challenge. It is an effervescence when all your nerves seem to light up and you score the jackpot; the sluice gates open and the adrenalin is flowing freely. It’s almost like a state of grace (Berkoff 1989: 112).

But it is not simply that my students were by dint of workshopping becoming capable of noting the inspired moments in each others’ recitals. They were, as I stated above, creating them in their own.

I put this outcome down to the following, quite obvious, fact. Our students are culturally literate in acting, deeply so, and in direct converse to their illiteracy in the enjoyment, and therefore judging, of verse. We as educators need to think more about this.

Could it be, for instance, that one of the best ways to get contemporary students into the reading and writing of poetry is to concentrate on those aspects of it that most relate to acting? There are a few ways into that idea: expanding the practice of by-heart recital in our teaching is obviously one of them. Another would involve introducing students to the possibility that what they are really doing, when they read poetry at the right, real-time speed to enjoy it, is performing (albeit in their own heads). Poet Mark Reid suggested just that when I interviewed him in Western Australia in 2007: “You

might say there’s a theatre in your head in which what you read on the page is performed.” I think Reid is right. And I suspect we can take the matter further. For it seems to me, reflecting on some of my interview research with poets, that there is a sort of theatre in each poet’s head, and that it is through a kind of improvisational acting there that the lines we read on the page get composed. I think that is what McCuckian is telling us.

Allow me to broach that claim a little digressively, by returning to the apparent paradox I tabled above, and attempting to think it through. There I reported my surprise that the act of analyzing and making judgements on other students’ performances actually improved my students’ recitals, when it came time for their own. I feel the need to underline this: in my twelve years of setting by-heart performance as an assessment item in the unit, I saw nothing like the extraordinary advance in abilities that flowed upon students’ being encouraged to discuss and think through each other’s recitals in the minutes immediately following them. Their performances became richer in personality, by way of technical and evaluative discussion.

But in some ways that outcome is just obvious. The fallacy is to imagine that reflexive thinking is *not* present in the moment of creative inspiration. Naomi Cumming’s *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification*, an attempt to theorize the semiotics of virtuoso violin performance, is fascinating on this:

To be engaged in an act of performance that requires the exercise of highly developed skills is neither to assume a state of forgetfulness towards one’s own bodily actions, nor to be absorbed by consciousness of them (Cumming 2000: 35).

To perform live is not “to assume a state of forgetfulness”. But as the second half of the quote makes clear, Cumming equally insists that the reflexive thinker retreat somewhat. It is like, she adds, what happens when acting. She proceeds to quote the ethnographer and philosopher of performance Richard Schechner on what differentiates an enraged Lawrence Olivier shouting “Down Strumpet!” at Desdemona as “he takes up the pillow to murder” her from a rampaging elephant (Schechner, qtd in Cumming 2000: 35). The difference is that part of Olivier “knows he is just acting and as such controls his gestures so that he does not

injure the actress playing Desdemona. Even more, Olivier feels and does not feel rage against the actress" (35). Olivier has clearly "put aside his character as a person external to the play" to take up the role; yet he "does not thereby lose his capacity to monitor the violent gestures he is enacting" (35). His or her monitoring agency, which Schechner refers to as an "I", can, Cumming continues:

commonly be recognized by an actor engaged in reflection, after an experience. It is known in looking back that a degree of control was enforced by the "self," even though the self who was fully engaged in the act of monitoring could not, in the process, also reflect on its own activities. The "I" (eye) at its centre is blind—as Victor Frankl put it so neatly. I am in an act of which I cannot be self-reflexively aware until it is over. I am in a moment of risk and its monitoring, as the subject of more than one level of consciousness (36).

This analysis is illuminating, on a number of levels. Firstly, it pinpoints the agency that can, for all the spontaneity of emotion in performance, be trained outside performance in the discriminations such complex and instant action requires: what Schechner refers to as the performer's "knowing half", the half caught up, as part of Olivier must have been when playing Othello, in the task of "performing-the-actions-that-communicate-to-himself-and-to-his-audience-the-emotions-required" (35). Secondly, the analysis shows that this same, educable, eminently discursive agency, can only function at the price of its owner's relinquishing other forms of control in the moment. Cumming thus highlights that performance is *both* something we can learn to do better *and* a moment of radical risk. It is a risk, each and every time, because it involves relinquishing control to an educable I that nonetheless "at its centre is blind".

Actor, director and politician Augusto Boal puts it this way: "Every time an actor plays a character, *he or she plays it for the first and last time*. Like we play every minute of our own lives" (2002: 38).

Is this blindness not at the root of theatre itself?

Isn't that why the experience of it is often so shattering of our commonplaces? Berkoff again:

I expect that what people mean when they say that an actor

has danger is that he does what is unexpected; or, in other words, he is not programmed by the simple responses and conditioning that makes us familiar with what he will do [...] somehow takes us in leaps and bounds to the unexpected since he is releasing the passion that is revolutionary (38).

Herbert Blau: "What you're looking for is the work which, if it isn't reflecting new conditions of existence (perhaps because suspicious of the reflections), is nevertheless determined to shake up the unchangeable" (1982: 26).

Petr Bogatyrev: "One of the most important and fundamental features of the theatre is *transformation*" (1976: 51).

I hasten at this juncture to add the most important thing of all: what also vastly improved over the semester I have been discussing were my students' own original compositions, relative to all prior years in which I had taught the unit. I cannot see any reason for this other than the introduction of peer-generated feedback on recitals. I think it brought my students closer to that place where "The 'I' (eye) at its centre is blind".

At which the broader question all these reflections have been tending toward arises: are original composition and genuine acting at core all that dissimilar?

*

A final comment, on the point at which the practices of reciting, on the one hand, and composing, on the other, seem most clearly dissimilar.

Surely any equation between the two falls apart the second we compare the original text one somehow dreams up in the moments of composition, and the received script one works with in front of an audience, a script as received as Hedda's, or Hamlet's, or Blanche DuBois'.

Does it?

Marguerite Duras:

When you're writing a kind of instinct comes into play. What you're going to write is already there in the darkness [...] It's not a matter of passing from one state to another. It's a matter

of deciphering something already there, something you've already done in the sleep of your life, in its organic rumination, unbeknown to you (Duras 1993: 25).

Isn't there something like a memorized script there, prior to and insistent within Duras' description of the act of original composition?

"Like we play every minute of our own lives."

Notes

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2. Bridget is Reader in Drama at the University of London. Her workshop, "Displaying Early Modern Emotion: the challenges of *Measure for Measure* in contemporary performance", offered participants a hands-on experience of certain issues in Shakespearean dramaturgy. It was keynote to the *Finding the Fourth Dimension: Learning through Practice in the Arts and the Humanities* conference convened by Kate Flaherty at the Australian National University on 25 July, 2014.

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- Paul Magee is author of Stone Postcard (John Leonard Press), named in Australian Book Review as one of the books of the year for 2014. His other books are Cube Root of Book (JLP 2006), also in verse, and From Here to Tierra del Fuego (University of Illinois Press, 2000), an ethnographic monograph. Paul has published widely across a number of scholarly fields, including creative writing scholarship, psychoanalysis and Marxian thought. He teaches poetry at the University of Canberra, where he is Associate Professor.*

Are universities still fit places in which to teach and learn creative writing?

Mike Harris



Last year *Writing in Education* published a short piece by Steve Dearden that he called “a provocation”. He tactfully pointed to some apparent problems with university creative writing (CW) courses.

The article you are reading now could have been subtitled “a bigger provocation” because I am going to suggest that the involvement of creative writers in universities was a Faustian Pact in which the devil is now claiming his dues.

I’m a script writer and theatre director who had, until May last year, taught one day a week on the MA in Writing at Sheffield Hallam for more than 20 years. I resigned because what was happening seemed to me to be both intolerable and unstoppable, and not in any way unique to that institution.

When it was set up in 1993, The Hallam course was one of the first Creative Writing MAs in the UK. I taught on it from the start and have therefore been able to follow the gripping story of University Creative Writing in this country from its early episodes onward. No CW course is typical, of course, but like rom-coms and horror films, there are common themes, stock characters, heroes, villains, plots and subplots.

The causes of the unprecedented 20-year boom in university creative writing were complex, and are not my concern here. The main reason why writers flocked to *teach in them* was, by contrast, simple. Most writers are short of money and universities paid. Happily for writers the sudden explosion in the number of Creative

Writing MAs, BAs and PhDs happened when they were being paid even less than usual.

I’m not suggesting that we didn’t have other reasons for taking the academic dollar. Teaching is interesting and satisfying. Writing can be a lonely business and universities are social. Thinking and writing about writing also has its attractions. Furthermore, universities not only paid but provided long holidays in which to write. In addition we were given a fair bit of elbow room at the start; possibly because university creative writing courses were new, and the writers who universities now called “creative writers” were exotic beasts in the jungle of academe. I think as well that we were held in a little bit of awe at the start, especially in English departments. After all, we were the people who actually produced what they wrote about.

In any case, the students flocked in and this pleased universities. Good writing was produced, writers were published who might not otherwise have been, and lots of others were given a solid grounding in basic creative writing skills which they could then profitably use elsewhere. Everybody was happy. So what went wrong and whose fault was it?

In his article, Steve Dearden tried to “to come up with some answers that aren’t just ‘it’s the administrator’s fault, the educational climate’s fault, the government’s fault’” (Dearden 2015: 25) and I’m going to begin by taking that same tack. So, there were some bad things we were responsible for, or in which we were culpably complicit.

We tolerated risibly low basic pass levels at MA. Forty

out of a 100 normally, which is four out of ten. Would you want to have brain surgery performed on you by someone who got four out of ten in finals? Would you get on an airliner if you knew it was to be flown by a pilot who'd failed then scraped a bare 40 in resits? Basically we have been handing out too many MAs to people who can't write. As a result they have been able to inflict their ineptitude on countless WEA and FE students, to name just two categories of blameless victim.

Now, we didn't cause this but we certainly went along with it, every time we marked scripts. Low standards are endemic in universities and have been for a very long time. After graduating from the elite institution I attended some forty years ago, I was wont to suggest that "you'd have to have your brain removed to fail at BA there", and I was only exaggerating a little. Lately however we have been compounding their low assessment standards with lowering our own entrance standards. Steve Dearden was horrified to discover that students applying for his Writing Squad had no obvious aptitude for writing but had been accepted on Creative Writing MAs. (Dearden 2015: 25).

Why have we been letting people in who basically aren't up to it? One reason seems obvious. The number of creative writing MAs jumped from three in 1992 to seventy in 2005. By then there were one hundred and forty undergraduate degrees, and about twenty PhD programmes, more were coming into the market place every year and they were all competing for students. At some point the number of available good students probably exceeded the number of places. Supply and demand then determined that we either accept students we wouldn't have given leg room a few years before, or lose our jobs.

No prizes for guessing which option we chose.

My general point is that "creative writers" went along with too many things that were of greater benefit and convenience to the university and themselves than they were to students.

Let's take another example: word length in the novel. Rhetorical question: What do most would-be novelists want? Obvious answer: To finish and publish a novel. Sadly, an average novel is about 80,000 words long and

many are longer, and you generally have to finish a full draft and then rewrite it several times to get it any good. In the beginning, a lot of MA courses helped would-be novelists by assessing and marking whole novels. As more and more courses and writers came on board, universities put an end to this profligacy. Academic validating committees argued that MA theses are nowhere near 80,000 words so why should the creative writing equivalent be? Thus it gradually became the norm for MAs to require and mark only part of a novel. Before it was transformed utterly last year, the MA at Sheffield Hallam was one of the last to both require *and mark* a completed novel. Nowadays, to get a whole novel completed and assessed on a university course, a writing student has to shell out for a PhD; except PhD students often don't come away with a finished, assessed novel either. The maximum word length for a PhD is 80,000 words, which would be fine if the novel was the only thing required but it isn't, usually because course validation boards do not consider that the research and thinking that goes into the writing of a novel is sufficiently "critical" and so they generally insist on a thesis or long essay as well. So the novel and the critical component have to be squeezed into the same 80,000 words, and in some PhDs the required word-count for the critical component is greater than for the creative part. In short, a full length novel can't possibly be written in the pitiful number of words left over. In these cases, as Andrew Cowan points out, the emasculated fiction becomes little more than "an excuse for its exegesis" (Cowan 2007).

Why did this happen? Were students demanding that they only be allowed to submit part of a whole work for MA? Or was it because it fitted in with existing university practices and – even better – because it channelled students into a cradle-to-grave progress from BA to MA to PhD with its attendant, steadily flowing income stream? The problem of course is that structure is crucial to all writing and you can't get structure right unless you finish a full draft and then redraft it several times. As the screenwriter William Goldman said: "until you've put a full stop at the end, it's all just a writing exercise." One wonders if MA students in other subjects are ever allowed to submit an unfinished fragment of their main thesis?

So why did we go along with this unprofessional absurdity? Well, to be charitable, courses in the early

boom years were often put together by English academics before the Creative Writing jobs were advertised, and when the impoverished writers were in post they tended not to bite the hand that fed them. The growth in PhDs meant even more teaching work for writers, and of course, reading novels is time-consuming, especially when you have a course full of novelists. Bits of novels are less hard work and writers are as attracted to an easier life as anyone else.

In any case, and as a result, it has for some years been possible, in principle, for a novel student to get a BA, then an MA and then a PhD in creative writing and to go on to teach novel writing at a university without finishing a single novel.

Which brings me to the bad things for which we are not responsible.

From Thatcher onwards, successive governments have reduced direct funding to universities and required them to change, in effect, from independent educational charities into state-controlled businesses. Direct government funding refocused on the so-called STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), so that most Humanities courses, and many smaller universities, are now reliant almost entirely on student fees to fund teaching and research. In effect, they have been privatized.

One result of all this is that universities began to squeeze out the administratively inconvenient and relatively costly part-time CW posts that many writers preferred because it left lots of time for writing. Permanent jobs were increasingly advertised as full-time only and required applicants to have PhDs, most of which take three years (and the rest) to acquire, and also, of course, have to be paid for. More and more writing time (and writer's money) was therefore sucked into universities. Meanwhile, the income writers got from writing outside universities continued to fall. Writers were therefore increasingly stuck in a web their erstwhile university patrons were weaving around them and, as they struggled to understand what was going on, a new management spider crept closer and closer.

Creative writing wasn't the only thing caught up in the web of course. The main prey was education itself. The move to a neo-liberal market model meant that

education became a means rather than the end. Education is now merely the bait that universities cast into murky waters as they trawl the world for student fees. There is an analogy with the newspaper industry. Ever since Lord Northcliffe revolutionized the economics of the industry in the late 19th century, newspaper proprietors have essentially been selling readers to advertisers, using news, features and gossip as bait. Universities now sell students to the government and industry using education as bait.

All this puts academics under increasing pressure to deliver "whatever is currently in fashion among 20 year olds" and it also encourages post grad courses to admit "students with undistinguished undergraduate degrees" (Eagleton 2015). Never mind the quality, feel the wallet.

The general cuts in government spending on Higher Education since 2010, have accelerated all these tendencies. Income had to be maintained and therefore costs had to be drastically reduced, especially labour costs. Hence the rise in zero hours contracts for associate lecturers. The lecturers' union estimates that at least 500 lecturers at Sheffield Hallam are on the same kind of No-Work No-Pay contracts as East European immigrants slaving for unscrupulous contract cleaners. The need for more cost-efficient "labour flexibility" puts pressure on academics to focus on courses that can be taught by anyone in the department (especially the aforesaid low cost, low maintenance, associate lecturers). Last year, in the Sheffield Hallam English department, courses were "rationalized". In other words, nearly all the courses drawing on lecturers' academic specialisms were cut. In one fell swoop, the 800-year-old link between specialist academic research and undergraduate learning was broken and university teaching took a step closer to the management ideal of fast, low-cost edu-product, using easily transferrable information components and interchangeable assembly workers.

And if we think that Creative Writing will be spared because it needs specialist writers to teach it, we need to think again. We have demystified the craft. We have organizing tips, rules, guidelines, intuitions and legitimate formulae into rational curricula and poured all this into teachable session plans. We have made it possible for writers with no experience of publication, and for lecturers with no experience of creative writing

at all, to teach it. And if that hasn't happened yet in your place, it surely will. The gravy train has left town, cowboy, and the guys in black hats have taken over, having shot the sheriff.

If successive governments were to successfully increase their control over universities they needed two things to happen. A new kind of management had to take control and a vast quantity of data had to be manufactured by this management in order to prove that the control was succeeding. So the collegiate, quasi-democratic, academic governance of old had to go and the neo-liberal university "manageriat" was created. Writing in *The Sidney Morning Herald*, David West recently described the new manageriat as a "hierarchy of [bureaucrats] empowered to put government policy into practice, and to turn academic colleagues into subordinates" (West 2015). Once it had been seeded in universities the manageriat grew and grew, like a monster in a 50s sci-fi movie, sperming data like a gigantic carp on heat, eventually bringing forth from its fishy womb countless groups, sub groups and "teams", each one churning out reports, evaluations and policies. These in turn required the creation of what one cultural anthropologist calls "bullshit jobs". Every dean needs his vice dean and sub dean and each of them needs a management team, secretaries, admin staff and so forth (Alex 2015). And as the number of managers rose, the number of teaching staff fell. This fall in contact-staff numbers inevitably went along with an increase in the amount of work they were required to do and the number of "targets" they had to meet. Some of the work was extra teaching, which was at least purposeful. A lot of it was just online form filling in order to feed the manageriat's insatiable appetite for factoids it could masticate into a semantic mush for easy government consumption.

Like baked bean manufacturers, universities now quantify their success entirely in numbers. Metrics is master. Everything is yoked to measurable "outputs": These outputs include promotions and increments, administrative and teaching workloads, academic performance, "impact", research funds, reputation and "ultimately employment itself" (West 2015).

All metrics are held in the balance so that they can be reviewed and massaged by the manageriat, before passing them on up to their political masters, except one:

a very special kind of metric, which the manageriat prefers not to disclose. This is the metric of their own recession-busting salary rises during the longest and worst economic downturn since the 1930s; even as the real incomes of lecturers and ancillary staff fell year on year. The average Vice Chancellor is now on £260,000 a year with some on more than £400,000. A study by Brighton University found that, between 1998 and 2009, VCs received pay awards four times greater than lecturers, and the differential has gradually increased since then. (Henry 2015). In addition 20 institutions paid more than 100 members of staff more than £100,000 a year. Tellingly, the same study found that "a significant proportion" of the manageriat's pay rises "bore no relation to performance". During this period lecturers had to threaten strike action to receive a proposed pay award of 1%. These bloated manageriat wages come, of course, from parents paying student fees rising to £9000 a year, for less and less personal teaching, at a time when their own incomes were shrinking.

This, of course, was bad but, arguably, not quite as bad as the rise in management bullying. There is no mystery about why this occurred. University managers are under massive pressure to achieve the required changes, however often the required changes change. As David West points out: "Successful change management is the currency of their success and failure, the raw material of their resume, the condition of their further promotion" (West 2015), and the lower they are in the manageriat pecking order, the less power they have to resist the pressure from above. Middle and lower levels of the manageriat are therefore especially pressured and the most likely to pass from encouragement to bullying. Fear, both their own and others, is the bully's crack cocaine. Opposition to change is therefore rarely tolerated and there is usually little point in complaining about this (or about anything) because "complaints and grievance procedures are decided by the same hierarchy with the same managerial imperatives" (West 2015).

Within the hierarchy, loyalty to superiors and effective control of subordinates are the primary goals, there is little scope for disinterested criticism or collegial solidarity (West 2015).

In a penetrating and witty paper, Liz Morrish argues convincingly that the manageriat is very like a cult: "Their identification with others in that tier, and their search for community, demands that they police the

borders of the in-group" (Morrish 2015). Recruitment into the manageriat is therefore ideologically self-perpetuating. She cites a presentation given to prospective managers by a "Talent Management Officer", which was followed by 10 hours of individual testing to see whether the participants had the necessary qualifications to be raised into the heady hierarchy of "bullshit jobs". The university claimed to be seeking "individuals with shared behaviour, standards and vision – not clones" (Morrish 2015). But how shared behaviour standards and vision makes successful candidates different from clones was not made clear.

Because bottom up criticism of the manageriat plan is effectively precluded, there is not only bullying but also endemically bad decision-making. As William Blake long ago pointed out: "without contraries there is no progress" and thus "Zombie" ideas now stalk the corridors of academe. The Nobel prize-winning economist Paul Krugman coined the term. It refers to "policy ideas that keep being killed by evidence but nonetheless shamle relentlessly forward, essentially because they suit a political agenda" (Morrish 2015).

It is well known that fish tend to rot from the head. It is less well known that a rotting fish-head always speaks in tongues. Liz Morrish notes an example from the endless supply of manageriat gibberish: the growing tendency in universities for every spreadsheet, algorithm and the simplest of lists to be called a "tool". This then escalates into the competitive management tool-naming game known as "pimp my tool". Thus there arises the "auditing tool", the "benchmarking tool", the "managing academic workloads tool", the "Competency Development tool", the "Research development tool" and the "smart working tool" (Morrish 2015).

But this is not in fact a game. Manageriat-speak has a serious political purpose. Morrish points out that writing is no longer writing and research is no longer research. Both are now "generating an output" and as Marina Warner explains, this re-naming freezes "the differences that writing and research make possible, and set them hard in the mould of market ideology, as sales items" (Warner 2014).

The "game" also has real effects on working conditions: Consider this particular catch 22, provided once again by Morrish: the "workload tool" does not allow you to

complain that your workload is too heavy. It merely considers that you are failing to manage it properly so that you can then be directed to the "smart working tool" (Morrish 2015). I offer another catch 22 emanating from a different group of management "tools": a colleague became angry with management in a meeting earlier this year because she felt that all criticisms from the staff were being completely ignored. She was not offered an explanations for this but rather "anger management" training. Criticism becomes pathology.

Words matter, as the manageriat know very well. "Failure to enter into the management discourse results in illocutionary silencing" (Warner 2014). In plain English: any criticism of management policy or off-message suggestion is likely to met by a Stepford manager's glassy stare, fixed smile, and a quick change of subject or, if you're really unlucky, the Kafkaesque referral of it to some other, higher, management group where it will eventually disappear without trace in the oubliette of its minutes.

It is often said, wrongly, that South American tribes literally could not see the first Spanish ships when they anchored offshore because they were so culturally different. I think the manageriat *literally* can't hear you if you don't speak their barbaric, mendacious, argot. And this is also seemingly true of government. Marina Warner points out that there has been no shortage of vocal opposition to the rampant neo-liberal commodification of education. It's just that "The arguments have not been answered; they have merely been ignored" (Warner 2014).

Management speak is the apotheosis of the post-modern, for it presides over a fiction and "it is precisely because a fiction has been constituted that management has to work so hard to maintain it by discourse" (Morrish 2015). Once a management plan is passed down and criticism of it duly ignored, its inevitable failures have to be resolutely defended. Thus "the demands of the imaginary" are "allowed to displace any possibility of managing the reality effectively" (Morrish 2015).

None of the developments I describe above are exclusive to universities. Manageriat hell is not circumscribed. It's everywhere. In the NHS, local government, charities. You name it. It straddles the world, except, interestingly,

the top-down neo-liberal management model is less likely to be found in some other industries that are, like universities, knowledge based. The structures in the IT giants tend to be much more “horizontal”. This is almost certainly not because their managers are nicer but it may be because they are more perceptively attuned to their ultimate interests. Their profits depend on new ideas and willing productivity, all of which tend not to be features of a demoralized, disempowered and de-professionalized workforce.

Patronage has always been a two-edged sword. The patron gives, but then sooner or later he or she will start making demands. For a while, universities loved writers because they were new and sexy and exciting and, most important of all, brought new money, like dowries, in their wake. But that honeymoon is long since over. So now, as writers, we have to ask a question: are universities any long fit for our purposes? Is the academic dollar worth the academic douleur? Is writing improved by more and more writers becoming full time academics? Are our students – the writers of the future – well served there? Are they likely to be better or worse served as time passes?

Well, in lots of places they probably still are being served well enough because writers (like our colleagues in other humanities subjects) are still committed to education rather than commodification. But I doubt that commitment is sustainable, or will even be allowed in the medium term. And in the long term, we’re all dead.

Is the situation changeable? Well, everything is changeable but this one can only be changed at government level and the commodification of higher education in this country has been a cross-party venture for decades now.

So are there alternatives? Thankfully, there are. Outside universities there are literally hundreds, possibly thousands, of writing courses, mentoring schemes, and workshops on offer to aspiring writers. Steve Dearden’s Writing Squad in Sheffield is an excellent example. Jill Dawson’s highly successful Gold Dust scheme is another but there are many more: the *Guardian* Master Classes, The London Screen Writers Festival, Script Yorkshire Master Classes, The Arvon Mentoring Scheme, The Word Factory, Writers and Artists (www.writersandartists.co.uk), The WoMentoring

Scheme, Inscribe (Peep Tree Press), Tell Us Another One (www.tellusanotherone.org), U3A, Cinnamon Press, and so on and so on.

Some will be better than others but maybe it is to this independent sector that writers need to look. Maybe it needs federating, growing. So that when university creative writing has had the life squeezed out of it by jargon, metrics, cost-cutting, and commodification there will be something already replacing it.

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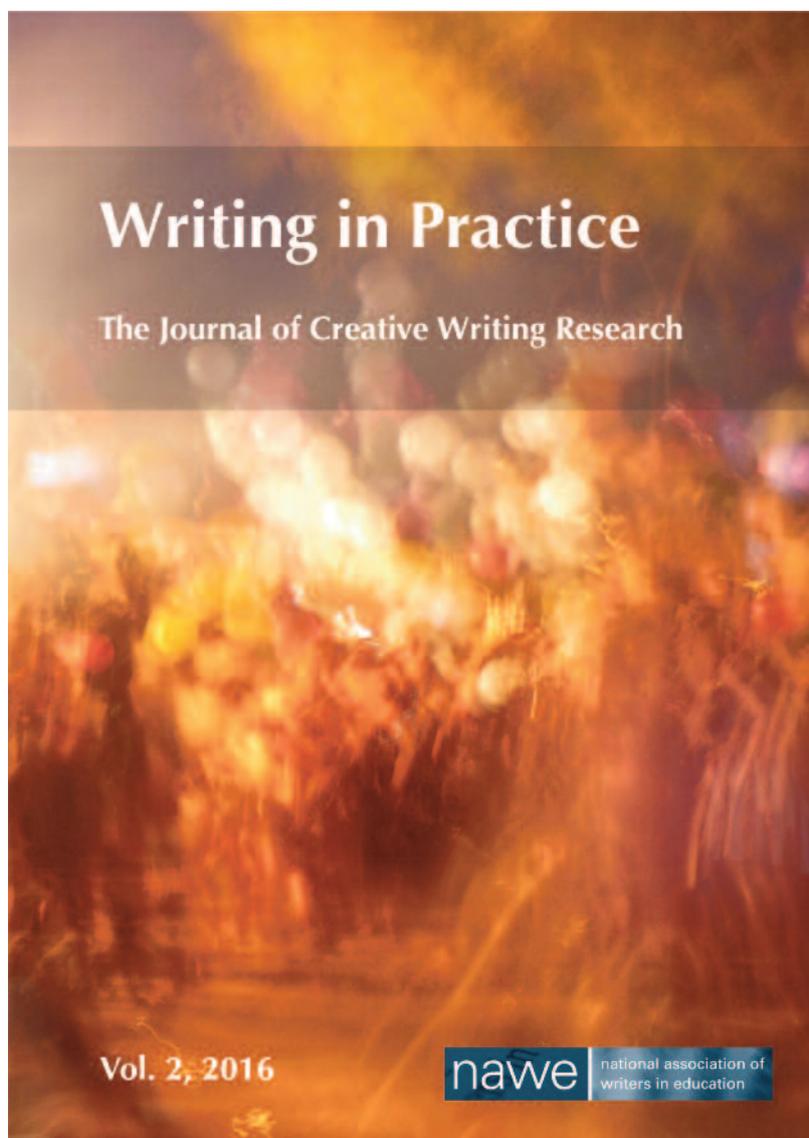
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